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Faith fills Kuwait's mosques on 20th night of Ramadan

'Sacred nights'

By Mohammad Al-Enezi Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: A profound sense of faith enveloped the country on the 20th night of Ramadan; as mosques throughout the country are filled with worshipers eager to perform the Qiyam prayer, seeking Allah's mercy and hoping to earn the blessings of these sacred nights.

In an atmosphere steeped in humility and supplication, the voices of worshipers resonated, embodying the deepest expressions of faith and a sincere closeness to the Almighty.

The first night saw only a few mosques open their doors to the faithful, including the Grand Mosque, Bilal bin Rabah Mosque and others. These mosques prepared meticulously for the occasion, with support from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, working in close coordination with the other concerned authorities.

All necessary services were provided to ensure the comfort of worshipers, with special attention given to the elderly and those with special needs, in addition to carefully managing traffic around the main mosques.

At the Grand Mosque, worshipers began arriving early in the evening, entering an atmosphere filled with tranquility and reverence. The mosque itself had undergone thorough preparations to provide the best possible services. Women's prayer rooms were set up, facilities were organized, and dedicated teams were stationed throughout to ensure the comfort of the worshipers.

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Ramadan Timings

Imsak	Friday Saturday	04:30	
	Saturday Sunday		



Devout worshipers gather at the Grand Mosque for Qiyam prayers on Wednesday night, seeking blessings in Ramadan's sacred nights.

Sporadic rain, dust storms to disrupt Kuwait weekend



Kuwait secures 30th spot in world happiness index

Steady ranking reflects resilience, progress

Photo by Samer Shiger Amid a dusty haze, motorists cautiously make their way towards Kuwait City, as a rare weather system grips the roads on Thursday.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): The Meteorological Department announced on Thursday that Kuwait will be impacted by a shallow depression, which will deepen in tandem with a high-altitude depression, bringing in rainladen clouds

Acting Director Dhirar Al-Ali informed KUNA that rainfall is expected to occur sporadically until Saturday night, with Friday seeing intensified rain and dust waves in the afternoon, continuing through Saturday.

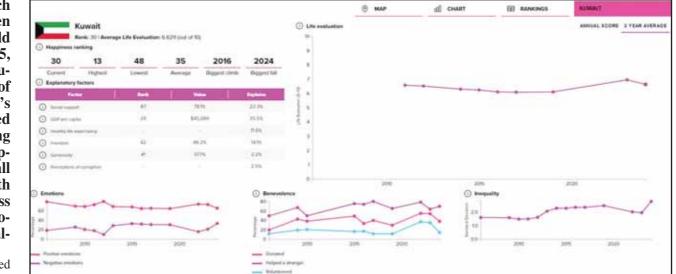
A gradual clearing of the atmosphere is anticipated to begin at midnight on Saturday.

Continued on Page 5

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Kuwait has been ranked 30th in the World Happiness Report 2025, with an average life evaluation score of 6.629 out of 10. While the country's ranking has fluctuated over the years – rising as high as 13th and dropping to 48th — its overall average position of 35th reflects steady progress in well-being despite economic and social challenges.

The annual report, released Thursday by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University

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Data shows Kuwait ranking released Thursday by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, in collaboration with Gallup and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, evaluates happiness levels in 147 countries based on self-reported well-being.

3 or 5 days break, pending moon sighting **CSC sets Eid holidays for gov't sector**

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): The Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced on Thursday suspending work at all ministries, governmental bodies, and public institutions for Eid Al-Fitr holiday, which will be determined based on the first day of Eid.

In a press statement, the CSC said that if the first day of Eid Al-Fitr falls on Sunday (March 30,) the official holidays will be three days starting from Sunday (March 30), Monday (March 31), and Tuesday (April 1), with work resuming on Wednesday, April 2.

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Arab League condemns Israeli attacks on Gaza

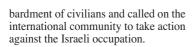
Kuwait urges global action to protect Palestinians

CAIRO, March 20, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait has called for the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip from the Israeli occupation's continued crimes.

Speaking to KUNA on sidelines an extraordinary meeting of the Arab League Council on the developments in the Palestinian territories, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the Arab League Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi emphasized that the international community and the international organizations should assume their responsibilities towards the protection of the Palestinian people.

He also stressed that the mediators of the ceasefire deal have a role to play to end hostilities.

Ambassador Talal recalled that the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry has also issued a statement condemning the blatant Israeli violations and the bom-





A man reacts over the bodies of victims of an Israeli army airstrike at Indonesia Hospital ahead of a mass funeral in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, Thursday, March 20, 2025. (AP)

He pointed out that Kuwait has spared no effort to offer all political and financial support to the Palestinian people and their rights.

The Arab League Council has strongly condemned the Israeli occupation for breaking the ceasefire agreement and resuming its brutal bombardment and horrific massacres against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

At the conclusion of its extraordinary meeting on the developments of in the Palestinian territories, the Council adopted a resolution condemning the occupation's continued crimes of aggression, genocide, and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people.

The resolution called on the international community to implement all legal requirements related to the implementation of relevant resolutions to protect Palestinian civilians.

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'Visa waiver for Kuwaiti fans positive step'



Gulf Bank hosts Ramadan Iftar for General Fire Force members



Zain's drive-thru **Girgeaan celebration** ... an exceptional experience

66% children affected

Survey reveals alarming rise in school violence in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Public Prosecution stated that the Juvenile Prosecution conducted a survey targeting 300 children, regardless of their legal status, who were summoned between September and December 2024. The aim of the survey was to determine the prevalence of school violence among children and its repercussions, as part of efforts to enhance legal and social protection for children, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A video posted by the Public Pros-

ecution on its X platform account indicated that 391 cases of assault were recorded in the Juvenile Prosecution in 2024, an increase of 57 cases compared to 2023. In 2022, 362 cases were recorded, and in 2021, 226 cases.

The video highlighted an upward trend in cases of assault and fights since the 2021/2022 school year, which recorded 184 cases, compared to 227 cases in 2022/2023 and 272 cases in 2023/2024.

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Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait has welcomed the diplomatic efforts exerted to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, especially the recent phone call between US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

The call, according to a foreign ministry statement, is a "major step" towards de-escalation, appreciating at the same time Saudi efforts in this regard, which will host US-Russian talks.

The statement concluded by underlining the State of Kuwait's belief and support for resolving such crises in peaceful manners. (KUNA)

ADEN: Kuwait's Direct-Aid Society's office in **Yemen** launched a project to provide Iftar (fastbreaking) meals to 3,800 families in need in three Yemeni governorates, as part of the "Kuwait Is by Your Side" campaign.

In a press statement on Thursday, the office's regional chairman Ali Butait said the project includes distributing 3,800 food baskets containing essential items for 26,600 individuals, until the end of the the holy month of Ramadan. (KUNA)

Weather

partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind changing to northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

Station Max Exp Kuwait City 31

Abdalv Bubyan Jahra Failaka Island Salmiyah Ahmadi Min Rec Jal Aliyah Nuwaisib

Kuwait Airport

'Visa waiver for Kuwaiti fans positive step'

LOCa

Iragi ambassador hosts Ramadan reception for well-wishers

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

partly cloudy with moderate to fresh southerly wind to south-easterly wind, with speeds of 20-55 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

By Day:Warm and cloudy to

By Night: Mild and cloudy to



Prayer Timings

Asr 15:23 Maghrib .. 17:59 Isha 19:16

Fajr 04:34 Sunrise .. 05:53 Zohr 11:56

Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Iraqi ambassador and Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Malek Al-Sabah



Iraqi ambassador receives UK, EU and Bahrain ambassadors.



Iraqi ambassador and Bahraini ambassador to Kuwait.



Iraqi ambassador, Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud, Faisal Al-Jazzaf

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Munhal Al-Safi said the Iraqi Embassy hosted a reception at its diwaniya for well-wishers celebrating the holy month of Ramadan.

In a press statement following the reception that took place recently in the presence of several royal family members, officials, ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, prominent figures, business leaders and representatives from all segments of the Kuwaiti society Al-Safi expressed his gratitude to all those who attended the event.



Iraqi ambassador receives Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Mohammad Al-Mubarak and other guests.

Meanwhile, in response to a question about the recent visit of Assistant Undersecretary for Bilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom Al-Safi described the visit as "brotherly" and expressed optimism that such visits will continue in the near future.

On the other hand, Advisor to the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Malik shared his happiness over attending the reception. He prayed for the enduring brotherhood, friendship and love between the two nations. "Kuwait and Iraq are brothers and neighbors with a long-standing relationship. Inshal-lah, this bond will remain strong forever," he said. He emphasized that the two countries' relationship is both geographically and brotherly rooted, likening it o that of "uncle and nephew," stressing it is built on mutual respect.

On the upcoming Kuwait-Iraq football match Sheikh Faisal wished success to both teams indicating "there are no losers in such a match. However, I do hope for a victory for Kuwait.³



Photos by Mohammad Morsi Iraqi ambassador and visitors from the church.

Sheikh Khaled Al-Bader Al-Mohammad also spoke at the event, affirming it is an honor to attend the reception at the invitation of the Iraqi Ambassador. "We are delighted to meet and connect with our diplomatic and Kuwaiti brothers," he said. He then expressed his Ramadan greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah.

He praised Iraq's initiative to waive visa requirements for Kuwaiti foot-ball fans, calling it a positive step. "Had we been hosting the tournament, we would have taken the same approach to ensure its success. Kuwait will always welcome them as they would in their second home," he asserted.

Describing the match between the Iraqi and Kuwaiti national teams as a "meeting of brothers;" he added "this is a victory regardless of which team wins. Any country that advances to the finals represents the other, as we share the same hopes and aspirations."

Other Voices

Historic reforms ensure women's rights: UN official

Raising legal marriage age to 18 wins praise

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Titbits...holidays conundrum

By Ahmad alsarraf

Hakem Al-Mutairi founded the ex-tremist religious Umma Party, which is banned by law. Al-Mutairi was sentenced to prison and is currently outside Kuwait. A controversial and widely circulated interview between Al-Mutairi and the tyrant Muammar Gaddafi gained attention on social media. One of the former leaders of this

party, known for delivering fiery speeches against ous groups, is now the dean of a prominent college at Kuwait University. Does this align with the government's efforts to ban



such affiliations and partisanship?

More than three million expatriates live in Kuwait, most of whom are without their families due to local laws that prevent them from bringing their families for administrative reasons. As a result, many of these individuals seize the first opportunity to travel and reunite with their families. Also, tens of thousands of Kuwaiti citizens take advantage of the opportunity to travel abroad whenever they can, for well-known reasons.

The government often delays the timing of official holidays, particularly those associated with religious holidays, due to their dependence on moon sightings . However, several Gulf countries have long moved away from this practice and now specify the dates of all religious holidays for the entire year, ensuring they remain consistent. This allows both residents and citizens to plan their travel in advance, avoiding last-minute confusion. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the upcoming holiday, as the date was announced late, leaving many to wait until the final day to find out when the holiday would start and end!

We hope the government will urge the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to be more flexible in setting holiday dates for the benefit of travelers. We would like to see the same approach adopted by the UAE, for example, in determining holidays in advance, allowing everyone to plan their travel with ease and avoid last-minute changes to their schedules within the final three or four hours. This would help prevent confusion, inconvenience, and wasted time.

What we seek is simple common sense in determining the next Eid holiday, something we did not witness in the process of setting the date for the upcoming Eid al-Fitr.

The world knows Kuwait as a small,

peaceful, and wealthy state, renowned for its pioneering rule of law, its enlightened constitution, its assistance to both near and far countries, its distinguished artists, and its scientific publications and cultural magazines, many of which have unfortunately ceased publication.

The official magazine issued by the Ministry of Information suffers from weakness, repetition, lack of structure, and often superficial content.

We are unsure of the reasons behind this alarming decline in our cultural and artistic publications, and no one has provided us with an explanation, perhaps because no one knows the real cause.

If the issue is financial, it can easily be managed both officially and publicly. If the problem lies with the writers, contributors, employees, professionals, and art departments, then it becomes a different matter, one that requires the rebuilding of specialized cadres. Who will tell us the truth about this issue? Huge construction projects, costing hundreds of millions of dinars, suffer

from the bureaucracy of several government agencies, particularly the Kuwait Municipality and the Kuwait Fire Force. One successful project became the biggest victim of this bureaucracy until intervention occurred, and officials were urged to redouble their efforts and avoid obstructing this iconic project with illegal and illogical excuses.

Today, the "Hessa Al-Mubarak" project, the largest of its kind by any standard, faces the same arbitrary treatment. This situation requires the intervention of the distinguished Minister Abdullatif Al-Mishari to resolve the issue and facilitate the project's progress, within the confines of applicable laws, without any leniency concerning violations, if any. We thank the government for its decisive action and decision to abolish exceptional pensions once and for all, restoring them to their logical and just limits.

We also thank the Minister of Interior for prohibiting traffic vehicles from using their flashers while on the road, and limiting their use to pursuits or stopping to manage accidents.

A group has raised \$10 million to build a children's hospital in Gaza, claiming to have approval from both the Kuwaiti and Palestinian authorities. This claim is inaccurate. We hope the Minister of Social Affairs will verify this information and temporarily withhold the funds until the situation is clearer, especially given that it is currently impossible to discuss the establishment of any major project in Gaza at this time.

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KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): UN Secretary-General's Representative and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait Ghada Al-Taher said Wednesday Kuwait is witnessing historic legal reforms that reflect commitment to ensuring women's rights.

Speaking to KUNA on the occasion of abolishing Article 153 of the Penal Code, the UN official commended the step as strong proof of opposition to all forms of violence against women.

She lauded the recent decision to raise the legal marriage age to 18 years as a step towards protecting young people from relevant negative impacts, ensuring their rights to characteristic development and helping them take careful decisions that suit their lives.

She regarded such achievements as reflecting Kuwait's commitment to international human rights criteria and gender equality, enshrined in the Kuwaiti Constitution.

Regarding education, Taher said that Kuwait has made remarkable progress in supporting women and girls' learning as women in this

Gulf country make up more than 70 percent of university graduates.

In employment, she remarked that women constitute over 44.59 percent of Kuwait's manpower in educational, healthcare and administrative jobs.

The UN official noted that this year marks 30 years since the Beijing Declaration was adopted as the global framework of promoting women's empowerment.

She added that Kuwait is part of women's empowerment efforts by means of ensuring girls' access to learning, increasing economic opportunities and promoting legal frameworks to back this empowerment.

Taher went on saying that in spite of the significance of achievements made since 2015, it is still necessary to empower women to hold leading posts.

She, further, believed that women and gender equality do not only concern women themselves but they are also a main factor of building fairer and more sustainable communities.



Ghada Al-Taher

She concluded by affirming that the UN would keep backing relevant national efforts and helping partners achieve Kuwait's new vision "New Kuwait 2025, which is mainly based on investment in human capital as part of Beijin-30 program.

Third medical clinic inaugurated in Al-Mutla'a

New infectious diseases hospital opens April end

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi announced that the new Infectious Diseases Hospital will be operational by the end of April, as the hospital is currently 90 percent complete.

Dr. Al-Awadhi also revealed that two new maternity hospitals will soon open in the Al-Sabah and Ahmadi health zones.

In a press statement issued on Wednesday on the sidelines of the inauguration of the Mutlaa Health Center (N8), Al-Awadhi explained that the ministry is implementing an ambitious plan to transform health zones into integrated medical cities, starting with Al-Sabah Medical City and Ahmadi Medical City. These two projects will serve as pioneering models, combining general and specialized hospitals with advanced health centers, aiming to enhance the efficiency of the health system and meet the growing demand for medical services.

He highlighted the upcoming opening of the Al-Wafra Specialized Health Center in April,

stressing that it will be a unique facility serving the residents of the southern region of the country. The minister affirmed that the ministry is focused on expanding its infrastructure and supporting it with national personnel, including doctors, nurses, technicians, and administrators.

In addition, Dr. Al-Awadhi said the Mutlaa N8 Center is the third to open, following the launch of centers in N10 and N11 suburbs, as part of the Ministry of Health's strategy to establish 15 health centers, along with specialized centers, to serve the residents of the Mutlaa area.

He stressed that the center's opening is part of the ministry's commitment to its strategic plan aimed at improving and developing the health services provided to both citizens and residents.

He indicated that a mini-emergency center, serving the residents of Mutlaa, will open after Eid al-Fitr to handle cases before transferring them to Jahra Hospital.

The minister explained that Mutlaa is a newly developed residential area with a rapidly growing population, which makes it a priority in the ministry's plan.

The new center will operate in the morning only during Ramadan from 7:00 am to 2:00 pm, and will switch to two shifts - morning and evening - after Eid. The center will gradually expand to 24-hour operations to better meet the needs of citizens and residents.

Audit Bureau seeks clarifications on MEW repairs tender

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) returned the KD44.402 million tender for annual maintenance of precision equipment and devices at power generation and water distillation plants to the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy on March 10; requesting for clarification on several points like the prices of materials, major works, spare parts and experience certificates for certain companies.

The ministry submitted the tender documents to SAB on Jan 29 for review to ensure procedural integrity before finalizing contracts with the selected companies. Prior to this, the ministry obtained approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to proceed with awarding the contracts.

This tender includes the provision of highly accurate and efficient engineering services for multiple plants, and to guarantee their safe operation; particularly during the summer months when electricity demand peaks. The maintenance work will also help reduce operating costs, limit carbon emissions, and support environmental conservation.

As one of the ministry's main tenders; it is vital for maintaining the power and water generation plants, improving their operational efficiency, and extending their lifespan.

Dr. Al-Awadhi

LOCAL

diwaniya 🕐 جيوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Hypocrisy abounds in a world of social media 'tomfoolery'

"THE obsession with using social me-dia channels has overwhelmed many people around the world. They live virtual lives more than their real lives due to their fascination with it, their attempts to achieve fame, and the large number of views they receive from the content they broadcast," Hamad Sa-lem Al-Marri wrote for Al-Seyassah daily

"Unfortunately, this obsession has drawn individuals from all walks of life

-- men, women children and -- to compete in broadcasting their photos, videos and details of their private lives; up to the point that their privacy has been lost. Some have even gone as far as broadcasting details



of their marital and family lives, including their family members. This has violated the sanctity of their homes and exposed their family secrets due to their fascination with social media channels and their love for fame.

"Due to the spread of this obsession, hypocrisy has crept into many people -whether they are aware of it or simply ignore it, trying to convince themselves that it is not hypocrisy so as not to stop using social media channels.

"One example of hypocrisy is the filming of some mosque imams performing prayers aloud, such as the Fajr, Isha and Maghrib prayers; as well as the Tarawih and Qiyam prayers, and posting them on their social media accounts.

"Some even film their prayers live on their social media accounts, as if they were praying for the people, not for the Lord. Otherwise, why would they film their prayers and post them on their ac-counts? Would social media users pray behind them through their accounts, or did they simply want to gain fame and have people follow them?

"Some people film themselves giv-ing charity to needy families or defending Palestine, and urging a boycott of certain western products, claiming to support the Palestinian cause . They post these videos on their social media accounts to gain people's sympathy, making them believe they are pious and charitable, when in reality, they are

simply seeking fame. "We have seen some individuals gain fame and a large following on social media channels due to these actions. They then began posting commercials through their accounts in exchange for money. One traveled to Russia and promoted tourism there and marriage to its girls. Another traveled to France to promote a perfume in exchange for money, forgetting that it is one of the countries

ness assigned Prof. Hamad Al-Jouan, may Allah have mercy on him, to draft the decree," Legal Advisor Dr. Kazem Bou Abbas wrote for Al-Sevassah

daily. "One of the provisions of the law, Article 80, authorizes the Council of Ministers to grant exceptional pensions or bonuses to insured persons, pensioners, their beneficiaries or other Kuwaitis, even if they are not covered by this law.

"The purpose of including this article in the law is to leave room for the Council of Ministers to assess certain cases that may not be subject to the law, which requires the government's humanitarian intervention. This is both correct and logical.

"This article was handled with caution and was only used in a few cases, particularly in those whose retirement circumstances did not allow them to receive a pension, either due to the short duration of their service or for other reasons

"Retirement pensions were disbursed according to brackets set by the institution's board of directors. Unfortunately, based on the alarming figures published in the press, Article 80 has been misused, contrary to its noble purpose and for purposes far removed from its intended purpose. In recent years, it has become a means for less noble ends, failing to achieve the justice and equality enshrined in the Constitution and general principles. It has become a means for unjustified gain at the expense of public funds and a burden on the State budget.

"The figures disbursed to date are frightening and unimaginable, amounting to tens of millions of Kuwaiti dinars, benefiting a limited number of people and serving in specific government agencies. What has caused discontent among the majority of citizens in general over the lack of fairness in its implementation?

"It appears that the government, recently embarrassed by the financial cost, which has become a heavy burden on the budget, sought to rectify the mistakes made by previous governments. It was shocked by the fatwa, which prohibits tampering with these exceptional pensions, as they are an acquired right of those to whom they are disbursed!

"Despite the reasons underlying this opinion, we disagree with it . The public interest allows, and indeed calls for, the implementation of the State's new vision for exceptional pensions.

"The public interest expands as long as there is damage to the budget, and surgical intervention becomes necessary and deserved, 'and the damage is removed'

"The Minister of Finance revealed frightening tables and staggering figures that are weighing on the State budget. It is time to correct this fundamentally flawed situation. "We support the State's move in this direction, including the abolition of all excess pensions, which retirees were entitled to, with a percentage not exceeding 25 percent, and the reconsideration of retirement pensions in general for citizens, so that they do not compromise justice and equality, as the Constitution, Sharia and general principles are committed to.



Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah during his tour to the Mohammad Al-Ahmad Naval Base in the Julai'a area



Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah conducts a tour of the base



KUNA photos Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah at the iftar time.

Leadership staunch support for armed forces

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah affirmed on Wednesday the political leadership's commitment to supporting the armed forces, raising their efficiency, and enhancing their readiness in facing various challenges.

The remarks were made in a press statement

issued by the Ministry of Defense, following a tour by Sheikh Abdullah to the Mohammed Al-Ahmad Naval Base in the Julai'a area. Sheikh Abdullah also shared an 'iftar' meal with working in the base.

He was accompanied by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Mubarak Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Ministry added that Sheikh Abdullah began the visit by listening to a briefing on the nature of the assigned duties, the workflow mechanism, and the readiness of the naval forces. The minister also was briefed during a field tour of several units and facilities of the naval force.

Domestic worker death probed

Construction site guard's savings stolen

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The body of a domestic worker from Al-Waha has been referred to the Forensic Medicine Department at the Interior Ministry for investigation into the cause of her death, reports Al-Anba daily.

This step was taken after an investigator

cidents Department in an ambulance, already deceased, with the cause of death unknown.

The case file includes a copy of the medical report, and copies of the civil identification cards of the deceased and the reporting individual.

Expat's savings stolen: Forensic experts were called to a tent in Mutlaa to collect any

tion site in Mutlaa and resides in a tent near the site. He reported that he had been keeping his savings in a closet inside the tent. Around 11:00 am on the day of the theft, he went to the construction site to take a shower; but upon returning to his tent, he was shocked to find his belongings scattered and the cash missing from the closet.

When asked whether anyone knew about the money being stored there, the victim explained that he had kept his salary in the same spot for six months and that no one else was aware of its location.

that support Israel, and calls for a boycott of the products of the countries that support it.

"Another form of hypocrisy is when some film themselves helping their parents, kissing their heads and hands or giving them gifts, so that people see them as dutiful to their parents. Otherwise, why would they film and share it with people? Was it not for fame? Allah knows the secret and even more hidden things. If their intention was to be dutiful to their parents, they would have done so without other people knowing about it.

