


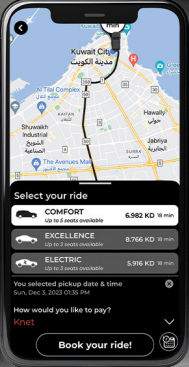
ISSUE NO: 19297
16 PAGES, 150 FILS



RIDE SAFE

@ridesafe.app

BOOK YOUR RIDE NOW



Download the app now

2

Kuwait Times announces new editorial management team



Ramadan Kareem

Fajr	: 04:25
Shrooq	: 05:44
Dhuhr	: 11:54
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:03
Isha	: 19:21

4 days left to deposit and enter the draw

KD One Winner 1,000,000

Open an AlDanah Millionaire Account Today!
e-gulfbank.com/AlDanah • 1 805 805



Amir calls to develop skills

Sheikh Mishal visits Sports Club for Deaf and Nabat Poets' Diwan



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visits the Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf and Nabat Poets' Diwan on March 25, 2024. — KUNA photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

Eid holiday to start April 9: Cabinet

KUWAIT: The Eid Al-Fitr holiday in the public sector will start on Tuesday, April 9, 2024, the Cabinet announced on Monday, adding that work would resume on Sunday, April 14, 2024.

Kuwait welcomes UNSC resolution

KUWAIT: Kuwait welcomed Monday UN Security Council resolution 2728 demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The Kuwaiti ministry of foreign affairs expressed regret for the inability of the UNSC to carry out its responsibilities stipulated in the UN Charter and to stop the aggression and crimes committed by the Zionist occupation forces against defenseless Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Kuwait's firm position in supporting the Palestinian people and their legitimate political rights and their right to self-determination and establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Antigua waives visas for Kuwaitis

KUWAIT: Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammed Al-Zaabi announced that his country's government has decided to exempt citizens of Kuwait from the entry visa requirement to its territories, making Kuwait the first Gulf country whose citizens can enter this Caribbean nation without a visa. Zaabi explained that this decision includes Kuwaitis holding valid passports of various types, including diplomatic, special and regular, exempting them from the entry visa requirement and allowing them to stay for up to one month from the date of entry.

Maternity leave on Sahel app

KUWAIT: The ministry of health announced Tuesday adding a new service to the Sahel app, allowing Kuwaiti working women to apply for maternity leave 30 weeks into their pregnancy directly through the app without the need to see a consultant.

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a visit Monday to Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf. HH the Amir, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, delivered a speech, in which he greeted and congratulated the club's members and staff on the holy month of Ramadan.

HH the Amir also expressed appreciation to club members for their efforts and contributions in all activities; especially sports, on both local and international levels, reiterating the state's keenness to provide all support and care to ensure the development and improvement of skills of all club members. "With your skills, you established that determination and sport can overcome disability, and you are able to achieve goals and ambitions," HH the Amir addressed the gathering.

Zionists keep up Gaza genocide, ignore truce call

GAZA: Zionist troops battled Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, with no sign of a let-up in the war despite a UN Security Council resolution demanding an "immediate ceasefire". The resolution was adopted on Monday after the Zionist entity's closest ally the United States abstained amid growing concern for the worsening humanitarian situation after nearly six months of war.

The text demands an "immediate ceasefire" for the ongoing holy month of Ramadan, leading to a

Major US bridge collapses as cargo ship plows into it

BALTIMORE: A major bridge in the US city of Baltimore collapsed early Tuesday after being struck by a container ship, sending multiple vehicles and people plunging into the frigid harbor below. Dramatic nighttime footage showed a 300-meter vessel hitting a pylon of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, bringing most of the steel-built structure crashing into the Patapsco River within seconds.

Vehicles could be seen on the road surface as the bridge warped and crashed in sections, with the third

At the reception were Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Affairs Dawood Maarafi, Director General of the Public Authority for Sports Youssef Al-Baidan and Chairman of the Club Anwar Al-Harbi. At the conclusion of the visit, HH the Amir was presented with a souvenir marking the visit.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal also visited the Nabat Poets' Diwan, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad. They were welcomed by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Secretary and Director of the Diwan Nassar Al-Khamsan. HH the Amir, in a speech, congratulated the audience on the holy month of Ramadan.

HH the Amir praised the diwan as a great edifice for conserving the literary heritage, social traditions and

national identity of the country, hailing efforts of the diwan to digitize the traditional Nabati poetry, keep abreast with the advancement of information technology and tap into the experience of the ministry of information in this regard.

Furthermore, HH the Amir called on the diwan members to adhere to the rules and parameters of Nabati poetry; continue excelling in producing creative poems; organize more competitions and symposia; encourage young poets to adopt this style of poetry; and publicize this poetry via traditional and modern mass media.

Secretary and Director of the Diwan Nassar Al-Khamsan expressed, on behalf of diwan members, best wishes for HH the Amir. He also read a Nabati poem welcoming HH the Amir, HH the Prime Minister and other officials. — KUNA

"lasting" truce. It also demands that Hamas and other fighters free captives they took during the unprecedented Oct 7 attacks on the Zionist entity, though it does not directly link the release to a truce.

In Gaza, there was intense fighting overnight, with Zionist operations in and around at least three major hospitals in the besieged territory. The health ministry in the territory said 70 people were killed early Tuesday, 13 of them in Zionist air strikes around the southern city of Rafah. The Zionist military said air raid sirens sounded in areas near the Gaza border.

The Security Council resolution was the first since the Gaza war erupted to demand an immediate halt in the fighting. After the vote, UN chief Antonio Guterres led calls for the resolution to be implemented. "Failure would be unforgivable," he said on social media platform X.



TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian receives Hamas' Doha-based political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh at the foreign ministry headquarters on March 26, 2024. — AFP



BALTIMORE: The steel frame of the Francis Scott Key Bridge sits on top of a container ship after the bridge collapsed on March 26, 2024. — AFP

New editorial management team at Kuwait Times

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times has appointed the following staff members to new positions on the editorial management team:

Shakir Reshamwala - Managing Editor

Shakir Reshamwala has more than 22 years of experience in the field of journalism. After earning a bachelor's degree in commerce, he worked for a travel magazine before joining Kuwait Times in 2003. He is also the front page editor. Reshamwala is a 2013 World Press Institute and 2017 East-West Center Senior Journalists Seminar fellow. He is also a competitive Scrabble player and has represented Kuwait at many world championships in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and the Middle East. A budding artist, Reshamwala painted a mural on a wall of Kuwait Times' coworking space.



Shakir Reshamwala

Faten Omar - Deputy Managing Editor

Faten Omar has been working for Kuwait Times as a reporter since 2014. She earned her BA in Journalism and Media from Petra University in 2009, and an MA in Media from Middle East University in 2012. Since 2012, Omar has been working as a journalist and freelancer for local, regional and international news agencies. She has reported for Xinhua, Raseef22, Rai Al-Youm and Al-Ghad, as well as a translator for the New York Times. In Kuwait, Omar worked as a reporter at Al-Kuwaitiyah and as managing editor of the local section at Al-Mustaqbal newspaper.



Faten Omar

Chidi Emmanuel Ekeh - Deputy Managing Editor

Chidi Emmanuel Ekeh has more than 20 years of experience in the field of media/journalism. After earning bachelor's degrees in statistics/math and mass communication, he worked for media agencies before joining Kuwait Times in 2004. He is an editor and a writer. Chidi also has a diploma in investigation and computer application and has traveled to over 30 countries while doing his duties. In Kuwait Times, he works as an editor and a writer. He has written many articles on various topics including features and news reports.



Chidi Emmanuel Ekeh

Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team visits kids in hospitals

To celebrate Girgian at Zain and Jaber Al Ahmad Hospitals



Zain Alshuhoor volunteers at Zain Hospital.

KUWAIT: The Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team has visited pediatric wards at the Zain Otolaryngology Specialized Hospital and Jaber Al Ahmad Hospital to celebrate the local Ramadan tradition of Girgian (candy distribution) with children, their families, and medical staff. The initiative reflected the deeply rooted spirit of giving during the Holy Month. The visits came in collaboration with the Ministry of Health under the Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan campaign, where the company extends its support with various partners from the public and

private sectors to share the blessings of Ramadan with the entire community.

Members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team, comprising Zain employees from various divisions and departments, actively participated in the initiative, embodying the Zain family's dedication to fostering positive social impact. The team visited pediatric wards at both the Zain Otolaryngology Specialized Hospital and Jaber Al Ahmad Hospital, where they were accompanied by Dr. Waleed Al Busairi, Director



Dr Waleed Al Busairi and Zain's team at Jaber Al Ahmad Hospital.

of Mubarak Al Kabeer Health District.

During these visits, the team distributed Girgian candy, gifts, and toys to the children, greatly uplifting not only the spirits of the young patients but also those of their families and the medical staff present. Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout Ramadan. Every year, the com-

pany introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year's initiatives and programs.

The Zain Otolaryngology Specialized Hospital, established by Zain, features state of the art medical equipment and facilities, and specializes in ear, nose, and throat cases. The hospital serves over 37,000 patients every year, with over 4,500 operations conducted annually. Zain volunteers visit the hospital during special occasions like national holidays, the Holy Month of Ramadan, and Eid.



Kuwait Municipality sets election plan

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced on Tuesday the field plan regarding the National Assembly 2024 elections set for April 4. Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous said in a press release that the election committee meeting discussed the preparations for the upcoming elections, noting that they will be cooperating with other government sectors to ease the voting process for citizens.

Al-Dabbous stressed the importance of the municipality's governorate chiefs to prepare the 118 schools, which will hold the voting process in the five constituencies. He also added that the municipality will empty school parking spaces from any cars, as well as remove candidate banners or posters near any polling stations. — KUNA

Kuwaitis among Qatar's top ten visitors: Al-Jaber

DOHA: According to statistics, Kuwaitis are among the top ten most frequent visitors to Qatar, stated the director of shared services at the Qatar Tourism Authority, Omar Al-Jaber, on Tuesday. He spoke to KUNA about the recent-

SAfrica 'supports Palestinian cause'

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Ambassador of South Africa Manelisi Genge praised the ongoing support and the common position that the embassy shares with Kuwait on the Palestinian cause. "South Africa has a long history of supporting the Palestinian cause, which was further consolidated by former President Nelson Mandela's declaration when he said South Africa's freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians," he said.

During a Ramadan Ghabga for members of local media held by the South Africa Embassy, the ambassador affirmed that South Africa will continue to do everything within its power to contribute to the preservation of the Palestinian people and end all acts of apartheid and genocide against them. On South Africa-Kuwait bilateral relations, the ambassador said his country values its relations with Kuwait and is working hard to consolidate the growing cordial relations between the two countries into a solid strategic partnership.

"The year 2024 marks 30 years of South Africa's diplomatic relations with Kuwait. The two countries have cordial diplomatic relations, where they signed various agreements/MoUs," Genge said, noting Kuwait has become an important market for South African high-quality food products, which include fresh fruits and vegetables, chilled meat, juices, spices, salad dressings, cereals and dairy products, among others.

Regarding tourism, he indicated the South African tourism sector is on the rise, and there

ly launched events calendar for the year 2024, filled with wondrous activities charming young and old. Days of the holy month have also been filled with events attracting visitors from neighboring Gulf countries and the world as a whole.

Al-Jaber named a few events and festivals, some displaying traditional textiles and offering a variety of international cuisines, while others include kiosks selling traditional products. The calendar also includes entertaining events for children, whether it is the Lego Show, a games festival, or interactive activities and musical shows.



South African ambassador poses with local media representatives at the Ramadan Ghabga.

has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of travelers from the Middle East, including Kuwait, with 54,339 arrivals to South Africa from January to December 2023, a 33.7 percent growth when compared to the same period in 2022. "South Africa's inbound tourism figures from Kuwait increased in 2023 to 1,477, compared to 2021 and 2022 where the numbers were 262 and 1,179 respectively," the ambassador said.

Genge pointed out that South Africa's strength lies in its diversity of culture, religious faiths

While Qatar employs impressive modern air-conditioning technologies to provide visitors with the opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities without suffering the heat of summer, as seen in 21 High Street and Um Al-Naseem Park, it is also keen on shedding light on its traditional side with Souq Waqif and Souq Garangoh. Al-Jaber also pointed out Qatar's keenness on promoting the tourism sector and cooperation with Gulf countries in that regard, as it recently held the eighth tourism ministerial meeting, discussing a number of themes and strategies.

and history, amongst others. "In this regard, the embassy has successfully participated in many events, exhibitions and engagements hosted by various entities in Kuwait to showcase and promote the South Africa brand. These engagements have provided the embassy the opportunity to advance South Africa's public diplomacy and promotion of South Africa as a touristic destination (leisure and medical) and education, trade/business and investment destination of choice for Kuwaitis and expatriates," he said.

He added that work on the joint tourism visa remains underway, saying that it would largely contribute to social and cultural exchange as well as stimulate development and prosperity in the region. Qatar saw an increase in the number of visitors, reaching 1.5 million this year compared to 1.3 million during the same period last year. Qatar Tourism Authority specializes in the development of tourism and hospitality, promoting investments in the field, as well as putting forward a national tourism strategy, overseeing its execution, and reviewing it regularly. — KUNA

Amir receives top dignitaries



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communication Dawood Maarafi at Bayan Palace. (Right) His Highness the Amir also received a handwritten letter Tuesday from the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud. The letter contained an invitation to participate in the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Riyadh in April, under the title "International Cooperation, Growth, and Energy for Development". The letter was delivered by Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Kuwait, Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud.— KUNA photos

Sports Club for Deaf welcomes Amir



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf on Monday. His Highness, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, delivered a speech, in which he greeted and congratulated the Club's members and staff on the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA photos

Amir visits Nabat Poets' Diwan



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday visited the Nabat Poets' Diwan, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. They were welcomed by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Secretary and Director of the Diwan Nassar Al-Khamsan. His Highness the Amir, in a speech, congratulated the audience on the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher

YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432

ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 359

CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 220

ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com

Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Benefits of fasting



Lowers cholesterol

Fasting is known to reduce triglycerides, which are responsible for causing heart diseases. Triglycerides are responsible for bad cholesterol. Interestingly, fasting does not harm the good cholesterol in the body.

Increases Leptin receptivity

The fatty tissue is responsible for secreting many hormones. One such hormone is Leptin that decides how you feel post a meal. Fasting promotes weight loss, and because of that, the body becomes more receptive to hunger and satiety signals. Thus, the leaner you are, the less hungry you feel, and because of the increased leptin receptivity, you feel full earlier post a meal. According to certain studies I came across, fasting before or during chemotherapy may help make the procedure more effective and reduce its side effects. It might improve the response of tumor cells to chemotherapy, help protect normal cells, and enhance the immune system's response. However, more research is needed to fully understand the benefits of fasting in combination with chemotherapy.

Makes you younger

Research has shown that fasting slows down the ageing process in animals. The jury is still out on humans, but many people believe that fasting reduces the free radicals, primarily responsible for ageing. Fasting is also thought to an increased life span. I saw an intriguing finding in one of the studies I read. When people fasted for 5 days, their growth hormone (GH) secretion increased notably. These findings show that fasting may influence GH secretion and help the body adapt during starvation.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: A group of merchants drink coffee at a shop in the early 1960s. — Photo from KOC archive, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

Ministers reject acts that threaten national unity

Cabinet announces Eid holiday, April 9 till 13

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held its weekly session on Monday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Following the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji made the following statement: "The Cabinet was briefed on the outcomes of His Highness the Prime Minister's official visit to Saudi Arabia last Thursday."

His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad and Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom, reviewed deep-rooted and historic relations between the two countries and means to develop them on all levels to benefit both brotherly peoples. The Cabinet then expressed its denunciation of all acts that harm national unity, especially via social media platforms.

Condemning all acts leading to splitting Kuwaiti society, the Cabinet stressed utter rejection of such manners and that nobody is above the law, lauding the firm role played by the Interior Ministry to confront such acts of bigotry via apprehending those responsible and bringing them to justice. The Cabinet also announced that the Eid Al-Fitr holiday at all



KUWAIT: The Cabinet holds its weekly session under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA

ministries and governmental bodies and institutions would start on Tuesday, April 9.

Work will resume on Sunday, April 14, while agencies of special nature will determine their Eid holiday by competent bodies to take into consideration the public interest. On an international scale, the Cabinet expressed strong condemnation of the

terrorist attack that targeted a commercial complex in the Russian capital, Moscow, leaving dozens dead and injured. While emphasizing its condemnation of this terrorist act and its rejection of violence in all its forms, the State of Kuwait also called on the international community to stand up to these terrorist acts that target civilians. — KUNA



GAZA: People inspect damage to a building that was hit overnight during Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 26, 2024.— AFP

GCC welcomes Gaza ceasefire resolution

RIYADH: The Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), Jassem Al-Budaiwi, welcomed Monday the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2728, demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. In a press statement, the Secretary-General stressed the necessity of adopting the resolution to reach a permanent and sustainable ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the parties' compliance with their obligations under international law, expanding the scope of the flow of humanitarian aid to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip, and enhancing their protection.

He hoped that this decision would lead to alleviating the suffering of the people of Gaza and would contribute to stopping the escalation, targeting and forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians, achieving a comprehensive cessation of the crisis, and ending the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

He also called on the occupation forces to immediately comply with this resolution and adhere to United Nations resolutions and the requirements of international humanitarian law, while immediately stopping targeting civilians in Gaza and humanitarian institutions and headquarters, including hospitals, schools, and shelters. Earlier, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted

a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire between Zionists and the Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Meanwhile, the Arab Parliament of the Arab League welcomed on Monday the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) resolution to ceasefire in Gaza. Despite the late adoption of the resolution, it is the right step towards reaching a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the Arab League said in a statement. The Parliament called on the International Community to intensify its efforts to take responsibility for legal action, hold Zionists accountable for their countless war crimes, and reach a permanent ceasefire. While also allowing immediate passage of human aid in Gaza to end the famine and take a step towards ending the occupation, liberating Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.

OIC welcomes resolution

The International Community holds responsibility to end the countless crimes committed by Zionists in the past six months. It is imperative that Zionists comply with the resolution and guarantee the immediate safe passage of human aid in Gaza, the OIC said. The OIC also renewed the call on the International Community to put a stop to all the war crimes Zionists are committing, including illegal settling, forced displacement, murdering civilians, and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. The UNSC adopted a resolution on Monday demanding an immediate ceasefire as a step to permanently end the war in Gaza. — KUNA



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext:220



Syrians missing, dying in jihadist-run prisons

5 Chinese workers, driver dead in Pakistan suicide bombing

Page 6

Page 7

Starving Gazans scramble for aid drops

‘Palestinians in Gaza desperately need a flood of aid. Not trickles. Not drops’

GAZA CITY: A military plane banked over the war-ravaged ruins of Gaza City dropping dozens of black parachutes carrying food aid.

