
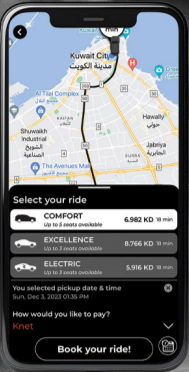


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12 Planet 'on the brink', with new heat records likely in 2024: UN



Ramadan KAREEM	
Fajr	: 04:32
Shrooq	: 05:51
Dhuhr	: 11:55
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:00
Isha	: 19:17

Amir hails security, civil forces

Sheikh Mishal visits ministry of interior, Kuwait Fire Force



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets senior officials and officers during his visits to the ministry of interior and Kuwait Fire Force on March 19, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

RAMADAN KAREEM

Acts of worship that will make angels supplicate

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

First, every person who sincerely supplicates to Almighty Allah yearns for his supplication to be accepted by Almighty Allah. So, what if the angels are the ones supplicating for you? It is known beyond any iota of doubt that the supplication of the angels is answered. (Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari)

Almighty Allah informs us in the Noble Quran that one of the many functions of the angels is to, generally speaking, invoke Almighty Allah and supplicate in favor of the inhabitants of the earth, saying, what can be translated as: "The heavens nearly burst, one above the other, (in awe of His Majesty), while the angels exalt their Lord with all praise, and seek forgiveness for those on the earth." (Ash-Shoura – Consolation 42: 5)

Second, following are some acts of worship that if any person performs sincerely, the angels will supplicate to Almighty Allah to forgive him:

a. Staying in your spot after performing salah (ritual prayer). Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "The angels keep asking for Allah's blessings and forgiveness for anyone of you as long as he is at his musallah (prayer spot) and does not pass wind. They (angels) say, 'O Allah, forgive him and show him mercy.' Each one of you is in Salah (Muslim Ritual Prayer) as long as he is waiting for the Prayer and nothing but the Prayer detains him (in a mosque or a place for prayer) from going to his family.'" (Al-Bukhari # 659)

Ibn Battal (an expert on prophetic narrations) said, translated as: "Whoever has committed many sins and seeks Almighty Allah's forgiveness, without much effort, then let him embrace the opportunity of staying at his prayer place after performing salah so that the angels pray for him as much as possible and ask (Almighty) Allah to forgive him, for angels are promised a definite answer when they supplicate." (Refer to Sharh Al-Bukhari, by Ibn Battal)

Note that the angels cannot pray for or intercede in favor of anyone with whom the Majestic Allah is annoyed. He (Allah) tells us in the Noble Quran: "He (alone) knows what lies before them and what lies behind them."

Continued on Page 6

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, on Tuesday visited the ministry of interior accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. HH the Amir was received by Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah and Interior Ministry Undersec-

PM: Protect public funds, uphold law

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah met on Wednesday with chiefs of state's regulatory authorities and called on them to heed HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad

retary Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah.

Addressing the ministry's top officials, HH the Amir congratulated the ministry and its staff on the holy month of Ramadan, praying to Almighty Allah to bring back the holy month with Kuwait and its people graced with goodness and blessings. HH the Amir said security forces have a great role to play to preserve order in the country, calling on forces to

stay alert at all times in order to prevent any possible danger and harm from happening.

"We appreciate the efforts of the ministry of interior in combating drugs and protecting our youth, which was crowned by the General Administration for Drug Control winning the competition for the best field cooperation and operational information at

Continued on Page 6

Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's directives of protecting public funds and sovereignty of law. During the meeting, HH the Prime Minister hailed the role of such agencies in combating financial and administrative corruption and underlined necessity of reviewing legislations organizing workflow to meet demands adequately and facilitate execution of developmental projects.

In an effort to promote the workflow of regulatory agencies, HH the Prime Minister asked them to provide

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets heads of the state's regulatory authorities on March 20, 2024. — KUNA

Kuwait happiest Arab country, 13th worldwide

KUWAIT: Kuwait is ranked as the happiest country in the Arab world in an annual UN-sponsored World Happiness Report published on Wednesday, with the country listed as the 13th happiest nation globally. It's

the country's first entry into the global top 20 and a huge jump for the Gulf nation, which ranked 50th in the world last year.

In the UAE, people remain relatively happy, with the Emirates moving up to the 21st position from 26 last year. Finland remained the world's happiest country for a seventh straight year. And Nordic countries kept their places among the 10 most cheerful, with Denmark, Iceland and Sweden trailing Finland. Afghanistan stayed at the bottom of the 143 countries surveyed.

For the first time since the report was published more than a decade ago, the United States and Ger-

many were not among the 20 happiest nations, coming in 23rd and 24th respectively. In turn, Costa Rica and Kuwait entered the top 20 at 12 and 13. The happiness ranking is based on individuals' self-assessed evaluations of life satisfaction, as well as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption. This year's report also found that younger generations were happier than their older peers in most of the world's regions – but not all. Meanwhile, happiness inequality increased in every region except Europe, which authors described as a "worrying trend". (See Page 11)

Kuwait calls for radical reform of Security Council

BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tariq Al-Bannai called for radical reforms in the United Nations Security Council. This came in Bannai's speech during the meeting of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament on Tuesday. Bannai said: "I come from Kuwait. Kuwait was invaded in 1990; it took a multilateral approach, and it took the Security Council exercising all its prerogatives, from diplomacy to sanctions to authorization of the use of force to compensation and border demarcation and many, many other issues that were part of the process of freeing my country from occupation."

"So we have seen it work. We have seen it perform at the best possible level. Therefore, it can work, but it does require unity amongst the permanent members, for sure, because if that is not there, nothing really that requires Chapter 7 processes can work if there are divergent or opposing views."

The Kuwaiti ambassador noted that the Future Summit organized by the UN in December would be an opportunity to discuss all possibilities for reforming the Council of Representatives and the way its mechanisms work in order to achieve the desired goals and create effectiveness and feasibility. He also touched on specific points, such as veto power, regional representation, the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, working methods and the future size of the Council.

"We hope that this year's discussion further enhances the convergences between member states, and that we can somehow be able to put those convergences in a package that allows member states at the highest level, the level of heads of state and government, to commit to reinvigorating not only this process, but also the ideas and the purposes and the principles of the charter itself, which the Security Council is an important aspect of," Bannai said. — KUNA



Tariq Al-Bannai

Court reinstates 2, bars 2 candidates

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The administrative court on Wednesday confirmed barring two candidates from running in the elections and returned two others to the race. The elections committee last week decided to bar 14 candidates from running in the polls for various reasons, mainly because their criminal record was not clean. Among those barred were former MPs for being convicted by court for participating in outlawed tribal primary elections. The verdicts are not final and are expected to be appealed before the court of appeals.

Also, the constitutional court on Wednesday rejected a petition filed by a lawyer demanding to cancel the April 4 snap parliamentary polls on the basis that the election law issued by the government contradicted the constitution. After HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah dissolved the National Assembly on Feb 15, the government issued a new elections law through an Amiri decree.



Local



KUWAIT: (From left) CMO at M2R Group Bilal Al-Mourad, Public Relations Manager, Corporate Development and Communications at Alghanim Industries Hussain Al-Qatari, Deputy General Manager for Public Relations and Media at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Yousuf Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh, CEO of CODED Ahmad Marafi, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, Agility Managing Director Abdullah Al-Failakawi, Dean of the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University Professor Adel Al-Wugayan and Managing Partner of Kuwait News and Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times Abdullah Boftain attend the launch of the fourth edition of the Kuwait Codes initiative by CODED Academy. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

CODED launches 4th edition of Kuwait Codes in partnership with Kuwait's leading organizations

Academy aims to enhance youth technology skills

KUWAIT: CODED Academy is pleased to announce the launch of the fourth edition of the Kuwait Codes initiative, targeting high school students and ninth graders, as part of a strategic partnership with Alghanim Industries, Kuwait Finance House, Zain, Agility and Kuwait University, and with the exclusive digital sponsorship of M2R and media sponsorship of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News.

In 2024, this initiative aims to teach a thousand high school students the fundamentals of programming in various programming languages and technology fields. These fields include application development, web programming, game development, cybersecurity and more. The initiative is entirely free of charge and also offers the opportunity to participate in training programs to develop and apply their skills.

The Kuwait Codes initiative represents a valuable opportunity for students, as it aims to build a tech-savvy youth community in the field of technology, providing new opportunities for participation and influence in the future of technology in Kuwait. This aligns with Kuwait's vision for 2035, focusing on a technology-dependent future. It's worth noting that the Kuwait Codes initiative has graduated outstanding students who have executed innovative projects in various programming fields, as well as forming a community of individuals sharing a common interest in the tech world and providing them with valuable scientific connections.



CEO of CODED Ahmad Marafi

CODED Academy

At the press conference announcing the launch of Kuwait Codes 2024, Ahmad Marafi, CEO of CODED, remarked: "This initiative comes at a crucial and vital time, as the world witnesses a rapid transition towards technology in various aspects of life. CODED Academy believes that by empowering Kuwaiti youth with programming and technical skills, our young men and women will have the ability to become critical and creative scientific figures - contributing to the development and progress of Kuwait. Furthermore, this initiative addresses the rapidly changing job market needs in Kuwait, offering new job opportunities for young tech enthusiasts."

Zain Kuwait

On his part, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti said: "We are delighted today to renew our support to the community's

top programming initiative – Kuwait Codes, which comes this year in its fourth season. We are proud to have supported the past two seasons of the program, which has achieved so many successes since its inception by upskilling over 2,500 aspiring young, Kuwaiti programmers, whom we look to as the leaders of our nation's digital future."

Al-Khashti added: "Many of our corporate sustainability initiatives center around youth and education development, and as digital skills are gaining accelerating importance in the future of education and the economy, we have put the development of programming and other digital competencies at the forefront of our priorities. Zain will always be keen to contribute to upskilling the next generation of local talents with the skills required by today's markets, like cybersecurity and AI, both of which are being introduced in the fourth season of Kuwait Codes."

He concluded by saying: "We look forward to a new season filled with success and achievement, and we can't wait to see even more aspiring young programmers join the program to bolster their skills. We wish our colleagues at CODED all the best in their ongoing journey to empower digital innovation and creativity, not only in our own community, but across the region as well."

Kuwait Finance House

Likewise, Deputy General Manager for Public Relations and Media at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Yousuf Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh stated: "We take pride at KFH in continuing our strategic partnership with CODED Academy, to develop programming fundamentals and support technological innovation, through which we aspire to support Kuwaiti youth and contribute to providing them with the best educational means in the field of programming."

Al-Ruwaieh emphasized that KFH is keen on continuing to enhance its role as a model in corporate social responsibility and innovation support at the level of private sector institutions, and to consolidate its prestigious position in the community as the largest bank in Kuwait and a leading global Islamic financial institution.

Agility

Commenting on their continued partnership with CODED for Kuwait Codes, Henadi Al-Saleh, Agility Chairperson, said: "Young people need digital fluency and technological skills to succeed in the knowledge economy. That's why Agility has partnered with CODED Academy. Together, we can equip the younger generation with critical software development skills so they can contribute to progress and innovation in Kuwait. I look forward to seeing their progression and development as part of the coming Kuwait Codes cohort."

Alghanim Industries

Public Relations Manager, Corporate Development and Communications at Alghanim Industries Hussain Al-Qatari added: "Over the past two years, we've witnessed firsthand how Kuwait Codes transcends the mere teaching of technical skills, instead nurturing critical life skills among our youth. At Alghanim Industries, our goal extends



Managing Partner of Kuwait News and Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times Abdullah Boftain

beyond fostering technological proficiency; we aim to cultivate the collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity that are vital in today's world.

"This program marks a significant shift from conventional coding education, encouraging continuous growth and active engagement. In collaboration with CODED and our partners in the private sector, we are deeply committed to unlocking the potential of our young people. Together, we are paving their path towards a future where they can lead with technological savvy and a spirit of teamwork, contributing to the 'Kuwait 2035' vision."

Kuwait University

Furthermore, Dean of the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University Professor Adel Al-Wugayan commented: "We gather here today to celebrate this ambitious event and the pioneering initiative marked by the signing of the memorandum of understanding concerning the joint strategic collaboration between the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University and CODED Academy, which includes the Kuwait Codes initiative."

The College of Business Administration at Kuwait University and CODED Academy share the mission to engage youth in technology and programming. Their partnership aims to foster programming skills among high school students and grow the programming community in Kuwait and the Gulf region through cutting-edge IT and programming courses. The college is dedicated to developing human capital, empowering young generations, serving the community and promoting enlightened thinking in line with the university's mission."

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

Managing Partner of Kuwait News and Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times Abdullah Boftain praised the significant role played by CODED in the past years, affirming that trust, good reputation and achievements have contributed to attracting prominent companies interested in social and national responsibility.

Boftain's remarks came during the launch of the fourth edition of the Kuwait Codes initiative by CODED Academy to develop programming basics and support technological

innovation, in media partnership with Kuwait Times and Kuwait News. He added Kuwait News and Kuwait Times carefully select media partnership opportunities, explaining that choosing this opportunity is in appreciation of the educational and technological company's efforts since 2015 in providing distinguished human resources to the job market with an eye on the future.

Boftain emphasized that Kuwaiti youth are ambitious and capable of creativity and innovation whenever given the opportunity. "Our role is to provide these opportunities and support them in implementing their ideas in reality," he stressed.



Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti

M2R Group

In a concluding remark, Bilal Al-Mourad, CMO at M2R Group, said: "As a pioneer in the media and advertising industry company with 360 approach, M2R group is proud to be a sponsor of Kuwait Codes as part of its CSR efforts and as an extension of its dedication towards supporting important initiatives in Kuwait. It's critical for media & advertising companies to support such initiatives in order to increase awareness for such initiatives, and engage as many people as possible. We thank CODED for this opportunity and wish participants the very best." Registration for Kuwait Codes 2024 is now open for all eligible high-school students on code.kw.

Zain continues strategic partnership with Kuwait Codes

KUWAIT: Zain announced the continuation of its strategic partnership with the community's top coding program, Kuwait Codes, in its fourth season in collaboration with CODED Academy. The initiative, supported by Zain for the third year running, continues its mission to empower the next generation of aspiring, young Kuwaiti programmers. The announcement was made during the press conference held at Kuwait University's Cultural Center in Shadadiya, joined by Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, CODED Academy CEO Ahmad Marafi, Zain and CODED officials, and representatives from the program's sponsors and supporters.

Waleed Al-Khashti said: "Delighted today to renew our support to the community's top programming initiative – Kuwait Codes, which comes this year in its fourth season. We're proud to have supported the past two seasons of the program, which has achieved so many successes since its inception by upskilling over 2500 aspiring young, Kuwaiti programmers, whom we look to as the leaders of our nation's digital future."

He added: "Many of our corporate sustainability initiatives center around youth and education development, and as digital skills are gaining accelerating importance in the future of education and the economy, we have put the development of programming and other digital competencies at the forefront of our priorities. Zain will always be keen to contribute to upskilling the next generation of local talents with the skills required by today's markets, like cybersecurity and AI, both of which are being introduced in the fourth season of Kuwait Codes."

Al-Khashti added: "At Zain, we're proud to be a part of CODED Academy's success story by supporting many of their best programs, including last year's Kuwait Hackathon, the nation's biggest cybersecurity competition. CODED launched this competition in response to a parliamentary initiative proposed by several members of the National Assembly, which was adopted by the Minister of Interior back then. It aimed at increasing awareness of cybersecurity and the protection of data, test the efficiency of sensitive government systems, and upskill national talents in cybersecurity."

He concluded by saying: "We look forward to a new season filled with success and achievement, and we can't wait to see even more aspiring young programmers join the program to bolster their skills. We wish our colleagues at CODED all the best in their ongoing journey to empower digital innovation and creativity, not only in our own community, but across the region as well." Ahmad Marafi said: "We take pride at CODED Academy in announcing our strategic partnership with Zain in the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative for the fourth year, following the remarkable success achieved in the previous year."

Zain is undoubtedly one of the leading and advanced companies in the world of technology and telecommunications, and its partnership in the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative has a significant impact on our students interested in the field of technology." Marafi continued: "Today, we are offering a free educational initiative to high school students and ninth graders with the aim of teaching them the fundamentals of programming in various fields. Our goal is to develop their critical and creative thinking in diverse areas."

This year, we aspire to educate 1000 male and female students through a specialized educational curriculum provided by the best teachers in the field. Additionally, we provide training opportunities for students to share and apply their skills." "Our partnership with Zain reflects our joint commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunities and fostering innovation and creative thinking in the field of technology. We thank Zain for their trust in CODED," he concluded.



M2R, Alghanim Industries, Kuwait Finance House, Zain, Agility, Kuwait University and Kuwait Times and Kuwait News executives sign the agreement.

Ministry of Interior receives Amir



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the Ministry of Interior on Tuesday. He was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Addressing the ministry's top officials, His Highness the Amir congratulated the ministry and its staff on the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir was received by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah, and the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



Amir visits Kuwait Fire Force



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, visited Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) headquarters on Tuesday. His Highness the Amir was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. They were received by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, and head of KFF Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mekrad. In his speech, His Highness the Amir congratulated all KFF staff on the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA



Local

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Words that linger in our memories

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Words are just words, but the way they are conveyed is what makes them hit differently. The tone, timing and expressions that accompany them can create the greatest transformation spells on people. However, as people depart, facial features are forgotten and tones of voices fade away, the memory of kind words can persist for decades. To mark the International Day of Happiness, Kuwait Times invited people to share cherished words that have brought joy to their hearts.

Dina Nemr: On a day when my dad was very ill last year, I was sitting beside him taking care of him. I looked into his eyes and asked him, "Daddy, do you love me?" Despite his exhaustion, he met my gaze with a soft and gentle expression, whispering back, "Very much." Since he was never good at articulating his feelings, saying those words felt like releasing all the love that he had bottled up for years. Though "very much" may seem like simple words, their impact on me remains remarkably vivid until this day. It felt like a message from God before my dad's passing, reassuring me that my dad always held deep affection for me.

Nada Dawood: Amidst a hectic day at work, even though I looked stressed and exhausted, a young girl whom I didn't know approached me and said, "I've been seeing you for the past few days, and every time I saw you, I wanted to come and tell you how beautiful you are." Whenever I recall her words, a smile spreads across my face involuntarily. Though I haven't met that girl again, I never forgot her. Now, whenever I encounter someone who looks lovely, I make sure to express it aloud because I realized how much they might yearn to hear such affirmations.

Raneem Magdy: "You are the first person I turn to whenever I feel lonely. I can't imagine us growing apart." I saved this message on my phone a while ago when my best friend sent it to me, and I find myself rereading it often.

Rudina Ghanem: Months ago, during my training as a doctor in the hospital, my teacher approached me and said, "You are going to be a successful doctor one day. Do you know why? Because you are hardworking and eager to learn." Despite my constant self-blame for not studying well enough during this time, I felt immense happiness and motivation knowing that someone recognized my efforts no matter what.

