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# New govt says it respects court ruling to scrap polls

Cabinet vows to implement all rulings in accordance with constitution and law



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the Kuwait Blind Association (top) and Kuwait Disabled Sports Club (above) on Monday, April 10, 2023. — KUNA photos (See Page 2)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The new government discussed at its first meeting Monday night the constitutional court's ruling to annul the Sept 29, 2022 elections and scrap the entire poll process, saying it fully respects all verdicts issued by Kuwait courts. In a statement following the meeting chaired by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, the Cabinet said it will implement all court rulings in accordance with the constitution and Kuwaiti law.

The new government was sworn in on

Monday by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who urged the government to push for reforms and called for applying the law equally on all. The constitutional court on March 19 annulled the September elections, scrapping the 2022 National Assembly which was dominated by the opposition.

It also reinstated the previous National Assembly, elected in 2020, which was dissolved by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in August last year over disputes with the govern-

ment. The court found that the Amiri decree which dissolved the previous Assembly was not in line with the constitution.

The government statement did not say whether it will cooperate with the revived Assembly or recommend to HH the Amir to dissolve it again and call for fresh polls. Speaker of the reinstated Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem has called for fresh polls, but only after allowing the Assembly to pass a series of laws to ensure free and fair elections, including the establishment of a higher election commission.

## AI news presenter Fedha 'represents everyone' in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait News has unveiled a virtual news presenter generated using artificial intelligence, with plans for it to read online bulletins. "Fedha" appeared on the Twitter account of the Kuwait News website on Saturday as an image of a woman, her light-colored hair uncovered, wearing a black jacket and white T-shirt. "I'm Fedha, the first presenter in Kuwait who works with artificial intelligence at Kuwait News. What kind of news do you prefer? Let's hear your opinions," she said in classical Arabic. The site is a sister concern of Kuwait Times, founded in 1961 as the Gulf's first English-language daily.

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Boftain said the move is a test of AI's

potential to offer "new and innovative content". In future Fedha could adopt the Kuwaiti accent and present news bulletins on the site's Twitter account, which has 1.2 million followers, he said. "Fedha is a popular, old Kuwaiti name that refers to silver, the metal. We always imagine robots to be silver and metallic in colour, so we combined the two," Boftain said.

The presenter's blonde hair and light-colored eyes reflect the country's diverse population of Kuwaitis and expatriates, according to Boftain. "Fedha represents everyone," he said. Her initial 13-second video generated a flood of reactions on social media, including from journalists, with widespread coverage all over the world. — AFP



Kuwait News' AI presenter Fedha

### RAMADAN KAREEM

## Let's not forget real benefits of fasting-II

By Dr Imam M Musa Azam-Ibrahimi

Sahru Ramadan, the month of Ramadan, is, as every Muslim knows, the month of fasting. As our Creator says: "The month of Ramadan is the month in which The Quran was revealed as guidance for humanity and as clear evidence of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights the new moon of the month, let him fast it..." (Quran 2:185)

### Fasting Strengthens Community Life

One of the benefits of fasting is that it helps the different layers of our community life to better understand each other's living conditions. People's livelihoods are diverse - some are rich, others are poor, while most are in between.

Continued on Page 6

## Grand Mosque holds qiyam prayers for first time in 3 years

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: Nightly prayers were held at the Grand Mosque for the first time in three years early Tuesday after closures due to the COVID pandemic and maintenance work. Security personnel and volunteers maintained order as worshippers streamed into the mosque for the qiyam ul layl prayers, held in the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan. The first four rakats of tahajjud prayers were led by Sheikh Omar Al-Damkhi, while the remaining four rakats were led by Sheikh Khaled Al-Juhaym.

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: Worshippers attend qiyam prayers at the Grand Mosque on April 11, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Yemen prisoner swap to start from Thursday

DUBAI: A prisoner exchange involving hundreds of detainees from Yemen's brutal civil war will start on Thursday, a Yemeni government official said, against a backdrop of rising hopes for peace. Nearly 900 prisoners, most of whom were fighting

with Houthi rebels, will be flown between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, which leads the military coalition fighting on behalf of the ousted government, the official said on Tuesday.

This week, a Saudi delegation has held discussions with the Houthi leadership in Sanaa, hoping to "stabilize" the truce and seeking inter-Yemeni dialogue towards a "comprehensive political solution", according to the Saudi ambassador. "I visit Sanaa along with a delegation from the brotherly Sultanate of Oman to stabilize the truce and ceasefire," Mohammed Al-Jaber said on Twitter in the first official comment from Saudi authorities about the trip. He

added that he also wants to "support the prisoner exchange process and explore venues of dialogue between Yemeni components to reach a sustainable, comprehensive political solution".

A truce announced roughly a year ago has significantly reduced active hostilities within Yemen, and is still largely respected even though it officially expired in October, providing respite for a population of 30 million that is mostly dependent on aid. A Yemeni government source, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said at the weekend that the Saudis and Houthis had agreed in principle on a new

Continued on Page 6

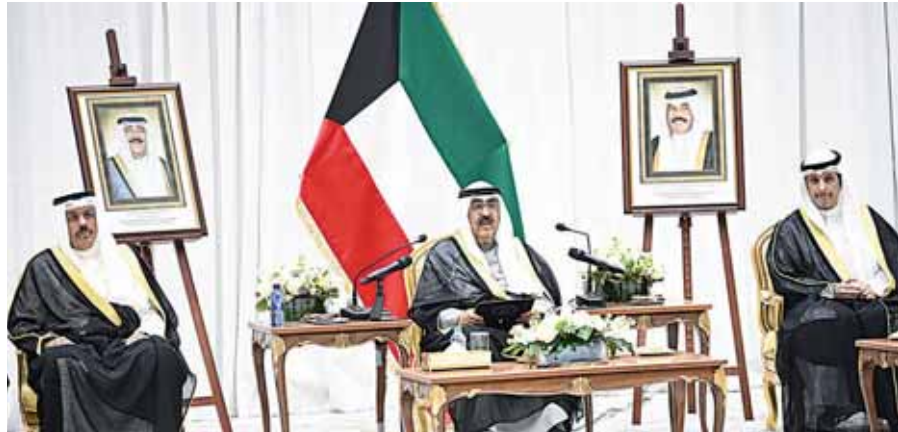




## Local

# Crown Prince praises Disabled Sports Club for supporting athletes

Cooperation with Public Authority for Sport contributes to club's outstanding achievement



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) speaks during his visit to the sports club.



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) is seen with senior officials during his visit.



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah watches a demonstration by an athlete at the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club.



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a souvenir during his visit.

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, visited on Monday the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club (KDSC). They were warmly welcomed by Minister of Information

and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sport Faisal Nasser Al-Yateem and KDSC Chairman Shafi Al-Hajeri. His Highness the Amir's Representative and Crown Prince delivered a speech, in which he conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir to KDSC members on the holy month of Ramadan. He

wished every success to the club under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. KDSC Chairman expressed his best wishes for His Highness the Amir's Representative, appreciating the limitless support from the State for the Club and its board and members.

He lauded the national partnership between the Club and the Public Authority for Sport which helped

Kuwaiti athletes make outstanding achievements on the regional and international levels. During his visit, His Highness the Amir's Representative was also accompanied by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and other senior State officials. — KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) is seen during his visit to the Kuwait Blind Association on Monday April 10, 2023. — KUNA photos



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) is pictured with other senior officials and representatives from the Kuwait Blind Association.

## Crown Prince lauds Blind Association's various contributions

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited the Kuwait Blind Association on Monday. His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech, in which he conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir to the association's members on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished every success to the association under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness congratulated the association on its 50th anniversary, as well as on its efforts and contributions on social, cultural, academic and sport levels, especially the distribution of Braille-system Quran copies both locally and abroad. During the visit, His Highness the Crown Prince was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal

Khaled Al-Ahmad, as well as senior state officials.



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) receives a souvenir during his visit to the Kuwait Blind Association.

Khaled Al-Ahmad, as well as senior state officials.

His Highness the Crown Prince was received by Minister of Social Affairs, Women and Child Affairs Mai Al-Baghli. Chairman of the Association Fayeze Al-Azmi welcomed His Highness the Crown Prince, conveying his congratulations and greetings to His Highness the Amir on Ramadan. — KUNA

## Kuwait, Turkey discuss bilateral ties, investments

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Turkey held on Tuesday the eighth round of political talks at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters. Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi led

the Kuwaiti side, while Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Burak Akcapar led the Turkish side.

During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral ties, strategic cooperation and ways to enhance relations on all levels. They also discussed how to overcome obstacles facing Kuwaiti investors and real estate owners in Turkey, alongside construction projects owned by Turkish companies in Kuwait, in addition to the latest regional and international developments. — KUNA



## Kuwait supports Palestinian cause

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait has a long history of supporting the Palestinian cause. The country has consistently expressed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and their aspirations for an independent and sovereign state. Kuwait has provided financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people over the years. It has also been a vocal advocate for Palestinian rights in international forums such as the United Nations, calling for an end to the Zionist occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Zionist exploratory research has showed Kuwaitis are the most committed to boycotting the Zionist entity in the Middle East and reject the most the idea of accepting dealing with them in the fields of trade, sports and defense. A random survey conducted by the Arabian Gulf Center for Studies and Research (CSRGULF) showed that about 95 percent of Kuwaitis oppose the idea of normalization of relations with the Zionist occupier or trade with it as long as the Palestinian cause has not yet been resolved.

The study showed 70 percent of the sample expressed complete refusal to deal with the Zionist entity in any case. Some Zionist research platforms, thinktanks and research centers promote information described as 'misleading' about the desire of Arab peoples to normalize with the Zionist entity and publish inaccurate and conflicting statistics about the rates of Arab acceptance of the idea of coexistence. The Zionist propaganda seeks to influence Gulf public opinion and bring about a change in the stereotypical idea of boycotting them and to improve Kuwaitis' view of the Zionist entity as a potential future partner.

In 2021, Kuwaitis expressed their position towards the Zionist entity and the Palestine issue frankly and clearly. More than 93 percent of them

declared their rejection of normalization. Head of the Center for Gulf Studies and the Arabian Peninsula at Kuwait University Faisal Abu Salih, who conducted a study about Kuwaiti public opinion towards the normalization with the Zionist entity revealed that the majority of Kuwaitis reject normalization with the Zionist entity, recognizing it, even on the level of academic and research cooperation, as well as exchanging technological expertise to benefit from them.

In addition, Kuwaitis rejected having Jewish friends who live in the Zionist entity through social media platforms. The study showed that 89.03 percent of the total sample believe that the Zionist entity is not a model for a democratic state in the region, where 86.07 percent of them (strongly disagree) with Kuwait's normalization with the Zionist entity, while 7.06 percent disagree with that, meaning that 93.13 percent of the sample do not agree with Kuwait's normalization of relations. It showed that 2.66 percent of the sample is neutral on this issue, 2.62 percent of them agree with normalization, and 1.59 percent agree strongly agree.

Regarding finding the Zionist entity as a threat to Kuwait, the study said that 2.64 percent are neutral, 2.24 percent agree, and 1.17 percent strongly agree. According to the study, 63.38 percent of the sample strongly disagree that the Zionist entity does not pose a threat to Kuwait, while 14.59 percent disagree with that, meaning that 77.96 percent of the respondents believe that the Zionist entity poses a threat to Kuwait.

According to the study figures, 75.63 percent of the total sample strongly disagree that Jews in the Zionist entity have historical rights to the land of Palestine, while 11.10 percent disagree with that, meaning that 86.73 percent of the total sample oppose the statement that the Jews in the Zionist entity have rights in the land of Palestine. The study indicated those aged 30 years and under had a negative attitude to a greater degree than those 31 years and over towards the recognition of the Zionist entity and the view of the Zionist entity. This result can be justified given that the younger age group of 30 and under is the most enthusiastic and daring to express its opinion.



Local

# Muslims level up worship as Ramadan nears end

## Taking small steps, time management help worshippers stay productive



KUWAIT: Muslims make an effort to perform more acts of worship, such as Qiyam prayers, during the last ten days of Ramadan. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nebal Snan

**KUWAIT:** Preparing for the last ten days of Ramadan begins at the start of the month for Noor Al-Huda Al-Hudaib, a mother and teacher from Kuwait. The final stretch of the holy month is known to be the most blessed, with Muslims increasing their good deeds to seek Allah's mercy. Although many people around her make elaborate schedules, with plans to fill their day to the brim with worship, Hudaib builds her stamina little by little.

Being a working mom, the first third of Ramadan can be a handful, as she juggles maximizing her worship and adapting to drastic changes in her family's routine. Keeping up with social obligations, exchanging greetings and gifts with loved ones and caring for her family can take a toll. "There's so much joy and happiness during the first third. There's also exhaustion as our bodies adjust to the Ramadan diet and the long fasting hours. So I find that the quality of my worship rituals improves gradually as we inch closer to the second third of Ramadan," she says.

As she gets used to Ramadan's rhythm, the last ten days are when Hudaib says she begins to "taste the sweetness" of

worship. Hudaib's strategy for the last ten days is simple: Focus your efforts and don't stretch yourself too thin. "I don't like setting unrealistic expectations. So, I make sure to increase my worship only slightly more than the rest of Ramadan. In my supplications, I like to repeat 'Oh Allah, you are forgiving and love forgiveness, so forgive me,'" she says.

### Ramadan vibes

Yara Eyad, a teacher who's lived most her life in Kuwait, says finding balance between work, worship and social responsibilities is all about time management. "When I have free time at school, I get all the work done, like grading papers, doing the assessment with students ... so that when I come home I can focus on reading the Quran or visiting my relatives ... (or) going to the masjid."

After living in North America for the past few years, Eyad is cherishing the sense of community and festive atmosphere in Kuwait this year more than ever. The beautiful decorations and the hustle and bustle of Ramadan nights make the month all the more special, she says. "It's so nice how people here in Ramadan are always positive," says Eyad. "I don't usu-

ally like crowded places, but during Ramadan, it's different. The vibes are different here in Kuwait."

The spirit of togetherness that envelops Ramadan is Abdurahiim Roberts' favorite thing about the month. "You're getting up with your family early in the morning for suhoor. You're breaking your fast together as a family. You go together to taraweeh. ... The family worship is stronger in Ramadan," says Roberts, who has lived in Kuwait since 2006.

### Going the extra mile

Like many Muslims, Roberts seeks Laylatul Qadr, one of the most sacred nights in the Islamic calendar. Although the exact date of Laylatul Qadr is unknown, it's thought to occur on an odd night in the last ten days of Ramadan. It's believed to be the night in which Allah shows great mercy to all creatures, so Muslims spend it praising Allah, thanking him for his blessings and asking for forgiveness. Offering prayers and remembrance (thikr) and reading the Quran are examples of acts of worship Muslims do during the night. "I love to do more (worship), especially in the last ten days. When you reach that time,

when your body is starting to get a bit tired, that's when you have to make the most effort," says Roberts.

In her quest to amplify her worship, Hudaib goes as far as deleting social media applications that take up too much of her time. "Social media apps could have a negative effect on our spirituality if they take us away from being conscious of Allah's presence, which is the basis of our worship during Ramadan," says Hudaib. "Taqwa demands our concentration, so we need to eliminate potential sources of distraction, such as spending too much time shopping online or looking up recipes on Instagram."

At the same time, some apps have the potential to help Muslims grow their relationship with Allah, if used correctly, says Hudaib. Some people benefit from WhatsApp groups, where participants encourage each other to do more acts of worship. Others use YouTube, for example, as a resource for learning about the teachings of Islam or listening to tafseer, the detailed explanation of the Quran. "These resources were not readily available to people, especially women, who would be too busy taking care of their family to go to the mosque and attend a lecture," she says.

**Don't be afraid to ask**

Ramadan can also be an opportunity for sharing the teachings of Islam with non-Muslims, who might have misconceptions about Ramadan or Islam in general. When Eyad observed Ramadan abroad, her colleagues would ask her about fasting. "They were surprised about how patient I was and how energetic I was. They were like, how could you manage?" she says. "We had a conversation about it and they understood that it's about learning how to be patient and healthy and balancing between our desires and duties. Two of them were curious to try (fasting) and were happy they did."

Roberts urged non-Muslims to seek answers to the questions they might have about Islam from Muslims around them. He advised Muslims to always be approachable and kind. "You can't understand that something's a misconception unless you speak to the people who are practicing their religion," he says. "Sometimes Arabic can sound a little harsh to a non-Arab speaker. And you'll think: 'Oh, is he angry with me?' But no, that's just how some people speak. ... I think people in Kuwait are very open and polite."

## EU Delegation hails Kuwait ties, holds ghabqa for media

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The EU Delegation in Kuwait held a ghabqa on Monday for media representatives on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. During the event, Gediminas Varanavicius, Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union Delegation in Kuwait, thanked local media representatives for their cooperation and coverage of EU-Kuwait relations and EU-related news throughout the year.

Varanavicius hailed the excellent EU-Kuwait bilateral ties, where both sides are determined to build on these strong relations, as evidenced during recent positive meetings between high-level representatives from EU and Kuwait, mentioning EU is the second biggest trading partner for Kuwait and the EU Delegation is determined to translate these words into action by seeking to do more together with Kuwait.

"The EU is eager to continue its political dialogue with Kuwait to compare notes on global and regional files. I hope the next political consultations between EU and Kuwait could be organized later this year," he said, noting the EU has worked constructively with Kuwait on regional issues such as Syria and the Middle East peace process, welcoming Kuwait's participation and generous pledge at the international donors' conference for the people of Turkey and Syria affected by the earthquake. He stated the EU also counts on Kuwait's participation in the 7th Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region", scheduled for June 15.

Varanavicius pointed out that in May 2022, the European Commission adopted a joint communication on a "Strategic Partnership with the Gulf" that aims at enhancing its relations with the GCC - including Kuwait - on a wide range of areas, covering political dialogue, security, counterterrorism, trade and investment, en-



KUWAIT: Gediminas Varanavicius, Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union Delegation poses for a group photo with local media.

vironment, climate change, education, health, cybersecurity and strengthening coordination in multilateral fora.

"The above strategy was translated into joint activities throughout the year between the EU and Kuwait. For instance, on security, the EU organized earlier this year, in cooperation with Kuwait's ministry of information, a specialized strategic communication workshop on tactics and strategies to counter radical, extremist and terrorist narratives," Varanavicius said, revealing that this workshop is the first of its kind in the Gulf region and that it has shown that both Kuwait and the EU are facing common global challenges, including on security. The enhanced relationship with the Gulf region and Kuwait in particular is important to overcome those challenges together.

