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AMIR VISITS MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, KUWAIT NATIONAL GUARD



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visits the Ministry of Defense.



Amiri Diwan photos

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visits the Kuwait National Guard.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah acknowledges the crowd with a wave during his visit to the Ministry of Defense.

Info Ministry, private media team up Calls for review committee on citizenship withdrawals

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Former MP and Fourth Constituency candidate Mohammad Hayef Al-Mutairi has stressed the need for the next National Assembly to form a fact-finding committee to deal with the cases of individuals whose citizenship was withdrawn by the Ministry of Interior.

Al-Mutairi said the committee should make sure that the citizenship withdrawal is due to forgery, not any other reason. He pointed out that a similar committee was formed in 2016 and the citizenship of some individuals was reinstated then, because of the work of this committee.

Fourth Constituency candidate Anwar Al-Fikr called for a legislative amendment in order to allow the judiciary to rule on citizenship cases. He clarified he does not support anyone proven to have acquired citizenship through forgery, asserting that the citizenship should be withdrawn only if proven that it was obtained fraudulently.

Meanwhile, the Court of Appeals canceled the decision on the dismissal of Mohammad Al-Yaseen — the former manager of the office of former Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim.

The court rejected the appeal filed by the Assembly against the decision to reinstate Al-Yaseen as manager of the Office of the Assembly Speaker.

In other news, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr. Nasser Muhaisen confirmed on Monday that the ministry is keen to partner with private media outlets to cover

the upcoming National Assembly elections.

The Ministry works to ensure the media coverage will reflect professionalism and contribute to successful parliamentary elections, he told KUNA at the conclusion of the second workshop on the basics of distinguished coverage and news production for the 2024 National Assembly's elections that was organized by the Ministry at the National Library.

For his part, the Assistant Undersecretary for Press, Publishing and Publications, Lafi Al-Subaie, stressed the interest of the Ministry in preparing the workshop, which is part of its role in supporting the media from the technical side, as well as their participation in highlighting the value of the event and focusing on the success of the electoral process in all its aspects.

Al-Subaie added in a similar statement to KUNA that the ministry is also keen on distinguished media coverage away from "offending the candidate and the voter."

He said that the Kuwaiti private media is one of the tributaries of the media in the country and has a great role in every event, expressing hope that the private media will contribute to the success of the democratic wedding and that the coverage of the 2024 elections will be distinctive befitting the name of the State of Kuwait and its democratic experience.

The workshop was launched on Sunday with the participation of senior program presenter in the news sector Munawar Mardi, director Bashayer Al-Sayegh, a number of media professionals in the private sector and KUNA editors.



KUNA photo
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr. Nasser Muhaisen with the participants of the workshop.

Amir commends security forces dedication, efforts

'Uphold justice, fiscal accountability'

KUWAIT CITY, March 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed confidence in the country's Armed Forces and its sectors, which defend and sacrifice for the dear homeland.

This came in a speech by His Highness the Amir during his visit to the Ministry of Defense on Monday accompanied by His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir appreciated the Ministry of Defense's keenness to enhance its combat capabilities, raising the level of training and defense readiness, under exceptional circumstances in the regional arena, pushing towards achieving the highest levels of alertness and readiness for the armed forces.

His Highness the Amir also expressed gratitude to the efforts made by the Naval Force, in cooperation and coordination with the General Administration of the

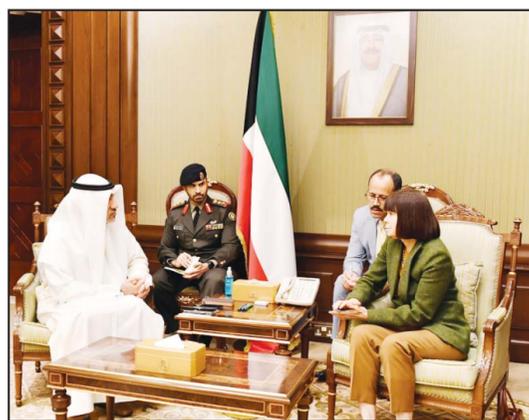
Coast Guard to achieve the highest levels of readiness to preserve the security of the nation and the safety of its territorial waters.

His Highness the Amir congratulated the Ministry of Defense on the 50th anniversary of its establishment of the (Facilities Engineering Department), which is an incubator of the initiatives and creativity of Kuwaiti youth, praising its role in preserving the environment.

During his speech, His Highness the Amir instructed the ministry's leadership to establish the rules of justice and impartiality and take all legal measures to preserve public money.

His Highness the Amir also instructed them to intensify inspection tours, and pay attention to infrastructure, especially warehouses of military machinery and equipment.

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Ministry of Defense photo

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah with the US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara.

Deputy PM meets US envoy for talks

KUWAIT CITY, March 19, (KUNA): Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara.

In a press release, the Ministry of Defense said that during the meeting, both sides discussed matters of common interest and regional and international developments.

Sheikh Fahad stressed deep bilateral ties with the US and the diverse cooperation across all fields.

Wishing the best for Sasahara on her new position, the Kuwaiti top brass hoped for more success and development between the two friendly countries, the release noted.

Chief Commander of the Kuwaiti Army, Air Marshal Bandar Al-Muzayen and Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

NewsWatch

WASHINGTON: United States Central Command (CENTCOM) announced late Monday that American forces destroyed several Houthi military assets in areas the militia controlled in Yemen.

A statement by CENTCOM revealed that forces destroyed seven anti-ship missiles, three unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and three weapons storage containers in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen in self-defense.

"It was determined these weapons presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and U.S. Navy ships in the region," it added.

"These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S. Navy and merchant vessels," CENTCOM affirmed. (KUNA)

terim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) called for all actors in southern Lebanon to "put down their weapons, recommit to Security Council Resolution 1701, and work toward a political and diplomatic solution."

Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL Aroldo Lazaro said on the 46th anniversary of the establishment of the Force that the resolution, "has been challenged by current events, but it remains as relevant and necessary as ever."

Lazaro paid tribute to over 330 military peacekeepers who have lost their lives serving with the mission over the years, adding that "the sacrifice of those who lost their lives here is not in vain and this motivates us to continue our work toward de-escalation in the short-term, and peace in the long-term" (KUNA)

Kuwait presses UNESCO for action on Gaza crisis

PARIS, March 19, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait on Monday called on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to play its role and responsibilities towards the Gaza Strip disaster.

This came in Kuwait's speech during the 219th session of the Executive Council of the UNESCO, delivered by Kuwait's permanent representative to the organization, Ambassador Dr. Adam Al-Mulla, after the organization's members observed a minute of silence to mourn the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



KUNA photo
Ambassador Dr. Adam Al-Mulla

Al-Mulla said, "Kuwait looks forward to the organization fulfilling its role and full responsibilities, as dictated by its founding mission towards the Gaza Strip disaster, and to accelerate the implementation of Resolution 42 C/54, which was

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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Wednesday 18:00
Imsak Thursday 04:29

BEIRUT: The United Nations In-

Prayer Timings

Fajr 04:34 Asr 15:23
 Sunrise... 05:53 Maghrib .. 17:59
 Zohr 11:56 Isha 19:15

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h.

By Night: Rather cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind

Weather

to variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station Max Exp Min Rec

Kuwait City	26	19
Kuwait Airport	25	18
Abdaly	24	18
Jahra	25	19
Salmiyah	26	22
Nuwaisib	25	22
Wafra	26	20

BIOMETRIC/FINGERPRINT APPOINTMENT: <https://meta.e.gov.kw/En/>

35 illegal in-kind collection kiosks removed

Ten charities blocked for good from collecting donations in week

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The first week of the work of inspection and monitoring teams in charge of charitable activities during the holy month of Ramadan — with the participation of 30 charitable societies — witnessed the withdrawal of 10 cards from representatives of charities tasked to collect donations as they violated the relevant law and regulations, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Sources explained that withdrawn cards will never be returned and the holders are suspended from working in the charitable project.

Sources added the first week also witnessed the removal of 35 kiosks for the collection of in-kind donations in various governorates and registration of more than 20 cases of unauthorized collection of donations involving individuals and institutions. Sources affirmed that the necessary measures were taken regarding these cases and they were referred to the competent authorities for legal action. Sources added a small number of electronic advertisements were monitored on social media.

Sources confirmed that most charitable organizations are committed to the law and regulations on charitable work, indicating the percentage of violations is much lower than in previous years.

Sources said the inspection teams monitor and eliminate charitable work violations immediately — whether committed by entities or individuals. They also monitor social media sites (Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook) to discover calls for donations without obtaining permission from the ministry to take the necessary measures against them and their owners.

Sources added: "Some unknown people are exploiting the nature of Kuwaiti society and its love for helping the needy to achieve personal goals that are far from charitable work. Therefore, we urge citizens and expatriates to be careful when donating. They should not be misled by such people and to give their donations to well-known entities in the country, especially since the money might fall into the hands of those who use it incorrectly; thereby, distorting the image of Kuwaiti charitable work."

MPW emergency teams tackle rainwater incidents

Kuwait witnesses moderate to heavy rain

By Mohammad Ghanem/Mohammad Al-Musleh
 Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The country yesterday witnessed moderate to heavy rains in many areas, which led to the flooding of a number of streets, and transformation of some squares in residential areas into what resembles lakes.

The Meteorological Department issued weather warnings yesterday early morning about the bad weather conditions and the proliferation of low and medium clouds, interspersed with thunderstorms accompanied by rain of varying intensity ranging from light to medium, and sometimes heavy, with active winds reaching speeds of up to 60 km/hour.

According to the readings obtained by Al-Seyassah, Rabya witnessed the highest amount of rain of up to 25 mm, followed by Ras Al-Salmiya area with 19.5 mm rain. The desert areas of Sabriya and Layah witnessed rains of 14 mm. The Meteorological Department affirmed that there are chances of fog formation on Wednesday morning, with the possibility of rain again on Friday morning.

Meanwhile, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works Ahmad Al-Saleh confirmed that the country is witnessing a wave of moderate intensity rain, which may intensify during the coming hours.

In a press statement, Al-Saleh said, "The emergency teams of the Ministry of Public Works and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation are present round the clock in critical places. These teams will carry out inspection tours to ensure that there is no accumulation of rainwater."

He appealed to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti motorists to take caution when driving vehicles on the roads. He called for getting rid of construction waste and pruning trees properly so that they do not negatively affect the efficiency of the rainwater drainage system.

Al-Saleh stressed to avoid paying any attention to rumors and to obtain information from official sources.

He said, "If there is heavy rain, the ministry and the relevant authorities in the country will stand united under the umbrella of civil defense." Al-Saleh advised motorists to adhere to the guidelines and instructions of the General



A municipality worker fixes a suction pump to drain rain water from the road.

Traffic Department, and to report any complaints via the hotline No. 150 or the ministry's application or the ministry's accounts on social media.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Municipality yesterday announced that it increased the readiness of the teams deployed in the governorates to immediately deal with reports of high water levels in private residences.

In a press statement, the Director of the Public Relations Department and spokesman for Kuwait Municipality Mohammad Al-Mutairi affirmed that the municipality receives reports via the WhatsApp service on the number 24727732 or via the hotline No. 139.

He said, "The municipality will remove water pools using tankers and deal with the rising water levels in some private residences, as well as remove tree waste on the roads." Al-Mutairi stressed that the field cleaning teams receive reports from citizens and residents around the clock and provide all support work to deal with the rainy situation and to ensure the preservation of public and private properties, with the cooperation of the relevant government agencies.

Other Voices

The governor's mule and military college 'scandal'

By Ahmad alsarraf

In yesterday's article, we touched on the issue of "Juha" taking the risk of teaching the governor's mule how to read, and how he relied on time as a solution to his predicament, and I found that his situation applies to the incident of large numbers of young men not being accepted to join the officers' course at 'Saad Al-Abdullah' College, and how whoever committed this serious violation, against the nation and against those who were enrolled in the course, relied on the time factor, but it seems that his calculations, in his rush to reach his goal, were completely wrong.

It was a wonderful and unprecedented work in the history of the Ministry of Interior, issuing a statement explaining the truth of what happened, a statement for which the Acting Minister of Interior was personally thanked, as his fingerprints were clear between the lines of the statement.

The statement contributed to putting an end to the spread of rumors and gossip related to the exclusion of some military personnel from graduation at Saad Al-Abdullah College, in addition to the non-payment of financial dues to others, as the Ministry indicated its keenness to deny the rumors, especially those circulated by irresponsible electronic accounts, and that it does not deny what was mentioned about exclusion, as it was based on legal, security and procedural considerations, the omission of which would have exposed state security to harm, as among those excluded were those whose data contained incompleteness and a contradiction in the conditions for enrollment in the aforementioned course, in addition to the presence of security notes in the data and other files.

Also, those who were excluded were included in the session with "exceptional decisions" in violation of the law, which required that things be restored to their correct order, in order to protect the legal and security



alsarraf

aspects

As for not disbursing the financial reward to students affiliated with the academy, this is due to parliamentary pressures in the previous council, which led to the acceptance of much larger numbers than the college's absorptive capacity, and the funds allocated to them in the budget.

The number of students was supposed to be around 900 officer students, but parliamentary interventions added 390 students outside the scope of the allocated budget, and this resulted in the non-disbursement of their dues, knowing that the Interior Ministry is communicating with the Ministry of Finance to solve their problem and not harm them.

The Ministry also confirmed, in its statement, that its approach is to always adhere to the constitution and the laws, and there is no doubt that it is specifically speaking about the current stage. If this had been its approach, these violations would not have occurred in the first place. So thanks to His Excellency the Minister, and we hope that the approach of respecting the laws will take hold.

It is clear from the ministry's statement that parties in Ahmad Al-Nawaf's government sought, often knowingly, to neglect important security aspects, to accept larger numbers than the military college's capacity, in addition to accepting those subject to security and procedural restrictions, to be men protecting the nation's security in the future, out of respect for representatives in the previous parliament, in order to buy their loyalty to achieve a certain goal, and this is what the highest authorities had previously warned about in their historic speech!

We can only offer our sincere thanks here to the wise leadership, and to the insistence of the Minister of Defense, the Acting Minister of the Interior, to continue his reform measures and to cleanse the Ministry of any dangerous and harmful impurities attached to it.

Most likely, no previous official body will be held accountable for the above serious violations, and this means that they will be committed again in the future.

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Exempting Kuwaitis from Schengen requirement top priority: EU envoy

Call reiterated to support peace, stability in region

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Ambassador of the European Union to Kuwait Anne Koistinen affirmed the commitment of both the European Union and Kuwait to supporting prosperity, stability and peace in the region, which was reflected in the fruitful cooperation in various fields including initiatives related to women's empowerment, green transition and climate change.

In a statement to reporters at a Ramadan gathering she organized, the ambassador affirmed that this cooperation will continue in order to strengthen the strong relations between the European Union and Kuwait within the framework of the European Union's joint declaration related to the strategic partnership with the Gulf states.

Concerned

Koistinen explained that the European Union is concerned about the regional escalation and its potential effects such as its impact on global trade, including the trade between the Gulf region and Europe. A new defensive maritime operation has been launched by the European Union called EUNAVFOR ASPIDES, with the objective of restoring and safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf region.

There have been some important events and achievements related to the relations between the European Union and Kuwait, such as the adoption of preferential rules related to the Schengen visa in September 2023 for Kuwaiti citizens, whereby Kuwaiti citizens can obtain a multi-entry Schengen visa valid for a period of up to five years when applying for the first time.



Anne Koistinen

She highlighted the successful rounds of senior officials meetings and the human rights dialogue between the European Union and Kuwait in December 2023, in addition to the strong relations in the field of trade and investment.

As for the Schengen visa exemption file, the ambassador stressed that exempting Kuwaitis from the Schengen visa requirement is one among her priorities during her work as ambassador to Kuwait. She expressed her hope that the new European Parliament, after the elections in June, will look positively at the proposal to exempt Kuwaiti citizens from the Schengen visa requirement.

Regarding the Palestinian issue, Koistinen said, "This year's Ramadan is different from previous years, as people inside and outside the region are feeling anxious due to the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza. I would like to express my sympathy to the people of Gaza who are suffering from hunger, bombing and displacement, but I also do not forget the suffering of Muslims in other places in the region during the month of Ramadan, such as Sudan, Yemen and Syria.

I also hope that lasting peace will prevail in

We've achieved expert status: Nazaha

CBK provides banks with new bank notes ahead of Eid Al-Fitr

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Central Bank of Kuwait has announced the successful completion of the distribution of new Kuwaiti currency notes across all local banks in anticipation of Eid Al-Fitr, reports Al-Anba daily.

The initiative aims to fulfill the demand for fresh currency among citizens and residents during the festive season.

Individuals seeking to obtain new banknotes of various denominations are advised to visit their respective bank branches during official working hours. The designated branches offering the "Ayadi" exchange service will be communicated through Kuwaiti banks and other available channels.

In a separate announcement, the Central Bank disclosed the issuance of bonds and tawarruq valued at 480 million dinars. The allocation comprises two tranches with varying returns and terms. The first tranche, valued at 240 million dinars, carries a return rate of 4.375% over a 3-month period. Meanwhile, the second tranche, also worth 240 million dinars, features a return rate of 4.500% over a 6-month period.

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Nazaha expert status: The Public Authority

the Middle East and in the world, including Europe, in this holy month, as Ukraine continues to fight for its freedom and independence."

Koistinen praised Kuwait's continued humanitarian support for the Palestinians and UNRWA, indicating that this issue is considered a top priority for the European Union as well.

Donor

She said, "The European Union is still the largest donor to the Palestinians in the world. Since last October, we have been able to raise an amount of 225 million euros. This is for the sake of offering humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. We have also increased our financial contributions to UNRWA. The European Union transferred 50 million euros to UNRWA at the beginning of March. The European Union will also increase its emergency aid to the Palestinians by 68 million euros in 2024. We believe that there is no alternative to UNRWA in order to provide services to Gaza and its population of 2 million people."

The ambassador also referred to the joint statement between the European Commission and other countries regarding opening a sea corridor in order to provide more humanitarian aid to Gaza, in addition to the plans to establish a temporary port.

She indicated that financial and humanitarian support is not considered sufficient in itself, and reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to addressing the roots of this conflict by supporting the two-state solution.

Koistinen said, "I am happy that the European Union agrees with Kuwait regarding the

for Anti-Corruption, known as "Nazaha," announced that Kuwait has achieved expert status in integrity education, as recognized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, reports Al-Anba daily.

This recognition comes as Nazaha continues to implement over 83% of the initiatives outlined in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, marking significant progress in combating corruption.

Nazaha's efforts to promote integrity and combat corruption in the educational system have garnered international acclaim. Kuwait's experience in integrating integrity values into the curriculum, training teachers, and supporting codes of conduct for educators was highlighted during the tenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

This achievement underscores Kuwait's commitment to fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct among its citizens, particularly within the education sector. Through ongoing awareness campaigns and proactive measures, Nazaha aims to further strengthen Kuwait's position as a leader in integrity education on the global stage.

paramount importance of finding a solution to end this conflict. We both support the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which is an excellent proposal on which we can build."

She stressed that the interest of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell is not limited to Gaza, as he condemned the provocative Israeli statements regarding the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Koistinen said, "The European Union has clearly stated that it will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including those related to Jerusalem, other than what the parties themselves agree upon."

She affirmed her commitment to strengthening dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and Kuwait, and building on the excellent and strong partnership between them.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Koistinen expressed her happiness at experiencing for the first time the Ramadan traditions in Kuwait, including Ghabga and Diwaniyas.

She affirmed the importance of such gatherings in strengthening family relationships, the spirit of one community, contemplation and generosity, which reflect the essence of this holy month.

Koistinen explained that millions of Muslim citizens and residents in the European Union from diverse backgrounds come together during this blessed month. They host various events, such as iftars and initiatives related to interfaith dialogue. These celebrations reflect the European Union's slogan, which is "United in Diversity."

'Report directly to your entities'

CSC names 1,270 Kuwaitis for jobs

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has nominated 1,270 citizens for employment and they were notified through messages sent to their telephones and their accounts on the CSC website, reports Al-Anba daily.

The CSC asked these citizens to directly visit the entities where they were nominated, without the need to refer to the CSC.

Meanwhile, sources stated that the total number of citizens waiting for employment reached 17,335 with various specializations and academic degrees, including those who are expected to graduate from the College of Basic Education — around 1,400 to 1,600 graduates, and the colleges of Education, Medicine and Nursing.

Sources told the daily that the an-

nouncement of the ranking of the 86th batch of registered job applicants starts on March 31. Sources confirmed that the concerned teams in the Employment Sector, which is under Assistant Undersecretary for Employment Affairs Ibrahim Al-Hajri, are currently completing the ranking and informing applicants through private messages or the CSC website.

According to the recent registration statistics; the CSC received 120,012 applications and 7,835 of which were accepted, while those eligible for nomination totaled 6,778.

Also, 5,198 were registered without review (76.6 percent); 1,580 were registered after review (23.31 percent); 2,457 registered without preferences and 4,321 with preferences registered for the first time.

Formation of Kuwaiti fabric and ... a spy in every house

"NOW that we have a minister in every country due to the many changes affecting successive governments, we will soon have a spy in every house... with the difference in the simile," columnist **Mubarak Fahd Al-Duwailah** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"We all know how modern Kuwaiti society was formed. After the 1940s, many students seeking a halal livelihood migrated to Kuwait from neighboring countries, and many of them descended on their relatives who were the original Kuwaitis. In the early 1960s, the genus was distributed to the residents of Kuwait, and the original Kuwaiti testified for his next relative from neighboring countries, some of whom may have been named after their families, and obtained Kuwaiti citizenship.

"Some of them, in the seventies, returned to their hometown or the homeland of their father and grandfather, extracted citizenship, and returned to Kuwait to settle there, and the generations passed for half a century, generations that knew nothing other than this land as a homeland and did not grow up in anything, and did not know about the eldest of them possessing a nationality of another country, and legal centers were established for all family members and even some large families, and nothing was done by them that contradicted their feelings of loyalty and belonging.

"Imagine with me that a dispute broke out between one of their neighbors, who heard about the issue of their duality, and a member of this family. Then came the Ministry of Interior's statement calling on members of Kuwaiti society to report the dualities, and he took the initiative to report in retaliation against this member of this family. Then came the decision to withdraw or revoke citizenship of all the families that belong to this 'dual' ancestor!

"I use this example because most of those whose citizenships were withdrawn are dual, and I am not talking here about a person who forged his documents and belonged to families with which he has no connection, nor am I talking about a person who paid a sum of money to an official in the relevant authorities, to make it easier for him to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

"On a personal level, I called for solving the problem of people with dual nationality by allowing them to hold dual citizenship, provided that they do not benefit from government housing and salary benefits from both countries, as is the case with many countries in the world and some Gulf countries.

"Even the issue of counterfeiters must be verified before the decision to withdraw is issued and families are separated and destroyed. The accused must be given the opportunity to defend themselves before the courts for fear of the interference of emotions and hatred in deciding their fate.

"The question that arises is: How many people send their daughters to be born in America? Why do we apply the law to dual citizens from neighboring countries and leave them alone?"

Also:

"During the last two decades, university degrees and academic titles have increased remarkably, to the point that we have become a society where almost all citizens hold the title of 'Doctor' "and the world almost envies us for the large number of holders of higher degrees we have, and we would have preceded Japan, with all this number of doctorate degree holders in various fields and specialties," columnist **Asrar Johar Hayat** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"These certificates increased until some people graduated with Master's and doctorate degrees within six months, from abroad, without leaving Kuwait.

"Then there was the scandal of the forged certificates file in 2018, where the Ministry of Higher Education discovered that a large number of these certificates were forged or fictitious, issued by educational 'shops' that sold the certificates by 'a kilo' and we heard about referrals of the forgers to the prosecution, as well as those who helped them to forge.

"The equations were issued to them, but the matter stopped after that, and I do not know whether the reason was the change of minister or the Covid-19 pandemic, which became a peg for all our failures, even though the issue of forging certificates should be included under the heading of 'national security', because of its direct impact on our daily lives.

