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Amir sends Ramadan greetings

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan on Saturday conveyed congratulations of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the citizens and residents of Kuwait on the near advent of the fasting month of Ramadan. The Diwan announced that HH the Amir and the gracious Al-Sabah family will receive well-wishers on the blessed month on the first and second days of Ramadan from 08:00 pm at the family's Diwan at Bayan Palace.

Ramadan well-wishers will be allowed to enter the palace via the gate on the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahad bin Abdulaziz Road. The Amiri Diwan prayed to the Almighty so He may safeguard HH the Amir and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and return the gracious month with all blessings and goodness. It also hoped Islamic states and their peoples witness progress and prosperity. — KUNA

5 NBK brings employees together in the annual 'Graish' event

16 Man Utd bounce back against Everton thanks to two penalties

'Everyone is a winner,' Prime Minister tells Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

Over 13,000 participants make Kuwait Sports Day a smashing success



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, along with thousands of participants, rides at the starting point of the first edition of Kuwait Sports Day on Jaber Causeway on March 9, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat & KUNA



People of all ages, needs and walks of life participate in first-of-its-kind event

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: "Today, everyone is a winner." HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said in exclusive statements to Kuwait News and Kuwait Times during his participation in Kuwait Sports Day on Jaber Causeway, organized by the Public Authority for Sport. Over 13,000 participants made the first-of-its-kind event a smashing success.

HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad lauded the level of participation from people of all ages in the event, drawing special attention to people of special needs "who participated in all activities" held during the Kuwait Sports Day. Their participation "is proof of the strong willpower of Kuwaiti men and women, and that they can achieve any goal they set their minds to," he pointed out.

"We celebrate all today, because we are all winners. Every participant is a winner for uplifting our spirits and our hopes that Kuwait is on the verge of a brighter future and broader horizons," HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad added. In addition to thanking the participants, HH the Prime Minister extended special gratitude to the event's organizers "for their excellent organization". He also expressed gratefulness for Saturday's great weather, saying: "Allah loves this country. He blessed us with this

perfect weather so that everyone can participate."

The event included a vibrant display of traditional dances and songs and symbolic representations of Kuwait's heritage, such as camels, boats, and airplanes with the Kuwaiti flag flying across the sky above Jaber Causeway. The enthusiastic participation of public schools and other government institutions added a special touch to the event, showcasing the importance of awareness of health and unity. (See Pages 2 & 3)

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First Kuwaiti medical team enters Gaza

GAZA: A Kuwaiti medical team entered the Gaza Strip Friday through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt to help their Palestinian peers treat victims of the ongoing Zionist aggression. Several Gaza health officials welcomed the Kuwaiti team, the first since the start of the war on Oct 7, 2023, at the Palestinian side of the crossing. The officials underscored the importance of the Kuwaiti team visit and its desperately-needed efforts to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's people, particularly after the collapse of the health system in the besieged Strip.

Head of the KRCS Operations Sector and the Kuwaiti medical team Dr Musaad Al-Enezi told KUNA that the team will carry out several surgeries on Palestinian patients in the Strip. He pointed out that the KRCS also brought in medical equipment, tools and medicine to be used in the treatment of the Palestinian people and to back the health system there.

The medical team will perform surgeries at the European Hospital and the Kuwait Specialized Hospital in Rafah in south of the Gaza Strip, Dr Enezi said. He added Kuwaiti relief aid will also be distributed to displaced people in makeshift shelters and refugee camps. The team will also supervise the establishment of a KRCS field hospital in the Strip, Dr Enezi revealed. He indicated that this move comes as part of the KRCS' efforts to aid Palestinian people, who face the inhuman war machine of the Zionist occupation forces.

He noted that KRCS has also delivered

46 paneloads of relief and humanitarian aid to Gaza through the Kuwait air bridge. The Kuwaiti medical team includes four consultants: Orthopedic Surgeon Consultant Dr Hussein Qwaiyan, Urology Consultant Dr Faisal Al-Hajri, Anesthesia Consultant Dr Muhammad Shamsah and Surgery Consultant Dr Muhammad Haider, along with Administrative Coordinator Abdulrahman Al-Saleh.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organizations Nasser Al-Hayen on Friday denounced the systematic destruction by Zionist occupying forces of places of worship in Gaza. Addressing a United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) panel discussion on countering religious hatred, in the presence of UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk, the Kuwaiti diplomat said this Zionist occupation action is clear-cut proof of systematic racism, continued suppression and bloody destruction against Palestinian civilians. — KUNA



GAZA: The first Kuwaiti medical team enters Gaza through the Rafah border crossing on March 8, 2024. — KUNA



People participate in the first-ever Kuwait Sports Day at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway in Kuwait City on March 9, 2024. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA

SOCIAL HEALTH AND UNITY IN FOCUS AT KUWAIT SPORTS DAY

By Ghadeer Ghloum & KUNA

Kuwait held its first-ever "Kuwait Sports Day" on Saturday on Jaber Causeway, with over 13,000 participants making the event a smashing success. The event was attended by members of all strata of Kuwait's society, headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, which touched the hearts of the attendees.

The event included a vibrant display of traditional dances and songs and symbolic representations of Kuwait's heritage, such as camels, boats and airplanes with the Kuwait flag across the sky above Jaber Causeway. The enthusiastic participation of public schools and other government insti-

tutions added a special touch to the event, showcasing the importance of awareness of health and unity.

Marwan Hafiz, second place winner of one of the competitions, spoke to Kuwait Times about his experience, expressing his joy at participating and emphasizing that sports has been a passion since his childhood, so he decided to take part upon learning about the event. Hafiz said he is willing to join future similar events, highlighting the experience not only benefits one's health and well-being, but also provides an enjoyable experience due to the vibes and atmosphere. He concluded with appreciating the excellent organization of the event and noted the traditional activities added a unique flavor to the overall experience.



Children participate in Kuwait Sports Day.



Camel symbolizes Kuwait's heritage at Kuwait Sports Day.



Ardha dance takes place to showcase Kuwait's heritage during Kuwait Sports Day.



Executive Board Member of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Fatima Hayyat.



Girls pose for a picture.



Entertainment activities on the North Island of Sheikh Jaber Causeway.



Kids and students enjoy entertainment activities after the race.



Resting zone.



Participants raise a scarf with Kuwait national flag's colors.

MoH allocates ambulances, equipment

The Ministry of Health has allocated ten ambulances, four motorcycles, two golf carts, and a field tent equipped with the necessary medical supplies in addition to preparing two ambulance helicopters for Kuwait Sports Day. The Sports Day was launched Saturday under the patronage and in the presence of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

The ministry stated in a press statement that the Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi supervised the preparations of the ministry's sectors for this major sporting event in which more than 13,000 people participated as the preparations included raising the level of readiness in the main hospitals concerned with the event area such as Al-Sabah and Al-Amiri in addition to the supporting hospitals in the country. - KUNA



Girls wave Kuwait national flag.



Women rest after the marathon.

Local



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah participates in Kuwait Sports Day.



HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah poses for a picture with his grandchildren.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah listens to girls singing the Kuwaiti national anthem.

This event served as a unifying platform, bringing together people of all categories and ages, from children to adults, in a spirit of solidarity and good health. The high energy and inspiration drawn from HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah uplifted the atmosphere and encouraged a sense of pride and togetherness among the people.

Competitions include a five-kilometer walking race and a 15-km bike race, in addition to other sports activities, shows and games. The Public Authority for Sport built a sports village on the causeway's southern island for tennis table, foosball, children's playgrounds, a theater where a folkloric band per-

formed popular songs and booths serving food and coffee.

PAS Director General Yusuf Al-Bidan said in a statement to KUNA that he and his peers were honored with the presence of HH the Prime Minister at the event, part of the authority's strategy inspired by former minister of youth Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. Bidan said the participation of more than 13,000 people in the activity signaled its success, noting that it has been adopted as a state annual sports day by the prime minister. Assistant undersecretary for educational development and activities Mariam Al-Enezi said in remarks to KUNA that the ministry of education participated with 1,400 students.



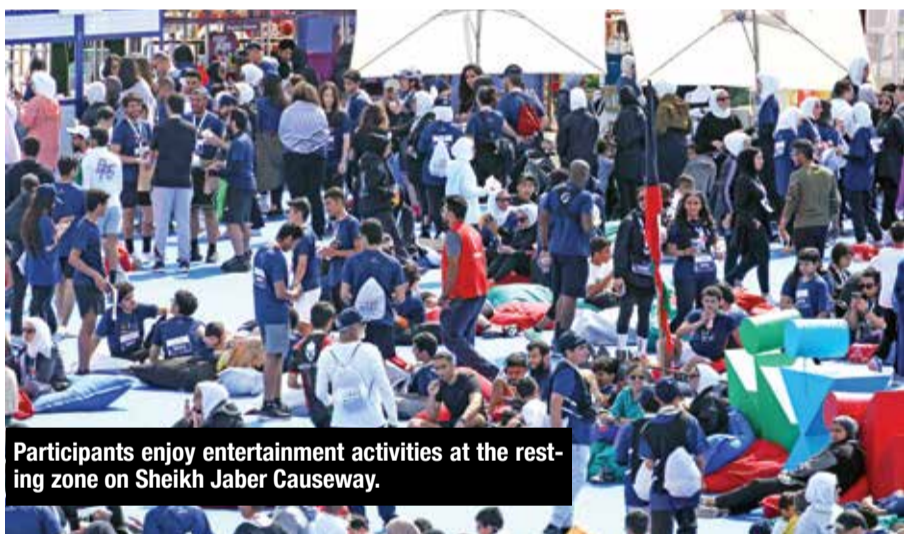
HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah receives his medal.



Participants pose for a group picture, showing their medals to Kuwait Times.



HH the PM alongside Minister of Youth and National Assembly Affairs Dawood Maarafi at the finishing line.



Participants enjoy entertainment activities at the resting zone on Sheikh Jaber Causeway.



Youth enjoy games at the event.



Participants take selfies.



Dr Zubaidullah Zubaidov

Dean: Sports Day boosts awareness

The Dean of Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Dr Zubaidullah Zubaidov said that the launch of Kuwait Sports Day is a great initiative to enhance sports culture amongst the society. This community sport event, with the auspices and attendance of HH the Prime Minister

Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah has witnessed a great turnout by members of the diplomatic corps in Kuwait, with the aim of making it a success and emphasizing the importance of sport for people's health, Zubaidov said in a statement to KUNA.

He stressed his keenness to participate in the walkathon and complete it, expressing his wishes to see more of these events in Kuwait throughout the year that will positively impact the society, noting diplomatic corps members' eagerness to support all activities and events that take place in Kuwait. — KUNA



School students participate in the event.



Kuwait Embassy in Belgium holds sports event on Kuwait Sports Day



BRUSSELS: Kuwait's embassy in Belgium organized a sports activity to coincide with the Kuwait Sports Day initiative launched by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on Saturday. Embassy staff, members of the military attaché and Q8 Oils office employees participated in the event.

Burgan Bank branch timings for Ramadan

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced its working hours throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. The Bank's Head Office and branches, except for the airport and The Avenues branches, will commence operations in one shift between 10 am and 1.30 pm.



Burgan's airport branch will provide all banking services to customers by operating seven days a week in three shifts. The morning shift will be from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm, the evening shift from 9.30 pm to 2.30 am, and the third shift from 3.30 am to 8.30 am. Meanwhile, The Avenues branch will operate from Sunday to Thursday in two shifts. The morning shift will start from 11.00 am to 3.30 pm, while the evening shift will be from 8.00 pm until 11.30 pm.

For more information about Burgan Bank's products and services throughout the holy month, customers can contact the customer service center at 1804080, via phone or WhatsApp. The Bank would like to take this opportunity to extend its warmest congratulations and best wishes to everyone during this blessed month of the year.

Women 'essential partner' in Kuwait's progress: Minister

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Children Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah said Friday that women play a fundamental role in progressing and building the state for a better future. On International Women's Day, Sheikh Feras, Chairman of Supreme Council of Family Affairs, congratulated Kuwaiti women as an essential partner in development, stressing that Kuwait has been paying much attention to women and keen on empowering them for their positive role in all domains. Women have made several achievements in multiple fields, and taken part in setting national strategies, the minister said.



Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General's Representative in Kuwait Ghada Al-Tajer said Friday Kuwaiti women have deep contributions to, and played a vital role in, the advancement of the society. Speaking to KUNA in a statement on International Women's Day, Al-Tajer said she realized that there are still differences between men and women in all aspects of life, adding that the UN has been committed to supporting initiatives empowering women for social and economic leadership.

She noted that the UN would continue cooperation with its partners in Kuwait regarding policies that boost women's welfare. Empowering women is not only a moral necessity, but also a strategic investment in sustainable development of "our" societies, she stressed, pointing to investing in human capital as part of the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035.

In addition, Al-Tajer showed sincere solidarity with Palestinian women who have been facing unprecedented challenges amid complicated geopolitical conditions. She affirmed the UN commitment to backing Palestinian women in getting their rights and dignity, calling for achieving their security and helping them accomplish their aspirations for a prosperous and fair future.

GCC honor

The Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council honored Secretary-General of Kuwait Women's Cultural and Social Society Ghada Al-Ghanem and the first head of the GCC Mission to the European Union (2006-2017) Ambassador Amal Al-Hamad as leaders of GCC action. A ceremony was held on Friday under the slogan of "inspiring Gulf woman," with GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi attending alongside with a number of diplomats, public figures and female leaderships. Speaking at the function, Al-Budaiwi extolled the Gulf women for the great roles they play in all aspects of life and the achievements they made on the regional and international arenas. He expressed hope that the Gulf women will add more achievements in the future, renewing the support of the GCC to the empowerment of females in the coming decade. The ceremony features a documentary on the achievements of the honored celebrities and a dialogue on "Gulf woman from empowerment to inspiration." — KUNA

New health center in Abdaly to serve 13,000 patients: Awadhi

New facility donated by Al-Ghanim comes under MoH's 100-day plan

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Ahmad Al-Awadhi said on Saturday that the newly-launched Ali Mohammad Thunayan Al-Ghanim Health Center in Abdali area in Kuwait's north-western Jahra governorate would serve as many as 13,000 patients. While opening the new center, the minister told reporters that the medical facility, which would function round-the-clock, is home to, inter alia, a laboratory, a pharmacy and 10 clinics and a dental radiology department.

Funded by Kuwaiti citizen Ali Al-Ghanim, the center comes in the context of the Health ministry's 100-day action plan, the minister pointed out.

The minister pointed out that the center also includes a residential section for workers, which includes four apartments. The center comes within the government's 100-day work plan and program to which the Ministry of Health and the government of the State of Kuwait are committed.

Ali Al-Ghanim said in a similar statement, "This donation comes within the framework of the contributions made by the people of Kuwait to serve the country," noting that the residents of the Abdali area and farm owners were waiting for this important occasion with the inauguration of a health center that provides various health ser-



KUWAIT: Opening of Ali Mohammad Thunayan Al-Ghanim & Sons Health Centre in Abdaly. — KUNA

vices to the region.

Al-Ghanim affirmed his complete readiness to contribute to any step that would provide more services to the people of Kuwait.

In turn, the head of the primary healthcare unit in the Jahra Health district, Dr Maryam Al-Ajmi, said in a statement, "We have been waiting for the opening of a health center in Abdali for ten years that

provides a high-quality health service and is one of the necessary requirements of this era."

Al-Ajmi confirmed that the goal of the center is to provide a comprehensive primary healthcare and is not limited to treating urgent and emergency cases, but extends to include chronic disease clinics, a small operating room, and a large observation room. — KUNA



A group photo of students of 'Young Ambassadors' program with the Kuwait Times team at Kuwait Times printing press. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

'Young Ambassadors' visit Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News hosted a workshop on Thursday as part of the Young Ambassadors Program, aimed to guide students on effective engagement with the public and delivering their message to broader audiences. According to Environmental Specialist Samia Al-Duaij, the Young Ambassadors Program is a collaboration between the Canadian and British governments, with support

from the United Nations.

The program is currently in its second year, and the focus of this year's program is on environmental protection and responsibility, with the theme focusing on climate change and climate diplomacy. Selected students from both private and public schools have the opportunity to participate in workshops, group activities and educational trips that are meant to enhance their understanding and exploration of the program's core ideas.

"We decided to bring the students to Kuwait Times based on a request from one of their peers, which we found is a valid suggestion that aligns with one of our targets. Students are here today to learn the role of the media and the importance of getting out of their bubble to speak to the public and reach wider audiences," said Duaij.

China Embassy marks 53rd anniversary of ties with Kuwait

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: In honor of the forthcoming 53rd anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait, established on the 22nd of this month, the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait hosted the Chinese Culture and Food Festival on Saturday.

During his opening speech, Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei emphasized the significant progress achieved in the bilateral relationship between China and Kuwait in recent years. He particularly highlighted the year 2022, when President Xi Jinping and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah reached a broad consensus on deepening practical cooperation across various sectors.

Ambassador Zhang expressed confidence that under their guidance, the China-Kuwait strategic partnership in the new era will experience further growth opportunities.

In an interview with Kuwait Times, Ambassador Zhang underscored the ongoing efforts of China and Kuwait to implement the cooperation agreements signed during His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to China in September last year. He stressed the significance of this cooperation as it will mutually benefit both nations across various fields which will include large-scale projects aimed at deepening and strengthening the ties between China and Kuwait.

Ambassador Zhang also emphasized the impor-



Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei speaks during the event.

tance of continuous communication between the nations, serving as the cornerstone for the development of political, economic, and trade relations.

"Exchanges enrich civilizations, and mutual learning fosters prosperity," Zhang remarked. He highlighted that guided by President Xi Jinping's Global Civilization Initiative, China remains steadfast in its commitment to collaborate with Kuwait and other nations, deepening exchanges and cooperation in cultural and people-to-people domains. "This endeavor actively contributes to the establishment of a community with a shared future for humanity," Ambassador Zhang concluded.