To facilitate people-to-people contacts, the EU Delegation and 16 EU member states represented in Kuwait will celebrate Europe Day on May 9, highlighting the joint aspirations of EU member states under the umbrella of the EU. The date marks the anniversary of the historic Schuman Declaration, which set out the idea for a new form of political cooperation in Europe, preparing the ground for what is now the European Union.

Varanavicius said another element of people-to-people contact is engaging with the youth. In this context, he shared that he was delighted when three outstanding Kuwaiti students from Kuwait University were recognized by the EU Delegation in Kuwait as women and

environment ambassadors in a competition organized in partnership with the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University. The students produced inspiring policy papers, which touched on key aspects of women's role in environmental policies in Kuwait.

"Facilitating travel is an important element of enhancing people-to-people contacts. The Schengen visa waiver for Kuwaiti nationals is currently in the European Parliament. The draft legislation will have to be endorsed by the European Parliament before the next steps of the EU legislative process can commence," Varanavicius said.

Regarding EU-Kuwait cooperation in international fora, he said Kuwait has always expressed its unwavering support for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, while condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine. "The EU appreciates this principled stance, which was evident in Kuwait's support to UN resolutions condemning the Russian invasion and calling for its immediate halt. EU counts on Kuwait's continuous support in this regard."

Varanavicius concluded by saying that during the visit of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell to Kuwait last year, he stressed during his meeting with HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the strength of the EU-Kuwait partnership. "For the European Union, Kuwait stands as a close and reliable partner," Borrell said.

## Governor receives Indian ambassador



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika met with Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate Mahmoud A. Boushahri on Tuesday. The ambassador thanked the governor for ensuring the welfare of Indian community within his jurisdiction. He also informed him of various steps being taken to increase people-to-people relations, including in the fields of tourism and healthcare.

## Online gaming traps students, concerns parents

By Alexis De Leon

**KUWAIT:** Online gameplay is becoming more and more common, especially among teenagers, as a growing number of individuals has access to high-speed internet. Concerns about the effects of excessive use have increased along with the popularity of online games. Internet gaming disorder was recognized as a mental illness by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2019. All over the globe, addiction to online gaming has emerged as a significant public health issue.

Teenagers are the age group most likely to face the adverse effects of technology, such as internet games. The loss of control over using online games causes Internet Gaming Disorder, which interferes with other daily tasks. Research has shown that adolescent online game addiction has an effect on social, academic, psychological, and health aspects of life.

Adolescents may become trapped in their obsession due to a lack of knowledge about the dangers of online game addiction. "I spent 9 to 10 hours gaming during high school. I would skip class to play games actually. During the weekends, I would game for 12 to 13 hours. I don't sleep much," Redwan Ahmed, graduated student and now a licensed gaming coach told Kuwait Times.

Ahmed used to participate in professional "Counter Strike - Global Offensive" tournaments for roughly over two and half to three years when he was in high school. He took part in 30 to 40 tournaments that earned him an estimate of \$15,000. However, because he constantly had gaming on his mind, it affected his hygiene and academics — he earned B's and C's, compared to the A's he got before discovering online games. Ahmed also mentioned that he would put off brushing his teeth and showering for playing another round. "I'm not that addicted now. Back then, I used to be very addicted. But now, I just don't play games that much anymore. I only play sometimes with a friend or so," Ahmed confessed.

Pix, an honors achiever in grade 11 STEM, has also participated in a few tournaments, winning a total of \$200 through playing for more than 10 hours a day as a junior high school student. "But now since I'm al-



most graduating, the timespan has gone from 10 hours to simply just a few minutes," he added. Pix admitted that as he lessened his time playing games, his grades got better. "If we're talking about when I was in junior high school, yeah, I'd consider myself addicted at that time, but not anymore," said Pix.

Rob Asumen, another honors achiever in STEM, said: "During the pandemic, I spent 7 to 8 hours gaming every day. After the pandemic, it's been shortened to 1 to 3 hours." Asumen added that one of the main purposes of gaming is to bring people together, both online and in real life. That's why when his friends are not online, he ends up studying instead of playing. Asumen doesn't think he is addicted to gaming but

said it's become a part of who he is. "I don't mean that I can't live without it. I don't make gaming my entire personality and my entire life, but you can't describe me without gaming," said Asumen.

Some parents are concerned about their children's online gaming habits. Rasha Al-Adawi has a 13-year-old son who often thinks about playing internet games. "All his focus and priorities are to buy new games and accessories instead of studying, which is why I will take (the games) away during school days so he can focus more," she said.

Claire, a mother of an 11-year-old child, said he is only allowed to play during the weekends. "He can only play for a maximum of 2 to 3 hours. He always asks for an extension to his time but we make sure to be strict with him because we're concerned for his eyes. He's wearing glasses which is why we started limiting his screen time," said Claire.

Oliver's 16-year-old son can only play for approximately an hour after completing his school work. "He goes to the gym every other day and plays badminton every Friday," said Oliver. Both students and parents emphasized that you should do what you enjoy doing, just not at the expense of your own health. It's all a matter of self-control and being able to prioritize yourself more than your games.



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Kuwaiti students in Jordan support and offer aid to Syrian refugees. — KUNA photos

# Kuwaiti students in Jordan provide humanitarian assistance to refugees



AMMAN: Kuwaiti students in Jordan had reflected their country's keen interest in supporting others via partaking in humanitarian efforts to aid Syrian refugees there. Charge d'Affaires at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Jordan Dr Mubarak Al-Hajri told KUNA that

the students' initiative came in line with the Kuwaiti government's policies to aid those in need far and wide. He noted that the students were partaking in "Kuwait by your side" campaign under the supervision of the Kuwaiti embassy in Jordan in coordina-

tion with Kuwaiti and Jordanian humanitarian societies.

On his part, the students' campaign coordinator Abdulrazzaq Al-Qallaf said that the campaign aimed at relieving the suffering of refugees in Jordan. The campaign

came in coordination with Nama charitable society and the Kuwaiti embassy in Jordan, he added. Speaking on part of the students, Hamad Al-Kandari and Manal Al-Harbi both said that Kuwaiti students were keen on providing a helping hand to Syrian refugees in Jordan es-

## Rehab Boresli honored for role in UN committee

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Trade Union Federation recognized member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Founder and Chairperson of the Kuwaiti Society for Guardians of the Disabled Rehab Boresli on the occasion of beginning her term at the international organization, which will continue until 2026.

The honoring took place during the girgian celebration themed: "Our joy ... is in our gathering", which was organized by the trade union in cooperation with several entities, including the disabled and working women's committees along with volunteer teams "Amal Gate" and "Kuwait Pearls". Advisor to the federation and head of the office of migrant labor Mohammad Al-Arada, Secretary of Culture and Information at the Union Jamal Al-Sawagh,



KUWAIT: Rehab Boresli (second right) receives a certificate on the occasion of beginning her term at the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Chairman of the Board of Al-Tahaddi Disabled Sports Club Mohammad Al-Otaibi and head of the "Amal Gate" volunteer group Anwar Al-Kandari were present.

Boresli said she appreciated the federation's initiative,

which opened doors to cooperating with volunteer teams and NGOs, particularly those concerned with caring for disabled people, organizing activities to highlight their role in society and advocating for them as a group capable of con-

tributing to the country's development. She commended the joyous atmosphere at the celebration, including a contest for the best drawing about Kuwait heritage, in which a group of talented people with disabilities participated.



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## Huawei organizes Ramadan 'Media Gathering 2023'

KUWAIT: Huawei, a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and smart devices, successfully held the "Ramadan Media Gathering 2023" on Wednesday, 5th of April, 2023 at the luxurious Kubar Tents in Waldorf Astoria. The Ghabqa's objective was to strengthen the ties between Huawei and the media and its partners. In addition, to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan with the media to show Huawei's appreciation for their support while paving the way for greater understanding between them.

With the presence of Paul Fanshibao, Director of Kuwait Device Office, Li Yiqi, the Marketing Director, and Humood Al-Shaheen, the Public Relations Manager from Huawei Kuwait Device Business Group. From Huawei Kuwait Rep Office, Henry Ye, Director of Gulf North Public Relations, Di Xu, Director of Huawei Kuwait Public Relations, and Zhao Fang, who warmly welcomed the guests and wished them a blessed Ramadan and thanked them for their constant support.

Countless valued guests arrived to Huawei's Ghabqa that varies from press, media influencers, TV stations, public relations representatives from several government entities, and the distinguished guests from the Chinese embassy. The hotel had this wonderful Ra-



madan-themed poolside area called Kubar Tent, that is filled with wonderful decorations and dimmed lights around the well-arranged buffet area. As the time passed by, it is made sure that the bond between Huawei and the media is stronger than ever.

The event provided media practitioners with an opportunity to engage Huawei and get connected with peers and share ideas in a relaxed and informal setting. Huawei has been operating in Kuwait for over 20 years, Huawei not only continues to support Kuwait's digital transformation in ICT infrastructure, talent ecosystem..., but also remains committed to supporting initiatives that promote community engagement and cultural exchange to build a better society.

At the same time, Huawei took the initiative to listen to their customers' reviews and feedbacks regarding their products and services. The guests at the Ghabqa found that all mainstream apps like Google Maps, YouTube and Google Drive can be easily downloaded from HUAWEI App Gallery. This was Huawei Kuwait's first Media Ghabqa in which the company had presented its sustainable and high-efficiency innovations to the public.

The main highlight of this year's Ghabqa was the promotion of the much-awaited and SOLD-OUT HUAWEI Watch Buds in Kuwait, which was released on the 30th of March, 2023, and announced Huawei "In Kuwait, For Kuwait" social values stories to the media guests. Multiple unreleased products were showcased including other exciting upcoming devices like buds and smartphones! In terms of wearable tech, Huawei continued to garner the interest of the market with its health and fitness products, like the revolutionary HUAWEI Watch Buds, which set the high technological standard for design.





**Bold Chinese vessels frustrate Taiwan's fishing communities**

## Air strikes kill dozens in coup-hit Myanmar



AMSTERDAM: French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and his wife Brigitte Macron (C) are welcomed by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands (2ndR) and his wife Maxima (R) during a welcoming ceremony in Amsterdam on April 11, 2023 as part of a state visit to the Netherlands. — AFP

# Macron visits Netherlands amid row over China comments

**‘The United States are our allies, we share common values’**

AMSTERDAM: French President Emmanuel Macron began a state visit to the Netherlands on Tuesday seeking to calm a furore over his controversial remarks on Europe and China. Macron will give a speech on European sovereignty that will be closely watched after he said in an interview that Europe must not be a “follower” of either Washington or Beijing on Taiwan.

Making the first state visit by a French president to the Netherlands for 23 years, Macron and his wife Brigitte were greeted by Dutch King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima on their arrival in Amsterdam. The French leader stood to attention alongside the Dutch royals outside the Royal Palace as a band played the Marseillaise, the French national anthem. A few people cheered as Macron’s car arrived, an AFP journalist said.

But amid the pomp and ceremony, all eyes are

on Macron’s comments on China, which he visited last week. The Elysee Palace insisted Tuesday that the president had never called for Europe to keep an “equidistance” from the United States and China.

“The United States are our allies, we share common values,” the French presidency said. Macron is due to make a speech in English on “European sovereignty” in security and economic matters on Tuesday afternoon at the Dutch Nexus institute in The Hague. He will use the address to present “a doctrine of economic security” against China and the United States, amid European unease over US climate subsidies.

The speech comes after Macron said in an interview with media including French business daily Les Echos and Politico that “we don’t want to depend on others on critical issues”, citing energy, artificial intelligence and social networks.

**‘Brain death’**

Macron’s comments in the same interview on Taiwan, that Europe risks entanglement in “crises that aren’t ours” and should “depend less on the Americans” in matters of defence, have raised questions, like his past remarks on Ukraine.

“The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must be followers and adapt ourselves to the American rhythm and a Chinese overreaction,” Macron said after his three-day state visit to Beijing. His comments were criticised on both sides of the Atlantic. US Senator Marco Rubio said on Twitter that “we need to find out if Emmanuel Macron speaks for Europe.”

“A brain death has occurred somewhere, no doubt,” said the director of the Polish Institute of International Relations (PISM), Slawomir Debski, referring to the words used by the French president to describe NATO in 2019.

But the White House said Monday it was “confident” in the relationship with France despite Macron’s comments. During the two-day Dutch state visit, Macron will have a state dinner with the king and queen, see the hot-ticket Johannes Vermeer exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and meet Prime Minister Mark Rutte on a canal boat.

The visit is meant to highlight a new dynamic between Paris and The Hague after the turning point of Brexit. In the wake of the speech, Paris and The Hague will sign a “pact for innovation” on Wednesday focusing on cooperation in semiconductors, quantum physics and energy.

France and the Netherlands will also work to finalise a defence pact by 2024. The French president’s domestic political troubles also threaten to intrude on the visit, with a new day of strikes against his pension reform plans planned for Thursday. —AFP

## Philippines, US open largest war games

MANILA: The Philippines and the United States launched their largest-ever joint military exercises on Tuesday, as the longstanding allies seek to counter growing Chinese assertiveness in the region. Nearly 18,000 troops are taking part in the annual exercises dubbed Balikatan, or “shoulder to shoulder” in Filipino, which for the first time will include a live-fire drill in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost entirely.

The drills follow Monday’s conclusion of a three-day Chinese military exercise that simulated targeted strikes and a blockade of self-ruled, democratic Taiwan, which Beijing considers part of its territory. Balikatan will include military helicopters landing on a Philippine island off the northern tip of the main island of Luzon, nearly 300 kilometres (180 miles) from Taiwan, and the retaking of another island by amphibious forces.

It will be the first time the exercises have been held under President Ferdinand Marcos, who has sought to strengthen ties with the United States after his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte trashed the alliance.

“In order for us to protect our sovereign territory, we really have to drill and exercise how we are going to retake an island that’s been taken away from us,” Philippine exercises spokesman Colonel Michael Logico told reporters after the opening ceremony at a military camp in Manila.

In recent months, Manila and Washington have agreed to re-start joint maritime patrols in the South China Sea and struck a deal to expand the US forces’ footprint in the Philippines, which has infuriated China.

US troops will be allowed to use an additional four Philippine military bases under the pact, including a naval base not far from Taiwan. The Philippines’ proximity to the island could potentially make it a key US partner in the event of a Chinese invasion.

At a joint news conference Tuesday, both armies did not address questions about the Taiwan tensions and a possible role for the Philippines if China invaded Taiwan. News of the expanded base access had prompted China to accuse the United States of “endangering regional peace and stability”.

“Countries in this part of the world must uphold strategic independence and firmly resist the Cold-War mentality and bloc confrontation,” China’s ambassador to Manila, Huang Xilian, said last week.



MANILA: Philippine exercise director Major General Marvin Licudine (L) and US exercise director representative Major General Eric Austin (R) link arms during the opening ceremony of the ‘Balikatan’ joint military exercise at the military headquarters in Quezon City, suburban Manila on April 11, 2023. —AFP

**Boosting military tactics**

About 12,200 American, 5,400 Filipino and just over 100 Australian soldiers will participate in the two weeks of Balikatan exercises—about twice as many as last year. About 50 leftwing protesters staged a rally outside the opening ceremony venue, calling on the Philippine government to scrap the exercises.

As part of the exercises, troops will stage an amphibious landing on the western island of Palawan, the closest Philippine landmass to the Spratly Islands, where Beijing and Manila have rival claims.

The Americans will also use their Patriot missiles, considered one of the best air defence systems in the world, and the HIMARS precision rocket system, which has helped Ukrainian forces fighting the Russian invaders.

The two armies originally planned to fire live rounds at sea off the northern province of Ilocos Norte, about 355 kilometres from Taiwan’s south coast, but later on had to move it further down the South China Sea, Philippine Army Major-General Marvin Licudine said.

The original site was “not sufficiently prepared” for unloading the needed equipment, he added. The new venue is less than 300 kilometres east of the Chinese-held Scarborough Shoal. The exercises will enhance “tactics, techniques and procedures across a wide range of military operations,” said Philippine military spokesman Colonel Medel Aguilar. Soon after the opening ceremony in Manila, the Philippine defence and foreign ministers will jointly meet their US counterparts in Washington. — AFP

Ministry of Commerce and Industry

RECALL INFORMATION

Mercedes-Benz

MODEL: G Class (463 platform)

Model year: from 2019 to 2022



G Class (463 platform)

RECALL REASON

Mercedes-Benz AG has determined that on certain G-Class (463 platform) vehicles, the front axle wiring harness might come in contact with the auxiliary oil cooler. In this case, the wiring harness might chafe on the auxiliary oil cooler and get damaged over time. As a result, ABS and ESP functions could be impaired. This might increase the risk of an accident.

REMEDY

As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz AG, via its Mercedes-Benz service partners, will check the front axle wiring harness on the affected vehicles and replace it, if necessary as well as install a protective sleeve. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

CONTACT

Please contact Al Mulla Automobiles Co.  
Phone 1-887-888  
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre – Al Shuwaikh Industrial Area – 9 Street  
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre – Al Shuwaikh Industrial Area – 13 Street  
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This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42,43,44,45,46 and 47) of no. (27/2017) issuing the executive by laws of law no. (39/2014) on Consumer Protection.



## International

# Air strikes kill dozens in coup-hit Myanmar

## ‘We are going to rescue you if we hear you screaming’

**BANGKOK:** Dozens of people in coup-hit Myanmar's central region were killed in air strikes Tuesday, according to local media reports and a witness contacted by AFP. The country has been in chaos and its economy in tatters since the military seized power in February 2021.

The death toll from the early Tuesday morning strike on the remote Kantbalu township in Sagaing region is unclear. At least 50 fatalities and dozens wounded were reported by BBC Burmese, The Irrawaddy and Radio Free Asia.

Sagaing region — near the second-largest city Mandalay — has put up some of the fiercest resistance to the military's rule, with intense fighting raging there for months. Graphic video clips circulating on social media — that AFP has been unable to verify — show bodies scattered among the ruins of homes.

“We are going to rescue you if we hear you screaming,” one person could be heard saying in the video. “Please scream!” A rescuer — connected to an anti-coup People's Defence Force group — told AFP that women and children were among the dead.

After recovering bodies and transporting victims for medical treatment, he estimated the death toll could be up to 100. Before military aircraft strafed Pazi Gyi village, scores of locals had gathered to mark the opening of a local defence force office.

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG), a shadow body dominated by former lawmakers from ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party, condemned the strike as a “heinous act”. “We... share the great pain felt by the families affected by this tragedy,” it said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the United Nations Special Envoy to Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, said agencies were trying to verify the reports. AFP attempted to contact the junta spokesperson for comment. The military, which accuses anti-coup fighters of being terrorists, has faced international condemnation for razing villages, mass killings and air strikes on civilians.