"The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) said: Shall I not tell you of what I fear for you more than the Antichrist ? They said: Yes, O Messenger of God. He said: Hidden polytheism, when a man stands to pray and beautifies his prayer because of the gaze of another man. He (peace and blessings be upon him) said: The first person to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who was martyred.

"He will be brought and told of his blessings, and he will recognize them. He will be asked: What did you do with them? He will say: I fought for you until I was martyred. He will then say: 'You lied, but I fought'; so that it would be said that he was brave, and it was said.'

"Then he will be ordered to be dragged on his face until he is thrown into the Fire. A man who learned knowledge and taught it, and recited the Qur'an, will be brought and told of his blessings, and he will recognize them. He will be asked: What did you do with them? He will respond: I learned knowledge and taught it, and recited the Qur'an for You.' He will say: You lied, but you learned knowledge; so that it would be said that he was a scholar, and you recited the Qur'an so that it would be said that he was a reciter and it was said.

"Then he will be ordered to be dragged on his face until he is thrown into the Fire. A man whom Allah has given abundantly and given all kinds of wealth, will be brought and told of his blessings, and he will recognize them. He will be asked: 'What did you do with them?' He will say, 'I did not leave any path in which you would like people to spend except that I spent in it.' It will be said, 'You lied, but you did it so that it would be said that he was generous, and it was said.' Then he will be ordered to be dragged on his face and thrown into the Fire." We ask Allah for wellness.

Also:

"When HH the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, may Allah have mercy on him, issued the Social Security Law through Amiri Decree No. 61/1976, His High-

"We also propose retaining the concept of the article and rewording it with certain controls.

"First, each pension applicant must submit a request the Public to Institution for Social Secu-Board rity's Directors. of

Dr. Bou Abbas

ommendation, based on a specific income bracket . It will then submit its recommendation to the Council of Ministers for approval or rejection.

"Second, it is not permissible to combine a retirement pension with any salary if the applicant is reinstated. In this case, the better-off recipient will benefit.

"Third, only the rightful recipient will benefit from the exceptional pension, which will not be transferred to their heirs.

"Fourth, the Council of Ministers may, under certain circumstances and in special cases, grant an exceptional pension at a specific rate. This neither violates the balance of justice and equal opportunity, nor is it exploited for political purposes.

"This is not a simple matter because it affects influential segments of society accustomed to a certain level of income. The minister may face some difficulties, which is not surprising. However, with Allah's grace and the support of the political leadership, the correct and appropriate decision will be made, one that serves the interests of the community and achieves justice among its members, without excess or deficiency.

"Any amendment to the existing exceptional pension system will not affect past disbursements and will only be applicable in the future.

"This is the proper application of the proposed new rules, as they have a di-

rect impact on existing legal positions. "Our final prayer is to praise Allah, Lord of the Worlds.'

- Compiled by Mahmoud Attiveh

at Al-Waha Police Station ordered the body of the woman, who was in her 50s, to be referred to forensic experts to determine the cause of death.

A citizen, born in 1982, visited the police station and presented a medical report from Jahra Hospital. The report stated that the woman arrived at the hospital's Internal Ac-



Fire brigade at the site.

Residents evacuated as Jahra house fire tackled

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Firefighters contained a house fire in Jahra in record time, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a firefighting source, the Operations Unit at Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) received a report early morning recently about a house fire in Jahra. Firefighters rushed to the scene and discovered that the fire started on the ground floor of a three-storey building. The house was quickly evacuated, and the fire was extinguished before it spread to the upper floors. The fire was brought under control in record time, with no casualties, the source narrated.

The source emphasized that the swift response of the firefighters played a crucial role in preventing the fire from spreading; thereby, limiting material damage.

Citizen in KD 1.3 mln fraud

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: An investigator at Taima Police Station has summoned a citizen on charges of breach of trust involving KD 1.3 million, reports Al-Anba daily.

This summons follows a report filed by an expatriate, who provided accounting documents and evidence suggesting that he received less than the amount owed.

According to the complainant, he and the defendant had a partnership in a car dealership. At the end of the previous year, the partnership was dissolved, and both parties received approximately KD10 million each.

He said "to ensure everything was in order, I hired a company specializing in accounting and financial auditing to conduct an inventory and audit of the partnership from its inception several years ago until its dissolution. I was informed that I was owed an additional sum, beyond what I already received, totaling more than KD1 million." When asked why he did not discover the discrepancy earlier, he responded "I never imagined I would be subjected to such a breach of trust."

A case was registered and the defendant has been scheduled to present his testimony.

potential evidence left behind by thieves who stole KD500 from the tent, reports Al-Anba daily.

The victim, an expatriate born in 1992, disclosed that the stolen money consisted of KD20 and KD10 bills; but refused to point fingers at anyone.

The victim works as a guard at a construc-

Following this, the Mutlaa Police Station investigator ordered the case to be registered as misdemeanor under number 51/2025 and instructed detectives to arrest the culprits.



The Board will review the request and issue a rational rec-

LOCAL

Crown Prince, PM extend wishes Kuwait HH Amir congratulates Tunisia on Independence Day

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to the President of Tunisia Kais Saied on his country's Independence Day.

His Highness the Amir wished the Tunisian President long lasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to Tunisia and its people.

He also wished that the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries would grow further.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to the President of Tunisia Kais Saied on his country's Independence Day.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Tunisian President long lasting health and wellness.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratulations to the President of Tunisia Kais Saied on his country's Independence Day.

PAFN Chair meets Peru's envoy, explores food security solutions



Seyassah daily. PAFN photo

PAFN Chair and Director General with the Ambassador of Peru to Kuwait.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: During a meeting with the Ambassador of Peru to Kuwait, Carlos Jiménez, the Chair and Director General of the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) Dr. Reem Al-Fulaij discussed food security issues and the opportunities to enhance it in Kuwait, particularly through the export of fresh fruits, for which Peru is renowned, reports Al-

The ambassador expressed sincere gratitude for the warm hospitality, and hopes for the continued advancement and development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired on Wednesday the

meeting of a committee to follow up on liabilities and priorities during Kuwait's presidency of the GCC. The meeting discussed the committee's agenda on

Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council, as well as future events of the country's chairmanship of the council.

Minister Al-Mashaan inspects T2 progress, urges swift completion



By Mohammad Al-Enezi Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Minister of State for Municipal and Housing Affairs Abdullatif Al-Mishari and Head of the Women's Housing Affairs Team Sheikha Bibi Al-Yousef Al-Sabah recently inspected Sulaibiya, in the presence of officials from the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) and representatives of the Interior Ministry.

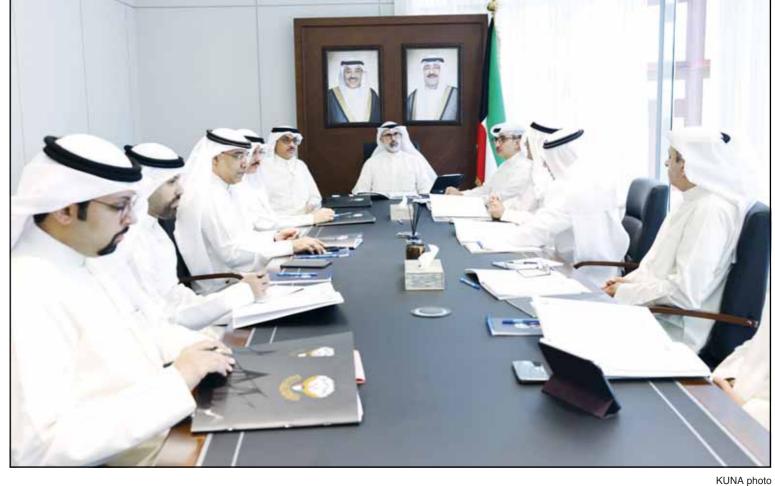
In a press statement, PAHW disclosed that the minister issued a directive to intensify the inspection efforts and increase the number of teams assigned in Sulaibiya to monitor violations and submit reports in this regard, so the necessary measures can be taken and the violations are removed.

The PAHW added that during the inspection tour. Al-Mishari and Sheikha Al-Yousef were briefed on the extent of the violations and encroachments. They listened to the comments of some residents benefiting from housing care in the area. Directives were also issued to find solutions At the end of its statement, the PAHW called on residents in the area, who benefit from rental housing, to cooperate with field teams and remove all forms of violations and encroachments on State properties.



KUNA photo The Minister of Housing and the Head of the Women's Housing Affairs Team inspect the housing units in the Sulai-

biya area.



Deputy Foreign Minister chairs meeting of the Entitlements and Priorities Follow-up Committee.

Kuwait charts GCC priorities under its presidency

PAHW focuses on encroachments

Al-Mishari orders crackdown on

'housing violations' in Sulaibiya

The Minister of Public Works inspects the new airport project 'T2'.

'Kuwait Airport expansion must meet highest standards'

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Minister of Public Works and Acting Minister of Electricity. Water. and Renewable Energy, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, visited the new airport project to monitor the progress of the new passenger terminal (T2) and oversee the implementation of the project's third phase.

In a statement, the Ministry of Public Works explained that the minister's tour included a visit to the main building, where

she reviewed the finishing work on the building's facilities and the air conditioning operations, in preparation for the upcoming summer.

Dr. Al-Mashaan inspected the parking building and was briefed on the latest developments in the project's progress. She also reviewed the work on Package 3, which includes groundworks for aircraft stands, excavation and infrastructure works, as well as concrete molding and reinforcement for the package's service buildings.

She received a detailed explanation from project officials about the completion status of the work and the challenges faced during its implementation.

The ministry quoted Dr. Al-Mashaan as

expressing strong commitment to developing the country's air transport infrastructure by adopting the best international standards in the civil aviation industry. She stressed the need for coordinated efforts to deal with the outstanding issues related to the new airport terminal T2 project and called for the speedy completion of all works with the required quality and efficiency

Dr. Al-Mashaan also highlighted the importance of coordinating with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and reiterated the government's dedication to harnessing all available resources and providing necessary facilities to ensure the completion of the project and the timely operation of all airport services and facilities.

Sources confirmed to the newspaper that the working teams have been in-

structed to seriously address encroach ments on State properties, affirming the ongoing coordination with relevant authorities to address these violations.

Sources warned that continued violations could lead to increased pressure on vital facilities; such as water, electricity and sewage networks, which could negatively affect the quality of public services.

Jahra Committee advances Mutlaa City entrance and steel industrial site plans

By Inaas Awadh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Jahra Governorate Committee at the Municipal Council, chaired by Abdullah Al-Hathal Al-Enezi, recently held its fifth meeting for the third legislative term; during which the following recommendations were presented:

- Retain two items on the agenda: proposal of member Walid Al-Dagher to establish an entrance to Mutlaa City and request of the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) to allocate a site for the construction of an iron and steel industrial complex.

- Assign the Kuwait Municipality to immediately remove obstacles to the tree belt project around Mutlaa City, ensuring its implementation within the timeframe set by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW).

q Expedite the allocation of the remaining old car scrapyard site as an expansion of the housing project and provide alternatives for the buildings in the expanded area, in preparation for an obstacle-free handover to PAHW.

The committee also addressed the inquiry of Abdullah Al-Hathal Al-Enezi about the tree belt project location, and that of Abdullah Al-Enezi regarding the old car scrapyard site.

PIFSS accelerates 'retirement' processing with shift system

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: In confirmation of the report published by the daily in November in the article titled "Public Institution for Social Security allocates additional teams to work on a shift system to reduce waiting time", the institution an-

nounced the formation of a dedicated team to deal with the issue delayed of retirement transactions and develop effective solutions to expedite their



Al-Fassam processing and prevent future delays, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press release, the institution explained that the team was established based on the directives of the Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, and Chair of the

Public Institution for Social Security's Board of Directors Noura Al-Fassam. Most applications have already been processed, and efforts are ongoing to complete the remaining applications without further delay.

The institution affirmed its commitment to promptly completing all applications, ensuring the rights of beneficiaries, and providing them with the highest quality services.

Previously, sources from the institution had informed that the increase in retirement applications had placed huge pressure on employees, leading to delays in the disbursement of retirees' pensions. It had implemented several measures at the time to ease the pressure on employees and accelerate the processing of retirement applications. This included allocating additional teams working on a shift system to speed up the completion of retirement transactions and reduce the waiting period for retirees to receive their pensions.



KFF photos The two vehicles involved in the collision on the Sixth Ring Road.

Dramatic two vehicles on fire after a collision

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Firefighters from Al-Sumoud Fire Station responded to a collision between two vehicles on the Sixth Ring Road Wednesday afternoon, which had caused both vehicles to catch fire.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), firefighters quickly extinguished the fire. No casualties were reported.

News in Brief

Kuwait, Malaysia strengthen ties

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): Min-ister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Wednesday a phone call from his Malaysian counterpart Mohamad Hassan discussing means of promoting the bi-

Power outage in Al-Rai: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy announced that six sub-feeders at the main power transformer plant (C) in Al-Rai went out of service, causing a power outage in limited areas, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

teams are on-site to take the necessary measures and restore power as quickly as

CSC launches online service: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) stated that as part of its efforts to transition to a paperless environment, it has launched an automated online service for re-nominating candidates to the same institution they previously declined or resigned from, without the need to visit the CSC in person, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

CSC explained that nominations are made based on the entity's requirements, and the aforementioned service can be accessed by visiting the CSC's website, logging into the central employment system, and completing the registration process.

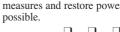
Judiciary backs Amir's directives: Kuwait Supreme Judicial Council promised Wednesday that its members would abide by all orders, directives and principles contained in the recent speech of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

This came in a press statement by the Ministry of Justice following the council's meeting held to look into His Highness the Amir's address during his meeting with the council's members.

The council expressed its appreciation for His Highness the Amir's meeting with the Council's members. (KUNA)

lateral relations in various sectors.

The Ministry stated that emergency



LOCAL

Kuwait Amir receives phone call from United Arab Emirates Prez

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call on Thursday from President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

During the call, the two leaders discussed the strong and longstanding brotherly relations between the State of Kuwait and the UAE. They also addressed various issues of mutual interest, in addition to regional and international developments.

Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed expressed his sincere wishes for the continued health and well-being of His Highness the Amir and for further growth and prosperity of the State of Kuwait under His Highness the Amir's wise leadership.

In response, His Highness the Amir voiced his appreciation to Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed for the call, which reflects the deep and firm ties between the two nations and their peoples. He also extended his wishes for the continued progress and prosperity of the United Arab Emirates under the wise leadership of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed

Kuwait named 'World Crafts City' for Sadu by World Crafts Council

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): Al-Sadu Society said Kuwait was named as "World Crafts City" for Sadu weaving by the World Crafts Council (WCC), in appreciation of its efforts to preserve this craft.

In a statement to KUNA on Thursday, the society's chairman Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Sabah said that the



KUNA photo Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Sabah, Al-Sadu Society chairman.

nomination came after an official visit by a WCC delegation to evaluate Kuwait's committment to preserve the craft.

The delegation, headed by the council's President Saad Al-Qaddoumi, visited Sadu House and other cultural centers in the country to learn of the work and efforts of Sadu weavers, she said.

The delegation also met with representatives of governmental bodies and cultural institutes to discuss means of developing the craft globally, she added.

Sadu is a part of Kuwait's heritage, as the geometric shapes and bright colors of the craft represent the country's history and culture, said Sheikha Bibi. Sadu was a big part of the lives of Bedouins, used in tents, furniture and accessories throughout the ages, she noted.

WCC is a non-profit organization established in New York in 1964 and is headquartered in Kuwait for the current presidency term.

Ministry of Health begins OT payments to employees

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Ministry of Health has started paying overtime to its employees in various health sectors, districts and central departments, reports Al-Anba daily.

This move is part of the ongoing efforts to recognize the exceptional contributions of medical, technical and administrative staff who play a vital role in serving the health sector.

According to sources, text messages have started to be sent to the eligible employees via the Sahel and civil service applications, informing them of the amounts due. This news has been warmly welcomed by health sector workers who are eagerly awaiting these payments as recognition of their efforts in improving healthcare services for both citizens and expatriates.

Sources affirmed that the disbursement process covers all employees who have worked overtime during the past period. They also emphasized the commitment of the ministry to fulfill its financial obligations in accordance with the relevant regulations and laws.

"This initiative is part of the broader strategy to support and motivate the staff, especially given the considerable pressure on the health system. It manifests the dedication of the ministry to appreciate the hard work and dedication of its employees in different healthcare fields," sources added



Worshippers seeking Allah's forgiveness, mercy and pardon at the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque in Al-Siddig.

Bilal bin Rabah Mosque ready for final ten days of Ramadan

Preparations lauded to ensure comfort for worshipers

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf, accompanied by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Faisal Al-Sabah, inspected the preparations of Bilal bin **Rabah Mosque in Al-Siddiq** suburb to receive worshipers during the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan for Qiyam prayers, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Since the beginning of the holy month, amidst an inspiring spiritual and religious atmosphere; Bilal bin Rabah Mosque has been adorned -- as is its annual custom -- to welcome worshippers seeking Allah's forgiveness, mercy and pardon.

The mosque has become a destination for tens of thousands of worshipers of all ages -- both men and women -- to commemorate the nights of the holy month



His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf joins worshippers during his visits to the mosques.

mosques

His Highness also checked the mosque's main courtyard, the large

prayer rooms in the basement for

men, the women's prayer rooms, and

various units spread throughout the

mosque's courtyards and dedicated

of Ramadan, from the first night until the last 10 days of the holy month.

During the tour, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf inspected the mosque's corridors, all its facilities, prayer areas and courtyards. This tour is part of his ongoing visits to the prayer areas for worshipers.

He ensured that the prayer rooms are ready to receive the large number of worshipers and ensure the appropriate atmosphere is created for easy and comfortable performance of Rama-dan rituals and prayers during these blessed nights. He also looked into the parking fa-

cilities, which feature electric golf cars to transport worshipers from the parking lot to the mosque and back, in addition to the services for the elderly and others.

He commended the organizing committee and instructed them to exert more efforts, pay attention to all details and remove any obstacles in order to provide conducive atmosphere and maximum comfort for worshipers; especially the elderly, women and people

of determination. He expressed his gratitude to all parties involved in this Ramadan gathering, and highly valued the tireless efforts and good endeavors that infuse the mosque with a spiritual atmosphere and inspire peace and tranquility; making it a destination for majority of worshipers during the holy month.

Bank continues to strengthen financial awareness and support the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

NBK alerts against online job offer scams promising high salaries

Continued from Page 1

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains steadfast in its dedication to enhancing financial literacy and fostering inclusivity across diverse societal groups. In line with this commitment, the bank actively supports the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, an initiative launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in partnership with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

NBK amplifies its awareness efforts by disseminating educational materials and awareness content across all communication platforms and digital channels. This includes videos, text messages, and practical tips. Additionally, the bank republishes messages from the Central Bank of Kuwait to further raise awareness among diverse groups across the society, informing them about various fraud methods and how to effectively avoid them.

NBK is committed to keeping customers informed about the latest fraud tactics and deceptive schemes used



by fraudsters. In this campaign, the bank emphasizes the risks associated with fraudulent job offers promising attractive salaries. These offers are often received via WhatsApp, email, or social media and are designed to lure individuals into disclosing personal or banking information, ultimately leading to financial theft.

Fake job offers may be sent by individuals pretending to be recruiters, high-level executives, or hiring managers from legitimate organizations, often advertising non-existent positions. NBK advises against sharing any personal information, such as passport details or credit card numbers. Additionally, the bank cautions against responding to requests for advance payments or fees for internships as conditions for employment.

NBK warns against falling for enticing advertisements that are often traps set by fraudsters. The bank emphasizes the importance of not disclosing sensitive information and advises changing your passwords for online accounts and applications to prevent hacking and data theft.

The bank also emphasizes that it will never request personal information via email, text messages, or phone calls. Customers are advised to ignore such communications, which are fraudulent attempts to obtain banking details for theft or data compromise. With the wide array of fraud tactics in play, NBK is

committed to protecting its customers and boosting their

awareness of fraud prevention. The bank delivers essential advice and guidance across all its digital channels to ensure customers remain informed and secure.

NBK leverages its extensive communication capabilities and leading electronic channels, which have the highest engagement among Kuwaiti banks, to bolster the Central Bank of Kuwait's efforts in safeguarding customers and the economy.

NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK campaigns and initiatives focused on enhancing financial and banking awareness across society. As Kuwait's largest financial institution, NBK is at the forefront of community education on essential banking issues.

The bank not only organizes impactful events but also invests in comprehensive training programs for its employees to bolster their skills in fraud prevention and financial crime combat, reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding both its customers and the broader financial landscape.

CSC sets

The statement also added that if the first day of Eid Al-Fitr falls on Monday (March 31), the official holidays will be five days starting from Sunday (March 30), Monday (March 31), Tuesday, (April 1), Wednesday (April 2) and Thursday (April 3), with work resuming on Sunday (April 6).

State agencies with a special nature will determine their Eid Al-Fitr holiday, with the public interest to be taken into consideration, according to the CSC.

Faith fills

Visitors and Activities Supervisor at the Grand Mosque Walid Al-Shatti confirmed that the mosque was fully equipped to welcome thousands of worshipers during the final 10 nights of Ramadan.

Separate prayer rooms for men and women were established, along with spaces designed for women and their children; fostering a respectful and spiritually uplifting environment within the praver areas.

Al-Shatti expressed his deep appreciation for all those involved in organizing the worshipers' entry, recognizing their efforts to maintain the flow of worshipers within the mosque and its courtyards. He also commended the smooth traffic management that allowed easy access to the mosque during these blessed nights.

The Ministry of Interior worked tirelessly to manage traffic, while medical teams were on standby to respond to any emergencies. Volunteers,

particularly those assisting the elderly and people with special needs, played an instrumental role in ensuring everyone's comfort.

Amidst this serene, faith-filled atmosphere; worshipers at the Grand Mosque were led in the first four rak'aĥs of Qiyam by Omar Al-Damkhi, with Sheikh Abdulrahman Al-Shuwaie leading the final four. The spiritual pause between the rak'ahs was delivered by Sheikh Issa Al-Dhafiri, who emphasized the importance of the last days of Ramadan; highlighting them as the most significant nights of the holy month.

He reminded the worshipers that these days are filled with boundless goodness and blessings, presenting a rare opportunity to draw closer to the Almighty through acts of worship and obedience. During these nights, rewards are multiplied, mercy descends, and the gates of heaven open wide for supplications and forgiveness.

He added "we are now experiencing the best days and nights of Ramadan, the nights in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) would strive in worship, seclude himself, pray, remember Allah, and wake his family; eager to seize these blessed hours. He is deprived who wastes them, and he is truly blessed who is guided by Allah to perform righteous deeds.'

He then pointed out the extraordinary significance of these nights, as they include the Night of Decree, which is better than a thousand months. "Allah, in His infinite wisdom, has declared that worship during this night is equal to the worship of an entire lifetime," he explained.

He concluded "we ask Allah to grant

us and you the Night of Decree, to accept our worship, to extend His mercy to us, and to make us among those He frees from the Hellfire. May He guide us to righteous deeds during these blessed days."

Kuwait secures

of Oxford, in collaboration with Gallup and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, evaluates happiness levels in 147 countries based on self-reported well-being. Factors such as economic prosperity, personal freedoms, social support, generosity, and perceptions of corruption are key determinants of rankings.

For the seventh consecutive year, Finland topped the happiness index, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Norway, Israel, Luxembourg, and Mexico.

