



7 21 hostages, 4 troops killed as Pakistan train standoff ends

11 Ramadan drummers, iftar staples and passion for art in Weekender

16 Penalty controversy as Real reach quarters, English duo advance

Ramadan

Fajr	: 04:41
Shrooq	: 05:59
Dhuhr	: 11:57
Asr	: 15:22
Maghrib	: 17:55
Isha	: 19:12

Kuwait frees jailed Americans

Prisoners' representative thanks Kuwaiti government for humanitarian gesture



KUWAIT: An image posted on X by Jonathan Franks shows Franks (left) with six American prisoners detained by Kuwait as they pose for a photo at Kuwait international airport on March 12, 2025.

KUWAIT: Kuwait has released a group of American prisoners, including veterans and military contractors who had been jailed for years on drug-related charges, in what is seen as a goodwill gesture between the two allied nations, a representative for the detainees told The Associated Press on Wednesday. Kuwait did not acknowledge the release on its state-run KUNA news agency and did not immediately respond to a request for comment by AP. The US State Department has not yet commented, and the names of the released prisoners were not immediately disclosed.

The release follows a recent regional visit by Adam Boehler, the Trump administration's top hostage envoy, and comes amid ongoing US efforts to bring home American citizens imprisoned abroad. Six of the freed prisoners were flown from

Kuwait to New York, accompanied by Jonathan Franks, a private consultant specializing in cases of American hostages and detainees. "My clients and their families are grateful to the Kuwaiti government for this kind humanitarian gesture," Franks said in a statement. He added that his clients maintain their innocence and that additional American detainees he represents are also expected to be released.

Kuwait, a major non-NATO ally of the United States, has maintained a close military relationship with Washington since the 1991 Gulf War to expel Iraqi troops after then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded the country. Kuwait hosts approximately 13,500 American troops at Camp Arifjan and Ali Al-Salem Air Base. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently reaffirmed the US commitment to Kuwait's sovereignty and security.

However, Kuwait has strict drug laws and prohibits alcohol, leading to the detention of several American military contractors on drug charges. The US State Department warns travelers that such offenses in Kuwait can carry severe penalties, including long prison sentences and, in some cases, the death penalty.

The release follows similar efforts by President Donald Trump's administration to bring home detained Americans. Recently, the administration secured the release of American teacher Marc Fogel in a prisoner swap with Russia and facilitated the release of another US citizen from Belarus. The Americans freed from Kuwait had not been officially designated as wrongfully detained, a status that would have ensured their cases were handled by the US government's special presidential envoy for hostage affairs.

RAMADAN KAREEM

The genius of the Quran

By Dr Teresa Leshner

Every writer starts his career unable to read. Letter by letter he learns the alphabet, then he learns to read words and sentences. His practice of writing usually begins with his name, then sentences and paragraphs. Gradually he builds his skills until he can write short stories. With years of practice he can produce a range of poetry and prose. If he is lucky, he can acquire the status of a literary genius. But even if he doesn't, he can certainly appreciate literary genius.

The novelist Reynolds Price defines literary genius as an innate ability to utilize word, phrase and rhythm toward a comprehensible end that is large enough to prove significant in more than one culture, as well as a fertility of intellect and language that results in enduringly magnetic and challenging work. The Holy Quran definitely falls within the purview of this definition.

Although we may initially fail to see the genius when we first read the Holy Quran, it is because of the limitation of our minds. We should not expect the Creator of humans to follow human standards of expression, organization and relevance. In fact, if we could grasp the full message of the Holy Quran with a single reading, we would be right to demote it to ordinary, non-genius literature.

Rightfully so, many people initially experience the Holy Quran as unorganized and fragmented because they are dealing with an extraterrestrial text, one that originated far beyond the range of our senses. But, with open-minded diligence, we will discover a message, style and artistry that stuns human intellect and far surpasses our experience with human literary genius.

Remarkably so, the genius of the Holy Quran does not preclude ordinary people from its grasp. No matter your culture, education or experience, the Holy Quran holds meaning for you. It was sent by the Creator of each of us, who says, "O mankind, there has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers" (10:57). Not mere claims, these promises hold true for those willing to receive this most important message, and perseverant enough to discover the miracle that it is.

Continued on Page 6

Mol urges safety during Girgian, arrests beggars

KUWAIT: The ministry of interior on Wednesday stressed the importance of adhering to traffic regulations and security guidelines to ensure public safety, particularly for children, during Girgian celebrations. The ministry emphasized that strict measures have been implemented to maintain road safety and protect children.

In a statement, the ministry reiterated the prohibition of closing internal roads in residential areas and the use of recreational vehicles, folk bands and food carts, citing the disruptions they cause to traffic flow and the risks they pose to public safety. Authorities warned legal action will be taken against violators.

The ministry urged parents to directly supervise their children rather than relying solely on domestic workers, while also calling on drivers to reduce their speed and remain vigilant on both internal and main roads to prevent accidents. Additionally, a comprehensive security and traffic plan has been implemented for the holy month of Ramadan, with both fixed and mobile patrols deployed across various governorates to enhance public security and safety.



KUWAIT: Girls wearing traditional dresses (dara'a) celebrate Girgian at a school. — KUNA

Meanwhile, the ministry announced that a recent security campaign led to the arrest of seven female beggars of Arab nationality, who have been referred to the relevant authorities for legal action, including deportation.

Continued on Page 6

Syria leader inks constitutional declaration, hails 'new history'

DAMASCUS: Syrian leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa on Thursday hailed the start of a "new history" for his country, signing into force a constitutional declaration regulating its five-year transitional period and laying out rights for women and freedom of expression. The declaration comes three months after Islamist-led rebels toppled Bashar Al-Assad's repressive government, leading to calls both inside and outside the country for an inclusive

new Syria that respects rights. The new authorities repealed the Assad-era constitution and dissolved parliament. Interim President Sharaa on Thursday said he hoped the constitutional declaration would mark the beginning of "a new history for Syria, where we replace oppression with justice... and suffering with mercy", as he signed the document at the presidential palace.

Continued on Page 6



DAMASCUS: Syria's interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa signs the country's constitutional declaration at the presidential palace on March 13, 2025. — AFP

Zionists carried out genocidal acts, sexual violence in Gaza: UN

GENEVA: A United Nations investigation concluded Thursday that the Zionist entity carried out "genocidal acts" in Gaza through the destruction of its main IVF clinic, maternity facilities and other reproductive healthcare facilities. The UN Commission of Inquiry said the Zionist entity had "intentionally attacked and destroyed" the Palestinian territory's main fertility center and had simultaneously imposed a siege and blocked aid including medication for ensuring safe pregnancies, deliveries and neonatal care.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted by calling the findings "false and absurd". In a statement, the UN commission said it found that Zionist authorities "have destroyed in part the reproductive capacity of Palestinians in Gaza as a group through the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare". It said this amounted to "two categories of genocidal acts" during the Zionist entity's offensive in Gaza.

The United Nations' genocide convention defines that crime as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Of its five categories, the inquiry said the two implicating the Zionist entity were "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction" and "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group". The report accused Zionist security

Three- to five-day Eid Al-Fitr holiday

KUWAIT: The Eid Al-Fitr holiday in the public sector in Kuwait will be for three days if Eid starts on Sunday, March 30, 2025, the Cabinet announced in a statement following its weekly meeting Thursday. Work would then resume on Wednesday, April 2, 2025. If Eid starts on Monday, March 31, 2025, then the holiday will extend for five days, including Thursday, which would fall between the Eid holiday and the weekend, the Cabinet explained. Work would then resume on Sunday, April 6, 2025.

Separately, Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority referred a former minister to the public prosecution on charges of embezzlement of public funds, Nazaha announced on Thursday. The action came after thorough examination of evidence and gathering of information related to the case, the authority said, vowing to continue exerting all efforts to protect public funds. — KUNA

Continued on Page 6



Local



KUWAIT: Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah, visits the "Wajib Mubarak" force in the northern region on Wednesday to mark the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA photos



Defense minister visits Wajib Mubarak force

Sheikh Abdullah urges ground forces to continue dedicated service to the nation



KUWAIT: Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah, visited the "Wajib Mubarak" force in the northern region on Wednesday to mark the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. He was accompanied by Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Major General Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and several senior military leaders.

According to a statement by the Ministry of Defense, Sheikh Abdullah began his visit by receiving a briefing from the commander of the "Wajib Mubarak" force, who outlined the force's preparedness and operational readiness. The minister also shared an iftar meal with the personnel in a Ramadan atmosphere.

During his speech, Sheikh Abdullah conveyed the greetings and best wishes of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on the occasion of Ramadan.



Expressing his happiness to be among the soldiers, Sheikh Abdullah praised the high morale of the armed forces and expressed pride in their dedication and sacrifices to protect the homeland and maintain its security, stability and territorial integrity.

He concluded his visit by urging the personnel of

the ground forces to continue their dedication and service to the nation, praying to Almighty God to preserve Kuwait's security and stability and to bless the country and its people during Ramadan under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince. — KUNA



Kuwait's foreign minister discusses ties with Iraqi, Iranian officials

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya received a letter on Wednesday from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr Abbas Araghchi, regarding the close bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to strengthen and develop them across various fields.

This came during Minister Al-Yahya's meeting with the Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Totonji, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters.

Separately, Al-Yahya, accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, met with Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister for Bilateral Relations, Ambassador Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom, during his official visit to Kuwait.

The meeting addressed the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and ways to strengthen and develop them across various fields. The parties also discussed regional and international developments and the latest issues affecting the region. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwaiti Minister Amthah Al-Huwailah and Chinese Minister Huang Xiaowei pose for a photo. — KUNA

Kuwait, China discuss cooperation in field of social welfare

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Family and Childhood Affairs Dr Amthah Al-Huwailah, reaffirmed on Wednesday the depth of the relationship between Kuwait and China, which has spanned over 55 years. She expressed her hope to strengthen the existing cooperation between the two countries in the fields of social welfare and family development. This came during Al-Huwailah's meeting with the Chinese Minister and Vice Chairperson of the National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council, Huang Xiaowei, on the sidelines of the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Both sides discussed ways to support and empower women in society and to enhance social services provided to families. During the meeting, Al-Huwailah highlighted Kuwait's policies to support women in the areas of social welfare and the services provided to promote family stability and offer support to mothers and children. She pointed out that Kuwait's experience in delivering such services aims to achieve social justice and strengthen social cohesion. Both parties expressed their mutual desire to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of social welfare, exchange expertise in supporting families and empowering women, and develop joint mechanisms in areas such as social protection, professional training, and support for vulnerable groups. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya meets with Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister for Bilateral Relations, Ambassador Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom, during his official visit to Kuwait. — KUNA photos



Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya receives a letter written by Iran's foreign minister from Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Totonji.

Kuwaiti charities provide aid to families in Kuwait, Al-Aqsa defenders

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti charities, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and Namaa Charity Foundation, have been actively supporting those in need both locally and abroad during Ramadan, embodying the spirit of the holy month through acts of compassion and solidarity. The KRCS distributed 1,300 food baskets to families in Kuwait, helping alleviate the financial strain during Ramadan. The baskets included essential items such as rice, sugar, dates, cooking oil, canned goods, and other necessities, providing vital support to vulnerable families. Fawaz Al-Mazrouei, the director-general of KRCS, emphasized the charity's goal of fostering social solidarity.

Meanwhile, Namaa Charity continued its efforts in Palestine by launching its "Iftar for the Fasting in Jerusalem" project. Over several days, the foundation distributed iftar meals to 1,800 defenders of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, offering nourishment and boosting morale during the sacred month. The defenders, facing daily challenges due to the ongoing Zionist entity occupation, received meals to support their steadfastness. Khaled Al-Shammari, director of Namaa Charity's Relief Department, described the

initiative as more than just a humanitarian project. "It is a message of support and love for the people of Jerusalem," Al-Shammari said. "Through this project, we are not only providing nourishment but also reaffirming our commitment to their resilience in the face of adversity."



KUWAIT: Fawaz Al-Mazrouei, the director-general of KRCS, poses in front of food boxes meant for needy families in Kuwait as part of a Ramadan aid campaign. — KUNA photos

The meals, carefully prepared and distributed during the nightly iftar gatherings at Al-Aqsa Mosque, offer more than just sustenance — they serve as a reminder of the deep bond between the people of Kuwait and Palestine. By supporting the defenders of Al-Aqsa, Namaa Charity helps strengthen their morale and bolsters the spirit of solidarity within the Muslim world. — KUNA



JERUSALEM: Aid workers prepare hot iftar meals for 1,800 defenders of the Al-Aqsa Mosque as part of a charity campaign organized by Namaa Charity.

Local

Kuwait's new communicable diseases hospital nears completion

Minister urges timely work to open hospital for patients as soon as possible



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi inspects Kuwait's new Communicable Diseases Hospital accompanied by health officials. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's new Communicable Diseases Hospital.

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi emphasized the need to complete all operational preparations for Kuwait's new Communicable Diseases Hospital within the specified timeline to ensure it is ready to provide healthcare services as soon as possible. This initiative aims to enhance the healthcare sector's capacity to meet patient needs and represents a significant step forward for Kuwait's healthcare system.

Following a field visit to the hospital project on Wednesday, Al-Awadhi underscored the importance of delivering comprehensive medical services that meet the highest quality standards to ensure patient comfort and efficient care. He reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to advancing healthcare development plans and strengthening the system's readiness to meet future demands.

The minister provided feedback during the visit and instructed technical and administrative teams to expedite preparations while adhering to the highest standards of quality and safety. He emphasized the need to finalize all operational requirements promptly to ensure the hospital's readiness for patient admissions.

Accompanying Al-Awadhi were Undersecretary Dr Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Assistant Undersecretary for Engineering Affairs and Projects



Ibrahim Al-Naham, Assistant Undersecretary for Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Khaled Al-Yaseen, and Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Dr Munther Al-Hasawi, along with other ministry officials and specialized teams.

During the visit, the delegation inspected various hospital departments and facilities to ensure all necessary preparations were on track for the hospital's official opening. Al-Awadhi also received a detailed briefing on the medical and

technical equipment and the hospital's operational plan, which aligns with international quality and safety standards.

Hospital features

The new Communicable Diseases Hospital is one of Kuwait's most advanced healthcare projects, spanning 46,523 square meters with a total building area of 74,000 square meters. It comprises a basement, ground floor, five upper floors, and a rooftop, with a capacity of 224 beds equipped with the latest medical and technological advancements.

The hospital features comprehensive medical services, including emergency care, medical records, radiology, main and outpatient pharmacies, a laboratory, outpatient clinics, sterilization, dental care, and physical therapy. It also provides ample parking facilities both in front of the building and in the basement, ensuring a fully integrated healthcare environment that meets international standards.

This project is part of the Ministry of Health's strategic plan to improve healthcare quality and enhance the system's ability to manage diverse medical conditions. It reflects Kuwait's commitment to developing advanced medical facilities that align with global best practices while providing comprehensive, patient-centered care. — KUNA

Factbox:

New communicable diseases hospital

Project overview:

- One of Kuwait's major modern healthcare projects.
- Aims to enhance the healthcare system's capacity to handle communicable diseases.

Hospital specifications:

- Total area: 46,523 square meters.
- Building area: 74,000 square meters.
- Structure: Basement, ground floor, five upper floors, and a rooftop.
- Bed capacity: 224 beds equipped with advanced medical and technological systems.

Medical facilities include:

- Emergency department
- Medical records and radiology
- Main and outpatient pharmacies
- Laboratory and sterilization units
- Outpatient clinics and dental clinics
- Physical therapy department

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Canadian envoy stresses gender equality at diwaniya

Mawani hosts diwaniya to celebrate International Day of the Francophonie and International Women's Day

By Jassim Al-Awadh

KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani hosted a diwaniya at the Canadian Official Residence to celebrate both the International Day of the Francophonie and International Women's Day. The event highlighted two intertwined celebrations that both emphasize the need for gender equality, cultural diversity, and active participation from all individuals, regardless of gender or background. The ambassador noted that gender equality is not just about justice but is a key driver of progress and economic development. "When we invest in women, we create stronger communities and stronger economies, to the benefit of everyone," she said.

The ambassador highlighted that companies with greater diversity tend to perform better financially. She stressed that having women in decision-making roles and leadership positions significantly improves the quality of negotiations and outcomes, offering a more sustainable path forward for all. "We, all of us, have to use one hand to keep the door open behind us for even more women to follow, while using the other to continue to hammer away at obstacles in our path and extend it in cooperation to men who are our allies, sponsors and mentors," she said.

Reflecting on Canada's evolving foreign policy over the past two decades, the ambassador proud-

ly highlighted the country's efforts to appoint more women in leadership positions. "By 2025, 50 percent of Canadian ambassadors around the world will be women," she shared. This milestone, she said, was a testament to the progress made in ensuring that women's voices are heard and valued in the international arena. However, despite these strides, the ambassador reminded the audience that the fight for gender equality is far from over. Drawing attention to a report by the World Economic Forum, she noted that at the current pace, it will take until 2158 to achieve full gender parity. "I think we can all agree that that's just not good enough," she said.

She added that navigating the challenges facing our world requires a new approach—one that incorporates diverse perspectives and experiences. "Each one of us has a unique lens on the world and bringing these diverse insights together can help us to harness opportunities and identify risks. I'm a big believer that inclusion helps us do what we do," she said.

Ambassador Mawani called on everyone, particularly women leaders in Kuwait, to continue supporting each other and breaking down barriers. She also thanked the men in attendance for being allies in the pursuit of gender equality. "Kuwait is full of extraordinary women leaders, and I've been privileged to meet women here who inspire me every day," Mawani added.



KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani poses for a photo with female leaders during an event held at the Canadian Official Residence to celebrate International Day of the Francophonie and International Women's Day.

EU envoy to Kuwait discusses key global issues at ghabqa

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The European Union Delegation to the State of Kuwait held a ghabqa on Tuesday, hosting local media representatives to mark the Holy Month of Ramadan at EU Residence. During her opening speech, EU Ambassador Anne Koistinen expressed gratitude for the continued cooperation between the EU Delegation and Kuwaiti media, acknowledging their role in covering EU-Kuwait relations and EU-related news throughout the year, extending her warmest Ramadan greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti Government, and the people of Kuwait.

