



A happy Eid Al-Fitr to all

There will be no issue of the Arab Times on Monday and Tuesday. The next issue of the Arab Times will appear on Wednesday morning. — See you then

Kuwait Amir congratulates citizens, expats on Eid Al-Fitr



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Gaza protests: A reckoning for exploiters of the Palestinian cause

WE do not exaggerate when we say the Palestinian people, especially those in Gaza, have suffered like no other people in history. Any fair-minded person can only point to this injustice and urge the world to awaken its conscience.

While the Arabs hold some responsibility for the fate of this cause, the bulk of the responsibility lies with the Palestinian leaders, starting with the first president of the PLO and to the last leader of even the smallest faction or party.

Securing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people was never the ultimate goal for these leaders. Instead, exploiting the Palestinian cause was their primary concern. At different times, it was figures like Abdel Nasser, Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, the Assad regime, and many others who capitalized on the blood of innocents. Even the Iranian regime, which still operates in medieval-like conditions, has been part of this

exploitation.

For 77 years, not a single holiday has passed for the people of Palestine without sorrow. All their holidays have been marked by grief, hardship, and suffering. The most recent of these moments, from October 7, 2023 to the current Eid, filled Arabs and Muslims with deep sorrow over the fate of this cause and the unbearable conditions experienced by the Palestinian people.

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- @Ahmedaljarallah
- Ahmed aljarallah
- ahmed@aljarallah.com



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His Highness the Amir



His Highness the Crown Prince

Gulf leaders exchange greetings

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): The Amiri Diwan relayed on Saturday the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to citizens and residents on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing all good health and blissfulness.

The Amiri Diwan congratulated His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister on this occasion.

The Diwan also extended its congratulations to Kuwaiti citizens and

residents, and wished Kuwait further safety, security and prosperity under the astute leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Also on Saturday, the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince relayed the greetings of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.

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Photo by Samer Shiqr

Worshippers lift their hands in prayer asking Allah's forgiveness for their sins, on the 29th night of Ramadan at one of the mosques in Kuwait. — See Page 2

Kuwait extends sympathy as Myanmar quake deaths soar

Over 1,000 lives lost, rescue efforts yield more bodies



Rescuers work at the site of a high-rise building under construction that collapsed after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, March 28, 2025. Inset: A woman reacts as she watches rescuers at the site of a high-rise building under construction that collapsed after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Bangkok on Friday. (AP)

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (Agencies): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared the State of Kuwait's solidarity with the Myanmar and Thailand in the aftermath of the earthquake that hit the two Asian countries, leaving hundreds of victims, dead or wounded, in addition to massive damage.

The ministry extended condolences and solace to the two friendly countries' governments and peoples and wished the injured quick recovery.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Embassy in Thailand affirmed Saturday that all Kuwaiti citizens currently in Thailand and Myanmar are safe, especially after the violent earthquake that struck both countries on Friday.

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'Case confidential'

Media ban on Ya Hala raffle probe

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): Attorney General Counselor Saad Al-Safran has ordered the Ya Hala Kuwait Shopping Festival raffle investigation to remain confidential, prohibiting any publication of related information.

The Public Prosecution announced that a report from the Ministry of Interior's security services alluded to tampering with festival raffle, involving crimes such as forgery, bribery, embezzlement, and money laundering.

Due to the case's media coverage, which hampers the investigation and harms individuals before convictions, confidentiality is deemed necessary.

Legal action will be taken against those who violate this prohibition. The Public Prosecution will release findings to the media once the investigation is complete.

Eid Prayer Timings

Eid Prayer Sunday 05:54

NewsWatch

Kuwait approves power import deal with GCCIA

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The total value of electricity import agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) for the months of March, April and May reached KD10.586 million -- around 300 megawatts per month.

Sources confirmed that the ministry obtained approval from the State Audit Bureau (SAB) to sign a contract with the GCCIA to import 300 megawatts for the month of March at a cost of KD3.330 million.

Sources said the second agreement was referred to SAB for oversight, study, audit and approval to import electricity for the months of April and May at a total cost of KD 7.256 million. Sources added the ministry is now waiting for the approval of the bureau to sign the contract to import electricity for these two months.

Article 8 Affairs Office offers support for citizenship cases

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Article 8 Affairs Office is continuing its efforts to provide services and support to individuals whose citizenships were revoked under Article 8 of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law (wives of citizens), reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These efforts are being exerted in coordination with relevant authorities to ensure quick responses and appropriate solutions for various cases.

In this regard, the office has been receiving requests and inquiries via WhatsApp at 97293232.

A team of specialists will be available to respond to messages during official working hours, from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm, and ensure accurate information is provided and inquiries are addressed promptly.

This team will also monitor developments and maintain continuous coordination with relevant authorities to ensure efficient processing of transactions according to approved procedures.

To enhance cooperation and integration among relevant government agencies, the office has activated direct communication channels to facilitate rapid information exchange and timely decision-making.

FM emphasizes strategic dialogue

'Kuwaiti-US relations remain robust'

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): The Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya has reaffirmed the depth and distinctiveness of Kuwaiti-US relations.



Al-Yahya

The Kuwaiti top diplomat told KUNA that both friendly countries are keen to develop and sustain such relation in a manner that would serve interests of their peoples. This came after Al-Yahya spoke on the phone with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier in the day.

During the conversation, he reviewed the strong and historic bilateral relations between Kuwait and the United States, highlighting the close strategic partnership. Al-Yahya also emphasized keenness and commitment of the political leadership towards such relationship on all levels.

Considered as one of the United State's most significant allies in the Middle East, Kuwait is taking up its role in sustaining security and stability of the region, noted Al-Yahya, as he voiced eagerness for the 7th round of the joint strategic dialogue between the two countries later this year in Washington, as well as the 164th GCC-US ministerial meeting this coming June, in Kuwait.

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9 Gulf Bank successfully concludes 'Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together' Ramadan campaign, featuring various charitable, social & sports activities



10 Burgan Bank reports KD 46.4 mln in net profit in 2024, an increase of 7% from previous year

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:22	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:42	Maghrib ..	18:04
Zohr	11:53	Isha	19:22

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Rather hot and partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 10-40 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

By Night: Mild to rather cold and

Weather

cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 12-40 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	29	18
Kuwait Airport	30	14

Abdaly	33	13
Bubyan	24	15
Jahra	32	16
Failaka Island	30	18
Salmiyah	24	19
Ahmadi	28	14
Jal Aliyah	31	16
Nuwaisib	28	14



HH the Amir



HH the Crown Prince



HH the Prime Minister

Amir wishes King Charles good health after medical check-ups

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to King Charles III, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to congratulate him on the successful medical check-ups he underwent recently.

His Highness the Amir wished King Charles everlasting wellbeing and the UK more progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also

sent a cable to King Charles III, to congratulate him on the successful medical check-ups he underwent recently.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished King Charles everlasting wellbeing and the UK more progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah then sent a similar cable to King Charles III, to congratulate him on the successful medical check-ups he underwent recently.

FM receives Tajik President letter addressed to Amir

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received a written message from President of the Republic of Tajikistan addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The message to His Highness the Amir was handed over to Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya by the Tajik Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydov during a reception at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters.

It dealt with the close friendship bonding the two friendly countries, means of cementing

these ties in various spheres and the 30th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the State of Kuwait.

The Foreign Minister also received an identical letter from President Rahmon addressed to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Moreover, Minister Al-Yahya received a similar letter from the Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, Sirojiddin Muhriddinmet.

Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received credentials of the



Al-Yahya

Republic of Niger's new Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Adam Abdo Hassan, during a meeting held at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters.

Minister Al-Yahya expressed good wishes to the new ambassador and hoped the close bilateral relations between the two friendly countries would enhance and prosper further.

Thousands bid adieu to Ramadan in midnight supplications on 29th

Securitymen, volunteers play vital role in helping worshipers

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Grand Mosque witnessed the arrival of thousands of worshipers to perform the night prayer on the 29th night of Ramadan, seeking the Night of Power (Decree).

Majid Al-Enezi led the worshipers in the first four rak'ahs of the Qiyam prayer, while Bader Al-Ali led the second four rak'ahs.

The Grand Mosque administration announced that the number of worshipers who performed the Qiyam prayer on the 29th night of Ramadan reached 9,330 -- 6,100 men and 3,230 women.

In a spiritual speech delivered between the rak'ahs, Sheikh Dr. Nawaf Al-Suraihi stressed the importance of thanking Almighty Allah for His blessings and even for performing acts of worship. "When a Muslim is able to pray, fast and perform other acts of worship; he is truly blessed and deserving of praise and gratitude," he pointed out.

Gratitude

He explained that gratitude is not only expressed verbally, but also in the heart and limbs, by appreciating the blessing and doing what pleases Allah.

He said Almighty Allah praised His Prophet Noah, peace be upon him, by saying, "Indeed, he was a grateful servant." He added that

"gratitude is one of the greatest attributes of believers. It is the reason for increasing blessings and preventing their disappearance. A grateful servant views everything Allah bestowed upon him, no matter how small, with gratitude; and is certain that every blessing requires greater obedience and closeness to Allah."

He asserted that among the greatest blessings for which gratitude is due are security and safety, as they are the foundations of stability and reassurance in human life.

He quoted the Hadith of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, "whoever among you wakes up secure in his home, healthy in his body and has his daily sustenance; it is as if the whole world has been given to him. Whoever has security, health and provisions already attained the great good that deserves praise."

He said gratitude for blessings is not limited to words, as it entails using them wisely in obedience to Allah. "Part of gratitude for the blessing of money is to spend it on charitable causes, part of gratitude for the blessing of health is to invest it in good deeds, and part of gratitude for the blessing of security is to protect one's homeland and society and not to corrupt them in any way," he added.

He called for contemplation of the bless-

ings that surround the people daily and not to neglect Allah's bounty. He asked "how many people have been deprived of what we enjoy and how many have lost a blessing they were unaware of?"

He urged everyone to repeat Allah's words: "If you are grateful, I will surely increase you"; and to approach life with gratitude that brings more goodness and blessings.

Facilities

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs fully prepared the necessary facilities for mosques to ensure the comfort of worshipers, including security preparations to ensure smooth traffic flow. A number of volunteers were present, devoting their efforts to meeting the needs of worshipers.

The surroundings of the Grand Mosque also witnessed extensive security preparations to regulate traffic, and facilitate the entry and exit of worshipers. Security and traffic personnel were deployed to secure the roads and guide motorists.

Volunteers played a vital role in providing assistance to worshipers by distributing water or guiding them to prayer areas, reflecting the spirit of cooperation and solidarity within the community.

Al-Ghanim and Al-Kharafi Mosques also welcomed thousands of worshipers who came from different parts of the country. In a religious atmosphere and with their melodious voices, the imams' recitations evoked interaction and reverence among the worshipers.

Turkiye ambassador extends Eid greetings to Amir, people

PRAISE be to God, abundantly, praise be to God, who has brought us the blessed Eid al-Fitr, after fasting the holy month of Ramadan with tranquility and peace. We ask Allah Almighty to accept our righteous deeds from us and from you.

On the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, we extend our warmest congratulations and blessings to the sisterly State of Kuwait, its leadership, government, and people.

We wish good health and well-being to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to our fellow citizens and residents of the State of Kuwait. We ask Allah Almighty to bring it back to us and to you with goodness, blessings, and prosperity.

As this blessed month of mercy and forgiveness comes to an end, we face great challenges imposed upon us by our moral and humanitarian commitment. The true essence of Ramadan is not limited to a month of religious worship alone, but rather a month of solidarity and support with our brothers and friends.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "The believers in their mutual love and compassion are like



Tuba Nur Sonmez

a single body. If one part of it is ill, the rest of the body feels pain and fever."

We recall with clarity and sincerity the need to stand with compassion and solidarity to end the devastating humanitarian losses resulting from unjustified wars that pierce hearts and eyes.

Once again, with the advent of Eid al-Fitr, I also pray for the people of Gaza, hoping that they will find peace and solace in these difficult times, and that the coming Eid will bring relief, prosperity, and lasting peace to all.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the staff of the Turkish Embassy, I extend my warmest congratulations to the Turkish community in Kuwait. We hope that these blessed days will bring peace and tranquility to the Islamic world and all of humanity.

On this occasion, I also extend my sincere congratulations on the strengthening of relations between our two countries, Turkiye and Kuwait. We pray to Allah to perpetuate our unity and solidarity, and to strengthen the bonds of friendship and brotherhood between our peoples. Hope you be well, healthy, and safe every year.

Tuba Nur Sonmez
Turkiye Ambassador to Kuwait

Other Voices

Man and struggle for survival

By Ahmad alsarraf

ONE of the recent and dangerous implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the gradual loss of control over our own lives. Our ability to think freely, make decisions, and move without constraint is now in the hands of others, not us.

Each day, we lose a bit more of our freedom to make decisions. Gradually, we find ourselves increasingly subjected to the authority and influence of external forces.

Every morning, we become more enslaved by what we see, or rather, by what is shared on social media, even if we don't really care about those messages.

The power to control our destiny, both as individuals and as societies, has shifted from the hands of governments, especially in small and poorer nations, to those of immensely wealthy and powerful entities. These entities, with influence surpassing that of several countries combined, make it increasingly difficult to imagine how we might break free from their grip.

For tens of thousands of years, Homo sapiens lived without realizing, let alone imagining, the existence of such forces. Most of the major transformations in human history were driven by individuals such as prophets, leaders, rulers, military commanders, emperors, popes, explorers, inventors, philosophers, and writers.

Suddenly, people's control was taken away from them. We all became, to varying degrees, completely subservient to artificial intelligence. This subservience came either abruptly or gradually, and voluntarily or not. Artificial intelligence manifests in many forms such as machines or robots that transport us, perform surgeries, write, draw, build, and handle many other tasks. In addition, AI now controls every detail of our lives.

For those who seek to escape the influence of artificial intelligence, the only option may be to withdraw from society entirely, and live in isolation on mountaintops, far-off deserts, or deep forests. This is a path some who reject the future way of life may choose in the near future.



alsarraf

Such developments have paved the way for the rise of new leadership in the United States to rule the most powerful country in history.

These changes will likely push toward the erosion of values and norms that humanity has long fought to establish, such as human rights, justice, democracy, economic openness, freedoms, and global solidarity through international organizations. In recent times, these have started to lose their significance and former momentum.

The United Nations and the Security Council have increasingly become entities resembling the Arab League in terms of weakness and diminishing significance.

The world witnessed, perhaps for the last time, how America stood in solidarity with humanity nearly four years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic. America invested tens of billions of dollars to discover and produce trillions of vaccines.

I believe this has become a relic of the past that is unlikely to be repeated if a new pandemic sweeps the globe. This time, America will not be the first to respond, and each country will have to manage its own affairs.

Under Trump's leadership, America will only respond to requests for assistance if it is in accordance with its own interests, prioritizing those over all other considerations. As a result, the Trump administration cut more than 80 percent of US foreign aid to poor countries. It is expected that the US Vice President Vance will follow this same approach when he assumes the presidency.

Europe realized early on that a split between itself and the US, as well as between the US and the rest of the world, was inevitable. Europe understood that it, along with the rest of the world, must become self-reliant for defense, food, and survival. Any agreements made will likely be bilateral and subject to cancellation, particularly by the stronger party.

No external parties will be able to impose their will on Europe, especially with the United Nations and its organizations losing momentum.

America will remain the destination for those seeking security, food, and survival, especially now that other blocs, such as Europe, Russia, and China, are burdened with their own problems.

email: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

Respect US laws or face visa revocation, deportation

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Kuwait Cultural Office at the Embassy of Kuwait in Washington has announced that, according to the articles 3 and 24 of scholarship regulations, scholarship students must respect the laws of the host country and represent Kuwait positively by adhering to all applicable regulations. Failure to comply may result in visa revocation, loss of entry status to the U.S., and potential deportation, which could severely affect a student's academic progress, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The office urged all students to fully adhere to the laws and guidelines to ensure a successful academic experience.

The Cultural Counselor and Head of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Washington Dr. Said Yousef Al-Rifai issued a circular to all students in the United States in which he stressed the importance of strict adherence to US laws to ensure their legal safety and academic progress without issues that could hinder their studies.

He highlighted some important laws and guidelines that students must follow, including traffic regulations.

Dr. Al-Rifai explained that students should obtain an American driver's license once they are settled in their residence and to stop using their Kuwaiti license. They should familiarize themselves with their state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) regulations, as requirements differ between states.

Comply

They must comply with traffic laws, including speed limits, traffic signals, vehicle insurance, public parking laws, and pay all relevant vehicle-related fees and taxes according to state laws. Students were also reminded to promptly pay any traffic violations to avoid legal penalties and ensure proper vehicle registration and insurance under the vehicle owner/driver's name.

Meanwhile, the office stressed the importance of adhering to immigration laws, urg-

ing students to update and validate their I-20 form with the International Student Office at their university, comply with academic attendance requirements, avoid unexcused absences, update their address with relevant authorities when moving to a new residence, and refrain from participating in protests or gatherings that could jeopardize their legal status in the country.

Regarding housing and rental agreements, the Cultural Office advised students to adhere to their lease terms and pay utility bills for electricity, water, gas and garbage services on time to avoid late fees. Students should respect housing regulations, maintain their residences properly, and avoid damaging any property to prevent legal or financial repercussions.

For banking and financial transactions, students were reminded to follow the terms of their bank accounts, use them legally, avoid late payments, and ensure they do not exceed available balances, as this could impact both their legal and financial status.

Gov't's strict eye on all charities: Al-Huwailah

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (Agencies): Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah reaffirmed on Friday the ministry's commitment to monitoring all charitable associations and public welfare organizations to enhance transparency and uphold Kuwait's social and humanitarian standing.

Al-Huwailah told KUNA that the ministry implements a technical policy for monitoring charitable fieldwork to ensure accuracy in activities and compliance with international regulations.

The ministry continues its strict approach against all violations and misconduct that hinder charitable work, she added.

Minister Al-Huwailah concluded her statement by emphasizing the ministry's commitment to its national responsibilities in maintaining Kuwait's reputation as a global center for humanitarian giving and social welfare.

New Kuwaiti envoys: Six new Kuwaiti ambassadors have been appointed, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

- Ziyad Al-Anbaei as Ambassador to Spain
- Mishari Al-Nibar as Ambassador to the Philippines
- Mohammed Yaqoub Hayati as Ambassador to Sweden
- Salah Al-Bannai as Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Khaled Al-Yassin as Ambassador to Indonesia
- Mohammed Al-Arifan as Ambassador to Armenia



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah presents a memento to the French ambassador.

Farwaniya Gov, French envoy discuss boost in bilateral ties

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah recently met with Ambassador of the French Republic to the State of Kuwait Olivier Gauvin in his office at the headquarters of the governorate.

During the meeting, they exchanged friendly talks, as they tackled bilateral relations between the two friendly

countries and ways to strengthen ties in various fields.

At the end of the meeting, Gauvin thanked Sheikh Athbi Nasser for the warm welcome; praising the historical and distinguished relations between Kuwait and France, the extensive cooperation between them in various fields, and the care his country's mission receives at official and public arenas.



Best for Iran to do good for its neighbors, cut meddling

"WE wonder who wrote the article, 'The World's Wealthy are Preparing for a Global Economic Collapse', published in Al-Seyassah daily claiming that people will sell their shares in global stock exchanges and then buy gold," Ahmad Al-Dawas wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"This article is inaccurate and its author is not an expert in economics.

"Returning to our topic, it is well known that none of the Gulf or Arab countries have harmed their neighbors. For example, we have not heard that Syria interfered in the affairs of Turkey, or that Egypt harmed the internal situation in Libya. The Gulf states have not interfered in the internal affairs of Iran. Arab peoples are peaceful, but Iran has insisted on interfering in other Arab affairs.

"In 2016, when we wrote an article about who benefits the international community more -- Iran or Saudi Arabia, Iran filed a lawsuit against us at the Kuwaiti Public Prosecution. Well, what was Iran's reaction after the Kuwaiti authorities foiled an attempt to smuggle Iranian drugs (Shabu) into Kuwait on Nov 3 and 5, 2020? The drugs were hidden inside a shipment of grouper fish coming from Iran, expertly concealed in the stomachs of the fish, making them appear to be fresh fish.

"On Nov 5, 2020 customs seized 270 kilograms of Shabu smuggled by an Iranian dealer. The drugs were hidden in bags of salt to deceive customs inspectors, given the close similarity between the artificial salt and Shabu. However, his attempts, along with his Bangladeshi partner, to flood the Kuwaiti and Gulf markets proved futile. The Iranian confessed that he intended to distribute the drugs in Kuwait and the Gulf markets.

"In June 2021, Iranian drug dealers smuggled Shabu into a shipment of chocolate, then into another shipment of rice bags. These attempts are continuing en route to Kuwait, concealed in some way. How did the drugs leave Iranian territory, evading the control of Iranian port and customs officials?"

"Does Iran not wish good for its neighbors? Otherwise, it would have tightened controls on ports and the exit of goods. Drug smuggling is a crime, destroying the minds of Kuwaiti youths and expatriates.

"If the opposite happened, that is if Kuwait introduced the drugs into the Iranian market, the Iranian arena would have erupted in outcry and threats. Outcries would have erupted condemning the act, considering it a crime whose perpetrator must be punished.

"Yesterday, the Kuwaiti Coast Guard thwarted a drug smuggling attempt by arresting three Iranians in possession of drugs valued at half a million Kuwaiti dinars. We watched the video. It is inconceivable that their country's authorities would not have known about them. Iranian boats patrol the length and breadth of Iranian territorial waters, flexing their muscles before the US Navy. How did these people leave Iranian territorial waters with drugs in their possession? Upon their return, didn't the Iranian Navy ask them what were they doing in Kuwait?"

"It is best for Iran to do good for its neighbors and encourage Gulf, American and European investments, thus, improving the standard of living of its people. This is the opinion of the wise, not the weak. This is my opinion based on my studies in economics. Iranians are suffering from severe economic hardship due to repression, suppression of freedom and arrests.

"Meanwhile, Reza Pahlavi, the Shah's son, predicts something will happen inside Iran."

Also:

"Many citizens interfere in matters that do not concern them -- whether in medicine, politics, sports or other matters in which specialists have an opinion that differs from the opinion of the 'spindlers.'" Kuwaiti citizen Ali Jaber Al Ahmad wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"This is an old impression we have established among some people who are oblivious to their knowledge of everything. It is something these people must stop thinking about, especially those who interfere in political matters, which should not be discussed by anyone without government approval or a long-standing political veteran.