At the bottom of the rankings, Afghanistan remains the least happy country, followed by Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Comoros, and Lesotho.

Meanwhile, the United States ranked 24th, one spot lower than last year, continuing its downward slide from 11th place in 2012, when the survey first began.

Kuwait's strong economy continues to be a pillar of its happiness ranking. With a GDP per capita of \$45,089, the country ranks 29th globally, with economic factors contributing 25.5% to its overall well-being. Investments in healthcare and quality of life further enhance satisfaction, with healthcare accounting for 11.6% of the score.

Personal freedom is another key factor, with Kuwait ranking 42nd in this category. A high 88.2% freedom score contributes 14.1% to the country's happiness index, emphasizing the role of individual liberties in shaping national well-being.

Despite its economic strength, Kuwait ranks 87th in social support, with 78.1% of the population reporting a sense of community connection. This suggests room for improvement in strengthening social ties and support systems.

Perceptions of corruption, while not a dominant factor, impact the country's overall score, contributing 2.5% to well-being levels. Ongoing efforts to enhance governance and transparency remain critical in boosting public confidence.

Kuwait's culture of generosity plays a notable role in its happiness ranking, with 37.7% of residents actively participating in charitable activities such as donations, volunteer work, and assisting strangers. This placed the country 41st in global generosity rankings, with 2.2% of its happiness score tied to these social contributions.

Additionally, inequality reduction efforts have led to greater well-being balance across different demographics, ensuring more citizens experience similar levels of happiness.

Sporadic rain,

On Friday, temperatures will be between 27 and 29°C during the day and 14 to 16°C at night. Saturday will see daytime temperatures of 22 to 24°C and nighttime temperatures between 13 and 15°C.

Survey reveals

The Public Prosecution explained that 80.7 percent of the target group were Kuwaitis, and 19.3 percent were expatriates. Among the expatriate group, 91.7 percent were boys and 8.3 percent were girls. The survey also re-vealed that 29.7 percent of the target sample were aged between 10 and 14 years, with 70.3 percent in the 15 to 17 age range. Also, 71.8 percent of the target

group attended public sector schools, and 28.2 percent were enrolled in private sector schools.

The survey further indicated that 82.3 percent of the target group experienced family stability, and 17.7 percent reported facing family is-

About 32.6 percent of individuals aged 10 to 14 were unaware that cursing, bullying, and assault are punishable crimes by law. And, 21.8 percent of those aged 15 to 17 lacked awareness of this legal information.

The Public Prosecution further noted that 62.9 percent of those aged 10 to 14 and 42.2 percent of those aged 15 to 17 were unaware of the consequences of their actions, such as criminal investigations, pretrial detention, and referral to criminal trials.

The survey revealed that 66 percent of the targeted group, or 198 students, had been exposed to violence in their schools. Of these, 60.6 percent experienced repeated physical or verbal violence. Specifically, 31.5 percent were repeatedly subjected to violence in the classroom, 39.4 percent in the schoolyard, and 26.1 percent outside of school.

And 82.8 percent of individuals reported the incidents of violence they experienced, while 17.2 percent did not.

About 69.9 percent of participants were affected by violence, experiencing feelings of fear, decreased academic performance, and thoughts of changing schools. Of those affected, 35.4 percent reconciled, while 64.6 percent did not.

Kuwait urges

It urged countries and institutions of the international community to participate in protecting Palestinian civilians and to establish a practical and effective mechanism to implement the provisions of the UN General Assembly resolution and the report of the UN Secretary-General, which included viable options for the protection of Palestinian civilians.

It warned that the occupation's persistent violation of the ceasefire and its continued perpetration of crimes of aggression, genocide, and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people for 17 consecutive months, including during the holy month of Ramadan, constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights and divine laws.

The resolution condemned the Israeli response to the message of peace, security, and stability contained in the Arab Summit resolution of March 4, by committing further brutal and horrific massacres against Palestinian civilians.

It cautioned that Israel is undermining any opportunity or initiative for a comprehensive and just peace in the region based on international law, international legitimacy resolutions, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, and an end to the illegal Israeli occupation.

INTERNATIONAL



Ahmed Mohammed shovels in front of the East Africa & Middle East Grocery Store during a blizzard in Omaha, Neb., on March 19. (AP)

Blizzard conditions hit Midwest, Great Plains

Another storm system affected mil-lions of people in the middle of the US on Wednesday, leaving parts of the Midwest and Great Plains under blizzard conditions and a broad swath of neighboring states at risk of high winds and wildfires.

Roughly 72 million people were under a wind advisory or warning, with winds gusting over 45 mph (72 kph), according to Bryan Jackson, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

At this time of year, cold air lin-gering in the north collides with warm air from the south to produce strong, low pressure systems. Jackson said. But he added that the latest weather was the third storm system to rapidly develop in recent weeks and bring high winds to a large swath of the US, a "very active pattern" since February.

At least 42 people died over the weekend when dynamic storms un-

leashed tornadoes, blinding dust and wildfires, uprooting trees and flattening hundreds of homes and businesses across eight states in the South and Midwest.

A band from southwestern Kansas to central Wisconsin was expected to bring as little as 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow or as much as a foot (30 centimeters). Combined with high winds, forecasters warned of whiteout conditions. (AP)

Government transparency often the price

Encrypted messaging apps promise privacy

WASHINGTON, March 20, (AP): As a devastating wildfire burned through a Maui town, killing more than 100 people, emergency management employees traded dozens of text messages, creating a record that would later help investigators piece together the government's re-

sponse to the 2023 tragedy. One text exchange hinted officials might also be using a second, untraceable messaging service. "That's what Signal was supposed to

be for," then-Maui Emergency Management Agency Administrator Herman Andaya texted a colleague.

Signal is one of many end-to-end encrypted messaging apps that include message auto-delete functions.

While such apps promise increased security and privacy, they often skirt open records laws meant to increase transparency around and public awareness of government decision-making. Without special archiving software, the messages frequently aren't returned under public information requests.

An Associated Press review in all 50 states found accounts on encrypted platforms registered to cellphone numbers for over 1,100 government workers and elected officials.

It's unclear if Maui officials actually used the app or simply considered it - a county spokesperson did not respond to questions - but the situation highlights a growing challenge: How can govern-



An image from the Signal app is shown on a mobile phone in San Francisco on March 18. (AP)

ment entities use technological advancements for added security while staying on the right side of public information laws?

The AP found accounts for state, local and federal officials in nearly every state, including many legislators and their staff, but also staff for governors, state attorneys general, education departments and school board members.

The AP is not naming the officials

because having an account is neither against the rules in most states, nor proof they use the apps for government business. While many of those accounts were registered to government cellphone numbers, some were registered to personal numbers. The AP's list is likely incomplete because users can make accounts unsearchable.

6

Improper use of the apps has been re-ported over the past decade in places like Missouri, Oregon, Oklahoma, Maryland and elsewhere, almost always because of leaked messages

Public officials and private citizens are consistently warned about hacking and data leaks, but technologies designed to increase privacy often decrease government transparency.

Apps like Signal, WhatsApp, Confide, Telegram and others use encryption to scramble messages so only the intended end-user can read them, and they typically aren't stored on government servers. Some automatically delete messages, and some prevent users from screenshotting or sharing mes-

sages. "The fundamental problem is that people do have a right to use encrypted apps for their personal communications, and have those on their personal devices. That's not against the law," said Matt Kelly, editor of Radical Compliance, a newsletter that focuses on corporate compliance and governance issues.

President's words being used against him in court

My job is to be more than Trump's bluntness powered White House comeback just an activist: Sen Slotkin

WASHINGTON, March 20, (AP): Donald Trump's shoot-from-the-lip style kept Americans on the edge of their seats during last year's campaign. But now that he's speaking as a president and not as a candidate, his words are being used against him in court in the blizzard of litigation challenging his agenda.

The spontaneity is complicating his administration's legal positions. Nowhere has this been clearer than in cases involving Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency, the driving force in Trump's efforts to downsize and overhaul the federal government.

The latest example came earlier this week, when US District Judge Theodore Chuang ruled that Musk had likely violated the Constitution by dismantling the United States Agency for International Development.

The lawsuit turned on the question of whether the billionaire entrepreneur had overstepped his authority. Justice Department lawyers and White House officials insist that Musk is merely a presidential adviser, not the actual leader of DOGE.

But Trump has said otherwise - in speeches, interviews and public remarks - and Chuang quoted him extensively in his decision

Trump most notably boasted of creating DOGE during his primetime address to a joint session of Congress and "headed by Flon Musl



US President Donald Trump greets Ireland's Prime Minister Micheál Mar-tin as he arrives at the West Wing of the White House in Washington on March 12. (AP)

Republicans gave Musk a standing ovation, who saluted from the gallery above the House chamber.

"Trump's words were essential, central and indispensable," said Norm Eisen, one of the lawyers for USAID employees who filed the lawsuit. "His admissions took what would have been a tough case and made it into a straightforward one.'

The looseness with words is a shift from predecessors like President Dhama who used to say that

he was careful because anything he said could send troops marching or markets tumbling.

Trump has no such feeling of restraint, and neither do other members of his administration like Musk.

Chuang, who is based in Maryland and was appointed by Obama, also cited social media posts from Musk, who writes frequently on X, the platform that he owns.

For example, Musk posted "we ent the weekend feeding USAID to the woodchipper" on Feb. 3. The agency was being brought to a standstill at that time, with staff furloughed, spending halted and headquarters shut down.

"Musk's public statements and posts ... suggest that he has the ability to cause DOGE to act," Chuang wrote in his ruling.

Harrison Fields, principal deputy press secretary at the White House, said Trump was fulfilling his campaign promise "to make the federal government more efficient and accountable to taxpayers.

"Rogue bureaucrats and activist judges attempting to undermine this effort are only subverting the will of the American people and their obstructionist efforts will fail," he said.

Anthony Coley, who led public affairs at the Justice Department during President Joe Biden's administration, said statements involving civil litigation were always coordinated between his office and the West Wing.

"The words could be used to support what we're doing or undermine what we're doing," he said. "It's a carefully choreographed effort to make sure there was no daylight between what was said in the court of public opinion and what could ultimately play out in the court of law."

In comparison to how things were done in the past, Coley said, Trump has a "ready-fire-aim approach of doing hu

LINT, Mich., March 20, (AP): Michigan Sen Elissa Slotkin said it's no secret Democrats don't have their strategy figured out, but insists the "yelling" coming from some progressive Democrats has not stopped President Donald Trump's agenda.

Slotkin was responding to a constituent who asked the freshman senator what Democrats

can do besides reiterating they are against the administration while at a town Wedneshall in Flint,

with the administration when Democrats are out of power in both chambers of Congress.

"I get it that it makes people feel good to see people yelling," Slotkin said. "But not one of those words is stopping the actual things that Donald Trump is doing."

A constituent, Kristin Fellows, 62 had asked Slotkin and Democratic US Rep Kristen McDonald Rivet what they would do to stand up to Trump like progressive Democrats Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

"We know that you are against these current awful happenings going on in the world, but it is simply not enough for you to repeatedly tell us that you are," Fellows said. Her question, posed at a gathering to address cuts to federal agencies made by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and concerns about social services like Medicaid, was met with applause, the first of any questions asked of the congresswomen.

Slotkin responded by saying she also serves Michigan residents who voted for Trump and that she is responding to the needs of residents who are impacted by changes at the federal level and executive orders from Trump.

"My job is to be more than just an activist," Slotkin said. "It is to answer the call when there's an immigration raid and we need to figure out where our people are. All of those things require me to be more than just an AOC.

Slotkin's firm response was also met with applause from the audience. Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Slotkin delivered the Democratic response to Trump's address to Congress earlier this month. Both she and Mc-Donald Rivet delivered key wins for the party in a battleground state that elected Trump in the November election.

They have both been looked to as potential models of the Democratic Party's future that is closer to the center than the progressive wing.



EU wants to break security dependency on US and buy more European weapons

BRUSSELS, March 20, (AP): The European Union on Wednesday announced a new drive to break its security dependency on the United States, with a focus on buying more defense equipment in Europe. The EU's executive branch unveiled its "Readiness 2030" security strategy



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, (left), speaks with European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas during the weekly College of Commissioners meeting at EU headquarters in Brussels on March 19. (AP)

with the threat of Russian aggression at the forefront of concerns. NATO intelligence estimates suggest that Russia could be capable of launching an attack in Europe again in three to five years.

Last month, the Trump administration signaled that US security priorities lay elsewhere - on its own borders and in Asia - and that Europeans would have to fend for themselves and Ukraine in the future. That was as Europe's biggest land war in decades entered its fourth year.

Under the strategy, member countries will be urged to buy much of their military equipment in Europe, working mostly with European suppliers - in some cases with EU help to cut prices and speed up orders. They should only purchase equipment from abroad when costs, performance or supply delays make it preferable.

In recent years, the 27 EU nations have placed about two-thirds of their orders with U.S. defense companies. To qualify for new loans, they would have to buy at least 65% of equipment from suppliers in the EU, Norway or Ukraine.

Fire kills five in China executed 4 Canadians eastern Slovakia earlier this year, says Joly

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia, March 20, (AP): A fire that hit a poor Roma settlement in eastern Slovakia killed five peo-



the fire.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire that broke before midnight.

The Roma are the most socially excluded minority group in Slovakia, who have long suffered discrimination, marginalization and poverty. Slovakia's prime minister is **Robert Fico**.

TORONTO, March 20, (AP): China executed four Canadians in recent months, Canada's foreign affairs minister said Wednesday. Such executions of Westerners are relatively rare.

Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly said she and former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asked for clemency in the drug-related accusations involving the dual citizens.

Beijing's embassy in Ottawa said the executions were due to drug crimes and noted that China does not recognize dual citizenship.

"We strongly condemn the executions," Joly told reporters in Ottawa. "I asked personally for leniency ... They were all dual citizens.'

Joly said Canada consistently asks for clemency for Canadians facing the death penalty abroad. She said the families have asked the government to withhold details of the identity of the four individuals.



Canada Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly responds to a question during a news conference on tariffs on March 12, in Ottawa. (AP)

Affairs spokeswoman Global Charlotte MacLeod said they continue to provide consular assistance to families and requested that the media respect their privacy.



In this photo taken from video distributed by the Russian Defense Ministry Press Service on March 13, 2025, Russian soldiers patrol an area in Sudzha, in the Kursk region of Russia, after it was taken over by Russian troops. (AP)

Military leaders to discuss peacekeeping force for Kyiv

Zelenskyy, Putin agree to limited ceasefire

KYIV, Ukraine, March 20, (AP): Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remains to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

The tentative deal to partially rein in the grinding war came after Russian President Vladimir Putin rebuffed Trump's push for a full 30-day ceasefire. The difficulty in getting the combatants to agree not to target one another's energy infrastructure highlights the challenges Trump will face in trying to fulfill his campaign pledge to quickly end to the war.

After a roughly hourlong call with Trump on Wednesday that both leaders said went well, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters that "technical" talks in Saudi Arabia this weekend would seek to resolve what types of infrastructure would be protected under the agreement.

But it was immediately clear that the three parties had different views about what the pact entailed, with the White House saying "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin saying the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure," and Zelenskyy saying he'd also like railways and ports to be protected.

"One of the first steps toward fully ending the war could be ending strikes on energy and other civilian infrastructure," Zelenskyy said on social media following his call with Trump, which came a day after the U.S. president held similar talks with Putin. "I supported this step, and Ukraine confirmed that we are ready to implement it."

During their call, Trump suggested that Zelenskyy should consider giving the US ownership of Ukraine's power plants to ensure their long-term security, according to a White House statement from Secretary of State

Marco Rubio and national security adviser Mike Waltz. Trump told Zelenskyy that the U.S could be "very helpful in running those plants with its electricity and utility expertise," the statement said.

Trump suggested "American ownership of those plants could be the best protection for that infrastructure," according to White House officials. The idea was floated even as the Trump administration looks to finalize an agreement to gain access to Ukraine's critical minerals as partial repayment for US support for Ukraine during the war.

Also:

KYIV. Ukraine: Senior officers from countries across Europe and beyond were due to meet Thursday at a military headquarters on the outskirts of London to flesh out plans for an international peacekeeping force for

Ukraine as details of a partial ceasefire are worked out. UK Prime Minister **Keir Starmer** said the "coalition of the willing" plan, led by Britain and France, is mov-ing into an "operational phase." But it's unclear how many countries are willing to send troops, or whether there will be any ceasefire to protect.

Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remained to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

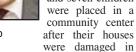
If peace comes to Ukraine, the size of any force that might help enforce it is vague. Officials have cited figures of between 10,000 and 30,000 troops.

Only Britain and France have said they are willing to send troops, though countries including Australia, Canada, France and Finland say they are open to being involved in some way.

ple, four of them children, officials said on Thursday. The town hall in Velky Saris said

the blaze destroyed eight houses where 30 people lived. It said 11 adults and seven children

Fico



INTERNATIONAL

30 years after deadly Tokyo subway gassing, survivors still seek closure

Japan's ex-PM Kishida, predecessors in scrutiny over giving gift vouchers

TOKYO, March 20, (Agencies): Former Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida distributed gift vouchers to lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) while in office, fueling speculation that gift-giving is a common practice among lawmakers in power, local media reported.

Kishida's staff delivered vouchers worth 100,000 yen (about 670 US dollars) each to LDP lawmakers who, at the time, served as parliamentary vice ministers ahead of a meal gathering at the prime minister's official residence on Dec 20, 2022, Kyodo News reported Wednesday, citing LDP sources.

Kishida's office told Kyodo News, "We always followed the law," without providing further details.

The revelation comes at a time when Kishida's successor, incumbent Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, has been under fire for his own distribution of vouchers worth 100,000 yen each to new LDP lawmakers.

Ishiba reiterated Wednesday that the vouchers his office distributed ahead of a March 3 dinner meeting at the prime minister's official residence were intended as tokens of appreciation and not meant to support political activities, denying that the move was illegal.

Japan's political funds control law bans donations by individuals to politicians for the purpose of political activities.

Meanwhile, multiple LDP lawmakers and other sources said they also received vouchers worth 50,000 or 100,000 yen at meal gatherings during the tenure of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who had been in office from 2012 to 2020, following a brief term from 2006 to 2007, the report said.

The office of another former prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, Abe's im-



Subway passengers affected by sarin nerve gas in the central Tokyo subway trains are carried into St. Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo on March 20, 1995. (AP)

mediate successor, said that "souvenirs" were distributed, but no laws were broken.

Opposition party lawmakers are turning up the heat on Ishiba and the LDP as those instances indicate that Japanese prime ministers have regularly distributed money and goods to LDP lawmakers. Leader of the main opposition Con-

stitutional Democratic Party of Japan Yoshihiko Noda, who served as prime minister between 2011 and 2012, told reporters he had "never" given out vouchers.

This looks to be an issue with the LDP's political culture. It is shaping up to be a deep-rooted structural one," Noda told reporters.

Also:

TOKYO: Thirty years on from the fatal sarin nerve gas attack in Tokyo's subway network, survivors and families

who lost loved ones are still seeking justice.

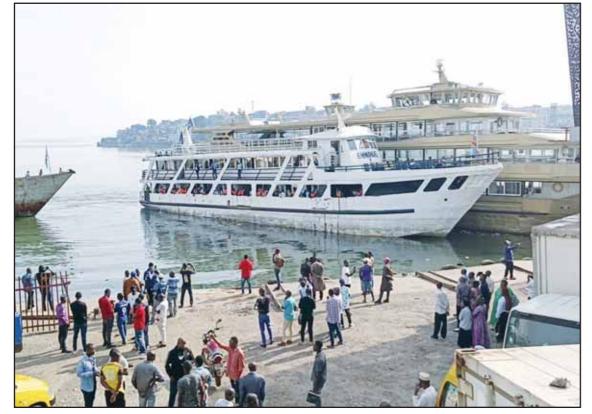
Thirteen people were killed and thousands were sickened when cult members released sarin nerve gas in the capital's subway trains on March 20, 1995. The attack remains one of the most shocking atrocities in Japan, a country known for its low crime rates.

The cult, Aum Shinrikyo or Supreme Truth, has since disbanded. Its founder, Shoko Asahara, and 12 of his disciples were executed in 2018.

But 1,600 former members still operate under renamed groups and have ignored an order to pay damages to survivors and bereaved families. Shizue Takahashi lost her hus-

band, a deputy station master, in the

attack. The couple was just starting to enjoy time to themselves after raising three children when tragedy struck.



People watch the first boat leaving Bukavu heading to Goma on Lake Kivu since the eastern Congo city was taken by M23 rebels on Feb 18. (AP)

M23 defying ceasefire calls

Rebels enter mineral-rich town in Congo

GOMA, Congo, March 20, (AP): Rwanda-backed M23 rebels entered the strategic town of Walikale in eastern Congo late Wednesday, according to residents and civil society leaders, a day after the Congolese and Rwandan presidents called for an immediate ceasefire.

"The information is confirmed: the rebels are visible at the monument and at the Bakusu group office," Prince Kihangi, a former provincial deputy elected for the Walikale territory told The Associated Press over the phone, referring to locations in the centre of Walikale. "This confirms of the M23 in the territorial capital

The meeting followed a failed attempt to bring Congo's government and M23 leaders together for ceasefire negotiations on Tuesday. The rebels pulled out Monday after the European Union announced sanctions on rebel leaders.

The decades-long conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January when the Rwanda-backed rebels advanced and seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by Bukavu in February.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the conflict that has world's most significant humanitarian crises. More than 7 million people have been displaced.

S.Korea constitutional court to decide whether to impeach Prime Minister Han on March 24

SEOUL, March 20, (Xinhua): South Korea's constitutional court said Thursday that it will decide whether to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on March 24.

The ruling on Han will be delivered at 10:00 a.m. local time (0100 GMT) on March 24, the court said in a statement. The impeachment motion against Han was passed by the

opposition-controlled National Assembly on Dec. 27 last year following the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol on Dec 14 over his botched martial law imposition.

If the motion is rejected, Han will be reinstated, but he will be removed from office if it is upheld. For the removal, the consent of at least six justices is re-

quired. The nine-member bench currently has eight justices. The National Assembly listed five reasons for Han's im-

peachment, such as involvement in the martial law imposition, refusal to appoint three constitutional court justices, and vetoes on special counsel bills targeting Yoon and his wife, Kim Keon-hee.

Han denied the allegations, claiming that he opposed the martial law imposition.

Also:

SEOUL: South Korea's rival political parties agreed Thursday on national pension reform plans amid chronic worry about the pension fund depletion.



Police buses are parked to make walls on the road as part of precaution for any eventuality near the Constitutional Court, left, in Seoul, South Korea on March 19. (AP)

The ruling People Power Party and the main opposition Democratic Party agreed to raise the pension contribution rate from the current 9 percent to 13 percent.

Under the agreement, it will be lifted by 0.5 percentage points per year for eight years beginning in 2026.

USAID cuts jeopardize Agent Orange cleanup, other efforts critical to ties with Vietnam

HANOI, Vietnam, March 20, (AP): At a former American air base in southern Vietnam, work abruptly stopped last month on efforts to clean up tons of soil contaminated with deadly dioxin from the military's Agent Orange defoliant.

The Trump administration's broad cuts to USAID also halted efforts to clear unexploded American munitions and landmines, a rehabilitation program for war victims, and work on a museum exhibit detailing US efforts to remediate the damage of the Vietnam



By taking control of Walikale, the M23 rebels seized a road linking four provinces in the east of the country: North Kivu, South Kivu, Tshopo and Maniema, cutting off Congolese army's positions.