During the festival, the Chinese Embassy provided a platform for the renewal of traditional friendship and the deepening of mutual understanding between the two countries by showcasing Chinese culture and cuisine. Ambassador Zhang emphasized that while the festival offers a glimpse into Chinese culture, the true richness of their country is best experienced firsthand. He warmly invited the audience to visit China to immerse themselves and truly appreciate its beauty and diversity.



Kuwait Times Archivist Yousef Abughazaleh shows historical news preserved in Kuwait Times archives.

During the visit to Kuwait Times, students were given a tour of the Kuwait Times building, introducing them to its multiple departments and each department's role. This provided them with a chance to take a closer look at the realm of journalism as they interacted with the Kuwait Times team members, who answered their questions and welcomed their suggestions on news presentations. Additionally, the students had their photos taken in each department before being taken to the studio for a real-life experience in front of the camera.

Content Creator Dhoha Al-Issa led the students to the studio to engage them in answering a set of questions, which further enriched their experience. The students answered her questions with valuable insights and profound perspectives, which will be posted on Kuwait Times' social media platforms.



Musical performance during the festival.

3 burial timings during Ramadan

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Municipality sets three burial timings for funerals during the period of the holy month of Ramadan, starting at 11 am, after the afternoon prayer, and after the Tarawih prayer. The municipality explained in a press statement Saturday that the choice of burial timings comes to ease the burden on the families of the deceased and to ensure the health and safety of mourners attending funerals in the cemeteries. — KUNA

Three people with 3.75 million Lyrica pills arrested

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced Friday that three people were arrested for smuggling 3.75 million Lyrica pills, saying that the move is part of continued efforts aiming to combat narcotics and pursue smugglers to protect society. In line with cooperation between Kuwait General Administration of Customs and UAE's brothers, the criminal sector managed to arrest two persons who tried to smuggle one million Lyrica pills into the country via Kuwait International Airport, the ministry's department of security media and public relations said in a statement.

When they were interrogated, they admitted that they were planning to trade in, and take, these pills, it added, noting that they told the investigation body about a third person who was arrested with 2.750 million pills of Lyrica, in coordination with the UAE.

The Ministry expressed great appreciations to UAE's ministry of Interior for its rapid, fruitful and decisive reaction to the incident, in implementation of the GCC deals, it noted. — KUNA



Audience captivated by the musical performance during the festival.

Local

NBK brings employees together in the annual 'Graish' event

Executive management attends the event held at JACC



National songs were strongly present in the country.



NBK Executive management attends the live performance of the orchestra.

KUWAIT: Following its annual custom at this time every year, with the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized its annual "Graish" event for employees last Wednesday evening at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC) – National Theatre, in the presence of the bank's executive management.

The event underscores NBK's dedication to foster the inherited traditions and values of the Kuwaiti society, and to strengthen relationships among employees from all departments, as well as to show appreciation to their vital contributions in the bank's ongoing successes.

During the ceremony, which saw a large attendance of more than 1,700 people, the bank's employees exchanged greetings on the advent of the blessed month of Ramadan, celebrating "Graish", a Kuwaiti tradition inherited down the ages. The event aimed to strengthen the NBK Family spirit, being a key concept that NBK always seeks to promote among its employees of different departments bank-wide.

Over two hours and a half, the bank took advantage of the annual "Graish" to express its appreciation of the efforts of its employees and to create joyful atmospheres for them through various entertainment activities combined with the captivating live musical performance. The event also featured a number of exciting competitions and raffles, which all gained the admiration of all attendees.

One-family

The ceremony kicked off with a video highlighting how the employees of one of NBK branches spend their working hours, and demonstrating the one-family spirit and cooperation among them to provide unmatched service level to customers. This was followed by a brief speech by Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group



Live performance by an orchestra at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC) – National Theatre, in the presence of the bank's executive management.



Al-Sager:

NBK stands out with its highly professional and dedicated employees and the one-family spirit

- Live performance by an orchestra of 50 musicians created captivating atmospheres in an unforgettable evening

- Various exciting activities and amazing competitions with valuable prizes
- The Graish aims to promote the NBK Family spirit among employees
- NBK regards employees as the most valuable asset and the cornerstone of its success



Isam Al-Sagar addresses the audience.



The national talents excelled in singing with the orchestra.

CEO of National Bank of Kuwait in which he extended greetings to all employees on the advent of Ramadan.

In his speech, Al-Sager mentioned that it is NBK's regular practice to organize the "Graish" event for employees before the advent of Ramadan every year, in appreciation of their noticeable efforts that greatly contributes to its leading position in the banking sector. He also noted that the opening video clearly represents NBK's uniqueness and excellence in everything, thanks to its highly professional and dedicated employees and the one-family spirit.

and dedicated efforts of its employees. Therefore, we also seek to motivate employees and provide them with an ideal work environment that continuously promotes career development, unlocks their potentials and encourages them to go the extra mile, as the one-team spirit demonstrated by employees bank-wide is the main driver of NBK's success and

provision of world-class banking service quality. Graish is a deeply rooted Kuwaiti tradition inherited down the ages. It is a gathering held on the last day of the month of Shaaban to celebrate the advent of Ramadan, during which all family members gather to have their last meal before starting the fasting of Ramadan the next day.

NBK's employees' talents excelled in playing and singing with the band.

CEO of National Bank of Kuwait in which he extended greetings to all employees on the advent of Ramadan.

In his speech, Al-Sager mentioned that it is NBK's regular practice to organize the "Graish" event for employees before the advent of Ramadan every year, in appreciation of their noticeable efforts that greatly contributes to its leading position in the banking sector. He also noted that the opening video clearly represents NBK's uniqueness and excellence in everything, thanks to its highly professional and dedicated employees and the one-family spirit.

Music and competitions

NBK Graish also featured musical majesty by hosting an exhilarating live performance by a musical band consisting of 50 musicians in addition to the choir led by Maestro Dr Khaled Nouri, which played the most enchanting national songs and a variety of instrumentals, creating captivating atmospheres in an unforgettable evening. This was made even more impressive as a number of NBK's employees showcased their talents in playing music and singing along with the band, amidst loud applause from the audience. NBK also sought to spread the spirit of familiarity and enthusiasm among employees by organizing various competitions during the event, and offered valuable prizes including travel vouchers, electronic devices and cash prizes, amidst thrilling and amusing atmospheres.

Strengthening relationships

Recognizing employees' efforts and strengthening relationships among them is at the core of NBK's strat-



The event underscored the one-family spirit and cooperation among NBK employees.



Competitions being held during the event.





Gaza war robs Muslims of Ramadan joy

Biden takes Trump fight to battleground states

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RAFAH/GAZA: (Left) Palestinians walk away with some items salvaged from the rubble of a residential building hit in an overnight Zionist air strike in Rafah on March 9, 2024. (Right) Aid parcels are airdropped over the northern Gaza Strip on March 8, 2024. — AFP photos

Aid boat ready for exhausted Gaza

Airdropped aid kills 5 Palestinians; UN agency warns relief efforts 'only part of solution'

GAZA: A boat laden with food for Palestinians in war-ravaged Gaza was "ready" to set sail from Cyprus, an NGO said Saturday, as the Zionist assault on Gaza continued into its sixth month. The sea route aims to counter aid access restrictions, which humanitarians and foreign governments have blamed on the Zionist entity, in an attack which has left Gaza's 2.4 million people struggling to survive.

The United Nations has repeatedly warned of looming famine, particularly in the Palestinian territory's north where no overland border crossings are open. Spanish charity Open Arms said its boat, which docked three weeks ago in Cyprus' Larnaca port, "will be ready" to embark later on Saturday but awaits final authorization.

It would be the first shipment along a maritime corridor from Cyprus — the closest European Union country to Gaza — that the EU Commission hopes will open on Sunday. Open Arms spokeswoman Laura Lanuza told AFP that Zionist authorities, which have welcomed the Cypriot sea corridor initiative, were inspecting the cargo of "200 tons of basic foodstuffs, rice and flour, cans of tuna".

US charity World Central Kitchen, which has partnered with Open Arms, has teams in the besieged Gaza Strip who were "constructing a dock" to unload the shipment, Lanuza said. With ground access

limited, countries have also turned to airdropping aid, although a parachute malfunction turned one delivery on Friday deadly.

The health ministry in Gaza said three more children had died from malnutrition and dehydration, with the total number of such deaths now 23. Another 82 people were killed in strikes over the previous day, the ministry said, bringing the number of fatalities in the Zionist entity's bombardment and ground offensive of Gaza to 30,960, mostly women and children.

'Only part of the solution'

The United Nations World Food Program has warned that the volume of aid that can be delivered by sea will do little if anything to stave off famine in Gaza. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, in Larnaca on Friday, said a "pilot operation" would be launched in partnership with World Central Kitchen, supported by aid from the United Arab Emirates. A US effort for a "temporary pier" to receive aid off Gaza, which the Pentagon said would take up to 60 days to establish, builds upon the maritime corridor proposed by Cyprus, senior US officials said.

Humanitarian workers and UN officials say easing the entry of trucks to Gaza would be more effective than aid airdrops or sea shipments. It was unclear

which country conducted Friday's deadly airdrop, but Jordanian, US, Belgian and Dutch officials denied that their aircraft were involved. A medic at Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital said it had killed five Palestinians. Witness Mohammed al-Ghoul told AFP he and his brother followed the delivery in the hope of getting "a bag of flour", but when the parachute failed to open it "fell down like a rocket".

Canada has since become the latest country to say it would join aerial aid delivery missions. But a steady, substantial flow of relief supplies into Gaza was "only part of the solution", said Mirjana Spoljaric, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The warring sides must do more to "safeguard civilian life and human dignity", Spoljaric said in a statement, decrying the "unacceptable" civilian death toll and calling for a ceasefire and hostage release.

'Just exhausted'

After a week of talks with mediators in Cairo failed to produce a breakthrough, Hamas's armed wing said it would not agree to a hostage-prisoner exchange without the withdrawal of Zionist forces. The entity has rejected such a demand.

US President Joe Biden — whose country provides billions of dollars in military aid to the entity — acknowledged it would be "tough" to secure a new

truce deal before Ramadan, the Muslim holy fasting month that could begin on Sunday depending on the lunar calendar. The war's effects have been felt across the region, including off Yemen where Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who say they are acting in solidarity with Gazans, have repeatedly fired at ships in the Red Sea area that is vital for world trade.

US and allied forces shot down 15 one-way attack drones fired towards the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden on Saturday, the US military said, after one of the largest such rebel strikes. Hamas authorities reported more than 30 air strikes overnight, including one on a building sheltering around 200 displaced people in Rafah, further south. Roughly 1.5 million Palestinians have sought refuge in Rafah, where Belal Abu Sabla told AFP the war must "end immediately". "We are dying of hunger," said the man displaced from Khan Yunis.

"We want a solution to stop the war," said Atallah al-Satel, also displaced from Khan Yunis to Rafah. "We are just exhausted citizens ... What do we have to do with everything that is going on?"

In a pre-Ramadan statement Saturday, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh called for the speedy distribution of relief aid to Gazans and for the full opening of crossings into the territory "to end the siege of our people". — AFP

Zardari voted as Pakistan president for second time

ISLAMABAD: Asif Ali Zardari, the widower of Pakistan's slain first female leader Benazir Bhutto, was voted in as president for a second time Saturday, after elections marred by rigging claims. Zardari was voted in with 411 votes to 181 for the opposition-backed candidate, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced after tallying the votes by national MPs, provincial MPs and senators.

Lawmakers of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) voted Zardari into the largely ceremonial post, backed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party in an alliance forged after the Feb 8 polls. Under the terms of the coalition pact, which also includes a handful of smaller parties, PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif was sworn in as prime minister on Monday. Zardari is expected to be sworn in at a ceremony on Sunday.

Pakistan's Feb 8 election was tainted by allegations of pre-poll rigging and vote tampering, with former prime minister Imran Khan jailed and barred from contesting and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party targeted by arrests and censorship, with members forced to stand as independents. They defied expectations to win more seats than any other party last month, but fell far short of the majority needed to govern — clearing the way for the alliance between PML-N and PPP.

However, PTI claim a polling day mobile internet blackout and a massive delay in results were used to cover up nationwide rigging preventing their landslide victory. PTI nominated Mehmood Khan Achakzai, a lawmaker from the western city of Quetta, as their presidential candidate. Despite a reputation as "Mr Ten Percent" — the alleged cut he took for rubberstamping contracts — Zardari was previously boosted to the presidential office in 2008 on a sympathy vote following the gun and bomb assassination of Benazir Bhutto as she campaigned for re-election.

Initially a background character as Bhutto's consort, Zardari was stained by a bevy of corruption and other allegations, including absurd kidnapping plots and taking kickbacks lavished on hoards of jewelry. Between 2008 and 2013, he ushered in constitutional reforms rolling back presidential powers, and the 68-year-old's second term will see him steer a largely ceremonial office.

He has spent more than 11 years in jail, a long time even by the standards of Pakistani politicians, with a wheeler-dealer's talent for bouncing back after scandals. Back in 2009, the New York Times said he had a knack for "artful dodging" — "maneuvering



ISLAMABAD: This handout photograph by Pakistan's Press Information Department shows the country's newly sworn-in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif greeting their newly-elected President Asif Ali Zardari. — AFP

himself out of the tight spots he gets himself into".

'Polo playboy'

Zardari was born in 1955 into a land-owning family from the southern province of Sindh. "As a child, I was spoiled by my parents as an only son," he said in a 2000 interview with The Guardian newspaper. "They indulged my every whim." He expressed only limited political ambitions as a young man — losing a 1983 local government election. It was his 1987 arranged marriage with PPP leader Bhutto that earned him a spot in the political limelight. Their union — brokered by Bhutto's mother — was considered an unlikely pairing for a leader-in-waiting from one of Pakistan's major political dynasties.

Bhutto was an Oxford and Harvard graduate driven by the desire to oust then-president Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, who forced her father from the prime minister's office and had him executed. Zardari was a university dropout with a reputation for brawling, partying and romancing women at a private disco in his family home.

On the eve of their wedding, Bhutto's team issued a formal statement denying he was "a playboy who plays polo by day and frequents discos at night". Their nuptial celebrations were dubbed the "people's wedding" — doubling as a political rally in the megacity of Karachi, where a crowd of 100,000 fervently chanted PPP slogans. Initially, Zardari pledged to keep out of politics.

Bhutto served as prime minister from 1988 to 1990 — the first woman to head a democratic government in a Muslim country — and again from 1993 to 1996. PPP insiders regarded Zardari as a liability, considering him likely to embarrass her leadership. Their fears were perhaps well-founded. In 1990, he was embroiled in accusations of an absurd plot to extort a businessman by tying a bomb to his leg. — AFP

India raids network sending citizens to fight for Russia

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities said they had detained members of a "trafficking" network sending citizens of the country to fight for the Russian army in Ukraine after raiding several travel agents.

Two years since Russia's invasion began, tens of thousands of its soldiers have been killed in Ukraine and Moscow is on a global quest for more troops. At least two Indian soldiers have been killed in the conflict, with several recruits telling AFP they were shipped to the frontlines under false pretenses. Investigators from India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted raids across 13 locations on Thursday and detained "certain suspects" for questioning, according to a statement issued late that evening.

"These traffickers have been operating as an organized network and were luring Indian nationals through social media channels like Youtube etc. and also through their local contacts/agents for highly paid jobs in Russia," the statement said. "Trafficked Indian Nationals were trained in combat roles and deployed at front bases in Russia-Ukraine War Zone against their wishes."

Expanding Zionist settlements a 'war crime': UN official

GENEVA: Expanding Zionist settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories constitutes "a war crime" and risks eliminating any likelihood of a viable Palestinian state, the UN rights chief warned on Friday. Volker Turk said there had been a drastic acceleration in Zionist illegal settlement building in the occupied West Bank as it wages a relentless war in the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

The UN high commissioner for human rights said creating and expanding settlements amounted to the transfer by the Zionist entity of its own civilian population into occupied territories. "Such transfers amount to a war crime that may engage the individual criminal responsibility of those involved," Turk said in a report to the UN Human Rights Council. Reported Zionist plans to build another 3,476 settler homes in the West Bank colonies of Maale Adumim, Efrat and Kedar "fly in the face of international law", he said.

Spain echoed the sentiment on Friday, with its

The CBI said it had established "around 35 instances" of Indians being sent to Russia but added it was working to identify more potential victims. India's foreign ministry had earlier said it was working to secure discharges for around 20 Indian nationals in the Russian army. "We remain committed to the early release of our nationals ... and their eventual return home," a ministry statement said Friday.

The CBI named four suspects in the network including Dubai-based recruitment agent Faisal Khan, who had advertised Russian army jobs on his social media channel Baba Vlogs. Khan told AFP last month that he had helped facilitate the travel of 16 Indian passport holders to Russia late last year for what he said were support roles in the army.

He said he had been "taken aback" when recruits were issued weapons, and "decided to put a stop to the recruitment process." Several Indian recruits told AFP in February that they were lured into joining up by promises of high salaries and Russian passports before being shipped to the frontlines.

The soldiers who spoke with AFP said they had been promised non-combatant roles but were trained to use Kalashnikov assault rifles and other weapons before being sent to Ukraine. India is a longstanding ally of Russia and has shied away from explicit condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine. Unemployment remains high despite rapid economic growth in India and huge numbers seek work abroad each year. — AFP

foreign ministry saying it "strongly condemns" the planned settlements that "undermine efforts to achieve a two-state solution and are an obstacle to peace". France's foreign ministry also said it "strongly condemns" the settlement plan and called on the Zionist government to "immediately reverse this decision". The Zionist entity seized the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Arab-Zionist war. It is illegal under international law for the entity to establish settlements in those Palestinian territories.

Despite opposition abroad, the Zionist entity has built dozens of settlements across the West Bank in recent decades. They are home to more than 490,000 Zionists, living in the same territory as around three million Palestinians. The entity gave the go-ahead for the new homes less than two weeks after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said any settlement expansion would be "counterproductive to reaching enduring peace" with the Palestinians.