On the ground, where almost no building within sight was still standing, hungry men and boys raced towards the beach where most of the aid seemed to have landed.

Dozens of them jostled intensely to get to the food, with scrums forming up and down the rubble-strewn dunes. “People are dying just to get a can of tuna,” said Mohamad al-Sabaawi, carrying an almost empty bag on his shoulder, a young boy beside him. “The situation is tragic, as if we are in a famine. What can we do? They mock us by giving us a small can of tuna.”

Aid groups say only a fraction of the supplies required to meet basic humanitarian needs have arrived in Gaza since October, while the UN has warned of famine in the north of the territory by May without urgent intervention.

The aid entering the Gaza Strip by land is far below pre-war levels, at around 150 vehicles a day compared to at least 500 before the war, according to UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

With Gazans increasingly desperate, foreign governments have turned to airdrops, in particular in the hard-to-reach northern parts of the territory including Gaza City.

The United States, France and Jordan are among several countries conducting airdrops to people living within the ruins of what was the besieged territory’s biggest city. But the aircrews themselves told AFP that the drops were insufficient.

US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Anderson noted earlier this month that what they were able to deliver was only a “drop in the bucket” of what was needed. The air operation has also been marred by deaths. Five people on the ground were killed by one drop and 10 others injured after parachutes malfunctioned, according to a medic in Gaza.

Calls have mounted for the Zionist entity to allow in more aid overland, while the entity has blamed the UN and UNRWA for not distributing aid in Gaza. “Palestinians in Gaza desperately need what has been promised — a flood of aid. Not trickles. Not drops,” UN chief Antonio Guterres said on Sunday after visiting Gaza’s southern border crossing with Egypt at Rafah. “Looking at Gaza, it almost appears



This photo shows an airdrop of humanitarian aid over the besieged Palestinian territory on March 21, 2024. — AFP

that the four horsemen of war, famine, conquest and death are galloping across it,” he added.

The Zionist entity’s bombardment and invasion of Gaza has killed at least 32,333 people, according to the health ministry in the territory. The entity

claims the war is aimed at destroying Hamas, which launched an attack on the south of the entity which resulted in the deaths of 1,160 people, according to an AFP tally of Zionist figures.

Returning home in Gaza City with little to keep

his family going, another Palestinian man said their situation was miserable. “We are the people of Gaza, waiting for aid drops, willing to die to get a can of beans — which we then share among 18 people,” he said. — AFP



Former US president Donald Trump

Trump trying to run out the clock on prosecutors

WASHINGTON: Facing a total of 88 felony charges in four separate federal and state cases, Donald Trump is employing a simple tactic that has always served him well in the past — running out the clock. The 77-year-old Republican presidential candidate has deployed an army of highly paid lawyers in New York, Washington, Georgia and Florida to push back his trial dates.

The goal is clear: delaying court action beyond the November election when, if he recaptures the presidency, he could potentially have the federal charges against him dropped — or even pardon himself. So far the strategy appears to be working.

“There is a chance that he could evade justice by delaying justice,” said Adam Schiff, a Democratic member of the House of Representatives who was on the committee that investigated the January 6 attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters refusing to accept the results of the 2020 election. “This is a tried and true tactic of Trump throughout his career,” Schiff told CNN. “The courts should not play into that stratagem.”

Andrew Weissmann, a former federal prosecutor and author of a book, “The Trump Indictments,” said the stalling tactics are understandable. “Most defendants do not want to go to trial,” Weissmann told AFP. “They are trying to put that off as much as possible.”

Trump had been scheduled to go on trial in Washington on March 4 on charges of trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden, now his likely November opponent. That trial has been delayed until the Supreme Court rules on Trump’s claim that a former president enjoys immunity from prosecution. The nation’s highest court is to hear arguments in the immunity case on April 25 but may not issue a ruling until late June or even July. Weissmann said it is “inexcusable” that the Supreme Court has put the case on “such a slow track.”

In New York, Trump faces state charges of falsifying business records to pay pre-2016 election hush money to a porn star with whom he allegedly had a sexual encounter back in 2006. That case was scheduled to start on Monday but Trump asked for it to be delayed by up to 90 days after prosecutors revealed that potential evidence had not been turned over to the defense.—AFP

Russia blames Kyiv, West over Moscow attack

MOSCOW: Russia on Tuesday sought to shift blame for the Moscow concert hall attack onto Ukraine and its Western backers, despite the Islamic State group claiming responsibility for the massacre of at least 139 people. The Kremlin’s security services have been scrambling to explain how gunmen on Friday managed to carry out the worst attack in Russia in over two decades.

President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged that “radical Islamists” conducted the bloody assault, but suggested they were linked to Ukraine, two years into the Kremlin’s offensive on the country. The head of Russia’s FSB security agency Alexander Bortnikov said Tuesday that while those who had “ordered” the attack had not been identified, the assailants were heading to Ukraine and would have been “greeted as heroes”.

“We believe the action was prepared both by the radical Islamists themselves and, of course, facilitated by Western special services, and Ukraine’s special services themselves have a direct connection to this,” Bortnikov was cited as saying by Russian news agencies. Ukraine has fiercely rejected any accusations from Moscow that it was tied to the assault, with a top aide to President Volodymyr Zelensky saying the Kremlin was looking to cover up the “incompetence” of its intelligence agencies.

Belarus undermines Kremlin

Russia’s closest international ally, Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko, appeared to undermine the Kremlin’s main narrative — saying that the attackers tried to enter his country first before heading to Ukraine. “There was no way they could enter Belarus. They saw that. That’s why they turned away and went to the section of the Ukrainian-Russian border,” he said.

The Kremlin has expressed confidence in the country’s powerful security agencies, despite questions swirling over how they failed to thwart the massacre after public and private warnings from the United States.

Islamic State jihadists have said several times since Friday that they were responsible, and IS-affiliated media channels have published graphic videos of the gunmen inside the venue. French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday said Paris had information that the jihadists were responsible and warned Russia against exploiting the attack to blame Ukraine.

The concert hall massacre was a major blow for Putin just over a week after he claimed a new term after one-sided elections the Kremlin billed as an endorsement of his military operation against Ukraine.

Putin on Monday said for the first time that “radical Islamists” were behind last week’s attack, but sought to tie it to Kyiv. Without providing any evidence, Putin connected the attack at Crocus City Hall to a series of incursions into Russian territory by pro-Ukrainian sabotage groups, and said they were all part of efforts to “sow panic in our society”. — AFP

Ramadan

MEGA DISCOUNT

27 MARCH - 02 APRIL 2024

Until Stock Lasts

From 27 to 29.03.2024

KD. 4.990

White Pomfret (Medium) /kg

From 28 to 30.03.2024

KD. 2.990

Seabass (Small) /kg

From 27 to 30.03.2024

KD. 3.190

Indian Chilled Whole Mutton /kg

From 27 to 29.03.2024

KD. 0.195

Watermelon (Oman) per kg

KD. 0.795

KD. 0.595

Tomato Box

KD. 1.295

KD. 0.895

Pomegranate (India) per kg

SCAN THE QR CODE

GET OUR WEEKLY OFFERS ON YOUR MOBILE

Lulu Hypermarket

لؤلؤ هايپرماركت

Where the world comes to shop

حيث يأتي العالم للتسوق

LuluHypermarketKw

Luluhyperkw

Luluhyperkw

Luluhypermarket.com

International

5 Chinese workers, driver dead in Pakistan suicide bombing

Attacks against Chinese workers slow down progress of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Expert

PESHAWAR: Five Chinese nationals working on a major dam construction site were killed along with their driver on Tuesday when a suicide bomber targeted their vehicle in northwest Pakistan, officials said. Their vehicle plunged into a deep ravine off the mountainous Karakoram Highway after the bomber rammed his car into them and detonated his explosives, police said. Beijing has poured billions of dollars into Pakistan in recent years, but Chinese-funded projects have sparked resentment and their citizens have frequently come under attack.

Images shared with AFP show smoke rising from the valley, near Besham city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. "Five Chinese and their local driver were killed in the attack," Muhammad Ali Gandapur, a senior provincial police official, told AFP.

He said the vehicle was travelling from the Dasu hydroelectric dam site, under construction by the China Gezhouba Group Company, towards the capital Islamabad. Zahid Khan, a senior local police official, told AFP that four Chinese nationals and their driver were killed. "Upon reaching an unpopulated area in Besham, a suicide bomber crashed his vehicle into theirs. The vehicle caught fire and plunged down the ravine," he said.

In 2021 a bus carrying engineers to the same construction site was hit by a bomb, killing 13 people including nine Chinese workers. Tuesday's attack comes days after security forces killed at least seven militants as they attempted to storm the offices of Gwadar Port in southwest Pakistan, considered a

cornerstone of Chinese investment.

'Most trusted friend'

Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi was pictured arriving at China's embassy in Islamabad within hours of the bombing. "The enemy aimed its attack at the citizens of Pakistan's most trusted friend country," he said in a statement. "A robust response will be delivered to the perpetrators."

Islamabad is Beijing's closest regional ally, readily providing financial assistance to bail out its often-struggling neighbor. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has seen tens of billions of dollars funneled into massive transport, energy and infrastructure projects. But separatist groups say locals see little benefit from major Chinese projects, with most jobs going to outsiders. The security of Chinese workers has long been of concern to both countries.

"The Chinese workers were already scared and feared that another attack was coming," said Azeem Khalid, a Chinese investment expert at COMSATS University Islamabad. "With every such incident, the speed of the project will be slower." In 2019, gunmen stormed a luxury hotel in Balochistan province overlooking the flagship Chinese-backed deep-water seaport in Gwadar that gives strategic access to the Arabian Sea - killing at least eight people. In June 2020, Baloch insurgents targeted the Pakistan Stock Exchange, which is partly owned by Chinese companies, in the commercial capital of Karachi. — AFP



BESHAM CITY: Security personnel inspect the site of a suicide attack near Besham city in the Shangla district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on March 26, 2024. — AFP

How anti-system newcomer became Senegal's leader

DAKAR: Hunched in his market workshop in a northern Dakar suburb, Cheikh Lo recounted why he had pinned all his hopes on Senegal's anti-establishment president elect Bassirou Diomaye Faye. "We've suffered a lot, 12 years of suffering, that's really enough," said the 34-year-old tailor, a day after Faye swept to a first-round victory.

"With Diomaye, we really want radical change". Faye, 44, is set to become Senegal's youngest ever president after winning Sunday's vote on a ticket of systemic overhaul after years of deadly unrest, economic stagnation and a political crisis.

His main rival, the governing coalition's Amadou Ba, conceded defeat after failing to woo voters on a promise of continuing the status quo. Even in his own voting district in northern Dakar, provisional results show Ba was crushed at the ballot box.

"It was a punishment vote really," said Lo, who works in a sprawling indoor market in Ba's working-class district. "That's why everyone came out en masse to vote and punish the regime that was in power".

'Through hell'

Despite implementing a vast multi-year development program, outgoing President Macky Sall leaves behind 20 percent unemployment and persistent poverty in the West African nation.

At least one in three of Senegal's roughly 17 million inhabitants still lives in poverty, according to the UN World Food Program. Lo estimated that his income had halved over the last 12 years under Sall.

While he said he could sometimes make up to



Senegalese opposition presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye addresses his first press conference after being declared winner of Senegal's presidential election on March 25, 2024.

20,000 CFA francs (\$33) per day, there were also days when he would make nothing. "In previous years, it was wonderful ... we didn't work much and got a lot of money. But now it's a shame ... We work hard but we don't get much," he said.

The sentiment was widely shared by Lo's fellow traders, whose jumble of stalls occupy the winding alleys of the market. Ndeye Farma Gueye, 43, said it had been around 20 days since she'd had a customer in her small shop selling artisanal goods. "We've been through hell," she said. "It was better before Macky came along ... we've had to tighten our belts," she added.

Soon-to-be president, Faye, ran on a pledge of redistributing Senegal's wealth and on Monday committed to lowering the cost of living. The campaign promises resonated with those AFP spoke to in northern Dakar.

Gueye said she voted for a transformation on multiple fronts, including living standards, youth prospects and the development of the country. "We're expecting a lot of things and we know they're going to change over the next few months," she added.

At Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, Zionist troops have been involved in heavy fighting for the past nine days. And on Monday, the Zionist military raided Al-Amal Hospital, also in Khan Yunis. Aid agencies have voiced concern for non-combatants caught up in the fighting. Palestinians living near Al-Shifa have reported corpses in the streets, constant bombardment and the rounding up of men who are stripped to their underwear and questioned.

Palestinians in Rafah welcomed the UN vote and called on Washington to use its influence with the Zionist entity to ensure the resolution is implemented. Bilal Awad, 63, said Washington must "stand against an attack on Rafah, and support the return of the displaced to their cities". Ihab Al-Assar, 60, expressed hope that "(the Zionist entity) will comply" with the Security Council text. — AFP



DAKAR: Supporters of opposition presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye and opposition leader Ousmane Sonko celebrate as the votes are being counted on March 24, 2024. — AFP photos

Trauma

The market traders were also eager for greater respect for the rule of law after several bouts of unrest since 2021. The turmoil — which partly stemmed from a stand-off between Faye's charismatic political mentor Ousmane Sonko and the state — saw dozens killed and hundreds arrested across the country.

Everyone AFP interviewed said they knew someone arrested during the protests. "I have a brother here at the market who was arrested and tortured in some way," said Gueye. "I know many, many, many people ... they came out with a lot of trauma," she added.

Faye, himself arrested in April 2023, was released from prison alongside Sonko just over a week before the election. He has said his priority is "national reconciliation", with a political project based on institutional reform to restore the rule of law in Senegal, which he asserts was flouted by Sall. "People have the impression that Ousmane Sonko and Bassirou Diomaye Faye have more values than the others who are candidates of the system," said El Hadji Mamadou Mbaye, a political science lecturer and researcher at the University of Saint-Louis. — AFP

Zionists keep up Gaza genocide...

Continued from Page 1

The Zionist entity reacted furiously to the US abstention, while Washington insisted that it did not mark a shift in policy, although it has taken a tougher line with the Zionist entity in recent weeks.

The United States had previously vetoed successive draft resolutions calling for a ceasefire, but it has become increasingly concerned by the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the United Nations has warned of famine in the north by May if urgent action isn't taken. The Gaza health ministry said seven people had drowned in the Mediterranean trying to reach aid airdropped into the territory.

Washington has also balked at the Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin's determination to launch an assault on Rafah, the last major population center still untouched by Zionist ground troops where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge from the fighting. In protest at the United States' abstention in the UN vote, which it said "hurts" both its war effort and attempts to release captives, the Zionist entity cancelled a planned visit to Washington by a high-ranking delegation.

The Zionist entity's campaign against Hamas has killed at least 32,333 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry. Hamas welcomed the Security Council resolution and reaffirmed its readiness to negotiate the release of hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist entity. In a statement, the militant group blamed the Zionist entity for the failure to make progress in the latest round of talks hosted by mediator Qatar.

Hamas said Netanyahu and his cabinet were "entirely responsible for the failure of negotiation efforts and for preventing an agreement from being reached up until now". Netanyahu's office hit back on X, charging that Hamas was "not interested in continuing negotiations" as it had been emboldened by the Security Council vote.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was in Tehran on Tuesday for talks with Iranian officials, state media reported. It is Haniyeh's second visit to key backer Iran since the start of the war. Haniyeh said the Zionist entity is experiencing "unprecedented political isolation". "Although this resolution came late and there may be some gaps that need to be filled, the resolution itself indicates that the (the Zionist entity) occupation is experiencing unprecedented political isolation," Haniyeh told a news conference in Tehran.

He added the Zionist entity is "losing political cover and protection even in the Security Council" and "the US is unable to impose its will on the international community". Haniyeh was accompanied by Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who made no comment during the press conference.

In the occupied West Bank, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. She welcomed the Security Council resolution and said it was "in the absolute interest of the people of the Zionist entity that we come to a ceasefire now so that the hostages can be released."

On the ground in Gaza, the fighting raged on unabated. Dozens of Zionist tanks and armored vehicles surrounded the Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis, where thousands of displaced people have sought refuge, witnesses said. The health ministry said shots were being fired around the sprawling complex, but no raid had yet taken place.

At Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, Zionist troops have been involved in heavy fighting for the past nine days. And on Monday, the Zionist military raided Al-Amal Hospital, also in Khan Yunis. Aid agencies have voiced concern for non-combatants caught up in the fighting. Palestinians living near Al-Shifa have reported corpses in the streets, constant bombardment and the rounding up of men who are stripped to their underwear and questioned.

Palestinians in Rafah welcomed the UN vote and called on Washington to use its influence with the Zionist entity to ensure the resolution is implemented. Bilal Awad, 63, said Washington must "stand against an attack on Rafah, and support the return of the displaced to their cities". Ihab Al-Assar, 60, expressed hope that "(the Zionist entity) will comply" with the Security Council text. — AFP

Major US bridge collapses as...

Continued from Page 1

tranche cantilevering upwards before it, too, tumbled into the water. Rescuers said they were still looking for at least seven people, having pulled two people free. As daylight broke the extent of the disaster became apparent.

Twisted stanchions of steel lay draped over the deck of the ship, on which stacks of containers teetered precariously — adding further danger to rescue and recovery work. Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said maintenance workers were on the bridge at the time of the collision, an incident he described as an "unthinkable tragedy... like something out of an action movie". "We have to be thinking about the families and people impacted, folks who we have to try to find," he said.

Footage appeared to show the ship going dark twice in the moments before the collision, possibly indicating some kind of power failure. There was no immediate confirmation of the cause of the crash, but Baltimore's Police Commissioner Richard Worley said there was "no indication" of terrorism.

A huge emergency response swung into action after the collision, which happened around 1:30 am (0530 GMT), with first response vehicles crowding the shoreline. Water temperatures were around 48 Fahrenheit (9 Celsius), narrowing the window of survivability and increasing the urgency for divers scouring the water, with tides also complicating efforts.

Baltimore's fire chief James Wallace said sonar had "detected the presence of vehicles" in the harbor, but declined to estimate how many. One person was taken to hospital in "a very serious condition," he said, adding a second person recovered from the water was uninjured. "We may be looking for upwards of seven individuals," he said.

