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Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	: 04:41
Shrooq	: 06:00
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Asr	: 15:22
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Isha	: 19:11

Amir receives Ramadan well-wishers

Reception reflects national unity • Sisi calls Amir to exchange Ramadan greetings



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Al-Sabah family receive well-wishers on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Al-Sabah family received Monday citizens and residents on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. The reception reflected the unity of the Kuwaiti people during these occasions.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal received a call on Tuesday from Egyptian President Abdulfattah Al-Sisi, in which the two exchanged greetings on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Sisi wished HH the Amir good health and the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his wise guidance.

HH the Amir thanked Sisi for this generous gesture, which reflects the depth of relations between the two fraternal nations, also wishing him good health and for Egypt to achieve all that it aspires to under his leadership. — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

Ramadan a time for introspection, reflection

By Nisar Ahmad

Muslims consider the month of Ramadan to be a blessed month for all of mankind, for many reasons. The month is very special, not just because Muslims fast in this month, but more importantly, because God chose to reveal His guidance for all of mankind during this month. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that all the divine scriptures were revealed in the month of Ramadan, including the Noble Quran, which was sent down to the first heaven from the preserved tablet and then began to be revealed to him for the guidance of mankind.

Divine guidance is the most precious gift on earth for those who have knowledge. Man, devoid of divine guidance, gropes in the darkness fumbling against everything that comes his way due to the absence of light (divine guidance). Sometimes, he bows down to idols, other times, he falls flat in front of people like him without recognizing his own stature. To express their gratitude to Almighty Allah for guiding them, Muslims devote themselves to fasting and worshipping their Creator and Maintainer in this month. Ramadan helps us develop and refresh our relationship with our Creator, and to reflect upon His message.

There are several aspects of Ramadan that need to be reflected upon. Here are some:

- The purpose of fasting**
Allah, the Glorified, has prescribed fasting in order to nurture and strengthen God-consciousness and piety. Giving up eating and drinking is not an easy thing for everyone except for those who truly believe in Allah and are ready to obey Him. The purpose is to make people pious and obedient servants of God. A fasting person feels closer to God, and that helps him shun disobedience of God, and he abstains from sins.

For this reason, fasting was prescribed for every nation. Fasting refines behavior and attitude. Allah says in the Holy Quran what can be translated as: O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you so that you may become righteous (Al-Baqarah 2:183). Moreover, when a person fasts for the sake of Allah, he finds it pleasurable

Continued on Page 6

MoH hails KRCS medical team's efforts in Gaza

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi hailed the efforts of the volunteer medical team of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society that performed delicate surgical operations on the injured and wounded in Gaza. Awadhi told KUNA after the medical team's return that this initiative is the first in the Gulf and the culmination of coordination between public benefit associations in Kuwait and humanitarian associations and organizations in Egypt and Palestine.

The minister affirmed that the medical team performed its work with full dedication and sincerity, expressing his pride in its efforts in treating the wounded and injured. He also praised Kuwait's firm position in supporting the Palestinian people by providing medical, food aid and urgent shelter for those affected in the Gaza Strip.

Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said the society is keen to provide aid



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi meets Kuwait Red Crescent Society's volunteer medical team on its return from Gaza on March 11, 2024. — KUNA

to Gaza, including providing medical personnel to provide the necessary treatment, adding the team's presence is "a national pride worthy of praise". The team performed around 23 surgical operations on sick and wounded Palestinians at Kuwait Specialist and Gaza European hospitals. — KUNA

Spanish aid ship sails for Gaza as war grinds on

GAZA: A Spanish charity ship taking food aid to Gaza left the Mediterranean island of Cyprus on Tuesday in an attempt to open a maritime corridor to the war-ravaged and besieged Palestinian territory. The vessel Open Arms set sail towing a barge loaded with 200 tons of relief goods and was expected to arrive

off Gaza, about 400 km away, sometime overnight or Wednesday. "The departure of the first ship is a sign of hope," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen wrote on social media platform X. "We will work hard together for many more ships to follow."

Heavy Zionist bombardment again rained down on Gaza, killing at least 80 people overnight, and dozens more were missing under the rubble, said the health ministry in the territory. "At least 80 martyrs arrived at hospitals, the majority of whom were children, women and the elderly, as a result of the occupation (Zionist entity) committing massacres against civilians," it said in a statement.

Continued on Page 6



JERUSALEM: Palestinian Muslim devotees perform night prayers known as 'tarawih' outside the Dome of the Rock in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound during the holy month of Ramadan on March 11, 2024. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

New Audit Bureau chief named

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Tuesday appointing Essam Salem Al-Roumi as the head of the State Audit Bureau (SAB). The first article of decree 37 for the 2024 stipulates Roumi be appointed Chairman of the Audit Bureau. — KUNA

Essam Al-Roumi

GCC pushes Schengen visa waiver

KUWAIT: GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi said that the bloc is ramping up efforts in the next couple of weeks to grant Schengen visa waivers to citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Budaiwi also said the unified GCC visa is expected to be unveiled later this year, calling it "an important step" to promote trade exchange and tourism in the region.

17 more candidates register

KUWAIT: One woman was among 17 new candidates who filed their nominations on Tuesday to run in the April 4 snap parliamentary elections. With just a day remaining for the registration, the number of hopefuls rose to 219, including seven women, after two candidates withdrew from the race. As many as 47 out of the 50 members of the dissolved Assembly have registered.

COVID lowered life expectancy

PARIS: COVID-19 caused the average life expectancy of people worldwide to fall by 1.6 years during the first two years of the pandemic, a more dramatic decline than previously thought, a major study said Tuesday. The rate of death for people over 15 rose by 22 percent for men and 17 percent for women during this time, while COVID was responsible for 15.9 million excess deaths during 2020-2021, the researchers estimated. — AFP

Chemical cat sparks Japan alert

TOKYO: Locals in a city in western Japan have been told not to approach or touch a missing cat that fell into a vat of hexavalent chromium, which is carcinogenic, and then scampered off into the night. An employee at a metal plating plant in Fukuyama arrived for work on Monday morning to find feline paw prints leading away from the container. Grainy security camera footage showed the furry fugitive fleeing from the factory, apparently unharmed. — AFP

Zain kicks off annual Ramadan social campaign with food supplies initiative

Presented to underprivileged families through 'Social Affairs', KRCS, 'Food Bank'



Abdulaziz Al Mutairi and Hamad Al Musaibeh with Zain and 'Social Affairs' officials.



Abdulrahman Al Oun with Zain and KRCS volunteers.



Members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team pack the food supplies.



Zain volunteers and Kuwait Food Bank officials at the Bank's store.

KUWAIT: Zain kicked-off its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, with the food supplies (Machla) initiative. The supplies were presented to underprivileged communities through three of Zain's strategic partners: the Social Care Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), and the Kuwait Food Bank - all official, recognized organizations.

The food supplies were prepared and distributed to those in need before the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan. In attendance were Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs

Abdulaziz Sari Al Mutairi, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Managing Director Abdulrahman Al Oun, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al Musaibeh, officials from the Kuwait Food Bank, and members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team.

In a step that showed the Zain family's commitment to bring about positive social impact in the community, members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team - that consists of Zain employees from across the company's divisions and departments - gathered at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh to prepare the food supplies. Foodstuffs

were categorized and distributed into boxes ahead of their delivery to the three organizations.

The food supplies were delivered to the Social Care Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs, where they were presented to residents of the centers, including foster care children, elderly individuals, and people with special needs. The supply boxes were also delivered to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and the Kuwait Food Bank to be presented to underprivileged families and individuals across the nation.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sec-

tors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year in its initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people.

Field visit to Wafra sheds light on fish and shrimp farming

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) considers that the continuation of the series of field visits organized by the society's friends under the program "Environmental Spring Program for Field Training" enhances the methodology of qualifying the team which consists of Kuwaiti school students in the age group of 8 to 18.

According to Eng Maali Al-Uqab, Public Relations Officer at the KEPS, "the team members are the nucleus of cadres and national elites in the specialized teams and committees of the society, and it is keen to comprehensively qualify them through their participation in voluntary environmental work and the awareness program that includes their field work and training."

Eng Al-Uqab explained, "Mohammed Al-Kharafi received the team from KEPS at the "Sally Fish and Shrimp Farm" in Wafra, which is an ideal model of



Eng Maali Al-Uqab

national initiatives that supports and enhances Kuwait's food security. This will also enhance environmental awareness, he said, praising the cooperation of Mohammed Al-Kharafi. Al-Kharafi shed light on the importance of fish farming projects in providing strategic stocks during the field visit to the Sally farm.

"They received hands-on experience on fish and shrimp farming and about the most sought-after Kuwaiti fish," Al-Uqab said. She pointed out that "the Sally farm for the cultivation and breeding of fish and shrimp is an integrated farm as it has more than one activity in which waste water is reused to reduce the wastage of natural resources. The water used for fish farming is filtered and reused in the farm and what is disposed of is used as natural fertilizer in irrigating crops to produce specific crops."

Al-Uqab noted that the visit also included a



KUWAIT: Participants explore the environment during a field visit organized by the society's friends under the program 'Environmental Spring Program for Field Training'.

briefing of the team on the process of breeding Sea bass fish, reviewing part of the challenges facing fish stocks in our marine environment. The risks also include the depletion of some stocks of economic value due to the rise in fishing operations for a long time. The increase in amateur fishing activity and

the use of unauthorized fishing methods, in addition to the degradation of the aquatic environment and the disappearance of some habitats suitable for certain species of fish and other marine life such as pearl oysters also pose challenges to the marine environment, she added.



Deputy FM chairs diplomatic and consular body meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired the meeting of the Diplomatic and Consular Council on Tuesday, with the participation of assistant ministers who are members of the Council. During the meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' headquarters, they discussed the issues of the meeting agenda. — KUNA



Kuwait, League support political solution in Libya

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday welcomed the recent meeting hosted by the Arab League, which aimed to support political solution efforts in Libya, paving the path towards eagerly anticipated presidential and parliamentary elections. In a statement released on Tuesday, the Ministry reiterated Kuwait's support for all Arab and international efforts aimed at strengthening the unity, sovereignty, security, and stability of Libyan territories, echoing the aspirations of its people for peace, development, and prosperity.

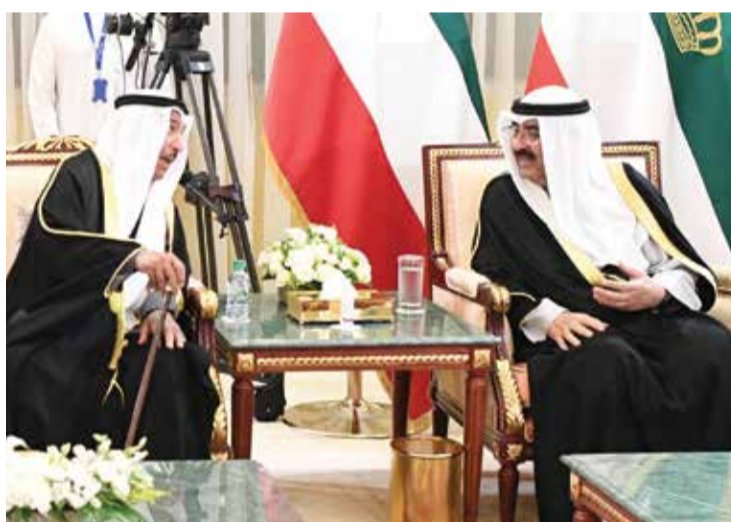
The Arab League had hosted a meeting on the Libyan crisis with the participation of the President of the Presidential Council, Speaker of the

House of Representatives, and President of the Supreme Council of Libya. They agreed that a unified government in Libya would be required for the supervision of presidential and parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile, Libyan officials have affirmed Libya's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and rejected any negative external interference in the political process. This came in a statement by Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abul Gheit at the end of the leader's joint conference, which was held at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

They also stressed the necessity of forming a unified government to supervise the electoral process, provide the necessary services to the citizens, and unify positions in a way that ensures the activation of its role. They appreciated the League's role in bringing the views closer in order to achieve the completion of the electoral process in Libya. — KUNA

Amir, Sabah family host Kuwaitis and residents



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis and residents were received by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Al-Sabah family during the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA photos

Beyond the religious rituals of Ramadan

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: It's that time of the year when you take the chance to finally pause, break away from your daily routine, and fully immerse yourself in 30 days of faith, spirituality and unity with Muslims from all around the world. It is the month of embracing inner peace and letting go of the negativity that has been bottled up all year long. In essence, this is what Ramadan is mostly about, as expressed by people interviewed by Kuwait Times.

"It's not just about praying or fasting, but it goes beyond that," Fatima Shamoon said. She spoke of the transformation in the entire environment and demeanor of people during this month, where everyone shares the same feelings of tolerance, patience, and kindness. "It's true that on a religious level, this month is one of the most important occasions for all Muslims, but on a humanitarian level, it also teaches us so much and cleanses our souls so deeply," she added.

Shamoon admires the fact that during this time, everyone's focus is redirected toward one goal: Becoming the best versions of themselves as Muslims. "During the rest of the year, we are all busy chasing worldly pleasures, but in this month, we want to



Young boy reads Quran.

give our all." Shamoon believes that the strong bond developed with the Creator during Ramadan brings people together, transcending any differences.

Rudina Ghanem echoed Shamoon's sentiments, emphasizing the indescribable sense of connectedness experienced during the holy month. "It makes me happy to know that we are all nearly following the same practices at the same time for 30 days," she said, referencing rituals such as performing tarawih prayers, breaking the fast (iftar), the pre-dawn meal (suhour) and reading the Holy Quran, which are among the most popular good deeds undertaken during Ramadan.

From that perspective, she explained how the supportive atmosphere of shared faith and com-

mon goals motivates her to embrace new religious routines and let go of sinful ones, which she can't easily do at any other time of the year. "Every Ramadan, I concentrate on one aspect of my religious rituals to improve, ensuring I practice it every day for 30 days. Eventually, it becomes a habit integrated into my daily life," she noted.

Ghanem shared examples of new habits she developed from past Ramadans, such as adhering to the sunnahs of prayers and dressing more modestly. Expanding on this, Shamoon contemplated the potential positive impact if everyone approached Ramadan with a similar mindset. "Imagine if each person kept striving to become slightly better than they are, slightly more charitable, or slightly more giving," she reflected, envisioning the significant increase in generosity and compassion that would spread in the world.

Notably, the profound impact of Ramadan extends from the spiritual aspect to all life aspects, seamlessly bringing them into harmony. Zainab Al-Mashoor highlighted that Ramadan allows her to allocate her effort and time evenly between prioritizing her worship of God, enjoying quality time with family and addressing daily responsibilities like work and cooking. Shamoon agreed on this point. "The routine of this month proves that all aspects of life can be balanced, and tasks can be completed, even while fasting and fulfilling our prayer and family obligations," Shamoon observed, adding, "The world moves beautifully during Ramadan."



Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah meets UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammad. — KUNA

Kuwait works with UN to empower women

NEW YORK: Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to working with the United Nations to improve the status of women. "The Kuwaiti government is implementing a range of initiatives to empower women and improve their status in the framework of Kuwait Vision 2035," he said on Monday. Sheikh Feras, who leads Kuwait's delegation to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, made the comments during his meeting with UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammad on the fringes of the session.

Out of belief in the crucial role of women in development, Kuwait made headway in implementing the fifth gender equality goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN member states in 2015, he pointed out. On her part, Amina Mohammad praised the relentless efforts of Kuwait to empower women, recalling her last visit to the country in early March. She expressed hope for more cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and Kuwait in this regard. — KUNA



Tarawih Prayers bring people together in unity.

Ramadan health tips



Avoid overeating

Practice portion control during iftar and suhoor to prevent digestive discomfort and bloating. Eating too much in one sitting can strain your digestive system, making you feel sluggish and uncomfortable. Instead, eat slowly and stop when you feel comfortably full.

Include fiber

Incorporate fiber-rich foods like whole grains, legumes, and fruits to promote digestion and prevent constipation. Fiber adds bulk to your stool, helping it move through your digestive tract more smoothly and preventing issues like bloating or irregularity.

Opt for healthy fats

Choose sources of healthy fats like avocados, nuts, and olive oil to support heart health and satiety. Healthy fats provide essential nutrients and help keep you feeling full and satisfied between meals, preventing excessive snacking or overeating.



Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: File photos shows students exiting a school bus in 1969. - Photo from the collection of Ghader Al Awadi, provided by Mohdzakaria Abu El Ella, researcher in the Heritage Ministry of Information.

NBK hosts series of knowledge sharing sessions with KNPC, KAFCO managers

Bank is keen on developing human capital

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted a series of knowledge sharing sessions with managers from Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and Kuwait Aviation Fuelling Company (KAFCO). The aim of these sessions is to share insights and experiences regarding leadership techniques and strategies, in coordination with the Training and Development Department at KNPC.

The sessions held during January and February brought together NBK's executive leadership and their counterparts from KNPC and KAFCO. The participants engaged in open discussions on a range of topics, including effective communication and motivation strategies, building high-performance teams, empowering employees, stimulating innovation, adaptability



to change, and overcoming challenges.

The sessions were joined by 22 managerial participants from KNPC and KAFCO, and included lectures by NBK's executive leaders: Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO-Consumer and Digital Banking, Mohammed Al Kharafi, COO - Head of Group Operations and Information Technology, and Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources. Speaking on this, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - head of Group Human Resources, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said, "NBK maintains solid ties with the oil sector, being the 'bank of choice' for Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries, in addition to its effective role in developing the human capital in state-owned entities as the strategic banking partner for the government sector."