Heavy artillery fire could be heard throughout the day but ceased in the evening, giving way to sporadic gunfire, Fiston Misona, a civil society activist in Walikale, told the AP over the phone.

"Our Congolese army is no longer fighting," he said. "It's as if we were being sacrificed.'

There was no immediate comment from the M23 or the Congolese government.

The escalation in fighting comes a day after the presidents of Congo and Rwanda held unexpected talks in Qatar and called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) to the east.

The U.N. Human Rights Council last month launched a commission to investigate atrocities, including allegations of rape and killing akin to "summary executions" by both sides.

The Walikale area is home to the largest tin deposits in Congo and to several significant gold mines. The Bisie tin mine, around 60 kilometers (35 miles) northwest of the town, accounts for the majority of tin exports from North Kivu province. Last week, its operator Alphamin Resources said it was temporarily halting mining operations due to the rebels' advance.

In addition to exposing thousands of people to health hazards, the cuts risk jeopardizing hard-won diplomatic gains with Vietnam, whose strategic importance is growing as the US looks for support in its efforts to counter an increasingly aggressive China.

"It doesn't help at all," said Chuck Searcy, an American Vietnam War veteran who has dedicated his time to humanitarian programs in the country for the last three decades. "It is just another example of what a lot of critics want to remind us of: You can't depend on the Americans. It is not a A Vietnamese soldier stands guard in front of military aircraft near a dioxin contaminated area while US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis visits Bien Hoa air base in Bien Hoa, outside Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on Oct 17, 2018. (AP)

good message."

Funding for the Agent Orange cleanup at Bien Hoa Air Base was unfrozen about a week after it was stopped, but it's unclear whether funds are fully flowing or how they'll be disbursed, with no USAID employees left to administer operations, said Tim Rieser, a senior adviser to Sen Peter Welch, who drafted a letter to admin-

istration officials signed by Welch and more than a dozen other Democratic senators urging the continued funding of the programs.

Other programs remain cut.

"They have reversed a number of these arbitrary decisions, but we're far from out of the woods and we don't know how this is going to end," Rieser said.

Africa

Nigeria leader suspends gov:

Nigeria's leader declared an emergency in oil-rich Rivers state and suspended its governor and lawmakers over a political crisis and vandalism to pipelines that contribute to the country's status as Africa's top oil producer.



crisis Rivers in brewed has months for between in cumbent Gov Siminalayi Fubara and state lawmakers, many of whom are backed by his

Tinubu predecessor. This week, some lawmakers initiated an impeachment process against the governor, accusing him of various illegalities regarding the presentation of the state budget and the composition of the legislative chamber.

President Bola Tinubu said in a state broadcast he was suspending the governor and other elected officials, including the state lawmakers, for six months. (AP)

2 soldiers killed in Cameroon: At least two Cameroonian soldiers were killed early Wednesday in a suspected separatist attack in the country's West Region, according to security sources.

The attack took place in Mag-da in the West Region, which borders the English-speaking region of Northwest, where an armed separatist conflict is ongoing, local officials said.

An army official in the region, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two soldiers were killed when separatist fighters ambushed them and opened fire. (Xinhua)



Forensic technicians excavate a field on a plot of land referred to as a cartel 'extermination site' where burned human remains are buried, on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico on Feb 8, 2022. (AP)



Chinese police officers monitor journalists gathered near a meeting of family members of passengers who were on board the MH370 Malaysia Airline jet that went missing in 2014 in Beijing, China on March 8, 2025. (AP)

Mexico's attorney general cites irregularities in investigation of alleged cartel killing site

MEXICO CITY, March 20, (AP): Mexico's attorney general on Wednesday reported irregularities in an investigation by state authorities into an alleged cartel killing site and training camp at a ranch in the western state of Jalisco where people searching for relatives found hundreds of articles of clothing and other personal effects.

The ranch in the town of Teuchitlan, outside Guadalajara, was found by authorities in September 2024. Six months later, a so-called search collective found charred bone fragments and personal items, raising questions about the original investigation by the Jalisco State Prosecutor's Office.

Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero, whose office took over the investigation last week, said that investigators in Jalisco failed to register evidence and fingerprints and process vehicles found at the ranch, three of which were later stolen.

He said local authorities didn't investigate the ownership of the ranch and failed to scientifically analyze locations at the ranch to understand if they were used as crematoriums. Investigators did not arrest local officials who have been linked to activities at the ranch, he said.

Gertz Manero said federal prosecutors were also not alerted about the site, as is standard procedure, and cast blame on the state prosecutor's office despite the National Guard carrying out an operation at the site carried out last year. There is still not enough information to confirm if the ranch was used to cremate bodies or train cartel members, he added.

The Jalisco Search Warriors group last week shared images that shocked many in a country that's long accustomed to stark news of cartel warfare, forced disappearances and government corruption. The images and videos showed dozens of shoes, piles of clothing and what appeared to be human bone fragments.

Such collectives have long risked their lives to seek answers about what has happened to Mexico's 120,000 disappeared people in the face of rampant impunity.

'No-find, no-fee contract with Ocean Infinity'

Malaysia approves new search for MH370

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, March 20, (Agencies): Malaysia's government has given final approval for a Texas-based marine robotics company to renew the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which is believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean more than a decade ago.

Cabinet ministers agreed to terms and conditions for a "no-find, no-fee" contract with Texasbased Ocean Infinity to resume the seabed search operation at a new 15,000-square-kilometer (5,800-square-mile) site in the ocean, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said in a statement Wednesday. Ocean Infinity will be paid \$70 million only if wreckage is discovered.

The Boeing 777 plane vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane turned from its flight path and headed south to the farsouthern Indian Ocean, where it is believed to have crashed.

An expensive multinational search failed to turn up any clues to its location, although debris washed ashore on the east African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing.

The final approval for a new search came three months after Malaysia gave the nod in principle to plans for a fresh search.

Ocean Infinity CEO Oliver Punkett earlier this year reportedly said the company had improved its technology since 2018. He has said the firm is working with many experts to analyze data and had narrowed the search area to the most likely site.

Loke said his ministry will ink a contract with Ocean Infinity soon but didn't provide details on the terms. The firm has reportedly sent a search vessel to the site and indicated that January-April is the best period for the search.

'The government is committed to continuing the search operation and providing closure for the families of the passengers of flight MH370," he said in a statement.

Kuwait oil price drops to \$74.73 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA): Kuwait oil price dropped by USD 1.14 to USD 74.73 per barrel in Wednesday's trading compared to Tuesday's rate of USD 75.87 pb, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)

said on Thursday.

In global markets, Brent crude futures moved up by 22 cents to USD 70.78 per barrel and the West Texas Intermediate oil climbed by 26 cents to reach USD 67.16 pb.





Hundreds of cars flocked to Zain's headquarters to celebrate

Waleed Al-Khashti joins Zain's team at the heart of the celebration.

Zain's Girgeaan - an exceptional experience with a unique flavor.

Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ in Shuwaikh to join the fun for third year running

Zain's drive-thru Girgeaan celebration ... an exceptional experience

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Following the remarkable success of the past two years, Zain once again organized its innovative drive-thru Girgeaan celebra-tion in collaboration with Wainkom, which saw hundreds of cars flock to the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh to take part in this one-of-a-kind event, held in a joyful and traditional family atmosphere.

This celebration came under the umbrella of Zain's community campaign, Zain Al-Shuhoor, which aims to share the joy and blessings of the Holy Month of Ramadan with the Kuwaiti community in all its diversity, particularly children and youth, who represent the most vibrant segment of society. The Holy Month presents an opportunity to revive beautiful traditions such as Girgeaan,

which the company is keen to celebrate in its own special way. For the third consecutive year, Zain celebrated Girgeaan through a drivethru experience at its Shuwaikh headquarters, with great turnout and interaction. Over a two-hour period, hundreds of vehicles lined up at the company's premises, where children and their families enjoyed the special activities Zain had prepared. The event was organized in collaboration with Wainkom, a company specialized in organizing innovative events, making this celebration the first of its kind locally.

The event featured many interactive activities that brought joy to the hearts of children and their families, along with the distribution of Girgeaan

treats, presented by Zain to put smiles on their faces. This initiative comes as part of the company's continuous social contributions throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan, aimed at fostering connections and reinforcing beautiful values.

The Zain Al-Shuhoor campaign continues to evolve every year, expanding its programs and initiatives. Through this campaign, the company builds bridges of cooperation with various entities across the country to embody the spirit of giving that distinguishes the Holy Month and reflect the authentic values of the Kuwaiti people in helping others and spreading love and peace.

Kuwait investment sector marks Union's 20 years of achievements

Union of Investment Companies honors national talent

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Union of **Investment Companies organized a special** celebration to mark its 20th anniversary with the theme, "Twenty Years of Continuous Giving and Achievement".

The main sponsors of the event are Kuwait Financial Center Company and Kuwait Clearing Company. Other sponsors include Arzan Financial Group for Financing and Investment, Kuwait Investment Company, Kamco Invest, Rasameel Investment Company, Amar Finance and Leasing Company, National Investments Company, Aayan Leasing and Investment Com-pany, and International Invest Company.

In a bid to have more accomplishments and strengthen Kuwait's position as a leading financial and investment center in the region and the world, the celebration highlighted the role of the Union at various levels and un-veiled an ambitious strategy based on four key pillars.

Union officials reaffirmed their commitment to support the concerned entities in the country and cooperate with regulatory authorities to enhance the status of the investment sector in the local market and develop its role in the country's economic activity. The importance of the Union's role in supporting investment companies in the country was also underscored; in addition to training officials and employees and introducing them to the latest developments in the investment sector, which contributes to raising productivity and performance to the highest level.

investment practices; encourage adherence to environmental, social and governance standards in investment strategies; and enhance transparency.

They spotlighted the role of the Union in strengthening public-private partnerships, supporting national employment, and supporting environmental, social and governance initiatives and other vital issues.

The celebration also emphasized that investment companies are a fundamental pillar of the economy, and that their presence and support through laws and procedures supporting their work are essential for development and increasing investment opportunities for individuals, rather than allowing them to be eroded by inflation. "These companies should be viewed as among the most important pillars of support and development for the Kuwaiti economy, especially in light of statistics that show the huge volume of assets they manage," the officials asserted.

On this occasion, Founding President of the Union Dhirar Al-Ghanim stated: The Union has contributed to numerous successes and achievements over the past 20 years. We are proud of what it offers today to the Kuwaiti investment sector, its companies and institutions."

Former Chairman of the Union Asaad Al-Banwan disclosed that the Union has been playing a fundamental and important role in the Kuwaiti investment sector over the past two decades.



A group photo of the Gulf Bank delegation and members of the Fire Force, with Bader Al-Ali, Colonel Ahmad Al-Maiadi, and Ali Al-Arbash in the middle

Bank expresses appreciation for firefighters during Ramadan

Gulf Bank hosts 'Ramadan Iftar' for General Fire Force members

The officials also stressed the need to conclude agreements with international companies to improve the performance of member companies and benefit from global expertise to seize the best opportunities.

They explained that innovation has been an integral part of the Union's values since its inception. "Over the years, the Union has achieved qualitative leaps in the field of financial services locally and regionally, as evidenced by its history of creating investment tools with unique characteristics and opening new investment gateways,' they affirmed.

The officials added that the Union spares no effort in cooperating with government and private institutions to achieve its desired goals, provide a conducive environment for attracting local and international capital to Kuwait, boost the national economy, and contribute to the development of the Kuwaiti capital market.

They stated that the Union aims to promote sustainable

Bader Al-Subaie, also a former chairman, confirmed the Union's success in overcoming crises and achieving numerous accomplishments.

Saleh Al-Salmi, another former chairman, highlighted the Union's significant contributions to the advancement and development of the sector.

Incumbent Chairman Abdullah Al-Terkait expressed honor in celebrating the 20th anniversary and highlighted the Union's role in shaping the investment and business environment.

He reported numerous achievements, including the development of the legislative and regulatory environments and active collaboration with government and regulatory bodies

He stressed the importance of national competencies and the Union's commitment to investment education and awareness.

He then renewed the Union's pledge to move toward a more ambitious future, strengthening Kuwait's position as a leading financial and investment center.

Fedwa Darwish, Secretary General of the Union, pointed out the Union's pioneering role in developing the investment sector, and its significant contributions to support this vital sector and develop the business environment in Kuwait.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: As part of its dedication to corporate social responsibility and its ongoing support for organizations that serve the community, Gulf Bank hosted a Ramadan Iftar for members of the General Fire Force at Al-Shaheed Center in Al-Nuzha. The gathering was attended by a Gulf Bank delegation led by Mr. Bader Al-Ali, General Manager of Consumer Banking, alongside a number of General Fire Force members, headed by Colonels Ahmad Al-Majadi and Ali Al-Arbash.

This initiative is part of Gulf Bank's Ramadan campaign, "Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together," which includes a series of charitable, social, and sports activities aimed at promoting humanitarian and social values. The campaign aims to spread joy, foster meaningful connections, and honor individuals and organizations that play a vital role in safeguarding society.

The visit included a communal Iftar gathering, bringing together Gulf Bank representatives and General Fire Force members. During the event, the Bank's officials expressed their sincere appreciation for the firefighters' heroic efforts in protecting lives and ensuring public safety.

Speaking on the occasion, Gulf Bank representatives stated: "As families come together for Iftar during Ramadan, firefighters make the selfless choice to be on duty, safeguarding their community. In recognition of their sacrifices, we wanted to be with them at their workplace, sharing Iftar and expressing our appreciation, along with that of the entire community, for their unwavering commitment and service."

This initiative reaffirms Gulf Bank's commitment to fostering community engagement and honor-

ing those who dedicate their lives to the safety and well-being of others.

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.

'Economy remains healthy despite rising economic uncertainty'

Fed holds interest rates steady, signals two cuts in this year

WASHINGTON, March 20, (AP): The Federal Reserve kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged Wednesday and signaled that it still expects to cut rates twice this year even as it sees inflation staying stubbornly elevated.

The Fed also now expects the economy to grow more slowly this year and next than it did three months ago, according to a set of quarterly economic pro-jections also released Wednesday. It forecasts growth falling to just 1.7% in 2025, down from 2.8% last year, and 1.8% in 2026. Policymakers also expect inflation will pick up slightly, to 2.7% by the end of this year from its current level of 2.5%. Both are above the central bank's 2% target.

Even though the Fed maintained its forecast for two cuts, economists noted that under the surface there were signs that the central bank could stay on hold for some time. That is likely to keep borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards unchanged in the coming months.

Eight of the 19 Fed officials said they see only one or zero rate reductions this year, up from just four in December.

"It will be harder for them to cut rates this year with inflation moving sideways," said Michael Gapen, an economist at Morgan Stanley.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, at a news conference, said that President Donald Trump's tariffs have started to push up inflation and would likely stall the progress the central bank has seen in reducing inflation since its peak in 2022.

"I think we were getting closer and closer" to price stability, Powell said. "I wouldn't say we were at that. ... I do think with the arrival of the tariff inflation, further progress may be delayed."

On his Truth Social platform late Wednesday, Trump posted: "The Fed would be MUCH better off CUTTING RATES as U.S. Tariffs start to transition (ease!) their way into the economy. Do the right thing.

Powell added that the Fed still expects inflation to get back to nearly 2% by the end of next year. Tariffs could just create a one-time increase in prices, he said, rather than an ongoing boost to inflation. And in some cases, the Fed can simply "look through" a temporary price rise, rather than respond by raising rates, Powell added.

Those comments appeared to please investors, and the S&P 500 stock index rose 1% Wednesday afternoon.

Luke Tilley, chief economist at Wilmington Trust, said Powell appeared



A news conference by Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is displayed on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York, Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (AP)

less alarmed about the impact of tariffs compared to the Fed's previous meeting in January.

'They're talking about tariffs in a totally different way," he said.

Powell acknowledged that the Fed initially thought inflation coming out of the pandemic would be temporary, which led it to delay raising rates to combat higher prices. But he added that in this case, it could be a "different situation."

'But...we really can't know that," he added, noting that uncertainty is enveloping the economy. "We're going to have to see how things actually work

Fed policymakers also expect the unemployment rate to tick higher, to

4.4%, by the end of this year, from 4.1% now.

The economic projections underscore the tight spot the Fed may find itself in this year: Higher inflation typically would lead the Fed to keep its key rate elevated, or even raise rates. On the other hand, slower growth and higher unemployment would often cause the Fed to cut rates to spur more borrowing and spending and lift the economy.

It is the second meeting in a row that the Fed has kept its interest rate at about 4.3% as the central bank has moved to the sidelines as it evaluates the impact of the Trump administration's policies on the economy. Economists forecast that tariffs will likely push up inflation, at least temporarily. But other policies, such as deregulation, could lower costs and cool inflation.

Powell acknowledged that many surveys of businesses and consumers have shown rising concern about the economic outlook. Yet he noted that the unemployment rate remains low and the economy is still expanding.

We do understand that sentiment has fallen off pretty sharply but economic activity has not yet," Powell said. "The economy seems to be healthy."

Powell underscored that uncertainty around the economy's outlook is "unusually elevated" and said that the Fed is prepared to be patient and see how the economy evolves before making further moves.

"We're not going to be in any hurry to move," he said. "We're well positioned to wait for further clarity and not in any hurry.

The Fed also said it would slow the rate at which it is reducing its Treasury holdings, which grew massively during and after the pandemic. Previously it had allowed \$25 billion of Treasurys to mature each month without reinvesting the proceeds. Now it will allow only \$5 billion to mature each month.

In effect, the Fed will be reinvesting more of the expiring bonds into new securities, which should keep interest rates on long-term Treasurys lower than they would have been otherwise. Powell characterized the change as a technical one and not related to its interest-rate policies. Yields fell slightly in Treasury markets.

Federal Reserve governor Christopher Waller voted against the decision to slow the Treasury purchases. The Fed is still allowing \$35 billion of mortgagebacked securities to mature each month.

Markets were closed in Japan

Asian shares mostly higher after advance on Wall Street

BANGKOK, March 20, (AP): Asian shares were mostly higher Thursday following an advance on Wall Street after the Federal Reserve said the economy still looks healthy enough to keep interest rates where they are.

Markets were closed in Japan for a holiday. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 2.1% to 24,455.60

and the Shanghai Composite index dropped 0.5% to 3,408.98.

In South Korea, the Kospi jumped 0.3% to 2,637.10, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 added 1.2% to 7.918.90.

Taiwan's Taiex jumped 1.9%, while the SET in Bangkok rose 0.4%

On Wednesday, U.S. stocks also got a boost from easing yields in the bond market. When Treasurys are paying investors less in interest, investors may be willing to pay higher prices for stocks.

The S&P 500 jumped 1.1% to 5,675.29, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.9% to 41,964.63. The Nasdaq composite rose 1.4% to 17,750.79.

The rally followed weeks of sharp and scary swings for the U.S. stock market as investors fret over how much pain President Donald Trump will allow the economy to endure in order to remake the system. He's said he wants manufacturing jobs back in the United States and far fewer people working for the federal government.

Trump's barrage of announcements on tariffs and other policies have created so much uncertainty that economists worry U.S. businesses and households may freeze and pull back on their spending.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged the rising pessimism among U.S. consumers and companies shown by recent surveys, but he also pointed to data such as relatively low unemployment that show the economy is still strong. It's possible to have periods where "people say downbeat things about the economy and then go out and buy a new car," he said. "Given where we are, we think our policy is in a good place to react to what comes, and we think that the right thing to do is to wait here for greater clarity about what the

economy's doing," Powell said. The Fed has been holding interest rates steady this year after cutting them sharply through the end of last year. While lower rates can help give the economy a boost, they can also push inflation upward.

Fed officials indicated they're still penciling in two cuts to the federal funds rate by the end of this year, just as they were forecasting at the end of last year. But they are also seeing weaker growth for the U.S. economy and higher inflation than they were before. More than anything, the message from the Fed seemed to be how much uncertainty is clouding everything. Powell pushed back against fears about what's called "stagflation," where the economy stagnates but inflation remains high. The Fed doesn't have good tools to fix such a toxic combination. The last time the U.S. economy suffered through it was in the 1970s, and Powell said, "I wouldn't say we're in a situation that's remotely comparable to that.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury dropped to 4.24% from 4.31% just before the Fed announced its decision. The Fed said it will also begin paring the monthly reductions of its trove of Treasurys beginning in April. Such a move can help keep longer-term yields lower than they would otherwise be.

On Wall Street, Nvidia helped support the market after rising 1.8% to cut its loss for the year so far to 12.5%. It hosted an event Tuesday where it largely "did a nice job laying out the roadmap" and fighting back against speculation the artificial-intelligence industry is seeing a slowdown in demand for computing power, according to UBS analysts led by Timothy Arcuri.

Tesla rose 4.7%, following two straight losses of roughly 5%. It's still down 41.6% for 2025 so far. It's been struggling on worries that customers are turned off by CEO Elon Musk's leading efforts to slash spending by the U.S. government.

In other dealings early Thursday, U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 47 cents to \$67.38 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, was up 46 cents at \$71.24 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar fell to 148.27 Japanese yen from 148.69 yen. The euro slipped \$1.0893 from \$1.0905.

Li's net worth put at \$38 billion

HK's richest man in hot water over his

company's Panama Canal ports deal

BoE leaves benchmark interest rate unchanged at 4.50 percent

LONDON, March 20, (AP): The Bank of England kept its main U.K. interest rate unchanged at 4.50% on Thursday even though the economy is barely growing and the nation faces more uncertainty in light of the tariff policies being enacted by the Trump administration in the U.S.

The decision by the ninemember Monetary Policy Committee was widely expected, and comes a day after the U.S. Federal Reserve also kept interest rates unchanged.

Minutes from the meeting showed that eight members voted to keep policy unchanged, with one backing a quarter-point reduction.

The rate-setting panel has re-duced the Bank of England's main rate from a 16-year high of 5.25% by a quarter of a percentage on three occasions since last August, most recently in February, after inflation fell from multi-decade highs of over 10%.

However, inflation, at 3%, remains above the bank's 2% target and is set to push higher in coming months, even without accountInflation still high



General view of the Bank of England, in London, Monday, May 2, 2022.

they will be armed with the bank's latest economic projections and Gov. Andrew Bailey next holds a press conference.

Bailey said rate-setters will be "looking very closely at how the global and domestic economies are evolving" and that whatever happens, "it's our job to make sure that inflation stays low and stable."

The U.S. Federal Reserve, which kept borrowing rates unit could rise as high as 4% in the coming months, even before accounting for any U.S. imposed tariffs.

The British economy, the sixthlargest, eked out modest growth of 0.1% in the fourth quarter, a hugely disappointing outcome for the new Labour government, which has made boosting growth its number one economic policy. Since the global financial crisis in 2008-2009, the British econHONG KONG, March 20, (AP): Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing's business empire is in the crosshairs after CK Hutchison Holdings chose to sell its Panama Canal port assets to a con-sortium that includes U.S. investment firm BlackRock Inc., apparently angering Beijing.

Over the past week, Beijing's Hong Kong affairs offices have posted scathing commentaries from a local statebacked media outlet over the tentative deal by Hutchison, which is controlled by Li's family.

That raises questions about the deal and highlights the difficulties Hong Kong businesses face as they balance demands from Beijing for national loyalty and their own capitalist interests in the once free-wheeling Asian financial hub. Here's what to know about the is-

Nicknamed "Superman," Li is among the world's 50 richest people, with Forbes calculating his net worth at \$38 billion. Li, 96, retired from his position as chairman of CK Hutchison in 2018, succeeded by his elder son Victor. But he's still one of Hong Kong's most influential figures.

