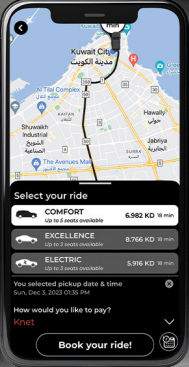



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8 Burgan Bank participates in event on women's empowerment in Kuwait




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Ramadan
KAREEM

Fajr	: 04:34
Shrooq	: 05:53
Dhuhr	: 11:56
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 17:59
Isha	: 19:16

Amir hails defense forces

Sheikh Mishal visits ministry of defense, National Guard



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets senior officials and officers during his visits to the ministry of defense and the National Guard on March 18, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

RAMADAN KAREEM

'Why would you torture your body by starving?'

By Akylai R Raimbekova

It is a natural question that could come to one's mind while observing the entire Muslim community fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, known as the month of fasting. Fasting is commonly interpreted as the obligation to refrain from food, drink and conjugal rites from dawn to dusk. However, it goes beyond that, encompassing the whole human body from eyes to limbs, tongue to brain. Thus, hurtful or false words, destructive or immoral deeds, conversations and intentions are considered to be as disruptive of a fast as eating and drinking.

It is crucial to note that fasting is an act of worship — submission to the Creator's command. It's worth mentioning that setting the right intention for fasting is the key. However, as with all of the acts of worship in Islam, fasting too has its practical benefits for us humans. Yet again, those benefits are not to be seen as the main purpose for practicing believers but rather as a nice bonus. Hence, a Muslim fasts to please the Almighty, and as a result gets both visible and invisible benefits.

From the biological perspective, huge amounts of biochemical reactions take place in our body during the period of intermittent fasting, by sort of restarting and accelerating metabolic processes. Generally, if we take care of our health and are in tune with our needs, and practice fasting before Ramadan throughout the year, fasting does not and should not cause any problems to our body.

However, there are individual cases with chronic diseases, who may have to prepare themselves for fasting by going for GI tract checkups or other to address certain issues they have before Ramadan or during the month, so their doctors can prescribe necessary intakes for a smooth transition of food timings. From a psychological perspective, fasting is a great chance to develop healthy habits and practice patience in trying to attain the full scope of

Continued on Page 6

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed confidence in the country's armed forces and its sectors, which defend and sacrifice for the dear homeland. This came in a speech by HH the Amir during his visit to the ministry of defense on Monday, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

HH the Amir appreciated the ministry of defense's keenness to enhance its combat capabilities, raising the level of training and defense readiness, under exceptional circumstances in the regional arena, pushing towards achieving the highest levels of alertness and readiness for the armed forces.

Warnings grow of starvation, famine in Gaza

GAZA: Efforts to hammer out a temporary truce in Gaza intensified Tuesday after months of war that have devastated the Palestinian territory and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine. While a UN-backed assessment said 300,000 people in Gaza's north would face famine by May without a surge of aid, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said everyone in Gaza was now in need of humanitarian aid.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk blamed the Zionist entity for the hunger crisis, telling reporters in Geneva

they were blocking aid and conducting the conflict in a way that "may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war". Zionist troops on Tuesday pressed an assault on Gaza's biggest hospital, which they allege is being used for military purposes. Hamas said the assault on Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital was a war crime.

The Zionist entity's spy chief David Barnea was in Qatar on Monday for a new round of talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators, after they failed to secure a truce for the holy month of Ramadan, which began last week. Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the latest negotiations but it was "too early to announce any successes".

The new push for a truce follows a Hamas proposal for a six-week

Continued on Page 6

HH the Amir also expressed gratitude for the efforts made by the naval force, in cooperation and coordination with the general administration of the coast guard to achieve the highest levels of readiness to preserve the security of the nation and the safety of its territorial waters. HH the Amir congratulated the ministry of defense on the 50th anniversary of its establishment of the facilities engineering department, which is an incubator of the initiatives and creativity of Kuwaiti youth, praising its role in preserving the environment.

During his speech, HH the Amir instructed the ministry's leadership to establish the rules of justice and impartiality and take all legal measures to preserve public money. HH the Amir also instructed them to intensify inspection tours and pay attention to infrastructure, especially warehouses of military machinery and equipment.

Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Maj Gen Bandar Al-Muzain expressed pride on the visit of HH the Amir, congratulating him on the holy month of Ramadan. He also noted that the ministry of defense, in its various military and civilian sectors, strives, through its work, to find lasting compatibility and harmony with the government action plan.

Continued on Page 6

Continued on Page 6

Incessant rains soak Kuwait



KUWAIT: Cars drive through rain and mist amid inclement weather on March 19, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (More pics on Page 2)

Aramco CEO calls energy transition strategy a failure

HOUSTON: Pointing to the still paltry share of renewable energy in global supply, the head of Saudi Aramco described the current energy transition strategy as a misguided failure on Monday. "In the real world, the current transition strategy is visibly failing on most fronts," Saudi Aramco Chief Executive Amin Nasser said at the CERWeek conference in Houston.

Fossil fuels accounted for 82 percent of global consumption last year, according to a report from consultancy KPMG cited by Nasser, who noted that the International Energy Agency has said oil demand could hit a record this year. "This is hardly the future picture some have been painting," Nasser said. "All of this strengthens the view that big oil and gas is unlikely for some time to come out, let alone in 2050," added Nasser, alluding to a medium-term target that has been seen



Amin Nasser

as a potential phaseout date for crude. Nasser called for policies more in tune with the "real world".

While alternative energy can reduce emissions, "when the world does focus on reducing emission from hydrocarbons, it achieves much better results," Nasser said. He said the world should "abandon the fantasy of phasing out oil and gas and instead invest in them adequately reflecting realistic demand assumptions". — AFP

Local

Ministry holds workshop with media professionals on election coverage

Info ministry partners with private media outlets

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: The ministry of information held a two-day workshop with private media professionals at the Kuwait National Library, discussing ways to cover elections while ensuring an integral democratic process without disruptions. The lecture was delivered by senior news sector presenter Munawar Mardi and director Bashayer Al-Sayegh, with the attendance of Undersecretary Dr Nasser Muhaisen and Assistant Undersecretary for Press, Publishing and Publication Lafi Al-Subaei.

Muhaisen said the ministry, through its media strategy, reaffirms its commitment to partnering with the private sector to cover the National Assembly elections in a professional manner that reflects media excellence by utilizing the efforts made by everyone to ensure the success of the electoral process. Mardi and Sayegh shared their experiences of election coverage, emphasizing the importance of reporting lawfully and in a way that does not hinder the election process, as well as the skills needed to create unique content reaching a wider audience.

Mardi stressed people must have accurate information, and adherence to regulations in covering elections is necessary to ensure that the democratic process is not affected. Sayegh demonstrated ways to achieve professional video coverage of the elections while being time-efficient and staying up to date with the news.

Subaei emphasized the ministry of information's interest in organizing the workshop, highlighting its role in supporting the media technically and in promoting the event, focusing on the success of the electoral process in all its aspects. He stressed that democracy is not reflected by raising voices or offending candidates.

He emphasized that the media's role is to ensure the correct transfer of information, with news and surveys having integrity and requiring the correct license from the ministry. He expressed hope that the private media, as a cornerstone of the election process, will contribute to its success and that the coverage of the 2024 elections will be distinctive and worthy of the name of Kuwait and its democratic experience.



Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr Nasser Muhaisen pose for a group photo with the participants of the workshop. — KUNA

EU ambassador hosts ghabga with media

KUWAIT: On 18 March, European Union (EU) Ambassador Anne Koistinen hosted a Ramadan Ghabga with journalists and representatives from the media. The event served as an occasion to express appreciation for the strong cooperation between the EU Delegation in Kuwait and local media, as well as to discuss the deepening partnership between the EU and Kuwait.

In her welcoming remarks, Ambassador Koistinen highlighted her commitment to fostering dialogue and collaboration between the EU and Kuwait and build on the already excellent and strong EU-Kuwait partnership. Ambassador Koistinen said "on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan, I would like to send my warmest greetings to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to Muslims inside and outside Kuwait."

She added "Ramadan this year is rather different as people in the region and beyond are concerned with the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza. My thoughts are with the people of Gaza, who are suffering from hunger, bombing and displacement. But I also don't forget the Muslims suffering in other places in this region during this Holy Month, such as Sudan, Yemen and Syria. I sincerely hope that this Holy Month of Ramadan brings lasting peace in the Middle East, and across the world including in Europe, where Ukraine continues to fight for its freedom and independence."

Ambassador Koistinen praised Kuwait's continuous humanitarian support to the Palestinians and to UNRWA, which also remains a top priority for the European Union. She noted that, in fact, the European Union remains the top donor to the Palestinians worldwide. "We have mobilized 225 million Euros since October 7 on humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, and we have also increased our financial contributions to UNRWA."

The European Union transferred 50 million Euros to UNRWA early March, and will increase its emergency aid to the Palestinians by 68 million euros in 2024. We believe that there is no substitute to UNRWA and for the provision of services to Gaza and its 2 million inhabitants", she said. Ambassador Koistinen

highlighted the joint statement between the European Commission and other countries on the opening of a maritime corridor to deliver additional humanitarian aid to Gaza alongside plans for a temporary pier.

Ambassador Koistinen noted that financial and humanitarian support are not enough, and reiterated the EU's commitment to addressing the root causes of the conflict and advocating for the Two-State Solution. "I am pleased that the EU agrees with Kuwait on the utmost importance to find a way out of the conflict, and we both support the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which is an excellent proposal to build on", she added.

She noted that the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell concern is not only limited to Gaza, as he has condemned the provocative announcements to expand the illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. "The EU has clearly stated that it will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties", Ambassador Koistinen added.

Ambassador Koistinen also noted EU's concerns over the regional escalation and the effects it may have for instance on world trade, including trade between the Gulf and Europe. She mentioned the new EU defensive naval operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES to protect the freedom of navigation and merchant shipping through the Red Sea and the Gulf. Ambassador Koistinen said that she was really excited to experience for the first time Ramadan traditions in Kuwait, including ghabgas and diwanis. She emphasized the significance of these gatherings in fostering family bonds, community spirit, reflection, and generosity, which are central to the essence of Ramadan.



KUWAIT: European Union (EU) Ambassador Anne Koistinen hosted a Ramadan Ghabga with journalists and representatives from the media on March, 18.

Deputy PM, US envoy hold talks



KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara. In a press release, the Ministry of Defense said that during the meeting, both sides discussed matters of common interest and regional and international developments. Sheikh Fahad stressed deep bilateral ties with the US and diverse cooperation across all fields. Wishing the best for Sasahara in her new position, the Kuwaiti top brass hoped for more success and development between the two friendly countries, the release noted. The Chief Commander of the Kuwaiti Army, Air Marshal Bandar Al-Muzayen, and Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah attended the meeting. — KUNA



Heavy rains soak Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait experienced incessant rain throughout Tuesday, reaching its peak in the afternoon. Director of the Meteorological Department Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi told KUNA there would be an increase in low and medium clouds, interspersed with thunderclouds accompanied by varying intensities of rain, ranging from light to moderate, and heavy in some areas.

Qarawi mentioned the possibility of hail at

times and increased wind activity, with speeds exceeding 60 km per hour, leading to waves reaching over 6 feet in height and reduced horizontal visibility in certain areas. He anticipated a gradual improvement in weather conditions after midnight, with clouds decreasing and rain chances diminishing gradually, while there may be fog forming in some areas on Wednesday morning.

Rain is expected to return on Friday morning, with precipitation being light to moderate in intensity. Qarawi said the highest recorded rainfall since midnight was 16 mm in Rabiya, 10 mm in Abdaly, 12 mm at Kuwait airport, 12 mm in Salmi and 4 mm in Jahra. — KUNA



Amir commends National Guard



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Kuwait National Guard on Monday and delivered a speech on the occasion. His Highness the Amir congratulated the top personnel, commanders and all its affiliates on this holy month. His Highness the Amir commended the efforts that culminated in the development of various National Guard camps. — KUNA photos

Amir affirms confidence in Kuwait Armed Forces



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the Ministry of Defense on Monday. His Highness the Amir affirmed confidence in the country's Armed Forces and appreciated the Ministry of Defense's keenness to enhance its combat capabilities, raising the level of training and defense readiness. — KUNA photos

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Ramadan health tips

Keep a journal

Journaling has been widely appreciated as a healthy habit of getting your thoughts out into a safe place. How we take care of our minds affects the way our body thrives. Negativity often clouds our outlook on life and if continuously being repressed, the repercussions can jeopardize our physical health as well. By writing them down, it allows you to look back through the pages and track the progress of your thoughts. Keeping tabs on your own growth helps to boost self-esteem and instill a feeling of gratitude.

Put down the cigarette

Ramadan also prohibits smoking in the daytime as the hazardous particles from cigarettes can enter the body when inhaled, thus making your fast invalid. Unfortunately, smokers often resort to chain-smoking — which refers to smoking a number of cigarettes continuously — after Iftar to compensate for their lack of nicotine consumption during the day. As generally known, the toxic substances in cigarettes bring harmful effects on our respiratory and nervous systems. In addition, chain smoking makes the unhealthy habit even more difficult to be curbed because no attempt is made to reduce the amount of puffing.

Consequently, you lose the opportunity to minimize your smoking behaviors during the holy month, which defeats the purpose of observing Ramadan. Managing addiction is a consistent commitment. Try cutting down your smoking habits gradually prior to Ramadan to avoid withdrawal symptoms when fasting, and continue to do so after the fasting month ends. Nicotine patches and nicotine gums can also be helpful alternatives.



Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Photo shows Safat Square in 1928. It was a daily market where the Bedouins would sell their goods (from ghee and yogurt). — Photo from Ali Al Rais Center of Research and Studies, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

stc partners with Aspire Kids Club for the 3rd year in a row

Spreading positivity amongst younger generation; Part of Ramadan campaign



A group photo of children participating in Ramadan initiatives.



stc team distributes meals with the children.

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KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, announced its partnership with Aspire Kids Club, a local entertainment and educational children's club that aims to promote culture, for the third year in a row. The partnership aims to spread positivity and empower the younger generation through 5 exclusive events sponsored by stc.

The activities also come as a continuation of the different programs organized under the Company's "With good, we go further" Ramadan 2024 campaign. stc indicated in a statement that its partnership with Aspire Kids Club encompasses 5 different activities that are part of the club's "Positive Sustainability" campaign, which is the theme for 2024.

The initiatives include involving the kids to distribute iftar meals to those who are in need, memorizing and reciting the Holy Quran in partnership with the Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, celebrating Girgian and distributing coloring books to children at Dar Al-Shoun, as well as additional initiatives that support kids in the country. stc's renewed sponsorship of the Aspire Kids Club follows the positive impact witnessed in previous years amongst participants and the community.

As part of its Ramadan campaign this year, stc aspires to show the importance of practicing habits and behaviors that spread positivity in the community, hence the title of its Ramadan 2024 campaign, "With good, we go further". Additionally, the sponsorship also touches on achieving positive sustainable habits, aligning with stc's focus on strengthening its sustainability program for 2024.

Danah Al Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "Involving the younger generation in programs that are designed to support the community is essential for fostering a culture of empathy and responsibility amongst our future leaders. stc is proud to sponsor the Aspire Kids Club once again as part of the various programs and sponsorships under its Ramadan 2024 campaign.

Exposing children to such activities at an early age enables them to develop mental awareness of how important it is to become active contributors to society. At stc, we understand that with leadership comes responsibility, further inspiring us to seek

innovative ways to engage with all segments in our community, leaving a lasting impact." Taiba Al-Ruwaihi, an advocate for children's education and Founder of the Aspire Kids Club, said, "We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to stc for sponsoring our program for the 3rd year in a row.

Through our programs, we have witnessed amazing progress in how our kids have developed empathetic qualities and grasped the understanding of helping others. Developing these qualities at an early stage not only supports the development of personal skills but also allows the kids to experience the joy of helping others within their community. Our continuous partnership with stc supports our vision to expand our reach and enhance our initiatives, further solidifying the foundation of our model to promote a compassionate and socially responsible generation."

To find out more about stc's events, promotions, and sponsorships, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download my stc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.

Kuwait calls on UNESCO to help end Gaza disaster

PARIS: Kuwait has called on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to play its role and responsibilities in the Gaza Strip disaster. This came in Kuwait's speech during the 219th session of the Executive Council of UNESCO, delivered by Kuwait's permanent representative to the organization, Ambassador Dr. Adam Al-Mulla, after the organization's members observed a minute of silence to mourn the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Al-Mulla said, "Kuwait looks forward to the organization fulfilling its role and full responsibilities, as dictated by its founding mission towards the Gaza Strip disaster, and

to accelerate the implementation of Resolution 42 C/54, which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its last session." He stressed that the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip have now reached an "unprecedented" stage of destruction, displacement, starvation, and loss of the necessities of life for tens of thousands of children, women, and the elderly.