"NBK's strategic partnership with oil sector companies in training and development extends over long decades, and is continuously increasing, in line with our unwavering commitment towards the oil sector and ambition to provide

ongoing support to this strategic industry," he added. "In this context, NBK has launched the NBK-KPC Visa Infinite Credit Card exclusively for the employees of KPC and its subsidiaries, in an effort to enhance their banking experience and promote the cooperation and partnership between the two organizations over several decades," he mentioned.

"NBK is keen on developing the human capital, especially in state-owned entities, in line with its social and development responsibilities, complementing its year-round initiatives that underline its profound belief in the powerful impact of these programs in serving society and individuals, and echoing its leading role in this field for long decades," he emphasized. NBK always seeks to strengthen its leading position as the most socially responsible private sector institution through a wide range of initiatives including training national talent in different government entities, especially the oil sector, which contributes to developing human capital and supporting the Kuwaiti economy.

Exclusion from military graduation 'based on security concerns'

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Ministry of Interior said that the exclusion of some military personnel from graduating from the Non-Commissioned Officers Course for those who have a university degree and the First Deputy Officer Course for those who have a high school diploma was "based on many legal, security, or procedural considerations, the omission of which would expose the country to harm."

This came in a statement issued by the Department of Relations and Security Media, in which the Ministry of Interior expressed its thanks and appreciation to the citizens who were investigating the facts to find out the circumstances of the measures that finally led to the exclusion of some military personnel from graduation.

The statement explained that among these

are "those whose data imply inconsistencies in the conditions of admission to the courses mentioned, as well as security notes in the data of their files. Some joined the session with extraordinary decisions contrary to the law, which necessitated returning things to their proper legal and proper status."

As for what was raised about the non-disbursement of financial remuneration to students affiliated with Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences, the statement said that this was "due to parliamentary pressures that led to the acceptance of the reserve number of those who passed the entry requirements, which was not within the budget plan, as the budget is determined according to the capacity that was supposed to enroll in the academy."

"The budget was allocated for 900 officer students, and 390 students were added outside the budget. This was the reason for not paying their dues. The Ministry of Interior stressed that its approach in all its decisions is always to abide by the constitution, laws, and security considerations to protect the interest of the country," the statement added. — KUNA



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Haiti PM resigns amid turmoil

Senegal's multiple crises leave mental scars

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DEIR AL-BALAH: People look for salvageable items amid the rubble of Al-Bukhari Mosque that was destroyed in Zionist strikes in Deir Al-Balah in this file photo. — AFP photos



A Palestinian family eats an iftar meal amidst the ruins of their family house, on the first day of Ramadan.

Gazans struggle for food on first day of Ramadan

Dozens pray in rubble of mosque, one of 500 targeted by Zionist forces since October

RAFAH: Dozens of Gazans offered prayers on Monday, the first day of Ramadan, in the middle of the ruins of a mosque hit by a Zionist air strike just days ago. Standing in rows before a prayer leader with their hands folded, the Palestinian men were entering a fasting month unlike any they had experienced before.

Many of those not attending prayers were out in the streets looking for whatever food they could find for their families living in makeshift camps across the war-ravaged territory. "I wish the planes would bomb me and I die," said Zaki Hussein Abu Mansur, once the proud owner of a house he had built for his family in Khan Yunis — where the Zionist forces are engaged in a sweeping ground operation against Hamas militants.

"It is better to die than live this life," the 63-year-old told AFP. "Sometimes we see that the things that we need are in the market but we can't buy them." Deprivation is normal in Gaza this Ramadan. Markets in Rafah are short on food items and few stores have qatayef, a dessert traditionally sold during Ramadan.

The bright lights and decorations that usually adorn streets during the fasting month are glaringly absent, though some stalls display Ramadan lanterns. "We can't even afford vegetables, let alone fruit," said Maisa al-Balbissi, a 39-year-

old displaced from northern Gaza and now sheltering in Rafah. "Everything is too expensive. My children and I are unable to buy anything. Prices of even the simplest items have skyrocketed," the mother-of-two told AFP by her tent.

'Don't feel joy'

Palestinians are observing Ramadan this year amid the relentless military campaign launched by the Zionist entity, which it claims is in response to an attack staged by Hamas in October 2023.

The Zionist offensive has killed at least 31,112 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. The Hamas attack resulted in the deaths of around 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally.

For those forced to stay in overcrowded camps for the displaced, the bleak reality of food shortages and unhygienic living conditions has dampened the holy month's festive mood. Around 1.5 million people have sought refuge in Rafah, according to the United Nations, largely without access to food, water and medicines.

"I suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure and heart problems," said Abu Mansur, describing his daily battle to find medicines. "I cannot eat canned food items."

Despite the Zionist entity's and Egypt's long-running blockade of the Gaza Strip, in previous years the goods needed for Ramadan were still available. "This Ramadan is different from last year when everything to do with Ramadan was available — be it electricity, food, water," said Abdelrahman Ashur, 19.

"Nothing is available anymore. We don't feel that joy. Every Ramadan we used to be at home and now we are sitting in tents that we built with our own hands."

'Real test' coming

As the sun rose on the first day of Ramadan, smoke from air strikes was visible over Rafah. Awni al-Kayyal, 50, said he saw ambulances carrying dead bodies as soon as he woke up.

"The start of Ramadan has been sad and covered in darkness, with the smell of blood and stench everywhere ... I woke up in my tent and started crying at our situation," he told AFP.

Late on Sunday, worshippers performed evening prayers at Al-Hadi mosque, damaged in a Zionist strike. Its classic Islamic arches are now chipped and cracked, while the concrete columns supporting the ceiling inside are dangerously askew.

According to Gaza's government



RAFAH: Displaced Palestinians collect food donated by a charity before an iftar meal on March 11, 2024.

press office, Zionist forces have targeted more than 500 mosques since the beginning of the war, with 220 of them destroyed. Meanwhile, in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, fears of clashes during Ramadan prevail among Palestinians.

Every year, tens of thousands of Muslims perform Ramadan prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third-holiest site in

Islam. This year Hamas has called on "our people" to mobilize and march towards Al-Aqsa from the start of Ramadan.

"For now it's more or less quiet. We will see on Friday," said Ali, a resident of the Old City, referring to Friday prayers, when large congregations gather at the mosque. "That will be (the) real test," he said. — AFP

India to enact divisive citizenship law before election

NEW DELHI: India's interior ministry said Monday it was enacting a citizenship law that critics say discriminates against Muslims, just weeks before the world's most populous country heads into a general election.

While the law was passed in December 2019, its implementation was delayed after widespread protests and deadly violence erupted in which more than 100 people were reported to have been killed. The law grants Indian nationality to Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who entered India from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh before December 2014 — but not if they are Muslim.

On Monday, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the rules would now come into force. "These rules, called the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules 2024, will enable the persons eligible ... to apply for grant of Indian citizenship", the ministry said in a statement.

Many among India's 200 million Muslims fear

the law is a precursor to a national register of citizens that could leave them stateless in the country of 1.4 billion. Many poor Indians do not have documents to prove their nationality. Prime Minister Narendra Modi denies this, saying that Muslims are not covered by the legislation because they do not need India's protection. The National Register of Citizens, a list of all legal citizens, has so far only been implemented in the state of Assam.

'Persecuted on religious grounds'

"These rules will now enable minorities persecuted on religious grounds in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to acquire citizenship in our nation," Home Minister Amit Shah said in a statement. Shah said Modi had "delivered on another commitment and realized the promise of the makers of our constitution to the Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians living in those countries". Besides stoking concern among Muslims, the proposed changes also sparked protests by residents unhappy about an influx of Hindus from Bangladesh. The immigration rules do not include migrants from non-Muslim countries fleeing persecution to India, including Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka and Tibetan Buddhists fleeing China's rule.

It also does not address Rohingya Muslim



KOLKATA: Activists shout slogans as they burn a copy of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) bill during a protest rally in Kolkata on March 12, 2024. — AFP

refugees from neighboring Myanmar. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party promised the law's implementation in its 2019 election manifesto. India is expected to soon announce dates for the general election, likely to be held in April-May, with Modi widely favored to win a third term in office. Rights groups have previously condemned the law. Human Rights Watch calls it "discriminatory" and that, for the first time in India, "religion is a basis for granting citizenship". — AFP

Several similar lawsuits are underway in other countries, including in Canada where the foreign and justice ministers have been targeted. But London's High Court last month rejected a similar petition to suspend British arms exports to the entity.

The Zionist bombardment and ground offensive on Gaza has killed 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. The entity claims it's in response to the October 7 Hamas attack that resulted in about 1,160 deaths in the entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP count. Hamas also took around 250 hostages, dozens of whom were released during a week-long truce in November. The Zionist entity believes 99 hostages remain alive in Gaza, along with the bodies of 31. — AFP

Malaysian PM defends Palestine on Germany trip

BERLIN: Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was Monday forced to defend his country's continued ties to Palestinian group Hamas during a visit to Germany, a staunch supporter of the Zionist entity.

Muslim-majority Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with the Zionist entity and many in the country support the Palestinians. Speaking at a press conference alongside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin, Anwar was repeatedly asked about Malaysia's long-standing ties to Hamas and stance on the war.

He stressed Malaysia's links were with Hamas's political wing, adding: "I make no apologies about it. We do not have any connection with any military outfit or wing. I've clarified this to many of my European colleagues (and) the United States."

He urged people to "understand the fundamental root cause of the problem". "What I reject strongly is this narrative, this obsession, as if the entire problem begins and ends with the 7th of October," he said.

There had been decades of "atrocities, plunder and dispossession of Palestinians," he added. Scholz reiterated Germany's position that "(the Zionist entity) has the right to defend itself against Hamas's terror attack". He also stressed that Berlin "wants more humanitarian aid to reach Gaza, we want the hostages to be released unconditionally, we want there to be no unnecessary casualties." The chancellor also called for efforts to foster long-term peace, and towards a two-state solution.

Germany's response to the Hamas attack and ensuing war has been driven by guilt over its own dark past, and the slaughter of six million Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust. — AFP



Anwar Ibrahim

Aid groups sue Denmark over arms exports to Zionists

COPENHAGEN: Four humanitarian organizations on Tuesday said they were suing Denmark to get it to stop its weapons exports to the Zionist entity. The lawsuit was filed against the national police and the foreign ministry.

"Denmark should not be sending weapons to the Zionist entity when there is a reasonable suspicion that it is committing war crimes in Gaza," Tim Whyte, the secretary general of Action Aid

International

Senegal's multiple crises leave mental scars

Experts call for more trained professionals, better mental health support as many people suffer

DAKAR, Senegal: After weathering a slew of health and political crises in recent years, many Senegalese are grappling with mental health issues, psychologists warn. Even before the West African nation had fully emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, it was rocked by violent riots in March 2021 triggered by the arrest of opposition figurehead Ousmane Sonko.

Senegal has since witnessed several bouts of unrest which have resulted in dozens of deaths, thousands of injuries and hundreds of arrests. Most recently, President Macky Sall's postponement of the February presidential election unleashed angry protests which left four people dead.

Health experts are calling for better support for those suffering from a range of symptoms including anxiety, sleep disorders and mental exhaustion. "We had barely emerged from COVID that we fell into this situation of chaos and great confusion," psychologist Serigne Mor Mbaye told AFP.

"We came out of a trauma that we hadn't healed from when we fell into another," he added. "From that moment on, you notice a lot of behavioral problems, sleep disorders, anxieties ... It has a lasting impact on people's mental health," said Mbaye, who has worked in crisis-wracked countries, including the Central African Republic, Mali and Niger.

The families of those detained during unrest have particularly suffered from the psychological fallout. The son of 57-year-old Maman Lucie is a close associate of Sonko and was imprisoned from March 20, 2023 to March 4, 2024.

"I couldn't sleep at night. I was always anxious. I was on the Internet until the early hours of the morning," she said. "All this is going to have a negative impact on my health later on, I'm sure".

Dieynaba Ndiaye, a social psychology lecturer and researcher at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, said there was an "arrest-related trauma for many people who have never had any problems with the law".

'Reflection of despair'

Doctor Abdoulaye Bousso, who was at the forefront of Senegal's COVID-19 strategy, said the impact of the pandemic was far greater than that of recent political events. "Here, when we have a political problem, we deal with it and move on," he said.

But the two psychologists said the turmoil had particularly hit hard many of Senegal's under-25s, who make up 60 percent of the population. The pandemic put an immediate halt on several years of growth, with economic activity hit again by the repercussions of the war in Ukraine.

Mbaye said this combination helped explain why tens of thousands have taken the often deadly Atlantic route to try and reach Europe in recent years. "It's a reflection of a despair that wasn't there before, of people saying 'We don't believe in it any more, we're giving up,'" agreed Ndiaye. But she also emphasized there had been an immense outpouring of solidarity during recent crises, including blood and monetary donations.

Lack of psychologists

Psychologist Mbaye is working to set



DAKAR: Young boys play football along Ngor beach, pictured through netting atop a boat, in Dakar on February 8, 2024. — AFP

up counselling centers in areas where there are high levels of irregular migration. He is calling for similar treatment for the hundreds of detainees who have been released or are about to be freed under a recently passed amnesty law. "We need to pay particular attention to prisoners. You have young people

who have been thrown into prison, young people who went to school, who had their own business. These people are going to be affected," Dr Bousso added.

But there are less than 30 clinical psychologists in Senegal according to Ndiaye, who said healthcare professionals should

be trained to provide initial counselling before referring the most severe cases to psychologists or psychiatrists. The psychology department at Dakar University closed in 1968 and did not reopen until 2021. The first graduating class has not yet completed its course. — AFP

Indian troops begin Maldives pullout

MALÉ, Maldives: India has begun withdrawing military personnel operating surveillance aircraft in the Maldives after the new pro-China president ordered them to leave, defense authorities said Tuesday.

An official of the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said 25 Indian troops deployed in the southernmost atoll of Addu had left the archipelago ahead of March 10, the official start of the withdrawal agreed by both sides. "We can confirm that the Indian troop withdrawal is underway," the MNDF said in a statement to AFP.

President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in September on a pledge to kick out Indian security personnel deployed in the Maldives to patrol its vast maritime border. The two sides had agreed to complete a withdrawal of 89 Indian troops and their support staff in the Maldives by May 10.

Local officials said the three Indian aircraft — two helicopters and one fixed-wing plane — will be operated by Indian civilian staff, who have already arrived. Last week, the Maldives signed a "military assistance" deal with China as the Indians prepared to leave. The Maldivian defense ministry said the deal was to foster "stronger bilateral ties" and that China would train its staff under the pact.

'Territorial sovereignty'

"We support the Maldives in safeguarding its territorial sovereignty," China's foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters in Beijing on Tuesday. "We also support the Maldives in developing friendly exchanges and cooperation with all parties on the basis of its independence and autonomy."

India is suspicious of China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and its influence in the Maldives as well as in neighboring Sri Lanka. The archipelago, better known for its white sand beaches and where tourism accounts for nearly a third of its economy, is also strategically placed halfway along key east-west international shipping routes. — AFP

Families wait on news of kidnapped students in Nigeria

KADUNA, Nigeria: Families of more than 250 Nigerian students kidnapped from a school last week waited desperately on Monday for news about their welfare and the progress in rescue efforts four days after the attack. Gunmen on motorbikes stormed the school in Kuriga, northwestern Kaduna state on Thursday, rounding up the pupils and forcing them into the bush before their panicked families.

It was one of the largest mass abductions carried out by criminal gangs known locally as bandits who target schools, villages and highways in their hunt for victims to squeeze out ransom payments.

The government said it has sent troops into the forests that carpet northwestern states to rescue the students who number about 280, but little detail has emerged after the kidnapping.

Muhammad Kabir, a relation of several of the schoolchildren, said the families had not been briefed on what is being done to free them. "From what we gathered, the children have been divided into groups by the captors and sent to different camps," he told AFP in Kaduna city where he lives. "We have been left in apprehension, we have no idea what the children are going through in the hands of their kidnapers." He said they feel time is running out, and called for the state and federal governments should act fast. "Kuriga is a closely-knit community, we are one big family. So, everybody has been affected by this tragedy," Monday marked the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when families in the mostly Muslim north of Nigeria gather in the evenings to break fast.

Resident Abdullahi Musa said little news had emerged in Kuriga after the government said troops were in the forests trying to locate the children. "This was on Saturday and since then we have not heard anything," Musa said. "We are talking about more than 280 children."

Another resident Isa Mustapha said they felt "in the dark" with little information. Nigeria's military



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

did not respond to calls for comment on a rescue. A presidential spokesman did not respond immediately to a request for an update. A spokesman for Kaduna state governor said it was a "national security" matter and he was unable to comment.

Second mass kidnap

The Kuriga attack was the second mass kidnapping in a week, illustrating the task faced by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who has promised to improve security since coming to office in May.

Kaduna State governor Uba Sani said security forces were working with state officials, but cautioned media against politicizing the incident at such a sensitive moment.

No group has claimed any responsibility, but residents blamed bandits, the gangs that raid villages to loot and carry out mass abductions for ransom especially in Nigeria's northwestern states.

A week earlier, Islamist militants also kidnapped as many as 200, mostly women and children, from a camp for people displaced by jihadist conflict in

northeast Borno State. Officials have given conflicting figures for the numbers of missing in that attack.

UN child welfare agency UNICEF has called on the government to do better at protecting schools in Nigeria, where hundreds of pupils have been kidnapped in the last three years. Most were released after weeks or months in camps hidden in forests following negotiations and ransom payments.

Kabir Adamu, director of Nigeria risk firm Beacon Consulting, said preventing school abductions was one of the responsibilities of the national police and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps paramilitary outfit. "The leadership of these organizations should be held responsible for failing to prevent the attacks," he told AFP.

More than 40,000 people have been killed and another two million displaced by fighting in Nigeria's northeast since the jihadist war began in 2009.