"If the time for breaking the fast is linked to the Maghrib call to prayer in Khairan, Kuwait City and Jahra, as we see on television daily; how can the residents of these three areas know the time for the Isha' call to prayer and the rest of the obligatory prayers without hearing the mosque call to prayer or being shown on screen? Why only the Maghrib prayer and not the five daily prayers? Is the State more concerned with breaking the fast than prayer?"

"Also, what are the cities doing in each region so that residents can observe their fasting? Since television announces the Maghrib prayer time for each region, why do radio and weather forecasters only announce the prayer time by saying, 'It is now time for prayer... for Ku-

wait City and its suburbs,' without mentioning the time for Khairan and Jahra?"

"Finally, will television continue to broadcast the Maghrib prayer time after Ramadan, as it does in Ramadan, or will the prayer times be the same as those for the days of Eid Al-Fitr?"

"As long as there is someone in heaven who protects you, there is no one on Earth who can harm you.

"May Allah protect Kuwait and its people from all forms of evil and harm."



"Allah did not make any man with two hearts in his body (Allah Al-mighty's truth)," journalist Hassan Ali Karam wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Allah prescribed the religion and called people in the noble verse (122 of Surat At-Tawbah) in His saying: And it is not for the believers to go forth all at once. So, why should not a party from every division of them go forth to gain understanding in religion and warn their people when they return to them that they may beware?"

"According to ancient interpretations, this noble verse states that Allah urged the warriors not to go to battle all at once, not to leave the Messenger (may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him and his family), and to remain with the Messenger to gain understanding of religion.

"Perhaps, there are many interpretations and meanings. The short answer is to gain understanding of religion, meaning to learn it. From here, we understand that spreading it to people comes through devoting oneself to religion and teaching people the verses and the religious duties of a Muslim. The people of war are for war, and the people of religion are devoted to religion and explaining the verses and the duties of a Muslim.

"Therefore, people gather behind the pulpits of religious scholars and jurists, so that they can explain to them the duties of a Muslim. Others devote themselves to their livelihood, which means specialization. However, in the present time, we see people becoming politicians, scholars, doctors and dream interpreters who give advice on matters that they are ignorant of and do not see what is hidden behind the issue.

"The scales have been disturbed, so everyone has become a politician, for example, who gives his judgment on matters that are beyond his understanding. We, as ordinary people, are far from the reality of what is going on behind the scenes, or what is happening in the corridors of politics, which some of us may see as something other than what should happen and make a decision that matches our opinion completely like the disagreement or quarrel between a husband and his wife behind closed doors, and they reach divorce or reconciliation.

"Contrary to the agreement or decision of the spouses, we legislate for ourselves, but without knowledge. We see this in our present age. Thus, we may be victims of the misleading media, most of which, even all of it, does not serve the truth, which we ordinary people want other than what politicians want, so politics has always been the game of nations, and we the

people are its victims.

"Sheikh Othman Al-Khamis is a man of pulpit and a jurist who answers religious questions. He is famous for that. He may be right or wrong, or he may differ with other people of knowledge. It may seem that the Sheikh is enacting the Sunnah of the Salafist groups, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood groups, and the involvement of both of them in politics, which made him fanatical about the opinion of the Salaf in the Gaza war against the Brotherhood.

"Many, not only Sheikh Al-Khamis, have criticized the leaders of Hamas for the surprise attack on Israel at dawn on Oct 7, 2023, which led to a tragedy in Gaza and its people -- from killing, destruction and demolition of homes to hunger and deprivation.

"Some Arabs, governments and peoples have taken undeclared or declared positions that translate their opposition to the October 7 War. The first of the opponents came from Palestine, when President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas announced from his headquarters in Ramallah his strong opposition to the surprise attack by Hamas on Tel Aviv.

"Politicians have a language, clerics have a language, and ordinary people have a language, although the latter are victims of both, so we found that amount of attack on Sheikh Al-Khamis.

"Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) said his eternal wisdom that is still alive today: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'. This summarizes what is required of ordinary people, and those who have no business in the affairs and issues of politics. It has been said that politics is impure. How wonderful it is if we, as citizens, will stay away from issues that we do not understand or are far from our understanding, and devote ourselves to our own work."

— Compiled by Mahmoud Attiyeh



Road maintenance underway in Jaber Al-Ali.



KUNA photos

Major road repairs commence in Jaber Al-Ali

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Masha'an announced the start of major maintenance work in Jaber Al-Ali in Ahmadi Governorate as part of new contracts.

In a press statement issued on Friday, Dr. Al-Masha'an affirmed that the ministry will

continue to implement road maintenance projects in all areas, based on its commitment to ensuring quality and adherence to international standards to enhance infrastructure development.

She explained that the relevant teams conducted an inspection of the area before initiating the necessary maintenance and repairs. The maintenance work will begin with the most damaged areas, fol-

lowed by less affected ones, all under the supervision and oversight of the ministry's teams.

The minister stressed the importance of coordination to resolve any outstanding issues related to road maintenance. She called on the implementing companies to complete the work quickly, ensure quality and efficiency in line with the approved technical specifications, and adhere to the agreed-upon schedule.

Illegal domestic workers major risk to Kuwaitis, gov't interests

House help with criminal record, carrying disease threatens families

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: **Illegal domestic workers continue to cause big challenges for licensed domestic labor recruitment offices, beyond their economic impact that undermines State revenues, reports Al-Rai daily.**

This includes losses from medical examination fees, residency renewal costs, flight operations and other indirect financial contributions, such as boosting the economy.

The detrimental effects of illegal workers are numerous, presenting health risks to families while some workers receive monthly salaries of up to KD280.

Head of the Domestic Labor Disputes Department at the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) MUSAED AL-HAJRI talked about the dangers posed by illegal workers, citing harm to families and wastage of State resources.

In an interview with Kuwait TV, Al-Hajri explained that licensed recruitment agencies must renew their licenses annually for a fee that benefits the State. "However, some families opt for illegal workers, which not only burdens them financially but also exposes them to increased risks, as these workers are often expensive and unsponsored.

He pointed out that legal domestic workers

contribute to the local economy, considering their food and clothing expenses are covered by employers and by stimulating air traffic and generating revenue from medical examinations and residency transfer fees.

Munir Al-Asimi, owner of a domestic labor agency, expressed his concerns indicating that illegal agencies advertise on social media, often without an office or license. "These individuals rely on their networks to smuggle workers from their original sponsors, offering high monthly salaries, sometimes reaching KD250 to KD280, but without official documentation," he revealed.

Al-Asimi warned that illegal workers might have contagious diseases or criminal backgrounds thereby, posing significant dangers to both citizens and expatriates.

Bassam Al-Shammari, another domestic labor agency owner, called for the formal and legal establishment of recruitment agreements with various countries through new memoranda of understanding.

He also proposed setting a minimum wage of KD120, and creating a new and swift mechanism

for resolving labor disputes that ensures the recovery of all legally stipulated dues. He stressed the importance of enforcing laws regarding financial entitlements, weekly off, end-of-service benefits and annual leave; as well as activating a blacklist for non-compliant employers.

Al-Asimi mentioned three major harms that unlicensed domestic workers pose to citizens as follows:

1. Risk of crime: Unlicensed workers may commit crimes and flee, making it difficult for citizens to protect their rights.
2. Health threats: These workers could be carriers of contagious diseases that might spread to family members.
3. Legal consequences: Employers of unlicensed workers may be accused of concealing criminal activity.

The government also faces several challenges due to the presence of unlicensed domestic workers:

1. Difficulty in prosecution: The illegal status of such workers makes it harder for authorities to hold them accountable.
2. Health risks: The spread of diseases from unlicensed workers is a public health concern.
3. Wastage of State resources: Illegal workers drain resources that could otherwise benefit the State.



Al-Hajri

Expat with bank link caught forging Kuwaiti dinars

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Counterfeiting and Forgery Investigations Department at the Criminal Security Sector in the Interior Ministry, led by Major General Hamed Al-Dawas, has referred an Asian to the Public Prosecution for forging Kuwaiti currency, reports Al-Anba daily. Case files indicate that around 19,000 Kuwaiti Dinars 20 and 10 notes from the fifth series were counterfeited.

During investigations, the accused revealed he believed his position at the Central Bank would allow him to commit the crime and obtain authentic

sixth-series currency in exchange.

A security source reported that the Central Bank informed the Criminal Security Sector about an expatriate in possession of the counterfeit money. In response, a team of counterfeiting and forgery detectives immediately apprehended the suspect and seized the forged currency.

The suspect was then taken to the Criminal Security Sector headquarters for questioning. He confessed that he had taken advantage of the deadline for replacing the old fifth-series currency and

forged the seized money. He had intended to exchange the counterfeit notes for new sixth-series currency, believing his Central Bank connections would allow him to avoid detection, as the old notes would be destroyed and no longer circulated.

The investigation also sought to determine if the suspect previously engaged in similar activities, including the exchange of counterfeit notes for genuine currency. The suspect admitted to collaborating with others in the production of the fake bills, leading to the arrest of his accomplices.



KFF photo

Firemen heading for the blaze site in the basement.

No injuries in Shuwaikh garage basement blaze

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Fire broke out in the basement of a garage in Shuwaikh Industrial Area on Friday afternoon.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), firefighters from Shuwaikh Industrial Area, Shaheed and Isnad fire stations rushed to the location and extinguished the fire. No casualties have been reported.

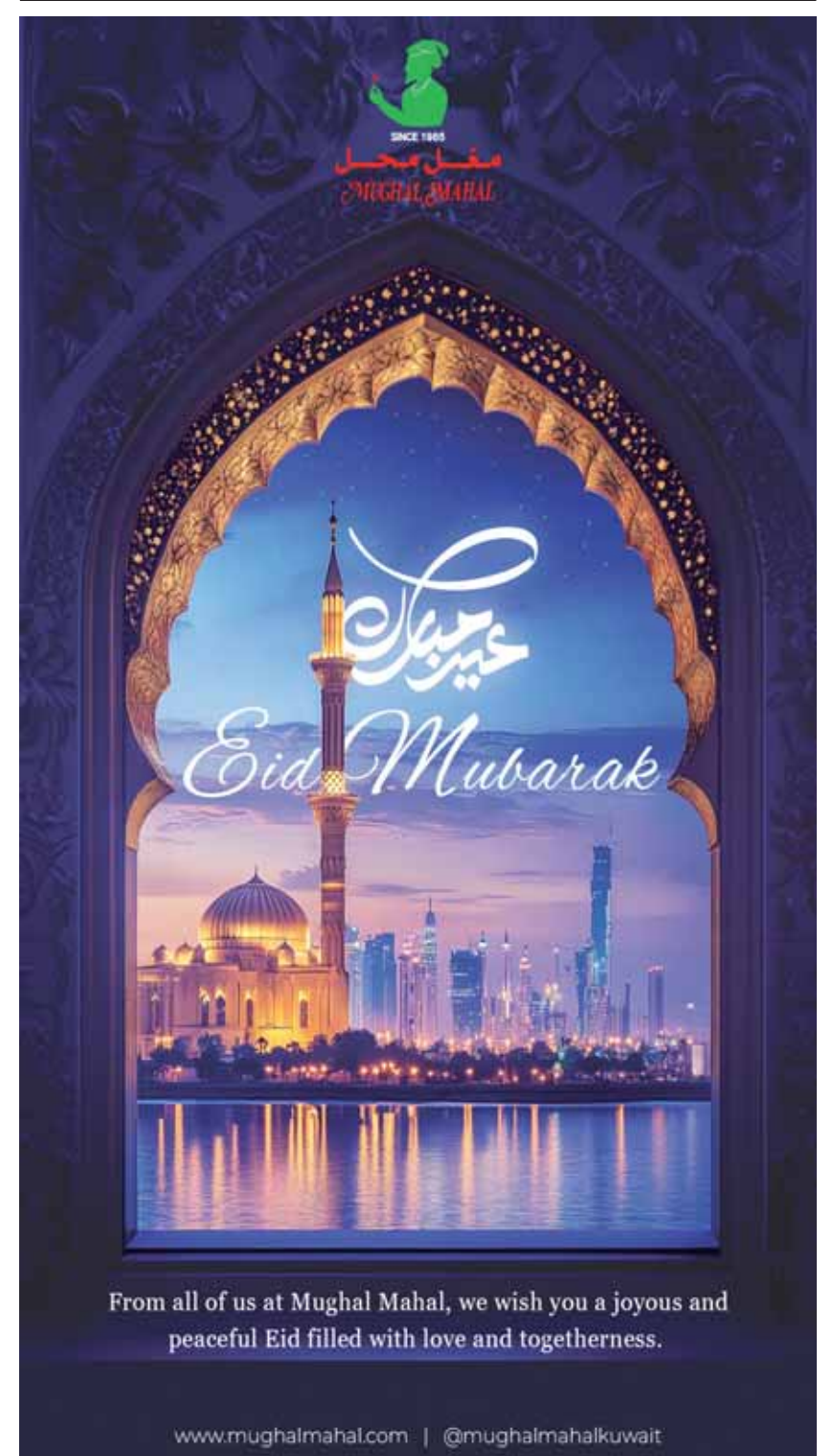
Meanwhile, the General Traffic Department has announced the closure of the Fourth Ring Road from the entrance to King Fahd Road at the flyover towards Salmiya, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Vehicles coming from Jahra will be diverted to the entrance of King Fahd Road towards Ahmadi or redirected back towards Jahra. The closure took effect on Friday and will remain in place until road maintenance is completed.

Suspects under probe in embezzlement of funds

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) referred some individuals to the Public Prosecution on charges of suspected embezzlement of public funds, closely linked to the felony of using a document devoid of legal force, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Nazaha affirmed its keenness and determination to continue its efforts in examining, collecting evidence, and investigating all serious and fully compliant reports referred to it, through any means necessary.



From all of us at Mughal Mahal, we wish you a joyous and peaceful Eid filled with love and togetherness.



Al-Seyassah photo
Sheikh Faisal Al-Hamoud, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan

Amiri Diwan Advisor urges youth to uphold 'public decorum' during Eid

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Advisor at the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Faisal Al-Hamoud urged young people, particularly mall-goers, during the Eid al-Fitr holidays to uphold public etiquette and exhibit good moral behavior, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He stressed the need to avoid quarrels, fights, and negative behaviors such as reckless driving, which can lead to road closures and disrupt the celebrations of these blessed days.

North Mutlaa adventure stalls over legal hurdles

Project seeks new oversight

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Over the past 10 months, the Municipal Council has approved a number of major development projects -- all of which fall within the New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

These projects include the Jahra Corniche, development of Sulaibikhat Bay, expansion of Mubarak Port, and the Cultural and Entertainment Center along Abdullah Al-Ahmad Street. The Kuwait Municipality is currently working on most of these projects.

On the other hand, the desert adventure project in North Mutlaa (the third regional zone) remains suspended; particularly after State Minister for Municipality Affairs Abdullatif Al-Mishari objected to the second clause of the decision of the council to allocate it to the Projects Sector in the Municipality. The council issued this decision during its session on Oct 14, 2024.

The objection is based on the violation of the Municipality's mandate under Law No. 33/2016 on its establishment. The mandate does not include the establishment of sites designated for tourism, recreational activities and investment.

In turn, the council, in its session on Nov 11, 2024, approved the objection of Al-Mishari; citing the lack of jurisdiction of the Municipality. This put the project in a gray area of suspension.

Meanwhile, sources from the Municipality told the newspaper that work is underway to redirect the project to the State entities responsible for developing tourism and entertainment in the country, so that it can be implemented.

Sources explained "this is particularly true since the council previously approved amending the size of the project to nine million square meters, instead of 13 million square meters. Therefore, the project's completion is contingent upon its transfer to a competent authority other than the Municipality; so that it can be offered for private sector investment."

Sources indicated that the project is the first of its kind in the country and is one of the first projects in the third regional zone. Its site boundaries have been modified to move one kilometer away from Sabah Al-Ahmad Nature Reserve to the East, from the regional road to the North, and from the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) facilities to the West.

Sources affirmed that the project provides opportunities to accommodate active recreational uses and less intensive activities (including camping); as per the structural plan for the third regional zone in North Mutlaa, which was approved by the council through a resolution issued on June 24, 2013.

Sources added the project consists of 25 percent active recreational spots like kiosks for craft workshops and small businesses, a global village, an indoor theater, kart tracks, various sports fields, desert arts competition areas, restaurants, cafés, a conference center, hotels, Mutlaa Theater (for events and performances), and an adventure entertainment city.

Sources revealed that 50 percent of the total project area has been allocated for quiet and peaceful recreational uses; such as a heritage district, modern art museums, Sadu House, painting and pottery studios, a library for reading and lectures, camping and chalet areas, sand dune skiing areas, a space dome, an exhibition area and lecture halls.

Sources said the remaining 25 percent has been allocated as well; indicating the total area of the project will be allotted for the main transportation infrastructure, afforestation and recreational resorts that are suitable for the desert environment.

Sources confirmed the importance of the project which, if completed according to the prepared study, will leave a mark on the entertainment and tourism map in the country. They said the Municipality will most likely play a supervisory role once the project is completed, through the authority designated by the government; particularly with regard to areas designated for camping, kiosks and shops for small businesses.



KUNA photo
The Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs inspected the Sulaibiya and Taima areas.

Minister vows strict action against violators

Al-Meshari inspects illegal construction

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdullatif Al-Meshari inspected on Friday residential districts to check whether there are illegal construction on State properties.

The minister, during the tour in Taimaa and Alsulaibiya, examined the teams tasked with dealing with such encroachments in these regions.

He was accompanied by Kuwait Municipality Director General Manal Al-Asfour, Deputy Director General for the sectors' affairs of Al-Jahraa and Al-Assima Nizar Al-Awwad, Director of the Municipality Branch in Al-Jahraa Governorate Thamer Al-Mutairi and a representative of the Ministry of Interior.

Kuwait Municipality has recently launched a wide-scale campaign to penalize offenders who build on State land plots in Taimaa and Alsulaibiya after discovering such illegal cases.

MoCI urges businesses to register beneficiaries to avoid hefty fines

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry stressed the importance of promptly registering the name of the real beneficiary through the commercial registry portal in order to avoid financial penalties, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministry explained that 73.3 percent of commercial registry owners, representing 167,531 records, have com-

plied with the registration requirements as of Wednesday. However, 60,957 records remain incomplete, and failure to finalize registration could result in financial penalties.

It is worth mentioning that the ministerial Resolution No. 16/2025 sets the end of March as the deadline for determining the real beneficiary. Businesses that fail to comply may face fines ranging from KD 1,000 to KD 10,000.

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Cleanup boosts marine protection

Kuwait Dive Team clears abandoned two-ton fishing net from Kuwait Bay

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): The Kuwait Dive Team, which is part of the Kuwait Voluntary Environmental Foundation, successfully removed the third abandoned fishing net from Kuwait Bay, which weighed two tons.

This effort by the team is aimed at protecting marine life and ensuring the safety of saltwater pathways from potential hazards that could threaten boats and ships.

Team leader Walid Al-Fadhel told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Tuesday that the mission was necessary due to the high number of abandoned nets in the bay, which is an environmentally significant area that serves as a vital fish habitat.

He explained that special boats were deployed to remove the nets, which contained numerous fish, marine organisms, and dead seabirds. Some nets were located in deeper areas (approximately 13 meters), while others were in shallower zones. The team relied on the tidal movements to retrieve the nets, while carefully considering weather conditions and sea wave heights.

Al-Fadhel expressed gratitude to the supporting organizations involved in this huge effort, including the Kuwait Ports Authority, the Environment Public Authority, the Kuwait Stock Exchange, the General Directorate of Coast Guard, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, and the Marine Rescue Centers of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF).

He stressed that this effort is part of the global environmental campaign "Clean Seas" with the cooperation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for West Asia.

Al-Fadhel indicated that the team's projects are ongoing, covering the entire Kuwait Bay from north to south,



KUNA photo
The Kuwaiti diving team raises a net east of Umm Al-Naml Island.

alongside efforts to monitor and protect coral reefs around Kuwait's islands and coastline.

He said the team is continuing with the beach cleaning campaigns in collaboration with civil society organizations to raise environmental awareness and promote volunteer work.

Al-Fadhel praised the efforts of the relevant authorities in protecting the marine environment, as well as the initiative of citizens who report the locations of nets for removal.

He urged boat owners to report any waste or violations to the Coast Guard, Marine Rescue Centers of KFF, or the Kuwait Dive Team, so that they can be removed and the risks they pose eliminated.

Al-Fadhel also stressed the need for stricter penalties against fishermen who violate maritime laws related to fishing, as well as those who frequent the sea, to prevent such violations from continuing.

900 job grades approved under CSC's selection

MoH nears promotion rollout for Kuwaitis

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Ministry of Health is currently putting the final touches on the selection-based promotion for Kuwaiti employees who meet the requirements of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), reports Al-Anba daily.

This is part of the ministry's commitment to support national competencies and implement just employment standards.

Sources revealed to the daily that the CSC has approved approximately 900 job grades for the Ministry of Health under the 'Promotion by Selection' system. They affirmed that work is underway to carefully and professionally screen candidates, in preparation for announcing the new grades in the coming period.

Sources explained that selection-based promotion includes all job categories for Kuwaitis only. Doctors are exempted from nomination due to the specificity of their promotion rules, which are determined by certain decisions, sources added.

Sources indicated that nominations are neither based on the completion of forms that were canceled recently, nor on the

nomination of officials. Rather, they are conducted in accordance with clear conditions set by the CSC as follows:

- Seniority in the current grade;
- Obtaining 'excellent' job performance rating for the past two years;
- At least two years have passed in the current grade;
- Must not have previously been promoted by selection from the current grade.

Promotion to Grades A and B is also permitted, even if the previous promotion was by selection; provided the employee has spent four years in the first grade overall.

Sources disclosed that the selection criteria for candidates are based on seniority in the current financial grade, early promotion to their current grade, seniority in the supervisory position, highest academic qualification, seniority in graduation and oldest age.

Sources said the names of eligible employees will be announced after completion of the annual screening and job performance evaluation process.

Kuwait offers condolences to South Korea's wildfire victims

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait extended sympathy and solidarity with the friendly Republic of Korea following the South's worst-ever wildfires, which claimed tens of lives and left many injured and displaced

southeastern the country.

This came in a statement by Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday, expressing sincere condolences to the South Korea over the victims and wishing the injured a speedy recovery.



KUNA photo

Distributing iftar meals to displaced families in the Gaza Strip.

Over 1,500 meals distributed

Kuwait Society for Relief supports Palestine food distribution project

RAMALLAH, March 29, (KUNA): Palestine's Tadhamon, solidarity, charitable society announced on Friday carrying out a charitable project, supported by Kuwait Society for Relief, to distribute coupons and iftar meals in Palestine's Nablus City in the West Bank.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Alaa Maqboul, the head of society, said the scheme seeks to offer continued support to Palestinian families who are facing tough conditions, adding that 400 food baskets are being handed out

during the holy month of Ramadan.

