



NOTICE

Eid Mubarak to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on April 23 and 24, 2023. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via our website [Kuwaittimes.com](http://Kuwaittimes.com) and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Facebook.



# Amir congratulates citizens, residents

**KUWAIT:** The Amiri Diwan is pleased to convey the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to all citizens and residents on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing them all a happy occasion. The Amiri Diwan seizes this blessed occasion to voice congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister. It also wished it to be a happy festival for the

nation and both Arab and Muslim worlds, and many happy returns of the occasion to the entire world, wishing the nation eternal security, peace and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Saudi Arabia announced the Eid Al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, will begin on Friday in the kingdom. "Tomorrow, Friday, is the first day of Eid

Al-Fitr for this year," with Thursday the last day of Ramadan, the official Saudi Press Agency said on its Twitter account citing a royal court statement. The timing of Eid Al-Fitr is determined by the sighting of the crescent moon, in accordance with the Muslim lunar calendar.

The holiday is normally celebrated with family gatherings. The daytime fasting month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. Observant Muslims refrain

from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, and traditionally gather with family and friends to break their fast in the evening. It is also a time of prayers, with the faithful converging in large numbers at mosques, especially at night. Fasting is widely practiced in Saudi Arabia, home of the holiest shrines in Islam in Makkah and Madinah. Saudis are expected to observe a four-day holiday for Eid Al-Fitr. — Agencies



Osama Al-Furaih



Bader Al-Kharafi

**KUWAIT:** Zain Group's Board of Directors elected Osama Othman Al-Furaih, the representative of the Kuwait Investment Authority, as Chairman of the Board and Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as Vice Chairman and Group CEO.

## Mol steps up preparations for Eid

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's interior ministry has stepped up the pace of its preparations for Eid Al-Fitr celebrations starting Friday with all security apparatus of the country gearing up for ensuring safety and security during the joyous occasion which usually witnesses huge gatherings at complexes and recreational facilities in addition to possible heavy traffic jams on several streets. This will also warrant additional traffic deployment and security vigilance to ensure safety of all during the occasion.

An interior source revealed to Kuwait Times that the instructions of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, in addition to senior security lead-

ers, stipulate the need to provide all means of security, safety and reassurance to citizens as well as residents during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday.

"All departments of the interior ministry have drawn up a traffic security plan with full coordination around-the-clock between all security sectors concerned to achieve security, safety and smooth traffic flow on all roads, in addition to rapid and firm interaction with any emergency," sources said.

"The plan also includes the necessity of deploying traffic patrols. Their deployments will be in accordance with the plan to maintain security and stability in traffic. We are very firm on dealing with any violators and reckless people during the celebrations," the sources said.

The source also added that among the plan is the establishment of security checkpoints at commercial complexes and the Gulf road as this will help maintain security and deal with any possible unruly behavior from anyone. There is a link between the operations room

and the forces on the ground to deal immediately with all incoming communications. Meanwhile, the Kuwait Municipality announced the increase of its teams in the public hygiene departments in all governorates in view of the Eid Al-Fitr celebrations and serve mosques and worshippers, in addition to providing containers and carrying out cleaning work in public squares designated for Eid prayer areas.

"Field teams have engaged around 1,000 workers who will be distributed at dawn of the first day of Eid Al-Fitr in all mosques that will be holding the Eid prayer. Moreover, 520 containers and 11 water tanks will be provided for the service of the worshippers," the Municipality said. "The Department of Public Cleanliness and Road Occupancy in Al-Asimah governorate has cleaned 10 squares of places where Eid prayers will be held. In addition to providing 100 workers who will be distributed to all places of Eid prayers, three water tanks and 60 containers for each prayer location will also be provided," the Municipality added.

RAMADAN KAREEM

## Eid Al-Fitr in Islam

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Celebrations in Islam are a blessing from Al-mighty Allah in that all of them come after accomplishing an act of worship. We have two main celebrations in Islam viz. Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) arrived in Madinah, he found its inhabitants celebrating two occasions. Upon asking them, they said, "We used to celebrate these two occasions during the Ignorance Era (Jahiliyya).

He then informed them that The Loving Allah has substituted those two occasions with two better ones viz. Eid Al-Fitr (festival of breaking the fast) and Eid Al-Adha (festival of sacrifice). (This Hadith was classified as authentic by Imam Ibn Hajar). Eid Al-Fitr is a very important festival for Muslims. It is vital in the Islamic calendar and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself celebrated it. People refer to it as 'The Feast of Breaking the Fast' and Muslims worldwide celebrate it to mark the end of the auspicious month of Ramadan.

Eid Al-Fitr traditionally starts with prayers, then a short sermon follows. In some countries, the prayers occur outside, while in others the prayers are hosted in mosques or large halls. After the prayers, Muslims wish everyone around them a Happy Eid. After that, they visit their relatives and friends to enjoy each other's company and have a feast.

Muslims officially celebrate these two occasions, which occur after Ramadan and after the pilgrimage, or Hajj. Once during Eid Al-Adha, or the festival of sacrifice, Abu Baker (second caliph in Islam) visited Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and found two maidens singing and playing tambourines. He reprimanded them saying, "Do you play Satan's equipment in

Continued on Page 6

## 85 crushed to death in Yemen

**SANAA:** At least 85 people were killed and hundreds injured in a crush at a Ramadan cash hand-out in Yemen early on Thursday, as the impoverished country suffered one of its worst tragedies just as optimism was growing over its bitter civil war. Three people were detained over the stampede in Sanaa, Yemen's rebel-held capital, after large crowds gathered at a school to receive gifts of 5,000 rial (about \$8) for the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month.

Harrowing footage screened by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels' Al Masirah TV showed a tightly packed crowd screaming and shoving, unable to move, while others attempted to haul stricken people out of the crush. Other shots showed dead bodies on the ground as the panic continued. Afterwards, piles of abandoned sandals, clothing and a crutch littered the scene, while an investigator in white protective gear collected evidence. "It was a huge crowd. They fell on me, and I got hurt," an injured child told

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## Explosions, gunfire rock Sudan capital

**KHARTOUM:** Explosions and gunfire resounded in Sudan's capital Thursday as fighting between the forces of two rival generals showed no signs of abating ahead of festivities marking the end of Ramadan. Nearly 300 people have been killed since the



HODEIDAH: Displaced Yemenis receive sacks of food aid at a camp in Hays district in the war-ravaged western province of Hodeidah, on April 20, 2023. — AFP

fighting erupted Saturday between forces loyal to Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Some of the fiercest battles have taken place in the capital Khartoum, a city home to five million people, most of whom have been cloistered in their homes without electricity, food and water. "We were awoken today at around 4:30 am to the roaring sound of fighter jets and air strikes," said Nazek Abdalla, a

38-year-old in southern Khartoum. "We locked our doors and windows hoping no stray bullets would hit our building."

The fighting entered a sixth day hours after another truce unraveled, with the crackle of gunfire heard and columns of thick black smoke seen rising from buildings around Khartoum International Airport and the army headquarters in the capital. The RSF had said its forces would "fully commit

Continued on Page 6

## Court rejects Gandhi's plea

**AHMEDABAD:** An Indian court on Thursday rejected a plea by top opposition figure Rahul Gandhi for a stay on a defamation conviction that prompted his expulsion from parliament last month. Gandhi, 52, who was sentenced to two years imprisonment for remarks he made in 2019 seen as insulting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and those sharing his surname, had been looking to overturn the conviction before national elections due next year.