Violence has eased and militants have been forced back from areas they once controlled but they still launch attacks, carry out kidnapping raids and ambush convoys in remote areas. — AFP

Ramadan a time for introspection...

Continued from Page 1

both physically and spiritually. The action provides its own rewards.

2. Sympathy for the poor

A fasting person feels the pain of hunger and thirst. This, in turn, creates empathy for the poor and needy, and prepares them to help them. Almsgiving is one of the good deeds which is most liked by Almighty Allah. Almighty Allah wants us to understand the needs of others and thus try our level best to help them as much as possible. Ramadan is a time for charity and generosity. It is reported that the Prophet (PBUH) was the most generous of all the people, and he used to become more generous in Ramadan when Gabriel (AS) met him. Gabriel (AS) used to meet him every night during Ramadan to revise the Holy Quran with him. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) then used to be more generous than a strong wind. (Sahih Al-Bukhari)

3. Subduing desires

There are two organs in our body, if they are controlled, everything else will be controlled; they are the tongue and the private parts. These two organs are the reason for many evils and crimes in our society. Fasting teaches us to control these two. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Whoever does not give up false statements (ie telling lies), and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, Allah is not in need

of his (fast) leaving his food and drink" (Sahih Al-Bukhari). Controlling the tongue is one of the important lessons to be learnt from fasting. Fasting enables us to control sensual desires and evil inclinations. Unbridled lust is the source of many problems in human life. Through fasting, one subdues unrestrained lust and other evil inclinations.

4. Pondering over the final testament

Ramadan is, of course, a time to reflect upon the Noble Quran. The Holy Quran is the Book of God that explains man's relationship with his Creator, with fellow human beings and with other creatures. It reminds us of the purpose of life, to worship our Creator. Whenever we stray from the path of our Creator, fasting brings us back to our Creator. It also reminds us of the reality that we are going to return to our Creator one day. By pondering over the verses of the Holy Quran, our faith in the hereafter increases.

5. Introspection and repentance

Ramadan is also a time to be introspective of our deeds, repent from our sins, and seek forgiveness from Almighty Allah. We often tend to sin and disobey our Creator out of human weaknesses or out of ignorance. Ramadan provides an opportunity to look within ourselves and seek forgiveness. Allah says in the Holy Quran what can be translated as, "Say, O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (Az-Zumar 39:53)

— Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

Spanish aid ship sails for Gaza as...

Continued from Page 1

The war and siege since Oct 7 leveled vast parts of the coastal strip and sparked dire food shortages that have led the UN World Food Program to warn that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza. As the flow of aid trucks from Egypt has slowed — a trend variously blamed on the war, the growing insecurity on the ground and cumbersome Zionist inspections of cargo — Western and Arab governments have stepped up airdrops.

However UN and other relief agencies warn that parachuting in aid parcels is less effective and falls far short of the hundreds of truckloads needed every day to sustain the population of 2.4 million people. The humanitarian crisis has gripped Gaza at a time Muslims have since Monday observed the holy month of Ramadan, where daytime fasts are traditionally broken with lavish evening iftar meals with family and friends.

In Gaza's southern city of Rafah, where 1.5 million people have sought refuge in crowded shelters and makeshift tents, one displaced man, Mohammad Al-Masry, said this year the family had just "canned food and beans". Another displaced man, Om Muhammad Abu Matar from Khan Yunis, told AFP that this year, Ramadan has "the taste of blood and misery, separation and oppression".

The Zionist entity's bombardment and ground offensive have killed 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. Weeks of talks involving US, Qatar and Egyptian mediators failed to bring about a truce and hostage exchange deal ahead of Ramadan. UN chief Antonio Guterres called Monday for "silencing the guns" during

the Muslim holy month and said he was "appalled and outraged that conflict is continuing".

Hamas has demanded a full withdrawal of Zionist troops from Gaza, a demand labelled "delusional" by the Zionist entity, which accuses the group of seeking to stoke unrest during Ramadan. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed, despite growing domestic and international opposition, to push on with the war to destroy Hamas and free the captives.

In an interview with Fox News, he doubled down on his plan to send troops into Rafah near the Egyptian border, the last area so far spared ground operations. "We can't leave a quarter of the Hamas terror army in place, they're there in Rafah," the rightwing premier said, adding that "it's either (the Zionist entity) or Hamas, there's no middle way".

He said the Zionist entity agreed with the United States on the need to "first enable the safe departure of the civilian population from Rafah before we go in". Asked about apparent growing friction between him and US President Joe Biden, the premier said that "we have our agreements on the basic goals, but we also have disagreements on how to achieve them".

The worst-ever Gaza war, now in its sixth month, has stoked anger and protests worldwide, most of them against the Zionist entity. It has also sparked clashes involving the Zionist entity's regional enemies, a coalition of Iran-backed armed groups dubbed the Axis of Resistance including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

Hezbollah said Tuesday it had launched more than 100 rockets at Zionist military positions in retaliation for a strike the previous day that killed one person near the eastern Lebanon city of Baalbek. Yemen's Houthis have been attacking ships on the key Red Sea trade route leading towards the Suez Canal, in professed solidarity with the Palestinians, forcing many vessels to make the costlier journey around Africa. — AFP

International

Haiti PM resigns amid turmoil

Ariel Henry accepts regional push to end violent crisis, paving way for international intervention

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Haiti's prime minister agreed late Monday to step aside as armed gangs plunge his country into anarchy, as he accepted a regional push for a transition that sets the stage for international intervention.

Caribbean nations secured Ariel Henry's resignation at an emergency meeting in Jamaica where US Secretary of State Antony Blinken offered another \$100 million to pave the way for the security force, which will be led by Kenya.

Gangs have taken over much of the Western Hemisphere's poorest country and in recent weeks the crisis has grown even more violent, with bodies strewn across the streets, armed bandits looting basic infrastructure and fears rising of a famine.

"The government I lead cannot remain insensitive to this situation. As I have always said, no sacrifice is too great for our homeland Haiti," Henry said in a resignation address that he posted online.

Gang leaders had demanded the departure of Henry who, while speaking of himself as a transitional figure, had remained in power since 2021 when Haiti's president was assassinated. Haiti has not held an election since 2016.

Guyana's President Irfaan Ali, who chairs the Caribbean regional body CARICOM, announced after a weekend of diplomacy that Henry would leave once a new transitional authority is in place. Ali saluted Henry, saying that the prime minister — stranded in Puerto Rico as Haiti's main airport is no longer functioning — "has assured us in his actions, in his words, of his selfless intent." "And that selfless intent was to see Haiti succeed," Ali said.

Blinken, who spent seven hours inside the talks in a Kingston hotel, confirmed Henry's resignation in a telephone call initiated by the prime minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley. A US official traveling with Blinken said that Henry had agreed to quit on Friday but was waiting for the Kingston conference to sort out details of the transition.

Also raised were ways to prevent reprisals against Henry and his allies, with the United States

agreeing that the outgoing prime minister would be welcome to stay on US soil if he feels unsafe in Haiti, the official said.

Seeking new legitimacy

Senior officials from Brazil, Canada, France and Mexico joined the talks. CARICOM, in a statement with its partners and the United Nations, said that Haiti's new Transitional Presidential Council would have seven voting members who make decisions by a majority vote.

The seven will include representatives of major political parties, the private sector and the Montana Group, a civil society coalition that had proposed an interim government in 2021 after President Jovenel Moise's assassination.

There will also be two non-voting seats on the council — one for civil society and another for the church. Authority has badly eroded in Haiti. A nighttime curfew was extended through Thursday — although it is unlikely overstretched police can enforce it.

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness, the host of the crisis talks, warned that Haiti risked all-out civil war. "It is clear that Haiti is now at a tipping point," he said, urging "strong and decisive action" to "stem the sea of lawlessness and hopelessness before it is too late."

US boosts security aid

Blinken promised another \$100 million to back an international stabilization force, bringing the total pledged by the United States to \$300 million since the crisis intensified several years ago. Blinken also offered another \$33 million in immediate humanitarian assistance.

Escalating violence "creates an untenable situation for the Haitian people, and we all know that urgent action is needed on both the political and security tracks," Blinken said.

"All of us know that only the Haitian people can, and only the Haitian people should, deter-



PORT-AU-PRINCE: A protester burns tires during a demonstration calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry in Port-au-Prince on February 7, 2024. — AFP

mine their own future — not anyone else," Blinken said. But he said the United States and its partners "can help restore foundational security" and address "the tremendous suffering" in Haiti.

President Joe Biden — who ended the US war in Afghanistan — has ruled out putting troops in harm's way in Haiti, which the United States occupied for nearly two decades a century ago and where it has intervened since.

Eyes initially turned to Canada, but it also decided a Haiti mission was too dangerous with

success uncertain. Canada, however, has offered \$91 million for Haiti, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised continued support as he addressed the Kingston summit remotely.

Kenya stepped forward but was set back by a domestic court ruling against the deployment. The plan again picked up steam after Henry visited Nairobi and agreed on a "reciprocal" exchange of forces between the two countries. But with violence soaring, Henry was unable to return to Haiti, landing in Puerto Rico after the Dominican Republic declined to take him. — AFP



ZUMPANGO, Mexico: This aerial view shows abandoned boats on the completely dry Zumpango lake in San Pedro de la Laguna, Mexico. — AFP photos

'It was an oasis': Mexico City frets about water

LAKE ZUMPANGO, Mexico: Agustin Garcia looks with dismay at the dry bed of the lake where he once fished for a living — a symptom of the water problems facing Mexico and its capital, one of the world's biggest cities. "It was an oasis here, something beautiful, and now it's dry," the 55-year-old said by the sunbaked shore of Lake Zumpango to the north of Mexico City.

After water supply cuts in several neighborhoods this year, nervousness is growing among the 20 million residents of the Mexico City metropolitan area about whether they will avoid major shortages before the rainy season arrives.

The use of tanker trucks to deliver water has already increased, while some residents have installed big storage tanks as they anxiously await the regular downpours that usually begin in May.

Despite talk in the media of "Day Zero" when the taps might eventually run dry, the government has insisted there is no need to worry. The increased jitters follow a significantly less wet than usual rainy season last year, combined with hotter than average recent temperatures, which have left reservoirs near



MEXICO CITY: A worker of the National Water Commission fills a water truck with drinking water to be distributed on January 29, 2024.

Mexico City more depleted than normal.

Rainfall in Mexico in 2023 was 21 percent below average, making it the driest year since record keeping began in 1941, according to a report published by the National Meteorological Service. "This is part of global environmental change," said Roberto Constantino, an expert at the Metropolitan Autonomous University. Variations in meteorological cycles are "predominantly causing the lack of water," he told AFP. Juan Manuel Nunez, an expert at Iberoamericana University, believes that "rapid urbanization and careless management of our water resources" are also part of the problem in Mexico City.

Water leaks involving aging pipes are not uncommon. Activists have also called for tighter control of water use by major corporations such as breweries and construction companies.

'Feel devastated'

In Zumpango, six boats lay abandoned on the dusty lakebed — a far cry from past years when Garcia and his colleagues caught carp and other fish. "I feel devastated, weak, unable to earn an income so that I can continue to support myself," he said.

"We were all used to feeling an early morning breeze, seeing the ducks, seeing the herons," Garcia said, adding that some fishermen gave up and went to the United States to seek work.

Around a dozen rigs, reportedly for drilling and pumping wells to supply Mexico City with water,

were seen in the area, further upsetting locals. "No to water theft. The water is ours," read graffiti on a nearby wall.

The National Water Commission did not respond to AFP's request for information about the equipment. With less than three months to go before Mexico holds presidential elections, candidates have put the water issue at the heart of their campaigns.

Opposition hopeful Xochitl Galvez has promised to treat 100 percent of wastewater for recycling — following the example of other cities such as Los Angeles and Singapore. Ruling party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum has proposed that water be recognized in the constitution as a national resource and opposes giving new concessions to the private sector.

'No lake, no life'

It is not just Greater Mexico City that has been affected. In 2022, residents of the northern industrial hub of Monterrey, one of Mexico's wealthiest cities, faced weeks of water rationing due to depleted reservoirs.

In the western state of Michoacan, Lake Cuitzeo — one of the biggest in the country — has lost more than half of its surface area. "The authorities aren't interested. They only remember the lake when they are campaigning," said fisherman Rafael Vazquez.

More than 140 families in his community of La Mina depend on fishing, he said. A heat wave is forecast to continue in the coming days, offering little sign of respite. "If there's no lake, there's no life," Vazquez said. — AFP

Pro-Ukraine Russian militias attack two border regions

KYIV: Pro-Ukrainian militias staged a brazen cross-border raid on Tuesday, claiming to take control of a Russian village, as Kyiv launched one of its largest drone attacks since the start of the war.

Groups of pro-Kyiv volunteer fighters, made up of Russians who oppose the Kremlin, said that they had broken into the Kursk and Belgorod regions, while Moscow said it had fired rockets and artillery to foil the attempted incursion.

"The village of Tyotkino, Kursk region is completely under the control of Russian liberation forces," the Freedom of Russia legion, a militia that claims to be made up of Russian citizens fighting on behalf of Ukraine, said in a post on Telegram. It published a video purporting to show a handful of Russian troops fleeing across a snowy field. Moscow denied that the fighters had made ground, saying its forces had thwarted multiple attacks.

"At about 3:00 am (0000 GMT), Ukrainian terrorist groups, after intensive shelling of civilian sites, tried to invade Russian territory in three directions," Russia's defense ministry said. "All the Ukrainian attacks were repelled. The enemy was hit by aircraft, rockets and artillery," it added.

Another attack at 8:00 am (0500 GMT) at Tyotkino was also foiled, it added. Russia's defense ministry said it halted the last attack at 8:25 am (0525 GMT), but a spokesperson for the Freedom of Russia region told AFP fighting was ongoing.

'Not in control'

Moscow also reported a wave of Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian border regions overnight and throughout Tuesday. In one statement it said it had shot down four Ukrainian drones over the Kursk region in the space of an hour.

Kursk Governor Roman Starovoyt said there had been a shoot-out in his region. The neighboring Belgorod region was also hit in a series of drone attacks on Tuesday — including a strike on Belgorod city hall, the regional governor said.

Officials in Kursk city said they were closing schools until the end of the week amid the spike in attacks. Russia's FSB security service said that since Sunday it had repelled a number of attempted cross-border attacks in the Belgorod and Kursk regions.

A spokesman for Ukraine's military intelligence, Andriy Yusov, said the fighters were not acting under orders from Kyiv. But he said the attacks showed "the Kremlin is once again not in control of the situation in Russia."

Ukraine-based militias — made up of Russian citizens who oppose Moscow's invasion and have taken up arms for Kyiv — have claimed to be behind previous incursions into Russian territory.

The Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion said they took temporary control of several settlements in the Belgorod region in May and June 2023 in a string of raids after breaking through a border checkpoint. — AFP

Orban claims Trump won't 'give a penny' to Ukraine

BUDAPEST: Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban has asserted former US president Donald Trump told him during a meeting that he would "not give a penny" to the war in Ukraine — a claim Trump's team did not comment on.

Orban — the only EU leader to have maintained ties with the Kremlin since Russia invaded Ukraine — travelled to Florida on Friday to meet his "good friend" Trump. He has frequently expressed hope for the Republican's return to power.

Speaking about his visit to public broadcaster MI late Sunday, Orban said the two men spoke about the war in Ukraine during their Friday meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence. "He has a very clear vision, which is hard not to agree with. He says the following: first of all, he will not give a penny in the Ukraine-Russia war," Orban said.

"That is why the war will end, because it is obvious that Ukraine cannot stand on its own feet ... If the Americans do not give money, the Europeans alone will not be able to finance this war. And then the war is over," he added.

When contacted by AFP, Trump's team did not comment. Trump however returned the praise for Orban in an interview Monday, describing him as a "tough man" and saying the Hungarian leader believed Russia would not have invaded had Trump been president. "All of those dead people in blown-up cities because Ukraine is now just like a demolition site, what they've done to Ukraine — none of that would have happened," Trump told CNBC.

'Dictators'

US President Joe Biden reiterated his criticism of election rival Trump for meeting Orban. "He was with Viktor Orban, who talked about democracy being the problem, and telling how much he understood and agreed with him. Come on. I mean, this is not who we are," Biden told a campaign event Monday in New Hampshire.

Last week in a fiery State of the Union speech Biden accused Trump of "bowing down" to Russian President Vladimir Putin over Ukraine. Biden's campaign added Monday that Orban had "rigged his political



PALM BEACH: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (left) and former US President and Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump are seen during their meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence. — AFP

system to keep himself in power". "President Biden stands up to dictators and defends freedom," campaign spokesman Ammar Moussa said in a statement. "Donald Trump consistently praises authoritarian leaders and dictators." Orban meanwhile angered fellow EU leaders by meeting Putin in September and has previously spoken out against Western sanctions on Moscow. The Hungarian also told MI that Trump had "quite detailed plans on how to end this war", declining to elaborate.