She stated that this year is significantly important in bilateral relations, as Kuwait will be hosting the next EU-GCC Ministerial meeting later in the year. "The EU and Kuwait have a strong friendship based on shared interests, including Kuwait's genuine support to multilateralism and the principles of good international cooperation. I see a positive potential in our relations, there is much more we can do together bilaterally, regionally, and globally."

The ambassador added that both the EU and Kuwait are strong humanitarian actors and share a strong interest in supporting vulnerable populations around the world, in support and cooperation with the UN system and multilateral organizations.

She said that this ghabqa comes at a critical



KUWAIT: EU Ambassador Anne Koistinen poses for a group photo with the local media representatives at the ghabqa.

moment for the multilateral and rules-based world order. "Gaza and Ukraine still remind us these days how much the international community needs an efficient multilateral system, founded on universal rules and values that are respected by all. As the President of the European Council Antonio Costa said last week at the Arab League Summit in Cairo, the EU firmly rejects any attempt at demographic and territorial changes in Gaza."

She added that international law and rules-based order are also under threat in Ukraine. "We believe that any peace for Ukraine must be just, sustainable, and with security guarantees for Ukraine and Europe," she said.

Concerning the developments in Syria, the ambassador indicated that the EU strongly condemns the recent attacks on interim government forces in

the coastal areas of Syria and all violence against civilians. "Civilians have to be protected in all circumstances in full respect of international humanitarian law. The EU also calls on all external actors to fully respect the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria. We believe that Syria has a historic opportunity to reunite and rebuild the country under an inclusive and Syrian-led political process," she said.

Koistinen said she looked forward to a high-level participation from Kuwait in the Syria Conference to be held on March 17 in Brussels. "From 2013 to 2015, Kuwait hosted the first three international donor conferences for Syria, playing a crucial role in rallying financial and humanitarian assistance," she said, further highlighting Kuwait's efforts to alleviate suffering in war-torn regions.

KFAED signs \$2.1m grant deal to aid displaced in Yemen

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed a \$2.1 million grant agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Thursday. The grant will support a project aimed at rehabilitating and repairing homes for displaced families in Yemen. According to a press release, the project will assist returning displaced families by providing the materials, equipment, and labor needed to repair homes damaged by Yemen's ongoing conflict. It is expected to directly benefit approximately 670 families.

Walid Al-Bahar, Acting Director-general of KFAED, highlighted that this agreement demonstrates Kuwait's commitment to supporting the Yemeni people, who continue to face severe humanitarian and economic challenges. UNHCR Representative in Kuwait, Nisreen Rubaian, noted that Yemen is enduring one of the world's most complex humanitarian crises. With more than four million people displaced and 40 percent of the population facing inadequate housing, the need for such assistance is urgent. This grant marks the eighth collaboration between KFAED and the UNHCR. Since 2016, Kuwait has contributed approximately \$24 million to fund seven humanitarian projects. KFAED is a development institution that provides concessional loans and development aid to help finance projects in developing countries. —KUNA

Jahez International concludes National Holidays campaign

KUWAIT: Jahez International Company ("Jahez International"), a pioneering platform that connects customers with their favorite restaurants through online orders, announced the conclusion of its extensive National Holidays campaign whereby the company organized a series of community-driven initiatives throughout the month of February and March in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. The initiatives organized under the campaign align with the core values that Jahez International stands by when serving and engaging with the community that extend beyond its business operations.

Jahez International's National Holidays campaign featured various collaborations with renowned institutions in Kuwait and public figures that share the same values as the company. The initiatives included sponsoring the Kontinue program by LOYAC, an exclusive artistic collaboration with local Kuwaiti illustrator and artist 'Sheikha', engaging family-focused activities with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital ('KACCH') and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice ('BACCH'), and a large reconstruction of the Residential and Industrial



Artist Sheikha Al-Habshi

Sulaibiya Tunnel ('Kabd Tunnel'). These efforts were launched in addition to Jahez International's ongoing commitment to giving back to its valued customers through cash-back rewards, daily promotions, and exclusive collaborations on the Jahez App.

Bader Al-Ajeel, General Manager of Jahez International, said: "Kuwait's National Holidays are a time to reflect on the values that bring our community together. At Jahez International, we believe businesses have a responsibility to contribute beyond their core services by organizing and supporting initiatives that create a lasting and meaningful impact. Through our ongoing efforts, we are committed to strengthening our connection with the community by launching a diverse range of initiatives. These initiatives aim to extend beyond our platform and into the daily lives of our customers and the community."

Empowering entrepreneurs

As part of its commitment to youth empowerment and engaging with the community, Jahez International sponsored 'Kontinue', a six-week program launched by LOYAC. The program aimed to equip aspiring business owners aged 20 and above with essential skills in leadership, business development, and startup strategy. Held at Boursa Kuwait, the program included mentorship and industry experts, hands-on workshops, and a final pitch competition where participants presented their business ideas to a judging panel for an opportunity to secure funding for their project.

Supporting local art

In celebrating Kuwait's vibrant cultural and arts scene, Jahez International partnered with local artist Sheikha Al-Habshi to design exclusive National Day themed artwork for coffee sleeves and stickers, in collaboration with Kofe - Espresso Bar. The sleeves and stickers were placed on all coffee mugs and orders placed to Kofe on the Jahez App. The coffee sleeves featured a colorful tribute to Kuwait with various elements resembling Kuwait's heritage and traditions placed in the artwork.

Celebrating the youth

Giving back to those in need, Jahez International



Jahez International Company partners with Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice ('BACCH') during its National Holidays campaign.



A lecturer speaks to LOYAC 'Kontinue' participants, an initiative sponsored by Jahez International and held at Boursa Kuwait.

partnered with KACCH and BACCH, bringing joy to young patients through an interactive arts and crafts experience. Representatives from the Jahez International team personally distributed creative activity kits and giveaways, getting a chance to also meet and speak with the children. The initiative aimed to brighten the children's day and their families while also providing them with a moment of joy that is outside their daily routines.

Making a change with Bu Jarrah

Community development is an essential factor for progress especially when celebrating the Nation-

al Holidays, which serve as a time to reflect on the importance of collective efforts in building a better future. In collaboration with Bu Jarrah, a well-known activist and social media influencer in Kuwait, Jahez International took the initiative to completely renovate the Kabd Tunnel, transforming it into a safer and more visually appealing passageway for the community. The tunnel, which had significantly deteriorated over time, was renovated along with a complete reconstruction of the road leading to it. In addition to the structural enhancements, Jahez International, alongside Bu Jarrah, collaborated with local graffiti artists to turn the outer walls of the tunnels into a vibrant display to commemorate Kuwait's heritage.

Strengthening community ties

Jahez International's National Holiday initiatives reflect its long-term approach of creating a deeper connection with the Kuwaiti community. Through its projects, the company aspires to play a contributing role in supporting and progressing Kuwait's social and economic fabric.

Al-Ajeel added: "Our initiatives this year were designed to blend celebration with social impact, reflecting our core belief that businesses must actively contribute to the well-being of the communities they serve. We are proud to have played a part in marking this year's National Holiday celebration more memorable for families, entrepreneurs, and the wider public."



At least 25 bodies retrieved from Pakistan train siege

Fears grow of renewed conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray

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DAMASCUS: A member of the Syrian security forces stands guard at the site of a Zionist air strike on a building in Damascus in an area where Palestinian leaders are known to reside, on March 13, 2025. — AFP photos



DAMASCUS: Syrian White Helmets rescuers inspect the site of a Zionist air strike on a building in Damascus.

Zionist forces pound Damascus

Iraq repatriates more families from Syria camp • 9,000 Syrians take refuge at Hmeimim air base

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity's Defense Minister Israel Katz confirmed the Zionist Air Force conducted an air strike in Damascus on Thursday, following reports from a war monitor that Zionist raid had killed one person in Syria's capital.

"There will be no immunity for Islamic terrorism against (the Zionist entity) — whether in Damascus or anywhere else. We will not allow Syria to become a threat to (the Zionist entity)," Katz said in a statement. Syrian state media said that Zionist entity had struck a building in Damascus.

The Zionist entity's military said, "The command centre was used to plan and direct terrorist activities by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad against the state of Zionist entity." It said the military "will not allow terrorist organizations to entrench themselves in Syrian territory and operate against the Zionist entity, and will respond forcefully to any such entrenchment." A source in the Islamic Jihad said a building belonging to the group had been hit by Zionist jets, adding

there were "martyrs and wounded" in the strike. "(Zionist) aircraft targeted a building with two missiles in... Damascus, killing at least one person," the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said. On Tuesday, the Zionist entity's military said warplanes struck southern Syria, targeting air defense systems and other military sites, "to eliminate future threats".

Since the overthrow of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad in December, the Zionist entity has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria and deployed troops to a UN-patrolled buffer zone on the strategic Golan Heights. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that southern Syria must be completely demilitarized, warning that his government would not accept the presence of the forces of the new Islamist-led government near its territory.

Meanwhile, Russia's air base at Hmeimim in Syria is sheltering about 9,000 people seeking refuge from a wave of sectarian violence. Foreign Ministry

spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.

Hmeimim is one of two military bases in Syria that Russia is hoping to retain despite the toppling of its ally, former president Bashar Al-Assad, by Islamist rebels in December. "They were seeking refuge, simply understanding that it was a matter of life and death," Zakharova told reporters, adding that most of the civilians taking shelter there were women and children. The sectarian violence in Syria has pitted the new Islamist-led government's security forces against fighters from Assad's Alawite minority. Hundreds of Alawite civilians have been killed in what the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said were reprisals after attacks on the security forces.

Meanwhile, Iraq has repatriated more than 150 additional families from Al-Hol camp in neighboring Syria, an Iraqi security official said on Thursday, the latest such transfer from the camp where many have alleged jihadist links. Kurdish-run camps and prisons in northeastern Syria still hold about 56,000

people from dozens of countries, many of them the family members of Islamic State group (IS) suspects, more than five years after the jihadists' territorial defeat in Syria.

While many Western countries refuse to take back their nationals, Baghdad has taken the lead by accelerating repatriations and urging others to follow suit. The latest group of 505 people is the sixth since the beginning of the year to be repatriated. They left the camp on Wednesday, said Jihan Hanan, Al-Hol's director. About "153 families arrived yesterday" in Iraq, the Iraqi security official who spoke on condition of anonymity confirmed to AFP.

IS captured nearly a third of Iraq before local forces backed by a US-led coalition defeated them in Iraq in 2017. In Syria, US-backed Kurdish forces dislodged IS from the last of its Syrian-held territory in 2019.

Al-Hol is located in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of Syria. — AFP

More wait for stranded astronauts

WASHINGTON: A pair of astronauts stuck aboard the International Space Station (ISS) for over nine months may have to wait a little longer to return home after the launch of their replacements was postponed.

The Falcon 9 rocket propelling the NASA-SpaceX Crew-10 mission was set to blast off from Florida's Kennedy Space Center on Wednesday at 7.48 pm (2348 GMT). But with around 45 minutes left on the countdown clock and the four-member team strapped in, the launch was scrubbed because of a technical issue.

"There was an issue with the hydraulic system on the ground side," NASA launch commentator Derrol Nail said, adding that "everything was fine with the rocket and the spacecraft itself." NASA said the next launch opportunity would be on Friday, cancelling a planned Thursday attempt due to expected "high winds and precipitation."

Crews were also "working to address a hydraulic system issue with a ground support clamp arm" associated with the launch, NASA said. NASA duo Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams have been stranded aboard the ISS since June after their Boeing Starliner spacecraft developed propulsion issues and was deemed unfit for their return. It came back empty. Wilmore and Williams were initially slated for an eight-day mission but were reassigned to Crew-9 after its astronauts arrived in September aboard



NASA astronauts Anne McClain and Nichole Ayers, JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) astronaut Takuya Onishi and Roscosmos cosmonaut Kirill Peskov are seen as they prepare to board the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft for the Crew-10 mission launch on March 12, 2025. — AFP

a SpaceX Dragon. The spacecraft carried only two crew members instead of the usual four to make room for Wilmore and Williams.

That Crew-9 spacecraft now docked at the ISS can only return to Earth after the one carrying Crew-10 arrives. "We came up prepared to stay long, even though we plan to stay short," Wilmore said in a recent news conference. "That's what your nation's human space flight program is all about, planning for unknown, unexpected contingencies."

Crew-9 was set to depart on Sunday, weather

permitting, for an ocean splashdown off the Florida coast. It was not immediately clear if that timeline was still feasible. Along with Wilmore and Williams, NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov will also be aboard the returning Dragon capsule. Space remains an area of cooperation between the United States and Russia despite the Ukraine conflict, with cosmonauts traveling to the ISS aboard SpaceX Crew Dragons and astronauts doing the same via Soyuz capsules launched from Kazakhstan. — AFP

US negotiators to set out Ukraine truce plan to Russia

MOSCOW: US negotiators travelled to Russia on Thursday to present their plan for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, but Moscow warned in advance it would refuse any temporary deal that gave Kyiv a "breather".

Ukraine agreed to the plan during talks with US officials in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, as US President Donald Trump pushes for a speedy end to the more than three-year conflict. Russia has been grinding forward on the battlefield for over a year, claiming on Thursday to have driven Ukraine from the town of Sudzha in its Kursk region. Russian President Vladimir Putin will likely give his assessment of the US and Ukrainian-backed proposal later on Thursday, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

A plane linked to Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff landed earlier at Vnukovo-2, a Moscow airport terminal often used to receive foreign dignitaries, Russian news agencies reported.

Russia meanwhile claimed rapid advances in the Kursk region — where Kyiv launched a cross-border assault last August. The Russian defense ministry said it had "liberated" Sudzha along with two other settlements in the border region. Sudzha, home to



Russia's President Vladimir Putin visits a command point for the Kursk group of troops involved in the counteroffensive in the Kursk region. — AFP

around 5,000 people before the fighting, was the largest settlement Kyiv seized after it launched its shock assault into Russia.

The Kursk region was one of Kyiv's few bargaining chips in swapping land with Russia, which has occupied around a fifth of Ukraine since it took Crimea in 2014 and launched its full-scale assault in February 2022. Ukraine now risks losing its grip on the border region entirely, ceding dozens of square kilometres in the past seven days, according to military bloggers. Ukraine's commander-in-chief hinted late Wednesday some of its troops were pulling back in the region. Putin visited the region on Wednesday for the first time since Ukraine launched its incursion. Dressed in battle fatigues, he expressed hope his army would "fully liberate" areas under Kyiv's control. — AFP

Duterte says he is 'responsible' as ICC takes him into custody

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands: Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte said he was prepared to accept responsibility as the International Criminal Court took him into custody Wednesday to face charges over his war on drugs.

The ICC, based in The Hague, believes there are "reasonable grounds" to charge Duterte with murder as a crime against humanity, as an "indirect co-perpetrator" during the anti-drug campaign that rights groups estimate killed tens of thousands. "I am the one who led our law enforcement and military. I said that I will protect you and I will be responsible for all of this," Duterte said in a video posted to his and a close advisor's Facebook pages.

"I have been telling the police, the military, that it was my job and I am responsible," said the 79-year-old, the first Asian former head of state to appear before the ICC. A spokesman confirmed Duterte was in court custody after he arrived in Rotterdam by private jet. A vehicle thought to be carrying Duterte drove into the ICC detention centre in The Hague past a crowd of dozens of supporters, some shouting: "Bring him back" and waving national flags. "There has been no due process," said caregiver Duds Quibin, 50. "This is kidnapping. They just put him on a plane and brought

him here," he told AFP.

The centre, located close to the North Sea coast, offers each prisoner an individual cell equipped with a computer to work on their case, along with an outdoor exercise area. Duterte will be held there until an initial court appearance, likely in the coming days.

Speaking to AFP outside the ICC, Gilbert Andres, a lawyer representing victims of the drug war, said: "My clients are very thankful to God because their prayers have been answered." "The arrest of Rodrigo Duterte is a great signal for international criminal justice. It means that no one is above the law," Andres added. Before her father's departure, the Philippines' Vice President Sara Duterte said he was being "forcibly taken to The Hague", labeling the transfer "oppression and persecution".

On Wednesday, she flew from Manila to be by his side. A media relations officer for the vice president told AFP that she had since landed in Amsterdam and planned to hold a press conference at The Hague on Friday. The one-time alliance between President Ferdinand Marcos and the Duterte family has exploded spectacularly since the 2022 presidential election, when Sara Duterte was Marcos's running mate. She is currently facing a Senate trial on a number of charges, including corruption and an alleged assassination plot against Marcos.

At a church in the capital Manila, people whose family members were killed in the drug war welcomed the arrest. "Duterte is fortunate, there's due process for him. There was no due process for my son" Angelito, said Emily Soriano at a press briefing organized by a local rights group. — AFP

International

Ethiopia's Tigray on the brink of fresh war

Rival faction challenges Ethiopian govt, embassies call for 'urgent dialogue'

ADDIS ABABA: Infighting between rival factions in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray has raised the specter of a fresh war between Ethiopia and neighboring Eritrea, analysts and residents said Thursday.

The region's embattled administrator has appealed for help from the federal government as a rival faction has challenged his power and international embassies called for "urgent dialogue" to de-escalate tensions.

Tigray was the scene of one of the most devastating wars of the century between 2020 and 2022, having claimed as many as 600,000 lives, according to some estimates.

It pitted local forces against the federal government, allied militias and Eritrean soldiers. Despite a November 2022 peace agreement, the region has not found stability. Disputes between rival factions have intensified recently, with deteriorating relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia coming soon after the deal.

The federal government appointed veteran Tigray politician Getachew Reda as head of an interim regional administration. But he has been challenged by his former ally, the leader of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Debretsion Gebremichael.

On Tuesday, forces loyal to Debretsion took control of Adigrat, Tigray's second-largest city. "The town is under renewed tension, the population fears a return to the bad old days of the war," one local resident told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Getachew ordered the suspension of three generals of the Tigray Defence Forces, accusing the rival faction of trying to "take over the whole of Tigray" in an interview with Tigray Mass Media Agency. There is growing fear that Ethiopia's neighbor and historic

rival, Eritrea, may take advantage of the situation to launch an invasion.