"Now, the issue of forging certifi-

icates has returned to the forefront, with the examination of certificates being circulated to government agencies, and how I hope that there is a serious desire to examine academic certificates, but the long deadlines and the many correspondences do not bode well, as work is the criterion and not the abundance of circulars and official letters, so it is up to those concerned.

"They should begin checking on the certificates immediately, to detect forgers, in addition to the fact that the accountability mechanism must be clear, as the forger, if it is proven that he benefited from a forged certificate, is an embezzler of public money, in addition to that the legal loopholes must be closed, so that no one escapes accountability. Other than that, it is throwing ash in the eyes.

"In conclusion, and in order to get out of the cycle of a valid certificate and a weak and forged certificate, the solution is to apply professional licenses to everyone, meaning holding tests to measure the level of a number of special professions that are directly related to people's lives, such as doctors, engineers, architects, and others, and thus the test is the decisive factor in whether the certificate is holder qualified to perform the profession, or does his certificate not reflect his professional level?"

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"Crazy fasting! During the first Friday prayer of the holy month, the Friday Imam was late in ascending the pulpit for about five minutes. While the worshipers were looking at each other searching for the Imam, I said to myself: 'This Imam was only late to prepare for a solid sermon (speech) that respects the minds of the worshipers, reaches the hearts, affects the worshipers and makes them cry!'" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Then the Imam came and I wished he had disappeared, because when he ascended the pulpit, he took out of his pocket a sermon prepared by the ministry, or more correctly, from the 'Look Your Honor' group in the ministry. For your information, this is the group that controls the joints of the Awqaf Ministry, and deliberately belittles our minds and disrespects our understanding.

"We return to the sermon. The Imam stood up in front of us and then read to us the written sermon, which was a copy of the first Friday sermon of the previous Ramadan, and the one before it. No one bothered to write a new sermon that respected the minds of the worshipers, as the sermon focused on the impermissibility of fasting by an insane person!

"Is this what is said at this time? Who among you has seen an insane person fasting? How many 'insane' people in Kuwait fasted during Ramadan? Indeed, how many crazy people are there in Kuwait until the ministry addresses the sane worshiper and informs him that it is not permissible for an insane person to fast?

"When the Imam came out of the topic of fasting for an insane person, he spoke about what breaks the fast. He said openly that eating and drinking during the day in Ramadan are among the things that break the fast! This is what came from the mind of the creator who wrote the sermon for him, or copied it from Ramadan sermons in past years. In his opinion, he brought what the ancients and others did not bring when he told us that whoever eats or drinks intentionally during the day of Ramadan spoils his fast!

"Allah bless the ministry, its preachers and the writers of the Friday sermon, among whom are those who do not respect the minds of the worshipers, because basically no one holds them accountable, and no official follows up their work, so they resort to the shortest path, which is copying previous sermons without even reading or reconsidering them!

"O government, O Ministry of Awqaf, do not waste your time with things that do not benefit the people. Take advantage of the presence of these groups in the State's mosques to spread enlightened thought and address minds. The national and Islamic stances of the State of Kuwait have great meanings that need to be published and clarified in service of the homeland and to encourage dedication to it. This is the essence of what our true religion has enjoined upon us. They were unable to tell us what the Beloved Chosen One (may Allah bless and grant him peace) said when he migrated from Makkah to Madina. He looked at Makkah with tears in his eyes and said: 'O... Allah I will leave you, and I know that you love the land of Makkah. To me and to Allah and honor her with Allah, and had your family not expelled me from you, I would not have left.' Is there a lesson in patriotism after this?"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



A fire engine at the construction site.

2 die in fall at construction site

Two individuals lost their lives after falling from a construction site in the Mirqab area on Tuesday, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

According to the fire department,

emergency teams promptly responded to the incident and managed the situation. Subsequently, the area was handed over to the relevant authorities for further investigation.

20,391 traffic citations issued, 142 cars & 70 bikes seized in one week

28 vehicles used in crimes impounded; 57 people arrested

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Traffic Sector continued its periodic campaigns under the leadership of Major General Yousef Al-Khadda, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaigns carried out by the Traffic Departments in the six governorates from March 9-15 resulted in the issuance of 20,391 traffic violation citations, while 142 vehicles and 70 bicycles were impounded as their owners or drivers committed grave violations.

These campaigns also led to the arrest of 12 persons wanted by law for committing various crimes, nine expatriates who hold expired residency permits, 23 juveniles for driving without a license and 57 individuals who committed serious traffic violations. A total of 28 vehicles were impounded as they were reported to have been utilized in committing crimes.

Meanwhile, the General Traffic Department (GTD) dealt with 258 collision accidents that resulted in injuries, while the number of accidents that did not cause injuries reached 1,903.

GTD also carried out a campaign against craft workshops in Shuwaikh with the participation of several other concerned entities. This led to the issuance of 95 citations for various traffic violations, closure of a workshop, disconnection of electricity from six workshops and arrest of three individuals who violated the Residency Law.

□ □ □

Director in funds scam: An engineering company has lodged a report at Sabah Al-Salem Police Station, accusing the Sales Department director of embezzling KD117,000, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The report did not clarify whether the accused is still in Kuwait or if he fled to his home country, as well as how this large amount was embezzled.

According to a security source, the company director informed the police station that the accused, an expatriate in his 40s, embezzled the company's funds. He said the embezzlement was discovered on March 6 during the inventory process.

The source added: "Immediately after registering a betrayal of trust case, the file was referred to the Investigations Department to include the name of the accused on the list of people banned from traveling, arrest him and interrogate him about the company's accusation against him."

□ □ □

Delivery boy's bike stolen: A 30-year-old expatriate, who works in the delivery sector, has informed police that the motorcycle he was using for his delivery jobs was stolen, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Maidan Hawally detectives circulated descriptions of the motorcycle to all patrol units, after the expatriate reported the theft. The expatriate told police that he left the Japanese-made motorcycle at 9:00 pm in front of a building to deliver an order. After about three minutes, he returned but could not find the motorcycle. The thieves probably loaded the motorcycle on a vehicle or van and fled from the scene.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to arrest the culprits.

Stores, shops issued 31 citations for violations

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Public Relations Department at Kuwait Municipality has announced that the Municipal Services Audit and Monitoring Department recently carried out a comprehensive inspection campaign to check the validity of health licenses and store advertisements and uncover violations, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to the Public Relations Department, the supervisory team at the Municipal Services Audit and Monitoring Department in Ahmadi Governorate inspected the shop licenses and advertisements, took measures against violators and ensured strict compliance with regulations.

The inspection campaign resulted in the issuance of 31 citations for various violations such as non-renewal of advertisement license, placing an introductory advertisement without a license, adding an advertisement without a license, using spaces and squares without a license from the Municipality and violating licensing regulations.

Young Kuwaiti girl drowns in college swimming pool

By Munaif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: A 23-year-old Kuwaiti girl lost her life due to drowning at the College of Basic Education swimming pool in Kuwait. The young woman's body was transferred to forensic medicine for examination, while authorities initiated an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Reports indicate that the college's operations room received the news in the early hours, detailing the drowning of a female student within the premises' swimming pool. Security personnel and ambulances rushed to the scene, but unfortunately, their efforts to rescue her were in vain. Despite all attempts, the young woman could not be revived.

The deceased's body was subsequently moved to forensic medicine for further examination, as authorities registered a case to delve into the details of the event.

Police foil drug addict's bid to flee at checkpoint

By Mansour Sultan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Hawalli patrol officers have arrested an unidentified person for possessing a cocktail of drugs, as he attempted to evade a checkpoint on a street in the Hawalli area.

According to a security source, officers observed the suspect turning his vehicle in the opposite direction when he saw a checkpoint.

Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the individual was wanted in connection with various criminal and civil cases. Subsequently, a precautionary search led to the discovery of

narcotics in his possession.

The suspect was promptly arrested, and the seized drugs were handed over to the relevant authorities for further investigation.

Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti citizen has filed a report at the Jahra police station, stating that his property in the Al-Mutlaa desert area has been burglarized. The perpetrator allegedly stole an electrical machine, electrical wires, a television set, and a pressure cooker.

According to the citizen's statement, the perpetrator gained entry through the main gate of the property and stole the items while the owner was away on his weekly vacation. Police are looking for the suspect.



Cars submerged in rainwater after the deluge which hit Kuwait on Monday evening, which continued into Tuesday late in the afternoon. Municipality deployed its workers at multiple places to clear the accumulated water.

4 rain-blocked intersections cleared

Mol handles 17 traffic incidents

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: In response to inclement weather conditions, the Ministry of Interior's Traffic and Operations Sector swiftly mobilized its resources to ensure public safety. Major Abdullah Bu Al-Hassan, spokesperson for the Public Relations and Traffic Awareness Department within the General Traffic Department, highlighted the coordinated efforts of various departments under the Ministry's umbrella, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

Under the guidance of Major General Yousef Al-Khadda, Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic and Operations Affairs, the sector was placed on high alert upon receiving forecasts of rain from meteorologists. Bu Al-Hassan emphasized that proactive measures were taken, with patrols from the General Directorate of Traffic and the General Directorate of Rescue Police deployed promptly as the rain began.

The vigilance of these patrols proved crucial as they swiftly responded to reports of traffic disruptions, including minor accidents and congestion on roads. Notably, engineers and technicians from the Traffic

Engineering Department were able to rapidly address and clear four intersections affected by the rain.

Bu Al-Hassan reported that the combined efforts of traffic and rescue patrols successfully managed 17 minor traffic accidents, ensuring the smooth flow of traffic at accident sites. Additionally, collaboration with the General Fire Force facilitated the clearance of an obstruction caused by fallen trees in the Jabriya area.

It is reassuring to note that despite these incidents, there were no significant injuries or damages reported. The Ministry of Interior remains committed to maintaining public safety and will continue to monitor and respond to any challenges posed by adverse weather conditions.



Al-Khadda

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Riyadh event attracts over 1,800 exhibitors from top technology companies

AUM female students shine at LEAP Int'l Technical Conference

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Female students from the College of Engineering and Technology at the American University of the Middle East (AUM) actively participated in the third edition of the LEAP International Technical Conference in Riyadh, themed "New Horizons."

The event attracted over 1,800 exhibitors from major technology companies globally and featured more than 1,000 experts and speakers from 180 countries, focusing on the future of technology and artificial intelligence while showcasing the latest innovations, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The conference showcased various activities, including the "Investors Platform," offering insights into innovative investment opportunities through specialized workshops with renowned international investors. Additionally, the "Startup Theater" highlighted support for change makers, and the "Rocket Fuel" competition presented prizes exceeding a million dollars to innovative startups.

AUM students, namely Jana Al-Shaya, Dalia Tariq Gharib, and Maha Al-Kharing, representing different disciplines of the College of Engineering, actively engaged

in the conference. Over three days, they explored different exhibition areas, gained insights into the latest technologies and innovations, and attended workshops and lectures by prominent speakers from around the world.

Jana Al-Shaya shared her excitement about interacting with innovative companies, particularly expressing interest in Oculus's leading virtual reality technology and its potential application in their capstone project. Maha Al-Kharing found inspiration in projects utilizing industry-specific hardware and software to enhance efficiency and

productivity. Meanwhile, Dalia Gharib was fascinated by a smart home project, especially due to her passion for interior design and its simplicity of operation.

The university's involvement underscores its dedication to enriching student experiences, fostering skills development, and promoting innovation and creativity. Such engagements aim to provide practical training, enhance job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth, and encourage constructive participation in digital transformation, ultimately contributing to the advancement of engineering and technology fields.

Council okays CBK's KD 650K donation for Darwaza project

Al-Farsi asks a number of questions about project

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Municipal Council, in its 15th regular session of the second term Sunday, approved the donation worth KD 650 thousand of the Commercial Bank of Kuwait as a contribution to the restoration of the Darwazat Al-Abdul Razzaq Street and tunnel.

In the interjections related to the Darwaza, the Municipal Council member Dr. Hassan Kamal stressed the need to be careful when looking at the project and avoid dealing with the Municipal Council and the municipality as a corridor for donations to projects.

He said the project is under the supervision, implementation and responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works, and the municipality is not concerned with it, adding that its role begins after the project is delivered and not before it.

Dr. Kamal reiterated the need to avoid involving the municipality as a party in a matter that is not under its jurisdiction, insisting that the Darwaza project has been discussed by the Municipal Council for more than four years.

He revealed that the former state minister for Municipal Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, allocated one million dinars to demolish and close the tunnel, but because of the municipality's insistence on not demolishing it, the matter was reconsidered for rehabilitation.

Dr. Kamal indicated that the problem in developing the project is not financial, but primarily administrative and coordination.

He concluded by asking, "Does the municipality have a plan to develop Darwaza Al-Abdul Razzaq after receiving the project from the Ministry of Public Works?"

Meanwhile, another member Alia Al-Farsi asked a number of questions about the project, the most important of which were related to the scope of work for the project, the specific time period for its completion, and the work on which the Commercial Bank of Kuwait's donation to the tunnel project will be spent.

Furthermore, the Municipal Council member Ismail Behbehani praised the step that will contribute to developing an important location in the heart of Kuwait City after it had been neglected for years.

Meanwhile, the Municipal Council approved the request of the Public Institution of Social Security to add activities in the Mubarak Al-Abdullah area branch designated by decision of the Municipal Council dated 8/2/1999.

It includes a physical therapy center, specialized medicine, orthopedic treatment, a health institute, a café and a restaurant, in addition to medical services in specialized clinics and rehabilitation and preventive health centers.

The Municipal Council was informed of the response of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad to the congratulatory message sent by the Chairman of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri on the occasion of Ramadan, as well as to the complaint submitted by the residents of Abu Al-Hasaniya regarding the naming of the area, and to name blocks 1 and 2 after Abu Al-Hasani.



Students during a tour in the exhibition.

Al-Jarida photo



Patent team members being honored.

Al-Jarida photo

Dr Al-Harbi expresses pride in inventions

KU registers innovative airport baggage storage system patent

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Patent and Intellectual Property Rights Office, part of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at Kuwait University, has successfully registered a patent titled 'Baggage Storage System' with the United States Patent and Trademark Office, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The patent was led by Dr. Abdullah Al-Azmi, a faculty member in the Department of Electrical Engineering at the College of Engineering and Petroleum, along with his students Batoul Abdul Hamid, Badour Al-Mutairi, and Fatima Mubarak.

In a ceremony held under the patronage and presence of the university's acting director, Dr. Mishary Al-Harbi, Dr. Al-Azmi and his female students were honored for their remarkable achievement.

The newly patented system revolutionizes baggage handling at airports, offering enhanced safety features to prevent loss or theft of luggage.

Dr. Al-Harbi expressed pride in the inventions, highlighting their positive impact on Kuwait University's reputation and the quality of education it provides. He commended the faculty members for their dedication to showcasing the university's excellence on the international stage.

Dr. Othman Al-Khader, the university's acting deputy director for research, emphasized the role of the research sector in fostering students' creativity and encouraging them to pursue patents. He noted that providing a supportive environment for researchers contributes to the development of groundbreaking ideas.

Dr. Haneen Al-Ghabra, Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Research Cooperation and Consultations, underscored the significance of the invention in improving airport services, ultimately enhancing the travel experience for passengers and saving time and effort.

'KFH committed to supporting youth'

KFH renews its partnership with Kuwait Codes Initiative

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) renewed its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Codes initiative. This is in line with KFH's CSR strategy, which focuses on supporting digital transformation and innovation, fostering technological knowledge, and nurturing young talent.

During the launch conference for the 4th edition of Kuwait Codes 2024, KFH Deputy General Manager Public Relations and Media, Yousef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh, said: "We at KFH are proud to continue our strategic partnership with Coded Academy to develop programming fundamentals and empower technological innovation. Through such initiatives, we aim to support Kuwaiti youth and equip them with the best educational methods in the field of programming."

He reiterated KFH's commitment to strengthening its role as a social responsibility leader, fostering innovation within the private sector, and solidifying its prestigious position as both Kuwait's largest bank and the world's leading Islamic financial institution.

Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH's partnerships emphasize its role in supporting national initiatives that aim to develop a generation equipped with the skills to build and progress society in the coming years. This focus is especially critical because advancements in technology, artificial intelligence, and other tools are becoming increasingly essential in all aspects of life.

He added that KFH has a history of collaborating with organizations like CODED Academy to ensure its community contributions are meaningful and extensive. These contributions align with societal and global developments, pro-



Yousef Al-Ruwaieh speaking during the press conference.

viding added value and benefits across all sectors. KFH places a particular focus on supporting young people, entrepreneurs, and students.

Al-Ruwaieh emphasized KFH's track record of supporting innovation and technological advancement. He pointed to KFH's recent sponsorship of Kuwait Hackathon, Kuwait's biggest cybersecurity competition, held at Kuwait University. The event was organized by Coded Academy, in collaboration with the National Cybersecurity Center.

In conclusion, Al-Ruwaieh thanked everyone present and stressed the importance of KFH's continued commitment to forging strategic partnerships. This focus on collaboration will promote technology, programming, entrepreneurship, and various application projects for Kuwaiti youth, ultimately leading to significant achievements.



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LOCAL

Surgeons urged to implement ... 'Surgical Safety Checklist'

Health minister attends KAS' Ghabqa

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi urged Kuwaiti surgeons to adopt and implement the "Surgical Safety Checklist" in all operating rooms of Kuwait hospitals.

In a speech he delivered during the Ramadan Ghabqa held by the Kuwait Association of Surgeons (KAS) the day before yesterday, Dr. Al-Awadhi said the checklist has proven its ability to improve patient safety, and is now widely used in many countries of the world.

He highlighted the importance of using it as a protocol in operating rooms, as it not only led to improving patient safety procedures, but also to the integration of teamwork skills and improved the culture, quality and safety of work within operating rooms.

Dr. Al-Awadhi stressed the Ministry of Health's keenness to keep pace with the great developments in the field of technology and medical research, the specialty of general surgery and its branches and sub-specialties, as well as to support conferences to exchange experiences and knowledge for improving medical services and their impact on the development of the health system in the country.

Important

He also highlighted the important roles played by surgeons in the fields of general surgery, obesity surgeries, colon surgeries, tissue tumors, severe injuries, and other delicate surgeries.

The minister affirmed that Kuwait is distinguished by the cooperation between the government sectors and the public benefit associations, pointing out the presence of many associations, including the Kuwait Association of Surgeons, which includes an elite of surgeons

from various medical specialties.

He said, "They truly are people who handle difficult tasks in difficult places such as earthquakes, wars, etc. Despite the large role that doctors play in general in serving patients, surgeons still have a distinctive role among doctors."

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah appreciated the efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health to improve the health services provided in the country.

He said, "The development and advancement of health services requires concerted efforts between various ministries and state institutions. It is a shared collective responsibility that everyone must cooperate to achieve and advance in order to provide distinguished medical services to citizens and residents."

Furthermore, the President of the Kuwait Association of Surgeons Dr. Shihab Akrauf highlighted the society's keenness to hold the Ramadan Ghabqa annually, as it is the only gathering of surgeons outside the walls of work, and away from daily pressures, in a unique family atmosphere interspersed with many competitions.

He said it is an opportunity to review the society's achievements during the year, including community contributions, first aid training programs and awareness of chronic diseases, as well as various training courses held inside and outside Kuwait.

Dr. Akrauf highlighted the conclusion of a number of agreements with similar external bodies, the preparation of training programs at a high level of professionalism and leadership training, and the holding of many conferences.

He praised the society's cooperation with the Kuwait Red Crescent to provide aid and medical support to the people of Gaza, stressing that a conference on surgery in times of war and crises had been held recently within the framework of the distinguished social and pivotal role of the State of Kuwait in the areas of relief.

Dr. Akrauf also highlighted Ku-

wait's pioneering role in the field of surgical operations in various specialties such as in the heart, bones, organ transplantation, nerves, or eye specialties.

He appreciated the society's pioneering role in surgical training programs, advancing the medical services provided, enhancing the work of surgeons, each in their specialty, and developing their surgical expertise and skills by holding workshops and organizing conferences, as well as drawing on international expertise in this field.

Encouraging

Dr. Akrauf also affirmed the role of the society in raising the scientific level and encouraging research and study among surgeons through various means, such as holding seminars, lectures and conferences at the local and international levels, and exchanging experiences with specialized societies abroad.

He said the society, through its ongoing programs throughout the year, works to develop the spirit of cooperation among members, maintain the technical and moral level, and help them achieve the best possible conditions for serving their patients.

It is worth highlighting that the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, during the Kuwait Association of Surgeons' Ghabqa honored the Kuwaiti volunteer medical team that had assisted the Palestinian medical teams in Gaza, and helped them in performing surgical operations on many of the wounded and injured.

He expressed appreciation for the society's initiative with this honor.

The team includes anesthesia and intensive care consultant at Adan Hospital Dr. Mohammad Shamsah, urology consultant Dr. Faisal Al-Hajri, orthopedic and endoscopic surgery consultant Dr. Hussein Al-Quwaia, liver and pancreas surgery consultant Dr. Mohammad Al-Jamal, and Director of the legal department and volunteer affairs at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr. Musaed Al-Enezi.

Chief of the National Guard, and all members of the National Guard, commanders and forces, we express our great pleasure for this blessed visit.

"It gives me great pleasure to extend to your Highness the Amir and to the Kuwaiti people our warmest congratulations and blessings on the holy month of Ramadan, wishing to you and our dear homeland and the Islamic world prosperity, and blessings.

Al-Rifaie also remembered, during his speech, the Late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah.

"We take this opportunity to renew our pledge, and obedience to the leader of our country His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces," Al-Rifaie added.

Kuwait presses

Continued from Page 1

adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its last session."

He stressed that the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip have now reached an "unprecedented" stage of destruction, displacement, starvation and loss of the necessities of life for tens of thousands of children, women and the elderly.

Al-Mulla stressed that there is something that can be done "now" before stopping the fighting, repairing the infrastructure, and finding safe corridors to implement the plans on the ground, calling for the formation of a group of partners or an alliance - as happened in similar cases - to develop plans and mobilize support in order to work to lift part of the current suffering in Gaza.

On the other hand, Kuwait welcomed the draft resolution submitted by Qatar on (protecting education from attacks) in view of its importance and the urgent need for such resolutions and their implementation on the ground.

Regarding the implementation of the program adopted by the General Conference and the evaluation of the results of UNESCO's work during the years 2022-2023, Al-Mulla praised the new approach in its preparation and its inclusion of clear indicators, stressing that the organization is moving in the right direction to develop mechanisms for presentation and evaluation and follow up on the progress made in implementing the program.

Elsewhere, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres discussed late Monday the latest developments in the Gaza Strip.

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said that during a phone conversation, the two officials also focused on the recent efforts to bring peace and stability to the region.

Meanwhile, Director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Samantha Power warned Tuesday that "Famine is imminent" for Palestinian civilians in Gaza, urging Israel to take immediate action and open land routes to ensure the entry of relief aid to those affected.

"Today, food security experts released a heart-wrenching assessment that Famine is imminent in northern Gaza between now and May. There is also a serious risk of Famine for the rest of Gaza," Power said in a press statement.

She went on to say, "The catastrophic levels of hunger and malnutrition described in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report should be unimaginable in the current era, but for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza, this is the reality. With just two previous Famine declarations in the twenty-first century, this is a horrific milestone."

"We call on Israel to take immediate action to put an end to this mass - and preventable - suffering," she mentioned, adding that "Israel must do more to protect civilians and allow humanitarians to safely and consistently deliver assistance."

"There must be a continued and sustained international effort to ensure the right type of assistance is getting to the most vulnerable. Israel must do more to protect civilians and allow humanitarians to safely and consistently deliver assistance," she mentioned, adding that "We will continue to do everything we can to fight Famine in Gaza. We call on Israel to take immediate action to put an end to this mass - and preventable - suffering."

Power underlined that "USAID continues to prioritize emergency food assistance through ongoing support to the World Food Program (WFP), which was able to reach 1.45 million people with partial food assistance in February - but much, much more is needed."

"We continue to call on Israel to open more land routes into Gaza and reduce bottlenecks and inspection delays to get land crossings operating at full capacity, even as we pursue air and maritime options to supplement these land routes," she said.

