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3 New Lesotho ambassador hails ties with Kuwait, warm welcome



11 Ramadan traditions, simple joys and local theatre in Weekender



16 Super-sub Elliott hands Liverpool win over PSG in Champions League



Ramadan

Fajr	: 04:48
Shrooq	: 06:07
Dhuhr	: 11:59
Asr	: 15:21
Maghrib	: 17:51
Isha	: 19:08

US holds secret talks with Hamas

Group says Trump's 'DEAD' threat to Gaza undermines truce, emboldens Zionists



GAZA: A displaced Palestinian woman reads the Holy Quran before iftar during the holy month of Ramadan near rubble at the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on March 5, 2025. — AFP

GAZA: Hamas said Thursday that Donald Trump's threats would encourage the Zionist entity to disregard the fragile ceasefire, after the US president said that unless captives are freed, the people of Gaza would be "DEAD". Trump's warning came hours after his administration revealed it held unprecedented direct talks with Hamas, which it proscribes as a "terrorist" group, focused on American hostages in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed the Zionist entity was consulted and said in a statement that it "expressed its opinion" on the direct talks. Trump said later he was "sending (the Zionist entity) everything it needs to finish the job" as his administration expedites billions of dollars in weapons.

"Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," he wrote on his Truth So-

cial platform after meeting freed hostages. "This is your last warning! For the leadership, now is the time to leave Gaza, while you still have a chance."

Trump also warned of repercussions for Gaza as a whole, where virtually the entire population has been displaced by the Zionist entity's relentless military campaign. "To the People of Gaza: A beautiful Future awaits, but not if you hold Hostages. If you do, you are DEAD!"

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasim said Trump's words pushed the Zionist entity to disregard the terms of a ceasefire in place since Jan 19. "These threats complicate matters regarding the ceasefire agreement and encourage the occupation to avoid implementing its terms," Qasim said in a statement, urging the United States to pressure the Zionist entity to enter the ceasefire's second phase.

The first phase of the truce ended at the

weekend after six weeks of relative calm that included exchanges of Zionist captives for Palestinian prisoners held in Zionist jails. While the Zionist entity has said it wants to extend the first phase until mid-April, Hamas has insisted on a transition to the second phase, which should lead to a lasting ceasefire. The Zionist entity has ramped up its rhetoric and halted the flow of goods and supplies into Gaza. "Hamas has indeed suffered a severe blow, but it has not yet been defeated. The mission is not yet accomplished," Zionist entity's new military chief Eyal Zamir warned Wednesday.

France, Britain and Germany jointly called the humanitarian situation in Gaza "catastrophic" and urged the Zionist entity to ensure the "unhindered" delivery of aid. South Africa said the Zionist entity's restriction of aid into Gaza amounted to using starvation as a weapon of war.

Continued on Page 6

RAMADAN KAREEM

Fasting vs feasting

By Yasmin Mohammad Salim

Ramadan, the month of fasting and worship. The month of endless blessings from Allah. In Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and worldly pleasures from dawn to dusk. A Muslim must utilize every minute of this month in getting closer to Almighty Allah by fasting, praying and performing every act of worship possible. Nowadays, many Muslims are missing the point of this blessed month and may, alas, waste their time in food preparation, over-indulgence and other distractions. Fasting in Ramadan is so virtuous that it is considered the fourth pillar of Islam. In a hadith (prophetic narration), the Prophet (PBUH) related that Almighty Allah said, "Every good deed of Adam's son is for him except fasting; it is for Me, and I will reward (the fasting person) for it." (Al-Bukhari # 5, 927)

Moreover, apart from weight loss, scientists have proven that intermittent fasting has many health benefits on the human body. Regulating blood sugar, enhancing heart health, improving brain function and even preventing cancer are a few of the benefits that have been discovered. This only shows how abstaining from food is beneficial for us in many ways. Almighty Allah tells us in the Noble Quran, translated as: "Fasting is good for you if you only knew." (2:184)

When talking about Ramadan, all some Muslims think about are the various dishes and delicacies that they can indulge in, even though this is definitely not the purpose of this holy month. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us how to break our fasts after bearing long hours of hunger and thirst because apparently, it is best to break our fasts on a few dates, and eat gradually to avoid discomfort, especially before the Maghrib (sunset) and tarawih (after Isha) prayers. It is narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) used to break his fast on fresh dates before he prayed. If he did not find fresh dates, then he would use dried dates. If he did not find that also, he drank a few sips of water." (Ahmad and Abu Dawood)

The Prophet (PBUH) used to eat moderately and prevent extravagance in any way. Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karib (RA) narrated, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say, 'The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is enough for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls to straighten his back, but if he must (fill his stomach), then one-third for his food, one-third for his drink, and one-third for his breath.'" (Sunan Ibn Majah # 3, 349) To sum up, we are to spend this limited time in Ramadan in what pleases Almighty Allah and not take this month for granted because we may not be so lucky to witness such blessed days in the following year. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

Kuwait partners with Microsoft to drive AI, digital transformation

By Jassim Al-Awadhi

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and CITRA have signed a strategic partnership with Microsoft to accelerate AI development and digital transformation across government entities. The agreement includes launching an AI data center — the first of its kind in the region, a digital economy hub and cloud auditing facilities while providing civil servants access to Microsoft 365 Copilot.

Microsoft will train 4,500 government officials in cybersecurity and AI, along with 30,000 individuals on the Copilot system. The partnership aims to boost workforce skills, attract global investors and

Malala returns to hometown 13 yrs after being shot

PESHAWAR: Nobel Peace Prize laureate and education activist Malala Yousafzai returned to her Pakistan home village on Wednesday, 13 years after surviving an assassination attempt by militants. Yousafzai was a 15-year-old schoolgirl when Pakistan Taliban militants boarded a bus and shot her in the head in the remote Swat Valley near the Afghanistan border.

She has made rare visits to the valley since, but it was the first time she returned to her childhood home in Shangla since being evacuated to the United Kingdom after the attack. "As a child, I spent every holiday in Shangla, Pakistan, playing by the river and sharing meals with my extended family," she said on X. "It was

Danish postal service to stop delivering letters

COPENHAGEN: The Danish postal service announced Thursday that it would no longer deliver letters from next year and would lay off a third of its staff. "At the end of the year, PostNord will deliver its final letter... to focus on its role as the premier parcel delivery service in Denmark," the company announced in a statement.

PostNord said the restructuring was due to digitalization leading to a staggering decrease in the number of letters being sent, with a 90 percent reduction since 2000. A total of 1,500 out of 4,600 jobs will also be cut. "In 2024, the number of letters fell by more than 30 per-



KUWAIT: Minister of Communications Omar Al-Omar and Microsoft's President for EMEA Samer Abu-Ltaif seal the deal. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

enhance innovation in Kuwait. As AI technology demands significant energy, Microsoft and other tech giants are investing in nuclear energy. When asked about Kuwait's energy strategy, Minister of Communications Omar Al-Omar said renewable energy projects are in the pipeline. (See Page 3)



SHANGLA, Pakistan: Nobel Peace Prize laureate and education activist Malala Yousafzai poses during a visit to her home village on March 5, 2025. — AFP

such a joy for me to return there today — after 13 long years — to be surrounded by the mountains, dip my hands in the cold river and laugh with my beloved cousins. This place is very dear to my heart and I hope to return again and again." **Continued on Page 6**

cent compared to the previous year and this trend will continue," the company said. PostNord lost its obligation to deliver post to the whole of Denmark last year in a move towards market liberalization, meaning the company also lost much of its financial support. The distributor DAO, which won the contract to deliver public service mail last year, has said it is ready to strengthen its letter distribution service. "We can still send and receive letters everywhere in the country," Transport Minister Thomas Danielsen told the local news agency Ritzau.

Many postal services are struggling across Europe due to digitalization. The German postal service, Deutsche Post, also announced Thursday that it would cut 8,000 jobs in Germany to reduce its costs. Britain's postal operator, Royal Mail, has also seen its core letters business ravaged. The communications regulator Ofcom has proposed that Royal Mail cuts delivery to five days, or even three days per week, potentially saving the company hundreds of millions of pounds. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

464 stripped of citizenship

KUWAIT: The Supreme Committee on Kuwaiti Citizenship announced Thursday that 464 individuals have been stripped of their Kuwaiti citizenship, with the matter now referred to the Cabinet. According to the interior ministry, 12 individuals lost their citizenship due to holding dual nationality, 451 nationalities were revoked for forgery and fraud, while one individual's citizenship was canceled for reasons related to the country's higher interest. — KUNA

Rain to persist until Saturday

KUWAIT: Rainfall in Kuwait is expected to continue until Saturday morning, accompanied by strong southeasterly winds exceeding 60 km/h, which may cause dust storms and reduced visibility. The weather will remain cloudy and moderate, with scattered rain showers and temperatures ranging from 15°C to 13°C on Thursday. Similar conditions are expected on Friday, with a temperature range of 21°C to 12°C. By Saturday, the weather will warm up, reaching 24°C to 22°C during the day and dropping to 11°C at night. — KUNA

11 arrested for begging

KUWAIT: The interior ministry arrested 11 beggars of Arab and Asian nationalities near mosques and markets as part of a crackdown ordered by Acting PM and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. Some detainees entered on visit visas or loose labor permits, with legal action underway against recruiting companies. Violators will be deported along with their sponsors, depending on residency type, while those exploiting children will face strict legal action. Authorities will also monitor electronic begging. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Campaign to pay off debts

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Dr Amthlal Al-Huwailah announced Wednesday that the ministry is preparing to launch a national campaign to help citizens pay off their debts. The campaign, aligned with directives from HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, aims to encourage charitable giving and strengthen social solidarity. It will be supervised by the ministry in coordination with charitable organizations to ease financial burdens on struggling families. — KUNA



Local

Zain's iftar hall welcomes worshippers daily

Initiative continues for 18th year with 40k meals served throughout Ramadan



CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally with Zain's team at the iftar hall.



The initiative runs daily throughout the Holy Month.

KUWAIT: From the first day of Ramadan, Zain's annual iftar initiative has once again commenced, marking its 18th consecutive year. The initiative welcomes fasting individuals daily at Manahi Al-Dawwas Hall in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, providing 40,000 meals throughout the Holy Month. The Iftar initiative is a cornerstone of Zain's annual Ramadan campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, where the company serves daily iftar meals to fasting individuals. Additionally, in collaboration with its

strategic partner, the Kuwait Food Bank, Zain distributes meals through a fleet of dedicated trucks that travel across the country.

Zain's team plays a hands-on role in managing and organizing the initiative, supported by the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team, which consists of employees from various departments. Their participation reflects Zain's deep commitment to meaningful community engagement. Zain recently kicked off its annual Zain Alshuhoor cam-

paign with the Ramadan Food Baskets initiative, providing essential food supplies to underprivileged families and individuals. The initiative was carried out in collaboration with Zain's strategic partners, including the Social Care Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Kuwait Food Bank.

The food baskets were distributed to the Social Care Centers, benefiting residents such as family care children, the elderly, and people with dis-

abilities. Additionally, the Kuwait Food Bank ensured that these baskets reached underprivileged families and individuals across various regions of Kuwait. Year after year, Zain Alshuhoor continues to evolve and expand its programs, embodying the spirit of generosity that defines Ramadan. Through this campaign, Zain upholds the deeply rooted values of the Kuwaiti people — offering support to those in need and fostering a culture of compassion, love, and peace.

Rainy weather, climate change present health challenges

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In a recent statement, Ministry of Health spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad underscored the importance of adhering to preventive guidelines during rainy weather, noting that while climate changes bring beauty, they also present health challenges that require heightened caution, particularly for vulnerable groups such as respiratory patients, the elderly, and children.



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

Speaking on Thursday, Dr Al-Sanad highlighted the need for heightened attention and responsibility when driving during rainfall. He explained that rainwater reduces tire traction on the road, which increases the risk of accidents. As such, reducing speed and maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles are essential safety measures.

He also emphasized the importance of avoiding direct exposure to cold and humid air, particularly for asthma and allergy sufferers, as these conditions could worsen respiratory symptoms due to airborne allergens. Dr Al-Sanad pointed out that scientific studies have shown that high humidity levels can exacerbate bronchospasm in asthma patients, making it crucial for them to carry an inhaler and follow their prescribed treatment plans.

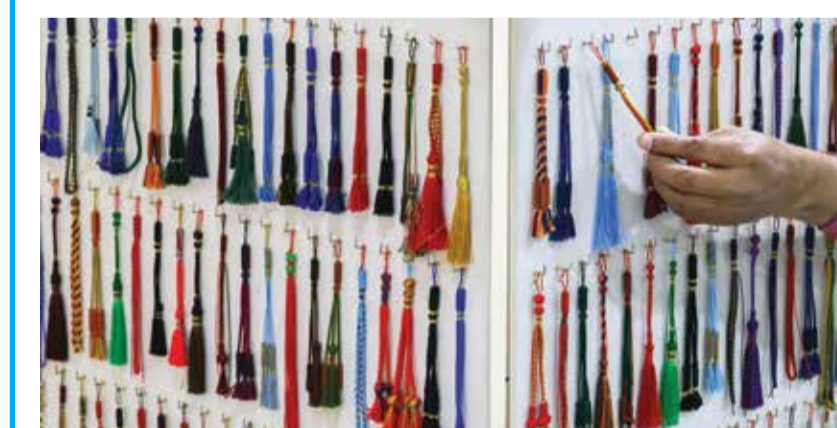
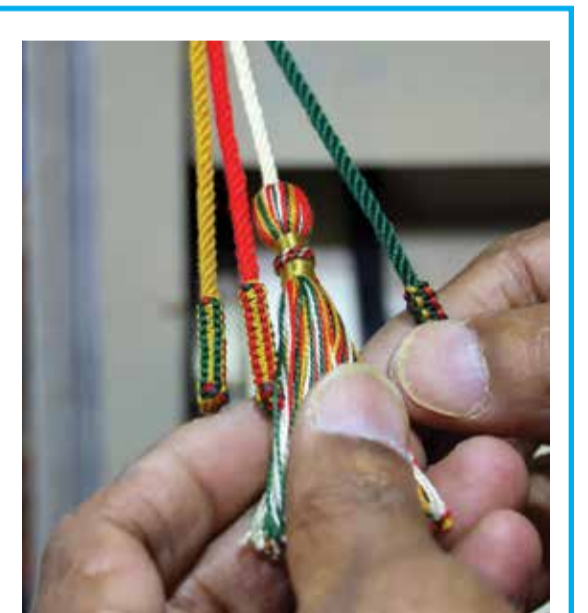
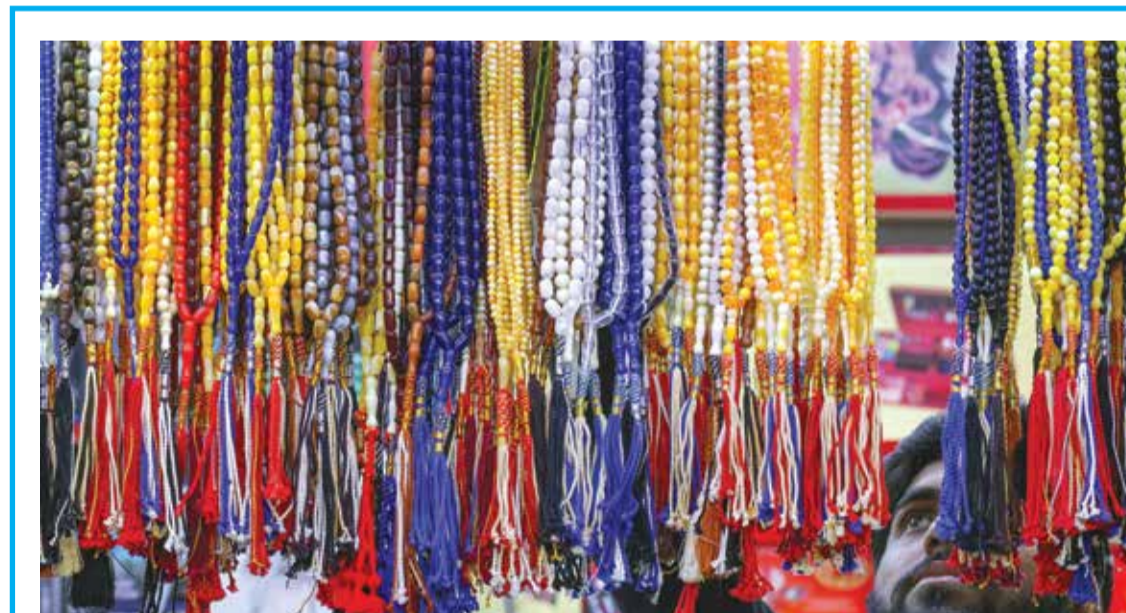
Furthermore, he recommended closing windows in homes and vehicles to limit exposure to airborne irritants that may be carried by rain. He also cautioned against handling electrical appliances during wet conditions, as water can cause short circuits, posing serious risks. Dr. Al-Sanad advised against touching electrical wires or sockets with wet hands and ensuring that water does not leak into electrical devices.

Dr Al-Sanad also stressed the importance of following weather forecasts issued by official authorities and adhering to the guidance provided by relevant agencies regarding both traffic and home safety measures. He emphasized that seeking medical assistance without hesitation is a responsible course of action, particularly if any unusual health symptoms arise. The Ministry of Health continues to raise awareness about preventive measures to safeguard public health. Dr Al-Sanad encouraged everyone to enjoy the winter weather responsibly by taking the necessary precautions to mitigate potential health risks.

Al-Canar a seasonal fruit of high nutritional value



KUWAIT: Al-Nabaq or Al-Canar is a seasonal fruit that is increasingly popular in Kuwait these days due to its taste and high nutritional value. It has many names and its source is the Seder trees in Arab countries, including Kuwait, and produce fruits during the spring equinox in various shapes, color and taste. Seder trees, which can withstand harsh environmental conditions, are characterized by the density of their hanging branches and their deep roots, while their height reaches between 2 and 12 meters. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Vendors display prayer beads for sale at a market in Kuwait City during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

IICO launches first development project in Sudan

KUWAIT: The International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) announced on Thursday the inauguration of its first development proj-

ect in Sudan following the war, with the opening of Al-Asiab Water Station in Al-Ubaidiya Unit, Berber Locality, River Nile State. The project aims to provide clean and sustainable drinking water to local communities.

In a press statement, IICO emphasized that the initiative aligns with its mission to empower communities and implement high-quality programs that foster positive impact. The project was carried out in collaboration with the Golden Pickaxe Company and local authorities. With

a total investment of \$43.76 million (approximately KD 13.43 million), the station has a production capacity of 40 cubic meters of purified water per hour. It serves as a vital resource for over 12,000 people who face acute shortages of drinking water, particularly as displaced residents begin returning to their homes after years of instability.

IICO affirmed that the launch of this station marks the beginning of its broader development efforts in Sudan in the post-war period.

The organization reiterated its commitment to implementing further initiatives that promote community stability, sustainable development, and humanitarian values. The organization highlighted that the generosity of Kuwaiti donors enables it to create meaningful change and execute impactful projects in underserved communities. It called for continued support to its global charitable initiatives, aimed at ensuring dignified living conditions for vulnerable populations. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait partners with Microsoft to drive AI and digital transformation

Agreement includes AI data center, workforce training and cloud auditing



Minister of State for Communications Affairs Omar Saud Al-Omar (right) and Samer Abu-Ltaif, Microsoft's President for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

By Jassim Al-Awadhi

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) signed a strategic partnership agreement with Microsoft Corporation, marking the Kuwaiti government's second collaboration to accelerate digital transformation and enhance artificial intelligence (AI) development across government entities.