Al-Mulla stressed that there is something that can be done "now" before stopping the fighting, repairing the infrastructure, and finding safe corridors to implement the plans on the ground, calling for the formation of a group of partners or an alliance — as happened in similar cases — to develop plans and mobilize support in order to work to lift part of the current suffering in Gaza. On the other hand, Kuwait welcomed the draft resolution submitted by Qatar on protecting education from attacks in view of its importance, the urgent need for such resolutions, and their implementation on the ground. — KUNA



Hong Kong passes tough new national security law

CapeXit? Separatists bid to split South Africa



MANILA: Policemen are seen as people protest on Mendiola Street against the visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on March 19, 2024. (Right) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (center) attends a meeting with Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. — AFP photos

US affirms commitment to Philippines, Ukraine

Defense chief, secretary of state challenge Russia, China in separate remarks Tuesday

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE/MANILA: Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin promised Tuesday that the United States will not let Ukraine fail in fighting off Russia, even as further aid remains stalled in Congress and Kyiv's forces face shortages of munitions.

In Manila, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States stands by its "ironclad" commitments to defend longtime ally the Philippines against armed attack in the South China Sea. Blinken's visit to Manila is his second since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos took office in 2022 and is part of a brief Asia tour.

The two statements come as the United States attempts to reinforce support for its allies amid world-wide instability.

The Republican-led House of Representatives has been blocking \$60 billion in assistance for Ukraine and the United States has warned that a recent \$300 million package would only last a few weeks.

The "United States will not let Ukraine fail", Austin said at the opening of a meeting in Germany of Ukraine's international supporters, at which he is seeking to secure further assistance for Kyiv. "We remain determined to provide Ukraine with the resources that it needs to resist the Kremlin's aggression," he said.

Blinken's renewed defense pledge to the Philippines follows recent incidents involving Philippine and Chinese vessels near disputed reefs off the Southeast Asian country's coast, including collisions.

"These waterways are critical to the Philippines, to its security, to its economy,

but they're also critical to the interests of the region, the United States and the world," Blinken said at a joint press conference with his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo. "That's why we stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defense commitments, including under the mutual defense treaty."

'Incremental gains'

Washington announced \$300 million in assistance for Ukraine last week, but Austin said it was only possible due to savings on recent purchases. "We were only able to support this much-needed package by identifying some unanticipated contract savings", Austin said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a statement the day before that it is "critically important for us that the Congress soon completes all the necessary procedures and makes a final decision" on aid for Kyiv. Top US military officer General Charles "CQ" Brown told journalists en route to the Ukraine meeting that Kyiv's troops are "having to pay attention to their supply rates and how they execute."

There is an "incremental kind of back and forth between Ukraine and Russia", with "incremental gains on both sides", Brown said. But he noted that "even as the Russians have gained territory, they do it at a pretty big cost in number of casualties, like in personnel, but also in number of pieces of equipment that are being taken out."

Austin said in his remarks Tuesday that "Russia has paid a staggering cost

for (President Vladimir) Putin's imperial dreams", using "up to \$211 billion to equip, deploy, maintain, and sustain its imperial aggression against Ukraine."

"At least 315,000 Russian troops have been killed or wounded" since Russia launched its all-out invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Austin said, adding that Ukraine has also "sunk, destroyed, or damaged some 20 medium-to-large Russian navy vessels."

'Rock solid' alliance

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing aside competing claims from several Southeast Asian nations, including the Philippines, and an international ruling that has declared its stance baseless.

After Blinken's remarks, China said the United States has "no right" to interfere in the South China Sea. "The United States is not a party to the South China Sea issue and has no right to interfere in maritime issues that are between China and the Philippines," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular press conference.

In his meeting with Marcos, Blinken said the alliance between the United States and the Philippines was "more than rock solid" and was "an absolute priority for President Biden".

Top US officials have repeatedly said that "an armed attack" against Philippine public vessels, aircraft, armed forces and coastguard would invoke the 1951 US-Philippines mutual defense treaty in which Washington is obliged to defend its ally. Marcos has expressed "great alarm"



RAMSTEIN AIR BASE: US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J Austin (left) and Ukrainian Minister of Defense Rustem Umerov speak at a press conference.

over the recent confrontations that have sparked diplomatic sparring between Manila and Beijing.

'Advancing the alliance'

Beijing has accused Washington of using the Philippines as a "pawn" in the dispute over the South China Sea and various reefs. China deploys boats to patrol the busy waterway and has built artificial islands that it has militarized to reinforce its claims.

Manalo told the news conference that he had emphasized to Blinken the importance of "more substantial US investments towards enhancing our defense and civilian law enforcement capabilities".

Blinken's visit was aimed at "advancing

the alliance", said Renato Cruz De Castro, professor for international studies at De La Salle University in Manila.

Marcos would also likely be interested to hear from Blinken what the "trigger points" are for the United States to invoke their mutual defense treaty, said Herman Kraft, a political science professor at the University of the Philippines.

Relations between Washington and Manila were rocky under former president Rodrigo Duterte, who pivoted towards China. Since Marcos took power, however, he has sought to deepen cooperation with the United States and regional neighbors, while standing up to Chinese aggression towards Philippine vessels in the South China Sea. — AFP

Sewage, rubbish threaten health of displaced Gazans

RAFAH: Putrid rubbish piles and sewage-contaminated puddles are increasingly encroaching on the makeshift encampments of displaced Palestinians in southern Gaza, compounding the health risks facing people who have fled the Zionist entity's invasion.

"We suffer from foul smells and illnesses among children, who are always suffering from colds," said Sayed Rafik Abu Shanab, who lives in the southern city of Rafah, where the majority of Gazans have sought refuge from the war. "The sewers here are infested with mosquitoes, which bite people and transfer infections to others."

While the United Nations warns of imminent famine, after more than five months of war between the Zionist entity and Hamas, humanitarian officials say fast-deteriorating sanitation conditions are making Gazans even more vulnerable.

"Sanitation is one of the key drivers for the nutritional crisis, the health crisis, and I would even say food insecurity as well," Jamie McGoldrick, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, told a press briefing on Monday.

"People are hungry but they're even more hungry because ... their immune systems are being affected by their living conditions. People

are living in very squalid, overcrowded conditions."

The Zionist entity's military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 31,726 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the territory. The entity claims it's in response to an attack staged by Hamas in October 2023 which resulted in about 1,160 deaths, according to an AFP tally of Zionist figures.

Half of Gazans are experiencing "catastrophic hunger and starvation", and famine is projected to hit the north of the territory by May unless there is urgent intervention, a UN-backed food security assessment warned on Monday.

In Rafah, where the UN says the population has ballooned from around 300,000 to 1.5 million since October as civilians fled the fighting, survivors eke out a grim existence as they wait for a possible truce, dodging ever-growing mounds of rubbish during their daily hunt for food. "There is no garbage collection," McGoldrick said. "At the side of the camps, at the side of the roads, there are piles of used papers, plastic, tins, remnants of food, etc."

'Explosively dangerous'

The dire sanitation situation in Rafah and elsewhere in the Gaza Strip has already resulted in a spike in Hep-



GAZA: A Palestinian boy walks along a street dumped with garbage in Gaza City on February 24, 2024. — AFP

atitis A, a liver inflammation caused by a virus that spreads via feces. It is not usually fatal.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned in January there had been 24 confirmed cases as well as "several thousand people with jaundice, presumably also due to Hepatitis A." Other diseases could thrive as the situation deteriorates, he said.

"The inhumane living conditions — barely any clean water, clean toilets and possibility to keep the surroundings clean — will enable Hepatitis A to spread further and highlight how explosively dangerous the environment is for the spread of disease," he said on X.

Hassan Mustafa, who was displaced from northern Gaza to Rafah, told AFP the growing health risks were creating fear in the tents where he is living. "We endure this suffering every day, every moment, and we hope to return to our previous lives as soon as possible," he said.

But McGoldrick said that, without a pause in the fighting, there was little humanitarian agencies could do to make things better.

"Because the power plants are not working and because ... the water and sanitation systems are broken or in need of repair, we don't have the ability to turn that into something that is better than the current situation," he said. — AFP

Fighting halted on Afghanistan-Pakistan border after skirmishes

KABUL: Fighting has stopped on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border after Pakistani air strikes sparked skirmishes, a Taliban government spokesman said Tuesday. "The situation is calm, the fighting has stopped," Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP.

Pakistan carried out strikes in the border areas in Khost and Paktika provinces in Afghanistan early on Monday. Islamabad said it had targeted militants it said were responsible for a recent attack on its soil, but Taliban authorities said eight civilians, all women and children, were killed in the bombardment.

Afghanistan's defense ministry said its border forces retaliated by targeting Pakistani military posts along the border with "heavy weapons", with cross-border skirmishes reported by both sides. A senior police officer in the Pakistani border district of Kurram told AFP that Afghan security forces struck the area with mortar shells.

"As a result, three security posts and five houses of civilians suffered partial damage, with nine individuals, including four security personnel wounded," the officer told AFP, asking not to be named. "Silence prevails on the border today, and security forces have reinforced their positions."

Border tensions between the two countries have steadily escalated since the Taliban government seized power in 2021. Islamabad has accused Kabul's Taliban government of harboring militant fighters, allowing them to strike on Pakistani soil with impunity. — AFP

International

CapeXit? Separatists bid to split South Africa

Group campaigning for separate state reflects wider frustration with government

CAPE TOWN: On a windy Cape Town morning, a small group of activists hands out flyers calling for secession. “South Africa cannot be saved, Cape Independence is our only hope,” read the leaflets issued by the Cape Independence Party.

Also known as CapeXit, in a nod to Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union, the group is one of a couple campaigning for a separate state in Cape Town’s Western Cape region ahead of May 29 national and provincial elections.

Small and with little support, theirs is bound to remain a pipedream. But analysts say the parties’ bombastic demand is symptomatic of a wider Western Cape frustration with the central government that is likely to turn into louder calls for devolution. “The worse the country gets, the more popular Cape independence becomes,” said CapeXit leader Jack Miller, 39.

Frustration with the ruling African National Congress (ANC), accused of corruption and mismanagement, is ubiquitous across South Africa as it heads to the polls. Thirty years after the party came to power bringing an end to apartheid rule, the economy is at a standstill, unemployment sits above 30 percent, poverty is widespread and crime rampant.

Better Cape?

Amid the general bleakness, the Western Cape has built a reputation for relatively good governance. Long run by the liberal Democratic Alliance (DA), the leading opposition party, the province has a 20-percent jobless rate, the lowest in the country. Of the only 38 out of 257 municipalities that were given a clean financial audit by an official watchdog in 2021/2022, 21 were in the Western Cape.

In recent years, droves of affluent, largely white families have moved there from Johannesburg’s Gauteng attracted by more than the province’s natural beauty. Roads have fewer potholes, public schools are better and power and water infrastruc-

ture breakdowns are less frequent, many say. The province’s demography is also distinct. Nationally a minority, mixed-race people, who in South Africa are known as and largely identify themselves as “colored”, are the largest group.

White people are also overrepresented, while the opposite is true for black people, who make up the core of the ANC electorate. As unseating the ANC nationally seems difficult — the party is expected to drop below 50 percent for the first time but should remain the largest group and be able to form a coalition government — some Capetonians have come to believe they’d be better off alone.

A poll commissioned by a pro-independence lobby group last year suggested 68 percent of voters in the province favor a referendum on secession and more than half would vote for it. But the purported separatists’ enthusiasm is yet to turn into actual votes.

CapeXit unlikely

While advocating for non-racialism, CapeXit has struggled to expand beyond its mainly white base. “We have to free ourselves from this black government,” a party activist told AFP as he canvassed at a crossroad, before correcting himself and describing the ANC government as simply “corrupt”.

“I believe in a black, white, green, yellow but independent province,” said the 75-year-old, adding however that he was “old enough to remember white people on advertising on the television”.

At the road crossing, few motorists stopped to take a leaflet. Some pulled up their windows upon seeing the activists approach. “I don’t see it make any sense to separate the Western Cape,” said Simbarashe Milos, a 24-year-old Cape Town concierge.

Founded in 2007, CapeXit won only two of the 231 seats on Cape Town City Council in 2021 and has barely managed to collect the 7,000 signatures needed to contest provincial elections in May. Its

the road,” the police report said. This “prompted the driver of the truck to avoid head-on collision, hence hitting the left side of the university bus,” it added.

The bus was carrying 58 people on an academic trip. The injured were taken to a hospital in the nearby town of Voi, the Kenyan Red Cross said. “This is unacceptable,” Transport Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said Tuesday, deploring a “spate of road accidents”. “Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of these accidents and appropriate remedial action shall be taken,” he said in a statement.

‘Deeply saddened’

Kenyatta University said it was “deeply saddened” by the accident and had set up a help desk at the main campus to provide “assistance during this challenging time”.

Seven students have been airlifted to Nairobi for specialized treatment, Joseph Lelo, chief medical officer at African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), told AFP. “We are quite concerned about their conditions. Some suffered spinal injury, they bled a lot, and they need urgent surgery.”

According to figures by the National Transport and Safety Authority, 4,324 people were killed and 18,561 injured in 2023 in road accidents in Kenya, down 7.8 percent from the previous year. But numbers jumped at the start of 2024, with 536 people killed between January 1 and February 11, a five-percent rise over a similar period last year. — AFP

international,” HHH the Amir said, stressing at the same time the need to continue such excellent work so that the National Guard remains the vital role of support for the ministry of defense, ministry of interior, Kuwait Fire Force and state institutions, especially those of a strategic nature.

HHH the Amir commended as well the efforts that culminated in the development of various National Guard camps, including the shooting ranges camps of HHH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali, which refined the skills of National Guard personnel. HHH the Amir also congratulated the opening of specialized clinics, dialysis ward and diagnostic radiology center at the new specialized medical center in Tahrir camp.

National Guard Undersecretary Hashim Al-Rifaie delivered a speech marking the visit of HHH the Amir. Rifaie said on behalf of HHH Sheikh Salem, Chief of the National Guard, and Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of the National Guard, and all members of the National Guard, commanders and forces, that “we express our great pleasure for this blessed visit.”

“It gives me great pleasure to extend to Your Highness the Amir and to the Kuwaiti people our warmest congratulations and blessings on the holy month of Ramadan, wishing you and our dear homeland and the Islamic world prosperity and blessings,” he said. Rifaie also remembered the Late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. “We take this opportunity to renew our pledge and obedience to the leader of our country, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,” Rifaie added. — KUNA

According to the sunnah (traditions of Prophet Muhammad PBUH), the breaking of the fast should be as simple as possible, by putting the importance on pre-fasting meals instead. Breaking fast with dates is the sunnah and has great benefits, since dates are one of the best electrolytes, consisting of minerals and glucose. It could be followed by a carefully sipped cup of room temperature water, and only after the body feels refreshed and ready for food, should we have a portion of a well-balanced meal. It is important not to overeat and leave a third of the stomach empty, leaving the table with a feeling of slight hunger which helps the person to stay toned for the rest of the night.

May this month be a period of a nice restart for our bodies, developing healthy habits and improving our character. May all the faithful intentions and prayers be accepted and our sins forgiven.



CAPE TOWN: Cape Independence Party (CapeXit) volunteers and agents hand out flyers and campaigning material. — AFP

cousin, the Referendum Party, said it has gathered only a slightly higher number of signatures.

Political analyst Daniel Silke dismissed the idea that, even with bigger numbers, the separatists would win out. “Constitutionally they would be unable to force a secession of the Western Cape anyway, even if they were to gain some sort of powerful position, which is exceptionally unlikely,” he said.

In the meantime, the DA has been pushing for greater federal autonomy rather than a full divorce. It has tabled a provincial bill seeking to de-

volve more powers to the Western Cape. The legislation is currently undergoing public hearings, having drawn an angry response from the ANC, which brands it unconstitutional.

And as the DA, which has struck a coalition pact with almost a dozen other parties, seeks to make gains in other provinces in May, other bids might follow. “In a country as diverse as ours, federalism makes sense. The DA is pursuing it to the fullest extent possible,” DA leader John Steenhuisen said, presenting the bill last July. — AFP

Kenya bus crash kills 11 students on academic trip

NAIROBI: A collision between a bus and truck has killed 11 students from a top Kenyan university and injured dozens, prompting the government Tuesday to announce investigations into a “spate of road accidents”.