Li's rags-to-riches story paralleled the former British colony's rise. His business empire touches almost every aspect of daily life in Hong Kong, from properties and supermarkets to telecommunications and utilities. Globally, his conglomerate owns assets including British drugstore chain Superdrug and European mobile phone network operator Three.

A Hutchison subsidiary has operated ports at both ends of the Panama Canal since 1997. That was one reason U.S. President Donald Trump has alleged Chinese interference with the critical shipping lane's operations.



Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing, chairman of CK Hutchison Holdings com-pany, waves goodbye to media after the company's Annual General Meet-ing in Hong Kong, May 10, 2018. (AP)

If approved, the deal, valued at nearly \$23 billion including \$5 billion in debt, will give the consortium control over 43 ports in 23 countries, including the ports of Balboa and Cristobal, located at either end of the canal. The transaction does not include ports in Hong Kong or mainland China. CK Hutchison said the transaction was purely commercial in nature.

The deal pleased Trump but angered Beijing.

One of the Beijing-backed newspaper commentaries described the deal as a betrayal of all Chinese and said the company should think about which side to take. The other said great entrepreneurs are patriots, suggesting that businesspeople who "dance with" predatory American politicians would be doomed to infamy.

Comments on popul

say 'Sorry, I'm canceling the deal.' You can imagine what Trump's reac-tion would be," he said, adding that would also affect how the outside world views Hong Kong businesses.

CK Hutchison has not commented on the controversy.

The company reported its 2024 financial results on Thursday, but did not hold a news conference. Victor Li did not mention the deal in his chairman's statement but said the operating environment for the group's business is expected to be volatile and unpredictable. He said he anticipated potential headwinds for the company's ports and related services in early 2025 as shipping lines transition into their new alliances and ongoing geopolitical risk impacts global trade.

The first Trump administration sancioned Chinese and Hong Kong of ficials for undermining the autonomy

of the territory promised when Britain

handed its colony to Beijing in 1997

ing for any tariffs imposed by the Trump administration.

"There's a lot of economic uncertainty at the moment," said Bank Gov. Andrew Bailey. "We still think that interest rates are on a gradually declining path, but we've held them at 4.5% today."

If policymakers continue pursue their recent gradual approach, then another cut is likely in May, when changed Wednesday, also expressed uncertainty about the near-term economic outlook, particularly in light of U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff policies, which economists worry would lower global growth and lead to an uptick in prices.

Inflation in the U.K. rose to a 10-month high of 3% in January further above the bank's target of 2%. And many economists think omy's growth performance has been notably below its long-run average.

Critics say Treasury chief Rachel Reeves is partly responsible for the gloomy economic news since Labour returned to power in July after 14 years, because she was overly downbeat when taking on her role and has since increased taxes, particularly on businesses.

Li's influence extends beyond business. He has met with top Chinese leaders and has served on the elite committee that selected Hong Kong's leader.

Experts on ties between Beijing and Hong Kong said ruling Communist Party leaders once understood that support from the business sector was crucial for maintaining Hong Kong's capitalist system. It has been strategically vital for mainland China's economy, given the role their global networks and resources play in the country's development. So, Li has had notable political influence.

But Li has faced criticism over some business decisions. When he sold off some mainland Chinese assets in 2015, an article published by a think tank affiliated with Chinese official news agency Xinhua accused him of being immoral

During pro-democracy protests in 2019, Li was blasted by some pro-Beijing supporters for his perceived ambivalence about the unrest. Some other Hong Kong business leaders adopted a harsher stance.

CK Hutchison announced March 4 that it would sell all its shares in Hutchison Port Holdings and in Hutchison Port Group Holdings to the consortium that also includes BlackRock subsidiary Global Infrastructure Partners and Terminal Investment Limited, which is chaired by Italian shipping scion Diego Aponte, whose family reportedly has a longstanding relationship with Li's.

the deal on Chinese social media platform Weibo tend to be more critical than favorable toward Li.

Chief Executive John Lee avoided direct criticism of the deal or Trump, but told reporters on Tuesday his government opposes bullying tactics in international economic and trade relations, reiterating Beijing's stance.

Some unconfirmed reports have suggested Chinese leaders were angry not to have been consulted in advance about the deal.

George Chen, managing director for Hong Kong at The Asia Group, a Washington-headquartered business and policy consulting firm, said Beijing may have been disappointed because it had almost no time to devise a response in advance.

Ports are valuable strategic assets and transactions involving them are always sensitive, said Wilson Chan, cofounder of the Pagoda Institute, a think tank focusing on public policy and the global political economy.

It is unclear whether pressure from Beijing will affect the deal, which has to be approved by Panama's government. China's Foreign Ministry deflected a question about whether authorities are investigating the deal, saying reporters should ask other authorities.

Cancelling the deal would be risky, Chan said. "Strictly speaking, you just let

Trump take credit for it, then you later

under a concept dubbed "One country, two systems." It promised the city could keep its Western-style civil liberties and economic autonomy for at least 50 years, but following the 2019 protests, Beijing has doubled-down on its political control of the city. Li could try to placate critics who deem him insufficiently patriotic, Chan said, by using proceeds from selling the port assets for investments aligned with Beijing's policies, particularly in developing Hong Kong and mainland

port businesses. But relations between private businesses and Beijing remain uncertain, said The Asia Group's Chen. Even though Chinese President Xi Jinping recently met with private sector business leaders in a show of support, some may wonder if they must follow the party line even if that might conflict with their business interests, he said.

If Beijing steps up pressure on Li to scrap the deal, the Trump administration could hit back with more sanctions and restrictions on Hong Kong and Chinese businesses and some individuals, he said.

The situation shows that Washington's concerns about Hong Kong's business autonomy are valid, Chen said. "This is bad when it comes to the defense of 'one country, two systems," Chen said.

EU lays out how Apple must open its tech up to competitors under bloc's digital rules

LONDON, March 20, (AP): The European Union on Wednesday outlined the steps that Apple must take to open up its iPhone and iPad operating systems to work better with competing technologies.

It's the first time it has moved to compel a technology company to comply with the bloc's digital rulebook, known as the Digital Markets Act. The 27-nation bloc's executive Commission had opened two "specification proceedings" last year to lay out the steps Apple needed to comply with the sweeping rulebook, also known as the DMA, which took effect last year.

In its decision, the commission detailed the measures that the iPhone maker has to take so that smartwatches and other devices have better access to Apple's iOS operating system. It also laid out a second set of measures aimed at improving transparency and effectiveness of the process for software developers to request access to iPhone features.

With its decision, Brussels is "providing regulatory certainty both to Apple and to developers, the European Commission Executive Vice President Teresa Ribera said in a press release. "Effective interoperability" for third-party devices will mean "better choice for consumers in the fast-growing market for innovative connected devices," she said.

Apple, however, voiced its unhappiness with result, saying it's bad for the company's products and for European users.

"Today's decisions wrap us in red tape, slowing down Apple's ability to innovate for users in Europe and forcing us to give away our new features for free to companies who don't have to play by the same rules," the company said in a statement.

Apple said it will continue to

ing enough to comply with DMA. Despite making changes, including removing flight listings, Google was still giving preference to its own services in search results, it said.

work with the European Commis-

sion to "help them understand our

The Commission also said

Wednesday that Google wasn't do-

concerns on behalf of our users."

Google is also failing to let app developers steer users to cheaper options outside its Google Play Store app marketplace, the commission said in preliminary findings.

Google said the EU findings will require the company to make even more changes to how it displays some search results, "which would make it harder for people to find what they are looking for and reduce traffic to European businesses. This is, quite simply, misguided.'

Eurostat says Eurozone inflation drops to 2.3 percent

BRUSSELS, March 20, (KUNA): Data revised by the European Statistics Office (Eurostat) showed on Wednesday that the annual inflation rate in the euro area dropped to 2.3 percent in February 2025, which is lower than the previous estimate of 2.5 percent.

The rate in the same month of the previous year was 2.6 percent, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, said in a report.

It added that the annual inflation rate in the European Union reached 2.7 percent in February 2025, down from 2.8 percent in January. The rate in the same month of the previous year was 2.8 percent.

Eurostat reported that the lowest annual rates were recorded in France (0.9 percent), Ireland (1.4 percent), and Finland (1.5 percent). The highest annual rates were recorded in Hungary (5.7 percent), Romania (5.2 percent), and Estonia (5.1 percent). Official statistics show that annual inflation decreased in fourteen member

states, remained stable in six countries, and rose in seven countries compared to January 2025.

Eurostat pointed out that the services sector was the largest contributor to the rise in the annual inflation rate in February 2025, with an increase of 1.66 percent, followed by food, alcohol, and tobacco with an increase of 0.52 percent.

In contrast, the prices of non-energy industrial goods increased by 0.41 percent, while energy prices saw a rise of 0.01 percent.

African governments urged to trade, transact in local currencies

ADDIS ABABA, March 20, (Xinhua): Experts attending the 57th session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development have urged African governments to seek options of settling trade and other transactions in local currencies.

Prioritizing local-currency financing is a proactive step to protect Africa's economies from external shocks and create a more resilient financial ecosystem, Hanan Morsy, chief economist with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, told the gathering Tuesday.

"Another game changer in African development is the growth of pan-African payment system which would enable trading in local currencies," Morsy said, noting that Africa's heavy dependence on the U.S. dollar has caused economic vulnerabilities.

Melaku Geboye Desta, coordinator of the Africa Trade Policy Center, said Africa's trading in currencies such as the U.S. dollar costs the continent about 5 billion dollars a year.

"The moment we remove the non-African currencies, the hard currency serving as an intermediary, the moment we start saving the transaction cost involved in the conversion and reconversion process," he said. "We believe trade will be facilitated. It will be cheaper. It will be more competitive."

Desta said a single African currency would help boost trade, increase economic cooperation among African Union (AU) members and stimulate faster development across the continent. "We believe that there are huge opportunities to save transaction costs that would in turn make African firms more competitive and trade with each other," he added.

Desta said that recently, some African countries have begun using local currencies to conduct business with non-Western partners such as China and Russia. "For decades, African states have traded both within the continent and with international partners with foreign currencies, namely the U.S. dollar, the euro, and, to a lesser extent, the British Pound," he said.

This reliance has been the result of historical economic links, post-colonial banking institutions, and global trading patterns, Desta said.

The secretary general of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, Wamkele Mene, said Africa is already moving toward a single currency, which is critical to eliminating some of the transaction costs related to intra-African trade.

He said a monetary union would help reduce the cost of financial transactions and eliminate exchange risks.

What's On

AI Ahli Bank collaborates with Central Bank and Kuwait Banking Association for awareness

ABK encourages financial awareness through 'Let's Be Aware' padel tournaments

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is proud to announce its ongoing commitment to financial awareness by actively supporting the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign. This initiative, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association, is designed to engage various customer segments, introducing them to a wide range of topics that focus on financial inclusion within Kuwaiti society.

A key component of these initiatives is the monthly 'Let's Be Aware' padel tournaments. These events attract a substantial number of community members and strategically utilize advertisements in the playing fields to enrich attendees' understanding of essential banking culture. Participants are introduced to prominent banking services and solutions that facilitate simple and smooth financial transactions.

The tournaments are an excellent platform for educating participants on various banking topics, such as types of bank accounts, loans, digital services, fraud prevention, and personal data protection. Furthermore, they shed light on services for people with special needs and emphasize the importance of caution against engaging with unknown individuals and the dangers of cashing out loans.

During these events, the Bank's team actively interacts



ABK hosts monthly padel tournaments to promote financial inclusion.



with attendees through competitions to ensure the effective communication of the campaign's content. Bank employees are on hand to provide necessary guidance, enhancing attendees' banking and financial knowledge, thereby contributing to the campaign's objectives.

As a leading and responsible banking institution, ABK emphasizes its significant role in the local market. It remains committed to collaborating with the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association to discuss the various campaign topics, ensuring they reach a broad audience over time.

The Bank is dedicated to utilizing all resources to support the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign, sharing unique content across its digital platforms and branch screens to connect with diverse age groups within the community.

Alfouz account offers KD 100,000 quarterly draws

ABK announces Mona Alsheetan as Alfouz draw winner

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Mona Adnan Alsheetan as the winner of the Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw on Monday, 17 March, 2025. The draw took place in the presence of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative, ensuring transparency.

From the highly coveted mega annual draw of a KD 5,000 monthly salary for 10 years to its KD 10,000 weekly prize, the account has attracted significant attention in the Kuwaiti market. Based on the account's great success, ABK decided to go above and beyond to reward customer loyalty.

With a KD 100,000 quarterly draw, in addition to an exciting KD 20,000 monthly draw, the Alfouz account continues to surpass expectations and deliver even more customer satisfaction.

To top it off, ABK has simplified the ability to open the account and win! Customers can enter the draws and get extra entry chances for every KD 10 deposited. The more you save, the higher your chance to be the next Alfouz winner!

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account or increase their balance to participate in the upcoming draw, which is scheduled to take place on Monday, 24 March, 2025

Open an Alfouz account today and enjoy increased opportunities to win the lifestyle you've been waiting for!



ABK's Alfouz account winner.

To learn more about the Alfouz account and its range of exciting draws and prizes, please follow ABK's Instagram account @abk_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

'Seamless shopping experience with pre-booking benefits'

Kalyan Jewellers offers exclusive deals

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest and most trusted jewellery brands, is celebrating the soon approaching auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya with a wide range of exclusive offers designed to elevate the festive spirit. Known for its customer-centric approach, the brand is offering exciting deals that allow patrons to maximize their value on jewellery purchases, making this the ideal time to invest in timeless pieces.

To ensure a sear ess shopping expe





'Continuing its support for the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign'

KIB launches banking awareness booth at Marina Mall to boost financial literacy

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently setup a special awareness booth at Marina Mall aimed at raising banking awareness and enhancing financial literacy among community members. This initiative comes as part of the Bank's ongoing commitment to supporting the directives of the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) campaign, which was introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) in collaboration



the safety and security of their Sultan-Al-Hajri banking informa-

tion. Commenting the Bank's on initiative,Sultan Alhajri, Area Manager of Retail Banking at KIB, said: "As a bank that prioritizes financial literacy and customer empowerment, we are pleased to continue our support of and participation in the Diraya campaign, offering a dedicated awareness booth at Marina Mall to further engage with the community. We believe that raising awareness about financial matters is crucial in today's evolving banking landscape, and this initiative aligns with our efforts to enhance financial knowledge among all segments of society while deepening customer relationships.



Diraya Marina Mall Booth.

nancial concepts, including responsible banking practices, personal financial management, and the importance of safeguarding banking data, including the safe use of banking cards and protecting their accounts. They also discussed with mall visitors steps to avoid falling victim to fraud and phishing schemes, as well as raising awareness about the importance of adopting a culture of investment and savings.In addition, they seized the opportunity to point out the role of bank-

ing institutions in financing, particularly Islamic financing. KIB's representatives also introduced visitors to the Bank's diverse and innovative range of products and services that fit their various lifestyles and needs.'

It is worth noting that KIB continues to reinforce its role as a trusted financial partner, committed to educating the public on key banking topics, in line with its comprehensive social responsibility strategy. The Bank strives to launch initiatives that promote a secure financial environment and support the goals of the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, embodying

lamic Shari'ah, based in the State of Kuwait. Incorporated in 1973, and originally known as Kuwait Real Estate Bank, KIB made the transition to its current Islamic operating model in 2007. In 2018, KIB embarked on a new phase of its journey full of innovation and development. As part of its new strategic direction, the Bank focuses on offering a next-level customer experience under the slogan: "Bank for Life".

Through a network of branches spread across the State of Kuwait,KIBoffers a broad range of banking products and services, as well as innovative digital banking solutions in line with international best standards. As part of its duty towards the community, the Bank also encompasses a leading social responsibility program that aims at positively impacting all members of the community through a wide range of impactful initiatives and activities.

Today, KIB has taken concrete steps in implementing its new strategic objectives. The Bank has cemented its role as a key player in the local banking industry

with local banks.



rience during the festive rush, Kalyan Jewellers has introduced an exclusive pre-booking program, enabling customers to secure their jewellery with a minimal 10% advance payment*. This allows for a hassle-free pick-up experience on or near the festival, minimizing the traditional rush and long wait times. The pre-booking program also protects customers from potential price hikes during this period.

Kalyan Jewellers is also offering a free 2-gram gold coin with the purchase of Diamond or Polki jewellery worth KWD 550. A 1-gram gold coin can be availed for free with the purchase of platinum, precious stones, or uncut jewellery worth KWD 550, or Diamond or Polki jewellery worth between KWD 350 - KWD 549. Additionally, customers can receive a 1/2 gm gold coin free on gold jewellery purchases worth KWD 550, or platinum, precious stones, and uncut jewellery purchases between KWD 350 – KWD 549. For gold jewellery purchases between KWD 350 – KWD 549, customers will receive a 1/4 gm gold coin.

Speaking on this occasion, Mr. Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director of Kalyan Jewellers, said, "Akshaya Tritya is a time of gratitude, reflection, and meaningful connections. Jewellery plays a significant role in these celebrations, symbolizing love and cherished memories. With our exclusive festive offers, we aim to ensure our patrons can celebrate the festival



Kalyan Jewellers celebrates Akshaya Tritiya with exclusive offers.

without the concerns of price hikes while continuing to embrace the tradition of gold buying.

Kalyan Jewellers' showrooms across the Kuwait showcase an extensive range of collections, including Muhurat, the brand's signature bridal jewellery line featuring exquisite designs from across India. Customers can also explore Kalyan's diverse house brands, such as Tejasvi (Polki jewellery), Mudhra (Handcrafted Antique Jewellery), Nimah (Temple Jewellery), Glo (Dancing Diamonds), Ziah (Solitaire-like Diamond Jewellery), Anokhi (Uncut Diamonds), Hera (Daily Wear Diamonds), Rang (Precious Stones Jewellery), and the latest addition, Lila (Coloured Stones and Diamond Jewellery).

With its heritage of trust, craftsmanship, and innovation, Kalyan Jewellers invites customers to make this Akshaya Tritya extra special by selecting from an exquisite collection of jewellery designed to elevate every celebration.

For more information about the brand, its collections, and special offers, visit www.kalyanjewellers.net.

Alhajri added: "Our booth at Marina Mall served as an interactive platform where visitors engaged with KIB representatives to learn about essential fi-

its main slogan, 'Bank for Life' About KIB

Kuwait International Bank (KIB) is a bank that operates according to the Is-

and has continued to maintain its strong financial performance; enabling it to be globally recognized for its strong credit rating and financial position.

In collaboration with V-Thru

KFH organizes V-Fit virtual walking challenge

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) organized the V-Fit virtual walking challenge, the largest of its kind, in collaboration with its strategic partner, the V-Thru application. The challenge is part of KFH's Ramadan program, "Increase Good Deeds in Ramadan," and aims to promote social responsibility while emphasizing the importance of sports and public health.

KFH Senior Manager PR and Event Management, Fahad AlSaad said that the event was held for the 5th consecutive year at 9 locations across Kuwait, including Avenues Mall, Al Shaheed Park, Kuwait Towers walkway, Mishref Oasis, Abdullah Al Salem walkway, Al Rawda walkway, Al Yarmouk walkway, Jabriya walkway, and Murooj walkway.

He explained that participants in the competition can earn credits and purchase value within the V-Thru app for every 2,000 steps, promoting exercise and supporting Kuwaiti businesses featured in the app.



V-Fit virtual walking challenge.

"KFH, reinforcing its commitment to environmental sustainability through the "Keep It Green" campaign, incentivized participation in a virtual walking challenge with special prizes. Participants increase Kuwait's greening efforts by collecting virtual flags, bearing the campaign logo, as they virtually walked through designated areas,"he added.

AlSaad pointed out that since the V-Fit challenge's launch, participants have contributed to planting thousands of trees, a contribution that will have a significant positive impact on the region's climate. Furthermore, the initiative serves to raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation and sustainability.

AlSaad explained that to encourage exercise and promote public health awareness across all segments of society, the challenge featured prizes and engagement with participants through KFH's social media accounts (@KF-HGroup).

He concluded that KFH continues to organize and support sports campaigns to encourage sports, promote healthy living, and emphasize the importance of exercise and a healthy lifestyle, under the slogan "Better Health ... Better Life".

Lulu supports students of Al Resala Bilingual School on World Down Syndrome Day

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: As part of its ongoing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, Lulu Hypermarket extended its support to the students of Al Resala Bilingual School's Special Education Department in celebration of World Down Syndrome Day on March 21, 2025.

On March 20, 2025, the senior management team of Lulu Hypermarket visited the school to interact with the students, engaging in meaningful conversations and activities that foster inclusivity and empowerment. Recognizing the importance of providing a nurturing and supportive environment, Lulu Hypermarket ensured that the students felt valued and appreciated.

As a gesture of commitment to community welfare, Lulu Hypermarket provided an assortment of treats and refreshments for over 250 students, creating a joyful and engaging atmosphere for the celebration. The initiative aimed to not only recognize the abilities of these wonderful students but also to spread awareness about Down Syndrome and promote an inclusive society.

"Lulu Hypermarket believes in making a difference in the lives of children with special needs and promoting inclusivity in our communities. Our visit to Al Resala Bilingual School's Special Education Department was a heartfelt experience, and we are proud to support these bright young minds," Lulu Hypermarket management stated.

Lulu Hypermarket's top management also expressed their gratitude to the school's administration for their unwavering dedication and efforts in providing a supportive learning environment for students with special needs.

Lulu Hypermarket remains committed to supporting social causes and fostering meaningful relationships within the community. Through such initiatives, the company continues to reinforce its dedication to social responsibility, inclusivity, and making a positive impact on society.



Lulu Hypermarket promotes inclusivity on World Down Syndrome Day.

Features

Ashford and Quaid lead unique crime drama

'Happy Face' looks at ripple effects of true crime

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): The new Paramount+ series "Happy Face" has all the elements of a gripping true-crime yarn: A serial killer, his estranged daughter, a race to get an innocent man off death row. But perhaps the most intriguing part? How it examines the warping nature of true crime itself.

"I was less interested in the specific psychology of a serial killer or glorifying the murders or seeing violence against women on screen," says Jennifer Cacicio, executive producer and showrunner. "I just feel like we've seen that. I was very interested in making a true-crime show told through a different lens.

"Happy Face," which begins airing Thursday, is inspired by the true story of Melissa Moore, whose father was a prolific serial killer infamous for drawing smiley faces on letters to the media and prosecutors. She was just 15 when he was captured.

Decades later, as an adult with her own children,

she finds herself drawn back into his orbit as she sets out to save an innocent man for a crime her father committed. She also has to tell her daughter the truth about her grandfather.

Starring Annaleigh Ashford and Dennis Quaid, "Happy Face" is told from a female point of view and looks at how a shameful secret can echo through generations. It's also about the push and pull of infamy, with horrendous crimes somehow remaining an alluring draw.

"There's a lot of crime dramas out there that I think are very male-centric. It's either about the cops are the cool guys or the criminals are the cool guys, and it's all about kicking in doors. I've written on those shows and they're fun and they serve a purpose. And I think that I really wanted to try something different," Cacicio says. "What is it like for the rest of the family when

there's this shameful secret and this series of crimes

Film

and these acts of violence and what are the ripple effects on everybody involved?"

Ashford, who earned a Tony Award nomination playing a serial killer on Broadway in "Sweeney Todd. plays Moore with tenderness and anger, saying she was interested in exploring generational trauma.

"It's one of the worst nightmares," she says. "The worst nightmare of all is having a family member be a victim. And then the second worst nightmare is having a family member be the perpetrator. So what would you do if you're a parent or your sibling or your spouse or your child committed an atrocity?