"We have been close to a new conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia for the past two years," Kjetil Tronvoll, Oslo University professor specializing in the region, told AFP.

"We just do not know what will be the triggering factor." Afwerki's dissatisfaction with the 2022 peace agreement, Abiy's ambitions for a Red Sea port, and geopolitical interest from the Middle East have all played into the deteriorating tensions, he argued. That has left the "two countries inching closer to a new war", he added. "The situation in Tigray can be the triggering factor."

Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have seen extreme highs and lows since the latter's independence in 1993. A bloody two-year war pitted the countries against each other over territorial disputes, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths between 1998 and 2000.

Abiy was lauded, including winning the Nobel Peace Prize, for finally reaching a peace agreement with Eritrea when he came to power in 2018. It briefly allowed borders to reopen to the isolated country, which Afewerki has ruled virtually unchallenged since 1993.

However, relations have strained since the end of the Tigray war in 2022. Eritrea claimed in February that Ethiopia was waging an "intense campaign" against it. "A war between Ethiopia and Eritrea could break out at any moment," said General Tsadkan Gebretensae, senior strategist for the Tigray forces in Getachew's administration, in remarks published earlier this week.

A group of Western embassies, including the United States, Britain, Japan and the European Union

federal government, with more expected.

On Wednesday, a group of US senators led by Bill Cassidy, a physician from Louisiana who chairs the committee overseeing the confirmation, launched a Senate Republican working group to examine potential legislative reforms to the CDC. Weldon will likely face questions from Democrats about his past statements on vaccine safety after Kennedy responded to a widening measles outbreak in Texas and New Mexico by saying vaccination is a personal choice.

While in Congress, Weldon challenged studies demonstrating the safety of childhood vaccines, asserting they were harmful and linked with autism, a theory espoused by longtime vaccine skeptic Kennedy but debunked by scientists. Reuters reported that the CDC does plan to study autism and vaccines. As CDC director, Weldon would oversee the agency's role in reviewing and making recommendations about the use of licensed vaccines, aided by a panel of outside experts known as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

A three-day ACIP meeting set for late February was postponed last month after Kennedy's installation as Secretary of Health and Human Services. CDC also oversees the Vaccines for Children program that sets childhood vaccination schedules and provides inoculations to those who cannot afford them.

The CDC director can reject ACIP recommendations about vaccines approved by the FDA, appoint members who oppose vaccines or abolish the panel altogether. Weldon also would play a major role in the US response to the growing H5N1 bird flu outbreak, which has decimated poultry flocks, infiltrated dairy herds and infected about 70 people in the United States, with one death. — Reuters

miracle of its divine origin. The first words are "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and Especially Merciful" and the Book is interspersed with descriptions of Him so that we can know the author of not only the Book, but also of our souls, the universe as we know it, and the Next Life as only He can know it.

It is incumbent on us to discover the Holy Quran. Even if our experience is elementary at first, eventually we will become more fluent, and with time we will grow to appreciate the genius of the Holy Quran. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

residency type. Those on family visas (article 22) will face deportation along with their sponsors. Violators under private sector employment (article 18) will be deported, and their company's file will be closed. Domestic workers (article 20) will also be deported, and their employers will be barred from issuing future visas or sponsorships.

The ministry also stressed that legal action will be taken against individuals exploiting minors for begging, with cases filed under the charge of child exploitation. It urged all citizens and residents to cooperate and report any cases of begging by calling 97288211, 97288200 or 25582581, or through the emergency hotline 112, which operates 24/7. — KUNA

Declaring a state of emergency.

Awak added that the people's assembly, a third of which will be appointed by the president, would be tasked with drafting all legislation. A supreme electoral committee would be formed to oversee the election of members of the legislature. Under the declaration, the legislature cannot impeach the president, nor can the president dismiss any lawmakers.

Executive power would also be restricted to the president in the transitional period, Awak said, pointing to the need for "rapid action to confront any difficulties". He added that the declaration also guarantees the "freedom of opinion, expression and the press". The declaration affirms the independence of the judiciary and prohibits "the establishment of extraordinary courts", under which many Syrians suffered for decades, Awak said.

He said a committee would be formed to draft a new permanent constitution. The declaration becomes effective as soon as it is officially published. In late January, Sharaa promised a "constitutional declaration" to serve as a "legal reference" during the transitional period. — AFP



A general view of the city of Mekele, Ethiopia. — AFP

issued a statement saying there must be "no return to violence". "We strongly urge all parties to protect the (2022) Agreement by de-escalating and engaging in urgent dialogue," they said in a post on the US embassy X account. France earlier called on its nationals in Tigray to "stock up on emergency supplies (food, water, medicine, and possibly fuel) and to exercise utmost caution."

"Given the ongoing internal clashes in Tigray,

particularly in Adigrat and in the regional capital, Mekele, all travel throughout the Tigray region is now formally discouraged," its foreign ministry said.

Getachew's administration asked the Ethiopian government on Wednesday to "provide necessary assistance", though he told reporters that the assistance he had requested was not military.

Federal authorities in the capital Addis Ababa have not yet commented. — AFP

Trump's CDC pick Weldon to face bird flu, measles threats

CHICAGO: Vaccine critic Dave Weldon, President Donald Trump's pick to lead the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will face rising measles cases and bird flu threats at an agency already in turmoil from staff cuts and public distrust over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Weldon, a physician and former Republican congressman who has opposed abortion rights, will appear before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Thursday as part of the confirmation process. All of Trump's nominees that require Senate confirmation have been green lighted by the Republican-controlled chamber. In his prepared testimony, Weldon said he plans to recommend the measles vaccines for children and he would focus on "restoring public confidence" in the CDC, Bloomberg News reported.

In written testimony, he also said that he would do a "comprehensive" assessment of the agency's programs. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., under whose purview the CDC falls, has said it should focus more on tackling chronic disease.

The CDC, with a budget of \$17.3 billion, tracks and responds to domestic and foreign threats to public health. Roughly two-thirds of its budget funds state and local health agencies' public health and prevention activities. The agency has already faced staff cuts as the Trump administration overhauls the

The genius of the Quran...

Continued from Page 1

The literary miracles of the Holy Quran include a precision, depth and nuance of meaning, as well as rhetoric, ellipsis, parallelism, timelessness, universality and inimitability. But these pale next to the

MoI urges safety during Girgian...

Continued from Page 1

According to a press release, the campaign was conducted under the directives of Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah as part of ongoing efforts to combat negative phenomena and apprehend violators.

The General Department of Residency Affairs emphasized its firm stance against the issue and outlined the legal consequences based on the violator's

Syria leader inks constitutional...

Continued from Page 1

The declaration sets out a transitional period of five years, during which a "transitional justice commission" would be formed to "determine the means for accountability, establish the facts, and provide justice to victims and survivors" of the former government's misdeeds. The declaration enshrines "women's right to participate in work and education, and have all their social, political and economic rights guaranteed", said Abdul Hamid Al-Awak, a member of the committee that drafted the declaration. It maintains the requirement that the president of the republic must be a Muslim, with Islamic jurisprudence set out as "the main source" of legislation. It also stipulates the "absolute separation of powers", Awak said, pointing to toppled president Assad's "encroachment" on other branches of government. It gives the president a sole exceptional power:

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan sign border deal to boost regional stability

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed on Thursday a border agreement seen as key for the stability of Central Asia, a move that follows three decades of conflict between the two former Soviet republics over water resources and land. The deal — signed in Bishkek by Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon — is a sign of how relations between the two allies of Russia have improved since their last clash in autumn 2022.

"From now and forever, the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will be the border of eternal friendship," Japarov said. Japarov's office said the accord would contribute to "strengthening security, stability and sustainable development in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and in the whole of Central Asia".

The two leaders said direct air links would resume and the border, closed nearly four years ago in May 2021, would reopen. The deal involves an exchange of territory.

Kyrgyzstan will receive about 25 square kilometers (nearly 10 square miles) from Tajikistan in exchange for about the same amount of land or for better access to shared water resources, Kyrgyz authorities said. The accord stipulates that certain roads will be designated as neutral, and that neither side may hinder the use of agricultural or energy facilities in border regions.



BISHKEK: Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon interact during a signing ceremony following their talks at the Yntymak Ordo state residence in Bishkek on March 13, 2025. — AFP

Rakhmon hailed the "historic" agreement, which was concluded 33 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recent years have seen an improvement in relations between the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

One by one, they have clinched border agreements designed to ease trade and enhance stability in the region, which is important for its resources and strategic location.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) — which comprises China, most Central Asia countries, Iran, India and Russia — welcomed the Kyrgyz-Tajik treaty. China, which has borders with both countries, has become a key player in Central Asia. It is financing a colossal infrastructure scheme it calls the New Silk Roads, which aims to open up access to the mountainous region and facilitate trade with Europe. — AFP



GAZA: People pray over bodies after Palestinian civil defence workers uncovered corpses buried in the grounds of Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on March 13, 2025. — AFP

Zionists carried out genocidal acts...

Continued from Page 1

"We'll be soon in a position to deal comprehensively with the question of genocide," he added, potentially later this year.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told AFP the report "confirms what has happened on the ground: genocide and violations of all humanitarian and legal standards". He said it underscored "the urgent need to expedite the prosecution of its (the Zionist entity's) leaders for these crimes and ensure their swift trial at the International Criminal Court".

Netanyahu branded the Human Rights Council an "anti-Israeli circus". He said the UN "once again chooses to attack the state of Israel with false accusations, including absurd claims". The Zionist mission in Geneva accused the commission of advancing a "predetermined and biased political agenda... in a shameless attempt to incriminate the Israel Defense Forces". In response, Sidoti said the Zionist entity "continues to obstruct" the inquiry's investigations and prevent access to the Zionist entity and the Palestinian territories. "They clearly do not read our documents. They clearly have an agenda that they pursue, totally devoid of any relationship to fact. It's chronic lying," he said.

The report said maternity hospitals and wards had been systematically destroyed in Gaza, along

with the Al-Basma IVF Centre, the territory's main in-vitro fertility clinic. It said Al-Basma was shelled in Dec 2023, reportedly destroying around 4,000 embryos at a clinic that served 2,000 to 3,000 patients a month.

The commission found that the Zionist Security Forces intentionally attacked and destroyed the clinic, including all the reproductive material stored for the future conception of Palestinians. It concluded that the destruction "was a measure intended to prevent births among Palestinians in Gaza, which is a genocidal act".

Furthermore, the report said the wider harm to pregnant, lactating and new mothers in Gaza was on an "unprecedented scale", with an irreversible impact on the reproductive and fertility prospects of Gazans. Such underlying acts "amount to crimes against humanity" and deliberately trying to destroy the Palestinians as a group — "one of the categories of genocidal acts", the commission concluded.

The report concluded that the Zionist entity had targeted civilian women and girls directly, "acts that constitute the crime against humanity of murder and the war crime of willful killing". Women and girls died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth due to the conditions imposed by the Zionist authorities impacting access to reproductive health care, "acts that amount to the crime against humanity of extermination", it added. Sidoti said the next steps "certainly involve the courts", and countries could take action themselves under international law. "If they waited for action by the Security Council they'd be waiting until hell froze over," he said. — AFP

International

At least 25 bodies retrieved from Pakistan train siege

Security forces free more than 340 passengers in two-day rescue operation

MACH, Pakistan: The bodies of at least 25 people, including 21 hostages, killed in a train siege by separatist gunmen in Pakistan were retrieved from the site on Thursday ahead of the first funerals, officials said. Security forces said they freed more than 340 train passengers in a two-day rescue operation that ended late on Wednesday after a separatist group bombed a remote railway track in mountainous southwest Balochistan and stormed a train with around 450 passengers on board.

The assault was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), one of a number of separatist groups that accuse outsiders of plundering natural resources in Balochistan near the borders with Afghanistan and Iran. Death tolls have varied, with the military saying in an official statement that "21 innocent hostages" were killed by the militants as well as four soldiers in the rescue operation.

A railway official in Balochistan said the bodies of 25 people were transported by train away from the hostage site to the nearby town of Mach on Thursday morning. "Deceased were identified as 19 military passengers, one police and one railway official, while four bodies are yet to be identified," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

A senior local military official overseeing operations confirmed the details. An army official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, earlier put the military toll at 28, including 27 off-duty soldiers taken hostage. Passengers who escaped from the siege said after walking for hours through rugged mountains to reach safety that they saw people being shot dead by militants. The

first funerals are expected to take place on Thursday.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif was also expected to visit Balochistan, his office said. "The Prime Minister expressed grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of security personnel and train passengers during the operation," it said in a statement.

The BLA released a video of an explosion on the track followed by dozens of militants emerging from hiding places in the mountains to attack the train. Attacks by separatist groups have soared in the past few years, mostly targeting security forces and ethnic groups from outside the province.

Muhammad Naveed, who managed to escape, told AFP: "They asked us to come out of the train one by one. They separated women and asked them to leave. They also spared elders."

"They asked us to come outside, saying we will not be harmed. When around 185 people came outside, they chose people and shot them down." Babar Masih, a 38-year-old Christian labourer, told AFP on Wednesday he and his family walked for hours through rugged mountains to reach a train that could take them to a makeshift hospital on a railway platform.

"Our women pleaded with them and they spared us," he said. "They told us to get out and not look back. As we ran, I noticed many others running alongside us." Security forces have been battling a decades-long insurgency in impoverished Balochistan but last year saw a surge in violence in the province compared with 2023, according to the independent Center for Research and Security Studies. — AFP



MACH: Train passengers sit in a bus after being freed by armed militants who ambushed the train in the remote mountainous area of southwestern Balochistan province, in Mach, on March 13, 2025. — AFP

Parents of murdered UK-Pakistani girl appeal life terms

LONDON: A UK court on Thursday will hear the appeals of the father and stepmother of a murdered British-Pakistani girl, who were jailed for life after killing the child following years of torture.

The trial of Urfan Sharif and his wife Beinash Batool caused waves of revulsion in the UK as the horrific abuse suffered by the 10-year-old girl was revealed in a London court. There was anger too at how the bright, bubbly youngster had been failed by all the authorities supposed to be in charge of her care.

London's Old Bailey court heard that her body was found in her bed in August 2023 covered in bites and bruises with broken bones and burns inflicted by an electric iron and boiling water. Burning sentence in December after the trial, judge John Cavanagh

said Sara had been subjected to "acts of extreme cruelty" but that Sharif and Batool had not shown "a shred of remorse".

They had treated Sara as "worthless" and as "a skivvy", because she was a girl. And because she was not Batool's natural child, the stepmother had failed to protect her, he said. "This poor child was battered with great force again and again."

Sara's father, 43, was sentenced to 40 years in prison while her stepmother, 30, was ordered to remain in jail for at least 33 years. Both are now appealing their terms at the Royal Courts of Justice, along with Sara's uncle, Faisal Malik, 29, who lived with the family and was sentenced to 16 years after being found guilty of causing or allowing her death.

The Solicitor General, Lucy Rigby, is also appealing the sentence imposed on Urfan Sharif, maintaining it was "unduly lenient". A post-mortem examination of Sara's body revealed she had 71 fresh injuries and at least 25 broken bones.

She had been beaten with a metal pole and cricket bat and "trussed up" with a "grotesque combination of parcel tape, a rope and a plastic bag" over her head.

A hole was cut in the bag so she could breathe and she was left to soil herself in nappies as she was prevented from using the bathroom. Police called the case "one of the most difficult and distressing" that they had ever had to deal with. The day after Sara died, the three adults fled their home in Woking, southwest of London, and flew to Pakistan with five other children.

Her father, a taxi-driver, left behind a handwritten note saying he had not meant to kill his daughter.

After a month on the run, the three returned to the UK and were arrested after landing. The five other children remain in Pakistan. There has been anger in the UK that Sara's brutal treatment was missed by social services after her father withdrew her from school four months before she died. Sharif and his first wife, Olga, were well-known to social services.

In 2019, a judge decided to award the care of Sara and an older brother to Sharif, despite his history of abuse. The school had three times raised the alarm about Sara's case, notably after she arrived in class wearing a hijab, which she used to try to cover marks on her body which she refused to explain. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Americas to witness 'Blood Moon' total lunar eclipse

WASHINGTON: Stargazers in North and South America will be able to view a red-colored "Blood Moon" starting Thursday night in the first total lunar eclipse visible on the continents since 2022. The celestial event, observable with the naked eye, will have more than an hour of totality and can additionally be seen in parts of western Europe and Africa, as well as New Zealand. — AFP

Russia says foiled letter bomb attack on military

MOSCOW: Russia's security service said Thursday it had arrested a man on suspicion of sending letter bombs to military officials, the latest such attempted attack that Moscow has blamed on Kyiv. Russia has arrested hundreds of citizens for collaboration and acts of pro-Kyiv sabotage since it began its full-scale military assault on Ukraine in February 2022. The FSB said that the suspect, born in 2003, had sent packages containing explosives to "military personnel and officials in the Moscow, Voronezh, Krasnodar and Saratov regions" earlier this month. — AFP

Gang's grenade attack in Colombian capital kills 3

BOGOTA: A grenade attack by a local gang in Colombia's capital late Wednesday killed three people and wounded nine, Bogota's mayor said, weeks after a similar attack in the same neighborhood. "Tonight, a new explosive device was thrown into a crowd of people... unfortunately leaving three dead and at least nine wounded," Mayor Carlos Fernando Galan said in a statement on social media platform X shortly before midnight (0500 GMT) Wednesday. — AFP

London trial on 2015 Brazil mine disaster wraps up

LONDON: A trial on whether Australian mining giant BHP is liable for one of Brazil's worst environmental disasters concludes Thursday in London, with hundreds of thousands of victims demanding billions in compensation. The 2015 dam collapse killed 19 people and unleashed a deluge of thick toxic mud into villages, fields, rainforest, rivers and the ocean. — AFP

Australian state to ban 'dangerous' machete knives

SYDNEY: The Australian state of Victoria will outlaw machetes to try stem an outbreak of "knife crime", its premier said on Thursday, making it the country's first state to impose such a ban. Broad machete blades—more commonly used to cut crops or slash through jungle—will be declared a "prohibited weapon", Jacinta Allan said. "There's no place for machetes...on our streets," she said in a post on platform X. "That's why I've announced Australia's first machete ban here in Victoria". — AFP

Guatemala's wanted drug suspects caught in Mexico

GUATEMALA CITY: One of Guatemala's most wanted drug fugitives was captured in Mexico and handed over to his country to face likely extradition to the United States, authorities said Wednesday. Aler Baldomero Samayoa is accused of leading a group called Los Huistas, which allegedly trafficked US-bound cocaine from South America to Mexican cartels, Guatemalan Interior Minister Francisco Jimenez said. — AFP

Hospitalized pope marks 12 years in job with future uncertain

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis marks 12 years as head of the Catholic Church on Thursday, seemingly out of danger after a month in hospital but with his health casting a shadow over his future.