Road accidents are common in the east African nation, where road conditions are often poor and traffic regulations violated or ignored. Although the number of accidents fell last year, the start of 2024 has seen a rise, according to official figures. In the most high-profile accident, 24-year-old world marathon record holder Kelvin Kiptum lost his life in a late-night crash on February 11.

The Kenyatta University students were enroute to the coastal town of Mombasa when the accident happened on a busy highway Monday at Maungu, 360 kilometers (220 miles) from the capital Nairobi.

Ten died on impact and another died later in hospital, police said, adding that 42 people were seriously injured. “The driver of (the) university bus was overtaking a fleet of motor vehicles and as it was raining heavily, the bus skidded to the right side of

Amir hails defense forces...

Continued from Page 1

HHH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also visited on Monday the Kuwait National Guard and delivered a speech on the occasion. HHH the Amir said he is pleased with this visit which coincides with the blessed month of Ramadan, and in confirmation of the great values and authentic principles that our dear Kuwaiti leadership and people have upheld throughout the years.

HHH the Amir congratulated its leadership, commanders and affiliates on this holy month, praying to Almighty Allah for many returns to our Islamic and Arab nations, our beloved homeland and its honorable people, with goodness and blessings.

“My brothers and sons (guardians of the homeland): This place has witnessed over decades clear fingerprints, achievements and excellence in all fields — military, security, administrative, medical and technical, the pillars of which were laid down by my dear brother His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the National Guard Chief, wishing him great health and care,” HHH the Amir said.

“We remember with admiration and pride Sheikh Salem’s journey, which culminated in this military-security institution, reaching a distinguished position among the relevant authorities at all levels: Local, regional and

‘Why would you torture your body...’

Continued from Page 1

fasting range, and tackle anger management problems so common these days. It’s the month when people should avoid any form of waste — time, energy, natural resources or food. The usual practice is that we go without food all day long, and then after the sun sets, rush into eating big amounts and varieties of dishes, not only wasting food as a result but also causing sudden boosts of cortisol or insulin levels, etc in our body. The way we break the fast becomes a big burden on our bodies by stressing it. This surely may lead to a feeling of heaviness rather than freshness and satisfaction later on.

Gambia votes to reverse ban on genital mutilation

BANJUL, Gambia: Gambian lawmakers voted on Monday to advance to the next parliamentary stage a highly controversial bill that seeks to lift a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been in place since 2015.

The issue has divided the tiny West African nation for months, with hundreds gathering to protest outside parliament. Pro-FGM campaigners outnumbered those calling for the ban to remain in place, according to AFP journalists.

“The bill seeks to uphold religious loyalty and safeguard cultural norms and values,” Almane Gibba, the lawmaker who introduced the bill, said during the debate. “The use of a ban on female circumcision is direct violation of the citizens’ rights to practice their culture and religion,” he added.

But activists and rights organizations say the suggested legislation reverses years of progress and risks damaging the country’s human rights record. “There’s the inherent risk that this is just the first step and it could lead to the rollback of other rights such as the law on child marriage... and not just in The Gambia but in the region as a whole,” Divya Srinivasan, from women’s rights NGO Equality Now, told AFP.

Lawmakers voted 42 in favor and four against to send the bill to a parliamentary committee for at least three months for further scrutiny before it returns for a third reading.

“To hear mainly men speak on behalf of women and speak about what should happen to the bodies of women is just the most disheartening thing,” said anti-FGM activist Jaha Dukureh, who herself underwent the practice and watched her sister bleed to death following the procedure. “As a woman who has lived with this practice, that was just one of the most heart-wrenching things to watch,” she told AFP after the debate.

‘Irreversible harm’

Seventy-six percent of Gambian women aged between 15 and 49 have undergone FGM, according to



BANJUL, Gambia: Pro Female Genital Mutilation protesters gather outside the National Assembly in Banjul on March 18, 2024. — AFP

a 2021 report by the UN children’s agency UNICEF. UNICEF defines the practice as “the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”.

It can lead to serious health problems, including infections, bleeding, infertility and complications in childbirth, and impairs sexual pleasure. “Girls’ bodies are their own. FGM robs them of autonomy over their bodies and causes irreversible harm,” the UN’s Gambia office posted on X, formerly Twitter, ahead of the debate.

The UN rights office had called for the bill to be withdrawn, while Amnesty International said it would set a “dangerous precedent” for women’s rights.

Former Gambian dictator Yahya Jammeh banned FGM in the Muslim majority country in 2015, branding it outdated and not a requirement of Islam. Parliament later adopted the first Gambian law specifically banning the practice, which is now punishable by up to three years in prison.

But since 2015, only two cases have been prosecuted, with the first conviction made in August 2023, according to Amnesty International. The issue flared up last year, when three women received fines or prison sentences for performing FGM. The Islamic Council, the country’s main Muslim organization, said the practice was “not just a merely inherited custom” but “one of the virtues of Islam”. It called on the government to reconsider the ban. — AFP

Rafah to root out Hamas in the area. The city is already under frequent bombardment by the Zionist military, with AFP TV footage showing residents picking through debris of buildings on Tuesday after another night of bombardment. Gaza resident Ibrahim Jarghun, at a funeral on Tuesday for those killed in the latest Rafah bombardment, told AFP the killings were shattering Ramadan customs like the traditional pre-dawn “suhoor” meal. “For us, our suhoor is blood,” he said.

In Washington, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan reported the death of senior Hamas official Marwan Issa. The Zionist entity had on March 11 said an air strike on an underground compound in central Gaza targeted Issa, whom it called the deputy head of Hamas’ armed wing. At the time it was unclear if he had been killed.

In January, the Zionist entity said it had “completed the dismantling” of Hamas’ command structure in northern Gaza, but on Monday military spokesman Daniel Hagari said Palestinian militants and commanders have since returned to Al-Shifa “and turned it into a command center”. Witnesses reported air strikes and tanks near the hospital compound which is crowded with thousands of displaced civilians as well as the sick and wounded.

The Zionist army identified one of the dead as Hamas internal security official Fayq Al-Mabhouh. A Gaza police source confirmed his death and said he was a brigadier general in the force. Zionist troops previously raided Al-Shifa in November, sparking an international outcry. — AFP

International

Hong Kong passes tough new national security law

Law to give government more power to curb dissent, curtailing people's rights, freedoms

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's legislature unanimously passed a new national security law on Tuesday, introducing penalties such as life imprisonment for crimes related to treason and insurrection, and up to 20 years' jail for the theft of state secrets.

The law, which the United States, Britain and the European Union have warned could further curtail freedoms in Hong Kong, was fast-tracked through the city's rubber-stamp legislature. "Today is a historic moment for Hong Kong," city leader John Lee said after the vote, adding the law would come into effect on March 23.

Commonly referred to as Article 23, the home-grown legislation will work in tandem with the national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 in the wake of huge and at times violent democracy protests. The new law punishes dozens of new and revamped offences under five categories: treason, insurrection, theft of state secrets and espionage, sabotage endangering national security, and external interference.

Lee had said the law was needed to plug the legislative gaps left by Beijing's law — which targets secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces. He had also repeatedly cited Hong Kong's "constitutional responsibility" to create it as required by the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution since its handover from Britain to China in 1997. The law "will allow Hong Kong to effectively

prevent, prohibit and punish espionage activities, plots and traps set up by foreign intelligence units, infiltration and sabotage carried out by hostile forces," Lee said Tuesday.

He added that it would also "effectively prevent black-clad violence and color revolution", a reference to the democracy protests which kicked off in 2019. One of the last-minute amendments added last week by the government empowers Lee and his cabinet to create new offences — to account for "unforeseen circumstances" — punishable by up to seven years in prison.

'An effective lock'

Sanctioned by the United States for his oversight of the protests in his role as security chief, Lee has called the law "an effective lock to prevent burglars" as authorities seek to combat "threats posed by external forces and local terrorism".

Penalties run up to life in prison for sabotage endangering national security, treason and insurrection; 20 years for espionage and sabotage; and 14 years for external interference.

It has also expanded the British colonial-era offence of "sedition" to include inciting hatred against China's Communist leadership, with an aggravated sentence up to 10 years in jail. And, as with its 2020 predecessor, some offences committed outside Hong Kong will fall under its jurisdiction.



HONG KONG: Lawmakers vote for Article 23 in the chamber of the Legislative Council after the conclusion of the readings of the Article 23 National Security Law, in Hong Kong on March 19, 2024. — AFP

As part of the 1997 handover from Britain, Hong Kong was guaranteed certain freedoms — as well as judicial and legislative autonomy — for 50 years in a deal known as "One country, two systems".

This has helped cement the city's status as a world-class business hub, bolstered by a reliable judiciary

and political freedoms distinct from the mainland. Britain's foreign minister David Cameron had urged the government to "reconsider" the law, while the United States had said it "risks compounding the 2020 National Security Law that has curtailed the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong". — AFP

The Netherlands: The world's global legal battlefield

THE HAGUE: From conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East to salt mining in Brazil — courts in the Netherlands have become Ground Zero in a global legal battlefield with far-reaching implications. A strong legal tradition, home to many multinationals and international organizations, and global ease of reach: the country has several trump cards making it the preferred legal arbiter of choice.

Three months into 2024, the city of The Hague's two most influential international courts have already cast headline-grabbing rulings on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the spiraling Zionist war in Gaza.

In early March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for two high-ranking Russian commanders, while in January the UN's top International Court of Justice (ICJ) handed down emergency measures telling the Zionist entity to boost aid in Gaza and to protect its population. At the same time, a local civil court handed down a landmark judgement halting the supply of F-35 fighter jet parts from the Netherlands to the Zionist entity.

Victims of devastating salt mining in the Brazilian city of Maceio are suing petrochemical giant Braskem for compensation before a Rotterdam court — one of many international compensation suits launched in recent years. An Amsterdam court in February quashed an appeal by Russia in a record \$50-billion case involving a compensation claim by former shareholders of the dismantled oil giant Yukos. Recent years have also seen Dutch courts hand down rulings in major climate cases including one won by NGO group Milieudefensie in 2021. In that case, the court ordered petrochemical giant Shell to curtail greenhouse emissions in what is considered the first major climate change ruling against a corporation.

Legal hotbed

So why is the Netherlands a hotbed of international litigation? "I do think it is potentially easier to launch lawsuits in the Netherlands," said Cecily Rose, assistant professor of public international law at Leiden University. "The legal bar for bringing collective actions is relatively low in the Netherlands, and this does have the effect of making it easier for NGOs to pursue public interest litigation in Dutch courts," she told AFP.

"Cases with international implications regularly reach the Dutch courts partly because the Netherlands is home to transnational companies with a global reach, such as Shell, Unilever or Heineken," added Leon Castellanos-Jankiewicz, senior researcher at the Asser Institute for International and European Law. "These multinationals are subject to Dutch law and therefore the Dutch courts have jurisdiction over these entities and their dealings," he told AFP.

The country also has a highly skilled legal workforce and a strong belief in upholding the law.

"The Netherlands has a tradition of placing strong emphasis on the development of international law," Castellanos-Jankiewicz said. "Promoting the development of the international legal order is a permanent objective of Dutch foreign policy," he said. Coupled with good infrastructure with global reach and the perception that the Netherlands was a "neutral ground" made it an appealing choice for parties seeking an impartial resolution, experts said.

'Peace and Justice'

The Netherlands also hosted several international courts and tribunals as well as agencies such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and Europol, "embedding these organizations in the Dutch legal landscape," legal experts said.

Nestled on the Dutch coast between Amsterdam and Rotterdam, The Hague has always been seen as the "City of Peace and Justice" with its first international arbitral body, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, established in 1899. Still existing today, the PCA laid the groundwork for later bodies established in the city, including the ICJ after World War II and the ICC, which opened its doors in 2002. Other international courts, including the now defunct Yugoslav war crimes tribunal (ICTY) and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers also found a home here. — AFP



SEOUL: Medical workers walk outside a hospital in Seoul on March 19, 2024. — AFP

South Korea begins suspending doctors' licenses over walkout

SEOUL: South Korea has suspended the medical licenses of two doctors, the Korean Medical Association said Tuesday, in the first punitive action over a month-long strike that has caused healthcare chaos. Thousands of junior doctors stopped working February 20 to protest government reforms aimed at creating more medics to end shortages and deal with a rapidly ageing population, forcing hospitals to cancel crucial treatments and surgeries including chemotherapy and C-sections.

The government has repeatedly urged doctors to return to their patients, warning of legal action for non-compliance, but the standoff has spiraled, with senior doctors now threatening to join their junior colleagues and no serious talks underway.

Two officials from the Korean Medical Association, which has been heavily involved in the walkout, were informed Monday that their licenses had been suspended for three months, purportedly for instigating the strike. "The two officials, Kim Taek-woo and Park Myung-ha, received the notice yesterday," spokesperson Lee Seok-young told AFP.

A health ministry spokesperson told AFP that the government would not provide confirmation regarding the specific administrative actions taken against individual physicians. The KMA has previously accused the government of using "intimidation tactics" to try to force doctors back to work, and said it was turning the country into a "totalitarian state".

Under South Korean law, doctors are restricted from striking, and the government has requested police investigate people connected to the stoppage,

including officials at the KMA. "The government deeply regrets the current situation where even professors are considering resigning following the footsteps of trainees," second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told reporters Tuesday.

"Once again, the government is willing to talk to the medical community at any time without conditions," he said, although Seoul has emphasized that abandoning the reform plan is not an option.

'Save lives'

Seoul is pushing to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools annually from next year to address what it says is one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed nations. Doctors say they fear the reform will erode the quality of service and medical education, but proponents of the plan accuse them of trying to safeguard their salaries and social status.

President Yoon Suk Yeol on Tuesday said the reforms were necessary, and lamented the fierce opposition from physicians. "Medical licenses granted to save the lives of the people should not be used as a means of threatening and destabilizing the people," Yoon said.

The reforms will "strengthen essential medical care in the (non-capital) regions," he added. Experts say that one of the South Korean medical system's biggest problems is that many doctors are concentrated in the Seoul metropolitan area leading to access issues in rural areas.

Last week, the junior doctors said they had submitted a "letter requesting emergency intervention" from the International Labour Organization (ILO), claiming they were being "forced" by the government into unwanted labor. The government has dismissed the claim. The reform plan enjoys broad public support, but a new poll by local media found 34 percent of people wanted the government to negotiate to end the standoff. — AFP

Deforestation in Brazil Amazon lowest since 2018

RIO DE JANEIRO: Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon in the first two months of 2024 was at its lowest level for that period in the last six years, a report published Monday said. In January and February, 196 square kilometers (76 square miles) of the Amazon was deforested, 63 percent less than in the same period in 2023.

That area is still equivalent to almost 327 soccer fields per day, according to the environmental group Imazon, which shared the data from its Deforestation Alert System (SAD). "The first two months of 2024 ended with the lowest amount of forest clearing in the last six years, since 2018," said the organization, which has carried out satellite monitoring for nearly two decades.

Of Brazil's nine Amazonian states, three (Amazonas, Mato Grosso and Roraima) accounted for 77 percent of the deforested area in January and February. Deforestation in Roraima has encroached on Indigenous lands, Imazon's report said, including areas belonging to the Yanomami people. The Yanomami have been ravaged by a humanitarian crisis blamed on illegal gold mining, which is destroying the jungle and polluting rivers.



BRAZIL: A drone view of the Manicore river, deep inside the Amazonia rainforest, Amazonas state on June 7, 2022. — AFP

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's government has committed to combating deforestation, which dramatically worsened under his predecessor, agribusiness ally Jair Bolsonaro, who held office from 2019 through 2022.

Bolsonaro drew international criticism for presiding over a 75-percent increase in average annual

deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon compared to the previous decade. "The data shows that we still have a great challenge ahead," said Larissa Amorim, a researcher with Imazon. "Achieving the zero deforestation goal promised (by Lula) by 2030 is exceedingly necessary to combat climate change," she added. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

Business

Burgan Bank participates in event on women's empowerment in Kuwait

In continued efforts to empower women in the workplace and the community



KUWAIT: Participants of the Kuwait Women's Economic Empowerment Platform's (KWEEN) event pose for photos.

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, represented by Fadel Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer – Kuwait, recently took part in the Kuwait Women's Economic Empowerment Platform's (KWEEN) event, which was held at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC). The event called on all private sector institutions to collaborate in shaping the future of women in Kuwait. The bank's participation comes as part of its unwavering dedication to supporting and empowering women in Kuwait and especially in the Banking sector.