This partnership is a milestone in advancing AI applications to support Kuwait's economic diversification, innovation and entrepreneurship. It will help train the national workforce, enhance IT skills, and prepare individuals for leadership roles, Minister of State for Communications Affairs Omar Saud Al-Omar said at Wednesday's signing ceremony.

The agreement includes plans to launch an AI data center, an integrated AI system, a center for

promoting the digital economy and state services, and a center of excellence in cloud auditing. The government will also provide civil servants with access to Microsoft 365 Copilot, making Kuwait one of the first countries in the region to implement these solutions, which aim to enhance productivity and improve state services, Al-Omar noted.

He highlighted that the establishment of cloud auditing centers, improvements in digital infrastructure, and fast access to Microsoft services are key factors in attracting global investors and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Kuwait. "A significant portion of all our agreements is dedicated to developing workforce skills," Al-Omar added.

Samer Abu-Ltaif, Microsoft's President for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, announced that as part of the partnership, Microsoft aims to train 4,500 government officials in cybersecurity and AI, along with 30,000 individuals on the Copilot system.



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Microsoft operates in Kuwait under a license from the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), reinforcing its 25-year presence in the country, which has included cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about the 4,500 government officials, Abu-Ltaif noted that they would be certified to train others, underscoring the initiative's long-term value. He also emphasized that Kuwait's AI data center — the first of its kind in the region — along with the government's strong commitment over the past two years, played a key role in Microsoft's decision to move forward with the agreement.

A Goldman Sachs report highlights the energy-intensive nature of AI technologies, stating that a single ChatGPT query requires 10 times more energy than a standard Google search due to the high computational power needed for AI-driven queries. In response to rising energy demands, major tech

companies — including Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Meta — are investing billions in nuclear energy to power their data centers.

Microsoft, for instance, has signed a \$1.6 billion deal to reopen the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor, which was shut down in 1979. The facility is expected to be restored by 2028 to support Microsoft's growing AI infrastructure. Unlike renewable energy sources, which are intermittent, nuclear power provides a continuous and scalable energy supply, making it a more reliable option for AI operations.

When asked by Kuwait Times whether discussions between Microsoft and the Kuwaiti government, represented by Minister Al-Omar, included energy demands and strategies to meet them, the minister responded: "I don't want to delve into the Ministry of Electricity's affairs, but they have projects in the pipeline that include renewable energy."

Ambassador praises Kuwait, Lesotho ties

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Lesotho to Kuwait, Manthabiseng Phohleli, highlighted the longstanding and cordial relationship between Kuwait and the Kingdom of Lesotho during a statement on Thursday. "We have had a strong relationship with Kuwait for nearly 30 years, initially covering Kuwait from Egypt before relocating our mission here in 2010. Our King visited Kuwait in 2010, coinciding with our establishment of the mission. Additionally, we have supported Kuwait in various UN assemblies, especially during times of diplomatic disagreements with other nations," Ambassador Phohleli said.

Reflecting on her own experience, the ambassador noted, "When I presented my credentials to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, he expressed great joy, sending heartfelt messages to my King, emphasizing the im-

portance of continuing and strengthening the bond between our nations. He conveyed deep gratitude for Lesotho's support during Kuwait's challenging moments."

The ambassador extended her appreciation to the people of Kuwait, saying, "The government of Lesotho and I are sincerely grateful to His Highness the Amir for his leadership, and we wish him continued health, peace, and prosperity. His efforts for the betterment of the Kuwaiti people are truly commendable." Ambassador Phohleli also praised the warm reception she received upon her arrival, remarking that even her predecessors had described Kuwait as "a home away from home."

Looking ahead, she shared that Lesotho would be celebrating the birth of its founder, Moshoeshe I, on March 11. "We are grateful for his unification of the tribes of Lesotho into a cohesive nation after British colonization," she added. Addressing visa procedures, the ambassador confirmed that the process between the two countries is seamless. "It's a straightforward process. Kuwaiti citizens wishing to visit Lesotho for tourism can easily apply online," she explained.

Furthermore, Ambassador Phohleli mentioned that a Mosotho (a person from Lesotho) currently



Ambassador of Lesotho, Manthabiseng Phohleli

resides in Kuwait, working as a gym trainer. "She applied through LinkedIn and initially worked in Saudi Arabia before coming to Kuwait. We are working closely with the Department of Manpower Authority to encourage more Basotho to work here, as they are known for their strong work ethic," she stated. The Kingdom of Lesotho, with a population of approximately 2.2 million, has Sesotho as its primary

Palestinian ambassador lauds Kuwait's stance

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, delivered a resolute and unequivocal address at the extraordinary Arab Summit in Egypt. His speech conveyed Kuwait's firm stance on the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people and the attempts to forcibly displace them, warning against efforts to eradicate the Palestinian cause.

Kuwait's assertion that the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people constitute ethnic cleansing underscores its unwavering commitment to its principles and red lines regarding the Palestinian issue. The country remains steadfast in its unconditional support for the Palestinian people in their pursuit of freedom, independence, and the establishment of their sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital.

His Highness the Crown Prince's address was a powerful reaffirmation of Kuwait's dedication to bolstering Palestinian resilience and a compelling call for Arab unity against all schemes aimed at uprooting the Palestinian people from their homeland. Kuwait, its leadership, and its people continue to stand at the forefront of efforts to uphold justice and support the Palestinian cause.



Rami Tahboub
Ambassador of Palestine

Sleep disruption linked to inflammatory immune changes and health risks

KUWAIT: New research conducted by Dr Fatema Al-Rashed, Scientist at Dasman Diabetes Institute which is founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, reveals insight into the impact sleep quality has on a person's immune system and how it could be linked to the development of diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The study, published in The Journal of Immunology, found that even a single night of 24-hour sleep deprivation in young, lean, and healthy individuals altered the profile of immune cells that help regulate the immune system to resemble that of individuals with obesity — a condition known to drive chronic inflammation.

This suggests that the immune system is highly sensitive to sleep and may adapt rapidly to changes in sleep pattern. According to the researchers, if these shifts persist, they could contribute to long-term inflammatory states and increase the risk of disease. Substantial evidence exists linking sleep disorders and disturbances to an array of chronic conditions and morbidity, such as type 2 diabetes and cardio-

vascular diseases. It's also known that poor health outcomes can be driven by chronic inflammation but the direct influence of sleep on circulating immune cells, such as monocytes, is not as well understood.

In this study, the researchers from the Dasman Diabetes Institute, analyzed the sleep patterns of 237 healthy adult participants of varying BMI, and took blood samples to profile the levels of different monocytes as well as markers of inflammation. They found that obese individuals had significantly lower sleep quality and higher chronic low-grade inflammation compared to the lean group.

Dr. Fatema Al-Rashed, who led the study, said: "Our findings underscore a growing public health challenge. Advancements in technology, prolonged screen time, and shifting societal norms are increasingly disruptive to regular sleeping hours. This disruption in sleep has profound implications for immune health and overall well-being." The researchers next want to explore in greater detail the mechanisms linking sleep deprivation to immune changes. They also want to find out if interventions such as structured sleep therapies or technology-use guidelines can reverse these immune alterations.

In the long term, we aim for this research to drive policies and strategies that recognize the critical role of sleep in public health. We envision workplace reforms and educational campaigns promot-



(Top - from left to right) Fahd Al-Mulla, Dr Fatema Al-Rashed and Rasheed Ahmed. (Above - left to right) Haleema Al-Saeed, Haya Al-Abduljader and Nadeem Akhter.

ing better sleep practices, particularly for populations at risk of sleep disruption due to technological and occupational demands. Ultimately, this could help mitigate the burden of inflammatory diseases like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases," Dr Fatema Al-Rashed.

doctors serve as the first line of defense in society, playing a crucial role in saving lives and providing essential healthcare services to all patients.

Chairman of the Kuwait Medical Association, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Tawala, also addressed the gathering, emphasizing that the annual Ramadan Ghabqa is a long-standing tradition aimed at fostering camaraderie among medical professionals in a relaxed setting away from workplace pressures.

Dr. Al-Tawala highlighted that the medical profession goes beyond patient care; it is a solemn duty to serve the community. He commended the dedication and daily sacrifices of doctors, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where their commitment was instrumental in Kuwait's successful response to the crisis. He pointed out that while some countries experience delays and congestion in healthcare services, Kuwait stands out for its efficiency in scheduling medical appointments, surgeries, and diagnostic procedures, ranking among the fastest worldwide.

However, Dr Al-Tawala acknowledged the challenge of "continuous fatigue" among doctors, a global concern that necessitates sustainable solutions. He emphasized that excessive workloads and stress could impact doctors' health and performance, underscoring the need for a fair and supportive work environment that mitigates burnout and ensures the well-being of medical professionals. — KUNA

ing better sleep practices, particularly for populations at risk of sleep disruption due to technological and occupational demands. Ultimately, this could help mitigate the burden of inflammatory diseases like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases," Dr Fatema Al-Rashed.

MoI arrests 11 beggars, vows strict action

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced on Wednesday the arrest of 11 beggars of Arab and Asian nationalities, including eight women and three men, who were caught soliciting alms in front of mosques and markets. The arrests were made in line with directives from Acting Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah to combat negative social phenomena.

The General Department of Security Relations and Media stated that some of those apprehended had entered the country on visit visas or family residency permits, while others had been brought in as "loose labor" without permanent employment. The ministry is currently taking legal measures against companies found to have facilitated their entry through illegal means.

Authorities reiterated their firm stance against begging, warning that all violators will face deportation in accordance with their residency status. Under Article 22 (family visa), violators and their sponsors will be deported. Those under Article 18 (private sector employment) will be deported, with the company's file being closed. Meanwhile, under Article 20 (domestic workers), both the violator and their sponsor will face penalties, including a ban on future sponsorship or visa issuance. — KUNA

MoH reaffirms commitment to performance

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to enhancing technical and professional performance while preparing new generations of doctors in both the public and private sectors. He emphasized that this initiative is a cornerstone in elevating Kuwait's healthcare services and advancing the medical sector.

Speaking to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) during the Ramadan Ghabqa hosted by the Kuwait Medical Association, Minister Al-Awadhi highlighted the Ministry of Health's continuous efforts to develop medical professionals. These efforts include ongoing medical education, inviting visiting doctors, and collaborating with leading international institutions — all in alignment with the ministry's dedication to delivering top-tier healthcare services.

He stressed that investing in human capital and pro-

viding essential support for training national medical cadres are integral to the ministry's strategic plan. This commitment is aimed at achieving excellence in scientific research to better serve patients and ease their suffering, thereby reinforcing the health sector and strengthening Kuwait's global medical standing.

Minister Al-Awadhi commended the efficiency of national medical professionals, noting their significant contributions to global scientific research. He emphasized that their achievements have gained international recognition, with their work featured in prestigious medical and research journals. Acknowledging the exceptional caliber of Kuwaiti medical professionals, he underscored the importance of safeguarding doctors' rights and fostering a conducive work environment that encourages professional growth.

He also lauded the collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the Kuwait Medical Association, and other medical organizations. "Our presence at the Doctors' House Ghabqa today underscores the importance of unity and communication within the medical community. This gathering strengthens professional bonds and highlights our collective commitment to healthcare excellence. I extend my gratitude to our doctors for their unwavering dedication to their humanitarian mission, which is unparalleled in any other profession," he stated. Minister Al-Awadhi reiterated that

Local

طلبات

‘No security breach’,
talabat reassures
its customers

KUWAIT: talabat Kuwait reassures its customers and partners that no security breach has occurred, following recent misinformation circulating on social media. The company confirms that all customer data, including payment information, remains secure and protected. talabat experienced a temporary technical issue affecting some orders processing, which was swiftly resolved. “At talabat, customer security and privacy are our top priorities. We implement best-in-class security protocols to safeguard customer information, and we assure our users that their data is fully protected.

The recent claims of a security breach are completely unfounded, and we remain committed to providing a safe and seamless ordering experience,” said Bader Al-Ghanim, Vice President & Managing Director of talabat Kuwait. talabat Kuwait remains fully compliant with international security standards, including PCI-DSS certification, ensuring encrypted and secure transactions. The company actively monitors its systems to prevent unauthorized access and remains committed to transparency with its users and partners.

Kuwait Heritage



In the yard of the Dickson house, Violet Dickson is kneeling on the ground while her cousin, Betty Lindley, stands beside a horse in 1938. (Source: Mohammad Al-Habib, Kuwait Through the Dickson Family's Lens, published in Kuwait, 2019.) — Compiled by Mahmoud Zakaria, researcher in heritage.

NBK warns customers about the risks
of fraudulent online shopping offers

Bank reaffirms its commitment to ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign

KUWAIT: In line with its unwavering commitment to fostering financial literacy and empowering all segments of society, NBK continues to bolster its support for the “Let’s Be Aware” banking awareness campaign. Spearheaded by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). As part of its commitment to customer protection, NBK is actively educating the public about fraudulent online shopping offers, often promoted through social media.

These scams typically feature links to fake applications or websites that lure victims with enticing discounts and promotions. Designed to mimic legitimate platforms, these fraudulent sites deceive users into providing sensitive personal and banking details—such as account and credit card numbers—ultimately compromising their financial security. NBK urges customers to remain vigilant and avoid engaging with suspicious links, reinforcing its dedication to safeguarding the community from cyber threats.

NBK advises customers to exercise caution and



avoid being misled by deceptive shopping deals that promise steep discounts. The bank emphasizes the importance of verifying website URLs and refraining from clicking on links from unknown sources—especially those received via email that advertise offers that appear too good to be true.

Furthermore, NBK cautions customers about the risks of saving credit card details on e-commerce websites or browsers for faster future transactions. The bank highlights that such platforms are susceptible to security breaches, potentially exposing

stored banking data to theft. The Bank also emphasizes that it will never request personal information via email, text messages, or phone calls. Additionally, NBK warns customers against responding to such messages, as they are often fraudulent attempts to steal banking credentials, sensitive data, or funds.

NBK remains vigilant in monitoring emerging fraud tactics, educating customers, and providing clear guidance on how to stay protected. Through comprehensive awareness materials shared across its digital platforms, the bank continuously emphasizes the importance of engaging only with trusted links and avoiding interactions with unidentified sources. Harnessing its vast communication capabilities, NBK utilizes all its digital channels—boasting the largest following among Kuwaiti banks—to ensure the widest dissemination of the campaign’s messages, effectively reaching the largest possible audience.

Led by the Central Bank of Kuwait in partnership with Kuwait Banking Association, “Let’s Be Aware” stands as the region’s most comprehensive finan-

cial literacy campaign. Aimed at empowering bank customers, the initiative delivers essential education on critical financial topics. Key focus areas include practical steps to prevent fraud, strategies for maximizing banking services, and fostering a strong culture of savings and investment. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and tools to make informed financial decisions, the campaign strengthens financial security and resilience across Kuwait’s banking sector.

As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region, NBK remains a key supporter of the Central Bank of Kuwait’s initiatives aimed at enhancing financial literacy and promoting banking awareness across all segments of society. The bank actively organizes various educational events to keep the community informed about critical banking issues while also investing in specialized training programs for its employees. By strengthening expertise in fraud prevention and financial crime mitigation, NBK reinforces its commitment to safeguarding customers and upholding the integrity of the financial sector.

Kuwait sends
35th relief aid
plane to Sudan

KUWAIT: The 35th relief aid plane from Kuwait departed for Port Sudan on Thursday morning, carrying 40 tons of food supplies and tents to assist displaced individuals in Sudan. This initiative is part of the ongoing “Kuwait by Your Side” campaign, as reported by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS). Ambassador Khaled Al-Maqamis, Chairman of the KRCS Board of Directors, stated to KUNA that the relief mission was launched under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Al-Maqamis emphasized that this latest aid flight aligns with Kuwait’s continuous support for the Sudanese people, delivering crucial humanitarian supplies including 40 tons of food and tents aimed at alleviating the hardship faced by displaced families. He also extended his gratitude to the Kuwaiti Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Social Affairs, as well as the Kuwait Embassy in Sudan and the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) for their contributions to ensuring the success of the mission.

In addition to food and shelter, KRCS has provided medicines, medical supplies, and ambulances, in close coordination with SRCS to facilitate their distribution to the affected communities. Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Awad Karim Balah, speaking on Wednesday, commended the humanitarian efforts of KRCS, highlighting how these initiatives have significantly eased the suffering of those in need in Sudan and around the world. - KUNA

International Friends
Club organizes cultural,
social presentation

KUWAIT: The International Friends Club put together a cultural and social presentation and a “Graish” potluck for its new members, for the occasion of the upcoming holy month of Ramadan. The event was held in the “Yown Al Bahhar” heritage village. In addition to new and existing club members, the event was attended by Sheikhana Hanaa Bader Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Sheikhana Hala Bader Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and also the ambassadors of Sierra Leone, Kenya and Lesotho respectively Haja Ishata Thomas; Halima A Mohamud; and Manthabiseng Phohlele; as well as spouses of ambassadors and diplomats.

The presentation introduced new club members and diplomats to some of the Kuwaiti social traditions and customs associated with celebrating Ra-

madan, including the pre-Ramadan Kuwaiti tradition of celebrating “Al Graish”. The club’s advisor Narjes Alshatti, also explained the historical context of these Kuwaiti Ramadan traditions, the role of various members of society in contributing to them, and how these customs evolved over the years.

She also talked about the most popular Kuwaiti dishes that are particular to the month of Ramadan and how these dishes are prepared. After that, fellow members who came dressed in their respective countries’ traditional costume, shared how Ramadan is celebrated in their countries and some of the Ramadan traditions that are particular to each country. The members also shared dishes from their countries for the potluck. A contest was then held among the members to choose best costume and best dish.

This was followed by a musical and dance presentation by the Kenyan community, which was arranged by the ambassador of Kenya. At the culmination of the event, the club’s President Taiba wife of the Ambassador of Benin thanked the event’s participants for making this a special evening for all, as well as the management of the Yown Al Bahhar village for hosting this event, and the assistance they offered to make this event a success.





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After a murder, cartels loom over Mexico's new system of electing judges

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WEST BANK: People carrying some personal items walk along a devastated street as they leave the Nur Shams camp for Palestinian refugees, where Zionist forces allowed residents to retrieve belongings after issuing reported demolition notifications for several houses, in the occupied West Bank on March 5, 2025. — AFP

Zionist settler pressure on West Bank villages stirs annexation fears

Zionist settlement expansion undermines prospects for Palestinian state

BARDALA: Just meters from the last houses in Bardala, a Palestinian village at the northern end of the occupied West Bank, the Zionist entity's army has been bulldozing a dirt road and ditch between the community and open grazing land on the hills behind it. Zionist military told Reuters the works were for security and to allow it to patrol the area following the killing of a Zionist civilian in August near the village by a man from another town. It did not detail what it was building there.