Modi's government is widely accused of using def-

amation law to silence critics. The case in the premier's home state of Gujarat is one of several lodged in recent years against Gandhi, who is Modi's chief opponent and the foremost member of the opposition Congress party. The judge in Thursday's hearing rejected Gandhi's plea for a stay, Congress member Naishadh Desai told reporters, adding that the verdict would be appealed in the Gujarat High Court. Critics highlight that the defamation conviction came after Gandhi repeatedly raised the issue of Modi's relationship with business tycoon Gautam Adani both inside and outside parliament.

The two men - both Gujaratis - have been close associates for decades, but Adani's business empire has been subject to renewed scrutiny this year after a US investment firm accused it of "brazen" corporate fraud, which it denies. Gandhi, currently on bail, is the

leading face of the Congress party, once the dominant force in Indian politics but now a shadow of its former self. He is the scion of India's premier political dynasty and the son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru.

But he has struggled to challenge the electoral juggernaut of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its nationalist appeals to the country's Hindu majority. In an appeal filed this month, Gandhi's lawyers argued the trial was "harsh" and excessive. They also said that if the trial court's decision was not stayed, it would cause irreparable damage to his reputation. The sentence renders Gandhi ineligible to stand in next year's election, which Modi's party is widely expected to win convincingly. — AFP





## Local

# Walking 'a healthy lifestyle'

## Ramadan an opportunity to modify bad eating habits

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Sports and fasting can be a challenging combination, and yet walkways in Kuwait are full of people who decided to change their lifestyle during Ramadan. Kuwait Times asked people about their sports journeys during fasting and whether it was crucial to plan their meals and workouts accordingly. Muhammad Al-Harbi said that his daily walking routine started 20 years ago. Walking was a passion for Harbi, and the number on the scale wasn't an issue for him.

"Losing weight was never my main goal. I don't think about losing weight as much as I do about burning food I have already consumed and keeping my routine going," he said, adding that his eating habits during Ramadan have become more organized. "I believe that Ramadan is a wonderful opportunity to modify bad eating habits and transform them into healthy, positive ones. Also, I started using the stairs more often," he said.

Harbi revealed that the most useful walkways in Kuwait are those near the seaside due to the clear weather. "In Kuwait, people don't walk often, first because of the weather and, secondly, because the design of the streets is not safe enough for walking. The most important

thing is that people go out at a time when the weather or air is clear, but unfortunately, Kuwait (a small country) has its own pollution issues," he explained.

For Muhammad Al-Fadhli, walking is not only for young people but has also become very popular with the elderly, pointing out that the elderly are keen to practice it during the dawn hours after prayers, while young people prefer it before Iftar or in the evening. "I started walking five years ago. I lost about 25 kilos. Walking has many benefits. It helps you to keep fit and deters the risk of age-related diseases such as diabetes," he said, adding that he conducted a test that showed that he is at risk of developing the disease. He was advised to exercise more and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Fadhli enjoys walking, especially when the weather is great, but he affirmed that some walkways lack essential services. "Some walkways lack toilets and paths for cyclists. Also, some sports machines are rusty due to a lack of periodic maintenance," Fadhli explained.

Abdullah Amro is disappointed over the lack of cycling routes. "Many people are comfortable seeing cyclists in crowded walkways. The government should create walkways with cycling routes and some areas for families to spend



their time away from the hustle and bustle of restaurants and cafes. Exercising during Ramadan helped me lose more than five kilograms. It

is recommended to break your fast with a light meal, followed by a more substantial meal and then a workout," Fadhli said.

## Eid Al-Fitr message

**KUWAIT:** On behalf of the delegation of the European Union to Kuwait, Chargé d'Affaires Gediminas Varanavicius extended his best wishes to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and all those celebrating Eid Al-Fitr in Kuwait, Europe, and around the world.

The EU and Kuwait enjoy strong ties across the board. Kuwait is a close and reliable friend, and one of our most like-minded partners in the wider region. People-to-people ties only further strengthen the bond between the EU and Kuwait. Today, many Kuwaiti students call the EU countries their second home, while thousands of Kuwaitis choose these countries as their preferred destination during the summer holidays.

Eid Al-Fitr serves as an important reminder of the values of compassion, charity, and cooperation. As we mark this joyous occasion with our family and friends, we mustn't forget those spending Eid separately from their loved ones and unsure of their future. Therefore, the EU is grateful to the Kuwaiti leadership for its strong stance in support of humanitarian causes around the world. I wish everyone a happy, safe, and blessed Eid Al-Fitr. Eid Mubarak!



Gediminas Varanavicius

## WHO congratulates Kuwait leadership

**KUWAIT:** On behalf of World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Assad Hafeez (Representative in Kuwait) extended his heartfelt congratulations to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the government and the people of Kuwait on the joyous occasion of Eid celebration.

"It is an honor for me to serve as the WHO representative to Kuwait and to work alongside the government and people of Kuwait towards the common goal of promoting 'Health For All'. We are committed to supporting the country's efforts in improving the health of its citizens and achieving the sustainable development goal targets. I am particularly impressed by the dedication and hard work of healthcare professionals in Kuwait who continue to provide quality care and services to the population, especially during challenging times. Your commitment to ensuring access to healthcare services for all is an inspiration to us all," he said.

"As we celebrate this special occasion, let us renew our commitment to working together towards a healthier and more prosperous future for all. The WHO remains committed to supporting the government and people of Kuwait in achieving their health goals. Once again, congratulations on this joyous occasion, and may Allah's bless-



Dr Assad Hafeez,  
WHO Representative  
to Kuwait



## NBK concludes its annual Ramadan social program

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait concluded its Ramadan program "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan", carried out for over 30 consecutive years. The program included the distribution of Iftar meals, visiting various institutions and in addition to participating in numerous charitable and social events. NBK's Head of Corporate Communications, Manal Al Mattar, said that NBK is proud to be a leading pioneer in social development through its CSR programs.

"This program aims to maintain deeper relationships with the communities we operate in, through the introduction of dozens of initiatives and projects that aim to nurture individuals and families and provide the necessary support to their goals of decent living, education and health care, the most important pillars to social development and progress," she added. For almost three decades, the Ramadan program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity in Kuwait. "NBK hopes to encourage a greater sense of responsibility during the holy month", Al Mattar noted.

### Ramadan tours

NBK Ramadan Social Program 2023 distributed 6,000 iftar meals and breakfasting meals via special convoys that toured around different areas in the

country including Farwaniya, Salmiya and Mahboula, Hawally, Bneid El Gar, Mubarakiya, Sharq, in addition to hospitals: Amiri, Mubarak and Sabah as well as Jleeb Fire Station.

### Volunteers

As they do every year, NBK employees participated in "Do good Deeds in Ramadan" program by conducting visits to various areas, institutions, public facilities and hospitals to do good deeds. This comes in light of NBK's keenness to promote volunteerism among its employees by reinforcing participation in various humanitarian and social activities organized by the bank.