Commenting on the event, Fadel said: "Women, inside Burgan Bank and across our community, are integral to any serious plan for positive change and development, and acknowledging their unique value and vital role is the only viable path toward the growth and evolution of society and the domestic economy. As a signatory of KWEEN, it was an honor to represent Burgan Bank among several other private sector entities that continue to place women's empowerment at the heart of their human capital development efforts and strategies."

The event shed light on several key topics that represent both challenges and opportunities for the growth of women in the business and economic landscape of Kuwait – whether they are employees or business owners. Under the umbrella of Burgan's adherence to the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, as well as the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, and Kuwait's Vision 2035, the Bank recorded numerous achievements on the women's empowerment front. This includes Burgan

Bank's commitment to achieving and maintaining gender equality in the workplace, resembled in its Kuwaiti female workforce that makes up around 48% of all staff, marking one of the highest rates of female employment across the Kuwaiti banking sector. Furthermore, Burgan Bank remains dedicated to offering its employees of both genders equal compensation per job level, ensuring that they are all given equal opportunities for growth, especially in the leadership positions. To this end, the

Bank offered its female employees multiple channels of personal and professional development, whereby women received 50 percent of the total hours of training fulfilled by all staff. Burgan Bank's efforts to empower women among its staff and its community include participating in several women-centric awareness campaigns, such as breast cancer awareness campaigns and workshops and the annual UN-led "Orange the World" campaign, which calls for ending the violence against women and girls.



Fadel Abdullah

Nvidia unveils AI 'superchips'

SAN JOSE, US: Nvidia on Monday unveiled its latest family of chips for powering artificial intelligence, as it seeks to consolidate its position as the major supplier to the AI frenzy. "We need bigger GPUs. So ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce you to a very, very big GPU," said CEO Jensen Huang at a developers conference in California, referring to the graphics processors that are vital in the creation of generative AI.

The event, dubbed the "AI Woodstock" by Wedbush analyst Dan Ives, has become a can't-miss date on big tech's calendar due to Nvidia's singular role in the AI revolution that has taken the world by storm since the introduction of ChatGPT in late 2022. "I hope you realize this is not a concert, this is a developers conference," Huang joked as he took the stage in a packed arena usually reserved for ice hockey games and concerts.

Nvidia's powerful GPU chips and software are an integral ingredient in the creation of generative AI, with rivals like AMD or Intel still struggling to match the power and efficiency of the company's blockbuster H100 product, launched in 2022. Apple, Microsoft and Amazon have also developed chips with AI in mind, but for now are stuck trying to get their hands on Nvidia's coveted products in order to deliver on their own AI promises. That lynchpin role in the AI revolution has seen Nvidia's share price rise roughly 250 percent over the last 12 months, propelling the company above Amazon when measured by market capitalization, behind only Microsoft and Apple.

Not letting up, Nvidia told the audience of developers and tech executives it was releasing an even more powerful processor and accompanying software, on a platform called Blackwell — named after David Blackwell, the first Black academic inducted into the National Academy of Science. Blackwell GPUs were AI "superchips" four times as fast as the previous generation when training AI models, Nvidia said.

Georgia weathered multiple shocks since COVID: IMF

WASHINGTON, DC: Georgia has weathered well multiple shocks since the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by increased tourism, transit trade, and financial inflows linked to Russia's war in Ukraine and swift policy responses, the International Monetary Fund said on Monday.

Financial inflows triggered by the war in Ukraine have moderated but remain above pre-war levels, supporting continued strong economic performance. Growth remained above trend at 7.5 percent in 2023, driven largely by tourism, trade, construction, and financial services as well as continued strong investments. Growth is expected to ease to 5.7 percent in 2024, with consumption playing a larger role supported by strong real wage growth and employment.



SAN JOSE, United States: Protesters shout outside the annual Nvidia GTC Artificial Intelligence Conference at SAP Center in San Jose, California, on March 18, 2024. — AFP

"The rate at which computing is advancing is insane," Huang said. They would also deliver 25 times the energy efficiency, Nvidia said, a key claim when the creation of AI is criticized for its ravenous needs for energy and natural resources when compared to more conventional computing.

Unlike its rivals Intel, Micron and Texas Instruments, Nvidia, like AMD, does not manufacture its own chips, but uses subcontractors, mainly the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. Given the geopolitical concerns with Taiwan and China, this could be a potential weak spot, and the US has banned Nvidia from sending its most powerful chips to Chinese companies.

Gr00T

Nvidia also announced other AI developments, including a platform for training humanoid robots. Project Gr00t, which Nvidia said was not named

after the "Guardians of the Galaxy" movie character Groot, was described as the "world's first human foundation model."

Gr00t-powered robots will be designed to understand what people say and mimic people's movements, learning from experience how to interact with the world, according to Nvidia. The models "will enable a robot to learn from a handful of human demonstrations so it can help with everyday tasks and emulate human movement just by observing us," Nvidia said. Nvidia said it was also working with Apple to put AI capabilities into the newly released Vision Pro spatial computing gear.

The collaboration comes as Apple is under pressure to show it is not being left behind by Amazon, Google, Meta and OpenAI when it comes to artificial intelligence. Nvidia also unveiled the Earth-2 Cloud Platform for predicting climate change, using simulation by AI supercomputers. — AFP

unwound. Inflation is expected to converge back to target in the medium term, the report said.

The current account deficit is estimated to have remained at a historic low of 4.5 percent of GDP in 2023, with lower remittances from Russia offset by an improved goods trade deficit helped by lower import prices. Gross international reserves stood at \$5 billion at end-2023, covering just above 3 months of imports. The current account deficit is expected to widen in 2024 to 6 percent of GDP as remittances continue to normalize and imports pick up. In the medium term, it should converge to 5.5 percent of GDP as the services trade balance continues to improve.

The fiscal deficit in 2023 (including budget lending) was 2.4 percent of GDP, compared to a budgeted deficit of 2.8 percent, reflecting overperformance in revenues. The 2024 budget targets a deficit of 2.5 percent of GDP, with increased revenues from CIT for banks and new gambling taxes financing increased expenditures, including on higher wages, social benefits, and capital investments. Public debt is expected to remain below 40 percent of GDP in 2024 and over the medium term, the statement added.

World Bank plans \$6bn of financial support for Egypt

WASHINGTON: The World Bank is planning to give Egypt more than \$6 billion in financial assistance over the next three years to help it meet its development priorities, the Washington-based lender announced Monday. "Over the coming three years, the World Bank Group intends to provide more than US\$6 billion of support to Egypt," the development lender said in a statement. This includes "US\$3 billion for financial support to Government's programs and US\$3 billion for the private sector (including mobilization) – subject to Board approval," it added.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous nation, is in dire need of financial help as it weathers a severe economic crisis marked by rapid inflation. Its economy, which is dominated by military-linked enterprises, has been hit hard by a series of economic shocks, including the recent Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea that have slashed Suez Canal revenues for Egypt and deprived it of a key source of foreign currency.

The World Bank Group is comprised of five separate agencies which deal with a range of issues including concessional lending, investment, and insurance. Its current portfolio with Egypt is worth more than \$8 billion. Its announcement Monday follows a flurry of recent support pledged by allies including the United Arab Emirates, and also by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank's sister organization in Washington. — AFP

Apple in talks to bring Google's Gemini AI to iPhone

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple is in advanced negotiations with Google to adopt its powerful Gemini AI models for the iPhone, Bloomberg reported on Monday. The move, if confirmed and resulting in a deal, would answer one of the big questions about the iPhone-maker's AI strategy, which has been criticized as lagging its tech giant rivals.

Google's share price soared by well over six percent on the news. Apple's was up by as much as 2.5 percent. According to Bloomberg, Apple is seeking to partner with Google for its next iOS operating system release and will likely feature on its next iPhone, expected later this year. Apple and Google are already locked in a search engine partnership that sees Google pay Apple tens of billions of dollars every year to give the search engine a prominent place on the iPhone.

That long-running search engine deal is facing a historic lawsuit from the US Department of Justice for alleged violations of antitrust law. Bloomberg reported that Apple had also held talks with OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, to partner on generative AI, without providing more details. Apple CEO Tim Cook last month said there would be major updates in store on the AI front, though some observers may be disappointed that the company is teaming up with others to deliver on AI. "For Google, any hypothetical deal with Apple could mean they essentially 'own' generative AI on mobile devices (Android + iOS)," said Colin Sebastian, an analyst at Baird. — AFP

NBK ranks among top-rated GCC FIs for climate actions by CDP

The only bank in Kuwait to receive this rating

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received a score of “C” for the second consecutive year in the categories of Climate Change and Forests 2023, as announced by CDP (formerly known as the Carbon Disclosure Project), a globally recognized non-profit organization overseeing the leading environmental disclosure platform.

NBK stands out as the sole bank in Kuwait to be rated by CDP, establishing its position among the leading financial institutions in the GCC engaged in the initiative. A “C” score

reflects the depth of understanding regarding various aspects such as climate change and forestry. It also indicates an in-depth analysis of how businesses approach important environmental topics, integrating them with their business methodology. This entails a holistic understanding of the outcomes of these practices and their effects on communities and ecosystems.

This rating aligns with NBK’s roadmap aimed at strengthening transparency regard-

ing the environmental impacts of the bank’s operations and its endeavors to mitigate emissions through CDP. The bank initiated its disclosures in 2021, signaling its commitment to transparency and emissions reduction. Moreover, this accomplishment underscores NBK’s leading position among the top-performing organizations in sustainable practices, highlighting its dedication to transparency and responsible environmental leadership.

NBK’s participation in the CDP strengthens its role in fulfilling the growing demand

for the second consecutive year, NBK sustains its robust ratings in the CDP, showcasing our dedication to advancing transparency regarding the environmental impacts of our operations. This commitment aligns with our efforts to facilitate the shift towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy and to contribute to realizing Kuwait’s sustainability vision. NBK has initiated crucial efforts to integrate ESG standards and climate risk considerations into its operational framework, acknowledging their pivotal role in fostering sustainable growth. Furthermore, the bank



- The score highlights the bank’s dedication to increasing transparency regarding the environmental impact of its operations.
- NBK’s disclosures provide an annual evaluation of its environmental performance, including energy and water consumption.
- The bank targets its sustainable assets portfolio to reach approximately \$10 billion by 2030.



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NBK’s participation in the CDP strengthens its role in fulfilling the growing demand for environmental transparency set by financial institutions, clients, and regulators. NBK has consistently provided an annual evaluation of its environmental performance, encompassing metrics such as energy and water consumption, waste management, resource utilization, and greenhouse gas emissions. This information is detailed in the bank’s annual sustainability reports, offering transparency regarding its environmental impact and operational carbon footprint.

actively collaborates with its customers to advocate for the adoption of sustainable practices, facilitating effective communication to catalyze collective efforts towards sustainability. Furthermore, the bank is actively exploring innovative research and development technologies to magnify our reliance on renewable energy and transition all its facilities into eco-friendly structures. Additionally, it seeks to quantify and assess the greenhouse gas emissions linked to its portfolio by aligning with international accounting frameworks

and utilizing greenhouse gas assessment tools. As a leading regional financial institution, the bank consistently seeks diverse approaches to evaluating risks associated with climate change, alongside managing its environmental impact operationally. This encompasses interactions with both customers and suppliers. NBK’s efforts align with its commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2060, with interim targets to decrease total operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025. Additionally, the bank aims to grow its portfolio of sustainable assets to approximately \$10 billion by 2030.

It further pledges to play a responsible role in supporting global en-

deavors to mitigate carbon emissions and address climate change risks by establishing clear, measurable, and accountable objectives. This commitment underscores NBK’s determination to integrate climate-related considerations into its future business strategies. CDP collaborates with over 740 financial institutions worldwide, overseeing assets exceeding \$136 trillion. Its objective is to encourage companies to disclose their environmental impacts, diminish greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water resources, and safeguard forests. In 2023, approximately 24,000 companies submitted their disclosures through this initiative. — AFP

Bank of Japan hikes rates for first time since 2007

TOKYO: Japan’s central bank pulled the plug Tuesday on its ultra-aggressive monetary stimulus program, hiking rates for the first time since the global financial crisis. The Bank of Japan’s outlier policy of negative rates and massive asset purchases was aimed at jump-starting economic growth and price rises after the “lost decades” of stagnation and deflation.

But on Tuesday, following months of speculation, the BoJ finally changed its policy rate range from -0.1 per-

cent to between zero and 0.1 percent, in its first hike since 2007. Officials “assessed the virtuous cycle between wages and prices” and concluded that “the price stability target of two percent would be achieved in a sustainable and stable manner”, it said. The move will make loans more expensive for consumers and businesses, but banks will be able to earn more money from lending.

It will also increase Japan’s bill for servicing the national debt, which at around 260 percent of national output is one of the world’s highest. The BoJ also called an end to other unorthodox policies including its yield curve control program, which allows bonds to move in a tight band, and the purchase of exchange-traded funds because they had “fulfilled their roles”.

But it said it would keep buying long-term government bonds. Taro Saito, senior economist at NLI Research Institute, told AFP that the move was a “great step for the BoJ towards normalization of its monetary policy

it has long craved for”. The US Federal Reserve and other central banks yanked up rates to rein in inflation after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

But despite inflation also exceeding four percent at one point, the BoJ kept its main rate below zero, where it has been since 2016. Because negative interest rates mean banks lose out by parking capital with the BoJ, the policy was aimed at encouraging them to lend to businesses.

The policy has sharply weakened the yen against the dollar, which is good news for exporters but not for consumers as it made imports more expensive. The yen fell past 150 per dollar and stocks gained as the BoJ’s comment that conditions would remain accommodative poured cold water on expectations of more hikes. “For the BoJ to take a next step, which will probably be a rate hike, a hurdle is high—it has to have clearer signs that the economy is improving,” said Saito. — AFP



TOKYO: Bank of Japan (BoJ) governor Kazuo Ueda speaks at a press conference after a two-day monetary policy meeting at the BOJ headquarters in Tokyo on March 19, 2024. — AFP

Ben & Jerry’s owner Unilever to spin off ice cream arm

LONDON: British consumer goods giant Unilever announced Tuesday that it will separate its ice cream unit, whose top-selling products include Ben & Jerry’s and Magnum, as a standalone business. The company also unveiled a major overhaul which it said would “impact” around 7,500 mainly office-based jobs worldwide and save 800 million euros (\$870 million) over the next three years.

“The separation of Unilever and Ice Cream in combination with the productivity programme will ensure that Unilever’s financial and management resources are focused on its strongest, global or scalable brands,” Unilever said in a statement. “These will have the capability to drive category expansion and deliver accelerated, sustainable levels of growth and improved profitability.”

The ice cream unit has five of the 10 biggest global brands, including Wall’s brand Cornetto and Carte D’Or, with turnover of 7.9 billion euros in 2023 --

although underlying sales growth was disappointing.

“A demerger of Ice Cream is the most likely separation route... Other options for separation will be considered to maximize returns for shareholders,” Unilever added Tuesday. Spin-off activity will start immediately with full separation expected by the end of 2025. Unilever added that its overhaul will see it focus on four divisions: Beauty & Wellbeing, Personal Care, Home Care, and Nutrition.

The multinational, which also produces Cif surface cleaner, Dove soap, Hellmann’s mayonnaise and Marmite yeast spread, predicted the move will improve its profit margins. “The board believes that Unilever should be increasingly focused on a portfolio of unmissably superior brands with strong positions in highly attractive categories that have complementary operating models.” It added: “After separating Ice Cream and implementing the productivity programme, Unilever will have a structurally higher margin.”

“Post separation, Unilever aims to deliver mid-single digit underlying sales growth and modest margin improvement.” Unilever added that ice cream activity has “distinct characteristics” when compared with its other businesses. “These include a supply chain and point of sale that support frozen goods, a different channel landscape, more seasonality, and greater capital intensity.” —AFP



TOKYO: A man walks in front of the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) on March 19, 2024. — AFP

financial markets as investors switch their cash to Japan in search of better returns as other central banks prepare to begin cutting.

Other stock markets were mixed on the eve of the Federal Reserve’s latest rate decision. There were gains in Sydney, Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok and Wellington, but Hong Kong and Shanghai fell, while Seoul, Mumbai, Taipei and Manila also registered losses.

In Europe, London nudged lower while Frankfurt and Paris rose by 0.4 percent and 0.3 percent respectively. While the Fed is forecast to keep rates on hold at a two-decade high, it will release its “dot plot” outlook for the rest of the year. Analysts see three cuts this year, half the amount predicted fairly recently, as US inflation remains high. June is penciled in as the first likely reduction. — AFP

Yen drops, stocks mixed as Japan hikes rates at last

LONDON: The yen weakened and Tokyo stocks rose Tuesday after the Bank of Japan hiked interest rates for the first time in 17 years owing to elevated inflation.