Orban regularly advocates for immediate ceasefire and peace talks, arguing Trump is best qualified to find a way

out of the conflict. Trump has previously expressed admiration for Putin and said he would end the war in Ukraine "in 24 hours" if he was elected. Trump and his Republican allies have also opposed sending more aid to Ukraine, and Republicans in Congress are blocking Biden's request for a multi-billion-dollar package of vital military assistance for Kyiv. The first of Trump's two impeachments while in office was for allegedly threatening to hold up aid for Ukraine, unless President Volodymyr Zelensky dug up political dirt on the Ukrainian business dealings of Biden's son Hunter. — AFP



BELGOROD: The damaged Belgorod city hall is damaged after a hit by a drone attack. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024

In hunt for gold, unemployed Afghans risk death and debt

Half of Afghan population is still living in poverty: World Bank



YAFTAL SUFLA, Afghanistan: In this photograph taken on February 24, 2024, an Afghan youth (center) pans for gold in a traditional way at a gold mine along the Kokcha River at Yaftal Sufla district in Badakhshan province. (Right) An Afghan man carries containers filled with stones and soil from a tunnel at a gold mine in the mountains of Yaftal Sufla district in Badakhshan province. — AFP Photos

Lego steams ahead despite struggling toy market



Lego sales reached a new high last year. — AFP

COPENHAGEN: Lego cemented its position as the world's biggest toymaker last year despite logging its first decline in net profit since 2017 and slumping sales in China, company results showed Tuesday. The Danish toy giant's overall sales inched up by two percent to 65.9 billion kroner (\$9.6 billion), a record sum for the family company that continues to gain market share.

Sales made directly to consumers through Lego's physical and online stores rose by four percent in a challenging year as high inflation weighed heavily on the industry.

Its net profit fell five percent to 13.1 billion kroner amid a 60-percent rise in spending on green initiatives as it tries to find alternative materials for its colourful plastic bricks. It also boosted investments by 27 percent in technology modernization and innovation.

Lego posted three years of record-breaking sales during the COVID lockdowns, and shows no sign of slowing down. The unlisted family-owned company never reveals detailed market share figures, but according to market data consultancy group Statista, Lego has been the world's biggest toymaker since 2020 with a 14-percent market share in 2022.

"In five years we've grown 81 percent organically, where the market has grown 12 percent," Lego chief executive Niels Christiansen told AFP in an interview.

He said the company expects to see more of the same in 2024. "Every year we've taken market share and the outlook for this year is that we would continue to take," he added. A small dark cloud was a decline in sales in China.

"In China the economic conditions in the country are severe enough that many consumers have been holding back a little bit, maybe buying the same number of Lego sets but those a little bit lower in price," Christiansen explained.

With a record 780 products in its portfolio, Lego doesn't have to worry about being dependent on the success of a single toy or game.

"We're not the type of company that has 25 percent of sales on one product," the chief executive said. The company's bestsellers are its flagship product ranges Lego City and Lego Technic, the Star Wars and Harry Potter franchises, as well as Lego Icons for older builders. In December, the company, whose name is a contraction of the Danish words "play well" (Leg godt), also tied up with video game leader Epic Games to launch Lego Fortnite. — AFP

YAFTAL SUFLA, Afghanistan: Tearing off a piece of moldy flatbread, Homayon gulped tea in a brief reprieve from the din of the machines he and a dozen other men were using to dig for gold on a mountainside in northeastern Afghanistan.

The 30-year-old found little work as a mechanic in nearby Faizabad city, so he banded with other unemployed men to try their luck carving out a living in the rocky mountains that dominate Badakhshan province.

"Five, six of us were jobless, we came here to see if we can find anything," Homayon told AFP, as the handful of men finished their break and returned to work at the small-scale mine they had set up.

Their efforts digging four tunnels have borne little fruit, even as they pour money into fuel, tools and labor. Other mines in the area had proved productive, Homayon said, so they kept digging—the promise of a windfall outweighing the risks of debt.

The losses can be significant, warned fellow miner Qadir Khan. "There are people who went into debt and were not able to find anything from these kinds of tunnels," he said. "They lost two to three hundred thousand (Afghanis, or roughly \$2,800-\$4,200), and there was nothing to do but try to find different work,

make money, and come back to pay their debts." Despite being 74, Khan says he has no choice but to keep working, as he hunches over a pile of rocks to break them into smaller pieces. The Afghan Taliban's takeover of the country in 2021 may have seen an end to two decades of war with the United States and its allies, but, according to a World Bank report, half the population is still living in poverty.

Laborer Sharif, 60, said he used to keep livestock but has been mining for the last year. Two of his sons had left for Iran to find work. "We are still farming, but it is not the way it used to be," he said, complaining of a lack of water—another shortage drought-hit Afghanistan has faced in recent years.

The rocks Sharif helps mine are broken up and hoisted down the steep mountainside, then pulverized into a flour-like substance. On the banks of the Kokcha River, which snakes between snow-capped peaks, men use makeshift buckets to scoop water over piles of the powder. It is then sifted as it runs down a sluice covered by material pulled from car interiors. The proceeds of the first wash are used to fund the equipment and labor and to keep the mine going. The gains from the second and third washes

are shared between those bankrolling the operation.

A young man stopped swirling water around a shallow dish to separate the powdery rock from gold, pulling from his pocket a bit of plastic wrapped around 4,000 Afghanis—worth of the precious metal.

As of late February, 4.5 grams (0.16 ounces) of the precious metal could be sold for 18,000 Afghanis (about \$250), Homayon said. Global gold prices hit an all-time high of \$2,141.79 per ounce on March 5.

Even if the miners can collect significant amounts of gold, a fifth of proceeds will go to the Taliban authorities. Delving deep into the Afghan mountains, the miners risk not just debt, but death as well.

Mine collapses are common in Afghanistan, which is rich with precious minerals like the lapis lazuli Badakhshan is famous for. The miners on the Kokcha said they had lost friends recently, and local media reported earlier this month that a gold miner died when part of a mine collapsed in neighboring Takhar province. In 2019, at least 30 people were killed when a gold mine collapsed in Badakhshan.

Despite the risks, the men continue digging. "So far we have not found much of anything," said Homayon. "But we have hope, we trust in God." —AFP

Flying high: UK's modern-day green airship takes shape

BEDFORD, United Kingdom: Britain's innovative Airlander 10 airship could soon take to the skies to offer leisure passengers panoramic views and far less pollution than traditional aircraft, according to its manufacturer. On the outskirts of the town of Bedford, north of London, UK company Hybrid Air Vehicles (HAV) says its plans are well underway for greener but slower commercial air travel.

The Airlander—which is 300 feet (91 meters) long—is lifted by its gigantic helium-filled hull, which is then steered through the air by engine propellers powered by conventional fuel. The dirigible is "unlike any other aircraft cabin you've sat in", HAV chief executive Tom Grundy told AFP on a visit to the Bedford facility.

"It's big, it's long, it's spacious (and) it's very quiet to sit on board. "There's floor-to-ceiling windows, and the aircraft's unpressurised, so you can even open a window and look at the outside world as you're going over it."

The airship, initially developed for the US army, is longer than the Airbus A380 jumbo yet pumps out up to 75 percent less emissions than aircraft, according to HAV. The group plans to start production later this year, while electric- and hydrogen-powered versions are planned in order to further slash emissions. HAV has already manufactured a prototype, part of which is now on display in Bedford after completing test flights. The tech hub also features a life-size model of the future airship that allows visitors to step on board and view its "luxury" configuration including a bar, passenger cabins and an observation lounge.

However, experts concede that airships will be hindered as a form of transport owing to its slow speed versus other airborne modes. Professor Andreas Schaefer, director of the Air Transportation Systems Laboratory at University College London, cautioned that it would be a "niche" market.

"On a commercial basis, as a vehicle for long distance transport, I can't see any future because simply the speed is by far too slow," he noted. HAV is one of the few companies that it seeking to relaunch the airship, but using the inert gas helium. Almost 90 years ago, the Hindenburg Zeppelin—filled with highly flammable hy-



BEDFORD: Hybrid Air Vehicles Chief Executive Officer Tom Grundy speaks during an interview with the press at the company headquarters in Bedford, England.— AFP photos

drogen—exploded in the United States in 1937, killing 36 people and ending the widespread use of airships.

Yet the potential of airships to provide an environmentally friendly, low-cost alternative to helicopters and passenger jets for transportation has now sparked renewed interest.

HAV's French peer Flying Whales is seeking to develop a fleet of rigid airships for carrying heavy cargo. "The airship revival has been talked about, like the revival of Concord, for about 30 years now (or) more," aviation consultant Philip Butterworth-Hayes told AFP. "The idea is absolutely great, it should theoretically be able to meet all the environmental challenges that aviation has in terms of being able to reduce carbon emissions." Yet he sounded a cautious note over the outlook for airships.

"There's a whole number of very complex technical regulatory issues that need to be sorted out before it becomes a reality," said Butterworth-Hayes. "You need an awful lot of money to certify an aircraft," he added.

Airlander, which is capable of taking off and landing on land or water, can stay airborne for up to five days and travel more than 7,000 kilometers at about 140 kilome-



BEDFORD: A three-bladed ducted propeller used on the Airlander 10 displayed at the Hybrid Air Vehicles centre in Bedford.

ters per hour. Yet its British manufacturer estimates that its first commercial airship flights will not be until 2028.

HAV currently has 23 pre-orders for the airship, with an order book totaling more than £1.0 billion (\$1.3 billion). That includes 20 lodged by Spanish regional airline Air Nostrum. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Oil prices gain over 2% in Feb over macroeconomic signals

Kuwait crude jumps 2.9%, closes month at \$81.8pb

KUWAIT: Brent futures rallied for a second consecutive month in February, rising by more than 2 percent to \$83.6/bbl (+8.5 percent ytd) on the back of positive macroeconomic signals and continuing geopolitical tensions surrounding events in Gaza and the Red Sea. Stimulus measures undertaken by the Chinese government and expectations of an extension of OPEC+ supply cuts into Q2, which were announced on March 3, also factored in oil's move to its highest level since November.

Brent's backwardated price structure, where prices for prompt delivery are higher than prices for delivery in the future, widened to more than \$2.4/bbl (M1-M3) by February's close, a four-month high, signaling increasing supply tightness. Local marker Kuwait Export Crude (KEC), meanwhile, closed the month at \$81.8/bbl (-2.7 percent m/m; +2.9 percent ytd).

In the futures markets, bullish speculator positioning increased substantially in February, with net length (the difference between the number of bullish "long" and bearish "short" contracts) reaching the highest in nearly a year at 276k contracts, before pulling back towards the end of the month. Furthermore, as a sign of renewed appetite for oil trades, Brent open interest (the total number of outstanding derivative contracts) rose in February to its highest level since last July.

Oil demand growth forecasts for 2024 remained relatively unchanged in February, though all the reporting agencies noted the likelihood of a softer pace of expansion this year compared to last. The International Energy Agency (IEA) reduced its projection by 20 kb/d to 1.2 mb/d, still a huge 1 mb/d below OPEC's estimate of 2.2 mb/d, which is by far the most bullish among forecasters. Non-OECD economies including China, India and Brazil are expected to drive the increase this year, accounting for 78 percent of total oil demand gains in 2024. OECD members, on the other hand, will likely post much slower growth amid a lackluster economic environment. For 2025, OPEC sees oil demand rising by a stillstrong 1.85 mb/d to 106.2 mb/d.

On the supply side, combined data from OPEC secondary sources and S&P Global show aggregate OPEC+ production (quota-bound members) falling 234 kb/d m/m to 34.4 mb/d in January. Among OPEC members, the steepest declines came from Kuwait (-109 kb/d) and Iraq (-98kb/d) as both countries began implementing their voluntary cuts. Increased production in the UAE (+31 kb/d), in accordance with its new higher baseline, and in Saudi Arabia (+25 kb/d), slightly offset the losses. Of the 8 OPEC+ members taking part in the latest round of supply cuts, which on paper total 2.1 mb/d but which in practice will see only about 500 kb/d of fresh production cuts (the remainder is a combination of Saudi's 1 mb/d output cut rollover from mid-2023, Russia's 300 kb/d export cut rollover from 2023 and an additional Russian 200 kb/d refined product exports cut, while the UAE's 163 kb/d cut is offset by a 200 kb/d increase to its baseline) only Saudi Arabia was in perfect compliance in January, with Kazakhstan yet to move at all with its 82 kb/d cut.

Meanwhile, quota-exempt Libya saw its output fall 135 kb/d to 1.0 mb/d in February following protests at Al-Sharara field earlier in the month and Iran recorded its first monthly production decline in a year (-5 kb/d to 3.16 mb/d). As was widely expected, OPEC+ announced on 3 March that these producers will extend their cuts through Q2, with Russia also signing up, but with a mix of production and export cuts totaling 471 kb/d rather than an outright 500 kb/d export cut as was the case in Q1. Russia intends to gradually deepen its production cut from 350 kb/d in April to 471 kb/d in June while simultaneously reducing its export cuts from the initial 121 kb/d in April.

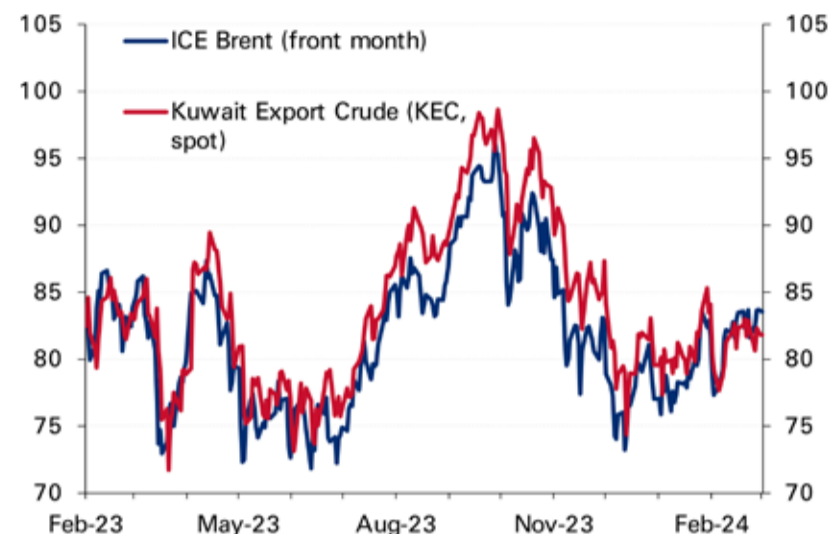
Outside of the OPEC+ group, the IEA reckons that output gains from the US, Canada, Brazil and Guyana will drive aggregate non-OPEC supply growth of 1.5 mb/d in 2024, which, while down on 2023's breakneck pace of 2.5 mb/d, will, nonetheless, outpace expected demand growth this year, leading to a surplus

of supply over demand and potentially around 0.2 mb/d of oil inventory gains on average. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) and OPEC do not share that view, with the former pegging non-OPEC supply growth in 2024 at around half the IEA's rate and OPEC at around 1.3 mb/d. We think non-OPEC supply growth could come in lower at about 1.1 mb/d, which, with OPEC+ supply cut extension into Q2, could almost certainly leave the market short of barrels and facing an inventory drawdown in Q1-Q3 and for the year as a whole (-0.4 mb/d). Were OPEC+ to extend their voluntary cuts beyond Q2 then the oil market balance/stock change would tip further into a supply deficit/drawdown.

In the US, crude oil production returned in February to the record 13.3 mb/d level following January's winter storms when 1 mb/d of output was shut in. It is partly as a result of this and partly on expectations of lower drilling during the rest of the year that the EIA has reduced its crude oil output growth projections this year from 290 kb/d to just 170 kb/d, a sizeable drop from 2023's growth of 1.0 mb/d. The EIA expects output to generally flatline around 13.1 mb/d on average for 2024. For 2025, however, the agency expects production to rise to 13.5 mb/d (+400 kb/d) despite no significant change in the expectations of oil prices over the period. Meanwhile, active oil rigs increased to 506 (+1.2 percent ytd) by February's close, the highest level since September.

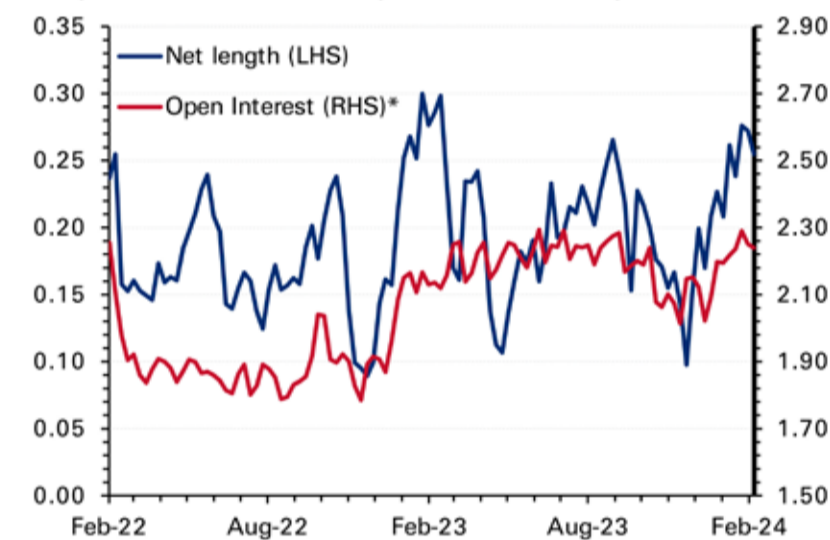
OPEC's policy path will likely be the focal point for markets this year. Having announced an extension to their Q1 supply cuts, the producer bloc will be watching carefully how oil demand fares through the months ahead and the trajectory of non-OPEC supply. Of comfort to OPEC+ will be that prices appear to have firmed with a price floor established at around the \$80/bbl level. We think that level will be a reasonable base case for 2024, though with a stronger upside risk developing than before.

Chart 1: Oil prices (\$/bbl)



Source: Refinitiv, KPC

Chart 2: Brent money manager net length (million futures and options contracts)



Source: Bloomberg. *Futures contracts only

Musk says will 'open source' Grok chatbot

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk on Monday said he would make his Grok chatbot, a rival to ChatGPT, open source as his feud with OpenAI deepens. The multi-billionaire unveiled Grok late last year as he attempts to catch up with OpenAI which he helped create in 2015 along with its CEO Sam Altman, providing key financing in its early days.