Earlier this month, US President Joe Biden announced his country's plan to establish a temporary military port on the coast of Gaza, aiming to receive and distribute urgent humanitarian aid to Palestinians affected by the Israeli aggression against Gaza.

Biden said in his State of the Union speech that he directed the US military to lead an emergency mission to set up a temporary pier in the Mediterranean Sea on the Gaza coast, calling on Israel not to exploit humanitarian aid as a card for negotiation.

The US administration has reiterated its intention to increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, yet the Israeli occupation forces has persistently hindered aid delivery to the population at risk of famine, according to the United Nations.

In latest development, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the Israeli forces have killed Marwan Issa, a leading member of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), in the ongoing fighting in Gaza Strip last week.

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Monday, he said, "Israel has made significant progress against Hamas. They've broken a significant number of Hamas battalions, killed thousands of Hamas fighters, including senior commanders."



Above: Some photos from the 'Ramadan Ghabqa'.

Photos by Rizk Taufiq

IWG President Antonia Dimitrova gives welcome speech

International Women's Group hosts Lebanese-Night 'Ramadan Ghabqa'

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: The International Women's Group (IWG), in collaboration with the Lebanese Embassy and the wife of the Chargé d'Affaires to the State of Kuwait, Mrs. May Mansour, and the Lebanese Ladies' Society, organized the outstanding cultural event of a 'Lebanese Ghabqa-Night' on Sunday, March 17, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

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

eration of the Embassy of the Republic of Lebanon and thanked H.E Mr. Ahmad Arfa and his spouse.

The Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait, Mr. Ahmed Arafa, in his opening address expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to the president and members of the Executive Board of the International Women's Group for their effective contribution to the organization of the celebration.

He also extended his congratulations on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing him good health and well-being, and to the Kuwaiti people for further progress and prosperity.

The event included a musical performance of songs by Fairuz, presented by the artist Najla Al-Faqih, accompanied on the oud by the artist

George Tohmeh.

A short film about Lebanon entitled "Lebanon in the Eyes of Travelers" was also screened during the event, highlighting the various tourist, historical and cultural aspects of Lebanon.

This was followed by another performance of Fairuz songs by the artist Najla Al-Faqih, accompanied by the oud. This was followed by a raffle draw for valuable prizes, including gifts from the Lebanese community.

The traditional Lebanese Ramadan "Masaharti" also brought joy and happiness to the hearts of the attendees, inviting them to a food buffet that featured some of the famous Lebanese dishes prepared by the chefs of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in an atmosphere of Lebanese songs by Fairuz.

News in Brief

Handing over of 3 buildings:

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) is in the process of carrying out the initial handover of three buildings for gas stations in Mutlaa Residential City within this month, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources revealed the three gas stations are located in Plot Two in N9, N10 and N11 suburbs. Sources explained the initial handover requires the formation of a committee composed of competent authorities that conduct on-site inspection of the project and the committee should submit its recommendations to the PAHW for approval.

PAHW recently announced the completion of 113 public buildings in the city.

Innovative system: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has concluded a research project titled "Developing a Home Energy Management System based on Active Control," aiming to pioneer environmentally friendly building designs and advance sustainability efforts, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Headed by Farid Al-Ghamlas, the project utilized cutting-edge

strategies, including artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, to optimize air conditioning units for reduced energy consumption while maintaining thermal comfort.

Al-Ghamlas emphasized the implementation of the latest AI and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to control air conditioning, lighting, and window blinds in a model house resembling Kuwaiti architectural style. The model house served as a testing ground for innovative control strategies, resulting in a significant reduction of energy consumption in residential units by at least 20% through the optimized control system.

The research project achieved its objectives through the construction of a model house located south of the Water and Agriculture Research Building at KISR.

Various experiments were conducted to control air conditioning devices using three machine learning models, with the artificial neural network demonstrating the highest energy savings of 26% among the tested models.

Possible scenarios cited: In a new step towards maximizing financial resources, the Kuwait Mu-

nicipality intends to look into the proposed scenarios for the spring camps in the next season, which will be submitted to the Legal Department for study and then to the Municipal Council for approval, reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting a reliable source.

The source revealed the most prominent proposed scenarios in the new regulations for the coming season include allowing the establishment of commercial camps to be an entertainment site for families, and holding activities and events after obtaining approval from the concerned government agencies and in accordance with the rules and regulations.

The source stated that the amendments that will be made to the regulations include allowing the establishment of small enterprises within the borders of the commercial camp, where rules and regulations will be established; as well as allowing renting out spring camps to those with licenses issued by the Municipality and to those holding commercial licenses under the item 'organizing land trips'. He said the new regulations will allow government agencies and ministries to hold various events and activities in the camping sites.

World News Roundup

Europe

Russia aims to create buffer zone inside Ukraine: Russian President Vladimir Putin said after extending his rule in an election that stifled opposition that Moscow will not relent in its invasion of Ukraine and plans to create a buffer zone to help protect against long-range Ukrainian strikes and cross-border raids.

The Kremlin's forces have made battlefield progress as Kyiv's troops struggle with a severe shortage of artillery shells and exhausted front-line units after more than two years of war. The front line stretches over 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) across eastern and southern Ukraine.

Advances have been slow and costly, and Ukraine has increasingly used its long-range firepower to hit oil refineries and depots deep inside Russia. Also, groups claiming to be Ukraine-based Russian opponents of the Kremlin have launched cross-border incursions.

"We will be forced at some point, when we consider it necessary, to create a certain 'sanitary zone' on the territories controlled by the (Ukrainian government)," Putin said late Sunday.

This "security zone," Putin said, "would be quite difficult to penetrate using the foreign-made strike assets at the enemy's disposal."

He spoke after the release of election returns that showed him securing a fifth six-year term in a landslide in an election devoid of any real opposition following his relentless crackdown on dissent.

Monday marks the 10th anniversary of Russia's seizure of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula, which set the stage for Russia to invade its neighbor in February 2022. However, Putin has been vague about his goals in Ukraine since that full-scale invasion floundered. (AP)



Putin

UK's contentious plan close to clearing Parliament: The British government hopes one last push can revive its stalled plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda. A bill aimed at overcoming a UK Supreme Court block on deportation flights returns to the House of Commons on Monday and could be passed into law within days.

That would be a boost for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is facing disquiet from fellow Conservative lawmakers as the party lags in opinion polls ahead of an election due this year.

Britain and Rwanda signed a deal almost two years ago that would see migrants who cross the English Channel in small boats sent to the East African country, where they would remain permanently. So far, no migrant has been sent to Rwanda under the agreement.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons on Monday rejected changes made to the Safety of Rwanda Bill by Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords. The Lords inserted a series of amendments designed to water down the legislation. (AP)

'William, Kate video should halt royal rumor mill': Prince William and his wife Catherine have been filmed at a farm shop near their Windsor home. The Sun newspaper reported - the first footage of Kate since she had abdominal surgery for an unspecified condition two months ago.

The newspaper published a short clip late Monday that appeared to show William and Kate smiling as they walked together, carrying shopping bags. It said the footage was taken on Saturday in Windsor, west of London.

The Sun quoted Nelson Silva, who said he filmed the video, as saying, "Kate looked happy and relaxed. They look happy just to be able to go to a shop and mingle."

The couple's Kensington Palace office did not comment. The palace has said Kate, 42, will return to official duties after Easter. That's likely to be once her children go back to school on April 17. (AP)

London police arrest man: London police said Monday they have arrested a man on suspicion of attempted murder after two people were wounded with crossbow bolts in two separate attacks in the capital.

A manhunt was launched after a 44-year-old woman was hit in the head with a crossbow bolt in a residential part of Shoreditch, east London, on March 4. In a separate incident on March 14, a 20-year-old man was wounded in the neck by the same weapon in the same area.

The Metropolitan Police said their injuries were not life-threatening.

The force said a 47-year-old man was arrested late Sunday in Shoreditch, and that officers searching his home found a crossbow, knives and other weapons. (AP)

US envoy travels to Montenegro: A senior US official visited Montenegro Monday to offer support to the small Balkan nation seeking to join the European Union.

During a press conference in the capital Podgorica, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gabriel Escobar said Montenegro should be next in line to join the 27-nation bloc.

"There is absolutely no doubt in our mind... (the) strategic goal of this country is to become (a) full EU member," said Escobar after talks with Prime Minister Milojko Spajic.

Six nations from the Western Balkan region - Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia - are at different stages of the EU accession process following a period of wars and crises in the 1990s. (AP)

'Milanovic can't run for prime minister': Croatia's president can't run for prime minister, take part in the upcoming parliamentary election or campaign in favor of an opposition party, unless he resigns immediately from his current post, according to a ruling on Monday from the country's top court.

President Zoran Milanovic blasted the Constitutional Court decision, saying: "They did it in a gangster way."

"I will eventually be prime minister, but I won't tell that gang how," he told reporters.

Milanovic on Friday called a parliamentary election for April 17, but hours later announced that he would run for Croatia's next prime minister on the list of the opposition Social Democratic Party.

The surprise announcement has triggered a deep political crisis in the European Union and NATO-member country, with the state's constitutional court called in to give its opinion on Milanovic's move to run in the parliamentary election. (AP)

Notre Dame restoration 5-yr journey of dedication: The restoration of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris following a tragic blaze in April 2019 is a story of dedication and recovery.

The iconic medieval monument immortalized in history, film and literature has been gradually rebuilt over the past five years, through challenges that have included delays during the pandemic and the loss of the project's leader.

It's slated for completion by the end of 2024. Here is a timeline of events in the restoration:

April 2019 - A fire ravages Notre Dame, collapsing its roof and spire and destroying its interior, unleashing a global wave of solidarity. A monumental effort to restore the cathedral's grandeur is launched, and French President Emmanuel Macron pledges to complete it within five years. (AP)

Spanish police arrest 3 people: Spanish police have arrested three people for the deaths last November of five migrants who were threatened with a machete and forced to jump off the boat they were traveling in with dozens of other migrants, authorities said Monday.

According to a police statement, the five died on Nov. 29 off the southern coast of Cadiz. The police said two men and a woman were arrested earlier this month but gave no further details.

The people smugglers had threatened the five with a machete and forced them to jump into the Atlantic Ocean despite the strong currents and cold temperatures. (AP)



US President Joe Biden speaks during a Women's History Month reception in the East Room of the White House on March 18 in Washington. Biden is embarking on a three-day campaign swing aimed at shoring up his standing in the Sun Belt as part of an aggressive play to re-energize vital parts of his 2020 electoral coalition. (AP)

Politics

Trump makes Jan 6 attack cornerstone of bid for WH

Biden heads West to secure his standing

WASHINGTON, March 19, (AP) - US President Joe Biden is embarking on a three-day campaign swing aimed at shoring up his standing in the Sun Belt as part of an aggressive play to re-energize vital parts of his 2020 electoral coalition.

Much of Biden's time on this trip this week, which includes stops in Nevada, Arizona and Texas, will be geared toward courting the Latino voters who helped power his coalition in 2020 and to emphasizing his pro-union, pro-abortion rights message.

Biden's first stop Tuesday is in Reno, Nevada, where he will meet with local officials and campaign volunteers in Washoe County before heading to Las Vegas to promote his administration's housing policies.

Next he'll travel to Phoenix for another campaign stop in a critical swing county paired with an event talking up what he has done to bolster the computer chip manufacturing sector.

Critical

Biden's push with Latino voters this week is also part of the campaign's broader efforts to put in place the infrastructure to re-engage various constituencies that will be critical to the president's reelection. That effort is all the more crucial as key parts of Biden's base, such as Black and Hispanic adults, have become increasingly disenchanted with the president's performance in office.

In an AP-NORC poll conducted in February, 38% of US adults approved of how Biden was handling his job. Nearly 6 in 10 Black adults (58%) approved, compared to 36% of Hispanic adults. Black adults are more likely than white and Hispanic adults to approve of Biden, but that approval has dropped in the three years since Biden took office.

Biden's reelection campaign, along with allied Democratic groups, has opened offices in Washoe County and in specific areas of Las Vegas that aides said will help the campaign to target Black, Latino and Asian American voters.

Bilingual campaign organizers are already in place in Arizona, and the campaign has opened an office in Maryvale,

Biden to host 1st US-Japan-Philippines leaders' summit in Washington on April

WASHINGTON, March 19, (Agencies) - US President Joe Biden would host the first trilateral US-Japan-Philippines leaders' summit in Washington on April 11, the White House announced on Monday.

At the summit, the leaders would discuss the trilateral partnership built on deep historical ties of friendship, robust and growing economic relations, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said in a press statement.

She added that the summit would resolute commitment to share democratic values, and a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, affirming that the leaders would reaffirm the ironclad alliances between the United States and the Philippines, and the United States and Japan.

Jean-Pierre also said that the leaders would discuss trilateral cooperation to promote inclusive economic growth and emerging technologies, advance clean energy supply chains and climate cooperation, and further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and around the

world. Additionally, Biden would host Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr for a meeting at the White House on April 11 to review the historic momentum in US-Philippines relations and discuss efforts to expand cooperation on economic security, clean energy, people-to-people ties, and human rights and democracy.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre in a statement on Monday said the first-ever US-Japan-Philippines leaders' summit is an opportunity to highlight the countries' "growing economic relations, a proud and resolute commitment to shared democratic values and a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific."

The three leaders have no shortage of issues to discuss.

The announcement came as North Korea's state media reported that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire drill of nuclear-capable "super-large" multiple rocket launchers designed to target South Korea's capital.

a major Latino community in Phoenix. The campaign has hired more than 40 staffers in Nevada and Arizona.

Campaign officials believe that tuned-out voters are starting to pay attention to the reality of a rematch between Biden and Trump now that the two candidates have clinched their respective nominations. They're trying to boost coalition-building efforts in battleground states now that the matchup is set, using the energy coming out of Biden's State of the Union earlier this month to jolt their campaign momentum.

Also:

WASHINGTON: US Republican Donald Trump has launched his general

election campaign not merely rewriting the history of the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack, but positioning the violent siege and its failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election as a cornerstone of his bid to return to the White House.

At a weekend rally in Ohio, his first as the presumed Republican Party presidential nominee, Trump stood on stage, his hand raised in salute to the brim of his red MAGA hat, as a recorded chorus of prisoners in jail for their roles in the Jan. 6 attack sang the national anthem.

An announcer asked the crowd to please rise "for the horribly and unfairly treated January 6th hostages." And people did, and sang along.



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visits an apprentice training centre at the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC), in Coventry, England, on March 18. (AP)



Lambert



McLeland

America

Man found guilty of murder: A man living in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, has been found guilty in the 1980 cold case murder of a 19-year-old college student.

Multnomah County Circuit Judge Amy Baggio on Friday found Robert Plympton, 60, guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Barbara Mae Tucker, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office said in a news release on Monday.

Plympton was not convicted of rape or abuse because prosecutors failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it happened while she was still alive, the judge said. A medical examiner determined Tucker had been sexually assaulted and beaten to death.

In 2021, a genealogist with Parabon Nanolabs using DNA technology identified Plympton as likely linked to the DNA in the case. Detectives with the Gresham Police Department who found Plympton living in Troutdale, began conducting surveillance and collected a piece of chewing gum he had spit onto the ground, according to prosecutors. (AP)

Pro-Trump attorney arrested: An attorney facing criminal charges for illegally accessing Michigan voting machines after the 2020 election was arrested Monday after a hearing in a separate case in federal court in Washington, D.C.

Stefanie Lambert was arrested by US Marshals after a hearing over possible sanctions against her for disseminating confidential emails from Dominion Voting Systems, the target of conspiracy theories over former president Donald Trump's 2020 election loss. Lambert obtained the Dominion emails by representing Patrick Byrne, a prominent funder of election conspiracy theorists who is being sued by Dominion for defamation.

In a statement, the Marshals office said Lambert was arrested on "local charges." A Michigan judge earlier this month issued a bench warrant for Lambert after she missed a hearing in her case, in which she's charged with four felonies for accessing voting machines in a search for evidence of a conspiracy theory against Trump. Lambert had earlier, unsuccessfully, sued to overturn Trump's loss in Michigan. (AP)

Woman arrested in fatal crash: A 78-year-old woman was arrested in connection to a fatal crash at a bus stop in San Fran-

cisco that killed two adults and a child and injured an infant who remains hospitalized, police said Monday.

Mary Fong Lau, of San Francisco, was

booked into jail on Sunday and remained in custody Monday, jail records show.

Jail officials said Monday that Lau had not yet appeared in court. It was not imme-



The cruise ship Viking Sky arrives at port off Molde, Norway, on March 24, 2019, after it issued a mayday call following engine problems in heavy seas off Norway's western coast. A cruise ship carrying more than 1,370 people set sail along Norway's often wild western coast despite storm warnings, forcing a major evacuation by helicopter, should never have left harbor, Norwegian officials said on March 19 adding it could have developed into 'the worst disasters at sea in modern times.' (AP)

diately known if she had an attorney who could speak on her behalf.

Lau was charged with three counts of felony vehicular manslaughter, felony reckless driving causing bodily injury, and additional traffic violations, the San Francisco Police Department said in a statement.

A man and a child were killed at the scene of the crash after a Mercedes SUV crashed into a bus shelter Saturday afternoon in the city's West Portal neighborhood, police said. Three others, including Lau, were taken to hospitals. (AP)

Judge approves new charges: A judge approved two additional murder counts Monday against an Indiana man charged in the killings of two teenage girls but rejected a prosecutor's bid to add kidnapping charges.

The new charges approved against Richard Allen of Delphi are murder while committing or attempting to commit kidnapping.

Allen was arrested in October 2022 and charged with murder in the 2017 slayings of 13-year-old Abigail Williams and 14-year-old Liberty German. He pleaded not guilty to the original murder charges.

Carroll County Prosecutor Nicholas McLeland said when he filed the amended charges in January that it "more accurately causes the charging information with the cause's discovery and probable cause affidavit." (AP)

Lat/Am

3 police officers killed

Gangs 'unleash' fresh attacks in Haiti capital

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, March 19, (AP): Gangs attacked two upscale neighborhoods in Haiti's capital early Monday in a rampage that left at least a dozen people dead in surrounding areas.

Gunmen looted homes in the communities of Laboule and Thomassin before sunrise, forcing residents to flee as some called radio stations pleading for police. The neighborhoods had remained largely peaceful despite a surge in violent gang attacks across Port-au-Prince that began on Feb 29.

An Associated Press photographer saw the bodies of at least 12 men strewn on the streets of Pétionville, located just below the mountainous communities of Laboule and Thomassin.

Crowds began gathering around the victims. One was lying face up on the street surrounded by a scattered deck of cards and another found face down inside a pick-up truck known as a "tap-tap" that operates as a taxi. A woman at one of the scenes collapsed and had to be held by others after learning that a relative of hers was killed.

"Abuse! This is abuse!" cried out one Haitian man who did not want to be identified as he raised his arms and stood near one of the victims. "People of Haiti! Wake up!" An ambulance arrived shortly afterward and made its way through Pétionville, collecting the victims.

"We woke up this morning to find bodies in the street in our community of Pétionville," said Douce Titi, who works at the mayor's office. "Ours is not that kind of community. We will start working to remove those bodies before the children start walking by to go to school and the vendors start to arrive."



Ruto

It was too late for some, though. A relative of one of the victims hugged a young boy close to his chest, with his head turned away from the scene.

The most recent attacks raised concerns that gang violence would not cease despite Prime Minister Ariel Henry announcing nearly a week ago that he would resign once a transitional presidential council is created, a move that gangs had been demanding.

Gangs have long opposed Henry, saying he was never elected by the people as they blame him for deepening poverty, but critics of gangs accuse them of trying to seize power for themselves or for unidentified Haitian politicians.

Meanwhile, the deployment of a UN-backed Kenyan police force to fight gangs in Haiti has been delayed, with the East African country saying it would wait until the transitional council is established. Kenya's president is **William Ruto**. In a bid to curb the relentless violence, Haiti's government announced Sunday that it was extending a nighttime curfew through March 20.

Late

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Cuba protests US comments: Cuba's government on Monday protested as interventionist comments from the US Embassy on the island following demonstrations against power blackouts and food shortages by hundreds of people in eastern Cuba.

Cuba's Foreign Ministry delivered a note expressing the complaint to the chargé d'affaires at the US diplomatic mission in Havana, Benjamin Ziff.

On Sunday, protesters took to the streets in the eastern city of Santiago decharging power outages lasting up to eight hours and shortages of food. State media confirmed the protests in Santiago, while the U.S. Embassy in Havana said there were also reports of protests in a number of other provinces across the island.

Videos showing people chanting "electricity and food" were quickly shared by Cubans on and off the island on platforms like X and Facebook. A nongovernmental human rights group that monitors Cuba said there had been at least three arrests.

The U.S. Embassy urged the Cuban government to respect the protests in a post on its Facebook page.

"We urge the Cuban government to respect the human rights of the protesters and attend to the legitimate needs of the Cuban people," it said.

On Monday, Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío, speaking to The Associated Press, called the comments "disrespectful" and an "open interference in Cuba's domestic affairs."

Panama demands Nicaragua rein in Martinelli: Panama on Monday accused Nicaragua of meddling in its internal affairs by allowing former Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli to continue taking swipes at the justice system and promoting his political allies from within the walls of the Nicaraguan embassy.

Martinelli has been holed up in the embassy for more than a month since Panama moved to arrest him after his appeals ran out on his money laundering conviction. The 72-year-old former leader maintains that his prosecution was politically motivated as he sought to run for a second term in office. Nicaragua granted Martinelli political asylum. Panama has refused to grant Nicaragua permission to move Martinelli to Nicaragua. So Martinelli has stayed in the political mix using social media to advance his agenda.

Panama's Foreign Relations Ministry said Monday in a statement that it had sent Nicaragua a "vigorous" protest and called on Nicaragua to closely monitor Martinelli's behavior.

Panama's electoral authorities ruled Martinelli ineligible to participate in the May 5 presidential election following his conviction and sentencing. He previously governed Panama from 2009 to 2014.

Since being ruled out of the race, Martinelli has worked to promote his running mate José Raúl Mulino, who is now atop the ticket.

3 police officers killed in Mexico: A state police officer and her two bodyguards were killed in a highway attack in Mexico's violent western state of Michoacan, security officials said Monday.

Michoacan's state security agency said on X, formerly Twitter, that three members of the state Civil Guard had died in the line of duty Sunday night. One of them, Cristóbal García Hurtado, was a regional police commander. Local press reported that she had been decapitated.

The attack occurred on the highway connecting the towns of Patzcuaro and Uruapan.

The Michoacan state prosecutor's office, which is investigating, did not immediately comment.

Michoacan has been particularly hard hit by gang turf wars, with the Jalisco New Generation cartel fighting a local gang, the Viagras, for control. Thousands of residents have been displaced as organized crime experiments with drone attacks and improvised explosive devices.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, (second left in the background), attends a meeting with Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., (center), at Malacanang Palace in Manila, Philippines on March 19. (AP)

Asia

HK lawmakers pass new nat'l security law

Blinken underscores support for Manila

MANILA, Philippines, March 19, (AP): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored Washington's "ironclad commitment" Tuesday to help defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack against its forces after clashes between Chinese and Filipino coast guards in the disputed South China Sea recently turned more hostile.

Blinken, the latest high-level official to visit the United States treaty ally, met his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo on Tuesday before separately meeting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila. "We stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defense commitments, including under the Mutual Defense Treaty," Blinken said in a news conference with Manalo.

"We have a shared concern about the PRC's actions that threaten our common vision for a free, open Indo-Pacific, including in the South China Sea and in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone," Blinken said, using the abbreviation for the People's Republic of China. He cited "repeated violations of international law and the rights of the Philippines: water cannons, blocking maneuvers, close shadowing other dangerous operations."

The Chinese coast guard blocked and used water cannons against Philippine vessels in a confrontation two weeks ago that slightly injured a Filipino admiral and four of his sailors near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. The March 5 faceoff in the high seas also caused two minor collisions between Chinese and Philippine vessels and prompted Manila's Department of Foreign Affairs to summon China's deputy ambassador to convey a protest against the Chinese coast guard's actions, which the Philippines said were unacceptable.