Ghadeer Ghloom: I remember when my mum told me, "You are worth the whole world to me." I believe no tangible or intangible force in the world could rob me of the feeling I experienced that day. Not only did it make me feel like I was a priority to my family, but I also felt surrounded by an immense amount of love and warmth.

Samy Yasser: "Always stay as you are, and never stop being yourself." Since I heard these words, I've grown more confident in myself and increasingly determined never to let the ugliness in people change who I truly am.

Hassan Fahd: "Thank you for existing."

Nadine Abdullah: "I am proud of you". Sometimes when the whole world is against you, hearing words like these is all you need.

Zainab Al-Mashhour: "You are Pure". I love hearing this word: it takes me back to my younger days when I used to hear it often. Now, whenever someone says it to me, it serves as a gentle reminder of my true self, which I'm grateful to have preserved on my journey.

Laila Mahmoudi: "You are one of the most beautiful creations of God." My entire demeanor shifted upon hearing those words. I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards God for allowing others to recognize the goodness within me effortlessly.

Hana Ghanem: "Whoever has you in his life must be so lucky."

Mariam Moustafa: "You make me feel so happy."

Rana Ghassan: "You are so innocent." Despite often being criticized for being overly kind to people and trusting their intentions, I cherish hearing words like these, as they remind me of the importance of preserving this rare trait within me.

Jana Nassar: "You are very rare." It made me feel that every good deed I've done for anyone is truly meaningful to them and was worth all the effort.

Cabinet holds weekly session

Ministers briefed on proposal to postpone installments

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Cabinet held its weekly session on Tuesday at Bayan Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Following the meeting, Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya said that the Cabinet was briefed on the visits of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Ministry of Defense and the National Guard, where he affirmed confidence in the country's security sectors, which defend and sacrifice the dear homeland.

Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Child Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah informed the Cabinet on the launch of an award in the name of His Highness the Amir for creativity for people with disabilities. The Cabinet touched on the recommendation of the Ministerial Economic Affairs Committee regarding the concepts submitted by the Ministry of Finance on ways to enhance and maximize state revenues through optimal exploitation of state lands belonging to the Ministry of Finance.

Further, the Cabinet was briefed on an explanation presented by the Minister of State for



KUWAIT: Kuwait Cabinet holds its weekly session at Bayan Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

National Assembly Affairs, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and the Minister of State for Communications Affairs, Dawood Maarafi, on the proposal to postpone the installments due

to owners of small and medium enterprises financed by the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Care, for six months. — KUNA

International Women's Group hosts Lebanese ghabga night

KUWAIT: The International Women's Group (IWG), in collaboration with the Lebanese Embassy and the wife of the Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait May Mansour, and the Lebanese Ladies' Society organized the outstanding cultural event 'Lebanese Ghabqa-Night' on Sunday, March 17, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

The event was opened by Layla Boulos, who welcomed the attendees. The IWG President and wife of the Bulgarian Ambassador, Antonia Dimitrova, gave a welcome speech, congratulating His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Dimitrova expressed appreciation for the cooperation of the Embassy of the Republic of Lebanon and thanked Ahmed Arafa and his spouse.

In his opening address, the Chargé d'Affaires Ahmed Arafa, expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to the President and members of the Executive



Board of the International Women's Group for their effective contribution to the organization of the celebration. He also extended his congratulations on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing him good health and well-being, and to the Kuwaiti people for further progress and prosperity.

The event included a musical performance of songs by Fairuz, presented by the artist Najla Al-Faqih, accompanied on the oud by the artist George Tohmeh. A short film about Lebanon entitled "Lebanon in the Eyes of Travelers" was also screened during the



event, highlighting the various tourist, historical and cultural aspects of Lebanon.

This was followed by another performance of Fairuz's songs by the artist Najla Al-Faqih, accompanied by the oud. This was followed by a raffle draw for valuable prizes, including gifts from the Lebanese community. The traditional Lebanese Ramadan "Masaharti" also brought joy and happiness to the hearts of the attendees, inviting them to a food buffet that featured some of the famous Lebanese dishes prepared by the chefs of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in an atmosphere of Lebanese songs by Fairuz.



Minister visits social care, reinforces spirit of love and unity

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Family Affairs and Childhood Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah emphasized the importance of involving children, workers and residents in the social care sector in the atmosphere of the blessed month of Ramadan. The minister expressed his pleasure in participating in the collective iftar ceremony organized by the social care sector in collaboration with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs for children, residents and workers in the social care sector under the theme "Your presence sweetens our iftar".

This annual tradition reinforces the spirit of love and unity and embodies the concept of one family



by involving the elderly, children, people with disabilities and youth. The minister praised the efforts of those responsible for the collective iftar and the beautiful spirit that reflects the atmosphere of the holy month and the values and customs of the Kuwaiti people.



Amir receives letters from Iran president

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Tuesday two letters from Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. The letters touched on the bilateral ties between the two countries and issues of common interest. The letters were handed to Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah by Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Totunji. — KUNA



Group photo of the participants and winners.



Ahmed Al-Nuwaibet honors the winners of the first place.

stc 'main sponsor' of KTECH's coding competition

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, was a main sponsor of the Kuwait Technical College (KTECH) coding competition for public high school students. stc's sponsorship of the competition aligns with the Company's objectives behind its educational 'upgrade' initiative which aims to enhance the quality of education in the community, as well as the recently formed strategic collaboration with KTECH.

The coding competition included training sessions that were held on March 5th and 6th, as well as the final

competition that took place on March 9th, where the winners were announced. Over 30 public high schools participated in the competition, providing students with a chance to utilize the specially designed initiative to boost their problem solving and coding skills through the programming language Python.

As a main sponsor of this competition, and in line with the recent MoU signed with KTECH, stc presented awards to the students that placed in the top positions of the competition. The Company's participation reflects its commitment to supporting the local educational initiatives, and providing platforms to students that can empower their skills and showcase their abilities to excel across various fields.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "Our role as a main sponsor in this initiative comes as a reflection of the level of empowerment we aspire for the future generation, especially within the digital world. We are thrilled to have witnessed students showcase their best coding abilities throughout this competition and are proud to

see the level of sophistication they possess within this programming language. Such competitions serve as the core of our educational 'upgrade' initiative, providing students with an opportunity to learn and implement their knowledge in a competitive environment."

AlJasem added, "On behalf of stc, I would like to congratulate the winners of the competition and thank all the students who participated in the coding competition for their effort. Additionally, I would like to extend a special thanks to KTECH for organizing the competition which comes as one of the initiatives under our strategic collaboration for the year 2024.

stc highly values the importance of being an active contributor to the community, as it is through initiatives like these that we provide additional educational platforms that students can participate in to discover their skills and areas of interest. We look forward to participating in similar initiatives that will support the community in various ways and strengthen the initiatives organized under the educational pillar of our extensive corporate social responsibility program."



Girls barred from high school in Afghanistan for third year

US court blocks Texas from arresting, deporting migrants



RAFAH: Displaced Palestinian children wait inside their makeshift tents at a camp beside a street in Rafah on March 14, 2024. — AFP photos

Thunder, rain lash tent camp in Rafah

Palestinians shiver from fear, cold as rainwater seeps through tents, thunder sounds like rockets

RAFAH: Torrential rains lashed a tent camp for displaced people in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, where frightened Palestinian children can no longer distinguish between thunder and Zionist bombardment.

The storm fell overnight Monday to Tuesday in the southernmost Gaza Strip city, adding to the anguish of Palestinians who fled Zionist attacks, many without warm clothes, blankets or proper footwear.

Oum Abdullah Alwan said her children "screamed in fear" because "we can't tell the difference between the sound of rain and the sound of shelling". "It's shelling, Mum, we have to run," one of the children told Alwan, who was displaced from Jabalia further north, and now lives with more than a dozen family members in a tent in the makeshift camp.

She asked her son: "Is that the sound of shelling?" He told her it was thunder. The rain, accompanied by biting winds, soaked foam mattresses and the meagre belongings of the camp's residents.

"We are 14 people living in a tent and we cannot find a single dry mat-

ress to sleep on, or even a dry blanket. We have been soaked in rainwater all night," said Alwan.

Like other parents, she said she huddled with her children, embracing them to quell their shivers and "feel a little warmth". "How much longer will we live in this torment? How much longer?" she cried out.

The war, now in its sixth month, has devastated vast swathes of Gaza and pushed hundreds of thousands to flee their homes seeking safety. Many have flooded into Rafah, on the border with Egypt, where Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to launch a ground offensive.

The Zionist entity's relentless air, ground and sea bombardment on the Gaza Strip that has killed at least 31,819 people, mostly women and children, the health ministry in the territory says.

The entity claims the assault is in response to an attack by Hamas which resulted in about 1,160 deaths in the Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Zionist figures. Hundreds of thousands of people are now also on the brink of famine, the

United Nations and international aid groups have warned.

"Tired of living in a tent"

An estimated 1.5 million Palestinians now live in Rafah, most of them displaced from other parts of the Gaza Strip and living in a sea of makeshift tents. In the camp, a group of children walked past the tents wearing sandals or even barefoot. "I've told you many times not to play here," an old man shouted at them. "It's (the water is) dirty. You'll get sick."

Residents complained that rainwater was seeping through the tents, drenching them and their belongings and making them ill. Many tried to patch up their improvised homes with whatever they could find.

Mahmoud Saad gathered sand and pushed it against the edge of his family's tent to stop the water, with help from his daughter Aya. "Winter is usually a blessed season, but not for Gaza," said Aya.

Further away, Akram Al-Arian, who is displaced from Khan Yunis, said when the rain fell he too was confused, thinking it was another Zionist bombardment. "I held my children close to me like a hen



A displaced Palestinian woman stands at the entrance of a tent flooded by heavy rain, at a makeshift camp in this file photo.

protecting her chicks," Arian said. "I didn't know what to do. I'm tired of living in a tent."

Abir Al-Shaer, also originally from Khan Yunis, said her children had "de-

veloped a psychological obsession with rockets". "Every sound is a rocket sound to them, even when the tent flap flutters in the wind, they think it's the sound of a rocket." — AFP

Irish PM Varadkar announces shock resignation

DUBLIN: Leo Varadkar on Wednesday announced that he was stepping down as Ireland's prime minister and leader of the Fine Gael party in the governing coalition, citing "personal and political" reasons.

Pundits called the surprise move, just 10 weeks before Ireland holds European parliament and local elections, a "political earthquake". A general election also has to be held within a year. Deputy Prime Minister Micheal Martin, leader of the Fianna Fail coalition partner, said Varadkar's announcement was "unexpected" but added that he expected the government to run its full term.

An emotional Varadkar, who is in his second stint as prime minister and at 45 remains one of Ireland's youngest leaders, said he felt he was no longer the "best person" to lead the country. "Politicians are human beings. We have our limitations," he said in a statement on the steps of Government Buildings in Dublin, surrounded by his Fine Gael cabinet colleagues. "We give it everything until we can't anymore and then we have to move on."

Despite recent poor showings at the ballot box, Varadkar insisted that he believed the government could be re-elected. But he added: "I believe a new taoiseach (prime minister) will be better placed than me to achieve that — to renew and strengthen the top team, to refocus our message and policies, and to drive implementation."

"After seven years in office, I am no longer the best person for that job," he said. "I am resigning the presidency and leadership of Fine Gael and will resign as Taoiseach as soon as my successor is able to take up that office. "My reasons for stepping down now are personal and political, but mainly political," he said, without elaborating.

Earlier this month, Varadkar was widely blamed for a twin defeat, including the biggest-ever referendum loss by a government, on proposals to reform referendums to women, the family and care in the Irish constitution.



BELFAST: Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar waves in this file photo. — AFP

"Electoral loser"

Varadkar said his center-right Fine Gael party would have a leadership contest, and that he would remain as premier until the new leader is elected, after parliament returns from recess next month. Varadkar first became prime minister in June 2017. He was the youngest person to ever hold the office, Ireland's first openly gay prime minister, and the first to be from an ethnic minority background.

He stepped down as part of a deal with opposition parties after his party's poor performance in the 2020 general election, but took over for a second time in 2022 as part of the same agreement.

Varadkar, a pugnacious and sometimes controversial speaker in parliament, was in charge of Ireland's response to the COVID pandemic and during Brexit negotiations, where he helped prevent a hard border with UK-run Northern Ireland.

Fine Gael has lost five recent by-elections, leading some insiders to see Varadkar as an electoral liability. Ten of the party's lawmakers have announced that they do not plan to stand at the next election.

"His legacy will be that of an electoral loser. He promised to be a good communicator, but it turned out he was bad at it. He had no clear agenda, and delivered little," Eoin O'Malley, a political scientist at Dublin City University, told AFP. — AFP

The search to discover why 'outliers' survive deadliest cancers

PARIS: When Herve found out he had glioblastoma — the most aggressive form of brain cancer — at the age of 40, he made a deal with himself. "I said to myself: it is serious, but you are at war — and you're going to win," the French teacher, who did not want to give his surname, told AFP. "For my wife and children, I forbade myself to die."

Eight years later, following surgery to remove the tumor, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, Herve is still winning his war. He is just one of the thousands of people across the world to have survived an extremely deadly cancer for which there is no known cure.

Herve eagerly volunteered for research being conducted by a biotech start-up aiming to find out what makes these exceptional cases different, in the hope of reproducing their unlikely tales of survival on a grand scale. "We call them outliers," said Nicolas Wolikow, the CEO and co-founder of the Paris-based firm Cure51.

"For unknown reasons, when these people face an illness they take a completely different trajectory from other people," he told AFP. The start-up is working on creating "the first global clinical and molecular database of exceptional survivors" of cancer, according to its website.

The project will involve patients who lived for more than three or five years after being diagnosed with three of the deadliest cancers: glioblastoma, metastatic pancreatic cancer and small cell lung cancer. "They are very aggressive cancers for which real new treatments have not been developed over the last 15 years," Wolikow said. Yet the rare few — tens of thousands of people

worldwide — still defy what for most would be a death sentence. The question is why.

Search for 'molecular signature'

One problem has been that almost all research has been based on North American or Western European patients, Wolikow said. So the firm has partnered with 50 cancer centers around the world to get data from a wider variety of survivors. So far, the firm has found 1,300 patients to be part of the project.

Once the data is collected "we will begin analyzing medical reports, images, tumor cells," Wolikow said. The patients will also fill out questionnaires about their lifestyle, sleep, diet and the roles of people around them.

Algorithms deploying artificial intelligence will also be used to seek out the patients' common traits, comparing them to those of people who succumbed to their cancer. On Wednesday, Cure51 announced it has raised 15 million euros (\$16 million) for the project. Eventually, it hopes to be financed through collaborations with other biotech firms or pharmaceutical labs.

Olivia Le Saux, an oncologist in the French city of Lyon who is supervising the project, said the team was hoping to discover a "molecular signature which would explain the exceptional survival of these patients". The ultimate goal is to create new drugs or treatments that mimic the molecular characteristics of those few who do survive these killer cancers.

For Herve, there was some satisfaction in seeing the surprise on the face of his doctor when his tumor kept failing to return in his regular MRI scans. "At each appointment I could see the relief on his face," said the teacher in southeastern French department of Isere.

So Herve has happy to volunteer for the Cure51 project. "I am well aware of having extraordinary luck," he said. "I told myself that if I wanted to make a contribution, now was the time." — AFP

International

US court blocks Texas from arresting, deporting migrants

Law allowing arrest of migrants placed on hold hours after Supreme Court puts it into force

WASHINGTON: A Texas law that would allow state police to arrest and deport migrants who cross illegally into the United States from Mexico was again placed on hold late Tuesday, the latest in an ongoing legal back-and-forth over its fate.

The administration of Democratic President Joe Biden has strongly opposed the law, known as Senate Bill 4, arguing that the federal government has authority over immigration matters, not individual states.

"SB 4 will not only make communities in Texas less safe, it will also burden law enforcement, and sow chaos and confusion at our southern border," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement. "SB 4 is just another example of Republican officials politicizing the border while blocking real solutions."

A federal judge last month temporarily blocked the law passed by the Republican majority in the Texas state legislature saying it "conflicts with key provisions of federal immigration law."

But a conservative-dominated appeals court said SB 4 could go into force unless the Supreme Court ruled otherwise. The nation's highest court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, issued a temporary stay on SB 4 earlier this month but lifted it Tuesday, allowing it to take effect while legal challenges play out in lower courts.

But by Tuesday evening, the 5th

Circuit Court of Appeals put the law back on hold. That hold, however, could be soon again reversed - allowing the law to go back into effect as arguments over it continue.

The three liberal justices on the Supreme Court had dissented. "Today, the Court invites further chaos and crisis in immigration enforcement," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote.

"Texas passed a law that directly regulates the entry and removal of noncitizens and explicitly instructs its state courts to disregard any ongoing federal immigration proceedings," Sotomayor said. "That law upends the federal-state balance of power that has existed for over a century."

Mexico said Tuesday it "will not accept, under any circumstances, repatriations by the state of Texas," including Mexican citizens. Migrants in Mexico, meanwhile, told AFP they still planned on crossing the border.

"We've come to work," said 42-year-old Oscar Galeano of Guatemala, hoping for compassion from US authorities and an opportunity to immigrate. "We didn't come to take anything from anyone." Venezuelan Giancarlo Navarro, 43, described himself as "a political exile." "I cannot return to my country," he said. Republicans blame Biden for the recent record flow of migrants into the United States, while the White House accuses Republicans of deliberately sabotaging a bipartisan attempt to find a solution. — AFP



TEXAS: Migrants walk between Concertina wire and a string of buoys placed on the water along the Rio Grande border with Mexico in Eagle Pass in this file photo. — AFP

Senegal heads for wide open presidential poll

DAKAR, Senegal: Seven million Senegalese are due to head to the polls on Sunday to vote in a wide open presidential election following weeks of chaos and uncertainty. Whoever comes out on top will be tasked with steering the traditionally stable West African nation out of years of turmoil, and managing revenues from recently discovered oil and gas reserves.

The 18 men and one woman have until Friday to finish a raucous two-week campaigning period, which was dramatically shortened after a last-minute change to the election date. The election race was also fired up by a rapidly-passed amnesty law that led last week to the release from prison of Bassirou Diomaye Faye and the charismatic Ousmane Sonko, figureheads of the anti-establishment opposition.

Although Faye is Sonko's deputy, the former is on the ballot because the latter has been barred from standing. In voters' eyes, they come as a package deal. They plan "to share resources fairly. What belongs to Senegal should be left to Senegal, that's patriotism," said 38-year-old teacher Gnima Mane in the southern city of Ziguinchor.

For the first time in Senegal, the incumbent will not feature on the ballot, with the candidate selected by outgoing President Macky Sall's governing coalition up against 18 rivals. In the central town of Diourbel, many people have faith in Sall's candidate, Amadou Ba. "We have new streetlights, roads and a grass stadium," said high school student Ousseynou Diene during a rally for Ba.