Farmers from the fertile Jordan Valley village fear the army patrols and Zionist settlers moving in will exclude them from pastures that feed around 10,000 sheep and goats, as has happened in other parts of the West Bank, undercutting their livelihoods and eventually driving them from the village. Zionist settler outposts have appeared around the village since last year, with clusters of blue and white Zionist flags newly fluttering from nearby hilltops. The settlers intimidated semi-nomadic Bedouin shepherds to abandon their camps in the area last year, four Bedouin families and Zionist human rights NGOs told Reuters.

Over recent weeks, caravans and shelters have begun appearing on the scrub-covered hills a few hundred meters west of Bardala, on land behind the new track, Reuters reporters saw. Such temporary shelters have been the first signs of new outposts being

built. Reuters was unable to contact any of the new arrivals in the outposts around the village.

The tighter military control in the Jordan Valley and arrival of settler outposts in the area over the past months are new developments in a part of the West Bank that had mostly avoided the build up of Zionist's presence on the ground in central areas of the Palestinian territory. With each advance of Zionist settlements and roads, the territory becomes more fractured, further undermining prospects for a contiguous land on which Palestinians could build a sovereign state. Most countries consider the Zionist entity's settlements in the occupied West Bank to be illegal.

Zionist's pro-settler politicians have been emboldened by the return to the White House of US President Donald Trump, who has proposed Palestinians leave Gaza, a suggestion widely condemned across the Middle East and beyond as an attempt to ethnically cleanse Palestinian territories. Ibrahim Sawafta, a member of the Bardala village council, said two dozen farmers would be prevented from reaching grazing land if soldiers and settler outposts obstruct their free movement. Unable to keep their large flocks in pens within the village itself, they would be forced to sell.

"Bardala would be a small prison," he said, sitting on a bench outside his house in the village. He said the overall goal was "to restrict people, to force them

to leave the Jordan Valley." In response to Reuters questions, the army said the area behind the dirt road outside Bardala was designated as a live fire zone but included "a passage" manned by Zionist soldiers, suggesting limitations on free movement in the area.

It said the passage would allow for "the continuation of daily life and the fulfilment of residents' needs," without giving further details. The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as the Yesha Council and the Jordan Valley Council, that represent settlers in the West Bank did not reply to requests for comment for this story. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Sawafta said gunmen had been known to come into the area from towns to the west and the barrier appeared intended to make access more difficult and force traffic through main roads with security checkpoints under Zionist control. But he said the effect of the move would be to obstruct access to the land, which in some cases was owned by villagers.

The activity around Bardala is part of a wider Zionist effort to reshape the West Bank. Over the year and a half since war broke out in Gaza, settlement activity has accelerated in areas seen as the core of a future Palestinian state. In recent weeks, army raids in refugee camps near volatile West

Bank cities, including Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas, near Bardala, have sent tens of thousands of people fleeing their homes, fueling fears of permanent displacement. The raids come amid a renewed push to formally absorb the West Bank as part of the Zionist entity, a proposal supported by some of Trump's aides. Zionist military has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Middle East war.

Bardala, with a population of about 3,000, lies a few meters from the pre-1967 line separating the West Bank from the Zionist entity. It prospered quietly over the past 30 years as the Zionist entity's settlement movement swallowed up thousands of hectares of land in other parts of the West Bank.

The cornfields and clusters of plastic-sheeted greenhouses where its farmers grow aubergines, peppers and zucchini for the markets of the West Bank and the Zionist entity underscore how fertile the land is in the narrow strip of valley alongside the Jordan River, running from the Dead Sea north towards the Sea of Galilee. But the new Zionist-controlled path will squeeze the village against Highway 90, a road that runs north-south along the riverine border with Jordan from the Dead Sea. Highway 90 ends at the separating line between the West Bank and Zionist entity, just outside the village. The separating line is marked by a high fence. — Reuters

'Erratic' cyclone creeps towards eastern Australia

GOLD COAST: An "erratic" tropical cyclone lingered off Australia's eastern coast on Thursday, bringing drenching rains and record-breaking waves to a heavily populated region rarely hit by typhoons. Tropical Cyclone Alfred was 250 kilometers (155 miles) east of busy Brisbane city on Thursday afternoon, but government forecasts warned its slow and "erratic" crawl towards the mainland was growing difficult to predict.

Some four million people were in the firing line along a 400-kilometre (250-mile) stretch of coastline expected to see the worst of the storm. "We're already seeing gales developing on the coastal fringe," Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Sarah Scully told AFP. "There have been very large waves and powerful swells. That's generated by Alfred lingering in the Coral Sea and creating a whole lot of wave energy."

A 12.4-metre (40-foot) wave was recorded on the Gold Coast south of Brisbane, the largest swell ever picked up by that monitoring station. Daring surfers paddled out to catch the supercharged waves, ignoring the threat of US\$10,000 fines for "reckless behavior". "I am just staggered that people would be so stupid. It is a huge act of stupidity," said acting Gold Coast mayor Donna Gates.

Wild weather

Alfred was initially forecast to strike land late on Thursday evening. But the



GOLD COAST: Young men play in sea foam created by record-breaking waves as the outer fringe of Tropical Cyclone Alfred started whipping eastern Australia, in Coolangatta on March 6, 2025. — AFP

slow-moving storm - churning towards the coast at just 7 kilometers per hour (4 mph) - was now more likely to make landfall late on Friday or early Saturday. While this gave coastal hamlets more time to stack sandbags and stockpile food, Scully warned it also left them exposed to wild weather on the storm's outer edges.

"It will mean that the coastal areas are exposed for a longer period of time," she said. Some towns had already seen "well over" 200 millimeters (8 inches) of rain, Scully said. Alfred would cross the coast somewhere near the bustling metropolitan hub of Brisbane, the weather bureau said.

It would be the first cyclone to make landfall in the area for more than 50 years. "There's a lot of people in harm's way here. We're talking about something like four-and-a-half million Australians," said senior

government minister Jim Chalmers. "It's rare for a cyclone to be this far south and to threaten such a huge population area."

American rap star Ice Cube was caught in the storm ahead of concert dates in southern cities Sydney and Melbourne. "I'm staying clear of it. I haven't been through a cyclone before. I can check this off my bucket list for sure," he told Australia's Channel 10. "I'm right here on the beach. The beach looks like it is going to be in the lobby in a minute."

Strong winds knocked out power to more than 4,000 homes, utility company Essential Energy said. More than 900 schools across Queensland state and the flood-prone northern rivers region of neighboring New South Wales were closed on Thursday morning, education department officials said. — AFP

Accused IS militant appears in US court over Kabul attack

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia: An Islamic State operative who allegedly helped carry out the 2021 suicide bombing outside Kabul airport during the chaotic US military withdrawal from Afghanistan appeared in a Virginia court Wednesday. Mohammad Sharifullah has confessed to scouting out the route to the airport, where the suicide bomber later detonated his device among packed crowds trying to flee days after the Taliban seized control of Kabul, the Justice Department said.

The blast at the Abbey Gate killed at least 170 Afghans as well as 13 US troops who were securing the airport's perimeter. Sharifullah appeared in a court in Alexandria, near the US capital Washington, wearing light blue prison garb and a black face mask. He was officially appointed a public defender and provided with an interpreter. He did not enter a plea. His next appearance will be in the same courthouse on Monday, and he will stay in custody until then, the judge said.

Sharifullah — who the US says also goes by the name Jafar and is a member of the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) branch in Afghanistan and Pakistan — was detained by Pakistani authorities and brought to the United States. President Donald Trump triumphantly announced his arrest Tuesday in an address to Congress, calling him "the top terrorist responsible for that atrocity".

ISK militants gave Sharifullah a cell-phone and a SIM card and told him to check the route to the airport, accord-

ing to the Justice Department's affidavit in the case. When he gave it the all-clear, they told him to leave the area, it said. "Later that same day, Sharifullah learned of the attack at HKIA described above and recognized the alleged bomber as an ISIS-K operative he had known while incarcerated," the affidavit said, using an alternative acronym for the group. Sharifullah is charged with "providing and conspiring to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization resulting in death."

Trump thanked Islamabad "for helping arrest this monster". "This evil ISIS-K terrorist orchestrated the brutal murder of 13 heroic Marines," US Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a statement. Sharifullah also admitted to involvement in several other attacks, the Justice Department said, including the March 2024 Moscow Crocus City Hall attack, in which he said "he had shared instructions on how to use AK-style rifles and other weapons to would-be attackers" by video.

The United States withdrew its last troops from Afghanistan in Aug 2021, ending a chaotic evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans who had rushed to Kabul's airport in the hope of boarding a flight out of the country. Images of crowds storming the airport, climbing onto aircraft as they took off — and some clinging to a departing US military cargo plane as it rolled down the runway — aired on news bulletins around the world. — AFP

International

After a murder, cartels loom over Mexico's new system of electing judges

More than 6,000 candidates will compete for judge and magistrate positions

ACAPULCO: Clerical workers in an Acapulco courthouse heard the shots ring out as they were wrapping up their workday. Gunmen had opened fire on Magistrate Edmundo Roman Pinzon, a former president of the highest court in Guerrero state, killing him instantly as he tried to pull out of the parking lot. The December 11 killing happened months before thousands of candidates will vie for federal judge and magistrate positions in an election that marks a sea change in how Mexico runs its judicial system after years of rampant lawlessness.

In a country that last year endured the bloodiest political elections in its modern history, the heightened public exposure of those competing for the prestigious posts has sparked fears that the candidates will be easy targets. "Undoubtedly all of us are at risk to suffer an attack," Ynocente Orduno, former president of Guerrero's judges' association, said in an interview at his office in the courthouse where Roman was killed.

Roman's position is expected to be on the ballot in Guerrero's local judicial elections slated for 2027. Two legal professionals in Acapulco who knew Roman and spoke to Reuters said many in the community believe the magistrate was targeted directly for his work.

Guerrero's attorney general and Mexico's security secretary have announced at least three arrests in the case, including a person suspected of links to organized crime, according to local media. Authorities have not disclosed a motive and the prosecutor declined to comment. The June 1 elections are part of a reform passed last year that overhauls the country's judicial system. Around 5,000 candidates are vying for more than 840



MEXICO CITY: Outgoing Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador waves upon arrival at the inauguration ceremony of Mexico's President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum at the Congress of the Union in Mexico City on October 1, 2024. — AFP

federal positions in June, including Supreme Court justices. Another 1,737 candidates will compete for local positions in 17 states. Other states will hold their local elections in the coming years.

President Claudia Sheinbaum's mentor and predecessor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said the reform was necessary to root out corruption and better serve the interests of ordinary citizens. But it has raised fears that judges will be targeted by criminal gangs. Ahead of the 2024 elections that Sheinbaum and her party won in a landslide, 37 candidates were assassinated, which human rights monitors largely link to organized crime.

Reuters spoke to six judicial professionals, security experts, politicians and academics who questioned how the gov-

ernment will keep the election safe. Mexico is up against a budget crunch and a depleted National Guard as it focuses on collaboration with the United States at its shared border.

"Mexico is going through a very important (deficit) crisis, there will not be money for these conditions," said Jose Ramon Cossio of Tec de Monterrey university, a former Mexican Supreme Court justice. Mexico's autonomous election body INE serves as a conduit between candidates who report threats and authorities, but any protection measures fall to the federal government, according to Claudia Zavala, an electoral advisor at INE. A spokeswoman for Sheinbaum reiterated INE's role in requesting security for candidates and said "normally, if there

is a request, security is assigned to them." She did not elaborate on a specific plan or budget resources dedicated to candidate security.

'Justice by the strongest'

Orduno, a judge of almost three decades, acknowledged it would be financially difficult for the government to fully protect every candidate, but implored officials to take the issue more seriously. At least 22 local judicial professionals, including Roman, have been killed in Mexico since 2012, according to think tank Mexico Evalua. In the majority of cases, authorities did not publicize the motives for the killings, though Mexico Evalua found at least four to be associated with the judges' work. When Reuters visited the courthouse in Acapulco's rough Las Playas neighborhood in February, a state police officer stood outside. At the door, there were no security checks and no surveillance cameras. Members of the public moved freely between floors. An abandoned car with smashed windows sat parked outside.

Guerrero state is one of the most dangerous areas of the country to campaign. A mayoral candidate in the town of Coyuca de Benitez was shot point-blank at a rally just days before the 2024 elections. In October, the newly sworn-in mayor of state capital Chilpancingo was brutally murdered and decapitated.

"I could foresee a scenario where (cartels) are supporting a particular candidate, and another candidate on the other side is equally as popular. The threat of violence or coercion is very strong," said Mike Ballard, director of intelligence at international security firm Global Guardian. "Then you end up with a number of judges who are in the pockets of the

cartels, which is not going to be a positive thing for fairness or democracy in Mexico," Ballard said. Sheinbaum is trying to control a worsening security crisis in the country, which has recorded an average of 78 homicides daily since she took office in October, according to pollster TResearch. Without real protection available, cartels could strong-arm their opponents to drop out, said Cossio, the former Supreme Court justice. "If Mexico is left without justice, you are opening the doors for justice by the strongest," said Cossio.

Not enough police

Ramiro Solorio, an attorney and law professor who has made three unsuccessful bids for mayor of Acapulco, knows the risks. When he started receiving death threats ahead of last year's election, Solorio reported them and INE activated a protocol that prompted protection by the National Guard. "There will not be enough police to follow each candidate," Solorio said.

He pointed to security for government officials and questioned why it should be different for those in the judicial branch. "The president, the governor, secretaries... they have security even for their families," Solorio said. On a recent visit to Acapulco, Guerrero Governor Evelyn Salgado was flanked by members of her security team as she prepared to depart a busy street after speaking to journalists. Asked about candidate security, Salgado said coordination with Sheinbaum's administration has been "perfect." "As always, a security protocol that we have for each election will be followed to guarantee that the elections are peaceful," Salgado said. Then her team ushered her into an SUV and drove away. — Reuters

Modern slavery cases in Britain reach record high

LONDON: The number of potential modern slavery victims in Britain rose to a record last year, official statistics showed on Thursday, highlighting a growing crime that experts say requires the government to undertake urgent policy reforms. Home Office figures showed there were 19,125 referrals of

potential victims into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) — Britain's system for identifying and protecting victims — in 2024, surpassing the 2023 record of around 17,000.

Modern slavery, which can include human trafficking, slavery, servitude or forced labor, has been rising globally due to a mix of poverty, conflict and migration, affecting millions of people.

The crime takes various forms in Britain, where men, women and children can be forced into exploitative work in the drug or sex trades, car washes, nail salons, private homes or the social care sector.

"These statistics are not just numbers, they are individuals with voices, voices that the Government

need to listen to," said Britain's independent anti-slavery commissioner Eleanor Lyons. "A cross-government modern slavery strategy is needed that will enable law enforcement to prioritize tackling this crime." The real number of people living in modern slavery in Britain is estimated to be around 130,000, according to human rights group Anti-Slavery International.

Around 23 percent of the referrals into the NRM represented British nationals, the top nationality, while Albanians were the second most referred nationality at 13 percent, followed by Vietnamese people at 11 percent. About 31 percent, or nearly 6,000, of the referrals were children. Charities and lawmakers have urged Britain to change its approach to tackling mod-

ern slavery, by ensuring stronger enforcement of labor laws and reforming immigration policy, which has focused on stopping illegal migration.

Tougher immigration policies are leaving thousands of people trapped in modern slavery and less likely to come forward for fear of being deported, Reuters reported last month. "(Today's) figures reinforce a crucial point: modern slavery is a crime against individuals and must not be conflated with immigration offences," Lyons said. The government has pledged to hire dozens more caseworkers to process claims for support in the NRM. More than 17,000 people were waiting for a second-stage decision on their claim at the end of last year, official data showed. — AFP

US holds secret talks with Hamas...

Continued from Page 1

"We lack drinking water. People are complaining of lack of water in general. We cannot get rid of the waste, which affects the groundwater," Abu Hamam Al-Hasanat, a 34-year-old who lives in the Gaza Strip, told AFP.

Trump's hawkish language came after the United States confirmed unprecedented direct talks with Hamas, with the US envoy on hostage affairs, Adam Boehler, discussing American hostages. "Look, dialogue and talking to people around the world to do what's in the best interest of the American people is something that the president" believes is right, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Egyptian security officials confirmed to Reuters on Thursday that talks between the Trump envoy and Hamas had taken place, and were also attended by Egyptian and Qatari mediators. The Egyptian sources said talks ended in a positive spirit, indicating the sides may soon move towards negotiating the second phase of the deal.

The United States had refused direct contact with the Palestinian fighters since banning them as a terrorist organization in 1997. But Leavitt said the hostage envoy "has the authority to talk to anyone". Five Americans are believed to remain among the captives — four have been confirmed dead and one, Edan Alexander, is believed to be alive.

The Egyptian military offensive in Gaza has killed at least 48,440 people, mostly civilians. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Hamas to take seriously Trump's threats of retaliation. "He doesn't say these things and not mean it, as folks are finding out around the world. If he says he's going to do something, he'll do it," he said.

Trump triggered global outrage by suggesting the

Malala returns to hometown 13 yrs...

Continued from Page 1

Yousafzai was accompanied by her father, husband and brother for the high-security visit by helicopter which lasted just three hours. Authorities have been cautious in allowing her to return to Shangla district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where militancy has soared following the return of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul in 2021. The area was sealed off for several hours to provide security for her visit on Wednesday, which included a stop at local education projects backed by her Malala Fund.

"Her visit was kept highly secret to avoid any untoward incidents," a senior administration official told AFP on condition of anonymity as he was not autho-



GAZA: A girl shows a traditional lantern to a toddler, ahead of the iftar fast-breaking meal during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, at a displacement camp at the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on March 5, 2025. — AFP

United States "take over" the Gaza Strip and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East", while forcing its Palestinian inhabitants to relocate to Egypt or Jordan. Arab leaders have sought support for an alternative plan that would finance Gaza's reconstruction through a trust fund, and would see the return of the Palestinian Authority to the territory.

Hugh Lovatt at the European Council on Foreign Relations said the Arab leaders' plan was "far more realistic than what the Trump administration is proposing". But Ghassan Khatib, a Palestinian political analyst and former Palestinian Authority minister, was skeptical. "It doesn't make sense to expect (the Zionist entity) to drop the plan of Trump and to adopt the plan of the Arabs. There's no chance." — Agencies

alized to speak to the media. "Even the locals were unaware of her plans to visit." The Pakistan Taleban is a separate but closely linked group to the Afghan Taleban and controlled swaths of the border regions at the time Yousafzai was shot.

Militants had ordered girls to stay home, but she continued to secretly go to school and wrote a blog about her experience. She went on to become an education activist and the world's youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner at age 17. In January, she addressed Muslim world leaders at an education conference in Islamabad where she called for action against the Afghan Taleban, who have banned teenage girls from going to school.

Her hometown visit comes in a week marred by violence in Pakistan, with 18 civilians and soldiers killed in an overnight suicide attack on a military compound in the same province. "I pray for peace in every corner of our beautiful country. The recent attacks, including in Bannu yesterday, are heartbreaking," Yousafzai said of the attack. — AFP

Global sea ice cover hits record low amid global hot streak

PARIS: Global sea ice cover reached a historic low in February, Europe's climate monitor said Thursday, with temperatures spiking up to 11C above average near the North Pole as the world continued its persistent heat streak. Copernicus Climate Change Service said last month was the third hottest February, with planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions stoking global temperatures.