Donald Heinbuch, a former Baltimore firefighter, said he could see the bridge from his bedroom

window. "We were awakened by what appeared to be an earthquake and a long, rolling sound of thunder," he told local media. "I saw some emergency lights in the area and decided to drive up... what was in progress was a multi-jurisdictional response to a disaster."

The 2.6-km, four-lane bridge spans the Patapsco River southwest of Baltimore. Named after the man who wrote the lyrics for the US national anthem "The Star Spangled Banner", it opened in 1977 and carries more than 11 million vehicles a year, around 31,000 a day. It is a major part of the road network around Baltimore, an industrial city on the US East Coast close to the capital Washington.

Maryland Governor Wes Moore declared a state of emergency, a move that will ease the release of federal resources, while the White House said President Joe Biden was briefed on the incident. Shipping giant Maersk said the "Dali", which was leaving Baltimore heading to Colombo in Sri Lanka, was being operated by charter vessel company Synergy Group, and carrying cargo belonging to Maersk customers. "We are horrified by what has happened in Baltimore, and our thoughts are with all of those affected," a Maersk statement said.

All crew, as well as pilots — the specialized mariners who navigate vessels around ports — have been accounted for, with no reports of any injuries, Synergy said. While rescue and recovery efforts extended through Tuesday, attention will also shift to what happened, and whether the bridge was fit for purpose. Some experts suggested the bridge's support structures may not have been properly protected to withstand a collision by a large vessel.

"The extent of the damage to the bridge superstructure appears disproportionate to the cause, a matter for future investigation," said Toby Motttram, a structural engineering professor at the University of Warwick in Britain. Baltimore is one of the busiest ports in the United States, handling \$80 billion worth of cargo last year, including a large volume of vehicles. The bridge's destruction could have a significant economic impact, with shipping in and out of the port suspended from Tuesday. — AFP

International



HARBANUSH: Ahmad Al-Hakim prays as he sits by the tomb of his brother Abdul Qader, who was reportedly killed by torture while in captivity by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. — AFP photos



Noha Al-Atrash, the wife of Syrian detainee Ahmed Abbas Majloubha who has been held captive, poses with her children during a demonstration.

Syrians missing, dying in jihadist-run prisons

Grim treatment echoes torture reported in Syrian government-run prisons since 2011

HARBANUSH, Syria: Ahmed Al-Hakim's 27-year-old brother was tortured to death in prison in Syria's jihadist-run northwest, sparking rare protests amid accusations from residents and activists of rights violations in the opposition bastion.

"We protested and rose up against the Assad regime in order to be rid of injustice," said Hakim, 30, referring to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Now "we find ourselves ruled with the same methods," he told AFP, crouched near his brother Abdel-Kader's grave, flowers and plants placed in the freshly turned soil.

Syria's 13-year-old conflict, sparked by Assad's brutal repression of anti-government protests, has drawn in foreign armies and jihadists and killed more than 500,000 people. Around half of Idlib province and parts of neighboring Aleppo, Hama and Latakia provinces are controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), an alliance of Islamist factions led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate. Accusations of torture and other rights violations have increased since last year when HTS launched a crackdown on suspected "agents" for Damascus or foreign governments. Security forces from the Islamist group have detained hundreds of civilians, fighters and even prominent HTS members, providing no information to families, said residents and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor.

Abdel-Kader's death triggered rare protests in Idlib province — home to some three million people, many displaced from government-held areas — in recent weeks and calls for the release of detainees, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

The war monitor said demonstrations are taking place daily in towns and villages, most recently on Sunday evening, when protesters chanted slogans against HTS leader Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani. Jolani has said the protesters' demands were "mostly justified", and announced changes including the restructuring of the security force running the prisons. HTS's media office told AFP the group was "seriously examining" the protesters' demands and would "tighten security bodies' work (and) improve prison infrastructure ... to deal with any dysfunction".



KAFALDIN: Amina Al-Hamam, 70, whose son Ghazwan Hassun was detained by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in 2019, kisses her grandson as they sit at the entrance of their tent at a camp for those displaced by conflict.

turing of the security force running the prisons. HTS's media office told AFP the group was "seriously examining" the protesters' demands and would "tighten security bodies' work (and) improve prison infrastructure ... to deal with any dysfunction".

'Beaten with piping'

Hakim, an accountant originally from Aleppo province, said his brother participated in anti-government protests before becoming a fighter and was part of the small HTS-aligned Jaish Al-Ahrar group. He said the faction told Abdel-Kader to report to HTS, considered a terrorist organization by several Western countries, on suspicions of collaborating with the government.

Abdel-Kader handed himself in on March 16 last year "on the understanding that he would be out ... in a week at most", Hakim said. After detaining him for several months and then saying he was "in good health", HTS stonewalled the family's requests for information, according to Hakim.

Months later, a factional contact and a former fighter told the family Abdel-Kader had died due to torture. Jaish Al-Ahrar only notified them formally on February 22 that Abdel-Kader was dead. The family found his grave was "new but the date of death written on it was around 20 days after his arrest", a distraught Hakim said. Former detainees told Hakim his brother was "beaten with piping until he lost consciousness and tied up by his hands for days without food or water". Abdel-Kader denied any wrongdoing "so they increased the torture until they killed him", they told Hakim.

One former detainee said Abdel-Kader was tortured so severely that "he couldn't walk because his feet were swollen and filled with pus". The day he died, the guards "tortured him for six hours" and after he was returned to the cell he "kept vomiting", Hakim was told.

The grim treatment echoes torture that rights groups have reported in Syrian government-run prisons, particularly since 2011, with tens of thousands of people forcibly disappeared and arbitrarily detained.

Amnesty International in 2017 accused authorities of committing secret mass hangings in the notorious Saydnaya facility. The Observatory said HTS this month released 420 prisoners in an amnesty aimed at quelling the discontent in the northwest. But it made no difference for Noha Al-Atrash, 30, whose husband Ahmed Majluba has been detained since December 2022, accused alternately of theft and belonging to an extremist group. "He has been arrested five times ... there is no proven reason for his detention," she said from her home in Idlib city as her two young children held photos of their father, 38.

Majluba, a labourer, was shot in the leg "during a previous period" in HTS detention, Atrash said. "I go to the protests, I make posters with pictures of my husband on them, and I take the kids," said Atrash who was covered head-to-toe in a niqab.

'War crimes'

She and her children were themselves detained for around 20 days after she hounded authorities for information. During one prison visit, she saw her husband's hand was broken and "his face was swollen from beatings", she said. "They've asked us to pay \$3,000 to have him released," Atrash said, but added that she doesn't have the money. "I have no choice but to protest ... I won't give up as long as they have my husband," she said defiantly.

The UN's independent commission of inquiry on Syria said recently it had "reasonable grounds to believe" HTS members had committed "acts that may amount to the war crimes of torture and cruel treatment and unlawful deprivation of liberty".

Bassam Alahmad from the Paris-based Syrians for Truth and Justice said people were "fed up with HTS violations" such as "arbitrary arrests and torture". He urged families and rights groups to gather independent, credible evidence for potential future investigations.

In a camp near the Turkish border, Amina Al-Hamam, 70, said her son Ghazwan Hassun was detained by HTS in 2019 on suspicion of "informing for the regime". "Some people tell us he's dead, others say he's alive," the distressed elderly woman said, sitting with her son's children, aged five and nine. Days before being detained, Hassun, a defector from the Syrian police, had published a video criticizing HTS, his family said.

During Hamam's only visit — eight months after he was detained — Hassun told her guards used a torture method notorious across Syria where the victim has their hands tied behind their back and is suspended from them for hours. The family has heard nothing since about the 39-year-old but has vowed to keep fighting. "I cry for him night and day," said Hamam. "We fled from injustice, but here we have seen worse." — AFP



MALINDI, Kenya: Mortuary workers move the remains of several members of the same family who were victims of a Kenyan starvation cult at a private mortuary in Malindi on March 26, 2024. — AFP

Kenya releases first cult massacre bodies to families

MALINDI, Kenya: Kenyan authorities on Tuesday began releasing the bodies of victims of a doomsday starvation cult, almost a year since the discovery of mass graves in a grisly case that shocked the world.

One family received four bodies that were loaded into a hearse from a morgue in the Indian Ocean town of Malindi, as loved ones wailed, an AFP correspondent at the scene said. The remains are the first to be handed over to their relatives after months of painstaking work to identify them using DNA. Hundreds of bodies, including those of children, have been exhumed from the shallow mass graves discovered in April last year in a remote wilderness inland from Malindi.

Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie is alleged to have incited his followers to starve to death in order to "meet Jesus" in what has been dubbed the "Shakahola forest massacre". A number of the 429 bodies exhumed between April and October last year have been positively identified through DNA profiling.

While starvation caused many deaths, some of the bodies, including of children, showed signs of death by asphyxiation, strangulation or bludgeoning, according to government autopsies. A homicide officer from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations told AFP it was up to relatives to make their own burial arrangements.

Families have had to endure a painful wait for the bodies of their loved-ones after the DNA profiling was delayed by lack of reagents and equipment. Mackenzie is facing a slew of charges, accused of driving his followers to death by preaching that starvation was the only path to God. The former taxi driver turned messiah has pleaded not guilty to 191 counts of murder, manslaughter and terrorism. He has also been charged with child torture and cruelty.

'People need closure'

The state-backed Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) last week accused security officers in Malindi "gross abdication of duty and negligence". "They not only failed to be proactive in collecting and acting on intelligence to forestall the Shakahola massacre but also unjustifiably failed to act on credible and actionable reports," KNCHR chair Roseline Odede said. The body also deplored the slow process of identifying the victims and enabling families to bury them, saying: "People are anxious and need closure on the matter". But chief government pathologist Johansen Oduor said last week that most of the families have not been coming to claim the bodies, posing a challenge to obtain DNA samples.

Oduor said Monday that at least 35 other mass graves have been identified in Shakahola and further exhumations set to begin soon could drive up the overall death toll. Questions have been raised about how Mackenzie, a father of seven, managed to evade law enforcement despite a history of extremism and previous legal cases. The case led the government to flag the need for tighter control of fringe denominations. —

Christians in India fearful as election looms

IRPIGUDA: Church walls crumble in India's Kandhamal district, where brutal attacks on Christians 16 years ago means many survivors still worry about their minority's place in a Hindu-majority nation. With India's election on the horizon and Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi widely expected to win, many Christians fear they may once again become targets. Deepti was among those attacked in 2008 when mobs rampaged through parts of India's eastern state of Odisha after the murder of a Hindu priest and his four followers.

The murder was widely blamed on Christians, and the ensuing revenge rampage left at least 101 people dead. Aged 19 at the time, she was gang raped by a mob enraged that her uncle had refused to recant his Catholicism. "I remember it every minute," the 35-year-old domestic worker said in tears, using a pseudonym because she feared being identified.

"I had been living there since childhood, I recognized them from their voice," said Deepti, who moved to the state capital Bhubaneswar after the attack. "I can still remember each one of them."

She was one of scores of women who, according to community leaders, were sexually assaulted across the district. Mobs targeted dozens of churches, prayer halls and Christian homes, forcing tens of thousands to flee.

Last year, the Vatican greenlighted the start of the beatification process towards potential sainthood for 35 of those killed in the violence, a group the church calls the "Kandhamal martyrs". Local Odisha Archbishop John Barwa calls the move a "source of renewed faith and hope". A simple memorial for those who were killed has been erected in the village of Tiangia. "Where there is hatred, let me sow love", the memorial reads, quoting Saint Francis of Assisi.

'Still scared to talk'

Prasanna Bishnoi, head of Kandhamal's survivors' association, said church recognition that people had "died because of their faith" was welcomed — but that honoring the dead did nothing to address the worries of the living. "Otherwise, I don't think it is going to benefit our people," Bishnoi said.

Six weeks of voting in marathon general elections began on April 19, but few doubt the June 4 result — with the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power for a decade, widely tipped to win again.

Critics accuse Modi's BJP of wanting to turn officially secular India into a Hindu nation, something he denies. But many Christians worry. Right-wing Hindu

groups have long accused Christians of forcibly converting Hindus and these allegations, which the community has vehemently denied, have resulted in attacks.

India has 1.4 billion people and according to the last census, more than two percent are Christians. Believers say the religion has been present in the country for nearly two millennia, since the apostle Thomas arrived in the year AD 52. The New Delhi-based United Christian Forum (UCF) rights watchdog recorded 731 attacks against Christians in India last year, warning of "vigilante mobs comprising religious extremists".



Survivor of mob violence, Raheli Digal, stands in front of her house destroyed by a mob 16 years ago. — AFP

In Kandhamal, the trauma of the 2008 attack haunts survivors, fearful they could be targeted again. "Even now the danger persists," said Raheli Digal, 40, showing AFP the charred walls of what was once her house in Irpiguda village, where the church also lies in ruins.

"When we remember those old scenes, and watch the news (about ongoing incidents of violence against Christians), we feel scared," she added. "They have been saying for a long time that they won't let Christians live here." The housewife said she has lived since the 2008 violence in a resettlement camp nearby, and rarely returns to her village. "We do not come here ... we are still scared to talk to them (Hindus)," she said.

She sobbed as she described how she hid in the surrounding forested hills, watching as a mob chanting anti-Christian slogans came with blazing torches. "They destroyed our home, set it on fire," she said. "We had nothing, not even a piece of cloth, not even water or food," she added. "We had small children with us — we grabbed them, and ran into the forest."

When Modi in January inaugurated a grand temple to the deity Ram in the northern city of Ayodhya, sparking Hindu celebrations nationwide, Digal and her neighbors stayed home. The temple was built on the site of a centuries-old mosque whose destruction by Hindu zealots in 1992 sparked sectarian riots that killed 2,000 people nationwide, most of them Muslims. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

Business

Geopolitical tensions boost oil prices

Global equities mixed amid Russia-Ukraine escalations

NEW YORK: Global stocks were mixed Monday, while oil prices advanced as escalations between Moscow and Ukraine raised questions over Russian oil production. US oil prices jumped 1.6 percent on news of the latest drone attack by Kyiv causing a fire at a major Russian oil refinery, the latest in a series of strikes against the country's fuel industry.

Analysts also pointed to a rise in geopolitical unease following a separate attack on a concert hall in Moscow, claimed by the Islamic State group. President Vladimir Putin on Monday acknowledged for the first time that "radical Islamists" were behind the attack that left 139 people dead, but suggested they were linked to Ukraine somehow.

"Heightened tensions between Ukraine and Russia have brought a halt to the rally in equity markets seen last week," said Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell. "Investors were nervously watching proceedings from the sidelines, particularly as oil prices crept up once again."

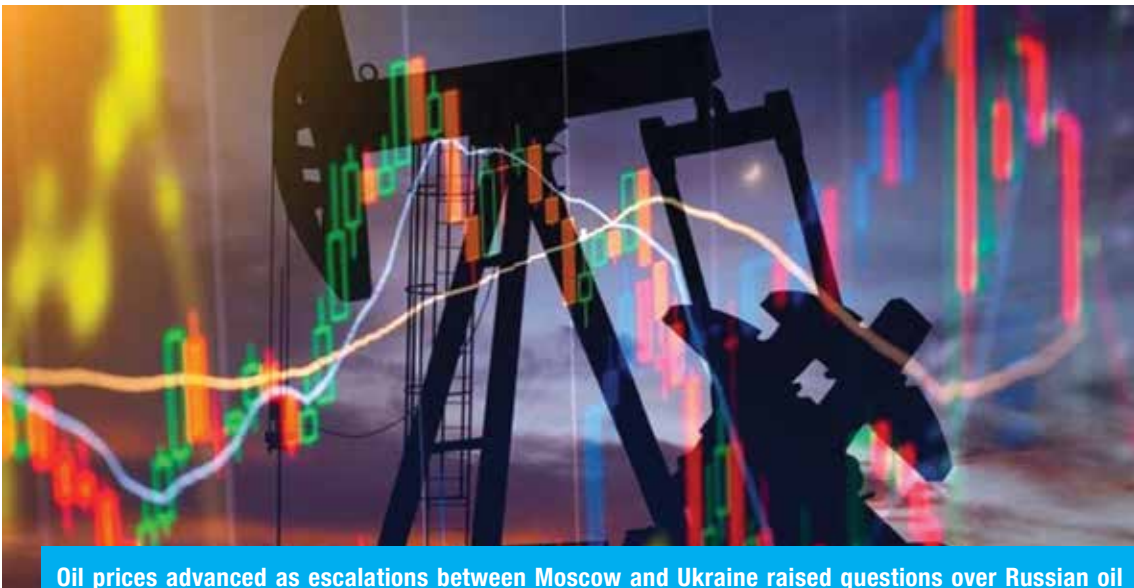
On Wall Street, stocks retreated as a market rally showed signs of fatigue. Maris Ogg of Fiduciary Trust said the reticent start was unsurprising given

the relatively light schedule this week as far as economic news. "It certainly wouldn't be unusual" to have some kind of consolidation after last week's highs," Ogg said. Sentiment was also dented after EU antitrust regulators said they were probing US tech giants Apple, Google parent Alphabet and Facebook parent Meta in relation to a digital law intended to ensure competition.

Earlier, Frankfurt's DAX added 0.3 percent to set a new record, as Paris finished flat and Tokyo lower.

Meanwhile, shares in Boeing climbed 1.4 percent after the company announced Monday that CEO Dave Calhoun would leave his post as the aviation giant faces increased scrutiny after a series of safety incidents and manufacturing issues. Susannah Streeter at Hargreaves Lansdown said the gain paled in comparison to the 25 percent drop in Boeing shares since the start of the year.

"It's not surprising that there appears to be some skepticism about the changes, given previous executive merry-go-rounds appear to have made no difference and the company has slid into further chaos," she said. — AFP



Oil prices advanced as escalations between Moscow and Ukraine raised questions over Russian oil production.

Boeing CEO to exit as safety concerns mount

NEW YORK: Boeing announced Monday a leadership shakeup headlined by the departure of CEO Dave Calhoun as the aviation giant faces heavy scrutiny following safety incidents and manufacturing issues. Calhoun will depart at the end of 2024. Stan Deal, Boeing's head of commercial airlines since 2019, will exit immediately, while the company's chairman, Larry Kellner, a former airline CEO, will depart after the company's annual meeting this spring.

Replacing Deal will be longtime Boeing executive Stephanie Pope, while former Qualcomm CEO Steve Mollenkopf will serve as the new chairman. The sweeping personnel changes come in the wake of Boeing's near-catastrophic incident in January when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight.