The project also involves distributing 1,193 food meals to orphan families and those with humanitarian cases benefiting from society's services, he noted.

The move shows fruitful collaboration among charities, and highlights the key role of humanitarian support in improving conditions of the needy, he noted.

He thanked Kuwait and the Kuwait Society for Relief for continued support to Palestinians.

Zakat unveils new e-service on Sahel

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Zakat House has introduced a new e-service via the Sahel app for Zakat al-Fitr, which enables users to make payments

easily, in compliance with approved Sharia regulations, by selecting the quick donation box, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Kuwait, Tajikistan expand cooperation with new embassies and direct flights

Kuwaitis granted visa exemption

By Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov has confirmed the opening of a Kuwaiti Embassy in the capital -- Dushanbe, as well as the appointment of a Kuwaiti ambassador there; indicating the opening is expected to take place within the next few months.

At a press conference held recently to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwaiti-Tajik relations, Zubaydov announced the allocation of land for the construction of the Tajik Embassy in the diplomatic zone in Mishref. He said construction will begin soon, without specifying a date.

He also revealed that his country abolished entry visas for Kuwaitis; adding that during his meeting with



Al-Seyassah photo
Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan

Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, they discussed facilitating the entry of Tajiks to Kuwait with the Kuwaiti side. He said the minister promised to consider this matter as soon as possible and to allow Tajiks to obtain electronic visas.

He expressed his satisfaction over the achievements made so far; stressing "our

political relations are distinguished. We have signed approximately 30 cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding with Kuwait. We also have a program to develop economic relations between the two countries."

He confirmed the contributions of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) to the development process in Tajikistan, where the fund has financed six vital projects.

He added "Kuwait will host the Foreign Affairs Conference of the Gulf and Central Asian States in the middle of next month. The Tajik foreign affairs minister will attend the conference. A leaders' summit will be held in the Uzbek city of Samarkand in May and there is cooperation between the two countries in the field of combating terrorism; specifically the conference held in Kuwait on this issue, co-chaired by the United Nations, Kuwait and Tajikistan."

Regarding the supply of Tajik water to the Gulf region, he stated that "Tajikistan was one of the countries under the former Soviet Union. It has approximately 60 percent of the water reserves in Central Asia, so it can supply the Gulf countries with fresh water through Iran."

He affirmed his belief in the possibil-

ity of implementing the project in the near future, as well as the possibility of cooperation in the field of electricity generation.

He pointed out that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon chose Kuwait as the first Arab country he officially visited, reflecting Tajikistan's commitment to strengthen bilateral relations and learn from the experience of Kuwait as a developed country.

He said "the tourism sector is another area for strengthening cooperation between the two friendly countries. This progress has facilitated the establishment of direct flights between the capitals of Tajikistan and Kuwait through Kuwait Airways."

"Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait, the foreign affairs ministries of the two countries have actively sought to implement the directives of their leaderships; thereby, strengthening cooperation in areas of mutual concern. Bilateral political consultations, several sessions of which have been held in the capitals of the two friendly countries, are considered the main mechanism for coordinating and overseeing these efforts," he explained.

Congratulatory message from Catholic Church in the State of Kuwait on occasion of Eid Al-Fitr

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: On behalf of the Catholic Church in the State of Kuwait, we are honored to extend our highest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait – may God protect and preserve him – to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince – may God protect and preserve him – to the wise government, and to the noble people of Kuwait on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.

During these blessed days, we pray to Almighty God to safeguard the State of Kuwait and its wise leadership, to bless its dear people, to grant it continued security, stability, and prosperity, and to keep it as a model of brotherhood, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among all its citizens.

Eid Mubarak! May this occasion bring goodness and blessings upon Your Highness and upon Kuwait and its people.



The Catholic Church in the State of Kuwait.

Continued from Page 1

Gaza protests:

When we demand the removal of malicious, collaborating hands from Palestine, it is not because we, as Arabs, and Gulf citizens in particular, are constantly bearing the financial burden of rebuilding what was destroyed by the actions of Palestinian factions. If the issue could have been resolved with money, it would have been settled long ago.

I recall what happened after March 3, 1965, when the then-Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba visited Jericho to persuade the Palestinians and Arabs to accept Security Council Resolution No. 181. This resolution proposed establishing a Palestinian state with 49 percent of the land shared with Israel, and with Jerusalem as an independent, neutral capital under UN administration.

At that time, Jamal Abdel Nasser was furious and refused to even open a letter Bourguiba had sent him. Demonstrations erupted throughout the Arab world, instigated by Nasserist organizations, rejecting the proposal. Today, because of the recklessness of Hamas and other factions, the Arabs are pleading for aid to enter the Gaza Strip.

Yahya Sinwar, along with the commanders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, sought revenge on the Israeli jailer on October 7, rather than aiming to achieve better terms through negotiations.

At the same time, throughout their 18-year rule of Gaza, they presented themselves as new investors. They found a new patron in the so-called "Islamic Revolution," whose leaders once boasted of controlling four Arab capitals.

This patron used this slogan to achieve their own goals.

Once Iran realized that the folly of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" would cause it huge damage, it abandoned Hamas through the voice of its highest authority, believing this would absolve it of any consequences.

The same pattern was repeated with Hezbollah, the Iraqi sectarian militias, and later with the defunct Syrian regime. It reminds us of what Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said to Abu Ubaidah when he sent him to those people: "You are heading towards a land of deceit, trickery, and betrayal. You will encounter people who have dared to do evil, learned how to commit it, and forgotten goodness, while those people remained distant from it. So, make your own mind."

After all this history, the time has come for Arabs, particularly Palestinians, to make the current protests in Gaza a moment of reckoning, not only for the leaders of Hamas but for anyone trafficking in their cause.

The time has come for Arabs to close their doors to the extremists who raise the slogan of "liberating Palestine from the sea to the river."

They have destroyed everyone, yet have not even liberated their own homes. They are experts at achieving Israel's goals. Recently, they succeeded in furthering Israel's objective of destroying the two-state solution.

May God help the people of Gaza through their catastrophe under Hamas rule, which has destroyed both stone and soul, and turned the Eid of the people of Gaza into a time of tears, wailing, and hunger. This is why we echo the words of the poet Abu Tayyeb al-Mutanabbi: "O Eid, what difficult conditions you have returned with."

Finally, Arab rulers must stop yielding to the blackmail of those exploiting the Palestinian issue.

'Kuwaiti-US

Latest regional and international developments were discussed during the call, as Rubio expressed his country's appreciation for the State of Kuwait's "just and balanced" stances, especially regarding the Palestinian cause, and the situations in Lebanon and Syria, according to Al-Yahya.

Kuwait Amir

The Diwan also extended His Highness congratulations to Kuwait citizens and residents, and wished Kuwait further safety, security and prosperity under the astute leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Friday a telephone call from Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khaifia.

During the call, King Hamad congratulated His Highness the Amir on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr, praying to Allah Almighty to repeat this blessed occasion on the two countries, and the Arab and Muslim nations, with goodness, prosperity and blessings, wishing His Highness the Amir everlasting good health.

His Highness the Amir thanked King Hamad for this good initiative that embodies the deep-rooted relations between the two countries and their nations, congratulating him on this joyful occasion.

His Highness the Amir wished perpetual well-being to the King, and further progress and prosperity to Bahrain.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received on Friday a call from the President of the UAE Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

During the call, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed congratulated His Highness the Amir on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr, expressing best wishes and prayers on this blessed occasion, wishing many returns for the two countries, Arab and Muslim nations.

In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed for this kind gesture, which reflects the deep-rooted ties between the two countries, wishing Sheikh Mohammad good health and wellness and the UAE further prosperity and progress.

His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani who congratulated him on Eid Al-Fitr.

In the call, Qatari Amir wished happy returns of the blessed occasion for both nations and all Arab and Muslim countries. He also wished His Highness Sheikh Meshal everlasting wellbeing.

For his part, His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal thanked the Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim on the good sentiments which reflect the deep-rooted relations between the two Arabian Gulf nations. He also wished Sheikh Tamim everlasting wellbeing and progress and prosperity for Qatar and its people.

On Saturday, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a call from the Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq, expressing his best wishes on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.

The Sultan wished prosperity and abundance to all Arab and Islamic countries, wishing His Highness and his people good health and wellbeing.

His Highness thanked the Sultan on his generous gesture that embodies the deep relations

between the two countries, congratulating him on this blessed occasion, and wishing Oman and its people progress and prosperity.

Kuwait extends

Acting Charge d'Affaires at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Bangkok, Counsellor Abdulmohsen Al-Fares, told KUNA that the embassy had been in contact with relevant authorities in Thailand and Myanmar since the first moments of the earthquake to ensure that no Kuwaitis were among the victims.

Al-Fares added that communication is ongoing with major hospitals in the Thai capital, Bangkok, as well as in Myanmar, to ensure there are no Kuwaitis injured in the earthquake.

On Friday, Kuwait Embassy in Thailand called on Kuwaiti citizens in all governorates to take caution due to the earthquake that struck Bangkok this afternoon, and to adhere to official instructions.

The embassy urged citizens to call the emergency number:

0066918909998

Foreign Ministry emergency numbers:

+965 159

+965 22225504

In latest developments, the death toll from the powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar jumped to more than 1,000 on Saturday as more bodies were pulled from the rubble of the scores of buildings that collapsed when it struck near the country's second-largest city.

The country's military-led government said in a statement that 1,002 people have now been found dead and another 2,376 injured, with 30 others missing. The statement suggested the numbers could still rise, saying "detailed figures are still being collected."

The earthquake struck midday Friday with an epicenter not far from Mandalay, followed by several aftershocks including one measuring a strong 6.4 magnitude. It sent buildings in many areas toppling to the ground, buckled roads, caused bridges to collapse and burst a dam.

In the capital Naypyidaw, crews worked Saturday to repair damaged roads, while electricity, phone and internet services remained down for most of the city. The earthquake brought down many buildings, including multiple units that housed government civil servants, but that section of the city was blocked off by authorities on Saturday.

In neighboring Thailand, the quake rocked the greater Bangkok area, home to some 17 million people, and other parts of the country.

Bangkok city authorities said so far six people have been found dead, 26 injured and 47 are still missing, most from a construction site near the capital's popular Chatuchak market.

On Saturday, more heavy equipment was brought in to move the tons of rubble, but hope was fading among friends and family members of the missing that they would be found alive.

"I was praying that that they had survived but when I got here and saw the ruin - where could they be? In which corner? Are they still alive? I am still praying that all six are alive," said 45-year-old Naruemon Thonglek, sobbing as she awaited news about her partner, who is from Myanmar, and five friends who worked at the site.

"I cannot accept this. When I see this I can't accept this. A close friend of mine is in there, too," she said.

Waenphet Panta said she hadn't heard from her daughter Kanlayanee since a phone call about an hour before the quake. A friend told her Kanlayanee had been working high on the building on Friday.

CSC nominates 72 citizens in comprehensive hiring drive

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Civil Services Commission (CSC) has announced the nomination of a new batch of 72 male and female citizens registered in the Central Employment System, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

CSC stated that the nomination includes individuals who are eligible for nomination for the first time, and those with university

qualifications and post-secondary diplomas.

This batch is part of the comprehensive employment plan approved by the Civil Service Council in its meeting No. 13/2024 with the aim of completing the nomination process for those registered in the Central Employment System.

Kuwaiti aid effort provides vital support to displaced Sudanese

PORT SUDAN, March 29, (KUNA): A Kuwaiti humanitarian initiative has provided much-needed aid to thousands of displaced people in Sudan, as the country continues to grapple with a severe humanitarian crisis.

The Kuwait Patients' Helping Fund Society (KPHFS) - Sudan Office, in partnership with the Kuwait Relief Society, has distributed 1,626 food baskets across 12 locations in the states of Gezira, Kassala, Gedaref, and River Nile. The initiative aims to assist more than 28,000 displaced individuals and returnees affected by ongoing instability in the region.

Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Gedaref State Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Zahraa Mirghani described the initiative as a "significant contribution" in alleviating the hardships faced by those impacted. She extended her gratitude to the Kuwait Relief Society and other partners supporting the effort.


Dr. Omar Awad Al-Karim, the project director for KPHFS, highlighted the scale of the initiative, noting that 28,821 beneficiaries have received assistance, which includes the distribution of food baskets and



KUNA photo


Part of the food basket distribution drive. 3,000 blankets. Each food basket, designed to sustain a family for a month, contains 25 kilograms of flour, 10 kilograms of sugar, 4 liters of oil, 3 kilograms of lentils, and a quarter kilogram of Indian peas.

Dr. Al-Karim also emphasized that KPHFS is working alongside its partners to expand aid distribution efforts, particularly as security conditions improve in some areas.



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Correction to the announcement published on 28/3/2025 regarding the opening of applications for the positions mentioned below. The correct version is:

Required Job	Qualifications	Required Experience
Sr. Expert, Passenger Services	Bachelor's degree in Administration of Science or equivalent.	14 years' experience in airport operations in passenger services including required training courses.
Expert, Passenger Services	Bachelor's degree in Administration of Science or equivalent.	12 years' experience in passenger services including required training courses.
Specialist (A), Passenger Services	Completion of Secondary (12 years) education, leading to diploma or equivalent.	10 years' experience in passenger services including required training courses.
Superintendent, Passenger Services	Completion of Secondary (12 years) education, leading to diploma or equivalent.	8 years' experience in passenger services including required training courses.

For more information, please visit the website: careers.kuwaitairways.com

Kuwait Airways
30 March 2025

US president urges House to pass it

Trump endorses budget fix that would restore Washington, DC, shortfall

WASHINGTON, March 29, (AP): US President Donald Trump is pushing the House of Representatives to pass a measure that would prevent immediate financial disaster for the District of Columbia even as he continues to level harsh criticism at the city and its leaders.

In a Friday morning post on Truth Social, he wrote, "The House should take up the D.C. funding 'fix' that the Senate has passed, and get it done IMMEDIATELY."

It's the first direct public indication from the Republican president that he supports efforts to restore a \$1.1 billion hole in the district's budget, and it's a major boost for Democratic Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser's campaign to reverse a legislative change that she says would devastate the capital city.

Earlier this month, the House passed a federal government funding bill that would force the district's government to revert to its 2024 budget parameters, effectively cutting \$1.1 billion from its budget midway

through the financial year. Bowser spearheaded an intense congressional lobbying campaign to prevent the change, saying it would result in immediate across-the-board cuts to staffing and programs, including teachers and police officers being laid off.

The Senate approved the funding bill with the cut but immediately followed up with a separate bill that would make the district's budget whole again. That measure now awaits House approval, and Bowser has delayed unveiling her 2026 budget plan until the issue is resolved.

Despite indications that Trump supported the budget fix, he had not publicly weighed in until now. The House adjourns for its spring recess on April 11, and House Republican leadership has remained vague on the topic, with Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana saying Tuesday that it was too early to confirm when the House would vote on the budget fix.

"We're working through that," Johnson said. Majority Leader Steve Scalise of



District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser speaks at a news conference to address the impact of the proposed continuing resolution, on Capitol Hill in Washington on March 10. (AP)

Louisiana said earlier this week that the district's claim of financial ruin "sounds overstated."

House Democratic leader Hakeem

Jeffries of New York said Thursday that the April 11 recess provides a natural deadline and a sense of urgency. "It needs to happen before we go

on the next district work period, which means it should occur either next week or the week after next," Jeffries said.

Speaking before Trump's Friday posting, Jeffries said, "apparently even Donald Trump himself has expressed support for the need to correct this egregious error."

Trump's endorsement of the budget fix comes amid a flurry of attention on the nation's capital, with the president issuing a series of statements and executive orders targeting crime, homelessness, immigration policy and gun control in the district.

On Thursday night, Trump issued an executive order establishing the inter-departmental D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force, which he said would coordinate with local officials on such things as enforcing federal immigration law, including deporting people living illegally in the city, boosting the law enforcement presence and increasing the speed and lowering the cost of processing applications to carry concealed weapons. "America's capital must be a place

in which residents, commuters, and tourists feel safe at all hours, including on public transit. Its highways, boulevards, and parks should be clean, well-kept, and pleasant," the order stated. "Its monuments, museums, and buildings should reflect and inspire awe and appreciation for our Nation's strength, greatness, and heritage."

And despite the support for the budget fix, Trump's Friday morning posting also came with criticism of the nation's capital and a warning: "We need to clean up our once beautiful Capital City, and make it beautiful again."

"We will be TOUGH ON CRIME, like never before," Trump wrote. "I will work with the Mayor on this and, if it does not happen, will have no choice but to do it myself."

Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's non-voting delegate in the House, hailed Trump's support for the budget fix and tied the issue into Washington's longstanding and increasingly beleaguered campaign to become the 51st state.

'You cannot pay people to vote or not to vote'

Is Musk skirting election law in Wisconsin Supreme Court race?

MADISON, Wis., March 29, (AP): Billionaire Elon Musk's unprecedented efforts to bolster the conservative candidate in next week's hotly contested Wisconsin Supreme Court race ran into legal hot water Friday amid accusations that he had broken state election law.

Musk announced late Thursday that he planned to hold a Sunday rally in Wisconsin, where he said he would "personally hand over" \$1 million checks to two voters who had already cast their ballots "in appreciation for you taking the time to vote."

Wisconsin state law expressly prohibits giving anything of value in exchange for voting - drawing a slew of complaints, including from Wisconsin's Democratic attorney, who sued Friday afternoon to block Musk from handing out the checks.

Amid the backlash, Musk deleted the post and later posted a revised offer.

"To clarify a previous post, entrance is limited to those who have signed the petition in opposition to activist judges. I will also hand over checks for a million dollars to 2 people to be spokesmen for the petition," he wrote.

Andrew Romeo, a spokesperson for Musk's political action committee, declined to comment on what had prompted the change.



Elon Musk, (left), shakes hands with US President Donald Trump at the finals for the NCAA wrestling championship on March 22, in Philadelphia. (AP)

Musk's initial post drew a flurry of accusations just days before Tuesday's election, which will determine the ideological makeup of the highest court in the perennial presidential battleground.

Attorney General Josh Kaul on Friday asked the circuit court to issue an emergency injunction to stop Musk from making the payments, calling them a "blatant attempt to violate"

Wisconsin's anti-bribery statute.

They also took issue with Musk's political action committee, America First, offering to pay \$100 to any registered Wisconsin voter who signed a petition voicing opposition to "activist judges" - or forwarded it to someone who did. Earlier this week, the group announced that it had awarded \$1 million to a Green Bay man to serve as a "spokesperson for signing our Petition

In Opposition To Activist Judges."

The recipient, Scott Ainsworth, has donated to Republicans and made social media posts supporting President Donald Trump and his agenda.

A bipartisan coalition of government watchdog groups and former officeholders, along with a liberal Madison law firm, asked the Wisconsin attorney general and the Milwaukee County district attorney to investigate the \$1 million payment and \$100 signing payments.

Wisconsin law makes it a felony to offer, give, lend or promise to lend or give anything of value to induce a voter to cast a ballot or not vote.

Numerous legal experts argued Friday that Musk's first post promising payments to voters for voting appeared to be in clear violation of the bribery statute.

"You cannot pay people to vote or not to vote," said Richard Painter, a law professor at the University of Minnesota and former White House ethics chief in the Bush administration. "His running these lotteries based on whether people vote or not, it's illegal. And he's got to cut that out."

Musk's revised X post, Painter said, "at least purports to comply with Wisconsin law."

"I guess that technically complies," he said.



In this photo provided by Cameron County Constable PCT 5, the streets are flooded after Thursday's severe thunderstorms passed Primera, Texas on March 28. (AP)

Storms kill 4 in Texas-Mexico border

Drenching rains along the Texas-Mexico border trapped hundreds of people in flooded homes and in cars stranded in high waters, scrambling rescue crews to calls for help that continued Friday even as the downpours let up. At least four people died, including some who drowned.

Officials warned that the devastation from the storms - which set records in parts of Texas' low-lying Rio Grande Valley - was only starting to come into focus. In Mexico, hundreds sought temporary shelter, and videos on social media showed military personnel wading through chest-high waters.

On the US side, officials said at

least three people were killed in Hidalgo County, where officials said more than 21 inches (53 centimeters) of rain this week soaked the city of Harlingen. The region is rich with farmland, and Texas' agriculture commissioner said the damage included significant losses to agriculture and livestock.

"The bed is the only thing dry right now, because the sofas are soaked. Everything is soaked," said Jonni Ochoa, 46, from his home in Palm Valley, near Harlingen. He and his wife were still waiting to be rescued Friday as the water inside reached their knees. (AP)



US Vice President JD Vance, (center right), and Second Lady Usha Vance, (center left), pose with personnel at Pituffik Space Base on March 28 in Greenland. (AP)

Danish foreign minister scolds WH for criticism of Denmark and Greenland

NUUK, Greenland, March 29, (AP): The Danish foreign minister on Saturday scolded the Trump administration for its "tone" in criticizing Denmark and Greenland, saying his country is already investing more into Arctic security and remains open to more cooperation with the US.

Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, make the remarks in a video posted to social media after US Vice President JD Vance's visit to the strategic island.

"Many accusations and many allegations have been made. And of course we are open to criticism," Rasmussen said speaking in English. "But let me be completely honest: we do not appreciate the tone in which it is being delivered. This is not how you speak to your close allies. And I still consider Denmark and the United States to be close allies."

Vance on Friday said Denmark has "underinvested" in Greenland's security and demanded that Denmark change its approach as President Donald Trump pushes to take over the Danish territory.

Vance visited US troops on Pituffik Space Base on mineral-rich Greenland alongside his wife and other senior US officials for a trip that was ultimately scaled back after an uproar among Greenlanders and Danes who were not consulted about the original itinerary.

"Our message to Denmark is very simple: You have not done a good job by the people of Greenland," Vance said Friday. "You have underinvested in the people of Greenland, and you have underinvested in the security architecture of this incredible, beautiful landmass filled with incredible people. That has to change."

Vance said the US has "no option" but to take a significant position to ensure the security of Greenland as he encouraged a push in Greenland for independence from Denmark. "I think that they ultimately will partner with the United States," Vance said. "We could make them much more secure. We could do a lot more protection. And I think they'd fare a lot better economically as well."

Ukrainians expect Russia to launch fresh offensive to strengthen negotiating position

KYIV, Ukraine, March 29, (AP): Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in the coming weeks to maximize the pressure on Ukraine and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in ceasefire talks, Ukrainian government and military analysts said.