### Traffic awareness campaign

NBK distributed around 1,500 fast breaking meals to drivers at traffic lights in strategic locations as Adailiya area, Mishref, Khaldiya, Shamiya, Assidiq, Al Surra and Kaifan. This initiative is aimed at reducing traffic accidents during the holy month of Ramadan, especially around iftar time as drivers attempt to reach their destinations before iftar time, resulting in speeding and traffic violations.

### Fun activities, Girgian

NBK shared the joy of Girgian at NBK Children's Hospital, Center 21. This is an annual tradition celebrated in Kuwait during the middle of the month of Ramadan. At NBK Children's Hospital, NBK participated in the Girgian celebration and shared with the children the happy moments of Girgian. The event was attended by NBK Public Relations Team and a number of NBK Staff volunteers.

Celebrating with the residents of Center 21 comes with the occasion of International Autism Day. NBK's participation in this event reflects NBK's efforts to

communicate with all segments of the society Contributing to Center 21 is an integral part of NBK's culture and practices that reflect its deep commitment to its corporate social responsibility.

### Health and wellbeing

NBK organized competitions in different Walking Trails in Kuwait where families experienced their daily walks before iftar while they take part in one of NBK competitions and get rewarded. NBK and Omniya are collaborate in these walking events as well to encourage people to collect plastic wastes. People are invited to gather their plastic wastes and meet NBK's team at the walking trails to trade what they collected with heat-insulated bottles. This initiative encourages recycling and helps in reducing the consumption of plastic in Kuwait. NBK was present in Al-Surra and Al-Yarmouk walkways, Mishref and Rumaithiya walkways, in addition to Al-Mubarakiya area, prior to Iftar time, and rewarded people with valuable prizes and collected plastic waste.

### Dama tournament

NBK organized Ramadan Dama Tournament at Al Aswak in Al Mubarakiyah. The Tournament was designed to engage with youth and families visiting the area. NBK volunteers were there to help engagement between families to take part in the competition and to reward the top three winners in the tournament.



Manal Al Mattar





# Ticket prices skyrocket amid Eid celebration

## DGCA expects 220,000 passengers during Eid

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Despite the high prices of airline tickets, citizens and residents opted to pay the skyrocketing ticket fares to spend Eid Al-Fitr holidays abroad. Travel agencies confirmed to Kuwait Times that many people booked and bought tickets during the past few days, which contributed to an increase of more than 300 percent. The tourism and travel offices said the turnout was due to a number of factors. Many people traveled to see their families, while some decided to change their environment and explore the new direct destinations. The top destinations are Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Qatar, the UK, and other European countries.

Ibrahim Raafat, a travel agent, indicated that the turnout rate reached about 90 percent, coinciding with the opening of new destinations by local airlines in the past few years. "Travelers prefer to travel to coun-

tries that are close to Kuwait, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The average price of a ticket is KD 200," he said. He explained that the average price of a ticket to Dubai was KD 280; KD 220 to Jeddah; KD 350 to Istanbul; and KD 300 to Cairo, noting that many travelers went to European countries such as London, Geneva, and Spain.

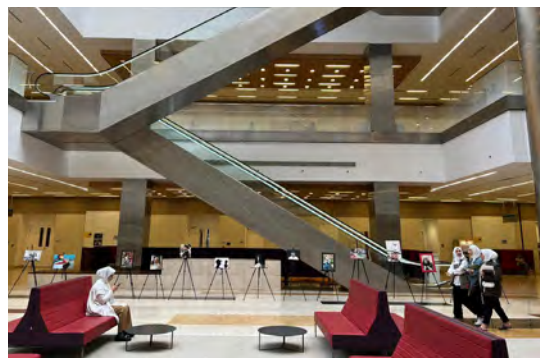
"Many people traveled to London, Cairo, and Dubai during Eid. The demand for Istanbul declined after the recent earthquake. Airline ticket prices rose by more than 300 percent (for some destinations) during this holiday. The ticket to London was about KD 690, compared to KD 190 a few weeks ago. Also, the ticket to Cairo reached KD 270, compared to KD 50 to KD 70 before the festive season. Other nearby destinations (within the GCC) reached up to KD 200," Adnan Hamadi told the Kuwait Times. He

indicated that most tourists traveled to Jeddah from Kuwait after the Saudi government launched the online tourist visa for foreigners.

Earlier, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) expected that travelers to and from Kuwait International Airport would reach 220,000 passengers during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, specifically from Thursday to April 25. Deputy Director General for Planning and Projects Affairs Saad Al-Otaibi confirmed the readiness of the DGCA and all its operational sectors for the Eid holiday, in cooperation with all governmental and non-governmental agencies operating at Kuwait International Airport. The most traveled destinations during the Eid holidays are Dubai, Istanbul, Cairo, and Doha. He pointed out that the expected travel movement during the same period is estimated at 110,000 departing and 110,000 arriving. Up to 1,800 flights will be operated.



## KU holds photo exhibition



KUWAIT: A photography exhibition "Portrait" was organized at the College of Administrative Sciences. The exhibition showcased various photos that were taken by the students. The photos reflect the students' skills in the art of photography. Various artistic activities that are organized throughout the academic year were aimed at developing students' skills.

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## Kuwait-Japan trade surplus almost double

**TOKYO:** Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan almost doubled from a year earlier to JPY 121.4 billion (\$902 million) in March, fueled by brisk export performance, government data showed Thursday. The Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report that the surplus surged by 98.5 percent, up for the first time in two months, and Kuwait recorded black ink with Japan for 15 years and two months on a monthly basis.

Kuwaiti overall exports to Japan ballooned 91.4 percent year-on-year to JPY 149.7 billion (\$1.1 billion) for the first expansion in two months. Imports from Japan also inflated 65.8 percent to JPY 28.4 billion (\$211 million), up for the 11th month in a row. Middle East's trade surplus with Japan widened 5.4 percent to JPY 819 billion (\$6.1 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region increasing 12.1 percent from a year earlier.

Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 95.8 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, rose 13.1 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan expanded 32.3 percent on demand for automobiles and machinery. The world's third-biggest economy logged a global trade deficit of JPY 754.5 billion (\$5.6 billion) in March for the 20th straight month, as higher energy bills and the yen's depreciation continued to push up the value of its imports.

Exports grew 4.3 percent from the year before, mainly driven by shipments of automobiles, semiconductor production equipment and nonferrous metals. Imports, however, also rose 7.3 percent, amid rising energy prices, especially coal, crude oil and refined products. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors.

### Kuwait oil price down

Meanwhile, Kuwait oil price went down by \$1.08 to \$85.73 per barrel in Wednesday's trading, as opposed to \$86.81 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday. In the international markets, the Brent crude increased by \$1.65 to \$83.12 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by \$1.70 to reached \$79.16 pb. — KUNA

### Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A bee flies by sunflowers at a garden in Kuwait City on April 19, 2023.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## AD ZONE Global organizes Iftar



**KUWAIT:** AD ZONE Global held Iftar at the luxurious Arjan Al Bida'a Hotel, providing a joyous and festive atmosphere for the company's employees and their families during the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan.



**KUWAIT:** AD ZONE Global's annual Iftar was held this year at the luxurious Arjan Al Bida'a Hotel, providing a joyous and festive atmosphere for the company's employees and their families during the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan. The event was attended by the company's management, employees, and their families, and it had a familial ambience between the workers, responsible managers, and the company's owners.