That helped push combined Antarctic and Arctic sea ice cover — ocean water that freezes and floats on the surface — to a record minimum extent of 16.04 million sq km on Feb 7, Copernicus said. "February 2025 continues the streak of record or near-record temperatures observed throughout the last two years," said Samantha Burgess of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, which runs the Copernicus climate monitor. "One of the consequences of a warmer world is melting sea ice, and the record or near-record low sea ice cover at both poles has pushed global sea ice cover to an all-time minimum."

Decreased ice cover has serious impacts over time on weather, people and ecosystems — not just within the region, but globally. When highly reflective snow and ice give way to dark blue ocean, the same amount of the sun's energy that was bounced back into space is absorbed by water instead, accelerating the pace of global warming. Antarctic sea ice, which largely drives the global figure at this time of year, was 26 percent below average across February, Copernicus said.

It said the region may have hit its annual summer minimum towards the end of the month, adding that if confirmed in March this would be the second-lowest minimum in the satellite record. The Arctic, where ice cover normally grows to an annual winter maximum in March, has seen record monthly lows since December, with February seeing ice cover eight percent below average for the month.

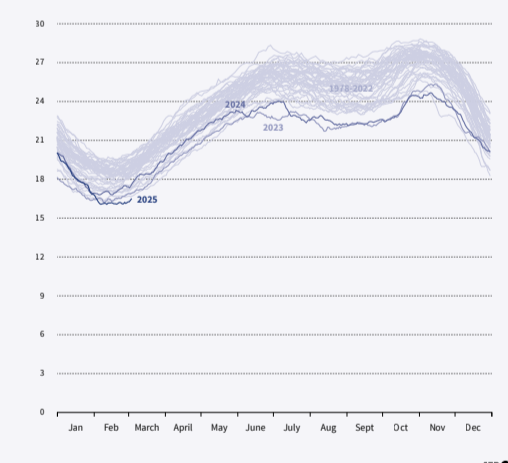
"The current record low global sea ice extent revealed by the Copernicus analysis is of serious concern as it reflects major changes in both the Arctic and Antarctic," said Simon Josey, Professor of Oceanography at the UK's National Oceanography Centre. He added that warm ocean and atmospheric temperatures "may lead to an extensive failure of the ice to regrow" in the Antarctic during the southern hemisphere winter.

Heat streak

Globally, February was 1.59 degrees Celsius hotter than pre-industrial times, Copernicus said, adding that the December to February period was the second warmest on record. While temperatures were below average last month over parts of North

Global sea ice extent reaches new record minimum in February

Daily global sea ice extent (both polar regions) in millions of km² from Oct 1978 to Mar 4, 2025



America, Eastern Europe and across large areas of eastern Asia, it was hotter than average over northern Chile and Argentina, western Australia and the southwestern United States and Mexico.

Temperatures were particularly elevated north of the Arctic Circle, Copernicus added, with average temperatures of 4C above the 1991–2020 average for the month, and one area near the North Pole hitting 11C above average. Copernicus said a lack of historical data from polar regions makes it difficult to give precise warming estimates compared to the pre-industrial period. Oceans, a vital climate regulator and carbon sink, store 90 percent of the excess heat trapped by humanity's release of greenhouse gases. Sea surface temperatures have been exceptionally warm over 2023 and 2024, and Copernicus said readings in February were the second highest on record for the month.

Climate scientists had expected the exceptional heat spell across the world to subside after a warming El Nino event peaked in January 2024 and conditions gradually shifted to a cooling La Nina phase. But the heat has lingered at record or near-record levels ever since, sparking debate among scientists.

A single year above the Paris Agreement limit of 1.5C warming from pre-industrial levels does not mark a breach of the climate deal, but with record-breaking temperatures last year scientists warn that target is rapidly slipping out of reach. In the 20 months since mid-2023, only July of last year dipped below 1.5C, Copernicus said.

The EU monitor uses billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations to aid its climate calculations. Its records go back to 1940, but other sources of climate data — such as ice cores, tree rings and coral skeletons — allow scientists to expand their conclusions using evidence from much further in the past. Scientists say the current period is likely the warmest the Earth has been for the last 125,000 years. — AFP

International

Hong Kong top court quashes conviction of Tiananmen vigil activists

Judges cite miscarriage of justice in overturning activists' prison sentences

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's top court quashed the prison terms of three Tiananmen vigil activists on Thursday, saying it was a "miscarriage of justice" to jail them for refusing to submit information to national security police. The judgment is a stinging rebuke to the government, which has targeted dissent using expansive powers under a national security law imposed by Beijing after Hong Kong's huge pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The law can be used to demand information from alleged "foreign agents" and authorities used that power in 2021 on the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance, which organized vigils to mark Beijing's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown before those events were banned. Three group leaders — Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong — were jailed, each for four and a half months, after they refused to turn over details on group members and finances.

But five judges at the Court of Final Appeal sided with the trio on Thursday and said the prosecution "made it impossible for them to have a fair trial". "The court unanimously allows the appeals," Chief Justice Andrew Cheung said. Tang, who had finished serving his prison term, said the ruling was a vindication of his group and urged people not to forget the victims of the Tiananmen crackdown.

"This is hugely gratifying for those who support the Alliance and its volunteers," he told reporters outside the court. "I hope we can prove in the future that the 1989 democracy movement (in China) was not a counter-revolutionary riot." The Alliance is facing more serious subversion charges under Hong Kong's national security law and the historical narrative surrounding Tiananmen is expected to be a key point of contention at an upcoming trial.

Redacted evidence

Prosecutors earlier argued the police chief could order people to hand over information when he "reasonably believed" they were foreign agents, without needing to prove it in court. But top judges said that was a misreading of the law and the police chief made "no attempt" to prove the Alliance was in fact a foreign agent when issuing the 2021 demand.

Judges also blasted prosecutors for heavily redacting evidence that purported to show the Alliance's overseas links, leaving "pages often completely covered in black ink". "The striking feature of the exhibits is that a very large part of each document was redacted," they wrote.

"Non-disclosure of the redacted facts in any event deprived the appellants of a fair trial so that their convictions involved a miscarriage of justice." Hong Kong used to be the only place on Chinese soil where people could publicly mourn the deadly clampdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, but commemorations have gone underground in recent years. Hong Kong has arrested 320 people for national security crimes and convicted 161 of them as of March 1. Defendant Chow, a lawyer-turned-activist, remains behind bars awaiting trial in the Alliance subversion case, which could land her in jail for life.

Chow is in good spirits because "she is doing what she feels is right", her mother said after the ruling. Chow represented herself in a January hearing and urged the top judges to stop their "complicity" in a police state.

The Court of Final Appeal is keen to shake off the perception of a credibility crisis after a recent exodus of foreign judges, some of whom cited politics as a reason for leaving. In a separate ruling on



HONG KONG: Hong Kong activist Tang Ngok-kwan (center) leaves the Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong on March 6, 2025, after the top court ruled in his favor and quashed his jail term for refusing to hand over information to the city's national security police. — AFP

Thursday, the same Hong Kong court ruled against activist Tam Tak-chi over a colonial-era sedition offence. Tam, who is serving a jail sentence of more than three years, argued that prosecutors needed to prove he intended to incite violence.

Judges said the case was largely "transitional" as Hong Kong authorities had already revamped the law last year, so that people can be convicted of sedition even if no intention to incite public disorder or violence was proven. — AFP

Sri Lanka police seek public help to arrest chief

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's police issued a public appeal Thursday to locate their fugitive chief, who has been missing since a court order for his arrest following the death of an officer. Spokesman Buddhika Manatunga said they had been unable to find Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon despite deploying several special units. "We urge the public to provide any information about his whereabouts," Manatunga told reporters in Colombo. "We also warn that anyone harboring the IGP will be prosecuted for obstructing justice."

Manatunga admitted that the failure to locate their own chief had "undermined public confidence in the police force". A foreign travel ban has been imposed in case he tries to flee the island. "It is a serious matter, and we are working with more vigour to arrest him," he added. "As someone who is aware of the law, the IGP should have complied with the court order and surrendered," Manatunga said.

A magistrate ordered Tennakoon's arrest last week following allegations that he had authorized an illegal raid on a hotel in 2023. Tennakoon had ordered a unit from Colombo to search for illegal drugs at the hotel in the southern coastal resort town of Weligama, about 150 kilometers (95 miles) from the capital. Local police, unaware of the undercover operation, confronted the unit, sparking a gun battle in which one officer was killed and another was critically wounded. No drugs were found.

Tennakoon was controversially appointed as police chief in November 2023, but his appointment was challenged in the Supreme Court, which suspended him last July pending the outcome of a hearing. He was given the top job despite the country's highest court ruling in a separate case that he had tortured a suspect in custody by rubbing menthol balm on his genitals. The court ordered Tennakoon to pay half a million rupees (\$1,600) in compensation to the victim, but the government at the time ignored judicial orders to take disciplinary action against him. — AFP

Malaysia aims to be 'global leader' in carbon capture

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's parliament on Thursday passed legislation intended to help the country become a "global leader" in carbon capture, utilization and storage — a technology touted as reducing planet-warming emissions. The bill provides a legal framework for the so-called CCUS, which the Southeast Asian nation says could be a key economic driver, worth up to \$250 billion and the source of hundreds of thousands of jobs by 2050. CCUS seeks to eliminate emissions created by burning fossil fuels for energy and from industrial processes.

The carbon is captured at source and stored permanently in various underground environments. It has been promoted by emitting sectors including heavy industry and the oil and gas sector, and has backing from the United Nations' key scientific panel on climate change as a solution for difficult-to-decarbonize industries.

However, some scientists and environmentalists view it as a license to continue burning fossil fuels and cite doubts over its effectiveness, given its cost and complexity. Malaysia's Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli said the bill would help the country address climate change, while strengthening its position as a "regional frontrunner in low-carbon technologies." CCUS offers a "new source of economic growth," he added. "This will enable Malaysia to become a global leader in CCUS because, at present, only Norway has successfully implemented it effectively." — AFP

Thailand repatriates hundreds more Chinese scam center workers

BANGKOK: Hundreds of Chinese nationals freed from Myanmar online scam centers flew home through Thailand on Thursday, as the kingdom said it aimed to repatriate 1,500 such workers a week. Thailand, Myanmar and China have been making efforts in recent weeks to clear out illegal cyberscam compounds on the Thai-Myanmar border where thousands of foreigners — mostly Chinese nationals — have been working. Under pressure from key ally Beijing, Myanmar has cracked down on some of the compounds, freeing around 7,000 workers from more than two dozen countries.

Around 600 Chinese nationals were returned from Myanmar through Thailand two weeks ago, and last week the three countries held talks in Bangkok to arrange further transferrals. Thai media broadcast footage on Thursday of coaches bringing hundreds of



BANGKOK: Alleged scam centre workers and victims from China handed over from Myanmar board a plane at Mae Sot Airport in Mae Sot in Thailand's Tak province on February 20, 2025. — AFP

Chinese workers from Myanmar and offloading them on to planes destined for China at Mae Sot airport.

Thai foreign ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura told reporters that "another group of Chinese nationals" were repatriated on Thursday, without saying how many. He added that Thailand plans to repatriate 1,500 people per week, or 300 each

weekday, with "regular repatriations of Chinese nationals every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday."

Mondays and Tuesdays would see other foreign nationals including Africans repatriated, he said, with the ministry coordinating with foreign embassies to help with "immediate" repatriations. The remaining freed workers have been languishing for weeks in sometimes squalid conditions in holding camps near the Thai border while officials organize their repatriation.

Many workers say they were lured or tricked into taking the work — defrauding strangers online with investment, romance and gambling scams — and suffered beatings and abuse. A Rwandan scam center worker who asked to remain anonymous told AFP on Wednesday that he had been trafficked into one of the compounds where he was tortured and had his money taken from him. "It's a big challenge. If I get home I will have a big challenge also," he said. Unsanitary conditions at the overcrowded makeshift encampments have raised concerns about possible disease outbreaks. "There are sick people... they need to be repatriated onto the Thai side as early as possible," Nikorndej said. — AFP

Vietnam expands cost-cutting drive with province merger plan

HANOI: Vietnam is planning to merge provinces and eliminate district-level authorities, the government said Thursday, as a streamlining drive aiming to slash billions of dollars from state budgets gathers pace. The cost-cutting measures have already seen the number of government ministries and agencies slashed from 30 to 22, and one in five public sector jobs will be cut over the next five years.

On Thursday, a statement on the government's website cited Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh as saying a "key and urgent task" was to complete the rearrangement of "administrative boundaries... merging some provinces... and cutting off the district level". State media said the merging of provinces is scheduled for this year,



HANOI: Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh takes part in a meeting with New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon at the Government Office in Hanoi on February 26, 2025. — AFP

aiming at "streamlining the apparatus and improving the quality, efficiency and effective distribution of resources". Communist-ruled Vietnam, a one-party state, is currently divided into 63 major cities and provinces,

under which there are around 700 administrative units at the district level and more than 10,000 at the communal level. Almost two million people worked in the public sector as of 2022, according to the government, which announced this year that 100,000 people would be made redundant or offered early retirement as part of the bureaucratic reforms.

It is unclear if there will be further job cuts as part of the provincial mergers, or which provinces will be affected. Vietnam's top leader To Lam, who last year became Communist Party general secretary following the death of his predecessor, has said that state agencies should not be "safe havens for weak officials". "If we want to have a healthy body, sometimes we must take bitter medicine and endure pain to remove tumors," Lam said in December.

However, there are fears the bureaucratic reforms could cause short-term chaos, with reports surfacing of log-jams in provincial offices as administrative procedures slow. Vietnam's foreign ministry has denied any impact on the investment and business environment. — AFP

South Korea air force jet accidentally drops bombs, injures civilians

SEOUL: Two South Korean Air Force fighter jets accidentally dropped eight bombs on a village during a joint training exercise with US forces on Thursday, officials said, with civilians among 15 people injured. The Air Force KF-16 jets were participating in joint US-South Korea live-fire training exercises in Pocheon, about 25 kilometers (16 miles) south of the heavily fortified border with nuclear-armed North Korea, military and government officials said. The two jets accidentally released eight MK-82 general-purpose bombs — four each — which landed "outside the designated firing range", the Air Force said.

"The pilot appears to have entered incorrect coordinates during the pre-flight preparation process," an Air Force official told reporters. One Pocheon resident told Yonhap news agency he was watching television when he heard the bombs explode. "I suddenly heard an enormous explosion, like a thunderclap, and the whole house shook," said the resident, who gave only his surname Park. "When I went outside, everything was in chaos," he said. The two aircraft were meant to fire simultaneously at a target as part of the exercise, the Air Force official said.

"It is believed that the first pilot entered incorrect coordinates, leading the second aircraft to drop its munitions as well." A defense ministry official said an investigation was underway. "We deeply regret the unintended release of the bombs, which resulted in civilian casualties, and wish those injured a swift recovery," the Air Force said in an earlier statement. It said it would "take all necessary measures, including compensation for damages".



SEOUL: South Korean soldiers and a policeman stand next to a damaged vehicle after a bomb accident at a village in Pocheon on March 6, 2025. — AFP

South Korea's National Fire Agency said the bombs had "fallen on a village during a South Korea-US joint exercise". That resulted in "casualties and property damage, with many displaced residents", it said. Fifteen people were injured, including civilians and military personnel, the agency said. One church building and sections of two houses were damaged, according to an agency statement.

'Simply unimaginable'

The mayor of Pocheon demanded that all military exercises cease until preventive measures were made. "While there have been accidents where bullets bounced off targets and landed elsewhere, it is simply unimaginable that an aircraft would directly fire at civil-

ian homes," said mayor Baek Young-hyeon. Baek told reporters that "until a thorough and acceptable safety plan is established to the satisfaction of Pocheon residents, all military exercises must be suspended". "I strongly urge the government to recognize the gravity of this incident and act swiftly in response," Baek said. The blast was felt at a center for seniors about a kilometer away.

"A sudden explosion shook the building. The windows shattered, and one of our teachers was injured and taken to the hospital," the centre's director, surnamed Yu, told Yonhap. "Fortunately, none of the seniors were hurt but they were so frightened that we sent them all home," Yu said. The South Korea-US "Freedom Shield" military exercises, one of the allies' largest annual joint exercises, are set to begin later this month. — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

Trump pauses tariffs for autos

Concerns mount over consumer impacts



BLAINE: Vehicles prepare to enter the US from Canada at the Peace Arch border crossing in Blaine, Washington on March 5, 2025. The United States will allow a one-month exemption from tariffs on auto imports from Canada and Mexico, the White House said on March 5, a day after steep levies on its neighbors came into effect. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Automakers received temporary reprieve Wednesday from US President Donald Trump's tariffs targeting Canada and Mexico, as concerns mounted over consumer impacts and talks with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau yielded no immediate breakthrough. Following discussions with the "Big Three" US automakers — Stellantis, Ford and General Motors — Trump decided to "give a one-month exemption on any autos coming through USMCA," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said, referring to the North American free trade pact. "They made the ask, and the president is happy to do it," Leavitt told reporters. Wall Street stocks rallied after the announcement, with shares of the three automakers each surging about six percent or more.

The American Automotive Policy Council said it applauded Trump's move. But prospects of wider relief were dampened after Trump's call with Trudeau. The US leader said he was unconvinced that Ottawa had done enough to address Washington's concerns over smuggling of the dangerous drug fentanyl. Canada contributes less than one percent of fentanyl to the United States' illicit supply, according to Canadian and US government data. But Trump has shrugged off these figures.

On social media, Trump accused Trudeau of using the dispute to "stay in power," but noted their discussion ended in a "somewhat" friendly manner. Later on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with his Canadian counterpart Melanie Joly, according to a US statement. "Secretary Rubio reaffirmed the importance of US-Canadian relations and reiterated that the Trump Administration will continue to put Americans' safety and national security first," said US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce.

Trump's sharp 25-percent tariffs on US imports from Canada and Mexico — with a lower rate for Canadian energy — kicked in Tuesday, sending global markets tumbling and straining ties between the neighbors. Ottawa swiftly announced retaliatory levies, while Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum plans to unveil her response at a mass rally on Sunday. Trump has cited illegal immigration and fentanyl trafficking in imposing tariffs, though he frequently lambasts alleged trade imbalances when discussing levies.

More exemptions?

Consumer items appear poised for US price hikes after Trump's tariffs on Canada, Mexico

and China. These include products like avocados, strawberries, electronics and gasoline. Of the agricultural products imported from Mexico to the United States in 2023, more than 72 percent were fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as beer and other alcohol, government figures showed. Trump said Tuesday that tariffs would bring "a little disturbance" to the world's biggest economy.

Leavitt defended Trump's remarks Wednesday as "realistic," saying that standing up to foreign nations "requires a little bit of disruption." But she added of tariffs: "The president is open to hearing about additional exemptions." Earlier Wednesday, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Trump was mulling market segments where he could provide temporary relief. Trump's tariffs on Mexico and Canada are a heavy blow given that the three countries have a trade pact — which the US president renegotiated in his first term.

'Other trading partners'

Sheinbaum said Wednesday that Mexico has to take key decisions for its future, adding that "if necessary, other trading partners will be sought." Expressing a preference for a negotiated solution, she has said she anticipates speaking to Trump

by phone on Thursday about tariffs on Mexican goods. She earlier vowed retaliatory action and called for supporters to gather in Mexico City's main square on Sunday to hear details on her government's response.