More than 30 people sheltering in a monastery were killed in Shan state in March. Last year, a military air strike on a concert put on by the Kachin Independence Army in northern Kachin state killed around 50 people and wounded more than 70, the rebels said.

At a military parade last month, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing vowed to continue cracking down on opponents. The military last month announced a six-month extension of a state of emergency and postponed elections it had promised to hold by August because it did not control enough of the country for a vote. More than 3,200 civilians have been killed and more than 21,300 arrested since the coup, according to a local monitoring group. — AFP



**MAE SOT:** People fleeing fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic rebel groups shelter on the Thai side of the Moei river, in Mae Sot district in Tak province. Thousands of people have fled into Thailand following fierce fighting between Myanmar rebels and the military, Thai officials said. — AFP

## S Lanka delays local polls, defying court

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka again postponed local polls on Tuesday in defiance of a court order, delaying a de facto referendum on President Ranil Wickremesinghe's efforts to restore the bankrupt island nation's finances. The elections were originally slated for last month but Wickremesinghe's administration refused to finance them, saying the money was needed to pay for salaries and pensions.

His government was rebuked by the Supreme Court and ordered to release the funds for a re-scheduled vote on April 25, but so far that has not happened. The delayed polls are to pick local councillors but would be the first electoral test for Wickremesinghe since he took office.

“A new date will be announced if a firm date is given by the government to release the necessary funds or there is another decision of the Supreme Court,” the election commission said in a brief statement. Sri Lanka suffered acute shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals along with lengthy black-outs last year as a result of the worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948.

Months of protests and political upheaval culminated last July in the ouster of Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa after an angry crowd stormed his compound. The polls are widely seen as a referendum on unpopular austerity measures implemented to satisfy the terms of an International Monetary Fund bailout, including a doubling of income taxes and a sharp rise in energy tariffs.

Opposition lawmakers have accused Wickremesinghe of using the economic crisis as an excuse to sabotage democracy by delaying the election. — AFP

## Russian volcano spews ash across Kamchatka peninsula

**MOSCOW:** Russia's Shiveluch volcano erupted on Tuesday, spewing ash across a vast swathe of the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula, potentially posing a risk to flights and paralyzing several villages. Dramatic videos published by officials showed a huge wall of ash rising above a snowy forest.

Volcanologists issued a red code warning for flights and Russia's aviation authority Rosaviatsiya urged crews to “constantly monitor changes in meteorological information”. The Kamchatka Volcanic Eruption Response Team (KVERT), which monitors

eruptions in the region, reported that the ash cloud had drifted hundreds of kilometres (miles) to the north and southwest of Shiveluch.

“An extrusive eruption of the volcano continues. Ash clouds of up to 15 kilometres (49,200 feet) tall ... could occur at any time. Ongoing activity could affect international and low-flying aircraft,” the KVERT said in its red code alert notice.

Rosaviatsiya said it had issued a notice to plane crews asking them to ensure their flights were safe. It added that regional air traffic management teams were “ready to assist crews of Russian and foreign airlines in choosing alternative safe routes”.

The governor of Kamchatka, Vladimir Solodov, said that three villages — Kliuchy, Kozyrevsk and Mayskoye — had been the worst affected. He urged people there to stay at home and announced that schools had been closed. The remote rural villages lie on the Kamchatka river

on the eastern side of the peninsula. “As much as possible, stay at home,” Solodov said on Telegram. “We are waiting for the forecasts of volcanologists monitoring the eruption to assess how long the ashfall will last.” He said schools would switch to remote classes “for the duration of the aftermath of the disaster”.

Solodov said there were “some problems with water supply” and the authorities were delivering bottled water. He said health officials had “gone went into every house, every apartment” in the villages to check on residents.

According to KVERT, Shiveluch is between 60,000 and 70,000 years old, and is one of the largest volcanoes in Kamchatka. The Kamchatka Peninsula is sparsely populated. The Smithsonian Institution's Global Volcanism Program estimates that fewer than 12,000 people live within a 100-kilometre radius of Shiveluch. — AFP

## US charity says two staff killed in Ethiopia

**ADDIS ABABA:** Humanitarian charity Catholic Relief Services (CRS) said two of its staff were shot dead at the weekend in the Amhara region of northern Ethiopia, which has witnessed anti-government protests in recent days.

The incident took place on Sunday, when demonstrations were held in several Amhara cities against government plans to dismantle regional forces. “Chuo Tongyik, a security manager, and Amare Kindeya, a driver, were shot and killed in

a CRS vehicle in the Amhara region as they were returning to Addis Ababa from an assignment,” the US charity said in a statement dated Monday, adding that further details were unknown.

“The depth of our shock and sorrow is difficult to measure and we are saddened over this senseless violence,” said Zemed Zewdie, CRS country representative in Ethiopia. “CRS reiterates our commitment to continue working in support of the people in Ethiopia,” Zemed added.

The charity's website said it has worked in Ethiopia for nearly 60 years. On Tuesday, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was “concerned about recent attacks on ambulances and healthcare staff evacuating patients suffering from life-threatening medical conditions in Amhara region.”

“Health workers, ambulances & hospitals are not a target & must be respected and protected at all times,” the ICRC said on Twitter. Restrictions on movement and other curbs were imposed in three cities in Amhara on Monday following the protests over moves to integrate regional military forces into the federal army or regional police.

It is not possible to independently confirm the situation on the ground in Amhara as the region is restricted to journalists for what the authorities say are security reasons. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Sunday the initiative to dismantle the regional forces was for the sake of Ethiopia's “unity” and warned that law enforcement measures would be taken against any “destructive” opposition. — AFP

## Let's not forget real benefits of...

Continued from Page 1

Because of this human condition, Allah invites the well-off to help those in need through zakah and sadaqah (charity). However, it is often hard for wealthy people to understand the pitiful suffering and hunger the poor are often compelled to endure. But we can experience it with the temporary hunger and thirst generated by the Ramadan fast. Without fasting, well-off people cannot fully appreciate how distressing hunger and poverty can be and how those who suffer from these states need compassion and support.

Compassion for our fellow human beings is the root of genuine gratitude. No matter who we are, we can find someone worse off than we are. Thus, we have no excuse for not showing compassion. If we were not compelled to starve our ego, the nafs, with fasting, we would not feel the need to do good and help those who are less fortunate. And even if we did, it would not truly be complete because we would not be aware of our nafs' rebellious state.

**Fasting Helps Us Learn Self-Discipline**

One benefit brought by our Ramadan fasting is that it is the most ideal form of ibadah (worship) for self-discipline. The nafs thinks it is free to do whatever it desires. It even thinks itself to be a little “god”; thus, it is like our own personal Firawn (Pharaoh). It does not want to think its countless blessings are a test from its Creator. If it has wealth, comfort, and power and blinded by heedlessness, the ego devours divine blessings like an animal without thinking of its Creator, who gave the blessing.

However, in Ramadan, everyone's ego, from the richest to the poorest, understands that it is a servant, not a master. If its cravings are held in check, if its simplest desires — like eating and drinking — are subdued, the arrogance of this Firawn will be broken. It will then assume the state of submission and servanthood and give thanks to its Creator, which is its real duty.

**Fasting Reveals Our Frailty Before Our Lord**

Another benefit of fasting is that it shows us the vastness of our needs and how incapable we are of meeting them. It is easy for us to forget our own nature through the heedlessness of Allah Almighty. We do not see, or do not want to see, how helpless, poor, and flawed we are. We have endless emotional needs, such as love and kindness, and unlimited material needs, such as food, water, and even breath. We can provide for only a few of these needs for ourselves, and are incapable of meeting most of them. For there to be water, it must rain ... and we cannot make it rain! Think of all the things we need to eat a loaf of bread, things that are utterly out of

our control — sunshine, the rotation of the earth, the role of clouds, etc.

We seldom understand how weak we are as created beings. We are susceptible to death. We can suffer calamities at any moment. Sickness and death are always around the corner. Yet, we live as if we have bodies of steel and think we are immune to the assaults of Dunya (the world). Our egos generate greed, craving, and self-centeredness, so we grasp everything delicious and enchanting. We forget our Creator and the purpose of our lives and tumble into disobedience and sin.

Thus, fasting in Ramadan reminds we are helpless people and stubborn folk how weak, helpless, and poor we are. The hunger and thirst generated by fasting help us to think about our stomachs. Then we understand how much our bodies require Allah's blessings. We realize how much mercy and compassion we need. We then long to abandon our personal Firawn and seek refuge in Allah Almighty. Knowing our helplessness and neediness before our Lord, we knock on the door of mercy with the hand of thankfulness!

**Fasting Turns Our Focus Back to the Quran**

Ramadan is the month in which The Quran was revealed to the world. In this blessed month, in which The Quran was given to us, we are ordered to fast to receive this heavenly revelation in the best possible way. We know that to touch a mus-haf (bound copy of the Quran), we must have wudu' (ablution). Our fasting can be seen as an “inner” wudu', allowing our hearts and souls to “touch” the Quran!

During Ramadan, the Muslim world becomes like a great masjid (mosque). In every corner of this world masjid, millions of huffaz (one who has memorized the whole Quran) allow the whole world to listen to the Quran. Every Ramadan brilliantly manifests Quran 2:185. Surat ul-Baqarah, which is “The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Quran,” proving indeed that the Ramadan is the “Month of the Quran”. Our global Islamic jamaat (community) spends this time reading or listening to the Quran.

Knowing this, how ugly would it be to leave this beautiful masjid by eating and drinking, or obeying the evil desires of the ego, at such a time when the entire Muslim world is turning the earth into a great mosque? Just as it would be disrespectful for us to play games instead of worshiping or listening to music instead of listening to the Quran, it would be disrespectful to eat, drink and break the fast at a time when the entire Muslim world is engaged in fasting and reciting the Quran!

*NOTE: Dr Musa is serving as a community activist and motivational speaker. He is the Director of Development of an international organization representing imams through NAIIF (North American Imams Federation) and WCMIR (World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations). He has also served as the Director of Development at Sound Vision Foundation, Justice for All, and Islamic Relief USA.*

## Grand Mosque holds qiyam...

Continued from Page 1

“The Grand Mosque has readied fully staffed clinics, an outdoor tent and a designated place for women, in addition to other facilities in cooperation with various ministries and institutions to serve worshippers. All parking lots of the Public Utilities Company are open free of charge for worshippers of the Grand Mosque after midnight,” Director of the

## Yemen prisoner swap to start...

Continued from Page 1

six-month truce to pave the way for talks on establishing a two-year “transition”. On Sunday, Houthis media showed Al-Jaber shaking hands with the rebels' political chief, Mahdi Al-Mashat. Houthi officials said on Monday that Al-Jaber had also met with the Houthis' leader, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, though Saudi officials did not confirm this.

The Arabian Peninsula's poorest country has been at war since the Saudi-led intervention began in March 2015, months after the Iran-backed Houthis seized the capital Sanaa. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, through direct and indirect causes, and Yemen is suffering one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, according to the United Nations.

The prisoner exchange, the biggest since October 2020, will last three days and involve multiple cities in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, said Majid Fadael, the official spokesman for the government delegation negotiating the exchange. The Houthis will release 181 prisoners, including Saudis and Sudanese, in exchange for 706 detainees held by government forces, according to an agreement reached last month in Switzerland.

“All arrangements have been completed... to implement the agreed-upon exchange process,” Fadael tweeted. “The first day of the exchange process will be through reciprocal flights of the Red Cross between Aden-Sanaa and Sanaa-Aden,” he added. The exchange agreement was struck days after the landmark announcement that heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran, long at odds in the turbulent Gulf region, would seek to restore diplomatic ties after a hiatus of seven years.

This week, a Saudi delegation has held discussions with the Houthi leadership in Sanaa, hoping to “stabilize” the truce and seeking inter-Yemeni dialogue towards a “comprehensive political solution”, according to the Saudi ambassador.

After Thursday's flights between rebel-held Sanaa

Grand Mosque Ali Shaddad said on Monday. “Buses have also been provided to transport worshippers from parking lots to the main gate of the mosque. Special parking spaces have been allocated for the disabled at the Kuwait stock exchange and the adjacent building, in addition to karts provided for transporting the disabled and the elderly,” Shaddad added. He called on citizens and residents to cooperate with the organizing authorities and not to pray in undesignated places.

The Grand Mosque is one of the Islamic cultural landmarks of Kuwait and the largest mosque in the country, with an area of 45,000 sq m and a capacity of more than 60,000 worshippers.



**SANAA:** The Houthi group's political leader Mahdi Al-Mashat welcomes Saudi Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed Al-Jaber and a delegation on April 9, 2023. — AFP

and Aden, on Friday and Saturday prisoners will be flown in and out of Riyadh and Abha in Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Sanaa, Mocha and Marib, Fadael said. “This exchange process will be followed by other exchanges in the near future until all detainees and abductees are released on the basis of all for all, and all detention centers and prisons are cleared,” he tweeted.

According to the Houthis, 13 prisoners arrived at Sanaa international airport on Saturday, in exchange for a Saudi prisoner who was released earlier. “More than 1,050” prisoners were released in the last major exchange in Oct 2020, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis' political council, told AFP that the talks with the Saudi delegation “now revolve around lifting the (transport) blockade completely, withdrawing all foreign forces in Yemen, and releasing all prisoners”.

“What we care about now is the issue of achieving comprehensive peace,” he said in an interview. But in a tweet, he also warned of “the return of war... in a more fierce manner” if negotiations fail. “Saudi aircraft will bomb Yemen again, and the Yemeni air and missile forces will resume bombing Saudi Arabia,” Bukhaiti tweeted. — AFP



## International

# UN chief sounds alarm on Somalia's 'massive' need for international aid

## Somalia's worst drought in decades has driven many to the brink of famine

**MOGADISHU:** Visiting UN chief Antonio Guterres appealed Tuesday for "massive" international support for Somalia as it battles a desperate humanitarian crisis caused by drought and protracted armed conflict. Guterres said at a joint press conference with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud that he was on a "visit of solidarity" to the troubled Horn of Africa nation, where five million people are facing high levels of food insecurity.

"I am also here to ring the alarm on the need of massive international support... because of the humanitarian difficulties the country is facing," he said, adding that he wanted to help build Somalia's security capacity and encourage its development. The United Nations has launched a \$2.6 billion call for humanitarian assistance, but Guterres said the appeal was only 15 percent funded.

Somalia's worst drought in decades has driven many to the brink of famine, while the government is also engaged in a major offensive to quell a bloody Islamist insurgency. The authorities earlier imposed a security lockdown in Mogadishu for Guterres' arrival, closing most roads and restricting public transport. The UN chief, who is making his first visit to the country since March 2017, is also due to tour a camp for internally displaced people before leaving on Wednesday.

### 'Victims of climate change'

Mohamud said the trip was also a gesture of solidarity "towards the government and the democratic process of Somalia". "This visit ensures that the United Nations is fully committed to support our plans for state building and stabilising

the country," his office said in a statement.

Five successive failed rainy seasons in parts of Somalia as well as Kenya and Ethiopia have led to the worst drought in four decades, wiping out live-stock and crops and forcing at least 1.7 million people from their homes in search of food and water.

While famine thresholds have not been reached in Somalia, the UN says about half its population will need humanitarian assistance this year, with 8.3 million affected by the drought. Adding to the woes, seasonal rains in March led to flooding that claimed the lives of 21 people and displaced more than 100,000, according to the UN, which warned that the rains were unlikely to be enough to improve the food security outlook for many. "Although Somalis make virtually no contribution to climate change... the Somalis are among the greatest victims," Guterres said.

### 'Excess deaths'

Somalia was hit by a famine in 2011 which killed 260,000 people, more than half of them children under six, partly because the international community failed to act fast enough, according to the UN. A report by the UN and the Somali government released in March said that drought may have led to 43,000 "excess deaths" last year, with children under the age of five accounting for half the victims.

One of the poorest countries on the planet, Somalia has been wracked by decades of civil war, political violence and a bloody insurgency by the Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Shabaab. Mohamud last year declared "all-out war" against the Islamist militants and sent in troops in September to back an uprising against Al-Shabaab launched by local



**MOGADISHU:** UN secretary general Antonio Guterres (L) and Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud are seen during a press briefing at the presidential palace, Villa Somalia, in Mogadishu on April 11, 2023.—AFP

clan militias in central Somalia.

In recent months, the army and the militias known as "Macawisley" have retaken swathes of territory in an operation backed by an African Union force known as ATMIS, and by US air strikes. The government said late last month that more than 3,000 Al-Shabaab fighters had been killed since it launched the offensive.

It also said 70 towns and villages had been "liberated" from Al-Shabaab, which has been fighting the

fragile central government for more than 15 years. It was not possible to independently verify the claims. Al-Shabaab has frequently retaliated against the offensive with bloody attacks, undermining its ability to continue to strike civilian, political and military targets despite the government's advances.

In a report to the UN Security Council in February, Guterres said that 2022 was the deadliest year for civilians in Somalia since 2017, largely as a result of Al-Shabaab attacks. — AFP

## Taiwan detects Chinese warships after drills end

**TAIPEI:** Chinese warships and aircraft were still operating around Taiwan on Tuesday, the island's defence ministry said, a day after Beijing declared an end to its massive war games. China launched three days of military exercises around self-ruled Taiwan on Saturday that saw it simulate targeted strikes and practise a blockade of the island.

The show of force from Beijing, which claims the island as part of its territory, was a response to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week, an encounter it had warned would provoke retaliatory measures.

Taiwan's defence ministry said it had detected nine Chinese warships and 26 aircraft around the island as of 11:00 am (0300 GMT) on Tuesday. China "organised military aircraft this morning and crossed the median line from the north, the centre, and the south", the ministry said, referring to the unofficial but once largely adhered-to border that runs down the middle of the Taiwan Strait.

On Monday, the final day of the drills, the ministry said it had detected 12 Chinese warships and 91 aircraft around the island, with 54 planes crossing into Taiwan's southwestern and southeastern air defence identification zone (ADIZ). The ADIZ incursions were the highest recorded in a single day since October 2021.

## Bold Chinese vessels frustrate Taiwan's fishing communities

**MATSU:** Taiwanese fisherman Wang Chia-wen contends with Chinese incursions every day, although not usually the kind staged by Beijing's military during its latest round of war games. Fish stocks around Taiwan's tiny Matsu archipelago, a chain of rocky islands near the Chinese mainland, are crucial for the livelihoods of residents but the intruding crews are eating away at them.