With Japan’s annual inflation rate consistently holding above the BoJ’s two-percent target and recent wage talks ending with bumper rises, the BoJ finally felt confident to pivot from a policy that has been an outlier in the global economy as other countries ramped up borrowing costs. The Japanese currency fell more than one percent against the dollar to 150.69 yen at 0955 GMT after the central bank also poured cold water on expectations of more hikes, sending the Tokyo stock market racing higher.

“The yen has weakened across the board while the Nikkei has surged higher. This is likely due in part to cautious signals from the BoJ which warned that the hike is unlikely to be followed quickly by further increases,” said TickMill analyst James Harte. Following months of speculation, the BoJ changed its policy rate range from minus 0.1 percent to between zero and 0.1 percent, in its first hike since 2007.

Several major central banks this week hold gatherings that will decide on interest rates, including the United States, Britain and Australia. Markets are waiting to see when they will start cutting borrowing costs after several hikes to combat soaring inflation.

The BoJ also said it would scrap its program of allowing government bond yields to move within a tight range—known as yield curve control—and stop buying risk assets such as exchange-traded funds and real estate investment trusts. There is concern that tighter Japanese policy could disrupt

Announcement Reminder

Invitation to Attend the General Assembly Meeting

Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)

Kuwaiti Shareholding Company (Public)

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company (**stc**) is pleased to invite you to attend the Ordinary General Assembly Meeting for the financial year ended 31 December 2023, which will be held on Wednesday 27 March 2024 at 11:30 a.m., at the Company's Headquarters - Olympia Mall / West Office Towers, where Shareholders shall be able to attend by their physical presence or electronically through Kuwait Clearing Company's platforms specified for holding Annual General Assembly Meetings to discuss the agenda of the Ordinary General Assembly Meeting.

Ordinary General Meeting Agenda	
First	Discussing and approving the Board of Directors' Report of the company's activity, financial position and business outcomes for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2023.
Second	Discussing and approving the External Auditor's Report on the results of the company's financial statements and approving the dividable net profit for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Third	Presenting and approving the Sharia Supervisory Board's report for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Fourth	Presenting and approving the Corporate Governance Report and the Audit Committee Report for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Fifth	Presenting any breaches monitored by the regulatory body/bodies and any penalties issued due to such breaches and led to [financial and non-financial] penalties against the company [if any], for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Sixth	Review and approve the financial statements and profit and loss accounts for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Seventh	Discussing the Board of Directors' recommendation to stop deducting any percentage for the voluntary reserve account from the net profits for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023 and following years.
Eighth	Discussing the Board of Directors' proposal to distribute cash dividends 35% of the company's total capital for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023, (i.e. 35 fils per share), to shareholders registered in the company's Shareholder Register as at the Maturity Date on Monday, April 15, 2024. The cash dividends shall be distributed to shareholders who are entitled to them, starting from Sunday, April 21, 2024, while authorizing the Board of Directors to change the dates mentioned in the previously specified entitlement schedule in the event that they are required to be changed [if necessary].
Ninth	Discussing the Board of Directors Members Remunerations, amounting to KWD 192,500 [one hundred and ninety-two thousand five hundred Kuwaiti dinars] for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023.
Tenth	Authorizing the Board of Directors to deal in the company's shares not exceeding 10% of the number of its shares, in accordance with the articles of Law No. 7 of 2010 and it's Executive Regulations and their amendments.
Eleventh	Discussing the executed related parties transaction during the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023, and authorizing the company to deal with related parties during the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024.
Twelfth	Discussing the release and discharge of the Board of Directors Members and absolving them from all liabilities related to their legal, financial, and administrative actions for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2023.
Thirteenth	Appointing or reappointing the company's External Auditor from the approved list of auditors at the Capital Markets Authority, taking into account their mandatory execution period for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024, While authorizing the Board of Directors to determine their fees.
Fourteenth	Appointing or reappointing the Sharia Board Members for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024, while authorizing the Board of Directors to determine their fees.
Fifteenth	Elect the Board of Directors Members for a three-year tenure.

Electronic Attendance: Shareholders wishing to attend the meeting electronically are required to register their names using the electronic voting service eAGM by filling up the intended form available on the website of the Kuwait Clearing Company (www.maqasa.com) in addition to providing the required documents in order to obtain the username and password which shall authorize them to attend and vote electronically on the agenda items of the Ordinary General Assembly. Participation and voting currently available until 08:00 a.m. of the day of the Ordinary General Assembly Meeting scheduled on Wednesday 27 March 2023, as per the Policies and Procedures Guidelines published on Kuwait Clearing Company's website with regards to convening the general assemblies through the electronic systems.

Physical Attendance: Shareholders wishing to attend the meeting physically should visit the Investor Relations Department at the Company's Headquarters - Olympia Mall / West Office Towers. Shareholders shall bring with them their share certificates or the original transfer receipt in order to obtain the attendance invitations and the AGM agenda.

In the absence of a quorum for the Ordinary General Assembly Meeting another meeting with the same agenda items and same place will be held on Tuesday, 16 April 2024, at 10:30 a.m. whereby, the attendance and voting shall be either physically or electronically.

Board of Directors



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2023 annual report



Gulf Bank holds ‘Nuqsat Al-Khaleej’ for the fourth consecutive year

Event in collaboration with numerous local restaurants and bakeries

KUWAIT: For the fourth consecutive year, Gulf Bank is organizing ‘Nuqsat Al-Khaleej’ as part of its various community events and initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, in collaboration with several local restaurants and bakeries, every Thursday.



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications, emphasized, “Annually, we prioritize arranging ‘Nuqsat Al-Khaleej’ to revive this authentic Kuwaiti tradition, and to enhance our engagement with the community throughout the holy month of Ramadan. Additionally, this initiative aids in supporting local SMEs, by promoting their products.”

Al-Mulaifi mentioned that Gulf Bank supports SMEs in expanding their product distribution to the public, allowing their restaurants and bakeries to tap into new customer segments, thus facilitating their growth and expansion. He emphasized that this initiative is one of Gulf Bank’s charitable events during the holy month of Ramadan, which reflects the bank’s involvement with the community over the last sixty years, and its integral part in Kuwait’s economic and social history.

Al-Mulaifi highlighted Gulf Bank’s unwavering commitment to sustainability programs spanning social, economic, and environmental aspects. These programs involve carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the bank and society. These initiatives are noteworthy as they align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Gulf Bank’s vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee’s role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the



Weekly Naqsa Al-Khaleej activities during Ramadan.

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.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia OKs ban on fishing subsidies

GENEVA: Russia on Monday joined the group of around 70 countries, including China and the United States, that have formally accepted the World Trade Organization’s ban on certain fishing subsidies. In a statement, the WTO said Russia’s ambassador Nikolai Platonov presented his country’s “instrument of acceptance” to the body’s director general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. “Russia’s formal acceptance demonstrates leadership and commitment to ocean sustainability,” Okonjo-Iweala said. “It brings this landmark agreement closer to entry into force, and underscores the importance of global cooperation for the benefit of people and planet.” She also urged all remaining WTO members to present their instruments of acceptance.— AFP

Brazil’s Embraer in black in 2023

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian Embraer, the world’s third-biggest plane-maker after Airbus and Boeing, on Monday reported a net profit of \$164 million for 2023, after posting strong results in the third and fourth quarters. For the period October to December, the company reported profit of \$192.6 million, up from \$22.9 million in the same quarter of 2022. Embraer said it had nearly erased a loss of \$185 million reported in 2022. In 2023, the company delivered a total of 181 jets—a 13-percent increase from the previous year. Of the total, 64 were commercial aircraft, 115 executive jets and two military C-390s. Embraer said it expected even better results in 2024, with plans to deliver up to 80 commercial planes.—AFP

Tata Steel to close UK coke ovens

LONDON: Indian-owned Tata Steel UK said Monday that it would shut down coke ovens at its Port Talbot steelworks in south Wales starting this week—months earlier than previously announced. The ovens, which had initially been planned to close from July, are used to turn coal into coke, a key raw material used in the steel-making process. Tata Steel UK chief Rajesh Nair said the date had been brought forward to Wednesday “as a result of significantly deteriorating operational stability”. “The performance of the coke ovens has been deteriorating over many months, despite some Herculean efforts by the teams there,” he said.— AFP

United CEO vows enhanced safety

NEW YORK: United Airlines is redoubling safety training following a number of incidents in recent weeks, the company’s chief executive told customers Monday. United has experienced “a number of incidents” that are “unrelated” but serve as “reminders of the importance of safety,” Chief Executive Scott Kirby said in an email to customers. Kirby said the company is reviewing the episodes and would use “those insights to inform our safety training and procedures across all employee groups.” The missive comes after the carrier discovered Friday that a jet was missing an external panel following its landing in Portland, Oregon from San Francisco.—AFP

Evergrande chair to be banned from securities market for life

BEIJING: Chinese regulators will ban the chairman of property giant Evergrande from the securities market for life on grounds of financial fraud, a subsidiary of the company said Monday. Heavily indebted Evergrande has become a potent symbol of the years-long crisis in China’s property market, a crucial pillar of growth in the world’s second-largest economy.

The company has struggled to repay creditors for years, defaulting in 2021 and becoming subject to a winding-up order by a Hong Kong court earlier this year. On Monday, its flagship unit Hengda Real Estate said in a filing to the Shenzhen stock exchange that it had received an “advance notice” from the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) regarding “administrative penalties and market bans targeting... illegal and illicit behaviors”.

The CSRC plans to rule in favor of a lifetime ban for Evergrande chairman Xu Jiayin, the filing said.

The regulator is set to conclude that Xu, also known by his Cantonese name Hui Ka Yan, “made decisions and organized the implementation of fi-

nancial fraud, using particularly egregious means and under particularly serious circumstances”. Xu is already under criminal investigation in mainland China.

He will be fined 47 million yuan (\$6.5 million), according to the statement, and Hengda itself will “be ordered to make corrections and be issued with a warning as well as a fine of 4.175 billion yuan (\$580 million)”. Former Evergrande CEO Xia Haijun will also be given a lifetime securities market ban and fined a total of 15 million yuan for helping to prepare false financial reports, the filing said.

Evergrande was once China’s biggest real estate firm, a titan in a sector that ballooned as property became the cornerstone of a burgeoning middle class’s growing wealth. But it accumulated massive loans at a time when credit flowed freely, and was left owing more than \$300 billion after Beijing turned off the taps to rein in the sector in 2020. Unable to repay interest on its loans, the company formally defaulted the following year, sending shockwaves through the industry.

In January, a court in the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong issued a winding-up order for Evergrande, ruling that the company had failed to come up with a debt repayment plan that suited its creditors. Evergrande has insisted that its operations in the mainland will be unaffected by the decision, and



Xu Jiayin

analysts have cautioned that its creditors are unlikely to get repaid in full.

Several other Chinese real estate firms have crumpled under massive debts in recent years, prompting Beijing to issue several rounds of bailout funds for the embattled sector.

The government provided nearly 10 trillion yuan in loans to the property sector last year, though analysts warn the crisis is far from over. It is one of several major headaches afflicting Chinese policymakers, with the economy also suffering from chronic low consumption, high youth unemployment and a rapidly ageing population.— AFP

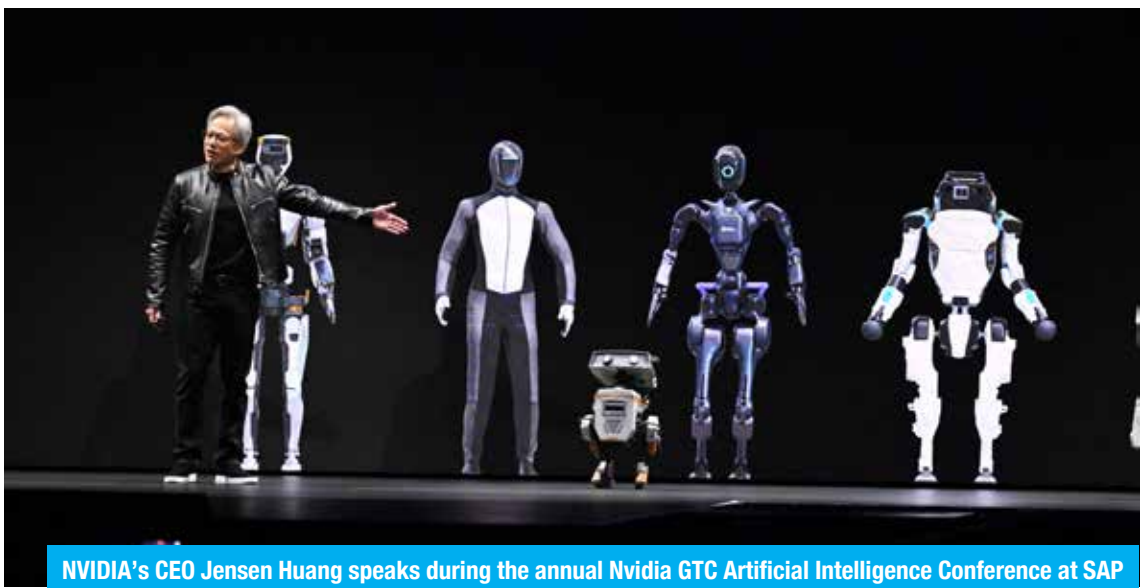
Nvidia ramps up collaboration with Chinese auto giants

SAN JOSE: Nvidia on Monday announced a major expansion of its collaboration with world-leading BYD and other Chinese electric car makers, including on the development of autonomous AI-boosted vehicles. The move deepens Nvidia’s connections with the Chinese EV industry even as it is separately prohibited by the United States from exporting its most powerful AI hardware to China.

BYD, which beat Elon Musk’s Tesla in sales in the last quarter of 2023, is the latest Chinese auto firm to use Nvidia’s DRIVE Thor, an all-in-one vehicle control system that is bolstered by powerful generative AI features. “Today we’re announcing that BYD, the world’s largest EV company, is adopting our next-generation (AV computer),” Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said at a developers conference.

Nvidia said other major Chinese EV firms, including XPeng, Li Auto, ZEEKR and GAC Aion have also adopted the Thor platform, which was first announced in 2022.

“DRIVE Thor is poised to revolutionize the automotive landscape, ushering in an era where generative AI defines the driving experience,” Nvidia said in a statement. The company said BYD will also use Nvidia’s infrastructure for “cloud-based AI development and training technologies”. Thor is expected to roll out for production vehicles as early as 2025, ac-



NVIDIA’s CEO Jensen Huang speaks during the annual Nvidia GTC Artificial Intelligence Conference at SAP Center in San Jose, California, on March 18, 2024. — AFP

cording to Nvidia. The company has skyrocketed to become one of the most valuable businesses in the world on the back of the AI frenzy sparked by the success of OpenAI’s ChatGPT.

It is prohibited, however, from selling its most powerful chips to Chinese companies under US rules. Washington has said these restrictions are meant to prevent China’s military and security services from getting tech that could help develop advanced military equipment and applications, including AI.

Beijing has slammed these curbs as “bullying” and “technological terrorism”. Danny Shapiro, Nvidia’s vice president for automotive, has in the past told US

media that customers in this sector are not impacted by the restrictions. AFP has asked Nvidia if its automotive products and services are affected by the US restrictions. There is reportedly also apprehension in Beijing about the extensive relationship between Chinese EV companies and US tech suppliers. The Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) has “quietly asked” auto companies such as BYD to boost their purchases from domestic chipmakers to lower their dependence on foreign firms, Bloomberg News reported last week, citing unnamed sources. AFP has contacted the ministry for comment.— AFP

Vietnam property boss on trial in \$355m bond scam

HANOI: A top Vietnamese property tycoon went on trial Tuesday accused of cheating thousands of investors in a \$355 million bond scam, in the communist nation’s latest criminal case targeting high-flying business leaders.

Vietnam has embarked on a sweeping graft crackdown in recent years, with corrupt officials and senior business figures among 4,400 people indicted in more than 1,700 cases since 2021.

Do Anh Dung, head of the Tan Hoang Minh group, which specialises in luxury offices and apartments, went on trial in Hanoi on Tuesday alongside his son

Do Hoang Viet and 13 others on fraud charges. They are accused of illegally acquiring \$355 million in a bond sale to 6,630 investors—all of whom have been invited to attend the trial, which is expected to last around three weeks.

Thousands took up the invitation and poured into the Hanoi People’s Court, where a large viewing area was set up with CCTV to allow the victims to follow proceedings. According to previous state media reports, by January 2022 the Tan Hoang Minh group was struggling with debts of some \$810 million because of stalled projects and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The defendants sold bonds to raise capital, promising investors high returns, but embezzled the \$355 million raised, the VNexpress news site reported, quoting a copy of the indictment.