Senegal has traditionally been considered a bea-

con of democracy and stability in coup-hit West Africa. But Sall's last-minute decision in February to delay the presidential vote due later that month sparked unrest that left four people dead.

Sall, who had won praise abroad by renouncing a possible third term bid in 2023, said he called off the vote over fears the ballot would not go well. After weeks of political crisis, the country's top constitutional body stepped in and forced him to reset the date to March 24.

Ba and Faye, who has pitched himself as the "candidate for system change" and "left-wing pan-Africanism", both claim they will be able to win in the first round. Khalifa Sall, the former mayor of the capital Dakar, has also been mentioned as an outsider. But the election remains wide open.

The race is "the most open" of the 12 presidential votes held under universal suffrage since Senegal gained independence from France in 1960, said Sidy Diop, deputy editor of Le Soleil daily.

Sovereignist rhetoric

The recent unrest witnessed in Senegal was the latest chapter in various episodes of violence since 2021, triggered partly by the stand-off between the firebrand Sonko and the state. Economic and social tensions, as well as concerns that Macky Sall would run for a third term, also fueled the unrest that left dozens killed and hundreds arrested.

In a bid to end the latest crisis, the government passed an amnesty law and released hundreds of prisoners, including Sonko and Faye. The pair are hoping to harness Sonko's charisma and former colonial ruler France. "The greatest danger facing Senegal today is Amadou Ba," Sonko said during a press

conference the day after his release, denouncing the former prime minister as a "billionaire civil servant" who "will be the president of foreign countries".

At a recent rally, Ba urged people to vote "for experience and competence instead of entrusting the reins of the country to adventurers". His candidacy has not been smooth sailing, though, with some dissent coming from within his own camp.

Ba says he wants to "share the prosperity" generated by Sall's development plan and has pledged to create one million jobs in five years. But Sall's legacy



DAKAR: A man walks in front of a defaced campaign poster for presidential candidate Amadou Ba of the Alliance for the Republic is seen on the side of a road in Dakar, on March 19, 2024. — AFP

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Ba says he wants to "share the prosperity" generated by Sall's development plan and has pledged to create one million jobs in five years. But Sall's legacy

also includes persistent poverty, with unemployment officially at 20 percent and thousands making the perilous voyage to Europe each year.

Senegal is due to join the ranks of oil and gas producers this year, but some fear that a newfound rush of petrodollars would lead to corruption, instability and even greater poverty. Experts have warned of the potential for flaring tensions on Sunday, particularly if Ba wins in the first round or Faye fails to reach the second. Provisional results could be known overnight. — AFP

Amir hails security, civil...

Continued from Page 1

the Arab level," said HH the Amir. During the visit, HH the Amir urged the top officials to continue to develop and advance security work, raise the efficiency, capacity and readiness of security personnel, develop infrastructure, provide distinguished services to citizens and residents and continue to consolidate joint cooperation locally, regionally and internationally. HH the Amir also urged the digital transformation of all possible services provided by the ministry of interior in all its sectors. Undersecretary Sheikh Salem thanked HH the Amir for the visit.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal also visited the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) headquarters on Tuesday. Accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad, HH the Amir was received by Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Head of KFF Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad. In his speech, HH the Amir congratulated all KFF staff on the holy month of Ramadan, expressing his appreciation to them for their strenuous efforts and sacrifices for the sake of the dear homeland.

"We evaluate the keenness of the KFF on achieving its missions in line with a five-year strategic doc-

ument based on a scientific approach which studies reality and benefits from resources and potentials, seeking to achieve leadership and excellence," HH the Amir said. He further expressed appreciation to the KFF for its approach in boosting cooperation between military and security bodies on one hand, and their counterparts in sisterly and friendly countries on the other.

HH the Amir called on the KFF to remain vigilant and cautious as well as ready to face the risks of fires and accidents. He also instructed KFF personnel to make sure of facilities' safety and preventive measures to avoid fires. HH the Amir asked the KFF to keep pace with the developments and changes in civil protection and enhance preventive strategies as well as the plans of crisis management and disasters to reach the highest level of society security.

Mekrad affirmed that the KFF is following up the directives of the wise political leadership by implementing laws and rules for all, referring to cooperation with the state's regulatory bodies. Mekrad confirmed to HH the Amir the KFF personnel vowed that they would continue protecting souls and property in the dear homeland by getting ready to face crises, accidents and disasters. He expressed high appreciation, sincerity, loyalty and obedience to HH the Amir and congratulated him on Ramadan. A documentary themed "Regional Leadership in Civil Protection" was shown. — KUNA

every person who spends in Your cause," and the other one says, "O Allah, destroy every miser." (Al-Bukhari # 1, 442)

c. Praying for your brother or sister when you see them successful: Abu Ad-Dar'da'a (RA) related that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "There is no believing servant who supplicates for his brother (or sister in belief) in his/her absence, except that angels would say, 'May Allah accept your supplication and grant you the same.'"

These simple acts of worship will guarantee that angels supplicate for you.

— Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

A Nigerian man's lucky escape in kidnapping attack

KAJURU, Nigeria: Waking up to a gunman shining a light around his house, Nigerian Yusuf Thomas took his chance to escape when his would-be kidnapper told him to lie still and walked away to make a call.

He was lucky. More than 80 residents from his village in northwest Nigeria's Kaduna State were snatched after gunmen marched them out of their homes on Sunday evening in the country's most recent mass abduction for ransom. The raid on the village in Kajuru district came just weeks after around 280 pupils were abducted from a school by a criminal gang in the same state, prompting a national outcry about Nigeria's insecurity.

Thomas thought he would be shot until he managed to escape. "I heard a voice telling me not to raise my head or I'd be shot, so I laid down," he told AFP. "They asked for my phone and money, so I said I don't have a phone, I don't have money. When he turned back and was making a call to his colleagues, I used the opportunity to escape."

Kaduna is one of the northwestern Nigerian states where heavily armed criminal gangs known locally as bandits target villages and communities to raid, loot and carry out mass abductions for ransom. Dense forests that carpet parts of the region offer cover for gangs to set up camps while they negotiate for ransom payments.

The Kajuru attack was one in a string of recent kidnapping assaults in Africa's most populous nation in a challenge to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu who has promised to tackle insecurity. Kajuru Station village was almost deserted after the attack with many residents fleeing in fear of more abductions.

Kaduna State officials have not given any figures for the kidnapping on Sunday evening, but local officials say 87 people were taken, mostly women and children. Tanko Wada, a village head, said five people had since managed to escape from their captors. "We are living in fear because we don't know what will happen next," he told AFP.

Officials said gunmen went house to house taking people before leaving the village for nearby forests. "We are suffering because of the bandits that came into our community and abducted our children, our parents," said resident Martha Luka, 45. "What are we going to do? What is the solution now? I am begging the government to come to our help." — AFP

Acts of worship that will make...

Continued from Page 1

Nor do they (angels) intercede (with Allah in anyone's favor), except on behalf of those with whom He is pleased. For out of fear of Him, they are cautious." (Al-An'biya'a – the Prophets 21: 28)

b. Giving charity whatever small it may be: Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "Every day two angels descend from Heaven and one of them says, "O Allah, compensate

meetings to identify recurring issues and discuss mechanisms of addressing such issues.

Representatives of authorities extended their appreciation to HH the Prime Minister and for his valuable remarks and affirmed their intent on heeding the directives. Attending the meeting were Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji and chiefs of Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), Bureau for Financial Control, Department for Legal Advice and Legislation and Civil Service Commission, as well as the deputy chief of the Government Performance Follow-Up Agency and the Finance Ministry undersecretary. — KUNA

PM: Protect public funds...

Continued from Page 1

periodic reports clarifying obstacles hindering their performance, as well as present recommendations and suggestions. He also urged them to involve public opinion, through media outlets or designated reports, for them to recognize efforts of agencies. The premier tasked the authorities with amplifying cooperation and coordination by holding regular

International

Girls barred from high school in Afghanistan for third year

Male students say their ‘sisters’ to go to school because ‘they are half of society’



KHOST: Afghan school boys attend their first class following the start of the new academic year, at a private school in Khost on March 20, 2024. — AFP photos



FAYZABAD: Afghan primary school girls walk to their school to attend the first class following the start of the new academic year.

KABUL: Schools in Afghanistan opened for the new academic year on Wednesday, with girls lamenting being banned from joining secondary-level classes for a third year in a row.

Taliban authorities barred girls from secondary school in March 2022, after surging back to power in 2021 and imposing an austere vision of Islam with curbs the United Nations labels “gender apartheid”. On Wednesday morning, uniformed boys carried black and white Taliban flags as they lined the entrance of Kabul’s Amani school, where local officials arrived for the ceremonial start of the school year.

But 18-year-old Kabul resident Zuhail Shirzad had to stay home when the school bell rang. “Every year when my brother went to school, I felt very disappointed,” she told AFP. “I was happy for him and sad for myself,” she said.

“This winter, my brother was studying and preparing for the university entrance exam,” she added. “I looked at him desperately and said that if I had been allowed to go to school, I would also be preparing for the university entrance exam now.”

Afghanistan is the only country where girls’ education has been banned after elementary school. “None of the girls like me can continue our education and studies, and it is excruciating that boys can continue,” said 18-year-old Asma Alkozai, from the western city of Herat. “When there are barriers to education in society, such societies can never progress,” she told AFP.

Online classes have sprung up in response to restrictions but a dearth of computers and internet, as well as the isolation of learning via screen, makes them a poor substitute for in-person learning, students and teachers say.

stitute for in-person learning, students and teachers say.

Education ‘essential’

The education ministry announced the new school year on Tuesday, a day before the start of the Afghan calendar’s new year, in a media invitation that expressly forbade women journalists from covering the ceremony at the Amani school.

At the ceremony, Taliban government Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi praised education, saying, “A nation without education will always be dependent on others”, local media reported.

Universities also recently started the new academic year, but women have been blocked from attending since December 2022. Under the Taliban authorities, women have been excluded from many spheres of public life. Beauty salons have been shuttered and women have been

barred from parks, funfairs and gyms.

Women’s rights remain a key obstacle to international recognition of the Taliban government, which has not yet been recognized by any country. The United Nations mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called on the authorities to “end this unjustifiable and damaging ban”. “Education for all is essential for peace & prosperity,” the agency said in a post on social media platform X.

‘Half of society’

Taliban authorities have insisted since girls were barred from secondary school that they are working on establishing a system that aligns with their interpretation of Islamic law.

Thirteen-year-old Mudasir in eastern Khost province said girls and women should be given their rights to education “in the Islamic framework”. “They can go

to school wearing Islamic hijab (covering),” he told AFP. “They must be given their rights, because if a sister is educated, she can be the reason for the whole family to be educated.”

Faiz Ahmad Nohmani, who started secondary school at a private institution in Herat on Wednesday, was excited to start the new academic year but said he was “very sorry” that girls were not also returning. “Today, when I came to school, I wanted our sisters to come as well because they are half of society,” the 15-year-old told AFP. “They should study like us.”

Ali Ahmad Mohammadi, an 18-year-old student in his final year of secondary school, also in Herat, said he’s aware of the chance he has to study. “Literacy helps us progress, it saves society,” said the teenager, who hopes to go on to university. “An illiterate society will always face stagnation.” — AFP

Afghan women cling to glitchy online learning

KABUL: Sequestered at home in a remote Afghan town, 18-year-old Shekiba often roams the house hunting for the patchy internet signal that is her last link to an education.

Shekiba has turned to online learning since the Taliban returned to power in 2021 and shut her out of classrooms, signing up for live economics lectures she squints at on a pocket-sized phone screen.

She hopes to save for a laptop but is forced to buy expensive mobile data packages that still don’t guarantee a signal in the town of Ishkashim perched high in mountainous Badakhshan province.

“If there were no internet issues, it would be much easier,” she told AFP by phone. “But it’s better to carry on, instead of sitting and doing nothing.” “I just hope to study, to succeed, to progress. If one person progresses in a family, the whole family progresses, as well as the whole society.”

Boys and men returned to classes with the start of the Afghan new year, but girls and women will be left behind again by a Taliban government education blockade that is part of a raft of restrictions the United Nations has labelled “gender apartheid”.

While online alternatives have sprung up, a dearth of computers and internet, as well as the isolation of learning via screen, makes them a poor substitute for in-person learning, students and teachers say. Many of those alternatives also cannot provide diplomas, which offer a promise that qualifications will be acknowledged.

‘No perspective of future’

It’s unclear exactly how many girls and women are involved in online learning, but two higher education platforms report Afghans registering or applying in the tens of thousands since the Taliban takeover.

Begum Academy, an online platform with some 8,500 free videos in Dari and Pashto covering the Afghan secondary school curriculum, launched in December 2023 and quickly had more than 3,000 users.

Director Hamida Aman said parents are grateful but it’s hard for girls to stay driven. “It’s difficult to get motivated when everything is closed to you and there’s no perspective of future,” she told AFP from France, where she is based. “These girls cannot have certificates, or they cannot have the ambition to go to the university or to have any job later.”

Education for girls and women was a key aim of the US-backed government but gains were largely limited to cities, with only 23 percent of girls aged 13 to 18 in school nationwide, according to the International Crisis Group. The think tank said that figure dropped to 13 percent after the Taliban government issued its edicts barring female education in 2022. Zainab was soon to start high school when it came into effect and was twice rebuffed by an online school that was at capacity before she finally secured a place.

“Before taking online classes, we were idle at home. We were worried. We used to sleep most of the time, which made us depressed,” said Zainab, who asked not to use her full name for fear of reprisal. Online classes



This file picture taken on July 25, 2022 shows girls studying in a secret school at an undisclosed location in Afghanistan.

“keep us busy”, she told AFP, but they “cannot replace schools”.

Twenty-two-year-old Ruhila teaches English classes online while trying to continue her university education, also virtually, and says the teaching helps her spirits. “The only thing that gives me energy in the current situation is teaching these girls,” she said.

“But when you accept that it’s going to be online forever then you lose enthusiasm and you don’t put in the same effort,” she said. “Mentally, online classes are very tough. They are stressful, and boring.” Taliban authorities have insisted since girls were barred from secondary school that they are working on establishing a system that aligns with their interpretation of Islamic law.

Poor internet, few computers

Widespread virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated it was “at best, a rather

partial substitute for in-person instruction”, a UNESCO report found.

Afghan students face the burden of trying to log on in a country where the internet is often down — or painfully slow — and where electricity outages are common. Less than a quarter of the population uses the internet, according to online insights company DataReportal. With stark poverty rates in Afghanistan, computers are also a luxury many cannot afford.

Some 90 percent of Begum Academy students use their phones to learn, according to Aman. But even more than those frustrations, 18-year-old Aisha misses the social aspect of school.

“Online classes cannot be as effective as physical classes where we meet our peers and our teachers and exchange our ideas,” she said. “Online courses can only give us a hope,” she added. “But we can never say, ‘I have studied online so I have graduated from school.’” — AFP

In the case of SAF, the court ruled that while it can contribute to reducing the harmful impact of flying, “the term ‘sustainable’ is too absolute and not sufficiently concrete.” The statement that it is a ‘promising solution’ also gives too rosy a picture,” according to the court.

According to the court documents, KLM had disputed the idea that the statements were misleading and said the firm was free to communicate about its sustainability efforts. The firm said in a statement it had not used the expressions at the heart of the case “for some time”.

“It is good that the court gives us more clarity on what is possible and how we can continue to communicate transparently and honestly about our approach and activities,” said the airline.

“We are pleased that the court ruled that we can continue to communicate with our customers and partners about our approach to making aviation more sustainable. We are continuously learning how best to include them in this.” — AFP

‘Overly rosy picture’: KLM loses Dutch ‘greenwashing’ case

THE HAGUE: Dutch airline KLM misled consumers with “vague and general” adverts about its efforts to reduce the environmental impact of flying, an Amsterdam court ruled Wednesday in a greenwashing case brought by a pressure group.

KLM also “paints an overly rosy picture of the impact of measures such as Sustainable Aviation Fuel (made from renewable raw materials) and reforestation”, the court ruled. “These measures only marginally reduce the negative environmental aspects and give the mistaken impression that flying with KLM is sustainable.”

The case was brought by the Fossielvrij NL (Fossil-free Netherlands) group, which accused KLM of greenwashing — conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about the extent to which a company’s products, operations or services are environmentally sound.

KLM is no longer carrying the adverts in question, so the court did not order any alterations. The airline “may continue to advertise flying and does not have to warn consumers that current aviation is not sustainable”, the court said. “If KLM informs consumers about its ambitions in the area of CO2 reduction, for example, it must do so honestly and concretely,” the verdict added.

Most of the adverts were part of KLM’s “Fly Responsibly” campaign, which the airline says is an “awareness campaign”. They range from general statements such as “join us in creating a more sustainable future” to declarations about KLM’s use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), described as a “promising solution”.

Indian food app rethinks vegetarian fleet on safety fears

NEW DELHI: India’s top food delivery app walked back plans Wednesday to start a dedicated vegetarian fleet on fears it could jeopardize the safety of its drivers and put customers at risk of eviction. Food consumption is deeply political in India, where many practicing Hindus maintain that a vegetarian diet is necessary to maintain “purity”.

Some residential associations in India will only lease to people who say they are vegetarian, and Hindu activist groups have in the past forcefully demanded the closure of restaurants serving meat during religious festivals. Many Hindus at the top of the faith’s rigid caste hierarchy also avoid eating at restaurants that serve meat, even if vegetarian alternatives are offered.

Zomato, the most successful platform for home food deliveries, announced plans Tuesday to cater to that market by rolling out a separate and strictly meat-free service. The fleet was to be easily identifiable with its motorbike riders wearing green uniforms instead of Zomato’s usual red corporate livery.

But the company revised the plans a day later after an online backlash, with founder and chief executive Deepinder Goyal admitting the company had failed to think through the safety implications.

Goyal said that having a separate color-coded fleet risked having drivers get into altercations in residential areas that maintained a de facto vegetarian policy. “Our riders’ physical safety is of paramount importance to us,” he wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

“We now realize that even some of our customers could get into trouble with their landlords, and that would not be a nice thing if that happened because of us,” he added. “While we are going to continue to have a fleet for vegetarians, we have decided to remove the on-ground segregation of this fleet on the ground using the color green.”

Goyal’s announcement of the new fleet was roundly criticized on social media with many warning it risked entrenching food-based discrimination. One user warned the new color-coded system risked outing Zomato customers as covert meat-eaters, potentially upsetting their landlords.

“You know many tenants in societies and standalone houses don’t disclose to landlords they eat meat,” the user wrote in reply to the scheme’s announcement. Nearly 40 percent of Indians abstain from eating meat according to a Pew survey — by far the highest rate out of any country. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

Business

Google hit with \$272m French fine in news copyright fight

French magazines, newspapers lodged case with regulator in 2019

PARIS: French regulators said Wednesday they were fining Google 250 million euros (\$272 million) for breaching commitments on paying media companies for reproducing their content online and for using their material for its AI chatbot without telling them. Google had made commitments in 2022 to negotiate fairly with French news organizations, a year after the Competition Authority hit the US tech giant with a 500-million-euro fine over the long-running dispute.