The move could give Russian President Vladimir Putin every reason to delay discussions about pausing the fighting in favor of seeking more land, the Ukrainian officials said, renewing their country's repeated arguments that Russia has no intention of engaging in meaningful dialogue to end the war.

With the spring fighting season drawing near, the Kremlin is eyeing a multi-pronged push across the 1,000-kilometer (621-mile) front line, according to the analysts and military commanders.

Citing intelligence reports, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia is getting ready for new offensives in the northeast Sumy, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.

"They're dragging out the talks and trying to get the U.S. stuck in endless and pointless discussions about fake 'conditions' just to buy time and then try to grab more land," Zelenskyy said Thursday in a visit to Paris. "Putin wants to negotiate over territory from a stronger position."

Two G7 diplomatic officials in Kyiv agreed with that assessment. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the press.

Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting, and the feasibility of a partial ceasefire on



Police officers carry the body of a person killed by a Russian drone strike in a residential neighborhood in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine on March 21. (AP)

the Black Sea was thrown into doubt after Kremlin negotiators imposed far-reaching conditions.

Ukraine's emergency service said four people died and 21 were injured Friday evening after Russian drones struck Dnipro in the country's east. At least five more people were injured when a Russian ballistic missile struck Kryvyi Rih, President Zelenskyy's hometown, according to the head of the local military administration.

Battlefield success is clearly in Putin's mind.

"On the entire front line, the strategic initiative is completely in the hands of the Russian armed forces," Putin said Thursday at a forum in the Arctic port of Murmansk. "Our troops, our guys are moving forward and lib-

erating one territory after another, one settlement after another, every day."

Ukrainian military commanders said Russia recently stepped up attacks to improve its tactical positions ahead of the expected broader offensive.

"They need time until May, that's all," said Ukrainian military analyst Pavlo Narozhnyi, who works with soldiers and learns about intelligence from them.

In the north, Russian and North Korean soldiers have nearly deprived Kyiv of an essential bargaining chip by retaking most of Russia's Kursk region, where Ukrainian soldiers staged a daring incursion last year. Battles have also escalated along the eastern front in Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia.

Italy OKs plan to expand use of Albanian migration centers



Migrants disembark an Italian Navy ship, as Italy sent 49 people to Albania for processing following earlier court rejections to Albania, in Shengjin, northwestern Albania, on Jan 28. (AP)

ROME, March 29, (AP): Italy's far-right government approved a decree that expands the use of Albanian fast-track asylum processing centers to include repatriation hubs, in line with a recent EU proposal.

Under the new decree Friday, the two centers in Albania - originally aimed at processing non-vulnerable migrants rescued in international waters - will now also house migrants who arrived in Italy, had their asylum request rejected and received a deportation order.

In a separate decree, the government also toughened rules to obtain Italian citizenship.

The Albanian centers have remained substantially inactive since their opening in October, due to legal hurdles and amid wide opposition from human rights associations, which believe they violate international laws and put migrants' rights at risk.

Europe

Hungarian PM warns: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has warned against the political escalation of the armed conflict in Ukraine.

Speaking on local public radio, Orban referred to recent recommendations from European Union (EU) officials advising households to stockpile food for 72 hours. "At first, this might sound funny, but if you look deeper, it's rather alarming," he said.

Orban said that the EU had already become involved in the conflict through its support for Ukraine. "Hungary stayed out. We are on the side of peace; we don't send weapons or soldiers," he said. "But there are countries within the Union, and Brussels appears to be their spokes-

person, that want to go deeper into the war."

He argued that Europe had failed to enforce the Minsk agreements and lacked the strength to guarantee peace in Ukraine. The Hungarian prime minister also noted a growing divide between the US and the EU on the Ukraine conflict, adding that some EU countries, such as Slovakia and Italy, were increasingly hesitant to support the escalation of the conflict. (Xinhua)

Orban

Russia summons diplomat:

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Friday summoned the deputy chief of the Canadian diplomatic mission in Moscow, Brian Ebel, to lodge a complaint over "hostile remarks" by the Canadian Ambassador to Russia Sara Taylor.

The ministry said in a statement that the ambassador made "harmful hints against our people" in her statement.

The department summoned the senior Canadian diplomat after the ambassador made the remarks while laying a wreath at Mother Russia statue in Saint Petersburg.

The deputy head of the mission was handed a strong rhetorical complaint, affirming Moscow's emphatic rejection of "making biased remarks" regarding the siege of Leningrad during World War II. (KUNA)

INTERNATIONAL

China bristles at growing ties between US, oil-rich Guyana

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, March 29, (AP): China's government bristled at the strengthening ties between Guyana and the United States in online comments a day



Guyanese President Mohamed Irfaan Ali and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio meet in Georgetown, Guyana on March 27. (AP)

after a visit to the South American country by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

The Chinese comments came after Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said his oil-rich nation would give the US preferential treatment over other countries after it pledged to respond forcefully if neighboring Venezuela tries to annex Guyanese territory as it has threatened.

The Chinese Embassy in Guyana posted on Facebook on Friday that China has always "put China-Guyana Friendship first."

"We honor our commitment with concrete actions. As a matter of fact, China has participated fully at the biggest economic and social transformation in the history of Guyana. Facts and figures speak louder than anything else," the embassy said.

China cited its \$1.4 billion in annual trade with Guyana and a string of major infrastructure projects that Chinese firms are undertaking, some secured by Chinese loans.

S.Korea wildfires almost contained

SEOUL, South Korea, March 29, (AP): The most destructive wildfires ever to hit South Korea were almost contained, authorities announced Friday, after rain and cooler temperatures helped fire crew put out the blazes that have killed 28 people and razed vast swaths of land since last week.



Lim

In a televised briefing, Korea Forest Service chief **Lim Sang-seop** said that all main fires at four of the hardest-hit areas in the south-east have been fully contained. The forest service's website shows efforts to extinguish the wildfires remain at only one place as of Friday afternoon. The government's disaster response team earlier said that wildfires at other sites have been put out. "As we've completed works to contain main fires, we're turning into a system to deal with small fires," Lim said. "There are still dangers of breakouts of another wildfires so we won't loosen our vigilance and will make all-out efforts to prevent them."

PM candidates disrupted by protesters Australia to hold general elections on May 3

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 29, (Agencies): Australians will go to the polls on May 3 for general elections with high costs of living and a shortage of housing likely weighing against the government as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party seeks a second three-year term.

Albanese drove to Governor-General Sam Mostyn's official residence on Friday to trigger the election and announced the date later at a news conference at Parliament House.

"Over the last few years, the world has thrown a lot at Australia. In uncertain times, we cannot decide the challenges that we will face, but we can determine how we respond," Albanese said.

"Our government has chosen to face global challenges the Australian way: helping people under cost-of-living pressure while building for the future," he added.

Opposition leader Peter Dutton later launched his conservative coalition's campaign by promising better economic management after 29,000 small businesses had failed across Australia during three years with Labor in charge.

"It's a choice about who can better manage our economy and, of course,



Australia's then Defense Minister Peter Dutton addresses Parliament House in Canberra on July 24, 2019. (AP)

the question that Australians need to ask is are you better off today, is our country better off today, than three years ago?" Dutton said to reporters.

Meanwhile, Australia's two candidates for Prime Minister have spent the first day of the general election campaign in the battleground state of Queensland where they were both dis-

rupted by protesters.

Albanese and Dutton both made multiple stops in Queensland on Saturday at the start of a five-week campaign before the election on May 3.

Despite the leaders' events being carefully planned and subject to strict security, both Albanese and Dutton on Saturday faced protesters.

US defense secretary joins WWII memorial service on 1st trip to Japan

Hegseth tells Philippines WH to ramp up deterrence against China threat

MANILA, Philippines, March 29, (AP): US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Friday that the Trump administration would work with allies to ramp up deterrence against threats across the world, including China's aggression in the South China Sea.

Hegseth, who was visiting the Philippines, blamed the previous Biden administration for insufficient actions that emboldened aggressors like China over the years. He said the U.S. military was being rebuilt under President Donald Trump and was re-establishing its "warrior ethos" in the region, but did not elaborate.

"What we're dealing with right now is many years of deferred maintenance, of weakness, that we need to reestablish strength and deterrence in multiple places around the globe," Hegseth told a news conference with his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, after meeting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila.

"There's a long line of countries in the past who have attempted to test US resolve," Hegseth added. "We are resolved at this time ... to work with our partners."

Earlier, he told Marcos that deterrence was particularly needed in the Indo-Pacific region "considering the threats from the communist Chinese."

"Friends need to stand shoulder to shoulder to deter conflict, to ensure

that there is free navigation whether you call it the South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea," he told Marcos.

The US was not gearing up for war, Hegseth said - while underscoring that peace would be won "through strength."

The Philippines was the first stop in Hegseth's first trip to Asia. He is due to travel next to Japan, another staunch U.S. ally.

Ahead of his visit to the region, China called the United States a "predator" and an unreliable ally.

Hegseth said the Trump administration would commit more security assistance to the Philippines in addition to a \$500 million fund to help the Philippine military modernize. The US funding was first announced by the previous Biden administration.

The US would also deploy an anti-ship missile system called the Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System as well as unmanned sea vessels for largescale military exercises involving thousands of American and Filipino forces next month in the Philippines, Hegseth said.

That would enable the allied forces to train together to defend Philippine sovereignty, he said.

Additionally, the allied forces agreed to stage special operations forces training in Batanes province, a cluster of islands in the northernmost



In this photo provided by the Iwo Jima Association of America, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth greets veterans including Charles Cram, Hegseth is shaking hands with, a former Marine, who fought on Iwo Jima, during the 80th Reunion of Honor ceremony on Iwo Jima, now known as Iwoto, or Iwo Island, Japan on March 29. (AP)

tip of the Philippine archipelago across a sea border from Taiwan, he said.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, a major security and global trade route. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims to the resource-rich and busy waters, but confrontations have spiked between

ships and aircraft from the three allied countries were undertaking maneuvers off the Scarborough Shoal in an unsettling moment, but it was warned by a Philippine frigate by radio and kept away.

"There was a time when they attempted to maneuver closer but, again, we challenged them," Philippine navy Commander Irvin Ian Robles told reporters on board the frigate BRP Jose Rizal.

The latest naval drills, called the Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity, were opened for the first time to a small group of Manila-based media, including an Associated Press photojournalist, since such high-seas maneuvers and joint naval sails began last year.

Also:

TOKYO: US Secretary of Defense **Pete Hegseth** praised Saturday the friendship and trust that his country and Japan have developed while attending a memorial service on **Iwo Jima** to honor those who died in battle during World War II.

Japan is Hegseth's second stop after the Philippines on his first Asia trip. His visit comes as Beijing has been showing increasingly assertive actions in the disputed South China Sea and following threats by President **Donald Trump** to impose trade tariffs on the East Asian country, a key US ally.

Hegseth landed on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima, now known as **Iwoto**, where Japanese and American soldiers faced off in one of the war's fiercest battles. He joined several American veterans who survived the battle and Japanese bereaved families, as well as his Japanese counterpart, **Gen Nakatani**, Prime Minister **Shigeru Ishiba** and other officials at Saturday's Reunion of Honor event.

"Iwo Jima embodies our shared warrior ethos, our shared devotion to the nation, and to duty and our shared reverence for the men of valor who preceded us," Hegseth said in front of the cenotaph built in 1985 marking their first joint memorial.

"The **US-Japan** alliance shows ... how yesterday's enemy has become today's friends," Hegseth said. "Our alliance has been and remains the cornerstone of freedom, prosperity, security and peace in the Indo-Pacific."

Recent polls show the Japanese feel more affinity toward the US than any other country. Most Americans and Japanese alive today were born after Japan surrendered in August 1945.

Japan, which faces growing threats from **China**, **North Korea** and **Russia**, has been accelerating its military buildup and increasingly working closely with the US military.

Former leader Martinelli gets Panama's permission to take asylum in Nicaragua

PANAMA CITY, March 29, (AP): Former Panama president Ricardo Martinelli will be allowed to leave the Nicaraguan embassy where he's been holed up for more than a year to travel to Nicaragua for humanitarian reasons, Panama Foreign Affairs Minister Javier Martínez-Acha Vásquez said Thursday.

Martinelli has been inside Nicaragua's embassy in Panama since Pana-

ma moved to arrest him after his appeals ran out on his money laundering conviction. The 73-year-old former leader maintains that his prosecution has been politically motivated as he sought to run for a second term in office.

Martínez-Acha Vásquez said that by leaving the embassy and going to Nicaragua, Martinelli would be able to manage his legal defense under better

conditions and receive medical treatment for unspecified issues.

"Given that justice's timeline does not always coincide with health's timeline, the Foreign Relations Ministry has decided to recognize the asylum granted to Mr. Martinelli Berrocal by the Nicaraguan government," the foreign affairs minister said.

Martinelli has until midnight on March 31 to leave Panama.

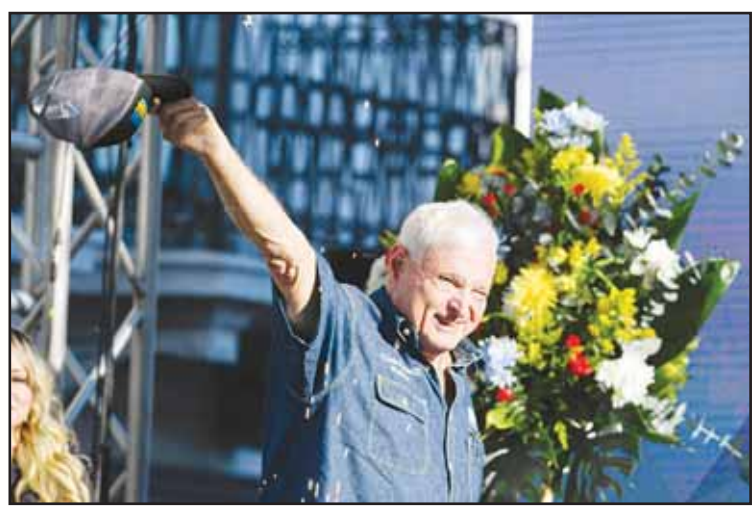
Martinelli is a businessman and supermarket magnate who governed Panama from 2009 to 2014.

In 2023, he won his party's nomination to seek the presidency again. However, he was convicted of money laundering and sentenced to more than 10 years in prison and fined \$19 million.

Once the Supreme Court denied his appeal, he was ineligible to run.

Ultimately Martinelli supported his running mate, current President José Raúl Mulino. At the time, Mulino said that Martinelli would remain on the ballot and return to Panama once he had won.

Mulino said a month ago that he was going to meet with Nicaragua's new ambassador to Panama and that permission for Martinelli to travel to Nicaragua was among the issues they would discuss.



Panama's former president Ricardo Martinelli waves to supporters during a campaign rally in Panama City on Feb 3, 2024. (AP)

World leaders must speak with one voice to prevent new civil war in S.Sudan - UN chief

UNITED NATIONS, March 29, (AP): The United Nations chief urged regional and international leaders to prevent South Sudan from falling "over the abyss" into another civil war and speak with one voice to support a return to peace.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the world's newest and one of its poorest countries is facing "a security emergency" with intensifying clashes and a "political upheaval" culminating with this week's arrest by the government of First Vice President Riek Machar.

"Meanwhile, ethnic and political targeting by security forces - coupled with the spread of misinformation on social media - is lighting the fuse for even worse," he warned. "Let's not mince words: What we are seeing is darkly reminiscent of the 2013 and 2016 civil wars, which killed 400,000 people."

The civil wars ended in a 2018 peace agreement that brought President Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, and



Austria Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger, (right), and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, (left), arrive for their meeting at UN headquarters on March 24. (AP)

Machar, an ethnic Nuer, together in a unity government, which is supposed to be heading toward delayed national elections in December 2026.

But tensions have been increasing

between Kiir's and Machar's parties, and they escalated in March when the White Army, an armed group loyal to Machar, overran an army base in Upper Nile state and attacked a UN helicopter. The government responded with deadly airstrikes.

Guterres urged South Sudan's leaders to "end the politics of confrontation," restore the national unity government, and release detained military and civilian officials now.

"I also urge the regional and international community, as guarantors of the (2018) peace agreement, to speak with one voice in support of the peace process and against any attempts to undermine it," he said.

Guterres said he spoke to the chair of the African Union Commission on Friday morning and announced the UN's support for the deployment of the AU's five-member Panel of the Wise and the special envoy of Kenya's President William Ruto to South Sudan's capital, Juba, to pursue a diplomatic solution.



US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, (left), and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum pose for photos at the National Palace in Mexico City on March 28. (AP)

Noem ends 1st visit to Latin America in Mexico to discuss crime, migration and deportation

MEXICO CITY, March 29, (AP): US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem landed in Mexico on Friday to cap off a tour to three Latin American nations to discuss immigration, crime and deportation.

Noem's first visit to the region comes as it gains increasing importance to the Trump administration, which is attempting to scale up deportation efforts and warn against migration north. As Noem visited El Salvador and Colombia, Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Guyana to meet with a number of Caribbean leaders.

After being greeted at the airport by Mexico's foreign minister, Noem met with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and other top Mexican

officials. The two leaders were photographed sitting next to each other in a meeting room along with other aids and together in front of American and Mexican flags.

Sheinbaum's government has been working to offset tariffs lodged by the Trump administration, which economic forecasters say could thrust the Mexican economy into a recession.

In exchange for delaying sanctions in past months, the Mexican government sent 10,000 troops to the US-Mexico border and reported sharp crackdowns on drug labs. It also sent 29 top cartel figures long sought by the American government to the US to face justice.

After the meeting on Friday, Noem wrote on a post on the social media

platform on X that the moves were "a positive step."

"But there is still much work to be done to stop the flow of drugs and illegal immigrants into our country," she added.

Sheinbaum, meanwhile, called the meeting "fruitful" and said Mexico and the US "maintain a good relationship within a framework of respect for each other's sovereignty."

Despite 25% tariffs on auto parts announced by US President Donald Trump earlier this week, Sheinbaum said ahead of the meeting that the focus of her conversation with Noem would largely be about security and migration, adding that she would emphasize Mexico's sovereignty in the meeting.

Africa

Ex-dictator pardoned: Guinea's ruling junta has pardoned the country's former dictator, **Moussa "Dadis" Camara**, who was serving a 20-prison sentence for the 2009 stadium massacre by the military, according to a decree read on state television.

Camara was sentenced in July 2024 after he had been guilty of crimes against humanity in the deaths of at least 157 people at the stadium. Dozens of



Camara

women were also raped.

Troops opened fire on demonstrators at the stadium who were protesting Camara's plans to run for president, a year after staging a coup. (AP)

M23 agrees to ceasefire: The M23 rebels in control of key areas of eastern Congo agreed Friday to a ceasefire with African coalition peacekeepers who have announced their withdrawal.

The rebels and troops from the South African Development Community, or SADC, said in a joint news release that they would work together to rebuild the airport in the eastern hub of Goma, which was damaged when rebels took over, so that the SADC troops could depart the country in an orderly way. (AP)

KPC declares LNG prices for April

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has announced the new prices of liquefied natural gas (LNG), propane and butane, for April.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, the corporation said a propane metric ton would be sold for USD 615 during April, while a bu-

tane metric ton for USD 605.

Both propane and butane are used in petrochemical industry, cooking, heating purposes and others.

LNG prices are mainly affected by global oil prices, market supply and demand and other factors.

Business

Under strategic partnership with CODED Academy

Kuwait Finance House participates in 5th 'Kuwait Codes' 2025 launch

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Kuwait Finance House (KFH), participating in the launch conference for the fifth edition of the "Kuwait Codes" for 2025, expressed its appreciation for its strategic partnership with CODED Academy. This collaboration reflects KFH's commitment to social responsibility and its dedication to supporting technological advancement, creativity, and innovation in Kuwait, aligning with its sustainability and digital transformation strategy.

Executive Manager Corporate Relations and CSR at KFH, Faisal Alsurayye said: "The initiatives focused on technology and software development, aimed at enhancing the capabilities and creativity of Kuwaiti youth, are of significant importance to KFH. This underscores the bank's commitment to supporting digital transformation and innovation within society, empowering young people, and nurturing their talents. As part of its corporate social responsibility strategy, KFH continues its successful seven-year strategic partnership with CODED



Faisal Alsurayye and Ahmad Marafi during the ceremony announcing the launch of the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative.

Academy."

He also added, "At KFH, we are proud of the strategic partnership with the CODED Academy since 2018, through which we sought to enhance our role in supporting our community and youth to establish a generation that possesses programming skills and cybersecurity."

Alsurayye emphasized that sup-

porting "Kuwait Hackathon," the largest cybersecurity competition in Kuwait, in collaboration with the National Cyber Security Center and CODED Academy, underscores KFH's commitment to its societal role as a leader in social responsibility. This includes supporting national initiatives, innovation, and programming skills within the pri-

private sector. He expressed gratitude to the organizers and partners of the initiative and wished them continued success.

Co-Founder and CEO of CODED Academy, Ahmad Marafi said: "We are proud to announce the continuation of our strategic partnership with KFH for the 5th edition of "Kuwait Codes", a pioneering



Faisal Alsurayye during the ceremony.

national initiative that has successfully trained at least 3,500 students in technical programming skills across various fields."

He added, "We are pleased to continue this fruitful partnership, which demonstrates our mutual commitment to investing in youth and supporting society by providing free educational opportunities

for over 1,000 students in fields such as cybersecurity, website and application development, and other technical skills."

He further expressed his wish to continue this successful trajectory and positively impact the future of youth. Marafi thanked KFH for its continuous support and confidence in CODED Academy.

Boursa Kuwait sees 25.2% drop in liquidity in March

Premier market index dips 0.2%

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait's total liquidity declined in March compared to February's liquidity, as it amounted to KD 2.135 billion (approx. USD 6.5 billion) from KD 2.853 billion (approx. USD 8.7 billion) in February, marking a 25.2 percent decrease.

Al-Shall Consulting Company mentioned in a report on Saturday that Boursa Kuwait's performance during March was less active compared to February's, as the average daily trading value decreased alongside negative performances regarding all indices.

The Premier Market index

dropped by 0.2 percent, the Main Market index by 0.9 percent and the All-Share Market index (the outcome of both mentioned markets) decreased by 0.3 percent, as did the Boursa Kuwait Main 50 index by 4.2 percent.

The average daily trading value for March was KD 106.7 million (approx. USD 328.6 million), dropping by 36.4 percent from the average of February at KD 167.8 million (approx. USD 516.8 million).

Boursa Kuwait's liquidity in the first quarter of 2025 reached KD 6.717 billion (approx. USD 20.6 billion), thus the average daily trading value for the period scored KD 119.9 million (approx. USD 369.2 million), an increase by 106.4 percent versus the average for the same period of 2024 at KD

58.1 million (approx. USD 178.9 million).