Turk said that during the period covered by his report — November 1, 2022, to October 31, 2023 — some 24,300 housing units were added to existing Zionist settlements in the West Bank. That marks the largest number on record since monitoring began in 2017. It includes nearly 9,700 units in east Jerusalem, the UN rights office said. — AFP

International

Biden takes Trump fight to battleground states

US president, rival exchange attacks after scorching presidential address

PHILADELPHIA: US President Joe Biden stepped up his attacks on Donald Trump Friday as he took his election message to crucial battleground states on the back of a combative, well-received State of the Union address.

Speaking to supporters in the swing state of Pennsylvania, 81-year-old Biden finally attacked Trump by name, a day after he had referred to him only as "my predecessor" multiple times. "Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans are trying to take away our freedoms, and that's not an exaggeration," Biden said, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "Well guess what? We will not let him."

The Democrat slammed Trump for backing abortion bans and for inviting Russian President Vladimir Putin to invade NATO members that don't pay their bills. He also criticized Trump for meeting Friday with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who he said "is looking for dictatorship." Orban has also angered EU allies by maintaining ties with Putin after the invasion of Ukraine.

Biden's wife Jill Biden gave a lively introduction at the campaign event in Philadelphia in which she also laid into Trump.

"Donald Trump is dangerous to women and to families and to our country and we can't let him win" in November's election, she said.

A smiling First Lady also hailed her husband's performance in the set-piece State of the Union speech, saying: "Did you all see Joe last night? Wasn't he on fire?" Dozens of demonstrators however rallied outside the venue to protest against Biden's support for the Zionist entity's offensive in Gaza after the Hamas attacks on October 7.

'Grand slam'

Pennsylvania is Biden's first stop of a tour of all the key battleground states in March as the race to stop a White House comeback by Trump starts in earnest. Biden travels on Saturday to Atlanta, Georgia — the same state where Trump is giving a rally on the same day.

He then heads to New Hampshire on Monday, Wisconsin on Wednesday and Michigan on Thursday. Along the way, the president will look to ride a wave of momentum from the State of the Union speech, which ratings firm Nielsen esti-

mated was seen by 32 million people, up from last year's viewership of 27 million.

A pumped-up Biden on Thursday launched one of the most scorching addresses ever seen from the podium of the House of Representatives, transforming what used to be a somber set-piece occasion into a raucous political rally.

He repeatedly attacked Trump for "bowing down" to Putin and being a threat to US democracy, while assailing Republican lawmakers in the chamber as the former president's stooges.

The aim was also to ease concerns of skeptical voters about his age, with America's oldest president bringing the fight in an energetic performance that saw him spar with Republicans in exchanges sprinkled with jokes. "President Biden hit a grand slam," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters flying with him to Philadelphia.

Trump, 77, hit back at Biden on Friday, saying Biden was a "psycho" and saying his speech was "getting 'panned' all over the world," without offering any examples. Trump has said that he will debate Biden on television "anytime" but Biden



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address in the House Chamber of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on March 7, 2024. — AFP

told reporters on Friday that it "depends on his behavior."

Biden has branded Trump a threat to democracy. The former president faces multiple criminal cases, including for trying to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden, and a \$355 million civil fraud fine. But he currently holds a narrow lead over Biden in the polls. — AFP

Turkey's March local elections to be Erdogan's 'last'



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

ISTANBUL: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday said that the country's March local elections would be his last, suggesting an end to his more than two decades in power. It was the first time that Erdogan, who has been in power since 2003, has spoken about leaving office.

"I am working non-stop. We're running around breathlessly because for me, it's a final," said the president at a meeting of the TUGVA young Turks foundation. "With the authority that the law confers on me, this election is my last election."

The 70-year-old leader expressed confidence that his conservative Justice and Development (AKP) party would nonetheless remain in power even after he has left office. He said that the results of the March 31 local elections would be "a blessing for the brothers who come after me. There will be a transfer of confidence".

The AKP is hoping to regain the mayorship of Istanbul in the elections later this month, having seen it taken by the opposition in 2019. Erdogan was himself mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998.

He was then elected prime minister in 2003 when the premier was the dominant figure in Turkish politics. That changed when Erdogan was elected president in 2014, following three terms as prime minister.

A constitutional change in 2017 then turned Turkey from a parliamentary system into an executive presidency, abolishing the position of prime minister and ensuring that Erdogan's grip on power remained unchanged.

Further election successes in 2018 and last year have meant that Erdogan's often controversial rule has extended into a third decade. Internet users were quick to pour scorn on Erdogan's claim to be nearing the end of his political hegemony.

"Don't believe it," human rights activist Ercan Ozcan wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "We know he tries to modify the constitution to ensure his re-election again and again."

Erdogan has built up a reputation as an unbeatable leader since his AKP party came to power in 2002. However, his drawing power has waned a little in recent years. His candidates for the mayorship in Istanbul — the country's economic hub — and the capital Ankara were both beaten in 2019. And last May in the presidential election, he was taken to a second-round run-off for the first time. — AFP

Ex-UK PM joins Tory MPs quitting before election

LONDON: Former prime minister Theresa May announced on Friday she will stand down as an MP at the next election, adding to a growing list from the UK's ruling Conservatives to abandon leader Rishi Sunak. May, 67, is the most high-profile of scores of Tory lawmakers to say they will not seek re-election at this year's nationwide vote, in which opinion polls predict a thumping defeat for their party.

The Conservatives have consistently trailed the main Labour opposition, led by Keir Starmer, since October 2022 and are widely seen as on course to be kicked out of power after 14 years. May has represented the constituency of Maidenhead in southeast England since 1997 and served as prime minister between 2010 and 2016 — a tumultuous period in the UK when it attempted to negotiate its departure from the European Union.

"It has been an honor and a privilege to serve everyone in the Maidenhead constituency as the member of parliament for the last 27 years," May told the local Maidenhead Advertiser newspaper. She said causes close to her heart, including tackling modern slavery and human trafficking, had been "taking an increasing

amount of my time". "Because of this, after much careful thought and consideration, I have realized that, looking ahead, I would no longer be able to do my job as an MP in the way I believe is right and my constituents deserve," she said. May said she remained "committed" to supporting Sunak and believed the Conservatives could win the election, the date of which is still unknown but is expected in the second half of the year.

A total of 64 Conservatives and former Conservatives have now announced they will not fight their seats — the largest number of Tories to retire from parliament since Labour's landslide win under Tony Blair in 1997. Labour chairwoman Anneliese Dodds said the numbers showed there was "no confidence" in the Conservative party's prospects. Treasury minister Gareth Davies MP denied this, telling Times Radio that lawmakers were standing down "on all sides of the house". Almost 100 of parliament's 650 MPs have said they will not seek re-election.

Brexit woes

Political scientist Tim Bale, author of a book on the Conservative party's rightward shift since Brexit, said many Tories will be jumping ship due to the prospect of being in opposition. "And for a few of them, I suspect, driven, too, by distinctly mixed feelings about the radical right-wing populist direction their party seems to be taking nowadays," he told AFP.

British media have reported that the Conservatives are struggling to field candidates and some of their MPs putting out leaflets failing to men-



Theresa May

tion which party they represent. A Conservative spokesperson did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

May served as interior minister between 2010 and 2016 under then leader David Cameron. But Cameron resigned immediately after Britain voted to leave the EU on June 23, 2016, and May took over as prime minister less than a month later.

She called a general election in 2017 to try to break the logjam over the terms of Britain's departure from the EU but the vote resulted in a hung parliament. Unable to get her deal through parliament, the Tories suffered a drubbing in European elections in May 2019, leading to her resignation. — AFP

Political party with violent past reborn in disillusioned Pakistan

KARACHI: A shadowy political party that ruled Karachi for more than three decades, overseeing the city's descent into a swamp of organized crime, has risen from the ashes in Pakistan's tainted elections.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) ran the city through a pervasive network of street enforcers and elected lawmakers, with its founder Altaf Hussain calling the shots from self-exile in London.

In 2016, the MQM was dismantled in a security crackdown by the military — its headquarters were sealed off and its offices bulldozed, followed two years later by a collapse in votes at the polls.

But the party's disbanded cadre unified ahead of February's elections, winning enough seats in the city of more than 20 million people to become the third-largest partner in the national coalition government, after an election marred by vote-rigging allegations.

"The (MQM) brought cruelty to the people of Karachi, everybody was crying in pain," said 76-year-old Abdul Sajid, who lived through the worst days of the party's urban warfare with its rivals. "I don't think people will tolerate that kind of violence again."

Under new leadership, MQM swept up most of the seats in Karachi in a success analysts say was engineered by the military to keep out MPs loyal to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan — whose opposition party has been subject to a sweeping crackdown.

In return for supporting the military-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), analysts predict the



KARACHI: Commuters ride past election campaign posters of Syed Mustafa Kamal, senior deputy convener of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) party, along a street in Karachi. — AFP

MQM will be rewarded with a handful of federal ministries and its choice of governor of Sindh province, where Karachi sits. Analyst Tauseef Ahmed Khan told AFP the MQM no longer has the support of its previous voter base, and was "brought in as the only possible alternative to (Khan's) PTI" party. The city's voter turnout has historically been lower than the national average and fell to a paltry 38 percent in last month's polls — 10 percent below the rest of the country. "We know there is no point in casting votes," said 37-year-old Umme Hani as she tended to her family's jewelry shop. "Whoever is supposed to come will come, this

whole election process is a dummy."

Founder Hussain forged MQM from the fires of Karachi's ethnic discontent in the 1980s when frustration was raging among the majority Mohajir population, who are descended from Indian Muslims who crossed into newly founded Pakistan after Partition in 1947.

MQM workers clashed with other ethnic groups and the security forces, unleashing a wave of bloodshed that regularly shut down Karachi. Hussain fled to London in 1992 before the first of many military operations against his party, but ran the city from a multi-million dollar UK office. — AFP

Campaigning wraps up in Portugal snap vote with right ahead

LISBON: Waving colorful flags, hundreds of campaigners took to Lisbon's streets on Friday ahead of Portugal's weekend snap election, with polls giving the opposition center-right an edge after eight years of Socialist rule, and huge gains for the far-right.

Support for the Democratic Alliance (AD) has inched up in the final days of the campaign to hit 32.6 percent against the Socialists' 27.9 percent, according to Radio Renascença's poll aggregator. But analysts warned the results of Sunday's general election remained wide open due to the large number of undecided voters.

Far-right party Chega, led by former television football commentator Andre Ventura, is tipped to get more than double the 7.2 percent it won in the last election in 2022. That scenario would make it a kingmaker in a new parlia-

ment and add momentum to Europe's swing to the populist right. Angela Loureiro, a 51-year-old lawyer, brought her 16-year-old daughter to an AD street rally near a fruit and vegetable market in Lisbon's upscale Alvalade neighborhood. "I am tired of these incompetent people who have governed us. It is unthinkable that this country has regressed in eight years," she told AFP as other AD supporters waved orange party flags around her.

The election was called after Socialist leader Antonio Costa, 62, resigned in November following an influence peddling probe that involved a search of his official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Costa himself has not been accused of any crime but he decided not to run again. Under Costa, unemployment has dropped, the economy expanded by 2.3 percent last year — one of the fastest rates in the eurozone — and public finances have improved. But surveys indicate that many voters feel Costa's government squandered the outright majority it won in 2022 by failing to improve unreliable public health services and education, or address a housing crisis that has sparked noisy street protests.

"The positive macroeconomic context is not reflected in the quality of life of the Portuguese because of



LISBON: Democratic Alliance (AD) leader Luis Montenegro flashes the victory sign to supporters at the end of the last rally of the electoral campaign in Lisbon on March 8, 2024. (Right) Chega far-right party leader Andre Ventura (center) waves as he takes part in a street rally. — AFP photos

inflation, low wages or problems with state services," said political scientist Marina Costa Lobo of Lisbon's Social Sciences Institute.

The Socialists' new leader, 46-year-old former infrastructure minister Pedro Nuno Santos, has defended the government's record even as he acknowledges it could have done better in some areas. Addressing the crowds at a rain-soaked rally in Baixa Chiado, one of



Lisbon's most iconic neighborhoods, he said the Socialist party was a "safe harbor" that would "govern for all Portuguese, unlike our adversaries".

The AD has vowed to boost growth by cutting taxes, and to improve public education and healthcare. At a final rally at Lisbon's main bullring, the party's leader, 51-year-old lawyer Luis Montenegro, said the AD offered a "safe change". — AFP

International

Gaza war robs Muslims of Ramadan joy

'I pray the war will be over soon. The people there are suffering so much.'

GAZA: For Muslims worldwide, Ramadan is a time of prayer, reflection and joyful evening meals, but all Gazans wish for this year is an end to five months of war and suffering.

It is a hope shared widely across the Islamic world, where the thoughts of many are with Gaza ahead of the fasting month which starts with the sighting of the crescent moon on Sunday or Monday.

The Zionist assault on Gaza has devastated the Palestinian territory, killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and triggered violence elsewhere in the Middle East, from Lebanon to the seas off Yemen.

Amid the ruins of southern Gaza, Nevin Al-Siksek sat recently outside her makeshift tent, distracting her young daughter from the carnage around them with a plastic Ramadan lantern. The colorful fanous lanterns are an iconic symbol of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar marked by dawn-to-dusk fasting and, in better times, festive evening iftar meals with family and friends.

Across Gaza this year, the lights are among the few signs signaling the coming holy month, amid dire warnings of mass starvation. Much of the territory of 2.4 million people has become a hellscape of bombed-out neighborhoods, emaciated children and mass graves dug in the sand.

Siksek and her family, instead of tucking into lamb and sweets at the home they had to flee in northern Gaza, will break their fast in the bare-bones tent they share with other displaced civilians. If they can find anything to eat, that is. "We do not have any food to prepare," Siksek said as her husband, Mohammed Yasser Rayhan, nodded in agreement.

In the past during Ramadan, which commemorates the beginning of the Quranic revelation to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in the seventh century, "there was life, joy, spirit, decorations and a beautiful atmosphere", Rayhan said. "Now Ramadan is coming and we have war, oppression and famine."

'A prayer for our brothers'

The Zionist entity's military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 30,800 people so far, the vast majority women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. The entity claims the assault is in response to

an attack staged by Hamas that resulted in the deaths of around 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Zionist figures.

Other parts of the Islamic world may be grappling with their own challenges, from conflicts to high inflation. But many Muslims say their thoughts are with Palestinians this year.

"Every time I pray, I always send a prayer for our brothers and sisters in the Palestinian territory," said Indonesian housewife Nurunnisa, 61, in Aceh province in the west of the country with the world's largest Muslim population. "I can't help them with anything so I can only help them with prayer. I pray the war will be over soon. The people there are suffering so much."

The reports of looming famine in Gaza, where desperate residents have taken to eating slaughtered horses and even leaves, also weigh heavily on Jordanian father-of-five Saif Hindawi, he said as he shopped for rice and oil in Amman. "Imagine in Jordan, there are high prices, but there is still the ability to buy what is available," said the 44-year-old. In Gaza, he said, "they have used animal fodder to make bread".

The war has had a severe impact on southern Lebanon, where Iran-backed Hezbollah militants have exchanged near-daily strikes with the Zionist entity and tens of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border.

Retired teacher Maryam Awada, now living in a school-turned-shelter in the city of Tyre, said she would be unable to fast this Ramadan because of the stress. "God will not force me to fast here in this hell we're living in," she said.

In Yemen, Iran-backed Houthi rebels began firing missiles at vessels linked to the Zionist entity in November. The Houthis' campaign has won them fans abroad, but within Yemen it has worsened a humanitarian crisis brought on by a nearly decade-long civil war.

In the port city of Hodeida, an area targeted by anti-Houthi US strikes, restaurant manager Ali Mohammad said he was bracing for a lean month. "When the air strikes began, business suddenly collapsed," he said. "If the situation continues ... our



GAZA: Palestinian children sit in front of wall bearing Ramadan theme drawings in Gaza City on March 8, 2024. — AFP

only option will be to close down." In Somalia's capital, trader Abdurahim Ali said he worried the Red Sea crisis would drive up prices, something that "affects people during Ramadan" especially.

'Tired and drained'

Muslims in annexed east Jerusalem worry about violence at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a regular flashpoint. The site is Islam's third-holiest and Judaism's most sacred, known to Jews as the Temple Mount. During Ramadan, Muslims in their tens and even hundreds of thousands pray at the compound's iconic Dome of the Rock. But in February, the Zionist entity's hard-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir argued that Palestinian residents of the occupied West Bank "should not be allowed" entry to Jerusalem during Ramadan.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said

on Tuesday that worshippers would be allowed to enter the mosque "in similar numbers" to past years. That did little to reassure Ahlam Shaheen, 32, who works at a community center near Al-Aqsa.

When Zionist police stormed the mosque in 2021, Shaheen saw women praying next to her get shot with rubber bullets, and she fears it could happen again. "We're living with the war for five months now," she said. "We're really tired and drained."

In Cairo, the most festive of cities during Ramadan, a Gazan student who asked not to be named feared the holy month this year would be unbearable. "For the first time in my life, I can't stand the idea of Ramadan," she said. "It hurts every time I see a fanous," she said about the lanterns that festoon the city's streets. "My brothers and sisters can't even eat once a day, and we're supposed to have a fast-breaking meal like everything is normal?" — AFP

Indonesia to open probe after pilots fell asleep mid-flight

JAKARTA: Indonesia's transport ministry said Saturday it would open a probe into local airline Batik Air after two of its pilots were found to have fallen asleep during a recent flight. A pilot and co-pilot were simultaneously asleep for approximately 28 minutes during a flight from South East Sulawesi to the capital Jakarta on January 25, a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) said.

The incident resulted in a series of navigation errors, but the Airbus A320's 153 passengers and four flight attendants were unharmed during the two-hour-and-35-minute flight. The transport ministry "strongly reprimands" Batik Air over the incident, air transport director-general M. Kristi Endah Murni said, calling on airlines to pay more attention to their air crew's rest time.

"We will carry out an investigation and review of the night flight operation in Indonesia related with Fatigue Risk Management for Batik Air and all flight operators," Kristi said in a statement. Batik Air said in a statement on Saturday that it "operates with adequate rest policy" and that it was "committed to implement all safety recommendations".