Organizations representing French magazines and newspapers – as well as Agence France-Presse (AFP) – had lodged a case with the regulator in 2019. Under its commitments, the US tech giant has to provide news groups with a transparent offer of payment within three months of receiving a copyright complaint. But the regulator said Wednesday it was imposing the new fine on Google for “failing to

respect commitments made in 2022” and not negotiating in “good faith” with news publishers.

The US tech giant also used content from press agencies to train its artificial intelligence platform – Bard (now known as Gemini) – without notifying them or the authority, the regulator said.

Google failed to provide publishers and news agencies a technical solution allowing them to object to the use of their content, “hindering” their ability to negotiate remuneration, it added. The watchdog said Google had agreed to “not dispute the facts” as part of the settlement process and proposed “a series of corrective measures” in response to the failings identified by the authority. In a statement, Google said the fine was disproportionate and did not “sufficiently take into account the efforts we have made to answer and resolve the concerns raised — in an environment where it’s very hard to set a course be-

cause we can’t predict which way the wind will blow next.” “We’ve settled because it’s time to move on,” the company said.

The EU created in 2019 a form of copyright called “neighboring rights” that allows print media to demand compensation for using their content. France has been a test case for the rules and after initial resistance Google and Facebook both agreed to pay some French media for articles shown in web searches. Other European Union countries have also challenged Google over news content.

Spain’s competition watchdog launched an investigation into Google last year for alleged anti-competitive practices affecting news agencies and press publications. In 2022, Germany’s antitrust regulator shelved an investigation into Google’s News Showcase service, after the tech giant made “important adjustments” to ease competition concerns. — AFP



PARIS, France: The Google logo displayed on a screen and reflected on a tablet in Paris. — AFP

UK inflation slows to lowest level in almost 2.5 years

LONDON: Britain’s annual inflation rate fell more than expected in February, official data showed Wednesday, fuelling speculation that the Bank of England will start cutting interest rates in the coming months. The Office for National Statistics said inflation reached 3.4 percent last month – the lowest level since September 2021 – as growth in food prices eased further. The rate came down from 4.0 percent in January, while the Bank of England and other economists had forecast consumer prices to rise by 3.5 percent in February. The drop may give a boost to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his Conservative party as they face the prospect of losing a general election later this year amid discontent over the country’s cost-of-living crisis.

But with inflation remaining well above the BoE’s two-percent target, the central bank is widely expected to keep its main interest rate on hold in an announcement due Thursday.

This follows a regular monetary policy meeting and also an interest-rate announcement Wednesday from the US Federal Reserve. Economists are forecasting the Fed and European Central Bank will begin cutting rates from June — having massively hiked borrowing costs to tackle soaring prices.

For the BoE, the outlook is less clear according to economists, even if rate cuts could give a lift to Britain’s recession-hit economy. “The Bank of England has already said it’s not going to cut interest rates in a hurry,” Sarah Coles, head of personal finance at Hargreaves Lansdown, said following Wednesday’s data. “It’s going to wait for lower inflation to bed in. It means there’s a decent chance we won’t see cuts until August.”

Other analysts said a cut was likely to occur in June. There is no BoE monetary policy meeting in July. “Right now, the market is split between the first-rate cut coming at the June or August meeting,” noted Kathleen Brooks, analyst at XTB trading group. “Overall, there was something in this (inflation) report for both the hawks and the



BRISTOL: Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (second left) and Rolls-Royce Group President Chris Cholerton look towards an engine during a visit to the Rolls-Royce manufacturing facility in Bristol. — AFP

doves as we lead up to Thursday’s BoE meeting.”

On a monthly basis, the Consumer Prices Index rose 0.6 percent last month compared with a rise of 1.1 percent in February 2023. The pound was down against the dollar and steady versus the euro following the latest data, while London’s FTSE 100 stocks index fell slightly. The chief economist at the statistics office, Grant Fitzner, said “almost unchanged” food prices were the “main driver” of the fall to UK inflation last month. Offsetting this were rises to petrol prices and rents, he added.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt welcomed the headline drop. “Inflation has not just fallen decisively but is forecast to hit the two-percent target within months,” he said in a statement.

“This sets the scene for better economic conditions which could allow further progress on our ambition to boost growth.” With his Conservative party forecast to lose power to main opposition

Labour in the election, Hunt cautioned against “increasing borrowing or cutting funding for public services” to fund recent tax cuts. Hunt earlier this month announced a tax cut for millions of workers as the government tries to win around voters.

Sunak followed this up on Monday by launching measures to help small businesses navigate the weak economy. Companies and individuals have been hit by soaring interest rates as retail banks pass on hikes by the Bank of England.

At 5.25 percent, the BoE’s main rate is the highest level for 16 years, hurting borrowers but handing a boost to savers. The BoE hiked its key interest rate 14 times between late 2021 and second half of last year. Global inflationary pressures started to build after Covid lockdowns were lifted. Energy and food prices went on to skyrocket following the invasion of key grains producer Ukraine by major oil and gas provider Russia in early 2022. — AFP



Mustafa Suleyman

Microsoft hires DeepMind’s co-founder Suleyman

SAN FRANCISCO: DeepMind co-founder Mustafa Suleyman will become the head of a newly-created consumer AI unit at Microsoft, the scientist and entrepreneur said on Tuesday. Suleyman is one of the biggest names in the artificial intelligence revolution that is taking the technology world by storm and his hiring is a major move by Microsoft, which already partners with ChatGPT creator OpenAI.

Of all the tech giants, Microsoft has moved the fastest into adopting generative AI, integrating its powers into a whole range of products, most notably through its Copilot chatbot.

“I’m excited to announce that today I’m joining @Microsoft as CEO of Microsoft AI. I’ll be leading all consumer AI products and research, including Copilot, Bing and Edge,” Suleyman said in a post on X.

Suleyman said he would be leaving his role as chief executive of Inflection, a startup he co-founded and that became a promising rival to OpenAI and Anthropic in building the models that deliver ChatGPT-style AI. He added that some key collaborators at Inflection, including co-founder Karén Simonyan, had “chosen to join” his team at Microsoft. “We have been operating with speed and intensity and this infusion of new talent will enable us to accelerate our pace yet again,” Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said in a blog post.

Nadella said AI innovation at Microsoft would still depend on its partnership with OpenAI, the company led by Sam Altman where Microsoft invested \$13 billion last year. “We congratulate Mustafa and Karén on their new roles and look forward to working with them,” an OpenAI spokesperson said in a statement to US media.

With the hire, Microsoft is expanding its already leading position in the AI frenzy, accumulating investments and partnerships well beyond its deal with OpenAI. Last month, the company said it had partnered with French startup Mistral AI, a company that is seen as another promising upstart in the generative AI field. The full embrace of artificial intelligence has often taken archival Google by surprise and seen Microsoft become the world’s biggest company by market capitalization, taking over that top berth from Apple.

Suleyman’s DeepMind was acquired by Google in 2014 for \$500 million and the company was fully merged with Google’s own AI research department last year. Regulators in the United States and Europe have been scrutinizing the relationship between Microsoft and OpenAI amid a broader inquiry into how tech giants are potentially dominating the fledgling sector. — AFP

Temu owner nearly doubles annual profit

BEIJING: Chinese low-price online retailer Pinduoduo, the owner of the Temu app and Alibaba’s main competitor, almost doubled its net profit in 2023, the group announced on Wednesday. The Shanghai-based giant, which has made affordable products its speciality since launching in China in 2015, posted a year-on-year net profit jump of 90 percent in 2023 to 60 billion yuan (\$8.3 billion), according to a statement.

Pinduoduo is now a major competitor to behemoth Alibaba, though its highly successful Temu app is now in the crosshairs of several countries, including France, whose parliament has backed a string of measures against low-cost fast fashion brands.

France’s National Assembly approved moves including a ban on advertising for the cheap-textiles, and an environmen-

tal charge slapped on low-cost items. Temu’s Chinese rival Shein was singled out as a prime example of intensive fashion production. The European toy industry lobby accuses Temu of failing to comply with safety standards and of marketing products that present a “real risk” to children.

Pinduoduo co-founder and co-CEO Chen Lei said during an earnings call on Wednesday that the company’s global business was at a relatively early stage and admitted it may face “uncertainties and challenges ahead”. The company said its net profits more than doubled in the last quarter of 2023, up 146 percent, and the firm’s annual sales reached 247.6 billion yuan (\$34.4 billion), up 90 percent year-on-year.

As well as its rise overseas, Pinduoduo is enjoying growing success at home at a time when Chinese consumers are curbing their spending and turning to low-price products, against a backdrop of economic slowdown and high youth unemployment. That change in behavior enabled Pinduoduo to briefly overtake Alibaba in terms of market capitalization in November. — AFP

Lagarde warns of risk of cutting rates ‘too late’

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde warned Wednesday of the risk of acting “too late” on interest rate cuts, reaffirming the likelihood that the first reduction in borrowing costs will come in June.

The ECB has kept its interest rates steady since October, following an unprecedented series of hikes to tame red-hot inflation. With inflation steadily declining and the eurozone economy stuttering, attention has shifted to when the ECB will start easing its monetary policy. “We cannot wait until we have all the relevant information. To do so could risk being too late in adjusting policy,” Lagarde said at a conference in Frankfurt.

The ECB was therefore focusing on “two important pieces of evidence” before deciding its next move: data on eurozone wage growth and the bank’s own economic forecasts. Many wage negotiations in large sectors are still taking place, as unions across Europe push for salary hikes to compensate for higher living costs. The ECB expects to have a clearer picture on the outcome

of wage agreements at the end of May, Lagarde said. The ECB’s latest projections on economic growth and inflation meanwhile will be unveiled in June. The data should give “more visibility on the strength” of the economies of the 20-nation club as well as confirming whether inflation remains on track to return to the two-percent target in 2025. Policymakers will know “a lot more by June”, Lagarde said, echoing comments she made after the latest ECB meeting earlier this month.

If the data confirms the disinflationary process is continuing, “we will be able to move into the dialling back phase of our policy cycle and make policy less restrictive”, Lagarde said.

But she cautioned that there was no guarantee that a first rate reduction would automatically be followed by further cuts. “Our decisions will have to remain data dependent and meeting-by-meeting, responding to new information as it comes in,” she said. “This implies that, even after the first rate cut, we cannot pre-commit to a particular rate path.”

Across the Atlantic, the US Federal Reserve was widely expected leave its rates unchanged again later on Wednesday. But observers will be listening for updates on how many cuts Fed policymakers see this year, with many anticipating a first move in June. — AFP

Business

Burgan Bank attends EU workshops for Kuwaiti women in leadership

Bolstering bank's active participation in women's empowerment in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently participated in a series of workshops that were organized and hosted by the European Union's (EU) Delegation to the State of Kuwait, which focused on the best practices for increasing women's participation in leadership roles within the private sector. Representing Burgan Bank at the event was Huda Al-Shammari, General Manager – International Banks Office. Other attendees included high profile women in leadership positions in sectors such as politics, diplomacy, media, business – including the banking industry– academia, and civil society.

Commenting on the bank's participation in the leadership event, Al-Shammari said: "It was an honor for us to be present amongst such an inspiring group of visionary women who have boundless knowledge and passion for their fields and practice and for the advancement of Kuwait. During Women's Month, we see numerous activities taking place in appreciation and acknowledgment of women and the unique value that they bring to their environments, whether they are social, economic, or personal."

She added: "While these efforts are usually more vivid during March, their impact continues throughout the year. The umbrella of "wom-



Huda Al-Shammari



A group photo taken during the EU mentorship workshop for Kuwaiti women leaders.

en empowerment" covers a wide range of topics and issues, and the role of "women in leadership positions" may be one of the most prominent of those issues. It determines many trends and ensures higher rates of inclusion and empowerment

of women in a real way, not only in leadership positions, but in many fields, sectors and tracks."

It serves to note that Burgan Bank continues to lead by example in the banking and financial sector in Kuwait on the women's empowerment

front, with 48 percent of its staff being women (as of 2023), and 52 percent of all promotions being awarded to outstanding female employees (as of 2022). As for the bank's leadership and supervisory positions, it is currently 38 percent female.

NEWS IN BRIEF

China youth unemployment up

BEIJING: China's youth unemployment rate rose slightly in February, official data showed Wednesday, as policymakers in the world's second-largest economy work to ease mounting fears of a downturn. After youth joblessness soared to 21.3 percent in June last year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stopped releasing monthly figures, then resumed in December under revamped calculation criteria. The latest unemployment figure for 16- to 24-year-olds—which now does not include students—edged up to 15.3 percent in February, from 14.6 percent in January, NBS data showed. The youth unemployment rate in December last year was 14.9 percent. — AFP

Lonza snaps up Roche site

GENEVA: Swiss healthcare manufacturing group Lonza announced Wednesday that it had reached an agreement to buy a US biologics site from pharmaceutical giant Roche for \$1.2 billion in cash. In a statement, Lonza hailed the "highly valuable strategic acquisition" of the Genentech site in Vacaville, California—one of the world's largest biologics manufacturing sites by volume. The agreement between the two Swiss companies "will make capacity immediately available for our customers and unlock future growth for our Biologics division," Lonza's president of biologics Jean-Christophe Hyvert said in the statement. — AFP

Japanese yen hits 16-year low

HONG KONG: The Japanese yen fell to a 16-year low against the euro on Wednesday as the Bank of Japan indicated that monetary policy would remain loose even after shifting out of its negative interest rate environment. The unit hit 164.48 per euro—its weakest since 2008 -- as the difference between European Central Bank rates and the BoJ remained wide enough to prevent traders shifting their focus to Japan. The bank announced the rate hike on Tuesday—the first in 17 years—along with the scrapping of its control of bond yields and the purchase of risk assets as it moved away from years of its ultra loose monetary policy. — AFP

Apple CEO in China ahead of Shanghai store opening

SHANGHAI: Apple CEO Tim Cook was on a China charm offensive Wednesday ahead of a new flagship Shanghai store opening, weeks after a report suggested the company's sales in the country slumped at the start of 2024. Cook posted a video compilation on Chinese social media platform Weibo that featured him strolling in Shanghai's Bund area, taking selfies and eating soup dumplings with Chinese actor Zheng Kai.

"I'm always so happy to be back in this remarkable city," he wrote in an accompanying caption in Chinese and English. Apple will on Thursday open an eighth store in Shanghai, China's most populous city and its financial hub.

Cook's visit comes as worries grow around Apple's market share in the world's second-largest economy. A recent Counterpoint Research report said iPhone sales in China fell nearly a quarter year-on-year over the first six weeks of 2024.

The report attributed the fall to stiff competition from domestic brands, including tech giant Huawei, but also noted a high base of comparison from the same period in 2023. — AFP

Report: No oil and gas majors aligned with climate targets

PARIS: All major oil and gas companies plan fossil fuel expansion incompatible with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a new report said Wednesday. The assessment of the 25 largest listed fossil fuel firms by the think-tank Carbon Tracker is designed to enable investors to judge whether the firms are in line with internationally agreed climate goals. None are, the report found.

"Companies worldwide are publicly stating they are supportive of the goals of the Paris Agreement, and claim to be part of the solution in accelerating the energy transition," said Maeve O'Connor, Carbon Tracker Oil and Gas Analyst and report author. "Unfortunately, however, we see that none are currently aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement, albeit

there are clear differences between companies."

The report scores firms on a scale from A to H, using criteria including investments, production plans and emission targets. An A grade would be potentially aligned with the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit temperature rise to "well below" 2C and if possible the safer curb of 1.5C.

An H grade, according to Carbon Tracker, is the furthest from the Paris goal, with activities and strategy more consistent with catastrophic warming of 2.4C or worse. The report found that the company with the highest score was Britain's BP, rated D. At the bottom of the Carbon Tracker list were Saudi Aramco, Brazil's Petrobras, and the US's ExxonMobil, all rated G. The US firm Conoco Phillips was given an H.

Almost all the firms assessed plan new developments and production increases in the near-term. Only BP plans a decline in the longer term, while Repsol, Equinor, and Shell envisage keeping levels roughly the same. However, BP last year said its carbon emissions would not fall as quickly as anticipated, as it posted record annual profit thanks to soaring oil and gas prices.

EU agrees new caps on Ukraine farm imports

BRUSSELS: EU member states and lawmakers on Wednesday reached a deal to cap duty-free imports of a range of Ukrainian farm goods, which were allowed in the wake of Russia's invasion but have drawn fierce protests from farmers in the bloc.

The agreement renews for one year a broad tariff exemption first granted in 2022, but adds "safeguards" for a list of products including maize, oats, eggs, poultry, sugar and honey to stop cheaper imports from flooding the market. The 27-nation bloc initially dropped tariffs on Ukrainian imports in a bid to help keep Ukraine's economy afloat after the country was invaded by its neighbor.

Two years into the conflict, EU farmers complain they are being undercut by less expensive imports from Ukrainian producers not bound by the bloc's stricter rules—for example, on animal welfare—with the issue fuelling angry protests across the bloc. In response to those concerns, the regulation "provides for an emergency brake for poultry, eggs and sugar" as well as "oats, maize, groats (grain kernels) and honey", the European Parliament said in a statement. The "brake" would be used to stop duty-free imports rising beyond the average volumes of 2022 and 2023, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal, in Brussels for talks with EU leaders, called the overnight deal a "very good decision".

European Parliament rapporteur Sandra Kalniete said the accord "reinforces the EU's continued commitment to stand by Ukraine" in the face of the Russian invasion. She said it also "bolstered safeguard measures that would alleviate the pressure on EU farmers should they be overwhelmed by a sudden surge in Ukrainian imports". Wheat and barley will not be subject to import



BRUSSELS: EU member states and lawmakers on Wednesday reached a deal to cap duty-free imports of a range of Ukrainian farm goods.

safeguards, a decision that triggered an angry response from farmer groups that said this was a key demand.

Polish farmers have been blocking checkpoints with Ukraine in anger at imports from their war-torn neighbor, and this week expanded their protests to the western border with Germany.

Member states had signed off last month on an initial European Commission plan for narrower safeguards, but the EU parliament subsequently called for cereals and honey to be included, prompting a new round of negotiations. France in particular was pushing for caps on wheat, and its Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau called the overnight deal "insufficient." "The work continues," he said. "This is not the end of the process."

The agreement has yet to be formally adopted by EU member states, and by EU lawmakers meeting in late April, with a view to having it come into force on June 6. Christiane Lambert of the powerful Copacogeca European farmers' association said the deal

the latest portion of the deal, subject to board approval in late April.

Pakistan held elections last month, and a shaky coalition government has been tasked with an economic turnaround requiring them to agree to a raft of unpopular IMF belt-tightening measures.