Calhoun called the Alaska Airlines incident a "watershed moment" for the company in a letter to employees, predicting the aviation giant would ultimately emerge as "a better company." Several analysts greeted the action, but cautioned that it would take time for Boeing to turn itself around.

Shares advanced on the announcement, which follows criticism of Boeing's manufacturing and quality control practices from the Federal Aviation Administration.

Boeing has also faced heavy questioning from airlines, who had requested a meeting with the Boeing board in a move seen as a sign of restiveness among



WASHINGTON: Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun speaks with reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

carriers. The Alaska Airlines incident put Boeing back in the hot seat, a familiar spot after a 20-month grounding of the 737 MAX following fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019. Boeing had originally tapped Calhoun, a longtime board member, as CEO after ousting former chief Dennis Muilenburg in December 2019 amid widespread criticism of Muilenburg's handling of the MAX crisis following the crashes.

Calhoun's tenure was challenged by the effects of the MAX grounding, and the severe industry downturn due to COVID-19 that was quickly followed by a frenzy of new orders from airlines facing surging post-pandemic travel demand—with the flood of orders straining the industry's supply chains.

In April 2021, Boeing extended Calhoun's contract as CEO potentially through 2028, raising the company's retirement age to 70. But in recent weeks the company has faced questions following other potentially dangerous episodes, including an incident in

New Zealand in which a Boeing 787 Dreamliner lost altitude mid-flight from Sydney to Auckland, injuring some passengers.

But the Alaska Airlines incident has proved especially bruising, generating a skit on Saturday Night Live and prompting an uptick in consumer requests to avoid Boeing aircraft while booking online travel.

The leadership changes were praised by Ryanair Chief Executive Michael O'Leary as "much needed" as the Irish carrier pointed to delayed new aircraft deliveries as a drag on the company's prospects. But Michel Merluzeau, an aeronautics specialist with consulting firm AIR, expressed misgivings, saying, while there is a need for "fresh enterprise leadership" at the top, "the urgency lies primarily on the factory floor." Susannah Streeter of Hargreaves Lansdown said Boeing "has been left largely rudderless," and that whomever is recruited as the next CEO "will have a mountain to climb in terms of enacting culture change in the organization and restoring the company's safety credentials."

In an interview with CNBC, Calhoun described the personnel changes as "all about a clear path to give our best people internally an opportunity to shine in front of the board to demonstrate everything that they can do."

Formerly head of Boeing Global Services, Pope was promoted to chief operating officer in January. She takes over commercial planes immediately. With degrees in electrical engineering, Mollenkopf, a Boeing board member since 2020, will lead the search for the next CEO.

In his letter, Calhoun praised Kellner for recruiting "superb" board members, including members with engineering degrees or aviation safety backgrounds, in some cases replacing outgoing board members who were politicians or Washington insiders.

Shares of Boeing rose 1.4 percent. — AFP

Iraq Central Bank: Regulated dollar transactions rising

BAGHDAD: Iraq, fighting a booming currency black market, has considerably increased overseas dollar transactions through the official global SWIFT system, the Central Bank vice governor said on Monday. With dollars dominating the country's economy, Baghdad has imposed a series of restrictions on the use of American greenbacks domestically.

At the end of 2022 the country's banking sector also adopted the international financial messaging system known as SWIFT as part of the reforms, to help tackle money laundering and ensure respect for international sanctions. Oil-rich Iraq has no shortage of dollars, with foreign currency reserves of more than \$100 billion (92 billion euros). But experts say tax evasion, the black market and dollar smuggling to countries and entities facing United States sanctions, mainly neighboring Iran, have increased demand for foreign currencies. Transactions through the Central Bank electronic platform—which ensures compliance with SWIFT—have considerably increased, the bank's vice governor Ammar Khalaf told AFP.

Many "foreign trade transactions are now being conducted via the platform," he said. "At the beginning of 2023, transactions were at \$50 million per day. Now, we have around \$200 million, which is consistent with the size of Iraq's economy," he added. Iraqi banks wanting to access dollar reserves held in the United States must make transfers through the electronic system. The US Federal Reserve will then examine the requests and block them if it finds them suspicious.

"We noticed that rejections have decreased recently because the banks understood international requirements" and traders know better what is needed to transfer their money, Khalaf said. But the black market is still thriving. The official exchange rate is fixed by the government at 1,320 dinars to the dollar. On unofficial markets the dinar has been trading at 1,470 per dollar.

Iraq has close commercial ties with Iran, which also wields considerable political influence in Baghdad where its Iraqi allies dominate parliament and back the current government.

Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani acknowledged last year that sanctions preventing dollar transfers to Iranian banks had driven Iraqi traders to the black market. In late November, the government announced steps to encourage importers of goods like cigarettes, cars, gold and mobile phones to use official channels to obtain dollars. Iraqi authorities have banned more than 20 Iraqi banks from conducting dollar transactions in accordance with US regulations regarding sanctions and against money laundering. "We are in constant contact with the American Treasury in an attempt to lift the ban," Khalaf said, hoping that talks "will yield good and positive results."

The banned banks are restricted from dealing in dollars, but they are allowed to operate local transactions. — AFP

EU agrees farm policy review as tractors throng city

BRUSSELS: EU member states Tuesday agreed to unpick more eco-friendly requirements under the bloc's common agricultural policy (CAP) in a new bid to pacify months-long protests by farmers—who rolled hundreds of tractors into Brussels to vent their grievances. A special committee endorsed the review to be debated by agriculture ministers meeting in Brussels as farmers thronged the city's European quarter for the third time in two months, setting fire to tires and bales of hay, and throwing eggs at riot police.

"We have listened to our farmers and we have taken swift action to address their concerns at a time when they are confronted with numerous challenges," said David Clarinval, deputy prime minister of Belgium, which holds the rotating EU presidency. He said the revision aims to slash red tape for farmers and give them more flexibility complying with green regulations while also "maintaining a high level of environmental ambition". The committee backed a proposal from the European Commission to change a set of environmental and climate standards that determine whether farmers can receive CAP subsidies. A key change involves granting leeway to farmers who fail to meet CAP requirements because of extreme weather.

The revision does away entirely with the obligation



BRUSSELS: A man throws a projectile during a demonstration by farmers on the occasion of a EU agriculture ministers meeting in Brussels, on March 26, 2024. — AFP

to leave a share of arable land fallow—a measure aimed at protecting soils and promoting biodiversity but a major gripe for farmers. But they would still be incentivized to do so. Member states would have more flexibility to decide which soils to protect and in which season, and allows them to diversify crops as well as rotate them.

And it exempts small farms under 10 hectares (25 acres) from inspections and penalties related to

the island's biggest bilateral creditor. "We are in the final stages of restructuring our foreign debt and the prime minister is in China for this purpose," Gunawardana told reporters in Colombo.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said the economy was rebounding since the second quarter of last year, helping it to reduce the benchmark lending rate from 10 percent to 9.5 percent. The deposit rate was also reduced by 50 basis points to 8.5 percent, the first reduction in four months.

The bank said it would boost "the ongoing revival of economic activity", adding that the country was close to finalizing a restructuring of its bilateral loans and international sovereign bonds.

Bank Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said deals with bilateral creditors and bond holders must be completed before June for Sri Lanka to continue with the four-year \$2.9 billion International Monetary Fund bailout. The first \$330 million tranche of the program was drawn down in March last year.

The IMF has urged a speeding up of negotiations to ensure the debt sustainability of Sri Lanka, which defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign loans in April 2022. "We look to see swift progress ... (in) reaching agreement with the commercial creditors, the international bondholders, and also China Development Bank," IMF mission chief for Sri Lanka Peter Breuer said last week.

The central bank said the economy had grown since the second half of last year, to contain the overall contraction in 2023 to 2.3 percent. That compared with a 7.3 percent shrinkage in 2022, when an unprecedented economic crisis gripped the nation and months of protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign in July 2022.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has doubled taxes, cut generous energy subsidies and raised prices of essentials to shore up state revenues. Tourism and foreign remittances have also picked up. Tourist numbers jumped to 210,000 in December, more than double the 91,900 a year earlier, according to official data. — AFP

Sri Lanka cuts interest rates, seeks China deal

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank cut interest rates Tuesday as the prime minister visited China seeking a debt restructuring deal crucial to maintaining an IMF bailout. Transport minister and government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana said Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardana was in Beijing,

Business

Weyay Bank launches podcast to foster kids' financial empowerment with Jeel

Podcast features kids in age group of 8 to 14, discusses kid-friendly banking

KUWAIT: Weyay Bank, a leading innovator in digital banking solutions, is thrilled to announce the launch of its pioneering podcast aimed at fostering insightful conversations surrounding the new Jeel feature within the Weyay App.

The podcast premiered on March 24, 2024. It featured kids ages 8 to 14 and focuses on discussing kid-friendly banking, exploring their financial needs, and the value of money and finances from their point of view. Jeel Weyay, a feature that was introduced on February 15, 2024, revolutionizes the digital banking landscape for young users, offering a tailored experience distinct from traditional banking platforms.

Designed to cater to the evolving needs of children and their parents, Jeel provides a seamless journey within the Weyay app, ensuring age-appropriate engagement and empowerment.

At the heart of Jeel lies its innovative features, including the ability for young users to customize their banking experience by selecting from three vibrant card colors: pink, blue, and yellow. More-



Dana Al-Kharafi



KUWAIT: Weyay Bank's pioneering podcast fosters insightful conversations surrounding the new Jeel feature within the Weyay App.

over, Jeel empowers children to take charge of their financial affairs, while also allowing parents to control their child's card and account within the app and supervise them.

"Jeel isn't just a card; it's a comprehensive digital banking solution," remarked Dana Al-Kharafi, Marketing & Engagement Manager at Weyay Bank. "Through our Jeel podcast, we aim to initiate meaningful conversations about financial literacy, empowerment, and the transformative impact

of Jeel on young users and their families."

The podcast will delve into various aspects of Jeel, exploring its role in shaping financial habits, promoting transparency, and facilitating parent-child dialogue around money management. Listeners can expect engaging discussions and real-life anecdotes highlighting the significance of early financial education and the benefits of Jeel.

Join the conversation and stay informed about the latest episodes by following Weyay Bank on

YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. For more information about Jeel and Weyay Bank's innovative digital banking offerings, visit www.weyaybank.com.

Weyay Bank is a leading provider of digital banking solutions, dedicated to empowering individuals and families to achieve their financial goals. With a focus on innovation, transparency, and customer-centricity, Weyay Bank continues to redefine the standards of banking excellence in Kuwait and beyond.

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

US grows at 3.2%, Europe struggles

KUWAIT: Global economic prospects have diverged in recent months, with the US seeing solid growth and proving resilient to the current elevated interest rate environment. However, within Europe, conditions are much weaker with – alongside high interest rates – more restrictive fiscal policy, less exposure to the booming tech sector and greater exposure to sluggish global trade weighing heavily on activity.

Meanwhile, in a historic move, the Bank of Japan tightened monetary policy on a view that inflation is finally heading sustainably back up to the 2 percent target, despite still-muted domestic activity. Elsewhere in Asia, the Chinese economy got off to a decent start in Q1, though structural issues compounded by a moribund property sector continue to pose questions over the strength and durability of the recovery. More positively, India continues to deliver above-expected growth rates, and remains the fastest-growing major economy.

Underpinned by a robust job market and resilient consumer spending, the US economy has defied slowdown predictions, growing by a solid 3.2 percent (annualized) in Q4 2023 versus expectations of a 2 percent rise. Although softened from +4.9 percent in Q3, there seem to be no major signs of a downturn. Household consumption remained largely intact (+3 percent y/y), while residential investment rose for the second quarter and business investments increased. This said, economic indicators thus far in Q1 have been relatively underwhelming, with retail sales (+0.6 percent m/m) and industrial production (+0.1 percent m/m) recovering somewhat in February after outsized drops in January, and consumer sentiment still somewhat subdued. As a result, GDP growth could slow to 1.5-2 percent in Q1, near its trend rate.

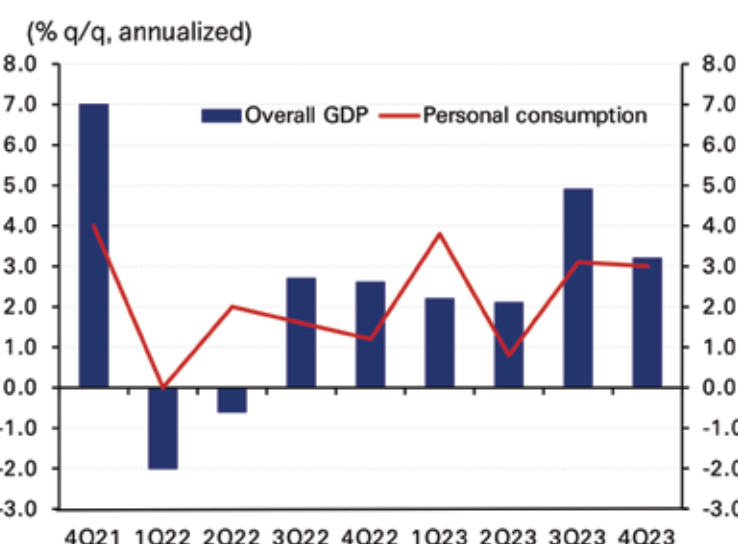
Offering support to the ongoing momentum, the labor market remains solid despite a mixed set of data in February, with strong job gains (+275K) but substantial downward revisions to the previous two months' data, ebbing but still-robust wage growth (4.3 percent y/y), and a pickup in the unemployment rate (3.9 percent), albeit historically a low level.

Consumer price inflation has broadly decelerated, with the core rate receding to 3.8 percent y/y in February. Although well off its peak of 6.6 percent in September 2022, progress on disinflation seems to have lost steam, with the core rate moderating only marginally from 4 percent in October. With the Fed funds target rate now at 5.25-5.50 percent, real policy rates are in positive (and restrictive) territory, which risks causing a sharp downturn if rates are kept too high for too long. But given the robust economic picture, the Fed wants to achieve greater confidence that inflation is heading back to the 2 percent target before shifting policy. For now, the FOMC, in its latest dot-plot projections, continued to see three rate cuts later this year and looked set to slow the pace of the bank's quantitative tightening program despite hotter inflation data so far this year.

Europe growth weaker

Euro Area GDP was unchanged in Q4 2023 after falling 0.1 percent q/q in Q3. Growth could edge up to 0.8 percent this year based on the European Commission's forecast, following a 0.5 percent rise in 2023 – though this is still a downgrade from an earlier forecast of 1.2 percent. France, Germany, and Italy will likely see slower growth, while others like Greece and Spain could deliver better outcomes. Growth should be helped by easing inflation, rises in real wages, and likely ECB interest rate cuts. However, the composite PMI in February remained in contraction for a ninth straight month at 47.2, signaling still-weak business conditions overall. Inflation fell to 2.6 percent y/y (from 2.8 percent in January), with the core rate coming in at 3.1 percent from 3.3 percent the previous month. Wages were up 5.6 percent in Q3 but could start to tick down as inflation drops towards the ECB's 2 percent inflation goal in 2025. Given weak growth and inflation now below that in the US, the ECB could now start cutting interest rates earlier (and more aggressively) than the Fed,

Chart 1: US GDP and personal consumption



Source: Haver

not later than the bank's meeting in June.

The UK economy showed some signs of recovery, growing 0.2 percent m/m in January 2024 versus -0.1 percent in December after recording a minor recession in H2 2023. The IMF expects growth to reach 0.6 percent in 2024 versus 0.1 percent in 2023, with a somewhat positive outlook stemming from resilient wage growth (5.2 percent in December) and moderating inflation (3.4 percent in February). Additionally, the March budget announced that fiscal policy will be tightened by less than previously planned (ahead of a likely general election later this year), providing some help for household disposable incomes. With inflation trending steadily lower, the Bank of England could also start to cut interest rates in June.

Japan escapes recession

GDP growth was revised up for Q4 2023 to +0.1 percent q/q from -0.1 percent q/q in the previous estimate, following a large 0.8 percent drop in Q3, helping the country to avoid a technical recession. This was due to an upgraded estimate for private investment and despite steeper declines in private consumption. A favorable trade balance partly offset weak domestic activity, with Japanese goods more competitive amid a weaker yen. Sluggish economic growth is expected in the current quarter, with leading indicators, including the PMI, signaling a continued contraction in manufacturing, weak household consumption, and a modest rise in retail sales. However, the expanding service activity in February, strong exports, and tumbling energy imports could provide some support.

Consumer price inflation reversed the declining trend and rose 2.8 percent in February from 2.2 percent in January, while core inflation also accelerated to 2.8 percent from 2 percent y/y. However, recent union negotiations have delivered decades-high wage growth to workers, moving wages into positive territory – a prerequisite for inflation being sustained at or above the 2 percent target according

to the Bank of Japan (BOJ). This pushed the bank in March to abandon its eight-year negative interest rate policy and discontinue yield curve control (which capped long-term bond yields). But the small size of the widely anticipated rate move, the absence of commitment to further increases and the BOJ's pledge to keep buying government bonds all signaled a continuation of the bank's accommodative stance and resulted in the yen and government bond yields falling post-announcement.

Chinese economy picked up

Economic growth surpassed the government's target of 5 percent in 2023, accelerating to 5.2 percent y/y, helped by base effects from severe "COVID-Zero" lockdowns in the preceding year. But excluding the pandemic period 2020-22, this was a multi-decade low. Recent economic indicators have painted a rosier picture. The trade data surprised positively as exports grew 7.1 percent y/y in the January-February period (on average) while imports edged up 3.5 percent y/y, signaling a slight pickup in domestic consumption. Industrial production and retail sales were also above forecast. Consumer prices rose 0.7 percent y/y in February following four months of deflation, though this could have been impacted by the Lunar New Year holiday falling in February compared to January in the previous year. Moreover, the decline in producer prices worsened to 2.7 percent y/y in February, signaling further deflationary pressure in the pipeline. The composite PMI remained steady in the first two months of the year at 50.9, but manufacturing activity was in contraction for the fifth month in a row. The uneven economic performance highlights the challenges the government will face in achieving its "around 5 percent" GDP growth target for 2024, considering property market and demographic headwinds.