Moore previously shared her story in the bestselling memoir, "Shattered Silence" and the 2018 "Happy Face" podcast, reaching out to her father's victims and advocating for other family members of killers. Cacicio was one of a number of writers interested in telling her story for TV.



This image released by Paramount+ shows Annaleigh Ashford in a scene from the series 'Happy Face.' (AP)

People

Copyright infringement

Man charged for selling stolen Eminem's songs

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): A former Eminem studio engineer was charged Wednesday with stealing the Detroit rapper's unreleased music and selling i online, federal prosecutors announced.

Investigators say more than 25 songs have been played or distributed online without the consent of Eminem or Interscope Capital Labels Group, which owns Eminem's music. The music was stored on password-protected hard drives



in Ferndale, a Detroit suburb, according to an FBI affidavit. Joseph Strange, 46, of Holly, Michigan, was charged via a criminal complaint with copyright infringement and interstate transportation of stolen goods,

on if convicted of both counts.

kept in a safe at Eminem's studio

Acting US Attorney Julie Beck in Detroit said. Strange, who lost his job at Eminem's studio in 2021, could face up to 15 years in pris-

Eminem

Strange's attorney, Wade Fink, said in a text to The Associated Press that Strange is a married father of two "with decades of dedication to the music industry." He called the charges "untested allegations" that haven't been vetted by a grand jury or a judge

"We will handle the matter in a courtroom and we have great faith in the judges of our district," he said.

Studio employees reported the theft to the FBI in January, saying unreleased music that was still in development was being played on various websites, including Reddit and YouTube.

A review showed someone transferred files from a hard drive in a safe to an external hard drive in October 2019 and January 2020, when Strange was a sound engineer at the studio.

Investigators found buyers after Eminem business associate Fred Nassar posted an online warning to fans not to distribute the music.

A Canadian resident who used the screen name Doja Rat told investigators he had purchased 25 unreleased songs from Strange for about \$50,000 in Bitcoin. He said he raised the money from a group of fans of Eminem, whose real name is Marshall Mathers III.

This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Robert De Niro as Vito Genovese, (left), and Robert De Niro as Frank Costello in a scene from 'The Alto Knights.' (AP)

Two De Niros deliver fun but not enough drama

'Alto Knights' lacks 'Goodfellas' mob magic

LOS ANGELES, March 20, (AP): "You're the actor!" shouts Anna Genovese at her estranged spouse, gangster Vito Genovese, in a courtroom where he's implausibly claiming he lacks funds to support her. "The best actor in the world! Better than Clark Gable!"

And we all chuckle. They probably all chuckled on set, too. Because the man playing Vito in "The Alto Knights" is none other than Robert De Niro, indeed one of the best actors in the world, revered in our time as Gable was in his.

lent subject matter.

Also, "Goodfellas" fans may wonder if the Vito role was once intended for Joe Pesci (the movie's been in development forever), so similar is the character to that actor's impulsive, manically suspicious persona. On the other hand, in two brief scenes where the De Niros appear together for momentous meetings, one might be forgiven for wondering if Al Pacino was

in comically sudden fashion.

We begin in 1957 in Manhattan. Costello, after a night partying respectably with high society, stops at his swank apartment building. "This one's for you," declares the nervous man who shoots him in the head in his lobby.

The shooter (Cosmo Jarvis), sent by Genovese, makes a bad mistake, as his boss will remind him later: "You gotta go SEE if they're dead!" Amazingly, Costello survives. "I shoulda been paying more attention," says the genteel mobster who favors diplomacy over bloodletting, narrating from the future.

(Debra Messing, making a nice foray into drama), is a loyal partner who urges her husband to retire and leave New York along with their adorable dogs (De Niro's own pooches, dressed in mink coats and hats - a costume design Oscar for this canine fashion, please!). Genovese's wife Anna (Kathrine Narducci, excellent) is a businesswoman - she owns a gay bar - whose fiery union with Vito turns dis-

ABAB C TIMES FRIDAY-SATURDAY, MARCH 21-22, 2025

sell some of strange also was tryli handwritten lyric sheets, Doja Rat said.

Another group of fans organized by someone in Connecticut using the screen name ATL also pur-chased a "couple" of songs from Strange for about \$1,000, according to the affidavit.

A 'coward'

DiCaprio's art adviser jailed for \$6.5m fraud

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): A New York art adviser who once counted actor Leonardo DiCaprio among her wealthy patrons was sentenced Wednesday to 30 months in federal prison after admitting to cheating clients out of \$6.5 million in connection with the sale of 55 works of art.

Lisa Schiff sobbed as she turned to her former friends and clients seated behind her in Manhattan federal court and apologized to them by name.

"I stand here as a criminal who hurt clients, col-leagues, and friends," the 54-year-old Manhattan resident said, calling herself a "coward" for hiding her deceit and "living lavishly" off money stolen from people who had "loved and trusted" her.

"I am a guilty person and I am prepared to face my punishment," Schiff said tearfully. "I am scared, but I am ready

Schiff is to report to prison July 1.

One of Schiff's victims, Michael Barasch, told the court that his family had embraced her as one of their own, inviting her to family gatherings and holiday parties.

"Your disgraceful conduct goes well beyond stolen money," he said. "You broke my wife's heart. You were her best friend, or so she thought.'

Barasch estimated that Schiff's victims stand to lose as much as \$10 million when considering the costs of lawyers and other experts they've hired to try to recoup

some of their losses through litigation. "We'll be lucky to get five cents on the dollar. No victim will ever be made whole," he said. "Shame on you.

Judge J. Paul Oetken, in handing down the sentence, called Schiff's crimes "quite brazen," noting her fraud persisted for roughly five years and involved more than a dozen clients.

At the same time, he noted that Schiff comes from a "loving family," appeared to be smart and thoughtful and was raising a 12-year-old son as a single mother.



Lisa Schiff, (right), an art adviser who once counted actor Leonardo DiCaprio among her wealthy clients, walks out of Manhattan federal court after pleading guilty to wire fraud, Wednesday, March 19, in New York. (AP)

It's a cute moment and an apt one, too, because Barry Levinson's film, which aims but fails to channel the magic of decades-old mob movies like "Goodfellas" - though penned by the same writer, Nicholas Pileggi - is all about De Niro. Actually, it's all about De Niro AND De Niro. The man plays both lead roles, feuding mobsters Genovese and Frank Costello, in a story based on real events. Is it a gimmick? Surely. Does it work?

Well, there's the entertainment value this is De Niro, after all - and if you feel that more De Niro minutes are always better, then it follows that two roles are better than one. Others may feel it has a mobthemed "Parent Trap" vibe, less weighty than it should be given the obviously vio-

in line at some point, for a "Heat"-like moment

Happily, De Niro relies here on makeup, and not de-aging as in "The Irishman," though it must be said that, at times, his two characters just don't look different enough. More importantly, "The Alto Knights," despite its pedigree, doesn't rise anywhere near the heights of its glorious predecessors. It is, rather, an enjoyable if choppily paced look at a relationship between two men, where unfortunately we're arriving pretty late in the game.

There are, though, a few crackling surprises: that domestic courtroom scene; a tense, televised Senate committee grilling; and finally a climactic gathering of mob bosses in the countryside, with fabulous period vehicles parked on the lawn and sausages on the grill, that's disrupted

We then go back in time to figure out how things got this bad.

With the help of vintage photos and footage artfully edited to include actors playing the younger Frank and Vito, we learn the two were good friends as young Italian immigrants on the streets. But when Vito got mixed up in a murder case, he had to flee to Italy - leaving coolerheaded Frank in charge of the business.

Years later, Vito returns, and wants his role at the top of the mob family. And so things go south, quickly.

The women in their lives mirror the differences between the two men. Costello's wife of more than 50 years, Bobbie astrous.

A mere glance at Wikipedia will tell you that both Genovese and Costello ultimately died in nonviolent ways. There's plenty in "The Alto Knights" that you won't see there - for example, the movie's version of just who engineered that farmland mob summit, and why.

But watching dozens of mobsters run like heck when police happen upon their gathering is a hoot, and it's hard to beat the moment when two of them insist to suspicious cops: "We're hunters!'

If only such witty moments were more frequent in a two-hour movie that somehow, alas, feels much longer.

"The Alto Knights," a Warner Bros. Pictures release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for violence and pervasive language." Running time: 120 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Variety

NEW YORK: Amazon is ending a littleused privacy feature that let some users of its Echo smart speaker prevent their voice commands from going to the company's cloud.

Beginning on March 28, Amazon is ending the "Do Not Send Voice Recordings" option that kept audio from being sent to Amazon's cloud and had it process locally on the device instead.

In an email sent to customers who'd been using the option, Amazon said it made the decision to "no longer support this feature" as it expands Alexa's capabilities with generative artificial intelligence features that rely on being pro-

cessed in the cloud. While the change may sound alarming to some privacy-minded users, it was not widely used or available. It only worked on

three devices: the 4th generation Echo Dot, the Echo Show 10 and the Echo Show 15 - and only for customers in the US with devices set to English. Amazon said less than 0.03% of customers use it. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: The Latin Grammys are getting closer to cinema and television with the new best music for visual media category.

category announced new The Wednesday will recognize original music for movies, TV shows, video games and other visual media. For a project to participate in this category, it must feature Latin rhythms or be composed by someone of Ibero American descent.

"It is a category that we had been analyzing for almost three years," Luis Dousdebes, the Latin Recording Academy's chief awards, membership & preservation officer, told The Associated Press. "We were told 'there is a lot of production here that is being orphaned a little in the process."

After analyzing statistical information, meeting the Latin creators of music for visual media and finding the necessary experts for the committee that will vote in the category, the academy decided to create the category.

"We know that in the near future it will mutate into other categories and, logically, it will be differentiated between soundtracks, music for video games, best song, all sort of things," Dousdebes said.

The Latin Grammys will also add a best roots song category. This award will go to the songwriters of new, unpublished recordings that reflect the traditions and roots of various communities, cultures, or social groups, especially those of Hispanic American origin, whether in Spanish, Portuguese or Indigenous languages or dialects.. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Sia filed for divorce Wednesday from second husband Daniel Bernard after two years of marriage.

The Grammy-nominated Australian singer-songwriter whose legal name is Sia Furler filed the petition in Los Angeles

Superior Court. listed It Tuesday as their separation date. As happens in the vast majority of California divorces, she cited irreconcilable differences as the reason. She asked the court to award no spousal support

payments to

Bernard. She's also seeking legal and physical custody of their 11-month-old child, Somersault Wonder Bernard.

It's not clear when the secretive singer began dating Bernard, or how they met. They were legally married in December of 2022 and had a small marriage ceremony in Portofino, Italy, the following May. From 2014 to 2017, Sia was married to

filmmaker Erik Anders Lang. (AP)

New visionary leader

Disney searches for its next big sequel: Iger's successor

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): Behind the red carpet movie premieres and new thrillinducing rides for fans of its amusement parks, there is a quiet search underway to find the successor to Bob Iger, the face of Disney for most of the past two decades.

Disney went through the CEO search recently, and it was nearly a disaster.

Only two years after stepping down as CEO, Iger returned to Disney in 2022 after a period of clashes, missteps and a weakening financial performance under his handpicked successor, Bob Chapek.

But how do you replace a chief executive who is considered by many to be the gold standard?

Iger strengthened the Disney brand through his acquisitions of Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm, oversaw the expansion of the company in China and India and had a laser-like focus on technology that both made the Disney product better, and more accessible. Iger, at the same time, is approachable, media savvy and has deftly managed a company that is like no other.

Under Disney's umbrella are theme parks, movies studios and streaming technology, all with priorities seemingly at odds with each other, or at least vying for the attention of the company's chief executive.

The question of who can follow Iger will clearly be on the minds of investors as Disney kicks off its annual shareholders meeting on Thursday.

Disney created a succession planning committee in 2023, but the search began in earnest last year when the company enlisted Morgan Stanley Executive Chairman James Gorman to lead the effort.

Gorman said in a January letter to shareholders that the committee had made 'strong progress" over the past year.

"The full board is engaged in and committed to finding the right leader for the company and we



enable Disney's continued success," he wrote. Disney does has the benefit of time. After signing a twoyear contract mostly to right Disney's tra-

jectory after a rocky

Bob Iger

two years under his hand-picked successor, Iger agreed to a contract extension that keeps him at Disney through the end of 2026.

Disney declined to comment on its succession planning efforts.

It is a broad search. Disney is looking inside and outside of the company. Internal candidates are being mentored by Iger, interacting with the company's 15 board members (including Iger) and receiving external coaching.

The internal candidates are widely believed to include the chairman of Disneyowned ESPN, Jimmy Pitaro, Chairperson of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Josh D'Amaro, Disney Entertainment Co-Chairman Alan Bergman and Disney Entertainment Co-Chairman Dana Walden.



NEWS/FEATURES

A festival of healing after deadly floods

Valencia seeks catharsis in traditional burning of sculptures

VALENCIA, Spain, March 20, (Agencies): The enormous blue cone slowly crushes tiny piles of sand that represent houses.

It symbolizes the deadly havoc wrought by floods that ravaged Spain's eastern Valencia five months ago.

The artwork is one of hundreds of wood and papier-maché sculptures that are painstakingly crafted - and then burned - when Las Fallas, the most important yearly celebration in Valencia, reaches its climax on Wednesday night.

This year's festival has taken on special meaning.

There is hope that the burning ceremony, or Crema, will provide some catharsis for the city and surrounding villages after over 220 people died in October's flooding

UNESCO, which added Las Fallas to its catalog of intangible cultural heritage in 2016, describes the incineration of the sculptures as "a form of purification" and "social renewal.

Culture



A cardboard sculpture known as a 'Ninot' depicting Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is engulfed in flames during the Fallas festival in Valencia, Spain, on Wednesday, March 19, 2025.

The festival originated in the 18th century, according to UNESCO, and now brings together some 200,000

people for the event that runs from March 14-19, culminating in the day of St. Joseph.

Spain's King Felipe VI visited the party on Wednesday to show his continued support for flood victims.

The king had been pelted by mud when he visited a hard-hit area along with politicians in the immediate aftermath of the floods.

The sculptures made by local artisans can tower over 20 meters (65 feet). This year, some were built using wreckage from peoples' homes.

Others lampoon politicians accused of mishandling the catastrophe. And U.S. President Donald Trump was depicted unfavorably in a few sculptures - one alongside Elon Musk - after his wavering on Europe's defense.

But "Nada," or "Nothing," the wooden cone by artist Miguel Hache, stands out for directly taking on the pain of the floods.

Passersby can use cardboard molds to make little houses of sand, then roll the cone to flatten them, evoking the brutality of the rushing waters.

In its path, the cone leaves an im-

print of a street map of the southern neighborhoods where the deluge was the heaviest.

"If I had to sum my work in one phrase, I would call it 'the weight of the water on the earth," Hache told The Associated Press.

"A devastated landscape is left behind."

Hache, 40, has been crafting sculptures for Las Fallas for 25 years

He originally planned to save the idea for "Nada" for the 2027 Fallas to mark the 70th anniversary of a previous flood that hit Valencia's city center in 1957.

But he decided this year was perfect for the design, especially after he spent days joining thousands of volunteers cleaning up the mud months ago.

Hache said he had been pleased by receiving so many messages of appreciation for the work.

On Wednesday night, "Nada" will be consumed by flames.

"I am excited to see how it will

come apart and reveal itself," Hache said.

"Normally I don't get emotional, but maybe tonight I will.'

The Fallas is an annual celebration in Valencia, Spain, honoring Saint Joseph. This vibrant festival spans five days, from March 15 to 19, with daily pyrotechnic displays known as the Mascletà, which run from March 1 to 19.

The term "Fallas" refers not only to the festivities but also to the large monuments, known as Falla (singular) or Fallas (plural), that are burned at the event's climax.

These monuments, often constructed with intricate and humorous designs, symbolize a form of social commentary and artistic expression

While the main event takes place in Valencia, other towns in the Valencian region, like Alicante and Castellón de la Plana, have their own variations of the celebration, such as the Bonfires of Saint John and the Fiestas de la Magdalena.

'Unique harmony'



The exhibition features books in both Arabic and Turkish on religion, literature, science, and other specialties.



Books for children, educational and informative, related to religion, as well as others for language learning.

Istanbul hosts Ramadan Book Fair



KUNA photos The exhibition is an annual event hosted by the city of Istanbul.

Doobie Brothers rock on with new album and tour

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): Just cue up the first song from the new album by The Doobie Brothers and you'll hear something unusual: harmony, in a new way.

It's not just that soulful blast from Michael McDonald, marking his first time recording with the band in 45 years. Listen and you'll also hear founding member Pat Simmons and original vocalist Tom Johnston. "Walk This Road" - with the always-

welcome addition of Mavis Staples - is a horn-and-slide-guitar slice of bluesy, wailing rock that's also a celebration of a band that has endured changes and re-formed with members now in their 70s.

"Somehow, here we are," says Mc-Donald. "We've been friends throughout the years. Our kids have all grown up together and our kids have kind of kept us in contact even at times when we might have dropped off the radar for each other.

The Doobie Brothers, who formed in 1970 and initially broke up in 1982, have a packed 2025 planned: A European tour that leads to a North American one, the strong new album and inclusion in the Songwriters Hall of Fame

Features

"I don't think any of us ever even really thought we'd still be on stage at this age doing this, much less together," says McDonald. "That we're still able to express ourselves artistically is something that's not lost on us.

ferent bag," says McDonald, who officially reunited with the band on tour in 2019. "We like to do that. You know, I think this album is hopefully no different in that respect."

John Shanks, who produced the band's 2021 album "Liberté," returned for "Walk This Road," lending them his Los Angeles studio, with a writing room upstairs and a recording booth downstairs where each songwriter took turns cutting tracks.

'The band, I think, presents all of us with an opportunity to do things that we might not do just as individual songwriters," says McDonald.

Situation

While the Doobies have never been a concept band, the album explores seizing the moments, reflects on paths taken and coming to grips with the past.

"This is a snapshot in time of where the band is and where the writers are,' says Johnston. "We didn't consciously sit down and say, 'Well, we're going to try and do this.

One track, "Learn to Let Go," is an unrequited love song that's about letting go of things that hold you back, while Speed of Pain" is about how the worst things in life can become the best.

"In many cases, it's just a situation where you have to lose it all. I can't tell you how many people I've met over the years who have told me that going to jail was the best thing that ever happened to them," says McDonald. "I think total defeat in this world is the

The city of Istanbul hosts the 42nd edition of the Áamadan Book Fair, involving a large number of publishing houses that present a variety of books.

The exhibition is displaying books about religion, literature, sciences and other subjects, in addition to books for children and teaching languages including Arabic.

The fair ground is drawing eminent religious and cultural personalities who participate in seminars narrating their accomplishments and works. (KUNA)

Books

Collins' 'Sunrise on the Reaping' is finally out

New 'Hunger Games' novel delights fans

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): Savannah Miller, 26 years old and a "Hunger Games" reader for half of her life, has only grown in admiration for Suzanne Collins' dystopian novels.

"As a kid you focus so much on the plot and the action," says Miller, a researcher at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and among hundreds of fans at the Barnes & Noble in Manhattan's Union Square who attended the midnight launch party for "Sunrise on the Reaping," published Tuesday. "As an adult I connected to

the characters a lot more and had more of an emotional response. I also appreciated the writing a lot."

"Hunger Games" fans gathered in bookstores around the world for celebrations of Collins fifth novel in her blockbuster series about a post-apocalyptic society in which combatants are forced to fight on camera for their survival.

Attendees in New York - some dressed as Haymitch Abernathy, Effie Trinket and other characters - went on scavenger hunts, attempted to solve "Hunger Games"-themed puzzles and tried out a "Hunger Games" trivia game so challenging that even Collins' editor, David Levithan, said he couldn't answer them all.

Many arrivals Monday night were women in their 20s and 30s who had loved the books in middle school and renewed their attachment when Collins unexpectedly resumed the novels five years ago.

"I've been reading the books since I was 12," says 23-yearold actor Ella Dolynchuk. "It's a big part of my life, my childhood, and I love reading them as an adult when I can really understand them.'

"Sunrise on the Reaping" had already reached No. 1 on Amazon before its publication and is widely expected to be one of the year's biggest fiction sellers.

Although the book was embargoed before its official sales date, gleeful fans were posting videos on social media in recent days that showed off advanced copies apparently shipped too early or prematurely placed on shelves, including at Los Angeles Airport, a Sam's Club in California and an Indigo bookstore in Canada.

According to Scholastic Inc., the four previous books have sold tens of millions of copies and have been published in 55 languages.

Adaptation

Film adaptations helped launch the career of Jennifer Lawrence, who starred as the heroine Katniss Everdeen in the movies based on the first three books, and have grossed more than \$3 billion worldwide.

A screen version of "Sunrise on the Reaping" is scheduled for November 2026, with Francis Lawrence returning as director.

Collins had planned to end the series after the third book, "Mockingjay," which came out in 2010. But she startled readers and the publishing world by announcing a decade later that she was working on a fourth volume, the prequel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes.

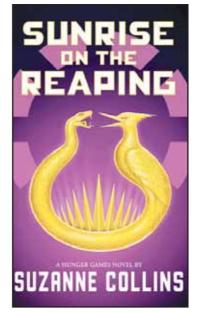
Levithan was among those who had not suspected that Collins was returning to the ravaged land of Panem.

"She decides and then she springs it on me," Levithan said Monday night at the Barnes & Noble launch. "We had never talked about prequels. The trilogy was the trilogy, and then she realized she had more to say."

Mythology

The new book begins at sunrise, with the reaping of the Fiftieth Hunger Games. It's set 24 years before the original "Hunger Games" novel, which came out in 2008, and 40 years after "Songbirds and Snakes."

Collins has drawn upon Greek mythology and the Roman gladiator games for her earlier books. For "Sunrise on the Reaping," her muses included the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume.



This image released by Scholastic shows 'Sunrise on the Reaping' by Suzanne Collins. (AP)

"With 'Sunrise on the Reaping,' I was inspired by David Hume's idea of implicit submission and, in his words, 'the easiness with which the many are governed by the few," Collins. who did not attend the Barnes & Noble event and rarely gives interviews, said in a statement released when the new book was announced.

"The story also lent itself to a deeper dive into the use of propaganda and the power of those who control the narrative. The question 'Real or not real?' seems more pressing to me every day."

"Sunrise" centers on a teenage Haymitch, who will age into Katniss' sardonic, alcoholic mentor, and includes references to various other characters and subplots in previous books.

New York Times reviewer Jennifer Harlan on Tuesday called the novel a "propulsive, heart-wrenching addition" to the series that adds "welcome texture to the cruel world of Panem." People magazine's Lizz Schumer noted some passages could be seen as references to current events, including "If you can get people to laugh at someone, it makes them look weak."

On Monday, lines began to form four hours before the store's doors opened: 34-year-old Elizabeth Kelly was among the first to arrive. She thinks of the series as her "comfort books," while also calling them "survival stories that feel more and more relevant."

"It takes a lot of imagination to expand a world and say something new every time," she said. "I feel like she's writing the books to tell us something and not just writing books to make money.

The North American tour kicks off

in Detroit on Aug. 4 and heads to such cities as New York, Boston, Chicago, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Minneapolis and Toronto. The opening act will be The Coral Reefer Band.

'Walk This Road'' features 10 new songs sung by McDonald, Simmons and Johnston, who collaborated on writing the tracks and play on each other's tunes. Longtime collaborator John McFee also returned for the project.