He left OpenAI a few years later and last week filed a shock lawsuit against the company for breaking its original non-profit mission to make AI research available to all. "This week, @xAI will open source Grok," Musk said in a post on X, entering one of Silicon Valley's burning philosophical debates on the future of artificial intelligence.

Tech investors are increasingly in split camps on the development of AI and how the technology should advance. On one side, companies such as Meta support an open source system in which researchers and other companies can access the technology's inner workings to develop new products or innovations. Meta, IBM and dozens of startups and researchers in December launched an alliance defending more open and collaborative AI, afraid that regulators would close the path to this method.

On the other side, OpenAI and Google support a higher level of secrecy in order to protect the technology from bad actors, and make money to recoup the high computing costs necessary to build their industry-leading tools.

Shortly after filing his lawsuit, Musk said in a post that he would drop his case if OpenAI changed its name to ClosedAI. OpenAI argues that Musk's lawsuit, as well as his embrace of open source development, is little more than a case of sour grapes after leaving the company.

"Seeing the remarkable technological advances OpenAI has achieved, Musk now wants that success for himself," OpenAI said in a court filing. "Musk purports to bring this suit for humanity when the truth—evident even from the face of Musk's contradictory pleading—is that he brings it to advance his own commercial interests." Musk is one of the world's few investors with deep enough pockets to compete with OpenAI, Google or Meta on AI. Building an AI model at the same scale as those companies comes at an enormous expense in computing power, infrastructure and expertise. — AFP

Moody's downgrades major Chinese developer Vanke

BEIJING: Moody's has downgraded one of China's largest housing developers' credit rating, as woes in the country's property sector show no sign of abating.

China's real estate market is grappling with unprecedented challenges, with some developers on the verge of bankruptcy and lower property prices deterring consumers from making investments.

Vanke—long considered to be financially stable—is one of several major Chinese developers to run into trouble, with Moody's on Monday downgrading its rating to "Ba1", indicating it has "substantial credit risk". It said the firm's contracted sales had fallen around 40 percent—to 34.5 billion yuan (\$4.8

billion) in just the first two months of the year.

"Moody's expects volatile operating and funding conditions for China's property sector to continue to drag on China Vanke's contracted sales, access to funding and liquidity," the rating agency said Monday. The hurdles facing the firm would continue for "the next 12-18 months", it added.

It did not rule out further downward revisions to Vanke in the future. Vanke was the second-largest developer in China last year in terms of sales, according to specialist firm CRIC.

It is part-owned by the city government of Shenzhen in southern China—once seen as a guarantee of its solidity. But setbacks make it the latest Chinese developer to be caught up in a mounting crisis within the real estate sector, following Evergrande and Country Garden.

The industry, which once experienced two decades of meteoric growth as living standards rose across China, has long accounted for more than a quarter of the country's GDP. In a bid to revive activity, authorities have introduced various incentive

Britain vows to build new gas power stations

LONDON: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government Tuesday pledged to build new gas-fired power stations to boost energy security, drawing criticism over his climate policies ahead of a general election this year. The Conservative government, which aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, announced in a statement that it would seek to construct the gas power plants to avert a threat of energy blackouts.

The UK has spearheaded low-carbon energies such as nuclear, solar and wind power in a strategy to combat sky-high domestic electricity and gas bills, which rocketed after key producer Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022, cutting off gas supplies and sparking a cost-of-living crisis. "The government has committed to support the building of new gas power stations to maintain a safe and reliable

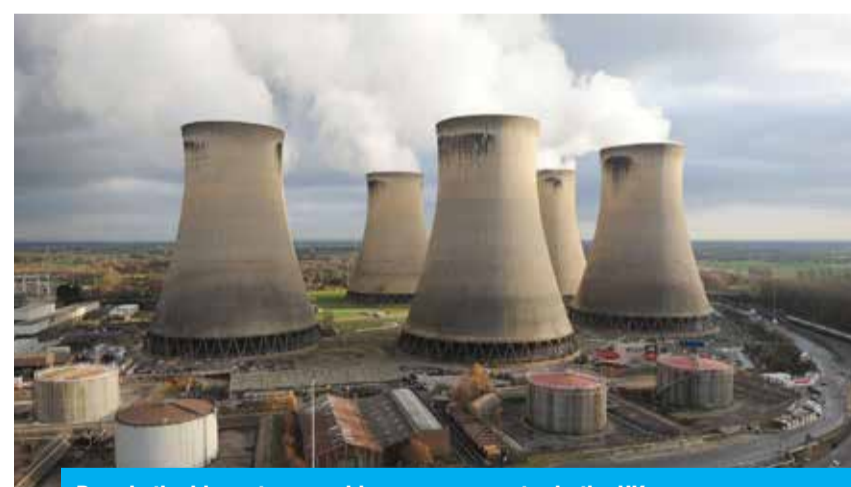
energy source for days when the weather forecast doesn't power up renewables," it said in Tuesday's statement.

Sunak added that Britain needed to reach its net zero target "in a sustainable way that doesn't leave people without energy on a cloudy, windless day". The independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), a UK body which advises the state, conceded last year that a "small amount" of gas-fired power in 2035 was "compatible with a decarbonized power system" in order to provide balance and ensure security of energy supplies. Sunak last year softened his administration's net zero goals, specifically by delaying a ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars by five years to 2035.

The UK has also issued a swathe of new oil and gas exploration licenses to lift energy supplies amid Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. "This is the latest step in efforts to reach net zero in a sustainable, pragmatic way that rid the UK of the need to rely on foreign dictators like Putin," the British government added Tuesday. "The UK led the way on banning imports of Russian gas and is delivering new sources of home-grown

authorities said Monday. Ford, which denies wrongdoing, is accused of using the scheme from 2009 to 2013 to avoid paying higher duties on Transit Connect utility vehicles imported from Turkey by declaring them as passenger vehicles, the Justice Department said in a statement.

Ford installed "sham rear seats and other temporary features to make the vans appear to be passenger vehicles," the Justice Department alleged. In fact, the "temporary rear



Drax is the biggest renewable power generator in the UK.

energy: with new nuclear power plants, record investment in renewables, and new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea." The announcements sparked anger from environmentalists who argue they are counter to the nation's net zero ambitions.

"The government's cunning plan to boost energy security and meet our climate goals is to make Britain more depen-



measures and made announcements of state support.

But such efforts have so far had little impact on the ailing sector. Chinese Housing Minister Ni Hong acknowledged the difficulties in stabilizing the market during a press conference on Saturday.

Real estate companies that "need to go bankrupt should go bankrupt, and those that need restructuring should be restructured", he said. — AFP

dent on the very fossil fuel that sent our bills rocketing and the planet's temperature soaring," said Greenpeace UK policy director Doug Parr. "The only route to a low-cost, secure and clean energy system is through attracting massive private investment to develop renewables and upgrade our ageing grid, but this government has failed on both fronts." — AFP

ported from Turkey during the period. Ford fought the case in courts for years, arguing that the rear seats were genuine. The settlement states that Ford does not admit liability but that the two sides reached an agreement "to avoid the delay, uncertainty, inconvenience, and expense of protracted litigation." The \$365 million payment includes nearly \$184 million for restitution of unpaid customs duties and the rest is penalties, the settlement said. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank celebrates graduation of its senior Leaders from Harvard program

Executive program as part of CBK's 'Kafaa' initiative, managed by KIBS

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to develop human capital, Gulf Bank announced the graduation of its senior leaders from the Harvard Business School executive program – a custom executive development program for banking and finance executives that are part of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies. The program is designed to support and develop leaders in the banking and financial sector, under the theme “Strategic Leadership in a Changing World”.

This program is part of the “Kafaa” initiative launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks to help develop and qualify national talents; and is managed by the Institute of Banking Studies, in cooperation with Harvard Business School. The Bank celebrated the leaders for completing the program and receiving the Harvard Business School certifications, namely: Deputy General Manager Basel Asad from Branch Banking, Assistant General Manager of Card Products Mohammad Taqi, Assistant General Manager of Enterprise Core Services Rami Al-Zaid.

The program focuses on two primary themes: Financial markets strategy and leadership, equipping participants with concepts and tools for successful leadership in a rapidly changing financial landscape, and ways to impact the performance, innovation, and culture of their organization.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources Salma Al-Hajjaj, said: “At Gulf Bank, we believe that our employees are the foundation of our success and the drivers of our excellence. Therefore, we are continuously working on training and developing them, which contributes towards consolidating Gulf Bank's leading position in the banking sector.”

Al-Hajjaj mentioned that the major transformations recently witnessed by Gulf Bank as part of its 2025 strategy, especially when it comes to digital transformation, makes the Bank's employees' participation in such specialized programs a top priority. Noting that digital transformation requires strategic leaders capable of facing market fluctuations, and to make the most of the opportunities they generate; ensuring the best results are achieved with the fast-changing financial technologies.

She pointed that the program provides an opportunity for participants to anticipate and respond quickly, and effectively, to strategic opportunities



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank honors senior leaders from the Harvard Business School executive program.

Salma Al-Hajjaj:
At Gulf Bank, we believe that our employees are the foundation of our success and the drivers of our excellence.

and threats in financial markets, such as: Understanding risks and appropriate responses to cyber threats, managing, and leading digital innovation, and ways to understand and manage investor concerns around ESG and sustainability.

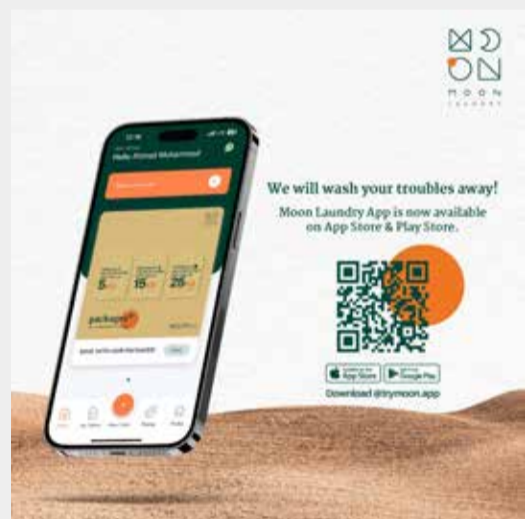
Al-Hajjaj also expressed her pride in Gulf Bank for being one of Kuwait's leading banks that generously invests in human capital in order to en-

hance the competencies of its employees – as they are the key for achieving its strategic objectives. This is accomplished through providing employees with the latest expertise and skills necessary to keep pace with the major banking developments that the banking industry is undergoing locally and internationally.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti

Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 “New Kuwait” and works with various parties to achieve it.

With new app, Moon Laundry redefines laundry experience



KUWAIT: Moon Laundry, a leader in the garment care industry, has transformed the laundry experience by seamlessly integrating premium service with affordability. Since its inception, Moon Laundry has been a beacon of excellence, delivering meticulous attention to detail and unparalleled care for every garment entrusted to them.

Through its innovative mobile app, Moon Laundry has revolutionized how laundry is done. Customers can now schedule pick-ups with unparalleled ease, freeing themselves from the burden of laundry while Moon Laundry's expert team handles everything with precision. This innovative approach ensures convenience and peace of mind for customers, allowing them to focus on their daily activities while their garments receive top-tier care.

At Moon Laundry, each garment undergoes a thorough inspection upon collection to identify any special care requirements. The team meticulously sorts items by color, fabric type and care instructions, ensuring personalized treatment throughout the process. From pre-treatment for stains to washing, drying and ironing, Moon Laundry leaves no stone unturned in delivering perfection to its customers. In addition to its premium laundry services, Moon Laundry specializes in the care of handbags and footwear, extending its meticulous processes to accessories to ensure they remain as pristine as the wardrobe itself.

Moon Laundry offers value-packed packages designed to maximize savings for frequent users who prioritize both care and convenience. Moreover, for those moments when urgent laundry needs arise, Moon Laundry has customers covered, ensuring they are never without their essentials when they need them most. For an effortless and reliable laundry experience, choose Moon Laundry. Explore their services and discover special offers by visiting www.trymoon.app. Welcome to the future of laundry, where premium care meets unparalleled convenience.

Ancient community banking enters digital age in Cameroon

YAOUNDE, Cameroon: Joseph Ngonu's face lights up with a smile as he looks at his smartphone, where a payment worth \$830 has just appeared in his digital wallet. Like many Cameroonians, the computer scientist pays in each week to a shared savings fund known as a “tontine”—an ancient system that start-ups are now bringing into the digital age.

This week it has paid out 500,000 Central African francs to Ngonu, who will use it to cover the final instalment of his children's school fees. “Without it, they wouldn't go to school,” he said. Shunned by banks, many people in Cameroon turn to their communities for help in the form of tontines, such as the one Ngonu uses via the smartphone app Djangui.

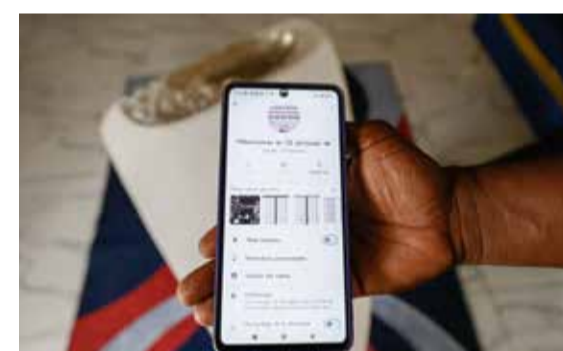
In its most common form, members pay money into a common fund and take turns collecting it after an agreed period—interest free. Every week Ngonu, along with colleagues and strangers whom they sponsor, contributes 10,000 FCFA (\$16) each on Djangui. It

gives crucial access to ready cash for Ngonu—he only occasionally receives his monthly salary of 150,000 FCFA (\$250) because his employer is “experiencing some cash-flow difficulties.”

The system of “pooling savings... between people united by connections of family, friendship, profession, clan” existed “long before the introduction of money,” said a 2020 report published by the Global Development Research Center. It lists at least 30 African countries where tontines are used and 14 in Asia. Launched in 2016 by Guilain Kenfack, Djangui was one of the first tontine apps in the country.

“The idea came to me because I was in a traditional tontine and it was becoming very difficult. We weren't sure if some people had paid or not,” he said. Since its creation, Kenfack said the app has gained 50,000 users. A number of imitators of Djangui have sprung up and now there are several apps offering tontines online in Cameroon.

As in other countries in Africa, many Cameroonians struggle to get loans from mainstream banks. The African World Institute wrote in a 2019 report that 85 percent of people on the continent are “excluded from the banking system”. In Cameroon and elsewhere the average interest rate for loans to individuals was 10 percent in 2022, according to the Bank of Central African States (BEAC).



YAOUNDE, Cameroon: This photograph taken in Yaounde, on Feb 17, shows an example of a WhatsApp group dedicated to discussions of tontines.

It can exceed 20 percent elsewhere in Africa. Banks also rarely give credit to those on small and medium sized incomes. The tontine “replaces the bank” and allows “informal economic players” to make essential expenditures or investments, said Omer Zang, the founder of Social Brokers—a Cameroonian NGO that supports tontines. The digitized saving systems have attracted the interest of large banking corporations including Cameroon's Afriland First Bank which offers customers the chance “to tontine.” — AFP

Xiaomi announces release date for first EV, shares surge

BEIJING: Chinese electronics giant Xiaomi will start deliveries of its first electric vehicle by the end of March, the firm's boss said Tuesday, bringing its highly anticipated entry into the automotive industry to the brink of completion.

Xiaomi—the world's third-largest smartphone manufacturer—also produces tablets, smartwatches, headphones, and scooters. In 2021, the Beijing-based firm announced its planned foray into the electric vehicle sector, made highly competitive in recent months as top Chinese brands engage in an aggressive price war.

“The Xiaomi SU7 will be officially released on March 28,” Lei Jun, the company's founder and CEO, wrote on Chinese social media site Weibo.

The announcement was accompanied by a photo of the new vehicle, which was first unveiled to the press in December. The firm's shares soared nearly 10 percent by midday in Hong Kong, where the firm is listed. Equipped with Xiaomi software and electronic features, the SU7 is produced by Chinese auto giant BAIC.

Its batteries—with a driving range of up to 800 kilometers (500 miles) -- are supplied by China's largest electric automaker BYD, as well as domestic battery giant



Chinese electronics giant Xiaomi will start deliveries of its first electric vehicle by the end of March, the firm's boss said on Tuesday.

CATL. “The goal is to become one of the world's top five automotive manufacturers through 15 to 20 years of hard work,” Lei said in December.

Many top tech firms in China—the world's largest auto market—have invested recently in the country's

EV sector, where foreign firms have struggled to get a foothold. Founded in 2010, Xiaomi has achieved rapid growth through its strategy of marketing high-end devices at affordable prices, initially directly through online channels. — AFP

Venezuelan exports to US rose 770% in 2023, mainly oil

CARACAS, Venezuela: Venezuelan exports to the United States, mainly of oil, rose 770 percent in 2023 from the previous year, after Washington eased some sanctions on the country, according to a report Monday from a US-based business chamber. Overall

trade more than doubled in 2023 to over \$6 billion, said the Venezuelan-American Chamber of Commerce and Industry—an increase of more than 127 percent. The figures were still far from a high of \$38 billion recorded in 2008, when the United States was the South American nation's top crude oil customer, according to the chamber.

Washington ramped up sanctions against Venezuela following President Nicolas Maduro's 2018 re-election—widely seen as fraudulent—to a second, successive term.