On the occasion of the blessed Eid Al-Fitr, the AD ZONE GLOBAL family extends its congratulations to the state of Kuwait, its leadership, its people, and to all citizens and residents on its land, wishing everyone the blessings and happiness of Eid. Mohammad Rameeh Al-Dgheeni, CEO of AD ZONE Global, stated that the company's annual iftar (breaking of the fast) for its employees and their families is one

of the major events in AD ZONE's priorities and interests, as well as its affiliated service companies. It is an opportunity to create affection, love, and constructive social communication between everyone.

This year's celebration was held at the Arjan Al Bida'a Hotel and Resort to allow for a wider participation in the event, which included guests and business partners, reflecting the company's policy of strengthening relationships with all its employees and stakeholders and deepening cooperation and communication. The annual iftar also reflects the company's sense of social responsibility, concern for its employees' moral aspects, and its keenness to provide a suitable and productive work environment for them.

Mohammad Mustafa, Executive Director of the company, says that the annual iftar is an opportunity to enhance team spirit, brotherly ties, social and

human closeness between employees, managers, and stakeholders, and to ensure continuity of communication between employees and top management outside the formal work environment, and in a Ramadan atmosphere dominated by affection and faith, reflecting the meanings of the holy month.

At this year's iftar event, gifts were distributed to the families and children of the attending employees, and joy and happiness filled the place. Anthony Elzoghby, Managing Director, announced that the company achieved the highest sales growth rate in 2022 among advertising companies operating in Kuwait. This is attributed to working as a team and employing good ideas that contribute to business development and sales growth. He pointed out that there are many competent and outstanding employees who deserve reward and appreciation, and that they will receive it throughout the year.



## Christians and Muslims: The promoters of love, friendship

**KUWAIT:** Miguel Angel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, Prefect, Vatican City, sent the following letter, sending greetings to Muslims around the world on the holy month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr occasions:

"Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

The month of Ramadan is important for you, but also for your friends, neighbors and fellow believers of other religions, in particular Christians. Existing friendships are reinforced and others are built, paving the way for more peaceful, harmonious and joyful coexistence. This corresponds to the divine will for our communities, and indeed for all the members and communities of the one human family.

We are aware, dear friends, that peaceful and friendly coexistence faces many challenges and threats: extremism, radicalism, polemics, disputes, and religiously motivated violence. The threats are fueled by a culture of hate. We need, then, to find the most appropriate ways of countering and overcoming such a culture, enhancing instead, enhancing love and friendship, in particular between Muslims and Christians, due to the bonds that unite us. This is why we deemed it opportune to share some thoughts with you in this regard, hoping to receive yours as well. All begins with our attitude towards each other, in particular when there are differences between us in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, or politics.

Differences can be perceived as a threat, but everyone has the right to his or her specific identity with its diverse components, yet without ignoring or forgetting what we have in common: "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend

to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light" (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, 28 October 1965, n. 1). Negative attitudes and behaviors towards those who are different from us are unfortunately numerous: suspicion, fear, rivalry, discrimination, exclusion, persecution, polemics, insults, and backbiting, to name a few.

Social media platforms are common spaces for such harmful behaviors, perverting their role from being means for communication and friendship to being instruments for enmity and fighting. In this regard, Pope Francis has said: "Even as individuals maintain their comfortable consumerist isolation, they can choose a form of constant and febrile bonding that encourages remarkable hostility, insults, abuse, defamation and verbal violence destructive of others, and this with a lack of restraint that could not exist in physical contact without tearing us all apart. Social aggression has found unparalleled room for expansion through computers and mobile devices" (Fratelli Tutti, 3 October 2020, n. 44).

The opposites of the above-mentioned negative behaviors, are respect, goodness, charity, friendship, mutual care for all, forgiveness, cooperation for the common good, help to all those who are in any kind of need and care for the environment, in order to keep our "common home" a safe and pleasant place where we can live together in peace and joy.

We cannot prevent and counter the culture of hatred and, instead promote a culture of love and friendship, without a sound education for future generations in all the spaces where they are formed: in the family, at school, in places of worship, and on social media. A world where justice, peace, fraternity and, prosperity reign pleases the Almighty and brings joy, calling, therefore, our sincere and shared engagement.

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, may you enjoy the Almighty's abundant blessings during Ramadan and celebrate Eid Al-Fitr in the joy resulting from fidelity and love for the Almighty and all persons you live with or meet."



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# The British physicist making women scientists visible online

## Science ‘is very male-dominated’: Wade

**LONDON:** By day, Jessica Wade spends her time in a laboratory at Imperial College London surrounded by spectrometers, oscilloscopes — and men. At night, she writes biographies on Wikipedia about women researchers like her who don't have an online presence. “We can't just do the shouting about how we need more women in science. We have to do the point of honoring and celebrating the women scientists that we have,” she told AFP.

“And I think writing their stories, making sure the world recognizes what they've done is a really important way to do that.” Wade, 34, has worked at Imperial's imposing campus in west London since 2016. As a physicist, she is involved in developing new generations of carbon-based semi-conductors to make optical and electronic devices such as televisions and solar panels more energy efficient.

She leads a team of five people in a wider team of about 15. Of them, only one other scientist is a woman. Science “is very male-dominated,” Wade said, lamenting the lack of interest in it among girls whose parents are not scientists.

“As soon as I walked into a physics department that had a majority of men and a majority of people from white privileged backgrounds, I suddenly realized that not everyone's getting the opportunity to study physics, not everyone's getting excited about it,” she added. “That lack of diversity impacts the

science we do, the questions we ask, the directions we go in, the way we translate our innovations into society, where those kinds of devices are actually used in the world and who they benefit.”

**Visibility**

Wade now seeks to “take science to more people” but came across “knowledge gaps” in the internet's free, multilingual, collaborative encyclopedia. “Wikipedia is an amazing platform because it's used by everyone in society,” she said. “It's used by 15 billion access points a month. Parents, teachers, policymakers, journalists, scientists, Amazon, Alexa, Google Home, they all use Wikipedia when they're looking for information.” But there is one big problem, she added: “About 90 percent of Wikipedia contributors and editors are men, and about 19 percent of the biographies on English language Wikipedia are about women.”

Wade set out to redress the imbalance in 2018 and has since written almost 2,000 pages by herself at the rate of one a night, at home, after dinner. “They take more than one hour each, so that's already too many hours of my life,” she laughed. But she is undeterred by the daunting task.

“I don't see it stopping anytime soon,” she said.

In fact, the research itself creates more work, as she often discovers more women scientists when writing another biography. Wades' first Wikipedia

biography entry was the American climatologist Kim Cobb. She saw her at a conference but after looking her up on Wikipedia found there was nothing on her oceanographic research.

**Acknowledgement**

Wade, who is now part of a network of women editors and leads workshops on how to write for Wikipedia, says a person's presence and their work on the internet means they are discoverable.

“Little girls who are googling something, let's say about sea urchins, will click through and then land on a Wikipedia page about an awesome woman scientist who had contributed to that,” she said. “If you're trying to nominate someone for an award or to become a fellow or to invite someone to give a lecture, you always google them and if they've got a biography nicely summarized on somewhere like Wikipedia, it's so much easier to write someone's citation or reference.” That happened for Gladys West, a 92-year-old black American mathematician, whose profile was one of Wade's first.