The father and son have already repaid the \$355 million, according to state media. One vic-

tim who attended court told AFP she invested \$20,000 of family savings in the bonds and was glad the authorities had brought the case. “I have not received anything. I feel so stupid investing in these bonds,” 47-year-old office worker Phuong, who gave only one name, said. “Now I really hope they give the money paid by the boss of Tan Hoang Minh to people like us.” Thuy, 72, said she invested her life savings of \$40,000 in the bonds.

“I really don’t know whether I will get all my money back,” she told AFP. “I don’t know whether I want them to be jailed for long or what. I just want my money back.” In the country’s biggest ever fraud case, Truong My Lan, chairwoman of the Van Thinh Phat property development group, is currently on trial in Ho Chi Minh City accused of embezzling \$12.5 billion.

The trial of 86 people, including former senior state bank and government officials, is expected to end in late April.— AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

NEW PICTURES OF KATE PUBLISHED A WEEK AFTER PHOTO-EDITING FURORE

British media on Monday published new images of Catherine, Princess of Wales, a week after a furore over an edited photograph turned into a “PR disaster”. British tabloid The Sun published a video and a photograph of a smiling Kate, 42, walking alongside her husband, Prince William, at a farmer’s market in Windsor, west of the capital London. “Great to see you Kate,” said The Sun on Monday evening, alongside the images of the princess wearing leggings and a black top.

Kate was at the centre of an uproar last week after she admitted to editing an official portrait of her and her three children that was released by Buckingham Palace on Mothering Sunday.

It came after Kate had not been seen at a public event since attending a Christmas Day church service, and underwent abdominal surgery in January, fuelling speculation about her health. Instead of calming fears over her health, the edited picture sent the rumor mill into overdrive as media scrambled to pull the picture.

Kate apologized but faced criticism even from usually supportive media. British media said that these new images were taken on Saturday on a shopping trip. The Sun — a usually pro-royal family publication — said that experts had decried the video as a “perfect answer to trolls”. It said that William, the heir to the throne, and Kate were also present at a sports event on Sunday in

which their three children — George, Charlotte and Louis — took part.

Another newspaper that is often supportive of the royals, The Daily Mail, lauded an “image that will silence the conspiracy theorists”. The image “will reassure fans she is making a good recovery from her abdominal surgery”, added the Mail, which last week described the edited photograph fiasco as a “PR disaster”.

Before its release, Kate had actually already been photographed in a car with William. But rumors about her health have persisted for weeks. British media over the weekend said that Kate is still not due to return to public duties until mid-April. — AFP



A visitor looks at a painting entitled ‘Mother and child’ (Paris, 1921).



A visitor walks past an oil on wood painting entitled ‘Fernande with Mantilla’ (Gosol, 1906).



Visitors look at an oil painting entitled ‘Paul on a donkey’ (Paris, 1923).

Ex K-pop star leaves jail after five-year rape, spycam term

Former K-pop star Jung Joon-young left prison Tuesday after completing a five-year term for gang rape and illicit filming, in one of South Korea’s high profile spycam scandals. Jung was found guilty of rape on two occasions in 2016 and of filming himself having intercourse with other women without their knowledge and sharing the footage without their consent. Known as “molka” in Korean, spycam videos are typically made by men who secretly film women in schools, toilets and elsewhere, although the term can also be applied to clandestinely-shot footage of consensual sex.

Jung’s case was one of a series of high-profile sex scandals involving male celebrities which emerged at the height of a local #MeToo movement, when thousands of women protested in the capital Seoul in 2018, chanting: “My life is not your porn”. Another K-pop star and a former member of popular boyband BIGBANG, Seungri, was found to have received Jung’s videos and was later separately found guilty of multiple charges linked to a sex and drugs scandal at his “Burning Sun” nightclub.



K-pop star Jung Joon-young

Wearing a black hat and mask, the 35-year-old Jung walked out of the prison in Mokpo, some 350 kilometers (218 miles) south of Seoul, without talking to waiting press early Tuesday, the News1 agency reported. Jung rose to fame in 2012 when he came third in the audition show “Super Star K” and had a number of solo hits before the spycam scandal emerged in early 2019, when he announced his retirement from entertainment business.

At the time the rape accusations had yet to emerge, but he said he had “committed crimes that cannot be forgiven”. Goo Hara, a former member of girl group Kara, died by suicide in 2019 after she was blackmailed over “revenge porn” by an ex-boyfriend.

South Korean international footballer Hwang Ui-jo is currently under investigation over allegations that he filmed sexual encounters without consent. Hwang, who is currently on loan from Nottingham Forest at Turkish club Alanyaspor, denies the charges. — AFP

Malaga Picasso Museum reorders works in new exhibition



Women look at an oil and charcoal painting entitled ‘Woman with Arms Crossed’ (Paris, 1919-1920) during the official unveiling of ‘Pablo Picasso: structures of invention, the unity of a life’s work’ exhibition in Malaga’s Picasso museum. — AFP photos



A visitor looks at an oil-painted wooden box entitled ‘Journal and Glass’ (Paris, 1923).

The Picasso Museum in Malaga, the southern Spanish city where the artist was born, will open a new exhibition on Tuesday which groups his works according to theme instead of by period. The show - which runs until March 2027 - brings together 141 Pablo Picasso works that the artist kept for himself, including 10 which were never before seen in Spain.

“We have not followed chronology strictly. We do begin with the very early work of Picasso and we end with the last work that he created but with that we often are combining works from different decades,” said the curator of the exhibition, Michael FitzGerald, a professor of art history at Trinity College in the United States. “It is a group of works, paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints that represents the entire production of Picasso I hope very accurately. and we particularly emphasized ceramics among them which is a part of Picasso’s work that is often not shown and not perhaps taken as seriously as it should.”

Museums have traditionally displayed works by Picasso grouped according to his key periods, from blue, pink and cubist to surrealist. Picasso’s great-grandson, Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, said combining works of distinct periods and techniques “allow us to link different moments of his life”.

Among the works never exhibited before in Spain is a 1922 painting called “Paul” which depicts the artist’s son as well as the 1933 sculpture “Femme accoudée” (1933) and a dish decorated with a bull’s head from the 1950s. Opened in 2003 in a 16th century mansion, Malaga’s Picasso Museum is located just a couple of hundred meters (yards) from the house where the artist was born in 1881.

Picasso left for Paris in 1904 and most of his adult years were spent in France where he died in 1973. The Picasso Museum in the French capital houses the world’s biggest collection of the artist’s works. — AFP



Culinary chefs celebrate their Michelin stars on stage during the Michelin Guide for France 2024 awards ceremony in Tours, center France. - AFP photos



Three Michelin-starred French chef for La Table du Castellet in Le Castellet (Var) Fabien Ferre (top left) and Three Michelin-starred French chef of Gabriel at La Réserve Paris hotel Jerome Bancel (top right) celebrate their three Michelin stars on stage flanked by one and two Michelin star-awarded chefs during the Michelin Guide for France 2024 awards ceremony.



One Michelin-starred French chef of L'Espadon of Parisian hotel Le Ritz, Eugenie Beziat poses during a photocall as part of the Michelin Guide for France 2024 awards ceremony.

MICHELIN UNVEILS 62 NEWLY STARRED FRENCH RESTAURANTS

The Michelin Guide unveiled its annual list of the best French restaurants Monday, praising the “cultural dynamism” of a new generation of chefs, though again honoring only a handful of women. After a long period of resting on the laurels of its gastronomic reputation, France has seen a flourishing of new establishments in the last decade or so, absorbing international ideas and increasingly focusing on sustainability.

Two restaurants achieved the highest pinnacle of three stars at the annual ceremony, this year held in the Loire Valley city of Tours: Le Gabriel in Paris and La Table du Castellet in the southern Provence region. A total of 62 restaurants were awarded at least one star — most joining the Michelin ranks for the first time, including 23 that have been open for less than a year.

The Espadon at the Paris Ritz won a star for the innovative Africa-inspired cooking of chef Eugenie Beziat. Reflecting the continued male dominance of the industry, Beziat was one of just six women earning a star. “Hopefully I’m here to inspire (other women) but I don’t have the answers. Everyone has a place in my kitchen as long as they work hard,” she told AFP.

Speaking on stage, Michelin Guide director Gwendal Poullennec acknowledged: “There are too few women at the head of kitchens despite their being more and more numerous in culinary schools and restaurant teams. “It’s a reality we deplore,” he said, adding he remained

hopeful about “the strong initiatives to promote talented young women.”

‘Age doesn’t matter’
La Table du Castellet, which focuses on locally-sourced seafood and vegetables, went straight to the top ranking in its first year under Fabien Ferre. At just 35, he is now the youngest chef in France with three stars. “Age doesn’t matter. Life is made of failures. I’ve had them and yet I’m here being crowned... you have to fight,” a tearful Ferre told AFP immediately after earning his three-starred chef’s whites.

The Michelin Guide celebrated his “perfectly executed creative dishes” and “deep and punchy sauces”. Le Gabriel is an exclusive eatery near the Champs-Elysees in Paris inspired by head chef Jerome Bancel’s native Brittany, where the dinner menu starts at 278 euros.

Michelin praised Bancel’s “cosmopolitan alchemist skills”, singling out his lobster cooked with binchotan (a carbon normally used in Japanese cooking), almond praline and peach with verberna. “All these years of working without any recompense and moments of self-doubt,” a choked-up Bancel told AFP, adding he couldn’t wait for the tears and cries of joy when he walked back into the kitchen on Tuesday morning.

There are now 30 restaurants with three stars in France, 75 with two, and 534 with one. Many were rewarded Monday for their sustainable, locally-sourced cuisine. “French gastronomy is no longer

stuck in the past,” Poullennec told AFP before the ceremony. “There is a very clear emphasis on the ‘terroirs’ — the local agricultural fabric.”

Demotions
Michelin announced demotions two weeks ago — done in advance to avoid



any bitter taste at the ceremony. A total of 28 lost a star this year, including one three-star establishment. The annual ceremony has become a touring affair around France since the Covid-19 pandemic, with the last two held in Strasbourg and Cognac.

That reflects the spread of France’s best restaurants beyond Paris, with re-

gional eateries accounting for most of the new stars in recent years. Some 40 small municipalities and villages find themselves with a Michelin-starred restaurant in the new edition. Among top chefs, the Michelin Guide is as feared and criticized as it is respected.

Its anonymous reviewers can make

or break reputations, with very tangible impacts on the fragile bottom lines of restaurants. Tyre-manufacturing brothers Andre and Edouard Michelin launched their first guide in 1900 to encourage motorists to discover restaurants around France. — AFP

The secret agents of the Michelin Guide

They are paid to eat in the best restaurants in the world — but the price is having to lie even to their friends about the job. Hidden amongst hundreds of guests descending on the 16th century Chateau de Chambord in the Loire Valley for a luxurious dinner ahead of the Michelin Guide’s annual ceremony on Monday was the group’s covert inspectors.

One guest at the weekend event told AFP he worked in the automobile industry — plausible given Michelin’s main business of selling tyres. But his knowledge of France’s best restaurants was suspiciously encyclopedic. Whether or not he was a Michelin inspector would remain a mystery, since they are sworn to secrecy.

Each year, the guide receives 8,000 spontaneous applications to become an inspector, its boss Gwendal Poullennec told AFP. The key criteria are “professionalism” and “openness” — to travel, different cultures and new experiences, he added. Michelin does not say how many it employs — part of the strict secrecy it maintains to ensure they are never recognized by a restaurant and given preferential treatment. The guide does reveal that its inspectors currently include 25 different nationalities, and men and women of all ages, operating across the 45 destinations covered by Michelin.

Undercover
It is a full-time job, and all are drawn from the world of fine dining and hospitality: applicants must have at least 10 years of experience as chefs, sommeliers or hoteliers, according to the guide’s website. A new inspector is paired with a more experienced colleague for a training period of up to two years — or around 800 meals — to learn the Michelin method, the organization told AFP.

The inspector then lives undercover. Only their inner circle of family are allowed to know — and they have an interest in keeping quiet since they often tag along to meals to avert suspicion. The most common cover story that inspectors give their friends and wider family is that they are “consulting” with restaurants on their business strategies — a good excuse to travel and indulge.

They give false names and even change their phone numbers when making reservations — vital since many restaurants now have applications to scan their bookings for journalists and potential inspectors. The reviews require an excellent memory. The inspector must recall the tiniest details of the food, service and ambiance — right down to the appearance of the toilets — without taking notes, though phone pictures are now common.

They must also research the wider context — the restaurant’s suppliers, how it fits into the local community and its finances. The final report sticks to five criteria: the quality of the ingredients, the culinary technique, the harmony of the flavors, the emotion which the chef is seeking to convey through their menu, and the restaurant’s consistency over time. The latter requires multiple visits. The awarding of a star — with three stars as the absolute pinnacle — must be a unanimous choice when inspectors meet to discuss their reviews. If there is disagreement, further visits are organized until a consensus is reached. — AFP

Creeping ice clouding vision of Europe space telescope Euclid

Scientists are trying to melt a thin layer of ice that is increasingly clouding the vision of the “dark universe detective” space telescope Euclid, the European Space Agency said on Tuesday. It is the latest of several technical setbacks for the wide-eyed telescope, which blasted off into space in July on a mission to chart a third of the sky. By doing so, the ESA hopes Euclid will reveal out more about the nature of dark matter and dark energy, which are thought to make up 95 percent of the universe but remain shrouded in mystery.

During checks in November, the team on the ground first noticed that they were losing a little light coming into the telescope’s visible light imager, Euclid instrument operations scientist Ralf Kohley told AFP. After digging into the data, they believe the problem is a layer of ice — thought to be just the width of a strand of DNA — that is building up on the telescope’s optical surfaces. “It’s a big problem,” Kohley acknowledged.

But researchers have been working on it, Kohley said, adding that he had no doubt Euclid would be able to finish its mission. Keeping out water is a common problem for all spacecrafts. Despite best efforts on the ground, a



Scientists attend the presentation of ESA's Euclid spacecraft in Cannes, south-eastern France, on February 21, 2023. — AFP photos

tiny amount of water absorbed during a spacecraft’s assembly on Earth can smuggle its way to space. Faced with the cold vastness of space, the water molecules freeze to the first surface they can — in this case, some may have landed on the Euclid’s mirrors.

Thin ice
Shortly after the telescope launched, scientists used its on-board heaters to

heat up everything on the spacecraft, hoping to blast out any potential water. This could be done again. “But heating out everything is very disruptive for the mission,” Kohley said. Because heat expands most materials, warming up the whole spacecraft involves careful recalibration.

It would take at least a month to get the telescope back to its job surveying the sky, Kohley said. So last week, the

ESA started warming just two of the telescope’s mirrors, turning the temperature up just enough to hopefully melt away the ice. This “minimally invasive” partial warming will last until Thursday, Kohley said. The scientists may not know if it works until mid-April.

Part of the problem is that the scientists do not know exactly where the ice is accumulating — or how much there is. And even if the scientists do manage to melt the ice, it could come back over time, Kohley warned.

If the partial warming plan fails, the ESA will have to heat up the whole spacecraft. If the team have to do this every year during the telescope’s planned-six year mission it could result in a six-month delay, Kohley said. “But that’s all speculation,” he said.

“For the moment, we have to wait and see — and hope we can rid of this problem in a more elegant fashion.” It is not the first problem for Euclid. Cosmic rays previously confused the spacecraft’s fine guidance sensor, which required a complicated software update. Some unwanted sunlight also interfered with its observations, a problem solved by slightly rotating the telescope, Kohley said. However nothing can be done about particularly strong solar flares occasionally projecting



This undated handout shows an alternative crop of an astronomical image of spiral galaxy IC 342 taken during ESA's Euclid space mission, which is built and operated by the European Space Agency ESA and with contributions from NASA.

X-ray images on the visible imager. Euclid, which the ESA calls its “dark universe detective,” officially started its survey last month. Its first images, released in November, revealed swirling galaxies bursting with color in the distant cosmos. — AFP



A picture shows a part of the archaeological site of Ani ruins. — AFP photos

Ancient city that could bridge Turkey and Armenia's bitter divide



A picture taken near Kars shows the ruins of a bridge over Arpacay river, the natural border between Turkey and Armenia.



A woman visits Ani ruins near Kars.



A woman walks near Tigran Honents Church in Ani ruins near Kars.