In response to the subdued economic picture, the People's Bank of China kicked off the year with

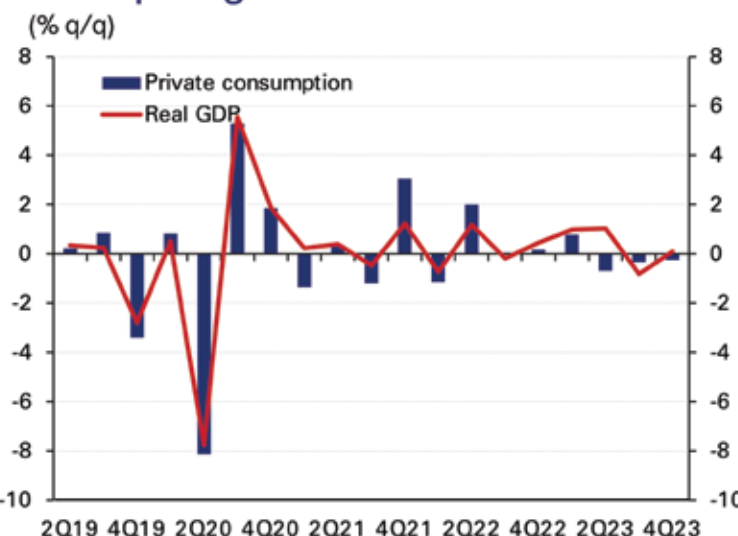
monetary policy loosening, lowering the reserve requirement ratio by 50 bps in January. In addition, state-owned banks earmarked \$8 billion in funds for eligible property projects. The authorities also introduced measures to boost stock market valuations, such as restrictions on short selling, increasing margin requirements, and suspending broker lending of shares. The government has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting economic conditions, but details are scant.

India's economy continued to surprise positively, growing by a solid 8.4 percent y/y in Q3 of FY23/24 (October-December), much higher than the 6.6 percent forecast, accelerating from an upwardly-revised 8.1 percent in Q2 on strong public investments. A continued push by the government to accelerate capital spending and potentially create more job opportunities before this year's general election has been a key growth driver in recent periods. However, private consumption lagged, rising at a slower 3.5 percent pace, though better than +2.4 percent the previous quarter.

On the back of a solid performance in Q3 and upward revisions to H1 growth, the government raised the growth forecast for the full-year to 7.6 percent from the 7.3 percent projected earlier. Despite the latest improvement, headwinds persist for private consumption, mainly in the rural segment where the impact of erratic rains is more visible, as the official forecast projects the slowest private consumption growth in over two decades outside the pandemic period at 3 percent for the current fiscal year.

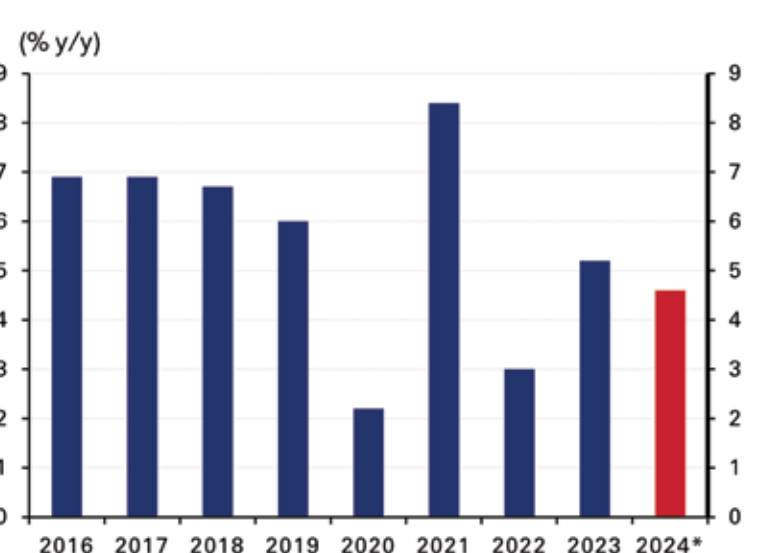
Consumer price inflation remained broadly stable at 5.1 percent y/y in February on elevated food prices after irregular rains impacted agricultural production. The Reserve Bank of India has kept the repo rate steady at 6.5 percent since April 2023 as it grapples with food price uncertainty and an unclear inflation outlook amid worsening geopolitics and volatile oil prices.

Chart 3: Japan real GDP and personal consumption growth



Source: Haver

Chart 4: China GDP growth



Source: IMF * forecast

China’s semiconductor industry defiant as trade restrictions bite

Semiconductors become a key battleground in recent years

SHANGHAI: “Support Chinese chips, join the enterprise of the century” read an upbeat slogan at a recent semiconductor industry fair in Shanghai, where the mood was defiant despite the intense pressure placed on the sector by geopolitical tensions. Stands at last week’s Semicon were packed with visitors, who inspected the mostly domestic displays of glittering wafers, silicon ingots and circuit boards, while sales staff touted products and services running the gamut of the chip manufacturing process.

Semiconductors, which power everything from mobile phones to cars, have become a key battleground in recent years, with the United States and some European countries blocking exports of high-tech chip technology to China over fears of military use. In response, Beijing has turbo-charged a drive for self-sufficiency — a prominent theme at the fair, with exhibitors plastering their stands with slogans like ‘Overcome ‘bottleneck’ technology, realize nationalization of key ‘Chinese chip’ materials’.

“The more restrictions the United States imposes on us, the faster some of our domestic companies will develop,” an industry professional named Wang told AFP. Vicky Zheng, a representative of a Qingdao-based chip assembly company, said she believed restrictions would force China to “have more updated development to catch up or even replace things, so we will have more and better solutions”.

Huang, an exhibitor representing the Suzhou-based semiconductor testing company King Long Technology, agreed. “Under an environment with such pressure, China’s internal expansion of some technology and production capacity and the training of technical personnel are making very rapid progress,” he told AFP.

In September, the United States and its allies

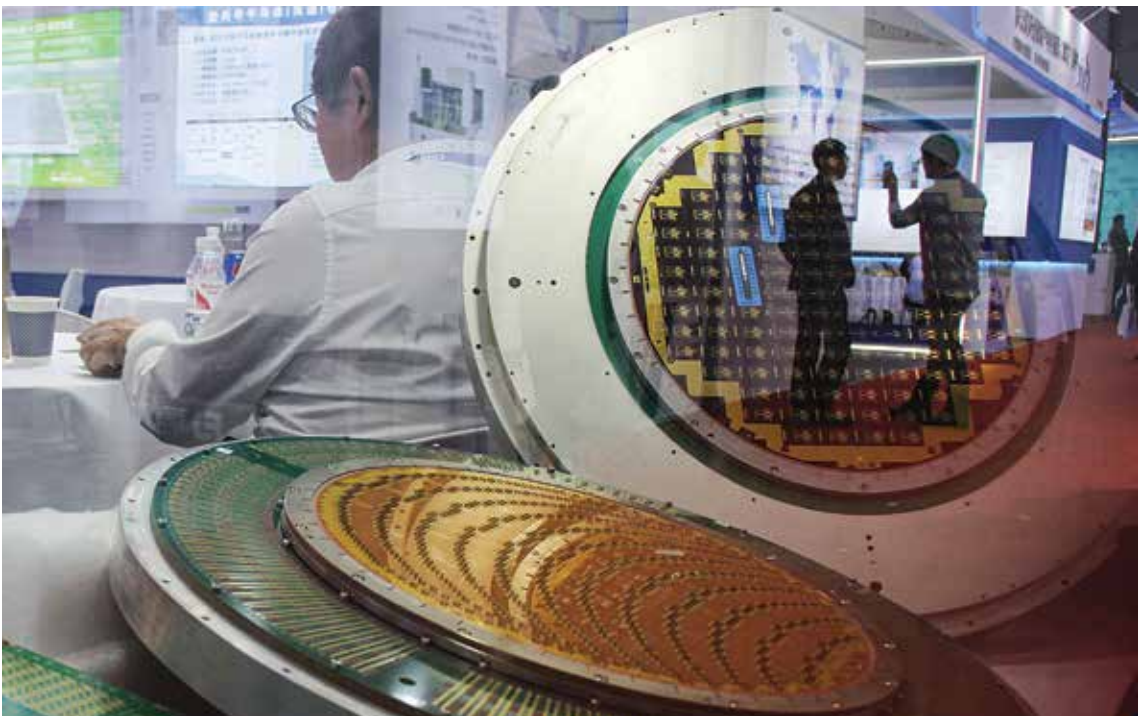
got a nasty shock when it appeared that rapid progress was indeed underway. Telecoms giant Huawei released its new Mate 60 Pro smartphone, powered by the Kirin 9000s chip. The chip initially appeared to be a homegrown replacement of the earlier Kirin 9000 chip made by Taiwan’s TSMC, which Huawei is no longer able to purchase due to US sanctions.

But the chip’s provenance has since come into question, with a US official saying last Thursday that the Huawei chip could have been made using American equipment, in violation of Washington’s export controls. King Long’s Huang admitted that foreign restrictions would “still have an impact”, especially in the short term.

Major domestic chip firms have warned of losses over the past year, with fabless chip maker Loongson Technology reporting a 329 million yuan (\$45.5 million) net loss for 2023, compared to a 5.2 million yuan profit in 2022. The company, which was put on a US Commerce Department blacklist last year and barred from accessing key American technologies, said in a report last month that its research development costs had shot up more than 36 percent.

Scotten W. Jones, a senior fellow at specialist platform TechInsights, said he understood that the current Chinese standard of the lithography equipment that makes semiconductors was “significantly behind the best equipment from (Dutch chip-making machine supplier) ASML”.

“Ultimately if China is willing to invest enough, they can likely catch up with the rest of the world but my guess is it is at least a decade away,” said Jones. Beijing is planning that serious investment—Bloomberg news agency reported this month that China was raising more



SHANGHAI: Semiconductor products of Maxone semiconductor company displayed during the SEMICON China semiconductor exhibition in Shanghai. — AFP

than \$27 billion for a massive chip industry fund.

And Robyn Klingler-Vidra, an innovation policy expert at King’s College London, told AFP the optimism expressed by Semicon attendees was “warranted” by the pace at which key firms were closing in on some cutting-edge production processes. She singled out the Huawei chip, manufactured by China’s

Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp, and pointed to the fact the two companies were “looking at” even more sophisticated chips. “This upends long-standing expectations that despite significant government investment, China would only remain competitive in producing mature processes,” she said. — AFP

News in Brief

China complains over US subsidies

BEIJING: China has lodged a complaint with the World Trade Organization over subsidies provided by the United States for its new energy vehicle sector, Beijing said Tuesday, accusing Washington of unfair competition. The US Inflation Reduction Act “formulates discriminatory subsidy policies for new energy vehicles ... distorts fair competition, seriously disrupts global new energy vehicle industrial and supply chains, and violates WTO rules,” China’s Ministry of Commerce said. “China firmly opposes this,” the ministry said, adding it urged the United States to abide by WTO rules and correct its “discriminatory industrial policies”. — AFP

Atos reports 3.4bn euro net loss

PARIS: Debt-ridden French IT group Atos on Tuesday reported a net loss of 3.4 billion euros in 2023 due to asset writedowns and said it was aiming for a debt restructuring by July. Atos has to repay or refinance 3.65 billion euros (\$4 billion) of loans and bonds maturing by the end of 2025. Chief executive officer Paul Saleh said Atos was “in discussions with our financial creditors with a view to reaching a refinancing plan by July within the framework of an amicable conciliation procedure”. “Our operating margin has improved year over year, reflecting the execution of our cost improvement plans, while our cash flow was impacted by workforce optimisation, separation costs and lower working capital actions,” he said. — AFP

FTX sells stake in AI startup Anthropic

WASHINGTON: FTX, the bankrupt company once run by disgraced crypto king Sam Bankman-Fried, will sell two-thirds of its shares in hot AI startup Anthropic for \$880 million, a court filing said on Monday. The shares in Anthropic were considered plum assets in the remains of the FTX empire that collapsed in late 2022, when revelations showed occurrences of massive fraud by Bankman-Fried and his close associates. Bankman-Fried, 32, was found guilty in November 2023 on a raft of charges and is set to be sentenced at a federal court in New York on Thursday, with prosecutors seeking a 40 to 50 years in prison. The biggest chunk of the Anthropic shares will go to ATIC Third International Investment Company, which is affiliated to the Mubadala sovereign wealth fund in the United Arab Emirates, the court filing said. — AFP

UK cuts NatWest bank stake

LONDON: Britain said Monday it has trimmed its stake in NatWest to just under 30 percent, meaning it is no longer a controlling shareholder in the UK bank it rescued during the global financial crisis. The government’s Treasury said it sold shares Friday to take its holding to about 29.8 percent, as part of a broader plan to fully return it to private hands. That marked a slight reduction of just over one percentage point in its stake. “Although the government remains the largest single shareholder in the bank it is no longer a controlling shareholder,” it added in a statement. — AFP

Strike-hit German rail operator agrees to shorter work week

FRANKFURT: German rail operator Deutsche Bahn said Tuesday it had agreed with the GDL union to shorten train drivers’ working week, ending a months-long row that caused strikes across the country. “It was a difficult road,” Deutsche Bahn’s human resources director Martin Seiler told a press conference. “But in the end we were able to reach an intelligent compromise.”

Under the terms of the agreement, the standard working week will be gradually shortened from 38 hours to 35 hours by 2029 with no loss in wages, Deutsche Bahn said. But train drivers will have the option of working longer hours, up to 40 per week, at 2.7 percent more salary per additional hour. “Our colleagues can decide for themselves which weekly working hours suit them and their lifestyle best,” Seiler said.

He called it a “modern” solution that would bring “flexibility” to the profession, at a time when Germany is grappling with a shortage of skilled labor. As part of the deal, all workers will also receive a wage hike of 420 euros (\$455) per month in two stages and a one-off payment of 2,850 euros to help compensate for inflation. The agreement brings an end to a bitter dispute between the operator and the GDL union which led to six rounds of walkouts since November 2023, causing travel misery for thousands of passengers. The deal will run until the end of 2025 and both sides have ruled out any further strike action for nearly two years. “The good news is that there will be no rail strikes until at least the end of February 2026,” Seiler said.

Germany, Europe’s largest economy, has been affected by strikes in a wide range of sectors in recent months, including air travel, public transport, the civil service and supermarkets. Pinched by inflation over recent following the war in Ukraine and the coronavirus pandemic, workers are demanding



BERLIN: The CEO of German railway operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) Richard Lutz gets out of high-speed ICE 4 train ‘Spree’ during its christening at Berlin’s main station (Hauptbahnhof) in Berlin. — AFP

higher wages to cope with shrinking purchasing power. The strikes added to an already gloomy economic picture, with the German economy shrinking 0.3 percent across the whole of last year. Deutsche Bahn, which made a net loss of 2.35 billion euros in 2023, said last year’s walkouts alone cost it some 200 million euros.

Meanwhile, German consumer sentiment is set to edge up for a second straight month in April but the pace of the recovery remains sluggish, a key survey said Tuesday. Pollster GfK said its forward-looking survey of some 2,000 people nudged up by 1.4 points to minus 27.4 points for April, after recording a modest increase a month earlier. While respondents’ income expectations rose and they felt slightly less pessimistic about the outlook for Europe’s top economy than a month ago, the willingness to make large purchases remained stuck at a low level.

“The recovery of the consumer climate is pro-

gressing slowly and very sluggishly,” said Rolf Buerkl, consumer expert at the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions (NIM) which publishes the survey together with the GfK. Rising wages and a robust labor market were “very good pre-conditions” for boosting consumption, he said, but “a high level of uncertainty” about the struggling German economy continued to put the brakes on spending. “Domestic demand is still failing to stimulate the economy,” Buerkl said. The German government recently slashed its economic forecast for 2024 to just 0.2 percent growth, from 1.3 percent previously, as the country battles headwinds including costly energy, high interest rates and weak global trade.

The economy is expected to have shrunk in the first quarter of 2024 but is seen gaining momentum later in the year as inflation eases further and the European Central Bank starts lowering borrowing costs. — AFP

UK farmers stage tractor protest outside parliament

LONDON: British farmers drove their tractors outside the UK parliament in central London on Monday to protest post-Brexit trade deals, which they say threaten food production. Approximately 100 tractors from around the country converged in Westminster, where they blared their horns and displayed slogans including “Support British Farmers” and “Brexit is a disaster”.

“We’ve had enough,” organizer Liz Webster of Save British Farming told AFP, as she denounced accused “substandard” imports of “undercutting” British products. The UK has signed several trade deals since it left the European Union in early 2020 after Britons voted to leave the bloc in a referendum four years earlier.

Farmers say some of the deals, and a lack of import checks, is allowing poorer quality food to come into Britain from countries with less stringent regulations. They add that the policy in England of paying farmers to create habitats for environmental reasons was taking land out of food production.

Several demonstrations have taken place sporadically in recent months against the post-Brexit agricultural policy of the Conservative government, which has been in power for 14 years.



LONDON: Farmers drive tractors back to the start point after a demonstration organized by Save British Farming against UK food policy, substandard imports and stricter food labelling regulations, in central London on March 25, 2024. — AFP

British agriculture provides around 60 percent of the food consumed in the UK, but farmers fear this share is falling. They also say they are suffering from rising costs and a shortage of seasonal workers, many of whom are foreign and whose recruitment is more difficult since Brexit. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak promised to support UK farmers when he told the National Farming Union conference last month that “the nation’s food security” was a “vital part of our national security”.

The Tories lag well behind the main opposition Labour Party in opinion polls as a general election looms later this year. — AFP

Alibaba withdraws Hong Kong IPO for logistics arm

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba is withdrawing a planned initial public offering for its logistics arm Cainiao, the company said Tuesday, as a major company overhaul faces setbacks. The leading tech firm faces fierce competition from rivals such as JD.com, Pinduoduo and Douyin, China’s version of video app TikTok.

Cainiao has “withdrawn its initial public offering and listing application on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange,” Alibaba Group said in a filing on Tuesday. The group, which currently owns 63.7 percent of shares in Cainiao, will instead offer to buy back the remaining equity held by minority shareholders, for a total of \$3.75 billion. Alibaba said on Tuesday it had called off the listing, announced in September last year, to “support Cainiao to execute a long-term strategic expansion of its global logistics network”. The decision comes after Alibaba announced in November the cancellation of a planned spin-off of its cloud computing business—also part of its company restructuring program.

A pioneer in Chinese online shopping, the group is listed in New York and Hong Kong. Based in eastern China’s Hangzhou, Alibaba is a key player in the country’s digital sector and is considered a barometer of consumer spending in the world’s second-largest economy. The company published disappointing quarterly results last month, recording a 77 percent drop on-year of its net profit in the quarter ending December 31. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024



Swiss chocolate Easter bunnies are displayed to be sold during 'Festichoc' chocolate festival.—AFP photos



A Swiss chocolate box is displayed to be sold during 'Festichoc' chocolate festival.