In a statement, the IMF said "Pakistan's economic and financial position has improved" in recent months. "However, growth is expected to be modest this year and inflation remains well above target, and ongoing policy and reform efforts are required to address Pakistan's deep-seated economic vulnerabilities." Pakistan has historically been hamstrung by chronically low tax takings and unsustainable subsidies which have seen it accrue huge foreign debts it struggles to pay down without outside assistance. The new administration—led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif—is also set to barter over a fresh deal after the conclusion

as stands "does not answer the concerns of producers and therefore remains unacceptable". Copacogeca was also pushing for curbs on duty-free wheat as well as for the safeguard reference period to be extended to include 2021 -- when imports were lower.

The European Parliament statement said lawmakers "attained firm commitments from the (European) Commission to take action if there is a surge of Ukrainian imports of wheat". They had "also ensured that the Commission would act faster—within 14 days instead of 21 days—if trigger levels for the automatic safeguards were reached". In a further nod to farmers' grievances, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen indicated Friday after talks with Polish leader Donald Tusk that Brussels was also looking at restrictions on Russian agricultural imports.

The concessions come three months before European Parliament elections, with opinion polls pointing to a surge of support for far-right parties that have widely seized upon the farmers' discontent in their campaign-

of the current nine-month program. "We will not pursue it with joy, but out of necessity as we must rebuild our economic foundation, revive our economy, and rid ourselves of debt," he told his cabinet in televised remarks.

Inflation is soaring at 23 percent, with water, electricity and gas prices increasing at 36 percent, in the nuclear-armed nation of more than 240 million. February 8 polls were marred by allegations of rigging, with opposition leader Imran Khan jailed and barred from running and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party subject to a crackdown. The coalition which has taken power has dismissed the claims and said results should be accepted in the interests of a crucial economic recovery.

On Wednesday, Sharif's office announced he and other federal ministers would not accept salaries or benefits "in the context of promoting austerity at the government level". — AFP

NBK offers customers 20% discount at X-cite online on Mother's Day

Within ongoing efforts to provide exclusive offers and exceptional benefits

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to be closer to customers, share with them their celebrations of various occasions, by providing exclusive offers and exceptional rewards. In this context, the bank announced an exclusive discount of 20 percent on X-cite electronics products for its customers via website or mobile app, on the occasion of Mother's Day.

According to the offer, eligible NBK customers will get a 20 percent discount at X-cite capped at KD 30 for one-time use per customer on Mother's Day corresponding to March 21. The offer will be available online and in-app only, with minimum spends of KD 20 made using the following eligible NBK Cards:

- NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK-KPC Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK Avios Visa Signature Prepaid Card

Speaking on this offer, Anwar Al-Ballam Cards Products Manager, at Consumer Banking Group,



Al-Ballam: NBK strives to deliver top-notch banking experience to customers and share with them festive occasions

at National Bank of Kuwait said, "We are keen to be closer to customers and share with them festive occasions by providing top-notch exclusive offers tailored to the needs of their different segments and ages, as we are tirelessly working to keep pace with their changing needs and live up to their evolving expectations."

"We are glad to collaborate with X-cite once again, seeking to leverage this partnership to enhance customer banking experience by delivering premium offers, discounts and benefits," he added.

"Delivering a top-notch customer experience is



embedded in NBK's culture. We maintain close communication with customers to identify their needs and expectations, and work to fulfill these needs by delivering top-notch services and exclusive offers that even go beyond their expectations for an unmatched banking experience," he noted.

In light of the strategic partnership between Xcite and the National Bank of Kuwait, Saleem Hammad, the Senior General Manager for E-Com-

merce at Xcite, shared his insights on the importance of this collaboration and its positive impact on their customers. Hammad underscored the company's dedication to enhancing the customer experience through offerings that are both unique and tailored specifically to their needs. He stated: "At Xcite, we deeply value our relationship with every customer, recognizing that the cornerstone of an outstanding experience lies in thoroughly understanding their preferences and requirements. Our partnership with the National Bank of Kuwait is a testament to our shared goal of presenting our customers with exclusive offers that genuinely enrich their lives. This approach not only improves their overall shopping experience but also underlines our commitment to innovation and achieving excellence in customer service. NBK Credit Cards gives customers the opportunity to benefit from the various offers introduced by the bank all year round, in addition to offering cardholders a unique lifestyle thanks to the superior benefits."

NBK Credit Cards offer the best payment method for the numerous benefits they provide to customers, including NBK KWT Program, Oasis Club Miles, NBK Miles Program, NBK Rewards Program as well as Purchase Protection and Extended Warranty.

China giant Tencent posts lowest annual profit since 2019

BEIJING: Chinese internet giant Tencent on Wednesday posted its lowest annual profit since 2019, despite slight improvements recently in China's economy and a more lenient attitude taken by regulators towards the tech sector.

Tencent's total net profit for 2023 stood at 115.2 billion yuan (\$16.0 billion), according to a filing of annual results at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Decades of meteoric growth that turned China's tech industry into one of the most dynamic in the world came to an abrupt halt in 2020, when Beijing introduced more stringent oversight measures.

Authorities have since relaxed their approach to regulating the vital domestic tech sector as broader concerns about the health of China's economy mount. Tencent—one of the world's leading gaming firms and developer of China's ubiquitous messaging and services app WeChat—announced Wednesday 609.0 billion yuan (\$84.6 billion) in total revenue in 2023, up 10 percent year-on-year.

The Shenzhen-based firm also announced plans to increase the size of its share repurchasing scheme, more than doubling in 2024 from last year to "over HKD100 billion" (\$12.8 billion), the filing said.

In 2022, Tencent saw its annual profit fall 16 percent on the heels of a fresh crackdown by officials on video game addiction among youth. And despite more recent signs of vigor in the sector, the regulatory hurdle for new games remains



SHENZHEN, China: People walk past the Tencent headquarters in Shenzhen in China's southern Guangdong province. — AFP

"relatively large", Li Chengdong, founder of Beijing-based tech consultancy Dolphin, told AFP.

New games in China must first obtain formal approval from authorities before being released. The issuance of all new game licenses was frozen for nine months in 2021, and approvals have not since returned to the speed and reliability of previous years. "Even if (Tencent) develops new games, there's no guarantee it can distribute them," Li said.

Tencent and several of its domestic competitors—including Alibaba, Huawei and Baidu—are now eyeing the promising field of artificial intelligence (AI). Last September, Tencent unveiled Hunyuan, an AI-powered chatbot intended to compete with the US's ChatGPT, whose services are not accessible in China.

Wednesday's filing hailed Hunyuan as a "top-tier foundation model with superior performance in numerical reasoning, logical inference, and multi-turn conversations". But despite the push into AI, gaming still represents Tencent's most important business, Li told AFP, adding that "in the short term, there's not much expectation that the revenue from AI products could cover the costs".

As many Chinese tech giants rush into AI, Tencent remains cautious about making big moves, Beijing-based tech expert Kevin Zhou told AFP.

"(Tencent is) slower in pouring investment and could be up to one or two years behind the first movers," Zhou said. The firm is seeking to enhance its position in the video games sector by acquiring stakes in emerging studios, particularly in Europe.

Tencent, founded in 1998 in the midst of China's rapid economic development, is a key player in the country's tech sector as the parent of the WeChat "super-app". WeChat is on most mobile phones in China, where it is used for a wide range of purposes including messaging, calling, digital payment and social media. — AFP



KUWAIT: Chairman and CEO of Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) Faisal Ali Al-Mutawa receives Swiss Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Tiziano Balmelli.

AAW receives Swiss envoy to Kuwait Dr Tiziano Balmelli

KUWAIT: Chairman and CEO of Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW), Faisal Ali Al-Mutawa, received the Swiss Ambassador



Swiss Ambassador and Faisal Al-Mutawa (center)

to Kuwait Dr Tiziano Balmelli on March 17, 2024 at the company's headquarters. The meeting was also attended by the Trade and Diplomatic Officer, Nada Haddad Ghafari. The two parties discussed ways to strengthen and expand business relations between AAW and Swiss companies.

AAW Chairman and CEO Faisal Al-Mutawa said: "We are honored to host the Ambassador of Switzerland to the State of Kuwait, Dr Tiziano Balmelli. We are keen to enhance our partnerships with Swiss private companies to en-

rich the Kuwaiti market with renowned global brands that cater to the needs of the consumers in Kuwait."

Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Company is one of the largest retail and distribution companies in Kuwait's private sector, with world-class operations across various industries. The company is the distributor for numerous global brands in Kuwait's surging wholesale and retail market, and is one of the main representatives for several Swiss brands in Kuwait.

Zimbabwe farmers buckle under El Nino drought

KANYEMBA, Zimbabwe: Ladias Konje's maize field in northeastern Zimbabwe is normally green at this time of the year, but it is already parched yellow.

The drought from the El Nino weather pattern has withered leaves, wilted cobs and raised the specter of hunger for the 38-year-old and millions of others. "On a good year we would be relying on fresh maize, pumpkins and groundnuts but there is nothing at all in the fields this time," said the small-scale farmer.

More than 13 million people across southern Africa can't put enough food on the table and the number is expected to surge in the coming months as the result of months of poor rains kick in, according to the United Nations. In Zimbabwe, officials are urging people to tighten their belts as authorities scramble to find alternative food supplies.

"Families must not be wasteful. They must be conservative and prepare only food that is enough for the meal," said Leonard Munamati, who heads the Agricultural and Rural Development Advisory Services, a government agency. Konje said her children are already going to school on an empty stomach. Her tobacco crop that usually brings in some extra cash has also failed, she said. President Emmerson Mnangagwa has promised that no Zimbabwean will starve. But many are worried.

As soon as a ruling party lawmaker stepped out of his car upon arriving in Konje's village of Kanyemba for a visit this month, a group of women heading to fetch water from a borehole dropped their buckets and quickly surrounded him to air their grievances. "Families are relying on wild fruits," MP Tendai Nyabani later told AFP. Kanyemba's Rushinga district is a stronghold of ZANU-PF, the party in power since independence in 1980.

Some have resorted to making flour for pap or sadza, a traditional dish, with chemically treated maize seeds meant for planting and handed out under a government program, he added. The govern-



KANYEMBA, Zimbabwe: Ladias Konje, a communal farmer, walks through her wilting maize field, which suffered from moisture stress at tasseling during a long mid season dry spell, in the Kanyemba village in Rushinga. — AFP

ment has teamed up with charities and UN agencies to bring in aid and opposition politicians have called for ZANU-PF leaning areas not to be favoured—something authorities have been accused of in the past. Officials are also looking at increasing food imports. But this has become harder as El Nino—which warms the sea surface in the southern Pacific and leads to hotter weather globally—wreaks havoc across the region.

"Traditionally we have been buying organic maize from Zambia. Now Zambia doesn't have (any) and Malawi also doesn't have (any)," said Tafadzwa Musarara, chair of the Grain Millers Association of Zimbabwe. Zambia declared drought a national disaster in February.

"We are all now buying GMO maize from South Africa," said Musarara. Imports of GMO (genetically modified) grains were first allowed in 2020 as Zimbabwe faced another drought. They come with

strict conditions: grains can only be milled and planting them can lead to prosecution, according to the agriculture ministry. Meanwhile prices have skyrocketed.

In Rushinga, a 25-kilo (55-pound) bag of maize is now selling for up to \$15. That is a prohibitive sum in a country where 42 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty, with less than \$2.15 a day, according to the UN's World Food Programme (WFP). The crisis has compounded hyperinflation and other pre-existing economic troubles in a country once seen as the region's breadbasket.

Zimbabwe's agricultural sector has long struggled to recover from the expropriation of land from white large-scale commercial farmers carried out more than two decades ago under President Robert Mugabe. Aimed at correcting historical wrongs, critics say the move brought agricultural production to its knees, causing a sharp decline in economic output. — AFP

Spain's public deficit tumbled to 3.7% in 2023

MADRID: Spain's public deficit fell just below the government's target last year thanks to robust growth in 2023, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Wednesday.

The 3.7 percent rate was lower than the 3.9 percent forecast by the government and more than a percentage point lower than 2022 when it stood at

4.8 percent. The figure was achieved as the Spanish economy expanded by 2.5 percent last year, one of the highest rates in the eurozone, Sanchez told parliament. "Spain is in better shape than the European Union: we're growing five times more than the average in the eurozone," the Socialist leader said, vaunting his government's policies of wealth "redistribution" and budgetary discipline.

"We are redistributing economic growth, we're increasing pensions, raising the minimum wage and strengthening public services and we're doing it in a fiscally responsible way," he said.

Spain's economic growth, driven by record tourist numbers, also enabled Madrid to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 107.7 percent, according to the INE

national statistics institute. Sanchez's government has assured Brussels it would continue its policy of consolidating public accounts throughout 2024, bringing its public deficit to 3.0 percent—the maximum level set by European treaties.

"We have a clear commitment to reducing the deficit and debt ratio," Finance Minister Carlos Cuperpo told the Expansion business daily. Under European budgetary rules, member states' public deficit must in theory remain equal to or under the symbolic figure of 3.0 percent while their debt ratio must not go beyond 60 percent of GDP. However early last month, the European Parliament and member states agreed to reform the budgetary rules which are seen as obsolete and are rarely respected. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

Lifestyle

FINLAND IS WORLD'S HAPPIEST COUNTRY FOR SEVENTH YEAR: STUDY

Finland remained the world's happiest country for a seventh straight year in an annual UN sponsored World Happiness Report published on Wednesday. And Nordic countries kept their places among the 10 most cheerful, with Denmark, Iceland and Sweden trailing Finland. Afghanistan, plagued by a humanitarian catastrophe since the Taliban regained control in 2020, stayed at the bottom of the 143 countries surveyed.

For the first time since the report was published more than a decade ago, the United States and Germany were not among the 20 happiest nations, coming in 23rd and 24th respectively. In turn, Costa Rica and Kuwait entered the top 20 at 12 and 13. The report noted the happiest countries no longer included any of the world's largest countries.

"In the top 10 countries only the Netherlands and Australia have populations over 15 million. In the whole of the top 20, only Canada and the UK have populations over 30 million." The sharpest decline in happiness since 2006-10 was noted in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Jordan, while the Eastern European countries Serbia, Bulgaria and Latvia reported



ed the biggest increases. The happiness ranking is based on individuals' self-assessed evaluations of life satisfaction, as well as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption.

Growing inequality
Jennifer De Paola, a happiness researcher at the University of Helsinki in

Finland, told AFP that Finns' close connection to nature and healthy work-life balance were key contributors to their life satisfaction. In addition, Finns may have a "more attainable understanding of what a successful life is", compared to for example the United States where success is often equated with financial gain, she said.

Finns' strong welfare society, trust in

state authorities, low levels of corruption and free healthcare and education were also key. "Finnish society is permeated by a sense of trust, freedom, and high level of autonomy," De Paola said. This year's report also found that younger generations were happier than their older peers in most of the world's regions—but not all.

In North America, Australia and New Zealand, happiness among groups under 30 has dropped dramatically since 2006-10, with older generations now happier than the young. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, happiness increased substantially at all ages during the same period, while in Western Europe people of all ages reported similar levels of happiness. Happiness inequality increased in every region except Europe, which authors described as a "worrying trend". The rise was especially distinct among the old and in Sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting inequalities in "income, education, health care, social acceptance, trust, and the presence of supportive social environments at the family, community and national levels," the authors said. —AFP

- World's 20 Happiest Countries in 2024:**
1. Finland
 2. Denmark
 3. Iceland
 4. Sweden
 5. Zionist entity
 6. Netherlands
 7. Norway
 8. Luxembourg
 9. Switzerland
 10. Australia
 11. New Zealand
 12. Costa Rica
 13. Kuwait
 14. Austria
 15. Canada
 16. Belgium
 17. Ireland
 18. Czechia
 19. Lithuania
 20. United Kingdom

CEZANNE AND RENOIR: CLASH OF THE TITANS IN MILAN



This file photo shows a statue of Colonel Sanders, the founder of US fast food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken, being displayed by Osaka city officers after it was recovered from a river.

'Curse of the Colonel' KFC statue disposed of in Japan

A plastic statue of Kentucky Fried Chicken's founder Colonel Sanders that was a lucky charm for superstitious Japanese baseball fans has been "disposed of" 15 years after being dredged out of an Osaka river, the firm said. Jubilant supporters of Osaka's Hanshin Tigers, known for being Japan's most passionate baseball fans, flung the effigy—and themselves—into the dirty Dotonbori river in 1985 after winning Japan's version of the World Series.

But as the years went by and the Tigers' fortunes faltered, a belief took hold among fans dubbed the "Curse of the Colonel" that success would only return if the life-sized doll was recovered. The bearded statue was finally found during construction work in 2009 and salvaged, covered in sludge and missing his glasses and left hand. It was cleaned up, blessed by a priest and put on display.

The alleged jinx took some time to be exorcised, but finally last year the Tigers won the Japan Series again after a 38-year wait, prompting wild celebrations and more jumping into the river. KFC said on Tuesday that the statue was now "too dilapidated to maintain" and would be disposed of.

But first, a ritual "showing our gratitude" was held at a temple and attended by KFC's Japan president Takayuki Hanji, who offered Japanese sake along with the chain's signature fried chicken. —AFP

One structured and austere, the other sensual and joyous—Paul Cezanne and Auguste Renoir were two founding fathers of Impressionism, but a new Milan exhibition explores their sharply different styles. Marking 150 years since the founding of the art movement, 52 masterpieces by the two Frenchmen are on loan from Paris for an unprecedented show at the Palazzo Reale—alongside two by Picasso, whom they inspired.

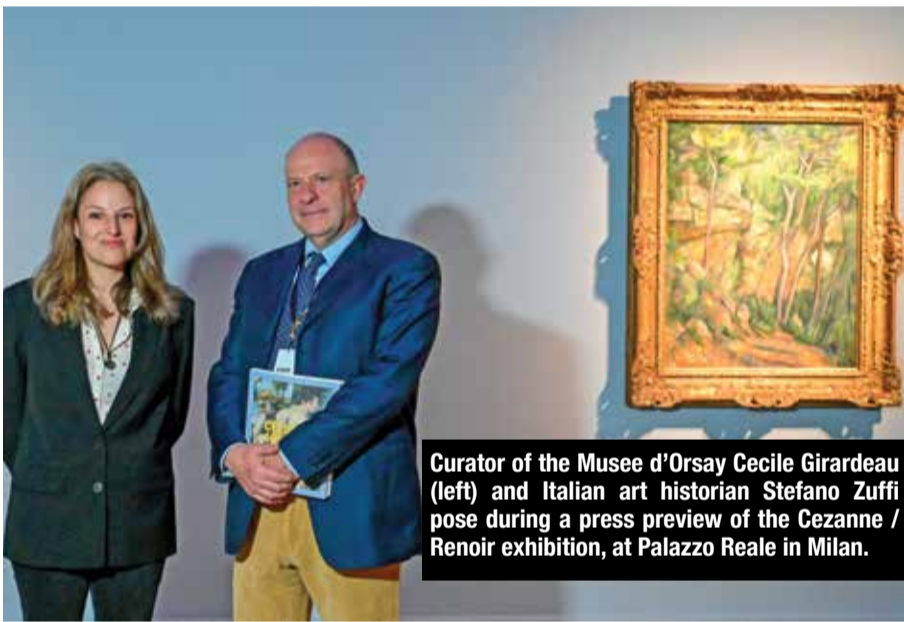
The paintings date from the 1870s to the early 20th century. Renoir and Cezanne "were both part of the Impressionist adventure, before moving away from it. Cezanne turned towards extremely strong geometric structures, while Renoir kept his vibrant and sensitive touch", said Cecile Girardeau, curator of the exhibition. The solitary, rather gloomy Cezanne had struck up a friendship in the 1860s with the jovial Renoir.