The pilots involved in the January 25 incident had been temporarily suspended, the statement added. The KNKT report, seen by AFP on Friday, was uploaded to the agency's website in late February. One of the pilots had not rested adequately on the night before the flight, according to the report.

About half an hour after the plane took off, the captain asked permission from his second-in-command to rest for a while, with the request being granted. The co-pilot then took over command of the aircraft, but also inadvertently fell asleep, the report said. "The second-in-command had one-month twin babies. His wife took care of the babies and he assisted while at home," the report said.

A few minutes after the last recorded transmission by the co-pilot, the area control center in Jakarta tried to contact the aircraft. It received no answer. Twenty-eight minutes after the last recorded transmission, the pilot woke up and realized his co-pilot was asleep and that the aircraft was not on the correct flight path. He immediately woke his colleague up, responded to the calls from Jakarta and corrected the flight path, the report said.

The plane landed safely after the incident. Investigators did not identify the pilots, but said they were both Indonesians and were aged 32 and 28. KNKT urged Batik Air to conduct regular cockpit checks and ensure that pilots and cabin crew were well-rested before their flights. — AFP

Nigeria sends troops to save hundreds of kidnapped students

KANO, Nigeria: Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Friday sent troops to rescue more than 250 pupils kidnapped by gunmen from a school in the country's northwest in one of the largest mass abductions in three years. The Kaduna state attack was the second mass kidnapping in a week in Africa's most populous country, where heavily armed criminal gangs on motorbikes target victims in villages and schools and along highways in the hunt for ransom payments.

Local government officials in Kaduna state confirmed the kidnapping attack on Thursday, but did not provide figures as they said they were still working out how many children had been abducted. At least one person was shot dead during the attack, local residents said.

Sani Abdullahi, a teacher at the GSS Kuriga school in Chikun district, said staff managed to escape with many students when the gunmen, referred to by locals as "bandits", attacked early Thursday firing in the air. He told local officials that 187 pupils had been snatched from the main junior school along with another 100 from primary classes. Three residents also said between 200

and 280 children and teachers had been snatched.

"Early in the morning ... we heard gunshots from bandits. Before we knew it, they had gathered up the children," resident Musa Mohammed told AFP. "We are pleading to the government, all of us are pleading, they should please help us with security."

The Kaduna abduction and the mass kidnapping a week ago from camps for people displaced by jihadists in northeast Borno state illustrate the challenge facing Tinubu, who promised to make Nigeria safer and bring in more foreign investment. "I have received briefing from security chiefs on the two incidents, and I am confident that the victims will be rescued," Tinubu said in a statement ordering armed forces to track down the kidnapers. "Nothing else is acceptable to me and the waiting family members of these abducted citizens. Justice will be decisively administered."

The two mass kidnappings came almost 10 years after Boko Haram militants triggered a huge international outcry in April 2014 by kidnapping more than 250 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno state. Some of those girls are still missing. More than 100 people were reported missing after last week's mass kidnapping in Borno, but conflicting accounts have emerged about the time and number of victims.

'No stone unturned'

Police did not provide figures for the Kuriga school kidnapping. But the numbers of those reported abducted in Nigeria are often lowered after people who went missing while fleeing attacks return home.

International Women's Day marked on the streets, in the courts

PARIS: People around the world marked International Women's Day Friday with protests and celebrations. Some countries marked the day by voting on — or confirming — groundbreaking legislation, while the failure of others to pass reforms on key issues such as abortion rights was the focus of some of Friday's protests. Here is a round-up of some of the demonstrations.

AFGHANISTAN: Small groups of women staged rare demonstrations in private spaces, after a crackdown by Taliban authorities forced activists off the streets. A handful of women in several provinces gathered to demand restrictions on jobs, travel and education be lifted, said activists from the Purple Saturdays group.

PAKISTAN: Hundreds of women rallied in major cities to highlight street harassment, bonded labor and the lack of female representation in parliament. "We face all sorts of violence: physical, sexual, cultural violence where women are exchanged to settle disputes, child marriages, rape, harassment in the workplace, on the streets," said Farzana Bari, lead organizer of the Islamabad event.

SPAIN: Tens of thousands of women marched in Barcelona, Madrid and other cities, many dressed in purple, the color associated with women's rights. According to police estimates, 40,000 women marched in Barcelona alone, with around 30,000 in the streets of Madrid on Friday evening.

ITALY: Thousands of people marched in Rome and Milan calling for an end to violence against women following a number of high-profile cases of young women murdered by their boyfriends.

Holding banners, dancing and chanting slogans, at least 10,000 people gathered in the Italian capital at the Circo Massimo, an ancient Roman racing ground, according to police.

IRAN: Jailed Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi called for an end to "gender apartheid", which "not only amplifies discrimination and oppression against women but also fortifies the authority of religious and authoritarian regimes".

She denounced the regimes in Iran and Afghanistan for having "systematically ... orchestrated conditions of suppression, domination, tyranny (and) discrimination against women".



KURIRIGA, Nigeria: A general view of a classroom at Kuriga school in Kuririga on March 8, 2024, where more than 250 pupils kidnapped by gunmen. — AFP

"The Kaduna State Government and Security Agencies are working round the clock to ensure the safe return of the school children," state governor Uba Sani said on social media platform X. "I have received strong assurances from the President and National Security Adviser that no stone will be left unturned to bring back the children."

In the last three years, hundreds of schoolchildren and college students have been kidnapped in mass abductions in the northwest and central region, including in Kaduna. Almost all were released for ransom payments after weeks or months spent in captivity at bandit camps hidden in the forests that stretch across northwestern states. — AFP



LONDON: Protesters dressed as characters from The Handmaid's Tale TV series hold placards at a demonstration calling for women's rights in Iran. — AFP photos

JAPAN: Six couples marked International Women's Day by filing a case suing the government for the right to use different surnames after marriage. Under laws in place since the 19th century, married couples must choose the husband's or the wife's name, and about 95 percent take the man's, according to the plaintiffs' lawyers.

BRITAIN: Protesters in London dressed as characters from "The Handmaid's Tale", Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel about a future in which women

have been reduced to chattel. They held placards calling for women's rights in Iran. A separate demonstration in the capital's Parliament Square highlighted the plight of women in Afghanistan, and called for the right of girls to go to school.

FRANCE: President Emmanuel Macron presided over a ceremony enshrining the right to abortion into the French constitution, the first country to make such a move. "We will not rest until this promise is held everywhere in the world," he said. — AFP



WARSAW: A woman holds a placard reading as 'Abortion is freedom' during a rally calling for the right to abortion.



PARIS: French actress Judith Godreche (front left) flanked by demonstrators holding placards displaying names of victims of femicide take part in a protest.

Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024

Zain teams up with Huawei to establish AI Center of Excellence

Step aims to push AI-enabled innovative services and 5.5G network automation



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Steven Yi with Zain and Huawei executives.

KUWAIT/BARCELONA: Zain announced it is teaming up with global partner Huawei to establish an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Center of Excellence. The step aims to push both partners' plans for AI-enabled innovative services and 5.5G network automation in the region.

The announcement was made during the Mobile World Congress (MWC 2024) in Barcelona, Spain. In attendance were Zain Kuwait Chief Executive Officer Nawaf Al-Gharabally, President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia Region Steven Yi, Zain Group Chief Investment and Digital Transformation Officer Malek Hammoud, Zain Kuwait CCO Meshal Al-Kandari, Zain Kuwait Chief Enterprise & Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, and executives from the companies.

Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally commented: "Our proactive efforts to offer AI-enabled services on 5G and 5.5G networks will establish a new benchmark and create new opportunities for the telecom industry in Kuwait and the region. These AI services encompass innovations such as New Calling, network energy conservation, and efficient O&M solutions, all aimed at keeping up with our everchanging industry and to exceed our customers' expectations."

Al-Gharabally added: "We will leverage on the innovations of AI to achieve network transformation, enhance data analysis, and introduce novel AI-based services. Our collaboration with Huawei to establish an AI Center of Excellence marks the initial steps toward achieving this vision."

President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia Region Steven Yi said: "Zain Kuwait and Huawei have partnered to establish this center to leverage on AI tools and create new services for consumers and businesses, as well as to improve network operations for the 5.5G era."

"This will involve training AI algorithms to enhance network automation to offer faster custom-



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Steven Yi at MWC Barcelona.

er service, provide high-quality network solutions, and optimize maintenance. This will also support the development of high-quality networks, fast and efficient services, and the best-in-class user experiences." Yi added. Zain aspires to reinforce its efforts to further push AI-enabled innovative services and 5.5G network automation. The company strongly believes in the pivotal role AI tools and applications play in transforming networks, ultimately improving performance, efficiency, optimization, operations, and maintenance. These innovations also improve other aspects for networks, such as self-healing, power saving, analytics, and more.

This announcement solidifies the collaboration between Zain Kuwait and Huawei to leverage AI-driven applications. Together, the companies aim to revolutionize services such as cutting-edge calling features, improved network efficiency, and optimized operations. This partnership is dedicated to adapting swiftly to evolving demands while

maintaining cost-effectiveness at its core.

Zain works to provide revolutionary technology like the market's first AI-powered, real-time voice/video translation communication. By integrating AI into its 5.5G New Calling services, Zain takes communications to new heights with instantaneous translation across multiple languages (including Arabic and English). This groundbreaking solution has undergone successful testing by Zain and is now being prepared for commercial launch in Kuwait with support from Huawei. Its primary goal is to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps through voice and video calls. Consumers and enterprises alike can enjoy seamless translation experiences, unlocking significant market opportunities in areas such as social networks, tourism, businesses, call centers, and content creation.

In addition, Zain recently announced that it has achieved speeds of 10 Gigabits per second after completing a 5.5G technology trial on its network, becoming the first operator to reach this significant milestone in Kuwait's telecom market. The company also succeeded in testing Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communication (URLLC), a key 5.5G feature.

The announcement was made after the successful completion of a 5.5G trial on Zain's network with Huawei, and under supervision and in collaboration with the Communication and Information Technology Reg-

ulatory Authority (CITRA). Zain has invested early in upgrading and enhancing its network's infrastructure to prepare for the shift towards the 5.5G era, which brings limitless opportunities and opens up new horizons for businesses and consumers alike. In addition, the achievement serves as a testament to Zain's leadership position and goes in line with its digitization efforts for the 'New Kuwait' vision.

5.5G, which features blazing-fast speeds and higher efficiency levels, combined with Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communication (URLLC), which brings reduced latency and ultra-reliable connections, will meet the ever-growing demand of cloud computing, AI, big data, immersive AR/VR experiences, autonomous vehicles, and more. These fast growing technologies and more rely on higher, more stable speeds, and are increasingly adopted by businesses and government agencies.

Zain maintains its leadership position within the local ICT industry through its robust ecosystem of strategic partnerships with the world's biggest technology leaders. Building upon early investment in cutting-edge technology infrastructure and harnessing the talent of its national workforce, the company remains at the forefront of innovation, consistently delivering groundbreaking technologies to Kuwait's largest customer base.

- **Al-Gharabally:** Our vision harnesses AI innovations to drive network and service transformation. We're joining forces with Huawei to make this vision a reality.
- **Steven Yi:** The center aims to invest in the capabilities of AI to transform networks and offer unprecedented services to consumers and businesses.
- **The two partners explored future collaboration at MWC Barcelona.**

US hiring beats expectations with solid showing

WASHINGTON: Hiring in the United States was robust in February although unemployment crept up, government data showed Friday, a potentially encouraging sign for policymakers hoping to cool the economy without tipping it into a downturn. Officials have been walking a fine line trying to bring down inflation by raising interest rates without causing a major blow to the economy. While analysts believed the United States could enter a recession last year, the economy has defied expectations and a surprisingly resilient labor market has helped to support growth. "The great American comeback continues," said President Joe Biden in a statement.

The world's biggest economy added 275,000 jobs last month, in an unexpected pickup after January's figure was revised significantly lower, according to Department of Labor data. Initial estimates put employment growth at 353,000 in January, but Friday's report pegs the figure now at 229,000.

The numbers point to a "strong labor market," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on MSNBC.

Even though the revisions showed less strength in employment growth, Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics noted that the market "continues to create jobs at a fast rate." A "soft landing" for the economy would be positive news for Biden as he seeks reelection in November. While the jobless rate rose slightly to 3.9 percent, the highest since January 2022, it remains on the lower end when compared with levels over the past



NEW YORK: A 'now hiring' sign is displayed in a retail store in Manhattan in New York City. — AFP

decade. Yellen added on MSNBC that there is "no evidence of inflationary pressure coming from the labor market," another positive sign.

Wage growth has edged down, from 0.5 percent in January to 0.1 percent in February on a monthly basis. Compared with the same period a year ago, average hourly earnings were up 4.3 percent, a lower reading than January as well. Labor Department figures showed.

"The labor market should continue to cool this year while the unemployment rate should see a slight uptrend but remain relatively low," said EY chief economist Gregory Daco. He expects that employers will "become increasingly strategic" in attracting and hiring talent, while holding back on pay raises to bring down overall labor costs. But strong job growth could lower the odds of an interest rate cut in May by the Federal Reserve. Fed policymakers will be "patient" in making changes to the benchmark lending rate, said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist of Nationwide. — AFP

Georgieva says she would be 'honored' to serve 2nd term

WASHINGTON: IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Friday she would be "honored" to helm the Washington-based financial institution for a second five-year term if she is renominated by member states. "I have received words of support for the work of the IMF from many of our members in recent weeks," Georgieva, 70, wrote in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

"If the broader membership agrees, I would be honored to continue to serve as the IMF Managing Director," she added. Speculation has swirled in recent months about whether Georgieva, a Bulgarian economist, might run again once her current term expires on September 30.

Since she took office in 2019, the IMF has stepped in on numerous occasions to support countries facing significant financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In an interview earlier this year, Georgieva told AFP that 2024 will be "very tough year" for fiscal policy, as countries look to tackle debt burdens accumulated during the pandemic.

Inflation is also likely to remain a challenge

for many economies, including the United States, with central banks looking to loosen monetary policy without pushing up prices.

Under a controversial, decades-old agreement between Europe and the United States, the International Monetary Fund has historically been led by a European, and the World Bank by a US citizen. This unwritten arrangement was reaffirmed last year when the Biden administration nominated Ajay Banga, an Indian-born, naturalized US citizen, to run the World Bank, which sits just across the street from the IMF in Washington.

Georgieva has received backing from key European allies in recent weeks, including France's finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, who told reporters on the sidelines of the G20 in Brazil that she was doing a "great job" running the IMF. Earlier Friday, the governor of the Bulgarian National Bank, Dimitar Radev, said in a statement that he had spoken with Georgieva about running for a second term.

"I am glad to report that she confirmed that it would be an honor for her to do that, as long as she receives support from IMF members," he said, in words later mirrored by Georgieva. — AFP



IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva

Business

Gulf Bank mobile app offers payment link sharing and bill splitting services

Bader Al-Ali: We are eager to enhance customer experience with Gulf Bank even further

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's latest mobile application has rapidly advanced towards digital leadership by offering a wide range of top-notch services. Among these offerings is the ability to send payment links to groups and divide bills among them, effectively improving the overall customer experience with Gulf Bank.

Bader Al-Ali, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, emphasized that the bank's mobile application offers numerous features and services through a smart user interface. This interface is tailored to meet the specific needs of each individual customer, ensuring a seamless experience that exceeds customer expectations. Al-Ali also highlight-

ed the distinctive features of the bank's mobile app, positioning it as the most user-friendly, efficient, and advanced in the banking industry.

Describing the process of sending bills to multiple recipients, Al-Ali outlined a clear set of instructions to follow. It begins with choosing the recipients after clicking on "Request Money" upon selecting the payments button then choosing "Send group link and finally forwarding the link to the group. In order to add beneficiaries, the application needs permission to access the user's phone contact list. From there, users can select recipients and specify both the amount and purpose of the payment. Once completed, a confir-

mation page assists in sending the links to added contacts via SMS.

Regarding the bill splitting service, Al-Ali highlighted that users can access it by navigating their bank account, selecting the transactions to be split, choosing the desired payers, and confirming the process through a review and payment step. Al-Ali concluded by emphasizing that the new version of Gulf Bank's mobile application represents a significant advancement in customer experience, impacting various banking services and transaction stages. It is accessible to everyone, regardless of location or time, via a simple, fast and secure interface.

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.



Bader Al-Ali

Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

US senators avert partial shutdown

WASHINGTON: US senators voted late Friday to green-light a government funding package that keeps open several key departments threatened with closure this weekend, a major step toward finalizing the 2024 federal budget after months of deadlock in the deeply divided Congress.

The \$460 billion package got broad cross-party support, although there were objections from nearly two dozen Republicans who had been holding up the agreement in a row over spending cuts, along with one Democrat who voted against the deal. Congress was supposed to approve the 12 annual bills that make up the federal budget five months ago, and without Friday's vote the lights would have gone out across several departments and agencies this weekend.

But the Senate staved off the shutdown with a deal on the first six bills allowing the departments or agencies dealing with agriculture, commerce, justice, science, environment, housing and transport to function until the end of the fiscal year, on September 30. Some of the most contentious battles — over the bills funding defense, labor, health and homeland security — have been put off for a second package that needs to reach President Joe Biden's desk by March 22.

A partial weekend shutdown would have threatened an array of government functions, including food inspections, veterans' benefits or scientific research — although in reality federal funding rules allow a few hours' grace and a brief lapse would not have sparked any immediate closures.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer in a statement ahead of the bill's passage hailed the legislation as a "major step" toward a fully funded government. "To folks who worry that divided government means nothing ever gets done, this bipartisan package says otherwise: it helps parents and veterans and firefighters and farmers and school cafeterias and more," he added.

The first package had a relatively smooth path

French CB chief: ECB rate cut likely in 'spring'

PARIS: The European Central Bank will "very likely" cut interest rates in the spring, an ECB governing council member said Friday, fuelling market hopes that the move could take place by June. The comments by French central bank governor Francois Vil-

leroy de Galhau came a day after the ECB decided to keep rates steady for a fourth straight meeting.