Lutnick told Bloomberg Television on Wednesday that broader reciprocal levies, tailored to each US trading partner, were still coming on April 2. Trump has vowed tariffs targeting friend and foe to remedy practices deemed as unfair, slamming the European Union particularly. Some of these duties could come immediately, although Lutnick said others could take a month or longer. France's President Emmanuel Macron called planned US tariffs on European products "incomprehensible," adding Wednesday that he hoped to "dissuade" Trump from them.

This week, Trump also inked an order doubling an additional tariff rate on Chinese imports from 10 percent to 20 percent, similarly over the country's alleged role in illicit fentanyl entering the United States. The duties pile atop existing ones on Chinese products. Beijing hit back, promising 10-percent and 15-percent tariffs on a range of US agricultural imports. Economists warn that tariff hikes stand to bog down economic growth and add to US inflation. — AFP

Mexico congress passes ban on GMO corn

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's Congress on Wednesday approved a constitutional reform that bans the cultivation of genetically modified corn and protects native grain varieties in the country. An initiative of President Claudia Sheinbaum, the legislation was approved by 97 votes to 16 in the Senate on Wednesday, a week after the lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, gave it the green light.

The reform must now be approved by the local legislatures of at least 17 of the country's 32 states, where the ruling Morena party has a majority. The Mexican government announced earlier this month that it had scrapped restrictions on the use of genetically modified corn for human consumption after a dispute resolution panel in December upheld a US complaint that the rules violated a free trade agreement.

Mexico also rescinded an order to gradually phase out the use of genetically modified corn for animal feed and industrial food production. The constitutional amendment approved on Wednesday makes no reference to imports, but stipulates that corn cultivation in Mexico "must be free" of genetic changes carried out using "techniques outside the boundaries of nature." It allows the planting of grains improved by selection methods based on traditional practices, and prohibits the growing of corn modified using "modern biotechnological techniques".

The Latin American nation is one of the world's largest buyers of corn, mostly yellow corn, with 95 percent coming from the United States, where most corn is genetically modified. Yellow corn is used mainly for fodder and various industries, including the manufacture of processed foods. Mexico is self-sufficient in the production of white corn, a staple food for its 129 million people. The reform approval comes at a time of trade tensions with the United States, after President Donald Trump's administration imposed 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico earlier this week. — AFP

Philippines' Palawan approves 50-year ban on new mining permits

MANILA: The local government in a resource-rich Philippine province has unanimously voted in favour of a 50-year ban on new mining permits, a decision its supporters said cannot be overridden by Manila. Palawan province, a UNESCO "biosphere reserve" known for its diverse flora and fauna, has become a hotbed for mining as the national government seeks to widen its market share for minerals like nickel, a key component of electric vehicle batteries.

But locals have increasingly pushed back against new mine proposals, with environmental groups and activists pointing to effects ranging from deforestation and flooding to the displacement of Indigenous peoples. There are currently 11 mines operated in Palawan, but scores of applications are pending. Environmental lawyer Grizelda Anda, who worked in support of Wednesday's vote, said Manila would not be able to legally overrule the local government's decision, which now awaits the governor's signature.

"The (Philippine Mining Act of 1995) provides that you have to get the endorsement of the LGU (local government unit)," she said. The new permit

Taiwan says TSMC investment 'historic moment' for US ties

TAIPEI: Taiwanese chipmaking giant TSMC's plan to invest \$100 billion in the United States was a "historic moment" for Taiwan-US ties, the island's President Lai Ching-te said on Thursday. TSMC, which counts Apple and Nvidia among its clients, announced the plan this week after US President Donald Trump threatened to impose tariffs on overseas-made chips. It will take the total amount the world's biggest chipmaker has pledged to invest in the United States to \$165 billion, which TSMC said was the "largest single foreign direct investment in US history".

Lai hailed the "historic moment for Taiwan-US relations" at a joint news conference with TSMC chairman and chief executive CC Wei at the Presidential Office. It followed Trump's accusations that Taiwan stole the US chip industry and his threats to



PUERTO PRINCESA, Philippines: Photo shows an aerial view of a tourist spot in Puerto Princesa in Palawan. The local board in a resource-rich Philippine province has unanimously passed a 50-year ban on new mining permits, a decision heralded by supporters who said it could not be overridden by Manila. — AFP

ban also imposes a 25-year pause on applications to renew or expand mining licenses. Existing mines can continue "as long as they do not increase their production" or move into new areas, Anda added.

"This is a really big win not just for the people but for the environment, especially Palawan, which is our last frontier here in the Philippines," said Jonila Castro, a spokesperson for the Manila-based Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment. "We hope that many other provinces will have the same moratorium."

Palawan resident Jade Cabasag, 23, whose church advocated for the ban, told AFP she was one of about 100,000 people who had signed a petition in favor of it. "We are more than just a sector that values our faith, but we also value our environment," she said, adding she was proud she could help in her "own little way". But the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines criticized the vote, saying in a statement on Thursday that the environmental concerns were overblown given laws it said provided "stringent" safeguards. — AFP



TAIPEI: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te and TSMC Chairman CC Wei shake hands after holding a joint press conference at the Presidential office on March 6, 2025. — AFP

impose tariffs of up to 100 percent, as well as Taipei's promises to invest more in the United States.

TSMC has long faced demands to move more of its production away from Taiwan, with fears that supplies of the critical technology could be disrupted in any conflict with Beijing. China has upped military pres-

sure on Taiwan in recent years to press its claim of sovereignty over the self-ruled island, where TSMC has its headquarters and the bulk of its fabrication plants. Trump recently ratcheted up the pressure on TSMC and other chip manufacturers by publicly mulling the introduction of tariffs of 25 percent, or higher, on all chips made outside the United States.

US demand 'extremely high'

Lai said on Thursday the government was not pressured by Washington "during TSMC's US investment process". Wei said TSMC's expansion was driven by growing demand from US clients and that it would not affect the company's investments in Taiwan. TSMC planned to build 11 new production lines in Taiwan this year to meet demand, Wei said, adding "our production capacity is not enough". "Whenever TSMC builds a production line in any location outside Taiwan, it is always driven by customer demand," Wei said. "We went to Japan because of Japanese customer demand, to Germany because of German customer demand, and four years ago to the US because of American customer demand," he said. "Now, we are increasing our investment because the demand from US customers is extremely high." — AFP

Business

Strikes hit Lufthansa profits as Olympics dent Air France

European rival Air France-KLM reports big drop in annual net income

FRANKFURT: German airline giant Lufthansa said Thursday its 2024 profits dived during a turbulent year marked by strikes, rising costs and delays in aircraft deliveries, but vowed a turnaround plan will boost earnings this year. European rival Air France-KLM also reported a big drop in its annual net income as some tourists avoided Paris during the Olympic Games last summer. Lufthansa reported a net profit of 1.38 billion euros (\$1.49 billion) last year, down 18 percent from 2023. Revenue rose slightly to 37.6 billion euros. "Strikes weighed on the passenger airlines," Lufthansa said in a statement.

It also pointed to problems caused by "significantly higher costs, especially in Germany" as well as "further delays in aircraft deliveries". The result was nevertheless better than a forecast of just over one billion euros by analysts surveyed by the financial data firm FactSet. It came after a two-year streak of improving earnings for one of Europe's biggest aviation groups, whose carriers include Lufthansa, Eurowings, Austrian, Swiss and Brussels Airlines. Like other airline groups, Lufthansa was hit hard when the Covid pandemic shut down global air travel and it had to be bailed out by the German government in 2020.

It recorded two years of losses before flying strongly back into profit as demand roared back when lockdowns were lifted. Air France-KLM said its net profit fell almost threefold to 317 million euros from 934 million in 2023 due to the Olympics effect. Its revenue rose 4.8 percent to 31.5 billion euros. The Fran-

co-Dutch group said the Paris Olympic Games cost the company 200 million euros in lost revenue as tourists decided to avoid the capital, plus 50 million euros in staff bonuses. Other factors included rising costs and a strong dollar.

Upbeat outlook

Lufthansa's poor results for 2024 came despite a seven-percent increase in passengers to 131 million. For 2025, Lufthansa gave an upbeat outlook, saying it was aiming for operating profits that were "significantly higher" than last year. The group's 2024 operating profit - a key figure that indicates a company's underlying health - fell nearly 40 percent to 1.6 billion euros compared to the previous year. A turnaround program launched last year for its flagship carrier, aimed at making hefty savings in the years ahead, will "lay the foundation for a sustainable increase in earnings", it pledged.

Lufthansa faced substantial turbulence in the first half of 2024 when it was hit by a wave of strikes as workers pushed for higher pay to combat inflation. The group's ground staff and cabin crew staged repeated walkouts, which Lufthansa slammed as "uncompromising" and said risked "damaging our guests, the company and ultimately our employees". Its problems worsened later in the year due to a string of issues, including weak market conditions and delayed aircraft deliveries. The Zionist-Hamas war and broader tensions in the Middle East had an impact, forcing Lufthansa and



FRANKFURT: Planes of German airline Lufthansa are seen parked during a strike at Frankfurt Airport in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. - AFP

Air France on occasion to suspend flights to and from several destinations in the region. The German group has also blamed EU climate regulations, particularly rules related to sustainable aviation fuels, for increasing costs, and last year introduced an environmental charge for fares in Europe to compensate. There has been some good news however. Lufthansa in January

finalized an agreement with Italy to acquire a minority stake in ITA Airways, the state-owned carrier born from the ashes of Alitalia. Lufthansa has operational control of ITA, and will gradually increase its holding in the carrier to 100 percent. "The complete integration of ITA Airways is expected to be completed after just 18 months," Lufthansa said Thursday. - AFP

Trump hosts crypto elite

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump, who has multiple ties to the crypto industry, will host the sector's top players at a White House summit on Friday, as the field enjoys renewed momentum following his election. The US crypto community rallied behind Trump's campaign, contributing millions of dollars towards his victory over Joe Biden, whose administration tightened regulations and expressed skepticism toward digital currencies. Now, they're seeking their support pay dividends. Trump has waded into the space personally as well, partnering with exchange platform World Liberty Financial and launching his own "Trump" memecoin in

January as his wife Melania did the same - moves that have prompted conflict of interest accusations. The president's "crypto czar," Silicon Valley investor David Sacks, will convene prominent founders, CEOs, and investors with members of a Trump working group to craft policies aimed at accelerating crypto growth and providing the legitimacy the industry has long wanted. Guests will include twins Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss, founders of platform Gemini, with reports that Brad Armstrong of Coinbase and Michael Saylor, the boss of major bitcoin investor MicroStrategy, will also be in attendance.

Hanging over the crypto resurgence is the fate of FTX, the once-leading crypto exchange that collapsed spectacularly when its CEO Sam Bankman-Fried was found to have defrauded clients massively. He is now serving a 25-year term in a US jail. For believers, cryptocurrencies represent a financial revolution that re-

duces dependence on centralized authorities while offering individuals freedom from traditional banking systems. Bitcoin, the world's most traded cryptocurrency, is heralded as an alternative to gold or as a hedge against currency devaluation and political instability.

Critics maintain these assets function primarily as speculative investments with questionable real-world utility, warning that excessive deregulation could leave taxpayers on the hook for cleaning up market crashes. Law enforcement agencies see digital assets as a means to launder ill-gotten money. The proliferation of "memecoins" - cryptocurrencies based on celebrities, internet memes, or pop culture rather than technical utility - presents another challenge. Much of the crypto industry frowns upon this practice because they fear it tarnishes the business, amid reports of quick pump-and-dump schemes that leave unwitting buyers paying for assets that end up worthless.

Despite his previous hostility toward cryptocurrencies, Trump has embraced the technology, declaring his intention to make the United States a crypto world power. His administration has already taken significant steps to clear regulatory hurdles. On Sunday, Trump confirmed plans for a strategic cryptocurrency reserve where the US government would deposit digital currency holdings acquired mainly from judicial seizures. Jacob Phillips of Lombard Finance called this potential move "one of the strongest endorsements the industry has ever seen," noting that several founders and teams have already relocated to the United States in response to the improving regulatory climate. Trump also appointed crypto advocate Paul Atkins to head the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Under Atkins, the SEC has dropped legal proceedings against major platforms like Coinbase and Kraken that were initiated during Biden's term. - AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 6 MARCH 2025

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,030	1,042	1,050	1,020	30	29,826,074	12	1.17%	16.29%	1,009	1,048	15.0	1.91	3.4%	0.95
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	344	340	355	336	19	41,385,012	-4	-1.16%	4.29%	338	346	22.3	1.59	2.9%	1.15
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	327	324	329	323	6	21,080,546	0	0.00%	24.62%	322	334	15.4	1.12	2.6%	0.86
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	215	221	227	214	13	49,978,864	6	2.79%	20.77%	219	225	20.4	0.80	2.2%	1.05
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	226	232	247	223	24	34,632,188	6	2.65%	31.82%	230	234	23.1	0.84	2.5%	1.44
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	802	801	810	798	12	50,223,784	0	0.00%	7.37%	793	802	17.4	2.26	2.7%	1.10
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	670	668	682	665	17	15,754,678	-2	-0.30%	19.07%	644	669	31.2	2.67	1.5%	1.32
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	198	188	200	182	18	9,075,991	-9	-4.57%	8.67%	187	200	8.2	0.81	5.3%	2.23
204	National Investments	Financial Services	269	258	270	258	12	18,953,579	-11	-4.09%	1.57%	257	262	17.5	1.09	5.8%	2.41
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	99.1	98.0	105.0	97.8	7.2	161,565,729	-1.0	-1.01%	3.16%	97.6	99.5	NM	0.56	0.0%	1.11
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	298	285	299	284	15	33,392,888	-13	-4.36%	7.55%	281	292	18.1	1.51	0.7%	1.32
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	163	162	163	158	5	12,207,281	0	0.00%	3.18%	160	163	9.4	1.02	4.7%	1.99
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	322	320	326	318	8	15,350,172	-6	-1.84%	25.00%	312	323	25.1	1.83	1.2%	1.23
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	422	424	433	421	12	6,713,181	5	1.19%	6.27%	424	434	19.6	1.35	3.3%	0.36
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	829	829	845	825	20	7,075,505	2	0.24%	8.79%	825	838	17.9	1.74	1.7%	0.67
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	190	183	191	181	10	12,286,625	-7	-3.68%	23.65%	181	187	17.4	1.09	2.2%	1.02
501	National Industries	Financial Services	274	274	277	271	6	22,723,580	0	0.00%	10.48%	273	279	13.7	1.23	1.7%	1.57
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,969	1,971	1,971	1,921	50	1,531,931	2	0.10%	9.50%	1,965	1,997	20.8	1.59	3.3%	1.69
506	HEISCO	Industrials	841	892	900	835	65	3,061,211	53	6.32%	6.32%	886	907	18.7	2.09	3.5%	1.23
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	710	698	720	698	22	5,452,649	-11	-1.55%	7.38%	687	708	12.5	1.50	8.4%	0.72
603	Aglity	Industrials	273	262	275	261	14	32,016,389	-11	-4.03%	6.07%	260	265	11.1	0.70	7.5%	1.73
605	Zain	Telecommunications	494	469	495	467	28	35,148,338	-22	-4.48%	0.00%	468	473	9.8	1.66	7.4%	0.64
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	2,570	2,488	2,610	2,488	122	1,492,300	-77	-3.00%	-8.53%	2,470	2,500	8.5	3.12	12.9%	0.19
634	IFA Hotels & Resorts Co.	Consumer Discretionary	1,975	1,780	1,975	1,680	295	1,132,483	-182	-9.28%	-3.78%	1,698	1,850	34.2	14.84	0.0%	2.41
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	965	960	999	950	49	3,250,345	5	0.52%	-4.76%	949	990	21.4	6.15	2.8%	0.65
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	98.8	96.7	98.8	94.8	4.0	36,911,588	-2.3	-2.32%	-1.33%	96.5	98.9	9.8	1.17	5.1%	0.79
821	Warba Bank	Banking	240	227	245	225	20	72,971,676	-13	-5.42%	18.23%	221	229	26.9	1.26	0.0%	1.06
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	571	563	574	560	14	3,804,828	-6	-1.05%	4.65%	555	565	18.0	2.35	6.2%	1.14
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	930	926	958	909	49	2,796,398	-6	-0.64%	2.89%	879	949	19.5	2.42	2.2%	0.87
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	532	517	533	509	24	5,349,006	-5	-0.96%	12.39%	510	520	24.2	2.12	3.9%	0.45
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,900	2,975	2,989	2,791	198	1,380,169	120	4.20%	29.35%	2,945	2,989	32.4	8.71	2.8%	1.39
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,260	1,250	1,269	1,235	34	8,385,612	-8	-0.64%	21.36%	1,220	1,267	11.6	3.81	5.7%	0.77
831	Beyout Investment	Financial Services	444	429	444	421	23	4,982,198	-15	-3.38%	4.13%	425	431	15.7	2.36	0.0%	0.25

*As of end of week closing

Alibaba shares surge after launch of the new DeepSeek competitor

DeepSeek success shows China's 'ability to innovate'

BEIJING: Alibaba shares surged more than seven percent in Hong Kong trade on Thursday after the Chinese tech giant launched an artificial intelligence model it says can compete with DeepSeek, this year's surprise tech star. Investors have been riding high on China's AI capabilities since January, when DeepSeek unveiled a state-of-the-art chatbot seemingly at a fraction of the cost assumed necessary by Western industry leaders.

Alibaba says its newest AI model announced on Thursday morning, called QwQ-32B, has a "comparable performance" to DeepSeek while also requiring far less data to run. Shares in the e-commerce powerhouse rose more than seven percent before a midday pause in trading at Hong Kong's Stock Exchange. China's vast tech industry has enjoyed several weeks of revamped market confidence.

Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma was seen meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping at a symposium for the country's leading business figures last month, ending years out of the spotlight. The billionaire entrepreneur had criticized government regulations in late 2020, shortly before Beijing scuttled Alibaba's imminent blockbuster IPO. A broader regulatory crackdown that followed wiped more than a trillion

dollars off the value of China's major tech firms. But Ma's inclusion in last month's meeting hinted at his potential public rehabilitation following his tangle with regulators.

DeepSeek's arrival on the scene this year has pleased authorities, who have intensified efforts to revitalize lacklustre activity in the world's second-largest economy in recent months. Alibaba's QwQ-32B joins another recent entrant, Tencent's Yuanbao, in an enhanced domestic rivalry with DeepSeek. In a potential boost for the firm, Beijing promised on Wednesday to enhance support for consumption, which has been sluggish in China since the COVID-19 pandemic. Hangzhou-based Alibaba—operator of some of China's top online shopping platforms—said last month it planned to spend more than \$50 billion on AI and cloud computing over the next three years.

'Ability to innovate'

The shock entrance of DeepSeek in the race to develop advanced artificial intelligence has put the world on notice as to China's innovation prowess, a high-ranking Beijing official said Thursday. The startup released a new version of its AI chatbot in

January, sending shockwaves across global markets. DeepSeek wowed industry insiders with its apparent ability to rival or even surpass the capabilities of Western competitors like ChatGPT at a fraction of the cost. "DeepSeek has stood out in the global field of AI," said Wu Qing, Chairman of China's Securities Regulatory Commission. "It is not just that the field of AI has been deeply shocked, but now also the world and the financial community have a new understanding of China's ability to innovate in science and technology," he said.