As the years went on, the pair remained friends despite their different personalities and painting styles, with Renoir visiting Cezanne's home in the south of France several times between 1880 and 1890.

Bold brushwork
Impressionism was born in April 1874 when a group of painters—including Cezanne, Renoir and others such as Claude Monet—broke away from the government-backed Paris Salon to hold their own independent show. Their works were characterized by rapid dabs and brushstrokes that explore the effects of light and color.

Many of the paintings in Milan—on loan from the Musee de l'Orangerie and the Musee d'Orsay in Paris—address similar subjects, from landscapes to nudes or still life. But the artists' approaches varied, from Cezanne's bold brushworks focused on shapes to Renoir's more sensual touch that often sought to capture dappled light.

Girardeau, curator at the Musee de l'Orangerie, noted the differences between two still life paintings—Cezanne's "Straw vase, sugar bowl and apples" (1890-1894) and Renoir's "Peaches" (1881). "Cezanne tried to give us the essential structure of objects and it is through this that he makes us



A visitor looks at a painting by Paul Cezanne entitled "Portrait de Madame Cezanne" (Portrait of Madame Cezanne).

understand his view of the world," she told AFP.

By contrast, "Renoir captures the immediacy of the moment, gives us the sensation of the tablecloth, its folds, the softness of the fruit and the reflection of the light on the earthenware." The artists' workshops have been recreated for the show: Renoir's from Cagnes-sur-Mer in the south of France and Cezanne's from his family home of the Bastide du Jas de Bouffan, the family home in Aix-en-Provence. Time seems to have stood still as the light falls on the studios, the brushes, dried tubes of paint and wooden frames bearing witness to their masters' work.



This photograph shows a reconstruction of Auguste Renoir's atelier in Cagnes-sur-Mer during a press preview of the Cezanne / Renoir exhibition.



Joie de vivre
The painters' personalities came out in their paintings. The sober Cezanne described wanting to portray nature "according to the cylinder, the sphere, the cone", whereas the exuberant Renoir described a painting as a "joyful, pretty thing". Cezanne's portraits are austere, the subjects staring into space without the hint of a smile, while Renoir's exude a sense of gentle serenity or, in the case of his voluptuous female nudes, of sensuality. Their differences reflect their backgrounds. Cezanne was the son of a banker, who had no need to sell his art, while Renoir was from a family of poor artisans. "Cezanne certainly didn't



Visitors look at a painting by Paul Cezanne entitled "Paysage au toit rouge ou Le Pin a l'Estaque" (Landscape with a red roof or the Estaque pine).



A visitor takes a photo of a painting by Auguste Renoir entitled "Gabrielle et Jean" (Gabrielle and Jean).— AFP photos

have a spontaneous natural talent and had to study hard at painting," said Stefano Zuffi, an art historian and co-curator of the exhibition.

"He nevertheless achieved an exceptional synthesis between a very rigorous, very geometric sense of composition and on the other hand, the spontaneity, the freshness, the color of nature's light," Zuffi added, calling him a "genius". By contrast, "Renoir's greatness consists of his inexhaustible 'joie de vivre'," he said. "For him, life was beautiful and painting was a way to make it even more beautiful." —AFP



A visitor takes a photo of a painting by Pablo Picasso entitled "Grande nature morte" (Large still life).



Mob Wife Aesthetic

Daring and dramatic: Mastering the art of ‘mob wife’ makeup

In the realm of beauty and glamour, the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic stands as a bold testament to the power of makeup in transforming not just appearances but also attitudes. This style, deeply rooted in the iconic looks of cinematic legends and immortalized by contemporary influencers, merges classic glamour with an edge that resonates with today’s fearless woman. It’s a makeup philosophy that champions confidence, sophistication, and the art of making a statement.

Laying the foundation:
A canvas for drama
The journey to achieving the quintessential ‘mob wife’ makeup look begins with the base. A flawless complexion sets the stage for the dramatic elements to come. High-coverage foundations and concealers are pivotal, providing a smooth, even can-

vas that conceals imperfections and prepares the skin for the layers of colour and texture that define this bold aesthetic. Matte or semi-matte finishes are preferred, offering a sophisticated backdrop for the vibrant expressions of individuality that follow.

Eyes: Windows to a bold soul
The eyes, in the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic, command attention, serving as the focal point of the look. Dark, smoky eyeshadows, rich in grays, blacks, and jewel tones, create a depth and intensity that’s unmistakably dramatic. The addition of shimmer or glitter elevates the look, adding a dimension of glamour that’s both captivating and sophisticated. Eyeliner, preferably winged, enhances the eyes’ allure, while false lashes contribute to the overall impact, amplifying the eyes’ drama and depth.

Lips: Bold statements and precision
Lip makeup varies within the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic, swinging from the subtle sophistication of overlined matte nudes to the daring vibrancy of bold reds. The key lies in precision, achieved through meticulous application of lip liners for a defined, clean contour. The choice between matte textures for a modern touch and glossy finishes for a hint of opulence allows for personalization, enabling each individual to tailor the look to their preferences and the occasion.

Sculpting the visage:
Contouring and highlighting
No ‘mob wife’ makeup ensemble is complete without the sculpting artistry of contouring and highlighting. These techniques, essential to the

aesthetic, define and enhance facial features, adding depth and an ethereal glow. Strategic application of bronzers and highlighters not only accentuates the makeup’s dramatic effect but also contributes to the overall narrative of strength and confidence that the ‘mob wife’ style embodies.

Conclusion: A celebration of fearlessness and flair
‘Mob wife’ makeup transcends the boundaries of mere cosmetic application; it’s an affirmation of boldness, a willingness to embrace risk, and a declaration of individuality. It invites experimentation and personal expression, encouraging each woman to discover and showcase what makes her unique. This style isn’t just about the physical transformation—it’s about adopting an attitude of empowerment and confi-

dence, embracing one’s strength and individuality through the transformative power of makeup.
As we delve deeper into the resurgence of the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic, it becomes clear that this trend is more than a nod to the past—it’s a forward-looking celebration of personal style, encouraging women to be fearless in their makeup choices. Whether it’s through the smoky allure of dramatic eyes, the precision of a perfectly defined lip, or the sculpted beauty of a contoured face, the ‘mob wife’ makeup style is about owning your look and feeling confident in your skin, making every application an opportunity to express your unique spirit and strength. Get more inspiration by visiting our website dashebeauty.com. — Dashe Beauty Kuwait



Annie Leibovitz attends as Anna Wintour hosts Special Screening of “Living” at Crosby Hotel in New York City.--AFP

Photographer Annie Leibovitz: ‘AI doesn’t worry me at all’

Photographer to the stars Annie Leibovitz, inducted into the French Academy of Fine Arts on Wednesday, told AFP that AI was not a threat to her trade—just another artistic tool. Leibovitz is arguably the world’s most famous living photographer—thanks in large part to the iconic figures she has snapped in her 50-year career.

Rare is the celebrity who has not been in front of her lens: from John Lennon embracing his wife Yoko Ono on a bed (just hours before he was shot dead) to a pregnant Demi Moore, to world leaders such as Queen Elizabeth, Barack Obama and Emmanuel Macron—and hundreds of celebrities in-between.

Many see photography as threatened by the emergence of artificial intelligence tools that can generate images from simple text prompts. But Leibovitz just sees new opportunities. “That doesn’t worry me at all,” she told AFP. “With each technological progress, there are hesitations and concerns. You just have to take the plunge and learn how to use it.” She says AI-generated images are no less authentic than photography. “Photography itself is not really real... I like to use Photoshop. I use all the tools available.” Even deciding how to frame a shot implies “editing and control on some level,” she added.

‘Quite an honor’
Leibovitz is being inducted as a foreign associate member of the French Academy of Fine Arts in a ceremony at the Institute of France on Wednesday. It is her long-time collaborator, Vogue boss Anna Wintour, who will present her with the ceremonial sword. Leibovitz began her career in 1970 with Rolling Stone magazine. As well as lots of rock’n’roll shots, she also covered many political assignments.

Her photo of President Richard Nixon leaving the White House by helicopter after resigning in 1972 went around the world. In the 1980s, she moved to Conde Nast where her work for Vanity Fair and Vogue made her a huge name in celebrity and fashion photography.

She said it was “quite an honor” to be inducted into the academy. “But it’s a bigger honor for photography,” she added, recalling that it took until 2004 for the first photographer to join the academy, which is more than 200 years old. “I like to be behind the camera, not in front,” Leibovitz said. —AFP

FASHION DESIGNER DRIES VAN NOTEN TO RETIRE

The feted Belgian designer Dries Van Noten will step down as creative director of his namesake fashion label this summer, he announced Tuesday. Van Noten, 65, is set to leave after the next Paris Fashion Week menswear show in June. Known for luxurious colors, avant-garde styles and expert tailoring, Van Noten began as part of the so-called Antwerp Six who trained at the city’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the 1980s.

Other members included daring designers Walter Van Beirendonck and Ann Demeulemeester. In his statement, Van Noten said his career had been “a dream come true”. “I want to shift my focus to all the things I never had time for. I’m sad, but at the same time, happy,” he said. Van Noten added that a replacement would be

announced “in due time” and that his studio team would handle the next womenswear collection.
Though not a household name, Van Noten is a hero for many in the fashion world where he is often known simply as DVN. He grew up as the third generation of a family of tailors, and worked first as a freelancer before launching his own collection of menswear in 1986.
He won the International Designer of the Year Award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America in 2008, and celebrated his 100th fashion show in 2017. “My joy is to create a garment that fuses and balances beauty, craft and function,” he said in an interview on his website.
“I enjoy juggling with colors, textures and light in a way that evokes

rather than provokes.” His latest womenswear collection, presented this month in Paris, was lauded for bringing a note of color and excitement to everyday items—which fashion site WWD described as “audacious everyday”, a counterpoint to the recent trend for “quiet luxury”.
Van Noten sold a majority stake in his label to Spanish conglomerate Puig in 2018, but remained chairman of the board and creative director. The brand has added beauty and perfume lines, and expanded into e-commerce, since Puig’s takeover. Van Noten finished his letter by thanking his clients and fans. “Seeing our clothes out in the world... has fulfilled me beyond words,” he said. —AFP



Fashion designer Dries Van Noten

Planet ‘on the brink’, with new heat records likely in 2024: UN

Global temperatures “smashed” heat records last year, as heatwaves stalked oceans and glaciers suffered record ice loss, the United Nations said Tuesday—warning 2024 was likely to be even hotter. The annual State of the Climate report by the UN weather and climate agency confirmed preliminary data showing 2023 was by far the hottest year ever recorded.

And last year capped off “the warmest 10-year period on record”, the World Meteorological Organization said, with

average near-surface temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—dangerously close to the critical 1.5-degree threshold that countries agreed to avoid passing in the 2015 Paris climate accords.

‘Red alert’
“I am now sounding the red alert about the state of the climate,” Saulo told reporters, lamenting that “2023 set new records for every single climate indicator”. The organization said many of

heatwave conditions at some point during the year, the WMO said. More frequent and intense marine heatwaves will have “profound negative repercussions for marine ecosystems and coral reefs”, it warned.

Meanwhile key glaciers worldwide suffered the largest loss of ice since records began in 1950, “driven by extreme melt in both western North America and Europe”. In Switzerland, where the WMO is based, Alpine glaciers lost 10 percent of their remaining volume in the past two

its highest point since satellite records began in 1993, WMO said. The agency highlighted that the global mean sea level rise over the past decade (2014-2023) was more than double the rate in the first decade of satellite records.
The dramatic climate shifts, it said, are taking a heavy toll worldwide, fueling extreme weather events, flooding and drought, which trigger displacement and drive up biodiversity loss and food insecurity. “The climate crisis is THE defining challenge that humanity faces and is closely intertwined with the inequality crisis,” Saulo said.

‘Glimmer of hope’
The WMO did highlight one “glimmer of hope”: surging renewable energy generation. Last year, renewable energy generation capacity—mainly from solar, wind and hydropower—increased by nearly 50 percent from 2022, it said. The report sparked a flood of reactions and calls for urgent action. “Our only response must be to stop burning fossil fuels so that the damage can be limited,” said Martin Siebert, a geosciences professor at the University of Exeter.
Jeffrey Kargel, a senior scientist at the Planetary Science Institute, stressed that the dramatic climate shifts “do not connote the inevitable doom of civilization”. The outcome, he said, “depends on how people and governments change or don’t change behaviors”. Saulo acknowledged that the cost of climate action might seem high. “But the cost of climate inaction is much higher,” she said. “The worst thing would be to do nothing.” Guterres also emphasized that there was still time to “avoid the worst of climate chaos”. “But leaders must step up and act—now.” —AFP



File picture shows people gather to watch as molten lava flows out from a fissure on the Reykjanes peninsula north of the evacuated town of Grindavik, western Iceland.--AFP

even hotter temperatures expected. “There is a high probability that 2024 will again break the record of 2023”, WMO climate monitoring chief Omar Baddour told reporters.

Reacting to the report, UN chief Antonio Guterres said it showed “a planet on the brink”. “Earth’s issuing a distress call,” he said in a video message, pointing out that “fossil fuel pollution is sending climate chaos off the charts”, and warning that “changes are speeding up”. The WMO said that last year the

the records were “smashed” and that the numbers “gave ominous new significance to the phrase ‘off the charts’.”

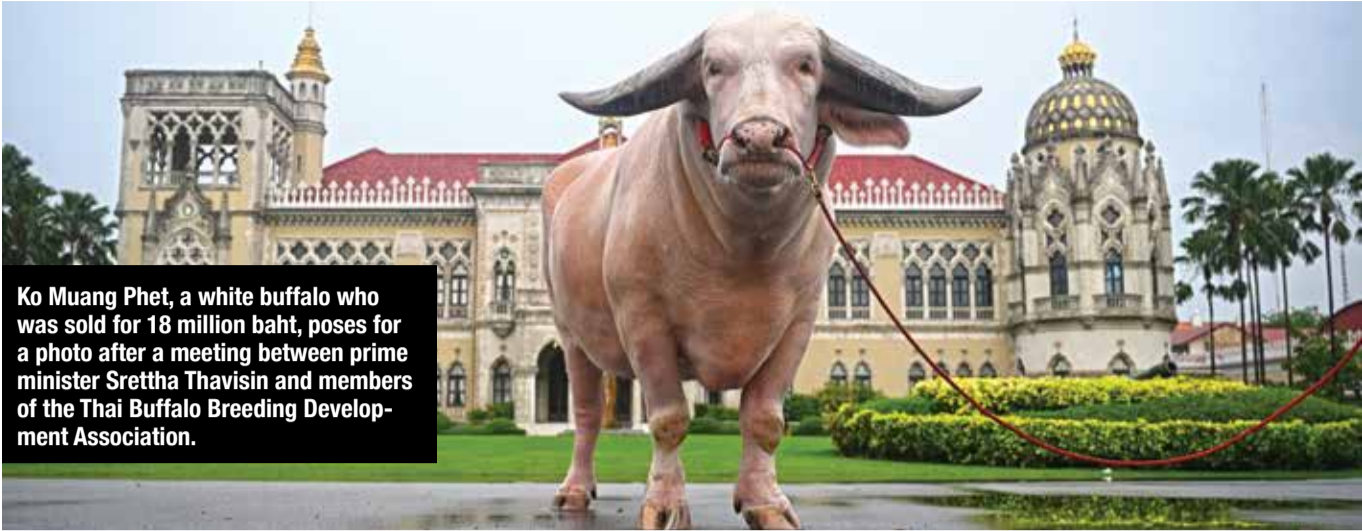
“What we witnessed in 2023, especially with the unprecedented ocean warmth, glacier retreat and Antarctic sea ice loss, is cause for particular concern,” Saulo said. One especially worrying finding was that marine heatwaves gripped nearly a third of the global ocean on an average day last year.

And by the end of 2023, more than 90 percent of the ocean had experienced

years alone, it said. The Antarctic sea ice extent was also “by far the lowest on record”, WMO said.

Rising sea levels
The maximum area at the end of the southern winter was around one million square kilometers below the previous record year—equivalent to the size of France and Germany combined, according to the report. Ocean warming and the rapidly melting glaciers and ice sheets drove the sea level last year to

Lifestyle



Ko Muang Phet, a white buffalo who was sold for 18 million baht, poses for a photo after a meeting between prime minister Srettha Thavisin and members of the Thai Buffalo Breeding Development Association.



Thai prime minister Srettha Thavisin pets Ko Muang Phet, a white buffalo who was sold for 18 million baht, at Government House in Bangkok.



Ko Muang Phet is seen with his new owner Jintanat Limtongkul, before a meeting between prime minister Srettha Thavisin and members of the Thai Buffalo Breeding Development Association.

Thai PM meets \$500,000 albino buffalo in ‘soft power’ push

Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin took the bull by the horns Wednesday as he welcomed an unusual visitor to his offices — an enormous white buffalo that recently sold for \$500,000. The bulky bovine, named Ko Muang Phet, was renowned in Thai farming circles as a stud animal but hit the mainstream last week with its big-ticket sale, and earned a trip to Government House to meet Srettha. Standing 1.8 meters (six feet) tall, the four-year-old albino from western Phetchaburi province weighs 1.4 tons — almost three times more than the average buffalo.

Ko Muang Phet has already become a minor TV star, featuring in an episode of the hugely popular “Sound From The Field Of Love” soap opera. Srettha — no shorty himself at 1.92 meters tall — went nose-to-nose with the horned celebrity in

front of Government House.

“I had no idea we had such beautiful buffalo,” Srettha told gathered reporters, gingerly patting one of the creature’s huge curved horns. “Are there more like this?” Water buffalo are ubiquitous in the Thai countryside, prized as sturdy and reliable farm animals, and albino specimens are particularly valuable because of their rarity.

And big bulls are big business — last year a farmer in northern Phitsanulok province reportedly sold his 1.4-tonne bull for more than \$1.45 million. In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Srettha said the Thai Buffalo Breeding Association had asked the government to promote the animals as a tool of “soft power”.

Ko Muang Phet’s delighted owner Jintanat Limtongkul was all for the idea. “I want people to get the know buffalo

more. Thai people used to be close to agriculture and buffalo, but our lifestyle nowadays has distanced us,” he told reporters at Government House.