"It seems very likely to me that there will be a first rate cut in the spring," Villeroy de Galhau told broadcaster BFM Business, adding that "in Europe like elsewhere, spring is a season that goes from April to June 21". ECB president Christine Lagarde said Thursday that the Frankfurt-based institution was making "good progress" against inflation but "not sufficiently confident" about it.

Stock markets cautious after US jobs report

NEW YORK: Global stocks wobbled Friday as investors digested a jobs report that failed to settle the debate about when the US Federal Reserve could start cutting interest rates. The US economy added 275,000 jobs in February, higher than analysts expected and accelerating from January's revised figure.

Stocks wavered throughout the session, falling in pre-market trading as the news seemed to suggest the economy is running too hot to justify the Fed easing its monetary stance. But the report also included downward revisions to previous months, as well as a rise in the unemployment rate to 3.9 percent from 3.7 percent. All three major US indices ended the day lower, while the labor market figures did not give a clear indication of when the US central bank might start lowering interest rates.

"The Fed, having steered the economy with a steady hand thus far, is poised to maintain its cautious stance, likely resisting the clamor for rate reductions in the immediate term," said Richard Carter, head of fixed interest research at Quilter Cheviot. Wall Street had reached all-time highs, lifted by Fed Chair Jerome Powell hinting at a more dovish tilt to monetary policy coming soon. But in his testimony to lawmakers he also insisted the Fed needed to see more signs of winning the battle against inflation before making a move.

In Europe, Paris closed slightly higher while Frankfurt and London fell. They had been higher earlier in the session before being pulled lower by Wall Street.

Paris and Frankfurt also hit record highs Thursday after European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde hinted at cuts to eurozone interest rates starting in



WASHINGTON: The US Capitol in Washington, DC, on March 8, 2024. US senators were racing against the clock March 8 to vote on a package of funding bills for key federal agencies to avert a partial government shutdown ahead of a midnight deadline. — AFP

through the House on Wednesday, although figures on the Republican right voiced disappointment that it failed to address several of the party's policy priorities.

The agreement adds an extra \$1 billion for a federal nutritional program for low-income mothers and their babies, a key Democratic funding priority, increases rental assistance and boosts spending on veterans. There are cuts of up to 10 percent for agencies regularly in Republican crosshairs, including the FBI, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

"This legislation... imposes deep cuts to the EPA, ATF and FBI, which under the Biden administration have threatened our freedoms and our economy,

while it fully funds veterans' health care," Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson said, praising the bill. Republican squabbling over amendments to the legislation and "earmarks" — provisions circumventing the normal competition process to direct funds to lawmakers' pet projects — are threatened to delay the vote, however.

Conservatives were demanding that the leadership in both parties allow a vote on reinstating an earmark ban overturned by Democrats in 2021, effectively stripping more than \$12 billion from the bill. They highlighted examples of what they see as profligate spending, including \$1 million for an environmental justice center in New Jersey, \$4 million for a waterfront walkway in New Jersey and \$3.5 million for a Thanksgiving parade in Michigan. — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address in the House Chamber of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on March 7, 2024. — AFP

Biden pushes higher corporate tax, touts strong economy

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden called for higher taxes on corporations Thursday in his State of the Union address, while pushing for lower medicine costs and improved housing affordability, as he sought to allay concerns over the economy.

The 81-year-old outlined his agenda in the annual speech, in an effort to speak to voters' worries while taking credit for the recovery of the world's biggest economy as he seeks reelection this year.

Although the United States notably averted predictions of a recession last year as inflation cooled, Biden has struggled to convince voters on economic issues. But he told the joint session of the House and Senate at the US Capitol: "Folks, I inherited an economy that was on the brink."

"Now our economy is literally the envy of the world. Fifteen million new jobs in just three years — a record. Unemployment at 50-year lows," he said. Besides taking aim at Republican rival Donald Trump, Biden touted the economy's "greatest comeback story" under his own leadership.

Biden's economic proposals further an agenda the Democrat has been driving since the 2020 presidential race. But for Biden to enact them fully, Democrats will have to win strong majorities in both chambers of Congress in November's elections — a situation which appears unlikely for now.

On Thursday, Biden said: "It's time to raise corporate minimum tax to at least 21 percent so every big corporation finally begins to pay their fair share." These are part of a broader plan to lower the federal deficit by trillions of dollars. Biden is also seeking to levy a 25 percent minimum tax on billionaires, and took aim at former president Trump's administration over tax cuts that he said benefit the wealthiest.

He added that while Medicare is negotiating lower prices for prescription drugs, it was time to go further by expanding its power to broker lower costs for 500 drugs over the next decade to save taxpayers' money.

Turning to competition with China, Biden pointed to his own actions to curb exports of advanced technology. "Frankly, for all his tough talk on China, it never occurred to my predecessor to do any of that," Biden said, referring to Trump. He added that Washington is in a "stronger position" to win against China than anyone else, though stressing he did not seek conflict with the second biggest economy. On the domestic front, the president said he wanted to provide an annual tax credit to help Americans with housing costs. He highlighted his efforts to reduce unfair pricing and junk fees too, in an appeal to millions of Americans tuning in — with many still feeling the pinch from lingering inflation. A phenomenon he seeks to curb is "shrinkflation," where companies reduce the size of products to obscure price hikes. The practice drew ire even from popular Sesame Street children's character Cookie Monster this week, who complained about it in a widely reported social media post. — AFP



TOKYO: A man looks at an electronic board displaying stock prices of companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. — AFP

June. The Fed and the ECB have jacked up interest rates to combat inflation, which spiked after Russia invaded Ukraine. Inflation rates have slowed, but are still above the central banks' targets. The higher rates have risked pushing countries into recession, particularly in Europe. Official data Friday showed German industrial production rose for the first time in nearly a year in January, fueling hopes that a manufacturing slowdown in Europe's biggest economy was bottoming out.

The US stock market has gained around 10 percent so far this year, driven higher by tech stocks, but they have started to diverge in recent weeks.

Chipmaker Nvidia is up 85 percent from the start of the year and Facebook owner Meta is up 46 percent, but Apple is down seven percent. Another major stock, electric carmaker Tesla, has lost 29 percent. "It's quite obvious that some differentiation is coming back into the market," said David Morrison, senior market analyst at Trade Nation.

Leading crypto currency Bitcoin hit another record during the day, smashing through \$70,000 for the first time on growing investor demand amid speculation over when the United States may begin lowering rates. — AFP

Business

Soaring food prices dampen Ramadan spirits in Nigeria

Food inflation hovers around 35%; reforms compound living costs

LAGOS: The holy fasting month of Ramadan begins early next week in Nigeria, with the worst economic crisis in a generation leaving many in Africa's most populous Muslim country struggling to buy food. With food inflation at around 35 percent, worshippers taking part in Friday prayers at the central mosque in Lagos told AFP they were barely able to provide for their families.

"Some people already started fasting because they can't afford to eat," said Owoyemi Sherifent Mojisola, 54, in the mosque in Nigeria's economic capital.

"Everything is expensive at the moment." The government brought in reforms last year that have had a devastating effect on citizens of Africa's biggest economy, where around half the population of 220 million is Muslim. Since coming to office last year, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has ended a fuel subsidy and currency controls, leading to a tripling of petrol

prices and a spike in living costs as the naira has slid against the dollar.

Tinubu has called for patience to allow his reforms to take effect, saying they will help attract foreign investment, but the measures have hit people hard. Many poor Nigerians have had to skip meals and give up products such as meat, eggs and milk.

"It's really hard," said Idihabom Nafisah Oyebanji, a 42-year-old mother at the central mosque, who said she was unable to afford her favorite Ramadan foods, including milk and melon.

Food insecurity

At the market on the outskirts of the mosque, traders also said they were struggling. "People no longer have money to pay for small pleasures for Ramadan," said incense-seller Azeez Shelifu. He said that in under six months, his monthly income had fallen by a third to around 40,000 naira (\$25).

Nigeria's economic crisis has triggered

sporadic social unrest in recent months. Earlier this week, the national emergency agency said it had tightened security at its warehouses after hundreds of people looted a food store in the capital Abuja.

In the face of such hardship, the imam at the central mosque, Sulaiman Oluwatoyin Abou-Nolla, called for solidarity. "We need to support each other especially during this period of Ramadan," he told AFP, outlining plans to distribute food at the mosque this month.

He warned the economic crisis was fuelling other problems in Nigeria, including kidnappings for ransom. "It's an economic factor and can be political. The rate of employment is high—industries are closing," he said. Nigeria's latest mass kidnapping took place on Thursday in the northwestern state of Kaduna, where gunmen abducted more than 250 school pupils. At least 63 percent of Nigeria's population lives in extreme poverty, according to the national bureau of statistics. — AFP



LAGOS: A woman buys fruits at the Lagos Island market in Lagos on March 8, 2024 ahead of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. — AFP

China consumer prices rise in February

BEIJING: Chinese consumer prices rose in February for the first time since August, data showed Saturday, bucking a months-long stretch of deflation that compounded the country's myriad economic woes. The world's second-largest economy posted some of its lowest growth in decades last year and is battling a prolonged property sector crisis and soaring youth unemployment.

But in a rare bright spot, official statistics Saturday showed the consumer price index rose 0.7 percent last month, according to Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) -- the first increase since August.

The figure was higher than a 0.3 percent rise analysts surveyed by Bloomberg had expected and a sharp increase on the 0.8 fall seen in January, their sharpest drop in more than 14 years.

The positive data comes as senior officials meet in Beijing for the annual "Two Sessions" of China's parliament and its top political consultative body, in gatherings that have been dominated by the economy and national security. On Tuesday, Premier Li Qiang told that gathering the country would seek five percent growth in 2024 -- an ambitious goal that he acknowledged would be "not be easy" given the headwinds facing the economy.

High among those issues has been deflation, which China entered last July for the first time since 2021.

Apart from a brief rebound in August, prices had not risen until last month. Consumer prices traditionally see a boost during the Chinese New Year period, also known as Spring Festival, which fell in February this year. "It was primarily food and service prices that rose more," NBS statistician Dong Lijuan said in a statement.

"During the Spring Festival period, consumer demand for food products grew, in addition to



Consumer prices traditionally see a boost during the Chinese New Year period, which fell in February this year. — AFP

rainy and snowy weather in some regions affecting supply," Dong said.

China's sinking prices are in stark contrast with the rest of the world, where inflation remains a persistent bugbear, forcing central banks to ramp up interest rates. While deflation suggests goods were cheaper, it poses a threat to the broader economy as consumers tend to postpone purchases, hoping for further reductions. A lack of demand can then force companies to cut production, freeze hiring or lay off workers, while potentially also having to discount existing stocks—dampening profitability even as costs remain the same.

Given the holiday factor, one analyst cautioned against seeing Saturday's figures as suggesting China was no longer struggling with deflation. "I think

it is too early to conclude that deflation in China is over," Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said.

"Domestic demand is still quite weak. Property sales of new apartments have not stabilised yet," he explained. And producer prices continued to fall in February, dropping by 2.7 percent, the NBS said.

"Affected by the Spring Festival holiday and other factors, industrial production was in its traditional off season," Dong said. Investors have called for much greater action from Beijing to shore up the flagging economy. But despite calls for broader stimulus measures Beijing indicated this week it was unlikely to resort to big-ticket bailouts, setting a fiscal deficit-to-GDP target of three percent, similar to last year. — AFP

Fears grow for Hong Kong's finance hub status

HONG KONG: As Hong Kong fast-tracks a new national security law, the legislation and questions about its implementation have raised fears among the business community. The draft bill, introduced at the city's legislature on Friday, includes major offences such as treason and insurrection, which could be punished with life imprisonment.

The government has said it intends to pass the bill as soon as possible to plug legislative gaps left by an existing national security law imposed on Hong Kong by Beijing in 2020 after the finance hub saw massive pro-democracy protests. Authorities also say it is their constitutional responsibility to enact homegrown national security legislation according to Hong Kong's Basic Law—a mini-constitution governing the city since it was handed back to China from Britain in 1997.

But the city is entering "untested, uncharted waters" with the proposed law, said Kristian Odebjerg, chairman of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, speaking to AFP before the draft bill was unveiled. Its offences include treason, insurrection, espionage and theft of state secrets, sabotaging national security, and external interference.

But the definitions are "vague", said Odebjerg, particularly for the theft of state secrets—which, according to the draft bill, includes defense intelligence but also encompasses information about the city's economic, social and technological developments. "This could have a negative impact on... activities that some of our members engage in like research and due diligence activities," Odebjerg told AFP.

These activities "contribute to, or are necessary even, for a functioning financial centre and a market economy like Hong Kong", he said. However, city leader John Lee, a Beijing-picked ex-security chief sanctioned by the United States, said the proposed national security law—known as Article 23—would act as "an effective lock to prevent burglars".

It will exist alongside the Beijing-imposed national security law, which covers four major crimes: secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces.

AFP sought comments from members of the business and diplomatic communities during a one-month public



HONG KONG: As Hong Kong fast-tracks a new national security law, the legislation and questions about its implementation have raised fears among the business community.

consultation period. In the draft bill introduced Friday, a "public interest" defense to the state secrets offence was added. It means a person accused of such a crime could argue their action was in the "public interest" and outweighs the alleged threat to national security—though the bill did not define "public interest".

For an economist working for an international bank, the biggest risk "is that increasingly sometimes you don't really know where the red line is". Banks, firms and investors regularly rely on research, economic data and due diligence reports which could fall under the purview of "state secrets". The economist, who declined to be named for fear of repercussions, told AFP there could be a situation where a published analysis would affect investors' sentiment in Hong Kong.

"Will they (the authorities) come back to me?" he questioned. "Is (the report) a threat to so-called economic security?" The Law Society of Hong Kong, a statutory body all solicitors must join, has recommended the government ensure that "legitimate commercial secrets... will not inadvertently fall within the ambit" of the state secrets offence.

It also provided a fictitious example of research done by a private company into "booster fuels" for vehicles, which later discovered it could be used in rockets and missiles. "Should (the firm) continue to possess these secrets, knowing that unlawful possession of state secrets is

an offence under the proposed ordinance?" the society asked. A previous attempt in 2003 to introduce a national security law triggered massive pushback. Half a million Hong Kongers protested against what they regarded as an erosion of the liberties Beijing promised Hong Kong would have for 50 years post-handover under the "one country, two systems" doctrine.

Today, four years since Beijing's national security law was enacted, much of the city's opposition bloc and democracy activists have been arrested, silenced or fled Hong Kong. Britain has called on the government to reconsider the legislation, while the United States said the new law "risks compounding the 2020 National Security Law that has curtailed the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong".

"Basically they took the worst of mainland China's criminal law, they took the worst of post-9/11 English-speaking countries' anti-terrorism laws and they took the worst of colonial law," a diplomat told AFP, requesting anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter. He added that the decision for international firms to set up in Hong Kong was because of the "one country, two systems" doctrine, which allows the city to be governed under British common law instead of mainland China's opaque legal system. "Now it seems that the border between the 'two systems' is becoming... smaller and smaller," the diplomat said. — AFP

Sam Altman returns to OpenAI board months after crisis

SAN FRANCISCO:

CEO Sam Altman will return to the board of OpenAI, the company said on Friday, just months after a boardroom dustup that saw him fired and rehired by the company behind ChatGPT. Altman was also found to have been wrongly fired in an internal investigation that was launched in the days after his chaotic dismissal last year, the company said.



Sam Altman

Altman will join the board with three other new directors: Sue Desmond-Hellmann, a former CEO of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Nicole Seligman, a former president of Sony Entertainment; and Fidji Simo, CEO of Instacart. They will join Ex-Salesforce co-CEO Bret Taylor and former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, who joined in the immediate aftermath of the November 2023 tumult.

Microsoft also gained an observer seat on OpenAI's board at the time, a move that drew criticism and a lawsuit from Elon Musk earlier this week, who helped found OpenAI in 2015 before leaving the project.

"I am excited to welcome Sue, Nicole, and Fidji to the OpenAI Board of Directors," said Bret Taylor, chair of the OpenAI board. "Their experience and leadership will... ensure that we pursue OpenAI's mission of ensuring artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity," he added. Quora CEO Adam D'Angelo is the sole holdover from the old board that had taken the decision to fire Altman.

Altman has become the face of the recent artificial intelligence explosion that burst onto the scene with his decision to release ChatGPT in November 2022. But in a shock move, the company's board summarily fired Altman without any clear reason given, sparking the threat of a mass exodus by the company's 700 strong employees, who stuck by their star CEO. Microsoft, the tech giant with major investments in OpenAI, offered to hire those leaving the AI company, forcing a change of mind by its board, which reinstated Altman after a few days of chaos. The board members behind Altman's shortlived ouster, left their roles.

In the aftermath of the events, the new fangled board launched an internal investigation on what happened with a law firm. The results of that investigation "unanimously concluded that Altman and president Greg Brockman "are the right leaders for OpenAI," Taylor said in a separate statement.

The company said the probe, handled by outside firm WilmerHale, "reviewed more than 30,000 documents; conducted dozens of interviews, including of members of OpenAI's prior Board, OpenAI executives, advisors to the prior Board, and other pertinent witnesses..." OpenAI remains the standard bearer of generative AI, the technology that can generate human level texts and images in seconds.

But it faces increased rivalry from Google, Meta and other startups, including Anthropic, Musk's xAI and French company Mistral. OpenAI is now caught up in a legal battle with Musk, who accuses Altman and top executives of betraying the original nonprofit status of the company.

Musk's suit alleges that OpenAI was now effectively a subsidiary of Microsoft, arguing that this was breach of contract. Microsoft's embrace of AI, and OpenAI's technology in particular, has made it the world's biggest company by market capitalization.

OpenAI is also being sued by The New York Times for allegedly illegally using its articles to train the models that power ChatGPT and other applications. The Times believes that ChatGPT has the capability to become a substitute for its journalism and was built from scraping its content from the internet without payment or permission. — AFP



Members of the media document the aftermath of the red carpet rollout.