The 88-year-old was for a time critically ill as he battled pneumonia in both lungs at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where he was admitted on February 14. The Argentine's situation has markedly improved since then, with the Vatican confirming his condition as stable on Wednesday evening, and talk is now turning to when he might go home.

But his hospitalization, the longest and most fraught of his papacy, has raised serious doubts about his ability to lead the world's nearly 1.4 billion Catholics.

Francis had before now refused to make any concessions to his age or increasingly fragile health, which saw him begin using a wheelchair three years

ago. He maintained a packed daily schedule interspersed with frequent overseas trips, notably a 12-day tour of the Asia-Pacific region in September, when he presided over huge open-air masses.

But experts say his recovery could take weeks given his age and recurring health issues, not helped by having part of one lung removed as a young man. "The rest of his pontificate remains a question mark for the moment, including for Francis himself," said Father Michel Kubler, a Vatican expert and former editor in chief of the French religious newspaper La Croix. "He doesn't know what his life will be like once he returns to the Vatican, and so no doubt reserves the option of resigning if he can no longer cope," he told AFP.

Francis has always left the door open to resigning were his health to deteriorate, following the example of Benedict XVI, who in 2013 became the first pope since the Middle Ages to voluntarily step down. But the Jesuit has distanced himself from the idea more recently, insisting the job is for life.

While in hospital, Francis has delegated masses to senior cardinals but has kept working on and off, including signing decrees and receiving close colleagues. But he has missed a month of events for the 2025 Jubilee, a holy year organized by the pope that



This handout photograph taken on December 5, 2021 and released by Vatican Media shows Pope Francis meeting refugees on the island of Lesbos. — AFP

is predicted to draw an additional 30 million pilgrims to Rome and the Vatican.

And it is hard to imagine he will be well enough to lead a full program of events for Easter, the holiest period in the Christian calendar that is less than six weeks away. Many believe that Francis, who has not been seen in public since he was hospitalized, has to change course. "This is the end of the pontificate as we have known it until now," Kubler said. — AFP

Taiwan to reinstate military judges for China spy cases

TAIPEI: Taiwan plans to reinstate military judges to hear Chinese espionage cases and other offences involving Taiwanese service members, President Lai Ching-te said Thursday. The number of people prosecuted for spying for Beijing has risen sharply, with retired and serving members of Taiwan's military the main targets of Chinese infiltration efforts, official figures show. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has threatened to use force to bring it under its control.

Taiwan says China also uses "grey zone" tactics, including espionage, cyberattacks and disinformation, to weaken its defenses. Lai said there would be a review and an amendment to the law "to reinstate the military trial system", he told reporters after a national security meeting. "Military judges will return to the front line," Lai said.

He said military judges would work "alongside prosecutorial and judicial agencies to handle criminal cases involving active-duty military personnel accused of treason, aiding the enemy, leaking classified information, dereliction of duty, insubordination, and other military offences".

Taiwan's intelligence agency previously said that 64 people were prosecuted for Chinese espionage in 2024, compared with 48 in 2023, and 10 in 2022. Retired and serving members of the military were the main targets of China's infiltration efforts, Taiwan's National Security Bureau said.

Taiwan disbanded the military court system after the death of a young corporal in 2013.



TAIPEI: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te delivering a speech about the reaction of the government toward Chinese infiltration in Taipei. — AFP

Hung Chung-chiu died of heatstroke on July 4, 2013 just three days before the end of his compulsory year-long military service. The changes proposed by Lai would apply to crimes committed by serving members of the military during peacetime.

They would have to be approved by the opposition-controlled parliament, Ryan Yen-Hsuan Chen, a lawyer and executive committee member of the Judicial Reform Foundation, told AFP.

Previous concerns about the military trial system included the lack of independence of judges and prosecutors, and transparency of the judicial process, the National Human Rights Museum said on its website. Former lawmaker Hung Tzu-yung, who is the sister of the late conscript, expressed concern about the potential for abuse.

"The Code of Military Trial was revised to end the harmful influence of military trials during the authoritarian period," she said. "Now that President Lai wants to conditionally restart (military trials) against 'foreign hostile forces', the supporting measures must be sufficient." — AFP

UN chief heads to Dhaka for Rohingya solidarity visit

DHAKA: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was headed to Bangladesh Thursday for a four-day visit that will see him meet with Rohingya refugees threatened by looming humanitarian aid cuts.

Around a million members of the persecuted and mostly Muslim minority live in squalid relief camps in Bangladesh, most of whom arrived after fleeing the 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar. Successive aid cuts have already caused severe hardship among Rohingya in the overcrowded settlements, where many rely on aid and suffer from rampant malnutrition.

Guterres is slated to visit one of the largest relief camps on Friday for an evening fast-breaking meal during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"The Bangladeshi government believes this visit will bring the Rohingya crisis back to the forefront of global discussions," government spokesman Shafiqul Alam told reporters Wednesday.

Severe aid funding shortfalls would require a cut in monthly food vouchers from \$12.50 to \$6.00 per person, the UN World Food Programme announced earlier this month. Youngsters in the camps are already experiencing the worst levels of malnutrition since 2017, with admissions for severe malnutrition treatment up 27 percent in February compared with the same month in 2024, the UN children's agency UNICEF said.

US President Donald Trump imposed a freeze on foreign aid in January pending a review, with a knock-on effect in the Rohingya camps. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025

Trade war threatens global oil demand growth, warns IEA

Agency sees oil market in 600,000 bpd surplus in 2025

PARIS: Global oil demand growth is set to accelerate this year but the escalating trade war launched by US President Donald Trump threatens to disrupt the market, the International Energy Agency said Thursday. The IEA noted that crude prices dropped in February and early March as concerns grew about the impact of trade tensions on the global economy and the OPEC+ cartel confirmed plans to raise production next month.

Global oil demand is expected to rise by just over one million barrels per day (bpd) in 2025, up from 830,000 bpd in 2024, according to the Paris-based agency. That would take overall demand for the year to 103.9 million bpd, with lower oil prices and demand from China fuelling demand.

But the agency, which advises developed countries on energy policy, said it lowered its estimates for the last quarter of 2024 and the first three months of this year. "New US tariffs will clearly act as barriers to global trade and economic growth in 2025," the IEA said in its monthly oil market report.

The outlook of ample supplies despite US sanctions on major exporters Russia and Iran highlights the challenge for OPEC+, or the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries plus Russia and other allies, in balancing the market. "The United States is currently producing at record highs and is forecast to be the largest source of supply growth in 2025," the IEA, which advises industrialized countries, said in a monthly report.

"The latest round of sanctions on Russia and Iran has yet to significantly disrupt loadings, even as some buyers have scaled back purchases." Last month, the IEA had suggested a slightly narrower



DUBAI: This picture taken on December 10, 2023 shows the OPEC pavilion at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai. — AFP

surplus of around 500,000 bpd, according to Reuters calculations based on the agency's data.

World oil demand is now expected to rise by 1.03 million bpd in 2025, the IEA said on Thursday, down 70,000 bpd from last month's forecast, with growth driven largely by Asia and specifically China.

"Asian countries will account for almost 60 percent of gains, led by China where petrochemical feedstocks will provide the entirety of growth as

demand for refined fuels reaches a plateau."

Growing consumption of petrochemical feedstocks, the IEA added, accounts for almost all demand growth gains since the COVID-19 pandemic. Oil ticked lower after the report's publication. Brent oil futures traded at \$70.85 at 0926 GMT, compared with \$71.01 at 0900 when the report was published. The report highlights the headwinds OPEC+ faces this year as growing global trade ten-

sions could impact demand against a backdrop of robust supply growth.

OPEC+ decided earlier this month to start unwinding its most recent layer of output cuts from April. The 2025 surplus could grow by a further 400,000 bpd if OPEC+ extends its unwinding of cuts and fails to rein in overproduction, the IEA said. "The macroeconomic conditions that underpin our oil demand projections deteriorated over the past month as trade tensions escalated between the US and several other countries," the IEA said, prompting it to revise down its demand growth estimates for the fourth quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025.

In its own report on Wednesday, OPEC kept its view for 2025 oil demand growth unchanged at 1.45 million bpd, and flagged a 363,000 bpd rise in OPEC+ output in February led by Kazakhstan.

The IEA sees 2025 global supply growth doubling relative to the 2024 pace of growth, to around 1.5 million bpd, assuming OPEC+ does not unwind its cuts further beyond April. It added that OPEC+ may actually only add around 40,000 bpd of oil to the market, less than the nominal 138,000 bpd April increase, from Saudi Arabia and Algeria, because overproduction from other member states leaves no room to open taps further. Global supply gains will be almost all driven by non-OPEC growth, primarily the record US output as well as gains from Canada, Brazil and Guyana.

Proposed US tariffs on Mexican and Canadian oil could impact flows, the IEA said, however it said it was too early to assess the impact given negotiations are ongoing, as well as a lack of clarity around the scope and scale of the measures. — Agencies

NBK highlights key security guidelines for safe use of 'WAMD'

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains committed to supporting the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). The initiative aims to promote financial literacy, enhance financial inclusion, and educate customers across all segments of society.

As part of the campaign, NBK is raising awareness among customers about fraudulent schemes targeting Instant Payment Service (WAMD). The bank underscores the importance of recognizing these tactics and following essential precautions to safeguard against falling victim to such fraudulent transactions.

The Bank warned that fraudsters often contact individuals, falsely claiming to have mistakenly transferred funds to their accounts via "WAMD". They then urge recipients to return the money using payment links sent through WhatsApp, which are secretly designed to access victims' bank accounts



and steal their financial information.

Furthermore, NBK urged customers to remain vigilant and avoid clicking on suspicious links or those from unknown sources. The bank emphasized the importance of verifying the legitimacy of messages and communications before taking any action or making financial transfers. Additionally, it advised regularly updating banking passwords to enhance security and protect against potential breaches or data leaks. The bank also urged customers to follow key security measures when using WAMD. These include verifying the beneficiary's name and transaction amount before transferring funds, ensuring the recipient's number is saved in their contact list, and confirming the legitimacy of the request, including the name and amount, before proceeding with the transaction.

NBK continues to play a proactive role in identifying emerging fraud tactics, equipping customers

with essential knowledge, and providing clear, actionable guidance on prevention. Through its social media platforms, the bank consistently delivers targeted awareness materials, empowering customers to stay vigilant and safeguard their financial security. NBK leverages its extensive communication capabilities, including its industry-leading digital channels with the largest following among Kuwaiti banks, to ensure the campaign's messages are effectively disseminated to the widest audience, reinforcing financial awareness and security. The "Let's Be Aware" campaign, launched by CBK in collaboration with KBA and local banks, stands as the largest financial awareness initiative in the region. It aims to enhance banking and financial literacy among customers by addressing critical topics, including fraud prevention measures, optimal use of banking services, and the promotion of a savings and investment culture, along with other key financial education themes.

NBK is a key supporter and strategic partner of all CBK campaigns and initiatives aimed at raising financial and banking awareness across society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region, NBK actively organizes various initiatives to educate the community on banking-related matters. Additionally, the bank conducts extensive training programs for its employees to strengthen their expertise in fraud prevention and financial crime mitigation.



MCLEAN, Virginia: A woman looks at eggs for sale in a Giant grocery store in McLean, Virginia. — AFP

US inflation cools slightly as tariff worries flare

WASHINGTON: US consumer inflation inched lower in February according to government data Wednesday, in the first full month of Donald Trump's White House return—but concerns remain over stubborn price growth as jitters flare over the president's trade policies. The consumer price index (CPI) came in at 2.8 percent last month from a year ago, down from 3.0 percent in January, said the Department of Labor. This was slightly better than a consensus forecast of analysts predicted.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the report showed "the economy is moving in the right direction under President Trump," pointing to his plans for "massive deregulation and energy dominance" to push down costs. While easing inflation is a relief for policymakers, the latest reading is just the lowest since late-2024, signaling a longer road ahead to bringing price increases back to officials' two percent target. The world's biggest economy is also grappling with fears of a downturn—and near-term inflation—sparked by Trump's expanding slate of tariffs.

On Wednesday, Trump's latest salvo of 25 percent levies on steel and aluminum imports kicked in, sparking vows of firm responses from the European Union and China. The European Commission said it would impose countermeasures from April 1 to counter Washington's "unjustified trade restrictions." Between January and February, the CPI picked up 0.2 percent. Labor Department data showed, also a cooldown from January's 0.5 percent figure.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, the index was up 3.1 percent from a year prior, an improvement from before as well. Last month, a pick-up in shelter costs was partially offset by declines for airline fares and gasoline prices. The index for food also picked up for the month. The index for eggs jumped 10.4 percent, the report said. Egg prices—a hot political issue—have surged recently as the country contended with an avian flu outbreak.

Trump has imposed sweeping tariffs on imports from Canada, Mexico and China since taking office, providing only a partial rollback for the United States' immediate neighbors. But the added 10 percent tariffs on China "don't appear to have had a discernible impact" last month including for apparel, furniture and electronic prices, said Ryan Sweet, chief US economist at Oxford Economics.

The US president has since doubled the additional rate targeting the world's second biggest economy to 20 percent. "Odds are that these tariffs and others that the Trump administration recently implemented will begin to lift US consumer prices over the next few months," Sweet said. — AFP

Is US heading for a recession?

WASHINGTON: US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick says a recession would be "worth it" to get President Donald Trump's economic policies in place, while Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has spoken of a coming period of "detox" and Trump himself says the economy is in "transition."

However it plays out, history shows recessions - should it come to that - are costly affairs: The pain is never spread equally, and the outcome - from the length and depth of the downturn to the speed and breadth of recovery - is unpredictable. In general terms a recession is when the total output of an economy, called gross domestic product, declines in a meaningful way. One common rule of thumb is that when GDP contracts for two consecutive quarters, the country is in recession.

But that doesn't really capture it. The National Bureau of Economic Research's Business Cycle Dating Committee, which determines when recessions begin and end, looks beyond GDP at things like unemployment, personal income excluding government benefits, consumer spending and industrial production. Those might deteriorate just a bit for a long time. Or they might crash so hard that it is obviously recessionary, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic when activity fell fast but rebounded quickly to yield only a two-month recession, the shortest on record in the US.

By contrast, a sluggish economy in 2016 never tilted into a declared recession. NBER never declares recessions in real time. That's left for others to ponder by looking at things

like changes in the unemployment rate, where rises of a half percentage point or more within a year have in the past meant recession is underway. Nothing in hard data like unemployment, GDP or consumer spending currently suggests that is happening. The conversation is in the air because of recent surveys showing declining business and consumer sentiment, and because of memories of Trump's first term, when tariffs far smaller than those proposed now, and preceded by tax cuts, caused global economic growth to stall.

As of January, the risk of a US recession was considered small. A low unemployment rate and rising wages meant consumers were continuing to spend, inflation was drifting down towards the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target, and the US central bank had cut interest rates by a full percentage point since September. Fed officials considered it a stable foundation for continued growth, and many economists thought the central bank had nailed a "soft landing" from the high inflation of 2021 and 2022. That's a rare feat: Sometimes it is central bank policy that triggers a downturn, most famously in the early 1980s when then-Fed chief Paul Volcker sent the economy into a painful recession with crushing interest rate hikes to tame high inflation.

This time, the volatility in sentiment, the declines in stock market wealth, and the worries of a coming drop in activity stemmed from Trump's move to rewire global trade with broad and steep tariffs on major US trading partners. Such shocks are the other sources of downturns. The pandemic was another one, as was the combined shock in the early 2000s from the crash in tech stocks and the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US. Reces-



NEW YORK: News about financial markets is seen on a monitor in the window of the NASDAQ MarketSite in Times Square New York City on March 12, 2025. — AFP

sions come with costs. Business profits fall, as do stock prices, which can then amplify the impact as investors reduce their own consumption. Incomes fall and government deficits rise as more people qualify for benefits meant to offset economic weakness, known as automatic stabilizers.

One reason the pandemic shutdown gave way to a period of strong economic growth was the amount of government support under both the first Trump administration and former President Joe Biden. Both administrations left huge deficits in their wake, which some feel may limit the government's response this time if the economy does sink. But typically the most notable recession feature is rising unemployment, a fact that puts the heaviest burden of any downturn on those thrown out of work.

Rising US unemployment tends to fall disproportionately on Blacks and Hispanics, but each downturn is different. The 2007-2009 reces-

sion, for example, was both deep and long, emanating from a financial crisis that is among the most difficult types of downturns to resolve. Some have called it the "man-cession" because of large job losses in construction, manufacturing and finance - industries dominated by men. The pandemic downturn, by contrast, initially fell hard on women and Hispanics, with massive layoffs in the services sector.

If there is a bright side, it's that recessions lower inflation. There has been talk lately of stagflation, with growing concerns that economic growth will slow or even shrink while inflation rises on the back of the US tariffs aimed at Canada, Mexico, China and other trading partners. But if a downturn is steep enough, inflation eventually slows as demand weakens, and prices can even drop, something Trump pledged would happen on his watch. In fact, it is unusual outside of recession for overall price levels to decline. — Reuters

Business

Gulf Bank distributes Ramadan food packages in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank Initiative during holy month supports underprivileged families and individuals in need



KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank, in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank & Relief, has distributed Ramadan Food Packages to support underprivileged families and individuals in need, with the active involvement of the Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej volunteer team. Upholding its annual tradition, the Bank continues to organize various charitable activities throughout Ramadan, reaffirming its commitment to community sustainability. Among these efforts, the distribution of food packages helps ease financial burdens for families facing economic hardships.