The album, out June 6, has something for everyone - honky-tonk, driving country, flirty Southern pop, moody folk and melodic rock. There are songs about New Orleans and Hawaii. Angels make the lyrics on two

"One of the strengths of our live couldn't show was the fact that you couldn't get bored with any one style of music because everything was kind of a difgreat teacher.' The Doobie Brothers are already members of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame - with tracks like "Takin' It To the Streets," "What a Fool Believes" and "Minute By Minute" - but shortly after the album comes out, they'll be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

"I think it's really great for this band," savs Johnston. "I think it's great for us as individual writers, but I think it's also great for the group, and it kind of carries on the name, if you will."

McDonald and Johnston both expressed a little surprise that they're still making music with the folks they worked with in their 20s and are still a draw on the road.

"It's just fun to visit all these places musically. It's fun to put that out in front of the crowd live. And to do an album now - I didn't picture doing this, but I'm all for it," Johnston says.



Tom Johnston, (from left), Michael McDonald, John McFee and Pat Simmons of the Doobie Brothers pose for a portrait at Show Biz Studios in Los Angeles on Aug. 17, 2021. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: A former Meta official's explosive insider account sold 60,000

copies in its first week and reached the top 10 on Amazon.com's best-seller list amid efforts by the social media giant to discredit the book.

Released last week Zuckerberg Flatiron

by Books, a Macmillan imprint, Sarah Wynn-Williams' "Careless People' alleges cruel and otherwise disturb-



According to Flatiron, first week sales include print audio and digital editions. On Wednesday, 'Careless People" ranked No. 3 on Amazon.

In response to a complaint filed by Meta, emergency arbitrator Nicholas A. Gowen last week placed a hold on Wynn-Williams' promoting the book or making further "critical claims" about her former employer. (AP)

HEALTH/SCIENCE

Can social media be both safe and supportive for teens?

Social media design is key to protecting kids online

By Abdulmalik Alluhidan

Vanderbilt University

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

Social media is a complex environment that presents both opportunities and threats for adolescents, with self-expression and emotional support on the one hand and body-shaming, cyberbullying and addictive behaviors on the other. This complexity underscores the challenge to regulating teen social media use, but it also points to another avenue for protecting young people online: how social media platforms are designed.

The growing debate around teen social media use has intensified, with recent bipartisan policy efforts in the US, such as the Kids Online Safety Act, seeking to protect young people from digital harms. These efforts reflect legitimate concerns. However, broad restrictions on social media could also limit benefits for teens, throwing the baby out with the bath water.

I am a researcher who studies online safety and digital well-being. My recent work with colleagues in computer scientist Pamela Wisniewski's Socio-Technical Interaction Research Lab underscores a critical point: social media is neither inherently harmful nor entirely beneficial. It is a tool shaped by its design, how teens use it, and the context of their experiences.

In other words, social media's impact is shaped by its affordances - how platforms are designed and what they enable users to do or constrain them from doing. Some features foster connection while others amplify harms.

As society moves toward practical solutions for online safety, it is important to use evidence-based research on how these features shape teens' social media experiences and how they could be redesigned to be age appropriate for young people. It's also important to incorporate teens' perspectives to pinpoint what policies and design choices should be made to protect young people using social media.

My colleagues and I analyzed over 2,000 posts from teens ages 15-17 on an online peer-support platform. Teens openly discussed their experiences with popular social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok. Their voices highlight a potential path forward: focusing on safety by design - an approach that improves platform features to amplify benefits and mitigate harms. This approach respects young people's agency while prioritizing their digital wellbeing.

While social media's worst outcomes such as cyberbullying or mental health crises are often in the spotlight, our research shows that teens' experiences are far more nuanced. Instead, platforms enable diverse outcomes depending on their features and design.

Experiences

Teens commonly described negative experiences involving social drama, cyberbullying and privacy violations. For example, Instagram was a focal point for body-shaming and self-esteem issues, driven by its emphasis on curated visual content. Facebook triggered complaints about privacy violations, such as parents sharing private information without teens' consent. Snapchat, meanwhile, exposed teens to risky interactions due to its ephemeral messaging, which fosters intimate but potentially unsafe connections.

At the same time, teens expressed that social media provides a space for support, inspiration and self-expression, particularly when offline spaces feel isolating. Teens used social media to cope with stress or seek out uplifting content. Platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp were key spaces for seeking connec-

Platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp were key spaces for seeking connection, enabling teens to build relationships and find emotional support. Snapchat, in particular, was the go-to platform for fostering close personal connections, while YouTube empowered teens to promote their creativity and identity by sharing videos. Many praised Instagram and Snapchat for providing inspiration, distraction or emotional relief during stressful times. Teens also used social media to seek information, turning to YouTube and Twitter to learn new things, verify information or troubleshoot technical problems.

These findings underscore a critical insight: Platform design matters. Features such as algorithms, privacy controls and content-sharing mechanisms directly shape how teens experience social media. These findings further question the perception of social media as a purely negative force. Instead, teens' experiences highlight its dual nature: a space for both risk and opportunity.

The concept of affordances - design and features - helps explain why teens' experiences differ across platforms and provides a path toward safer design. For example, Instagram's affordances such as image sharing and algorithmic content promotion amplify social comparison, leading to body-shaming and self-esteem issues. Snapchat's affordances, such as ephemeral messaging and visibility of "best friends," encourage personal connections but can foster risky interactions. Meanwhile, YouTube's affordances, such as easy content creation and discovery, promote self-expression but can contribute to time-management struggles due to its endless scroll design.

By understanding these platform-specific designs and features, it is possible to mitigate risks without losing the benefits. For example, Facebook could allow for appropriate levels of parental oversight of teen accounts while preserving privacy. Instagram could reduce algorithmic promotion of harmful content. And Snapchat could improve safety features.

This safety by design approach moves beyond restricting access to focus on improving the platforms themselves. By thoughtfully redesigning social media features, tech companies can empower teens to use these tools safely and meaningfully. Policymakers can focus on holding social media companies responsible for their platforms' impact, while simultaneously promoting the digital rights of teens to benefit from social media use. (AP)



This image provided by NSF's NOIRLab shows the trails of stars above Kitt Peak National Observatory, where a telescope is mapping the universe to study a mysterious force called dark energy. (AP)

Will the universe end?

New research suggests dark energy could be weakening

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): Scientists are homing in on the nature of a mysterious force called dark energy, and nothing short of the fate of the universe hangs in the balance.

The force is enormous - it makes up nearly 70% of the universe. And it is powerful - it is pushing all the stars and galaxies away from each other at an ever faster rate.

And now scientists are getting a little closer to understanding how it behaves. The big question is whether this dark energy is a constant force, which scientists have long thought, or whethgalaxies and quasars last year and has now added more data, bringing the count to nearly 15 million. Their updated results, taken with other measurements - exploding stars, leftover light from the young universe and distortions in galaxy shape - support the idea presented last year that dark energy may be waning.

"It's moving from a really surprising finding to almost a moment where we have to throw out how we've thought about cosmology and start over," said Bhuvnesh Jain, a cosmologist with the University of Pennsylvania who was not involved with the research It's not time to completely rule out the idea that dark energy is constant because the new results are still shy of the gold standard level of statistical proof physics requires. The collaboration aims to map around 50 million galaxies and quasars by the end of its survey in 2026. And other efforts around the globe have an eye on dark energy and aim to release their own data in the coming years, including the European Space Agency's Euclid mission and the Vera C. Rubin Observatory in Chile. "We want to see several different collaborations having similar measurements" at that gold standard to be sure that dark energy is weakening, said cosmologist Kris Pardo with the University of Southern California who was not involved with the new research.

Researchers find a hint at how to delay Alzheimer's symptoms

Drug trial caught up in funding delays

NEW YORK, March 20, (AP): An experimental treatment appears to delay Alzheimer's symptoms in some people genetically destined to get the disease in their 40s or 50s, according to new findings from ongoing research now caught up in Trump administration funding delays.

The early results - a scientific first - were published Wednesday even as study participants worried that politics could cut their access to a possible lifeline.

"It's still a study but it has given me an extension to my life that I never banked on having," said Jake Heinrichs of New York City. Now 50, Heinrichs has been treated

Now 50, Heinrichs has been treated in that study for more than a decade and remains symptom-free despite inheriting an Alzheimer's-causing gene that killed his father and brother around the same age.

Blocked

If blocked funding stops Heinrichs' doses, "how much time do we have?" asked his wife, Rachel Chavkin. "This trial is life."

Two drugs sold in the US can modestly slow worsening of early-stage Alzheimer's by clearing the brain of one of its hallmarks, a sticky gunk called amyloid. But until now, there haven't been hints that removing amyloid far earlier - many years before the first symptoms appear - just might



Jake Heinrichs prepares for his infusion treatment with an experimental anti-amyloid Alzheimer's drug while at home in New York, on Wednesday, March 12. (AP)

research.

Now participants have been

switched from an earlier experimental drug to Leqembi, an IV treatment approved in the U.S., to try to answer the obvious next question. "What we want to determine over the next five years is how strong is the protection," said Washington University's Dr. Randall Bateman, who directs the Dominantly Inherited Alzheimer's Network of studies involving families mer's, as much as we ought to have, is because the NIH has not supported a sufficiently wide range of hypotheses," Bhattacharya told senators, responding to one who brought up an example of earlier science misconduct unrelated to current research.

Scientists don't know exactly what causes Alzheimer's, a mind-destroying disease that affects nearly 7 million Americans, mostly late in life. What's clear is that silent changes occur in the brain at least two decades before the first **Mobility restored**

New hope for the paralyzed

SHANGHAI, March 20, (Xinhua): For many, walking is a simple and everyday act, yet for those living with spinal cord injuries, it remains a distant and often unattainable dream.

However, four patients in China have taken life-changing steps toward reclaiming this ability after they received surgery featuring an innovative "brain-spinal interface" technology in Shanghai. The breakthrough hinges on a "triple-integrated" brain-spinal interface system created by Jia Fumin's team at Fudan University's Institute of Science and Technology for Brain-Inspired Intelligence.

Their brain-spinal interface system works by capturing motor signals from the brain's movement center, decoding them via advanced algorithms, and delivering tailored electrical pulses to spinal nerves below the injury site, thus effectively rerouting movement commands around injured areas.

Unlike external assistive devices, this system creates an internal "neural bypass," allowing patients to control their limbs naturally.

their limbs naturally. For patients like Lin, a man in his 30s who found himself reliant on a wheelchair following a life-altering fall two years ago, the results have been nothing short of transformative.

Lin's journey began in October 2024 when he volunteered for a clinical trial after spotting a recruitment notice on Fudan's official social media page. His surgery, performed on Jan. 8 at Fudan-affiliated Zhongshan Hospital, involved minimally invasive im-

er the force is weakening, a surprising wrinkle tentatively proposed last year.

Results presented at a meeting of the American Physical Society Wednesday bolster the case that the force is weakening, though scientists are not yet certain and they still haven't worked out what this means for the rest of their understanding of the universe.

The updated findings come from an international research collaboration that is creating a three-dimensional map to see how galaxies have spread and clustered over 11 billion years of the universe's history. Carefully tracking how galaxies move helps scientists learn about the forces that are moving them around.

Called the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, the collaboration released its first analysis of 6 million postpone the disease.

The research led by Washington University in St. Louis involves families that pass down rare gene mutations almost guaranteeing they'll develop symptoms at the same age their affected relatives did - information that helps scientists tell if treatments are having any effect.

The new findings center on a subset of 22 participants who received amyloid-removing drugs the longest, on average eight years. Long-term amyloid removal cut in half their risk of symptom onset, researchers reported Wednesday in the journal Lancet Neurology.

Despite the study's small size, "it's incredibly important," said Northwestern University neuroscientist David Gate, who wasn't involved with the with these rare genes. "Will they ever get the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease if we keep treating them?"

Confirmatory

Here's the worry: Bateman raised money to start that confirmatory study while seeking National Institutes of Health funding for the full project but his grant has been delayed as required reviews were canceled. It's one example of how millions of dollars in research have been stalled as NIH grapples with funding restrictions and mass firings.

At the same time researchers wonder if NIH will shift focus away from amyloid research after comments by Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, nominated as the agency's new director.

"One of the reasons I think that we have not made progress in Alzhei-

symptoms -- and that sticky amyloid is a major contributor. At some point amyloid buildup appears to trigger a protein named tau to begin killing neurons, which drives cognitive decline.

Tau-fighting drugs now are being tested. Researchers also are studying other factors including inflammation, the brain's immune cells and certain viruses.

NIH's focus expanded as researchers found more potential culprits. In 2013, NIH's National Institute on Aging funded 14 trials of possible Alzheimer's drugs, over a third targeting amyloid. By last fall, there were 68 drug trials and about 18% targeted amyloid. Northwestern's Gate counts himself among scientists who "think amyloid

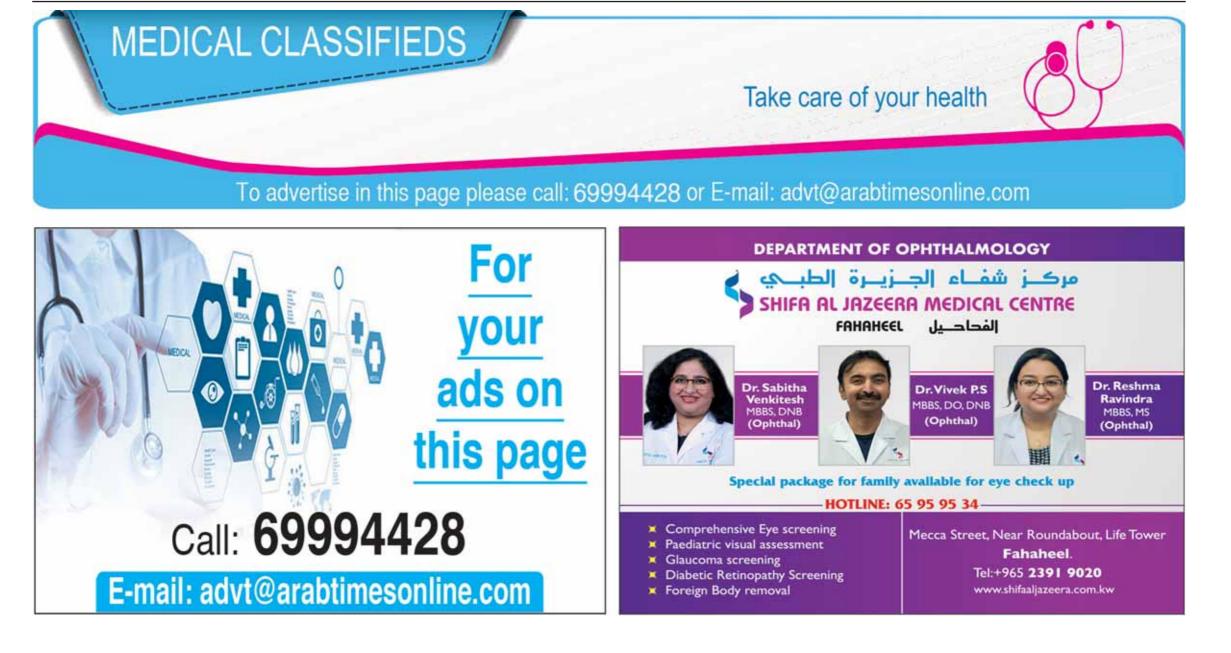
isn't everything," but said nothing has invalidated the amyloid hypothesis.

plants: two 1-mm-diameter electrodes placed in his brain's motor cortex and a stimulator chip in spine.

The progress was startlingly swift. By day three, he could move both legs using brain signals. Within two weeks, he could lift his right leg high enough to step over moving obstacles. By day 15, he managed to walk more than five meters using a standing frame with suspension support.

"I used to cry every day," Lin shared. "Now, I can walk again. I am grateful for the efforts of every member of the research team."

Similar breakthroughs took place for two other patients who regained leg movement within hours of their surgeries in February. Notably, both exhibited voluntary leg lifts just one day after their operations.



Johnson led Longhorns with 23 points

Musketeers rally to beat Texas in the First Four

DAYTON, Ohio, March 20, (AP): Marcus Foster scored 22 points and Zach Freemantle added 15 while overcoming foul trouble as Xavier rallied past Texas 86-80 in the First Four on Wednesday night.

The Musketeers (22-11) erased a 13-point deficit in their biggest comeback win this season and advanced into the main bracket of the NCAA Tournament to play No. 6 seed Illinois on Friday night in a Midwest Region game at Milwaukee.

"That's one of the greatest games I've ever been a part of," Xavier coach Sean Miller said. "I thought we beat an excellent Texas team. They are disciplined. They have depth and talent. We knew it was going to be a great challenge to beat a really good team from the SEC. I'm really proud of our team."

Tre Johnson led the Longhorns (19-16) with 23 points in a matchup of No. 11 seeds. Tramon Mark scored 16.

Freemantle hit a turnaround jumper to break a 78all tie with 1:48 remaining and his two free throws extended Xavier's lead to 82-79 with 1:09 left. Johnson missed a fadeaway jumper, and Dailyn Swain's putback of Freemantle's missed 3-pointer upped the margin to five with 20 seconds to play.

Chendall Weaver made one of two free throws for Texas before Freemantle's dunk sealed it. Xavier closed the game on a 16-6 run over the final six min-

r utes.

Freemantle arrived at Xavier in 2019. He sat out last season because of injury and returned for a fifth season of competition with the hope of playing in his first NCAA Tournament.

"Storybook, maybe not," he said. "Obviously, we would have liked to maybe win by a little more. But any win we can get is a great thing. It was a very hard-fought game. That's a very good team we just played, and I'm just thankful to be a part of it."

Foster shot 8 for 9 from the field, including 4 of 5 on 3s, and finished with eight rebounds.

Freemantle, who averaged 19.8 points during the Musketeers' seven-game winning streak to close the regular season, had two points and two fouls in the first half. He picked up his fourth foul with 7:10 left. Texas led 47-39 at halftime. It was the first time Xavier trailed at the break since a Jan. 29 loss at Creighton.

"I thought we had one of our better first halves of the year," Texas coach Rodney Terry said. "Give them credit. They made big plays, big shots, and finished the game down the stretch."

The Musketeers were down by 13 in the first half and still trailed by 10 with 16 minutes remaining. Jerome Hunter's 3-pointer tied the score at 65 with eight minutes left. A 3-pointer by Oklahoma transfer John Hugley put the Musketeers ahead 75-74 with 5:07 to go.

It was the fourth time since 1990 the teams met in the NCAA Tournament, with each school winning twice.

The Longhorns took advantage of early foul trouble for Xavier and got to the rim at will in the first half, scoring 26 of 47 points in the paint. The Musketeers adjusted defensively and allowed only 10 points in the paint after halftime.

What changed?

"I would just say our defensive intensity, getting more deflections," Foster said. "When we get deflections, it's hard to beat us. So we really just locked in on that. We understood that we really didn't have much of a problem on offense, but a problem on defense. Once we addressed that, things started to go our way."

University of Dayton Arena is located about an hour's drive from Xavier's campus, resulting in a partisan Musketeers crowd. Dayton playing in the NIT on Wednesday night gave Xavier fans an opportunity to scoop up more seats.

"Our fans certainly took advantage of the proximity to Cincinnati," Miller said. "And that emotion when we needed them, it was certainly a factor in the game."



Texas guard Tre Johnson (20) dunks against Xavier forward Zach Freemantle (32) during the first half of a First Four college basketball game in the NCAA Tournament in Dayton, Ohio. (AP)

City ends Chelsea's season-long unbeaten run with win in Women's Champs League



Count on Lamar, too

LA Oly head says 2028 games will be a catalyst for rebuild

COSTA NAVARINO, Greece, March 20, (AP): After deadly fires that devas≠≠tated much of Los Angeles, organizers of the 2028 Olympics told the IOC on Thursday how the city will rebuild with help from the games. Count on Kendrick Lamar, too, to be part of "the greatest show on earth" in three years' time.

"The rebirth, the rebuild, maybe reimagining LA 2.0 - and the Olympics as a catalyst for all those things - we think is really part of our ethos," organizing committee chairman Casey Wasserman told The Associated Press. "You can't have a natural disaster at that scale in a city as big and as important as Los Angeles and not have it be part of your core philosophy going forward," he said in an interview ahead of giving sports leaders an update at the International Olympic Committee's annual meeting.

Kendrick Lamar would a globally popular part of the opening ceremony on July 14, 2028 after his stunning halftime show at the Super Bowl last month.

"Fortunately in my day job I represent Kendrick Lamar," said Wasserman, who heads an international talent and promotions agency. "He is truly an LA icon so I think it would be a pretty fair bet that Kendrick will be involved in the Olympics in Los Angeles in some way." The wildfires in January have reset the daily life and global perception of the city.

"Everyone loves a comeback story," Wasserman told IOC members Thursday. Olympic venues and operational plans escaped serious damage.

"From purely an Olympics perspective we got very lucky. That's not the most important thing," Wasserman told The AP on Wednesday. "What's important is helping people get back into their homes, get back settled, get back with their lives." Another expected challenge for LA organizers is ensuring athletes, officials and fans from every Olympic team feel welcome and safe coming to the United States after what shapes to be a turbulent future for the world.

"Irrespective of politics today, America will be open and accepting to all 209 countries for the Olympics," Wasserman told The AP. "LA is the most diverse city in the history of humanity and we will wel-

"LA is the most diverse city in the history of humanity and we will welcome the people from around the world and give them all a great time," he said. Updating IOC and sports leaders Thursday, Wasserman said his team made "significant strides" with President Donald Trump's administration, which has security obligations for the Olympics and subsequent Paralympics.

"I have met with President Trump and his team both prior to his inauguration and again last month," the LA Olympics leader said. "We have a regular cadence across all federal agencies with leadership from the president to make sure that these games deliver for all our constituents." IOC member Gene Sykes, also president of the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic

Manchester City's Mary Fowler attempts a shot on goal during the Women's Champions League, quarter-final first leg, soccer match between Manchester City and Chelsea FC in Manchester, England. (AP)

Barcelona beats Wolfsburg 4-1

MANCHESTER, England, March 20, (AP): Manchester City ended Chelsea's unbeaten run this season as Vivianne Miedema scored twice to give her team a 2-0 win in the Women's Champions League quarterfinals.

Four days after Chelsea beat City to win the English League Cup, injury-hit City became the first team to beat Chelsea under coach Sonia Bompastor in her team's 29th game of the season.

Miedema came off the bench at halftime and made the difference in the 60th minute, pouncing on the rebound after Chelsea goalkeeper Hannah Hampton tipped Laia Aleixandri's header onto the crossbar. Her second was a clinical finish in the 89th off Kerolin's pass after Chelsea had been pushing to level the score.

It was a triumphant display of the impact Miedema can still have at Champions League level despite repeated setbacks with knee injuries since tearing her ACL in 2022. Her most recent operation was just five months ago.

Chelsea had one goal by Mayra Ramirez ruled out for offside before Johanna Rytting Kaneryd nearly scored soon after with a shot that hit the bar. Maika Hamano reached the rebound first but couldn't emulate Miedema as her shot was saved.

"We didn't play with a lot of desire. We need to run to make more effort as a team, but also as individuals," Bompastor said. "Sometimes it's easy to talk about tactics, but football is about running and making sure you put all

your effort in on the pitch, so maybe we were a little bit sloppy in that aspect tonight."