The report also mentioned that liquidity trends since the beginning of the year indicate that half of the listed companies represent only 2.6 percent of total liquidity, including 50 companies obtaining only 0.8 percent of that liquidity and three companies without any trading.

As for the small liquid companies, 12 companies whose market value equals 3.2 percent of all listed companies' value captured 46.6 percent of total market liquidity.

This means that major liquidity activity is still deprived in almost half of the listed companies, on the contrary, it strongly favors companies with small market value, explained the report.

Brent and WTI see declines

Kuwait oil price up 45 cents to \$77.99 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 29, (KUNA): Kuwaiti oil price increased 45 cents to USD 77.99 per barrel in Friday's trading com-

pared to Thursday's USD 77.54 pb, as per Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

In global markets, Brent crude

futures dropped 40 cents to USD 73.63 pb, as West Texas intermediate decreased 56 cents to USD 69.36 pb.

Other Voices

'Economic growth at risk without new income solutions'

Kuwait set to borrow KD 50 bln, faces persistent budget deficit

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

IT is a sad reality that our country is turning to international borrowing to balance its accounts. Kuwait is set to borrow KD 50 billion over a period of 30 years, having already borrowed KD 35 billion in the past ten years, from 2014 to 2024, which is an average of KD 3.5 billion annually. This means the additional KD 30 billion will only sustain us for another 10 years.

This means that we have entered the global borrowing markets for the foreseeable future, as the annual budget deficit will continue to be a persistent issue.

Fortunately, our economy is strong. It is supported by the steady flow of crude oil and a fully integrated oil industry, which could be considered one of the best in the world.

With modernized refineries and a fully integrated industry covering all oil-related activities, Kuwait's oil sector is highly advanced. While Kuwait may be lacking in the petrochemical industry, this gap could be dealt

with by finding the right partner for local investment. In the meantime, we continue to invest with partners outside Kuwait.

We can also improve our cash flow in the coming years by increasing crude oil production to 3 million barrels per day at a sustainable level, and operating our refineries at full capacity both in Kuwait and abroad.

Borrowing from external markets could prove to be more cost-effective than selling our overseas assets or privatizing some of our oil companies, which may be uncertain or under consideration for future actions. For now, borrowing remains a short-term solution.

We have many options available that are comfortable and sustainable. However, we continue to spend more than we earn annually. This spending is expected to

increase with the growing population, rising number of graduates seeking employment, and increased demand for housing.

Unless we and the government take a step back and become open and decisive in exploring new sources of income beyond annual oil revenues, the challenge remains in finding alternative solutions and determining how to implement them effectively.

Privatization is a viable option, as the government currently owns and operates almost everything in the country. It is time to open up opportunities for the private sector to invest, manage, and run these companies at their own risk and using their own capital. Let them take the initiative, take risks, and excel. It is their decision, their money, and their risk. Ensure they are held accountable for performance and maximize earnings.

In conclusion, our concern about borrowing KD30 billion will not be enough if we do not explore additional sources of income beyond oil.
Email: naftikuwaiti@yahoo.com



Al-Harami

Available on several channels

Kuwait Finance House continues to serve customers during Eid holiday

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to provide its banking services around the clock through a group of various digital tools during the Eid holiday.

Most of the banking services are available on several channels around the clock, whether through the bank's digital platforms, or through the KFH Express self-banking stations that are spread in many important locations to serve our customers, in addition to the KFH accounts on social media and many E-service channels.

The KFH Express self-banking station is considered a smart electronic channel that helps transfer normal customer transactions to an innovative automated branch, allowing customers to benefit from highly efficient banking services. It includes more than 80% of the services and business provided by the branches in their traditional sense.

KFH Express self-banking stations include the XTM device that allows direct video calls with service personnel, as well as ATMs and cash deposit machines. The cash deposit machines receive 300 notes per transaction.

Moreover, customers can perform a variety of interactive banking services through KFH Express branches located in various places in Kuwait, including Kuwait International Airport. These services include: establishing Murabaha financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque and card printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold, savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, or by using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services conducted quickly, easily and safely.

The electronic banking services at KFH are also characterized by their high efficiency in addition to ease and safety. This was evident in the number of electronic banking operations that KFH customers carried out via KFHonline, on the website or through mobile applications.

The e-banking transactions includes: opening an additional bank account online for citizens and residents without having to visit the branch, local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque book request, opening gold account, selling and purchasing gold, requesting financing, requesting Al-Khair Card, and checking the PINs of the credit and debit cards, activating new cards, reporting a lost credit/debit cards, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, reviewing investment plans, receiving account balances and deposits summary, along



KFH offers 24/7 digital banking services during Eid holiday.

with other wide range of digital services.

The Bank also launched the Live FX Pricing, and instant cross-border payments service at KFH-Turkey using Ripple's technology in addition to the instant card printing service within two minutes. Additionally, KFH offers digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches, providing advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

Call Center
Meanwhile, the call center continues to provide services 24/7 to receive customer calls, listen to their enquiries and respond to them through a qualified and technically advanced staff. KFH provides the automated telephone service 1803333 that works with the same efficiency and speed, to respond to transfers between accounts, inquire about financial operations, pay bills, and recharge Mobile phone cards, among other services.

Social Media
KFH's social media team remains dedicated to addressing customer inquiries and assisting them at all hours through the official social media accounts (@KFHGroup).

Government divided over new central bank leadership

Lebanon appoints new central bank governor

BEIRUT, March 29, (AP): Lebanon appointed asset manager Karim Souaid to the post of central bank governor Thursday as the government tries to reform the economy after months of war and decades of mismanagement and corruption.

The country's economy has been in crisis for five years and desperately needs reforms to unlock international aid, and on top of that, Israel's 14-month war with Hezbollah caused what the World Bank estimates was \$11 billion in damages and economic losses.

The appointment was announced by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, the International Court of Justice jurist who was named Lebanon's premier in January following the election of President Joseph Aoun earlier that month.

Salam said that Souaid was chosen by more than two-thirds of the 24 members of Lebanon's reformist Cabinet, though the prime minister said he himself did not support the decision. "The Lebanese have asked us for reforms and we insist on reforms," Salam told reporters after the government meeting.

Souaid, an asset manager who previously was a senior executive at HSBC bank, is seen by critics as being sympathetic to the stance on economic reform taken by the country's banks, and fear he might sell what's left of Lebanon's state assets to bail them out.

An unproductive economy and decades of corruption by Lebanon's political and financial leaders that drained state resources eventually led to a run on the banks in 2019. Covid-19, the massive Beirut Port blast in August 2020 and the monthlong Israel-Hezbollah war furthered compounded the country's economic woes.

Lebanon has been running on a cash economy, with most of its electricity coming from private suppliers, leading to inflation and pulling almost half the population into

poverty, according to the World Bank.

The country has struggled to reach an International Monetary Fund-approved deal to unlock aid to make the economy viable again, with the international financial institution asking Lebanon to end waste, crack down on corruption and financial crimes, and restructure its banking sector.

Lebanon's commercial banks have been hesitant to implement some of these reforms, as it would burden them with the country's tens of billions of dollars in economic losses, experts and activists say. The banks believe the state should carry most of that burden, blaming them for defaulting on paying back the state's massive debt in 2020 and for its wasteful spending.

Souaid had the backing of President Aoun, while Salam and a handful of ministers have remained skeptical of him.

"Karim Souaid was not my candidate and I abstained with some ministers because of my concerns regarding the rights of depositors," Salam told reporters after the Cabinet meeting, referring to concerns that large amounts of bank deposits might not be given back to depositors. "He will have to abide by the financial policy of our reformist Cabinet."

Souaid succeeds Riad Salameh, the embattled former governor of 30 years whose term ended with several international corruption cases lodged against him and for embezzlement and other financial crimes. Salameh was appointed in 1993, when Lebanon was scrambling to bounce back after a 15-year civil war.

Salameh, who is currently in detention, was heralded as a financial genius for preventing hyperinflation and keeping the Lebanese currency stable through years of political tensions and conflict, and then left his post widely perceived as a key architect of the country's financial downfall.

Inclusive Ramadan programs reach all segments of Kuwaiti society

Gulf Bank successfully concludes ‘Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together’ Ramadan campaign, featuring various charitable, social & sports activities

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Every year during Ramadan, Gulf Bank continues to uphold the values of generosity and community support that define this special time. In Ramadan 2025, this commitment was showcased through the launch of the “Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together” campaign, which included a variety of charitable, social, and sports initiatives, making a positive impact on various segments of the community.

Commenting on the campaign, Mrs. Najla Aleisa, Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, said: “As part of our strategy to promote social sustainability, we focused on creating a well-rounded program that combines charitable efforts with sports and social activities. This was made possible through the support of Gulf Bank’s volunteer team, “Sawa’ed Al-Khaleej”, and in collaboration with numerous strategic partners from various sectors.”

She emphasized that Gulf Bank’s program aims to reinforce humanitarian and social values, bringing joy and benefits to the community. “Through our diverse and inclusive initiatives during Ramadan, we successfully reached various regions of Kuwait and engaged with different segments of society – customers and non-customers, citizens and residents, men and women, young and old, as well as underprivileged families, orphans, and individuals with special needs.”

Mrs. Aleisa also emphasized that Gulf Bank has declared 2025 as “The Year of Giving,” embodying a noble concept that reflects the true spirit of humanity. “In line with this, we have committed our resources – time, effort, and financial support – to reviving our traditions and values under the slogan ‘Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together.’”

The “Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together” campaign featured a variety of initiatives, including:

Joy Land Initiative

We ensured to bring happiness and joy to the hearts of underprivileged families ahead of the blessed month of Ramadan by participating in the Joy Land initiative. We distributed essential supplies for Ramadan and Eid clothing, aiming to enhance the quality of life for these families during this special time by fulfilling their basic needs and spreading joy.

Employee and Media Ramadan Iftar

We welcomed the holy month with a traditional Kuwaiti iftar, bringing together our employees, partners, and media representatives to celebrate the arrival of Ramadan.

Exclusive Ramadan Crescent Sighting Experience

In collaboration with renowned astronomer Khaled Al-Jamaan, we offered a unique opportunity for attendees to take part in a special Ramadan crescent sighting experience, where they could explore the fascinating astronomical details behind moon sighting.

20-Day Iftar Meal Distribution

As part of our steadfast commitment to supporting those in need, we distributed iftar meals over a period of 20 days, providing an opportunity to share the blessings of Ramadan with fasting individuals and contribute to bringing joy to their lives.

Ramadan Grocery Distribution at Lulu and Shamiya Co-op

Over the course of two days, the Bank generously distributed “Machlat Ramadan” groceries to shoppers at Lulu Hypermarket and Shamiya Co-op, demonstrating its com-

Najla Aleisa:

- “Through our diverse and inclusive initiatives during Ramadan, we successfully reached various regions of Kuwait and engaged with different segments of society”
- We distributed iftar meals over a period of 20 days, providing an opportunity to share the blessings of Ramadan with fasting individuals.
- We generously distributed “Machlat Ramadan” groceries to shoppers at Lulu Hypermarket and Shamiya Co-op, as well as to less fortunate families and individuals in need.
- We organized the Gulf Bank Fitness Challenge, offering valuable prizes to encourage health and fitness within the community.
- We organized a two-day Gargee’an celebration for children, with particular focus on those from NEO Account holders, individuals with special needs, and orphans.
- We are thrilled by the outstanding response to this year’s Ramadan advertisement, “Awaidna,” which has garnered an incredible number of views.
- We joined traffic and fire department officers for Iftar to express our appreciation for their exceptional service to the community.



Najla Aleisa



QR code of Gulf Bank’s Ramadan initiatives.



Najla Aleisa with media channel.



Distribution of iftar meals in Mubarakiya.



Gulf Bank honored for sponsoring the Gargee’an celebration for the disabled, organized by the Friends of the Disabled team.



Hani Al Awadhi leads the Gulf Bank team during the distribution of iftar meals.



The Gulf Bank team distributes Ramadan food parcels to needy families.



Waleed Mandani and the executive management at the Gulf Bank’s Ghabga gathering.



A group photo of the Gulf Bank delegation and members of the General Traffic Department, with Bader Al-Ali and Jamal Al-Foudari in the middle.



A group photo of Gulf Bank officials.

mitment to supporting the community and enriching customer experiences, in collaboration with both partners.

Distributing ‘Machlat Ramadan’ Groceries with Kuwait Food Bank and City Hypermarket

In collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank and City Hypermarket, Gulf Bank distributed “Machlat Ramadan” groceries over four days, honoring the cultural traditions of the holy month that have been passed down through generations, while enhancing community involvement in charitable initiatives.

Gulf Bank Fitness Challenge

Gulf Bank organized the Gulf Bank Fitness Challenge in collaboration with Lose-Gain Gym over two days—one for men and one for women—to promote health and fitness within the community. The initiative encouraged participants to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle during the holy month, with cash prizes awarded to the top three teams in each category.

‘Nuqsat AlKhaleej’ to Empower Entrepreneurs

Gulf Bank resumed “Nuqsat AlKhaleej” every Thursday to support innovation and economic growth, providing a platform for entrepreneurs to thrive. The initiative was met with strong client engagement.

Gargee’an Celebration and Arab Orphan Day Participation

As children hold a special place during Ramadan, Gulf Bank organized a two-day Gargee’an celebration for children, with particular focus on those from NEO Account holders, individuals with special needs, and orphans. Additionally, the Bank participated in the Arab Orphan Day celebrations, sponsored and attended by Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood, along with other distinguished guests.

Iftar with Kuwait Fire Force and General Traffic Department

In recognition of their vital role in ensuring the safety and security of our community, Gulf Bank joined members of the Kuwait Fire Force and the General Traffic Department for an Iftar gathering. This initiative was a sincere expression of the Bank’s gratitude for their exceptional service and continuous efforts in fostering teamwork and strengthening community collaboration.

Annual ‘Ghabga’ Gathering to Celebrate Employees

This Ramadan, Gulf Bank, recognizing its employees as its greatest asset, hosted the annual “Ghabga” gathering. The event offered a chance to celebrate their dedication and hard work over the past year, while fostering collaboration and teamwork among them.

‘Awaidna’ Ramadan Ad Receives Tremendous Praise

Gulf Bank is thrilled by the outstanding response to its Ramadan advertisement, “Awaidna,” featuring singer Rashed Al-Majed. The advertisement has garnered an incredible number of views, beautifully capturing the joy and traditions of Kuwait’s National Day celebrations and the holy month of Ramadan.

In conclusion, Mrs. Aleisa emphasized, “As the bank closest to the community, we take great pride in our role and will continue to honor our commitments by hosting a range of meaningful events that enhance social ties, support emerging businesses, and promote a healthy lifestyle during the holy month of Ramadan each year.”

Shareholders approve cash dividends of 6 fils and bonus shares of 5%

Burgan Bank reports KD 46.4 mln in net profit in 2024, an increase of 7% from previous year



Officials pose for a group photo.



Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah



The General Assembly Meeting in progress.



Tony Daher

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Burgan Bank held its 61st Annual General Assembly Meeting and the 38th Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting on Saturday, 29/03/2025 at the Bank's headquarters, with a quorum of 81.457%. During the meeting, the Bank's Board of Directors presented the shareholders with the financial results and an overview of operational performance for the year ending December 31, 2024. Meanwhile, the shareholders approved the distribution of cash dividends of 6 fils per share in addition to bonus shares of 5% for the fiscal year 2024.

During his speech at the general assembly meeting, Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Board of Directors, said: "During 2024, the Bank succeeded in recording good achievements under its new strategy, translating into notable improvement across most of its financial indicators. Driven by its ambitious vision and forward-looking roadmap, the Bank cemented its leading position in the market, upholding its commitment to achieving its growth and expansion plan."

He further clarified that the Bank focused during 2024 on strategic priorities, most notably asset redistribution, keeping pace with digital transformation, investing in human capital, and adhering to the highest environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. Together, these goals culminate in a distinctive banking experience for Burgan's customers that lives up to their aspirations and meets their needs. He also underscored the Bank's unwavering commitment to balancing returns and risks to achieve financial prudence and market-leading innovation.

The Chairman added: "2024 witnessed significant global and regional challenges, marked by geopolitical turmoil that cast a shadow over some economies. Despite the difficult conditions and uncertainty surrounding some countries in the region, the banking sector in Kuwait once again demonstrated exceptional resilience and maintained its position as a pillar of stability and growth. As Kuwait continues to benefit from prudent fiscal policies, strong regulatory frameworks, and a proactive economic strategy, these factors helped maintain investor confidence and enabled sustainable growth during periods of volatility in global markets and the accompanying inflationary pressures

and turmoil."

"This has proven to be instrumental in our growth and development at Burgan Bank, as Kuwait remains the cornerstone of our operations," Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah continued. "We recognize that the market is full of promising growth opportunities, characterized by accelerated digital transformation, an increased focus on sustainability, and an ongoing pursuit of innovation."

Innovation as a Growth Engine

"We experienced good growth across all our operations in 2024, and we reaffirm our commitment to providing best-in-class financial services and innovating solutions designed to create sustainable value for all our shareholders," the Chairman noted.

He added: "Our commitment to several key strategic investments has strengthened our infrastructure and delivered advanced, streamlined financial solutions tailored to the needs of various customer segments. Among the key developments we have undertaken are enhancing our digital infrastructure, adopting digital technologies to develop the best and most advanced solutions, and refining our customer experiences across traditional and digital channels. We have also expanded our services and diversified our product portfolio, serving our goal to enhance the banking experience for all customers, retail and corporate, regardless of their segment."

Good Results and Strong Capital Ratios

The Chairman commended the progress achieved by the Bank during 2024, reflected in the 7% growth in profits to reach KD 46.4 million. In addition, the Bank reported KD 229 million worth of revenues, a 3% year-on-year increase, owing to the 17% growth in net interest income, which amounted to KD 157 million. Burgan Bank also maintained healthy capital levels during 2024, with the shareholders' Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) ratio reaching 12.6% and the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) reaching 18.6%, compared to the minimum regulatory requirements of 10.5% and 14.0%, respectively.

As part of Burgan Bank's new strategy to redistribute assets and build new revenue streams, it signed

an agreement with United Gulf Holding Company, a Bahrain-based joint stock company, to purchase the latter's entire stake in United Gulf Bank (UGB), a wholesale bank licensed and headquartered in Bahrain, for a value of USD 190 million. UGB also owns 60% of Kamco Investment Company K.S.C.P (Kamco Invest), a leading regional investment company based in Kuwait with USD 16 billion in assets under management. Burgan Bank obtained the necessary approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB), completing the acquisition only recently.

This acquisition provides Burgan Bank with the opportunity to enter high-growth sectors such as investment and Islamic finance, creating lucrative cross-selling and up selling opportunities, and achieving various synergies from the integration of the two entities' operations and systems. The acquisition will also enhance access to the Kamco Invest platform, which currently offers a comprehensive suite of investment solutions in asset management, investment banking, and financial brokerage.

Strategy Success

For his part, Mr. Tony Daher, Group CEO at Burgan Bank, said: "Our financial indicators in 2024 demonstrated real, long-term growth across all our core businesses, validating the success of our strategies. Burgan Bank has also made significant strides in achieving its core objectives of creating long-term value, increasing market share, and enhancing its banking experience."



A section of the attendees.

He added: "We are moving forward with our efforts to digitize all our activities and services, especially as our digital transformation journey continues to evolve while we successfully achieve new milestones and identify new market needs, emerging opportunities, and the latest industry trends."

"During 2024, we continued to invest our resources in ensuring that our customers enjoy a modern and seamless experience, driven by Burgan Bank's philosophy of providing smarter, easier, and more sustainable banking services. This has driven us to adopt the latest technologies and implement advanced digital solutions across all stages of the customer journey," Mr. Daher said.

Regarding digital transformation, he stated that the Bank took a major step in 2024 by signing a landmark agreement with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) to upgrade and modernize its core banking systems using the TCS BaNCS™ suite of solutions.

Furthermore, Mr. Daher explained that in 2024 the Bank achieved another milestone, represented by its successful issuance of KD 150 million Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Bonds, where demand exceeded expectations, and the subscription volume exceeded the target amount. This issuance represents a historic achievement for Burgan Bank, marking the first and largest issuance of KD-denominated perpetual Tier 1 capital bonds in Kuwait, and placing it among the largest KD-denominated issuances.

Investing in Human Capital

"Guided by our vision to become the top employer of choice in the Kuwaiti banking sector, we remain committed to investing in, developing, and advancing our human capital by building a dynamic, progressive, and innovative internal culture," Mr. Daher said.

He also noted: "Throughout 2024, we made several appointments and promotions across all employment levels, including senior and executive management, as part of our efforts to expand the Bank's national talent pool. To maintain and grow the Bank's highly valuable human capital, we will exert every effort not only to attract outstanding talents but also to retain them through a holistic yearlong development scheme. Therefore, our learning and development strategy is a key component of our success, which has prompted us to launch several dynamic career development programs for our employees throughout 2024."

Furthermore, the Bank launched the new 2024 edition of its pioneering Ro'ya talent development program and expanded the scope of its Burgan Cares program to support employees interested in pursuing higher education. It also launched the new Burgan Beacon (Manarat Burgan) program, which aims to recognize high-performing employees. These efforts resulted in Burgan Bank receiving the Brandon Hall Group Human Capital Management (HCM) Gold Award of Excellence in the "Learning and Development" category for the "Best Use of Social/Collaborative Learning".

Developing Banking Services

On the ongoing development of banking services, Mr. Daher noted: "During 2024, we launched a dedicated development strategy aimed at improving and expanding the Private Banking suite of services, in addition to enhancing the portfolio of solutions specifically designed for high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs). We also expanded our Private Banking branch network and launched a range of new exclusive products designed solely for this distinguished customer segment."

He added: "We have accelerated our strategy to enhance retail banking offerings, expanding the range of services and solutions offered to

esteemed customers by launching the new Elite segment as well as revamping the Premier segment and reinforcing it with new special benefits. We also launched the awal savings account for young customers up to the age of 14 in a bid to meet customers' needs at various stages of their lives."

Burgan Bank also launched a dedicated investment and wealth management training program in collaboration with Fitch Learning, a global training and development solutions provider and a subsidiary of Fitch Group. In addition, 2024 witnessed the launch of the Burgan's "Lean-in Circle for Women Empowerment" program, which explores and addresses the unique challenges women face in the workplace.

On the digital front, one of Burgan's most notable achievements in 2024 was the launch of its innovation and digital transformation center, Burgan Lab, designed to foster a culture of collaboration, creativity, and excellence through a series of yearlong workshops, training sessions, and focus groups. Following this, the Bank launched the pioneering training program, Burgan Lab Academy, developed in collaboration with CODED Academy, to empower new graduates and prepare future technology leaders in Kuwait's banking sector.