He pledged to bring four giant buffalo to meet tourists at Bangkok’s backpacker hotspot of Khao San Road next month for Songkran — the Thai new year festival which sees thousands of revelers soak one another in the streets in a mass water fight. — AFP

Ko Muang Phet, a white buffalo who was sold for 18 million baht, is seen with his new owner Jintanat Limtongkul, after a meeting between prime minister Srettha Thavisin and members of the Thai Buffalo Breeding Development Association at Government House in Bangkok. - AFP photos



A pelican flies over Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador.



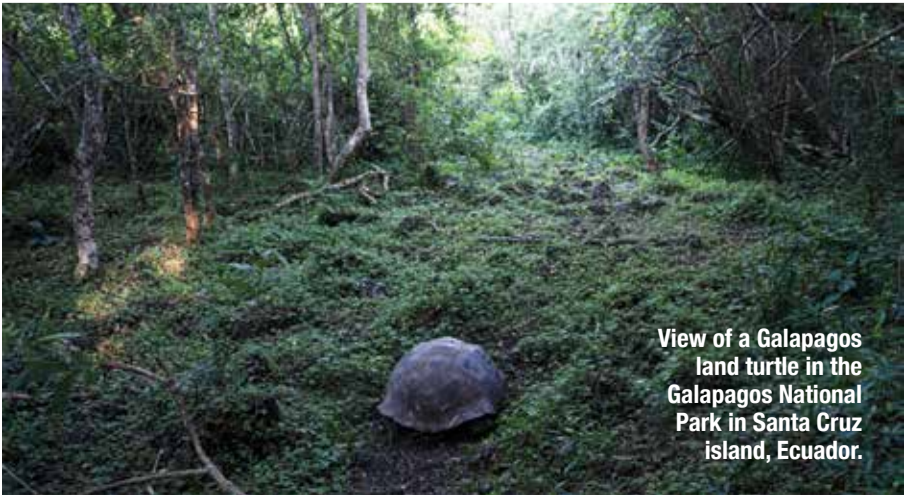
A red-billed tropicbird (Phaethon aethereus) flies in the Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador.



Specialists prepare to deploy a ROV (remotely operated vehicle) during a scientific expedition by Greenpeace in the Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador.



Underwater image of a school of barracudas at the North Seymour Island dive site.



View of a Galapagos land turtle in the Galapagos National Park in Santa Cruz island, Ecuador.

Darwin’s Galapagos island species, protected yet still at risk

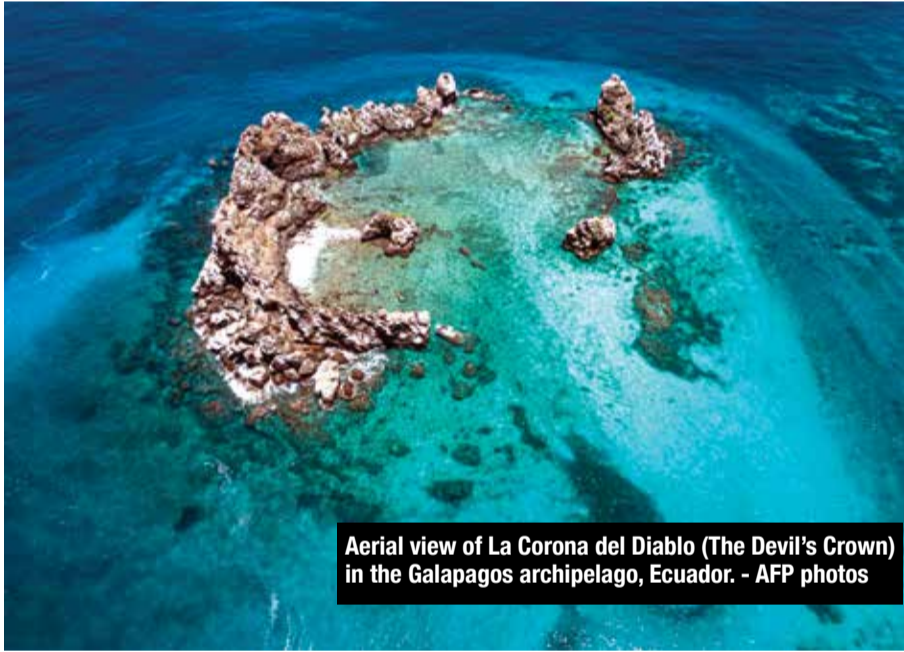
Industrial fishing boats hover menacingly on the edges of Ecuador’s Galapagos Marine Reserve, where schools of multicolored fish and hammerhead sharks frolic in the protected Pacific waters. The reserve is a haven for the flurry of creatures and plants living in the waters around the Galapagos Islands where naturalist Charles Darwin found the inspiration for his theory of natural selection. But outside its boundaries, not delineated by any physical barrier, there is no protection on the high seas where these same species also venture.

The sharks, turtles, iguanas, sea lions and fish that thrive in the Galapagos “don’t understand political boundaries,” Stuart Banks, a senior marine scientist at the Charles Darwin Foundation, told AFP on board Greenpeace’s Arctic Sunrise research vessel. “So they’re going to be moving between different territories and that’s when they’re most at risk, particularly to things like industrial fishing and bycatch.”

The solution, according to Greenpeace, is to secure a much larger area of ocean by creating the first-ever marine protected area on the high seas bordering the Galapagos Marine Reserve. But for this to happen, at least 60 countries must ratify the High Seas Treaty adopted by United Nations member states last June. Only two have done so to date.

Like a jigsaw puzzle

AFP accompanied an Arctic Sunrise scientific mission to the area this month to investigate the threats posed to the Galapagos Marine Reserve, which Greenpeace describes as “probably the



Aerial view of La Corona del Diablo (The Devil's Crown) in the Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador. - AFP photos

best conservation project carried out in the oceans.” The reserve of nearly 200,000 square kilometers (some 77,000 square miles) is one of the world’s largest and most biodiverse with more than 3,000 species, many of them found nowhere else.

Biologist Paola Sangolqui explained she was testing water samples to analyze “which marine species have been in this area and have left some kind of DNA trace.” For his part, Daniel Armijos was in charge of underwater video monitoring of fish numbers and prevalence.

“It is kind of like putting together a big jigsaw puzzle because everything is integrated in some way,” explained Banks.

“And if you’re looking to prioritize the most important regions to start working, to know where those corridors are (along which species migrate), you need to use genetics so you can start to look at how particular populations are connected from one region to another.”

Hammerhead haven

From the Arctic Sunrise, scientists also descended a robot to explore the coral reefs that serve as key feeding and breeding grounds for many fish, said expedition leader Sophie Cooke, for whom “the abundance of marine life in this national park is simply staggering.” Marine reserve employee Eduardo Espinoza,

in charge of day-to-day monitoring, told AFP the archipelago is a rare sanctuary for hammerhead sharks, whose fins are a delicacy in some Asian countries.

Hammerheads were at particular risk of “overfishing and illegal fishing,” Espinoza said as he fixed an identifying label to a young specimen. “In the Galapagos, hammerhead sharks are always abundant. They have a refuge here to reproduce, from where they move throughout the Pacific,” he added.

Free species worth more

Cooke said the Galapagos was an important migratory stop for many species, which is “why we need to connect all these different marine protected areas and protect these reserves: so the migration routes of these species can be kept safe.” The Galapagos Islands are designated a UNESCO Natural World Heritage site. Another reason to protect the area is its attraction for tens of thousands of visitors every year, like American diver Ryan Doyle, 24.

“In comparison to Florida, where I’d also dive recreationally, there’s so much life here,” Doyle told AFP. “There’s so many sharks and everything looks so healthy. So you can kind of like see the conservation” at work. Diving instructor Anthony Gavilanes, 30, said locals like himself nowadays “live off tourism” more than fishing, as before. “For us, species swimming freely in the water are worth more than they are on a plate served at a table.” — AFP



A marine iguana (Amblyrhynchus cristatus) is seen in Tortuga Bay at Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador.



Underwater image of whitetip sharks (bottom) with other fish at the North Seymour Island dive site.

Sports

Kohli, Pant in spotlight as IPL mega-show returns, WCup looms

Organisers release only first two weeks of IPL schedule

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant will be under scrutiny on their return to action as the Indian Premier League begins on Friday, with the T20 World Cup hot on its heels. The 17th edition of the world's richest cricket league is expected to end close to the June 1 start of the World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

Organisers have released only the first two weeks of the IPL schedule so far because it clashes with India's six-week-long general election. Last season the 10-team IPL lasted eight weeks. "This is a world stage for cricket," IPL chairman Arun Dhumal told AFP on Wednesday, boasting the "quality is above any T20 league in the world".

"Not only the Indian players but also the overseas players will be looking to give their best performance in the run-up to the World Cup," Dhumal said. Master batsman Kohli, who missed India's 4-1 Test series victory over England because of the birth of his second child, is back with Royal Challengers Bengaluru, previously the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

They take on defending champions Chennai Super Kings, led by M.S. Dhoni, in the opening match in Chennai on Friday. "Kohli is crucial for India in the T20 World Cup," former chief selector M.S.K. Prasad told the IPL's official broadcaster. "He has been in form for a long time. He will make runs in this IPL as well." Kohli has still never won the IPL but Bengaluru broke their title jinx when the women's team lifted the WPL under Smriti Mandhana on Sunday.

Pant is back as captain of the Delhi Capitals, returning to cricket for the first time since being seriously hurt in a car crash in 2022. They face the Punjab Kings on Saturday. The wicketkeeper-batsman

has been on an intensive rehabilitation programme since surviving the crash with a damaged ligament in his right knee, a hurt wrist and ankle, and abrasions to his back. If he proves his form and fitness, Pant is another in line to play for India at the World Cup.

Another with something to prove is Hardik Pandya, the new captain of five-time IPL winners the Mumbai Indians. Pandya has been out of action since October after an ankle injury and replaces Rohit Sharma as skipper. Rohit, who led Mumbai to their five title wins, remains with the team.

Dhoni swan song?

The move to replace Rohit, who captains India in all formats, has not gone down well with pundits and fans, but Pandya brushed off any problems with the national skipper. "I don't think it will be awkward," Pandya, who led Gujarat Titans to the 2022 IPL title in their debut season, told reporters. "I've played my whole career under him and I know he's going to have a hand on my shoulder always."

The season could be Chennai veteran Dhoni's swansong, after the warhorse led the team to its fifth title in 2023. He said then that another year was a "gift" to his fans. The 42-year-old wicket-keeper-batsman, who led India to two World Cup triumphs, in 2007 and 2011, remains a huge star in cricket-crazy India.

He underwent knee surgery last year and has hit the training nets in Chennai. "He's preparing really well," CSK batting coach Mike Hussey said. "His knee seems good at this stage and he's batting extremely well at the moment." Australia's Pat Cummins will be one of two overseas captains in the IPL this year, after



MUMBAI: Mumbai Indians' captain Hardik Pandya (L) speaks as coach Mark Boucher looks on during a press conference in Mumbai ahead of the Indian Premier League 2024. — AFP

being named skipper of Sunrisers Hyderabad.

The fast bowler briefly broke an IPL auction record when Hyderabad paid 205 million rupees (\$2.5 million) at auction last year. Fellow Australian quick

Mitchell Starc soon smashed the record when Kolkata Knight Riders paid 247.5 million rupees. Starc, 34, returns to the IPL after a nine-year absence, having previously played for Bengaluru. — AFP



SEOUL: Police officers stand guard in front of the Gocheok Sky Dome in Seoul on March 20, 2024, ahead of the 2024 MLB Seoul Series baseball game between Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres. — AFP

No explosives found after bomb threat against Ohtani

SEOUL: South Korean police on Wednesday said no explosives had been found at Seoul's Gocheok Sky Dome after they searched the venue in response to a reported bomb threat against Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani.

The Dodgers are in the South Korean capital to face the San Diego Padres in two games to open the Major League Baseball season on Wednesday and Thursday. It is the first time that MLB has opened the regular season in South Korea.

The star attraction is Japan's Ohtani, whom the Dodgers in December signed to a 10-year contract worth \$700 million. He has been described as a contemporary version of Babe Ruth. Seoul's Guro district police office told AFP that authorities did not find anything at the venue after special investigators searched the premises in the morning.

"We received a report about a potential explosive device, and searched the site, but we found nothing," official Kim Seung-beom told AFP. "We intend to carry out another search before the audience is allowed to enter the Sky Dome later, before the game tonight."

San Diego Padres manager Mike Schildt said he had "complete confidence" in MLB and the security in South Korea. "We feel safe and we haven't really given it a second thought, quite honestly," he said.

According to Seoul's Yonhap news agency, South Korean authorities received a report from an employee at the Consulate General of South Korea in Vancouver, Canada. The person reportedly received an email threatening to detonate a bomb during the San Diego Padres and Los Angeles Dodgers game, targeting superstar Shohei Ohtani and others, it added.

Written in English, the email was allegedly sent by someone claiming to be a Japanese lawyer, Yonhap said, adding South Korean authorities are currently investigating to determine if the email was indeed sent from Japan.

Ohtani won his second American League Most Valuable Player Award in six seasons with the Los Angeles Angels last year before departing for free agency. He is a national hero in his native Japan, even more so after leading the country's national team to victory in last year's World Baseball Classic. But his popularity also translates to South Korea, where baseball is arguably the country's number-one sport. — AFP

Afghanistan call for 'politics-free cricket'

KABUL: Afghanistan cricket bosses Wednesday expressed disappointment that Australia had scrapped a men's T20 series because of deteriorating women's rights in the Taliban-ruled country and called for "politics-free

Returning Halep rails at Wozniacki after cheat comments

MIAMI: Simona Halep returned to tennis on Tuesday, losing in three sets to Spaniard Paula Badosa at the Miami Open and then hit back at Caroline Wozniacki after the Dane criticised the decision to give her a wildcard into the tournament.

Former world number one Halep was given a warm welcome by the Miami crowd before fading as she lost 6-1, 4-6, 3-6 in her first game since the 2022 US Open. But while the Romanian flags and chants of her name showed she retains plenty of support after having her doping ban reduced by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) last week, former world number one Wozniacki questioned the way Halep was allowed into the tournament.

"This is not directly at Simona, but if someone purposely cheats, if someone has tested positive for doping... I understand why a tournament wants a big star in the tournament, but it's my personal belief, and it's not a knock on anyone, but it's my personal belief that I don't think people should be awarded wild cards afterwards," said the Dane.

"If you want to come back, and it's been a mistake, I understand, you should work your way up from the bottom. That's my personal opinion upon things.

Verstappen favourite as Red Bull drama rumbles on

MELBOURNE: Max Verstappen will be heavy favourite to make it three wins from three this season as his Red Bull team attempt to put weeks of paddock intrigue behind them at the Australian Grand Prix. The Dutch three-time world champion emphatically led home teammate Sergio Perez in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but the celebrations were overshadowed by team disunity and allegations against Christian Horner.

The long-serving Red Bull boss was cleared of inappropriate conduct involving a woman colleague ahead of the season-opener in Sakhr and tried to put a lid on the drama in Jeddah. But the unnamed woman has appealed to Red Bull GmbH, the parent company of the all-conquering Formula One team.

She has also reportedly lodged an official complaint to Formula One's governing body the FIA, ensuring the saga will rumble on in Melbourne this weekend. Horner has guided Red Bull to six constructors' and seven drivers' world championships since 2005, including the last three won by Verstappen.

But the star driver's father, the former racer Jos Verstappen, claimed earlier this month that Red Bull faced being "torn apart" if Horner remained in his position. His son also issued a veiled threat to quit if team adviser Helmut Marko was sidelined in any power struggle.

Horne insisted "it is absolutely fine with Max", but added the caveat that "we are a team and no single individual is bigger than the team". That piqued the interest of Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who needs a replacement next season when Lewis Hamilton departs for Ferrari.

"There is no team up and down the grid who wouldn't do handstands to have him (Verstappen) in a car," Wolff told reporters ahead of arriving in Australia.

Momentum

Intrigue aside, victory in Saudi Arabia was Verstappen's ninth in a row, with more of the same expected at Albert Park,

cricket". Cricket Australia said it had received advice "that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse" and postponed the three-match series scheduled in August, likely to have been hosted by the UAE.

"The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) expresses disappointment over Cricket Australia's decision to postpone yet another bilateral series against Afghanistan and reiterates its stance on neutral and politics-free cricket across the globe," said a statement.

The decision, announced Tuesday, was the third time

"Simona's situation has obviously dragged on for a long time. She got her suspension reduced. It wasn't a clearance, it was a reduced sentence," she added.

Asked about Wozniacki's comments, Halep said she did not understand her motivation. "Why did she say that? I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't cheat. I didn't dope. So it's better if we read the decision from CAS that it was a contaminated supplement, it wasn't doping. I never had something to do with doping. I never doped, so I'm not a cheater.

"Thank you to the tournament for giving me the wild card and have the possibility to play in such a big tournament. It was great to be back," said the 32-year-old. "Only one person being negative about me is not that important because I have hundreds of people that are giving me love, so I will take that," added Halep.

Halep looked like her old self in the opening set, cheered on by a small but passionate crowd, including many of her compatriots, she struggled later in the near two-hour contest. There were the familiar chants of 'Simona' as she broke to go 4-1 up in the first set and the fist-pump showed the level of motivation after her lengthy, enforced absence.

But she needed treatment to her shoulder during the second set and she lost the accuracy of her serve while looking increasingly tired. But she was upbeat about her first match after such a long absence from the court.

Positive emotions

"It felt really good. I had emotions, but positive



MELBOURNE: A man speaks on his phone at the Albert Park Circuit ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 20, 2024. — AFP

barring any technical hiccups. "It has been a great start to the year and we don't know the full potential of the car yet, so now we want to keep the momentum going," said the Red Bull ace. Verstappen won a chaotic race from pole in Australia last year, holding off Hamilton after the grand prix was red-flagged three times, with multiple crashes and just 12 drivers finishing. It was his maiden win in Australia and Red Bull's first in the country since Sebastian Vettel in 2011.

Perez, in the other Red Bull, is the only driver to get close to Verstappen this year. The Mexican is determined to keep pressing hard as Ferrari's Charles Leclerc snaps at his heels. "Max is driving at a super-high level and I think he is the only driver who has maximised qualifying and the race so far this season," said Perez.

"It is great though because I have the best possible

since 2021, when the Taleban returned to power, that Australia have refused to play Afghanistan outside of international tournaments. Cricket has surged in popularity inside Afghanistan in recent years, fuelled by triumphs over bigger nations on the international stage.

But under the Taleban government's brand of Islamic rule, women are effectively barred from the game, as part of a raft of restrictions on women in Afghanistan the United Nations has labelled "gender apartheid".