Island authorities are under-resourced and locals say they are helpless to stop the hostile competition that doesn't respect the median line, an unofficial boundary in the Taiwan Strait that Beijing refuses to recognise.

"Everyone is frustrated. It has become a common occurrence," said Wang, 45. "They come very close to the shore. We can see each other. They act as if they don't see us, but there's nothing much we can do." The boats are harming livelihoods as well as the seabeds and marine ecosystem of Taiwan, which has one of the world's largest fishing industries, in their search for fish, squid and crabs.

Some officials say it could be part of Beijing's "grey zone" tactics, a non-military means of coercion that keeps pressure on the self-ruled island. "With any type of grey zone harassment, there's always this component of deniability. It might be civilian, and it might be intentional," said Lii Wen, director of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's Matsu office.

Chinese officials have described China as a responsible fishing country that opposes illegal and unregulated fishing.

### 'Every day'

The Taiwanese coast guard often finds itself chasing Chinese vessels that fish illegally in the sprawling island chain's waters. But they are regularly too late, locals say, especially if the Chinese boats come at night.

Authorities still managed to expel 1,291 Chinese fishing vessels from its waters last year, according to Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration data. Such incidents bring both sides into dangerously close contact.



**PINGTAN:** Picture shows, a Chinese helicopter flies over a military base in Pingtan island, in China's southeast Fujian province. China declared it had "successfully completed" three days of war games around Taiwan. — AFP

The zone is not the same as Taiwan's territorial airspace, and includes a far greater area that overlaps with part of China's own ADIZ and even some of the mainland. During the exercises, J15 fighter jets had been deployed off China's Shandong aircraft carrier and were among the aircraft that crossed the median line, the defence ministry added. A similar number of warships and jets were deployed by Beijing on Saturday and Sunday.

"The Shandong carrier battle group deployed in

the Philippine Sea was involved in the drill and the total of 232 air sorties in three days are unprecedented," Alexander Huang, a military expert at Tamkang University in Taipei, told AFP.

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen condemned the military drills on Monday, hours after they officially came to an end, saying China was using Taiwan's engagement with the United States as an "excuse to launch military exercises, causing instability in Taiwan and the region". — AFP



**QIAO ZI:** File photo shows a boat being worked on by fishermen at Qiao Zi harbour on Beigan island in Taiwan's Matsu islands. Fish stocks around Taiwan's tiny Matsu archipelago, a chain of rocky islands near the Chinese mainland, are crucial for the livelihoods of residents but the intruding crews are eating away at them. — AFP

"Any type of accident or unpredictable events could lead to larger tensions or escalate tensions in unexpected ways," said Lii. At the sleepy fishing harbour of Qiao Zi on Matsu's Beigan island, crews worked to fix their boats while amateur anglers sat at the end of a small jetty casting their lines into the ocean.

Chiu Ching-chih, clad in stained overalls and black Wellington boots, showed off a fresh catch of seabass jumping around behind him at the end of his working day. The 51-year-old said Chinese incursions were incessant and islanders felt powerless to stop them. "It has become very frequent, you can see them every day," he said.

### 'Make ends meet'

Another threat to their stocks is squid fishing by Chinese light boats, which locals say shine LEDs from Chinese waters that have at times turned Matsu's skies a luminous green. "There is an indirect impact because they attract the small fish to their side. Big fish from our side will also go to their side," Chiu said.

Crew on Chinese boats have also thrown stones

at their Taiwanese rivals, shattering windows, and even cut their expensive nets to gain the upper hand. "The impact has been very serious. Their fishing nets overlap with ours. They won't cut their own net and they will damage our nets," said Wang's brother, 44-year-old Chia-ling.

A fishing net can cost between 200,000 and 300,000 Taiwanese dollars (\$6,560-\$9,800). Other tactics used by the Chinese vessels condemned by the Taiwanese islanders include blast fishing with dynamite that ruins the seabed and the ecosystem below the waves.

Locals compare it to killing the hen to get the egg. They also accuse the Chinese crews of using electrofishing—stunning fish to catch them. With the threat of incursions ever-present, the Matsu locals now question if they will be able to carry on, or even be able to feed their families in the future.

"Illegal fishing in our water does the most harm to us. The catch will become fewer and fewer. We have to make a living too," said Chiu. He said a kilo of fish can fetch 400 Taiwanese dollars (\$13). "If we are unable to make ends meet, maybe one day we might have to give up fishing." — AFP

## UN says forced into appalling choice by Taliban ban on women

**KABUL:** The United Nations is being forced to make an "appalling choice" over whether to continue operations in Afghanistan while the Taliban government bans women from working for the organisation, the world body said Tuesday.

Under their austere interpretation of Islam, Taliban authorities have imposed a slew of restrictions on Afghan women since seizing power in 2021, including banning them from higher education and many government jobs.

In December, they banned Afghan women from working for domestic and foreign non-governmental organisations, and on April 4 extended that to UN offices across the country. In a statement Tuesday, the UN mission in Afghanistan said the ban was "unlawful under international law, including the UN Charter, and for that reason the United Nations cannot comply".

"Through this ban, the Taliban de facto authorities seek to force the United Nations into having to make an appalling choice between staying and delivering in support of the Afghan people and standing by the norms and principles we are duty-bound to uphold," it said. The increasing curbs are reminiscent of the Taliban's first government between 1996 and 2001, when the UN said they were responsible for repeated human rights violations—particularly against girls and women.

UN mission head Roza Otunbayeva has initiated an "operational review" to decide next steps, the statement said. "It should be clear that any negative consequences of this crisis for the Afghan people will be the responsibility of the de facto authorities," it said. The world body employs around 400 Afghan women in the country.

UN humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told AFP soon after the ban that the decree violated the world body's charter. "It is absolutely clear that no authority can give instructions to the United Nations... on who should be employed," he told AFP. "We are not going to make an exception."

### Severe restrictions on women

Since the ban was announced, the UN has ordered all its Afghan staff, men and women, not to report to the offices until further notice. The ban triggered international outrage, with the Taliban authorities coming under severe criticism. They have so far not issued any clarification or reason for the UN ban.

Local employees make up the bulk of the 600 women working for the UN in the country. In total, there are about 3,300 Afghans in the country's 3,900-strong UN workforce. Many NGOs suspended all operations in the country in protest after the ban on women staff was announced in December, piling further misery on Afghanistan's citizens, half of whom face hunger, according to aid agencies.

It was agreed after days of discussion that women working in the health sector would be exempt from the decree, although the UN also enjoyed a general exemption. Aid workers say women employees are crucial in delivering help to other women.

The restriction will also hamper donation-raising efforts by the UN at a time when Afghanistan is enduring one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, UN officials say. The UN airlifted \$1.8 billion into Afghanistan between December 2021 and January 2023, funding an aid lifeline for the nation's 38 million citizens and shoring up the domestic economy.

In other restrictions placed on Aghan women since 2021, authorities have barred teenage girls from secondary school, while women have been pushed out of many government jobs, prevented from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover up outside the home, ideally with a burqa. Women have also been banned from universities and are not allowed to enter parks, gyms or public baths. — AFP



# Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2023

## IMF lowers global growth forecast to 2.8% Most countries may avoid recession, but face half-decade of low growth

**WASHINGTON:** The International Monetary Fund slightly lowered its outlook for the global economy on Tuesday, while predicting that most countries will avoid a recession this year despite economic and geopolitical concerns.

The IMF predicted the global economy will grow by 2.8 percent this year and three percent in 2024, a decline of 0.1 percentage point from its previous forecasts in January. The American economy is expected to grow by 1.6 percent in 2023, up 0.2 percentage point on the IMF's previous forecast. US growth is then predicted to slow to 1.1 percent next year, up 0.1 percentage point from January.

"The global economy is recovering from the shocks of the last few years, and particularly of course the pandemic, but also the Russian invasion of Ukraine," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said in a press briefing ahead of the release of the IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) report.

The leadership of the World Bank and IMF hope to use this year's spring meetings to promote an ambitious reform and fundraising agenda. But their efforts will likely be overshadowed by concerns among member states over high inflation, rising geopolitical tension, and financial stability.

**Advanced economies drag down growth**

The overall picture painted by the WEO is a gloomy one, with global growth forecast to slow in both the short and medium terms. Close to 90 percent of advanced economies will experience slowing growth this year, while Asia's emerging markets are expected to see a substantial rise in economic output — with India and China predicted to account for half of all growth, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said last week. Low-income countries, meanwhile, are expected to suffer a double shock from higher borrowing costs

due to high interest rates, and a decline in demand for their exports, Georgieva said. This could worsen poverty and hunger.

The IMF expects global inflation to slow to seven percent this year, down from 8.7 percent last year, according to the WEO forecasts. This figure remains significantly above the two-percent target set by the US Federal Reserve and other central banks around the world, suggesting monetary policymakers have a long way to go before inflation is brought back under control.

The IMF's baseline forecasts assume that the financial instability sparked by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank last month has been broadly contained by the "forceful actions" of regulators on both sides of the Atlantic, Gourinchas told reporters. But he added that central banks and policymakers have an important role to play to buttress financial stability going forward.

**Germany on the brink of recession**

While the picture is one of slowing growth, almost all advanced economies are still expected to avoid a recession this year and next. Alongside growth in the US, the Euro area is also forecast to grow by 0.8 percent this year, and 1.4 percent next year, led by Spain, which will see 1.5 percent growth in 2023 and 2 percent growth in 2024. But Germany is now expected to contract by 0.1 percent this year, joining the UK as the only G7 economy expected to enter recession this year.

The picture is more positive among emerging market economies, with China forecast to grow by 5.2 percent this year. But its economic growth is predicted to slow to 4.5 percent in 2024, as the impact of its reopening from the COVID-19 pandemic fades. India's economic forecast has been downgraded from the previous forecast in January, but it is still predicted to grow by 5.9 percent this year and 6.3



WASHINGTON: People line up outside the IMF and World Bank Spring Meeting registration office in Washington, DC on April 10, 2023. — AFP

percent in 2024, providing some much-needed stimulus to the global economy.

And Russia is now expected to grow by 0.7 percent this year, up 0.3 percentage point on January's forecast, despite its invasion of Ukraine.

**Poor productivity**

Looking forward, the IMF forecasts that global growth will fall to three percent in 2028, its lowest medium-term forecast since the 1990. Slowing population growth and the end of the era of econom-

ic catch-up by several countries including China and South Korea are a large part of the expected slowdown, as are concerns about low productivity in many countries, according to Daniel Leigh, who heads the World Economic Studies division in the IMF's Research Department.

"A lot of the low hanging fruit was picked," he told reporters ahead of the publication of the World Economic Outlook. "On top of that now, with the geopolitical tensions and fragmentation, this is going to also weigh on growth," he said. — AFP

## Rising oil prices to help GCC post huge surpluses: Report

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is benefiting from a resurgence in growth. Giga investment projects, elevated energy prices, greater fiscal responsibility, and improving demographics are among the drivers. An additional tailwind for equity investors is the increasing weight of MENA in emerging market equity indexes, according to a report prepared recently by Salah Shamma and Bassel Khatoun of Franklin Templeton Emerging Markets Equity.

Making a case for investing in the region, Salah Shamma and Bassel Khatoun say the four major countries in the GCC — Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait — are expected to experience double surpluses due to elevated oil prices, on both their fiscal and current accounts.

"Fiscal surpluses during 2022 didn't translate into excessive government expenditure, which has been a common policy approach of the GCC nations during times of excess in the past. This time around, the GCC governments have acted prudently and focused on their long-term economic agendas rather than provide a short-lived stimulus," the report pointed out.

**Giga investment projects**

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has big

spending plans, especially in Saudi Arabia, the region's largest economy. As part of its Vision 2030 economic transformation plan, the government has announced its intention to invest over \$2 trillion in the domestic economy between now and the end of this decade.

Giga projects have been the cornerstone of the multi-year reform process underway in the region. The imperatives of diversifying the economy away from oil, attracting capital and talent, and generating jobs for a young population have driven sustained momentum on the projects despite local and global headwinds. "The steady progress on giga projects despite the volatility in oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic reflects the government's long-term commitment. By mandating the country's sovereign wealth fund as the independent sponsor of these projects with its own balance sheet, the government has endeavored to separate the outcomes of the projects from fluctuations in their fiscal position and, by extension, oil prices," the report said. This is a major departure from the past when government spending was tightly linked to oil prices.

In Dubai, its economic Agenda 2033 aims to double the size of economy and place the city among the top three economic cities in the world. Dubai will focus on foreign trade, foreign direct investment, private sector investments, and government spending to achieve its 2033 goals.

In the energy space, Qatar plans to increase its liquefied natural gas (LNG) capacity to 110 million tons per year by 2026. Qatar will provide Germany with LNG under a long-term supply deal reflecting Germany's efforts to wean itself off Russian gas.

"We remain bullish on the energy price outlook over the medium-term. In our view, the balance of risks for oil prices in 2023 appears to be on the up-

side, given the reopening of China, a continued revival in global travel, and the embargo/price cap on Russian oil by the United States and the European Union," Salah Shamma and Bassel Khatoun said.

**Improving demographics**

In a world grappling with the challenges of falling birth rates and increasing dependency ratios, the demography of the GCC economies, particularly Saudi Arabia, is moving in the opposite direction, the report said. Rising birth rates, a falling dependency ratio, and social reforms are powerful combinations which have the potential to raise the potential growth rate of GCC economies.

Saudi Arabia is currently in the demographic sweet spot, with high and relatively stable births, and low and stable deaths. Saudi Arabia's expected growth in the economically active 25-64 year old population is among the fastest in emerging markets: 19.6 percent between 2019-2039, only the Philippines 43 percent growth rate is higher. "In our view, positive demographics in Saudi Arabia, combined with high per-capita income (\$28,000) and political stability provides a tailwind for consumption, and in turn economic growth," they said in the report.

"In sum, we see a positive backdrop for MENA equity markets in 2023. The region is not immune from risk, including the impact of rising interest rates on growth and, in turn, the demand for energy, as well as the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the connection between oil prices and the economic and market outlook for MENA is being steadily diluted thanks to economic diversification and a greater reliance on sovereign wealth funds to finance investment in the region," the report added.

## Doctors in England start historic four-day strike

**LONDON:** Doctors working in England's public health service on Tuesday launched what has been billed as the most disruptive strike in its history, in a dispute over pay and working conditions. The four-day walkout, which began at 7:00 am (0600 GMT), follows months of strikes by other public and private sector staff as inflation sparks the UK's worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

The action by so-called junior doctors — physicians who are not senior specialists but who may still years of experience — comes after a three-day stoppage last month and several strikes by nurses.

It threatens to be the most serious walkout yet and lead to the cancellation of hundreds of thousands of appointments. They are demanding a pay rise of 35 percent, which they say is needed to help make up for more than a decade of salary cuts in real terms. They also argue pandemic backlogs coupled with staff shortages are massively increasing workloads, endangering patients. "We have had a massive (pay) cut and we are filling more gaps because people are leaving," said junior doctor Katrina Forsyth, who added she sometimes wept after shifts. "It's becoming less safe for patients," she said from a picket line after finishing a night shift at St. Thomas' Hospital in London.

The government maintains the BMA's request is unaffordable, as ministers try to dampen wage demands across the public sector amid stagnant growth and high inflation. After slowing for three straight months, the Consumer Prices Index shot up to 10.4 percent in February — close to 40-year highs and more than five times the target set by the Bank of England. "I hoped to begin formal pay negotiations with the BMA last month but its demand for a 35 percent pay rise is unreasonable," said Health Secretary Steve Barclay.

"If the BMA is willing to move significantly from this position and cancel strikes we can resume confidential talks and find a way forward, as we have done with other unions."

**'Immense pressures'**

Barclay struck a deal last month with unions representing various health workers, including nurses, to increase pay by five percent. Union members are currently voting on whether to accept it.

However, the deal does not cover junior doctors, who comprise around half of all NHS doctors, according to official figures. Their latest walkout will pile "immense pressures" on the service, NHS England medical director Stephen Powis warned.

"This is a significant set of industrial action that's going to cause major disruption," he told BBC radio.

The strike affects the NHS in England but not in the UK's other regions. Up to a quarter of a million appointments could be postponed, according to the NHS Confederation, which represents the system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Family doctors are also reported by British media to be closed for appointments for up to a week, as GPs are drafted in to provide cover. Powis said the NHS is "working very hard" to ensure emergency services are staffed but that cover was "fragile" and "routine care will be affected". Phil Sutcliffe, 75, of south London, was among those affected, with his cancer check-up appointment postponed to next month. — AFP

## Germany to switch off last remaining nuclear plants

**BERLIN:** Germany will shut down its three remaining nuclear plants on Saturday, betting that it can fulfill its green ambitions without atomic power despite the energy crisis caused by the Ukraine war. The cloud of white steam that has risen since 1989 over the river in Neckarwestheim, near Stuttgart, will soon be a distant memory, as will the Isar 2 complex in Bavaria and the Emsland plant in the north.

At a time when many Western countries are ramping up nuclear power in their transition to greener energy sources, Europe's biggest economy is resolutely sticking to its plans — though not everyone is in agreement. Germany has been looking to phase out nuclear power since 2002, but the decision was accelerated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011 after the Fukushima disaster in Japan.

Fukushima showed that "even in a high-tech country like Japan, the risks of nuclear energy cannot be safely controlled", Merkel said at the time. The exit decision was popular in a country with a powerful anti-nuclear movement fuelled by fears of Cold War conflict and disasters such as Chernobyl.

But Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 threatened to upend the plans, putting an end to



LINGEN, Germany: Activists of the nationwide anti-nuclear organization 'ausgestrahlt' illuminate a cooling tower of the nuclear power plant Emsland run by German energy company RWE with the slogan 'Nuclear energy - never again' in Lingen, western Germany on April 10, 2023. — AFP

cheap Russian gas and throwing the country into an unprecedented energy crisis.

Just a few months before Germany's last three remaining plants were due to be turned off on December 31, 2022, the tide of public opinion began to turn. "With high energy prices and the hot topic of climate change, there have of course been calls to extend the power plants," said Jochen Winkler, the mayor of Neckarwestheim. The government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, which includes the fierce-

ly anti-nuclear Greens, agreed to extend the life of the plants to April 15.

"There might have been a new discussion if the winter had been more difficult, if there had been power cuts and gas shortages. But we had a winter without too many problems" thanks to accelerated liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, Winkler said. Neckarwestheim has around 4,000 inhabitants, more than 150 of whom work at the plant — but Winkler is philosophical about the decision. — AFP



## Business

# Credit Suisse rescue averted catastrophe: Swiss president

## Berset says government ‘deeply regrets’ thousands of job losses

**BERN:** Swiss President Alain Berset told lawmakers Tuesday that letting banking giant Credit Suisse collapse would have triggered a catastrophe, as he defended the orchestrated takeover by UBS. Berset addressed an extraordinary session of parliament that was called to debate the controversial March 19 deal that his government arranged in double-quick time behind closed doors.