Look at this stone bridge," said writer Vedat Akcayoz pointing to the crumbling stumps of a 10th-century span over the Arpacay river that marks the closed border between Turkey and Armenia. "The fish under the bridge, are they Turkish or Armenian?" The spectacular ruined city of Ani stands on one of the world's most sensitive borders, dividing two countries daggers drawn over their painful past.

Deserted now amid snow-capped peaks, Ani was once the capital of a mediaeval Armenian kingdom before it fell to the Seljuks in 1064, the first city taken by the Turks as they swept into Anatolia. Their sultan Alparslan converted its cathedral into his "conquest mosque". But its sack by the Mongols and an earthquake sent Ani into terminal decline. "This is the land conquered by our ancestors," said Ziya Polat, governor of the nearby Turkish city of Kars. "Sultan Alparslan's first Friday prayer, the first Turkish mosque, the first Turkish cemetery, the first Turkish bazaar are all here," he added.

With such symbolic importance to both sides, historians and officials hope restoring the UNESCO world heritage site might ease relations poisoned by the mass killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, which Turkey refuses to recognize as genocide. Akcayoz, who wrote a book on the ruins, said Ani is "humanity's common heritage".

"Ani was Zoroastrian, Ani was shaman, Ani was pagan, Ani was Christian, Ani was Muslim, Ani was yours, Ani was ours," he told AFP. Turkey and Armenia have no formal relations. But peace talks between Yerevan and Ankara's ally Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh—which Baku retook last year after a lightning war—has sparked hope that one day Turkey and Armenia could also sit down around a table.

Haunting beauty

For years Ani was off limits for tourists, with a military permit required to visit it. But local authorities are now keen to promote its haunting beauty as well as neighboring Kars, which had a large Armenian population until 1915. With 5.5 million euros (\$6 million) in funding, mostly from the European Union,

they hope to draw more visitors.

Gonca Pabuccu, deputy head of the archaeological team at Ani, said restoration and conservation work has been going on for several years. "Our aim is not only to unearth these structures, but also to preserve what we have unearthed" so tourists can visit, she said.

Akcayoz said 80 to 85 percent of the site has yet to be explored. "Ani has an underground world as big as what is on the surface. In the caves around Ani, there are churches, mosques and places of worship. Not a lot of people know this."

Akcayoz looks to the legacy of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who helped spark an unprecedented—if fleeting—period of dialogue and detente between the two peoples in the early 2000s. When Dink was shot dead outside his Istanbul newspaper office in 2007 by a teenage Turkish ultra-nationalist, tens of thousands Turks took to the streets to express their horror, chanting, "We are all Armenians, we are all Hrant Dink."

'Who will cure us?'

Akcayoz pointed to a famous speech Dink gave a year before his murder saying denial and blame about the past had made Turks and Armenians both "clinically ill... Armenians with their trauma, Turks with their paranoia." "Who will cure us?" Dink asked. "The Armenians are the Turks' doctor—the Turks are the Armenians' doctor," he said. Akcayoz believes Dink's vision can help end the impasse.

"There's no other way out than peace," he said. A local Turkish official, who wished to remain anonymous, said Ani was more prone to be politicized than other archaeological sites. "It is still a religious capital for Armenians and the first city captured in Anatolia by Turks," he said. Opening the sealed border would naturally increase visitor numbers, he said. "Armenians would want their grandchildren to see this site," he said. "We cannot build a future on past tragedies." —AFP



A picture taken near Kars shows Tigran Honents Church, part of the archaeological site of Ani.



A picture taken near Kars shows a part of the archaeological site of Ani ruins.



People visit the Mosque of Manuchar in Ani ruins near Kars.



A picture taken near Kars shows a part of Tigran Honents Church, in the archaeological site of Ani.

New research deepens Havana Syndrome mystery

The mystery of so-called Havana Syndrome, which struck down dozens of US diplomats, deepened Monday as new research found no tangible evidence of brain injury in those affected. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) acknowledged that ongoing symptoms including migraines, chronic dizziness, and depression are still very much real—even if they cannot yet be explained.

Havana Syndrome first baffled officials in 2016 when US diplomats in Cuba's capital reported falling ill and hearing piercing sounds at night, sparking speculation of an attack by a foreign en-

emy using an unspecified sonar weapon. Similar reports of the illness later emerged from embassy staff in China, Europe and US capital Washington.

Yet despite the "disabling" symptoms, people with Havana Syndrome—formally referred to as anomalous health incidents (AHIs)—show no clinical differences, according to two new papers published Monday in peer-reviewed journal JAMA.

Leighton Chan, lead author of one of the papers, said "it's important to acknowledge that these symptoms are very real, cause significant disruption in the lives of those affected and can be quite prolonged, disabling and difficult to treat." In this study, researchers assessed more than 80 US government officials and their family members using MRI brain scans and other blood, visual and auditory tests. They were compared with a control group of overseas US officials who had similar work assignments but were unaffected by the symptoms. It found those with AHIs

self-reported increased symptoms of fatigue, post-traumatic stress and depression.

Forty one percent of those with AHIs met the criteria for "functional neurological disorder"—problems with the way the brain sends and receives information from the rest of the body, and as a result nearly all with this dysfunction could be diagnosed with a chronic form of dizziness. "These individuals have symptoms that are genuine, distressing, and can be quite prolonged, disabling, and difficult to treat," said the researchers.

In the second paper, participants underwent MRI scans to examine their brain size, structure, and function. These were carried out on average 80 days after symptom onset and revealed no imaging abnormalities differentiating the group with AHIs. But this "does not exclude that an adverse event impacting the brain occurred at the time of the AHI," said Carlo Pierpaoli, who led the study. — AFP



Sports

Afghanistan dominate Ireland with bat and ball to win T20I series

Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan says it is a great series win for us

SHARJAH: Afghanistan proved too strong with bat and ball against Ireland as they claimed a 57-run victory in Sharjah on Monday to edge the T20I series 2-1. A superb 72 not out from Ibrahim Zadran, backed up by the bowling of Azmatullah Omarzai, gave the hosts victory in the final match of Ireland's tour against Afghanistan.

"It is a great series win for us," said Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan, going on to praise the performance of his young side. The Irish were unable to chase down a target of 156, with Omarzai's four wickets for just nine runs helping bowl the tourists out for 98 inside 18 overs.

Ireland won the first T20I of the mini-series last week but consecutive wins on Sunday and Monday ensured Afghanistan recovered to take the three-game series, after earlier winning the ODI series 2-0. For the third consecutive time, Khan won the toss against Ireland and as he did in Monday's 10-run win, he elected to bat first.

Batting at three, 22-year-old Zadran anchored Afghanistan's innings with his career-best T20I score of 72, which boosted the hosts to a total Ireland could not match. Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz rounded off a T20I series he will hope to forget on a personal level, after scores of zero and three in the first two matches, when Harry Tector took a superb diving catch to dismiss him for six at the start of the third over.

Afghanistan were then ticking along nicely with Zadran and Sediqullah Atal at the crease, until Atal chipped a turning ball straight back to Gareth Delany.

In the very next over, Omarzai, on back-to-back golden ducks, was dropped by Delany on one but departed just two deliveries later, after lobbing Curtis Campher to Josh Little.

Mohammad Ishaq's arrival steadied the ship for Afghanistan as he mounted a crucial fourth-wicket stand of 54 with Zadran, until the number five mistimed a lob on 27 and Paul Stirling snaffled up the ball.

With just over five overs left, Zadran kept the scoreboard moving along for Afghanistan. Ijaz Ahmadzai ably deputised him at the end with 10 runs from three balls, including a monster six in the last over, before he was run out trying to get his partner back on strike for the final delivery. Ireland's run chase never really got underway, especially after Naveen-ul-Haq bowled both Andy Balbirnie and Lorcan Tucker with consecutive deliveries in the second over.

Some resistance came from Campher and Delany's 36-run sixth-wicket stand but the visitors were never really allowed to form any partnership of great merit by Afghanistan's pace attack.

Omarzai, 23, claimed the keys wickets of Tector and George Dockrell, before removing Mark Adair and Barry McCarthy as Afghanistan took apart the Irish batting line-up. Naveen-ul-Haq then bowled Ben White with a slower ball, bringing a close to affairs and securing Afghanistan a tight series win ahead of this summer's T20 World Cup. Despite defeat, Ireland will still view the tour as an historic success after they won their very first Test match on March 1.—AFP



SHARJAH: Afghanistan's Naveen-ul-Haq delivers the ball during the third Twenty20 International cricket match between Afghanistan and Ireland at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in Sharjah. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Boyfriend of Sabalenka dead

MINSK: Konstantin Koltsov, the boyfriend of two-time tennis Grand Slam champion Aryna Sabalenka and a former ice hockey player, has died aged 42, the Belarusian hockey federation said on Tuesday. In a short statement, the federation said that Koltsov "died suddenly", without saying how or where he died. "We are in mourning," the federation said on its website. "The Belarusian Hockey Federation expresses its deepest condolences to the family, friends, and everyone who knew and worked with Konstantin." Koltsov's playing career included a stint with the Pittsburgh Penguins in the NHL. There was no immediate reaction from the 25-year-old Sabalenka, the world number two, who is scheduled to play at the Miami Open this week. The Belarusian won the Australian Open in 2023 and retained her Melbourne title earlier this year. — AFP

Granada part ways with coach

BARCELONA: Struggling Granada parted ways with coach Alexander Medina on Tuesday with the team 19th in La Liga and 13 points from safety. "Granada and coach Alexander Medina have terminated the contract between them," said Granada in a statement. Uruguayan Medina, 45, who replaced Paco Lopez in November, achieved only one victory in the top flight from 14 matches at the helm. Granada, who have played one fewer match than the teams around them, next face Cadiz, 18th, in a crucial relegation battle on March 29. Former Granada and Rayo Vallecano coach Jose Ramon Sandoval is set to be appointed according to Spanish reports. — AFP

NBA fines Detroit guard

NEW YORK: Detroit Pistons guard Evan Fournier was fined \$25,000 by the NBA on Monday for kicking a game ball into the spectator stands, the league announced. The 31-year-old Frenchman was punished for an incident that took place just after the finish of the Pistons' 104-101 home loss to the Miami Heat on Sunday. With the loss, Detroit fell to 12-55, the second-worst record in the NBA. Fournier, in his 12th NBA campaign, joined the struggling Pistons last month in a deal that sent Bojan Bogdanovic to the New York Knicks. The Frenchman, selected 20th overall in the first round of the 2012 NBA Draft by Denver, has averaged 7.2 points, 1.9 rebounds and 1.3 assists a game this season for the Knicks and Pistons. Fournier, who helped France capture Tokyo Olympic silver, has averaged 13.8 points, 2.7 rebounds and 2.5 assists over 690 career NBA games with Denver, Orlando, Boston, the Knicks and Detroit. — AFP

Jacobs to compete in relay worlds

ROME: Olympic 100 metre champion Lamont Marcell Jacobs will compete in his first race of the year next month and in May's world relay championships, the Italian told the Gazzetta Dello Sport on Tuesday. I think I will begin my season around mid-April with one or two 100m races, although nothing is definite yet, said Jacobs, who has been based in Jacksonville, Florida where he is trained by American Rana Reider. Jacobs has training partners American Trayvon Bromell, Olympic 200m champion Andre De Grasse and Japanese sprinter Abdul Hakim Sani Brown. Since coming to Florida, everything has changed in five months in terms of strength, technique and execution... I'm happy with my choice, added Jacobs. — AFP

Islamabad United win Pakistan Super League

KARACHI: Resilient Islamabad United snatched a last-ball thriller to beat Multan Sultans by two wickets in the final in Karachi on Monday, winning the Pakistan Super League title for a third time. Young Hunain Shah pushed the final delivery of the last over for a boundary towards backward point as United overhauled a modest 160-run target at the National Stadium.

United needed eight runs off the 20th over bowled by Mohammad Ali and Hunain's elder brother Naseem Shah hit a boundary off the second delivery but with a single needed off the last two deliveries he fell caught behind.

However, Hunain kept his cool to give Sultans defeat in their third successive finals. United skipper Shadab Khan praised a total team effort. "It was a total team effort," said Shadab. "We peaked at the right time in the league and that mattered in the end."

United also won the inaugural PSL title in 2016 and doubled it two years later. Earlier, Sultans managed 159-9 in their 20 overs after winning the toss and electing to bat. They were guided by a 40-ball 57 by Usman Khan and 26 by skipper Mohammad Rizwan.

Khan hit seven boundaries and a six but once he fell in the 16th over, Sultans lost five wickets for just 13 runs, slumping to 127-9. Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim was the chief destroyer with



KARACHI: Islamabad United's players hold the Pakistan Super League (PSL) trophy as they celebrate their victory against Multan Sultans during the award ceremony for PSL Twenty20 cricket final match at the National Stadium in Karachi on March 19, 2024. — AFP

5-23 while Naseem grabbed 3-32.

It was Iftikhar Ahmed who revived the innings with a whirlwind 20-ball 32 not out with three sixes and as many boundaries, scoring 31 in the last two overs. United were also derailed from 121-4 to 129-7 but Wasim guided late order batters with a calm 17-ball 19 to help them cross the finish line.

For the winners, former New Zealand opener

Martin Guptill top-scored with a 32-ball 50 with three sixes and four boundaries. Azam Khan hit a 22-ball 30 with a six and four boundaries.

United, Sultans, Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators qualified for the play-offs while Karachi Kings and defending champions Lahore Qalandars were knocked out in the first round of the ninth edition of the League. — AFP

Australia scraps Afghanistan T20s, citing women's rights

SYDNEY: Australia on Tuesday scrapped a T20 men's cricket series against Afghanistan later this year, saying the situation for women in the Taliban-ruled country was deteriorating. Cricket Australia said it had received advice "that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse" and so had postponed the three-match series scheduled in August at a neutral venue.

Cricket has surged in popularity inside Afghanistan in recent years, fuelled by triumphs over bigger nations on the international stage. But under

the Taliban's brand of Islamic rule, women are effectively barred from the game. Australia's cricket governing body said its stance continued a "strong commitment to supporting participation by women and girls in cricket around the world". It is the third time since 2021 that Australia has refused to play Afghanistan outside of international tournaments.

Cricket Australia cancelled a one-off Test in 2021, months after the Taliban swept back into power. "If recent media reports that women's cricket will not be supported in Afghanistan are substantiated, Cricket Australia would have no alternative but to not host Afghanistan," officials said at the time.

In 2023, Australia pulled out of a three-match one-day international series in the UAE, with the Afghanistan Cricket Board in Kabul describing the decision as "pathetic". Afghanistan's best known cricketer, leg-spinner Rashid Khan, threatened to boycott Australia's Big Bash League as a result.

Major League Baseball, but all over the world."

Ohtani is a national hero and huge source of pride in Japan, even more so after leading the country to victory in last year's World Baseball Classic. The Dodgers followed up his signing by snapping up Japanese pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto on a 12-year, \$325 million deal.

Yamamoto is also a star in his home country, where he won three straight awards as Nippon Professional Baseball's top pitcher. The Dodgers have a rich history of signing Japanese players, starting with trailblazing pitcher Hideo Nomo in 1995.

Nomo was vilified in Japan for leaving to try his luck in the MLB, but he soon became a hero when he succeeded in L.A. "Hideo Nomo was a pioneer for the Dodgers," said Roberts. "Having Shohei and Yoshinobu here, the hope this winter was to paint the country of Japan blue, and I think we've done that."

Nomo brought the Dodgers to a nationwide audience in Japan but other teams have also enjoyed moments of popularity thanks to the success of their Japanese players. Former pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka told AFP that the Boston Red Sox saw a spike in interest when he led them to the World Series title in 2007. But he believes the Dodgers have an enduring popularity in Japan that Ohtani's arrival will only strengthen. — AFP



Shohei Ohtani

Sports

Napoli's Jesus accuses Italy defender Acerbi of racist abuse

Acerbi left Italy's camp after reports that he will be investigated

MILAN: Napoli defender Juan Jesus on Monday blasted Francesco Acerbi for denying he dished out racist abuse after the Italy international was forced to leave the Azzurri's training camp ahead of two friendlies in the United States.

Jesus had initially played down the incident following Napoli's 1-1 draw at Inter Milan on Sunday, telling DAZN "what happens on the pitch, stays on the pitch" after accepting Acerbi's on-field apology for unspecified insults.

Brazilian Jesus, who headed home Napoli's late equaliser at the San Siro, had been seen protesting to match referee Federico La Penna, pointing to the Keep Racism Out badge on his shirt and apparently saying that "(Acerbi) called me a negro".

Acerbi left Italy's training camp after reports that he will be investigated for the alleged abuse, and was replaced by Roma centre-back Gianluca Mancini in the 28-man squad selected before matches against Venezuela and Ecuador in the build-up to Italy's European title defence.