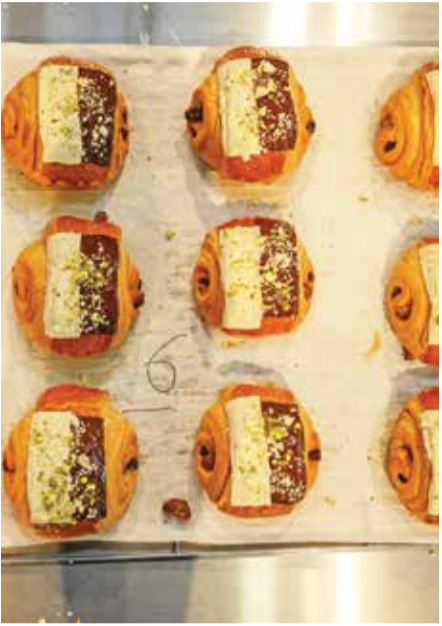
Last year, Maduro's government and Venezuela's opposition agreed to hold free and fair elections in 2024,

with observers present. The vote has since been scheduled for July 28. The agreement prompted Washington to ease sanctions against the oil-rich country, allowing US-based Chevron to resume limited crude extraction amid efforts to keep global oil prices down as the West pressed sanctions on Russia over its war on Ukraine.

The deal required that opposition candidates be allowed to appeal court rulings disqualifying them from holding office ahead of the vote. Since then, however, the Supreme Court loyal to Maduro upheld a 15-year ban on opposition primary winner Maria Corina Machado, which prompted the United States to announce it was mulling the reintroduction of some sanctions. — AFP

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024



"Pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" are displayed.



Contestants display their "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".



Contestant Thuy Vien representing Vietnam prepares a "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".



French baker hailed chocolate croissant world champion



"Pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" are displayed.



"Pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" in south-west France, are displayed.

A French baker has won the Chocolate Croissant World Cup, wowing judges with his windmill-shaped variation of the pastry with a dash of Chinese pepper and a citrus glaze. What US coffee houses market as a "chocolate croissant" is called a "pain au chocolat" in most of France, except in the southwest where bakery customers proudly order a "chocolatine".

Dimitri Bordon, 29, on Sunday won the "Pain au chocolat/chocolatine world cup" in the southwestern city of Toulouse for his rendition of the butter-rich morning pastry laced with chocolate. He was one of 20 candidates representing 12 countries, including France but also Vietnam, Canada, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Cameroon and Ivory Coast. Each baker had to make 24 pastries - 12 traditional golden buns and the other half their own version with a twist. A jury of 18 food and beverage professionals judged the entries for quality of puff pastry, taste, texture and cooking time.

"It's a huge honor - especially when you see the other candidates," Bordon said after winning. His winning variation was a vertical pastry made to look like a windmill, imbued with dash of tingling Sichuan pepper and covered in a tangy citrus glaze of mandarin, bitter orange and yuzu.



Winner Dimitri Bordon of France stands on the podium following the "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" in south-west France, annual Coupe du Monde (World Cup) de la Chocolatine competition, in Toulouse. - AFP photos

Others were equally as creative. Vietnam contender Thuy Vien, 35, made a flower-shaped pastry, using bright pink dragon fruit and a yellow citrus fruit called calamansi for trimmings. Twenty-nine-year-old Guy Orsini, from Corsica, crafted a bow tie filled with chocolate-hazelnut paste and candied clementine cream inspired by the fruit

of his youth. In May last year, a Paris baker of Sri Lankan origin said he "cried" when he heard he had won best baguette in the French capital. Tharshan Selvarajah's baguette was deemed the best among 175 anonymous contenders. — AFP



"Pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" in south-west France, are displayed.



A judge samples a "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine" during the annual Coupe du Monde (World Cup) de la Chocolatine competition.



Abdullah Ghoush of Egypt poses for a photo with his "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".



Winner Dimitri Bordon of France prepares a "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".



Judges sample a "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".



A contestant prepares a "pain au chocolat" also known as a "chocolatine".

Lifestyle



A scientist presents the non-destructive X-ray analysis that will be conducted on the world's most famous violin, "Il Cannone", made in 1743 and played by the great virtuoso Niccolò Paganini.— AFP photos



Paganini's violin gets X-ray treatment in quest of sound secrets

French experts fired X-rays at a 18th-century violin worth millions this weekend hoping to discover the secret of its magical sound, they said Monday. The violin, dubbed "Il Cannone" (the cannon) because of its powerful sound, was Italian composer and violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini's favorite. The maestro from the Italian city of Genoa played it for decades before it became the property of his home city after his death in 1840. The violin, made by instrument maker Giuseppe Bartolomeo Guarneri del Gesù in 1743, is now only brought out from time to time for the world's best to play, including the winners of Genoa's Premio Paganini international violin competition.

The European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF), a particle accelerator in the southeastern city of Grenoble, scanned the instrument down to the cellular structure of its wood. The idea is to create a 3D model of the violin in and out of which people can zoom, down to a micron, or millionth of a meter. "The first goal is conservation," said Paul Tafforeau of the ESRF. "If ever any flaws need repairing, we will have all the details."



This photograph shows the world's most famous violin, "Il Cannone", made in 1743 and played by the great virtuoso Niccolò Paganini.

But they also hoped the "non-destructive analysis" would help shed light on why it plays so beautifully. "It's an exceptional instrument in terms of its sound qualities," Tafforeau said. "With this data, we hope to better understand why."

The detailed analysis of the X-rays will take several months. "Working on

this violin is like a dream," Tafforeau said. Luigi Paolasini, who was in charge of the project at the ESRF, said the violin had been insured for a value of 30 million euros (\$32 million) to travel from Genoa to Grenoble. "The logistics were very complicated because we're not a museum that would have experience in moving



This photograph shows the world's most famous violin, "Il Cannone", made in 1743 and played by the great virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, being examined by a synchrotron during a non-destructive X-ray analysis.

works of art around," Paolasini said.

Whatever the outcome of the analysis, the guiding principle for any restoration work on the instrument is "to exercise extreme caution, or abstain altogether", said Alberto Giordano, a curator of precious instruments in Genoa. "I get older, but the violin stays the same,

and that's the way it should be," he said. "Just like the picture of Dorian Gray, it stays fresh as a rose," Giordano added in reference to a novel by Oscar Wilde in which a painting of a man ages in his stead in an attic, allowing him to remain eternally young. — AFP



Producers of "Oppenheimer" British film producer Emma Thomas (center), US film producer Charles Roven (left) and British filmmaker Christopher Nolan accept the award for Best Picture onstage during the 96th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Oscars ratings climb to almost 20 million as 'Oppenheimer' reigns

Wins for "Oppenheimer," live musical performances from "Barbie" and an (almost) naked John Cena helped lift Oscars ratings for a third consecutive year, early viewing figures showed Monday, as 19.5 million tuned in to watch Hollywood's big night. Broadcaster ABC's figure for Sunday night's well-reviewed gala was nearly double the pandemic-era ratings nadir of 10.4 million, though still historically low for a telecast that regularly topped 40 million just a decade ago.

Christopher Nolan's atomic bomb drama "Oppenheimer" ended the 96th Academy Awards with seven prizes, including best picture, best director and best actor for Cillian Murphy, while "Poor Things" earned four as its star Emma Stone prevailed in a tense best actress race. Highlights of the night included Ryan Gosling's live performance of "Barbie" ballad "I'm Just Ken," another accomplished hosting stint by Jimmy Kimmel, and wrestler/actor Cena's mock-reluctant presentation of the best costume design prize while wearing only his birthday suit.

Other standout musical performances came from Billie Eilish — the 22-year-

old became the youngest person ever to win two Oscars, after collecting best song for another "Barbie" tune in "What Was I Made For?" — and Native American musicians featured in "Killers of the Flower Moon." The upward ratings trend is a welcome shot in the arm for live award shows, which have been shedding viewers more broadly as they compete for eyeballs with streamers and social media highlight clips.

This year's Oscars benefited from having two giant-grossing smash hits — "Oppenheimer" and "Barbie," the so-called "Barbenheimer" phenomenon — in the mix for multiple awards. But the show itself also received plaudits, with the Los Angeles Times praising a "rowdy, raucous Oscars" that managed to mix humor and a poignant celebration of movie history — with a few political zingers thrown in for good measure.

Among the millions who tuned in to Sunday night's telecast was Donald Trump. The former US president, facing multiple criminal indictments, posted a scathing review on social media, which Kimmel read out on stage toward the end of the show. "Thank you President Trump. Thank you for watching, I'm

surprised you're still up — isn't it past your jail time?" Kimmel joked, prompting raucous cheers and laughs from the audience. There were also heartfelt references to Hollywood's recent union strikes, the Gaza conflict, and the war in Ukraine.

The night ended on a bizarre and confusing note, when Al Pacino revealed the best picture winner without first listing the nominees, as is customary. Opening the envelope, he mumbled "my eyes see 'Oppenheimer'" leaving the audience momentarily confused as to whether the film had actually won.

On Monday, Pacino released a statement saying the decision to keep the night's biggest announcement brief by not naming the other nominated films was taken by the show's producers. But on a largely smooth night, Variety singled out Gosling's musical performance as a "maximalist, infectiously goofy singalong." The crowd-pleasing karaoke moment was "the ideal way to channel the feel-good energy of an Oscars where none of the bonhomie felt forced, as it often can," said the film industry website. — AFP

Cork school 'super proud' of past pupil, Oscar hero Cillian Murphy

There was a whiff of Hollywood glamour in the air on Monday at St. Anthony's, a primary school in the Irish city of Cork that counts Oscar-winner Cillian Murphy as a past pupil. The day after Murphy won his first Oscar — Best Actor for his role in "Oppenheimer" — staff, parents, and children at his former school were basking in his success. "When we woke up this morning there was such a buzz of excitement," Sean Lyons, principal of the all-boys Catholic school, told AFP.

The 47-year-old Murphy was a pupil at St. Anthony's, in the tidy Cork neighborhood of Ballinlough, between 1982 and 1988. He won his first Oscar Sunday for his portrayal of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the US physicist who masterminded the atomic bomb, capping a glittering awards season that saw him snare a Golden Globe, a BAFTA and other prizes.

"We thought can this be real, that this man from Ballinlough in Cork actually won the Oscar, a global award!" said the beaming bespectacled teacher. "He has set the seed now for many students not just here in Ballinlough and St Anthony's but all around Ireland that they can achieve on the global stage," said Lyons.

'Super proud'

A "Congratulations" banner referred to the actor's recent Golden Globe and BAFTA awards and wished him luck for the Oscars. "That will have to be updated now," smiled Mary Harrington, a 68-year-old grandmother picking up her grandchild at the school gate. "I got up early this morning to make sure he'd won — I don't know why I did that as I knew he was going to win," she laughed.

"My brother was in secondary school with Cillian and here as well, and he remembers all the gigs that he played with his music," said Valerie Ni Cochlain, who was waiting for her child to come out from her school. "Well done to Cillian and his family, it's great news for Cork and Ireland," she said. Murphy had dipped his toe into

acting at both school and university in Cork. In 1996, after pestering a local director, Murphy landed a lead part in the frenetic "Disco Pigs", a play written by fellow Corkonian Enda Walsh. The stage show was a critical success, going on an 18-month world tour, and proved a launchpad for his career. "Cork is a small close-knit community, a small city, we're proud of everybody who achieves success and goes on to achieve great things," said Elaine Murphy, who is no relation.

"We are super proud and so are the children, it's a great boost for everybody to be proud of a local," she said alongside her two smiling children, seven-year-old Liam Eanna, and Holly, aged six.

Homework-free day

Displayed inside the school in a questionnaire filled out in 2015, Cillian Murphy advised current students on how to break into acting and film. "Join a theatre group, start making films on our phone with your friends, edit them on your computer and put them on YouTube," wrote the actor, who now lives in Dublin after returning to Ireland from a decade in London. According to the questionnaire his biggest challenge was "trying to understand the Cork accent" after moving to Cork as a child from Dublin, some 260 kilometers (160 miles) southwest of the Irish capital.

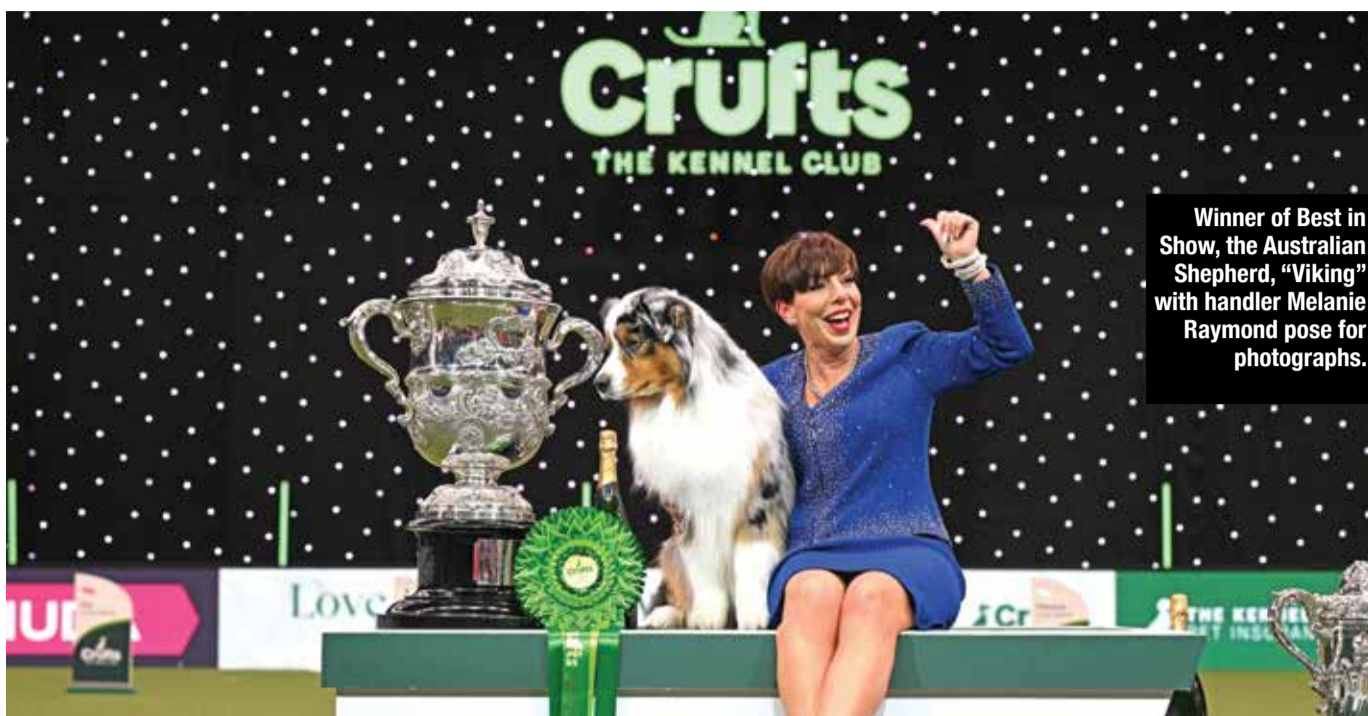
"One regret I have is that I didn't put money on him getting an Oscar back then," said Eddie Hogan O'Connell, a staff member who was a classmate of Murphy's. "I'd say the odds would have been great, whereas now he is up there with the best in the world and congratulations to him," he said. For the children at the school Murphy's win was reason for a surprise from the teachers: no homework. "The kids are especially happy that the teachers let them off," said Phil Howard, a grandfather collecting her grandson, Colm. "Cillian would be happy if he heard that I'm sure," she laughed. — AFP



Irish actor Cillian Murphy accepts the award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for "Oppenheimer" onstage during the 96th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



Winner of Best in Show, the Australian Shepherd, "Viking" poses for photographs at the trophy presentation for the Best in Show event at the Crufts dog show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, central England.--AFP photos



Winner of Best in Show, the Australian Shepherd, "Viking" with handler Melanie Raymond pose for photographs.

Australian shepherd named Viking crowned Best in Show at 2024 Crufts dog competition



Handler Melanie Raymond reacts as the Australian Shepherd, "Viking" was announced the winner of the Best in Show event.

An Australian shepherd named Viking has been crowned Best in Show at the 2024 Crufts dog competition in Birmingham, England. The three-year-old canine — co-owned by Melanie Raymond, John Shaw and Kerry Kirtley — beat more than 19,000 other dogs from around the world to claim the show's most coveted title. "Pinch me! This is everyone's dream. Crufts is the competition we all want to win!" Ms Raymond, who was Viking's handler at the show, said.

"My grandma started showing with Beagles and I feel like I've accomplished something she never managed. I'm hoping she is looking down on me." Crufts show manager Helen Kerfoot congratulated the pair for ending this year's

competition "on a real high". "It has been fantastic to watch their strong relationship together in the ring, and they are very deserving winners," she said. A Jack Russell terrier named Zen, from Japan, was named the Reserve Best in Show. The other five finalists were: Elton, a French bulldog; Raffa, a papillon; Hendricks, a weimaraner; Neville, a Leonberger; and Getme, a grand basset griffon vendeen. "All of the dogs and their owners and handlers should be incredibly proud to have taken part in such a momentous final," Ms Kerfoot said. "It really is an incredible achievement, and one we are sure they'll treasure for years to come."



The Jack Russell, "Zen" with handler Hiroshi Tsuyuki poses for photographs at the trophy presentation after coming runner-up in the Best in Show event.



People stand with Ibizan Hounds as they wait to be judged.



A woman handles her three Rough Collie dogs.



A Great Dane chews it's soft toy preparing for the Working and Pastoral class competition.



An Afghan hound is groomed before being judged.

Next Super Mario film in 2026, Nintendo says

Mario, the world's favorite Italian plumber, will hit the silver screen again in 2026 following the last movie's huge success, Japan's Nintendo and US animation studio Illumination said. Nintendo long shied away from adapting its video game characters for films but "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" was the second-highest grossing film of 2023 behind "Barbie", taking \$1.36 billion at the box office.