Letting Credit Suisse go bankrupt once the stock markets reopened on March 20 “would potentially have created an international financial crisis with devastating effects for Switzerland, for companies, for private customers but also for the reputation of our country”, the president said.

“The demise of Credit Suisse is not the demise of Switzerland. It is the loss of a bank; a large bank but only a bank. Nothing more, nothing less.” The three-day session at the Federal Assembly in Bern was called after lawmakers found themselves before a fait accompli.

The merger dramatically changes the financial landscape in the wealthy Alpine country, which stakes much of its national prestige on sound banking. The takeover triggered unease among the public and lawmakers alike, with the country’s second-largest bank rapidly imploding after 167 years, during which it helped finance Switzerland’s industrial growth.

### Switzerland shaken

“Without intervention, Credit Suisse would have found itself, in all likelihood, in default on March 20 or 21,” Berset said. Rather than bankruptcy, nationalization or attempting to restructure a bank in which confidence was shot, the takeover was considered the most likely option to restore market confidence,

the president told the 46-member Council of States, the upper house of parliament.

“The situation on the financial markets has calmed down, but it has not stabilized definitively. And our country, Switzerland, is shaken by this painful episode,” said Berset. “It is worth remembering the fundamentals that have made, and still make, our country: trust, security, reliability, fairness, freedom and responsibility. We must do everything not only to preserve them, but also to strengthen them.”

### \$120 billion in play

Amid fears of contagion following the collapse of three US regional banks, Credit Suisse’s share price plunged, despite reassurances from the central Swiss National Bank (SNB). But that failed to restore investor confidence, and fearing a bloodbath when the markets reopened on March 20, the government, the SNB and the FINMA financial regulator strongarmed UBS into a \$3.25-billion takeover the day before. Some 109 billion Swiss francs (\$120 billion) have been put on the table between government guarantees and the liquidity the SNB made available.

In the heat of the moment, parliament’s finance delegation had to authorize the credit release without lawmakers having a chance to debate and scrutinize the arrangements. The National Council wants to examine the guarantees granted to prop up the rescue, the possibility of legal action against Credit Suisse’s governing bodies and the regulation of banks considered “too big to fail”.

### Job fears

The government has calmed some of the anger in parliament by stripping Credit Suisse’s



BASEL, Switzerland: Outgoing CEO Ralph Hamers (left) reacts next to UBS Chairman Colm Kelleher (right) and UBS Vice-chairman Lukas Gahwiler (center) after he received a present at the end of the general meeting of shareholders of UBS bank in Basel, on April 5, 2023. —AFP

executive board of their 2022 and 2023 bonuses. As for the thousands of Credit Suisse jobs on the line, Berset said this was something the government “deeply regrets”.

“We have, of course, made the new leaders of

UBS aware of their social responsibility on this and expect them to clarify the situation quickly,” he added. The government last week promised lawmakers a full report within a year looking at the factors behind Suisse’s downfall. —AFP

## Gulf Bank provides ‘Ayadi’ at branches and ITMs

**KUWAIT:** As part of sharing and celebrating the joy of Eid with customers and the public, Gulf Bank is providing the “Ayadi” service at its various branches and ITMs located across Kuwait; including the newly launched ITM drive thru at Sharq branch. The bank is providing the service at all Gulf Bank branches —of which exceed 50 branches — and at the ITMs located in ten branches of which include: Sharq branch, Crystal Tower, Jabriya, Al-Shaab, Al-Adan, Al-Salam (South Surra), Fahahel (Al-Ghanim Electronics Complex), Hawally, Kuwait

## China to require ‘security assessment’ for new AI products

**BEIJING:** New AI products developed in China will have to undergo a security assessment before being released and must reflect “core socialist values”, a sweeping new draft law by the country’s internet regulator showed Tuesday. The fresh regulations come as a flurry of Chinese companies rush to develop artificial intelligence services that can mimic human speech since San Francisco-based OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November, sparking a gold rush in the market. Rapid advancements in AI have stoked global alarm over the technology’s potential for disinformation and misuse, with deepfake images and people shown mouthing things they never said.

“Before providing services to the public that use generative AI products, a security assessment shall be applied for through national internet regulatory departments,” the draft law, released by the Cyberspace Administration of China, reads. The draft law—dubbed “Administrative Measures for Generative Artificial Intelligence Services”—aims to ensure “the healthy development and standardized application of generative AI technology”, it read.

AI-generated content, it continued, needs to “reflect core socialist values, and must not contain content on subversion of state pow-

International Airport (TI), and Mishref.

The “Ayadi” service provides customers with brand new KD 20, KD 10, KD 5, and KD 1 banknotes to meet the growing demand for “Ayadi” on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.

Gulf Bank’s vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee’s role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability ini-

atives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 “New Kuwait” and works with various parties to achieve it.



tiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 “New Kuwait” and works with various parties to achieve it.



bot’s display of linguistic and maths skills at an unveiling, sending shares falling by as much as 10 percent. ChatGPT is unavailable in China, but the American software is also gaining a base of Chinese users who use virtual private networks to get around the ban, deploying it to write essays and cram for exams. And a 24-year-old Shanghai blogger caused a stir this month when he used AI technology to “resurrect” his dead grandmother, producing lifelike imagery of his interactions with the deceased relative.

Beijing has announced ambitious plans to become a global leader in the field of AI by 2030, and consultancy group McKinsey estimates the sector could add about \$600 billion every year to China’s gross domestic product by then. But it has also warned that deepfakes present a “danger to national security and social stability”. Beijing in January enforced new rules that would require businesses offering deepfake services to obtain the real identities of their users. They also require deepfake content to be appropriately tagged to avoid “any confusion”. —AFP



BIRMINGHAM: In this file photo taken on November 21, 2022 Confederation of Business Industry (CBI) director general Tony Danker addresses the annual CBI conference at the Vox Conference Centre in Birmingham. —AFP

The revelations have caused member companies and the UK government to distance themselves from the lobby group. —AFP

## Swiss reject flak over handling of Russian assets

**GENEVA:** Switzerland insisted Tuesday it was clamping down on Russian assets parked in the country, after other countries accused the Swiss of not going far enough. Bern has frozen 7.5 billion Swiss francs (\$8.3 billion) in assets since imposing sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine last year, said Helene Budliger Artieda, director of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) government department.

That is the equivalent of around “a good third” of the 21.5 billion euros (\$23.4 billion) frozen across the neighbouring European Union, she told the Neue Zürcher Zeitung newspaper. Switzerland is not in the EU but has matched the bloc’s sanctions on Russia. Budliger Artieda voiced surprise that Switzerland could therefore be accused of being “negligent” in its obligations.

Last week, the Group of Seven powers asked Switzerland to be more active in freezing the assets of Russian oligarchs, said the Handelszeitung newspaper. A confidential letter signed by all the G7 countries’ ambassadors in Bern was sent to the Swiss government asking it to do more, the weekly said. Last month Scott Miller, the US ambassador to Switzerland, took aim at SECO, estimating that Bern could block a further 50 to 100 billion Swiss francs in Russian assets.

“When we meet on a technical level with the EU, Britain and the United States, we never hear this kind of criticism. There are obviously misunderstandings,” Budliger Artieda told the NZZ. “The figure of 50 to 100 billion francs was initially circulated as a possible estimate of Russian funds under management,” though it was not an estimate produced by Switzerland, she said.

“But not all Russians are subject to sanctions—only a small minority.” Asked whether the frozen assets could be confiscated to finance the eventual reconstruction of Ukraine, Budliger Artieda said a working group had “come to a clear conclusion: ownership rights would be violated”.

“The confiscation of private assets is not permitted in Switzerland if they are of lawful origin and have no proven criminal background,” she said. —AFP

## Swedish pension fund sacks CEO over US bank losses

**ZURICH:** Sweden’s Alecta, one of the country’s largest pension funds, said Tuesday it was replacing its CEO, after the fund lost almost 20 billion kronor (\$1.9 billion) from investments in crisis-hit US banks.

“The Board has now concluded that Alecta needs new leadership to implement the necessary changes in asset management and restore trust,” the fund said in a statement. Alecta said CEO Magnus Billing would step down with “immediate effect,” and that Deputy CEO Katarina Thorslund would step in as CEO during the search for a permanent replacement. The fund announced in mid March that it had lost 19.6 billion kronor as a result of its holdings in three crisis-hit US banks: Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), Signature Bank and First Republic. Days before the collapse of SVB, Alecta told financial newspaper Dagens Industri that it had sold off its assets in two of Sweden’s largest banks in order to up its investments in US niche banks. —AFP

## Head of UK business lobby sacked over ‘misconduct’

**LONDON:** Britain’s main business lobby group, the CBI, has sacked Director General Tony Danker following a probe into allegations of sexual misconduct, it announced Tuesday. The Confederation of British Industry added in a statement that it had suspended three other employees “pending further investigation into a number of ongoing allegations”.

The CBI said Danker “is dismissed with immediate effect following the independent investigation into specific complaints of workplace misconduct against him”. He had stepped aside from his role in early March, allowing the investigation to occur.

“The allegations that have been made over recent weeks about the CBI have been devastating,”

Tuesday’s statement said. “While investigations continue into a number of these, it is already clear to all of us that there have been serious failings in how we have acted as an organization.”

The statement also apologized “to the victims..... including those impacted by the revulsion we have all felt at hearing their stories.” “Nobody should feel unsafe in their workplace,” it added.

The CBI announced that Rain Newton-Smith, a former chief economist at the group, had agreed to rejoin as its new director general. It will meanwhile create a chief people officer position, overseeing matters of workplace conduct and culture. “We know it will take time for these steps to make a difference and rebuild trust,” the CBI said. “We will now work tirelessly to ensure that under new leadership and with a commitment to build a modern, inclusive culture, the CBI can and will resume its vital work of supporting British business.” Britain’s Guardian newspaper had reported that more than a dozen women claim to be victims of sexual misconduct by senior figures at the CBI, including one woman who alleged she was raped at a staff party.



# Saudi non-oil sector to remain resilient despite the headwinds

Ongoing reforms continue to drive constructive growth outlook

Table 1: Key economic indicators

		2021	2022	2023f	2024f
Nominal GDP	(\$ bn)	869	1,108	1,083	1,161
Real GDP	(% y/y)	3.9	8.7	1.6	3.8
- Oil	(% y/y)	0.2	15.4	-2.9	2.9
- Non-oil	(% y/y)	5.7	4.8	4.5	4.5
Inflation (average)	(% y/y)	3.1	2.5	2.4	2.1
Fiscal balance	(% of GDP)	-2.3	2.5	0.2	1.3
Government debt	(% of GDP)	28.8	23.8	23.4	22.0
Current account	(% of GDP)	5.1	13.6	6.7	7.6

Source: National authorities, NBK forecasts

KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia's non-oil economic growth accelerated in the second half of 2022, finishing the year at a strong 4.8 percent, following a 5.7 percent expansion in 2021. The private sector (+5.4 percent in 2022) remained the main growth driver, although the government sector's expansion strengthened to 2.6 percent. Sector-wise, manufacturing, one key focus area within Vision 2030, continued to witness one of the highest growth at 7.7 percent in 2022, after a 9.5 percent expansion in 2021. In terms of expenditure on GDP, private investment remained the fastest growing at 25 percent in 2022 (accounting for nearly 60 percent of the increase in output), reflecting a rapid expansion in production capacity, which should support future growth.

The favorable growth dynamics are expected to be sustained in 2023-2024, despite higher interest rates and lower oil prices. The kingdom's consumer spending remains solid with the value of POS transactions up around 10 percent y/y through March. Despite tighter liquidity in the banking sector, credit growth remains in double digits at around 13 percent y/y through February as higher growth in corporate credit (+14 percent) is compensating the softer expansion in mortgage lending (+21 percent). PMI levels touched eight-year highs (59.8 in February), averaging a strong 58.9 in 1Q2023. Given all that, we forecast the non-oil sector's growth to remain solid

Chart 1: Real GDP growth

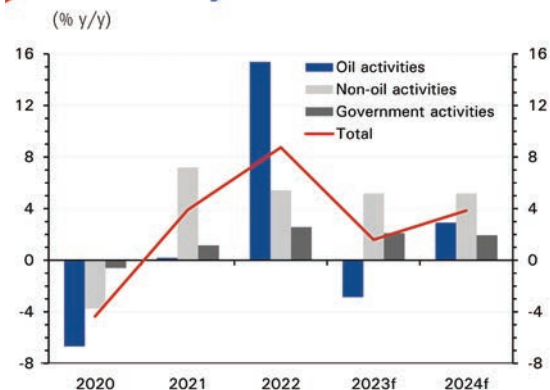


Chart 2: Credit and deposit growth

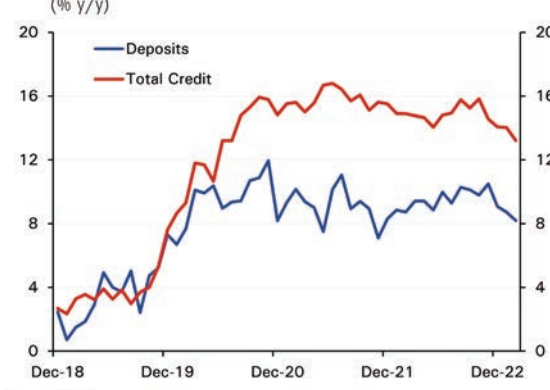
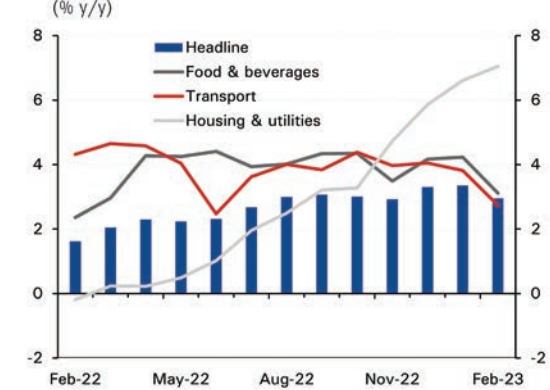


Chart 3: CPI inflation



at 4.5 percent in 2023-2024, powered by north of 5 percent expansion in the private sector.

The Saudi government's ongoing reforms continue to be a crucial driver of this constructive growth outlook. Some of the recent reforms and strategic initiatives include the National Industrial Strategy (targeting to triple industrial GDP) and the unveiling of the Shareek program's first batch of projects worth SAR 192 billion, aiming to create 64k jobs by 2040. Successful reforms and the country's overall favorable outlook led to recent credit rating upgrades by the main global rating agencies. Meanwhile, given a 4.75 percent increase in the US federal funds rate since March 2022, SAMA has hiked its policy rates by a similar 4.5 percent, and together with tightening liquidity in the banking sector (the simple loans-to-deposits ratio increased to 104 percent in February 2023 from 94 percent two years before), drove interbank rates to record levels.

Nevertheless, the tightening cycle is close to being done with even the possibility of US rate cuts commencing in the second half of 2023, which will alleviate some pressure on Saudi interbank rates, and hence drop the cost of borrowing, which will be positive for credit expansion and non-oil growth.

As for the oil sector, after surging by 15.4 percent in 2022, and given the OPEC+ production cuts announced last year and the recent voluntary cuts from

May till December 2023 (500K b/d by KSA) negative growth (-2.9 percent) is expected this year, before a rebound in 2024 (+2.9 percent) on the back of the expiry of the cuts and improving market dynamics. However, it will be unsurprising if OPEC+ (led by KSA) continues to take a proactive and nimble role in managing the global oil supply, including cutting or increasing production as need be. All in all, after soaring 8.7 percent in 2022, total GDP is forecast to grow by a limited 1.6 percent in 2023, pressured by the oil sector, before a 3.8 percent expansion is seen in 2024 on oil sector rebound and steady non-oil growth.

## Inflation to soften

Inflation softened to 3 percent y/y through February after likely hitting a peak of 3.3 percent-3.4 percent in December/January with housing rentals (+8.3 percent y/y) remaining the predominant driver of price pressures over the past year. Despite ongoing pressure from housing rentals going forward, we project inflation to average 2.4 percent in 2023 given that most other sectors are already beyond their peak price inflation. Solid economic growth and unwavering Saudization initiatives continued to push the unemployment rate among Saudis lower, dropping to an all-time low of 8 percent in 4Q2022, nearly half the post-COVID high of 15.4 percent recorded in mid-2020.

## Public finances on a solid footing

Higher oil prices and increasing oil production led to a fiscal surplus (2.5 percent of GDP) in 2022 for the first time in nearly ten years, despite a steep rise in government spending (+12 percent). Looking ahead, despite lower oil prices and production, we still expect fiscal surpluses, though limited, in 2023 and 2024 given) ongoing growth in non-oil revenues driven by solid private-sector growth and 2) limited expansion in government spending given the budgetary ceilings. Solid economic growth and higher oil prices in 2021 and 2022 have led to a sharp fall in the debt/GDP ratio to 24 percent in 2022 (31 percent in 2020), and we forecast that to inch down further to 22 percent by 2024.

The current account surplus swelled to 14 percent of GDP in 2022 on higher oil prices as well as exports, and we forecast further surpluses in 2023-24. Lower-than-forecast oil prices, driven by a weaker-than-expected global economic backdrop is a main downside risk. In addition, lower-than-forecast non-oil growth, which could result from a weaker-than-expected resilience to lower oil prices, is another downside risk. In contrast, higher-than-forecast oil production, due to, for example, a partial reversal of the recent OPEC+ production cuts is an upside risk.

## Jazeera Airways adds Larnaca to network of summer destinations

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier recently added Larnaca in Cyprus to its network of new European destinations for the 2023 summer season. Larnaca is Cyprus's oldest city, balancing a mix of the old and the new. Centrally positioned in Cyprus, the city provides easy access to other parts of the island for both leisure and business travel. With a Mediterranean climate, Cyprus is the perfect place to enjoy the sun, sea and fresh air.

Rohit Ramachandran, Chief Executive Officer, Jazeera Airways said: "We are pleased to add Larnaca to our growing list of European destinations for the upcoming summer season. This provides travelers from Kuwait another holiday destination that is a short, affordable flight away. With the addition of Larnaca, we now proudly serve 63 destinations across Europe, the Middle East, Central & South Asia and Africa." Jazeera Airways is currently running a special offer on fares for 50,000 seats starting from KD 21 only. This offer is open until mid-

night (Kuwait time) on 20 April 2023 and valid for travel between 1 May and 15 June 2023.