The ACB urged the Australian government "not to im-

pose its policies on cricket boards" and "focus on supporting the development of cricket". "ACB advocates for keeping cricket distinct from political influence, considering the game's significance in Afghanistan and its connection to the happiness and joy of the Afghan nation," the board said.

Whether his Ferrari partner Carlos Sainz returns is up in the air after the Spaniard missed Saudi Arabia with appendicitis. In his absence, reserve driver Oliver Bearman, just 18, scored a stunning seventh on his debut after just one free practice session, showcasing the Briton's huge potential.

Hamilton's Mercedes has now gone 47 races without a win, and judging by the car's performance so far, they won't be breaking the barren streak any time soon. Instead, it looks set to be another week of battling for the minor places with Aston Martin and McLaren. — AFP

Halep appealed to CAS in February, arguing her positive test for roxadustat—used to treat anaemia and banned as a blood doping agent—was the result of a tainted supplement. CAS determined that Halep had "established, on the balance of probabilities" that the banned substance did come from the contaminated product and her violations were therefore "not intentional."

CAS also ruled that the "irregularities" cited by the ITIA in Halep's biological passport, a longterm monitoring tool of an athlete's blood indicators that can provide evidence of doping, did not, in fact, support "the doping scenarios put forward by the ITIA." Halep had protested her innocence and refused to accept the ITIA decision, which would have kept her off the courts until October 6, 2026. — AFP



challenge in him. I must keep evolving weekend after weekend." With Verstappen already 15 points clear of Perez and 23 ahead of Leclerc, the Ferrari number one is desperate to break the stranglehold in Australia and close the gap before it widens too far.

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pose its policies on cricket boards" and "focus on supporting the development of cricket". "ACB advocates for keeping cricket distinct from political influence, considering the game's significance in Afghanistan and its connection to the happiness and joy of the Afghan nation," the board said.

Before the return of the Taleban, Afghanistan's cricket board was slowly making progress growing the game among women—even contracting a small number of semi-professional players in 2020. — AFP

Sports

Robinho awaits fate on serving nine-year rape sentence in Brazil

‘I hope that here in Brazil I can have the voice that I didn’t have there’

SAO PAULO: Brazil's justice system will decide whether former Manchester City and Real Madrid striker Robinho will serve his nine-year rape sentence, handed down by an Italian court, in the South American country. Brazil's Superior Court of Justice (STJ) will examine the Italian request to approve the prison sentence that was imposed in 2017 and ratified in 2022.

“I hope that here in Brazil I can have the voice that I didn't have there,” Robinho, who has protested his innocence, said in an interview with Brazilian network TV Record on Sunday. Robson de Souza, popularly known as “Robinho”, remains free despite his conviction for being among a group of six men who gang raped a young Albanian woman out celebrating her 23rd birthday at a Milan nightclub in 2013.

Former Brazil international Robinho was playing his club football for AC Milan at the time. His sentence was upheld by Italy's highest court, after which Italian prosecutors issued an international arrest warrant. Brazil does not extradite its nationals, however, and Italy asked that Robinho be made to serve his sen-

tence in his home country instead.

On Sunday, Robinho accused the Italian justice system of “racism”. “It was consensual,” Robinho told TV Record. “I never denied it (the encounter). I could have denied it because my DNA was not there, but I'm not a liar. “I played for four years in Italy and I got tired of seeing stories about racism. The same people who do nothing about racism, which I repudiate, are the ones who condemned me.”

If the ruling goes against him, the 40-year-old could still remain free while awaiting an appeal to Brazil's Supreme Court. Brazil president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said that he hopes Robinho can “serve” the sentence on Brazilian soil.

‘Unprecedented case’

According to Brazilian media, magistrates are expected to approve Italy's request. “Approval is not common, because the law that allows it is relatively recent. It would be an unprecedented case in Brazil,” lawyer Leonardo Pantaaleao told AFP.

Meanwhile, Robinho's case and that of former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Ger-



BELO HORIZONTE: (FILES) Robinho of Brazil's Atletico Mineiro gestures during their 2017 Copa Libertadores match against Bolivia's Wilstermann held at Mineirao stadium, in Belo Horizonte. — AFP

main defender Dani Alves have sparked criticism over the failure of football authorities in Brazil to condemn violence against women. In February, former Bra-

zil international full-back Alves, 40, was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for raping a woman in a nightclub in Barcelona.

The case was met with silence from the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF), the player's former clubs and former teammates. Former Brazil coach Tite said he could not “make a judgement without having all the facts and truthful information” about the case.

For Robinho, it has been a dramatic fall from grace. Having begun his career at Santos, a team made famous by Brazil great Pele, Robinho was touted as the successor to the golden generation of Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho.

In 2005, Robinho left Santos to join Zinedine Zidane, international teammate Ronaldo and David Beckham at Real Madrid. But although he played for big teams in Europe and won two Confederations Cups—in 2005 and 2009 -- and a Copa America in 2007, Robinho only displayed his talent intermittently.

In 2009, he was briefly detained in England for an alleged sexual assault on a young woman, but the charges were dropped after an investigation. He returned to Santos in 2020 but the club suspended the deal after pressure from fans, sponsors and the media, leading to the abrupt end of his career. — AFP

Amir's award launched for creative abilities of special needs people

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairwoman of the Board of Kuwait Society for the Guardians of the Handicapped (KSGH), member of the UN Committee for the Rights of the Handicapped Rhab Biouresli appreciated the Council of Ministers' initiative of launching an award in the name of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for creativity for the handicapped. The award aims at encouraging the spirit of innovation and creative abilities and innovative ideas in addition to developing the skills of the handicapped persons.

Bouresli said “designating an award for the handicapped persons innovations in the name of the country's symbol represents a core move for establishing



Rhab Biouresli



Jassim Al-Nouri

a new phase that allows for the handicapped wider horizons to integrated into the society through releasing their innovative capabilities, it also carries the true interpretation of the 17 UN sustainable development goals which calls for the handicapped to enjoy the suitable environment to enable them express themselves and show their innovation as an indivisible part of the sustainable development 2030 strategy”.

She said this initiative reflects the level of care and interest the handicapped enjoy in Kuwait, that has the leadership torch in the this field through several legislations that strengthen the status of the handicapped in the society and give them the opportunity to actively participate in the development march of the country.

Meanwhile, Tomooh Sports Club for the Handicapped Chairman Jassim Al-Nouri lauded the launch of the award that carries the name of HH the Amir. He said this award represents the appreciation and care of Kuwait's handicapped and is a major incentive to bring out the abilities and innovations of this dear group and strengthens their confidence, giving them the opportunity to build the country as individuals able to be outstanding and innovative.

Al-Nouri stressed the importance of consolidating the efforts of all entities concerned with the handicapped persons to provide them with the suitable environment and support the psychological, social, health, cultural and sports abilities to enable them show their abilities and develop their skills, allowing them to improve their performance.



SINGAPORE: Singapore's Japanese Tsutomu Ogura attends a press conference ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying football match between Singapore and China in Singapore on March 20, 2024. — AFP

Coach urges China to ‘play with passion’ in WCup qualifiers

SINGAPORE: New China coach Branko Ivankovic said Wednesday that his men must “play with passion” as they embark on two crucial World Cup qualifiers against Singapore. The Croat replaced Serbia's Aleksandar Jankovic last month after China's dismal Asian Cup where they failed to score a goal and went out in the group phase.

China have not reached the World Cup since their lone appearance in 2002. Back-to-back wins against Singapore, away on Thursday and in Tianjin on Tuesday, will put China in a strong position to progress from a group that also contains South Korea and Thailand. “I always require my team to play with passion and attacking football,” said the 70-year-old Ivankovic, who takes charge of China for the first time. “Modern football doesn't restrict you to a certain formation and players have techniques and qualities to adapt their game.

“Basically, what they have to do is to just try to execute my football philosophy.” China are second in Group C after a 2-1 win in Thailand and a 3-0 home defeat to South Korea. The top two in the group will progress to the next stage on the road to 2026.

Ivankovic is not taking anything for granted against Singapore, who have lost both games so far but are also under a new coach, Tsutomu Ogura from Japan. “Maybe we are favourites, but that means nothing because it depends on our performance on the pitch,” said Ivankovic, who led Iran to World Cup qualification in 2006. “I expect tomorrow will be a hard game and I have prepared my players in such a way. “I have watched Singapore's last three games, but it may mean nothing because they have a new coach with new ideas and new philosophies.”

Ivankovic had his first look at the squad during an intensive 10-day camp in Shenzhen before travelling to Singapore. “The team is relatively healthy,” he said, adding that he expects China's Brazil-born striker Elkeson to play some part in Thursday's game despite doubts over his fitness. — AFP

‘Frustration’ to drive Japan in N Korea WCup qualifiers

TOKYO: Japan will be motivated by the “frustration” of their Asian Cup flop when they face North Korea in a tricky World Cup qualifying double-header, coach Hajime Moriyasu said Wednesday. The pre-tournament favourites and four-time champions exited the Asian Cup in the quarter-finals last month after losing 2-1 to Iran.

Unconvincing in their three wins and two defeats, Japan had problems off the pitch too with winger Junya Ito leaving the squad after an allegation of sexual assault, which he denies. Ito, who plays for French side Reims, has been left out of the squad for Thursday's home game in Tokyo and the return leg next Tuesday in Pyongyang.

“All the players are frustrated with how they performed at the Asian Cup,” Moriyasu said. “It is with that sense of frustration that they are here fighting as part of the national team. “The frustra-

tion they felt at the Asian Cup made every single one of them hold themselves and their performance to even higher standards and move forward,” he added.

Japan are in a strong position to reach the next round of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup after winning their opening games against Myanmar and Syria, both 5-0. But they will be missing Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma and Arsenal's Takehiro Tomiyasu, who are both injured, and Moriyasu said their absence is “a blow”.

Japan will still be favourites against North Korea but Moriyasu is anticipating two tough tests. “North Korea's players are all very competent as individuals, and as a team they can be very thorough about what they need to do,” he warned. “They are also a team who go all-out in displaying their fighting spirit.” — AFP

North Korea's coach Sin Yong Nam predicted a “very fierce battle”, calling



TOKYO: North Korea's players attend a training session before their World Cup 2026 qualifier football match against Japan at Tokyo's National Stadium on March 20, 2024. — AFP

Japan a “very strong team”. “We have prepared a lot to face the strength of Japan,” he said. “But exactly how we've been gearing up for this moment, and what exactly we have done, I would like to refrain from elaborating here,” Sin

told a separate news conference. “Please watch us play tomorrow.” North Korea are second in the group behind Japan after a 1-0 defeat to Syria and 6-1 thrashing of Myanmar. The top two reach the next stage of qualifying. — AFP

in pre-trial detention following his arrest in January 2023. In its ruling, the court granted him “provisional release” in exchange for “the bail payment of 1,000,000 euros” also requiring he hand over his Spanish and Brazilian passports, remain in Spain and present himself to court “on a weekly basis”.

Public prosecutors had opposed his request, arguing he posed a high-flight risk. One of the world's most decorated footballers who played for Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain, Alves was sentenced on February 22 after being convicted of raping a young woman at a Barcelona nightclub in December 2022. His lawyers swiftly appealed the conviction. — AFP

Dani Alves freed on bail for 1mn euros

BARCELONA: Former Brazil international footballer Dani Alves is to be released from jail pending an appeal against his rape conviction in exchange for posting bail of one million euros (\$1.08 million), a Barcelona court said Wednesday.

The ruling came a day after his lawyer requested the 40-year-old's release on grounds he had already served a quarter of his four-and-a-half-year sentence



Brazilian footballer Dani Alves

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

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Jokic leads Nuggets past Wolves as Mavs sink Spurs

Dallas Mavericks overpowered San Antonio Spurs in Texas derby



MINNEAPOLIS: Reggie Jackson #7 of the Denver Nuggets drives to the basket against Kyle Anderson #1 of the Minnesota Timberwolves in the fourth quarter at Target Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Nuggets defeated the Timberwolves 115-112. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic scored 35 points as the Denver Nuggets held off a second-half rally by the Minnesota Timberwolves to record a 115-112 victory over their Western Conference rivals on Tuesday. Serbian star Jokic shepherded Denver over the line after Minnesota erased an 18-point second-quarter deficit to seriously rattle the reigning NBA champions.

Minnesota, missing the injured Karl-Anthony Towns and Rudy Gobert, had a last-gasp attempt to force overtime only for Anthony Edwards' three-point attempt to bounce off the rim. Denver move into second place in the Western Conference with a 48-21 record.

Oklahoma City Thunder lead the standings at 47-20 while Minnesota remain firmly in the hunt in third at 47-22. The Timberwolves came roaring back into the game after a third-quarter shooting spree that saw them outscore Denver 29-17 thanks to 14 points from Edwards, who finished with 30 on the night.

But defensive adjustments from Denver slowed Edwards' scoring rate in the fourth quarter and the Nuggets held on. "We threw an extra body at him," Denver coach Michael Malone said of his fourth-quarter tactical tweak to stymie Edwards. "One guy trying to guard Anthony Edwards is a challenge for anyone in the NBA so we started throwing bodies at him to get the ball out of his hands."

Russian, Belarusian athletes not part of Olympics ceremony

LAUSANNE: Olympic chiefs announced Tuesday that Russian and Belarusian athletes competing in this summer's Paris Games under a neutral flag will not be able to take part in the opening ceremony. Individual Neutral Athletes (AINs) from either country "will not participate in the parade of delegations and teams during the opening ceremony since they are individual athletes", IOC director James Macleod said after an executive board meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne.

"But an opportunity will be provided to them to experience the event," added Macleod. The AINs will be on site, he said, but not included as passengers on the boat parade on the River Seine on July 26. Macleod said the scenario mirrored that at the 1992 Barcelona Games for "Independent Olympic Participants" from former Yugoslavia. "The decision regarding the participation of AINs in the closing ceremony will be taken at a later stage, taking into consideration that it is not teams that enter the closing ceremony, but all athletes jointly together."

Athletes from both Russia and Belarus had already been banned from attending the opening ceremony of the Paralympics, starting in Paris on August 28, a little more than two weeks after the Olympics finish. The IOC in December suspended Russia from the 2024 Games, but gave the green light for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals as long as they do not actively support the war on Ukraine.

Irving, Doncic lead Mavs

Kyrie Irving finished with 28 points while Luka Doncic bagged his 18th triple double of the season as the Dallas Mavericks overpowered the San Antonio Spurs 113-107 in a Texas derby. Dallas improve to 40-29 to leave them in seventh place in the Western Conference, just outside the automatic playoff places heading into the final month of the regular season.

Doncic finished with 18 points, 16 assists and 10 rebounds to help drive Dallas to a second straight victory. Mavericks coach Jason Kidd admitted his team had been forced to grind out the win despite not playing their best.

"It does count as a W. Not all wins are pretty," Kidd said. "We relied on our defense to help us get this win." Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said his team—who are propping up the Western Conference with a 15-54 record—paid the price for making too many turnovers.

"We out-rebounded them, we shot better than they did, we outscored them in the third quarter and the fourth quarter, and we had basically the same number of assists," Popovich said. "But we had 16 turnovers, and that's the difference of the game." Popovich however was encouraged by signs of progress from his young team. "Our goal is to get better every game, individually and team-wise, and

they did that," Popovich said. "They played hard to win. You can't ask for anything else."

In other games, the New Orleans Pelicans continued their recent good run of form with a third straight win, beating the Brooklyn Nets 104-91 on the road in New York. After two lead changes in the first quarter, the Pelicans dominated thereafter, stretching into a 24-point lead just before half-time and maintaining a healthy double-digit advantage for the remainder of the game.

Pelicans forward Zion Williamson led the romp with 28 points, seven rebounds and four assists on a night when seven New Orleans players finished in double figures. "I thought first half we really set the tone, second half got a little sloppy, but overall a really good effort on the part of our guys," Pelicans head coach Willie Green said.

Green was satisfied that so many of his team made significant scoring contributions. "It's important that any of our guys that touch the floor compete, rebound, share the ball," Green said. "Overall, solid effort, we'll take it."

The Orlando Magic extended their winning streak to four games with a 112-92 triumph over the Charlotte Hornets. The Houston Rockets trounced the Washington Wizards 137-114 on the road thanks to a 42-point display from Jalen Green, with Amen Thompson adding 25. — AFP



BERN: (FILES) Belarus Konstantin Koltsov celebrates his team's first. The death of former NHL ice hockey player Konstantin Koltsov, the boyfriend of tennis star Aryna Sabalenka, is being treated as an "apparent suicide", Miami-Dade Police said. — AFP

Tennis rallies around Sabalenka after boyfriend's death

MIAMI: World number two Aryna Sabalenka intends to play in the Miami Open this week, organisers said Tuesday, as fellow players offered their support following the death of her boyfriend in an apparent suicide.

Sabalenka's partner, Belarusian former NHL ice hockey player Konstantin Koltsov, 42, died late Monday after jumping from the balcony of a room in an upmarket resort in Miami, police said. Two-time Grand Slam winner Sabalenka practiced at the Miami Open's Hard Rock Stadium venue early on Tuesday afternoon as organisers said she had not asked to withdraw and was "intending to play."

The 25-year-old from Minsk, who won the Australian Open in 2023 and retained her Melbourne title earlier this year, is due to face Spain's Paula Badosa in the second round. Badosa, a close friend of Sabalenka's, said the match would be "uncomfortable".

"Yesterday I spoke with her a lot of time. This morning the same. So I know what she's going through," she told a press conference. "I know the entire situation, what is happening. That for me is a little bit shocking also to go through that because at the end she's my best friend and I don't want her to suffer. It's a very tough situation," she added.

"At the same point playing against her, it's also uncomfortable," Miami-Dade police spokesman Argemis Colome said in an email that on Monday at 12:39 a.m. (0439 GMT), police "were dispatched to the St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort, in reference to a male that jumped from a balcony."

"The Miami-Dade Police Department, Homicide Bureau, responded and has taken over the investigation of the apparent suicide of Mr. Konstantin Koltsov. No foul play is suspected." Bal Harbour is a high-end district in the northern part of Miami Beach, known for a luxury shopping mall and plush accommodations. — AFP



BEIJING: (FILES) Belarus' flag bearer Ignat Golovatsiuk (L) and Belarus' flag bearer Hanna Nifantava parade during the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, at the National Stadium, known as the Bird's Nest, in Beijing, on February 4, 2022. Olympic chiefs announced on March 19, 2024 that Russian and Belarusian athletes competing in this summer's Paris Games under a neutral flag will not be able to take part in the opening ceremony. — AFP

Athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced sanctions from a multitude of sports since Moscow launched its assault on Ukraine in February 2022. Over the past year a number of Olympic sports have eased restrictions, allowing athletes from both countries to return to competition under certain conditions. However, Rus-

sians and Belarusians have remained banned from athletics. Macleod added that there are currently 12 AINs with a Russian passport and seven AINs with a Belarusian passport who have qualified for Paris 2024, out of the 6,000 quota places that have already been awarded for the Olympic Games Paris 2024. — AFP