SWISS CHOCOLATIERS BANK ON THE EASTER BUNNY AS COCOA COSTS SOAR

Swiss chocolatiers have a battle on their hands as Easter rolls around, with surging cocoa prices sending their costs soaring and consumers cutting back as inflation hits their pockets. Cocoa was breaking records last week, coming close to \$9,000 per ton in New York and topping £7,000 (\$8,850) in London, which will force chocolate makers to hike their prices even though they have little room for manoeuvre.

Earlier this month, Lindt & Sprüngli warned that its prices would be going up again in 2024 and 2025, having already been raised by 10.1 percent on average last year. They are banking on their higher margin products like pralines — not to mention their chocolate Easter bunnies — to absorb the shock.

The surge in cocoa costs, which comes on top of high sugar prices, “increases the challenges for Swiss chocolate”, Thomas Juch, spokesman for Chocosuisse, the sector’s employers’ federation, told AFP. The cocoa price hike is happening against a “context of increased price sensitivity” on the part of consumers, and is currently partly being



Penguins made with Swiss chocolate are displayed to be sold during 'Festichoc' chocolate festival in Versoix near Geneva.

borne by the manufacturers who “cannot fully pass on this increase in retail prices”, he said. This is because prices are adjusted at intervals during negotiations with the supermarket chains and are not changing continuously, said Juch.

Recipe for trouble

Food price inflation in 2023 dampened consumer appetite, with Swiss chocolate export volumes slipping 0.2

percent to 150,516 tons, according to Chocosuisse. And per capita annual consumption in Switzerland — the world’s largest consumer of chocolate — fell by one percent, to 10.9 kilograms.

Cocoa prices increased almost 70 percent in New York and almost 90 percent in London in 2023 following poor harvests in the leading producers Ivory Coast and Ghana, due to heavy rains, a cocoa pod disease outbreak and then drought. However, cocoa prices have doubled again since January. One solution the food industry regularly turns to when raw material costs explode is to alter the recipe.

But Nestle chief executive Mark Schneider said that was not on the cards, with consumers having clear expectations for their favorite products. “Tinkering now with the recipes and flavor profiles, simply because the input costs for cocoa has gone up, in my opinion would be a mistake,” he said during the group’s annual results announcement.

Jessica Herschkowitz, spokeswoman for Camille Bloch, which makes Ra-



Swiss chocolate Easter bunnies are displayed to be sold during 'Festichoc' chocolate festival.

gusa chocolate, put it succinctly. “Recipes are sacred,” she said.

Something for everyone

The other industry solution is to come up with new products — Ragusa itself being a well-known historical example. In 1942, Bloch, who was struggling to import cocoa beans into Switzerland due to the disruption in international trade during

World War II, created a new bar using the hazelnuts which he could source in abundance. But for now, “we will have to go through with price increases like all the other chocolatiers”, said Herschkowitz.

The family business has “done everything to avoid price increases”, she told AFP, notably by waiting as long as possible “before placing our new orders”. But the rise in cocoa prices is such that “we have no other options”, she said.

According to Jean-Philippe Bertschy, an analyst with Swiss investment managers Vontobel, Swiss chocolatiers cannot compromise on quality, “even if certain foreign groups are less careful”. Lindt, for example, makes no compromises because “quality is the basis of its success”, he told AFP.

While presenting his group’s annual results, Lindt and Sprüngli chief executive Adalbert Lechner said the company’s answer was to ensure there is “a product for every budget”, like its classic Easter bunny, which comes in six sizes ranging from 10 grams to one kilogram. — AFP

Diddy’s US homes raided by US federal agents

Homes belonging to Sean “Diddy” Combs were raided by federal agents Monday, with the US hip hop mogul at the center of sex trafficking claims and sex assault lawsuits. Armed agents from the Department of Homeland Security entered luxury properties on both East and West Coasts of the United States, with video footage showing helicopters circling overhead and a huge law enforcement presence on the ground.



US producer-musician Sean “Diddy” Combs poses with the Global Icon award in the press room during the MTV Video Music Awards at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey. - AFP photos

“Earlier today, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York executed law enforcement actions as part of an ongoing investigation, with assistance from HSI Los Angeles, HSI Miami and our local law enforcement partners,” the agency said. A source confirmed to AFP

that Combs was the target of the raids.

Media in Los Angeles carried aerial footage of a massive presence at a swanky Holmby Hills residence associated with Combs — an artist and producer also known as Puff Daddy. Heavily armed agents could be seen all around the sprawling property, with footage showing unidentified individuals being detained at the scene.

Entertainment title TMZ said pictures appeared to show the rapper’s sons Justin and King Combs in handcuffs. The outlet said it also had footage of a raid on a luxury waterside property in Miami connected to Combs. There was no immediate official confirmation about what precipitated the raids, but the involvement of Homeland Security in large, coordinated raids in two locations suggests serious allegations.

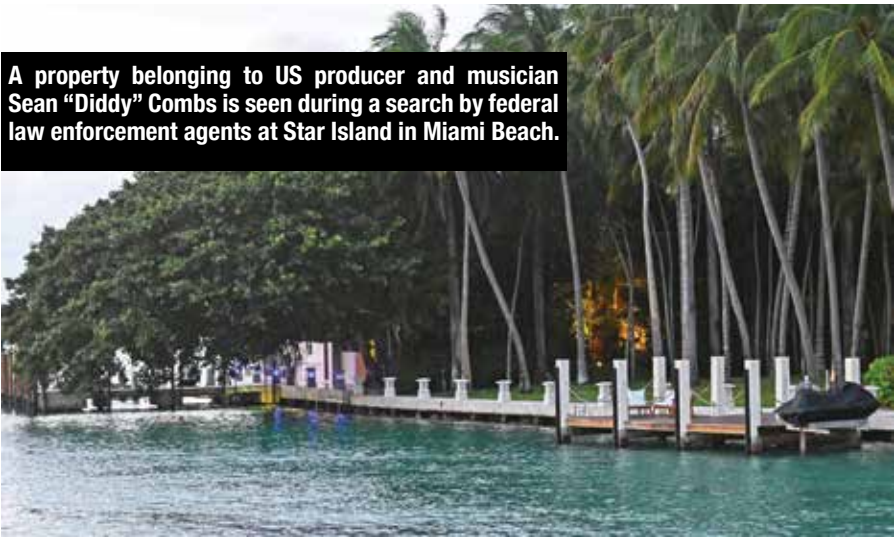
The development comes with legal pressure increasing on the rapper, who has faced at least four lawsuits from people who say he sexually abused them, with allegations dating back decades. Last year Combs was sued by former girlfriend Cassandra Ventura, who performed under the stage name Cassie and was signed to his Bad Boy label.

The suit alleged he had forced her to perform sexual acts with multiple men over a number of years in cities across the United States. The suit said that as a result of stops in these different locations, which necessitated crossing state lines, Ventura was the victim of sex traf-

ficking, a federal offence.

That suit was settled, but was followed by others, including one in December by a woman who accused Combs of sexual assault, alleging he and others gang-raped her when she

that will hold Mr. Combs responsible for his depraved conduct.” Combs has vehemently denied all accusations against him. Combs, 54, founded the Bad Boy record label in 1993, and was a major figure in hip-hop’s commercialization



A property belonging to US producer and musician Sean “Diddy” Combs is seen during a search by federal law enforcement agents at Star Island in Miami Beach.

was 17. Combs and other men, the suit said, plied her with drugs and alcohol before violently raping her repeatedly.

Douglas Wigdor, a lawyer who represents two of the women who have accused Combs of abuse, told AFP on Monday: “We will always support law enforcement when it seeks to prosecute those that have violated the law. “Hopefully, this is the beginning of a process

over the decades that followed. His proteges included the late Notorious B.I.G. and Mary J. Blige. He is among the industry’s billionaires, not least due to his ventures in the liquor industry. But contrary to a public image of suave businessman, lawsuits describe Combs as a violent man who used his celebrity to prey on and intimidate women. — AFP



Madonna

Madonna to end 'Celebration' tour with free Copacabana show

Madonna will perform a free mega-concert in May on Rio de Janeiro’s Copacabana beach to close out her “Celebration” tour, the singer and organizers announced Monday. Calling it her “biggest show yet,” a statement on the pop icon’s website said the concert is meant as a “thank you to her fans for celebrating more than four decades of her music.”

The 65-year-old, whose greatest hits include such classics as “Like A Virgin” and “Material Girl,” last performed in Brazil in 2012. The May 4 mega-show will be her only concert in South America under her “Celebration” tour, which has taken her to more than a dozen countries and is meant to honor her 40-year career.

Organizers said that the show will have similarities with the New Year’s Eve “Reveillon” parties held on the beaches of Rio. In 2006, a Rolling Stones show in Copacabana attracted between 1.2 and 1.5 million people, according to estimates at the time.

The “Celebration” tour is now in North America, with three April performances in Miami and five in Mexico City, the only Latin American stop before Rio. Madonna, who has won seven Grammy Awards and sold more than 300 million records worldwide, has additionally taken on acting, film directing and various business ventures over the years. — AFP



Police and members of the media gather outside the home of US producer and musician Sean “Diddy” Combs in Los Angeles.



Homeland Security Investigation agents are seen at the entrance of US producer and musician Sean “Diddy” Combs’ home at Star Island in Miami Beach.

Lifestyle



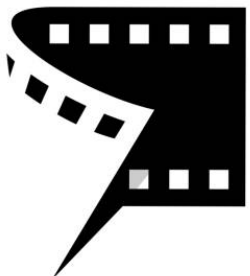
Alexandra Csoz-Horvath prepares a slide film screening in their home as the Hungarian 'Diafilmgyarto' celebrates its 70th anniversary with various events including monthly screenings of slide films at a Budapest cinema attracting dozens of children and nostalgic adults. - AFP photos



Some museum objects are on display in the Virtual Museum of Slide Film shows.



Ferenc Biro, filmstrip collector and owner of the Virtual Museum of Slide Film shows.



Filmstrip, Hungary's old-school projectors children love

Tablets and mobile phones may have to be prised from the fingers of children elsewhere, but in Hungary storytime can be all about a 100-year-old piece of tech — filmstrip. Generations of kids there have been enthralled with stories told with the help of a projector.



The schedule for slide shows is on display in a Budapest cinema.

Alexandra Csoz-Horvath turns off the lights and reads "Sleeping Beauty" from a series of still captioned images projected onto the bedroom wall — her three- and seven-year-old clearly un-

der her spell. "We're together, it's cozier than the cinema yet it's better than a book," said the 44-year-old lawyer.

Filmstrip — a century-old storytelling medium that was killed off in the West by the video cassette in the 1980s — is not just hanging on in Hungary, it is thriving with a new wave of enthusiasts charmed by its slower-paced entertainment. Printed on rolls of film, the still images were never meant to move.

Long tradition

"Between the 1940s and the 1980s filmstrips were used worldwide as a cost-effective visualization tool in education and other fields," Levente Borsos, of Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, told AFP. But while it was surpassed by more advanced technologies in the West, it became a popular form of home entertainment in the Soviet bloc where TVs and videos were harder to come by.

When communism collapsed, filmstrip began to disappear — except in Hungary, where the since privatized Diafilmgyarto company survives as the country's sole producer. "Continuous filmstrip publishing and slide shows at home can be considered a Hungarian peculiarity, a special part of the country's cultural heritage," Borsos said.

Revival

Producer Diafilmgyarto has seen sales rebound from 60,000 in the 1990s to 230,000 rolls last year. Each film — produced solely for the domestic market — costs around five euros (\$5.50), less than a cinema ticket. Most are adaptations of classic fairy tales or children's books.



Families wait for the beginning of a slide show in a cinema in Budapest.

One bestseller, Hungarian classic "The Old Lady and the Fawn" about a woman taking care of a young deer, has been in the top 10 since its release in 1957, according to Diafilmgyarto's managing director Gabriella Lendvai. The company also commissions artists, including some famous Hungarians, to create exclusive content for its filmstrips. It's "an irreplaceable tradition in Hun-

garian culture", said Beata Hajdu-Toth, who attended a recent filmstrip screening in a Budapest cinema along with her son to celebrate Diafilmgyarto's 70th anniversary. "I am very happy it's part of our life and hopefully I will be able to narrate to my grandchildren as well," the 37-year-old added.

At her home in the Budapest suburbs, Csoz-Horvath also hails the

tradition, preferring it to fast-paced cartoons, which she said drive the children "wild". "They just can't understand that what happens in three seconds on the screen happens in three hours in real life," she said. With filmstrips "they don't believe that everything happens in the blink of an eye." — AFP



A brother and sister read the schedule of slide shows.



Ferenc Biro, filmstrip collector and owner of the Virtual Museum of Slide Film shows their museum filmstrips.



Some catalog booklets of Slide shows are seen in a cinema in Budapest.



Alexandra Csoz-Horvath prepares a slide film screening in their home.



Beata Hajdu-Toth (left), incident manager and her child Matyas look at a movie program in Budapest.



Some museum objects are on display in the Virtual Museum of Slide Film shows.



Golden Globes get five-year TV deal after rocky patch

The Golden Globes has inked a five-year broadcast deal with a US TV network, organizers said Monday, after a troubled few years for the awards show. A new deal will see the gala — a major staging post for movies on the way to the Oscars — airing on CBS, and livestreamed on Paramount+, starting next year. The agreement solidifies a turnaround for the annual Tinseltown gathering, which was taken off air entirely in 2022 after long-simmering rumors of corruption and scandal burst into the open.

CBS carried this year's Globes, reportedly at a steeply discounted rate, which earned relatively respectable viewing figures despite a flailing host who was panned for crude jokes. "We're so proud to continue to call CBS our home for the Golden Globes," said Jay Penske, Chairman and CEO of Penske Media and Dick Clark Productions, which took over the show from the scandal-plagued Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

"CBS stepped up for the Globes during a very challenging time, and

inherently understood its value, while having the foresight, imagination and conviction to bring this iconic show to its many platforms." The Globes — which sees awards handed out for both television and film — have worked to rehabilitate their image under new ownership led by US billionaire Todd Boehly.

Allegations of corruption and racism led to an industry boycott in recent years, with the 2022 edition a low-point where awards were announced on social media only after broadcaster NBC

pulled the plug, with winning A-listers notably quiet about their triumphs.

Since then, the rowdy, obscure group of Los Angeles-based foreign journalists that created the Globes more than eight decades ago has been disbanded, and a wider net of overseas critics has been brought in to pick the winners. This year's gala was boosted by key wins for Christopher Nolan's \$950 million-grossing blockbuster "Oppenheimer," the film that went on to dominate the Oscars in March. — AFP



Mob Wife Aesthetic



ACCESSORIZING WITH ATTITUDE - THE BOLD ESSENCE OF THE ‘MOB WIFE’ STYLE

In the landscape of fashion and personal expression, the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic emerges as a commanding narrative of power, personality, and unabashed glamour. This style, deeply entrenched in the allure of classic Hollywood and revitalized by modern icons, advocates for a “more is more” approach to accessories. Each piece is not merely an addition but a cornerstone of the aesthetic, weaving together stories of elegance, strength, and individuality.

The bold statements of jewelry

At the heart of the ‘mob wife’ accessory ethos is statement jewelry. These are not just adornments but declarations of confidence, with bold necklaces, oversized earrings, and striking cocktail rings becoming the standard.

Embellished with crystals, pearls, or metallic details, these pieces are designed to complement the ensemble, asserting a sense of style that’s both opulent and discerning. They bridge the gap between mere fashion and personal emblem, embodying the dramatic flair central to the ‘mob wife’ identity.

Luxury at your fingertips and toes

Handbags and shoes within this aesthetic sphere exude luxury and statement-making impact. Opting for materials like premium leather or suede, adorned with distinctive hardware, handbags become a focal point of any outfit. Footwear follows suit, with high heels, stilettos, and platforms that not only elevate stature but also the style narrative, proving essential for

those seeking to encapsulate the ‘mob wife’s’ dramatic essence.

Mystery and flair: Sunglasses and scarves

Sunglasses in the ‘mob wife’ wardrobe are more than a sunny day afterthought; they are integral, offering an air of mystery and an additional layer of glamour. Silk scarves, in their myriad of colors and patterns, serve as a versatile tool for injecting personality into any look. These accessories can transform the simple into the sophisticated, marking a seamless transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Functional elegance: Belts and watches

In the ‘mob wife’ aesthetic, even the most functional items are infused with

a sense of style. Statement belts re-define silhouettes, turning loose forms into defined figures, while watches—preferably with large faces and metal bands—meld functionality with fashion. These items prove that practicality and style can coexist, enhancing the Mob Wife’s powerful allure.

Conclusion: The art of personal storytelling through accessories

The ‘mob wife’ aesthetic, with its rich tapestry of bold accessories, is more than a fashion statement; it’s a narrative of personal power and style. It encourages a deliberate choice of accessories that resonate on a personal level, worn with the confidence and attitude that define the aesthetic. Each piece, from the audacious sparkle of statement jewelry to the subtle sophis-

tication of a silk scarf, contributes to the overarching story of the wearer.

In embracing the ‘mob wife’ style of accessorizing, one engages in an act of personal storytelling, where each choice adds depth and dimension to the wearer’s narrative. This approach is not just about creating an image but about embodying an attitude that blends the lines between fashion and personal expression. As this aesthetic continues to inspire, it serves as a reminder that in the world of style, your accessories are not just additions—they are declarations of your unique identity and strength.—Get more inspiration by visiting our website dashebeauty.com or follow up at our beauty blog. — Dashe Beauty Kuwait



Planting trees in wrong places heats the planet: Study

Planting trees in the wrong places can actually contribute to global warming, scientists said on Tuesday, but a new map identifies the best locations to regrow forests and cool the planet. Trees soak up carbon dioxide and restoring areas of degraded woodlands or planting saplings to boost forest cover is one tool in the fight against climate change.

But in some cases, more trees means less sunlight is reflected back from the earth’s surface and more heat is absorbed by the planet, according to a study in the journal Nature Communications. “There are some places where putting trees back leads to net climate negative outcomes,” Susan Cook-Patton, one of the study’s co-authors, told AFP.

Scientists had already understood that restoring tree cover led to changes in albedo -- the amount of solar radiation bounced back off the planet’s surface -- but didn’t have the tools to account for it, she said. Using new maps, researchers were able to consider, for the first time, the cooling effect from trees and the

warming caused by decreased albedo.