It was the second of four consecutive games between Chelsea and City in the space of 12 days across three different competitions, and only City's second game since reappointing interim coach Nick Cushing. The two teams next play Sunday in the Wom-



Wolfsburg's Alexandra Popp, bottom, and Barcelona's Patri Guijarro, top, go for a header during the Women's Champions League, quarter-final first leg, soccer match between VfL Wolfsburg and FC Barcelona in Wolfsburg, Germany. (AP)

'All teams from confederations needed'

Wood backs automatic World Cup qualifying for Oceania minnows

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, March 20, (AP): New Zealand captain Chris Wood says it's "only fair" that FIFA's smallest confederation, Oceania, has been given direct qualification to the 2026 World Cup.

New Zealand will play Fiji and Tahiti will play New Caledonia in Wellington, New Zealand on Friday in the semifinals of the Oceania qualifying tournament. The final will be played in Auckland next Monday and the winner will be among the first teams to join hosts Canada, the United States and Mexico at next year's expanded 48-team World Cup.

It's the first time a team from Oceania has directly qualified for the World Cup finals rather than having to go through an intercontinental playoff.

The loser of the Oceania final still will have a chance to qualify through a playoff series involving teams from the Asian, African, South American and CON- CACAF confederations.

New Zealand, at 89 in the FIFA rankings, is favored to qualify as the largest Oceania nation and after also qualifying through a more rigorous process for the finals in Spain in 1982 and South Africa in 2010. It has yet to win a game at the World Cup. Fiji is ranked No. 148, New Caledonia No. 152 and Tahiti No. 153.

Critics have suggested that it's incongruous that such lowly-ranked teams should be able to qualify directly when higher-ranked teams are eliminated in larger and more competitive confederations.

Although Wood said if the World Cup is to be a true global tournament, it needs teams from all confederations. Australia moved to the Asian Football Confederation from Oceania after qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

"I do believe Oceania should have an automatic en-

en's Super League before their Champions League second leg March 27.

Earlier, Barcelona took a big step toward a third straight Women's Champions League title by beating Wolfsburg 4-1 in the first leg of their quarterfinal encounter.

In the first meeting of the two teams since Barcelona beat Wolfsburg 3-2 in the 2023 Champions League final, Barcelona showed how the gap between the two teams has only grown.

Barcelona dominated throughout and largely shut Wolfsburg's forwards out of the game as former Wolfsburg player Ewa Pajor caused her old team plenty of problems.

Barcelona took the lead when Pajor, who joined Barcelona from Wolfsburg last year, pressured defender Caitlin Dijkstra into conceding an own goal as she tried to stop Pajor connecting with Aitana Bonmati's cross in the 26th.

Two goals in the space of three minutes early in the second half took the game further away from Wolfsburg as Irene Paredes scored to finish off a short corner routine before Salma Paralluelo made it 3-0 soon after with a deflected shot. Wolfsburg had some hope of a comeback when Janina Minge scored a header from a corner in the 79th, but Barcelona's 18-yearold substitute Sydney Schertenleib responded with a curled shot that went in off the crossbar.

try to make it a full World Cup of every continent,"

Wood told reporters. "It's truly a fair way of doing it

qualifying games in nine months and traveling 55,000

miles. In 2010 it beat Bahrain from the Asian confeder-

ation in a two-leg playoff. Subsequent qualifying cam-

paigns have ended in playoff losses to Mexico, Peru

games and big moments. What we have now is play-

ers who have experienced the hurt of not qualifying,

whether that was Mexico, Peru or Costa Rica," New

Zealand coach Danny Bazeley said. "That makes it

more challenging for Fiji, knowing that we've got a

team that won't be complacent. This opportunity is in

"Obviously those intercontinental games were big

New Zealand reached the 1982 World Cup after 14

and our confederation should be represented."

and Costa Rica.

Committee, promised his city and nation will "extend warmth and respect" to all visitors.

"The recent tragic wildfires tested our community," Sykes said, "yet they illuminated our resilience and determination."



Reynold Hoover, CEO of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics organizing committee, speaks during the 144th International Olympic Committee session, which will elect the new IOC President, in Costa Navarino, western Greece. (AP)

World champion Neuville targets maiden WRC Safari Rally victory

NAIVASHA, Kenya, March 20, (Xinhua): World champion Belgian Thierry Neuville is out to clinch a maiden WRC Safari Rally Kenya title this year after blowing the chance to bag the coveted crown in the previous four year.

Neuville, the star of the Hyundai World Rally Team (WRT) has been an ever-present since the famous event returned to the World Rally Championship after a 19-year hiatus in 2021.

The Belgian has found himself in the lead in the opening stages of the African round of the WRC in all previous editions only to trail off with mechanical problems towards the end.

His misfortunes have seen him witness main rivals, Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT win all the previous four editions of the WRC Safari Rally.

"I am here to win the Safari Rally. I am also here to lead Hyundai to outperform Toyota on this landscape. After the four-year struggle to master the Safari Rally terrain, I believe this is quite our year," the world champion said ahead of the event shakedown in Kenya's lakeside town of Naivasha on Wednesday. Neuville will partner with 2019 world champion, Ott Tank and Frenchman Adrien Fourmaux who joined the Hyundai team this season from Ford Puma M-Sport WRT.

"Twice, I have had issues with my

dampers (shock absorbers) and twice I have had problems with my fuel pump, actually last year I was lying second before the unimaginable happened. Hopefully this year I stay away from the challenges. We already have a team set up to solve those critical issues before we start the Safari proper on Thursday and we believe this will be our year in Kenya," he added.

Neuville has admitted there is a lot of pressure to perform in the Safari Rally that will be the third round of the 2025 WRC owing to the fact that Toyota has started the season on a high.

The Japanese carmaker has bagged back-to-back 1-2 finishes in the opening leg in Monte Carlo in January and the second event Rally Sweden last month.

"We are out to overturn that in Naivasha and as a team (Hyundai) we need to be strong to achieve that. We also know that Toyota has been very strong in the Safari in the past so we are working to solve our weak points in Kenya and hopefully it works for us," the world champion stressed.

He has singled out championship leader and Welshman Elfyn Evans as the main threat to his ambitions.

The Safari is the third leg of the 2025 WRC after the opening event Rallye Monaco in January and Rally Sweden in February.

SPORTS

Kings hand Cavaliers third straight loss

Doncic scores 31 after big 1st quarter, Lakers rout depleted Nuggets

SACRAMENTO, Calif., March 20, (AP): DeMar DeRozan scored 27 points and the short-handed Sacramento Kings handed the **Cleveland Cavaliers their** third straight loss with a 123-119 victory.

DeRozan made back-to-back baskets down the stretch to give the Kings a 119-116 lead and they closed it out from there for their second consecutive win following a four-game losing streak.

Malik Monk added 20 points as the Kings won without stars Domantas Sabonis and Zach LaVine.

Evan Mobley scored 22 of his 31 points in the final 15 minutes for Cleveland but it wasn't enough to help the Cavs get back on the winning track. Cleveland has matched its longest skid of the season following a 16-game winning streak.

Donovan Mitchell added 26 points for Cleveland.

Lakers 120, Nuggets 108

In Los Angeles, Luka Doncic had 31 points, nine rebounds and seven assists in just three quarters of work, and the Los Angeles Lakers routed the Denver Nuggets in a matchup of injury-depleted Western Conference contenders.

Nikola Jokic (elbow) and Jamal Murray (ankle) missed their second straight games for Denver, while LeBron James (hamstring) and Rui Hachimura (knee) continued their longer-term absences for Los Angeles.

Austin Reaves had 22 points and eight assists for the Lakers, who have won nine consecutive home games and three straight since finishing their 0-4 road trip last Friday with a loss at Denver.

Thunder 133, 76ers 100

In Oklahoma City, Jaylin Williams scored a career-high 19 points and had 17 rebounds and 11 assists for his second career triple-double, and the Oklahoma City Thunder cruised past the injury-depleted Philadelphia 76ers with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and three other starters sidelined.

Gilgeous-Alexander, the NBA's top scorer at 33.0 points per game Detroit Pistons guard Cade Cunningham (2) defends Miami Heat guard Tyler Herro (14) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Miami. (AP)

and a leading MVP candidate, sat out for rest, while Lu Dort, Isaiah Hartenstein and Jalen Williams got the night off because of injuries.

Aaron Wiggins scored 26 points for the Western Conference-leading Thunder, who clinched the Northwest Division title and moved closer to wrapping up the No. 1 seed in the Western Conference.

Isaiah Joe added 21 points and Chet Holmgren scored 19 for Oklahoma City, which led 70-56 at halftime and 103-74 after three quarters.

Pelicans 119, Timberwolves 115 In Minneapolis, Zion Williamson scored 29 points and CJ McCollum added 18 for New Orleans as the Pelicans surprised the Minnesota

Timberwolves with a 119-115 win . The Timberwolves have lost two straight after winning eight in a row. Minnesota is in a battle with Golden State for the No. 6 seed in the Western Conference. Wednesday's loss drops Minnesota a full game behind the Warriors.

After trailing 43-32 in the second quarter, the Pelicans went on a 14-0 run to take a 46-43 lead. The two teams went back and forth for most of the rest of the game but Minnesota never could establish a comfortable lead against the Pelicans.

Spurs 120, Knicks105

In San Antonio, Sandro Mamukelashvili was 13 of 14 from the field, including 7 for 7 on 3-pointers, for a career-high 34 points and the San Antonio Spurs upended the New York Knicks.

Stephon Castle added 22 points as San Ântonio won for the third time in eight games. Chris Paul added 12 points and nine assists. Karl-Anthony Towns had 32

points and nine rebounds to lead New York while OG Anunoby and Mikal

Bridges added 14 points each. Rockets 116, Magic 108

In Orlando, Jalen Green scored 26 points, Alperen Sengun had 22 points and 12 rebounds, and the Houston Rockets extended their winning streak to a season-best eight games, beating the Orlando Magic.

Fred VanVleet added 19 points for

points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Heat, who are stuck in their longest losing streak since an 11-game slide during the 2007-08 season.

Pacers 135, Mavericks 131

In Indianapolis, Pascal Siakam scored 29 points, Bennedict Mathurin scored 16 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter and the Indiana Pacers rallied from an 11-point deficit in the final six minutes to beat the short-handed Dallas Mavericks.

The Pacers retook the lead with 14.7 seconds left when Siakam stole the ball and a wide open Andrew Nembhard knocked down a 3-pointer to make it 131-130. Indiana closed it out at the free-throw line.

Trail Blazers 115, Grizzlies 99

In Portland, Deni Avdija had 31 points, 16 rebounds and eight assists to lead the Portland Trail Blazers to a victory over the Memphis Grizzliest. Anfernee Simons added 22 points

for the Blazers, who led by 21 in the third quarter and never trailed. Desmond Bane led the Grizzlies with 20 points.

Suns 127, Bulls 121

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 41 points, including 20 in the fourth quarter, and the Phoenix Suns held off the Chicago Bulls.

Kevin Durant had 26 points and eight assists and Nick Richards had 18 points, nine rebounds and three blocks as the Suns won for the third time in their last four games.

Jazz 128, Wizards 112

In Salt Lake City, Kyle Filipowski scored 21 points, Keyonte George added 20 and the Utah Jazz snapped a season-worst 10-game skid with a 128-112 victory over the Washington Wizards.

Collin Sexton had 18 points and Brice Sensabaugh scored 17 for the Jazz in this matchup of the worst teams in each conference. The Wizards entered having won six of 11 to leave the Jazz with the league's worst record.

Colby Jones scored a career-high 24 points in his third game for the Wizards after being acquired from Sacramento, where the second-year player out of Xavier was a little-used reserve.

Kuwait Club cruises past Al-Nasr

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

the Rockets, who maintained their

second-place position in the Western

Conference, ahead of - among others

- the surging Los Angeles Lakers and

Pistons 116, Heat 113

banked in a 3-pointer with less than a

second remaining, giving the Detroit Pistons a 116-113 win over Miami

and sending the Heat to their ninth

Cunningham had his ninth triple-

double of the season - 25 points, 12

rebounds and 11 assists for the Pis-

tons, who trailed for most of the sec-

ond half and never led by more than

Bam Adebayo finished with 30

two until the final second.

In Miami, Cade Cunningham

Golden State Warriors.

consecutive loss

Al-Abdullah Complex, as part of the

By Hassan Mosa

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: Kuwait Club secured a commanding 114-75 victory over Al-Nasr at the Basketball Association Hall in Sheikh Saad

el," Al-Adwani stated. Following a one-week break, the Handball League returns today with 12th round fixtures:

ence, including at the continental lev-

Kuwaiti handball in upcoming events,

with a coach who brings vast experi-

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By Khaled Al-Enezi Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The draw for the 2024-2025 Handball Federa-



Draw unfolds

Kuwait Club eyes 12th consecutive Federation Cup

tion Cup took place at the Handball Federation headquarters in Al-Daiya. The draw for the public teams placed Kazma, Al-Arabi, Burgan, Qadsia, Khaitan, Fahaheel, and Sulaibikhat in Group Two, dubbed the "Fiery Group," while Group One included Kuwait Club, Al-Qurain, Al-Sahel, Yarmouk, Al-Tadamon, Al-Salmiya, and Al-Nasr.

Group One: Al-Qurain vs. Al-Sahel, Yarmouk vs. Al-Tadamon, Al-Salmiya vs. Al-Nasr.

Group Two: Al-Arabi vs. Al-Sulaibikhat, Burgan vs. Khaitan, Qadsia vs. Al-Fahaheel

The match dates will be announced later

Kuwait Club holds the record for the most Federation Cup titles (13), including the last 11 consecutive championships

Handball Federation Secretary General Qaid Al-Adwani confirmed that The draw taking place.

the appointment of Icelandic coach Aron Kristianten to lead the Kuwaiti national team is a significant step in the

Federation's strategic plan to elevate the level of Kuwaiti handball. "We aim to provide the best for

Al-Sulaibikhat vs. Al-Fahaheel at 9:00 pm. Al-Qurain vs. Al-Nasr at 10:30 am.

Al-Tadamon vs. Al-Yarmouk at 9:00 pm Khaitan vs. Burgan at 10:30pm matches are on Saturday. League Standings

Kuwait Club - 22 points, Kazma -19 points, Burgan - 17 points, Salmiya - 14 points

Al-Arabi - 14 points, Al-Qurain - 12 points, Sulaibikhat - 12 points, Qadsia - 12 points

Al-Nasr - 10 points, Khaitan - 8 points, Al-Fahaheel - 8 points, Al-Yarmouk - 2 points

Al-Tadamon -1 point, Al-Sahel -0points.

"Merged" I League. With this win, the "Dean" climbed to 23 points, securing second place, while Al-Nasr ("Annabi") reached 17 points.

In another thrilling matchup, Al-Sulaibikhat outlasted Al-Arabi in a high-scoring contest, winning 110-95. The victory brought Al-Sulaibikhat ("Reds") to 17 points, while Al-Arabi ("Greens") gained a losing point, bringing their total to 16 points.

On Saturday, a single match will take place between Al-Arabi and Al-Nasr at Al-Ittihad Hall at 8:45 pm. Meanwhile, the highly anticipated Kazma vs. Al-Qadsiya match, originally scheduled for 11 pm, is expected to be postponed due to Al-Qadisiyah's upcoming AFC West Asian Super League semi-final clash against Al-Ittihad (Saudi Arabia) on Monday.

Colbert dribbles the ball during Al-Sulaibikhat, Al-Arabi league match.

National coach Fahad Barjas' squad took control early, thanks to stellar performances from the pro trio of Dixon and Laznik, who combined for 66 points. Colbert added 12 points to the tally. On the Al-Arabi side, its new American pro, Tomer, led with an impressive 30 points.

With the league heating up, fans eagerly await the next round of highintensity clashes.

A man in a rush England's Tuchel takes tips from NBA as World Cup quest begins

MANCHESTER, England, March 20, (AP): There was outcry in the English media: In its bid to end its decades-long wait for a trophy, England's national team turned to a German.

The Daily Mail published a back page headline declaring it a "dark day for England" when it emerged Thomas Tuchel, a serial-winning coach with Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea and Bayern Munich, would lead the national team into the 2026 World Cup.

"I'm sorry, I have a German passport," he said when unveiled by the English Football Association last October.

Tuchel has an easy charm and sharp sense of humor. He will likely need both in the role.

For England's men, their one and only major trophy was the 1966 World Cup. Tuchel's predecessor, Gareth Southgate, came closest to ending that drought by leading England to the final of back-to-back European Championships and the semifinals of the 2018 World Cup.

Southgate was credited with making fans fall back in love with the national team, yet at last year's Euros he had to contend with fierce

criticism from the terraces, with some venting their fury by throwing plastic beer cups in his direction when he went to applaud them after one match.

That was despite England advancing to the knockout stage as group winner. It went on to reach the Euros final, where it lost 2-1 to Spain, with the winning goal coming in the 86th minute.

No other England manager reached the final of two major tournaments, yet Southgate was still considered by some to be a failure.

No wonder he's opted against giving advice to Tuchel. "I've already decided, I think the

best way I can help the next England manager is to stay out of the way," Southgate said. "I've had my time, I loved it, I'm not missing too much

England's Marcus Rashford during a training session at St George's Park, Burton upon Trent, England. (AP)

of it at the moment, but I think it's important I stay out of the way and allow Thomas to do his job."

Tuchel is a man in a rush. He is contracted until the World Cup and charged with the responsibility of leading a talented squad to glory.

He is not hiding from that fact. "He said the goal is to put another star on the jersey," said defender Dan Burn, referring to the one star above England's badge that represents its World Cup win in 1966.

In his first meeting with his players this week ahead of World Cup qualifiers against Albania on Friday and Latvia on Monday, Tuchel informed them they only had 24 training days ahead of the tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Put in those terms, it is a paltry amount of time to get his vision across in comparison to the daily routine of working with players at club level.

Just as well then that Tuchel has experience making a near immediate impact.

In late January 2021, he took over a Chelsea team that was ninth in the Premier League. By May, he'd turned that team into Champions League winners.





Denver Nuggets guard Jalen Pickett, right, tries to shoot as Los Angeles Lakers forward Jarred Vanderbilt reaches in during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles. Lakers won 120-108. (AP) – **See Page 15**

Sports

Sabah Al-Ahmad Ramadan tourney heats up



One of the championship teams.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The fourth edition of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Football Association Ramadan Tournament for adults and juniors is in full swing, with the first two days of competition concluding at Sabah Al-Ahmad Stadium. A total of 35 teams are participating in this year's tournament, delivering exciting performances.

Eng. Hamad Ali Al-Marri, Chairman of the Sabah Al-Ahmad City Cooperative Society, hailed the tournament's early success, commending the impressive displays by the teams.

impressive displays by the teams. He congratulated Sabah Al-Ahmad Youth and Eagles on reaching the final match and promised an exciting final day filled with surprises and major

prizes for the audience.

In the Junior Championship, Sabah Al-Ahmad Juniors and Eagles secured their spots in the final after showcasing outstanding performances.

Meanwhile, the Senior Championship saw several teams advance:Vamos defeated F 25, Beşiktaş overcame 50 A, Stark triumphed over Qadisiyah 2

Meringue outperformed Al-Hilal. Shamali secured a win against Misk Al-Khatam while Santos City claimed a 3-0 victory over Falcons of the Earth

With the tournament nearing its climax, fans can expect an electrifying final filled with top-tier football action.

Farwaniya wins Governorates Ramadan Super Cup



Farwaniya Governorate team crowned with the Super Cup.

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: The Public Authority for Youth Stadium in Mishref recently hosted the final of the Governorates Ramadan Super Cup football tournament, organized by the Sports for All Sector of the Public Authority for Sports.

In an exciting showdown, the Farwaniya Governorate team triumphed over the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate team with a commanding 4-1 victory.

After the match, both teams were honored in a special ceremony.

The final was attended by several distinguished officials, including Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser, Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Al-Badr, Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Al-Jaber, and Adel Al-Aslawi, representing the Governor of Hawalli. Also present was Bashar Abdullah, the Acting Director of the Public Authority for Youth. During the ceremony, Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser reaffirmed his commitment to supporting youth and sports activities, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, emphasizing their importance in fostering health awareness, promoting sports culture, and enhancing community engagement across Kuwait's governorates. He also expressed gratitude to the organizers and congratulated the winners, wishing them continued success.

Japan becomes first team to qualify for 2026 World Cup after host nations





The coordination meeting in progress at the Kuwait Football Association headquarters.

Coordination meeting held for Kuwait vs Oman WCup qualifier

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: A coordination meeting took place at the Kuwait Football Association headquarters, bringing together ministries and relevant entities involved in organizing the Kuwait national team's upcoming clash against Oman in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers next Tuesday. The meeting was attended by Dr. Saleh Al-Majroub, Secretary-General of the Association, Dr. Hamed Al-

KUWAIT CITY, March 20: A coordination meeting took place at the Kuwait Football Association headquarters, bringing together minis-

Japan players pose together as they celebrate after defeating Bahrain in the World Cup qualifying soccer match at Saitama Stadium in Saitama, Japan.

Australia takes big step towards seventh appearance

SAITAMA, Japan, March 20, (AP): Japan became the first team to qualify for the 2026 World Cup after beating Bahrain 2-0 at Saitama Stadium on Thursday.

Second-half goals from Daichi Kamada and Takefusa Kubo ensured the Samurai Blue secured a spot in Asia Group C's top two automatic qualification places.

At its eighth successive World Cup, Japan joins co-hosts the United States, Canada and Mexico in the expanded 48-team tournament.

Earlier, second-placed Australia took a big step towards a



Australia's Aziz Behich, right, shoots past Indonesia's Marselino Ferdinan during their soccer World Cup qualifying match at the Sydney Football Stadium, Sydney, Australia. (AP)

seventh appearance by defeating Indonesia 5-1 in Sydney in the visitor's first game under new coach Patrick Kluivert.

Indonesia's Kevin Diks missed a penalty in the eighth minute, and 10 minutes later Martin Boyle made no mistake with his spot kick to put the Socceroos ahead.

Nishan Velupillay and Jackson Irvine scored before the break and Lewis Miller made it 4-0 on the hour. Ole Romeny pulled one back for Indonesia before Irvine grabbed his second and the hosts' fifth.

The top two from each of the three six-team groups in the third round of Asian qualifying advance to the World Cup while the third- and fourth-placed teams advance to another stage to compete for two more places. Discussions focused on fan entry procedures, logistical preparations, and the overall readiness of working committees to ensure the smooth execution of the match. Officials emphasized the importance of seamless coordination to deliver a well-organized and successful event.

Kuwait Oly team set to face Lebanon in the West Asian U-23 Championship

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MUSCAT, March 20: The Kuwait Olympic team will take on Lebanon at 7:30 pm at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex Stadium in its second match of the West Asian Under-23 Championship.

Kuwait fell to Jordan 2-0 in the tournament opener, with Bakr Kalbouneh netting both goals in the 45th and 53rd minutes, securing Jordan's place in the semi-finals.

Kuwait started strong, creating multiple attacking opportunities. However, Jordan gradually gained control, utilizing its pace and tactical discipline to break through Kuwait's defense. Kalbouneh nearly opened the scoring early with a powerful strike, but goalkeeper Abdulrahman Ajaj made a brilliant save. Later, Kalbouneh and Jaafar Samara had close chances before Kalbouneh finally broke the deadlock in stoppage time of the first half.

Despite Kuwait's continued offensive efforts in the second half, Kalbouneh struck again in the 53rd minute, finishing off a well-placed pass from Al-Azaizeh. Kuwait pushed forward in search of a comeback but struggled against Jordan's solid defensive setup and missed key chances.

Now, Kuwait shifts focus to Lebanon, aiming for a crucial victory to keep its hopes alive in the tournament.



Players vying for the ball during Kuwait, Jordan game.



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