Also:

SEOUL, South Korea: North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** supervised a live-fire drill of nuclear-capable "super-large" multiple rocket launchers designed to target South Korea's capital as he vowed to boost his war deterrent in the face of deepening confrontations with rivals, state media said Tuesday.

The report came a day after South Korea and Japan said they detected **North Korea** firing multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward waters off its eastern coast, adding to a streak of weapons displays that have raised regional tensions.

Experts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundaries between artillery systems and bal-

US, Japan seek UN resolution calling on all nations to ban N-arms in outer space

UNITED NATIONS, March 19, (AP): The United States and Japan are sponsoring a U.N. Security Council resolution calling on all nations not to deploy or develop nuclear weapons in space, the US ambassador announced Monday.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield told a UN Security Council meeting that "any placement of nuclear weapons into orbit around the Earth would be unprecedented, dangerous, and unacceptable."

The announcement that the US and Japan had circulated a resolution follows White House confirmation last month that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared later that Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space, claiming that the country has only developed space capabilities similar to those of the US.

The Outer Space Treaty ratified by about 114 countries including the United States and Russia prohibits the deployment of "nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction" in orbit or the stationing of "weapons in

outer space in any other manner." Japan's Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, who chaired the council meeting, said that even during "the confrontational environment" of the Cold War, the rivals agreed to ensure that outer space remained peaceful. That prohibition on putting any weapons of mass destruction into orbit must be upheld today, she said.

Thomas-Greenfield said all parties to the treaty must commit to the ban on nuclear and other destructive weapons, "and we must urge all member states who are not yet party to it to accede to it without delay."

She said the United States looks forward to engaging with the other members of the 15-nation Security Council "to forge consensus around this text."

Russia's deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyansky said Moscow's initial impression is that the proposed resolution is "yet another propagandist stunt by Washington," "very politicized" and "divorced from reality."

He criticized the text, saying the wording wasn't worked out by experts nor discussed at specialized international platforms such as the UN Conference on Disarmament or the UN Committee on Outer Space.

listic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery. The North has described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Tuesday that it assesses North Korea conducted more launches than what was shown on the photos. Lt. Col. **Lee Chang-hyun**, a deputy JCS spokesperson, said that South Korea categorizes the North Korean weapons system tested Monday as a ballistic missile in view of its characteristics and capacities.

HONG KONG: Hong Kong lawmakers passed a new national security law on Tuesday that grants the government more power to quash dissent, widely seen as the latest step in a sweeping political crackdown that was triggered by pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The legislature passed the Safe-guarding National Security Law during a special session Tuesday. It comes on top of a similar law imposed by Beijing four years ago, which has already largely silenced opposition voices in the financial hub.

Hong Kong's Legislative Council, which is packed with Beijing loyalists following an electoral overhaul, expedited the process. Since the bill was unveiled on March 8, a committee held daily meetings for a week, following an appeal by Hong Kong leader **John Lee** to push the law through "at full speed."

The law threatens stringent penalties for a wide range of actions authorities call threats to national security, with the most severe - including treason and insurrection - punishable by life imprisonment. Lesser offenses, including the possession of seditious publications, could also lead to several years in jail. Some provisions allow criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.



A father lifts his daughter to the front of a line of people waiting to receive a plate of food, at a shelter for families displaced by gang violence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Gangs attacked two upscale neighborhoods in Haiti's capital on March 18 in a rampage that left at least a dozen people dead in surrounding areas. (AP)



Tinubu



Bujakera

Africa

SAfrica probes maritime mystery: South African authorities searching for a missing charter boat captain are concerned about possible foul play after they discovered his vessel burned and abandoned on a beach in neighboring Mozambique, but no sign of him or the unknown man who hired him.

The National Sea Rescue Institute raised the alarm over captain John Matambu and his passenger after they didn't return to Sodwana Bay on South Africa's northeastern coast on Saturday evening having gone out early that morning.

The charred wreck of Matambu's speed boat, *Magnum Too*, was discovered by a search plane on Sunday in the Dobela area of Mozambique, some 170 kilometers (105 miles) up the coast.

"Both men remain missing in unknown circumstances," the National Sea Rescue Institute said.

Matambu's cousin told local media that a petrol canister and a medical kit were found near the boat.

The NSRI said some of the circumstances "appear to indicate that foul play may be involved."

The man who hired Matambu to take him out on the 21-foot (6.4-meter) boat apparently gave false contact details, NSRI spokesperson Craig Lambinon said. The booking was made for a man, his wife and a child, but only the man boarded the boat, Lambinon said.

"Hopes are that this has all been a misunderstanding, and foul play was not involved, but at this stage all possibilities are being examined," Lambinon told national broadcaster SABC. "The fact that the boat has been found across the border is obviously the difficulty now." (AP)

Journo expected to be freed soon: Congolese journalist **Stanis Bujakera** was set to be freed soon after a court found him guilty and sentenced him Monday to six months in prison for spreading false information among other charges, according to media freedom group Reporters Without Borders.

He was expected to be released hours or days after the verdict, having already served more than six months while waiting for trial. A court in Kinshasa also fined him 1 million Congolese francs (\$360). Bujakera worked for Actualité.CD, a Congolese online news site, and Jeune Afrique, a Paris-based magazine, among others.

Bujakera, who has denied all charges, had faced up to 20 years in prison. He was

accused of fabricating a memo that implicated a Congolese intelligence official in the murder of an opposition spokesman.

"He should never have been arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned and convicted on

the basis of a case that was clearly fabricated against him," Reporters without Borders said in a statement.

Actualité.CD said in a statement that it stood behind Bujakera's reporting and

called on his lawyers to appeal the guilty verdict. (AP)

100 villagers abducted in Nigeria: Armed gangs attacked two villages in Nigeria's northwest over the weekend and seized at least 100 people from their homes, residents and a state official told The Associated Press on Monday, in the latest mass abduction in the region.

The gunmen attacked communities in Kaduna state's Kajuru council area on Saturday and Sunday, said Usman Dallami Stingo, who represents Kajuru in the state legislature.

Kaduna state is where nearly 300 schoolchildren were abducted less than two weeks ago. The latest kidnappings, like the previous one, have been blamed on bandit groups known for mass killings and kidnappings in Nigeria's northwestern and central regions. Most of the bandits were previously herders in conflict with local communities.

The kidnapers attacked the Dogon Noma community early Saturday and abducted 14 women, then attacked the Kajuru-Station community on Sunday night and seized 87 people, Stingo said.

President **Bola Tinubu**, elected to lead the country of more than 210 million people last year, has ruled out the payment of ransoms - as is often done - in the operation to free the children.

Tinubu's government did not immediately comment on the latest attacks. (AP)



This image taken by a drone and provided by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO) shows the snake-shaped robot designed to assist a drone inside the No. 1 reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Okuma town, northeastern Japan, on March 14. Images taken by miniature drones from deep inside a badly damaged reactor at the Fukushima nuclear plant show displaced control equipment and misshapen materials but leave many questions unanswered, underscoring the daunting task of decommissioning the plant. (AP)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+31.54	12,804.00	UAE	- DFM	-2.62	4,272.76
JAPAN	- Nikkei	+263.16	40,003.60	PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-4.86	6,848.43
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+542.03	65,455.69				

Business

Company focuses on growth strategies in '23, emphasizes product launches & wealth management

Markaz's general assembly approves 6% cash dividends per share

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" held its ordinary General Assembly meeting on Tuesday, 19 March 2024, with a (75%) attendance. The assembly approved all items of the agenda, including the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 6% per nominal value of the share or 6fils per share.

In 2023, Markaz recorded Total Revenues of KD 26.32 million, a growth of 40.0% from KD 18.80 million in the previous year. The company delivered a Net Profits attributable to shareholders of KD 4.15 million, with Earnings Per Share of 8 fils, compared to KD 2.86 million in the previous year, with Earnings Per Share of 6 fils. Markaz's Assets under Management (AUM) increased by 5.03% since December 2022, reaching KD 1.21 billion.

Commenting on the results, Markaz's Chairman, Mr. Dirar Yusuf Alghanim said: "Throughout the year 2023, the GCC Economies witnessed huge development driven by the momentum in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The MSCI GCC index increased by 7.7% in 2023. In the context of the national economy, the IMF anticipates 3.6% real GDP growth in 2024, underpinned by attractive oil market dynamics. Inflation is expected to remain relatively subdued."

Alghanim pointed out: "The global economy encountered significant challenges due to the effects of escalating inflation, rising interest rates and the prolonged war in Ukraine. The outbreak of war in the Middle East, and the cooling of the US-China relationship, further intensified supply chain constraints, and global GDP growth in 2023 declined to 3.1% compared to the previous year (World Economic Outlook January 2024 edition). On the other hand, the asset management sector is experiencing a data-driven transformation led by artificial intelligence. By generating superior insights, artificial intelligence supports decision-making, constructing investment portfolios, and enhancing risk management. This opens doors to a new approach to alpha generation and a future where asset management is dependent on leveraging the power of data."

Business Strategy

Alghanim stated: "In light of the challenges in the economic landscape, Markaz has been driving its growth strategies by focusing on launching new products, enhancing wealth management distribution, and continuously improving its operational processes. Markaz has maintained a structured approach to asset selection and risk management and has taken significant steps

in fortifying its transaction monitoring procedures, in compliance with the directives of the Capital Markets Authority."

He added: "In the fintech space, Markaz is strategically investing in digital technologies to strengthen its position in the competitive landscape. With initiatives such as iMarkaz we are improving client access to investments, simplifying transactions with efficient online reporting and prioritizing client satisfaction. This approach is essential to cater for the evolving needs of digitally advanced clients and their investment needs."

Alghanim mentioned: "By incorporating Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations into our investment frameworks, Markaz underscores its role as a trusted leader in responsible investment practices. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in 2023 continued to focus on youth development initiatives such as the strategic partnerships with Loyac, sponsoring AC Milan Soccer School, and Watheefi fair. Additionally, Markaz supports local talent with its Markaz Graduate Development Program (MGDP) where we successfully recruit business graduates to train across our multiple departments. Our efforts extended to hosting enriching lifestyle seminars and supporting vital causes such as Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH), Bait Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH), and the Children's Cancer Centre of Lebanon. In addition, Markaz supports the activities of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)."

He said: "Markaz was honoured with ten distinguished awards in 2023 in various domains including Wealth Management, Research, Investment Banking, CSR, Digital Solutions and Diversity and Inclusion. The awards were presented by organizations such as Global Finance, Wealth Briefing, Euromoney and MEED. These recognitions reflect our successful strategy in establishing long term client engagement across all our offerings."

Outlook

"The formation of the new administration, headed by His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, will contribute positively in achieving stability and enhancing Kuwait's business environment locally and internationally. Looking forward, the global economy is expected to grow by 3.1% in 2024 according to the IMF, reflecting the impact of sustained inflation, financial tightening, and geopolitical tensions. De-



Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" held its ordinary General Assembly meeting on Tuesday, 19 March 2024, with a (75%) attendance. The assembly approved all items of the agenda, including the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 6% per nominal value of the share or 6fils per share.

spite a projected decrease from the previous year, inflationary concerns remain with an average forecast of 5.8% worldwide. Central banking policies are expected to remain cautious, with the US Federal Reserve closely monitoring key indicators. Despite the uncertainties around the upcoming American presidential elections, interest rates are expected to remain stable in early 2024 before rate cuts being implemented later in the year. Oil prices are predicted to remain steady at approximately \$85 per barrel, although geopolitical factors could introduce volatility. The stability in oil prices is beneficial for Gulf economies, by enhancing its fiscal position at a time of broader uncertainties," Alghanim commented.

"For 2024, Markaz's fixed-income strategies will focus on identifying specific credit opportunities in the region and capitalizing on a potentially pivotal period for global interest rates. Our Investment Banking department is set to expand its offerings in IPOs, listings, bond issues advisory, and M&A. The real estate sector is expected to benefit from demographic and economic changes in the region, providing opportunities for the Markaz real estate division," Alghanim concluded.

Mr. Ali Khalil, Markaz CEO also commented saying: "Markaz has navigated challenging market conditions, including the strong geopolitical developments that impacted the regional economies throughout the year, to deliver good performance and returns for our valued shareholders and clients across various asset classes. As we enter 2024, we are eager to celebrate our golden jubilee. We are proud of our 50-year history, marked by substantial growth and an active role in launching innovative

investment solutions that have helped shape Kuwait's asset management and investment banking sector. We continue to be among the leaders in the Kuwait market by introducing the first momentum fund following a series of innovative investment strategies over the years. We firmly believe that investment opportunities are always present, regardless of market conditions, and we have maintained our leading position in the industry while expanding our client base with this approach."

Strategic Initiatives

Khalil Highlighted: "Numerous industry awards have recognized the quality of our investment programs and services. Our dynamic strategy and proper risk management have ensured consistent and sustainable performance through volatile market cycles. Markaz's equity, fixed income, and real estate fund managers continue to focus on generating long-term returns."

"Markaz launched a diverse array of products and services in 2023 that has positively shaped the investment landscape in Kuwait. The year was marked by a focus on the "Family Office" segment and customized services that have significantly broadened our Wealth Management capabilities. These services have been thoughtfully tailored to align with the evolving investor needs marked by the increasingly demanding needs of family offices in Kuwait. Our Wealth Management and Business Development team works closely with global advisors to empower our high net-worth and affluent clients to create investment vehicles, establish multi-generational endowments, and access a diverse range of international products. Simultaneously, we are

prioritizing digitization to improve our customer experience." He added.

Khalil stated: "Our creative approach to investment banking exemplifies our commitment to helping our clients achieve their strategic and financial objectives. Markaz leverages its fifty years of expertise and outstanding reputation to assist our clients across the entire spectrum of investment banking, such as improving their capital structure, financing their operations, and acquiring or disposing of entities."

"Heading into 2024, Markaz continues to refine its growth strategy, emphasizing an increase in Assets Under Management (AUM), fee growth, innovation of new investment products and solutions, and our client-centered investment banking services. Furthermore, Markaz will continue to offer clients tailored portfolios to match their risk profiles for investments in the GCC fixed-income market." He added.

Solid performance across markets and sectors driven by exceptional execution capabilities

Equities

Global equity markets have experienced significant volatility due to uncertainty over interest rates and geopolitical tensions. Despite stable oil prices and promising economic growth prospects, the GCC markets have shown subdued performance this year. However, Markaz's "equities" team's active strategy has been delivering favorable performance compared to their respective indices, regardless of the market conditions.

Fixed Income

The Markaz Fixed Income Fund (MFIF), a privately placed fund, has consistently achieved its investment objectives, underpinned by a disciplined investment strategy. This performance is attributed to the fund's investment philosophy and balanced allocation policy.

International Real Estate

After a decade-long strong growth in the US and Europe, the challenges that emerged in 2022 continue to put downward pressure on real estate in 2023. However, regarding international real estate activity, 2023 was a year of success for us. We demonstrated the strength of our investment strategies and the soundness of our investment criteria. Markaz managed to exit a multifamily project and partially exit an industrial project, with investors receiving net IRRs of 10.0% and 18.0%, respectively. In Europe, we exited an industrial project with a net IRR of 11.9%.

Our investment philosophy has always been strategy agnostic, making us agile in promptly capitalizing on opportunities. This agility allowed us to pivot towards real estate debt last year as it offered favorable risk-weighted returns, and we will expand our real estate debt offering in 2024. In the longer term, the team will build on its conviction regarding favorable economic and demographic trends that will benefit select property types, mainly apartments, senior housing, and logistics.

MENA Real Estate

Our Markaz real estate fund (MREF) ended the year with excellent performance. MREF was up by 7.7% for the year due to our managers' ability to increase the occupancy rate across its properties from 77.3% at the start of 2022 to 91% by the end of 2023. Our Markaz Gulf Real Estate Fund (MGREF) is a private placement fund that invests primarily in income-generating properties to generate stable income and returns through sound acquisition, management, and disposal of properties in the most promising segments of the real estate market in the GCC.

Our MENA Real Estate team has earned the preferred real estate manager position for leading institutions due to their hands-on approach, ac-

cess to market data, and unmatched experience across GCC markets. The MENA Real Estate team continues to focus on expanding its flagship real estate funds and actively pursues development opportunities. The team is also exploring development projects across the GCC and Private Public Project (PPP) opportunities in Kuwait.

Investment Banking Services

Over five decades, Markaz built a distinguished reputation for delivering tailored and high-quality investment banking services to corporate clients and family offices in local and regional markets. Our proactive business development strategies in 2023 have been fruitful, with our investment banking team successfully acquiring new mandates and clients. During the year, our Capital Markets team successfully executed the first tranche of the KWD-denominated Tier II bond for the Commercial Bank of Kuwait, valued at 50 million KWD, and executed Tier II bonds for Ahli Bank of Kuwait, also worth 50 million KWD. Additionally, the team successfully placed the region's first KWD-denominated convertible bond. Furthermore, our Advisory team implemented financial restructurings for high-profile companies, advised on mergers within the professional services and oil and gas sectors, conducted transaction feasibility studies, and prepared strategic expansion plans and valuations in the healthcare sector. These mandates reflect our highly regarded and trusted investment banking services.

As part of our business development efforts, Markaz is forging strategic partnerships with external advisors to enhance our client advisory capabilities. This approach further supports family groups in complex restructurings and succession planning and advising on stock exchange listings within and outside of Kuwait. We focus on actively pursuing new client engagements and deepening existing relationships, reinforcing our growth objectives.

Our People and CSR

During the year, Markaz continued to uphold its commitment to fostering a dynamic, merit-based, and enriching work environment, driving professional growth and achievement. The Company maintained a culture where the staff, at all levels, are involved in realizing our strategic ambitions and are accountable and rewarded for success. The Human Resources, Strategic Planning, and Corporate Communications teams have worked closely to align Markaz with its strategic aims through effective and transparent communication. As a testament to its commitment to nurturing new talent, Markaz conducted its seventh annual Graduate Development Program, sponsored opinion-shaping conferences, and hosted targeted developmental efforts. In 2023, Markaz relocated to a new office at Burj Alshaya. The move equips the organization to cater to the evolving needs of stakeholders in a dynamic and robust working environment more effectively.

Outlook

Current geopolitical tensions, particularly the war in the Middle East, have added further complexity to global economic prospects. Volatility is expected to remain across the financial markets in the year ahead. Nonetheless, Markaz's investment teams possess the expertise and proven mindset required to identify emerging opportunities and create tailored financial solutions for its clients.

Our team members are committed to our growth strategy, which focuses on expanding our investment offerings, enhancing investment banking services, and providing personalized and digitized client experiences. The economic fundamentals of the GCC region offer a stable foundation for implementing our strategies.

'Regulatory controls adopted'

Kuwait plans allocation committee for Al-Shaddadiya Industrial City

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Informed sources have disclosed plans to establish an allocation committee tasked with studying industrial applications submitted to the Public Authority for Industry in Al-Shaddadiya Industrial City, which is slated to be ready by May of the upcoming year, reports Al-Jarida daily.

According to sources the committee's primary responsibility will be to inventory and categorize all eligible applications received. Emphasis will be placed on aligning industrial projects with the strategy outlined by the Public Authority for Industry. Furthermore, consideration will be given to ensure that these projects are in line with Kuwait's National Industrial Strategy 2035, encompassing eight specialized programs aimed at enhancing government operations.

The new allocation committee will operate under newly adopted regulatory controls and conditions related to plots allocation to address any challenges and obstacles encountered by the industrial sector.

Al-Shaddadiya Industrial City, billed as Kuwait's largest industrial hub, spans over 5 square kilometers and comprises approximately 1,036 industrial plots.

The city is segmented into three primary sectors: "Chemical" with 242 plots, "Food" with 299 plots, and "Miscellaneous" with 495 plots.

Plot sizes range from 1,000 to 10,000 square meters, with 10 percent earmarked for the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority and another 10 percent allocated to the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises.

Kuwait's imports rise in '23 across multiple categories

Significant rise in imported medicines noted in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Kuwait's foreign trade data for 2023 indicates a slight uptick in imports across several sectors compared to the previous year, reports Al-Anba daily.

The country spent 572.17 million dinars on live animals and animal products, with imports including meat, edible entrails, and limbs amounting to 229.34 million dinars. Additionally, purchases of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks totaled 66.8 million dinars.

Imports of milk, dairy products, bird eggs, and natural honey reached 220.8 million dinars, while coffee, tea, mate, and spices accounted for 65 million dinars. Edible fruits and vegetables saw purchases of about 152.4 million dinars, with sugar and sugar products totaling 47.7 million dinars.

Kuwait imported medicines worth approximately 578 million dinars, while perfumes and aromatic oils amounted to 258.74 million dinars. Purchases of books, printing products, and manuscripts reached 12.7 million dinars.

In addition, synthetic hair imports recorded 21.16 million dinars, while shoes and headgear amounted to 130 million dinars and 7 million dinars, respectively. Notably, imports of pearls, precious stones, and metals decreased to 660.65 million dinars compared to the previous year.

Machinery, electrical equipment, audio, and video devices saw significant imports, totaling about 1.08 billion dinars. The country also spent 12.16 million dinars on importing ships and boats, while children's toys accounted for 55.54 million dinars in imports.

Total licensed real estate brokers reach approx. 1,594

Surge in new licenses for real estate brokers in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: According to official data from the Real Estate Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 228 new licenses were issued to practice the profession of land and real estate brokerage in Kuwait in 2023, bringing the total number of licensed brokers to approximately 1,594 by the end of December, reports Al-Anba daily. Additionally, 295 licenses were renewed, while 84 licenses were cancelled during the same year.

The data revealed a surge in new licenses during the last quarter of the year, with October leading with 41 new licenses, followed by November and December.

Renewals peaked in March and October, each with 33 licenses, and May with 29 licenses. Conversely, the last quarter also saw the highest number of license cancellations, with October recording 14 cancellations, followed by December and November.

Regarding real estate evaluators, 21 new licenses were issued in 2023, totaling approximately 157 licensed evaluators by the end of December. The administration renewed 42 licenses, including 17 for individuals and 25 for companies, while 14 licenses were cancelled, 7 for individuals and 7 for companies.

The recommendations came as follows:

- Proposing an integrated national strategy to develop competencies and build digital capabilities in the country with the aim of building qualified national cadres capable of keeping pace with future requirements.

- Building an integrated environment that supports digital transformation by creating initiatives, strategies, and formulating policies that aim to advance the wheel of innovation and creativity in all different fields in the country.

- Introducing artificial intelligence technologies in all the various sectors of the state to ensure the advancement of the services provided by the state and facilitating access to them and implementing them at the highest level in order to enhance the knowledge economy.

- Developing the capabilities of government leaders in the field of artificial intelligence and raising the skills of technological jobs.

- Implementing many training programs and work-

shops in all government agencies on applied mechanisms for artificial intelligence, organizing an annual global summit and launching government accelerators for artificial intelligence.

- Formulating national policies to acquire digital skills by integrating artificial intelligence into education policies and including it in all educational institutions to advance the educational process as a basic requirement to keep pace with the requirements of the times.

- Encouraging private sector initiatives and increasing productivity in general, and investing energies and exploiting the available human and material resources and capabilities in a creative and beneficial way for the state.

- Building local capabilities in the field of artificial intelligence in many local applications and providing a platform for participants to share their ideas and applications in this field.

- Supporting research institutions specialized in data and artificial intelligence to lead innovation and spread societal awareness of the importance of artificial intelligence.

- Ensuring information security and providing the necessary technical automatic control in order to build the integrated electronic technical structure for digital transformation.

The Government Readiness Index for Artificial Intelligence 2023 report showed a general improvement in Kuwait's performance on most dimensions and Kuwait's ranking in the Gulf on the human capital dimension with the dimensions of the technology sector capacity pillar for the year 2023 advanced.

Its ranking in the Gulf remained stable on all dimensions of the data and infrastructure pillar of the index.

The report indicated significant progress in Kuwait's values on the government and public services pillar and the technology sector pillar after the government and public services rose from 37.4 points in 2022 to 38.14 points in 2023, and the technology sector rose from 34.72 points in 2022 to 40.58 points. In 2023, data and infrastructure decreased relatively from 70.93 points in 2022 to 70.85 points in 2023.