The official added that DeepSeek had contributed to a "recent re-evaluation of Chinese assets". "If someone does not talk about DeepSeek these days, it seems that they're not fashionable," Wu said. "But this phenomenon is indeed worthy of our high attention." Recent weeks have seen shares in Chinese tech titans surge. Last month, long-shunned Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma was seen meeting President Xi Jinping at a business symposium—signalling a more welcoming stance from Beijing towards its domestic tech sector.

Alibaba's shares rose more than eight percent during Thursday trading in Hong Kong after it unveiled an AI model with a performance it said was



"comparable" to DeepSeek. Investors are watching for announcements this week from Beijing—where officials are convening for a key annual political event known as the "Two Sessions"—on further government support to boost innovation and spending. Wu's comments came during a press conference on China's economy, which has struggled to fully recover from the pandemic. Authorities are banking on advanced technology as a lifeline to reach official growth targets this year as heightened trade winds batter the export-dependent nation. — AFP

ABK hosts EOY 2024 analyst conference

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently hosted its EOY 2024 analyst conference attended by Abdulla Al Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer; Shiamak Soonawalla, Group Chief Finance Officer; Abdulaziz Jawad, Chief Strategy Officer; and Osama Ezzeldin, Assistant General Manager of Strategy and Follow Up.

Strategic accomplishments

On this occasion, Al Sumait said, "Let me start by highlighting our financial performance. We are proud to report an increase in net profit attributable to shareholders, rising from KD 45.2 million in 2023, to KD 52.4 million in 2024. In addition, Earnings Per Share also grew by 17 percent, from 18 fils to 21 fils and our Capital Adequacy Ratio has increased to 16.94 percent in 2024 from 16.74 percent in 2023." He added that, over the year, ABK has selectively grown its loan portfolio by 13 percent year-on-year, with quality being its utmost priority evident in an NPL ratio of 1.23 percent compared to 1.33 percent in last year.

"Our extensive footprint drives revenue growth, efficient loan distribution, and strong deposit acquisition with our international operations, including our UAE branches and ABK-Egypt, contributing 45 percent of our operating income and 34 percent of our assets, highlighting their contribution to our success," elaborated Al Sumait. He further emphasized that ABK's solid performance in 2024 was the result of careful planning, close coordination and cooperation between our business lines across the Group, introduction of new products and services culminating in a successful execution of our strategy.

He highlighted, "During the year, ABK launched innovative offerings catering to Youth, Elite and SME segments, including upgrading the A+ youth offering, improved our credit card offering with 3 new credit cards and offering to SMEs with ATajer Plus. Our latest milestone was the launch of ABK's all-new mobile banking in January 2025. This innovative platform delivers unmatched convenience, security and efficiency in banking."

Al Sumait closed, "Looking forward to 2025, we are steadfast in pursuing our long-term vision, focusing on strategic expansion and capitalizing on growth opportunities across regional and local markets. We will continue to uphold the highest standards of excellence and deliver innovative, world-class solutions to our customers."

Excellent performance

On his part, Soonawalla said, "I am proud to announce another year of outstanding financial performance, with a net profit attributable to shareholders of KD 52.4 million, reflecting an impressive 16 percent increase in profitability compared to the prior year. Additionally, earnings per share for 2024 stood at 21 fils, representing a 17 percent growth compared to the 18-fils reported in the prior year. Moreover, ABK's operating income of KD 200.75 million and operating profit of KD 107.41 million, reflect our strong performance and effective execution of strategic initiatives."

From a risk management and stability perspective, the Group non-performing loan (NPL) ratio stood at 1.23 percent vs. 1.33 percent, while the Group loan loss coverage ratio remains exceptionally strong at 460 percent vs. 445 percent year-on-year. Furthermore, ABK continues to hold provisions amounting to KD 204 million, which exceeds the requirements set forth by IFRS 9 according to Central Bank of Kuwait guidelines.

Soonawalla added, "We continued to maintain our net interest margin at 2.1 percent levels, stabilizing our earnings. Analyzing the key drivers of performance, the Group achieved a 9 percent increase in total operating income compared to the previous year. Additionally, our Return on Average Equity (ROAE) increased to 8.4 percent from 6.8 percent, a 24 percent year-on-year improvement. These achievements underscore our profitability and ability to deliver strong returns to our shareholders."

ABK's liquidity position remains exceptionally robust, supported by a net stable funding ratio of 109 percent and a liquidity coverage ratio of 281 percent. Additionally, its balance sheet is under-



Abdulaziz Jawad
Chief Strategy Officer

Abdulla Al Sumait
Acting Group CEO

Shiamak Soonawalla
Group Chief Finance Officer

pinned by customer deposits amounting to KD 4.4 billion, which represents 67 percent of total liabilities. "Our total interest income for 2024 reached KD 471.4 million, marking a significant year-on-year increase of KD 58 million, or 14 percent. This growth was primarily driven by increased asset levels and a favorable interest rate environment. Fees and commissions delivered a strong performance, contributing KD 37.1 million, reflecting a 6 percent increase compared to 2023. This consistent growth reflects the Group's ability to capitalize on core banking services and leverage diversified income streams, highlighting continued momentum in transaction-based income and an expanding client base," explained Soonawalla.

Furthermore, ABK's 11 percent increase in net operating profit demonstrates robust business performance and improved efficiency. The major contributions to operating income of KD 200.75 million for the year came from Commercial Banking (48 percent), Retail Banking (37 percent) and Treasury and Investments (15 percent). Our asset allocation reflects 57 percent in Commercial Banking, 12 percent in Retail and 31 percent in Treasury and Investments.

The Group's steadfast commitment to excellence is evident through continuous investment in key business initiatives, digital transformation, and process optimization. "These investments continue to enhance operational efficiency, reduce operating costs, and sustain long-term profitability. This is evident in ABK's cost-to-income ratio of 46.5 percent as of 2024 vs. 47.5 percent recorded in 2023," emphasized Soonawalla. As of 2024, the Group's total assets expanded to KD 7.4 billion from KD 6.3 billion, reflecting robust growth of 17 percent year-on-year. Net loans and advances grew by 13 percent, rising from KD 4.3 billion in 2023 to KD 4.8 billion in 2024.

Soonawalla summarized, "Our 2024 financial performance highlights robust loan growth, improved credit risk management, and a strengthened balance sheet, ensuring sustainable financial performance, adequate liquidity and a resilient capital position to support future expansion. With this strong foundation and strategic focus, we remain favorably placed to continue to create enduring value for our investors."

International economy

Discussing the global economy, Jawad stated, "The global economy continues to experience fluidity and volatility, which will most certainly have an impact on global growth projections. In its January 2025 world economic outlook update, the IMF projects a 3.3 percent growth for 2025, which is marginally higher than its 3.2 percent projection back in October.

Jawad emphasized that, Kuwait in specific is projected to witness a major transformation in its economic growth as the IMF forecasts an economic expansion of 3.3 percent in 2025, 50 bps higher than the previous forecast. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti economy is expecting two milestones which will have a seismic impact on economic activities, namely the public debt law and the mortgage law, which are both anticipated in the near future.

Jawad added that despite the challenging global macroeconomic environment of 2024, ABK has successfully navigated its path to solid results. "ABK Kuwait's strategic focus on salaried Kuwaitis and high-income expats has driven strong customer base and market share growth. For instance, our retail loan portfolio has experienced growth at double the pace of the market, while our credit cards' business has grown at close to double the market rate, supported by enhanced cross-selling to the existing base and new-to-bank customers," he said.



"Additionally, we have modernized our branch network, introducing a new branch concept in Jabriya, Salmiya, and Zahra, reinforcing our strategy to enhance the service quality across all customer touchpoints," Jawad highlighted. ABK continues to enjoy strong credit ratings of 'A' from Fitch and 'A2' from Moody's, reflecting its solid financial position, prudent risk management and strategic long-term investments. Additionally, in Q4-2024, ABK received global recognition, securing eight prestigious awards.

Egypt and the UAE

Shifting the focus to Egypt, Jawad elaborated that the country is on track regarding the IMF program as it continues its economic reform program and is unlocking its economic potential in the MENA region. In November 2024, Fitch upgraded Egypt's credit rating one notch from 'B-' to 'B,' citing stronger external finances, recovering FX buffers and greater confidence that the more flexible exchange rate policy will prove more durable than in the past.

Notwithstanding the turmoil in the region, IMF estimates an economic growth of 3.6 percent for Egypt, on the back of a loosening of monetary policy and the resumption of Suez Canal flows. Having said that, robust tourist inflows have helped stabilize external balance and improve the country's net international reserves which hit a record USD 47.1 billion in December 2024.

Jawad stated, "ABK-Egypt continues to deliver on the successful execution of its strategy and further strengthen its presence in the country." Last but not least, Jawad emphasized that 2024 was a stellar year for ABK-UAE and the Bank's DIFC presence, with sixteen syndicated loan transactions concluded during the year. The transactions' value crossed the USD 10 billion mark, spanning across various jurisdictions in the GCC, Europe and Asia.

Jawad reflected, "As communicated during our Q3-2024 earnings call, the hybrid pricing model for the UAE mortgage offering was in progress, and has now been successfully launched. This enables our valued customers to fix the mortgage interest rate for the initial year before moving on to market-derived floating rate. This thus offers customers the flexibility to lower their commitment in the initial year and manage their cashflow."

ESG

In what pertains to ESG, ABK is finalizing a number of crucial ESG milestones, which include the Sustainable Finance Framework to govern potential ESG issuances and loans, as well as the ESG Policy Framework to govern ABK's ESG performance. A 5th edition of our sustainability report is also in progress, where, among various outcomes, ABK aims to have a more comprehensive greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory, as well as expansions of our ESG Strategy via tools like an implementation plan (IP) and a monitoring & evaluation (M&E) framework. Concluding his statement, Jawad said, "Looking ahead to 2025, ABK remains dedicated to executing its strategy effectively, fostering sustainable growth and long-term value for our shareholders."



In El Salvador, a river without fish feeds fear of mining

SANTA ROSA DE LIMA: El Salvador's San Sebastian river has no fish. The runoff from a gold mine upstream, already shuttered two decades ago, has long killed them all. Now, residents fear the same fate for other rivers - and the creatures and people depending on them - after Congress, at President Nayib Bukele's request, reversed a ban on metal mining. Bukele billed the move as a way of invigorating the Central American country's stagnant economy, but environmentalists and river-side communities fear the potential harms far outweigh any benefits.

In the community of Santa Rosa de Lima, a two-hour drive from the capital San Salvador, wastewater still flows directly into the San Sebastian river from a nearby hill where a gold mine operated for 100 years until 2006. The site is still being illegally exploited by artisanal gold miners. On a recent expedition to survey the river with a group of environmentalists, community leader Graciela Funes took a sample of the water and shook her head as she examined its unnatural copper color. "We cannot allow this situation... We are human and we all need this vital liquid," the 67-year-old told AFP.

In 2016, a report by El Salvador's human rights ombudsman found that runoff from Santa Rosa de Lima's shuttered mine had "severely impacted the quality and availability" of water in the region. People who relied directly on the river had no option but to buy bottled water for drinking and cooking, it said. The report contributed to El Salvador becoming the first country in the world, in 2017, to outlaw metal mining due to the harmful effects of chemicals such as cyanide and mercury used in the extraction process.

'Pollution, poverty'

Last December, the mining ban was overturned after Bukele claimed El Salvador, a country of 6.6 million people, had "potentially" the largest gold deposits per square kilometer in the world. The president mentioned a study - written by unknown authors and which he did not share - which found that mining a mere four percent of the country's gold deposits would bring in \$131 billion. This was equivalent to 380 percent of GDP, the president argued, and would "change the economy of El Salvador overnight." But activists point to the San Sebastian gold mine - one of the most productive in Central America for much of the 20th century - as a cautionary tale.

The mine was shuttered after US firm Commerce Group had its environmental license revoked over river pollution. "The beneficiaries of mining here will be small groups of companies, whether national or transnational, powerful groups that will take the minerals and resources from our soil and leave behind... misfortune, pollution, poverty," said anti-mining activist Vidalina Morales, who joined Funes and others for the San Sebastian river analysis. Environmental defenders fear a return to metal extraction also threatens the Lempa river, which runs through several areas with mining potential and supplies water to 70 percent of the capital's inhabitants.

While mining does have its supporters, including from Salvadorans who see it as a source of much-needed employment, others worry it could be a dangerous environmental gamble with paltry gains. For economist Julia Martinez, it is hard to weigh the risks as "we do not see a study that explains if that gold really exists." And Ricardo Navarro of the Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology, an environmental NGO, said gold in the country was found in small concentrations of one gram per ton of rock: "much damage for little gold." — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

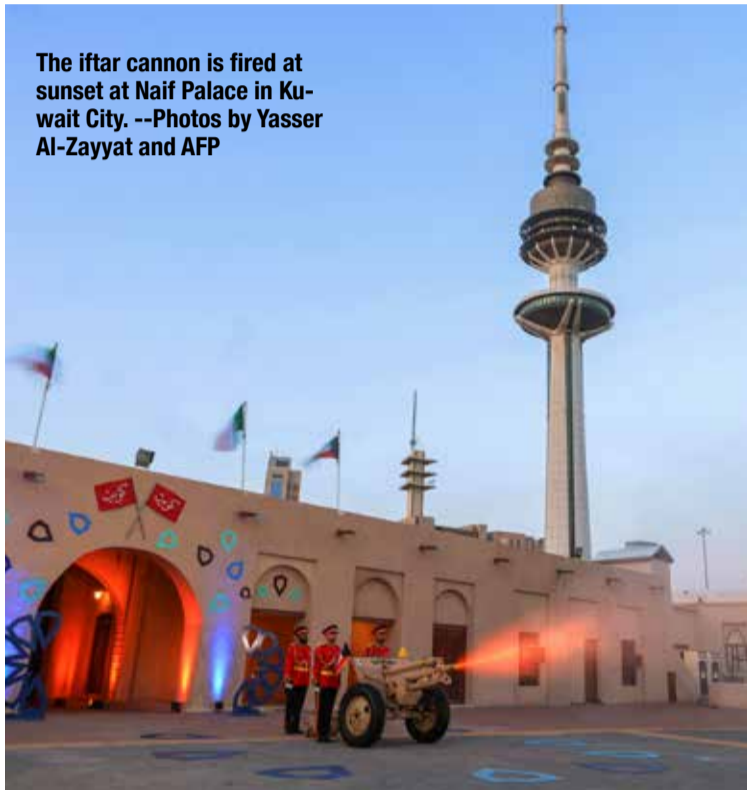
Weekender

Ramadan traditions

from Kuwait and around the world

By Shariffa Carlo Al Andalusia

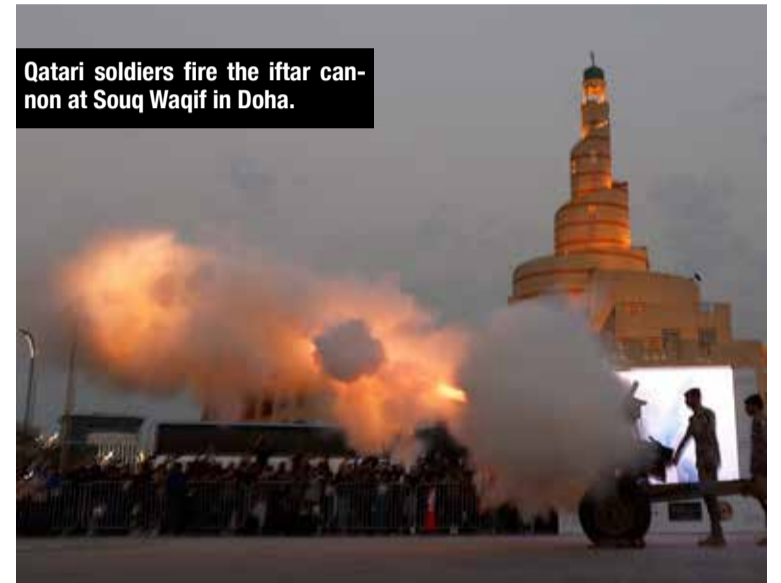
Ramadan, the holy month of fasting observed by Muslims worldwide, is marked by self-discipline, prayer and acts of charity. While fasting from dawn to sunset is a common practice, different cultures have developed unique traditions to celebrate this sacred time. Here are some lesser-known Ramadan customs from around the world:



The iftar cannon is fired at sunset at Naif Palace in Kuwait City. --Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and AFP



Emirati officers fire the iftar cannon near Burj Khalifa in the center of Dubai.



Qatari soldiers fire the iftar cannon at Souq Waqif in Doha.

The Cannon Firing of Kuwait, Istanbul and Cairo

In cities like Kuwait City, Istanbul, Cairo and Amman, a cannon is fired at sunset to signal the end of the fast. This tradition dates back to the Ottoman Empire when a misfired cannon inadvertently alerted people that it was time for iftar (the fast-breaking meal). The practice became so popular that it was intentionally continued and remains a Ramadan staple in some regions today. In Kuwait, people flock to Naif Palace to witness this annual tradition.

Girgian – A Ramadan Trick-or-Treat in the Gulf

In Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, children celebrate Girgian, a colorful festival held in the middle of Ramadan. Dressed in traditional clothes, they go door to door singing songs and collecting sweets — similar to Hallow-

een's trick-or-treating but with a Ramadan-themed twist. In Kuwait, many families host large, elaborate gatherings for children, where themed gifts are given alongside treats.



A group of boys collect Girgian in Kuwait.

The Dastarkhwan Tradition in Pakistan and India

In Pakistan and India, many mosques and charitable homes set up dastarkhwan — long communal tables filled with food — where anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, can sit and break their fast for free. This act of charity and hospitality is

an important part of Ramadan's spirit in South Asia. In Kuwait, families regularly send food to their local mosques, where everyone is welcome to break the fast together.



Muslims wait to break their fast in Rawalpindi.

Nigeria's Sahur Festivals

In Nigeria, large predawn gatherings known as sahur festivals take place in some communities. Drummers, food vendors, and others gather in the streets, creating a lively, celebratory atmosphere before the fast begins. This helps people stay awake for suhoor while fostering a strong sense of community.

Ramadan is much more than just fasting — it's a time of reflection, generosity, and cultural expression. These traditions highlight the diversity of the Muslim world and how each region adds its own unique touch to this sacred month.



A troupe of young Palestinian mesaharatis strike their drums to wake observant Muslims for their suhoor meal in the old city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank.

Mesaharati – The Night Drummers of Egypt and the Levant

In Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and parts of Turkey, the mesaharati is a person who walks through neighborhoods before dawn, beating a drum and calling out people's names to

wake them for suhoor (the predawn meal). This centuries-old tradition still survives in many areas, though modern alarms have largely replaced it.



An Iraqi woman checks a traditional lantern (fanous Ramadan) at Shorja market in central Baghdad.

Fanous - The Lanterns of Egypt

One of the most visually stunning Ramadan traditions is Egypt's fanous lanterns. These colorful, intricately designed lanterns are hung in homes, mosques, and streets, adding a festive glow to Ramadan

nights. This tradition dates back to the Fatimid era when lanterns were used to welcome the arrival of the khalifa (caliph) during Ramadan.