Digital Transformation

Burgan Bank doubled down on its unwavering efforts to enhance digital transformation in 2024. One of its most notable digital achievements was launching a new queuing system, which synchronizes with the Public Authority for Civil Information's (PACI) Mobile ID application (Hawtyti) and identifies customers' identities and information, allowing for advanced and personalized digital banking services that significantly reduce waiting times. In addition to joining the Gulf's real-time payment system AFAQ, the Bank launched the instant payment service WAMD.

The Chairman concluded his statement by extending his thanks to the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) for their continued support of Burgan Bank and the Kuwaiti banking sector. He also thanked Burgan Bank's Board of Directors, executive management, shareholders, customers, and all employees across all departments for their ongoing contributions to the Bank's development.

Over 600 Academy members criticize response to Ballal's attack

Academy apologizes to 'No Other Land' co-director after criticism

NEW YORK, March 29, (AP): After mounting criticism following its initial response to the violent attack on Oscar-winning "No Other Land" co-director Hamdan Ballal, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences apologized Friday for not acknowledging Ballal by name.

In a letter to academy members, academy CEO Bill Kramer and its president, Janet Yang, said they regretted not issuing a direct statement on Ballal. The director on Monday, witnesses said, was beaten by Israeli settlers in the West Bank and then detained by the Israeli military.

The attack, just weeks after Ballal and his fellow directors won best documentary at the Academy Awards, was widely condemned by numerous film organizations, among

others. The academy on Wednesday released a statement condemning "harming or suppressing artists for their work or their viewpoints."

Yuval Abraham, a journalist and co-director of "No Other Land," was highly critical of that response, comparing it to "silence on Hamdan's assault."

On Friday, more than 600 of the academy's 11,000 members issued an open letter saying the academy's statement "fell far short of the sentiments this moment calls for." Among the signatories were Joaquin Phoenix, Olivia Colman, Riz Ahmed, Emma Thompson, Javier Bardem, Penélope Cruz and "The Zone of Interest" filmmaker Jonathan Glazer.

After a meeting Friday by the academy's board of governors,

Kramer and Yang responded with a new statement.

"We sincerely apologize to Mr. Ballal and all artists who felt unsupported by our previous statement and want to make it clear that the academy condemns violence of this kind anywhere in the world," they wrote to members. "We abhor the suppression of free speech under any circumstances."

After being detained for more than 20 hours, Ballal was released by Israeli soldiers. Ballal and two other Palestinians were accused of throwing stones at a settler, allegations they deny. After being released, Ballal told The Associated Press a settler kicked his head "like a football" during an attack on his village.

"I realized they were attacking



Hamdan Ballal, Oscar-winning Palestinian co-director of 'No Other Land,' is checked at a hospital in Hebron, a day after being detained by the Israeli army following an attack by Jewish settlers in the village of Susiya in Masafer Yatta, Tuesday, March 25, 2025. (AP)

me specifically," Ballal said at a West Bank hospital after his release Tuesday. "When they say 'Oscar', you understand. When they say your name, you understand."

"No Other Land," a joint Israeli-Palestinian production, chronicles the situation in Masafer Yatta, which the Israeli military designated as a live-fire training zone in the 1980s and ordered the expulsion of the residents, mostly Arab Bedouin. Around 1,000 residents have largely remained in place, but soldiers regularly come in to demolish homes, tents, water tanks and olive orchards.

After not finding a US distributor despite wide acclaim, "No Other Land" was self-released in theaters. It still managed to surpass \$2 million in North American theaters.

Media

Cuts stopped

VOA wins legal battle for now

NEW YORK, March 29, (AP): The Voice of America can't be silenced just yet.

A federal judge on Friday halted the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the eight-decade-old US government-funded international news service, calling the move a "classic case of arbitrary and capricious decision making."

Judge James Paul Oetken blocked the US Agency for Global Media, which runs Voice of America, from firing more than 1,200 journalists, engineers and other staff that

it sidelined two weeks ago in the wake of President Donald Trump ordering its funding slashed.

Oetken issued a temporary restraining order barring the agency from

"any further attempt to terminate, reduce-in-force, place on leave, or furlough" employees or contractors, and from closing any offices or requiring overseas employees to return to the U.S.

The order also bars the Agency for Global Media from terminating grant funding for its other broadcast outlets, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Afghanistan. The agency said Thursday it was restoring Radio Free Europe's funding after a judge in Washington, D.C. ordered it to do so.

"This is a decisive victory for press freedom and the First Amendment, and a sharp rebuke" to the Trump administration's "utter disregard for the principles that define our democracy," said the plaintiffs' lawyer Andrew G. Celli Jr.

At a hearing Friday in Manhattan, Oetken faulted the Trump administration for "taking a sledgehammer to an agency that has been statutorily authorized and funded by Congress."

Criticized

The judge criticized the agency's leadership, including special adviser Kari Lake, for pulling the plug "seemingly overnight" on the US government's global, soft-power megaphone with "no consideration of the effects."

Oetken ruled after a coalition of Voice of America journalists, labor unions and the nonprofit journalism advocacy group Reporters Without Borders sued the Trump administration last week to block the cuts. Ultimately, they seek to have VOA return to the air.

The plaintiffs argued the shutdown violated a court's finding during Trump's first term that VOA journalists have a free-speech firewall protecting them from White House interference. Their absence from the airwaves has left a vacuum that's being filled by "propagandists whose messages will monopolize global airwaves," the plaintiffs said.

Trump and other Republicans have accused Voice of America of a "leftist bias" and failing to project "pro-American" values to its worldwide audience, even though it is mandated by congress to serve as a non-partisan news organization.

Voice of America went off the air soon after Trump issued an executive order on March 14 that pared funding to the Agency for Global Media and six other unrelated federal entities - part of his campaign to shrink government and align its with his political agenda. It also moved this month to terminate VOA contracts with news agencies, including The Associated Press.

The White House called the service "The Voice of Radical America" and said Trump's order would "ensure that taxpayers are no longer on the hook for radical propaganda."

Film



This image released by Focus Features shows Tom Basden, (from left), Carey Mulligan and Tim Key in a scene from 'The Ballad of Wallis Island.' (AP)

The loveliest movie of the year so far

'Ballad of Wallis Island,' is soul-soothing film

LOS ANGELES, March 29, (AP): It's never a bad time for a film like "The Ballad of Wallis Island," but at the moment it feels like a much-needed balm. Modest in scope and made with the lightest of touch, not unlike the lovely folk songs that populate its soundtrack, it's also deceptively powerful: A gentle ode to moving on, in quirky packaging.

This is a movie about a kind, chatty man named Charles (Tim Key) who invites his favorite folk band to play a concert on the remote island where he lives alone in a massive old home. Charles is a semi-recluse only by circumstance: He's holed himself up in this home full of eccentric acquisitions over the years after a lucky lottery win (there's another punline there, but I won't spoil it).

Wallis Island, though beautiful and serene, with white cliffs and rocky shores (it was shot in Wales), is not the kind of place where there's a lot of socializing, but there is quite a bit of time for reflection, hobbies and, probably, talking to oneself at length. And Charles's greatest passion is McGwyer Mortimer (Tom Basden and Carey Mulligan), a once popular folk group who have not been together, professionally or romantically, for almost a decade.

That this is to be a reunion is terrible news for Herb McGwyer (Basden), who has made a name for himself as a solo artist and who arrives first, already aggrieved about the decisions that have

led him here. All he seems to know is that it's a small gig that will get him a cool half million pounds, which will effectively finance his next album. Everything else about this journey to Wallis Island comes as an unwelcome surprise, starting with the fact that there's no dock, no car, no hotel and he's stuck as Charles' houseguest.

Escape

The owner of the small general store (Sian Clifford, always a welcome presence) does not even carry rice, which Herb needs to dry out his water damaged phone. That's a special order. And then Nell Mortimer (Mulligan) arrives, new husband, Michael (Akemnji Ndifornyen) in tow. Herb, faced now with his ex, has no phone and no escape plan: The one man who ferries people to and from the main island doesn't even keep a reliable schedule (the boat times are listed with a disclaimer: "sometimes").

Nell, meanwhile, is ready to perform with her old beau. She needs the money, but has also moved on with her life - making chutney in the Pacific Northwest, and seems to be in a good place. Herb remains the put-upon artist, a ball of childish anxiety and ego who has since sold out and seems to regret how things transpired with Nell so many years ago. And then there's Charles who is simply elated to be in the presence of these two. It's a fun group of

somewhat conflicting interests to mash together.

Once the bickering subsides, Nell and Herb will get to reconnect over their shared music, though someone will of course take the wrong message from it. And it's all a delight to watch: Mulligan and Basden are sublime together, naturally exuding the awkward chemistry of artist exes, with Key as the adorable comedic foil. Basden and Key actually co-wrote the script, based on a short film they and director James Griffiths made 18 years ago.

It's still early days for 2025 movie releases, and far too soon to be making any reasonable declarations about how something is going to stack up with the rest of them by December. But this is a special one for any year.

"The Ballad of Wallis Island" is the kind movie that makes it all look so easy - filmmaking, performance, mood, chemistry. It's not going to dominate any cultural conversations, and probably won't go the awards route, but it'll touch your soul if you let it. Like "Juliet, Naked" from several years ago, a kind of spiritual and tonal sibling, it's an easy one to recommend to just about anyone.

"The Ballad of Wallis Island," a Focus Features released in theaters Friday is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "some language and smoking." Running time: 99 minutes. Four stars out of four.

TV's Golden Girl

Betty White's legacy honored at stamp ceremony in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, March 29, (AP): Betty White is making her mark on the nation's snail mail.

The beloved actor of "The Golden Girls" fame was celebrated with a new US Postal Service stamp at a first-day-of-issue ceremony at the Los Angeles Zoo on Thursday.

Fans that were crowded behind barricades cheered as a blue curtain dropped to reveal the stamp featuring a portrait of White against a violet-colored background with lighter shades of bubbly spots in a nod to her sparkling personality. She wears a blue polka-dot blouse and peeking out of her blond curls is an earring shaped like a pawprint.

"When I was working on the stamp surrounding myself with Betty White videos and pictures, I felt like I was working on a portrait of a family member," Boston-based artist Dale Stephanos said. "I wanted Betty's huge personality to take center stage."

The illustration is based on a photo taken by Kwaku Alston in 2010.

At the celebration, singer-songwriter Ellis Hall performed a snippet of "Thank You for Being a Friend," the theme song to "The Golden Girls."

A laughing kookaburra and other squawking birds occasionally interrupted the speakers, which surely would have delighted the animal-loving White.

"Animals were her kids and she loved them all - any shape, size and kind," said Richard Lichtenstein, a board member of the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association. White had worked with the zoo since its opening in 1966 until her death in December 2021, a couple weeks shy of her 100th birthday.

"Who didn't love Betty White?" Lichtenstein said. "Her smile, her sense of humor, her basic decency. Our country, our city and yes, even our Los Angeles Zoo, would be much better if more people

followed her example. Betty White put her stamp on everyone and anyone she came in contact with."

He said White's financial support and advocacy helped make possible exhibits featuring chimps, gorillas and elephants, among others.

Lichtenstein said White set up a private foundation before her death that funds various zoo programs.

"This zoo, its inhabitants and this community meant so much to Betty White just as she meant so much to all of us," said Amber McReynolds, chair of the USPS board of governors. "Betty White was an American treasure."

People lined up to purchase panes of 20 forever stamps, pins and notecards before getting first-day cancellations near a churro snack stand while schoolchildren walked by.



Richard Lichtenstein, board member of the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association, speaks at the first day of issue dedication for the Betty White Forever stamp issued by the US Postal Service at the Los Angeles Zoo, March 27, 2025, in LA. (AP)

Variety

HOUSTON: The woman convicted of killing Tejano music legend Selena Quintanilla-Pérez has been denied parole and will continue serving a life sentence for fatally shooting the rising young singer at a Texas motel in 1995, the state's parole board announced Thursday.

Yolanda Saldivar, 64, was up for parole for the first time since the killing of the singer, known to fans as simply Selena.

One of the first Mexican American artists to break into the mainstream music scene, Selena shattered barriers for women in Latin music. She was 23 years old and on the verge of crossing over into English-language pop superstardom when she was killed.

The singer's family and Chris Pérez, her widower, expressed gratitude to the Texas Board of Pardon and Paroles.

"While nothing can bring Selena back, this decision reaffirms that justice continues to stand for the beautiful life that was taken from us and from millions of fans around the world far too soon," they said in a statement posted on social media.

In explaining the decision to deny parole, the board said in a statement that the panel found that Saldivar continues to pose a threat to public safety. It also said the nature of the crime indicated "a conscious disregard for the lives, safety, or property of others."

Saldivar, who is serving her sentence in a Gatesville prison, will be eligible to be reviewed again for parole in 2030.

Saldivar founded Selena's fan club and was the manager of the singer's clothing

boutiques, Selena Etc., until she was fired in early March 1995 after money was discovered missing. (AP)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.: President Donald Trump commuted the sentence of Ozy Media co-founder Carlos Watson on Friday, just hours before Watson was due to report to prison for a nearly 10-year sentence in a financial conspiracy case.

Watson was convicted last year in a closely watched case that showcased the implosion of an ambitious startup company at a time of turmoil in the media industry. He had been ordered to surrender to prison on Friday.

Watson thanked the president in a statement and blasted the judge who sentenced him as "conflicted and unethical."

"I am profoundly grateful to President Trump for correcting this grave injustice. His decision reflects his unwavering commitment to fairness and justice for those who have been wrongfully targeted," Watson said.

Trump has aggressively used his presidential power to commute sentences and issue pardons for people who he believes were treated unfairly by the justice system. The president himself was convicted last year in a case involving hush money payments, part of what he has described as a politically motivated witch hunt against him.

Watson's commutation was among a string of other acts of clemency revealed by the White House on Friday.

They included Trevor Milton, the founder of electric vehicle company Nikola, who had been sentenced to four years for fraudulently exaggerating the potential of his technology and was pardoned; and three entrepreneurs who founded and helped run the cryptocurrency exchange BITMEX, which was ordered to pay a \$100 million fine earlier this year after prosecutors said it "willfully flouted U.S. anti-money laundering laws to boost revenue." They had been sentenced to probation and were also pardoned. (AP)



Selena



Frank Carter, (from left), Glen Matlock, Paul Cook and Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols pose for portrait photographs, Friday, March 21. (AP)

Rock legends explain why now is the right time for a tour

The Pistols set for first American tour in 20 years

NEW YORK, March 29, (AP) — It wasn't the night punk broke, but it was close. Nearly 50 years ago, the Sex Pistols — then made up of vocalist Johnny Rotten, guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and bassist Glen Matlock — performed at the 100 Club Punk Special in London, a 140-capacity club, alongside Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees and The Clash.

The event marked a shift for the subcultural movement; the bands here would soon bring their underground culture to reach mainstream heights.

Now, the 2025 iteration of the Pistols — Jones, Cook and Matlock joined by frontman Frank Carter (of Gallows, Pure Love and Frank Carter and the Rattlesnakes) — sit in the same venue to discuss their forthcoming North American tour. "This is where it all kicked off, really, all the punk," says Cook.

This fall, the legendary punk band will embark on their first tour of North America since 2003, when they were joined by John Lydon (formerly Rotten.)

The 2025 run with Carter begins Sept. 16 at the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas, Texas — the site of a particularly hostile show for the band when it first toured the US in 1978.

It is one of a few dates featured in three "Live in the U.S.A." albums, documenting the band's '78 run: Atlanta, Dallas and San Francisco. The latter will release April 25 and captures the show where the band originally called it quits.

"We were thinking of breaking up in San Francisco again," Jones jokes.

The 2025 tour is currently scheduled to conclude Oct. 16 at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles. The band will hit Washington; Philadelphia; Brooklyn, New York; Montreal; Toronto; Cleveland; Detroit; Minneapolis; Denver; Seattle and San Francisco. Additional tour dates will be announced later.

Pre-sale opens April 2 and 3. Tickets go on sale April 4 at 10 a.m. local time.

They will perform the band's sole album, 1977's "Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols Album" live in its entirety as well as other material.

So, why tour the US and Canada now?

"Why not?" says Jones.

"I think everybody needs this band right now. I think the world needs this band right now," says Carter. "And I think definitely America is screaming out for a band like the Sex Pistols."

"At the end of the day, we're living in a really, really difficult time. So not only do people want to come and just be entertained, they want to enjoy themselves," he continued. "Punk is an energetic music. It's one where you can go and vent and let your hair down, hopefully in a safe manner."

Carter fronted the Sex Pistols last year for a few UK dates. The band says they did not reach out to Lydon to see if he wanted to participate in this reunion tour.

Music



Ella Langley performs during Amazon Music Country Heat at Country Radio Seminar in Nashville, Tenn., on Feb. 28, 2024. (AP)

Ella Langley leads 2025 ACM Awards nominations

Ella Langley leads the nominees for the 2025 Academy of Country Music Awards with eight nominations.

The first-time nominee's nods include female artist of the year and female new artist.

Notably, there are no nods for Beyoncé's landmark "Cowboy Carter," which won the Grammy for both album of the year and country album of the year last month. Miranda Lambert's "Postcards from Texas" was also not nominated.

The nominations for the 60th annual ACM Awards were announced Thursday. The awards ceremony will take place May 8 at the Ford Center at The Star in Frisco, Texas, just north of Dal-

las. Reba McEntire will once again host.

Six of Langley's nominations stem from her smash hit "You Look Like You Love Me" with Riley Green. It's up for single of the year, song of the year as both an artist and songwriter, music event of the year and visual media of the year as an artist and director.

Cody Johnson, Lainey Wilson and Morgan Wallen closely follow Langley's nominations with seven each. Chris Stapleton has six nominations; Riley Green and Post Malone are tied with five.

Johnson, Wilson, Wallen and Stapleton are up for the night's top category, entertainer of the

year. Kelsea Ballerini, Luke Combs and Jelly Roll are also nominated for the award.

Wilson took home the prize last year, becoming one of the few women to earn the trophy. If Combs wins the category, he will have achieved the ACMs' Triple Crown Award — which is made up of career wins in the entertainer of the year, new artist (male, female, duo or group) and artist (male, female, duo or group) categories.

In the album of the year category, Megan Moroney's "Am I Okay? (I'll Be Fine)" faces off against Wilson's "Whirlwind," Jelly Roll's "Beautifully Broken," Zach Top's "Cold Beer & Country Music" and Post Malone's "F-1 Trillion." (AP)

'There's artsy vibe and youth engagement'

Sundance heads to Boulder for new chapter

COLORADO, March 29, (AP) — The Sundance Film Festival is Boulder bound, leaving its home of four decades in Park City, Utah, for a new chapter in neighboring Colorado.

Organizers announced their decision Thursday after a yearlong search in which numerous US cities vied to host the nation's premier independent film festival. The other finalists were Cincinnati, Ohio, and a combined Salt Lake City and Park City bid.

Festival leaders said politics did not influence their move from conservative Utah to liberal Colorado. They did however make "ethos and equity values" one of their criteria and referred to Boulder in their announcement as a "welcoming environment."

Boulder stood out to organizers as an artsy, walkable and medium-sized city close to nature. It has one of the highest concentrations of professional artists in the US and is home to the University of Colorado, where the film program contributes to a vibrant art scene, Sundance leaders said. They noted the large student population and campus venues will create new opportunities to engage young people in the event.

Nature

Nearby nature in the Rocky Mountain foothills offers room for visitors and artists to stretch their legs and draw inspiration from high country scenery. It's also just over half an hour from downtown Denver and not much farther to the city's international airport. There is not currently a light rail system connecting Denver to Boulder, but a bus runs between the two cities.

When Sundance leaders began their search for a new home, they said the festival had outgrown the charming ski town of Park City and developed an air of exclusivity that took focus away from the films. Boulder, a city of 100,000 people, has space for a more centralized festival. But it's not all that more affordable for attendees. The cost of living is estimated to be 31% higher than the national average, versus Park City's 33%, according to the Economic Research Institute. Visitors also say it

can be difficult to find available hotel rooms and short term rentals when the university hosts large events or home football games.

Actor Jonah Hill, "South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone and — perhaps most significantly — Sundance founder Robert Redford all attended the University of Colorado in Boulder. The school has a heady party culture that sometimes spills into the surrounding streets. The city is also home to a private Buddhist college.

Redford, 88, gave the festival's relocation his blessing.

Redford is remembered in Boulder with a mural inside The Sink, a restaurant and bar where he worked as a janitor back in his college days.

"It's gonna be really fun to see what happens and when people are introduced to the beauty of Boulder and how amazing this place is. It's just gonna elevate Boulder's presence on the world stage, I think," said Chris Heinritz, a co-owner of The Sink.

Just outside Denver's suburbs, Boulder has its own identity — and decades ago a very unique, hippie vibe. Well before Colorado voters legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, thousands of University of Colorado students and others would gather on campus to

smoke pot every April 20.

Today, Boulder retains its charm at the foot of the sandstone Flatirons, a foothill range crisscrossed by hiking trails that begin at the Colorado Chautauqua, a cultural and performing arts hub dating to the 1800s. The pedestrian-only Pearl Street Mall with its nearby theaters could provide a similar central hub to Park City's Main Street.

Unattainable

It's no longer ideal for hippies, however. The university kicked the 4/20 weed fest off campus and soaring housing costs — the median home price is now \$1.1 million — make living there unattainable for most.

Films have been shown in Boulder since 1898, when the first kinetoscope, a device co-invented by Thomas Edison, showed moving pictures to one person at a time at the Chautauqua Auditorium.

Besides Redford, Hollywood names who attended the University of Colorado include Dalton Trumbo, a screenwriter for "Spartacus" and "Roman Holiday" who was among the Hollywood Ten blacklisted for suspected communist sympathies in the late 1940s and 1950s.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Boulder

locations featured as backdrops in the Woody Allen film "Sleeper" and Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining." And Boulder was the fictional setting of the TV show "Mork & Mindy."

Today, it's home to more than a dozen smaller film festivals, including the Boulder International Film Festival and Chautauqua Silent Film Series.

"It just makes perfect sense. We're a small teeny tiny town but we're filled with so much. We have so much art so much history, so much vibrancy," said Hannah Givens, a University of Colorado graduate who lives in the Boulder area.

Sundance has called Park City home for 41 years. Past leaders of the festival said Redford chose the mountains of Utah as a space to foster independent filmmaking away from the hustle and bustle of Hollywood. Utah's iconic red rock landscapes have served as a backdrop to many films, including "Thelma and Louise," "Forrest Gump" and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," for which the festival is named.