The initiative seeks to alleviate some of the burdens on these families amid rising living costs, by providing essential food supplies that last for several days. For 60 years, Gulf Bank has played a vital role in Kuwait's economic and social development. The distribution of Ramadan food packages is one of the many charitable initiatives the Bank undertakes during the holy month, demonstrating its deep commitment to the community.

This year, the Our Traditions Bring Us Together Ramadan campaign features a four-day distribution of food packages in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank and City Hypermarket. Additionally, Gulf Bank took part in the Joy Land event, providing families in need with household essentials, Eid clothing, and Ramadan food packages. The Bank also extended its generosity by distributing food packages to visitors at LuLu Hypermarket and Shamiya Cooperative Society. These initiatives reaffirm Gulf Bank's commitment to corporate sustainability, encompassing social, economic, and environmental aspects. Through carefully curated programs, the Bank continues to drive meaningful impact in line with its 2025 strategy, the United Nations Sustainable De-



velopment Goals (SDGs), and Kuwait Vision 2035. Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the Bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring

a seamless experience. In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

Food app Deliveroo delivers first annual profit

LONDON: Food delivery app Deliveroo announced Thursday its first annual profit as orders and revenue rose, while the 12-year-old company sees further growth despite exiting Hong Kong.

The milestone follows sizeable full-year losses owing to high investment costs since American Will Shu founded the company in 2013 and made Deliveroo's

first delivery in London. Deliveroo, which earlier this week said it was exiting Hong Kong owing to growing competition in the Chinese city, posted profit after tax of £2.9 million (\$3.8 million) last year following a loss of £31.8 million in 2023. Revenue grew two percent to nearly £2.1 billion, while orders also grew two percent, according to an earnings statement.

"Whilst the consumer environment remains uncertain, I am confident that we can continue to deliver growth," Shu said in the release. Going forward, Deliveroo said its focus would include "supporting restaurant partners to meet untapped consumer demand around new occasions", while expanding grocery and retail offerings. Deliveroo is present in the UK and Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, Kuwait, Qatar, Singapore

and the United Arab Emirates.

However, in recent years it has exited Australia and the Netherlands due to competition.

It also left Spain after it became the first European Union nation to give food delivery riders labor rights, requiring that they be recognized as employees instead of being considered self-employed freelancers. Deliveroo, which experienced surging demand during the Covid pandemic from lockdown-hit customers, has tens of thousands of self-employed riders—a status that continues to cause controversy.

In late 2023, the UK Supreme Court ruled that Deliveroo riders were not entitled to trade union rights such as collective bargaining. The company has faced questions also over its sustainability, highlighted by its

failed stock market debut in 2021.

Its initial public offering had been London's biggest stock market launch for a decade, valuing the group at £7.6 billion. But its share price tumbled on launch day by almost one third from the IPO price of £3.90 as investors questioned Deliveroo's treatment of its self-employed riders.

Despite the profit milestone, its share price slid 4.7 percent to £1.19 in early London deals. "It's been a long hard slog but Deliveroo has finally climbed the tough summit of reaching annual profitability," noted Susanah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown. "But it's not going to be freewheeling from here and the uncertain economic environment points to a wobbly ride ahead." — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 13 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	1,040	1,024	1,042	1,016	26	22,801,204	-18	-1.73%	14.29%	1,009	1,048	14.8	1.88	3.4%	0.95
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	339	329	343	327	16	28,928,119	-11	-3.24%	0.92%	325	329	21.2	1.51	3.0%	1.16
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	323	308	324	308	16	10,276,088	-16	-4.94%	18.46%	305	312	15.0	1.09	2.7%	0.86
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	221	222	225	212	13	26,752,654	1	0.45%	21.31%	219	225	20.3	0.80	2.3%	1.03
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	231	231	233	223	10	26,805,779	-1	-0.43%	31.25%	230	234	22.6	0.82	2.6%	1.43
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	800	784	800	779	21	50,288,585	-17	-2.12%	5.09%	783	793	17.0	2.21	2.8%	1.10
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	664	652	666	641	25	13,207,303	-16	-2.40%	16.22%	644	669	30.2	2.58	1.5%	1.32
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	186	187	191	182	9	9,305,014	-1	-0.53%	8.09%	178	187	8.2	0.81	5.3%	2.24
204	National Investments	Financial Services	257	250	258	249	9	11,001,428	-8	-3.10%	-1.57%	248	257	17.2	1.07	5.9%	2.42
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	98.0	95.5	99.1	95.5	3.6	29,210,039	-2.5	-2.55%	0.53%	95.0	96.5	NM	0.55	0.0%	1.10
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	285	295	298	277	21	50,604,014	10	3.51%	11.32%	292	297	18.3	1.53	0.7%	1.33
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	162	158	162	156	6	11,280,454	-4	-2.47%	0.64%	158	163	9.3	1.01	4.7%	2.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	320	324	324	312	12	35,971,525	4	1.25%	26.56%	323	327	25.2	1.84	1.2%	1.24
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	424	417	428	417	11	5,698,140	-7	-1.65%	4.51%	416	424	19.0	1.32	3.4%	0.36
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	826	796	828	796	32	3,372,024	-33	-3.98%	4.46%	778	799	17.2	1.68	1.7%	0.67
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	183	174	185	173	12	8,911,730	-9	-4.92%	17.57%	169	176	17.0	1.07	2.2%	1.04
501	National Industries	Financial Services	274	261	274	260	14	35,147,026	-13	-4.74%	5.24%	252	264	10.6	1.13	1.8%	1.58
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,921	1,935	1,971	1,912	59	1,191,100	-36	-1.83%	7.50%	1,910	1,940	20.8	1.59	3.3%	1.69
506	HEISCO	Industrials	892	851	895	850	45	2,078,494	-41	-4.60%	1.43%	846	858	17.7	2.07	3.4%	1.21
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	700	652	704	652	52	9,209,752	-46	-6.59%	0.31%	633	655	11.6	1.40	9.0%	0.74
603	Agility	Industrials	261	254	265	250	15	41,289,187	-8	-3.05%	2.83%	253	260	10.9	0.68	7.7%	1.73
605	Zain	Telecommunications	468	468	471	458	13	23,175,937	-1	-0.21%	-0.21%	463	468	9.8	1.65	7.5%	0.65
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	2,502	2,473	2,585	2,409	176	3,379,101	-15	-0.60%	-9.08%	2,470	2,500	8.1	2.96	13.6%	0.21
634	IFA Hotels & Resorts Co.	Consumer Discretionary	1,775	1,726	1,819	1,700	119	907,709	-54	-3.03%	-6.70%	1,698	1,850	32.9	14.27	0.0%	2.45
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	953	950	988	911	77	3,165,988	-10	-1.04%	-5.75%	949	990	20.7	5.95	2.9%	0.65
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	96.7	97.0	97.0	93.7	3.3	36,942,629	0.3	0.31%	-1.02%	96.5	98.9	9.6	1.15	5.2%	0.80
821	Warba Bank	Banking	228	221	229	220	9	22,634,056	-6	-2.64%	15.10%	221	229	25.5	1.20	0.0%	1.08
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	560	556	563	552	11	3,040,817	-7	-1.24%	3.35%	555	565	17.7	2.31	6.3%	1.14
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	926	900	945	900	45	2,255,536	-26	-2.81%	0.00%	879	949	19.2	2.33	2.2%	0.87
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	510	520	542	488	54	5,724,617	3	0.58%	13.04%	510	520	24.8	2.17	3.8%	0.44
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,940	2,720	2,974	2,671	303	1,573,297	-255	-8.57%	18.26%	2,700	2,787	30.0	8.07	3.0%	1.40
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,241	1,238	1,255	1,230	25	5,521,600	-12	-0.96%	20.19%	1,220	1,267	11.7	3.85	5.6%	0.77
831	Beyout Investment	Financial Services	428	417	431	415	16	4,434,970	-12	-2.80%	1.21%	410	420	15.8	2.37	0.0%	0.27

*As of end of week closing

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Global economy at a crossroads

Amid tariff flip-flops, US economy is showing signs of weakness

KUWAIT: The global economy is at a crossroads given heightened policy uncertainty while monetary easing, though ongoing, has limited room to run further given already material cuts to policy rates while inflation continues to be above target. In the US, amid tariff flip-flops and wider policy uncertainty, the economy is showing signs of weakness with bond yields down sharply recently and expectations for Fed rate cuts rising again.

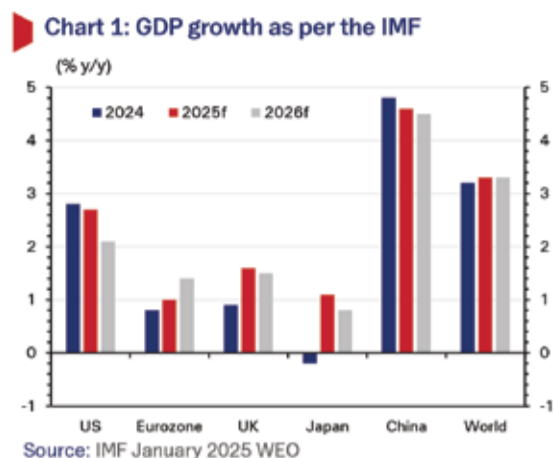
In the eurozone, the tariff threat is a major headwind, but the expected increase in defense spending should boost growth. The UK economy lost the early-2024 momentum while fiscal and monetary policies have little room to support growth. In Japan, policy rates are set to rise further in 2025 while 10-year bond yields have surged to multi-year highs. Finally, China has set an ambitious 5 percent growth target for 2025, signaled an appetite to increase fiscal spending, and stuck, so far, to a limited tariff-retaliation strategy.

Policy uncertainty

In the US, post-election buoyancy has faded, with January's retail sales and personal spending falling, and some sentiment indicators weakening. In fact, the treasury secretary recently warned of a "detox period" for the economy, attributing that to a needed shift from public spending to private-sector spending. Some forecasts are now indicating negative GDP growth in Q1, though that could be partially skewed by soaring imports given tariff front-running as seen in the January trade data. The markets are echoing this weaker outlook with the UST 10-year yield falling by around 50 bps since mid-January, the S&P 500 dropping 9 percent since 19 February, and the futures market currently implying two-to-three 25-bps Fed rate cuts up from zero-to-one few weeks ago. Meanwhile, the labor market continues to soften gradually with moderating monthly job gains, but a still-low unemployment rate (4.1 percent) and ongoing-robust wage growth (4 percent y/y).

A more pronounced weakening in the job market will not be surprising amid the increased policy uncertainty, impacting confidence and investment levels, especially given the ongoing federal job cuts. Meanwhile, January's PCE inflation helped calm some worries about renewed price pressures with the core rate moderating to 2.6 percent y/y, nearly a four-year low.

The weaker outlook is mainly being driven by the tariff-related flip-flops and wider uncertainty about the administration's overall policies. In terms of tariffs, what went into effect already is only a 20 percent duty on Chinese goods, while several other sectoral and country-specific (mainly Canada, Mexico, EU) levies have been imposed then postponed, threatened, or still due to go into effect. A key date will be April 2nd, when details of "reciprocal" duties will start to be announced on different countries. On the other hand, Trump's pledges, such as lowering taxes and increasing oil output are yet to materialize, while not much has been seen in



Source: IMF January 2025 WEO

terms of deregulation, delaying the expected support to the economy. Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress are trying to find a way to pass/implement Trump's plans as well as deal with the debt ceiling issue, big challenges to surmount given their razor-thin majority, often wide differences among them, and no support from Democrats.

The eurozone economy grew by 0.2 percent q/q in Q4, higher than initially-estimated putting full-year growth at 0.9 percent, up from 0.4 percent in 2023. Meanwhile, CPI inflation remains above the 2 percent target, with the headline rate at 2.4 percent y/y and core at 2.6 percent in February, driven by still-elevated though softening services inflation. PMI surveys for January-February indicate generally steady growth in terms of services and a softer contraction in manufacturing. In a major development, the EU, led by Germany is pushing for massive fiscal reform to allow increased government spending on defense.

Germany's chancellor-in-waiting, Friedrich Merz, is planning to amend the country's constitution to exempt defense and security expenditures from limits on public spending. The expected major increase in government spending (over several years) across the EU will push up GDP growth and likely inflation as well, with the bond yields of the bloc's four largest economies soaring by more than 40 bps in one week's trading in early March while the euro rallied by more than 4 percent against the US dollar over the same period.

On the other hand, the threat of tariffs is a major headwind, with president Trump on several occasions vowing to impose a 25 percent duty on imports from the EU. We note that the latter is the US's largest trading partner and had a merchandise trade surplus with the US of around \$240 billion in 2024, indicating that it will likely be targeted in a meaningful way by Trump's "reciprocal" tariffs, starting early April.

Given statements by EU officials, the bloc will undoubtedly retaliate to any US-imposed tariffs. Finally, at its March meeting, the ECB cut rates by another 25 bps (to 2.5 percent), bringing total cuts to a steep



Source: Haver

1.5 percent since June 2024, and lowered 2025-2026 GDP growth by 0.2 percentage points (to 0.9 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively), on weaker projected exports and investment.

UK economy loses momentum

The UK economy has lost the momentum seen earlier in 2024 partly due to the budgetary hike in employment taxes and a re-acceleration in inflation. Although Q4 GDP growth came in at a higher-than-expected 0.1 percent q/q, improving from no growth in Q3, that was mainly driven by higher government expenditures and an increase in inventories, while household spending was flat, and business investment fell. The recent PMIs continue to indicate sustained headwinds, with manufacturing (46.9 in February) at the lowest since December 2023 and services still subdued at around 51 since November 2024.

Given the weakening economic landscape and the likelihood of an official downgrade to the GDP growth forecast later this month, the government finances will likely come under further pressure. The government may have to raise taxes again (still seemingly unlikely at this point), and/or rationalize spending, pressuring growth prospects. Regarding trade and possible tariff implications, the US has a goods trade surplus with the UK, and hence, imposing tariffs on the latter may not be a priority for the US administration. At its February meeting, the Bank of England (BoE) cut the bank rate by 25 bps to 4.5 percent, and sharply downgraded its 2025 GDP growth forecast to 0.75 percent from 1.5 percent. Moreover, price pressures resurfaced with CPI inflation in January at a 10-month high of 3 percent y/y, and the BoE projecting a rise further to 3.7 percent by Q3, then softening to hit 2 percent only by end-2027. Amid higher inflation and accelerating wage gains, the bank may struggle to cut interest rates aggressively to support growth. The futures market is currently expecting around two more 25 bps rate cuts by end-2025, with a hold at the bank's meeting later this month.

Japan's GDP growth for Q4 2024 improved to

0.6 percent q/q from 0.4 percent in Q3 mainly on rebounding business spending and a strong net exports performance. In contrast, growth in private consumption (more than half of GDP) decelerated sharply, likely impacted by the persistent inflation, which has remained on an uptrend, reaching a two-year high of 4 percent y/y in January, while core inflation (3.2 percent) rose to its highest level since June 2023. This contributed to the Bank of Japan's (BoJ) decision to hike interest rates to around 0.5 percent in mid-January, the highest since 2008, while raising its projections for core inflation for FY24 and FY25 to 2.7 percent and 2.4 percent respectively, from 2.5 percent and 1.9 percent previously, making core inflation above the 2 percent target for four straight years. This has supported the yen which is currently trading at levels last seen in October 2024 while 10-year government bond yields remain on an uptrend, reaching a multi-year high of more than 1.5 percent recently.

However, the BoJ is expecting cost-push price pressures to dissipate by mid-2025, supporting a positive rise in real wages, especially following the Shunto 2025 negotiation results, which the BoJ considers as key for further rate hikes. Market-implied expectations are currently split regarding another rate hike in the summer, but overall indicate at least one more 25 bps hike before year-end. Related to that, recently, the BoJ Deputy Governor Uchida mentioned that the bank plans to continue raising interest rates in line with market expectations, and remained optimistic about the country's economy. In fact, the services PMI climbed to 53.0-53.7 in January-February, sharply higher than the Q4 average (50.4) and the highest in six months, auguring well for Q1 growth.

China sets an ambitious growth target

The Chinese government's measured retaliation to the US administration's cumulative 20 percent tariff hike indicates no willingness to engage in a full-blown trade war that will compound the losses on both parties. However, this is no guarantee that this approach will hold in the face of additional measures taken by the US administration. The economy had rounded off 2024 on a positive note with GDP growing by a stronger-than-expected 5.4 percent in Q4, helping the country reach its growth target of "around 5 percent" for the year. However, domestic demand remains muted with headline inflation in negative territory in February (-0.7 percent y/y) and the core rate in deflation for the first time in around four years while imports tumbled by 8.4 percent y/y in January-February, much weaker than expected. Moreover, the property market continues to be a drag with new home prices continuing to drop, falling 5.0 percent y/y in January although by a softer rate for the third straight month. PMI data for January and February indicated a generally stable economic backdrop, though February's expansion has likely been supported by the Lunar New Year festivities.

Generative AI rivals racing to the future

LAS VEGAS: Since ChatGPT burst onto the scene in late 2022, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) models have been vying for the lead - with the US and China hotbeds for the technology.

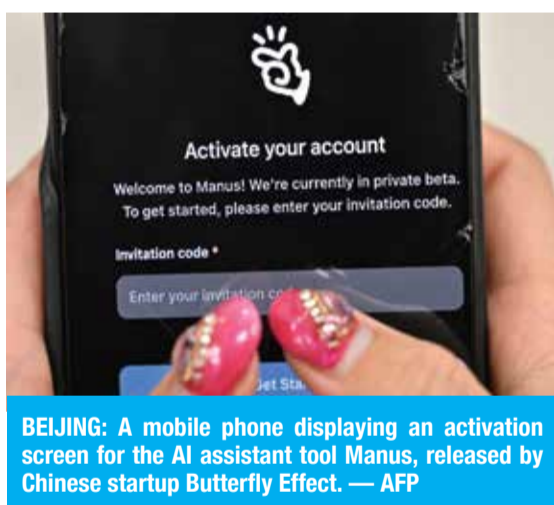
GenAI tools are able to create images, videos, or written works as well as answer questions or tend to online tasks based on simple prompts.

These AI assistants stand out for their popularity and sophistication. AI existed before ChatGPT, but it was first to make GenAI freely available for people to use as a dedicated application.