You can book your flights to Larnaca, Belgrade, Tirana, Sarajevo and Prague on the airlines website ([www.jazeeraairways.com](http://www.jazeeraairways.com)), or on the Jazeera App. The airline also connects from these European cities to other destinations across its network, providing convenient transits through Kuwait. Flights to Larnaca will operate twice weekly from 29 April – 27 May 2023, and three times a week from 29 May – 28 October 2023.



## Planned Flight Schedule

Flight Number	Frequency	From	To	Departure (Local Time)	Arrival (Local Time)
J9 0345	Wednesday, Saturday (from 29 April 2023)	Kuwait	Larnaca	10:00	13:15
J9 0346	Wednesday, Saturday (from 29 April 2023)	Larnaca	Kuwait	14:00	17:10
J9 0345	Monday, Wednesday, Saturday (from 29 May 2023)	Kuwait	Larnaca	10:00	13:15
J9 0346	Monday, Wednesday, Saturday (from 29 May 2023)	Larnaca	Kuwait	14:00	17:10

Flight schedules are subject to change.

## China consumer inflation falls below 1% in March

BEIJING: China's consumer price inflation fell below one percent in March, official figures showed Tuesday, a sign of weak demand as the world's second largest economy tries to recover from its pandemic-driven slump. The March consumer price index (CPI) -- the main gauge of inflation -- came in at 0.7 percent, down from the one percent seen a month earlier, according to the country's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Beijing is targeting an average inflation rate of three percent for 2023, which is still far below the current rates of many developed economies. Analysts had expected a faster pace in March, with economic activity picking up again after the aban-

donment of zero-COVID restrictions at the end of 2022. The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods leaving factories, shrank for the sixth consecutive month, with prices falling 2.5 percent -- indicating lower margins for businesses.

"Economic recovery is on track but not strong enough to push up prices," Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management wrote in a note. "This suggests the economy is still running below its potential," he added, suggesting the data made an interest rate cut more likely. Fresh fruit prices rose 11.5 percent year-on-year, and pork, the most consumed meat in the country, jumped 9.6 percent. The cost of fuel for transport fell 6.4 percent.

Globally, commodity and food prices are rising, though China has remained relatively unscathed by increases linked to the war in Ukraine. "We think consumer price inflation will rebound in the coming months as the labor market tightens again," analysts from Capital Economics said in a note.

"But it will be well below the government's ceiling of around three percent, and the increase in inflation will be far smaller than what was seen

of traditional PCs" in the first three months of this year, according to the report from IDC. PC shipments globally tallied 56.9 million, some 29 percent less than the same period a year earlier, the research firm said. Shipments of Apple Mac computers, which are in the premium segment of the market, shrank more than 40 percent in the quarter, IDC and Canalys, another research firm, reported.

"Consumers and businesses will remain cautious about outlays on new PCs in the short term," said Canalys analyst Ishan Dutt. "Demand across all customer segments remains dampened, with more pressure arising from further interest rate increases in the US, Europe and other markets, where reducing inflation is a top priority."

Lenovo had the largest share of the PC market



HANGZHOU, China: A customer (right) shops for meat at a supermarket in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province on April 11, 2023. —AFP

elsewhere when they opened up." China is targeting five percent economic growth this year, one of the lowest targets in decades, but Premier Li Qiang warned last month even this could be difficult to achieve. —AFP

with slightly more than 22 percent, despite shipments slipping 30 percent when compared with the same quarter a year earlier, the market trackers reported. The declines represented "a coda to the era of COVID-driven demand" for PCs and a return to a pre-pandemic trend, according to IDC. The PC market was expected to improve later in the year as the global economy improves and consumers become interested in upgrading to the latest Windows operating system. "By 2024, an aging installed base will start coming up for refresh," said IDC Devices and Displays research vice president Linn Huang.

"If the economy is trending upwards by then, we expect significant market upside...If recession in key markets drags on into next year, recovery could be a slog." —AFP



HAVANA: This file photo taken on August 4, 2022, shows a one US dollar bill and Cuban pesos in Havana. —AFP

## Cuba announces reversal of US dollar deposit ban

HAVANA: Cuba's government on Monday announced a surprise lifting of its ban on US dollar deposits in banks, reversing a policy which had been in place across the communist island nation since June 2021. "From this moment on, financial and banking institutions will accept cash deposits of US dollars in bank accounts," said a Central Bank of Cuba (BCC) resolution published Monday in the country's Official Gazette.

The Cuban government had announced the ban almost two years ago, saying at the time that the move was due to continuing difficulties caused by the ongoing US embargo. The policy reversal comes as the island faces its worst economic crisis in three decades, with mounting shortages of food, medicines and fuel worsening in recent weeks. However it is also seeing its vital tourism industry pick up following a collapse during the pandemic, which the government cited as one of the reasons for the move on Monday. Cuba has been subject to broad US sanctions since 1962, hindering its government's ability to transact in dollars.

After a relative easing under the presidency of Barack Obama, sanctions were ramped up during Donald Trump's tenure in the White House. During his administration's final days in office in January 2021, the United States added Cuba back to its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

That designation occurred the same month that Cuba's government moved to end its parallel currencies, phasing out a convertible peso that was pegged to the dollar, leaving only the regular, weaker peso, or CUP. Since then, the currency has fallen from 24 to an official rate of 120 to the dollar. On the black market, the rate is 185.

Trump's successor Joe Biden has kept up the prior administration's restrictions on Cuba, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken in March said the United States had no plans to lift the state sponsor of terrorism designation. —AFP

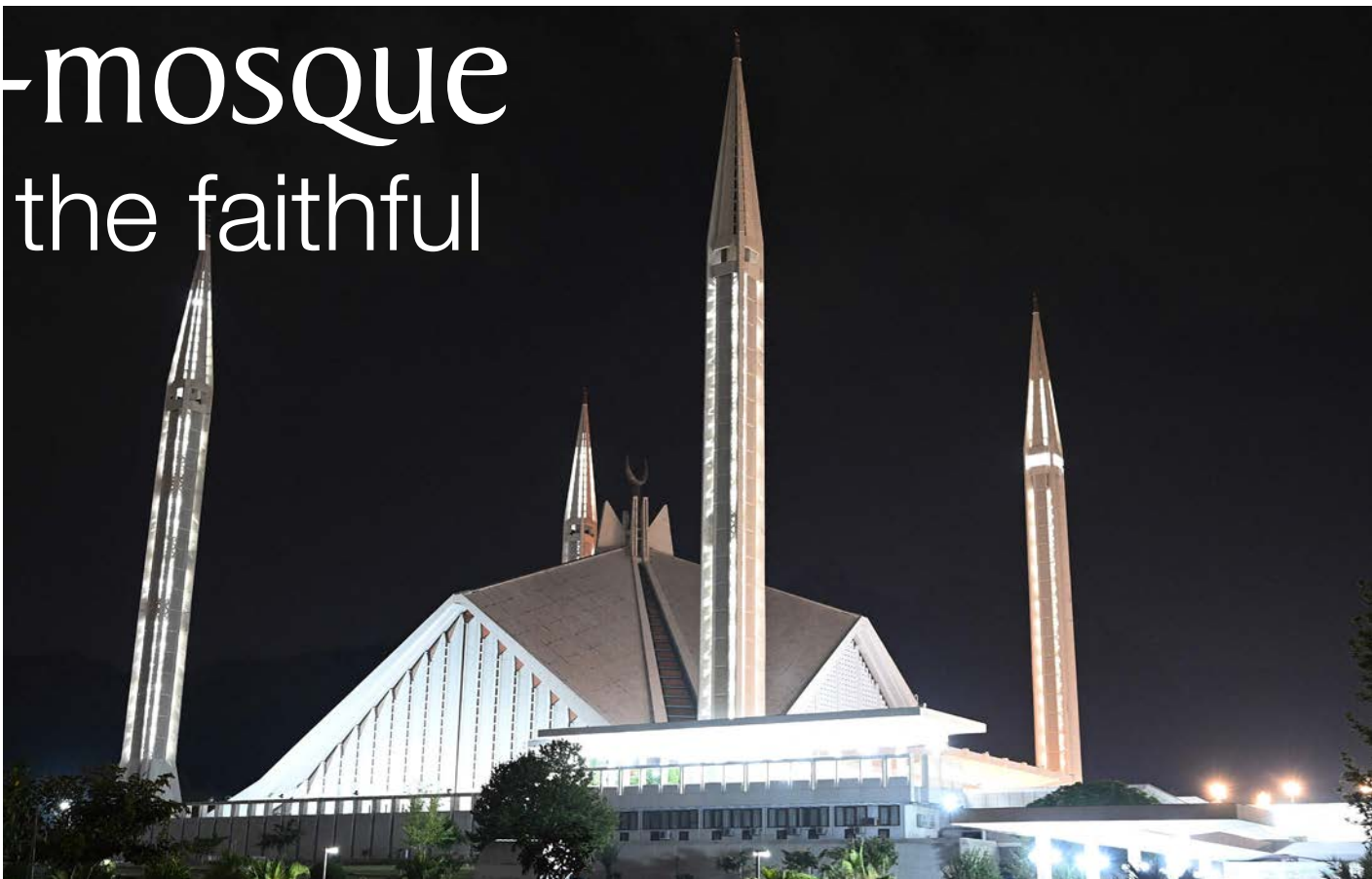


Lifestyle

# Pakistan mega-mosque muezzin summons the faithful



Noor ul Islam performs Maghrib Adhan at the grand Faisal Mosque.



In this photograph a general view of the grand Faisal Mosque is pictured during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Islamabad. —AFP photos

Moments before dawn, Noor ul Islam ascends the steps of one of the world's biggest mosques, enters its cavernous hall and says a private prayer before a faintly buzzing microphone.

Then, the 32-year-old gulps down a deep breath and makes the morning's call to worship -- a forceful yet lilting chant amplified across Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, marking the start of daylight fasting during Ramadan.

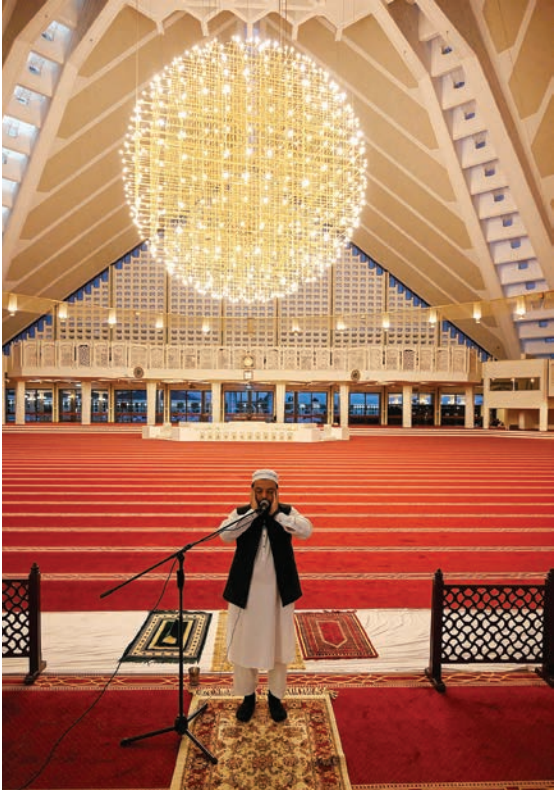
"The voice is a gift from God," Islam told AFP at Faisal Mosque, a towering marble monument

the mosque. Some of Islam's fellow muezzins coddle their vocal cords like rock stars and theatre performers, drinking honey-laced beverages, and avoiding cold breezes and oil-drenched Pakistani cuisine.

"I am a careless person when it comes to this," chuckles Islam. "I can't resist." Nonetheless, he treats his vocation with humble reverence.

"The fundamental purpose of the adhan is to invite people towards God. You can only accomplish this effectively when you possess a pure heart", he said.

"Any delay or lack of sincerity in performing the



Noor ul Islam performs Maghrib Adhan at the grand Faisal Mosque.



Noor ul Islam performs Fajr morning Adhan at the grand Faisal Mosque.



Noor ul Islam recites Quran at the grand Faisal Mosque.



Noor ul Islam (center) leads others in Maghrib prayers after breaking their fast at the grand Faisal Mosque.

to the nation's devotion to faith. "If your intentions are genuine, your voice will have the power to touch people's hearts," he said.

All across the Muslim world, men like Islam, known as muezzins, broadcast the "adhan" call to prayer, five times a day.

In the month of Ramadan, where prayers mark the start and finish of 14 hours of fasting in Pakistan, the faithful are particularly attuned. The script and rhythm are the same everywhere.

Intoned in Arabic over minaret loudspeakers, it reminds Muslims: "God is the greatest" and they should "hasten to prayers". But there is a quiet hierarchy among muezzins.

A particularly melodic caller can increase the standing of a mosque. House hunters might judge the neighbourhood adhan before making an offer. And at prestigious mosques, the job is highly coveted. The three muezzin roles at Faisal Mosque -- a national emblem opened in 1986 with a fabled capacity of 300,000 worshippers -- are among the most prized outside the holy sites of Makkah and Madinah.

## Holy calling

As a teenager visiting Pakistan's capital from his hometown 105 kilometres (65 miles) away, Islam was captivated by the soulful call from Faisal Mosque's four spiked towers.

"Every Muslim yearns to say the adhan, lead prayers or give a sermon at a well-known mosque," he said. "Every pious Muslim has this dream." His chance came in 2018, when a single slot opened and he beat 400 other candidates to the post.

When he steps up to the microphone, Islam plugs his ears with his fingers in order to block all sounds apart from his voice.

"The adhan, delivered with a beautiful and precise pronunciation, resonates with people," said 57-year-old businessman Aziz Ahmed in front of

adhan could potentially erode our faith." A sub-par adhan is treated as a "formality" by muezzins who create "fake voices".

A good recital can "strike me straight in the heart", Islam said. But the position does come with a hint of celebrity.

Devotees travel for miles to hear the call at Faisal Mosque, peer through the windows to watch Islam at work and ask for selfies afterwards. Back home in the town of Swabi, he is considered a local hero.

Now Islam aspires to secure a further promotion to muezzin at the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Makkah. "I can't explain these feelings," he said. "Every Muslim should try to make this bond between him and God." —AFP



Noor ul Islam (center) leads others in Maghrib prayers after breaking their fast at the grand Faisal Mosque.



In this picture Noor ul Islam (center) prays along with others before breaking their fast at the grand Faisal Mosque during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Islamabad.



Noor ul Islam performs Maghrib Adhan at the grand Faisal Mosque during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Islamabad.



Noor ul Islam (right) leads others in Maghrib prayers after breaking their fast at the grand Faisal Mosque.



Noor ul Islam (center) leads others in Maghrib prayers after breaking their fast at the grand Faisal Mosque.



# Oman's Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar valley comes alive with rose blooms



Pictures show the farmers picking roses during harvest season in Oman's Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar mountainous area.—AFP photos

The annual rose season has begun at the Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar valley in Oman and the region is covered by the beautiful pale blood-coloured flowers. Adding to the charm, the sweet scent of the unique variety of rose pervades the air.

The rocky valley, situated at a high altitude of the mountain, is an ideal ground for abundant growth of the rose plant. Every year, eight villages in the valley come alive with rose blooms, attracting numerous tourists to the area.

In all parts of the world, rose is considered the queen of flowers due to its beauty and sweet scent. Among the thousands of varieties of rose, Damask rose is noted for its high commercial value. This variety, which is widely used in the perfume industry, grows exceptionally well in Oman.

Infact, rose cultivation is an integral part of the culture and heritage of Oman. The heat and desert conditions of the country which prevail along with greenery provide a favourable climate for roses as well as other flowers to bloom to their best.

Harvesting of roses in Oman takes place entirely by hand. Travellers to the villages can watch the whole population engaged in picking flowers during the season. The time of harvest is from early morning to the time when sun-rays turn hot. Most farmers start a day's work by 5 am and end it by 9 am.

Damask rose, the variety grown in Oman, is indigenous to the Middle East and was first cultivated in Syria during Roman times. However, the Damask rose of Oman stands apart for its unique scent of musk. When tasted, the rose feels a little sour and hot. The rose grown in Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar, *Rosa damascena* trigintipetala, contains a high amount of oils, which makes it an inseparable part of the perfume industry.

Moreover, this variety is much in de-



mand for the manufacture of medicines and local cuisine. Local people claim that the rose is an antidote for mental stress and anxiety. The flower is also used as a medicine for menstrual problems and indigestion.

According to experts, Omani rose smells sweeter than other varieties when

used for rose water. Rose grown in Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar also remains without wilting for a longer time than other varieties.

#### Things to note:

Before heading to Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar, ensure that the village you are travelling to would be carrying out the harvest on the day of your visit.

Villagers welcome visitors warmly and allow them to join in the plucking of flowers. They will also explain the method of preparing rose water.—www.onmanorama

## The anime hit 'Suzume' and Shinkai's cinema of cataclysm

Makoto Shinkai was never the same filmmaker after the 2011 earthquake struck Japan.

When the tsunami and quake ravaged the Tōhoku region of northern Japan and prompted a nuclear meltdown, Shinkai, a now 50-year-old director and animator of some of the most popular anime features in the world, could feel his sense of storytelling crumbling.

"The shock to me was that the daily life that we had become accustomed to in Japan can suddenly be severed without any warning whatsoever," says Shinkai. "I had this odd, foreboding feeling that that could happen again and again. I began to think about how I wanted to tell stories within this new reality."

The three blockbusters that have followed by Shinkai — "Your Name," "Weathering With You" and the new release "Suzume" — have each tethered hugely emotional tales to ecological disaster. In "Your Name," a meteor threatens to demolish a village, an event that dovetails with a body-switching romance. In "Weathering With You," a runaway teenage boy befriends a Tokyo girl who can control the weather, spawning fluctuations that mirror climate change.

"Suzume," which opens in U.S. theaters Friday, returns to the earthquake of 2011. Suzume, whose mother perished in the tsunami, years later meets a mysterious young man responsible for racing to close portals — literal doorways that appear around Japan — before they unleash a giant, earthquake-causing worm.

"With these three films, I didn't set out to make a disaster movie. I wanted to tell a love story, a romance, a coming-of-age of an adolescent girl," Shinkai said on a recent trip to New York, speaking through an interpreter. "As I continued to make the plot, this idea of disaster kept creeping in. Suddenly,

I felt surrounded in my daily life by disaster. It's like a door that keeps opening."