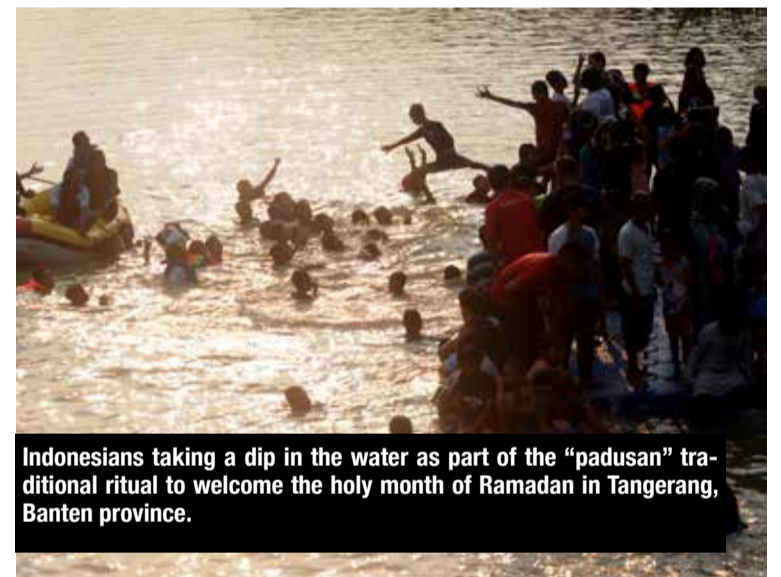


People walk past a shop displaying traditional lanterns at a market in Sayyida Zeinab district in the old quarters of Cairo.

Indonesia's Padusan Purification Ritual

In Indonesia, particularly in Java, Muslims participate in Padusan, a ritual where they take a full-body bath in natural springs before Ramadan be-

gins. This symbolizes physical and spiritual purification, preparing the body and soul for a month of fasting and prayer.



Indonesians taking a dip in the water as part of the "padusan" traditional ritual to welcome the holy month of Ramadan in Tangerang, Banten province.

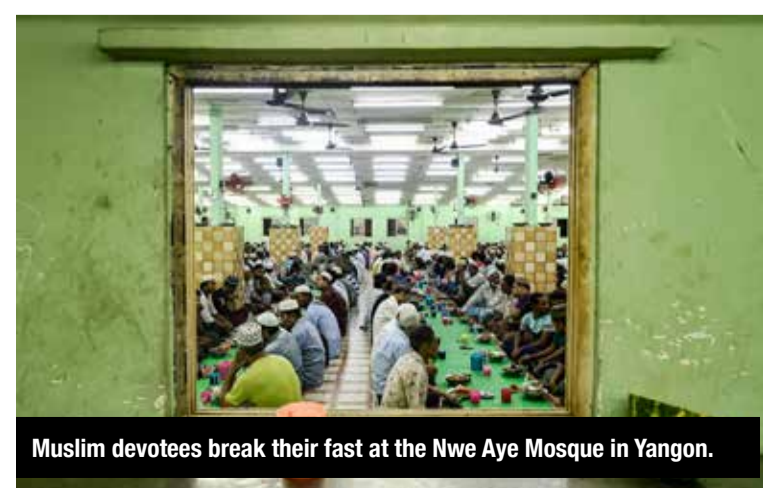
Zanzibar's Joyful Kula Kula Feasts

In Zanzibar (Tanzania), Ramadan is a deeply communal event. After Maghrib (sunset) prayers, people gather in open spaces to share large communal meals called kula kula

("eat, eat" in Swahili). The iftar dishes are often donated by wealthier families, ensuring that everyone — rich or poor — can break their fast together.



A boy hangs a lantern-shaped decoration ahead of a mass gathering for a communal iftar in the area of Al-Dahduh in Gaza City's Tal al-Hawa district.



Muslim devotees break their fast at the Nwe Aye Mosque in Yangon.

Eid celebrations in Al-Safat Square in the olden days.



Simple pleasures in old Kuwait

How children found joy in handmade toys, playful competitions and heartfelt celebrations



By Mahmoud Zakaria

Traditional games are an integral part of a country's heritage, reflecting its cultural identity and way of life. While some view them as mere entertainment, these games hold deep meanings, noble values and important objectives. They contribute to a child's social, emotional, educational, physical and linguistic development. Passed down informally through generations, these simple games continue to be played in various settings. They often rely on physical skill, agility and strategic maneuvering.

Most materials used in these games were simple and repurposed items like metal scraps, wood and glass, making them affordable and often free. This accessibility allowed children of all ages and social classes to participate, whether rich or poor.

Al-Adadeel, a traditional game popular among children near the sea, involved crafting small boats from foldable metal sheets. Openings were sealed with a petroleum-based adhesive called "tari" to prevent water from entering. A wooden mast and triangular fabric sail completed the design. Children gathered on the shore to launch their boats, relying on the wind for movement. If a boat capsized, its owner was eliminated. The last boat afloat was the winner. The excitement and competition made the race an enjoyable pastime.

Eid celebrations in the past

Eid in the past was filled with pure joy and excitement, unlike today, where celebrations are often limited to greetings, chalet trips or travel. Eid was once more festive. Families cleaned and organized their homes, women made traditional sweets and children eagerly awaited new clothes for the occasion.

On Eid morning, families woke up joyfully. If it was Eid Al-Fitr, they had a simple breakfast, often dates, before heading to the mosque for prayers. Afterward, people exchanged greetings, and children



Al-Forda vegetable market by the seaside.

kissed their elders' hands to receive their "Eidiya" (monetary gift), which they spent on rides and sweets.

Dressed in their finest clothes, boys and girls looked radiant. Girls adorned their hands and feet with henna, creating intricate red-hued designs. Children eagerly anticipated their "Eidiya", hoping for a rare fortune — a rupee (the pre-dinar currency), a sum that felt like a dream come true.

Water carriers who owned donkeys painted them in bright colors and patterns, decorated them with bells and rented them out to children, bringing joy to the occasion. Al-Safat Square was a lively gathering place where people showcased their new Eid clothes. Toymakers set up wooden games, including swings of var-

ious sizes and wooden horses known as "Um Al-Husan".

Eid celebrations featured traditional performances, particularly "Al-Ardah", a well-known Kuwaiti dance involving synchronized sword movements accompanied by drummers. Even Kuwait's ruler attended, personally congratulating citizens.

Preserving these games is vital. Families and the government play a key role in keeping them alive. The state should promote them through festivals featuring competitions and prizes, while schools should allocate time for students to engage in these historic games.



Al-Ardah dance

Olden games

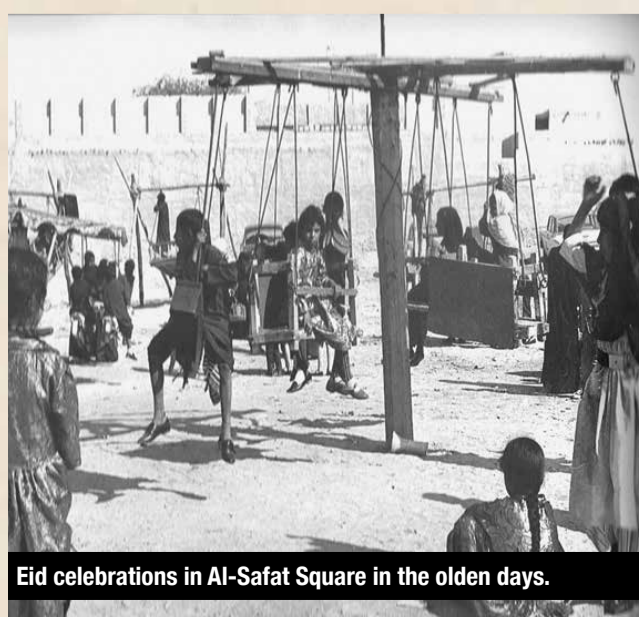
A popular game in the past, "darbaha" (Kuwaiti dialect for "rolling object"), involved a circular metal rod, usually from bicycle wheels. Children would salvage worn-out bicycle tires, using sticks to push and steer them. Owning a "darbaha" was as significant to them as owning a bicycle or car today. They held races and competitions, trying to steer their wheels into others to knock them down. This game embodied the simplicity of life and the ability to create fun from everyday objects.



Al-Adadeel, small boat competition.



Children play on a swing.



Eid celebrations in Al-Safat Square in the olden days.



Al-Darbaha, a famous Kuwaiti heritage game.

Weekender



Susanna Miller plays Weena and Nour Al-Kafrawy as Rian.



Nader Abdullah as Dr Elias Franklin and Daniel HervélLe as Kryn



Alex Owens plays Mr Thompson, a British soldier, in 1941



YOUNG KUWAITI ACTORS SHINE IN 'CHILDREN OF THE TIME MACHINE'



By Faten Omar

Young people in Kuwait are increasingly turning to theater as a platform to showcase their talents and creativity, making stage performances a rising trend in the local arts scene. In an interview with young actors who recently starred in the Shakespearean-inspired play *Children of the Time Machine*, Kuwait Times explored how their experience allowed them to take on complex roles, refine their acting skills, and connect with audiences on a deeper level.

Under the spotlights of Yarmouk Cultural Center's stage, the play — directed by Hamad Al-Jenaie and co-written by Nader Abdullah — was more than just a performance; it was a journey of creativity, dedication, and passion. Al-Jenaie saw *Children of the Time Machine* as more than a spectacle, describing it as a deeply human story about resilience, connection, and the power of choice.

"Bringing this vision to the stage has been a true testament to the power of collaboration, creativity, and resilience," Al-Jenaie told Kuwait Times. "Each actor brought a unique energy to their role, and my goal was to guide them in finding authenticity and connection within their performances. There were moments of deep discovery during rehearsals, where a subtle change in movement or a shift in delivery transformed a scene entirely."

Beyond its performances and elaborate production, *Children of the Time Machine* carried a message that resonated with its audience. "This play is more than just a story about time travel," Al-Jenaie explained. "At its heart, it's about the bonds that hold us together, the courage to face the unknown, and the hope for a better future. It reminds us that no matter the era or circumstance, human connection and resilience endure."

The production required not only strong acting but also seamless tran-

sitions between historical periods, demanding that the cast embody different eras with precision and emotion. Essa Haitham, who played the enigmatic Aurion, found the role both challenging and rewarding. "Playing Aurion was a fascinating experience that helped me ana-

lyze and understand the depth of changing characters," he said. "The best part was reuniting with my colleagues and our mentor, Al-Jenaie. It sparked a journey that will always remind us of how we traveled through time."

Behind the scenes, the crew worked tirelessly to craft intricate sets and ensure the audience felt every shift in time. For Nader Abdullah — who not only co-wrote the script but also played Dr. Elias Franklin — seeing the play come to life was a defining moment. "I got to see

Ali Abdullah, who took on the role of the formidable Vargak, embraced the character's complexity. "Vargak is not just about personifying power; it's about discovering the depth that makes him unforgettable," he said. "A big thank you to Al-Jenaie, the cast, and the crew for



Essa Haitham as Aurion, Nader Abdullah as Dr Elias Franklin, Fahad Al-Ramadan as Benjamin Franklin, Sara Al-Salah as Amy Franklin and Kerem Hidimoglu as Howard Franklin

new actors develop their talents, and together we put on a wonderfully entertaining show," he said. "The best part for me was witnessing the script I poured countless hours into being brought to life by the cast."

want to be taken lightly because of stereotypes about my age. This last performance was the best I have ever given, thanks to my incredible castmates who always supported me. No matter our ages or backgrounds, we trusted each other and became a family." As the cur-



Mariam Al Shammari plays Neira's character

their hard work and dedication. The sky is the limit!" Kerem, who played Howard Franklin, carried the weight of portraying one of the play's central figures.

"I had doubts at first, thinking I wouldn't do justice to this role," he admitted. "But I was determined to prove those who underestimated me wrong. As an underage theater actor, I didn't

tain fell and the audience erupted in applause, it was clear that *Children of the Time Machine* had done more than entertain — it had left a lasting impact. It was a production that, like time itself, would be remembered long after the final bow.



Quammar Al-Mumin playing Zethar, the village healer



Brian McLaughlin as Mark in 1970



The actors at the end of the play

Sports

New Zealand crush South Africa to reach Champions Trophy final

SA suffered their fifth Champions Trophy semi-final defeat

LAHORE: Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson struck hundreds as New Zealand eased to a 50-run win over South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday to set up a rematch with India in the Champions Trophy final.

Ravindra made 108 off 101 balls and Williamson hit 102 off 94 deliveries as New Zealand posted a Champions Trophy record 362-6 before restricting South Africa to 312-9. David Miller finished unbeaten on 100 but his 67-ball blitz came in vain with the game already well out of reach, as South Africa suffered their fifth Champions Trophy semi-final defeat after those in 2000, 2002, 2006 and 2013.

They won the first edition of the tournament in Bangladesh in 1998, when it was named the ICC KnockOut Trophy. New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner excelled with the ball and took 3-43 with his left-arm spin, breaking a 105-run partnership for South Africa's second wicket by removing rival skipper Temba Bavuma for 56.

Bavuma started slowly but steadied the innings with Rassie van der Dussen, who scored a fluent 69 before being deceived by a beautiful delivery from Santner. Santner then dealt a critical blow when he dismissed Heinrich Klaasen for three, caught by a diving Matt Henry at long-on, dashing South Africa's hopes of pulling off the highest chase in the tournament's history.

Ravindra (1-20) had Aiden Markram caught and bowled for 31 while Glenn Phillips chipped in with 2-27 as South Africa crumbled against spin. "It's a cool feeling to make the final," said Santner. "We

were challenged by a good side and now we've had a go against India, look forward to do it again."

New Zealand last won an ICC ODI men's event in 2000, beating India in the final of that year's Champions Trophy in Kenya. India won by 44 runs when the teams met in the group phase last Sunday in Dubai. Bavuma said New Zealand were simply too good for South Africa on Wednesday. "New Zealand were above par," said Bavuma. "We backed ourselves to chase 350 with the wicket getting better but they really put us under pressure from the get-go."

Huge partnership

Ravindra and Williamson set the foundations for a big total on a batting-friendly Gaddafi Stadium pitch after New Zealand won the toss and batted first.

Daryl Mitchell clubbed 49 off 37 balls and Phillips smashed a 27-ball 49 not out as the Black Caps plundered 110 runs in the last 10 overs and 66 in the last five. South Africa's bowling line-up struggled right from the start as Ravindra and Will Young (21) put on 48 for the opening stand.

It was followed by a magnificent 164-run partnership for the second wicket between Ravindra and Williamson that put the New Zealanders on track for a massive total, as the duo scored at will with some delightful strokes. Ravindra completed his fifth ODI hundred — all coming in ICC events — from 93 balls with a two off Kagiso Rabada.

Williamson reached his 15th ODI hundred with a ramped boundary, his third three-figure score in as many matches against South Africa.



LAHORE: New Zealand's Tom Latham (L) attempts to run out South Africa's Aiden Markram (R) during the ICC Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) semi-final cricket match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. — AFP

It was Rabada who finally ended the partnership by dismissing Ravindra caught behind. Ravindra hit 13 fours and one six in total. Williamson chipped Wiaan Mulder into the hands of Lungi Ngidi in the 40th over after hitting 10 fours and two sixes.

Mitchell and Phillips added some late impetus after South Africa had briefly dragged things back to give themselves hope of limiting the score to under 350. Fast bowler Ngidi finished with 3-72, while Rabada ended with figures of 2-70. — AFP

NZ vow to 'find ways' to beat India in final

LAHORE: New Zealand have vowed to "find little ways to win moments" against India after making Champions Trophy history to power into Sunday's final. The Black Caps posted a Champions Trophy record 362-6 before restricting South Africa to 312-9 in Wednesday's semi-final in Lahore.

They now face India in Dubai to decide the winners of the eight-nation 50-over tournament. Rohit Sharma's India are playing all their games in Dubai after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan because of political tensions.

India beat New Zealand by 44 runs in the group stage but batting all-rounder Daryl Mitchell said that would have no bearing on Sunday's result. "Final is a new day," Mitchell said after scoring 49 against South Africa. "Really excited to be stuck into that challenge and will adapt to whatever surface and conditions we get on the day, and will find little ways to win moments throughout that game."

The tournament's tangled schedule, with teams flying in and out of the United Arab Emirates from Pakistan while India have stayed put, has been hugely controversial. The pitches have been vastly different in the two countries.

Pakistan tracks produced big totals, in contrast to the slow and turning decks of Dubai's international cricket stadium. "We don't quite know how the Dubai pitch is like," said Rachin Ravindra, one of the heroes of New Zealand's semi-final win with a 101-ball 108.

"We know our game against India it did turn and Aussie v India (semi-final) didn't turn so much, so I think we pride ourselves in adapting and playing the situation in front of us." India unleashed four spinners against New Zealand in the group phase and Varun Chakravarty returned figures of 5-42 to bowl the Black Caps out for 205 in their chase of 250.

Rohit's side were unchanged in their four-wicket win over Australia as the spin-heavy selection came up trumps again, albeit on a pitch that turned a little less this time around. "They are all pretty good," Mitchell said of India's slow bowlers. "But we have got some pretty good spinners ourselves." — AFP

Passion driving LeBron to new records after scoring milestone

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James may never be able to settle the eternal debate over whether he deserves to be recognized as the greatest basketball player in history ahead of Michael Jordan. But after reaching another milestone in his age-defying career, there is a strong case to be made that the 40-year-old NBA icon is at least winning his improbable duel with Father Time.

On Tuesday, the Los Angeles Lakers star became the first NBA player in history to score 50,000 career points, an astonishing scoring record that many believe will never be beaten. Hours earlier, James had set another record, becoming the oldest man ever to win a player of the month award following a dazzling February in which he averaged 29.3 points, 10.5 rebounds and 6.9 assists per game. James finished Tuesday's 136-115 Lakers victory over the New Orleans Pelicans with 34 points, eight rebounds and six assists, demonstrating once again the kind of routine excellence and consistency that have been the hallmarks of a career now deep into its 22nd season.

'A love for the sport'

Speaking to reporters huddled around his locker



ROME: (FILES) France's lock Mickael Guillard (C) runs with the ball to score a try during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Italy and France at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome. — AFP

France focus on Galthie ahead of Ireland showdown

PARIS: France head to Ireland on Saturday in a probable Six Nations title decider with a lot of focus on Fabien Galthie's choice in midfield.

The head coach is set to keep Yoram Moefana and Pierre-Louis Barassi as his centres for a fourth straight match during this year's tournament.

The pair performed inconsistently during the wins over Wales and Italy which sandwiched the away defeat by England, decided by a last-gasp touchdown from Elliot Daly. "Moefana and Barassi, there were big mistakes against England, for their final try," former France head coach and winger Philippe Saint-Andre told AFP on Wednesday.

"They didn't manage to close off the inside runner," the 57-year-old TV pundit added. Two weeks after the Twickenham defeat the duo were influential in attack as Les Bleus kept their hopes of just a second title under Galthie alive by scoring 11 times against Italy.

One negative from the Rome rout was their combination off the ball, which was at fault for two of the Azzurri's tries. France's usual defensive leader, experienced outside centre Gael Fickou, missed the three opening games with injury.

Despite returning to training the 30-year-old is

unlikely to feature in Dublin as Galthie keeps faith with Moefana and Barassi. "If you say that with Moefana-Barassi you'll score four tries, you have to be ready to concede two," Saint-Andre said. "Their experience and the amount of times they'll play together, in training and in matches, will help them evolve and grow, to become something better."