They found that projects that didn’t factor albedo into the equation overestimated the climate benefit of additional trees by between 20 to 80 percent. But the maps also provide the tools to help policymakers identify where best to funnel scarce resources for maximum climate impact, said Cook-Patton, senior forest restoration scientist at The Nature Conservancy. “There’s also lots of places still where restoring tree cover is a great idea for climate change. We’re just trying to help people find those spots,” she said.

Return on investment

Albedo is highest in the frozen areas of the world, and mirror-like clean snow and ice with high levels of albedo reflect up to 90 percent of the sun’s energy. It is one of Earth’s major cooling agents, along with lands and oceans that absorb excess heat and planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

Many countries have promised to plant billions of trees as a bulwark against global warming but not all ef-

forts deliver for the planet equally, this study showed. Moist, tropical environments like the Amazon and Congo Basin boasted high carbon storage and low changes in albedo, making them ideal locations for restoring forest cover. The opposite was true in temperate grasslands and savanna, Cook-Patton said.

Even projects in the best locations were probably delivering 20 percent less cooling than estimated when changes to albedo were taken into account, she said. But she stressed that restoring forests delivered undeniable benefits for people and the planet, such as supporting ecosystems and providing clean air and water, among many. “We really don’t want our work to be a critique of the movement writ large,” she said. “(But) we can’t put trees everywhere. We don’t have enough money or time or resources or people or seedlings. “And so it’s really about making the most of limited investments and getting the greatest climate return per hectare of investment,” she added.—AFP

US Moon lander ‘permanently’ asleep after historic landing: Company

An uncrewed American lander that became the first private spaceship on the Moon has met its ultimate end after failing to “wake up,” the company that built it said. Houston-based Intuitive Machines said late Saturday that the lander, named Odysseus, had not phoned home this week when its solar panels were projected to receive enough sunlight to turn on its radio.

The lander touched down at a wonky angle on February 22, but was still able to complete several tests and send back photos before its mission was determined to have ended a week later, as it entered a weeks-long lunar night.

Intuitive Machines had hoped that it might “wake up” once it received sunlight again, as Japan’s SLIM spaceship -- which landed upside down in January -- did last month. The company said Saturday on X, formerly Twitter, that after several days of waiting, operators had confirmed that the power system of the lander, nicknamed “Odie,” would “not complete another call home.”

“This confirms that Odie has permanently faded after cementing its legacy into history as the first commercial lunar lander to land on the Moon,” it said.

The mission has been hailed as a success by Intuitive Machines and NASA, even as it ran into multiple problems along the way, including the tip-over at landing. It was also the first lunar touchdown by an American spaceship since the manned Apollo 17 mission in 1972.

NASA is planning to return astronauts to the Moon later this decade. It paid Intuitive Machines around \$120 million for the mission as part of an initiative to delegate cargo missions to the private sector and stimulate a lunar economy.

Odysseus carried a suite of NASA instruments designed to improve scientific understanding of the lunar south pole, where the space agency plans to send astronauts under its Artemis program later this decade. Intuitive Machines has two more Moon missions planned this year, both part of NASA’s Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative, which works with the private sector.

The United States, along with international partners, wants to eventually develop long-term habitats in the region, harvesting polar ice for drinking water -- and to produce rocket fuel for eventual onward voyages to Mars.—AFP



Top French court studies fate of ‘Europe’s largest’ hippo Jumbo

France’s top administrative court is to decide if a three-tonne hippopotamus called Jumbo should be freed after decades working as “the largest hippo in Europe” for a family circus.

The decision, which is expected in the coming weeks, is the culmination of a lengthy legal battle between an animal rights group and the Muller Circus.

The One Voice group has accused the circus of mistreating Jumbo, leaving the semi-aquatic mammal alone for hours on end in an enclosure, locked

up in a lorry, or standing in a water-filled skip from which it cannot clamber out on its own. They have requested that Jumbo, who they say is obese, be transferred to a sanctuary. The circus has rejected the claims, and said the animal should stay with them.

The centre of the case is an official permit issued by the southern Drome region in 2008 giving the Muller family the right to show the animal to the public. One Voice took legal action in 2017 to repeal the permit, but an administra-

tive court in 2019 refused to do so, and a regional appeals court in 2022 upheld that decision.

The case has now made its way to the State Council, France’s highest administrative court, where the fate of Jumbo was discussed Wednesday. The circus says the hippo, now in its late thirties, has retired. They did not however say when.

France has also since the start of the case introduced an animal rights law to gradually phase out the performance of wild animals from travelling shows by late

2028. A rapporteur at the State Council has advised the court to send the case back to the appeals court, recommending it re-examine it taking into account new developments. As Jumbo has retired, the contended 2008 permit to perform no longer applies, they argued. One Voice’s lawyer Thomas Lyon-Caen said that recommendation seemed “perfectly justified”. But the Muller family’s lawyer, Helene Farge, argued Jumbo would be happier living out the rest of its days with the circus. Won’t it “be better off where

it has always lived instead of in a retirement home?” she said.

Hippopotamuses hail from sub-Saharan Africa, where they usually wallow in water all day before emerging onto land at night to graze on grass. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists them as “vulnerable”, as they are threatened by human activity and drought.—AFP

Sports

‘Still got it’: Kohli hits 77 as Bengaluru beat Punjab in IPL

Kohli, third batsman after Chris Gayle, David Warner to score 100th 50-plus knock in T20

BENGALURU: Virat Kohli on Monday said he has “still got it” in him to ace T20 cricket after his attacking 77 guided Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their first win of this IPL season. Master batsman Kohli smashed 11 fours and two sixes in his 49-ball blitz as hosts Bengaluru chased down their victory target of 177 with four balls to spare against Punjab Kings and bounce back from their loss in the opener of the lucrative T20 tournament.

Kohli fell to fast bowler Harshal Patel in the 16th over and soon Bengaluru lost another wicket before Dinesh Karthik (28) and impact substitute Mahipal Lomror (17) steered the team home in an unbeaten stand of 48 off 18 balls. Kohli, who missed India’s 4-1 Test series victory over England because of the birth of his second child, has played just two T20 internationals for India since November 2022.

Some critics suggested he is not an automatic selection for this year’s T20 World Cup but Kohli has answered back with this latest knock. “I know my name is just attached to promoting the game in many parts of the world when it comes to T20 cricket, but still got it I guess,” Kohli told presenter Harsha Bhogle after being named man of the match.

The 35-year-old Kohli spoke about his paternity break. “We were not in the country. We were at a place where people weren’t recognizing us,” said Kohli. “Just to feel normal for two months was a surreal experience. I was telling the guys that the voices got that much louder (back home) which wasn’t the case for the last two months. It was amazing

to be another person on the road.” Bowlers set up victory with pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj and spinner Glenn Maxwell taking two wickets each to keep Punjab down to 176-6 despite skipper Shikhar Dhawan’s 45.

Fan love affair

Kohli then took charge after he was dropped on the second ball of the chase by Jonny Bairstow at first slip off Sam Curran. He capitalized on the spill on nought and hit the left-handed Curran for four boundaries including three successive hits to set up the chase in the first over.

His flowing cover drives, flicks on the outside and behind-the-wicket hits raised the noise at the M.Chinnaswamy Stadium as chants of “Kohli, Kohli” filled the air. “It’s been going on for years,” Kohli said about his love affair with his fans. “At the end of the day you don’t talk about the achievements, stats or numbers but the memories.”

“It’s what (India coach) Rahul Dravid says. The friendship, love, appreciation, backing has been amazing and is what you’ll miss and never forget.” He raised his 51st IPL fifty in 31 balls and became the third batsman after Chris Gayle and David Warner to score his 100th 50-plus knock in T20 cricket.

Punjab fast bowler Kagiso Rabada struck early with the key wickets of skipper Faf du Plessis and Cameron Green — both the batsmen out on three. Kohli stood firm but Punjab bowlers got down a few disciplined overs to put the pressure back on



BENGALURU: Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli watches the ball after playing a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Punjab Kings at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru. — AFP

Bengaluru, but the star batsman, and later Karthik, ensured victory. Bengaluru invited Punjab to bat first and struck regular blows after Siraj send Bairstow

trudging back to the pavilion for eight. Batsmen failed to convert starts with Prabhsimran Singh and Curran out for 25 and 23 respectively. — AFP

Australia-India Test series to start in late November

SYDNEY: Perth will host the first match of a blockbuster five-Test series against India from November 22, Cricket Australia (CA) said Tuesday as it released its international schedule for the 2024-25 season. The series will then move to Adelaide for a day-night Test and then Brisbane’s Gabba, which traditionally was the opening venue of Australia’s Test summer.

The Melbourne Cricket Ground will stage the Boxing Day Test and the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series will wrap up at Sydney Cricket Ground starting on January 3. CA chief executive Nick Hockley called it “one of the most highly anticipated summers of cricket in memory”.

“Fittingly, the Border-Gavaskar Trophy has been put on the same footing as the (men’s) Ashes with a five-Test series for the first time since 1991-92,” he said. Australia have not beaten India in a home series since 2014-2015. The hosts have, however, won all four previous Tests at Perth Stadium.

“We’re confident the schedule will maximize viewership and attendances and there will be a tremendous atmosphere in stadiums across the country,” said Hockley. Also released on Tuesday were dates for Australia’s home one-day and Twenty20 series against Pakistan in November that will precede the India Test series, and the Women’s Ashes against old rivals England.

The final match of the Women’s Ashes, starting January 30, 2025, will be the first women’s Test at the MCG since 1949.

Australia v India Test series schedule:
November 22-26: 1st Test, Perth
December 6-10: 2nd Test, Adelaide
December 14-18: 3rd Test, Brisbane
December 26-30: 4th Test, Melbourne
January 3-7, 2025: 5th Test, Sydney. — AFP

Players’ families to join in sports health program

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Families of players participating in the Sports Health Program (Your Health is in You Step 4) organized by Tomooh Club during the month of Ramadan in cooperation with Kuwait Special Olympics will be allowed to join the program.

Chairman of the Board of Tomooh Sports Club for the Mentally Disabled Engineer Jassim Al-Nouri said having guardians and families of players join the program will help achieve the goals of the program in encouraging the walking sport and activities due to its positive return on the health, physical and mental fitness in addition to the competition atmosphere to achieve the highest rate among the disabled, abled and the guardians as a form of sports inclusion and have families practice the walking sport and emphasize the importance of the right nutrition.

Al-Nouri said participating players carry out their daily training after iftar in various sports



games as they are keen to participate in all sports activities, as he pointed to the club’s players’ participation in the sports festival that was held in Al-Shaheed Park on the occasion of the world’s Down’s Syndrome day which included a three kilometer marathon, and in the Arena Challenge at the invitation of the Sports for All Sector of Public Authority for Sport which included physical fitness exercises, running, walking and padel game.

(Your Health is in You Step 4) that is being held with the participation of 70 mentally challenged players of various age groups will continue until 4/4/2024 at the Asima Mall. The weight of participants was taken at the start of the program, and each participant walks for three kilometers everyday then at the end of the program the weight will be taken again and the top three weight losers will be awarded and the same for girls.

Ohtani denies betting on baseball

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles Dodgers superstar Shohei Ohtani said Monday he had never bet on baseball or other sports, declaring himself “saddened and shocked” after accusing his interpreter of stealing from his bank account to pay off millions of dollars in gambling debts.

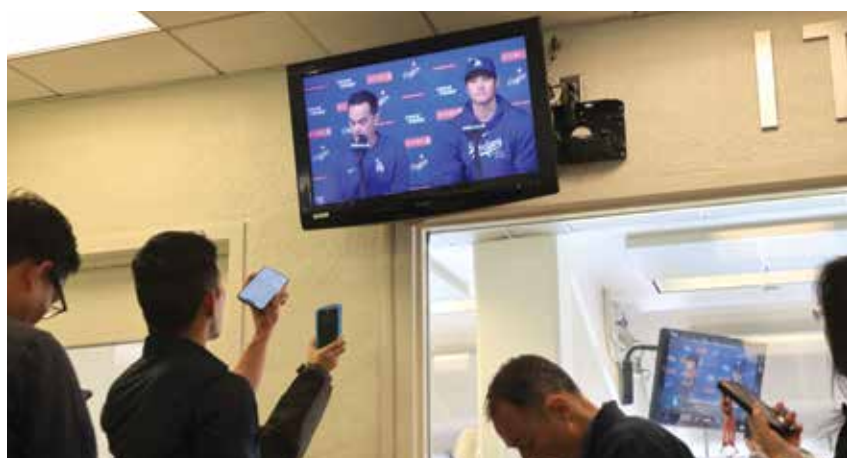
In his first public comments on the scandal which erupted last week and led to the firing of his long-time friend and translator Ippei Mizuhara, Ohtani emphasized he had been the victim of a theft and that he had no knowledge of Mizuhara’s gambling problems before last week.

“I never bet on baseball or any other sports and I never have asked somebody to do that on my behalf and I have never went through a bookmaker to bet on sports,” Japanese ace Ohtani said through a translator.

Ohtani, the biggest star in baseball, joined the Dodgers last December in a record-breaking \$700 million deal. He said an interview Mizuhara gave to ESPN last Tuesday before the scandal broke, in which his translator said the star had knowingly wired money to a California bookmaker to pay off the interpreter’s gambling debts, was “a complete lie.”

“Obviously I never agreed to pay off this debt or make payments to the bookmakers,” the 29-year-old told reporters at Dodger Stadium. “All of this has been a complete lie... Until a couple of days ago I didn’t know this was happening... Ippei has stolen money from my account and told lies.

“I’m very saddened and shocked that someone who I trusted has done this,” Ohtani said of the allegations. Ohtani, who appeared calm and composed throughout his remarks, did not take questions from reporters and did not immediately explain how Mizuhara had been able to access his bank account to steal the reported \$4.5 million. With Dodgers manager Dave Roberts and team president Andrew Friedman looking on, Ohtani said



LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Dodgers’ Shohei Ohtani delivers a statement during a closed press conference as seen on a TV in the press box at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles on March 25, 2024. Los Angeles Dodgers superstar Shohei Ohtani denied ever betting on baseball or other sports on March 25 in his first public comments since a scandal involving his long-time interpreter erupted last week. — AFP

the first time he became aware of Mizuhara’s gambling problem was when the interpreter addressed the Dodgers locker room after their win over the Padres in

South Korea last Wednesday. “During the team meeting, Ippei was speaking English but I didn’t have a translator by my side,” Ohtani said. — AFP

Former China football chief given life sentence for bribery

BEIJING: The former chairman of the Chinese Football Association has been sentenced to life in prison for accepting bribes worth \$11 million, state media said Tuesday, as a string of sports officials were jailed for corruption.

Under President Xi Jinping a sweeping crackdown on official graft has struck hard at China’s sports industry, especially football. About 10 senior leaders and executives of the CFA, including former national team coach Li Tie, have been brought down in recent years.

Former chairman Chen Xuyuan took advantage of his positions at the CFA and other bodies to “illegally accept sums of money from other people totalling 81.03 million yuan (\$11 million)”, the Communist Party-run People’s Daily newspaper said.

The bribes were “particularly huge” and his actions “seriously damaged fair competition and order”, the report said. He “caused serious consequences for the national football industry”, it added. Xi is a self-confessed football fanatic who has said he dreams of his country hosting and winning the World Cup.

That ambition appears further away than ever after the corruption probe and years of disappointing results on the pitch. National skipper Zhang Lin-



HUANGSHI: This handout photograph taken on March 26, 2024 shows Chen Xuyuan (C), former chairman of Chinese Football Association, standing during his trial at the Huangshi Intermediate People’s Court in Huangshi city, in central China’s Hubei province. — AFP

peng last week quit international football over the “disgrace” of a World Cup qualifying draw with Singapore, before reversing his decision.

‘Common practices’

Chen held other positions in football before serving as CFA chairman from 2019 until he came under investigation in February last year. In January, Chen appeared in a televised documentary confessing to

having accepted money from those wishing to get in his good books.

“Fans can accept the fact that the state of Chinese football is bad,” Chen said in the documentary. “But they cannot forgive corruption.” Rulings in other major graft cases are expected to be announced on Tuesday, according to state news agency Xinhua. They may include the fate of the former coach Li, who was close to Chen.

The former Everton midfielder admitted in the January documentary that he arranged nearly \$430,000 in bribes to secure that position and also helped fix matches when he was a club coach. “There were certain things that at the time were common practices in football,” he said. In separate bribery verdicts announced Tuesday, former senior CFA official Chen Yongliang was handed a 14-year sentence.

Former Chinese Super League general manager Dong Zheng received eight years. State media also reported that Yu Hongchen, the former chairman of the China Athletic Association, had been sentenced to 13 years for the same crime.

‘Broke my heart’

Another case that sent shockwaves through the Chinese game and beyond was that of South Korean international footballer Son Jun-ho, who was detained by Chinese authorities last May. Beijing said at the time that the World Cup midfielder was detained “on suspicion of accepting bribes by non-state employees”, without providing details.

Seoul’s foreign ministry said Monday that he had been released and returned home. Son played for Shandong Taishan in the Chinese Super League and also appeared in three of South Korea’s four matches during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

International teammate Lee Jae-sung told media that he was grateful for Son’s release. “It broke my heart when I first heard about his detention last year,” he told a press conference in Bangkok, where South Korea play Thailand later Tuesday in a World Cup qualifier. — AFP

Sports

Racism reducing my desire to play football: Brazil's Vinicius

‘When it seems that it hurts someone, they do it more and it’s a pity’

MADRID: Brazil winger Vinicius Junior said his desire to play football was reducing as incidents of racial abuse aimed at him piled up in Spain, during a tearful media appearance Monday. The Real Madrid forward has suffered abuse from opposition fans on many occasions in recent years, with one incident in Valencia in May provoking worldwide outrage.

Spain will face Vinicius' Brazil at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday under the slogan "One Skin" to help combat racism. "I've been seeing this (racism) for a long time, and every time I feel sadder, and every time I have less desire to play," Vinicius told reporters.

The 23-year-old broke down in tears at one point after answering questions about the racist abuse he has suffered in different stadiums across Spain. However later, Vinicius said he would not leave Spain and try playing in a different country to escape the abuse. "I would be giving the racists what they want," he said.

"I will stay at the best club in the world, scoring as many goals as I can so they keep watching me," Vinicius said he wished he could only think about his playing career. "Playing football is very important but the fight against racism is hugely important," he

said. "I want people of colour to have a normal life and if that was the case, I would go to games with my club only focussed on playing."