Shinkai has emerged as one of cinema's most imaginative filmmakers of contemporary cataclysm. His movies aren't just about surviving apocalypse, though, but living with its omnipresent threat. And it's made him one of the biggest box-office draws in movies.

After it was released in 2016, "Your Name" became the then-best-selling anime of all time, dethroning Hayao Miyazaki's beloved "Spirited Away" with nearly \$400 million in ticket sales. "Weathering With You" made nearly \$200 million. Before opening in North America, "Suzume" has already crossed \$200 million, including \$100 million in Japan and nearly that in China. It's easily the biggest international release of the year so far in China, more than doubling the sales of "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania."

Much of that success is owed to Shinkai's earnest grappling with today's ecological upheaval in sprawling epics that are filtered through everyday life. National trauma mixes with supernatural fantasy. While Japan has been home to many extreme geological events, it's a tension that most in the world can increasingly connect with.

"It can be anything: earthquakes, climate change, the pandemic. Russia and Ukraine, for an example," says Shinkai. "This idea that our daily life will continue to maintain the status quo should be set aside and challenged."

Shinkai, who writes and directs his films, has become convinced that young people shouldn't be pandered to with stories where the natural world is heroically returned to balance, calling such approaches "egotistic and irresponsible." Instead, his disasters take on metaphorical meaning for young



Makoto Shinkai arrives at the premiere of "Suzume" at The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles.—AP photos

protagonists who learn to persist, and find joy, in a world of perpetual danger, shadowed by loss.

His latest, which was the first anime in competition at the Berlin Film Festival in two decades, is a road movie where the 17-year-old Suzume (voiced by Nanoka Hara) travels from the southwestern island of Kyushu with that mysterious young man, Souta (Hokuto Matsumura), who happens to get transformed into a three-legged chair while closing a portal.

As a wooden sidekick, Souta recalls a Miyazaki side character like the hopping scarecrow of "Howl's Moving Castle." But Shinkai, who's often been cited as among the heirs to Miyazaki, says his film is no homage. But he grants Miyazaki's influence is so pervasive in Japanese society that it seeps into everything. He imagines Suzume, herself, grew up on his films.

Shinkai liked the symbolism of a chair, something we use every day. His father made him one as a child. While promoting "Suzume," Shinkai has traveled with a chair just like the one in the movie, packing it in a suitcase, bringing it with him on stage and occasionally taking pictures of it at places like Times Square or the Museum of Natural History.

"I've picked very daily items — a door, a chair — that are perhaps relatable to a wide range of au-



This image released by Sony Pictures Entertainment shows Suzume, voiced in Japanese by Nanoka Hara, and dubbed in English by Nichole Sakura, in a scene from the animated film "Suzume."

diences," he says. "This symbolism of the door, I think people are able to translate to their own story. We start thinking about: How do we maintain our daily routine?"

Shinkai is known for photorealistic panoramas of glittering splendor. As much as doorways make up the iconography of "Suzume," the most indelible image is one he uses at the beginning and end of the film. Suzume rides her bike on a steep hill with a sparkling ocean set behind her. The waters below, which to her could signify the tsunami that left her an orphan, are at once gorgeous and perilous.

"In a weird way, I feel that with 'Your Name' and 'Weathering With You' and 'Suzume' that I'm creating this sort of folklore or mythology," Shinkai says. "In mythology or these ancient legends, what they're doing is taking real-life events and transforming it into a story that can relayed to others."

Whether Shinkai will continue on this quest in his next film he doesn't know. It's a blank slate, he says. But he doesn't close the door. "As I continue to make more stories," he says, smiling, "that door might start creaking open again."—AP



Lifestyle



Mexican TikToker Santos Tuz records a video to spread the Maya language in Oxkutzcab, Yucatan State, Mexico.—AFP photos



# Mexican TikToker shares Maya language with new generations

Santos Tuz bids his followers farewell with a smile in Maya and Spanish on social media, where the young Mexican teacher shares his Indigenous language with thousands of people. The 21-year-old, from the southeastern state of Yucatan, discovered his vocation to keep the words of his ancestors alive during the Covid-19 lockdown.

His TikTok account @tuzsantos322 has 343,000 followers and 3.1 million likes. “Green on the outside, yellow on the inside, what is it?” he asks. “We’re referring to the avocado, which in the Maya language is called ‘oon’,” Tuz said, wearing an embroidered guayabera shirt and white hat typical of the Yucatan region.

Like many members of younger generations, his teenage sisters have only a rudimentary knowledge of the language, Tuz told AFP. “I re-

alized that many young people stopped speaking the Maya language. However, they do speak it in their homes. Why? Because they’re afraid. It’s not that they feel shame. They’re afraid of being discriminated against,” he said.

Maya is spoken by 860,000 people, the majority in the Yucatan Peninsula, making it the second most widespread Indigenous language after Nahuatl, according to official figures. Some 7.3 million Mexicans — 6.1 percent of the population — speak an Indigenous language.

Tuz said that when he was a child, schools blocked the admission of students who only spoke Maya. Although public education is now officially bilingual in the Yucatan, Indigenous language teaching is only just being introduced.

“Parents began to stop teaching their children Maya for fear that they would be rejected,” added

Tuz, who shares knowledge of the language with his students on his own initiative. Doing it on social media was not easy at first.

Tuz received mockery and criticism, but also messages from people happy to have found him, including old people who regretted not speaking the language of their ancestors. He has followers as far afield as the United States, Canada and Australia. Tuz records his videos with a cell phone, a camera and a tripod that a digital content producer from the United States gave him as a gift. The videos of him are short and colorful, sometimes in the countryside, at his house, visiting a historical site or tasting a typical dish. He comes from a low-income family and is just beginning to earn money from his videos. Despite often being asked for selfies, he does not consider himself a full-time influencer.—AFP



Mexican TikToker Santos Tuz records a video in his studio to spread the Maya language in Oxkutzcab, Yucatan State, Mexico.



Mexican TikToker Santos Tuz poses for a photo in his studio while showing a video of himself spreading the Maya language in Oxkutzcab, Yucatan State, Mexico.



Mexican TikToker Santos Tuz records a video to spread the Maya language in Oxkutzcab, Yucatan State, Mexico.



Mexican TikToker Santos Tuz prepares to record a video to spread the Maya language in Oxkutzcab, Yucatan State, Mexico.

# French ballet choreographer Lacotte dies aged 91



Kim Kardashian

## Kim Kardashian to appear in ‘American Horror Story’

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian is swapping her domestic drama for something scripted with an appearance on cult show “American Horror Story.” The socialite and billionaire businesswoman posted an eerie video Monday to her 352 million Instagram followers, confirming that she will be joining the series with regular Emma Roberts.

The brief video includes an off-key rendition of “Rock-a-bye Baby” and the whispered line: “Emma and Kim are delicate.” The showbiz news outlet Variety reported that Kardashian will have a lead role in Season 12, playing a character that was written specifically for her. Kardashian first came to public attention as a member of heiress Paris Hilton’s entourage, but gained global notoriety with the release of a sex tape.

That was followed by the long-running “Keeping Up with the Kardashians” series and its spin-offs, in which viewers get insights into the lives of the uber-wealthy family. As well as a now-dissolved high-profile marriage to Kanye West, Kardashian has also built a business empire selling lingerie and beauty products. She appeared in a handful of films in the late 2000s, and recently voiced a character in “PAW Patrol: The Movie.”

But “American Horror Story” will be her first scripted on-screen venture in a decade. “American Horror Story” is an anthology piece revolving around different characters and locations. It is known for its high-profile cast, which changes frequently. Previous stars have included Lady Gaga, Sarah Paulson, Kathy Bates and Angela Bassett.—AFP

Pierre Lacotte, a French choreographer who as a young man helped ballet superstar Rudolf Nureyev defect from the Soviet Union, died aged 91 on Monday, his wife said. “Our Pierre left us at 4:00 am,” said his wife, retired principal dancer Ghislaine Thesmar. “It’s very sad. He still had so many projects and was writing a book.”

The artist, known in his later years for his revival of 19th-century ballet productions, passed away in a clinic in the southern French town of



In this file photo taken on September 20, 2013 French choreographer Pierre Lacotte speaks to the press before a dress rehearsal of the ballet Paquita which he choreographed, at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, a day before the opening night.

Seyne-sur-Mer after he suffered a cut that became septic, she said. Born in the French capital in 1932, Lacotte became a dancer at the Paris Opera Ballet aged just 19. From the late 1950s, he worked as an independent dancer and choreographer.

In 1961, after becoming friends with Soviet-born ballet legend Nureyev while he was on tour in Paris, Lacotte was among those who helped the dancer escape KGB agents and seek



In this file photo taken on December 20, 1974 French ballet dancer Michael Denard (left) and Ghislaine Thesmar (center) rehearse a scene of Opera “Coppélia” with French choreographer Pierre Lacotte (right), in Paris.—AFP photos

asylum at the capital’s Le Bourget airport, according to his account in a BBC documentary. His role in the famous defection was also recounted in a 2018 biopic titled “The White Crow” directed by Britain’s Ralph Fiennes. After suffering an ankle injury, Lacotte increasingly turned his attention to the archives of the Paris Opera from 1968.

He devoted the rest of his career to bringing back to life forgotten 19th-century productions on the world’s greatest stages. They included “La Syl-

phide”, the first ballet completely on pointe when it was originally produced in 1832, and Orientalist fantasy “The Pharaoh’s Daughter” from 1862 — the latter for the Bolshoi Ballet. The Bolshoi on Monday paid its respects to Lacotte, describing him as a “talented man with a generous soul”.

Lacotte’s last work in 2021 was a production of “The Red and the Black” based on the 1830 novel by French writer Stendhal. When it opened, he was 89 years old.—AFP



## Sports

# Lucknow Super Giants edge out Royal Challengers Bangalore

## Pooran smashes the fastest fifty of IPL season

### News in brief



Frances Tiafoe of the United States

### Tiafoe win Houston title

**LOS ANGELES:** Frances Tiafoe defeated Thomas Etcheverry 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (8/6) to win the ATP clay court title in Houston on a double-duty day in Texas. The American, playing his first ATP tournament as the top seed, had to win twice on Sunday to secure the crown thanks to the weather delays earlier in the week. After beating Gijs Brouwer 6-4, 6-1 in the semi-finals he said he was up for the challenge. "I'm running on adrenaline," Tiafoe told the crowd after beating Brouwer. "I'm on a mission so I'm happy." By Sunday night it was mission accomplished as Tiafoe claimed his second ATP title and his first since 2018 in Delray Beach. Since then he'd come up empty in four finals appearances. The soggy week meant Tiafoe in fact had to win four matches in two days, playing his first two of the week on Saturday. He didn't drop a set and was broken just once — when he served for the title against Etcheverry at 5-4 in the second set. — AFP

### T'wolves suspend Gobert

**LOS ANGELES:** The Minnesota Timberwolves on Monday suspended Rudy Gobert for one game for punching a teammate, ruling him out of the team's play-in clash with the Los Angeles Lakers. Minnesota said in a statement Gobert would not travel to Los Angeles for Tuesday's clash with the Lakers, where the winner will secure a postseason berth. "The Minnesota Timberwolves today announced the team has suspended center Rudy Gobert for one game following yesterday's incident," the Timberwolves said in a statement. Gobert was benched by the Timberwolves on Sunday during the team's roller-coaster 113-108 defeat of New Orleans after a stunning incident in the second quarter where he aimed a punch at teammate Kyle Anderson. The players were forcibly separated by other Timberwolves players. Gobert was pulled from the game following the clash. — AFP

### Struggling Reading fire Ince

**LONDON:** Reading manager Paul Ince was sacked on Tuesday after his struggling side plunged into the Championship relegation zone. Former Manchester United and Liverpool midfielder Ince paid the price for Reading's woeful run of eight games without a win. Noel Hunt, a former Reading player, has been placed in charge of the Royals until the end of the season. "Reading Football Club can confirm that the contract of first-team manager Paul Ince has been terminated with immediate effect. Assistant manager Alex Rae has also departed the club," a Reading statement said. "Our Under-21s manager and former Royals striker, Noel Hunt, has been installed as interim first-team manager until the end of the season." Ince was initially hired by Reading on interim basis in February 2022 before earning the manager's job on a permanent basis. But Ince, who has also managed Blackburn, MK Dons, Notts County and Blackpool, was unable to stop Reading's decline in the second half of this season. — AFP

### Baena's Valverde incident

**VILA-REAL:** Villarreal's Alex Baena is hurt by accusations he wished "harm" on the family of Real Madrid's Fede Valverde to provoke being punched, he said in a statement on Monday. Baena reported being attacked to Spanish police on Sunday, with Spanish media stating he was hit in the face by Valverde after the teams' La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu. It was reported that Baena had taunted Valverde during a Copa del Rey game in January over complications regarding his partner's pregnancy, which the Villarreal winger strongly denies. "Last Saturday I was assaulted by a colleague from this profession after the game against Real Madrid ended," said Baena in a statement, not mentioning Valverde by name. "After it happened, some comments came to light, presumably made by his entourage, which said that I had wished harm on his family. "Since then, and it couldn't be otherwise, no evidence has been published that proves the deeds attributed to me." — AFP

**BENGALURU:** Nicholas Pooran smashed the fastest fifty of the IPL season in 15 balls as Lucknow Super Giants pulled off a stunning chase of 213 to edge out Royal Challengers Bangalore in a last-ball thriller on Monday. West Indies' Pooran smashed 62 off 19 balls before he departed but Lucknow crept over the line to win by one wicket in a dramatic final over in Bengaluru. Lucknow needed five off the last six balls after Ayush Badoni was out hit-wicket for 30 in the penultimate over, hitting his stumps while hammering what would have been a six. Mark Wood and Jaydev Unadkat were dismissed in the final over and Ravi Bishnoi was nearly 'mankaded' from the last ball.

With the scores level and a super over beckoning, number 11 Avesh Khan scampered a bye and threw his helmet in celebration. Australia's Marcus Stoinis had earlier clobbered a 30-ball 65, but it was Pooran's blitz including seven sixes that blew away RCB. Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell notched up 15 sixes between them in Bangalore's 212-2, with 27 hit in the match in total. Bangalore struck with three early wickets before Stoinis dominated a fourth-wicket stand of 76 with skipper KL Rahul.

Impact player Karn Sharma broke the partnership as he sent back Stoinis but Bangalore had a new nemesis in Pooran. The efforts of Pooran and Stoinis eclipsed the power-hitting from Kohli (61), Du Plessis (79 not out) and Maxwell (59) after Bangalore were put in to bat first. Kohli set the tone

## Red Bull Four 2 Score: Kuwait welcomes the debut of 4v4 event

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait will be one of 27 countries hosting the debut of a unique sporting tournament: Red Bull Four 2 Score, a 4v4 competition with international qualifiers held across the globe in preparation for the world finals, which will take place in Germany later this year. Teams of 4 will go head-to-head during the Kuwaiti leg, kicking off with the male qualifiers from the 4th of May until the 9th at 5:30 pm, held in Kuwait University, Mashael Al Jahra, and Boulevard Fields, respectively. Additionally, the tournament includes female qualifiers, held on the 10th at 5:30 pm at Boulevard Fields. Once the qualifiers are done, the qualifying male and female teams will move on to the national finals on the 11th of May at Argan Bedaya.

At the National Final, teams will get the chance to meet two special guests, one of Kuwait's most decorated football player, Fahad Al Ansari along with the French football and Global Red Bull athlete, Séan Garnier. The winning male and female teams, along with the other international winners, will head to Red Bull Leipzig in Germany later this year with the aim of becoming the first Red Bull

## Sextet shine in cycling's new golden age

**PARIS:** Mathieu van der Poel's triumph at Paris-Roubaix on Sunday is further confirmation of the stranglehold six cycling superstars have on the sport, which is basking in a new golden age as they sweep aside everyone in their path. One needs to go back decades to find such a profusion of talent that sparkles from February to October, leaving measly crumbs as a consolation for the rest of the pack.

There have been exceptional cyclists since the eras of Belgian legend Eddy Merckx and France's Bernard Hinault - but this is the first time there have been so many battling for the top honors and throughout the season. "Mathieu is no alien. He's human. He's just a super strong rider," said Jasper Philipsen, second Sunday behind his leader Van der Poel and ahead of Wout Van Aert, another member of the dominant sextet. "These guys have something extra," added the Belgian sprinter.

Rivals were bemoaning the same thing on the Tour of the Basque Country, beaten into submission by Denmark's 2022 Tour de France champion Jonas Vingegaard who won the general classification and half of the six stages to bring his record to eight victories since the start of the season. A week earlier it was two-time Tour de France champion Tadej Pogacar, maybe the mightiest of all of them, who shone. The 24-year-old became the first Tour

## Vanzeir apologizes for 'racist remark'

**NEW YORK:** The New York Red Bulls and their forward Dante Vanzeir apologized on Monday after the Belgian made a racist remark during a Major League Soccer match against the San Jose Earthquakes. Play was held up for about 15 minutes as San Jose's players debated whether to carry on with Saturday's game before deciding to do so. The match ended 1-1 at Red Bull Arena.

San Jose striker Jeremy Ebobisse said that a New York player used a racist epithet early in the second half, without naming the player. Ebobisse said following the game that San Jose decided to continue after the player insisted he had not directed the remark at a particular opponent. MLS immediately launched an investigation and Van-



BENGALURU: Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Lucknow Super Giants on April 10, 2023. — AFP

for Bangalore's big total with his second fifty of the season in a 96-run opening stand with Du Plessis. Maxwell kept up the charge after Kohli's departure

and Du Plessis delivered a flurry of sixes, including a hit of 115 metres, as he also registered his second half-century of the campaign. — AFP



Four 2 Score World Final Champions.

The new tournament challenges amateur footballers between the ages of 16 and 35 to put their best small-field, 4v4 football skills to the test. Teams of 4 players and 1 substitute go battle it out in 10-minute matches with no breaks and no goalies. The rules and concept of the tournament are designed to allow

participants to experience Red Bull's unique "power football" philosophy firsthand. But the most crucial twist is the first and last minute, during which every goal scored will be doubled, so players must score when it matters. To sign up for the Kuwait qualifiers, visit <https://participate.redbull.com/en/events/red-bull-four-2-score-KUW/2023>



ROUBAIX: Alpecin-Deceuninck team's Dutch rider Mathieu Van Der Poel cycles over the cobblestone sector during the 120th edition of the Paris-Roubaix one-day classic cycling race.— AFP

de France winner since Merckx in 1976 to also win the one day Classic Tour of Flanders, after having already triumphed on the Tour of Andalusia and Paris-Nice this campaign.