Starting in 1956, when racial segregation was still imposed in the United States, she worked for 42 years on navy navigation systems. Her calculations eventually led to the development of GPS.

“I researched Gladys to write her page and there was so little about her online, she was almost 90 and no one



**LONDON:** British physicist Jessica Wade poses for a photograph following an interview with AFP, outside of The Royal School of Mines in London. — AFP

had celebrated her,” she said. “I put her Wikipedia page online in February 2018 and in May 2018 she was in the BBC top 100 women in the world. “And then she was inducted to the US Air Force Hall of Fame, and she won the Royal Academy of Engineering Prince Philip medal, which had never before gone to a woman.” — AFP

## Monitor: Fast-warming Europe risks more summer droughts

**PARIS:** A fierce drought melted glaciers during Europe's hottest recorded summer last year, a phenomenon that could repeat as the continent warms at nearly twice the global rate, the EU's climate observatory said Thursday. Two-thirds of Europe's rivers fell below average levels and five cubic kilometers (two cubic miles) of ice disappeared from Alpine glaciers, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said in its yearly update.

With human-caused emissions heating the planet, Europe is warming around twice as quickly as the world average - 2.2 degrees Celsius over the past five years compared to the pre-industrial era.

In 2022 it saw its second-hottest year and its hottest summer since comparable records began in the 1950s, said Copernicus, which monitors numerous climate indicators via satellites plus land- and sea-based instruments. The forecast for 2023 remains uncertain but “with higher concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the probability of more warm years continues to increase,” said Samantha Burgess, deputy director of C3S.

With soils in southern Europe still “incredibly dry”, impacts will be felt this year “unless we have significant spring rainfall,” she added. “Unfortunately the impacts are probably already in place for growing season. So we're likely to see reduced crop production this year because of the dry winter and spring period.”

**Drought in Europe**

Copernicus had earlier announced that the past eight years have been the hottest on record. It found 2022 “another record-breaking year in terms of greenhouse gases concentration, temperature extremes, wildfire and precipitation, which have all had a notable impact on both ecosystem and community all over the continent,” said C3S director Carlo Buontempo. “We are really moving into uncharted territory.”

The continent had less snow and rain than average in winter 2021-2022, followed by prolonged heatwaves in the summer which hit the agriculture, river transport and energy sectors. — AFP

## Pacific solar eclipse dazzles stargazers

**DENPASER:** Professional astronomers and amateur cosmologists across the southern Pacific donned protective glasses Thursday to witness a solar eclipse as the moon blocked out the sun for about a minute, in some cases totally.

Parts of Australia, Indonesia and East Timor were plunged into daytime darkness, delighting curious onlookers. On Australia's northwest tip, the eclipse was total.

In the town of Exmouth, stargazers parked their caravans, pitched telescopes and donned protective glasses to watch the moon seemingly creep across the sun's surface before the totality hit at 11:29:48 local time. “Many people become addicted to that minute or so of eerie otherworldliness,” John Lattanzio of the Astronomical Society of Australia said.

“They become ‘eclipse chasers’ and they

travel all over the world for repeat experiences.” When the darkness hit, it brought a spectral calm, according to witnesses.

Less than a minute later, the dusty outback was again bathed in light. A little later, thousands waited in line at a planetarium in Jakarta, to see partial coverage of the sun through telescopes.

Over in Bekasi, on the outskirts of the Indonesian capital, Kristoforus Aryo Bagaskoro and his 10-year-old daughter Angela Tara watched the phenomenon on the reflective surface of a water-filled bucket.

“Tara could not stop talking about it since yesterday, so this morning, I used water to observe it in front of our house,” he said. “It was a rare event. Tara was enthusiastic about it and kept asking why it could happen”. Tara added that the partial eclipse — with about 40 percent of the sun obscured — was “awesome”. While fun and perhaps moving for spectators, the eclipse gave scientists a chance to observe the sun's corona, which is usually obscured by its bright rays.

Witnessing a similar eclipse once helped Albert Einstein hypothesize that light can bend. At Com Beach on the eastern tip of East Timor, more than a thousand people, including tourists and astrono-



**DENPASAR, Indonesia:** A general view shows a partial solar eclipse in Denpasar, on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on April 20, 2023. — AFP

mers from Southeast Asian countries, gathered to witness the one-minute total eclipse. The stargazers observed the rare phenomenon by using anti-UV glasses distributed by astronomy groups, while others lined up to use telescopes provided by the National University of East Timor. — AFP

## Tunisia opposition Ennahdha chief remanded in custody

**TUNIS:** Tunisian opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi has been remanded in custody following his arrest earlier this week, his Ennahdha party said Thursday, denouncing his “unjust imprisonment”.

Ghannouchi, 81, a former speaker of parliament, was arrested on Monday after remarks warning that eradicating different viewpoints such as the left or political Islam, from which his party originated, might lead to a “civil war”. The main opposition alliance, the National Salvation Front (FSN), of which Ennahdha is a member, said he had been held on suspicion of “plotting against state security”.

Ghannouchi's lawyer Mokhtar Jemai, speaking on a private radio station, said the court ordered his detention after more than nine hours of questioning. Ennahdha rejected any intention of Ghannouchi

to call for a civil war, saying it “strongly condemns an unjust ruling which aims to cover up the total failure of the authorities to solve economic and social problems”. Tunisia is heavily indebted and facing high inflation and unemployment, leading some of its citizens to try fleeing to Europe.

Since early February, authorities in the North African country have arrested more than 20 political opponents and personalities. The Islamist-inspired opposition Ennahdha party held the most seats in Tunisia's parliament before President Kais Saied dissolved the chamber in July 2021 in a power grab allowing him to rule by decree. Saied, 65, claims those detained were “terrorists” involved in a “conspiracy against state security”. Opponents have dubbed his actions a “coup” and a return to autocratic rule in the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings in the region more than a decade ago.

Tunisia has been negotiating for several months with the International Monetary Fund for a loan worth nearly \$2 billion, but discussions appear to have stalled. The exodus from the country has drawn concern from the European Union. On Tuesday the 27-nation bloc also expressed “concern” following



**Rached Ghannouchi**

the arrest of Ghannouchi, recalling the importance of the “fundamental principle of political pluralism”. The United States on Wednesday condemned the arrests of political opponents and said respect for freedom of expression and human rights are essential “to the US-Tunisia relationship”.

Tunis hit back with a strongly worded statement on Wednesday, calling them an “unacceptable interference”. — AFP

## Eid Al-Fitr in Islam...

**Continued from Page 1**

the house of the Messenger of Allah?” Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) woke up to Abu Baker's voice and said, “Leave them alone Abu Baker! Indeed every people have their own festival and this is our festival.” (Reported by Imam Muslim)

The religious festival of breaking the fast (Eid Al-Fitr) is an auspicious occasion during which Muslims perform different acts of worship. This Eid (festival) commemorates the end of fasting during the bountiful month of Ramadan.

It is an occasion for special prayers, family visits, gift-giving and charity. It takes place over one to three days, beginning on the first day of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Islamic lunar calendar.