Earlier, Spain defender and Vinicius' club teammate Dani Carvajal denied his country was not racist. "I am sure that Spain is not a racist country but there are many racists here and many of them are in the stadiums," said Vinicius.

"From the first time I complained about racism in Spain it's been blowing up... they are insulting me over the colour of my skin so I play worse on the pitch. They can say many other things to me and I wouldn't say anything, I hope I can go to stadiums and not think about what could happen."

He recently condemned Atletico Madrid fans for racist chanting aimed at him before their Champions League clash against Inter Milan earlier in March. "It's a sad reality that happens even during matches where I am not present," said Vinicius on social media platform X. Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said in November Vinicius has become "unfortunately used to" racism in Spain.

Ugliest thing'

Carvajal said earlier he did not think his country

was racist but also racist insults were the "ugliest" thing that exists in sport. "Sadly there are people who go to football it seems to let loose all their rage, their anger," said Carvajal.

"When it seems that it hurts someone, they do it more and it's a pity. Those type of people should not be allowed into stadiums because it's the ugliest thing that exists in sport." Spain lost 1-0 last Friday against Colombia in a friendly defeat as they continue preparations for Euro 2024.

Brazil coach Dorival Junior said 17-year-old starlet Endrick would not start against Spain but will likely get to make his bow at the home of his future club, Real Madrid. Palmeiras striker Endrick, joining Vinicius at Madrid in the summer, scored the winner in a 1-0 victory over England in a friendly on Saturday.

"Endrick will not be a starter—without doubt he will bring a lot of joy to Real Madrid, he has a brilliant future," said Dorival. "I think that Endrick will have his moment." Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said comparisons to legendary Brazil striker Pele were unfair on the teenager.

"He's 17, a very good player, like we have too, but you have to give him time and above all, be pru-



MADRID : Brazil's forward Vinicius Junior cries as he gives a press conference on the eve of the international friendly football match between Spain and Brazil at the Ciudad Real Madrid training ground in Valdebebas, outskirts of Madrid, on March 25, 2024. — AFP

dent," said De la Fuente. "Thinking he could be the next Pele would be putting a lot of pressure and stress on him." — AFP

Convicted rapist Dani Alves leaves Spanish jail

SAN ESTEBAN SASROVIRAS: Convicted rapist and former Brazil international Dani Alves left a prison near Barcelona on Monday after posting the one-million-euro bail set by a court to ensure his release pending appeal.

The 40-year-old has been in jail since his arrest in January 2023 on suspicion of raping a young woman in the VIP bathroom of a Barcelona nightclub in the early hours of December 31, 2022. Wearing jeans, a white poloneck and black jacket, his face expressionless, Alves walked out of the Brians 2 prison in San Esteban Sasroviras near Barcelona with his lawyer, AFP correspondents at the scene said.

He got into a white car without saying a word to the hordes of reporters waiting nearby, just hours after depositing the sum determined by the court five days earlier. The former Barcelona player, one of the world's most decorated footballers, was convicted last month and sentenced to four-and-a-half years in jail, with his lawyers swiftly moving to file an appeal.

But in a surprise move, the court agreed last Wednesday to conditionally release him conditionally in exchange for posting a one-million-euro (\$1.08 million) bail, handing over his Spanish and Brazilian passports, staying in Spain and presenting himself to court every week.

Alves had tried to make bail several times since his arrest but his requests were turned down on the basis he was a flight risk since Brazil does not extradite citizens sentenced in other countries. Alves' lawyers are seeking his acquittal, and the appeal process could take months to complete.

Prosecutors, however, want his prison sentence doubled to nine years. They and the victim's lawyer Ester Garcia have appealed the decision to grant Alves bail. "This sends the message that this is justice for the rich, and even if there is a conviction, if you pay bail there are no criminal consequences," she told reporters last week. "It's a very dangerous message for society," she added, saying her client was "totally outraged, very despondent and very frustrated".

Lula slams bail deal

The court's decision to free Alves was also ro-



SAN ESTEBAN SASROVIRAS: Convicted rapist and former Brazil international football player Dani Alves (R) leaves on provisional release, flanked by his lawyer Ines Guardiola, at Brians 2 prison in San Esteban Sasroviras. — AFP

bustly criticised by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. "We cannot stay silent in the face of this injustice," he said on Thursday, stressing that money "cannot undo the crime that a man commits by raping a woman".

"When sex is something between two people, it has to be agreed to by both of them" and if not, that constitutes "a crime", he said. During the trial, the victim, who testified behind a screen to protect her identity, said Alves had violently forced her to have sex despite begging him to let her go, causing her "anguish and terror", according to prosecutors present for her declaration.

Alves' lawyers had argued the victim had been "glued" to the player while dancing at the nightclub, saying there was "sexual tension" between them. But in its 61-page decision, the court said that did not mean "that she consented to anything that might have subsequently happened".

Spain's leftist government passed a new law in 2022 that strengthens the country's penal code against rape by requiring explicit consent for sex acts, a move long demanded by assault survivors and women's rights groups.

Alves is widely considered one of the greatest defenders of all time, having won 42 trophies. The peak of his career was with Barcelona between 2008 and 2016, alongside Lionel Messi, when he won 23 trophies.

At the time of his arrest, he was contracted to Mexican club Pumas UNAM. He was sacked soon after being detained. — AFP

another friendly on Tuesday. Les Bleus have reached three finals out of the last four major tournaments, European Championships and World Cups combined. They also won the UEFA Nations League in 2021, and are being tipped as the favourites for the Euro alongside a strong England side.

Paris Saint-Germain star Mbappe was keen to point out that France won just once in their six games leading into the last World Cup, before going on to reach the final of that competition. In contrast they came into the last Euro in 2021 in excellent form, only to go out in the last 16 on penalties to Switzerland.

"There have been tournaments where in the matches we have played beforehand we have taken beatings but then have played well in the competitions themselves. "There have also been competitions where we won the friendly games in the build-up but then ended up being knocked out and going home early," said Mbappe, who won his 76th cap against Germany aged just 25.

"The friendly matches give indications but not the whole truth. The proof of that is that we have lost twice to the Germans in friendly games but I have never lost to them in a competitive match." France are in a group with the Netherlands and Austria at the upcoming Euro, which will take place in Germany from June 14 to July 14. — AFP

Forest lodge appeal against deduction

LONDON: Nottingham Forest lodged an appeal Monday against the four-point deduction imposed upon them for a breach of Premier League financial rules. "Nottingham Forest can confirm that it has today lodged an appeal against the four point sanction imposed by the Commission in relation to the Club's breach of the Premier League's Profit & Sustainability Rules," the club said in a brief statement on its website.

"The club will not be making any further statement at this time," added Forest. On March 18, the Premier League club were docked four points after admitting breaching their profitability and sustainability rules (PSR) threshold of £61 million (\$77.5 million) by £34.5 million.

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

The four-point deduction meant they dropped into the relegation zone, one point behind 17th-placed Luton and four adrift of Everton. Premier



CANBERRA: Australia's Craig Goodwin (R) fights for the ball with Lebanon's goalkeeper Mustafa Matar (L) during the FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifier football match between Australia and Lebanon at Bruce Stadium in Canberra on March 26, 2024.—AFP

Australia advance in WCup qualifying by beating Lebanon

CANBERRA: Australia cruised into the next stage of Asian qualifying for the 2026 World Cup with a 5-0 drubbing of Lebanon in Canberra on Tuesday. Craig Goodwin's two goals, plus strikes from Kusini Yengi, John Iredale and a Bassel Jradi own goal gave Australia a maximum 12 points after four games and they are now assured of progressing from Group I.

It took just two minutes for Goodwin to have an impact on his return to the side after illness when his teasing cross found Yengi to open his international account. Yengi, a striker who plays for Portsmouth

in the English third tier, bundled home at the second time of asking after his initial effort hit the post.

Goodwin almost made a second with another pinpoint delivery after 43 minutes but Harry Souttar's header struck the woodwork and it remained 1-0 at half-time. As in the first half, Lebanon conceded after two minutes and again Goodwin, who plays for Al Wehda in Saudi Arabia, was the creator.

His free-kick from the right was headed goalwards by Souttar where 'keeper Mostafa Matar's save hit hapless teammate Jradi and ricocheted back into the net. A minute later Goodwin got his reward for a dominant display when lashing home left-footed superbly from just outside the box to make it 3-0.

Substitute John Iredale tapped in the fourth with his first touch after 68 minutes and Goodwin bagged his second from close range with nine minutes to go to cap a fine personal display. — AFP

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

Change of Name

I, Cheruvu Thomas (current name in passport) of Indian Passport No. V3747468, R/of H.No. 3/1445, Sionpuram, Kadapa town. A.P. India-516001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Siddavaram Thomas, S/O Raja Kumar (new name) previously called Cheruvu Thomas, S/o. Raja Kumar (old name).

(#5190) 27/03/2024

Atlanta Hawks stage 30-point comeback to stun Boston Celtics

First-placed Denver trounced Memphis Grizzlies 128-103



ATLANTA: Al Horford #42 of the Boston Celtics drives against Bogdan Bogdanovic #13 of the Atlanta Hawks during the third quarter at State Farm Arena on March 25, 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Atlanta Hawks produced a comeback for the ages to overturn a 30-point deficit and defeat the Eastern Conference-leading Boston Celtics 120-118 on Monday. Boston, who were confirmed as having clinched the Eastern Conference's top seed earlier on Monday, appeared to be cruising towards a resounding win after outscoring Atlanta 44-22 in the first quarter.

The Celtics raced into a 30-point advantage midway through the second quarter before Atlanta woke up and began chipping into the Boston lead.

The Hawks kept the rally going into the second half, narrowing the gap further with a 34-22 third quarter before harnessing that momentum into the fourth quarter to complete a dramatic win.

DeAndre Hunter led the Hawks scoring with 24 points, including a decisive three-pointer with 10 seconds remaining that gave Atlanta a four-point cushion and effectively made the game safe.

Hunter was backed with 22 points from Bogdan Bogdanovic while Dejounte Murray finished with 19 points, 15 assists and five rebounds. Hawks coach Quin Snyder praised the unrelenting support of the Atlanta home crowd in helping drive his team to a remarkable victory. "Tonight the way we started the game, and the way Boston started, their energy really

gave us a lift," Snyder said of the Atlanta fans.

"Anytime you're down that much you have to have something out of the ordinary a little bit to get back in the game. "And when you have a group of people you know who are behind you thick or thin, rain or shine — and there was a lot of rain early — they were a big part of helping the sun come out tonight." Atlanta improved to 32-39 and remain in 10th place in the East, on course for a spot in the play-in tournament.

'A good lesson'

Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said his team paid the price for not killing the game off, adding that Atlanta's physicality had caused his team problems in the second half. "It's a good lesson," Mazzulla said. "Credit to them for battling back.

"I thought their physicality — they were extremely physical as soon as the ball got past half-court. I thought that messed up our offense, and they made us work for everything." Celtics star Jayson Tatum had no excuses after the defeat.

"It's tough, you won't win every game you play," Tatum said. "We were up a lot but we didn't do the things we needed to do to win. "The key is to not over-react. Take it on the chin and get ready for (the next game)." Elsewhere, Donte DiVincenzo put on a three-point shooting clinic to finish with

a career-best 40 points as the New York Knicks kept rolling towards the postseason with a 124-99 blowout against the league-worst Detroit Pistons. DiVincenzo drained 11-of-20 from outside the arc, just three away from Klay Thompson's single-game record of 14 set in 2018. Jalen Brunson added 28 points as the Knicks improved to 43-28 to remain fourth in the East.

In San Antonio, Phoenix Suns duo Kevin Durant and Devin Booker combined for 65 points but it was not enough to prevent the Spurs from snatching an upset 104-102 win.

Jeremy Sochan and Devin Vassell each finished with 26 points as Western Conference basement club San Antonio claimed only their 16th win of the season. At the opposite end of the Western Conference, first-placed Denver trounced the Memphis Grizzlies 128-103 to edge closer to the No.1 seeding.

The defending NBA champions went wire-to-wire in an easy win, with Nikola Jokic once again leading the way, with 29 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists. The Nuggets lead the Western Conference with a 51-21 record, one win clear of second-placed Oklahoma (49-21). In Salt Lake City, Luka Doncic grabbed his 19th triple-double of the season to finish with 29 points, 12 rebounds and 13 assists as the Dallas Mavericks outgunned the Utah Jazz 115-105. — AFP

Saudi sizes up 'huge challenge' for WCup

RIYADH: A decade before it hosts football's World Cup, the size of the task facing Saudi Arabia is becoming apparent, including building stadiums, hotels and transport links. As the only bidder, Saudi Arabia was anointed host of the 2034 World Cup last October by FIFA.

Infrastructure is the initial concern for the oil-rich kingdom, which is snapping up high-profile sports events in an attempt to sweep away its conservative image and entice foreign investment. Despite its oil riches, the world's biggest

to speak to media.

By the time the World Cup kicks off, the desert country of 32 million will have hosted the 2027 Asian Cup and even the 2029 Asian Winter Games, a decision that was panned by environmentalists. In 2034, the same year as the World Cup, Riyadh will host the Asian Games — a two-week tournament with more events than the Summer Olympics and a similar number of athletes.

Saudi Arabia, where alcohol is banned, became the sole bidders for 2034 a year



JEDDAH: (FILES) Saudi supporters lift national flags ahead of the 2022 Qatar World Cup Asian Qualifiers football match between Saudi Arabia and Australia, at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium in the city of Jeddah, on March 29, 2022. — AFP

crude exporter has much on its plate. It has committed to several other giant projects — including NEOM, a \$500 billion, futuristic new city — as part of de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious Vision 2030 economic diversification plan.

To host the 48-team World Cup, the country needs 14 all-seater stadiums capable of holding at least 40,000 people, according to the bid document. It currently has two: Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City Stadium and Riyadh's venerable King Fahd International Stadium, which is undergoing a major refit.

Saudi Arabia has a well-established and popular football league but among its 30-plus stadiums, many are old, small and have pitches surrounded by athletics tracks, a design that has long gone out of vogue. "We still have 10 full years ahead of us that will see the state of stadiums in Saudi Arabia change radically," a Saudi Football Federation official told AFP. "It is a huge challenge, but we will overcome it," the official said on condition of anonymity, because he was not authorized

after gas-wealthy neighbour Qatar hosted the Middle East's first World Cup at an eye-watering cost of \$220 billion, including related infrastructure. As the 2027 Asian Cup looms, work has started not just on the King Fahd International Stadium refit but also on a new cliff-top venue in Qiddiya, a mega-project outside the capital, and another stadium in the eastern city of Dammam. All of them are scheduled to open in 2026.

Authorities are planning another in Diriyah, former base of the Al Saud royal dynasty, with its design already approved, according to a Saudi official. The sports ministry is preparing to issue tenders worth 10 billion riyals (\$2.69 billion) to build and expand football venues, according to domestic media. World Cup games are planned for Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and Abha along with Qiddiya and NEOM, both cornerstones of Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 and under construction. Saudi is going to need more than just stadiums, said architect Hussein Mahran. — AFP

Top seed Alcaraz sinks Monfils to advance in Miami

MIAMI: Top seed Carlos Alcaraz powered into the fourth round of the Miami Open with a 6-2, 6-4 win over French veteran Gael Monfils at Hard Rock Stadium on Monday. The 37-year-old Monfils was coping well with the power play of the talented Spaniard until he hurt his ankle in the fifth game.

While Monfils carried on bravely, bringing out some wonderful defensive shots from Alcaraz, the world number two was too much for the Parisian. There were plenty of smiles, in between the occasional wince from Monfils, who enjoyed some entertaining rallies where Alcaraz could show his deftness of touch.

With the outcome feeling like a formality, Alcaraz eased off the gas and Monfils was able to break for the first time to reduce the deficit to 5-3. Monfils then held his serve with a brilliant cross court winner before Alcaraz wrapped up business to book a place in the fourth round against Lorenzo Musetti.

"He's a great athlete," Alcaraz said of Monfils. "He reads almost every ball so I had to be patient but at the same time, with my forehand, my best shot, try to move him around the court, to get him tired a little bit and give myself the chance to dominate the point, get

to the net, hit my best shot.

"That's what I was trying to do in the match and it worked pretty well," he added. Alcaraz said he had enjoyed playing under the lights in front of stars such as Brazilian footballer Neymar and NBA star Jimmy Butler of the Miami Heat.

But he expects a much tougher test from Musetti, who won an enthralling battle with American Ben Shelton in front of a raucous crowd on the Butch Buchholz court 6-4, 7-6 (7/5). "I know that Lorenzo is a really talented player so that's a really tough one," said Alcaraz. "But I am really happy with the level that I am playing, with the performance that I am bringing to the court," he added. Earlier, fourth seed German Alexander Zverev came through a tricky test against American Christopher Eubanks, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Zverev delivered a crucial break when Eubanks was serving for the set at 5-3 before breaking early in the second to go 3-0 up and see himself through to victory. "He came out swinging and didn't give me chances to be aggressive. I tried to mix it up from the baseline," said Zverev.

"I was surprised how well he was playing from the baseline, not giving me many unforced errors. He makes a lot but usually misses a lot but today he wasn't missing, especially through some stages of the first set," he added. Zverev will face 15th seed Karen Khachanov who pushed all the way by Francisco Cerundolo 6-1, 5-7, 7-6 (7/5).

Meanwhile, World number one Iga Swi-

atek was knocked out of the Miami Open after inspired Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova triumphed 6-4, 6-2 in their fourth round match on Monday. The 16th seed Alexandrova played brilliant attacking tennis from the outset to beat the Pole and leave the WTA tournament without any of the top three seeds in the quarter-finals with Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff also out.

France's Caroline Garcia upset world number three Gauff beating the American 6-3, 1-6, 6-2 on Monday to advance to the quarter-finals of the Miami Open, while world number two Aryna Sabalenka had been eliminated by Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina on Saturday.

Swiatek never looked comfortable after Alexandrova broke her in the opening game and took control of proceedings with some outstanding, attacking tennis. The Pole, who was looking to become the second woman to win the 'Sunshine Double' after her triumph at Indian Wells, generated just one break point in the match but Alexandrova saved it to take a 4-2 lead in the second set.

Garcia, who had beaten four-times Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka in straight sets on Sunday, continued her inspired form as she defeated Gauff on her home court in one hour 43 minutes. After a thrilling encounter, which ebbed and flowed, Garcia, ranked 27th in the world, emerged to face a last-eight meeting with the winner of Monday's match between Romanian Sorana Cirstea and American Danielle Collins. — AFP