The Slovenian has already racked up 10 wins in 2023. His compatriot Primož Roglič has seven victories, including two general classifications, the Tirreno-Adriatico and the Tour of Catalonia. Not forgetting the sixth element, Belgium's road race world champion Remco Evenepoel, who currently has just

the three wins, including the UAE Tour, as he readies for the Giro. Between them, they have won all the most important races of the year so far and it is no longer far-fetched that one of them will emulate Merckx, the only cyclist in history to have won the three Grand Tours and the five Monuments. "There are a few riders who are really above the pack, who kind of do what they want. As soon as they start, all we can do is chase," says AG2R-Citroën's Franck Bonnamour. — AFP

zeir, the Red Bulls and their coach Gerhard Struber have now all apologized.

"I want to sincerely apologize to the players of the Earthquakes. I will do everything I can to be part of the change that needs to happen in this sport and our world," the 24-year-old Vanzeir said in a statement. "I also want to apologize to my teammates, coaches, the organization and our fans. I made a mistake and will take all the necessary steps to grow. "I accept full responsibility for my actions. While I did not intend to cause any harm or offense with my language, I know that I did and for that I am deeply sorry."

Also in a statement, the Red Bulls said they "wholeheartedly apologize for the unacceptable events that transpired on Saturday night". "The words and inaction was inexcusable, and we believe there is never a place for it," the team said. The Austrian Struber said that he regretted not immediately taking Vanzeir off the field following the incident. Vanzeir, who has played for his coun-



Dante Vanzeir

try once and moved to the Red Bulls in February from Belgian football, said he will accept any suspension or fine from his club or the MLS. — AFP



## Sports

# Assistant referee stands down after Robertson elbow incident

## Robertson ‘confront’ Hatzidakis in extraordinary incident

**LONDON:** Assistant referee Constantine Hatzidakis will not be involved in any matches while the Football Association investigate whether he elbowed Liverpool's Andrew Robertson. The extraordinary incident occurred just after the half-time whistle had been blown during Liverpool's explosive 2-2 draw against Premier League leaders Arsenal at Anfield on Sunday.

Robertson appeared to confront Hatzidakis on the pitch, reaching to grab the arm of the official, who reacted by jabbing his elbow towards the Liverpool left-back. Robertson gesticulated that he had been hit by Hatzidakis while the irate Scotland captain was led away by team-mates, only to receive a yellow card in the aftermath of the bizarre incident.

Hatzidakis is under FA scrutiny for his role in the row and will be sidelined until the governing body's probe is complete. A statement from Premier League referees' body the PGMOL read: "PGMOL will not be appointing Constantine Hatzidakis to fixtures in any of the competitions it serves whilst the FA (Football Association) investigates the incident involving the assistant referee and Liverpool defender Andrew Robertson at Anfield."

Keith Hackett, formerly head of the PGMOL, told BBC Radio Five Live: "Ultimately, if he is found guilty of this, his career is in jeopardy. "I was trying to find an excuse as to why he did it and I came up with was he in fear? He shouldn't be, because he's in a protected environment with plenty of security. "But he reacted in a way that he shouldn't have reacted at

the end of the day and here we are talking about a match official and not a decision, but an action by a match official—and he's clearly lost his composure."

### 'Big baby'

Another former top-flight referee, Mark Halsey, put the spotlight on Robertson's behaviour but admitted a ban is the most likely punishment for Hatzidakis if he is proven to have committed an offence. Writing in The Sun, Halsey drew a parallel with Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, who was recently banned for eight matches for pushing referee Chris Kavanagh.

"To me, it looks like Robertson goes to grab Hatzidakis, who brushes him off with his arm and catches him accidentally," Halsey said. "I cannot think why an assistant would throw his arms into a player's face. Sure, from one camera angle it does not look good. But you have to ask why has Robertson gone to approach the assistant referee? "I have heard people say this is the end of the linesman's career but, just like Aleksandar Mitrovic, it is his full-time job. However, if he is proven guilty and did intentionally use his elbow then he will face the same consequences as the Fulham frontman."

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp said he did not see what had happened, but Sky Sports pundits working on the game reacted with incredulity. Gary Neville, the former Manchester and England defender, said: "I've never seen an official raise an elbow to a player. I think he'll be in a lot of trouble after this



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp (right) looks on as Fourth Official Craig Pawson (center) talks to assistant referee and linesman Assistant Referee Constantine Hatzidakis during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Arsenal at Anfield in Liverpool. — AFP

game ends." Former Manchester United captain Roy Keane focused on Robertson's role in the incident. "He should be more worried about his defending,"

said Keane. "Do you know what he is, that Robertson? I've watched him a number of times, he is a big baby, that's what that guy is." — AFP

## Burnley move closer to title

**LONDON:** Johann Berg Gudmundsson's brace moved Burnley closer to the Championship title as Vincent Kompany's promoted side beat 10-man Sheffield United 2-0 on Monday. Burnley clinched an immediate return to the Premier League after last season's relegation when they won 2-1 against Middlesbrough on Friday. The Clarets are now chasing the second-tier title and they took another step towards that goal by defeating second-placed United at Turf Moor. United were reduced to 10 men in the first half when goalkeeper Wes Foderingham tripped Nathan Tella, who was seemingly through on goal.

The visitors held out until the hour mark when the ball fell to Gudmundsson inside the area and he drilled home. Gudmundsson added his second from close range 10 minutes later to leave Burnley 14 points clear of United with six games left. Pelly Ruddock Mpanzu scored twice as Luton climbed to third place with a 3-1 victory over second-bottom Blackpool. Andy Lyons gave Blackpool a shock lead at Kenilworth Road before Mpanzu

leveled on the stroke of half-time. Luton scored twice in four second-half minutes when Carlton Morris bagged his 17th goal of the season before Mpanzu's emphatic finish sealed the points. Fourth-placed Middlesbrough are without a win in three games after they rescued a 2-2 draw at Bristol City. Sam Bell and Harry Cornick gave City a two-goal lead with strikes either side of half-time. Michael Carrick's visitors were handed a lifeline when Aaron Ramsey got on the end of Tommy Smith's cross with a diving header.

Ramsey turned creator six minutes later as he picked out Matt Crooks for a composed finish to complete Middlesbrough's comeback. Ryan Hedges scored in stoppage-time to save sixth-placed Blackburn, who came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Huddersfield. Preston closed in on the play-off places with a 2-1 win over lowly Reading thanks to Brad Potts' stoppage-time goal. Coventry salvaged a 2-2 draw with Watford at the CBS Arena after trailing by two goals. The Sky Blues are three points off the play-offs, with Watford a further three back.

Struggling QPR fought back from two goals down to earn a 2-2 draw at West Brom. Adama Traore scored in the 70th minute as Hull secured a 1-0 victory over fifth-placed Millwall, who are now with-



**Burnley's Icelandic midfielder Johann Berg Gudmundsson**

out a win in four games. Bottom of the table Wigan are eight points from safety after a 2-0 home defeat against Swansea. Sunderland moved within four points of the play-off places after Dennis Cirkin's goal sealed a 1-0 victory over Cardiff, who are only one point above the relegation zone. Birmingham played out a goalless draw with Stoke, while Rotherham also held Norwich to a 0-0 draw. — AFP

Today's Matches	
UEFA Champions League	
AC Milan v Napoli	22:00
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports 1 FR	
Real Madrid v Chelsea	22:00
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 1 English	

## FIFA predicts 2023 women's World Cup will be 'watershed'

**SYDNEY:** FIFA has predicted the women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand will be a "watershed" moment that propels the game to another level, with the target to eventually rival the men's version. Women's football is already enjoying a surge in popularity in some countries, and the tournament looks set to spark further global interest. With 100 days till kick-off, FIFA's chief women's football officer Sarai Bareman told NewsCorp Australia in comments published Tuesday that more than two billion viewers were expected to tune in, double the previous tournament in France, won by the United States.

Record attendance is also predicted, with 650,000 tickets already snapped up. The next phase of sales opened Tuesday. Bareman said she believed the event would be a major turning point and a driver for social change, creating role models for young girls and helping promote gender equality. "People will be saying, 'That was the watershed moment that changed everything and took the game to the next level,'" she said.

"And that's in every aspect - commercially, participation, popularity and growth. "I think people will really look back and choose the women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand as that watershed moment where the growth, which is already exponential, just took off to the absolute next level." Bareman, a New Zealand-born former Samoan international, said the ultimate goal was to grow the tournament to rival the men's and get females on equal footing in terms of pay. "We know the men's World Cup is the primary source of revenue for FIFA and football, and that generates in excess of \$US5 billion per edition, and that's a clear target for women's football," she said. "We want to get to that level. The first World Cup for men was in 1930, it wasn't until 61 years later the first women's World Cup was introduced, we're still in our infancy as a product. — AFP



**SURREY:** Chelsea's English caretaker manager Frank Lampard (front center) speaks to (from left) Chelsea's English midfielder Conor Gallagher, Chelsea's Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovacic and Chelsea's Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang during a team training session at Chelsea's Cobham training facility on April 11, 2023. — AFP

celona despite a red card for John Terry on a memorable night in the Camp Nou. In the final against Bayern Munich, they needed a last-gasp equalizer from Didier Drogba to set up a penalty shoot-out victory over the Germans in their own Allianz Arena stadium. Repeating that fairytale success seems beyond Chelsea as they board their flight to Madrid, but Lampard insists anything can happen if his players show enough desire.

"There's a lot to it. Part of that was we parked the bus at the Nou Camp and managed to hang on for our dear lives! There are so many things, fate in dif-

ferent moments," he said. "But we did have a huge desire and a big character and a level of talent in the group that have been striving for years to win a Champions League, so that one you remember. "A team and a group will always go through tough moments to get to great ones." Chelsea are without a win in their last four games and once again lacked a cutting edge in the Wolves defeat. If Lampard's men are stunned Real in the Bernabeu, the Blues boss could do with a rare influential display from Raheem Sterling. The England forward has struggled badly since his move from Manchester City last year. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

### Clinics

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

### Change of Name

**I, MOHAMMED ZOAIB HUSAIN** holder of Indian passport No. M8399055 having permanent address Maharashtra, India n 400003 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: **MOHAMMED ZOAIB HUSAIN BADRI. (C 3200)**

**MAHABOOB BASHA SHAIK** Father of SYED AAHIL holding of his Indian passport number V5160992 resident in 2-361, Sastri Nagar, Akkayapalli, Kadapa have changed my son's name SYED AAHIL to Given name AAHIL Surname SHAIK. **(C 3199) 10/4/2023**



## Title-chasing Barcelona held Barca fail to capitalize on Madrid stumble

**BARCELONA:** Title-chasing Barcelona were held to a 0-0 draw by Girona at Camp Nou on Monday, extending their lead on Real Madrid at the top of La Liga by one point, now sitting 13 clear with 10 games remaining. Still smarting from their Clasico humiliation by Madrid last week in the Copa del Rey, Barcelona were far



**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski stares at the ball during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Girona FC on April 10, 2023. —AFP

from their best in a Catalan derby clash, despite the motivation of seeing the champions lose on Saturday against Villarreal.

Girona, mid-table, were solid and forced Xavi Hernandez's side to drop points at home in La Liga for only the third time this season. Barcelona secured their 21st clean sheet in the top flight but were not able to fully capitalize on Real Madrid's stumble, as they bid to win La Liga for the first time since 2019. "As the minutes passed, they started to gain confidence in defense, and we were struggling to make the final pass or take our chances," Barca captain Sergio Busquets told DAZN.

"Our objective remains the same, to win La Liga, and to try to win it as soon as possible. We're 13 points clear, but our objective remains the same." Xavi, still without several key players including Pedri and Ousmane Dembele, lined up with Ansu Fati and Raphinha alongside La Liga's top scorer Robert Lewandowski up front.

The Polish forward came close to opening the scoring on four minutes after being teed up by Fati, whipping an effort onto the roof of the net.

Barcelona supporters chanted Lionel Messi's name again after 10 minutes, representing the World Cup winner's former Barca shirt number, amid hopes he could return to his former club after his Paris Saint-Germain contract expires. "Leo generates excitement, they have chanted his name in two games now, we'll see what happens," Xavi told reporters. "We are focused on this, we have to win La Liga."

Barcelona came close again when Girona defender Santi Bueno almost put through his own net but goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga reacted well to slide in and divert the ball to safety. The former Tottenham goalkeeper saved well from Raphinha at his near post and then clawed away a Ronald Araujo effort from the resulting corner. Barcelona appealed that the ball had gone in but with the help of VAR - La Liga does not use goal-line technology - officials decided the ball did not cross the line.



### Girona blow chance

Eric Garcia headed over from a corner early in the second half as Barcelona kept looking for the opener. However the best chance of the game fell to the visitors, with Taty Castellanos spurning the opportunity by firing wide when through on goal, with Ivan Martin alongside in support, ready for a tap-in. Xavi threw on defender Jordi Alba as a left winger as he looked for better delivery in the final third, and he made an instant impact with a dangerous cross and some neat interplay with Lewandowski.

Gazzaniga made another fine save to tip over Gavi's header from a corner in stoppage time as Barcelona finally showed some urgency, but it was too late. Lewandowski had a late backheel deflected wide as Girona clung on for the draw. The Catalans took a meek step towards their title dream, extending their lead on Madrid by a point. "If we win it, we have to celebrate it big time, inside (the club) we value it a lot," added Xavi, who had complained at the weekend that some critics were trying to play down Barcelona's season. "We would absolutely have taken being 13 points clear, at the start of the season." — AFP

## Benzema 'hits the switch' as Madrid, Chelsea face off

**MADRID:** When Karim Benzema struck a magnificent hat-trick against Barcelona last week in the Copa del Rey, it served a dual purpose. The striker knocked Real Madrid's bitter rivals out of the Spanish Cup at Camp Nou, and, with the world watching on, issued a powerful statement of intent as the season reaches its business end. Los Blancos welcome Chelsea on Wednesday to the Santiago Bernabeu in a first leg Champions League quarter-final clash, and the Blues will be on red alert trying to stop the irrepressible Benzema.

Madrid, aiming to win the trophy for the sixth time in 10 seasons, have burst into life in recent matches, scoring 12 goals in their last three games, including the 4-0 romp against Barcelona. They suffered a 3-2 defeat on Saturday in La Liga against Villarreal, but coach Carlo Ancelotti made six changes from the side that beat Barcelona to keep the likes of Toni Kroos and Luka Modric fresh to face Chelsea.

Benzema netted consecutive hat-tricks against Real Valladolid and Barcelona before that, like Madrid he is finding his best form at the crunch moments. "He's hit the switch," said Ancelotti after the Clasico triumph. "Working in the international break has helped him, he's in good shape to make the difference." The Italian likened his team to a boiler, hitting the right temperature at the right time. "When the team is close to a title, the temperature of the boiler goes up," Ancelotti warned at the start of March.

After the 4-0 win at Camp Nou which saw Ma-

drig reach the Copa del Rey final for the first time since 2014, Ancelotti brought up the boiler again. "The boiler has returned to the right temperature at the most important moment of the season," he said. Benzema's own temperature has fluctuated this season, from moments of high quality to weeks sidelined with injury problems.

The 35-year-old Frenchman spent much of October and November on the sidelines and he missed the World Cup after sustaining a thigh problem. Benzema failed to score a goal in the Champions League group stages but hit three against Liverpool across both legs of the last 16 clash. Chelsea are familiar with the damage that the striker can do, with the striker netting a hat-trick last season at Stamford Bridge against the Blues in the quarter-finals in a 3-1 first leg win.

Despite Thomas Tuchel's side battling back at the Bernabeu, the hosts forced the game to extra-time and Benzema headed home decisively in the 96th minute after Antonio Rudiger, now at Madrid, slipped. It was a thrilling night of European football but despite Chelsea's best efforts in a 3-2 win, Benzema and Madrid marched on - as they so often do. Madrid went on to lift the trophy by beating Liverpool in the final in Paris. Now their sights are set on Istanbul.

"The truth is it was hard for us to be 100 percent motivated, that's quite normal," said Ancelotti after Madrid loss on Saturday in La Liga. The coach withdrew Benzema before the hour mark with his side 2-1 up against Villarreal, resting the striker for Chelsea's visit. Eventually Madrid fell to defeat, with their talisman only able to watch on from the sidelines. "The temperature of the boiler went down a bit today," admitted Ancelotti after the game, continuing his metaphor. "But on Wednesday we will be flat out." — AFP



**MADRID:** Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (right) heads the ball during a training session at Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid on April 11, 2023. — AFP

## Wawrinka, Thiem off the mark in Monte Carlo

**MONTE CARLO:** The 2014 Monte Carlo Masters winner Stan Wawrinka was full of relief Monday to get past the first round as Russian qualifier Ivan Gakhov secured a date with world number one Novak Djokovic. Three-time Grand Slam champion Wawrinka has slipped to 90th in the ATP rankings but secured his second-round ticket with a 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 defeat of Tallon Griekspoor. Also past the first hurdle in this warm-up for the French Open were 2021 Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini and Dominic Thiem.

But Andy Murray's participation in the Principality ended prematurely with the Scottish wild card dispatched 6-1, 6-3 by Australian 14th seed Alex de Minaur. Gakhov's reward for edging past American Mackenzie McDonald 7-6 (8/6), 2-6, 6-3 was a Tuesday second-round date with Djokovic, a David and Goliath clash with almost 200 rungs in the rankings between the pair. The Serb has not hit a shot in anger since losing his semi-final in Dubai at the start of March to Daniil Medvedev.

Forced to miss the American swing in Indian Well and Miami due to his anti-Covid vaccination stance Djokovic said on Sunday he was "motivated" to hit the clay-court season running as he targets a 23rd Grand Slam at Roland Garros. His path to a third Monte Carlo title has been smoothed by the absences due to injury of 11-time champion Rafael Nadal and Spanish teenage star Carlos Alcaraz. Wawrinka, who next faces American eighth seed Taylor Fritz, said "it's great



**MONTE CARLO:** Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka plays a right-hand return to Netherland's Tallon Griekspoor during their Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament on April 10, 2023. — AFP

to be here" after his defeat of Griekspoor.

The 38-year-old Wawrinka, who beat Roger Federer to the 2014 title, has failed to make it past the second round since 2017 and after two seasons blighted by injury is keen to make up for lost

time. "Nowadays, each win is important," he said. "Physically I'm doing well and my form is decent enough. "I'm capable of beating lots of players, I've just got to play my game." As for Berrettini, he was claiming his first win on Monte Carlo's clay at

the third attempt after dominating Maxime Cressy 6-4, 6-2. Thiem knocked out France's top hope Richard Gasquet 6-1, 6-4, with Danish sixth seed Holger Rune waiting for the 2020 US Open winner in the second round. — AFP