'Potential'

Moefana has been a dependable part of Galthie's set-up since his Test debut in 2020. The 24-year-old is in line for his 35th Les Bleus appearance this weekend. "He needs to progress as he's still a young player, who has a lot of caps," his France and Bordeaux-Begles teammate Maxime Lucu told reporters on Wednesday.

"We have to guide him more and more because he has an enormous potential with France." Toulouse's 26-year-old Barassi made the first of his six international appearances in 2019 before a series of injuries restricted his Test call-ups.

Barassi and Moefana are set to play the whole game against Ireland, with Galthie opting for just one back on the bench. "I think there's a certain amount of trust given to Barassi," former Toulouse and France centre Yannick Jauzion told Sud Radio on Saturday.

"Even if there are imperfections in defence, they are players that can adapt, that can understand their problems in defence. "Bringing back new players for an important match, would raise questions." A positive for the Moefana-Barassi alliance is the return of Romain Ntamack. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic #77 and LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers look on during the game against the New Orleans Pelicans at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

on Tuesday, James said his enduring passion for the sport had propelled him through the 50,000 points barrier. "I mean, that's a lot of points," James reflected. "Obviously, the first thing that comes to mind is where I'm from. Picking up the game when I was a little kid and having a love for the sport, and hoping that someday I'd be able to play at the highest level."

"I've been able to do that and really enjoy my career. So it's definitely an honor. It's pretty cool to see that." James admitted though that the relentless grind of the NBA's gruelling 82-game regular season has become more challenging as the years have rolled by.

"Continuing to fall in love with the process — that's the hardest thing, every single year," James said. "You know it's going to be a long season. It's 82 games, 41 of them are on the road. It's a lot of travel. And as you get older, it affects you differently."

"If you have a family, it affects you even differently. So the process, trying not to fall out of love with the process is the hardest thing." So far this season, there has been little sign that James' passion is on the wane. Last month, he became the only player in NBA history to record multiple 40-point games at the age of 40 or older after scoring 40 points in a 110-102 road win over the Portland Trail Blazers.

Incredibly, that performance came after James scored 26 points in a home defeat to the Charlotte Hornets the previous night. James and the Lakers only arrived in Portland at 3am on the day of the game. "He really just defies anything that's normal," Lakers coach JJ Redick said after the win in Portland.

"And not just the physical feats and the plays. It's the mentality. I believe I saw the other day, he's a billionaire. "And he's playing on the second night of a back-to-back at 40 after 22 years with every fricking record and every accolade. He's one of the greatest competitors."

"He's amazing to coach. He brings it every single day. He sets the standard for how you're supposed to approach this craft. And that's to me, the most incredible thing. "It's just a mindset to do it, get up the next day, do it, get up the next day, do it, over and over and over again." — AFP

Osaka bundled out, Kvitova ousted at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS: Naomi Osaka was bundled out of the first round at Indian Wells on Wednesday, falling 6-4, 6-4 to Camila Osorio in the Japanese star's first tournament since injury forced her out of the Australian Open. Former world number one Osaka, now ranked 56th in the world, looked rusty against the 52nd-ranked Colombian, struggling to find the range on her powerful groundstrokes on a chilly night in the California desert.

"There were certain things that felt extremely off because I could only start to practice serving after a certain amount of time and stuff like that," said Osaka. "So I think given the situation, it wasn't that terrible. "I don't feel like I played well at all, but I had chances to be in the match." Osorio, making a return from a lengthy injury break herself, challenged Osaka with an array of drop shots and slices and gained the lone break of the opening set for a 5-4 lead.

She served it out without a hitch then broke Osaka to open the second. The Japanese star immediately broke back, but Osorio gained the upper hand with a break in the seventh game. After Osaka fought off a match point against her own serve Osorio served it out, fighting off four break points to seal it with a stinging forehand winner.

"It's crazy for me, a dream come true," said Osorio, who pulled out of last week's event in Merida, Mexico, with an abdominal injury. She had never won a match at Indian Wells, and became the first Colombian woman to beat a former world number one.

Osaka, who returned from a 15-month break last year after giving birth to daughter Shai in 2023, reached her first final since 2022 in Auckland, but retired from the title match with an abdominal injury. Back for the Australian Open, she was forced to retire from her third round match with an abdominal strain.

"It just feels like a little bump in the road," Osaka said. "I'll be back in Miami and hopefully I'll have way more serve practice under my belt and things like that." Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, on the comeback trail seven months after giving birth to her son Petr, also fell in the first round.

France's 70th-ranked Varvara Gracheva beat the Czech 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, but the 24-year-old was full of admiration for her 34-year-old opponent, who lifted the trophy at Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014.

"If you let me step back a little bit, I really want to congratulate her," Gracheva said. "Because she had a child quite recently, and I'm so happy that she now has the role of a mother and a tennis player, which is very demanding. It's very inspiring for sports, athletes, women — it's just amazing."

All 32 men's and women's seeds have first round byes in this combined ATP Masters and WTA 1000 tournament. Gracheva lined up a second-round meeting with ninth-seeded Mirra Andrejeva, the 17-year-old Russian who became the youngest ever WTA 1000 champion in Dubai last month.

In other matches, French veteran Caroline Garcia beat US wild card Bernarda Pera 6-3, 6-4 to line up a second-round meeting with second-seeded defending champion Iga Swiatek.

Nishikori battles through

In men's action, Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands beat Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-3 to book a second-round meeting with top-seeded German Alexander Zverev, who heads a field missing world number one Jannik Sinner as he serves a three-month drugs ban.

China's Bu Yunchaokete defeated American Nishesh Basavareddy 7-5, 6-4 to book a second-round match against Russian fifth seed Daniil Medvedev, runner-up the past two years to Carlos Alcaraz — who is seeded second as he chases a rare three-peat.

Japanese veteran Kei Nishikori, who revealed during the Australian Open that he almost quit tennis last year after lengthy battles with injury, defeated Spain's Jaume Munar 6-2, 5-7, 7-6 (7/3) to line up a second-round match against 18th-seeded Ugo Humbert of France. — AFP

Sports

Kane brace puts Bayern on course for last eight against Leverkusen

Kane converted his 30th consecutive penalty since his miss for England in 2022 WCup

MUNICH: Harry Kane struck twice as Bayern Munich eased to a 3-0 home win over 10-man Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday, putting them on track for the Champions League quarter-finals. Unable to beat Leverkusen in six attempts since Xabi Alonso took over in October 2022, Bayern were dominant from start to finish in the first leg of their last-16 tie against the German champions at the Allianz Arena.

Kane headed in a lovely Michael Olise cross after nine minutes. Jamal Musiala was in the perfect spot early in the second half to capitalize on a goalkeeping howler from Matej Kovar, the usual backup to Leverkusen captain Lukas Hradecky.

Kovar rose high but not high enough, allowing a tame Joshua Kimmich cross to slip through his fingers. The ball fell at the feet of a grateful Musiala, who tapped home. Eight minutes later, centre-back Nordi Mukiele sunk his studs into the calf of Alphonso Davies, picking up a second yellow.

Mukiele's replacement Edmond Tapsoba bear-hugged Kane in the box. After the England captain fell to the turf, referee Michael Oliver consulted the VAR screen and pointed to the spot. Kane converted his 30th consecutive penalty since his miss for England against France in the 2022 World Cup, placing Bayern on course for a victory in the tie and keeping the dream alive of appearing in this season's final in Munich.

Cameras showed Alonso, who spoke of the need for cool heads on the European stage before the match, with his head buried in his palms as Kane and Bayern celebrated by the corner flag. Bayern, who were considered outsiders by an array of pundits before the match, roared back into form, sending a reminder of where the bal-

ance of power in German football lies.

"It was a really big step in the right direction. We've struggled against this side over the last couple of years, but from the first minute on we brought focus and intensity," Kane told DAZN. "They'll believe they can turn it around and we have to go with the same mindset we had today and get through."

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany was calm after the match, saying it was "only half-time" and that he would "not at all" enjoy the result until a quarter-final spot was secure. "This game was until now the most important game of our season. On Tuesday, we go again and then I hope another important game will come along," he said. "We're staying calm and ready for what comes."

Leverkusen's recent dominance broken

Last season's undefeated Bundesliga winners Leverkusen had already eliminated Bayern from the German Cup this season and looked the better team in a scoreless draw between the sides in February. Like he did in that match, Alonso opted not to name a striker in this game, leaving the in-form Patrik Schick on the bench.

Schick's counterpart Kane was by his standards on a lean run, without a goal in four matches, but he put Bayern into the lead early, heading home an Olise cross. Kovar, who emerged as Leverkusen's cup 'keeper mid-season, gifted Bayern a second, dropping the ball at the feet of Musiala to leave him with the easiest of finishes.

Bayern even overcame the loss of veteran captain Manuel Neuer, who was replaced by Jonas Urbig with half an hour remaining, but Leverkusen failed to challenge the 21-year-old debutant. Mukiele's send-



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's English forward #09 Harry Kane scores the 3-0 goal from the penalty spot during the UEFA Champions League last 16, first-leg, football match FC Bayern Munich v Bayer 04 Leverkusen on March 5, 2025 in Munich. — AFP

ing-off and Kane's spot-kick put Bayern on the verge of the last eight on an impressive night for Kompany. Leverkusen midfielder Granit Xhaka lamented

"conceding two very, very bitter and unnecessary goals," but said "we need to keep believing, right until the end." — AFP

Kuwaiti athletes capable of making achievements at Winter World Games

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait's Special Olympics delegation, Khalid Al-Nasser, confirmed the readiness of Kuwaiti athletes to participate in the 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games 2025 and confidence in their ability to make achievements thanks to their determination and technical preparation.

Al-Nasser told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Thursday before the delegation left to participate in the tournament, which starts in the Italian city of Turin on Saturday until March 15, that the preparation of the athletes was supervised by a highly qualified specialized technical staff and through camps held in the UAE and Egypt, especially with the presence of equipped places for the Winter Games in them.

He added that the Kuwaiti delegation will compete in the World Winter Games with three athletes, namely Maryam Dhiab in snowboarding, Hajar Al-Rashidi and Abdullah Al-Ali in snow running. He explained that this tournament will increase the balance of sports for people with intellectual disabilities from the Kuwaiti Special Olympics members who are working hard to achieve a national sporting achievement.

For her part, the Executive Director of the Kuwaiti Sports Club (Al-Tomouh), the official representative of Special Olympics Kuwait, Huda Al-Khalidi, confirmed to KUNA her confidence "in the ability of the Kuwaiti delegation participating for the first time in this World Games to achieve unprecedented numbers."

Al-Khalidi expressed her thanks to the country's official authorities, the board of directors of the (Al-Tomouh) Club and the regional Special Olympics



Khalid Al-Nasser seen with Kuwaiti athletes.

for their efforts in making the Kuwaiti participation a success, stressing that Kuwait Special Olympics provided all available resources from external camps and intensive training in order for the participating athletes to make the desired achievement.

For his part, Dr Ismail Habash, an emergency physician at the Ministry of Health accompanying the delegation, told KUNA that his participation as a representative of the ministry stems from the interest of government sectors in people with disabilities and the need to provide them with the necessary medical support in international sports championships. Habash added that his participation also stems

from his medical experience and his passion for supporting people with disabilities and establishing their active and influential role in society, explaining that their participation in the tournament itself is considered a success for Kuwaiti sports. The 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games is the largest sporting event for people with intellectual disabilities, during which 1,500 athletes with intellectual disabilities and a non-disabled partner compete with the participation of 1,000 coaches representing 100 different countries in 8 different winter sports, including mountain skiing, snowboarding, futsal, snow running and others. — KUNA

FIFA to pay \$1bn prize money for Club World Cup

PARIS: FIFA on Wednesday announced it will pay total prize money of one billion dollars to participants in the Club World Cup taking place in the United States this year.

The figure is significantly more than the prize money offered for either the last men's or women's World Cups. World football's governing body has given few details about the funding of the first edition of the 32-team tournament that will take place every four years but it has signed up a broadcaster and major sponsors in recent weeks.

In a statement confirming the prize money on offer, FIFA said it expected to generate \$2 billion in revenues from the expanded Club World Cup. It also confirmed that a women's edition will take place from 2028.

"The FIFA Club World Cup will not only be the pinnacle of club football, but also a vivid demonstration of solidarity that will benefit clubs at large to a scale that no other competition has ever done," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

"All revenue generated by the tournament will be distributed to the participating clubs and via club solidarity across the world as FIFA will not keep a single dollar." British streaming service DAZN was awarded the exclusive global rights to the June 14-July 13 tournament in December with a source close to the negotiations saying the contract was worth around one billion euros (\$1.05 billion).

FIFA has also signed sponsorship contracts with Coca-Cola, Bank of America, Chinese electronics brand Hisense and Belgian brewers AB InBev. By comparison the total prize money for the 2022 men's World Cup in Qatar was \$440 million, while for the 2023 Women's World Cup in New Zealand and Australia it was \$110 million. This season's UEFA Champions League, with a new 36-club format, will pay a total 2.47 billion euros (\$2.66 billion) to the clubs involved.

Widespread criticism

FIFA's expansion of the tournament has been met by widespread criticism, especially in Europe, largely due to concerns over player welfare. The global footballers' union FIFPro and the European Leagues association filed a complaint with the European Commission in October against FIFA, accused of abusing its dominant position by packing the calendar.

The Champions League was also expanded by UEFA this season and some players, including Balon d'Or winner Rodri and Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk, have raised the prospect of a strike. "I think we are close to that. I think if you ask any player he will say the same," said Rodri when asked in September if there was a possibility of players going on strike, shortly before suffering a season-ending knee injury.

"It is not the opinion of Rodri or whatever. I think it's the general opinion of the players." The tournament will feature 12 teams from Europe, six from South America and four each from Asia, Africa and North and Central America. — AFP

US confirms bid for 2031 Women's WCup after FIFA boost

LOS ANGELES: The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) said Wednesday it will press ahead with a joint bid for the 2031 Women's World Cup after a FIFA decision boosted the CONCACAF region's chances of staging the tournament.

The USSF said in a brief statement on social media that it planned to "complete the bid process to host the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup" in partnership with the CONCACAF regional federation and its members.

"We are excited by the opportunity to welcome teams and fans, inspire the next generation and grow the game regionally and globally," the US federation said. The United States and Mexico had initially planned to bid for the 2027 Women's World Cup but withdrew their candidacy last year weeks ahead of a FIFA vote in Bangkok, saying they would instead concentrate on a successful bid for 2031.

The 2027 tournament was eventually awarded to Brazil. In a statement issued in Zurich earlier Wednesday, world governing body FIFA announced that the field of eligible regions for the 2031 hosts had been narrowed down to two — North America, Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF) and Africa (CAF).

A US joint bid would still face competition, however, with both South Africa and Morocco in the running to stage the 2031 tournament. While FIFA has repeatedly signalled its willingness to take the Women's World Cup to new territories, a North American bid would represent an attractive commercial option for FIFA with the likelihood of packed stadiums and record attendances.

North America has hosted the tournament on three previous occasions, with the USA solo hosts in 1999 and 2003, and Canada staging the event in 2015. Hosting in 2031 would complete a busy cycle of major sporting events in North America.

FIFA is already staging its inaugural Club World Cup in the region this year, and the United States, Canada and Mexico are hosting next year's men's World Cup. Los Angeles is also hosting the 2028 Olympics. FIFA has said the vote to determine the 2031 tournament will take place at the 76th FIFA Congress ahead of the 2026 World Cup. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Dasireddy Amaravathi (old name) Passport No. M8391261, W/o Desireddy Ramanaidu, R/o Gaddamvaripalli, Udayamanikyam Post, Yerravaripalem Mandal, Tirupati District, Andhra Pradesh, have changed my name to Desireddy Amaravathi (new name) w/o Desireddy Ramanaidu. (07-03-2025)

I, Mohammed Sahib, holder of Indian passport no. Z3199942 having permanent address 19-2-21/11/25, Indira Nagar Tadban, Hyderabad, Telangana 500064, India residing in Kuwait at

present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Mohammed Saheb (given name). (#6645, 06-03-2025)

I, Adrians Ferns, holder of Indian passport no. M9149345 having permanent address, 11 Beatrice villa, Amboli, Andheri West, Mumbai 400058, Maharashtra, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Adrian and (surname) Ferns. (#6644, 05-03-2025)

Liverpool's Elliott nabs last-gasp winner against dominant PSG

PSG to face tough task at Anfield in return leg

PARIS: Liverpool substitute Harvey Elliott scored a last-gasp winner 47 seconds after coming on to earn a fortunate 1-0 win against Paris St Germain who outplayed their visitors during Wednesday's Champions League last-16 first leg match.

Elliott slotted home in the 87th minute against the run of play after a layoff from fellow substitute Darwin Nunez for a scarcely-deserved victory in Paris after goalkeeper Alisson had kept Liverpool in the game with a string of magnificent saves.

Liverpool's goal was their first shot on target and second attempt compared to PSG's 28. "To go away with a win from here was probably a bit more than we deserved," acknowledged Slot. Luis Enrique's PSG, who had won 18 and drawn two of their last 20 games, were left to rue missed chances as they contemplate a tough return leg at Anfield next Tuesday.

"We're going to show the team we are, we're going to show our character. We're going to win there," said their midfielder Vitorinha. "With the game we played, the win was more than deserved. We had plenty of chances ... we just couldn't score." The aggregate winner will face either Aston Villa or Club Brugge in the Champions League last eight.

Dominant hosts

PSG got off to a strong start with Liverpool's attempt at a high press not lasting long. The hosts had the first clear chance in the 16th minute when Joao Neves skied his attempt over the bar from Dembele's cutback after the France forward had outpaced two defenders.

Alarm bells were ringing for Liverpool and they again escaped punishment in the 20th when Khvicha Kvar-

atskhelia's superb curled effort was ruled out for offside after a VAR review. Bradley Barcola went down after a challenge from Ibrahima Konate, prompting another video check for a potential red card, but the visitors stayed with 11 men. With Liverpool in survival mode, Alisson parried Neves' 25-metre strike before denying Dembele. The ball went into the path of Barcola, whose first strike was blocked before his second flew over.

The Brazilian keeper's firm hand was there again to stop Kvaratskhelia and he made saves left, right and centre early in a one-sided second half. "Without him, I don't know where we'd be," said goalscorer Elliott.

Substitute the saviour

Slot sent Curtis Jones and Nunez on for Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota hoping to shift the momentum but PSG stayed a notch above. Alisson, again, stretched to tip away Desire Doue's missile 10 minutes from time and he also played a key role in the buildup to the goal. With the clock ticking down, Nunez showed his strength to win Alisson's long ball and played perfectly into the path of Elliott, who calmly slid the ball past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

"You could see they (PSG) had become a bit tired at the end," added Elliott. "It was down to me to put the opportunity away and fortunately it went in." Alisson, who was named man of the match, said it was the performance of his life. "We had to be ready to suffer ... It was a tough night for us with a happy end." he said. "We worked hard. We gave away so many chances ... And then at the end Harvey coming in and scoring the goal. It's unbelievable. A great story. A great night for us." — Reuters



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese midfielder #17 Vitorinha (C) is tackled by Liverpool's Argentine midfielder #10 Alexis Mac Allister (R) during the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 first leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) and Liverpool (ENG) at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on March 5, 2025. — AFP

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