"This new animated film based on the world of Super Mario Bros. is planned to be released on April 3, 2026 in the US and many additional markets globally with select territories releasing throughout the month of April," the companies said in a joint statement late Sunday. It will be produced by Chris Meledandri from Illumination and Shigeru Miyamoto from Nintendo, directed by Aaron Horvath and Michael Jelenic, and written by Matthew Fogel. "We'll let you know the details once we're ready to share more," Miyamoto said on Nintendo of America's X account. "We're thinking about broadening Mario's world further, and it'll have a bright and fun story," he said. The film will be co-financed by Universal

Pictures and Nintendo and distributed worldwide by Universal Pictures, it said.

"The Super Mario Bros. Movie", also a joint project of Universal, Nintendo and Illumination studios, was the second attempt to bring Mario to the big screen after a live-action movie flopped spectacularly in 1993. The success of last year's film helped Nintendo boost sales of games from the "Mario" franchise, and last month the firm hiked its profit forecasts.

However its Switch console is in its seventh year and the company has been tight-lipped about its plans for a successor machine. Nintendo is also working on a live-action film of its other hugely successful franchise, "The Legend of Zelda", together with Sony, maker of the rival PlayStation console.—AFP



Andrew Tate: Misogynist influencer facing growing legal jeopardy

Showing off his muscles, cigars and fast cars, influencer Andrew Tate's videos on social media have captured the attention of millions of teenage boys. But the 37-year-old US-born Briton is also accused of human trafficking in Romania, and police said Tuesday that he was taken into custody on UK sex offence charges.

This legal trouble follows a growing notoriety built on sexist and sometimes violent maxims, including Tate saying that women cannot be independent and placing blame on victims of rape or assaulted. The former kickboxing champion's controversial output has made him one of the world's best-known influencers, and a self-proclaimed multi-millionaire with a fleet of fast cars and properties.

Yet Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan have been awaiting trial in Romania on charges of human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal group to sexually exploit women. The men had been out of custody but were arrested Monday evening at their home near Bucharest on the UK case.

Lawyers for four British women who accuse Tate of rape and serious physical and sexual assaults said the UK warrant followed their warnings to police that he planned to flee Romania. Tate's spokesperson said the UK charges date back to 2012-2015 and that the brothers deny all the accusations against them.

Throughout most of his legal woes, he has been posting on X (formerly Twitter), where he currently has almost nine million followers. "The Matrix is afraid, but I only fear God," his handle, "Cobratate", posted Tuesday.

the title of world champion.

He first came to wider attention by appearing as a contestant on Britain's "Big Brother" reality show in 2016. But he was quickly ejected after a video emerged showing him hitting a woman.



Andrew Tate (left) and Tristan Tate (right) walk from the Bucharest's Court of Appeal after a hearing about their demand to be allowed to leave Romania as their mother allegedly suffered a heart attack, in Bucharest.--AFP

Online rise

Tate was born in the United States in 1986 and has US citizenship, according to his website. But after his parents separated, he grew up with his mother and brother in Luton, north of London. He has lived in Romania for several years. Before his rise to fame on social media, Tate was a professional kickboxer who gained

He then turned his focus to building his online presence, founding the so-called Hustler's University, initially on the social media platform Discord. It promises customers paying at least the \$50 joining fee "hands-on tutorials, dedicated millionaire mentors, a supportive community".—AFP

Sports

Dissent after Malaysia emerges as possible Commonwealth Games host

Commonwealth Games chiefs praised Malaysia's 'fantastic track record'

KUALA LUMPUR: Doubts emerged Tuesday over the prospect of Malaysia hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games after current and former senior officials expressed grave reservations about the country stepping in.

The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) is scrambling to find a host after the Australian state of Victoria abruptly pulled out in July last year citing spiralling costs. Victoria's sudden move and the lack of an obvious alternative triggered debate about the future of the Games, which take place every four years and were last held in 2022 in Birmingham.

The Olympic Council of Malaysia on Monday said that the London-based CGF had "offered Malaysia the opportunity to replace Victoria as hosts of the Commonwealth Games in 2026. "The offer includes significant financial investment of £100 million to support the local delivery and legacy planning of the 2026 edition."

Commonwealth Games chiefs subsequently praised Malaysia's "fantastic track record", the country having staged the Games in 1998. But Khairy Jamaluddin, a former youth and sports minister in Malaysia, on Tuesday rubbished the idea and called it "reckless" because the Games are little over two years away.

Any host would need at least four years to upgrade venues, plan sponsorship and set up infrastructure, he told AFP. "The Commonwealth Games is not a significant, marquee sporting event," he added. "As far as multi-sports Games are concerned, it is nowhere near the Olympics or even the Asian Games in terms of participation, exposure and returns."

"So the potential for monetization and spillover benefits for the host country will be minimal," Suhardi Alias, sports commissioner with the youth and sports ministry, also urged caution. "Two years is really a short time to organize this big event," said



Khairy Jamaluddin

Suhardi, whose views are significant but will not influence the final decision.

"If we fail, we will look like a bunch of clowns," he added. The ultimate decision will come down to Ma-

laysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's government. There is some support in Malaysia for the Games.

Ramlan Abdul Aziz, former director-general of the National Sports Council, a government agency, told Bernama news agency: "If we study carefully there is no big risk involved, especially with the injection of funds from the CGF."

The CGF says that the £100 million (\$130 million) of "financial and strategic support" is on offer for any potential host as part of the Victoria withdrawal settlement. A spokesperson suggested that Malaysia was not the only country that could potentially stage the Games in 2026, saying the organization was "in advanced, confidential discussions with potential hosts".

Mohamad Norza Zakaria, president of the Commonwealth Games Association of Malaysia, called it a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... which will build on the success of Kuala Lumpur 1998 and put Malaysia back onto the world sporting map". — AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Aryna Sabalenka serves against Emma Raducanu of Great Britain in their third round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Sabalenka, Gauff advance at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS: Reigning Grand Slam champions Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff reached the fourth round of the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters on Monday with challenging straight-set wins. But former number one and 2018 tournament winner Naomi Osaka failed to join them, with the Japanese player eliminated 7-5, 6-4 by Elise Mertens, who now takes on Gauff.

The Belgian saved three break points in the final game, advancing on her second match point which drew an Osaka error. Osaka, a four-time winner at the majors, is making her return to tennis this season after giving birth.

Earlier, double Australian Open trophy-holder Sabalenka defeated Emma Raducanu 6-3, 7-5 but double-faulted on a match point and needed three more winning chances before finally going through. The 2023 runner-up to Elena Rybakina here got a tougher than expected challenge from 2021 US Open champion Raducanu, who has returned to tournament tennis this year after an eight-month injury layoff.

Gauff, who won the US Open last September as a teenager, overcame Lucia Bronzetti 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) as she closed out victory in a tiebreaker with a minimum of drama. Sabalenka is playing only her second event since claiming her second trophy at Melbourne Park; she has now won 13 of 15 matches this season.

Raducanu, ranked 250th and playing on a wild card entry, was able to convert on only one of her 10 break chances against the second seed. Victory in 97 minutes ran Sabalenka's WTA-leading total of Masters 1000 match wins to 82.

"I was super-happy to close this match in two sets; the last game was tight," Sabalenka said. "It was a key moment. If I had lost that game it would give her emotionally much more belief and confidence - going to the tiebreak you never know, it's 50/50."

"I didn't want that to happen. That's why I felt relief after I closed this match in two sets."

Gauff improving

Gauff needed to fight to go past the 53rd-ranked Bronzetti, with the American finally closing out a straight-sets win with a tiebreaker.

The US Open champion who turns 20 on Wednesday won her sixth straight match against an Italian opponent. "She played really well," the winner said of Bronzetti. "But I was much better than in my last match - I'm improving with each one."

In the men's draw, seventh seed Holger Rune finally made it onto court after a first-round bye and a walkover in the second round against injured Milos Raonic. The 20-year-old Dane got off and running in the event with a 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) defeat of Italy's Lorenzo Musetti, earning revenge for a loss on grass last June at Queen's Club, London.

"It feels great to finally get started," he said after reaching the fourth round here for the first time. "The wait is finally over, I was so eager to play, though I did get two extra practice days." This month's Acapulco semi-finalist said that he could have played better against Musetti. "I'm working to convert as many break points as possible. At the start of the second set I could have done more - but you learn from it all," he said. "I'm just happy to get the win in good form."

Norway's ninth seed Casper Ruud advanced past Arthur Fils of France 6-2, 6-4. French showstopper Gael Monfils ended the run of 2021 champion Cameron Norrie, with the 36-year-old winner and the Briton playing a massive 31 break points in a match won by Monfils 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3. Tommy Paul earned a home win with his 6-4, 6-4 defeat of Dubai champion Ugo Humbert. Taylor Fritz joined him, 6-2, 6-2 over Argentine Sebastian Baez. — AFP

Pant set to return to cricket after 2022 car crash

NEW DELHI: Star wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant is fit to play in the Indian Premier League starting this month after being seriously hurt in a car crash in 2022, the cricket board said Tuesday. Pant is set to return to the Delhi Capitals after missing last season and could play for India at the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States in June.

"After undergoing an extensive 14-month rehab and recovery process, following a life-threatening road mishap... Rishabh Pant has now been declared fit," the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement. Following the BCCI announcement, the 26-year-old posted a picture of himself on Instagram with the caption: "Keep smiling." Pant crashed his Mercedes SUV north of New Delhi before dawn in December 2022, suffering multiple injuries when

the car rammed into a crash barrier, flipped over and caught fire.

He was rushed to hospital before being airlifted to Mumbai for further treatment and surgery. Pant has been on an intensive rehabilitation programme since surviving the crash with a damaged ligament in his right knee, a hurt wrist and ankle, and abrasions to his back. He was replaced as skipper of Delhi Capitals by David Warner of Australia last year. Pant has played for India a total of 129 times in all three formats since 2017.

'Big asset'

BCCI secretary Jay Shah foreshadowed Pant's return on Monday when he said that the destructive wicketkeeper-batsman could be available for the T20 World Cup. "If he can play the T20 World Cup for us that will be a big thing for us," Shah was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency. "He is a big asset for us. If he can keep (wicket), he can play the World Cup. Let's see how he does in the IPL." Before the IPL's latest player auction last December, Pant had spoken about the challenges



Rishabh Pant

he faced during the recovery period. "The kind of accident I had, I'm lucky to be alive," he said. "I think it was very challenging, especially the first part I would say more from a physical point of view... there was a lot of pain to be endured." The latest instalment of the IPL will begin on March 22, with defending champions Chennai

Super Kings taking on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the first match.

The BCCI has only announced the schedule for the season's first 21 matches because it is waiting for India's general election dates to be finalized. The IPL is the world's richest cricket league and has proven a cash bonanza for both the BCCI and top players. — AFP

Massa takes legal action against F1 over lost title

LONDON: Former Ferrari driver Felipe Massa filed a lawsuit against Formula One in London's High Court on Monday seeking damages for missing out on the 2008 world championship title. Brazilian Massa, 42, lost out to Lewis Hamilton by just a single point in a season where the sport was rocked by the "crashgate" scandal at the Singapore Grand Prix.

Renault staged a win for Fernando Alonso by ordering Nelson Piquet Jr to crash in their other car. Ferrari's Massa, leading at the time of Piquet's smash, finished 13th, before losing the championship by the finest of margins.

Piquet revealed the following season that he was under instruction by his bosses to deliberately crash. Massa has also brought proceedings against governing body the FIA, and the sport's former supremo Bernie Ecclestone.

He is reportedly seeking £62 million (\$80 million) in damages to reflect the difference in salary, as well as sponsorship and commercial opportunities he would have received as a world champion. Ecclestone confessed in an interview last year that according to the rules, the results from Singapore race should not have stood for the championship standings and as a result, Massa would have been declared champion.

"Mr. Massa is seeking declarations that the FIA breached its regulations by failing to promptly investigate Nelson Piquet Junior's crash at the 2008



YEONGAM: (FILES) Ferrari driver Felipe Massa of Brazil (R) talks to a pit crew member during the first practice session of the Formula One Korean Grand Prix in Yeongam. — AFP

Singapore Grand Prix, and that had it acted properly, Mr. Massa would have won the drivers' championship that year," said a statement from Massa's lawyers. "Mr. Massa also seeks damages for the significant financial loss he has suffered due to the FIA's failure, in which Mr. Ecclestone and FOM (Formula One Management) were also complicit."

The 2008 title was Hamilton's first world championship and he has since gone on to match Michael Schumacher's record of seven world drivers' titles. "If that's the direction that Felipe wants to go, that's his decision. I prefer not to focus on the past," said Hamilton when quizzed on the matter last September.

Massa did not win another F1 race after 2008 and suffered a near-fatal head injury at the 2009 Hungarian Grand Prix. However, he returned to the sport and continued racing with Ferrari and then Williams until 2017. — AFP

Former Ryder Cup star Poulter blasts irrelevant rankings

MACAU: Former Ryder Cup star Ian Poulter said Tuesday that golf's world rankings are "irrelevant", and the majors need to decide if they want the best players regardless. Englishman Poulter, who once would have depended on being in the world's top 50 to get into majors, elite tournaments and Ryder Cup teams, told AFP: "I don't even know where I am in the world rankings."

The 48-year-old has had top-12 finishes in all four majors in a career spanning more than two decades, but now plies his trade on the controversial Saudi-bankrolled LIV circuit. Last week the break-away tour withdrew its application to join the Official World Golf Rankings (OWGR) after trying since July 2022 to gain recognition for its 54-hole, no-cut \$25 million tournaments.

"The rankings do not reflect the top 100 players in the world, so therefore, they're not relevant any more," said Poulter. He was speaking ahead of this week's International Series Macau, one of 10 Asian Tour events bankrolled by LIV and its backers the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) to the tune of \$2 million.

The winner of the International Series order of merit wins an automatic place on LIV. The lucrative Saudi foray into golf and other sports has triggered accusations of "sportswashing" of the kingdom's rights record.

Poulter earned almost \$400,000 last week for a tied-eighth finish at LIV Hong Kong, won by Mexico's Abraham Ancer, yet slipped another eight places to 472 in the rankings. The rankings are largely used to decide who qualifies into golf's four majors.

"The more time goes on, the more it proves to be wrong," US Masters champion Jon Rahm, who left the PGA Tour for LIV in December and is still ranked world number three, said last week. The majors can make exceptions and issue their own invitations, as has been done with Joaquin Niemann, who has won two out of three LIV tournaments this year.

"Now they've given one player a chance, before you know it there will be a solution," said Rahm. "I think it's opening the door slightly."

'It's a stalemate'

Poulter was not so sure, especially since all the majors, tours and governing bodies, except LIV, have influence over the OWGR. "If the majors want to give allocated spots, I know one side of the fence will say: 'Why should they?'"

"I know the other side of the fence are going to say: 'They need to.'" Then it's a stalemate, it's a stand-off." Plenty of PGA Tour players agree the rankings are not fit for purpose without LIV players such as current major champions Brooks Koepka and Rahm.

World number four Viktor Hovland said last week: "When you have a huge chunk of really good players that are not getting any ranking points, it definitely devalues that ranking." There will be ranking points available however in Macau this week, where more than 20 LIV players have made the short trip over from Hong Kong. — AFP

Siya Kolisi captaincy future in doubt as Springboks plan ahead

CAPE TOWN: Springbok rugby coach Rassie Erasmus said on Tuesday that it was uncertain whether double World Cup-winning captain Siya Kolisi would continue to lead the team. Speaking at a press conference in Cape Town, Erasmus said Kolisi's contract with French club Racing 92 did not prevent him from playing for his country and that he would be considered for selection but not necessarily as captain.

"There are a lot of players who signed contracts with clauses that they will stop playing international rugby. Siya did not sign a clause like that so that tells you he wants to play for South Africa," said Erasmus.

"He will be considered and I think he will play some Test matches." Kolisi, 32, captained the Springboks to victory in the 2019 and 2023 Rugby World Cups but the flank forward will be 36 when the next World Cup is played in 2027. Erasmus said he preferred to have a captain who was based in South Africa - "it would be great to give the guy a call and spend the weekend together to discuss plans" - but he needed to know whether it was "doable" for Kolisi to continue in the role.

Erasmus said he had a good idea of which players would remain in contention for the 2027 World Cup



CAPE TOWN: South African head coach Rassie Erasmus addresses a Springbok rugby press conference to where new coaching staff were announced in Cape Town on March 12, 2024. — AFP

defence, but added that older players remained part of his short-term plans. "We know exactly which players we think can last another year and we have given them specific tasks to help the youngsters before they leave here," he said.

The Springboks open their 2024 campaign with a match against Wales at Twickenham in London on June 22. They then have a two-match home series against Ireland in Pretoria on July 6 and Durban on July 13. Erasmus said he would call on his most experienced players for the match between the teams ranked one and two in the world. — AFP

Sports

Palmer sparkles to boost Pochettino and leave Guardiola with regrets

Palmer has scored and assisted in five different games, a feat unmatched by anyone else

LONDON: Chelsea forward Cole Palmer has emerged as one of the Premier League's brightest young stars to ease the pressure on Mauricio Pochettino and leave Pep Guardiola rueing what might have been. Palmer is enjoying a breakthrough season after his surprise move from Manchester City on transfer deadline day last September.

The 21-year-old's latest highlight came on Monday when he played the decisive role in Chelsea's much-needed 3-2 win against Newcastle at Stamford Bridge. Palmer teed up Nicolas Jackson for Chelsea's first half opener when his shot was flicked in by the Senegal striker.

After Newcastle's Alexander Isak equalized, it was Palmer who stepped up to restore the lead with a superb finish for his 13th goal in all competitions for Chelsea. Given license to roam from his nominal starting position on the right of Chelsea's front three, Palmer has scored and assisted in five different league games, a feat unmatched by anyone else in the Premier League in the current campaign.