San Francisco-based OpenAI has made ChatGPT more powerful and capable with each update, the most recent being GPT 4.5. One version of ChatGPT released late last year, called o1, was touted as a new-generation that takes time to ponder answers, providing comprehensive results and less inclined to err. Instead of instantly cranking out results, the model shares its "chain of thought".

OpenAI has imbued ChatGPT with the ability to act as a digital "agent" capable of browsing the Internet, compiling information and using computers the way people do when working on tasks.

Google has long put AI to work behind the scenes at its platform but cranked out Bard to take on ChatGPT in March of 2023. Bard was gradually replaced by a more advanced Gemini model built into Pixel phones and more. The Internet giant integrated Gemini into its famous search engine to display results summaries called "AI Overviews" along with



BEIJING: A mobile phone displaying an activation screen for the AI assistant tool Manus, released by Chinese startup Butterfly Effect. — AFP

links in response to queries.

Google also put AI to work letting people search using pictures, video, or sound instead of just typed words. Such "multimodal" input capability has become common in GenAI tools.

A Gemini 2.0 model capable of "step-by-step" reasoning made its debut in February of this year.

Founded by former OpenAI engineers, Anthropic launched Claude in March 2023. The San Francisco-based startup stresses responsible development of AI, moving more cautiously than competitors as it innovates. Anthropic unveiled Claude 3.7 Sonnet in February, its first model combining instant responses and thoughtful reasoning.

Claude was previously enhanced with a "computer use" feature that let the AI independently perform computer tasks as a person might.

Meta has integrated custom AI into Facebook, Instagram, Threads, WhatsApp, Messenger and its

president to open vast new areas of Alaska and offshore for new drilling.

The cuts since mid-February have hit employees at agencies that play a crucial role in the process needed to issue permits for new federal and tribal energy production, including the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

"Streamlining organization charts in an effort to make government more efficient will not impact the President's Drill Baby Drill agenda, and any hyper-ventilating about cutting waste, fraud, and abuse is irresponsible," said White House spokesperson Harrison Fields. Permitting has slowed in some of the nation's top-producing oil and gas states, like New Mexico and Alaska, as well as among Native American tribes that rely on fossil fuel extraction for revenue for public services like schools, Reuters reporting showed. While federal lands and waters account for nearly a quarter of total US oil output and generate public revenue in the form of production royalties, it is not clear how much new production has been affected by the job cuts. Overall the US

Ray-Ban connected glasses with the aim of making it the most widely used digital assistant in the world. Meta's chatbot is based on the tech firm's open-source Llama model, considered one of the most powerful in the world.

Recent press reports tell of plans by the Silicon Valley titan to release MetaAI as a stand-alone application in a direct challenge to OpenAI and Google.

A co-founder of OpenAI, Elon Musk cut ties with the startup in 2018. Since ChatGPT took the lead in the GenAI race, Musk has sued OpenAI, offered to buy it, and launched a rival named xAI. Musk's chatbot Grok has the advantage of being able to use the trove of posts at X, formerly Twitter, for training the AI model.

The Tesla tycoon bought Twitter in late 2022. Musk made up for lost time by spending billions of dollars on high-end Nvidia chips for powering AI datacenters. He promotes Grok as a chatbot with personality, humor and fewer constraints on what it produces.

DeepSeek was founded in 2023 by Chinese investment fund High-Flyer. In January 2025, the Hangzhou-based start-up turned the world of generative AI upside down with its R1 model. DeepSeek claims the AI tool was built using less sophisticated chips than its competitors, slashing the cost.

The application was downloaded tens of millions of times in just a few weeks.

Chinese tech behemoths Tencent (Yuanbao), Baidu (Ernie) and ByteDance (Doubao) are also vying for position in the AI market. In early March, Alibaba released its QwQ-32B model, which it claims matches the performance of DeepSeek-R1. France-based Mistral early last year released Le Chat, AI software particularly advanced in document and image analysis. — AFP



Elon Musk shows off a shirt that says "DOGE" as he walks on the South Lawn of the White House after stepping off Marine One upon arrival to the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

produced an average of 13.23 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2024, according to the Energy Information Administration.

"I don't understand these broad cuts," said Mike Celata, who served as BOEM's regional director for

Chinese company to buy bankrupt German flying taxi firm

BERLIN: Insolvent German flying taxi firm Volocopter is to be bought by a Chinese vehicle parts maker, just weeks after another German company in the field, Lilium, collapsed. The Chinese firm, Zhejiang Wanfeng Auto Wheel Co., put the price tag of the transaction at 10 million euros (\$10.9 million), while Volocopter's assets were given a book value of around 42 million euros.

Founded in 2011, Volocopter filed for insolvency in December. It had wanted to bring its two-seater flying electric taxi "Volocity" to market by 2025 but suffered a setback when it had to cancel test flights at last year's Paris Olympics. The European Union's Aviation Safety Agency did not certify the aircraft's engine in time for the planned tests.

In a statement earlier this week, Zhejiang Wanfeng Auto Wheel said it would acquire the German company's assets and intellectual property rights, and assume contract rights and obligations under the name of Volocopter GmbH. AFP has contacted Volocopter for comment. The acquisition of Volocopter by a Chinese rival for a knock-down price will fuel debate about Germany's support for firms at the technological frontier.

Volocopter CEO Dirk Hoke told Capital magazine last year that "in a sector which is as technologically complex and capital-intensive as ours, we have to look to the state" for support.

In February, Lilium, another German firm making light electric aircraft, lapsed back into bankruptcy proceedings after a rescue deal with investors fell through. Last year, Lilium tried and failed to secure emergency funding from the German government. — AFP

Musk's layoffs shrink workforce needed to realize Trump agenda

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration's mass layoffs of federal workers have slowed the government's ability to permit some new energy projects in a potential setback to President Donald Trump's "drill, baby, drill" agenda, according to state officials, lawmakers and agency representatives interviewed by Reuters.

The situation reflects one of the unintended consequences of the spate of firings spearheaded by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, which are intended to slash wasteful public spending but current and former officials say are running counter to Trump's vow to expand production of everything from oil and gas to power generation and electric transmission. That strategy was partly detailed in a series of executive orders signed by the

the Gulf of Mexico for seven years, including during Trump's first term. "You're talking about an agency that essentially has brought billions of dollars of revenue into the Treasury."

The process of rigorous environmental reviews is critical to insulating government oil and gas auctions and drilling programs from litigation that can derail fuel producers' plans, Celata added. Lawsuits on behalf of environmental groups have delayed or canceled many energy projects, leases and drilling auctions both onshore and offshore in recent years. "You've got to follow that process," he said. "Loss of people becomes a problem."

More than 20,000 federal employees are estimated to have lost their jobs so far, almost all of them probationary workers that have less than a year in their current roles, and another 75,000 have taken a buyout, out of the 2.3 million federal civilian workforce. More cuts are expected in the coming weeks.

This includes over 2,000 workers in the Interior Department, which runs the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. — Reuters

Weekender

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025



Baghdad | Iraq



Sidon | Lebanon



Hyderabad | India



Cairo | Egypt

Drumming up tradition



By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

The Abu Tbailah (Arabic for “Father of the Mini-Drum”), also known as Al-Musaharati, Al-Musahher, or Al-Nafar, is a traditional figure responsible for waking people up before suhoor, the predawn meal during Ramadan. While less common today, he was once a beloved and essential presence in the Muslim world. The Abu Tbailah would walk through neighborhood streets, beating a small drum and chanting supplications to remind people that the call to prayer was approaching.



Acre | Palestine



Rawalpindi | Pakistan



Jakarta | Indonesia



Manama | Bahrain



Mosul | Iraq



Gaza | Palestine



Idlib | Syria



Damascus | Syria



Hebron | Palestine



For centuries, the Abu Tbailah played a crucial role in Ramadan, serving as a community alarm clock before the advent of modern technology. In many parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa, his role extended beyond mere functionality — it embodied cultural heritage and community spirit. Dressed in traditional attire, these nighttime heralds roamed the streets, rhythmically drumming and calling out encouragements, urging people to rise and eat.

Their calls were not just simple announcements but melodically performed chants that captured the spirit of Ramadan. The rhythmic drumming and phrases varied by region, incorporating local dialects and traditional melodies. This practice fostered a deep sense of community, as families and neighbors awoke together to share suhoor before the day's fast began.

In recent years, the Abu Tbailah's role has declined due to the widespread use of alarm clocks and smartphones. Modern generations, accustomed to technology, have largely replaced the tra-

ditional wake-up call with electronic devices. This shift has led to a decrease in musaharatis, particularly in urban areas where the noise of contemporary life drowns out older customs.

showcasing the Abu Tbailah to a global audience.

Today, some Abu Tbailahs have adapted their messages beyond Suhoor calls, incorporating reminders of traditional values, charitable giving,

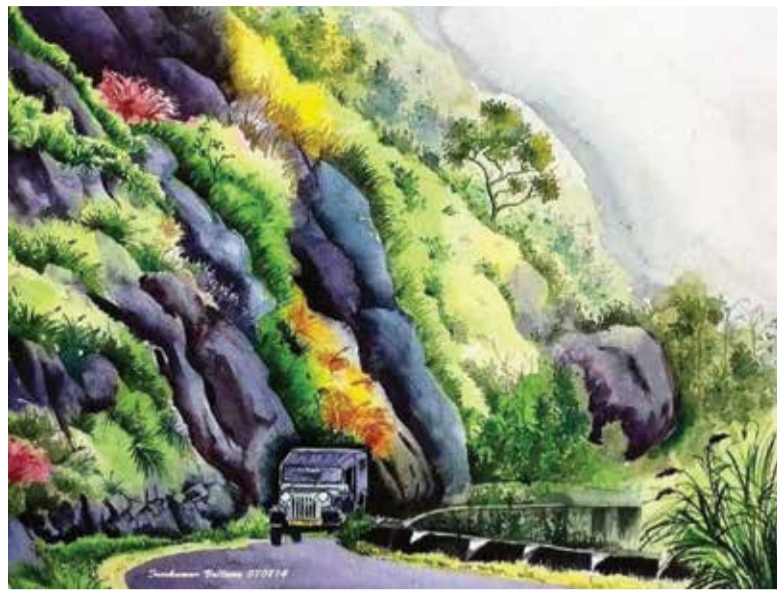
As alarm clocks replace the rhythmic calls of the Abu Tbailah, efforts to keep this cherished Ramadan practice alive are gaining momentum

However, efforts to preserve this cultural heritage have gained traction. Cultural organizations worldwide have held competitions to recognize and celebrate the artistry of the musaharati. Social media has also played a significant role in reviving interest in the tradition, with videos and posts

and prayers. This evolution blends tradition with modernity, ensuring that the spirit of Ramadan endures while remaining relevant to contemporary audiences.



A painting by Sunil Kulanada in poetry painting series.



'The Valley' by Sreekumar Vallana



A painting by Dr Waleed Sarab

A shared passion for art

InASK fostering an artist community in Kuwait



Kuwaiti artist Dr Waleed Sarab



Sunil Kulanada



Artist Nimsha Abdul Karim



Sreekumar Vallana



Hari Chengannur



A painting by Hari Chengannur



By Sajeev K Peter

What began as a small WhatsApp group has grown into a thriving organization, fulfilling the long-held dream of artists in Kuwait. As its name suggests, InASK (International Artists Space Kuwait) is likely the only organization in the country that brings together artists of all nationalities.

The initiative was launched two years ago when Indian expatriate artist Sunil Kulanada created a WhatsApp group for artists, which later evolved into InASK. Under the leadership of Kulanada and artists such as Hari Chengannur and Sreekumar Vallana, the group initially focused on organizing live painting sessions and exhibitions.

"The primary goal of InASK is the overall development of visual arts and artists. We organize exhibitions and art festivals like biennales and conduct discussions, symposiums and competitions," said Sunil Kulanada, who is also the Kuwait ambassador of 'Spandan', a Goa-based global art events promoter.

Sunil, known for his distinctive painting style, is constantly seeking poetry to translate into visual art. Dubbed the 'Poetry Painter' by his peers, he has already painted more than 40 poems onto a single canvas, including works by William Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Elizabeth Godsworth and Kalidasa, while preserving their poetic essence. His mural painting, The Mystical Supper — a unique reinterpretation of Da Vinci's 'Last Supper' — stands out as an intriguing masterpiece.

A platform for artists

Renowned Kuwaiti artist Dr Waleed Sarab Ameer, a member of InASK, believes the organization serves as an essential platform for artists in Kuwait to showcase their talent and sell their artwork. Dr Waleed, an associate professor at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, is also a member of the Free Atelier of Kuwait. He has held numerous painting exhibitions and symposiums, earning recognition at both GCC and international levels.

Hari Chengannur, an acclaimed artist, recalls how InASK emerged to fill a crucial gap. "Although Kuwait has numerous organizations, none were specifically dedicated to fine arts. Local



'Awaiting Destiny' by Nimsha Abdul Karim

painters lacked a platform to showcase their work or connect with the public. That's how the idea of International Artists Space Kuwait was born," said Hari, whose 'My Village' series — a collection of paintings capturing rural scenes from his childhood — gained widespread recognition at his solo exhibition in 2019.

Hari's works have been exhibited internationally, including at the 2017-2018 International Painting Exhibition in Simla. His oil painting of a 6th-century bronze statue won a gold medal at the 27th Art Point National Online Art Competition (2019), while his mural 'Ananthashayanam' won a silver medal in the same competition in 2017. "One unique feature of InASK is that it welcomes all expatriate artists, regardless of nationality, allowing them to collaborate, something no other organization offers," Hari said.

Events such as 'Winter Canvas' and 'Hala Canvas' — InASK's live painting sessions celebrating Kuwait's National Days — have further strengthened the organization's reputation for innovation

and inclusivity. "Today, InASK has grown into a prominent artistic collective, proving that a simple WhatsApp group can evolve into a thriving artist community. We remain committed to supporting both art and artists, ensuring that the visual arts scene in Kuwait continues to flourish," Hari added.

The power of passion

InASK is not just about exhibitions. It also fosters innovation and supports artists in their personal journeys. The story of Nimsha Abdul Karim, an active InASK member, is a testament to the power of passion, perseverance and artistic inspiration drawn from everyday life. "My journey from being a young student exploring art to becoming an artist deeply connected to nature and spirituality has been remarkable," Nimsha said. "I find inspiration in my mother's encouragement and the beauty of nature, which I see as symbols of tolerance and love."

A versatile artist, she works across multiple mediums, including oil and acrylic painting, graphite drawing, wa-



A painting by Dr Waleed Sarab

tercolor, digital art, fabric painting and portraits. "For me, nature, animals, birds, and landscapes hold deep meaning. I find inspiration in Allah's creation and the natural world, and that's what I focus on in my work," she explained.

Art with a purpose

InASK also highlights the social responsibility of artists. Sreekumar Vallana, a well-known expatriate artist and active member of the group, believes creative work should serve a greater purpose. "In our society, fine arts often go unrecognized. While many people enjoy viewing paintings, only a few actually purchase original artworks," he said, emphasizing InASK's role in nurturing and supporting artists within Kuwait's expat community. "I continuously refine my art through observation and the encouragement of friends," he added, reaffirming the power of collaboration in artistic growth.



A painting by Dr Waleed Sarab



'Golden Whirls of Imagination' by Nimsha Abdul Karim



Battlefield in acrylic by Sunil Kulanada



'Autumn Walks, Glowing Hearts' by Nimsha Abdul Karim



'Lost' by Sreekumar Vallana



A painting in 'My Village' series by Hari Chengannur

Taste of Kuwait in Ramadan



By Sahar Moussa

Ramadan in Kuwait is a time of spiritual reflection, family gatherings and cherished traditions, with food playing a vital role in uniting families and communities. Each dish carries a story of heritage and cultural significance, from the fragrant rice of machboos to the comforting sweetness of luqaimat, reflecting the warmth and hospitality of this sacred month.

As the sun sets and the call to prayer echoes through the streets, Kuwaiti households come together to break their fast with time-honored dishes passed down for generations. The iftar meal begins with simple yet essential elements, such as dates and laban, providing nourishment and energy after a long day of fasting. Paired with refreshing drinks like Vimto and tamarind juice, these culinary delights make Ramadan an unforgettable experience, blending tradition, community and the deep-rooted flavors of Kuwaiti cuisine. Let's dive into the rich world of Kuwaiti cuisine and explore the traditional dishes that make Ramadan so special.



Machboos diyay

Signature Kuwaiti dishes in Ramadan

Machboos: The crown jewel of Kuwaiti cuisine

Considered Kuwait's most iconic dish, machboos is a fragrant rice dish cooked with marinated meat, usually chicken or lamb. The dish is infused with spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, and dried limes (loomi), creating a unique and aromatic flavor. It is often served with dakkous, a tangy tomato sauce, adding an extra burst of taste.



Machboos laham

Jareesh and harees: Timeless comfort foods

These dishes, made from crushed wheat slow-cooked with meat, onions and aromatic spices, have been a part of Kuwaiti cuisine for centuries. Their creamy texture and rich flavors make them



Dates and soup

The iftar essentials: Dates and soup

Dates: Traditionally, the fast is broken with dates, a natural source of energy packed with essential nutrients. They are often enjoyed with a glass of laban (a yogurt-based drink) or water to aid digestion.

Lentil soup: A staple on every Kuwaiti iftar table, this comforting soup is made with lentils, onions, carrots and a blend of fragrant spices, offering warmth and sustenance.



Tashreeb

Tashreeb: A hearty Ramadan classic

Tashreeb is a rich and comforting stew poured over pieces of soaked bread, allowing the flavors to be fully absorbed. Made with tender meat, vegetables, and a flavorful broth infused with Kuwaiti spices, this dish is a perfect post-fasting meal, as the softened bread and nourishing stew are easy to digest.



Harees

Traditional Ramadan drinks

Laban: A cooling and hydrating yogurt-based drink that helps restore balance to the body after a long day of fasting.

Vimto: A sweet, fruity beverage that has become synonymous with Ramadan in Kuwait, known for its deep red color and rich berry flavor.

Tamarind juice: A tangy and refreshing drink, popular for its digestive benefits and ability to quench thirst after a day of fasting.