Preparations are underway for setting up the red carpet arrivals area ahead of the 96th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California.--AFP photos

NOT JUST KEN: OSCARS PRODUCERS SHARE VISION FOR GALA

When "Barbie," a neon-pink pop culture phenomenon like no other, was nominated for eight Academy Awards including best picture, the team organizing this year's Oscars gala knew exactly who they needed to approach. "The fact that Ryan Gosling will be performing 'I'm Just Ken' for the very first time, I think, will be a moment that everybody will want to watch," Oscars showrunner Raj Kapoor told AFP.

Gosling "was rightfully a little hesitant at the beginning," but quickly agreed because "he is a total professional," explained executive producer Molly McNearney. It is traditional for each of the year's five best song nominees to be performed live on the Oscars telecast. But it is rare that two of those tunes both come from the year's top-grossing film. "What Was I Made For?" will be performed at Sunday's ceremony by Billie Eilish, one of the world's biggest music stars who has already won two Gram-

mys for the tune.

And the other, a six-minute power ballad to the fragile male ego, will be sung by the Oscar-nominated Gosling, who plays Barbie's boyfriend-turned-foe Ken in the surreal feminist comedy.

The former Disney child star turned A-list, who performed at weddings and fronted an indie rock band in his teens, has been deep in rehearsals since agreeing to perform, meeting producers multiple times at the venue. "He's going to leave no one disappointed with that performance," said McNearney.

The emphasis on "Barbie" is unsurprising. It grossed \$1.4 billion, and movies that do well at the box office tend to attract more viewers to the Oscars when nominated. Last year, producers heavily emphasized "Top Gun: Maverick."

A promotional skit for Sunday's Oscars saw returning host Jimmy Kimmel visit the film's pink "Barbieland," alongside its stars including Gosling and

America Ferrera, also a nominee. The producers also can showcase "Oppenheimer," which is the favorite for best picture, itself earned nearly \$1 billion, and was the other half of last summer's "Barbenheimer" viral phenomenon.

"It just feels like that energy has carried on through the year," said executive producer Katy Mullan. "We're giving 'Barbie' plenty of love in the show. But we're giving every movie that's been nominated lots of love," added McNearney.

Another highlight will be Osage musicians performing a song from Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," on a night that could see its star Lily Gladstone become the first Native American actor to win an Oscar. "For everybody in that room and everybody at home, to have a little insight into the musical nuances of a historical tradition within that tribe, and it to be celebrated on our show? There's been a lot of time

and thought into how we honor that correctly," said Kapoor.

Celebrate

After a pandemic low of barely 10 million viewers led some to question the Oscars telecast's relevance in the era of TikTok, audiences bounced back strongly last year, to 18.7 million. Part of that was attributed to the successful return of late-night funnyman Kimmel as host, and he is back again Sunday for a fourth stint.

Could he be planning to go for Bob Hope's remarkable record of hosting 19 times? "I hope not—I don't think he could survive that!" joked McNearney, who is married to Kimmel. "I think it's really important to remind someone of all the obstacles before taking on such a big and truthfully thankless job. So I always try to talk him out of it! "If he still wants to do it, then I know he's truly committed," she said.

Kimmel was partly inspired to return by a desire to celebrate the end of last year's massive Hollywood strikes, which he plans to mention in his opening monologue, said McNearney. The host's first Oscars ended with the infamous envelope mix-up in which "La La Land" was mistakenly announced as best picture winner, before the prize was awarded to "Moonlight." Kimmel recently said he hopes Sunday night will again take some unexpected, spontaneous twists.

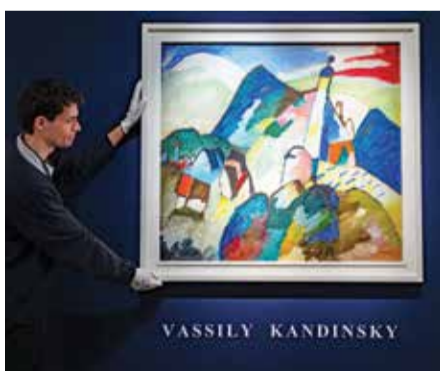
"That is where Jimmy completely shines. He is the most comfortable in discomfort," agreed McNearney. Mullan—who oversaw the London Olympics opening ceremony—has a more cautious approach. "I love that Jimmy says he hopes that something goes wrong," she said. "I really hope that nothing goes wrong."—AFP



Personnel members hang for display a rare Vincent van Gogh painting, "Tete de paysanne a la coiffe blanche" (Head of an old farmer's wife with a white hat), painted circa 1884, that will be auctioned at the TEFAF Maastricht art fair, in Maastricht.

Van Gogh, Kandinsky stars of the show at Dutch art fair

A rare early work by Vincent van Gogh and a record-selling masterpiece by Wassily Kandinsky will be up for sale when one of the world's largest art fairs opens its doors this weekend. From Saturday until March 14, visitors at The European Art Fair, better known as TEFAF, will be able to marvel at a treasure trove of paintings, sculptures and jewelry -- all up for sale—in the southern Dutch city of Maastricht.



A personnel member hangs for display a Wassily Kandinsky painting, "Blick auf Murnau mit Kirche II," ("View of Murnau with Church 2"), ahead of the TEFAF Maastricht art fair, in Maastricht. — AFP photos

Among the many pieces up for grabs, which include famous names like Manet, Rubens and Rodin, the undisputed stars of the show are two paintings: Van Gogh's "Tete de paysanne a la coiffe blanche" and Kandinsky's "Murnau mit Kirche II". Also known as "Head of an Old Peasant Woman with a White Cap", Van Gogh's early work, painted around 1884 has been put up for sale by M.S. Rau, one of the largest and best known galleries in the United States, based in New Orleans.

"Van Gogh is such an incredibly timeless artist," said the gallery's vice president of acquisitions Rebecca Rau. "There is bound to be a lot of interest"

from buyers, she told AFP. Van Gogh made the painting while living with his parents in the southern Dutch town of Nuenen the year before he painted his other famous work from the period, the 1885 "The Potato Eaters."

M.S. Rau's president Bill Rau told AFP the asking price for the painting—which goes on sale on Thursday—was 4.5 million euros (\$4.9 million). "We knew that this would be a star at the fair," Rau said. "But we had no idea how excited people would get just walking by."

Record Kandinsky

Painted in 1910, Kandinsky's "Murnau with Church 2" was sold by Sotheby's in London last year for a record \$45 million. A colorful vision of the German village of Murnau with its church spire stretched like the peaks of the Bavarian Alps, heralded the Russian master's move towards abstraction. The oil work once adorned the dining room of the Jewish couple Johanna Margarethe Stern and Siegbert Stern, founders of a textile company.

At the heart of Berlin's cultural life in the 1920s, counting Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and Albert Einstein in their circle, they built up a collection of around 100 paintings and drawings. Siegbert Stern died of natural causes in 1935. His wife fled to the Netherlands but died in Auschwitz in May 1944 after being captured by the Nazis.

"Murnau Mit Kirche II" was identified only a decade ago in a museum in the Dutch city of Eindhoven, where it had been since 1951. It was returned in 2022 to the heirs of the Sterns, whose 13 survivors shared the proceeds of the sale. It was bought on auction from Sotheby's last year by art dealer Robert Landau, the New York Times reported last month.—AFP

Not just humans: Bees and chimps can also pass on their skills

Bumblebees and chimpanzees can learn skills from their peers so complicated that they could never have mastered them on their own, an ability previously thought to be unique to humans, two studies said. One of humanity's crowning talents is called "cumulative culture"—our ability to build up skills, knowledge and technology over time, improving them as they pass down through the generations. This ability to transfer abilities no individual could learn by themselves is credited with helping driving humanity's rise and domination of the world.

"Imagine that you dropped some children on a deserted island," said Lars Chittka, a behavioral ecologist at the Queen Mary University of London and co-author of the bee study. "They might—with a bit of luck—survive, but they would never know how to read or to write because this requires learning from previous generations," he said in a video published with the study in the journal Nature.

Previous experiments have demonstrated that some animals are capable of what is known as social learning—working out how to do something by observing others of their kind. Some of these behaviors seem to have been perfected over time, such as the incredible navigational talent of homing pigeons or chimpanzees' ability to crack nuts, suggesting they could be examples of cumulative culture.

But it is difficult for scientists to rule out that an individual pigeon or chimp could not have worked out how to do achieve these feats by themselves. So a UK-led team of researchers turned to the humble bumblebee.

'So surprised'

The first step was training a crack squad of "demonstrators" to do a complex skill that they could later teach to others. In the lab, some bees were given a two-step puzzle box. They were tasked with first pushing a blue tab, then a red tab to release the sugary prize at the end.

Alice Bridges, a study co-author also from Queen Mary University, told AFP: "This task is really difficult for bees because we are essentially asking them to learn to do something in exchange for nothing" during the first step. Initially, the baffled bees just tried to push the red tab—without first moving the blue one—and simply gave up. To motivate the bees, the researchers put a sugary treat at the end of this first step which was gradually withdrawn as they mastered the process.

The demonstrators were then paired up with some new "naive" bees, which watched the demonstrators solve the puzzle before having a go themselves. Five of the 15 naive bees swiftly completed the puzzle—without



Chimpanzees bask under the sun in their enclosure at the Los Angeles zoo in California.—AFP photos

needing a reward after the first stage. "We were so surprised," Bridges said. "We were all just going crazy" when it first happened, she said.

Alex Thornton, a professor of cognitive evolution at the UK's University of Exeter not involved in the research, acknowledged that it was a small sample size. "But the point is clear—the task was exceptionally hard to learn alone, yet some bees could solve it through social learning," he wrote in a comment piece in Nature. The authors of the research said it was the first demonstration of cumulative culture in an invertebrate.

Chimp off the old block

Chimpanzees—our closest living relatives—also seem to possess this talent, according to a separate study in Nature Human Behavior. The puzzle box for a troupe of semi-wild chimpanzees at the Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage in Zambia was a little more

difficult. It involved retrieving a wooden ball, holding open a drawer, slotting in the ball then closing it to release the peanut prize. Over three months, 66 chimps tried and failed to solve the puzzle.

Then the Dutch-led team of researchers trained two demonstrator chimpanzees to show the others how it was done. After two months, 14 "naive" chimps had mastered it. And the more the chimps watched the demonstrators, the quicker they learned to solve the problem.

Bridges said the studies "can't help but fundamentally challenge the idea that cumulative culture is this extremely complex, rare ability that only the very 'smartest' species—e.g. humans—are capable of". Thornton said the research again showed how "people habitually overestimate their abilities relative to those of other animals".—AFP



A bumblebee draws nectar from the flowers of a gooseberry bush in a garden outside Moscow.

Lifestyle



This photo illustration shows books from the popular "Dragon Ball" manga series on a shelf in a store in downtown Tokyo.



A tourist wearing a T-shirt of Dragon Ball has his photographs taken with a statue of Dragon Ball character "Son Goku" in Tokyo.



Pedestrians walk past a poster (top L) advertising the popular "Dragon Ball" manga franchise along a street in the Akihabara area of Tokyo.



'Dragon Ball' creator Akira Toriyama dies aged 68

The creator of Japan's hugely popular and influential "Dragon Ball" comics and anime cartoons, Akira Toriyama, has died aged 68, his production team said Friday. First serialized in 1984, "Dragon Ball" is one of the best-selling manga franchises of all time and has spawned countless anime series, films and video games.

Toriyama died on March 1 because of a blood clot on his brain, a statement posted to the official "Dragon Ball" account on X, formerly Twitter, said. "It's our deep regret that he still had several works in the middle of creation," said the statement attributed to Toriyama's Bird Studio, which praised the artist's "great enthusiasm".

"He would have many more things to achieve. However, he has left many manga titles and works of art to this world," the statement added. "We hope that Akira Toriyama's unique world of creation continues to be loved by everyone for a long time to come."

"Dragon Ball" features a boy named Son Goku who collects magical balls

containing dragons to help him and his allies in a fight to protect the Earth from evil enemies.

The comics have sold more than 260 million copies in Japan and worldwide, according to publisher Shueisha.

Toriyama was already famous for his comedy manga "Dr Slump" in the early 1980s when he created "Dragon Ball", which he said was inspired by Chinese-style kung fu movies. The 1990s brought the beloved cartoon "Dragon Ball Z", and Toriyama was also part of the design team for the massively successful "Dragon Quest" games. Not all the spin-offs have been a hit, however, with the live-action 2009 movie "Dragonball Evolution" flopping at the box office and attracting withering reviews.

Publishing house Shueisha, whose weekly "Shonen Jump" magazine serialized the "Dragon Ball" comics, said it was "greatly saddened by the sudden news of his death". "His manga have been read and loved all over the world, transcending borders," it said.

'Big shoes to fill'

Eiichiro Oda, creator of Japan's major "One Piece" manga franchise, said in a statement that Toriyama's death was "too soon" and had left "too big shoes to fill". "To think I'll never see him again... I'm overwhelmed by sadness," Oda said.

Born in Japan's central Aichi region in 1955, Toriyama studied design at an industrial high school. He worked for three years at an advertising agency in the city of Nagoya before making his debut as a professional manga artist in his early 20s.

In an interview with Japan's Asahi newspaper in 2013, Toriyama described himself as a "difficult" person.

"Dragon Ball" is like a miracle, given how it helped someone like me who has a twisted, difficult personality do a decent job and get accepted by society," he said. He told the newspaper he had "no idea" why "Dragon Ball" had become such a huge hit worldwide.

"When I was drawing the series, all I ever wanted to achieve was to please boys in Japan," he said. The news of

Toriyama's death immediately made headlines in Japan, with many fans expressing their grief.

Rua Kimura, 20, said she was inspired by the growth and evolution of the story and characters in "Dragon Ball". "Since I was a child, I've sometimes felt weak or haven't been good at interacting with others, so watching 'Dragon Ball' made me want to try harder," she said.

Fans paid tribute with art posted under the statement on X, including of Son Goku ascending to the sky with angel wings and a halo. "Thank you for making my childhood awesome," one wrote.

Anime journalist Tadashi Sudo told AFP that for many manga artists, Toriyama was "a role model". "Toriyama knew exactly what everybody wants to read - adventure and the growth of characters," he said. "Many people - not only creators in Japan, but those abroad - saw in his works the culmination of what entertainment should be like," Sudo said. — AFP



A figurine character from the popular "Dragon Ball" manga franchise sits for sale inside a glass case at a shop in downtown Tokyo.



A poster of the popular "Dragon Ball" manga franchise hangs in a shop in downtown Tokyo.



Japan anime lovers in shock over second high-profile death

Japanese cartoon fans were devastated Saturday over the death of a voice actress behind one of the nation's most beloved anime heroines, just a day after the passing of the creator of the "Dragon Ball" mega-franchise was announced. Voice actress Tarako, best known for her role as the happy-go-lucky and occasionally troublemaking little girl from long-running anime series "Chibi Maruko-chan", died after an illness, her talent agency said Saturday. She was reportedly 63.

"Tarako passed away on March 4, 2024. She had been working while battling an illness since the beginning of this year, but her conditions deteriorated suddenly," Troubadour Musique Office said in a statement.

Set in suburban Japan, "Chibi Maruko-chan" depicts the comical everyday antics of schoolgirl Maruko, loved by viewers of all generations for her kind

heart and lazy personality. Tarako's cheerful voice as the show's titular protagonist has entertained Japanese households every weekend during dinner-time over the last 34 years.

Disbelief engulfed Japan as the news of Tarako's passing spread, coming just a day after the nation paid tribute to another anime legend, "Dragon Ball" creator Akira Toriyama, who died aged 68. "I'm still in shock over Toriyama and now Tarako? Please, my mind can't keep up with this succession of tragic news", one user wrote on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. Indeed, the death of Toriyama continued to spark an outpouring of grief from all over the world.

"To Akira Toriyama and the millions of fans who grew up with him," French President Emmanuel Macron said on X, posting a picture of a framed illustration of "Dragon Ball" characters,

autographed by Toriyama. Geraldo Alckmin, vice president of Brazil, also thanked Toriyama, calling his works a "legacy that has marked generations with values of companionship and loyalty".

Having started as a manga series penned by deceased artist Momoko Sakura, herself the model behind Maruko, "Chibi Maruko-chan" was adapted into anime in 1990 and has since morphed into a popular multimedia franchise. "We offer our deepest condolences for Tarako, who sincerely played the carefree Maruko that everybody loved", Fuji TV, which runs the series, said in a statement.

Tarako's funeral was attended only by close family, with a plan under way to organize a public farewell ceremony on a later date, her agency said. — AFP

'Dragon Ball': Japan's manga powerhouse

Kung-fu-style fights, a monkey-tailed boy and the search for seven magical dragon balls: since its debut in 1984, Japan's "Dragon Ball" manga has captured imaginations worldwide. It grew from a black-and-white serialized comic into one of the most successful manga and anime franchises, beloved by generations of fans and boosting the Japanese manga industry. The shock death of its creator Akira Toriyama, aged 68, was announced Friday by his production team. Things to know about "Dragon Ball":



260 million copies

The original "Dragon Ball" manga was published for over a decade in Japan's weekly Shonen Jump magazine, aimed at teenage boys. Part comedy, part absurdist adventure, the series fused martial arts action with a story influenced by the classic Chinese tale "Journey to the West".

Its hero, a monkey-tailed boy with spiky black hair called Son Goku, is trained by a turtle-sage and embarks on a quest to find seven mystical dragon balls. Over 519 chapters, the focus turns to the creative ways Goku defeats increasingly terrifying enemies, from sending them into a vortex to powering up until his hair turns gold. The comics have sold more than 260 million copies in Japan and worldwide, according to publisher Shueisha.

'Dragon Ball Z'

The first part of the manga series was turned into an anime cartoon also called "Dragon Ball" from 1986, featuring actress Masako Nozawa as the voice of Son Goku. On Friday, her talent agency said she was "too devastated" to comment on Toriyama's death.