German railway operator resumes talks with union

A union representing many German train drivers and the main national railway operator have resumed negotiations in a bitter dispute over working hours and pay and are optimistic that they will achieve a result next week, the state-owned company said Saturday.

The GDL union has called drivers for Deutsche Bahn out on strike repeatedly in the dispute that has dragged on for months. A walkout on Tuesday coincided with a strike by cabin crew at

Lufthansa in a separate dispute, adding to disruption for travelers.

The main sticking point in the dispute is GDL's demand for working hours to be reduced from 38 to 35 hours per week without a pay cut. Some smaller private operators that operate regional services have agreed to the demand.

In a previous attempt to bring the two sides together, moderators suggested a reduction from 38 to 36 hours by 2028, but details of their proposal didn't

satisfy GDL.

On Saturday, Deutsche Bahn said it has now resumed talks with the union, which it described as "intensive but constructive."

"An understanding was reached on many issues," it added in a brief statement, without elaborating. "Both parties are confident of being able to communicate an agreement in the next week. GDL will refrain from further strikes until then." (AP)



Passengers wait for a train in the central train station in Frankfurt, Germany, Monday, March 11, 2024. Germany's state-owned main railway operator says that it and a union representing many train drivers have resumed talks in a bitter dispute over working hours and pay. It said Saturday, March 16, 2024 both sides are optimistic that they will achieve a result next week. (AP)

The only bank in Kuwait to receive this rating

NBK ranked among the top-rated Gulf regional financial institutions for climate actions by CDP

■ The score highlights the bank's dedication to increasing transparency regarding the environmental impact of its operations.

■ NBK's disclosures provide an annual evaluation of its environmental performance, including energy and water consumption.

■ The bank targets its sustainable assets portfolio to reach approximately US\$10 billion by 2030.

■ NBK has strategically integrated ESG standards and climate risks into its operations.

■ The bank continuously demonstrates responsibility in supporting global carbon emission reduction efforts.

■ The bank has established specific, measurable goals to incorporate climate-related considerations into its business model, showcasing its commitment to sustainable practices.

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received a score of "C" for the second consecutive year in the categories of Climate Change and Forests 2023, as announced by CDP (formerly known as the Carbon Disclosure Project), a globally recognized non-profit organization overseeing the leading environ-

mental disclosure platform.

NBK stands out as the sole bank in Kuwait to be rated by CDP, establishing its position among the leading financial institutions in the GCC engaged in the initiative.

A "C" score from CDP reflects the depth of understanding regarding various aspects such as climate change and forestry. It also indicates an in-depth analysis of how businesses approach important environmental topics, integrating them with their business methodology. This entails a holistic understanding of the outcomes of these practices and their effects on communities and ecosystems.

This rating aligns with NBK's roadmap aimed at strengthening transparency regarding the environmental impacts of the bank's operations and its endeavors to mitigate emissions through CDP. The bank initiated its disclosures in 2021, signaling its commitment to transparency and emissions reduction.

Moreover, this accomplishment underscores NBK's leading position among the top-performing organizations in sustainable practices, highlighting its dedication to transparency and responsible environmental leadership.



NBK headquarters

NBK's participation in the CDP strengthens its role in fulfilling the growing demand for environmental transparency set by financial institutions, clients, and regulators.

NBK has consistently provided an annual evaluation of its environmental performance, encompassing metrics such as energy and water consumption, waste management, resource utilization, and greenhouse gas emissions.

This information is detailed in the bank's annual sustainability reports, offering transparency regarding its environmental impact and operational carbon footprint.

For the second consecutive year, NBK sustains its robust ratings in the CDP, showcasing our dedication to advancing transparency regarding the en-

vironmental impacts of our operations. This commitment aligns with our efforts to facilitate the shift towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy and to contribute to realizing Kuwait's sustainability vision.

NBK has initiated crucial efforts to integrate ESG standards and climate risk considerations into its operational framework, acknowledging their pivotal role in fostering sustainable growth. Furthermore, the bank actively collaborates with its customers to advocate for the adoption of sustainable practices, facilitating effective communication to catalyze collective efforts towards sustainability.

Furthermore, the bank is actively exploring innovative research and development technologies to magnify our reliance on renewable energy and transition all its facilities into eco-friendly structures. Additionally, it seeks to quantify and assess the greenhouse gas emissions linked to its portfolio by aligning with international accounting frameworks and utilizing greenhouse gas assessment tools.

As a leading regional financial institution, NBK consistently seeks diverse approaches to evaluating risks associated with climate change, alongside man-

aging its environmental impact operationally. This encompasses interactions with both customers and suppliers.

NBK's efforts align with its commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2060, with interim targets to decrease total operational emissions by 25% by 2025. Additionally, the bank aims to grow its portfolio of sustainable assets to approximately US\$10 billion by 2030.

It further pledges to play a responsible role in supporting global endeavors to mitigate carbon emissions and address climate change risks by establishing clear, measurable, and accountable objectives. This commitment underscores NBK's determination to integrate climate-related considerations into its future business strategies.

CDP collaborates with over 740 financial institutions worldwide, overseeing assets exceeding US\$136 trillion. Its objective is to encourage companies to disclose their environmental impacts, diminish greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water resources, and safeguard forests. In 2023, approximately 24,000 companies submitted their disclosures through this initiative.

Property sector still in the doldrums

China's economy is showing some signs of improvement

HONG KONG, March 19, (AP): China's manufacturing and investment improved in the first two months of the year, while weakness in the property sector weighed on the economy, the National Bureau of Statistics said Monday.

The report said industrial output rose 7% from a year earlier in January-February, better than analysts had forecast. Spending on factories and equipment, known as fixed-asset investments, rose 4.2%.

The real estate sector remained sluggish, with investment in real estate falling 9% in January-February compared to the same period a year earlier.

The property market is "still in a state of adjustment and transition" but policies outlined at China's annual legislative session earlier this month will promote "stable and healthy development," National Bureau of Statistics spokesperson Liu Aihua told reporters.

During the National People's Congress meetings, China's leaders pledged to refine property sector policies, including increasing financing to developers and building more affordable housing.

The signs of strength followed various moves by authorities to boost growth. The statistics bureau said retail sales climbed 5.5% and consumer prices rose for the first time since August. The consumer price index was up 0.7% in February after months of falling prices.

"Industrial production was a sizeable beat, supported by strong exports in the month, while fixed assets investments on the other hand, were likely supported by a state-driven push early this year," said Louise Loo of Oxford Economics in a note.

She said consumer spending was "buoyed temporarily" by spending

related to the Lunar New Year holidays, the biggest festival of the year, and that without added government spending it would be difficult to keep up strong growth.

Beijing has set an economic growth target of about 5% for 2024, which experts say may be challenging to reach.

"We expect economic momentum to improve further in the near-term given the tailwind from policy stimulus. But this recovery may prove short-lived due to the economy's underlying structural challenges," said Zichun Huang, a China economist with Capital Economics.

The recovery of the world's second-largest economy following the shocks of the pandemic has been hindered by various factors, one of the largest being a downturn in the real estate industry after authorities moved to curb excess borrowing by property developers.

Huang said that the correction in property construction is "still in its early stages."

Another area for concern is employment. While the official urban unemployment rate was 5.2% according to the latest data, but 14.6% of young Chinese 16-24 years old were jobless.

That's an improvement from 14.9% in December and nearly 20% in June, but still highlights persisting difficulties young Chinese face in finding jobs following the pandemic and a crackdown on technology companies that hurt investment in private businesses. The jobless figure for youths does not include students.

China usually releases economic data monthly, but data for the first two months of the year are combined to avoid distortions from the weeklong Lunar New Year holidays, when many businesses and factories are closed.

US Energy Dept conditionally OK's \$2.26b loan for huge lithium mine

RENO, Nev., March 19, (AP): President Joe Biden's administration has conditionally agreed to loan more than \$2 billion to the company building a controversial lithium mine in Nevada with the largest known U.S. deposit of the metal critical to making batteries for electric vehicles key to his renewable energy agenda.

The U.S. Energy Department agreed on Thursday to provide the \$2.26 billion conditional loan to Canada-based Lithium Americas to help cover costs at its open pit mine deeper than the length of a football field near the Oregon line.

The loan would help finance the a lithium carbonate processing plant at the Thacker Pass mine about 200 miles (322 kilometers) north of Reno - "the largest-proven lithium reserves in North America," DOE said in a statement.

"Thacker Pass is a treasure trove of lithium - key to strengthening U.S. energy security and electrifying Amer-

ica," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a message posted Friday on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"By presenting this \$2.26b conditional loan, we'll help level the global playing field and supercharge clean energy manufacturing nationwide," she said.

The Energy Department said the loan is contingent on its Loan Programs Office's review of the project under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Biden's renewable energy agenda aimed at easing U.S. reliance on fossil fuels so as to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is expected to be a key issue in his reelection bid against ex-President Donald Trump, who has said he would focus on drilling for more oil.

The department said lithium carbonate from Thacker Pass could support the production of batteries for up to 800,000 electric vehicles annually, avoiding the consumption of 317 million gallons (1.2 billion liters) of gasoline per year.

BoJ ends its negative interest rate policy, opts for first hike in 17 yrs

The bank has an inflation target of 2%

TOKYO, March 19, (AP): Japan's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate Tuesday for the first time in 17 years, ending a longstanding policy of negative rates meant to boost the economy.

The Bank of Japan's lending rate was raised to a range of 0 to 0.1% from minus 0.1% at a policy meeting that confirmed expectations of a shift away from ultra-lax monetary policy.

It was the first rate hike since February 2007. The negative interest rate policy, combined with other measures to inject money into the economy and keep borrowing costs low, "have fulfilled their roles," Bank of Japan Gov. Kazuo Ueda told reporters.

The bank has an inflation target of 2% that it used as a benchmark for whether Japan had finally escaped deflationary tendencies. But it had remained cautious about "normalizing" monetary policy, or ending negative borrowing rates, even after data showed inflation at about that rate in recent months.

Ueda said there was "a positive cycle" of a gradual rise of wages and prices, while stressing that monetary policy will remain easy for some time.

Although private sector banks and other financial organizations will make their own decisions about rates, he said did not foresee any drastic rises. The central bank will watch for any big moves in rates, which would cause confusion, he added.

"We made the decision because we foresaw stable and continuous 2% inflation," he added.

Another factor supporting the shift: Japanese companies have announced relatively robust wage hikes for this year's round of negotiations with trade unions.

Wages and profits at companies were improving, the Bank of Japan said, in releasing its latest decision, referring to "anecdotal" accounts as well as data it had gathered lately.

"Japan's economy has recovered moderately," it said.

Market reaction was muted as the decision had been anticipated after Japanese media reports earlier this week. Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 index gained nearly 0.7% on Tuesday, while the dollar was steady at about 150 yen.



Commuters walk in a passageway during a rush hour at Shinjuku Station Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024, in Tokyo. Japan's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate Tuesday, March 19, 2024, for the first time in 17 years, ending a longstanding policy of negative rates meant to boost the economy. (AP)

United Airlines CEO tries to reassure customers that the airline is safe despite recent incidents

WASHINGTON, March 19, (AP): The CEO of United Airlines says that a slew of recent incidents ranging from a piece of aluminum skin falling off a plane to another jet losing a wheel on takeoff will cause the airline to review its safety training for employees.

CEO Scott Kirby said the airline was already planning an extra day of training for pilots starting in May and changes in training curriculum for newly hired mechanics.

In a memo to customers on Monday, Kirby tried to reassure travelers that safety is the airline's top priority.

"Unfortunately, in the past few weeks, our airline has experienced a number of incidents that are reminders of the importance of safety," he said. "While they are all unrelated, I want

you to know that these incidents have our attention and have sharpened our focus."

Kirby said the airline is reviewing each recent incident and will use what it learns to "inform" safety training and procedures. He did not give any details beyond measures that he said were already being planned, such as the extra day of training for pilots.

Some of the recent incidents - such as cracks in multi-layer windshields - don't normally attract much attention but have gained news coverage and clicks on social media because of the sheer number of events affecting one airline in a short period of time.

To a degree, United may be a victim of heightened concern about air safety since January when a panel blew off

an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max at 16,000 feet above Oregon; investigators say bolts securing the panel were missing.

"I don't see a major safety issue at United," said John Cox, former airline pilot and now a safety consultant. "The media is enhancing the events with extra scrutiny. Anything right now that happens to a United airplane makes the news."

Cox said the incidents "are unfortunate, and they are getting a lot of attention, but I don't see that they are showing an erosion in the safety of the commercial aviation system."

In the most recent incident at United, on Friday a chunk of the outer aluminum skin fell off the belly of a Boeing 737-800 that was built in 1998.

begin falling below 2% and wage increases may not necessarily lead to robust consumer spending if people choose to save, rather than spend.

"While the bank's decisions will contribute to improving the functioning of financial markets, the impact on the real economy is likely to be limited," according to analysis by S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Ueda had repeatedly said the central bank would review its negative rate and other easing measures if the 2 percent inflation target was met and was accompanied by wage increases.

The Japanese central bank's policy is quite different from those of the U.S.

Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank. Both have been moving to lower interest rates after rapidly raising them to clamp down on inflation.

The Bank of Japan has kept borrowing costs extremely low for many years to encourage Japanese consumers and businesses to spend and invest to help sustain stronger economic growth.

Japan recently became the world's fourth biggest economy, slipping behind Germany in terms of its nominal gross domestic product, or GDP. The U.S. economy is the largest, followed by China, which overtook Japan over a decade ago.

BOJ officials say they want to make sure inflation is based on domestic factors that can sustain higher wages, not external ones. Analysts expect the Bank of Japan to continue to move slowly on further raising interest rates.

The ultra-lax monetary policy also included huge injections of money into the economy through purchases of Japanese government bonds and other assets. The bank said the BOJ would continue with those government bond purchases at a rate of about 6 trillion yen (\$40.2 billion), and adjust quickly depending on economic trends.

In collaboration with numerous local restaurants and bakeries

Gulf Bank organizes 'Nuqsat Al-Khaleej' for fourth consecutive year

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: For the fourth consecutive year, Gulf Bank is organizing 'Nuqsat Al-Khaleej' as part of its various community events and initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, in collaboration with several local restaurants and bakeries, every Thursday.



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi

Abdullah Al-Mulaifi: We are dedicated to supporting SME businesses and preserving authentic Kuwaiti traditions.

Abdullah Al-Mulaifi, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications, emphasized, "Annually, we prioritize arranging 'Nuqsat Al-Khaleej' to revive this authentic Kuwaiti tradition, and to enhance our engagement with the community throughout the holy month of Ramadan. Additionally, this initiative aids in supporting local SMEs, by promoting their products."

Al-Mulaifi mentioned that Gulf Bank supports SMEs in expanding their product distribution to the public, allowing their restaurants and bakeries to tap into new customer segments, thus facilitating their growth and expansion.

He emphasized that this initiative is one of Gulf Bank's charitable events during the holy month of Ramadan, which reflects the

bank's involvement with the community over the last sixty years, and its integral part in Kuwait's economic and social history.

Al-Mulaifi highlighted Gulf Bank's unwavering commitment to sustainability programs spanning social, economic, and environmental aspects. These programs involve carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the bank and society. These initiatives are noteworthy as they align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking ex-



Part of the weekly Nuqsat Al-Khaleej activities during the month of Ramadan.

perience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in

sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives,

strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Ku-

wait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Spreading positivity amongst younger generation as part of its Ramadan 2024 campaign

stc partners with Aspire Kids Club for 3rd year in row



A group photo of children participating in Ramadan initiatives.

AlJasem: Involving the younger generation in such programs is essential for fostering a culture of empathy and responsibility.
Al-Ruwaih: Our continuous partnership with stc further solidifies our model to promote a compassionate and socially responsible generation.

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, announced its partnership with Aspire Kids Club, a local entertainment and educational children's club that aims to promote culture, for the third year in a row.

The partnership aims to spread positivity and empower the younger generation through 5 exclusive events sponsored by stc.

The activities also come as a continuation of the different programs organized under the Company's "With good, we go further" Ramadan 2024 campaign. stc indicated in a statement that its partnership with Aspire Kids Club encompasses 5 different activities that are part of the club's "Positive Sustainability" campaign, which is the theme for 2024.

The initiatives include involving the kids to distribute iftar meals to those who are in need, memorizing and reciting the Holy Quran in partnership with the Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, celebrating Girgean and distributing coloring books to children at Dar Al-Shoun, as well as additional initiatives that support kids in the country. stc's renewed sponsorship of the Aspire Kids Club follows the positive impact witnessed in previous years amongst participants and the community.

As part of its Ramadan campaign this year, stc aspires to show the importance of practicing habits and be-



The joy of children during the distribution of breakfast meals.



stc staff preparing to distribute meals to children.

haviors that spread positivity in the community, hence the title of its Ramadan 2024 campaign, "With good, we go further". Additionally, the sponsorship also touches on achieving positive sustainable habits, aligning

with stc's focus on strengthening its sustainability program for 2024.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "Involving the younger generation in programs that are designed to support the community is essential for fostering a culture of empathy and responsibility amongst our future leaders. stc is proud to sponsor the Aspire Kids Club once again as part of the various programs and sponsorships under its Ramadan 2024 campaign.

Exposing children to such activities at an early age enables them to develop mental awareness of how important it is to become active contributors to society. At stc, we understand that with leadership comes responsibility, further inspiring us to seek innovative ways to engage with all segments in our community, leaving a lasting impact."

Taiba Al-Ruwaih, an advocate for children's education and Founder of the Aspire Kids Club, said, "We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to stc for sponsoring our program for the 3rd year in a row. Through our programs, we have witnessed amazing progress in how our kids have developed empathetic qualities and grasped the understanding of helping others.

Developing these qualities at an early stage not only supports the development of personal skills but also allows the kids to experience the joy of helping others within their community. Our continuous partnership with stc supports our vision to expand our reach and enhance our initiatives, further solidifying the foundation of our model to promote a compassionate and socially responsible generation."

To find out more about stc's events, promotions, and sponsorships, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download mystc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.

Fostering entrepreneurial spirit in Kuwait

KIB Mubader Center concludes sponsorship of Startups Expo

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that its subsidiary, KIB Mubader Center, sponsored the Startups Expo, which recently took place at A5 Mallin Shuwaikh.

The expo featured a distinguished lineup of small and medium-sized projects from various fields. This step comes as part of the Bank's and KIB Mubader Center's continuous efforts to support events that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. It underscores the importance of this vital sector in Kuwait in general, and the crucial role of the private sector in driving the local economy forward.

Commenting on the occasion, Mohammad Al-Huwaidi, Head of Mubader, expressed his delight in sponsoring this distinguished exhibition, saying: "It was an exceptional opportunity and an important meeting point for SMEs and service providers from various fields.

"It was also a unique platform that witnessed the presentation of diverse products and solutions from both sides, the exchange of experiences, and the exploration of potential business opportunities and partnerships."

Al-Huwaidi added: "As part of our participation in the exhibition, we offered a workshop that discussed a number of topics, issues, ideas, and projects,



Mohammad Al-Huwaidi, Head of Mubader

and touched on how to benefit from modern entrepreneurship models in es-

tablishing and developing projects."

He noted that KIB Mubader Center seeks to contribute to the creation of a new generation of talented Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, guiding them to become capable of leading the transformation journey pursued by the State of Kuwait within the framework of its leadership vision to become a leading financial and commercial hub at the regional level.

The exhibition witnessed significant participation from numerous SMEs from various sectors, including marketing and advertising, design, photography studios, accounting firms, feasibility study offices, consulting firms, interior and exterior design, application and website development, financial technology and

payments, delivery and logistics, international shipping, storage, packaging, printing, office and shop rental, business incubators, and recruitment and human resources.

It is worth noting that KIB established KIB Mubader Center to work alongside Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and SME business owners, as an incubator and accelerator within a comprehensive qualification system.

The Bank aims to ensure the provision of necessary support to entrepreneurs at every stage of their business journey by providing multi-level training and professional packages, along with a series of services that meet the needs of the local entrepreneurship environment on a broader scale.

New generation of readers embraces bell hooks' 'All About Love'

Books

NEW YORK, March 19, (AP) — In the summer of 2022, Emma Goodwin was getting over a breakup and thinking hard about her life and how to better herself. She decided to try a book she had heard about often, bell hooks' "All About Love: New Visions."

"I loved it. It takes seriously a subject that is scoffed at in popular culture, that a lot of people see as silly," says Goodwin, 26, a social media coordinator who lives in Philadelphia. "What has stuck with me over the past couple of years since I read it is the idea that to be a loving person is something you have to work at and not something that comes naturally."

Brianna Pippen, a visual artist in the Washington, D.C. area, has read "All About Love" a couple times, and values it for how it explores not just romantic love, but families and friends and relationships in general. Tiffany Stewart, a writer and producer in Los Angeles, first read "All About Love" two years ago with her reading group and reread it recently.

Just from the book's introduction, she knew it was going to "crack open" her mind and change everything she had believed.

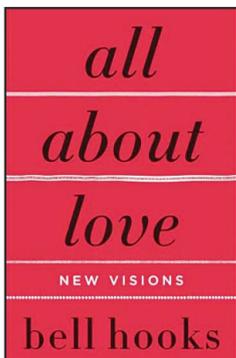
"We've always been told that

love should just feel good. It should be fluffy and light and easy. And that means you're looking at the media version of love," she said.

Published by William Morrow and Company in 2000, "All About Love" endures as a word-of-mouth favorite — the kind of book that continues to be read and discussed even without any breaking news event, movie tie-in or publicity campaign. Friends recommend it to friends. Fans post about it on Instagram and TikTok and review it on Goodreads, where more than 190,000 members have included it on their to-read list.

According to Circana, which tracks around 85% of physical book sales, "All About Love" sold more than 170,000 copies in 2023, compared to just over 27,000 in 2018. Morrow editor Rachel Kahan cites the murder of George Floyd in 2020 as a turning point, although sales were already rising.

"I think this is one of those situations where the book's been around a while and the culture rises up to meet it," says Kahan, who was working with hooks at the time of her death, in December 2021. A few months before,



This cover image released by William Morrow shows "All About Love: New Visions" by Bell Hooks. (AP)

Kahan had told the author that "All About Love" made The New York Times bestseller list.

"We were kind of laughing and crying," the editor said. "She was so excited that the book was getting all this attention from readers and influencing the conversation."

Scholars of hooks welcome the late feminist's ongoing popular-

ity, but some worry that readers are gaining only a selective understanding of her, viewing her more as a self-help author than as a political and social thinker.

The pen name for Gloria Jean Watkins, bell hooks helped popularize the idea of "intersectionality," a concept coined by Black civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, also known for her work on the concept of critical race theory. Intersectionality holds that racism, sexism and economic inequality reinforce each other and shape (and distort) the ways we see ourselves, and each other.

Author of more than 30 books, hooks explored everything from the lasting impact of slavery on Black women to the failure of white feminists to work more closely with their Black contemporaries. In her lifetime, she was often cited for the 1981 book "Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism," its title taken from the memoir of 19th century abolitionist Sojourner Truth.

She wrote often about love, family and community, but within the framework of a society that hooks saw as isolating us and setting us against each other. In "All

About Love," she rejected the "dangerous narcissism" of New Age thinkers, and contended that love had been distorted by "our obsession with power and commodity." The problem often began at home, she wrote, where too many children were subjected to "chaos, neglect, abuse and coercion."

"There can be no love without justice," hooks wrote. "Until we live in a culture that not only respects but also upholds basic civil rights for children, most children will not know love."

M. Shadee Malaklou, who directs the bell hooks center at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, where hooks taught over the final decade and a half of her life, says that some find it "convenient to flatten out a feminist of color."

"bell was never depoliticized," she says. "For bell, the love she talks about is a love for justice. 'All About Love' is a love letter to justice."

Stewart said she found that "All About Love" had both a personal and political message, aligning the "individual journey" with the "communal and societal one." We are affected on many levels by "this hyper-individual-

istic energy and temporary satisfaction." Stewart added, and the book "teaches us to think outside of ourselves, which is important because we can't get through life without one another."