Traditional Ramadan drinks



Traditional Kuwaiti food

A taste of tradition

Ramadan in Kuwait is not just about food; it is about the memories, the gatherings and the warmth of sharing meals with loved ones. Each dish tells a story of tradition, and every sip of a traditional drink is a reminder of the deep-rooted culture that defines Kuwaiti hospitality. Which of these traditional dishes have you tried?



Luqaimat

Luqaimat: The sweetest treat

No Ramadan feast is complete without luqaimat, deep-fried dumplings drizzled with sugar syrup or honey. Crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, these bite-sized delights are a must-have during the holy month, loved for their light yet indulgent taste.

WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT



Event: Kland Girgian
Location: Kland
Date: March 13-15, 2025

Event: Hypestate Ramadan Padel Tournament Girgian
Location: Regency El-Padel
Date: March 12-14, 2025



Event: Girgian Scientific Center
Location: The Scientific Center
Date: March 12-14, 2025
Time: 8 pm to 12 am

Event: Al-Kout Girgian
Location: Al-Kout Mall
Date: March 14-15, 2025
Time: 8:30 pm to 11:30 pm



Event: Zain's Drive-Through Girgian
Location: Zain's Main Headquarters - Shuwaikh
Date: March 14, 2025

Event: Toyota GR Yaris Cup+ Bugsha Popup
Location: Kuwait Motor Town
Date: March 14-15, 2025

Event: Ramadan Nights and Girgian
Location: Andalus Mall
Date: March 14-16, 2025



Event: City Hyper Market Healthy Girgian
Location: Al-Shaheed Park - Phase 1
Date: March 15, 2025

Event: Girgian Murouj
Location: Murouj Market
Date: March 13-15, 2025

Event: Girgian Al-Hamra
Location: Al-Hamra Tower
Date: March 13-15, 2025
Time: 9 pm to 11 pm

Event: Bugsha Market Girgian
Location: Shuwaikh Park
Date: March 14-15, 2025

Event: Zue Girgian
Location: Zue- Alrai
Date: March 14, 2025

Sports

Norris and McLaren hungry for more silverware in 2025

Piastrri says signing for long term with McLaren a 'no-brainer'

MELBOURNE: Lando Norris says his confidence was sky high after McLaren's first constructors' title in 26 years last season, with the team hungrier than ever to add the drivers' championship to their trophy cabinet.

The Briton came tantalizingly close to dethroning Red Bull's Max Verstappen as world champion in 2024 and is widely expected to be battling at the front of the grid again this year. "It's motivated everyone even more from a team perspective," he said of the constructors' crown. "The team got their first chance in 26 years to experience what it's like to win a championship and I think it's made them hungrier now that they know what it's like."

"I think it's good to acknowledge as a whole team that there will be more expectation now, more eyes, more pressure, more competitors trying to bring you down." McLaren were among the quickest at pre-season testing in Bahrain, with Norris and his Oscar Piastrri looking to lay down a marker at the season-opening race in Melbourne this week.

Norris said he was excited by what lay ahead after showing last year that he could thrive under the weight of expectation and in high-pressure situa-

tions. "I'm excited about the season, but very calm," he said on the McLaren website.

"I feel relaxed. From a personal side, I don't feel any more pressure. I'm always nervous and will always be, but that turns into excitement. "One (thing I've learnt) is that I can do it, and I've got what it takes," he added.

McLaren started last season slowly before an upgrade at the sixth round in Miami radically improved their fortunes and allowed Norris to take his first win. But that still left him 53 points behind Verstappen.

Norris attempted to claw back the deficit as Red Bull's supremacy was eroded, but his title bid ran out of steam. "This is the most confident I've been in the team and probably the most confident I have been in myself," he said. "It's honestly not a big change, it's quite small, but I feel more prepared and a more complete driver than I've ever been. "Achieving what we did last year makes you believe you can do it again. That belief is what gives you the most confidence."

Meanwhile, Oscar Piastrri said Thursday it was a "no-brainer" to commit his long-term future to McLaren while playing down expectations of vic-

tory at his home Grand Prix in Australia this week. The 23-year-old, who was already under contract until 2026, signed a multi-year extension with the British team ahead of the season-opening race in Melbourne.

"It felt like just a very natural progression to sign for even longer term," Piastrri said. "Obviously last year was an incredible year for the team. I think my two years for the team has been pretty incredible, starting from where we were when I joined to being constructors' champions."

His teammate Lando Norris has also been tied down long-term, as have McLaren principal Andrea Stella and chief executive Zak Brown. "So for me, it seems like a no-brainer, and I think it was reciprocated from the team as well," said the Australian.

Piastrri finished fourth overall after wins in Hungary and Azerbaijan last season, and is set to battle with Norris for the title this year with McLaren widely considered the car to beat. The pair combined last year to secure McLaren their first constructors' crown since 1998. But Piastrri played down his chances of getting off to a flying start by winning in Melbourne. "I know what you want me



MELBOURNE: McLaren's British driver Lando Norris poses for a portrait at the Albert Park circuit in Melbourne on March 13, 2025, ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix. — AFP

to say, and everyone's headline could be that, but we'll see," he said. "No one really knows what to expect. Testing went pretty well but you don't know where everybody sits." — AFP

Hamilton calls Ferrari debut 'most exciting period of my life'

MELBOURNE: Lewis Hamilton said Thursday he was itching to get going during the "most exciting period of my life" at Ferrari, but cautioned of a transition period as he gets used to a new car. After 12 years with Mercedes he will race for the first time in the Ferrari red at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix this week, knowing expectations are high.

The seven-time world champion officially began work at the Scuderia in January after his shock move and completed 162 laps of testing in Bahrain. The 40-year-old said it was hard to assess Ferrari's place in the pecking order so early in the season.

"Obviously three days in the car, difficult to know where we stand with everyone else. But we just try to keep our heads down and just focus on our job," he said in Melbourne. "But for me, I mean, I'm just itching to get going. I guess it's been a long time coming." Ferrari were pipped to the constructors' championship by McLaren last year, the seventh time the Italian team had finished second since they last won



MELBOURNE: Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton (C) walks in the paddock at the Albert Park circuit in Melbourne on March 13, 2025, ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix. — AFP

the team title in 2008. Kimi Raikkonen was the last driver to lift the world championship for Ferrari in 2007 and Hamilton tempered expectations about what he might achieve.

'I can deliver'

"I have an expectation for myself. I know what I can bring, I know I can deliver, I know what it's going to take to do that, and it's just getting your head

a talented France squad, who suffered a quarter-final loss on home soil during the 2023 Rugby World Cup, again risked failing to fulfil their potential.

But they have been in commanding form since their defeat against England. "We have reacted well since Twickenham. We've got something going though it's not finished yet," said France coach Galthie. France had to play more than half the Ireland match without inspirational captain Antoine Dupont after the outstanding scrum-half went off injured with torn ligaments in his right knee.

Yet so impressive was replacement scrum-half Maxime Lucu that Dupont was barely missed. There was no disguising Dupont's disappointment at being ruled out of the Scotland match. The 28-year-old told his social media followers: "The heart hurts even more than the knee when you have to leave your mates before the last hurdle.... I am with you with all my strength. You will do it (win against Scotland)."

Given how Scotland conceded a flurry of late tries in their victory against winless Wales last week, few would be confident that Gregor Townsend's can deny France a four-try bonus point. Townsend is under no illusions about the task facing his side, who for all their back-line quality appear seriously out-gunned up front.

The Scotland coach believes a match away to France is now "probably the toughest fixture in world rugby". England will be overwhelming favourites to beat a Wales team on a national record losing streak of 16 successive Test defeats.

"The place (the Principality Stadium), Cardiff, is one of my favourite places I've ever played in," said England coach and former captain Steve Borthwick. "What I'll say, and I said this to the team — where we play is not the most important thing. The most

important thing is the attitude with which we play. That's the challenge."

Saturday's match will be Cardiff coach Matt Sherratt's third and last as caretaker Wales boss since the Englishman took over mid-tournament after the end of Warren Gatland's unsuccessful second stint in charge.

"There's no greater challenge than England in Cardiff," said Sherratt. "So I know it's something the boys can't wait for and personally for me it should be a great occasion." Ireland will win a third successive Six Nations title if they secure a bonus-point win over Italy in Saturday's opener in Rome and both France and England fail to win. "We still have a chance," said Ireland interim head coach Simon Easterby. "We still genuinely feel like there's more in us." — AFP

down and working away," he said. "So I come with a very open mind. It is about getting into the season, this is about getting into a good rhythm."

"I'm still learning this new car that's quite a lot different to what I've driven for my previous career, in the sense of Mercedes power coming into Ferrari power," he added. "It's something quite new, different vibration, different feel, different way of working. "The whole team works completely differently." But he said the new challenge motivated him. "Definitely this is the most exciting period of my life, and so I'm really just enjoying it, and I'm so excited to get in the car tomorrow," he said. "The sooner you can get to performing at the high level, and getting results is the better. But admittedly, there is a transition period, and there is a foundation that needs to be built."



PARIS: France's coach Fabien Galthie gives a press conference to announce the 23 players of the Six Nations rugby union match between France and Scotland, in Paris on March 13, 2025. — AFP

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Germany recall Adeyemi, Goretzka for Italy Nations tie

BERLIN: Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann on Thursday recalled the in-form Leon Goretzka and Karim Adeyemi to his squad for the two-legged Nations League quarter-final tie with Italy. Injuries to key players including Florian Wirtz, Kai Havertz, Niclas Füllkrug and Marc-Andre Ter Stegen necessitated several changes as Germany look to reach the final four of the Nations League for the first time.

Bayern Munich midfielder Goretzka last played for Germany in 2023 but has regained the form of a few years ago. Nagelsmann, who coached him at Bayern, said: "Leon is in a very good phase from a sporting perspective."

Adeyemi has not pulled on a Germany senior shirt since 2022 and this is the first time Nagelsmann has selected him. Appointed Germany manager in September 2023, Nagelsmann has repeatedly selected on form rather than reputation, having regularly left big names out of the squad.

On Thursday, Nagelsmann said he selected "players who play regularly for the club" and added he wanted players to be "on fire (and) show their spirit even if they don't play from the start". Midfielder Nadiem Amiri has been chosen for the first time in five years as he benefits from Mainz's rise to third spot in the table.

Inter Milan centre-back Yann Aurel Bisseck, 24, is the only debutant. "We've got great respect for him," Nagelsmann said of Bisseck, adding "he's got a lot of talent and brings plenty to the table." Manchester City back-up Stefan Ortega joins Hoffenheim's Oliver Baumann and Stuttgart's Alexander Nuebel, on loan from Bayern, as the goalkeepers.

Nagelsmann did not indicate which of the three would play but said he would opt for the same player for both games. The coach complained about the scheduling of the Bundesliga, with seven members of the national squad involved when defending champions Bayer Leverkusen and last season's runners-up Stuttgart play on Sunday.

Nagelsmann said he would now have "the shortest training period" he has ever had as Germany coach. They face Italy in Milan on March 20 before hosting the Italians in the return leg in Dortmund on March 23. Italy eliminated Germany with two goals in extra time at the same venue in the semi-finals of the 2006 World Cup.

Germany had never beaten Italy at a major tournament until winning on penalties in the quarter-finals of Euro 2016. — AFP

France hot favourites to win three-way battle for Six Nations crown

LONDON: France head into Saturday's final round of the Six Nations with the luxury of knowing the destiny of the title is in their own hands. Les Bleus' dominant 42-27 defeat of double-defending champions Ireland in Dublin last weekend took them top of the table, a point clear of second-placed England.

And with France's game at home to Scotland the third and last of the tournament's concluding "Super Saturday", Fabien Galthie's men will know exactly what they need to do. Regardless of other results, a bonus-point win over Scotland would guarantee France a first Six Nations title in three years.

It would take them to 21 points, with 20 points the most England can manage if they beat Wales heavily in Cardiff. The French also have a vastly superior points difference — plus-106 to England's plus-20, meaning that barring an unlikely sequence of events they would win the tournament even if they finish level with England on 20 points. The only surprise approaching the finale of the championship is that France, after three thumping wins — including 43-0 and 73-24 routs of Wales and Italy — are not on course for a Grand Slam.

'Not finished yet'

But that dream died with an error-strewn display in a 26-25 second-round loss away to England, when France squandered several clear try-scoring opportunities. Defeat raised fresh questions about whether

Mullins' Galopin des Champs bids to join Gold Cup legends

CHELTENHAM: Galopin des Champs bids to join the legends of jump racing Arkle, Best Mate, Cottage Rake and Golden Miller as a three-time winner of the Cheltenham Gold Cup on Friday. Willie Mullins has nurtured many great champions but the 68-year-old is in no doubt as to Galopin des Champs being the best he has ever trained. "He has to be, you'd have to say that," said the Irish training titan ahead of the blue riband of the sport.

"He goes out and takes it from the front and grabs races by the scruff of the neck — and he battles off everyone" he added. Mullins and the Gold Cup has been a bit like the old saying of waiting hours for a London bus before two came along — though in his case it has been four.

Having swept the board in most of the big races at the Festival the Gold Cup eluded him till 2019 when Al Boum Photo won the first of his two Gold Cups. Al Boum Photo finished third when he tried for the treble but that was behind two outstanding horses, the Henry de Bromhead-trained duo Minella Indo and A Plus Tard.

The latter was to reverse placings with Minel-



CHELTENHAM: Runners and riders compete in the Brown Advisory Novices' Chase on the second day of the Cheltenham Festival at Cheltenham Racecourse in Cheltenham, western England. — AFP

la Indo the following year before the Galopin des Champs show came along in 2023. He will face eight rivals, five of them Irish making it odds on the Irish will extend their winning run in the race to seven. Galopin comes into the Festival on the back of two wins — including the Irish Gold Cup — and should he be successful aged just nine he would have time on his side to even equal Golden Miller's

record of five victories.

His jockey Paul Townend, who like Mullins is bidding for a fifth Gold Cup, says Galopin des Champs makes jumping seem effortless. "He obviously has huge, huge talent," said the 34-year-old Irishman, whose only equine company at home in Ireland is three Shetland ponies.

"His appetite for it is the one quality that stands

out. "You can look at the last fence and ride at it like it's not there. You know when you land, he's going to gallop to the line."

'Give him a fright'

His toughest challenger may be the fences as it is not the classiest field ever assembled for the most prestigious race on the jumps calendar. His likeliest rivals according to the bookmakers are Banbridge and Inothewayurthinkin. Banbridge is certainly a contender based on his win in the King George VI Chase in late December, moving into top gear to overhaul the gallant French runner Il Est Francais.

"We're well aware that Galopin Des Champs is a special horse and we're very privileged to have a horse that can even be considered a rival, or one that could give him a fright," trainer Joseph O'Brien told the Luck on Sunday programme. "We couldn't say that he wouldn't get the distance and, probably what will be more telling, is whether we can beat Galopin on the day or not," added O'Brien, who has won the Melbourne Cup twice, a rare race Mullins has competed for and failed to capture. There was enough confidence behind Inothewayurthinkin to pay a fee to supplement him, though, his main target is the Grand National for which he is favourite. However, with a lack of rain trainer Gavin Cromwell may have second thoughts and opt ultimately not to run him. "If he does (run) then I definitely think he'll get closer to Galopin Des Champs once again (fourth to him in Irish Gold Cup)," he said. — AFP

Sports

Alcaraz blows past Dimitrov into Indian Wells quarters

Keys battles through to book a meeting with resurgent Belinda Bencic

INDIAN WELLS: Two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz blew past Grigor Dimitrov 6-1, 6-1 on Wednesday to reach the Indian Wells quarter-finals, keeping his bid for a rare three-peat on course.

The world number three from Spain defied the difficult windy conditions on Stadium Court to deliver a dominant performance against a player who had won their past two encounters—including in the quarter-finals at the Miami Open last year. Alcaraz took another step in his bid to join Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic as the only men to win three straight Indian Wells titles.

Alcaraz appeared largely untroubled by the gusty winds that had ball kids scampering after blowing trash and changed the trajectories of some shots. "Today with the conditions, it was really tough for both," he said. "I had to survive. I always say in these conditions, you have to survive no matter what. I'm very happy that I was able to play long rallies. I got a good rhythm, even with the conditions."

Alcaraz didn't face a break point until the fifth game of the second set, and worked his way out of that jam with an ace on Dimitrov's third break chance. Alcaraz polished it off in style, giving himself a match point with his sixth ace of the match and sealing the win with a forehand winner.

He will play Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo for a place in the semi-finals. Cerundolo beat world number 10 Alex de Minaur of Australia 7-5, 6-3. Britain's Jack Draper delivered a masterclass to stun 2022 champion Taylor Fritz 7-5, 6-4.

Draper won seven straight games to seize a 7-5, 4-0 lead over the world number four. Fritz gave him some tense moments with a late break of serve before Draper served it out on his second opportunity. "It is the best match I have played here so far in the three



INDIAN WELLS: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain with his bags in the players tunnel as he walks out onto court to play against Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria in their fourth round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

years I have been here," Draper said. Draper next faces Ben Shelton, who became the only American man in the quarter-finals with a 7-6 (8/6), 6-1 victory over compatriot Brandon Nakashima.

Keys battles through

The only US woman in the last eight is Australian

Open champion Madison Keys, who battled past Donna Vekic 4-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 to book a meeting with resurgent Belinda Bencic, who ousted third-ranked American Coco Gauff 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

On the back foot early, Keys failed to convert a set point in the 10th game of the second set and was two points from defeat in the tiebreaker when Vekic took a 5-3 lead. Keys gutted out the breaker and gave herself some breathing room when she broke the Croatian to open the third. "At some point, I just felt like it was 'do or die,' probably five-all in the second-set tiebreaker," Keys said. "I kind of just decided that I was going to go for a little bit more, and (I'm) really happy to be able to get that match and get that win and play another match here."

Bencic also had to rally to reach her first WTA 1000 quarter-final since becoming a mother last year. She dominated Gauff to avenge a fourth-round loss to the American at the Australian Open this year.

Bencic, who was unranked when she returned to the tour in October, claimed her ninth career title in Abu Dhabi last month and has risen to 58th in the world. She said her improving fitness was a factor in her ability to best Gauff in three sets this time, when she couldn't back in January.