Dubbed in different languages, the show became a global sensation, capturing children's hearts with its madcap battles won by the small hero as his power grows. Then "Dragon Ball Z", the adaptation of the later part of the manga, took the series' popularity to new levels with planet-destroying fights and displays of formidable strength. — AFP

'Game of Thrones' makers turn to iconic Chinese sci-fi

The makers of "Game of Thrones" return with "3 Body Problem", the adaptation of an iconic Chinese sci-fi trilogy. It premieres this weekend at the South by Southwest Festival in Texas before launching on Netflix on March 21.

Showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, coming off their huge hit with "Game of Thrones", have liberally translated from the books by Liu Cixin, which has already been adapted for Chinese TV. The trilogy of books, which began with "The Three-Body Problem" in 2008, jumps between countries, eras and protagonists as Earth confronts an existential threat, and is considered a sci-fi landmark.

"Making Game of Thrones was the greatest experience of our lives, but we spent 10 solid years living in that fictional world, so we wanted something that presented a new set of challenges on every level," Weiss said. "It's the story of an impending threat, but it's tethered by and centred around this core group of characters," added Benioff.

The cast includes three of the main actors from "Game of Thrones": John Bradley as an Oxford scientist, Liam Cunningham as the head of an intelligence agency and Jonathan Pryce as an oil tycoon. The showrunners also brought back key members of the effects and production crew - as well as composer Ramin Djavadi - to try to achieve the same grandiose and polished style.

It was shot to a speedy nine-month schedule across England, Spain, the United Nations headquarters in New York and Cape Canaveral in Florida.

"Between climate change and the pandemic, we've gotten a glimpse into how people in the world react differently to a global threat," said Weiss. "We see a similar spectrum of reactions in '3 Body Problem', which resonates with so many of us now." — AFP



Natalie Portman divorces French choreographer husband

Natalie Portman has divorced her French choreographer husband, a source close to the Oscar-winning actress told AFP on Friday. The "Black Swan" star filed last July to end her marriage of 11 years to Benjamin Millepied, said People magazine, which first reported the news.

The divorce was finalized in France last month, the source confirmed. Portman, 42, who holds both US and Zionist citizenship, is one of Hollywood's top actresses. She made her debut as a child star in Luc Besson's thriller "Leon: The Professional," and went on to appear in blockbusters including "Star Wars" and Marvel films, as well as art-house fare.

Portman met Millepied in 2009 on the set of "Black Swan," a psychological horror story set in the ultra-competitive world of professional ballet, for which she won the best actress Academy Award. Millepied starred in the film too, as well as providing choreography. The couple wed in California in 2012. They have two children together - son Aleph, 12, and daughter Amalia, 7.

Last May, media reports emerged of an extramarital affair by Millepied. The couple never publicly addressed the allegations. Representatives for Portman did not immediately respond Friday to an AFP request for comment. — AFP



US actress and director Natalie Portman (left) and her husband French choreographer Benjamin Millepied pose as they arrive for the opening ceremony of the 68th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southeastern France, on May 13, 2015. — AFP

Sports

India crush England by an innings and 64 runs to seal Test series 4-1

James Anderson reached 700 Test wickets, third bowler to achieve the feat

DHARAMSALA: Ravichandran Ashwin took a five-wicket haul in his landmark 100th Test as India hammered England by an innings and 64 runs in the fifth match to seal the series 4-1 on Saturday. England's James Anderson reached 700 Test wickets early in the day to be just the third bowler to achieve the feat, but the tourists were never in the game.

Off-spinner Ashwin returned figures of 5-77 to help bowl out England for 195 inside three days at the picturesque Dharamsala stadium, overlooked by snowcapped Himalayan mountains, after India posted a mammoth 477.

He rocked England's top and middle-order after the tourists began their innings 259 runs behind and lost five wickets for 103 runs by lunch. After the match, Ashwin said he was "very happy" with his performance.

"Win the Test and take wickets, what more can a bowler ask for?" he added. Jonny Bairstow, also in his 100th Test, attempted to take on the spinners and hit Ashwin for three sixes but finally fell lbw to Kuldeep Yadav after his 31-ball 39.

At the stroke of lunch Ashwin bowled skipper Ben Stokes for two, taking down the star all-rounder for the 13th time in Tests.

Joe Root resisted with his 84 and was the last man to go. He was dismissed by Yadav, who took seven wickets in the match and scored 30 crucial runs to be named man of the match, as India celebrated and the players shook hands.

Ashwin finished with nine wickets in the match and his 36th five-wicket haul in a career which began in 2011. Skipper Rohit Sharma did not take the field due to a "stiff back", with fast bowler deputy Jasprit Bumrah in charge and taking two wickets of his own.

India's young guns

India missed its top stars including Virat Kohli, who was out due to the birth of his second child, and KL Rahul, who was injured, but new talent stood up to deliver. Twenty-two-year-old India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal remained the leading batsman in the series with 712 runs, including double centuries in matches two and three.

Batsmen Sarfaraz Khan, Devdutt Padikkal, wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel and fast bowler Akash Deep made impressive debuts in the series and Rohit was all praise. "All these guys are short on experience but they've played a lot of cricket," Rohit said.

"We've got to nurture them and make them understand the game.



DHARAMSALA: India's players pose with the trophy after winning the fifth and last Test cricket match between India and England at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamsala on March 9, 2024. — AFP

When put under pressure they responded pretty well." Earlier, Anderson got Yadav caught behind for 30 to become the first pacesman and third bowler overall to the 700 mark, after spinners Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka (800 wickets) and late Australian great Shane Warne (708). The 41-year-old held the ball aloft to the crowd as teammates gathered around him and England fans stood to cheer. It ended Yadav's stubborn 49-run ninth-wicket overnight stand with Bumrah.

Spinner Shoib Bashir soon wrapped

up the innings in the fifth over of the day when he got Bumrah stumped for 20, completing the 20-year-old's second five-wicket haul in his debut series. Rohit (103) and Shubman Gill (110) set up the huge victory on the second day with a 171-run second-wicket stand to put the England bowlers on the back foot.

Sarfaraz (56) and debutant Padikkal (65) also made useful contributions in India's sole innings in response to England's 218. Yadav made his left-arm wrist spin count with his own five-wick-

et haul to bundle England out on day one after the visitors elected to bat first. England won the opener by 28 runs in Hyderabad with their attacking "Bazball" style of play, which came under fire by the critics in the next three losses, after they suffered regular batting flops. "Since the first Test match, we're man enough to say we've been outplayed," said Stokes. "We've got so much cricket coming up, taking the positives is something I'm looking forward to and driving this team forward." — AFP

Latham hauls NZ back into 2nd Test against Australia

CHRISTCHURCH: A timely return to form by New Zealand opener Tom Latham hauled the Black Caps back into the second Test against Australia Saturday as they overhauled a 94-run deficit to lead by 40 at stumps. Latham, dropped by Alex Carey on 59, was unbeaten on 65 in New Zealand's second innings at Christchurch's Hagley Oval exactly a year after his last half-century against Sri Lanka at the same ground.

Following the early dismissal of Will Young for one, Latham and Kane Williamson put on a partnership of 105 for the second wicket. "We're in the positives," a relieved Williamson said, adding "there's still plenty of hard work to do but the wicket is good."

"There's a lot of time left in this game and from our perspective it's about getting as many as we can." Williamson, celebrating his 100th Test, reached his half-century with a single off Mitchell Starc, but faced only two more balls before he edged a Pat Cummins delivery onto his middle stump.

At the close, New Zealand were 134 for two with Rachin Ravindra not out 11 alongside Latham. Australia were all out midway through the day with Marnus Labuschagne's masterful 90 laying the foundation for their first innings 256 in reply to New Zealand's 162.

"The intent from the first ball was to put the opposition under pressure. There was a nice pace in the wicket which was good for scoring," Labuschagne said. With the pitch becoming more benign than it was when 21 wickets fell in the first five sessions, Latham and Williamson produced a morale-boosting century stand for New Zealand, who had struggled against Australia's intimidating attack.

Australia have also had their batting issues, but Labuschagne found some form after a string of single-digit performances to anchor their innings. Their second-highest scorer was pacesman Mitchell Starc with 28 and behind Cameron Green's 25 was 23 from Pat Cummins.

Cummins' innings included some big blows, including three fours and a six off successive deliveries from Ben Sears. The chief destroyer for New Zealand was Matt Henry, relishing the responsibility of taking the new ball with Trent Boult out of the picture and being rewarded with 7-67. Henry has taken 15 wickets so far in the series.

Australia resumed the day at 124-4. Labuschagne had an early issue with the umpires for standing too far out of his crease and potentially scuffing the wicket in the spinners' target area. "It was just a matter of making sure I started far enough back," he said.

"If they deemed it was damaging the pitch I can get docked penalty runs." As he neared his century, New Zealand keeper Tom Blundell stood up to the wickets for pace bowler Tim Southee, tempting Labuschagne to hit out.

The play worked, as the Australian steered the ball to gully, where Glenn Phillips made an acrobatic catch. Henry bagged nightwatchman Nathan Lyon for 20, caught at first slip by Daryl Mitchell, who had dropped him off Tim Southee at the start of the day.

Mitchell Marsh, who is also struggling for runs, was trapped leg before by Henry without scoring for his second consecutive duck, facing just four balls. Part-time bowler Phillips removed Alex Carey (14) when he paddled a simple catch to Tom Latham at mid-wicket, leaving Henry to mop up the tail. — AFP

Thushara hat-trick hands S Lanka series win over Bangladesh

SYLHET: Nuwan Thushara grabbed a maiden over hat-trick and finished 5-20 while Kusal Mendis hit a career-best 86 to help Sri Lanka pummel Bangladesh in Saturday's Twenty20 series decider. Bangladesh were bowled out for 146 in the final over in Sylhet despite late efforts by Rishad Hossain and Taskin Ahmed, who top-scored with 53 and 31 respectively.

Mendis set up the win for Sri Lanka with his 55-ball knock of six fours and as many sixes, guiding the visitors to 174-7 after they were put in to bat by the tourists for the third and final match. Thushara, bowled skipper Najmul Hossain (one) and Towhid Hridoy (nought) off the second and third delivery of his first over in the series, finishing the hat-trick by trapping Mahmudullah Riyad lbw.

"I'm really happy, it was the first hat-trick in my life," he said afterwards. "In a match like this, I'm just pleased to be able to help the team." Bangladesh, already one down with part-time spinner Dhananjaya de Silva removing Liton Das (seven), suffered another Thushara strike in his next over, rattling the stumps of Soumya Sarkar (11) to leave the hosts reeling at 25-5.

Rishad delayed the inevitable with his enterprising knock off 30 balls before Maheesh Theekshana ended his innings. His maiden T20 fifty saw seven sixes. Taskin also entertained the sparse crowd

Dravid hails 'confidence of young India'

DHARAMSALA: India coach Rahul Dravid on Saturday lauded his team's rising young talent for confidently filling the gap left by senior players after their 4-1 win in a high-profile England series. Rohit Sharma's men lost the opener but bounced back to clinch the five-match series in the fourth match and then hammered England by an innings and 64 runs in the final Test inside three days in Dharamsala.

"I think just the fact that we lost the first Test match, had to bounce back from there, had to do it with a slightly different team to the one that we probably expected to start the se-

ries with a few months ago," Dravid told reporters.

"It does make you feel really proud and happy for the way the team's evolved, the team's grown and just happy for the boys." India was missing several top stars including Virat Kohli, who was out due to the birth of his second child, and KL Rahul, who was injured, but new talent delivered in their place.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, 22, led the batting total for both sides with 712 runs — including double centuries in matches two and three — to be named man of the series. Batsmen Sarfaraz Khan and Devdutt Padikkal, wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel and fast bowler Akash Deep also made impressive debuts.

"I think it's just nice to see the confidence of the young India in some ways," said Dravid. "Just the amount of exposure these young boys have, by the time they're 22-23, the amount of

cricket they've played, certainly does help," he added.

"They are a lot more confident, they have a lot more belief in their abilities. From our perspective, it's just about trying to keep things quite relaxed in the dressing room. "I do believe that it's very hard to get into an Indian team. You have to really earn it, there's a lot of competition." India lost the opener by 28 runs but came back with big wins including a 434-run thrashing of the tourists in the third Test in Rajkot.

Test incentive

England had their moments in the first four matches only to lose the advantage to an Indian side unbeaten in a Test series at home since 2012, when England beat the hosts 2-1. "The first four Tests, there were periods in the game when they did put us under a little bit of pressure," said Dravid.

"The heartening thing for me was how well our experienced players

stepped up in those situations. England came here with an experienced batting line-up. Their inexperience was in the bowling." Veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took a five-wicket haul in his landmark 100th Test in Dharamsala and finished the series with 26 scalps.

Fellow spinner Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah returned with 19 wickets each. The Board of Control for Cricket India announced new pay incentives for Test players after the victory.

Players in the XI involved in more than five matches in one season will get a cash bonus of 3 million rupees (\$36,000) for each game. "I wouldn't see it as an incentive to make people play Test cricket. I hope it never really comes to that," Dravid said with a chuckle. "But I think it is just probably a recognition that this is a tough format and it is a hard format." — AFP

James Anderson, England's enduring 'king of swing'

DHARAMSALA: James Anderson may be 41 but the England veteran shows no signs of stopping after becoming the first pace bowler to take 700 Test wickets. Only two spinners, Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800 Test wickets) and the late Australia great Shane Warne (708), are ahead of Anderson on the all-time list of the five-day game's most successful bowlers. Anderson joined the exclusive '700 club' when he dismissed India's Kuldeep Yadav, who edged a length delivery outside off in the fifth and final Test in Dharamsala on Saturday. Anderson is renowned as both a conventional swing bowler and for generating reverse-swing later in an innings, while maintaining tight control.

Those qualities have helped him to the landmark of 700 wickets, including 32 five-wicket hauls, with his scalps coming at an average of 26.52. He has played an England-record 187 Tests so far. What is more, he is still putting his body through the gruelling demands of pace bowling at an age when many of his international contemporaries have long since retired.



SYLHET: Sri Lanka's cricketers pose with the Twenty20 trophy at the end of the third and last Twenty20 international cricket match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet on March 9, 2024. — AFP

with a brief cameo off 21, including two sixes off consecutive balls from Thushara. Man of the match Thushara completed his maiden five-wicket haul by forcing Shoriful Islam to give a catch at midwicket.

'Bowled brilliantly'

"Credit goes to Nuwan Thushara the way he bowled, I think he bowled brilliantly," said Bangladesh captain Najmul. Bangladesh's innings ended on the third-last ball with de Silva taking a jug-gling catch off Taskin from a Dasun Shanaka delivery at deep midwicket.

Kusal earlier led the batting charge for Sri Lanka despite Bangladesh bowlers making regular breakthroughs electing to bowl first. Taskin struck early to remove de Silva for eight before Rishad took the wicket of Kamindu Mendis for 12.

Kusal and returning captain Wanindu Hasaranga added 59 runs for the third wicket, with Hasaranga contributing just 15. Mustafizur Rahman forced Hasaranga to give a catch at third man before Shoriful Islam dismissed Charith Asalanka for three.

Kusal raced past his previous best of 79 against New Zealand with a six off Shoriful after bringing his fifty off 35 balls. Taskin ended his onslaught in his final spell during the 17th over as Soumya Sarkar took a high catch at midwicket.

Dasun Shanaka was the next top-scorer after Kusal. He hit 19 off nine balls before he was run out in the last delivery of the innings. Sri Lanka won the first match by three runs and Bangladesh triumphed by eight wickets two days later. The tour will resume with the first of three one-day internationals in Chittagong on March 15. — AFP

The dynamic leadership of England captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum has provided Anderson with fresh inspiration. "I am loving playing in this dressing room at the moment. That keeps me going a little bit more," Anderson, who made his Test debut back in 2003, told TNT Sports during the second match of the current series against India. "I love this group of blokes, the captain and coach have got a great thing going at the moment, and it's fun to be a part of. "For me, it is just something I want to try and do for as long as possible." Anderson's long-time bowling partner Stuart Broad retired after last year's Ashes series in England at the age of 37 with 604 Test wickets.

But Anderson has kept going and has proved his worth on the current tour, with two key wickets in the second Test, including bowling India captain Rohit Sharma for 13 with a delivery that nipped away.

'Look up to Jimmy'

Stokes lauded his old warhorse before that match in Visakhapatnam by saying: "It's great that Jimmy is doing good things for the old boys out there. "Lots of people should look up to Jimmy." India's Sachin Tendulkar, an all-time batting great, lauded Anderson's ability to challenge even cricket's greatest run-scorers.

"He would hold the ball as if he is bowling an out-swinger," said Tendulkar. "But the release point, he would try and bring the ball back in." And what is more,



DHARAMSALA: England's James Anderson (L) and captain Ben Stokes walk during the third day of the fifth and last Test cricket match between India and England at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamsala on March 9, 2024. — AFP

in defiance of conventional wisdom about the physical toll of pace bowling, there are signs that late-career Anderson could be the most effective version of them all. Statistics compiled by ESPNcricinfo showed that in the years he was aged 25 to 29, Anderson averaged 28.47 runs per Test wicket. Between 30 and 34, that figure improved to 25.45, and since turning 35, Anderson's average is just under 23. — AFP

Sports

Two-time world champion Joshua defeats Ngannou with brutal second-round KO

I thought this fight was something for the broadcasters to get behind: Joshua

RIYADH: Two-time world champion Anthony Joshua knocked out mixed martial arts star Francis Ngannou in just the second round of their widely-hyped heavyweight clash on Saturday, with his promoter quickly declaring him the division's "number one" fighter.

Joshua had his Cameroonian opponent on the canvas in the first round and twice more in the second in a brutal and brief exhibition of punching power. Ngannou, 37, a former UFC heavyweight champion, was taking part in only his second professional boxing match, having lost a split decision to Tyson Fury in an October fight that saw him put the WBC champion on the canvas in the third round.

"I thought this fight was something for the broadcasters to get behind," Joshua told DAZN after his quickfire victory. "When I saw the fight with Tyson Fury, I thought, 'I want some of that'. He is a great champion and this doesn't take anything away from his capabilities.

"I told (Ngannou) not to leave boxing. He's two fights in and he fought the best." Joshua, a former unified WBO, WBA and IBF heavyweight champion, went into the fight on the back of three successive wins. Before that, however, he lost back-to-back fights to Oleksandr Usyk, who will take on Fury for the undisputed heavyweight title in Saudi Arabia in May.