It is highly recommended and meritorious that Muslims give Zakat Al-Fitr (compulsory charity for ending the worship of obligatory fast) to the poor and needy so that they too enjoy themselves on Eid. Therefore, its purpose is to purify those who fast from

any indecent act or speech, and to help the poor and needy enjoy the Eid without fear and worry. Abdullah bin Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) prescribed the Zakat Al-Fitr as a means of purifying the fasting person from shortcomings in his fast, and as a means of providing food for the poor and the needy.

Whoever pays it before the Eid prayer will have it accepted from him as Zakat (Al-Fitr). And if anyone pays it after the prayer, then it will be regarded as any optional charity.” (Al-Albani rated it as Hasan (authentic) in Saheeh Abi Dawud # 1, 609)

**Cause for celebration**

The main reason for the Muslims to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr is their conviction that Almighty Allah has forgiven their sins. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Whoever fasts Ramadan out of pure faith and hoping for reward from (Almighty) Allah, he will be forgiven his previous sins. And whoever stands in Prayer and devotion during the Night of Power, his previous sins will be forgiven.” (Al-Bukhari # 1901) — Courtesy of the TIES Center

## 85 crushed to death in Yemen...

**Continued from Page 1**

Al Masirah from his hospital bed. A Houthi security official speaking on condition of anonymity told AFP that at least 85 people were killed and “more than 322” injured, 50 of them seriously. “Women and children were among the dead,” the official said. A health official confirmed the toll. The tragedy comes just ahead of Eid Al-Fitr, a major Muslim festival, and punctures a buoyant mood over the war in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country, following peace talks and an exchange of nearly 1,000 prisoners last week.

The Houthis, who seized Sanaa in 2014, are fighting a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia that intervened in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall the ousted government. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed by the war's direct or indirect causes, and millions pushed to

the brink of famine. But momentum is growing for a truce and peace process, with the Saudis and Houthis holding talks last week.

Eyewitnesses said gunfire sparked a stampede after crowds gathered at the school, in Sanaa's historic Bab Al-Yemen district, to receive the handouts from a businessman. AFP could not verify the reports of gunfire. The head of the Houthis' Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohamed Ali Al-Houthi, blamed “overcrowding”, saying people were packed in a narrow street leading to the school's back entrance.

Once the gates opened, the crowd streamed into a tight staircase leading to the courtyard where the distribution was taking place. “Citizens were informed a week ago that sums of money would be disbursed without ID verification,” said one witness. “People flocked in a huge way, the gate opened, and with the large numbers, the stampede happened.” The Houthis' political chief Mahdi Al-Mashat said a committee had been formed to investigate, and a Houthi security official said three people had been detained on suspicion of involvement. — AFP

## Explosions, gunfire rock Sudan...

**Continued from Page 1**

to a complete ceasefire” from 1600 GMT on Wednesday for 24 hours, as did the army. But witnesses said gunfire did not stop in Khartoum from the appointed time and into the night, as another ceasefire was breached within minutes of its supposed start for the second time in as many days. Beyond Khartoum, witnesses reported loud explosions in the city of Obeid, in central state of North Kordofan.

The fighting - which has also wounded hundreds of people - has taken a heavy toll on civilians across Sudan, many observing the holiest final days of Ramadan. “We wish the fighting would stop during Eid festivities” which is to begin Friday marking the end of the holy Muslim month of fasting, said Abdalla, the resident of southern Khartoum. “We know it will not happen though,” he lamented.

Burhan and Daglo's bitter dispute centered around the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army - a key condition for a final deal aimed at restoring Sudan's democratic transition. Around the capital and elsewhere, RSF fighters atop armored vehicles and pickup trucks laden with weapons have taken over the streets.

Many have put up checkpoints to search cars carrying civilians trying to escape Khartoum's worst battle zones to safer areas in the capital and beyond. Fighting has damaged residential and commercial buildings, and civilians sheltering in their homes are becoming increasingly desperate. By Tuesday, thousands of Sudanese had fled the capital, with many saying they had seen dead bodies littering the streets as they made their way to safety. “It reeks of death in some parts of town,” said a witness who was leaving a hotspot in central Khartoum.

Sudanese medics have warned of catastrophic health care situation, especially in Khartoum where many hospitals were apparently caught in the crossfire. As many as 70 percent of the hospitals in Khar-

toum and neighboring states have been rendered “out of service” due to the fighting, the doctors' union said. The conflict had killed at least 270 civilians in the first five days, 14 foreign diplomatic missions in Khartoum said Wednesday.

The union has warned, however, that the death toll was likely to be far higher, with many wounded unable to reach hospitals. Many countries have started to make plans to evacuate thousands of foreigners from the north African country, but their efforts have been put on hold by the ongoing violence. The Sudanese army said 177 Egyptian soldiers who had been captured by the RSF in the northern city of Meroe were evacuated Wednesday back to Egypt, which also confirmed their arrival. — AFP



## International

## UN chief to convene meeting on Afghanistan in Doha on May 1

## French court jails Afghans over Channel people smuggling

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN secretary-general is convening an international meeting on Afghanistan May 1-2 in Doha, where envoys will seek a “durable way forward” for the war-ravaged nation, his spokesman said Wednesday. Antonio Guterres will host the closed-door gathering featuring special envoys on Afghanistan from various countries who aim to “clarify expectations” on concerns including the Taliban authorities’ restrictions on women, according to spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

“The purpose of this kind of small group meeting is for us to reinvigorate the international engagement around the common objectives for a durable way forward on the situation in Afghanistan,” Dujarric told reporters at UN headquarters. Guterres “continues to believe that it’s an urgent priority to advance an approach based on pragmatism and principles, combined with strategic patience, and to identify parameters for creative, flexible, principled and constructive engagement.” It was unclear at this stage whether or not Taliban leadership would be represented at the talks.

The United Nations mission in Afghanistan has launched an assessment of its operations following a ban on Af-

ghan women working for the world body. The announcement of the meet in Qatar’s capital followed remarks Monday by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, who addressed the prospect of the envoys gathering to discuss the “baby steps” that could put the Taliban government back on the pathway to recognition by the international community, albeit with conditions attached.

“There are some who believe this can never happen. There are others that say, well, it has to happen,” Mohammed said in a talk at Princeton University. “The Taliban clearly want recognition... and that’s the leverage we have.” But Dujarric, the spokesman, on Wednesday stressed that Mohammed “was not in any way implying that anyone else but member states have the authority for recognition” of Afghanistan’s government.

Last December the UN General Assembly approved a decision by its credentialing committee to postpone any approval of Kabul’s request to accredit a new ambassador representing them at the United Nations following the Taliban’s return to power in August 2021. Dujarric said at Princeton the UN deputy secretary-general—who is deeply involved in the issue—spoke merely about

“reaffirming the need for the international community to have a coordinated approach regarding Afghanistan.”

“This includes finding common ground on the longer-term vision for the country, and sending a unified message to the de facto authorities on the imperative to ensure women have their rightful place in the Afghan society,” he added. On April 4 the Taliban authorities banned Afghan women from working for UN offices countrywide, sparking opprobrium from the West and a United Nations review of the world body’s Afghanistan operations. The announcement of the Doha meeting comes a day after the UN said the number of Afghans in poverty had nearly doubled to 34 million since the Taliban takeover.