Festivalgoers

This year, thousands of festivalgoers affixed bright yellow stickers to their winter coats that read "Keep Sundance in Utah" in a last-ditch effort to convince its leaders to keep it local.

Sundance will have one more festival in Park City in January 2026 before moving to Boulder in 2027.

Over four decades, Sundance helped transform its quaint mountain hometown into a renowned winter destination. Home prices skyrocketed, luxury hotels emerged and some local businesses shuttered while others thrived.

Out-of-state visitors spent an estimated \$106.4 million in Utah during the 2024 festival. Its total economic impact that year was estimated at \$132 million, with 1,730 jobs for Utah residents and \$70 million in wages for local workers. Utah Gov. Spencer Cox said he was sad to see Sundance go, but the state's economy could sustain the loss.

Utah offered Sundance \$3.5 million to stay. Colorado lawmakers proposed \$34 million in tax credits over 10 years to lure it away.

Art

'An insult to life itself'

AI-generated Ghibli art raises copyright issues

LOS ANGELES, March 29, (AP) — Fans of Studio Ghibli, the famed Japanese animation studio behind "Spirited Away" and other beloved movies, were delighted this week when a new version of ChatGPT let them transform popular internet memes or personal photos into the distinct style of Ghibli founder Hayao Miyazaki.

But the trend also highlighted ethical concerns about artificial intelligence tools trained on copyrighted creative works and what that means for the future livelihoods of human artists. Miyazaki, 84, known for his hand-drawn approach and whimsical storytelling, has expressed skepticism about AI's role in animation.

Janu Lingewaran wasn't thinking much about that when he uploaded a photo of his 3-year-old ragdoll cat, Mali, into ChatGPT's new image generator tool on Wednesday. He then asked ChatGPT to convert it to the Ghibli style, instantly making an anime image that looked like Mali but also one of the painstakingly drawn feline characters that populate Miyazaki movies such as "My Neighbor Totoro" or "Kiki's Delivery Service."

"I really fell in love with the result," said Lingewaran, an entrepreneur who lives near Aachen, Germany. "We're thinking of printing it out and hanging it on the wall."

Similar results gave the Ghibli style to iconic images, such as the casual look of Turkish pistol shooter Yusuf Dikec in a T-shirt and one hand in his pocket on his way to winning a silver medal at the 2024 Olympics. Or the famed "Disaster Girl" meme of a 4-year-old turning to the camera with a slight smile as a house fire rages in the background.

Lawsuits

ChatGPT maker OpenAI, which is fighting copyright lawsuits over its flagship chatbot, has largely encouraged the "Ghiblification" experiments and its CEO Sam Altman changed his profile on social media platform X into a Ghibli-style portrait. In a technical paper posted Tuesday, the company had said the new tool would be taking a "conservative approach" in the way it mimics the aesthetics of individual artists.

"We added a refusal which triggers when a user attempts to generate an image in the style of a living artist," it said. But the company added in a statement that it "permits broader studio styles — which people have used to generate and share some truly delightful and inspired original fan creations."

Studio Ghibli in Japan declined to comment Friday.

As users posted their Ghibli-style images on social media, Miyazaki's previous comments on AI animation also began to resurface. When Miyazaki was shown an AI demo in 2016, he said he was "utterly disgusted" by the display, according to documentary footage of the interaction. The person demonstrating the animation, which showed a writhing body dragging itself by its head, explained that AI could "present us grotesque movements that we humans can't imagine." It could be used for zombie

movements, the person said.

That prompted Miyazaki to tell a story.

"Every morning, not in recent days, I see my friend who has a disability," Miyazaki said. "It's so hard for him just to do a high five; his arm with stiff muscle can't reach out to my hand. Now, thinking of him, I can't watch this stuff and find it interesting. Whoever creates this stuff has no idea what pain is."

He said he would "never wish to incorporate this technology into my work at all."

"I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself," he added.

Josh Weigensberg, a partner at the law firm Pryor Cashman, said that one question the Ghibli-style AI art raises is whether the AI model was trained on Miyazaki or Studio Ghibli's work. That in turn "raises the question of, 'Well, do they have a license or permission to do that training or not?'" he said.

License

OpenAI didn't respond to a question Thursday about whether it had a license.

Weigensberg added that if a work was licensed for training, it might make sense for a company to permit this type of use. But if this type of use is happening without consent and compensation, he said, it could be "problematic."

Weigensberg said that there is a general principle "at the 30,000-foot view" that "style" is not copyrightable. But sometimes, he said, what people are actually thinking of when they say "style" could be "more specific, discernible, discrete elements of a work of art," he said.

"A 'Howl's Moving Castle' or 'Spirited Away,' you could freeze a frame in any of those films and point to specific things, and then look at the output of generative AI and see identical elements or substantially similar elements in that output," he said. "Just stopping at, 'Oh, well, style isn't protectable under copyright law.' That's not necessarily the end of the inquiry."

Artist Karla Ortiz, who grew up watching Miyazaki's movies and is suing other AI image generators for copyright infringement in a case that's still pending, called it "another clear example of how companies like OpenAI just do not care about the work of artists and the livelihoods of artists."

"That's using Ghibli's branding, their name, their work, their reputation, to promote (OpenAI) products," Ortiz said. "It's an insult. It's exploitation."

Ortiz was further enraged when President Donald Trump's administration jumped into the meme trend Thursday, using the White House's official X account to post a Ghibli-style image of a weeping woman from the Dominican Republic recently arrested by US immigration agents. The White House and OpenAI didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on how the image was made.

"To see something so brilliant, as wonderful as Miyazaki's work be butchered to generate something so foul," Ortiz wrote on social media, adding that she hoped Studio Ghibli sues "the hell out of" OpenAI for this.



Hayao Miyazaki of Japan, director of the animated film 'Ponyo,' poses at a special screening of the film in Los Angeles on July 27, 2009. (AP)



The marquee of the Egyptian Theatre appears during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah on Jan. 28, 2020. (AP)

Ghana's first 3D telemedicine trial benefits patients

3D tech brings surgeons closer to patients in remote regions

KOFORIDUA, Ghana, March 29, (AP) — Charles Owusu Aseku has traveled across Ghana and beyond in search of care for the large growth of tissue called a keloid on his neck since 2002. The 46-year-old was growing increasingly frustrated after two unsuccessful surgeries and a trip to South Africa that ended with just a consultation.

Aseku was preparing for yet another medical trip until late February when he joined others in the first trial of 3D telemedicine technology in Ghana powered through computer screens in the back of a van.

Those behind the initiative, developed by Microsoft's research team in partnership with local doctors and researchers, say the remote assessment will help provide medical consultations for patients awaiting surgery or after an operation, in a region where the doctor-to-patient ratio is among the lowest in the world.

The project builds on earlier trials in Scotland and now works as a portable system with enhanced lighting and



Surgeons interact with a patient via Microsoft Team call during a live trial of 3D telemedicine technology by the Microsoft Research team at Koforidua Hospital in Ghana on Feb. 25, 2025. (AP)

camera upgrades.

Once inside the van, cameras will capture a 3D model of each patient and

the image is then projected onto a large computer screen. Multiple doctors can join the consultation session online

and manipulate the 3D model to assess the patient.

"The idea behind the van is to allow it to travel to those remote villages that don't have specialized care ... to perform a pre or post-surgical consult," said Spencer Fowers, principal software developer and 3D-telemedicine project lead at Microsoft Research.

The initiative also gives patients the opportunity to have multiple opinions. Aseku's session had doctors from Rwanda, Scotland and Brazil, an experience that he said gave him hope.

"I see a lot of doctors here and I am very happy because experience will come from each of them and maybe they will find a solution to my problem," the 46-year-old said.

Researchers hope the trial at the Koforidua Regional Hospital, in Ghana's eastern region, is the start of a wider project that could expand the service and explore new use cases.

Recent years have seen growing use of telemedicine, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts say such digital tools can benefit patients

in Africa the most because there are so few specialist doctors for the continent's 1.4 billion people.

George Opoku, 68, was referred to the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in the capital Accra - nearly 100 kilometers away from the Koforidua hospital, which is much closer to his home - where he had first gone to seek care for sarcoma, a rare form of cancer that develops in the bones and soft tissues.

Upon hearing about the 3D telemedicine trial, his doctor decided to register him for the process, saving him the extra expenses and stress of long-distance travel.

"This time I had to sit in a van and to introduce myself and condition to not only one doctor but several of them. I was able to answer all their questions and I am hopeful that they will discuss and cure me of my condition," Opoku said. "I feel well already and I am hopeful."

A key challenge for the project is the lack of stable internet access, a common problem in remote parts of Africa. At the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital,

the technology is helping patients in need of plastic surgery. An inadequate number of plastic surgeons means that patients often have to consult with different doctors during each visit.

Dr. Kwame Darko, consultant plastic surgeon at the hospital and one of the principal investigators on the project, said that 3D telemedicine could give patients the chance to be seen by multiple doctors during one session.

The 3D technology could make a difference if replicated in Ghana and elsewhere, according to Dr. Ahensan Dasebre, chief resident doctor at the National Reconstructive Plastic Surgery and Burns Centre at Korle-Bu, who was not part of the project.

"We are already behind in terms of how many doctors are available to care for a certain number of the population," he said.

"If somebody is in a remote part of town where he doesn't have access to these specialized services, but needs it, the referring doctor could actually use this telemedicine thing to get access to the best of care."

Dentists, health groups caution

First in the US: Utah bans fluoride in drinking water

SALT LAKE CITY, March 29, (AP) — Utah has become the first state to ban fluoride in public drinking water, pushing past opposition from dentists and national health organizations who warn the move will lead to medical problems that disproportionately affect low-income communities.

Republican Gov. Spencer Cox signed legislation Thursday barring cities and communities from deciding whether to add the mineral to their water systems.

Florida, Ohio and South Carolina are considering similar measures, while in New Hampshire, North Dakota and Tennessee, lawmakers have rejected them. A bill in Kentucky to make fluoridation optional stalled in the state Senate.

The American Dental Association sharply criticized the Utah law, saying it showed "wanton disregard for the oral health and well-being of their constituents."

Cavities are the most common chronic childhood disease, the ADA noted. Fluoride strengthens teeth and reduces cavities by replacing minerals lost during normal wear and tear, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"As a father and a dentist, it is disheartening to see that a proven, public health policy, which exists for the greater good of an entire community's oral health, has been dismantled based on distorted pseudoscience," the as-

sociation's president, Denver dentist Brett Kessler, said in a statement.

The ban, effective May 7, brings into the mainstream concerns over fluoridation that for decades were considered fringe opinions.

It comes weeks after water fluoridation skeptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was sworn in as U.S. health secretary. Kennedy said in November that the administration of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump would advise water systems nationwide to remove fluoride.

Cox, who grew up and raised his own children in a community without fluoridated water, compared it recently to being medicated by the government. Utah lawmakers also said the ban was a matter of personal health choice and that putting fluoride in water is too expensive.

Florida's surgeon general last year recommended against community water fluoridation because of what he called its "neuropsychiatric risk." That guidance came after a federal judge ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate fluoride in drinking water because high levels could pose a risk to the intellectual development of children.

Federal officials determined last year "with moderate confidence" that there was a link between higher levels of fluoride exposure and lower IQ in kids.



A student drinks from a water fountain at an elementary school in California, Sept. 20, 2023. (AP)

85% of kids beat cancer, but many face infertility

Boys with cancer can face infertility as adults. Can storing stem cells help?

WASHINGTON, March 29, (AP) — A man who battled childhood cancer has received the first known transplant of sperm-producing stem cells, in a study aimed at restoring the fertility of cancer's youngest survivors.

Jaiwen Hsu was 11 when a leg injury turned out to be bone cancer. Doctors thought grueling chemotherapy could save him but likely leave him infertile. His parents learned researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center were freezing testicular cells of young boys with cancer in hopes of preserving their future fertility - and signed him up.

Hsu, now 26, is the first to return as an adult and test if reimplanting those cells might work.

"The science behind it is so incredibly new that right now it's kind of a waiting game," said Hsu, of Vienna, Virginia. "It's kind of eagerly crossing our fingers and hoping for the best."

It may seem unusual to discuss future fertility when a family is reeling from the diagnosis of a child's cancer. But 85% of children with cancer now survive to adulthood and about 1 in 3 are left infertile from chemotherapy or radiation.

Young adults with cancer can bank sperm, eggs or sometimes embryos ahead of treatment. But children diagnosed before puberty don't have that option because they're not yet producing mature sperm or eggs.

Boys are born with stem cells inside spaghetti-like tubes in the testes, cells that start producing sperm after puberty sparks a rise in testosterone. With funding from the National Institutes of Health, Pitt reproductive scientist Kyle Orwig studies how to preserve and potentially use tes-



In this image from video provided by UPMC/Pitt Health Sciences, Jaiwen Hsu sits with his mother, Jeng Hsu, before a stem cell implant procedure at the UPMC MageeWomen's Hospital in Pittsburgh on Nov. 10, 2023. (AP)

ticular cells to restore fertility.

It starts with a biopsy-like removal of a small amount of testicular tissue that contains millions of cells - some of them precious sperm-producing stem cells. Since 2011, Orwig's team has frozen samples from about 1,000 prepubertal boys.

It's impossible to tell if enough stem cells are in each tiny sample to matter. But in 2019, Orwig used preserved testicular tissue from a young male monkey that, in an animal version of IVF, led to the birth of a healthy baby monkey.

By 2023, Orwig was ready to reimplant now-grown cancer survivors' cells when Hsu - not ready to start a family yet but curious about his long-ago study participation - reached out.

"We're not expecting a miracle result," cautioned Orwig, whose colleagues transplanted Hsu's thawed cells in November 2023.

In a paper posted online this week, Orwig reported the injection, guided by ultrasound to the right spot, was safe and easy to perform. His work has not yet been reviewed by other scientists.

And Orwig said it's too soon to know if the experiment worked and standard tests likely won't tell, as animal testing found assisted reproduction techniques were needed to detect and retrieve small amounts of sperm. Still, he hopes the ongoing research will alert more families to consider fertility preservation so they'd have the option if it eventually pans out.

UNICEF calls for enhancing children's well-being

BOAO, Hainan, March 29, (Xinhua) — A representative from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called for greater attention to the protection of vulnerable children in Asia, emphasizing the need to ensure access to education, healthcare, and a sustainable future.

UNICEF Representative to China Amakobe Sande, stressed that children must be placed at the center of the international development and cooperation agenda in today's increasingly complex

and rapidly, ever-changing world, in an exclusive interview with Xinhua at the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2025 in south China's Hainan Province.

Children in Asia face overlapping crises including conflict, widening inequality and climate change, Sande said. "These crises erode children's coping strategies, deepen inequalities, and hinder their potential to thrive."

The Asia-Pacific region is home to a

large proportion of the world's children. According to UNICEF, children in this region are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters, with increasingly frequent and intense storms, floods, droughts, and other environmental hazards. Beyond natural disasters, ongoing conflicts and deepening economic disparities continue to place millions of children at risk, Sande noted, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated international responses.

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Tennessee heading back to the Elite Eight

Top-seeded Auburn rallies in 2nd half, beats Michigan in Sweet 16



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, India. (AP)

Bengaluru breaks 17-year winless streak in Chennai

Royal Challengers beat Super Kings by 50 runs

CHENNAI, India, March 29, (AP): Royal Challengers Bengaluru ended their 17-year drought against Chennai Super Kings at Chepauk in the Indian Premier League after a resounding 50-run victory.

Captain Rajat Patidar's 51 led Bengaluru to 196-7 despite Afghan left-arm spinner Noor Ahmad claiming the key wicket of Phil Salt in the powerplay and Virat Kohli's in the middle overs. Kohli struggled to 31 off 30 balls.

A revamped Bengaluru pace attack comprising of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood clipped Chennai in the first six overs and the home team limped to 146-8.

Bengaluru, which has never won the IPL, has got off to a perfect start with two big away wins against defending champion Kolkata Knight Riders and five-time champion Chennai.

Hazlewood struck twice in his first over, getting Rahul Tripathi and Chennai captain Rituraj Gaikwad caught off mistimed pull shots, followed by dismissing Ravindra Jadeja with another short ball.



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Bhuvneshwar Kumar fields the ball on his own bowling during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, India. (AP)

"It was game-changing (the powerplay) because we got three wickets in the first six overs," Patidar said. "Amazing to see how they kept it on the hard length because the ball wasn't coming on to the bat easily."

Kumar found Deepak Hooda's faint outside edge and Yash Dayal

put Chennai on the mat at 80-6 in the 13th over with the wickets of Shivam Dube and top-scorer Rachin Ravindra (41).

Dube tried to cut Dayal only to inside edge onto his stumps on 19, and then clean-bowled Ravindra with a yorker.

Chennai veterans Mahendra Singh

Dhoni (30 not out) and Jadeja (25) reduced the size of their first loss to Bengaluru since the inaugural 2008 IPL season as they were squeezed by the visiting bowlers.

"Bad fielding cost us," Gaikwad said. "When you're chasing 170, you have a little more time, but when you're chasing 20 runs extra you have to bat differently in the powerplay and it didn't happen today."

Kohli took the back seat in the powerplay as Salt smacked five fours and a six and blazed 32 off 16 balls before he fell to Dhoni's brilliant reflex stumping off Ahmad.

Devdutt Padikkal kept the scoreboard ticking at over nine an over with a breezy 27 off 14.

But Chennai wasted at least three opportunities to dismiss Patidar, and Kohli's scratchy innings ended when he couldn't clear Ravindra at deep midwicket.

Patidar hit three sixes and four boundaries before Matheesha Pathirana struck twice in the penultimate over which cost Chennai just one run from a wide ball. Pathirana had Patidar finally caught at cover off a full delivery.

Tim David gave Bengaluru a blazing finish when he smashed three consecutive sixes in Sam Curran's last over and finished with 22 off eight balls.

ATLANTA, March 29, (AP): With Auburn's season on the brink, Tahaad Pettiford and Denver Jones suddenly became unstoppable.

On to the Elite Eight for the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Pettiford and Jones scored 20 points apiece to lead a second-half barrage that rallied the Tigers to a 78-65 victory over Michigan in the Sweet 16 on Friday night.

The Tigers (31-5) wiped out a nine-point deficit, outscoring No. 5 seed Michigan 39-17 over the final 12 1/2 minutes to advance to the Elite Eight for only the third time in school history. They also became the fourth Southeastern Conference team to reach a regional final, with the SEC joining the Atlantic Coast Conference (2016) and Big East (2009) as the only leagues to do that.

"Just the kids' will to win," Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said. "Denver got heated up. Tahaad got heated up. We went to them, and they delivered."

Auburn will face Michigan State in the South Region final on Sunday, with a trip to the Final Four on the line. The Spartans held off Mississippi 73-70 in the first game of the night in Atlanta.

Johni Broome scored 22 points to go along with 16 rebounds, but it was Pettiford, a freshman, and Jones, a senior, who took control when Auburn needed them most.

Those two regular-season losses to Kentucky don't mean anything to Tennessee now.

The Volunteers avenged them in convincing fashion on the

stage of the NCAA Tournament on Friday night, posting a no-doubt 78-65 victory that sent them to a second consecutive Elite Eight.

Zakai Zeigler had 18 points and 10 assists, and Tennessee outthrustled and outplayed Kentucky on both ends of the court. The second-seeded Vols (30-7) beat their border rival in the first all-Southeastern Conference Sweet 16 matchup since 1986 and will play No. 1 seed Houston (33-4) on Sunday in the Midwest Region final.

No one enjoyed the show at Lucas Oil Stadium more than Peyton Manning, who was back in the town where he spent 13 years and won a Super Bowl with the Indianapolis Colts. The Vols' most famous sports alum was in a bright orange ballcap seated behind the bench as Tennessee ran off with the win in the "House Peyton Built."

Lamont Butler scored 18 points to lead first-year coach Mark Pope's third-seeded Wildcats (24-12), who were held 20 points under their season scoring average. Their 65 points matched their fewest in a game this season.

The Vols did what they failed to do in their first two meetings with Kentucky, when they lost 78-73 at home and 75-64 in Lexington. They've been one of the best in the nation at defending the 3-pointer, yet the Wildcats shot 12 of 24 on 3s in each of those games.

It was apparent early the Vols weren't going to let the Wildcats put up 3s at will again. Kentucky finished 6 of 15 from distance.



Tennessee's Zakai Zeigler (5) heads to the basket past Kentucky's Koby Brea, center, and Amari Williams, right, during the second half in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA college basketball tournament in Indianapolis. (AP)

Fan clashes at Copa America

Sports court hears appeal by Uruguay soccer players ban

LAUSANNE, Switzerland, March 29, (AP): Five Uruguay players who were banned after clashes with Colombia fans at a Copa America game in the United States had their appeals heard at sports' highest court.

The players - including captain and Atletico Madrid defender José María Giménez, Liverpool forward Darwin Núñez and Barcelona defender Ronald Araújo - claimed they were protecting their families in the stands after Uruguay's semi-final loss at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina, last July.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said Friday the appeal was being heard by remote video link. No timetable for a verdict was given.

The players, who also include Napoli defender Mathías Olivera and Tottenham midfielder Rodrigo Betancur, have been backed by the Uruguayan soccer federation in challenging the bans imposed by South American soccer body

CONMEBOL.

Núñez was banned by a CONMEBOL disciplinary panel from five qualifying games for the 2026 World Cup, Betancur for four and the other players each for three games.

"There is no place for intolerance and violence on and off the field," the soccer body said last July.

Núñez was fined \$20,000, Betancur \$16,000 and Giménez, Araújo and Olivera \$12,000 each. Uruguay, coached by Marcelo Bielsa, is on track to qualify for the World Cup and return to the U.S., which is co-hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico.

With four rounds left in the 10-team South American qualifying group, Uruguay is third in the standings, six points ahead of seventh-placed Venezuela.

The top six in the final standings in September advance directly to the World Cup and the seventh-place team enters intercontinental playoffs in March next year.

Leon urges FIFA to reconsider axing it from Club World Cup

MEXICO CITY, March 29, (AP): Leon captain James Rodriguez and coach Eduardo Berizzo urged FIFA on Friday to reconsider booting the Mexican team from the Club World Cup.

Leon was axed last week for failing to comply with regulations regarding multi-club ownership.

Leon and fellow Mexican club Pachuca both qualified but have the same owner, Grupo Pachuca.

"It's a big injustice," Rodriguez said at a media conference. "If they leave us out it is not going to be fair and it will be a stain on soccer. There are fans that have bought tickets and are in debt to pay for them. How do you tell them now that they are not going to go?"