The fight only got under way at 3:30 am local time (0030 GMT), but weary fans enjoyed a sensational start when Joshua quickly sent Ngannou to the canvas in the opening round with a brutal right to the

chin. It got worse for the Cameroonian when he was knocked down again in the second round, just managing to beat the count. His resistance lasted only a few more moments after he was sent to the canvas again for the third and final time.

'Sitting duck'

Ngannou lay on his back for some time and needed medical treatment inside the ring before being helped back to his stool. Joshua, 34, was reportedly being paid \$50 million for his clash with the MMA star, whose rags-to-riches story had captivated the sport. Ngannou grew up in abject poverty, working as a child labourer in a sand quarry for under \$2 a day. He then made his way to Europe, even sleeping rough in a car park in Paris before a local coach took him under his wing and steered him to boxing.

Joshua's victory immediately sparked feverish talk of a mega-fight with either Usyk or Fury. "You're looking at the number one heavyweight in the world," said promoter Eddie Hearn. "On this form, there is no man that can beat him. Tyson Fury, please beat Usyk, because you will get the biggest fight in the history of the sport.

"He destroyed Francis Ngannou. He's a beast and I cannot wait for him to beat Tyson Fury." Joshua's trainer Ben Davison told the BBC that "the only way to find out who is the best is to get the winner of Fury and Usyk. That's the only thing that makes sense."

However, not every ringside observer was impressed with the brief flurry of brutality. "That high-



RIYADH: British boxer Anthony Joshua (L) competes with Cameroonian-French boxer Francis Ngannou during their heavyweight boxing match in Riyadh's Kingdom Arena indoor stadium, on March 9, 2024. — AFP

lighted what happens when a world class heavyweight has a free shot on a sitting duck." Boxing News editor Matt Christie wrote on social media

platform X. "Hopefully no need to see that kind of fight again." He may get his wish, as Ngannou is scheduled to return to MMA later in the year. — AFP

Klopp, Guardiola set for EPL last dance with title at stake

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola face off for the final time in the Premier League on Sunday with the title on the line for two coaches who have defined an era in English football. Klopp's Liverpool lead Guardiola's Manchester City by one point in the latest title tussle between the two clubs since the inspirational managers arrived in the north-west.

The Reds' first league crown for 30 years in 2020 is the only blip in City's record of five titles in the past six years. But twice Guardiola's men have won by a solitary point against a Liverpool team who both times amassed more than 90 points.

Klopp is leaving Liverpool at the end of the season and champions City can expect an emotion-fuelled cauldron at Anfield, where even Guardiola has not won in front of fans. City's only away league win against Liverpool since 2003 came three years ago behind closed doors due to coronavirus restrictions.

Despite working with a smaller budget at Liverpool and previously Borussia Dortmund, compared with the backing Guardiola has enjoyed at City and Bayern Munich, Klopp has the better personal head-to-head record. The German has 12 wins to Guardiola's 11, with six draws in 29 meetings between the pair. But despite having the edge, Klopp hailed Guardiola as the standout coach of his generation. "In my lifetime he's the outstanding manager, definitely," Klopp said at his pre-match press conference on Friday.



LONDON: (COMBO) In this combination of file images created shows, Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola gestures on the touchline and Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp reacts during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Burnley. — AFP

"In this moment I have a positive record against Pep," he added. "I have no clue how that happened to be honest but it is all fine. I know I'm quite good at what I'm doing as well. I don't want to sound like somebody who is happy to be here but you ask me about the best and for me he is the best."

With contrasting styles, both coaches have rewritten the record books to set new standards in the Premier League. Six of the nine highest points tallies in Premier League history have come from Liverpool and City over the past six years. Klopp once described his football as "heavy metal" and his high-energy, pressing game has blended perfectly with the Liverpool support to make Anfield a bear pit for visiting sides. — AFP

Ancer said he felt he was striking the ball as well as at any time in his career. "I've had some rounds that I've felt the same sensations where you're really seeing the shots and you're on it and you're executing the shot exactly how you're picturing it," said Ancer. "It's definitely up there for sure. I can think maybe of a couple of times where it felt that crisp and the shape of the shots is usually exactly what I'm envisioning."

Varner said he would just try to stick to his own game on Sunday. "I think the most important thing is not to worry about Abe (Ancer). That's how you lose," Varner said. "I think I've played enough golf to know that the best thing I can do is just give myself as many looks as possible and try to just stay within myself and have fun doing it, and I think the fun part is pretty easy for me."

Chacarra, who will join Varner and Ancer in the final group Sunday, will take a similar approach. "Obviously Abe is playing tremendous golf," he said. "Five shots is a lot of shots, I'm not going to lie. My strategy is going to be the same. I don't really care where I am on the leaderboard. I'm just going to try to have a lot of fun out there." — AFP

Today's matches		
English Premier League		
Aston Villa vs Tottenham Hotspur	16:00	beIN Sports HD 1
Brighton & Hove Albion vs Nottingham Forest FC	17:00	beIN Sports HD Xtra 1
West Ham United vs Burnley FC	17:00	beIN Sports HD 2
Liverpool vs Manchester City	18:45	beIN Sports HD 1
Spanish Primera Liga		
Deportivo Alaves vs Rayo Vallecano	16:00	beIN Sports HD 3
Las Palmas vs Athletic de Bilbao	18:15	beIN Sports HD 6
Real Madrid CF vs Celta de Vigo	20:30	beIN Sports HD 3
Real Betis vs Villarreal CF	23:00	beIN Sports HD 1
Italian Serie A		
US Lecce vs Hellas Verona FC	14:30	AD SPORTS Premium 1
AC Milan vs Empoli	17:00	AD SPORTS Premium 1
Juventus FC vs Atalanta BC	20:00	AD SPORTS Premium 1
ACF Fiorentina vs AS Roma	22:45	AD SPORTS Premium 1
German Bundesliga		
VfL Bochum vs SC Freiburg	17:30	beIN Sports HD 5
Eintracht Frankfurt vs TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	19:30	beIN Sports HD 2
Bayer 04 Leverkusen vs VfL Wolfsburg	21:30	beIN Sports HD 1
French Ligue 1		
Paris Saint-Germain vs Stade de Reims	15:00	beIN Sports HD 2
FC Metz vs Clermont Foot 63	17:00	beIN Sports HD Xtra 2
Le Havre AC vs Toulouse FC	17:00	beIN Sports HD Xtra 3
RC Strasbourg vs AS Monaco	17:00	beIN Sports HD 9
LOSC Lille vs Stade Rennais FC	19:05	beIN Sports HD 4
Olympique de Marseille vs FC Nantes	22:45	beIN Sports HD 4



KEF head elected as AEF president

KUWAIT: Technical Director of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Waleed Al Jassim was elected member of the Asian Equestrian Federation and President of the Fourth Regional Group at the Continental Federation for a second time for the next four years. Al-Jassim was elected during the AEF held in Uzbekistan. In the meeting it was announced Kuwait will host the AEF General Assembly in 2025.

Flawless Ancer takes five-shot lead into LIV HK final round

HONG KONG: Abraham Ancer will take a five-shot lead into the final round of the inaugural LIV Hong Kong event after shooting an eight-under par 62 on Saturday. The Mexican had a second consecutive bogey-free round to go with Friday's 63 to put daylight between him and a chasing pack headed by American Harold Varner III and Eugenio Chacarra of Spain who both carded 66 to move to 10-under par.

It could have been even better had Ancer not missed an 18-inch putt for birdie at the first hole, but that was the only mistake he would make on his way to a 15-under par total after 36 holes. Ancer has been impeccable off the tee, only missing four fairways in his first two rounds and went to the turn in three-under par.

At that point he was in a three-way tie at the top,



HONG KONG: LIV team Fireballs GC player Abraham Ancer hits a tee shot during the LIV Golf tournament at Fanling golf club in Hong Kong. — AFP

but Ancer sped away from the field with a run of five birdies in six holes from the 11th at the 54-hole event. The music blaring around the historic Hong Kong Golf Club, which is celebrating its 135th anniversary this year, did not faze him and he almost capped the round with a 35-foot birdie putt at the 18th, which toyed with the hole before refusing to drop.

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Clinics		
Kaizen center	25716707	
Rawda	22517733	
Adaliya	22517144	
Khaldiya	24848075	
Kaifan	24849807	
Shamiya	24848913	
Shuwaikh	24814507	
Abdullah Salem	22549134	
Nuzha	22526804	
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764	
Qadsiya	22515088	
Dasmah	22532265	
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908	
Shaab	22518752	

Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Change of Name

I, Thadathil Kuttappan Anand, holder of Indian Passport number M5458621 having permanent address Thadathil house, Monipally Post, Pin code 686636, Kerala, India and residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that my Minor child's name Given name Arshia Anand and Surname Thadathil will be changed to Given name Arshia and Surname Anand for all future purposes. (#5176 7/3/2024)

I, Aii, holder of Indian Passport No. W4667476 issued at Kuwait on 03/11/2022 permanent address house No.8, street No.1, Basti Ram Ki Badi, Udaipur, Pin - 313001, Rajasthan, India. Presently residing in Kuwait do hereby declare that my name will be read as Ali (as given name) Mashraqi (as surname)

with immediate effect. (#5178 9/3/2024)

I, Shubam Chigari holder of Indian Passport No. M7464652 having permanent address H.No. 10 B Dando, Sanguem, Goa, South Goa. 403704 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Shubam Oliveira. (#5177 8/3/2024)

I, Janasco, holder of Indian Passport No. V3750473 having permanent address Goa, India, Pin Code 403706 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Janesco and (surname) Travasso. (#5174 7/3/2024)

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 issued at Kuwait on 20/05/2014 and Permanent Resident of 12/6, Ward No 1, Akab Makbara Jaora Dist. Rattlam, pin code 457226, Madhya Pradesh. Presently residing in Kuwait do hereby declare that my name will be read as Husain (as given name) Susnerwala (as surname) with immediate effect. (#5173 6/3/2024)



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's English striker #10 Marcus Rashford (C) vies with Everton's Portuguese midfielder #21 Andre Gomes (2L) and Everton's English midfielder #22 Ben Godfrey (R) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Everton at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on March 9, 2024. — AFP

Man Utd bounce back against Everton

Everton paid for conceding two first-half penalties

MANCHESTER: Everton paid for conceding two first-half penalties at Old Trafford as Manchester United bounced back to winning ways to keep their Champions League hopes for next season alive with a 2-0 victory on Saturday. Bruno Fernandes and Marcus Rashford converted from the spot to extend Everton's winless run in the Premier League to 11 games.

Victory takes United to within eight points of fourth-placed Aston Villa and three of Tottenham in fifth. Defeat leaves Everton still just five points above the relegation zone, having played two more games than 18th-placed Luton.

Back-to-back defeats to Fulham and Manchester City had dented a charge from Erik ten Hag's men to-

wards the top four. But with Villa and Tottenham facing off on Sunday, the Red Devils made the most of Everton's mistakes to close on their rivals for a return to the Champions League.

Alejandro Garnacho scored a goal of the season contender when the sides last met in November with a stunning overhead kick. The Argentine was again the difference between the sides as it was his quick feet that twice provoked spot-kicks.

James Tarkowski was the first Everton defender lured into a mistimed challenge on 10 minutes and Fernandes rolled home his eighth goal of the season. Scoring goals has been Everton's shortfall all season and it was a familiar tale for the Toffees.

A combination of Amadou Onana

and Ben Godfrey should have opened the scoring just three minutes in. Three times Dwight McNeil then tried his luck with his closest effort flashing inches wide. And even when the visitors did hit the target, Andre Onana produced a flying save to deny James Garner.

Instead, they soon trailed by two due to another self-inflicted blow. Garnacho danced through a series of challenges on the edge of the box before he was chopped down by Godfrey.

Just like he did at Goodison Park earlier in the season, Fernandes passed over penalty duties to Rashford. Jordan Pickford was unable to deny his England international teammate as Rashford fired home his fifth goal in nine Premier League games.

Pickford did succeed in keeping the score down as he denied Fernandes a second from a well-struck free-kick and low drive that was arrowing towards the bottom corner. Garnacho was also wasteful with a series of chances to add a goal to his involvement in the two penalties.

However, United were bailed out by Everton being even more toothless up front. For the 16th time in 28 league games this season, United gave up 16 or more shots on their goal. But Everton failed to make any of their 20 efforts count.

And they nearly conceded a third penalty in stoppage time when Rashford was wiped out by Jarrad Branthwaite, but the offside flag came to Everton's rescue. — AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain serves against Matteo Arnaldi of Italy in their second round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Alcaraz rallies to subdue Arnaldi in Indian Wells opener

INDIAN WELLS: World number two Carlos Alcaraz got off to a stuttering start in his Indian Wells Masters title defense on Friday but turned the tables to beat Matteo Arnaldi 6-7 (5/7), 6-0, 6-1. The second-round success served as a welcome fitness test for the 20-year-old Spaniard, who rolled his ankle a fortnight ago in Rio and retired from his first-round match there.

Alcaraz gathered his forces after dropping the opening set against Arnaldi, cutting his unforced error count from 23 in the first set to a mere eight for the remainder of the contest. The reigning Wimbledon champion lost just one more game as he came through in two and a quarter hours, concluding with 22 winners.

Alcaraz said his ankle felt better than expected. "Honestly, it surprised me," he said. "I felt great, moving normally without thinking about it. "It was a really good match to realize that I am better than I imagined," added Alcaraz, who next plays Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek swept into the third round with identical runaway scorelines. But there was no joy for former number one Andy Murray, who suffered a 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 loss to fifth seed Andrey Rublev to exit the event where he lost the 2009 final to Rafael Nadal.

Australian Open champion Sinner dominated Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-3, 6-0 while women's world number one Swiatek did the same to American Danielle Collins. Italy's Sinner, seeded third, backed up his debut Grand Slam title in Melbourne with a victory in the ATP 500 level tournament at Rotterdam last month.

He remains undefeated this season and completed a 13th consecutive match victory while improving to 4-0 over Kokkinakis. Top seed Swiatek, the 2022 Indian Wells champion and last year's Roland Garros winner who will start her 94th week on the top WTA ranking on Monday, broke Collins four times and wrapped up victory on her second match point.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova also advanced with ease, beating American Bernarda Pera with the loss of just two games. Vondrousova took just 64 minutes to dispatch Pera 6-0, 6-2.

But Elena Rybakina's WTA title defense ended without a ball struck as she withdrew before her scheduled opener with a gastrointestinal issue. — AFP

Cavs hold off Timberwolves in OT, Lakers win

LOS ANGELES: The Cleveland Cavaliers, fueled by 34 points from Darius Garland and 33 from Jarrett Allen, notched another big NBA victory on Friday, out-lasting Western Conference contenders Minnesota 113-104 in overtime.

The Cavs, who overturned a 22-point fourth-quarter deficit to stun the league-leading Boston Celtics on Tuesday, held on for the win over a Timberwolves team that came in as Western Conference leaders but finished the night half a game behind the Oklahoma City Thunder—who beat the Miami Heat 107-100.

Cleveland, without injured starters Donovan Mitchell, Evan Mobley and Max Strus, found the firepower to overcome Minnesota, who were coming off a draining victory over the Indiana Pacers on Thursday.

Allen's career-high in points included 10 in overtime when the Timberwolves had to make do without star center Rudy Gobert, who fouled out with 27 seconds left in regulation. Angry at the sixth foul call against him, Gobert made a finger-rubbing "money" gesture toward a referee and was promptly charged with a technical foul.

Garland made the technical free-throw to tie it up at 97-97 and force overtime. Gobert said he thought his reaction was "the truth," but he admitted it was an ill-judged gesture. "It cost my team the game," he said. "It was an immature reaction. It's not just one call. Everyone makes mistakes, but when it's over and over and over again, of course it's frustrating."

Micah Nori, who stood in for Timberwolves head coach Chris Finch after Finch began feeling ill before tip-off, called Gobert's actions at a crucial moment in the game "unacceptable." "He was obviously frustrated, both teams were, but we have to be smarter," Nori said.

Naz Reid scored a career-high 34 points for Minnesota and Anthony Edwards added 19 but was held scoreless in the fourth quarter and overtime. Meanwhile, Oklahoma City



LOS ANGELES: Brook Lopez #11 and Damian Lillard #0 of the Milwaukee Bucks defend against Rui Hachimura #28 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the second half of a game at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

erased a 14-point deficit to beat the Heat. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 23 of his 37 points in the second half to fuel the turnaround. The Thunder put together a 17-0 scoring run early in the third quarter to take a 68-65 lead and never trailed again.

Lakers hang on

Elsewhere in the West, D'Angelo Russell scored the game-winner with 5.9 seconds left, lifting the Los Angeles Lakers to a 123-122 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks. The Lakers were without superstar LeBron James, who was sidelined with a sore ankle. Anthony Davis was slowed by an apparent shoulder injury in the second half, but Russell picked up the slack, scoring 21 of his season-high 44 points in the fourth quarter.

"I just tried to do whatever I could do," Russell said. "Scoring, assisting, whatever it may be, whatever they need from me... Bron was out, so a lot of guys stepped up." The Lakers withstood Giannis Antetokounmpo's triple-double of 34

points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists. After trailing most of the game, Milwaukee took the lead on an Antetokounmpo jump shot with 2:53 to play.

The Bucks pushed their lead to six points with less than two minutes remaining when Damian Lillard converted a four-point play. But Russell scored eight points in the last 1:13 and Lakers forward Spencer Dinwiddie blocked Lillard's potential game-winner at the buzzer.

In other games, Zion Williamson scored 23 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead the New Orleans Pelicans, who surged to a 35-point lead midway through the second quarter and held on to beat the injury-depleted 76ers in Philadelphia.

The 76ers, struggling with NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid and Tyrese Maxey sidelined, cut the deficit to five points with less than a minute to play, but couldn't complete what would have been a monumental comeback. In Washington, the Wizards snapped a 16-game losing streak with a 112-100 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. — AFP