There is no contemporary census data for Afghanistan but the UN uses a population estimate of 40 million, meaning 85 percent of the nation is projected to be in poverty.

Meanwhile, a French court has jailed four Afghans and handed lesser sentences to five others for illegally smuggling migrants across the Channel to Britain on dinghies in 2021. London and Paris are clamping down on illicit boat crossings into the United Kingdom on the perilous



**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres is convening an international meeting on Afghanistan May 1-2 in Doha, where envoys will seek a “durable way forward” for the war-ravaged nation, his spokesman said Wednesday.

route, which has been used by growing numbers of people since 2018.

The court tried nine Afghans aged 21 to 39 for taking part in four operations to smuggle 53 mainly Vietnamese and Afghan migrants across the Channel between January and March 2021. All passengers were picked up in ei-

ther British or French waters. The Paris court on Wednesday jailed a 30-year-old for six years and fined him 30,000 euros (\$32,000) for orchestrating the crossings, charges he denied throughout the trial. It ordered that he should be expelled from France once he has served his time. —AFP

## News in brief

## One dead after boat sinks off Greece

**ATHENS:** One man died and 47 people were rescued after a boat carrying migrants sank off southern Greece, the coast guard said Thursday. A rescue operation was launched early Thursday and the coast guard found “a dead man, aged 45, and 47 surviving migrants” off the Peloponnese peninsula, an official told AFP. She said four children and three women were taken to hospital in Sparta, the main city in Laconia. Thousands of would-be migrants seek to reach the European Union via Greece, making a perilous crossing over the Mediterranean, often in flimsy, overcrowded boats. — AFP

## Train derailment sparks chaos in Italy

**ROME:** Passengers across Italy were left stranded Thursday after a train derailment caused the cancellation of dozens of trains, including high-speed services between the north and south of the country. Nobody was hurt when the carriage of the freight train came off the rails at around 2.20 am (00:20 GMT) between Florence and Bologna, for reasons that are still being investigated. But it knocked down poles supporting electric cables used by the trains, suspending services across the network. Italian rail firm Trenitalia announced at least 50 cancellations and delays of up to three hours, while other routes were diverted. — AFP

## Court lets Frenchman off death row

**HOUSTON, US:** The only French citizen currently on death row in the United States had his punishment changed to a life sentence after a Texas appeals court ruled in his favor Wednesday. Joseph Jean was sentenced to death in January 2011 after killing two teenagers with a baseball bat in April 2010 in Baytown, outside of Houston, Texas. But his lawyers have been arguing since 2013 that Jean has an intellectual disability, rendering him ineligible for the death penalty. The US Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that the death penalty is unconstitutional for such individuals. In 2021, a judge agreed that Jean had a mental disability, and on Wednesday a Texas appeals court confirmed that finding. — AFP

## Brazil security chief resigns

**BRASILIA, Brazil:** One of Brazil’s top national security officials resigned on Wednesday after the disclosure of videos of him at the scene of the January 8 attacks on the capital Brasilia. General Marco Edson Gonçalves Dias, head of the Institutional Security Bureau (GSI), submitted his resignation after CNN Brasil broadcast images from security cameras showing Gonçalves Dias at the Planalto Palace, one of the federal buildings ransacked by protesters earlier this year. The protesters were seeking to restore defeated former president Jair Bolsonaro to power, just days after he left office. — AFP

## PM: Japan wants ‘constructive, stable’ ties with China

**TOKYO:** Japan wants “constructive and stable” ties with China and calls on Beijing to behave “responsibly”, the country’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in an interview Thursday. Ties between the countries have soured in recent years, with Japan last December scolding China the nation’s “greatest strategic challenge ever”, as it announced a major security overhaul including more defense spending.

“We’re facing the most challenging, complex security environment since the war and what must be prioritized, I believe, is proactive diplomacy with China,” Kishida said in an interview with foreign me-

## Thailand air pollution leads millions to seek medical help

**BANGKOK, Thailand:** About 2.4 million people in Thailand have sought hospital treatment for medical problems linked to air pollution since the start of the year, health officials said, as toxic smog chokes parts of the country. Bangkok and the northern city of Chiang Mai were among the most polluted cities in the world on Thursday morning, according to air quality monitoring firm IQAir.

The poor air quality has seen 2.4 million people seek medical treatment since the start of the year, with 184,465 hospital admissions this week alone, Public Health Department permanent secretary Dr Opas Karnkavinpong said Wednesday. Opas said respiratory problems, dermatitis, eye inflammation and sore throats were among the most common medical issues.

Health officials have urged people to use high-quality N95 anti-pollution masks, close windows and doors, minimize time outside and exercise indoors. “Today is so smoggy. I cough so much,” a Thai Facebook user said. “I have a sore throat and cough so much. I did a test for COVID but it’s not that. Looking at the pollution level, that could be it.” Smoke from forest fires and farmers burning crop

## Cambodia PM Hun Sen’s son becomes four-star general

**PHNOM PENH, Cambodia:** Cambodian leader Hun Sen’s eldest son was officially promoted to the rank of four-star general on Thursday, in another sign of plans for him to succeed his father. Hun Sen has publicly backed Hun Manet to lead the kingdom in the future, Hun Manet, who is commander of the army, received the four-star rank at a ceremony attended by more than 1,000 senior military officials.

Defence minister Tea Banh, who presided over the ceremony, said Hun Manet’s promotion reflected his efforts “to serve the nation, military and Cambodian people”. Hun Manet—who was educated in Britain and the United States—has been officially backed by the ruling party as a future prime minister, and has been active on social media in recent months to increase his public profile.

The 45-year-old has also had more diplomatic meetings with senior political figures than before, according to the Lowy Institute’s Asia Power Index. In 2022 he met 10 world leaders, deputy leaders and foreign ministers, compared with only two in 2019, the institute said. He will run for a parliamentary seat when Cambodia goes to the polls in July this year, according to a party document seen by AFP. Hun Sen, who has ruled the country for 38 years, has repeatedly hinted at stepping down but has said he will run for office again in the coming election.

dia including AFP. Japan wants a “constructive and stable relationship” with Beijing, “which requires efforts on both sides”, he added.

“We will continue to call on China to act responsibly,” Japan is this year’s G7 host, and this week the group’s foreign ministers offered a united front on concerns about China, warning it on everything from maritime claims to Taiwan. The ministers put Beijing on notice over its “militarization activities” in the South China Sea and accused it of an “accelerating expansion” of its nuclear arsenal.

The statement prompted furious reaction from Beijing, which accused the group of having “maliciously slandered and smeared” China. The foreign ministry said it had “lodged solemn representations with Japan” over the statement, which it called “full of arrogance, prejudice and sinister intent”.