The author was in her mid-40s and had been publishing books for 20 years when she signed with William Morrow for "All About Love," the first of a "Love Song to the Nation" trilogy that also included "Communion" and "Salvation." The original editor of "All About Love," Doris Cooper, says she and hooks would work on the book at the author's Greenwich Village apartment.

"I remember how beautiful that apartment was, and that is was so light-filled. And when I look back, I think that was not insignificant. bell believed in beautiful things as a representation of love towards oneself," says Cooper, now vice president and editor-in-chief of Simon Element, an imprint of Simon & Schuster.

"One day, I was walking in the Village with her, and we passed a little jewelry store. She admired something in there and she bought it for herself. I was really struck by the idea of buying yourself jewelry."

Variety



This image released by Universal Pictures shows characters Po, voiced by Jack Black, left, and Zhen, voiced by Awkwafina, in a scene from DreamWorks Animation's "Kung Fu Panda 4." (AP)

Film

Animation movie earns \$30 million in ticket sales

Kung Fu Panda 4 holds box office throne

NEW YORK, March 19, (AP) — "Kung Fu Panda 4" stayed at the top of the North American box office in its second weekend in theaters. The Universal and DreamWorks Animation movie earned \$30 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday.

The franchise featuring the voice of Jack Black is responsible for over \$1.9 billion at the box office since it launched in 2008 and spawned several animated series, shorts, video games and a holiday special.

The fourth installment, playing in 4,067 locations in North America, has already made \$107.7 million domestically.

There were several new movies arriving in over 1,000 theaters (or expanding) this weekend, including Lionsgate's Mark Wahlberg dog movie "Arthur the King," Focus Features' comedic satire "The American Society of Magical Negroes" and A24's Kristen Stewart-led bodybuilding thriller "Love Lies Bleeding."

But the charts still belonged to the franchises, including "Dune: Part Two," which came in a very close second in its third weekend, with \$29.1 million.

That's down only 37% from last weekend. It's now made \$205.3 million domestically. The first film, which was released simultaneously in theaters and on streaming, capped out at around \$435 million globally, while "Part Two" is already at almost \$500 million worldwide.

"Arthur the King" did the best of the newcomers, landing in third place with \$7.5 million from 3,003 locations.

The studio went into the weekend expecting something in the \$8 million to \$10 million range. Its low production cost and international presales should yield profits.

Directed by Simon Cellan Jones and written by Michael Brandt, the movie is based on the true story of an adventure racer who befriends a stray dog on



This image released by Lionsgate shows Mark Wahlberg in a scene from "Arthur the King." (AP)

a perilous 435-mile trek in the Dominican Republic. Simu Liu plays one of Wahlberg's teammates. With an A CinemaScore, the studio is hoping positive word of mouth will boost sales in the coming weeks.

"Love Lies Bleeding" opened in 1,362 locations to \$2.5 million. Written and directed by Rose Glass ("Saint Maud"), it's a pulpy '80s-set Western thrill-

er about an isolated gym manager (Stewart) and a bodybuilder (Katy O'Brian) passing through town.

"The American Society of Magical Negroes" opened in 1,147 theaters and made an estimated \$1.3 million. According to exit data, 52% of the opening weekend audience was Black. The movie, written and directed by Kobi Libii, is a satire about a secret society of Black people dedicated to making white lives easier. Justice Smith and David Alan Grier star.

In the first weekend following the Oscars, "Poor Things" added \$2.3 million globally, bumping its total to \$112.6 million.

Next weekend, "Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire" will arrive in theaters, armed with proton packs and brand name recognition.

"When there's not a newcomer dominating the marketplace, it makes for a rather slow weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "Now we're just waiting for 'Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire' and 'Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire.' That combo should take us out of the month of March on a high note."

He added: "We're going to have to have a lot of patience until we get to May and 'The Fall Guy' and the summer movie season. But there's some great movies on the way."

Estimated ticket sales are for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Kung Fu Panda 4," \$30 million.
2. "Dune: Part Two," \$29.1 million
3. "Arthur the King," \$7.5 million.
4. "Imaginary," \$5.6 million.
5. "Cabrimi," \$2.8 million.
6. "Love Lies Bleeding," \$2.5 million.
7. "Bob Marley: One Love," \$2.3 million.
8. "One Life," \$1.7 million
9. "The American Society of Magical Negroes," \$1.3 million
10. "Ordinary Angels," \$1 million.

ST. PAUL, Minn.: A second man has been charged in connection with the 2005 theft of a pair of ruby slippers that **Judy Garland** wore in "The Wizard of Oz," according to an indictment made public Sunday.

Jerry Hal Saliterman, 76, of Crystal, Minnesota, was charged with theft of a major artwork and witness tampering. He did not enter a plea when he made his first appearance Friday in U.S. District Court in St. Paul.

The slippers, adorned with sequins and glass beads, were stolen from the Judy Garland Museum in the late actor's hometown of **Grand Rapids**, Minnesota, nearly 20 years ago and their whereabouts remained a mystery until the FBI recovered them in 2018.

The indictment says that from August 2005 to July 2018 Saliterman "received, concealed, and disposed of an object of cultural heritage" — specifically, "an authentic pair of 'ruby slippers' worn by Judy Garland in the 1939 movie 'The Wizard of Oz.'" The indictment says Saliterman knew they were stolen, and that he threatened to release a sex tape of a woman and "take her down with him" if she didn't keep her mouth shut about the slippers. Saliterman was in a wheelchair and on supplemental oxygen during his Friday court appearance. His oxygen machine hummed throughout the hearing and he bounced his knee nervously during breaks in the proceedings. He responded with "yes," when U.S. Magistrate Judge **Elizabeth Cowan Wright** asked whether he understood the charges against him, but he said nothing about the allegations.

The case was not openly discussed in court. The magistrate ordered Friday that the indictment be unsealed, but it did not become publicly available until Sunday.

Saliterman's attorney, **John Brink**, said after Friday's hearing that he couldn't say much about the case, but: "He's not guilty. He hasn't done anything wrong." Saliterman, who was released on his own recognizance, declined to comment to The Associated Press outside the courthouse. The man who stole the slippers, **Terry Jon Martin**, 76, pleaded guilty in October to theft of a

major artwork, admitting to using a hammer to smash the glass of the museum's door and display case in what his attorney said was an attempt to pull off "one last score" after turning away from a life of crime. He was sentenced in January to time served because of his poor health.

Martin's lawyer said in court documents that an old associate of



Garland



Saliterman

Martin's with connections to the mob told him the shoes had to be adorned with real jewels to justify their \$1 million insured value.

Martin, who lives near Grand Rapids, said at an October hearing that he hoped to take what he thought were real rubies from the shoes and sell them. But a person who deals in stolen goods, known as a fence, informed him the ru-

bies weren't real, Martin said. So he got rid of the slippers.

Defense attorney **Dane DeKrey** wrote in court documents that Martin's unidentified former associate persuaded him to steal the slippers as "one last score," even though Martin had seemed to have "finally put his demons to rest" after finishing his last prison term nearly 10 years earlier.

"But old habits die hard, and the thought of a 'final score' kept him up at night," DeKrey wrote.

According to DeKrey's memo, Martin had no idea about the cultural significance of the ruby slippers and had never seen "The Wizard of Oz." The documents unsealed Sunday do not indicate how Martin and Saliterman may have been connected. (AP)

People & Places

Obit

Singer Steve Harley dies

Byron Janis, renowned pianist, composer dies

NEW YORK, March 19, (AP): **Byron Janis**, a renowned American concert pianist and composer who broke barriers as a Cold War era culture ambassador and later overcame severe arthritis that nearly robbed him of his playing abilities, has died. He was 95.

Janis passed away Thursday evening at a hospital in New York City, according to his wife, Maria Cooper Janis. In a statement, she described her husband as "an exceptional human being who took his talents to their highest pinnacle."

A childhood prodigy who studied under Vladimir Horowitz, Janis emerged in the late 1940s as one of the most celebrated virtuosos of a new generation of talented American pianists.

In 1960, he was selected as the first musician to tour the then-Soviet Union as part of a cultural exchange program organized by the U.S. State Department. His recitals of Chopin and Mozart awed Russian audiences and were described by the New York Times as helping to break "the musical iron curtain."

Seven years later, while visiting a friend in France, Janis discovered a pair of long-lost Chopin scores in a trunk of old clothing. He performed the waltzes frequently over the ensuing years, eventually releasing a widely hailed compilation featuring those performances.

But his storied career, which spanned more than eight decades, was also marked by physical adversity, including a freak childhood accident that left his left pinky permanently numb and convinced doctors he would never play again.

Greater setback

He suffered an even greater setback as an adult. At age 45, he was diagnosed with a severe form of psoriatic arthritis in his hands and wrists. Janis kept the condition secret for over a decade, often playing through excruciating pain.

"It was a life-and-death struggle for me every day for years," Janis later told the Chicago Tribune. "At every point, I thought of not being able to continue performing, and it terrified me. Music, after all, was my life, my world, my passion."

He revealed his diagnosis publicly in 1985 following a performance at the Reagan White House, where he was announced as a spokesperson for the Arthritis Foundation.

The condition required multiple surgeries and temporarily slowed his career. However, he was able to resume performing after making adjustments to his playing technique that eased pressure on his swollen fingers.

Janis remained active in his later years, composing scores for television shows and musicals, while putting out a series of unreleased live performances. His wife, Cooper Janis, said her husband continued to create music until his final days.

"In spite of adverse physical challenges throughout his career, he overcame them and it did not diminish his artistry," she added. "Music is Byron's soul, not a ticket to stardom and his passion for and love of creating music, informed every day of his life of 95 years."



LONDON: Steve Harley, a British musician whose glam-rock band Cockney Rebel had an enduring hit with the song "Make Me Smile (Come Up and See Me)," has died. He was 73.

Harley's family said Sunday that he had "passed away peacefully at home, with his family by his side." Harley said late last year he was being treated for "a nasty cancer."

Born in London in 1951, Harley spent almost four years of his childhood hospitalized after contracting polio, periods during which he began reading and writing poetry. He worked as a trainee accountant and as journalist on local newspapers, and began his performing career at London folk clubs.

He formed Cockney Rebel, which released a debut album, "The Human Menagerie," in 1973 before foundering over creative differences. With a new lineup and rebranded as Steve Harley and Cockney Rebel, the band released the 1975 album "The Best Years of Our Lives," which contained Harley's biggest hit.

Barbed lyrics

With its barbed lyrics - aimed at Harley's former bandmates -- and infectiously catchy chorus, the Alan Parsons-produced "Make Me Smile" topped the U.K. singles chart. It went on to be covered scores of times and was used on countless soundtracks, including in the 1997 film "The Full Monty" and in ads for Carlsberg beer, department store Marks and Spencer and Viagra.

Harley also sang the title song of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "The Phantom of the Opera" alongside Sarah Brightman when it was released as a single in 1986. He was originally cast in the title role for the stage musical, but was replaced by Michael Crawford.

Ultravox frontman Midge Ure, who produced Harley's 1982 track "I Can't Even Touch You," called him a "true 'working musician'."

"He toured until he could tour no more, playing his songs for fans old and new," Ure wrote on social media. "My thoughts go out to Dorothy and his family at this very sad time. Our songs live on longer than we ever can."

Harley is survived by his wife Dorothy, children Kerr and Greta and four grandchildren. The family said in a statement that they knew he would be "desperately missed by people all over the world."



From left, Johnny Gill, Ricky Bell, Ralph Tresvant, Bobby Brown, Ronnie DeVoe and Michael Bivins, of New Edition, accept the Hall of Fame award during the 55th NAACP Image Awards, Saturday, March 16, 2024, at The Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. (AP)



This undated handout image shows the house known as the Garden Lodge in London, where rock star Freddie Mercury lived the final decade of his life. The mansion that was Freddie Mercury's sanctuary in London is on sale for the first time in nearly 45 years — minus his 'exquisite clutter.' (AP)



Kelly



Y-PHOTO

Variety

NEW YORK: R. Kelly's lawyer told an appeals court Monday that all kinds of legitimate organizations - even college fraternities - could be deemed racketeering organizations under a law used to convict the R&B superstar at his Brooklyn trial of sexually abusing young fans, including children, for decades.

Attorney Jennifer Bonjean, seeking to reverse his 2021 convictions or to win him a new trial, tried to persuade three judges on the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan that prosecutors improperly used a racketeering statute written to shut down organized crime to go after the singer.

She said it wasn't fair that prosecutors charged Kelly, 57, with leading a Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) enterprise from 1994 to 2018 comprised of individuals who promoted his music and recruited women and girls to engage in illegal sexual activity and to produce child pornography.

"This was not a collection of people who had a purpose to recruit girls for sexual abuse or child pornography," Bonjean said. "Whether they turned a blind eye, whether some of them suspected that some of these girls were underage, that's a whole different matter."

"And once we get into that sort of territory, where we're going to say that constitutes a RICO enterprise, well we have a lot of organizations - we have a lot of frat houses - we have all types of organizations that are now going to become RICO enterprises," she said in support of the Grammy-winning, multiplatinum-selling songwriter.

The judges did not immediately rule, but they had plenty of questions for Bonjean and a prosecutor who defended the government's handling of the case, which resulted in a 30-year prison sentence in June 2022.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kayla Bensing said Kelly's network of aides and employees were part of the singer's "system in place that lured young people in to his orbit" before he "took over their lives."

At trial, several women testified that they were ordered to sign nondisclosure forms and were subjected to threats and punishments such as violent spankings if they broke what one referred to as "Rob's rules."

Music

Iconic trio joins Country Music Hall of Fame

Burton, Anderson, Keith recognized

NASHVILLE, Tenn., March 19, (AP): James Burton, John Anderson and Toby Keith on Monday became the newest members to join the Country Music Hall of Fame.

The Country Music Association announced the 2024 inductees in Nashville, Tennessee, with Burton, a guitarist who was Elvis Presley's band leader, entering in the recording/touring musician category. Meanwhile, Keith, who passed away just days after voting for inductees concluded, joins as the modern era artist. Anderson, a country star known for his distinctive voice and songwriting, joins as the veteran era artist.

The three will be formally inducted during a ceremony in the fall.

While the celebratory ceremony focused on all three of the artists' contributions to country music and their influence, the event took a somber tone to reflect the passing of Keith, who died from stomach cancer in February.

"My heart sank that Tuesday afternoon knowing that we missed the chance to inform Toby while he was still with us, but I have no doubt that he'll always be 'as good as he once was,'" said Sarah Trahern, CEO of the

Country Music Association.

Tahern added that Keith's posthumous induction did not violate the Hall's rules against inducting an artist in the year of their death because he was selected before he died.

Keith, a hit country crafter of pro-American anthems who both riled up critics and was loved by millions of fans, died Feb. 5. The induction vote was finalized Feb. 2.

The "Should've Been a Cowboy" singer-songwriter, broke out in the country boom years of the 1990s and later became known for his overt patriotism on post 9/11 songs like "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," and boisterous barroom tunes like "I Love This Bar" and "Red Solo Cup."

Burton said Monday that he initially thought he was being pranked when he got the call sharing the news that he was being inducted. He hung up the phone and quickly called back just to double check the call was real.

"So much of my career was spent playing for incredible country artists and to now be going up on that wall with all those innovators and industry greats is just incredible," Burton said.

Along with leading Presley's "Tak-

ing Care of Business" band in Las Vegas, Burton also played in Emmylou Harris' Hot Band and later joined John Denver's band after Presley's death in 1977. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001 and the Musicians Hall of Fame in 2007.

For Anderson, the country icon has enjoyed a sweeping discography spanning more than 40 years - with particular breakout fame in the 1970s and 1990s. This included the career-defining hit "Seminole Wind," which touched on environmental themes by referencing the development of the Everglades and its diminishing size.

"Florida native John Anderson helped steer Country Music back to its traditions with his bold honky-tonk style," said Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum CEO Kyle Young in a statement.

"James Burton, who hails from Louisiana, blended Country and blues to create a fiery picking style that distinguished countless hits and has inspired guitarists the world over. Toby Keith from Oklahoma brought a sly swagger and a patriotic passion to songs that made him one of the best-selling Country artists of the past 30 years," Young said.

Some of the judges questioned whether the employees knew about Kelly's illegal activities with teenage girls.

"What evidence is there that staff who arranged these things knew that they were underage? asked Circuit Judge Denny Chin.

The prosecutor responded by citing numerous instances of testimony, including one in which a woman testified that she told a member of Kelly's entourage that she was 16 when he asked her age. Others knew some girls were not yet 18 because they booked flights for them and the girls had to provide their birth dates, she noted.

"So this is all evidence that the jury was entitled to infer that Kelly's inner circle knew what was going on. That he was recruiting and maintaining underage women for sexual activity," Bensing said.

"Members of the enterprise heard Kelly beat his girlfriends, they knew that Kelly was isolating his victims and they

helped him do it, including by enforcing his punishments such as watching over them while they were confined to a bus for prolonged periods of time," she added.

Kelly, born Robert Sylvester Kelly, is known for work including the 1996 hit "I Believe I Can Fly" and the cult classic "Trapped in the Closet," a multipart tale of sexual betrayal and intrigue. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Ariana Grande and Dalton Gomez are now divorced.

A Los Angeles Superior Court judgment dissolving their marriage of nearly three years became official Tuesday, six months after the 30-year-old pop star filed a petition to divorce the 28-year-old real estate broker.

The two separated more than a year ago, according to court papers. They had a pre-nuptial agreement, had no children and had no significant legal disputes in the split, allowing it to move quickly and

cleanly through the court system.

The terms of their settlement were agreed upon in October, they had only to wait the required six months before a judge's order could take effect.

Under the agreement, Grande will make a onetime payment of \$1,250,000 to Gomez with no future alimony, give him half of the proceeds of the sale of their Los Angeles home, and will pay up to \$25,000 toward his attorneys' fees.

Like the vast majority of California divorces, Grande's petition cited irreconcilable differences as the reason for the split.

The couple began dating in January 2020, and quarantined together during the pandemic. They appeared together in the video for the Justin Bieber charity single "Stuck With U" in May of that year, and announced their engagement in December. (AP)

SANTA FE, N.M.: A movie set armorer is challenging her conviction on an involuntary manslaughter charge in the fatal shooting of a cinematographer by Alec Baldwin on the set of the Western film "Rust," court records released Monday show.

Defense attorneys for "Rust" armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed filed a request for a new trial and urged a judge to release the defendant from jail as deliberations proceed.

Gutierrez-Reed was convicted by a jury this month in the shooting on the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico, during a rehearsal in October 2021. Baldwin was indicted by a grand jury in January and has pleaded not guilty to an involuntary manslaughter charge, with trial set for July.

In an emergency court motion, defense attorneys Jason Bowles and Monica Barreras asserted that the jury instructions in the case "could confuse the jury and lead to a nonunanimous verdict." Similar objections to the jury instructions were rejected at trial.

Gutierrez-Reed could be sentenced as soon as April 15 under the current scheduling orders from Santa Fe-based Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer. Involuntary manslaughter carries a felony sentence of up to 18 months in prison and a \$5,000 fine. Gutierrez-Reed is being held pending sentencing at the Santa Fe County Adult Detention Facility. (AP)



People look at a new Banksy mural painting on a wall in London, Monday, March 18, 2024. A new Banksy mural drew crowds to a London street on Monday, even before the elusive graffiti artist confirmed that the work was his. The artwork in the Finsbury Park neighborhood covers the wall of a four-story building and shows a small figure holding a pressure hose beside a real tree. Green paint has been sprayed across the wall, replicating the absent leaves of the tree, which has been severely cropped. Banksy claimed the work by posting before and after photos of the location on his official Instagram account. (AP)

'They can be quite profound, disabling and difficult to treat'

New study finds 'no brain injuries' among Havana syndrome patients

WASHINGTON, March 19, (AP): An array of advanced tests found no brain injuries or degeneration among U.S. diplomats and other government employees who suffer mysterious health problems once dubbed "Havana syndrome," researchers reported Monday.

The National Institutes of Health's nearly five-year study offers no explanation for symptoms including headaches, balance problems and difficulties with thinking and sleep that were first reported in Cuba in 2016 and later by hundreds of American personnel in multiple countries.

But it did contradict some earlier findings that raised the specter of brain injuries in people experiencing what the State Department now calls "anomalous health incidents."

"These individuals have real symptoms and are going through a very tough time," said Dr. Leighton Chan, NIH's chief of rehabilitation medicine, who helped lead the research. "They can be quite profound, disabling and difficult to treat."

Yet sophisticated MRI scans detected no significant differences in brain volume, structure or white matter - signs of injury or degeneration - when Havana syndrome patients were compared to healthy government workers with similar jobs, including some in the same embassy. Nor were there significant differences in cognitive and other tests, according to findings published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

While that couldn't rule out some transient injury when symptoms began, researchers said it's good news that they couldn't spot long-term



The U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba is seen on Jan. 4, 2023. An array of advanced tests found no brain injuries or degeneration among U.S. diplomats and other government employees who suffer mysterious health problems once dubbed "Havana syndrome," researchers reported Monday, March 18, 2024. (AP)

markers on brain scans that are typical after trauma or stroke.

That "should be some reassurance for patients," said study co-author Louis French, a neuropsychologist at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center who treats Havana syndrome. "It allows us to focus on the here and now, to getting people back to where they should be."

A subset, about 28%, of Havana syndrome cases were diagnosed with a balance problem called persistent postural-perceptual dizziness, or PPPD. Linked to inner-ear problems as well as severe stress, it results when certain brain networks show no

injury but don't communicate properly. French called it a "maladaptive response," much like how people who've slouched to alleviate back pain can have posture trouble even after the pain is gone.

The Havana syndrome participants reported more fatigue, posttraumatic stress symptoms and depression.

The findings are the latest in an effort to unravel a mystery that began when personnel at the U.S. embassy in Cuba began seeking medical care for hearing loss and ear-ringing after reporting sudden weird noises.

Early on, there was concern that Russia or another country may have

used some form of directed energy to attack Americans. But last year, U.S. intelligence agencies said there was no sign a foreign adversary was involved and that most cases appeared to have different causes, from undiagnosed illnesses to environmental factors.

Some patients have accused the government of dismissing their ailments. And in an editorial in *JAMA* on Monday, one scientist called for more research to prepare for the next such health mystery, cautioning that NIH's study design plus the limits of existing medical technology could have missed some clues.

"One might suspect that nothing or nothing serious happened with these cases. This would be ill-advised," wrote Dr. David Relman of Stanford University. In 2022, he was part of a government-appointed panel that couldn't rule out that a pulsed form of energy could explain a subset of cases.

The NIH study, which began in 2018 and included more than 80 Havana syndrome patients, wasn't designed to examine the likelihood of some weapon or other trigger for Havana syndrome symptoms. Chan said the findings don't contradict the intelligence agencies' conclusions.

If some "external phenomenon" was behind the symptoms, "it did not result in persistent or detectable pathophysiologic change," he said.

The State Department said it was reviewing NIH's findings but that its priority was ensuring affected employees and family members "are treated with respect and compassion and receive timely access to medical care and all benefits to which they are entitled."



In this March 22, 2016, file photo, retired NASA astronaut Tom Stafford, a native of Weatherford, Okla., who flew the first lunar module to the moon in 1969, stands in front of a portrait made in his honor in the Oklahoma House of Representatives lounge in Oklahoma City. (AP)

Astronaut Thomas P Stafford commander of Apollo 10 dies

WASHINGTON, March 19, (AP): Astronaut Thomas P. Stafford, who commanded a dress rehearsal flight for the 1969 moon landing and the first U.S.-Soviet space linkup, died Monday. He was 93.

Stafford, a retired Air Force three-star general, took part in four space missions. Before Apollo 10, he flew on two Gemini flights, including the first rendezvous of two U.S. capsules in orbit. He died in a hospital near his Space Coast Florida home, said Max Ary, director of the Stafford Air & Space Museum in Weatherford, Oklahoma.

Stafford was one of 24 NASA astronauts who flew to the moon, but he did not land on it. Only seven of them are still alive.

"Today General Tom Stafford went to the eternal heavens which he so courageously explored as a Gemini and Apollo astronaut as well as a peacemaker in Apollo

Soyuz," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said via X, formerly known as Twitter. "Those of us privileged to know him are very sad but grateful we knew a giant."