Rodriguez, the Golden Boot winner at the 2014 World Cup, signed a one-year deal to play for Leon and one of the reasons was to play in the Club World Cup staged in the United States this summer.

"I'm happy to be here," Rodriguez said. "Whether or not we play in the Club World Cup does not change the fact that I want to stay here. This is something new for me. I never qualified for a Club World Cup, and weeks before they tell you that you are out. I hope FIFA can do something."

Leon's owner Grupo Pachuca has announced it will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport next month.

"The CAS should rule in our favor," Berizzo said. "We have the right to compete, we did not break any law. The decision is unfair, there is time to fix this."

FIFA has yet to announce a replacement team but Costa Rican club Liga Deportiva Alajuelense has said it would play. Alajuelense asked FIFA last November to enforce its multi-ownership rules.

"The teams raising their hands for the right to compete in our place should be ashamed of themselves," Leon midfielder Andres Guardado said.

"It is a brutal injustice. If anyone has done things wrong it is FIFA. Multi-club ownership in Mexico has existed for many years and FIFA still allow us to compete."

New Zealand beats Pakistan by 73 runs in 1st ODI

NAPIER, New Zealand, March 29, (AP): Mark Chapman scored 132 and Daryl Mitchell 76 in a 199-run partnership as New Zealand made 344-9 and went on to beat Pakistan by 73 runs Saturday in the first one-day international.

Chapman posted his third one-day international century and rebuilt the innings with Mitchell after New Zealand had been three wickets down in the 13th over, struggling against bounce and swing from the Pakistan fast bowlers.

Muhammad Abbas, the first Pakistan-born player to play for New Zealand, made 50 from 24 balls - the fastest half century by a player on debut in one-day internationals.

Babar Azam led Pakistan's run chase with 78 from 83 balls but when he was out Pakistan slumped, losing seven wickets for 22 runs.

For much of its innings Pakistan was ahead of New Zealand, 64-0 after 10

overs where New Zealand had been 34-2.

Usman Khan and Abdullah Shafique put on 83 for the first wicket, Babar and Mohammad Rizwan added 76 for the third wicket then Babar and Salman Ali Agha contributed a further 85 for the fourth wicket. Pakistan was 249-3 in the 39th over and still well on target.

New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell was forced to bring back his strike bowlers Will O'Rourke and Jacob Duffy. O'Rourke offered a short ball to Babar which he hooked to Mitchell on the boundary at backward square.

Duffy then ran out Tayyab Tahir (1) and bowled Irfan Khan first ball as Pakistan slumped to 253-6 in the 40th over. Pakistan's hopes faded as wickets dwindled and the run-rate rose. Pakistan was 271-9 when Salman was out for 58 from 48 balls.

"We started the second innings with

good intent and we got the things you need for a big chase," Rizwan said. "But at the end the pressure was very big because as you get near to the end, the pressure becomes more."

Pakistan won the toss, bowled and was on top early through the efforts of its four seam bowlers, Naseem Shah, Akif Javed, Mohammad Ali and Haris Rauf. Akif and Ali were making their ODI debuts.

There were patches of grass on the pitch at McLean Park and the ball moved more than is usual at the venue where the average first-innings score in ODIs is 244. Naseem Shah and Akif Javed used the conditions superbly.

New Zealand slumped to 34-3 in the 13th over, bringing Chapman and Mitchell together. Runs were hard to come by at first but after bowling his seamers through the first 25 overs, Rizwan was forced to go to his fifth bowler. The New Zealanders cashed

in.

Chapman and Mitchell took 67 runs from the five overs bowled by Salman and 51 runs from five overs bowled by Irfan Khan.

Irfan had his revenge dismissing both Chapman and Mitchell. Chapman's 132 came from 111 balls and Mitchell's 76 from 84 deliveries.

"It was certainly pretty tricky to bat early on," Chapman said. "We were probably aiming for a total lower than we got in the end. But it's something we pride ourselves on, being able to adapt to the conditions then putting up a score and just scrapping."

Pakistan lost the preceding five-match T20 series 4-1 by margins of nine wickets, five wickets, 115 runs and eight wickets as the visiting batters struggled to adapt to bouncy New Zealand pitches.

The second match in the three-match ODI series is next Wednesday in Hamilton.

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Sulaibikhat boosts semifinal hopes

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Sulaibikhat basketball team secured a thrilling 101-97 overtime victory against Qadsia in the 16th round of the Second Division of the Basketball League (Merged) match at the Basketball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex, ended in an 89-89 tie before Sulaibikhat – nicknamed the “Reds of the North” – clinched the win, strengthening its bid for fourth place and a spot in the championship semifinals.

With this victory, Sulaibikhat moved up to 21 points, ranking fifth, while Qadsia remains in fourth place with 22 points and a postponed match against Kazma.

Sulaibikhat has shown impressive form, having previously



Qadsia player drives the ball past Sulaibikhat player.

shocked Kazma with an 85-75 victory in the league's opening round.

Earlier, Kuwait Club dominated Al-Qurain with a 92-73 win, maintaining its lead with

25 points, while Al-Qurain follows closely in third place with 23 points. The match also marked the return of international player Mohammed Adnan, who made his comeback after a wrist injury sidelined him for months.

Sulaibikhat's head coach, Fahad Barjas, capitalized on Qadsia's instability following its mid-March loss to Al-Qurain and its Asian Super League semifinal exit against Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad. The Yellows were hit hard by the resignation of their American coach, Anthony Zipping, last weekend, alongside the absence of key players – Chinemelo Elono (suspension) and Cedric Henry (injury).

With the playoff race heating up, Sulaibikhat will aim to maintain its momentum, while Qadsia looks to recover before its postponed clash with Kazma.

Kuwait Volleyball Association to discuss a new player eligibility rules for next season

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Volleyball Association's Competitions Committee is set to discuss a proposal at the end of the current season to allow one resident player and one Kuwait-born player to participate in next season's competitions. If approved by the Association's Board of Directors, each team will be able to register three non-Kuwaiti players – a foreign professional, a resident, and a Kuwait-born player – with only two allowed on the court at the same time.

The proposal arises from club demands to include these players as a solution to the financial difficulties of signing foreign professionals, strengthening teams and increasing competition in local tournaments.



Players in action during the league game.

The final decision is expected by next month or May, following a formal submission to the Board of Directors for approval.

Leverkusen keeps hopes alive



Bochum's Giorgos Masouras, left, and Leverkusen's Jonathan Tah fight for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Bayer Leverkusen and VfL Bochum at the BayArena in Leverkusen, Germany. (AP)

Bochum beaten 3-1 in Bundesliga

BERLIN, March 29, (Xinhua): Bayer Leverkusen kept its Bundesliga title hopes alive with a 3-1 victory over VfL Bochum.

Leverkusen made its intentions of staying in the title race clear early on. Dominating possession and controlling the tempo, the hosts were rewarded in the 20th minute when Aleix Garcia found space outside the area and curled a shot into the top corner, leaving Bochum goalkeeper Timo Horn

with no chance.

But the visitors, desperate for points in their relegation battle, made quick response. Six minutes later, Felix Passlack stunned the home crowd with a volley from the edge of the area to level the scores.

Despite enjoying over 70 percent of the possession in the first half, Leverkusen struggled to convert its dominance into further goals as Bochum defended well and looked dangerous on the counterattack.

Leverkusen regained momentum after the break and Victor Boniface found the back

of the net on the hour mark. A free kick saw Garcia float the ball into the box, where Piero Hincapie flicked it on for Boniface to slot home from close range.

Substitute Amine Adli put the result beyond doubt with three minutes to play. After a swift counterattack, the winger raced clear and slotted home.

“Bochum put up a good fight. We dominated from the beginning and basically handed them their goal. But overall, we stayed confident and got the win we deserved,” said Leverkusen captain Lukas Hradecky.

Ancelotti and Jesus considered

Brazil fires Júnior after worst defeat in qualifying

SAO PAULO, March 29, (AP): Brazil coach Dorival Júnior was fired on Friday after 14 months amid poor results and disappointing performances from the national team.

Júnior's sacking by Brazilian Football Confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues came three days after a 4-1 defeat to bitter rival Argentina in Buenos Aires, Brazil's heaviest defeat in a World Cup qualifier.

“The confederation announces that Dorival Júnior's cycle is over,” Rodrigues told media in Rio de Janeiro. “From now on, we will work in the search for a substitute. Much has been said about (the confederation) contacting A, B or C coach, but I should say that (comment) was never coming from this president or anyone that the president authorized.”

Brazil is fifth in South American qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The top six qualify automatically. Under the 62-year-old

Júnior, Brazil won seven matches, drew another seven, and lost two. But it has won only one of its last four games. The team scored 25 goals and conceded 17.

In the Copa America last year, Brazil was eliminated in the quarterfinals by Uruguay

on penalties.

Rodrigues was just re-elected on Monday to head the confederation to 2030. In 2023, he bet on Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti to take over one year later.

While waiting for Ancelotti, Brazil had under-20

coach Ramon Menezes as an interim then hired Fernando Diniz. Diniz was fired in January 2024 after two wins, one draw and three losses on the job and Ancelotti extended his contract in Spain.

The last time Brazil had three coaches between World Cups was before its latest title in 2002. Luiz Felipe Scolari took the job one year before the tournament in Japan and South Korea.

Local media reported that Rodrigues will make another approach to Ancelotti and that Al-Hilal coach Jorge Jesus is also being considered. Either the Italian or the Portuguese coach would become Brazil's first ever foreign coach if a deal is reached.

Brazil's next two South American qualifying matches are in June at second-placed Ecuador and at home against sixth-placed Paraguay.

Ancelotti's Real Madrid and Jesus' Al-Hilal are scheduled to play that month in the Club World Cup in the United States.



Brazil's coach Dorival Junior stands on the sidelines prior to a World Cup 2026 qualifying soccer match against Argentina at the Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (AP)

Sakamoto dethroned

Liu claims historic world title

BOSTON, March 29, (AP): Alysa Liu skated around the ice in disbelief, her golden dress shimmering in the lights of TD Garden, and the appreciative roar from a sellout crowd reminded her why she had returned to the sport following a nearly two-year retirement.

When her score was finally read, the 19-year-old from Clovis, California, had made history.

Liu became the first American women's figure skating world champion in nearly two decades, dethroning three-time defending champ Kaori Sakamoto with a brilliant free skate Friday night. Her program to a rendition of “MacArthur Park” by Boston native Donna Summer earned her a standing ovation, and allowed Liu to finish with 222.97 points.

“I mean, it means so much to me and everything I've been through,” Liu said. “My last skating experience, my time away and this time around - I'm so happy, I guess. I'm mostly glad I could put out two of my best performances.”

Liu's coaches, Phillip DiGuglielmo and Massimo Scali, pulled her into a hug in the kiss-and-cry area of the arena. Moments later, Sakamoto came over from where she had watched in the leader's chair and squeezed her tightly, as if Japan's hero was passing Liu the torch as the first world champion from the U.S. since Kimmie Meissner stood atop the podium in 2006.

“What the hell?” Liu asked in disbelief. “I don't know. I don't know how to process this.”

Sakamoto finished with 217.98 points to add a silver medal to her three previous golds. Her Japanese teammate, Mone Chiba, was third with 215.24 points while Isabeau Levito and Amber Glenn gave the Americans three of the top five.

“We are all so strong,” Levito said, “and we are all such fighters, and we all have our strengths, and are so different but we're all so sweet with each other. I'm just so glad these are my fellow Team USA skaters.”

Liu was once considered the sport's rising star, the youngest-ever U.S. champ when she triumphed at the age of 13 in 2019, and then defended her title the following year. She fulfilled a childhood ambition by qualifying for the Olympics, finishing sixth at the 2022 Beijing Games, and earned a bronze medal at the world championships that year.

Then she stepped away. Liu decided that skating had become less of joy and more of a job, and she wanted to focus on being a normal college student. It wasn't until she went on a ski trip and felt the rush of competition - albeit in a much different way, and with far lower stakes - that she began to think about a comeback.



Gold medalist Alysa Liu, of the United States bites her medal during a ceremony for the women's free skating program at the figure skating world championships in Boston. (AP)

Early last year, she made it official with a cryptic posting on social media. And while the path back in a notoriously fickle sport was bumpy, to be sure, Liu took a big step forward with her second-place finish to Glenn at the U.S. championships.

She took the last step up on the podium Friday night.

“Not every yesterday, I didn't expect this. I didn't have expectations coming in,” Liu said. “I never have expectations coming into competitions anymore. It's moreso, ‘What can I put out performance-wise?’ I really met my expectations on my part.” She left Sakamoto, the erstwhile champion, with feelings of awe and admiration.

“She went away and now she's back, and the world champion,” Sakamoto said. “I wouldn't say she's changed. Her cheerfulness and kindness and the way she's always happy brought her to the top step of the podium.”

Earlier in the night, American ice dancers Madison Chock and Evan Bates built a big cushion as they chase their third consecutive title, scoring a season-best 90.18 points for their rhythm dance to lead Canadian rivals Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier.

Gilles and Poirier scored 86.44 points to their dance, set to music from The Beach Boys. They held the lead only long enough for the U.S. duo to finish their “tour of the decades” program, which earned them a raucous ovation inside TD Garden.

The International Skating Union chose the theme this season of social dances and styles of the 1950's, 60's and 70's. But while some skaters picked one - the Watusi, the Madison or disco - Chock and Bates threw it all into their rollicking showcase.

“It was probably the most fun I've had thus far on competitive ice in a performance, maybe ever,” Chock said. “It was really a joy to perform in front of a home crowd and share that excitement with Evan. It was the best.”

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Bochum's Cristian Gamboa, left, and Leverkusen's Jeremie Frimpong fight for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Bayer Leverkusen and VfL Bochum at the BayArena in Leverkusen, Germany. Leverkusen won 3-0. (AP) — See Page 15

Sports

Amir Cup final set for June 16, Crown Prince Cup final on May 19, confirms KFA

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: The Chairman of the Kuwait Football Association, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef, has confirmed that the Amir Cup Final for the 2024-2025 season will take place on June 16, while the Crown Prince Cup Final is scheduled for May 19.

Al-Yousef extended his deep

gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his patronage of the tournament.

He also expressed his sincere appreciation to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, may God protect him, for his continued

support.

While the Amir Cup has yet to begin, the Crown Prince Cup has already kicked off with its preliminary round. Kuwait Club defeated Al-Tadamon 5-0 while Khaitan edged past Al-Sulaibikhat 4-1 on penalties, after a 0-0 draw. Kazma beat Al-Yarmouk 3-1 to advance.

Al-Salmiya dominated Burgan 5-1 as Al-Fahaheel secured a 2-0 win over Al-Shabab.

The remaining fixtures in the round include:

Al-Qadsiya vs. Al-Nasr (Monday) Al-Arabi vs. Al-Sahel (Tuesday) Al-Jahra vs. Al-Jazeera (Wednesday)



Amir Cup trophy

Timberwolves complete 4-game season sweep of Suns



Detroit Pistons center Isaiah Stewart, left, and Cleveland Cavaliers forward De'Andre Hunter chase a loose ball during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Detroit. (AP)

Pistons lock down 1st winning season since 2016

MINNEAPOLIS, March 29, (AP): Julius Randle scored 25 points, Anthony Edwards finished with 20 after missing the second quarter due to injury and the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the Phoenix Suns 124-109 on Friday night.

The Timberwolves completed a four-game season sweep of the Suns. Minnesota has won its last seven against Phoenix, dating to last year's postseason.

Edwards was hit in the face by Phoenix's Kevin Durant with 2:43 to play in the first quarter. Edwards attempted to intercept a pass intended for Durant, whose arm caught Edwards in the nose. Edwards fell to the ground in pain and remained down for a minute before being escorted to the locker room.

Durant had a team-best 23 points for Phoenix. Collin Gillespie added a career-high 22 points and nine assists.

The Suns have lost two in a row after winning four straight games. The Suns' Bradley Beal missed his sixth straight game due to a left hamstring injury.

Pistons 133, Cavaliers 122

In Detroit, Tim Hardaway Jr. scored a season-high 32 points and the Detroit Pistons beat the Eastern Conference-leading Cleveland Cavaliers to guarantee their first winning season since 2016.

Detroit withstood a 38-point performance by Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell, who scored 22 in the fourth quarter.

The Pistons (42-32) played without Cade Cunningham (calf) and were still able to end a 12-game losing streak against Cleveland.

Dennis Schroder started for Cunningham and had 16 points and 10 assists. Jalen Duren added 16 points and 13 rebounds, and Ausur Thompson contributed 18 points and 10 boards for Detroit, which failed to win 25 games in

the last five seasons.

The Pistons have eight regular-season games remaining. With three more wins, Detroit could reach 45 victories for the first time since going 59-23 in 2007-08 — also the last season it won a playoff game.

Darius Garland had 21 points for Cleveland, which hadn't lost to the Pistons since Feb. 24, 2022, when current Pistons coach J.B. Bickerstaff was in charge of the Cavaliers.

The Cavaliers trailed 108-89 with 8:56 to play and closed within 119-117 on Mitchell's 3-pointer with 3:31 left. Detroit answered with a 12-1 run to close out the win.

Warriors 115, Pelicans 95

In New Orleans, Stephen Curry scored 23 points in his return from a two-game absence and the Golden State Warriors beat the New Orleans Pelicans.

Coming back from a March 20 pelvic bruise, Curry played 34 minutes and made just 7 of 21 shots, but also hit five 3-pointers.

Jimmy Butler had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Jonathan Kuminga added 16 points for the Warriors, now 1-2 on what could be a pivotal six-game road trip as they

try to earn a top-six seeding in the Western Conference and bypass the play-in.

Bruce Brown scored 18 for injury-depleted New Orleans, which played without four starters including Zion Williamson (lower back).

Yves Missi had 12 points and 10 rebounds, the rookie center's 12th double-double.

The Pelicans led by as many as 12 points in the first quarter. Brandin Podziemski and Curry each hit 3s during an 8-0 Warriors run to open the third, and Golden State maintained the lead for nearly the entire second half.

Knicks 116, Bucks 107

In Milwaukee, OG Anunoby scored 20 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter and the New York Knicks defeated Milwaukee to hand the Bucks their third consecutive loss.

Mikal Bridges added 26 points for the Knicks, who took the lead for good less than four minutes into the game. Josh Hart had 13 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists. Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 14 points and 10 rebounds.

Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points, nine rebounds and seven assists in his return after missing one game with

a sprained left foot. Kyle Kuzma and Ryan Rollins added 20 points apiece, with Rollins getting a career high.

Clippers 132, Nets 100

In New York, Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points and the Los Angeles Clippers overwhelmed the Brooklyn Nets 132-100 for their second straight victory and 10th in 12 games as they fight to hold on to sixth place in the Western Conference.

Leonard was 5 of 6 from 3-point range, 10 of 14 overall from the field and made all six of his free throws. He also had six rebounds, four steals and two blocks in just under 27 minutes.

Ivica Zubac scored 21 points on 9-for-9 shooting and had 12 rebounds for Los Angeles. James Harden added 17 points.

Keon Johnson had 13 points for Brooklyn. The Nets have lost six straight and are 1-9 in last 10 and 2-16 in last 18.

Nuggets 129, Jazz 93

In Denver, Nikola Jokic had 27 points and 14 rebounds before sitting the fourth quarter and the Denver Nuggets beat the Utah Jazz to pad their lead in the fight for the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference.

Denver leads the Los Angeles Lakers and Memphis Grizzlies by two games. The Nuggets trail Houston by 1 1/2 games for the second seed.

Jokic had 11 rebounds in the first quarter, nearly matching his game average of 12.8. Michael Porter Jr. finished with 20 points, and Christian Braun had 16.

Nuggets point guard Jamal Murray didn't play. Utah was missing Lauri Markkanen and John Collins, its top two scorers.

Raptors 108, Hornets 97

In Toronto, Jakob Poeltl had 24 points and 12 rebounds to lead the Toronto Raptors to their third straight win, a 108-97 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Immanuel Quickley scored 19 points on 6-for-15 shooting, including 5 for 8 from 3-point distance, and added nine assists.

Petrovic to stay on

Qadsiya cements third-place finish in Zain Premier League

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Montenegrin coach Zeljko Petrovic is on the verge of renewing his contract with Qadsiya for another season. Recent discussions between both parties have resulted in an agreement on most terms, reflecting the club's satisfaction with his leadership. Under Petrovic's guidance, Qadsiya has made a strong impact, securing a spot in the Gulf Champions League final, where it will face Iraq's Duhok in a two-legged tie in early April. The team also holds third place in the Zain Premier League.

Qadsiyah closed out its Zain Premier League campaign with a 2-1 win over Khaitan in the 18th and final round, cementing its third-place finish with 37 points. Meanwhile, Khaitan remains in ninth place with 11 points.

Despite its efforts, Khaitan failed to secure a crucial point before heading into the relegation playoff battle, where it must overtake Al-Nasr (12 points) to retain their Premier League status.

With little time to rest, Qadsiya has already shifted focus to three crucial competitions: Crown Prince Cup Preliminary Round – Facing Al-Nasr tomorrow in a postponed fixture. Championship League (Top Six League) – Opening against Al-Fahaheel on Friday. Gulf Champions League Final – Hosting Duhok (Iraq) on April 8 for the first leg.

The team is racing against time to recover key players Khaled Ibrahim, Abdulaziz Wadi, and Bader Al-Mutawa, who are nursing muscle injuries. Elsewhere, Kazma took a major step toward Premier League survival, climbing to seventh place with 19 points after a 2-0 victory over Yarmouk. With three matches remaining, it needs just one more point to secure its place. On the other hand, Yarmouk's survival hopes are fading, sitting at the bottom of the table with six points. To avoid relegation, it must win all three of its remaining matches while hoping Al-Nasr (9 points) continues to drop points.

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Kazma and Yarmouk players fighting for the ball.

Al-Jahra claims sole lead in First Division League



Players in action during the First Division League match.

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 29: Al-Jahra surged to the top of the First Division League after securing a crucial 2-1 victory over Al-Shabab in the 11th round of the competition on Friday at Mubarak Al-Ayyar Stadium.

Al-Jahra now leads the league with 12 points, while Al-Shabab dropped to third place, remaining at 12 points.

The "Sons of the Red Palace" showcased resilience, overturning a one-goal deficit to claim

their first-time top position this season. To reward the team's efforts, Al-Jahra Club President Yousef Karim awarded each player a bonus of 150 dinars.

In another match, Al-Sulaibikhat and Al-Sahel played to a 1-1 draw at Al-Sahel's home stadium. The result pushed Al-Sulaibikhat up to second place with 12 points, while Al-Sahel, despite reaching 9 points, remained at the bottom of the table.

Fourth-placed Burgan, with 10 points, did not participate in this round.