"What changed is that I just kept on working also on the physical side," Bencic said. "The body is holding up much better, almost like it was before." World number one Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus got past an early hiccup, dropping her serve in the opening game before rolling to a 6-1, 6-2 victory over British lucky loser Sonay Kartal.

Sabalenka will next face 24th-ranked Russian Liudmila Samsonova, who surprised world number six Jasmine Paolini of Italy 6-0, 6-4. — AFP



LILLE: Lille's French midfielder #10 Remy Cabella (L) fights for the ball with Borussia Dortmund's Norwegian defender #26 Julian Ryerson during the UEFA Champions League last 16, second leg football match between OSC Lille and Borussia Dortmund in Lille, northern France. — AFP

Dortmund fight back to beat Lille and reach CL quarters

LILLE: Borussia Dortmund recovered from losing an early goal to fight back and beat Lille 2-1 in France in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday, sealing a 3-2 aggregate victory and a place in the quarter-finals.

Jonathan David gave Lille an early lead on the night, putting the French club ahead in the tie after last week's 1-1 first-leg draw. However, Emre Can squared things by converting a penalty for Dortmund on 54 minutes, and Maximilian Beier then fired in a fine winner for last season's runners-up.

Dortmund will now face Barcelona in the quarter-finals next month, having already lost 3-2 at home to the Catalans during the league phase in December. The result is a huge boost for Dortmund and their recently-appointed coach Niko Kovac, coming as the club languishes in 10th place in the Bundesliga.

"For the whole 90 minutes we controlled the game. It was a fantastic performance," Kovac told UEFA.com. He will now come up against a Barcelona side coached by Hansi Flick, his former assistant at Bayern Munich.

The result is a massive disappointment for Lille, who were hoping to reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League for the first time in their history after an outstanding performance during the league phase. They finished seventh out of 36 teams, beating both Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid on the way, while also holding Juventus and putting six past Feyenoord.

'Frustration' for Lille

Their coach Bruno Genesio insisted it had been a "satisfying" campaign despite the exit, but club president Olivier Letang was unhappy about the decision to award the penalty from which Dortmund equalized. "I want to emphasize how good a run we had, even if we are frustrated," before questioning the decision to appoint as referee Sandro Schaerer, a German-speaking Swiss.

"I don't think it was a penalty and it changed the game," he said. "When I saw who was appointed referee, and that he was a German-speaking Swiss, I thought it was a bit strange. And at half-time he was speaking to the Dortmund players exclusively in German."

Lille appeared to be in a strong position after coming from behind to draw in Dortmund last week, and they went in front in the tie when Canada forward David scored in the fifth minute. Ismaily's low ball in from the left was swept towards goal by David, somehow going in through the legs of Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel.

It was David's seventh goal in this season's Champions League, but it seemed to galvanize the visitors. They were denied an equalizer by a remarkable double save from Lille keeper Lucas Chevalier in the midst of a goalmouth scramble on 20 minutes.

Dortmund applied pressure and were rewarded when they won the penalty shortly after half-time as Serhou Guirassy went down under contact from Thomas Meunier. It appeared a soft decision, but Can fired in the spot-kick, and Karim Adeyemi then hit the bar for Dortmund before they found what proved to be the winner on 65 minutes.

Guirassy, who has 10 goals in the Champions League this season, was the provider but Beier still had work to do as he controlled the ball in the box before firing a lethal shot high into the net. Lille could not recover from that blow as they went out in the last 16, just like in their two previous appearances at this stage of the competition, in 2007 and 2022. — AFP

Manchester United look 'lost' and 'scared': Rooney

LONDON: Wayne Rooney thinks former side Manchester United look "lost" and "scared" on the pitch and that "10 to 15 players need to leave the club". Fallen giants United are a lowly 14th in the Premier League, with the likes of Brentford, Bournemouth, Brighton and Nottingham Forest all above them in English football's top-flight.

United have won just nine out of 28 league games so far this season and have been knocked out of both domestic cup competitions, with their hopes of winning any silverware this term hanging on Thursday's Europa League last 16 second-leg tie against Real Sociedad at Old Trafford.

A hoped for upturn in results since Ruben Amorim replaced the sacked Erik ten Hag as manager has so far failed to materialize, with the Portuguese coach presiding over a mere five wins from 17 Premier League fixtures.

United great Rooney, the club's record goalscorer, was blunt when asked on the Stick to Football podcast if there was any hope of a resurgence with the current squad. "No, I don't think so," he said. "They look lost. I think they look scared and just scared to make a mistake."

"I do think Bruno (Fernandes) is the one who keeps producing, he annoys you at times as well, but he's the one who keeps producing. But it needs massive changes to the squad. I think 10 to 15 players need to leave the club."

"Obviously they can't do that, but I think there is a mentality there where it's not going right. This player will pass it on to him, he'll pass it on to him and no one is taking responsibility." The 39-year-old Rooney, who mentioned United captain Fernandes and teenage fellow midfielder Kobbie Mainoo as players he would keep at United, added: "I think there is just a culture there now where it's too easy for them to lose games and then you see them coming out (with), 'on to the next one' and all this rubbish."

"You're like 'just show it on the pitch—show some character and fight on the pitch.' 'It's bad watching, it hurts. Being from Liverpool but spending so many years at Man United, I want the club to do well. I've got my kids in the academy there—and watching it, it hurts."

United co-owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe said Monday in a BBC interview that some of the club's players were "not good enough" and "some probably are over-paid". When Amorim was asked about those comments on Wednesday ahead of the Sociedad match, he said: "I think if we are being honest in this moment everybody—me, all the players—are underperforming this season so we can always change that." — AFP

Usyk ordered to defend WBO title against Parker

LONDON: Heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk has been ordered to start negotiations to defend his World Boxing Organization (WBO) heavyweight title against Joseph Parker. The move that could end British fighter Daniel Dubois' hopes of a re-match with the Ukrainian.

The WBO announced Thursday that Usyk, who also holds the World Boxing Council (WBC) and World Boxing Association (WBA) belts, has 30 days to "reach terms" for a mandatory title defence against New Zealand's Parker or the governing body will call for purse bids.

Parker defended his WBO interim title in Riyadh



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa's English midfielder #41 Jacob Ramsey (C) jumps over a tackle from Club Brugge's Argentinian defender #02 Zaid Romero (R) during the last 16 second leg UEFA Champions League football match between Aston Villa and Club Brugge at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

Aston Villa want to make 'history' in Champions League

BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa captain John McGinn has warned Paris Saint-Germain that his team want to "write our names in history" when they meet in the Champions League quarter-finals. Villa booked their first appearance in the last eight of Europe's elite club competition for 42 years with a 3-0 win against 10-man Club Brugge on Wednesday. Unai Emery's side romped to a 6-1 aggregate victory in the last 16 as Marco Asensio came off the bench to score twice in the second half of the second leg at Villa Park.

Brugge had Kyriani Sabbe sent off for a professional foul on Marcus Rashford early in the first half. Ian Maatsen netted in between Asensio's brace to set up a fascinating clash with Ligue 1 leaders PSG, who beat Liverpool on penalties at Anfield on Tuesday.

Villa are looking to reach the semi-finals for the first time since winning the tournament in 1982 and Scotland midfielder McGinn is determined to keep their fairytale campaign going against PSG in April. "It's mad. A lot of years of hard work. Champions League quarter-finalists? Can't ask for much more," he said.

"We let ourselves down in the first half but even with 10 men they were the better side. We're lucky to have Marco to come off the bench. The second half was brilliant. "It doesn't get much harder than PSG over two legs. We're giving these fans experiences they'll remember forever."

"We want to write our names in history and make

last month with a second-round stoppage of Martin Bakole, a late replacement after Dubois withdrew because of illness. Rather than reschedule his bout against Parker, International Boxing Federation (IBF) champion Dubois had hoped for a return clash with Usyk, who defeated the Briton by ninth-round knockout in August 2023.

Dubois re-established himself in the heavyweight ranks with stoppage wins over Jarrell Miller and Filip Hrgovic before most recently knocking out compatriot Anthony Joshua, himself a former world champion, at Wembley in September to take his professional record to 22 wins, with two losses and 21 knockouts.

The 27-year-old Dubois was understood to be in talks to face Usyk in a fight that would see all four major world heavyweight titles up for grabs but the WBO's announcement has complicated the picture in a sport where the lack of a single global governing body means there are often multiple world champions in the same weight class.

these nights more frequent." Villa were surprise qualifiers for the Champions League after finishing in the Premier League's top four last season. In their first appearance in the competition since 1982-83, Villa enjoyed memorable wins over Bayern Munich, RB Leipzig, Bologna and Celtic in the league phase before dispatching Brugge.

'Exciting end to the season'

With noted Villa fan Prince William cheering them on from the stands, Emery's men recovered from a nervous start to extend their remarkable Champions League run. Villa are also chasing FA Cup glory for the first time since 1957 and travel to Championship side Preston in the quarter-finals on March 30.

"It'll be good to have a bit of a break. We have a chance for Wembley in the FA Cup," McGinn said. "We want to get back and enjoy these nights next season. What an exciting end to the season we've got."

Villa's hopes of an incredible climax to the season can be traced back to Emery's arrival at the club in 2022. Emery has revitalized Villa since replacing the sacked Steven Gerrard and the four-time Europa League winner, with Sevilla and Villarreal, is once again showing his managerial acumen on the biggest stage.

His decision to send on Asensio and Leon Bailey at half-time against Brugge paid dividends as the pair immediately combined for the opening goal. Facing PSG will be extra special for Emery, who spent two turbulent years in charge there, winning the French title in 2018 but eventually leaving under a cloud after a pair of disappointing Champions League exits.

"We started the match under our expectations. They dominated the match. We didn't play the first half like we planned," Emery said. "We spoke at half-time, changed some thing, tried to change something in our minds to play better and it was completely different." — AFP

Usyk defeated Britain's Tyson Fury in May 2024 to become the first undisputed world heavyweight champion in almost 25 years. But he vacated his IBF belt before the rematch, with Dubois elevated to full champion.

Former undisputed world cruiserweight champion Usyk, 38, extended his perfect professional record to 23 wins in as many bouts, with 14 stoppages, after defeating Fury in a re-match in December that meant he retained the unified WBC, WBA and WBO championships. While Usyk was speaking immediately after being declared the winner by unanimous decision, Dubois entered the ring and interrupted the London 2012 gold medallist's interview to demand a bout.

But it appears Parker, who held the WBO title from 2016 to 2018 and is on a six-fight winning streak since losing to Joe Joyce in 2022, has overtaken Dubois as the next contender to face Usyk. In February, Usyk said he planned to have two more fights before retiring. — AFP

Real edge Atletico on penalties to reach Champions League quarters

'Atletico go out with their heads held high because they played at a good level'



MADRID: Real Madrid's German defender #22 Antonio Ruediger (L), Real Madrid's French forward #09 Kylian Mbappe (3L) and teammates celebrate their victory after the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 second leg football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Real Madrid CF at the Metropolitano stadium in Madrid. — AFP

MADRID: Real Madrid produced a gritty display to reach the Champions League quarter-finals with a 4-2 win on penalties against rivals Atletico Madrid, following a 1-0 defeat after extra time on Wednesday. Diego Simeone's side outplayed the record 15-time champions at the Metropolitano stadium for much of the game, but Madrid have never been eliminated by Atletico in the competition and they battled hard after Conor Gallagher's first-minute opener to secure a 2-2 aggregate draw.

Thibaut Courtois made several saves to thwart Julian Alvarez and Vinicius Junior blazed a penalty high and wide for Madrid. In the shoot-out Alvarez scored for Atletico but his effort was controversially ruled out for seeming to touch the ball twice because of a slip as he shot. "The ball didn't move," complained Simeone. "I want to believe they saw he touched it (twice)."

Marcos Llorente also missed for Atletico and Madrid's Antonio Rudiger struck the winner for the reigning champions, who will face Arsenal in the last eight. "I had to pick the coldest players possi-

ble (for penalties)," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti. "I think it's a lottery still, a toss-up, today it came in for us—Atletico go out with their heads held high because they played at a good level." Atletico played with caution in the first leg despite trailing, willing to take a single goal deficit back to the fiery Metropolitano stadium, where they believed they could really turn the heat up on their arch-rivals.

Real Madrid knocked Atletico out in the 2017 semi-finals in the final European game at the Vicente Calderon, with this the first time the derby has been played at Atletico's new home in the Champions League.

After defeats by Madrid in the 2014 and 2016 finals, the latter on penalties, and elimination on every other occasion the teams have met in the competition. Atletico were desperate to change the narrative, but came up fractionally short. "I think we played a great match, but unfortunately we lacked a bit of luck," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak told Movistar. "The truth is that one feels pain, it hurts a lot." Atletico came flying out of the blocks and took the lead after just 27 seconds through Gallagher,

levelling the tie on aggregate.

Rodrigo De Paul's low ball in from the right was not cut out by Raul Asencio and former Chelsea midfielder Gallagher lunged in to beat Courtois from close range. "We came out as if it was already won and in the first move they scored a goal against us, and that messed us up a lot," Madrid midfielder Fede Valverde told Movistar.

Atletico were content to sit deep and soak up pressure as Real Madrid pushed the ball around in their territory but were also ready to spring forward on the counter. Courtois saved on three occasions from Alvarez, who had scored a brilliant goal in the first leg.

Alvarez penalty controversy

With Atletico controlling the game, Real boss Carlo Ancelotti brought on Eduardo Camavinga and Lucas Vazquez in search of fresh energy. Madrid soon produced their best attack of the game, with superstar trio Vinicius, Jude Bellingham and Kylian Mbappe combining on a rapid counter.

Mbappe skipped away from Jose Gimenez and

then was dragged down by the desperate Clement Lenglet for a penalty before he could shoot. Vinicius stepped up, facing down a red wall of whistling Atletico fans behind the goal, and buckled under the pressure, firing high and wide.

Madrid shaded extra-time as both teams looked tired but pushed themselves to their limits with the match on a knife-edge. Mbappe stepped up first from the spot and sent Oblak the wrong way, with Bellingham following suit after Alexander Sorloth netted for Atletico.

Alvarez slipped as he smashed home the hosts' second penalty and after a VAR review it was ruled out as he had touched the ball twice as he struck it. Oblak saved from Vazquez's weak penalty to put Atletico back on track but it was short-lived as Llorente crashed his penalty off the bar.

Oblak dived the right way for Rudiger's decisive penalty, getting a hand to it but he could not keep it out as Madrid marched into the last eight, after winning their sixth shoot-out against Atletico from six. "We were never out of the tie—at worst, it was even," said Ancelotti. —AFP

Shai scores 34 points as Thunder down Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder punched their ticket to the playoffs with an impressive 118-112 victory over the reigning champion Boston Celtics in a potential NBA Finals sneak preview on Wednesday.

Gilgeous-Alexander enhanced his credentials as favorite for the Most Valuable Player award with a superb performance to silence Boston's TD Garden home crowd in an absorbing duel settled by a burst of fourth-quarter Thunder scoring.

The Canadian point guard shot 11-of-20 from the field to finish with five rebounds, seven assists and 34 points, including 10-of-11 from the free throw line. The win lifted Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City to 54-12 and guaranteed their place in next month's playoffs.

Wednesday's win over a vastly more experienced Boston lineup marked another mature display from a Thunder side that is the youngest in the league. Oklahoma City effectively sealed victory late in the fourth, pulling away to open up a double-digit lead with just under two minutes remaining after Cason Wallace nailed a superb 24-foot three-pointer followed by a driving reverse layup.

Gilgeous-Alexander said the Thunder's defensive solidity amid a barrage of 63 attempted threes from Boston had provided the foundation for the win. "We were able to get stops, and that's been the trend for us recently," he told ESPN.

"When you're coming down the stretch against a good basketball team with good players, you've got to find a way, and we did so tonight and gave ourselves a chance." While Gilgeous-Alexander



BOSTON: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder attempts a basket against Payton Pritchard #11 of the Boston Celtics during the fourth quarter at the TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

grabbed the scoring headlines, the towering Chet Holmgren caught the eye with a double-double of 23 points with 15 rebounds. "We all know the player Chet Holmgren is," Gilgeous-Alexander said of his 22-year-old teammate. "He's a stud, and he's going to be a stud for a very long time. He'll continue to grow and continue to be special."

Oklahoma City's balanced offense meanwhile suggests that they are well-equipped to make a deep run in the postseason as they pursue the franchise's first NBA title since 1979, when the club was the Seattle SuperSonics.

Despite missing Jaylin Williams from the lineup, the Thunder finished with seven players in double figures. Boston's scoring was led by Jayson Tatum with 33 points, while Derrick White had 22. Jaylen Brown though had an off-night, shooting 5-of-15 from the field before fouling out in the fourth quarter with 3min 36 remaining. Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said his team had failed to deal with Oklahoma City's physicality. "There were a lot of moments where we matched that and there were a few where we didn't, and I think stuff like that's the difference in the game," he said. — AFP

Iranian climber who competed without hijab leaves Iran

PARIS: An Iranian sports climber, widely praised in 2022 for competing without a hijab at the height of nationwide protests, has left the country, her brother and an Iranian official said. Elnaz Rekabi gained global attention in October 2022 when she took part in championships in South Korea without wearing the headscarf required for women in the Islamic republic.

She returned home and largely vanished from public view, with some Persian-language media based outside Iran reporting she had been placed under house arrest and banned from competing abroad. The protests erupted in September 2022 after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini who had been arrested for allegedly flouting the obligatory headscarf rule. The movement lasted for months before fading in the face of a deadly crackdown.

Rekabi has left Iran, her brother Davood wrote in an Instagram story quoted by the IranWire website and Iran International television channel, that also expressed hope she could return in the future. Iran International also shared another Instagram post by a fellow climber showing Rekabi training on an indoor wall in a vest and without a headscarf. It said that according to its information she had moved to Spain.

In Iran, the ISNA news agency also said that she had moved to Spain and quoted the head of Iran's National Olympic Committee Mehdi Alinejad as saying he was aware of Davood Rekabi's Instagram post. "If they want to pursue their professional sports, they should be in Iran. The National Olympic Committee has supported Rekabi for the past two years, and she herself will acknowledge this," he told reporters on Tuesday. — AFP