He insisted on his return to Milan that he "didn't say anything racist", echoing what his agent Federico Pastorello had said to broadcaster Radio Sportiva earlier on Monday. That sparked an angry reaction from Jesus on Instagram: "I thought that the incident was done with on the pitch and frankly I was hoping not to have to come back to something so despicable."

"However today I read Acerbi's comments which conflict completely with what happened, with what he himself said on the pitch which is backed up by video footage of him asking me for forgiveness," Jesus added. "I'm not having it, racism is going to be fought here and now. Acerbi said to me 'get lost black, you're just a negro'... now he's changed tack and claims that there was no racism."

Jesus' reaction is bad news for Acerbi as Italian Football Federation (FIGC) regulations say that if he is found guilty of racially abusing the Brazilian he will be banned for at least 10 matches. And authorities can ask for an even longer ban if they feel his behaviour warrants it.

A guilty verdict would be guaranteed to end his club season with Inter, who are set to win their 20th league title as they lead AC Milan by 14 points with nine fixtures remaining. And disciplinary authorities will likely insist that any eventual ban be extended worldwide with the Euro starting on June 14.

Serie A told AFP that the regular report from the division's "sporting judge" Gerardo Mastrandrea will be released on Tuesday. That document, which is usually published the day after the end of each round of matches, should confirm whether Acerbi will be investigated for the incident.

In a brief statement Inter said that they "will meet with the player as soon as possible to shed light on the exact details of what happened". — AFP



Francesco Acerbi

Son back on road to World Cup after turbulent Asian Cup

HONG KONG: Son Heung-min and South Korea must move on from their turbulent Asian Cup when they return to World Cup qualifying Thursday, while Japan face North Korea in a double-header that sees them travel to Pyongyang.

Asian football is back on the road to the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, a month after Qatar retained the continental crown on home soil with a 3-1 victory over Jordan. Much has happened since South Korea were dumped out 2-0 by unfancied Jordan in the semi-finals of the Asian Cup, including the sacking of coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

It emerged that skipper Son and Paris Saint-Germain attacking midfielder Lee Kang-in had been involved in a fracas on the eve of the match, leaving the Tottenham attacker with a dislocated finger. Legendary German striker Klinsmann was dismissed after having promised to take South Korea to their first Asian title in 64 years. He was replaced on an interim basis by Hwang Sun-hong.

Son and Lee have since made up, and Hwang included the duo in his squad for the home game with Thailand on Thursday and the return fixture five days later. "Lee Kang-in wanted an opportunity to apologise to fans and his team-mates from the bottom of his heart, and Son Heung-min said we should all embrace Kang-in and move forward," Hwang, South Korea's under-23 coach, said.

"Based on my experience as a national team player, I think issues like this can end up making the team even tighter," he added. Before Klinsmann's departure, South Korea thrashed Singapore 5-0 and won 3-0 in China to top Group C and will be fully expected to collect six more points against Thailand.

Japan are also eager to move on from the Asian Cup, where they went out 2-1 to Iran in the quarter-finals and never justified their tag as pre-tournament favourites. Hajime Moriyasu remained coach



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker #07 Son Heung-Min (L) vies with Fulham's Italian-born Nigerian defender #03 Calvin Bassey (R) during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Tottenham Hotspur at Craven Cottage in London. — AFP

despite the disappointment and Japan face two matches against North Korea, travelling into the unknown on March 26 when they play at Kim Il-sung Stadium in Pyongyang.

Moriyasu will have to make do without Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma, who looks set to miss the rest of the Premier League season with a back injury. Winger Junya Ito has been left out of the squad after an allegation of sexual assault. He denies the claim and is suing for 200 million yen (\$1.3 million) in damages. Japan have a perfect six points from two games with 10 goals scored and none conceded.

Qatar skipper bows out

China's Asian Cup was also a letdown, bundled out in the group stage with two points and no goals. The Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic took over

statement was the latest salvo in the body's dispute with MLS and its Professional Referees Organization (PRO). Major League Soccer kicked off its new season last month with the league forced to use substitute referees to officiate in games after contract talks between the PSRA and the MLS's PRO broke down.

MLS commissioner Don Garber has expressed frustration at the stalemate, accusing the PSRA of not negotiating "fairly" during talks. In an interview with The Athletic last week, Garber said the league was prepared to continue using substitute referees for as long as needed, and insisted feedback from MLS players and coaches had been positive.

"We have officials that we think are doing a really good job, our players think they're doing a good job, our coaches think they're doing a good job, and they're going to continue to work and in a way that will be supported by PRO until there's a resolution," Garber told The Athletic.

However, Garber's remarks were swiftly rebutted

from Aleksandar Jankovic and China travel to Singapore for his first game in charge.

Of the Asian Cup finalists, Qatar will be expected to make it four wins from four in Group A when they play Kuwait home and away. They will do it without Hassan Al-Haydos, who captained them to a second Asian Cup crown in a row last month but retired at the weekend from international duty aged 33.

He made a record 183 appearances for his country, scoring 41 goals. While Qatar are on course for the next round of World Cup qualifying, Asian Cup runners-up Jordan sit third behind Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan in Group G on one point from two matches.

With only the top two progressing, Jordan need to pick up six points in back-to-back games against basement side Pakistan. — AFP

by the players' union, the MLS Players Association (MLSPA), which said there was in fact widespread dissatisfaction at the standard of refereeing. "It is grossly inaccurate to say that players think that the current group of referees are doing a 'good job,'" the MLSPA said in a response to Garber's remarks. "In fact, players are very clear that the replacements are under-trained, lack experience and are not nearly at the level that a league of @MLS's stature deserves."

Those criticisms were underscored by last weekend's round of fixtures in MLS, where multiple officiating controversies prompted criticism from players and coaches. Charlotte FC coach Dean Smith said his team had been on the wrong end of several dubious decisions in a 2-1 loss to Nashville. The most notable was the failure to award what looked like a clear penalty when Charlotte striker Patrick Agyemang was bundled over in the area. "Maybe my interpretation is different but that's a stonewall penalty," Smith said after the game. — AFP

Asian qualifying tables for 2026 WCup

HONG KONG: Asian qualifying tables for the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico (top two reach next stage): (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)

Group A							
Qatar	2	2	0	0	11	1	6
Kuwait	2	1	0	1	4	1	3
India	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Afghanistan	2	0	0	2	1	12	0

Group B							
Japan	2	2	0	0	10	0	6
North Korea	2	1	0	1	6	2	3
Syria	2	1	0	1	1	5	3
Myanmar	2	0	0	2	1	11	0

Group C							
South Korea	2	2	0	0	8	0	6
Thailand	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
China	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Singapore	2	0	0	2	1	8	0

Group D							
Malaysia	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Oman	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Kyrgyzstan	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Taiwan	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Group E							
Iran	2	1	1	0	6	2	4
Uzbekistan	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Turkmenistan	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Hong Kong	2	0	1	1	2	6	1

Group F							
Iraq	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Vietnam	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Philippines	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Indonesia	2	0	1	1	2	6	1

Group G							
Saudi Arabia	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Tajikistan	2	1	1	0	7	2	4
Jordan	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Pakistan	2	0	0	2	1	10	0

Group H							
UAE	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Bahrain	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Yemen	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Nepal	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

Group I							
Australia	2	2	0	0	8	0	6
Lebanon	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Palestine	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Bangladesh	2	0	1	1	1	8	1

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

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

Lost & Found

I hereby invite the attention of the public that my mark list of the 5th Semester (Improvement) B-Tech examination held in March 1997 with Register No 3170 of the University of Calicut has been irrecoverably lost during travel. Consequently, I intend to apply for the duplicate mark list. If anyone happens to get the original, kindly notify the undersigned or the University. Felis Muhammed Velasseril Basheer (PP No. Z3081282) Kuwait 00965-66277699 (#5186) 19/03/2024

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Brunson, Knicks tame Warriors

Lakers bounce with an emphatic 136-105 win over Atlanta Hawks



SAN FRANCISCO: Trayce Jackson-Davis #32 of the Golden State Warriors dunks the ball on Precious Achiuwa #5 of the New York Knicks in the first half at Chase Center on March 18, 2024 in San Francisco, California. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Jalen Brunson scored 34 points as the New York Knicks completed a wire-to-wire 119-112 road victory over the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco on Monday. The Warriors, fresh from Saturday's high-scoring win over the Los Angeles Lakers, were always on the back foot after New York sprinted into an early 20-6 first quarter lead at the Chase Center.

Point guard Brunson pulled the strings superbly to guide an injury-hit Knicks line-up to an impressive win that keeps them firmly on course for the play-offs. Brunson received scoring support from Miles McBride, who finished with a career-high 29 points in just his sixth NBA start. "We keep finding ways to win," Brunson said afterwards. "Staying poised, staying confident—just sticking together."

But the loss was another body blow for the erratic Warriors, who are 17-18 at home this season. Golden State occupy 10th place in the Western Conference—the last of the four play-in berths. Stephen

Curry led Golden State's scorers with 27 points.

In Los Angeles, the Lakers bounced back from Saturday's defeat to the Warriors with an emphatic 136-105 win over the Atlanta Hawks. D'Angelo Russell drained six-of-10 from three-point distance to finish with 27 points, while LeBron James finished with 25 points and Anthony Davis 22. The Lakers are ninth in the West on 37-32.

In other games on Monday, the Cleveland Cavaliers fought back from a 15-point deficit to grind out a 108-103 victory over the Indiana Pacers in Indianapolis. Jarrett Allen and Caris LeVert led the Cavaliers with 23 points apiece while the Cleveland defense restricted Tyrese Haliburton to just 14 points. Cleveland improved to 43-25 with the win to remain in third place in the Eastern Conference behind the first-placed Boston Celtics and second-placed Milwaukee Bucks.

The Celtics, runaway leaders of the Eastern Conference with a 54-14 record, strolled to another rou-

tine victory with a 119-94 defeat of the Detroit Pistons at Boston's TD Garden.

Monster dunk

Jaylen Brown led the Boston scoring with 31 points in just three quarters, while Derrick White bagged the first triple double of his career to finish with 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

"I'm not usually one to try and chase stats and what not," White said after the win. "I've been close a lot of times so I was like, 'I'm going to try and get it this time'. So shout-out to my team-mates for real."

In Salt Lake City, Anthony Edwards produced a monstrous dunk-of-the season contender as the Minnesota Timberwolves rallied to beat the Utah Jazz 114-104 on the road. Edwards, who finished with 32 points, took flight in the third quarter, soaring over the 6ft 9in (2.06m) John Collins for a spectacular career highlight reel moment.

"That's the best dunk of my career, I'm not gonna

lie," Edwards said after the win, which left Minnesota in second place in the Western Conference on 47-21, one game adrift of leaders Oklahoma City (47-20).

In Philadelphia, Tyrese Maxey finished with 30 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds as the 76ers defeated the Miami Heat 98-91. The Sixers, without the injured Joel Embiid, took control of a tight game in the third quarter, outscoring Miami 28-16 to surge 17 points clear.

Although the Heat fought back to tie it in the fourth quarter, the Sixers held on to close out a win that left them level with Miami on 37-30. Sixers coach Nick Nurse said Philadelphia's former Heat stalwart Kyle Lowry had warned his team-mates to expect a Miami fightback.

"Kyle kept reminding everybody on the bench that they weren't gonna quit even when we had a 17-point lead or whatever it was," Nurse said. "They had a great run and we responded pretty good there at the end." — AFP

Forest docked four points for breaching EPL financial rules

LONDON: Nottingham Forest were docked four points for breaching Premier League financial rules on Monday, dumping them in the relegation zone. The Premier League said in a statement that Forest had admitted breaching the profitability and sustainability rules (PSR) threshold of £61 million (\$77.5 million) by £34.5 million.

However, Forest said they were "extremely disappointed" by the ruling and "dismayed by the tone" of the Premier League's argument. "We believe that the high levels of cooperation the club has shown during this process, and which are confirmed and recorded in the commission's decision, were not reciprocated by the Premier League," Forest said in a statement.

The two-time European champions are the second top-flight team to be penalised for PSR breaches this season after Everton were hit with a 10-point penalty in November, which was reduced to six on appeal. Everton are still waiting to discover if they will be hit with another points penalty relating to a second charge.

Forest's punishment means they drop into the bottom three, one point behind Luton and four adrift of Everton. Premier League clubs are usually allowed maximum losses of £105 million over a three-year assessment period but this is reduced by £22 million per season for any seasons within the period spent in the Championship.

Forest were promoted to the Premier League in May 2022, meaning two seasons of their three-year assessment period were as a Championship club. They had been absent from the English top-flight for the previous 23 years.

But the decision to sign a remarkable 29 players last season, with a reported spend of more than £150 million, has backfired. Forest's defence centred around the fact they sold Brennan Johnson to Tottenham for a reported £47.5 million just over two months after the end of the accounting period in



LONDON: (FILES) Nottingham Forest's Greek co-owner Evangelos Marinakis reacts during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Nottingham Forest and Manchester United at The City Ground. — AFP

June 2023. The club argued they achieved a higher fee for the Welsh international by not selling before June 30. However, an independent commission found that Forest had to be punished to "maintain the integrity" of the league.

The commission said that Forest had ignored a warning from its finance director ahead of the 2023 January transfer window about breaching PSR and pressed ahead with adding more players to their squad rather than stripping back.

"When a club invests as Forest did to compete in the Premier League, it still needs to comply with the PSR threshold for losses," the commission noted in its written reasons for the decision. "Such risk-taking and 'sailing close to the wind' needs a proportionate sanction to maintain the integrity of the Premier League."

Forest could still appeal the punishment and the Premier League is at risk of an embarrassing situation whereby relegation is decided in the courts after the end of the season. The English top-flight has previously said the process should "conclude no later than and if possible some time before 24 May", which is five days after the final weekend of the season. — AFP

Japan's Sakamoto, Uno seek world figure skating 'three-peats'

MONTREAL: Japan's Kaori Sakamoto and Shoma Uno each will seek their third consecutive world crowns at the 2024 World Figure Skating Championships, which begin Wednesday in Montreal. Not since American Peggy Fleming won world titles from 1966 through 1968 has anyone captured three women's world titles in a row, but Sakamoto could achieve the feat and complete an undefeated 2023-2024 campaign.

Uno could become the first man to win three world titles in a row since American Nathan Chen completed his run in 2021, but he must fight off the challenge of Grand Prix Final winner Ilia Malinin of the United States. The event features 200 top skaters from more than 40 nations, including Sakamoto, Uno and reigning pairs champions Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara from Japan.

Americans Madison Chock and Evan Bates will also defend their world ice dance crown on the home rink of the NHL's Montreal Canadiens. Sakamoto captured her first world title in 2022 at Montpelier, France, and defended the crown last year on home ice at Saitama, Japan.

This season, the 23-year-old from Kobe won Grand Prix stops at Canada and Finland and also took the Grand Prix Final in Beijing before claiming her fourth consecutive Japanese national title. Sakamoto continued her perfect season by defending her title at last month's Challenge Cup in the Netherlands, making her the huge favorite to defend the world crown as well.

"I can really feel that I've grown more this year than last year," Sakamoto told the Olympic website. "I'm much more motivated." European champion Loena Hendrickx of Belgium and South Korean teen Kim Chae-yeon could be Sakamoto's top challengers for the historic triumph.

On the men's side, Uno has been unable to match the domination of his unbeaten 2022-23 campaign,

settling for runner-up Grand Prix finishes in China and Japan and a Grand Prix Final loss to 19-year-old two-time US champion Malinin, the only skater to land a quadruple Axel in competition.

"Even if it becomes only Malinin being at the top in the future, I want to make sure that we can be rivals who can compete with each other properly," Uno told the Olympics website. "I'm going to do my best this year at least."

Two-time European champion Adam Siao Him Fa of France and Japan's Yuma Kagiyama, who won the Four Continents crown last month in Shanghai, also figure to contend. Kagiyama, a two-time world runner-up, took a silver medal at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

Americans Chock, 31, and Bates, 35, are engaged. They became a partnership in 2011 and last year won their first world ice dance title. This year, they hope to complete their first undefeated season after winning Grand Prix events on home ice and in Finland, the Grand Prix Final and taking a fifth US title.

Miura and Kihara, the first Japanese couple to capture the world pairs title, missed the Grand Prix season and national championships as Kihara coped with a back injury. They took second last month at the Four Continents in Shanghai. — AFP



BEIJING: (FILES) Japan's Kaori Sakamoto performs in the gala exhibition during the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in Beijing. — AFP