He has been directly involved in 19 goals this season and is Chelsea's top scorer. Palmer's emergence as their most influential player has been one of the only bright spots in a gloomy season for beleaguered Blues boss Pochettino.

The Argentine has struggled to create a cohesive unit from a disparate collection of players thrown together over the last two years in Chelsea co-owner Todd Boehly's £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) spending spree.

Even after beating Newcastle, they are still languishing in 11th place with only faint hopes of qualifying for a European competition. The recent 1-0 defeat against Liverpool in the League Cup final heaped further pressure on Pochettino, who has endured calls for his sacking from frustrated Chelsea fans.

'It's only going to get better'

Fortunately for Pochettino, he has Palmer's full support. "The fans don't see it, but the way the manager works us on the pitch, the things he does with us, it's only going to get better," he said. "It's a project and everyone's young. We will see it sooner or later."

Another virtuoso Palmer display in Sunday's FA Cup quarter-final against Leicester would surely keep alive Pochettino's hopes of winning his first silverware in England. It might also remind Guardiola of the controversial decision that could come back to haunt the Manchester City manager.

Eye-catching goals for City in the Community Shield against Arsenal and the UEFA Super Cup against Sevilla seemed to cement Palmer as a certainty to follow in Phil Foden's footsteps as a homegrown prodigy in Guardiola's team.

But Palmer was reportedly pressing for more playing time in a side already packed with attacking talent and, unable to guarantee that wish, Guardiola accepted Chelsea's £42 million bid. City fans were shocked and it could be argued the move has backfired.

While City are still in the hunt for a second successive treble, they sit third in the Premier League — one point behind leaders Arsenal — in part because of the injuries sustained by Kevin de Bruyne and Erling Haaland.

De Bruyne missed the first half of the season with a hamstring problem, while Haaland was sidelined for two months due to a foot issue. Palmer would have been a more than adequate replacement for both as a scorer and creator, potentially helping City to another vital win or



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder #20 Cole Palmer runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Newcastle United at Stamford Bridge in London on March 11, 2024. — AFP

two in their title defence.

Instead, it was Palmer who robbed City of two important points with his last-gasp penalty in the 4-4 draw between the teams in November. The England international's brilliant form has also put him firmly in contention for a place in Gareth Southgate's squad for Euro 2024.

With Southgate watching the Newcastle game in person, Palmer said: "If you'd told me at the start of the season I had a chance of going to the Euros I wouldn't have believed you." If Palmer's Euro dream comes true, Pochettino might be sitting more comfortably, while Guardiola is left with only regrets. — AFP

Kuwait's Sadiqa Al-Ansari elected VP of Special Olympics Council

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's candidate Sadiqa Al-Ansari won the Vice Presidency of the first leading council of families of Special Olympics Athletes, during the elections that were held in Cairo with 10 Arab countries in attendance.

Al-Ansari appreciated the members' confidence in her and electing her to participate in leading the council for the next two years. She said this confidence reflects the appreciation Kuwait Special Olympics experience enjoys, especially in regards to encouraging the family's role and its active participation in supporting the players, and provide them the suitable

environment to allow them to continue making significant achievements.

Al-Ansari thanked the regional Special Olympics headed by the regional Special Olympics president for MENA Eng Ayman Abdelwahab, and thanked all colleagues in the council, lecturers and organizers. She said the conference included several lectures and discussions about the strategy of Special Olympics, societal inclusion, unified school champions initiative, living skills training, personal protection of players and the importance of sports in the life of the special needs people.

The council elections resulted in Bahrain's Nazek Marhoun as President, Sadiqa Al-Ansari as Vice President, while Saif Ali bin Smaide from UAE, Rahaf Al-Bishri



Sadiqa Al-Ansari and Bahrain's Nazek Marhoun.

from Saudi Arabia, Abeer Al-Bougha and Noura Ahmad from Egypt, Maha Al-Masrwa from Jordan, Lamyia Zabeed from Lebanon, Naeema Haddadi from Morocco, Mariam Karkar from Algeria and Haleema Al-Beloushiya from Oman as members.

Al Nassr out of Asian Champions League quarters

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo scored in extra time but Al Nassr side were dumped out of the Asian Champions League quarter-finals on penalties by Al Ain on Monday. The 39-year-old Portuguese was the only Al Nassr player to score in the shootout as his Saudi side went out 3-1 on penalties, the tie having ended 4-4 on aggregate.

It was a frustrating night for the former Manchester United and Real Madrid forward, who missed a sitter from three yards with the goal gaping in normal time in Riyadh. Beaten 1-0 in the first leg in the United Arab Emirates, Ronaldo took the quarter-final to penalties when he held his nerve from the spot in the 118th minute.

His calmly taken spot-kick made it 4-3 on the night to the hosts, who had Ayman Yahya sent off in the 98th minute. But the home team failed with three of their four efforts in the shootout to send Al Ain into the last four of Asia's top club competition.

The Brazilian international defender Alex Telles, also formerly of Manchester United, was among the Al Nassr players to fluff his lines during the shootout. In Tuesday's quarter-finals, Ulsan face Jeonbuk in an all-Korean tie locked at 1-1.

The Saudi sides Al Ittihad and Al Hilal also clash, with Al Hilal ahead 2-0 from the first leg. Harry Kewell's Yokohama F-Marininos host Chinese side Shandong Taishan on Wednesday with a 2-1 lead from the first leg. — AFP



RIYADH: Ain's Emirati defender #44 Saeed Juma fights for the ball with Nassr's Portuguese forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo during the AFC Champions League football match between Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr and UAE's Al-Ain at Al-Awal Park Stadium in Riyadh on March 11, 2024. — AFP

Tehran football derby ignites passions in Iran

TEHRAN: Excitement is running high among fans of Tehran's two football giants before Wednesday's derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal whose long-running rivalry has ignited passions in sports and politics for decades.

The Azadi stadium, which is home to both teams, is one of the largest in the world, and will see its seats packed for the 103rd Tehran Derby. "It's the most important match. There's a crazy atmosphere, incredible to experience," Kevin Yamga, the only Frenchman playing in Iran, told AFP.

"Half of the stands are all blue, the other all red," said Yamga, who has played in five derbies since joining the blues of Esteghlal in 2021. Fans travel hundreds of kilometres to reach the capital before spending the night near the stadium to secure a seat.

"It's a very, very strong rivalry, comparable to that between the clubs of Manchester - United and City - or of Glasgow - Celtic and Rangers," Yamga said. The Frenchman, however, will not be playing on Wednesday due to injury. Both teams are competing in the Iranian top-tier football league, the Persian Gulf Pro League. Esteghlal are top of the table, three points ahead of title holders Persepolis, with 11 games to play.

Female VAR

This year, for the first time in Iran, a woman will join the refereeing team for a men's match. Though not on the field, 34-year-old Mahsa Ghorbani will observe the match with two others as video assistant referees.

Ghorbani's assignment is a mark of a new era in a closed-off world of Iranian men's football that has rarely seen women in the stadiums. Last year, 3,000 Iranian women, after decades of fighting to get into stadiums, were able to attend their first derby, a move welcomed by FIFA.

"Iranian women have proven that they can obtain their rights, despite the patriarchal management of football," said Ebrahim Afshar, one of the country's best-known sports journalists. "And one day, one of them will become the main referee." — AFP

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, **Zakaria** Ane Kallu, holder of Indian Passport No. T8762998 having permanent address 3-180/2, Anekallu house, Kudupall Athadkapos Karopady village, Bantwal Taluk, Dakshina Kannada Karnataka - India, Pin: 574279, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Zakaria and (Surname) Bin Hameed.
(#5180) 13/03/2024

I, **Sivakumar** son of Thiru Nadarajan, born on 26th June 1990 (District of Birth: Kanyakumari, Address: 4/93A Chemponkarai, Puthenthurai PO, Nagercoil-629501), residing in

Kuwait at present, holder of Indian Passport No. W0770771 & Aadhaar No. 4021 8173 5852, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given Name: Yoseph & Surname: Nadarajan.
(#5181) 13/03/2024

I, **Jaseena** Niranganpara Moideen, holder of Indian Passport No. V7431461 do hereby change my children name from their birth certificate, Mohammed Ayaan Nellyparambil Thyathedil to Ayaan Mohammed passport No U0461164 (Ayaan as given name and Mohammed as surname) and from Mohammed Ayaan Nellyparambil Ta-

thyathedil to Amaan Mohammed Passport No V1967065 (Amaan as given name and Mohammed as surname). I undertake to carry out this name change in their birth certificates.
(#5179) 11/3/2024

I, **Ali**, 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

Pochettino calls for Chelsea unity after Newcastle win

Chelsea remain 11th in the Premier League table



LONDON: Chelsea's French defender #27 Malo Gusto (L) shoots past Newcastle United's English defender #33 Dan Burn (R) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Newcastle United at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino called for the Chelsea fans to trust his players after a 3-2 win over Newcastle on Monday propelled the Blues back into contention for European football next season. Pochettino had faced open revolt from among his own support during last weekend's 2-2 draw at Brentford.

The former Tottenham boss has suffered a difficult first season at Stamford Bridge, which included losing the League Cup final to a severely depleted Liverpool last month. Chelsea remain 11th in the Premier League table, but closed to within four points of West Ham in seventh, which should at least secure a place in the Europa Conference League.

"We need to stick together," said Pochettino, whose side face Leicester in the FA Cup quarter-finals on Sunday. "Until the end we are going to fight to try to give our fans the best things. It helped a little bit today we scored from the beginning, the fans were good and behind us. They need to trust in us."

Newcastle's 12th defeat of the season leaves the Magpies just one point better off than Chelsea in

10th. The pressure is also rising on Eddie Howe as Saudi-backed Newcastle have failed to build on finishing fourth last season to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 20 years.

"All three goals are similar in their characteristics. We didn't defend those situations well enough and if you do that you are going to lose games," said Howe. "I know we can hit the heights of previously, but we are not doing it anywhere near often enough." There were promising signs for Pochettino as some of his much-criticised expensive young recruits showed glimpses of their potential.

Nicolas Jackson is now up to 12 goals in his debut season as he cleverly flicked in Palmer's shot after less than six minutes. However, it was the story of Chelsea's season that they failed to build on that flying start and allowed Newcastle to go onto control the rest of the first half.

The visitors were dealt an injury blow midway through the first period when Anthony Gordon was forced off. But Alexander Isak produced a quality

finish, fired low into the far corner, to bring Newcastle level two minutes before half-time.

The one new signing Chelsea have been able to rely on all season is Cole Palmer and the England international restored his side's lead in emphatic fashion just before the hour mark. Palmer collected Enzo Fernandez's pass, cut inside and unleashed a powerful effort for his 11th Premier League goal of the season.

Mykhailo Mudryk, by contrast, has been a constant frustration for a number of Chelsea managers since joining for £88 million (\$113 million) just over a year ago. The Ukrainian had been on the pitch only five minutes when showed his blistering pace to burst through the heart of the Newcastle defence and turn in just his sixth goal in 46 Chelsea appearances.

Jacob Murphy's rocket of a shot into the top corner set up a nervy finish for the hosts. But it was too little, too late for the visitors in the latest disappointment of an underwhelming campaign. — AFP

Jokic leads Nuggets fightback over fired-up Raptors

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic grabbed a 35-point triple-double as the Denver Nuggets staged a dramatic second-half fightback to defeat the short-handed Toronto Raptors 125-119 on Monday. Two-time Most Valuable Player Jokic produced a towering display to drag Denver back into contention after the NBA champions trailed by 22 points in the second quarter.

A fired-up Toronto looked poised to score a notable upset after starting strong to open up a double-digit advantage. But Serbian star Jokic seized control of the game in the third, scoring 19 points as Denver outscored Toronto 42-30 to trim the visitors' lead to five points heading into the fourth.

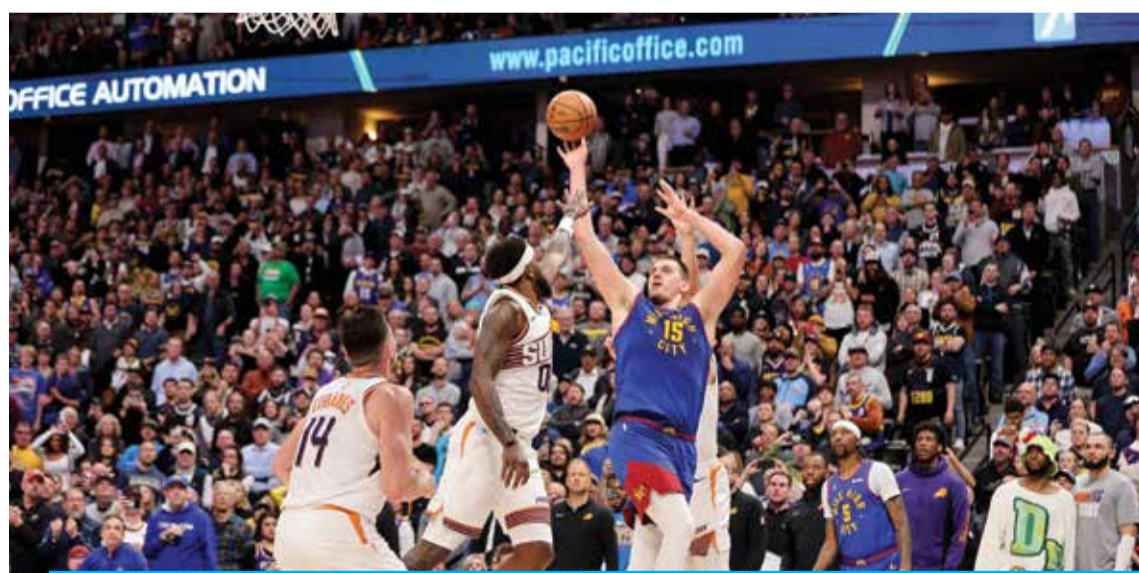
Denver's domination continued into the fourth and they finally took the lead midway through the final frame when Jamal Murray's layup put them 108-107 ahead. Denver outscored Toronto 32-21 in the fourth quarter to close out the win.

"In the first half they scored a lot and we didn't play any defense," said Jokic after completing his 21st triple-double of the season. "We just needed to match and exceed their physicality and that's how we turned the game to our advantage."

"We were just fighting. The whole crew showed their character today. We're not quitters." Jokic led Denver's scoring while point guard Murray added 26 points and 12 assists and five rebounds. Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr. finished with 19 points each. R.J. Barrett led Toronto's scorers with 26 points, with Kelly Olynyk chipping in with 24.

Durant leads Suns past Cavs

While Denver were forced to dig deep for their



DENVER: File photo shows Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets misses a last second shot in regulation against the Phoenix Suns. — AFP

win, there were no such problems for Eastern Conference leaders Boston, who coasted to their 50th win of the season with a 121-99 blowout on the road against the Portland Trail Blazers.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 27 points while Jayson Tatum finished with 26. In Cleveland, Kevin Durant finished with 37 points with eight rebounds and six assists as the Phoenix Suns overturned a 19-point deficit to down the Cavaliers 117-111.

Devin Booker added 27 points for Phoenix while Bradley Beal weighed in with 24 to give the Suns a battling victory on the road. Darius Garland led Cleveland's scoring with 30 points. Cleveland surged into a big early lead after a 41-point first quarter, extending their advantage to 63-44 with just under five minutes remaining in the second. But Phoenix roared back to outscore the Cavs 19-7 in the final minutes of

the half to close the gap to within seven points.

Phoenix kept up that momentum in the third period, outscoring the Cavs 34-21 to take the lead and then holding on down the stretch to close out the victory. Phoenix improved to 38-27 to remain in sixth place in the Western Conference.

In San Antonio, the Golden State Warriors shook off a slow start to take down the Spurs 112-102, two days after losing 126-113 to the Texan club. San Antonio led by 11 points in the first quarter and held a 10-point lead early in the third.

But a trademark high-scoring third quarter from Golden State—outscored the Spurs 32-18 -- swung the game back in the visitors' favor. With the Warriors missing the injured Stephen Curry, Jonathan Kuminga led their scoring with 22 points, while Klay Thompson added 21 and Chris Paul 19. — AFP

Djokovic out of Indian Wells in Nardi upset

INDIAN WELLS: Qualifying lucky loser Luca Nardi scored the biggest win of his young career on Monday, stunning world number one Novak Djokovic 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters. The world number 123 from Italy ended the 11-match win streak of the veteran Serb at Masters events, with Nardi betting the childhood tennis idol whose poster hung above his bed from the age of eight.

The 20-year-old was not awed by the big game of Djokovic, and broke Djokovic for a 4-2 lead in the deciding set before pounding out the victory three games later with a match point ace. The Italian finished with 36 winners and 41 unforced errors while Djokovic had 31 errors in just under two and a half hours.

"Before this night no-one knew me," Nardi said in an on-court interview after his win. "I hope the crowd enjoyed the game; I'm super happy with this one." Asked how he had pulled off the biggest win of his career, Nardi replied: "I don't know. I think it really is a miracle. I'm a guy ranked outside the top 100 in the world and now I'm beating Novak—crazy, crazy."

Nardi only reached the main draw in Indian Wells after a withdrawal. He had been beaten by Belgium's David Goffin in the final round of qualifying. Djokovic meanwhile attributed his defeat to a bad day at the office.

"He got in as a lucky loser to the main draw, so he really didn't have anything to lose," Djokovic said of Nardi. "He deserved to win. I was more surprised with my level. My level was really, really bad. That's it, these two things come together—he's having a great day; I'm having a really bad day." — AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Luca Nardi of Italy plays a forehand against Novak Djokovic of Serbia in their third round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 11, 2024 in Indian Wells, California. — AFP