After he put away his flight suit, Stafford was the go-to guy for NASA when it sought independent advice on everything from human Mars missions to safety issues to returning to flight after the 2003 space shuttle Columbia accident. He chaired an oversight group that looked into how to fix the then-flawed Hubble Space Telescope, earning a NASA public service award.

"Tom was involved in so many things that most people were not aware of, such as being known as the 'Father of Stealth,'" Ary said in an email. Stafford was in charge of the famous "Area 51" desert base that was the site of many UFO theories, but the home of testing of Air Force stealth technologies.

The Conversation

Children experience more injuries, stress and even burnout when they specialize in one sport

By Nirav Pandya

University of California, San Francisco

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.



From football to baseball, gymnastics to tennis, more young athletes are becoming sports specialists. They join expensive sports clubs or youth leagues and devote themselves to a single sport all year long. But Nirav Pandya, a professor of orthopedic surgery and sports medicine at the University of California San Francisco, says there are risks when kids specialize, including an increased possibility of injury and a high burnout rate.

The Conversation has collaborated with SciLine to bring you highlights from the discussion, which have been edited for brevity and clarity.

What trends do you see related to kids and sports participation?

Nirav Pandya: We're seeing a tremendous number of kids who are participating in sports outside of the school setting.

And kids are specializing in sports at younger ages. Six-, 7-, 8- and 9-year-olds are playing one sport year-round to the exclusion of other sports.

What are the outcomes for kids who specialize?

Nirav Pandya: When kids specialize, they have a significantly increased risk of injury.

We also know 70% of kids will drop out

of sports by age 13 if they specialize.

Also, in the long term, kids who specialize in a single sport perform less well in that sport and in all sports in general than kids who play more than one. So once again, we're really hurting kids from multiple different levels if they're specializing.

What is the relationship between sports specialization and injuries?

Nirav Pandya: There's a tremendous increase in traumatic injuries. ACL tears used to be something we'd see in 17-, 18-, 19-year-olds. Now, 10-, 11- and 12-year-olds get them. The rate of ACL injuries has gone up 12% over the last decade in this adolescent age group.

Based on my experience as a clinician, kids are also getting overuse injuries like knee pain and shoulder pain from doing too much of the same activity again and again.

Are clubs and leagues costly?

Nirav Pandya: The Aspen Institute has shown that families will spend, on average, about \$1,000 per year for these travel or private club sports. That's a big financial burden for a lot of families.

In addition, the reason why a lot of families are doing this is because they want their kids to get a college scholarship. Colleges are very expensive, and parents think if their child specializes in a sport and plays on these club teams, they can get to that level.



Pandya

What families don't understand is that the average four-year college scholarship amount is only \$14,000. And of all the kids playing sports, only 2% of them are actually going to get a college scholarship.

Is this mainly a problem for the rich?

Nirav Pandya: You have one group of kids who have access to sports because their families have the money and those kids are getting injured. And then you have another group of kids whose families don't have the money to participate, and therefore there isn't really an outlet for them to be physically active because school funding is going down. Recreational programs don't exist. So then those kids get the problems of diabetes, obesity and hypertension, and they carry that into adulthood.

What can parents do to ensure their kids have a healthy relationship with sports?

Nirav Pandya: It's important for parents to understand the data. And that's our role as physical therapists, athletic trainers and coaches - to understand that data and give it to parents.

I think the second thing is also not to feel the pressure to enter the youth sports complex, a US\$15.3 billion industry. Instead, donate to a community organization that is funding recreational sports, or try to push for your school to have those opportunities for your kids.

And finally, if your child is going to be playing travel sports or year-round sports, the parents should look at the websites of the club. Are they promoting kids to be healthy and active in a safe environment, or are they promoting kids to get a scholarship? (AP)

First total knee replacement patient treated with Polaris AR breakthrough

MIAMI, March 19, (BUSINESS WIRE): Polaris AR, a developer of advanced mixed-reality surgical guidance technology, announced the first total knee arthroplasty (TKA) using its STELLAR Knee mixed-reality surgical guidance system.

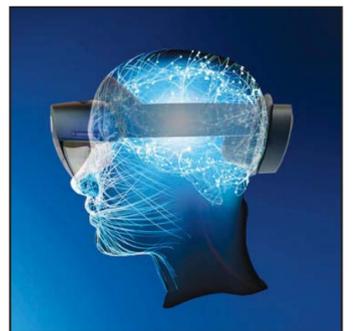
The procedure was performed at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York.

STELLAR Knee is a mixed-reality surgical navigation platform that guides TKA procedures by displaying measured and computed data overlaid directly in a 3D environment. The mixed-reality system acts as a spatial computer, creating continuous data exchange between the surgeon and the software to help enhance surgical decision-making while simplifying operating room workflow.

"STELLAR Knee represents a paradigm shift in the OR, as we aim to offer surgeons robot-like precision and real-time guidance throughout TKA procedures," said Paul Mikus, CEO of Polaris AR. "STELLAR Knee also fills a crucial gap in hospitals where existing robotic systems may already be in use. By seamlessly integrating into surgical workflows and delivering comparable precision in a mixed reality format, STELLAR Knee ensures that every patient can now access the highest standard of care."

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) cleared the STELLAR Knee mixed-reality surgical guidance system in November 2023 for use in TKA procedures.

The STELLAR Knee system is designed to offer precise control over intraoperative variables compared to traditional instruments, navigation systems, and first-generation augmented reality. Through meticulous measurement, planning and guidance, it enables surgeons to optimize lower limb alignment, soft tissue balance, joint line maintenance and component positioning.



The world's first total knee arthroplasty (TKA) was performed using the breakthrough STELLAR Knee mixed-reality surgical guidance system from Polaris AR. (Business Wire)

Over the next coming several weeks, STELLAR Knee's commercial launch will continue at leading institutions throughout the U.S.

Traditional techniques for TKA have long been associated with various challenges and limitations. Surgeons often face difficulties in achieving precise alignment and balance of the lower limb. Additionally, closed implant systems and preoperative imaging methods may restrict flexibility and customization, limiting the surgeon's ability to tailor the procedure to individual patient needs.

In addition, traditional robotic technologies, with their large intraoperative footprint, can present barriers to widespread adoption. By contrast, Stellar Knee is agnostic to implant and imageless, making it more accessible to surgeons. The democratization of enabling technologies is a key objective for Polaris AR.

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An independent regulator will oversee English soccer

New report highlights obstacles faced by Black coaches in England

Sub Tanzid 'guides' Bangladesh to series-clinching win over Sri Lanka

Janith hits maiden century

CHATTOGRAM, Bangladesh, March 19, (AP): Concussion substitute Tanzid Hasan hammered 84 off 81 balls to help Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by four wickets and win their one-day international series 2-1 on Monday.

Opting to bat first, Sri Lanka posted 235 all out in exactly 50 overs courtesy of Janith Liyanage's 101 off 102 balls for his maiden century.

Soumya Sarkar hit the ground while saving a boundary and felt neck stiffness, a headache and vision difficulties. He was substituted by Tanzid and the replacement proved his worth with a second half-century laced with nine fours and four sixes to see Bangladesh home with 9.4 overs left.

After Tanzid's fluent start, Rishad Hossain - one of the three changes made by Bangladesh for the match - struck an unbeaten 18-ball 48 containing five fours and four sixes to steer the hosts to 237-6.

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto praised Tanzid but expected him to last longer. He was out at 130-5.

"He batted well ... but I wasn't happy at the way he got out," Shanto said. "A set batter should be able to finish a chase."

"Mushfiqur also batted well, it helped Rishad's innings. On a wicket like this the bowlers showed a lot of character, especially with the new ball our three fast bowlers bowled really well. In the middle overs, Miraz and Rishad bowled really well. I am very happy with the bowlers. This win was very important for us."

Bangladesh won a second straight ODI series against Sri Lanka.

Tanzid and Anamul Haque, who replaced the out-of-form Liton Das, added 50 runs for the opening stand, with Tanzid dominating the partnership.

Pacer Lahiru Kumara, who grabbed a career-best 4-48, removed Haque (12) and Shanto (1) in consecutive overs to put Sri Lanka on the front foot to protect an under-par score.

Kumara also broke the 49-run partnership between Tanzid and Towhid Hridoy when he undid the latter with extra bounce on 22, and removed Mahmudullah (1) with a back-of-the-length delivery in his next over to leave Bangladesh at 113-4 in the 24th over.

When leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga had Tanzid caught by Charith Asalanka at long-on after building pressure on him with a series of dot balls, Sri Lanka got a ray of hope with Bangladesh at 130-5.

Mushfiqur Rahim and Mehidy Hasan put on 48 runs before Hasaranga (2-64) again struck with the wicket of Mehidy (25), but Rishad's brutal attack hastened Bangladesh to victory.

After Sri Lanka captain Kusal Mendis won the toss, Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed (3-42) dealt a double blow, removing the openers.

Pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who replaced injured Tanzim Hasan, took 2-39 and ripped through the middle order before Liyanage resisted.

Rishad further pegged back Sri Lanka with his leg-spin when he turned one sharply to get rid of Mendis after he made 29 off 51.

Bangladesh kept taking wickets at regular intervals but Liyanage kept the scoreboard going, finding boundaries with ease.

Liyanage raised his century in the last over with an elegant drive through extra cover for a boundary off Taskin.



Scottie Scheffler hits from the 15th tee during the final round of The Players Championship golf tournament Sunday, March 17, 2024, in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. (AP)

Scheffler is reaching a 'dominance' not seen since the legendary Woods

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, March 19, (AP): Scottie Scheffler is next in line for comparisons with Tiger Woods because golf, like other sports, is always looking for the heir to the throne.

Scheffler is playing great golf, measured as much by his elite ball-striking and alarming consistency as the results. He now has nine victories against the strongest fields - one of them a small field in the Bahamas - in the 25 months since he won his first PGA Tour title.

Equally impressive is his 65% rate of finishing in the top 10.

The next Woods?

"I think that's a funny question," Scheffler said Sunday evening after his record-tying final round made him the first back-to-back winner of The Players Championship.

He found out the answer a month earlier at Riviera during the Genesis Invitational.

"I'm not going to remember the exact numbers, but we're playing at Riv this year and I hit my tee ball, and this guy yells out, 'Congrats on being No. 1, Scottie - 11 more years to go!'" he said.

And then Scheffler repeated the number to let it sink in for anyone listen.

"Eleven more years to go."

Scheffler reached No. 1 in the world for the fourth time after his runner-up finish in the PGA Championship last May, and he has been there ever since, challenged a few times by either Jon Rahm or Rory McIlroy.

And now with his second straight win - a five-shot victory at Bay Hill, a five-shot comeback at the TPC Sawgrass - his lead at the top of the ranking is the largest since Dustin Johnson in May 2017. Johnson stayed No. 1 for 64 consecutive weeks, the longest in the post-Woods era. Scheffler is currently at

43 weeks. His total time has been 78 weeks.

Woods holds the record at 281 consecutive weeks, breaking his previous mark of 264 consecutive weeks. His total time at No. 1 was slightly more than 13 years.

Scheffler was off by two years. No need to quibble.

"Anytime you can be compared to Tiger I think is really special," Scheffler said. "But I mean, the guy stands alone I think in our game. He really does."

Scheffler has tied Woods with the most Players Championship titles - two.

"Outside of that, I've got 14 more majors and 70-some PGA Tour events to catch up," he said. "So I think I'm going to stick to my routine and just continue to plod along, try and stay as even-keeled as I can."

It's easy to overlook Johnson, partly because he is with LIV Golf and is seen against a full roster of great players only at the four majors, and partly because it has been seven years since he was at his most dominant. He won three straight tournaments - Riviera and two World Golf Championships - and was the overwhelming favorite at the Masters until slipping down the stairs the day before the first round and having to withdraw.

Before him was McIlroy, who won seven times from May 2014 through May 2015, including consecutive majors. And then he injured his knee playing soccer, missing the British Open at St. Andrews, and lost the No. 1 ranking to Jordan Spieth.

Scheffler offered a small reminder about looking too far into the future. He felt something in his neck on the second hole of his second round, and the pain was such that it hurt to take the club too far back. He needed treatment after the 13th, 14th and 15th holes. He had reason to with-

draw except that he was playing well - he was tied when he felt the pain - and his competitiveness kept him from stopping.

So he got through Friday with a 69, and then relied more on his hands for a game he described as "kind of slapping it around." He birdied the last three holes Saturday for a 68 to stay in the game, five shots behind.

And then he felt better on Sunday and delivered a masterpiece - a hole-out from 92 yards for eagle on No. 4, four birdies in a five-hole stretch around the turn and a 64 to match the Players Championship record for lowest Sunday score by a winner.

And no one was terribly surprised, the ultimate compliment.

Statistically, he led the field from tee-to-green, just like he seems to do whenever and wherever he plays. It wasn't his best week with the irons - remember the "slapping it around" from Saturday - and he a little better than middle of the pack in putting.

It's been that way for some time. His consistently great play first came into focus at the start of 2023 when it took until July at the British Open for his first result worse than a tie for 12th. And it hasn't really stopped.

The best since Woods in his prime? Scheffler gets closer the larger his sample size gets. The real measure is when expectations get too high for anyone but Woods to match. It's getting close. Still to be determined is whether it gets to him, which sounds unlikely.

"I try not to place too much emphasis on results, good or bad," Scheffler said. "I show up to try and perform my best and hopefully win tournaments. But when I stand on the tee on Thursday, I'm not thinking about the trophy ceremony at the end of the week. I'm just trying to be committed to the shot and just go from there."

MANCHESTER, England, March 19, (AP): Non-Black former soccer players in England were 50% more likely than their Black counterparts to progress into management, said a report published on Tuesday.

In a latest study into coaching diversity, U.K.-based advocacy group Black Footballers Partnership (BFP) highlighted the ongoing disparity in the sport and concluded Black managers or assistants were also 41% more likely to be fired.

"Football should be a game for everyone on and off the pitch. If you are good enough on the pitch your dreams and hopes can and should be realized," wrote a group of Black former players including Sol Campbell and Les Ferdinand in the report's foreword. "The significant drop off in off-field opportunities lets down Black players and an industry that relies on their talent."

The group, which also includes Chris Ramsey, Paul Davis and Ricky Hill, described the lack of opportunities for Black coaches as a "systemic issue."

Burnley's Vincent Kompany began the season as the Premier League's only Black manager. Then Nuno Espirito Santo, who was born on the African island of São Tomé, was hired by Nottingham Forest in December.

In its 2022 report, the BFP found 43% of Premier League players were Black, but only 4.4% of managerial positions for former players were taken up by Black applicants.

In the latest report, academics Sam Hoey from the University of Liverpool, Thomas Peeters from Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and Stefan Szymanski from the University of Michigan studied a sample of about 3,500 players from England's top two divisions from 1990 to 2010 and who stopped playing in 2013 or earlier.

The report said Black managerial staff were also less likely to be promoted.

"In sum, Black former players get fewer chances at management, get promoted more slowly (if at all), their progress stalls sooner, and they get fired quicker than their non-Black counterparts - and none of that is related to their performance," the BFP said.

"A career in football management often looks like a game of snakes and ladders; but for Black former players it's pretty much all snakes and no ladders, and we have the data to prove it," BFL executive director Delroy Corinaldi said.

Legislation to establish an independent regulator in English soccer will be introduced on Tuesday in an effort to ensure the financial sustainability of clubs and stop teams from joining breakaway competitions like the European Super League.

The Football Governance Bill, which will underpin the creation of a new regulator which will license clubs in the top five tiers of the English game, was described by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as a "historic moment for football fans."

The British government is acting on a recommendation from a fan-led review carried out in the wake of the collapse of two lower-league clubs - Bury and Macclesfield - because of financial mismanagement. It also comes in response to the failed attempts of 12 of Europe's elite clubs, including six from England's Premier League, to set up a European Super League in 2021.

The English clubs quickly shelved the idea after a backlash from fans and the government.

The government said the regulator will be a standalone body - independent of the government and soccer's authorities - that is "equipped with robust powers revolving around three core objectives: To improve financial sustainability of clubs, ensure financial resilience across the leagues, and to safeguard the heritage of English football."

Under the bill, new owners and directors will face more stringent tests to stop clubs falling into the wrong hands, and face the possibility of being removed from owning clubs if they are found to be unsuitable.

Clubs from the Premier League down to the fifth-tier National League will, for the first time, need a license to compete in elite competitions. That license will require all clubs to meet certain mandatory conditions, such as basic requirements on fan engagement, corporate governance and financial reporting.

Clubs will be required to consult their fans on key off-field decisions, such as club heritage and the club's strategic direction. There will be protection against breakaway competitions and stadium relocations.

The regulator also will have the power to settle an ongoing row over financial distribution between the Premier League and the English Football League - the three divisions below the top-flight. "Backstop powers," as the government has called them, will be confirmed when the bill is introduced to Parliament on Tuesday.

"Football is nothing without its fans," Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said. "We are determined to put them back at the heart of the game, and ensure clubs as vital community assets continue to thrive."

"The new independent regulator of football will set the game on a sustainable footing, strengthening clubs and the entire football pyramid for generations."



DFB President Bernd Neundorff stands next to the campaign motto 'Football time is the best time against racism' at the launch of the DFB's anti-racism campaign in Berlin, Germany, Monday March 18, 2024. (AP)

Federation presents strategy

Germany 'targets' racism before hosting Euro 2024

BERLIN, March 19, (AP): The German soccer federation is targeting racism and discrimination among fans and amateur players with a new campaign ahead of this summer's European Championship.

The federation presented its two-pronged strategy on Monday with a video message under the motto "Soccer time is the best time against racism."

Fans will be encouraged to take part on social media, and a new pilot project taking anti-racist measures to amateur clubs in the Northeast German Football Association was launched. The pilot project will run through 2025 before being extended to other areas.

"Everyone can do something against racism, not only the players, but we want to reach spectators, and parents when it comes to youth teams, to raise awareness of this topic," federation president Bernd Neundorff said during a visit to kids from the amateur club SFC Stern 1900 in Berlin.

"That's why it's so important that we take a broader view and not only notice what's happening on the professional fields at the weekend," Neundorff said. "We also have to clearly address the fact that it's a general problem in society, but also in football. And that includes amateur football."

The federation has had to deal with hateful abuse directed online at the Germany team that won the Under-17 World Cup last year. It announced in December that it was working with the public prosecutor's office in Frankfurt to identify the perpetrators.

Gerald Asamoah, who made 46 appearances for Germany, was the target of racist abuse from Hansa Rostock supporters shortly after being feted as

a hero at the 2006 World Cup. "It was disappointing to be marginalized like that just a few months later," said Asamoah, who sees Euro 2024 as "a huge chance to make amends, and I really believe we can do it."

Asamoah said it takes civil courage for people to speak up about racism, and said he was more confident now than he was in 2006 that people had the courage to speak up and confront it.

He also took encouragement from the level of political action against racism, and the fact that it's an important issue for the federation.

"When I compare it to my time, when I was marginalized in the youth teams, it didn't interest anyone. I had to deal with it by myself. When I was 18, I played in Cottbus and had bananas thrown at me. But the game was so important for us, that my issue interested nobody," Asamoah said. "That's why I find it super that we've made a start, that the federation is taking matters in its hands. There is so, so much (racism) happening in amateur football, also at youth level."

Reem Alabali-Radovan, who is Germany's federal commissioner for migration, refugees and integration, outlined how local soccer clubs are often the first points of contact for migrants who have just arrived in Germany. She said they are often subjected to racist abuse that doesn't get the same attention on a national level because the incidents are so localized.

"Far too many people are affected by racism every day in Germany," Alabali-Radovan said. "They experience racism in all sorts of situations, not just everyday racism, but also in the housing market, when looking for a job, in schools, and also in sports."

Acerbi sent home from Italy camp, denies racially abusing Jesus

MILAN, March 19, (AP): Inter Milan defender Francesco Acerbi was sent home from Italy's training camp, a day after an allegation he racially abused Napoli's Juan Jesus in a Serie A match.

Acerbi vehemently denied he used the offensive word, upon arriving back in Milan.

The incident happened during the second half of Sunday's match and Juan Jesus, who is Black, was visibly upset when he walked up to the referee, who then called over Acerbi.

In close-up television images, Juan Jesus seemed to be telling the referee that Acerbi used a racist slur. Juan Jesus also pointed at his shirt sleeve which had a 'Keep Racism Out' badge - as part of the league's anti-racism

campaign.

"I never said any racist expression, I am very calm," Acerbi told journalists at Milan's train station, in quotes reported by Gazzetta dello Sport. "I have been a professional for 20 years and I know what I say, no word of that type came out of my mouth, it was him that misunderstood."

"I'm disappointed to have left the national team."

Juan Jesus said after the match that Acerbi immediately apologized to him for using that term.

"He understood wrongly," Acerbi said. "A lot of things happen on the field, it's normal. You play soccer, you say certain things, but at the end of the match you shake hands and everything is as it was."

Acerbi joined the Italy squad in Rome before the Azzurri fly to the United States on Tuesday for friendly matches against Venezuela and Ecuador but he has been replaced by Roma defender Gianluca Mancini.

The Italian soccer federation said in a statement that in accordance with the Azzurri's internal policy, Acerbi spoke to Italy coach Luciano Spalletti and the players and explained his own version of "the presumed racist expression" he allegedly used.

"From the Inter defender's account, pending that what happened is reconstructed with full respect to the autonomy of the sporting justice system, it emerged that there was no defamatory, denigrating or racist intent on his part," the FIGC said.

"It was nevertheless agreed to leave Acerbi out of the squad for the next two friendly matches in the United States, to guarantee the necessary serenity to the national team and to the player himself, who will return to his club today."

Inter issued a brief statement after Acerbi was dropped from the Italy squad and said it "will meet with the player as soon as possible to shed light on the exact details of what happened last night."

Juan Jesus would not confirm after the match what happened.

"What happens on the field, stays on the field," the Brazilian told DAZN. "Acerbi apologized, he went a bit over the top with his words. He is a good guy."

Termination of an agency contract

Based on the settlement agreement signed on January 2024 the agency contract between **INVERSE UNITED** and **LAMOR CORPORATION** has been terminated from this date onwards. Therefore, **INVERSE UNITED** is not the agent of **LAMOR CORPORATION AB**,

or **LAMOR CORPORATION PLC** in Kuwait since the settlement agreement signed between the parties in January 4, 2024

Lawsuit over FIFA policy should go to trial: US

NEW YORK, March 19, (AP): The Biden administration sided with a promoter who filed an antitrust suit against FIFA and the U.S. Soccer Federation over the world governing body's policy against hosting league matches from other countries, urging the U.S. Supreme Court to allow the case to proceed to trial.

In a 23-page brief filed Thursday by Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Prelogar, the government said the Supreme Court should not review the case and should allow a 2023 2nd Circuit U.S.

Court of Appeals decision to stand.

The USSF "did not act independently. Rather, it participated in a membership association that adopted a policy binding the association's members, and it invoked that policy as its stated rationale for denying approval of the proposed matches," the government wrote.

The government added the USSF "was not a randomly selected FIFA member, nor was it a passive or unknowing bystander to the adoption and enforcement of the 2018 policy."

'A journey into the unknown'

Japan 'prepare' to host and then travel to NKorea for back-to-back WCup qualifiers

TOKYO, March 19, (AP): Even with the top continental ranking and players of vast international experience, Hajime Moriyasu's Japan squad faces a journey into the unknown in back-to-back World Cup qualifiers against North Korea.

Asian qualifying resumes Thursday with Japan hosting North Korea in Tokyo. Five days later, Japan will be playing in Pyongyang in front of a potential crowd of 50,000 - almost exclusively North Korean - at the Kim Il Sung Stadium.

The Japan Football Association's request that the match be moved from the North Korean capital to a neutral venue amid concerns over a lack of operational transparency - including visa and logistics information - was rejected by the Asian Football Confederation.

"There are probably a lot of unexpected things that could happen,"

Moriyasu, the Japan coach, said. "We just need to be prepared."

Japan has tallied 10 goals in its opening two matches against Myanmar and Syria in the second round of Asian qualifying. Back-to-back wins over North Korea, which lost 1-0 to Syria before responding with a 6-1 win over Myanmar, could assure it progresses to the third round as one of the top two teams in Group B.

But Japan's national men's team hasn't played in Pyongyang since a 2011 loss to North Korea in the qualifying stages for the 2014 World Cup.

The last men's international in Pyongyang was back in 2019, when the visiting South Korea team complained about a lack of contact with the outside world and an overly physical approach from the host team.

When Japan beat North Korea at the Asian Games in October, players from

the losing team manhandled the referee.

"I admit that our players were a little bit over-excited in the match but it is football," North Korea coach Sin Yong Nam said at the time. "But there are confrontations in football matches ... I think our behavior is acceptable."

Moriyasu decided not to select forward Junya Ito, who has been investigated by police after being accused of assault in Osaka last year. Ito has been playing for French club Reims, scoring the winning goal against Metz on Sunday.

"I tried to imagine what the surrounding environment would have been like for him in Japan and I didn't think it would be one that would allow him to live and play football in peace," Moriyasu said. "It wasn't just him - I didn't think the whole team would have been able to go about their business in peace."

SDCCER

South Korea, which is aiming for an 11th successive appearance at the World Cup, also has controversy to deal with.

The team's last game was an upset Asian Cup semifinal loss to Jordan which resulted in Jurgen Klinsmann being fired as head coach. Since then, a reported scuffle during the tournament between star players Son Heung-min and Lee Kang-in that resulted in Son injuring his finger has been in the headlines.

Lee, who plays for Paris Saint-Germain, attracted fierce criticism on social media and later publicly apologized to Son, the team captain. Son subsequently asked fans to forgive the younger player. Interim coach Hwang Sun-hong has selected both players for what will be his first game in charge against Thailand in Seoul.



Julian Alvarez with Al Marri and Al Failakawi.

Julian Alvarez signs contract with Kuwait

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Argentine Julian Alvarez officially signed a coaching contract with Kuwait national volleyball team, marking a significant development at the Volleyball Federation's headquarters in the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Complex. The signing ceremony took place in the presence of Federation President Dr. Jaber Al-Marri and Nayef Al-Failakawi, Chairman of the Training and National Teams Committee.

Previously, Al-Ittihad had announced its agreement with Julian Alvarez, former coach of Al-Qadisiya and Burgan, to lead the first team for the upcoming season.

VOLLEYBALL

Meanwhile, Al-Qadisiya has secured a spot in the final of the Federation Cup, setting a date with Kuwait Club. This follows their victory over Al-Shabab in the semi-finals with a decisive score of three games to none (25-18, 25-19, 25-17). Similarly, Al-Abyad emerged victorious over Burgan with the same result.

In another development, the youth volleyball team, born in 2005, resumed training at the Al-Ittihad Hall in preparation for the upcoming first Gulf Youth Games. The event is scheduled to take place in Dubai, UAE, from April 16 to 23.

Under the guidance of head coach Jassem Al-Tarawa, the team, comprising 12 players, along with the technical staff, including assistant coach Osama Madkour and fitness coach Firas Bin Mahmoud, commenced the final stage of their preparation plan. The training sessions will be conducted daily, with the intensity expected to increase in the coming days. Additionally, the team is scheduled to play trial matches, starting today against the Yarmouk Club team, to refine their playing strategies ahead of the tournament. Al-Tarawa also mentioned that six players will be eliminated from the current roster, which consists of 20 players, in accordance with the regulations of the Gulf tournament.

Best of the Rest

Olsson moved to rehab: Still unable to walk or talk, Sweden midfielder Kristoffer Olsson has been transferred to a neurological rehabilitation center after nearly a month in the hospital with an acute brain condition.

The 28-year-old Swede's club, Danish team FC Midtjylland, said in a statement on Monday that Olsson had been slowly taken off a ventilator but he "has not yet recovered either motor function or his verbal abilities."

Olsson lost consciousness at his home on Feb. 20 and was taken to Aarhus University Hospital, where he was diagnosed with several small blood clots in the brain as a result of an extremely rare inflammation in the vessels of the brain. (AP)

Messi out of friendlies: Lionel Messi will not play in Argentina's two friendlies in the United States this month due to a right leg muscle injury, the Argentine Football Association said.

The captain was injured last week while playing for his Inter Miami club in the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

The 36-year-old Messi will miss Argentina vs. El Salvador on Friday in Philadelphia and a friendly against Costa Rica four days later in Los Angeles, AFA said in a statement. (AP)

Sabonis records 50th straight double-double, Monk leads way in OT as Kings beat Grizzlies

LeBron scores 25, Russell ties Lakers 3-pointers record in LA's win over Hawks

SACRAMENTO, March 19, (AP): Malik Monk scored 12 of his 28 points in overtime, Domantas Sabonis had his 50th straight double-double and the Sacramento Kings beat the Memphis Grizzlies 121-111 on Monday night.

"Having a guy like Malik close the way he did was a lot of fun to watch," Sacramento coach Mike Brown said. "We just put the ball in his hands and put them in pick-and-roll, and he was able to create a little bit of separation and get to his medium game, and he was really on point with it tonight."

Monk added six rebounds and six assists as the Kings improved to 5-1 in overtime.

"I feel like I was relaxing a little bit in the fourth quarter," he said. "I was just able to turn that around in overtime and we got the win."

Sabonis finished with 25 points and 18 rebounds, and De'Aaron Fox had 23 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds for Sacramento.

BASKETBALL

GG Jackson scored the first basket of overtime to put Memphis in front before Monk scored eight in a row and assisted on a dunk by Sabonis as part of a 12-0 run that helped the Kings outscore the Grizzlies 16-6 in the extra period.

Lakers 136, Hawks 105

In Los Angeles, LeBron James had 25 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds, and D'Angelo Russell scored 27 points while tying the Lakers' single-season record for 3-pointers in a 136-105 victory over the Atlanta Hawks.

Russell's six 3-pointers against the Hawks gave him 183 this season, passing Kobe Bryant's 180 in the 2005-06 season and tying Nick Van Exel's franchise record set in 1994-95. Russell's latest standout shooting display was highlighted by a beautiful 3-pointer at the third-quarter buzzer followed by two more early in the fourth to tie the record before the Lakers emptied their bench.

Russell also had 10 assists, while Anthony Davis had 22 points and 15 rebounds as the Lakers snapped a two-game skid with their 13th win in 20 games since losing in Atlanta in late January.

Timberwolves 114, Utah 104

In Salt Lake City, Anthony Edwards had 32 points, eight assists and seven rebounds to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves over the Utah Jazz 114-104.

Edwards scored 25 of his 32 points in the second half to help the Timberwolves pull away late. It was his second consecutive 30-point game against the Jazz and third in a row overall.

His effort on both ends of the court swung a tight game in Minnesota's favor.

Naz Reid added 17 points on 7-of-12 shooting but did not play after halftime due to a head injury. Reid's absence further depleted a Minnesota frontcourt already missing Rudy Gobert and Karl-Anthony Towns because



Chicago Bulls' Ayo Dosunmu (12) drives to the basket as Portland Trail Blazers' Deandre Ayton (2) defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Chicago. (AP)

of injuries.

Knicks 119, Warriors 112

In San Francisco, Jalen Brunson scored 34 points and Miles McBride added a career-high 29 to lead the New York Knicks to their fourth straight win, 119-112 over the Golden State Warriors.

The Knicks raced out to an 18-4 lead early in the game and never trailed as they earned just their fifth win in their last 19 meetings against the Warriors.

Josh Hart had 10 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his fifth triple-double in the past 21 games for New York, while playing all 48 minutes.

Donte DiVincenzo added 18 points for the Knicks.

Bulls 110, Trail Blazers 107

In Chicago, DeMar DeRozan scored 28 points and found Nikola Vucevic for a key hook shot with 9.3 seconds left, helping the Chicago Bulls edge the Portland Trail Blazers.

Vucevic had 22 points and nine rebounds in Chicago's third win in four games. Ayo Dosunmu finished with 23 points and 10 assists.

Anfernee Simons scored 12 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter for Portland, but couldn't get off a 3-point attempt from the top of the key before time expired. Deandre Ayton had 25 points and 15 rebounds in his sixth consecutive game with at least 20 points.

The Blazers lost for the seventh time in nine games.

The Bulls' NBA-leading 24th clutch victory - a game that is within five minutes left - moved them under a game of .500 at 34-35. But they were outscored 32-21 in the final quarter.

Kazma meet Al-Arabi

Clash of titans as Kuwait Club take on Al-Qadisiya

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 19: Basketball enthusiasts eagerly anticipate tonight's showdown between Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya, scheduled for 8:45 pm at Al-Ittihad Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Indoor Complex, marking the final round of the Golden Square competitions' first section. Simultaneously, in the same venue, Kazma will take on Al-Arabi at 10:45 pm.

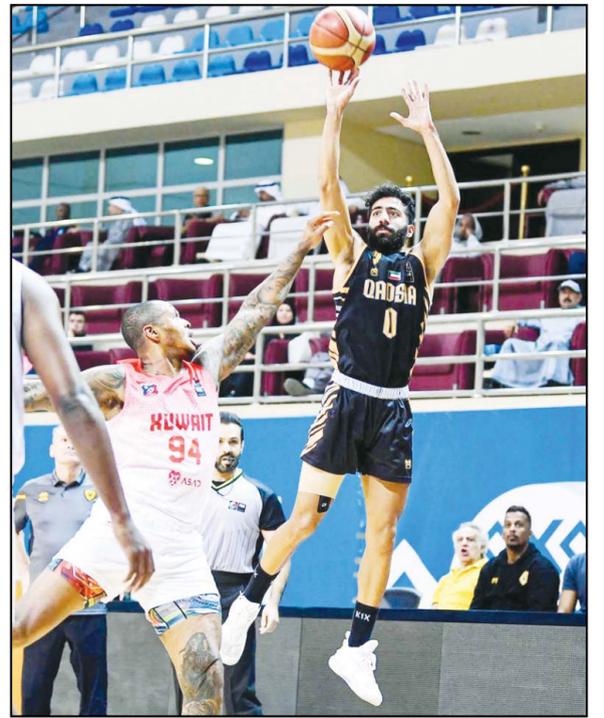
Both Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya currently lead the team standings with 4 points each, followed closely by Al-Arabi and Kazma with 2 points apiece.

The semifinals will adopt a two-part league system, wherein the first-ranked team will face the fourth, and the second will challenge the third in a "play-off" format comprising three matches. The team securing victory in two matches will progress to the final round, following the same system.

Tonight's match between the white and yellow-clad team's promises excitement as both sides vie for victory to secure the top spot and advance to face the fourth-placed team in the semi-finals.

Despite Kuwait's triumphs over Al-Qadisiya in their three encounters this season, including the Super Cup and the preliminary round's first and second legs, the Yellow team has displayed commendable performance throughout. This contrasts with their previous seasons, where they were distant from podium contention. Anticipation is high for a fiercely contested match tonight, fueled by both teams' determination and player readiness.

Under the guidance of American coach Anthony Stebbing, Al-Qadisiya relies on the contributions of their American professionals



In this file photo Al Qadisiya player shoots over Kuwait Club player.

Ronald Lowry and Alono, alongside Rashid Al-Rabah, Muhammad Ashkanani, Muhammad Al-Dakhil, and Nawaf Al-Anazi. Meanwhile, Ku-

wait's coach, German Peter Schumers, looks to his Haitian players Cadi LaLanne, and Americans Tony Carr and Marcus Hunt, in addition to the Adnan brothers, Alexander Al-Ghais, Turki Hammoud, and Imran Johar.

In the other fixture, Al-Arabi faces Kazma, promising another intense matchup as Al-Arabi aims to capitalize on their improved performance to secure victory, while Kazma seeks to outshine Al-Akhdar and narrow the gap with the leading teams.

BASKETBALL

wait's coach, German Peter Schumers, looks to his Haitian players Cadi LaLanne, and Americans Tony Carr

Each team played without its second-leading scorer. Bulls guard Coby White missed his third straight game with a right hip strain, and Portland's Jerami Grant sat out for the fourth straight contest with a right hamstring strain.

Cavaliers 108, Pacers 103

In Indianapolis, Caris LeVert and Jarrett Allen each scored 23 points and the short-handed Cleveland Cavaliers fended off a late push from the Indiana Pacers for a 108-103 win.

Cleveland played without three regular starters, including star guard Donovan Mitchell, as the Cavs fight to hold onto a top-three seed in the Eastern Conference.

Cleveland led by as many as nine in the final quarter before Indiana pulled even with 2:05 remaining. LeVert drove baseline and then pulled up and swished a 9-foot fadeaway jumper to regain the lead. The Pacers didn't score again.

LeVert had 11 assists and eight rebounds. Allen had nine rebounds.

76ers 98, Heat 91

In Philadelphia, Kyle Lowry hustled after a loose basketball and launched himself over the scorer's table and into the lap of the public address announcer.

Lowry turns 38 next week and joked that at his age, he has "no brakes." But his feet flying in the air is just the way

the 76ers' guard plays - no extra incentive needed, not even in his first game against his former Heat teammates.

Lowry shot 6 of 12 and scored 16 points for the Sixers in his first game against the Heat since they traded him in January.

Bam Adebayo had 20 points and 13 rebounds for the Heat. Terry Rozier III scored 20 points.

The Heat trailed by 14 points entering the fourth, before going on a 20-8 run and tying the game at 85 on Caleb Martin's dunk. Buddy Hield snapped the tie with 3-pointer and Lowry hit a 3, helping the Sixers avoid a collapse in a game they needed to win.

The Eastern Conference champion Heat are again in play-in mode with 14 games left this season, falling to eighth in the standings - they finished seventh a year ago when Jimmy Butler sparked an improbable run to the NBA Finals. With Indiana's loss, the 76ers are barely in sixth at 38-30 - Indiana is 38-31; the Heat 37-31.

Celtics 119, Pistons 94

In Boston, Jaylen Brown scored 31 points in three quarters, Derrick White posted his first career triple-double and the NBA-best Boston Celtics beat the Detroit Pistons.

Boston star Jayson Tatum missed the game because of a right ankle injury, but the Celtics had more than enough to make up for the absence of their leading scorer (27.1 points per game) and rebounder (8.3).

White had 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. He completed his triple-double when he passed to Payton Pritchard, who hit a 3-pointer with 6:25 to play.



New York Knicks guard Jalen Brunson (front right) drives to the basket against Golden State Warriors forward Andrew Wiggins (left), during the first half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)



Islamabad United's Imad Wasim bowls during the final of Pakistan Super League T20 cricket match between Islamabad United and Multan Sultans, in Karachi, Pakistan. (AP)

Sports

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Islamabad United seal dramatic PSL win

Sultans' heartbreak

KARACHI, Pakistan, March 19, (AP): Islamabad United won the Pakistan Super League after beating Multan Sultans with a last-ball boundary in a thrilling final on Monday.

Tailender Hunain Shah came in to face the final ball after the dismissal of Naseem Shah and steered fast bowler Mohammad Ali's delivery through point to finish the nailbiter.

Multan was restricted to 159-9 on a spinners' paradise after Islamabad allrounder Imad Wasim grabbed 5-23 and captain Shadab Khan picked up 3-32. "The sign of a good team is they win even without playing a perfect game," said Shadab, who was named player of the league after scoring 305 runs and taking 14 wickets.

CRICKET

Islamabad's chase got a great start from opener Martin Gupthil, stumbled in the middle, then got a great finish from Wasim, 19 not out, and Naseem, 17. Islamabad reached 163-8 to add to its titles in 2016 and 2018.

"To pick a five-for in a final and to stay in (batting) during a crucial game, it was a new experience," Wasim said. "We should have finished the game earlier rather than taking it down to the wire. I'm glad Hunain finished it." It was heartbreaking for Multan, which lost last year's final to Lahore Qalandars by one run. Playing its fourth consecutive final, Multan won the group stage and was the favorite in the final.

"The match goes to the last ball, you can't really point out any flaw," Multan skipper Mohammad Rizwan said.

"Credit to Imad for picking a five-for and scoring those crucial runs. There were a few ups and downs in the batting, but they played really well. Congratulations to Islamabad. It was fun to play to-night in front of a packed house."

Islamabad gained momentum in the playoffs thanks mainly to Wasim's brilliant all-round show.

Gupthil hit a 30-ball 50 before he was run out in the 13th over at 102-4.

Multan kept coming back strongly through its spinners Khushdil Shah (2-21) and Iftikhar Ahmed (2-19). League leading wicket-taker Usama Mir, who finished with 23 wickets, dismissed dangerman Azam Khan on 30 in the death overs and, when Ahmed plucked a superb return catch off Faheem Ashraf at 129-7, Islamabad still needed 31 off the



Islamabad United's players and officials celebrate with trophy after winning the final of Pakistan Super League T20 cricket match against Multan Sultans, in Karachi, Pakistan. (AP)

last 17 balls. Naseem smashed a quick-fire 17 off nine balls and Imad kept his cool to guide Islamabad to a sensational two-wicket win.

Earlier, Wasim wrecked Multan's top order with the wickets of Yasir Khan and David Willey in his first over. In-form Usman Khan, who scored two centuries this season, revived Multan hopes with a gritty 57 off 40 balls before Wasim struck back in the middle overs by dismissing Johnson Charles. Wasim capped his brilliant bowling by taking the wickets of Khushdil Shah and Chris Jordan in his final over.

Ahmed boosted Multan's total with a breezy 32 off 20 balls that included three sixes and three fours.

Real file new complaint over hate chants against Vinicius

MADRID, March 19: (AP): Real Madrid filed a new complaint with Spanish state prosecutors following reports of more hate chants aimed at forward Vinicius Junior in the Spanish league.

The club also filed a complaint with the Spanish Football Federation disciplinary committee against the referee of Saturday's match at Osasuna for not including in his match report the alleged "Die, Vinicius" chants by local fans at El Sadar Stadium.

Madrid called the match report by referee Juan Martinez Munuera "negligent."

"The official omitted, in voluntary and deliberate fashion, the insults and humiliating chants directed



Brazil's Vinicius Junior (foreground) and Bruno Guimaraes attend a training session at the Sobha Realty Training Centre, London. Brazil will play England in an international friendly soccer match on Saturday. (AP)

SOCCER

towards our player on a repeated basis, despite his attention being drawn to them continually by our players as they were happening," Madrid said in a statement late Monday.

Madrid last week asked prosecutors to investigate reported racist chants targeting the Brazil international outside the stadiums of Atletico Madrid and Barcelona before their Champions League games.

Madrid has asked prosecutors to try to "identify the perpetrators of the abuse" against its player.

"Real Madrid once again condemns these violent attacks of racism, discrimination and hate and demands that measures finally be taken in order to eradicate the violence to which our player Vinicius Junior has been subjected," the club said.

On Thursday, Vinicius retweeted

a video that showed Atletico fans jumping and chanting "Vinicius chimpanzee" before the team played Inter Milan on Wednesday.

There were also reports of hate chants against Vinicius before the Barcelona-Napoli match on Tuesday, when Barcelona fans also allegedly chanted "Die, Vinicius" before the team's 3-1 win.

Vinicius, who is Black, has been relentlessly targeted by racist slurs during away games in Spain, especially in the last two seasons.

The Spanish league has also reported some of the abuse aimed at Vinicius to Spanish prosecutors.

In 2023, Atletico fans hanged an effigy of Vinicius from a bridge in Madrid before a city derby. Prosecutors sought four-year prison sentences for the four hardcore fans accused by authorities of committing the act.

Blues eye victory to boost chances in WC qualifiers

Kuwait ready for battle, conclude training for Qatar encounter

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

DOHA, March 19: Kuwait will wrap up its training session on Wednesday evening at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium at Al Sadd Club, ahead of the upcoming match against Qatar scheduled for Thursday. This match marks the third round of the initial group stage of Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup and the 2027 Asian Cup finals.

Having conducted two training sessions in Doha, Qatar, following their participation in the Abu Dhabi camp in the United Arab Emirates, Al-Azraq aimed to assess each player's readiness and facilitate the recovery process, particularly due to injuries sustained by several

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players during the previous period. Consequently, there have been several changes to the team's roster in recent assembly periods.

The final training session will prioritize the tactical approach selected by the Portuguese coach, Rui Pinto, as it prepares to face Qatar. The team is focused on achieving the best possible outcome, considering the formidable challenge posed by the reigning Asian champions Qatar, whose title victory was secured last February.

Currently occupying the second position with 3 points, Kuwait is determined to boost its chances of progressing to the next round of qualifiers. It trails Qatar, which leads with 6 points, and is ahead of the Indian team, secured in third place on goal difference, with Afghanistan at the bottom of the group without any points.

On the opposing side, Spanish coach Marques Lopez of the Qatar has revealed the roster for the upcoming matches against Al-Azraq. The list comprises 25 players.

Goalkeepers: Meshal Barshim, Salah Zakaria, and Saud Al-Khater. Defenders: Mahdi Ali and Lucas Mendez, Tariq Salman, Hammam Al-Amin, Bassam Al-Rawi, Sultan Al-Burair, and Muhammad Ayyash.

Midfielders: Ahmed Fathi, Jassim Jaber, Abdullah Al-Maraifi, Abdulaziz Hatem, Muhammad

Team drops into EPL relegation zone

Nottingham Forest docked 4 points for overspending

LONDON, March 19, (AP): Nottingham Forest was deducted four points for overspending, dropping the team into the Premier League relegation zone with nine games remaining.

Forest was found to have breached the league profitability and sustainability regulations, which typically allow clubs to lose a maximum of 105 million pounds (\$133 million) over a three-year period or face sanctions.

Forest's assessment period ended in 2022-23 and therefore included two seasons when the club was in the second-tier Championship. For that reason, Forest was permitted losses of up to 61 million pounds (\$77 million) in its first year back in the Premier League last season and the club went above the threshold by 34.5 million pounds (\$44 million), having made an unprecedented 21 offseason signings at a cost of \$160 million following promotion.

The team managed by Nuno Espirito Santo fell from 17th to 18th - one of the three relegation places in the league - and onto 21 points. Luton, on 22 points, climbed out of the relegation zone as a result.

"We (have) got to take it on the chin and just keep moving forward," Forest goalkeeper Matt Turner said during a news conference at the U.S. training camp in Arlington, Texas.

"Points deduction aside, we've been our own worst enemies in a lot of ways



In this file photo, Nottingham Forest's Divock Origi (left), heads the ball as Luton Town's Issa Kabore looks on, during the English Premier League soccer match between Luton Town and Nottingham Forest, at Kenilworth Road, in Luton, England. (AP)

this entire season. So we have all of it in our control. Some of the games that we have coming up are teams in and around us, and if we can control those games and get some wins, then hopefully the point deduction shouldn't really matter."

The sanction was issued by a three-

person independent commission following a hearing this month.

Forest didn't immediately say if the club would appeal against the points penalty. If it did, the verdict might not be decided before the final round of games in the league on May 19. That raises the potential for the identity of the relegated teams being known only in the days after the season has finished, which would be hugely controversial.

Forest did, however, release a statement saying it was "extremely disappointed" with the decision to impose the sanction and "raises issues of concern for all aspirant clubs."

Saying clubs should invest only after they have realized a profit on their player development "destroys mobility in the football pyramid," Forest said, "and the effect of the

SOCCER

decision will be to drastically reduce the room for maneuver for all such clubs, leading to the stagnation of our national game."

Everton recently had a points deduction - for breaching spending rules in the three-year assessment period ending 2021-22 by less than 20 million pounds (\$25 million) - reduced from an initial 10 to six following an appeal.

That set the bar for future sanctions for similar offenses, with the commission saying it relied "heavily on the appeal board's position in the Everton appeal."

That might indicate, therefore, that Forest would be less likely to get its points reduction trimmed after any appeal.

Forest was treated more leniently by the commission after displaying what the panel regarded as "a level of cooperation which is above the level reasonably expected."

Everton was handed a bigger punishment despite being in breach by a smaller figure, which can be partly attributed to the fact that the commission said Everton provided "incorrect information" to the league as part of the investigation.

Everton, which is also embroiled in the relegation battle, could receive another points deduction soon for breaching the rules again - this time for the assessment period ending 2022-23.



Kuwaiti players hold training session ahead of Qatar showdown.