Tensions in the region have been stirred by a series of events including Chinese military drills launched after Taiwan’s president met a senior



**CHIANG MAI, Thailand:** In this file photo taken on April 10, 2023 an Air Asia plane descends towards Chiang Mai International Airport amid high levels of air pollution in Chiang Mai. — AFP

stubble have polluted the air in parts of the country, according to experts. Thailand is home to more than 70 million people and its poor air quality has be-

come a hot button issue ahead of the country’s May 14 election, with the incumbent government accused of not doing enough to tackle the problem. — AFP



**PHNOM PENH, Cambodia:** General Hun Manet (right), Commander of the Royal Cambodian Army and eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, salutes Tea Banh (left), Minister of National Defense, during a promotion ceremony at the Ministry of Defense in Phnom Penh on April 20, 2023. — AFP

The prime minister, who has wound back democratic freedoms and used the courts to stifle opposition, frequently characterizes his children’s achievements as the product of education and training, and rejects claims of nepotism. At the last general election in 2018, Hun Sen’s party won every seat in parliament after the Supreme Court dissolved the main opposition, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) a year before. A court

last month found Kem Sokha, a co-founder of the CNRP, guilty of conspiring with foreign entities to overthrow Hun Sen’s government. He was sentenced to 27 years in prison and immediately placed under house arrest. Scores of opposition figures were convicted of treason last year and Hun Sen ordered the shutdown of one of the country’s few remaining local independent media outlets in February, over a report about Hun Manet. — AFP

US politician. China considers Taiwan its territory and has vowed to bring the island under its control one day. It also claims the entire Taiwan Strait as its territorial waters.

## ‘Act responsibly’

Kishida said maintaining “peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait” was important not only for Japan but for “the stability of the international community”, though he declined to be drawn on how Japan might respond to an invasion. “We hope that issues about Taiwan will be solved peacefully through dialogue,” he added. Kishida met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of a summit last year, and the country’s foreign minister visited Beijing this month, the first such trip since December 2019.

But he arrived shortly after Tokyo announced it was joining Washington in unveiling export controls on semiconductor equipment—seen as targeting Beijing—and with a Japanese businessman being

held by Chinese authorities on allegations of spying. Kishida called on China to “ensure transparency in the judicial process” and return detained Japanese nationals. And he said China needed to do more to ensure a “transparent, predictable and fair business environment”.

“In addition to guaranteeing the safety of the Japanese citizens, the legitimate business activities of Japanese companies should also be ensured,” he added. China and Japan are the world’s second and third largest economies respectively, and Beijing is Tokyo’s largest trading partner. But the arrest of a man working for a Japanese pharmaceutical company, reportedly with years of experience in China, has chilled the business community.

Kishida also warned that the “stability” of US-China relations is “extremely important for the international community”. Japan, he added, would call on China “to fulfill its responsibility as a major power in the international community”. — AFP



## Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2023

## US seeks 'constructive and fair' economic ties with China: Yellen

Tensions remain elevated between the world's two biggest economies

**WASHINGTON:** The United States seeks a "constructive and fair economic relationship" with China, even as Washington holds firm in defending the country's national security, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in prepared remarks Thursday. Her speech, to be delivered at a school of Johns Hopkins University in Washington, comes as tensions remain elevated between the world's two biggest economies.

China's new Foreign Minister Qin Gang last month accused Washington of stoking tensions between both powers, warning of "conflict and confrontation."

But Yellen said the United States remains firm in its conviction to defend its values and national security. "Within that context, we seek a constructive and fair economic relationship with China," she added in her remarks. She also noted the need for both countries to be able to "frankly discuss difficult issues" and work together when possible.

Stressing that "healthy economic competition" is only sustainable with fairness, she said: "We will continue to partner with our allies to respond to China's unfair economic practices." Yellen noted that China has expanded support for its state-owned enterprises and domestic private firms, to "dominate foreign competitors."

## EU parliament OKs world's most sweeping cryptocurrency rules

**STRASBOURG:** The European Parliament approved the world's first comprehensive rules to regulate the "Wild West" world of cryptocurrencies on Thursday, hoping to protect investors against abuse and manipulation. EU member states have already backed the legislation covering cryptoassets, which include cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and ethereum and other tradable tokens whose value is secured using blockchain technology, such as NFTs.

The rules, now approved by a large majority of European lawmakers, hope to whip into shape an industry that has been beset by scandals and failures. One of the most recent cryptocurrency exchange failures came in November when the FTX platform and its sister trading house Alameda Research went bankrupt, dissolving a virtual trading business that at one point had a market value of \$32 billion.

The EU commissioner for financial services, Mairead McGuinness, said during a parliamentary debate on Wednesday that the rules would have regulated FTX's activities and perhaps prevented its collapse at great cost to some investors. Under the regulation known as Markets in Crypto Assets (MiCA), cryptoasset service providers (CASPs) must protect customers' digital wallets and will be

## US home sales slowed in March

**WASHINGTON:** Sales of existing homes in the United States slowed in March, the Commerce Department said Thursday, returning to a downward trend that was briefly broken by a surprise surge in February. "Home sales are trying to recover and are highly sensitive to changes in mortgage rates," Lawrence Yun, chief economist at the National Association of Realtors (NAR), which published the figures, said in a statement.

Homes sales in the US have slowed dramatically over the last year, as buyers contend with

## BMW apologizes over Shanghai Auto Show's ice-cream dispute

**SHANGHAI:** Car brand Mini apologized Thursday over accusations of discrimination at the Shanghai Auto Show, after a video apparently showed staff at its booth handing free ice cream to a foreigner after refusing it to a Chinese visitor. A video compilation posted on social media platform Weibo appears to show workers telling the Chinese visitor they were out of the dessert.

Mini posted an apology over the incident, saying "careless management and staff negligence caused unpleasantness for everyone", and pledged to improve training.

The topic "BMW Mini says sorry" had garnered more than 3.4 million views on Weibo by Thursday afternoon. China is the world's largest car market and Mini's owner, German auto giant BMW, has been at pains to emphasize the importance of Chinese customers at the show.

## Driven by security, values

Meanwhile, even as some of America's national security actions may have economic impacts, Yellen maintained that the moves are "motivated solely by our concerns about our security and values."

"Our goal is not to use these tools to gain competitive economic advantage," she added. Yellen also pushed back on the notion that US national security actions are aimed at stifling China's economic and technological modernization.

Chinese President Xi Jinping previously slammed the United States for leading an effort to contain and suppress China. Beijing's technology ambitions have been hit with restrictions by the United States and its allies, and Chinese authorities have doubled down on the need to move away from imports for sectors seen as key to national security, such as semiconductors.

Despite both parties' disagreements, Yellen stressed Wednesday the need to cooperate on urgent global challenges as well. Washington and Beijing have clashed in recent years over trade, human rights and other issues, and relations soured even more this year when the United States shot down a Chinese balloon it said was used for surveillance — a claim China strongly denied.

liable if they lose investors' cryptoassets. "We believe that had FTX, for example, been captured under EU jurisdiction, many of its practices would not have been permissible under MiCA," McGuinness said in Strasbourg. Large providers will also have to disclose their energy consumption as part of the EU's efforts to reduce cryptocurrencies' high carbon footprint.

A second regulation on fund transfers will lead to greater oversight of cryptoassets trades, bringing it more closely into line with practices traditional finance.

The EU says this will make it harder for criminals to use cryptocurrencies for illegal activity such as money laundering. The regulations "mark the end of the Wild West era for the unregulated world of cryptoassets", Ernest Urtaşun, one of the EU lawmakers spearheading the legislation through parliament, said during the debate. "For over a decade, the lack of regulation has resulted in massive losses to many first-time investors and provided a safe haven for fraudsters and international criminal networks," he added.

## Creating 'safer environment'

Some have, however, criticized the draft legislation for not going far enough. "In line with the principle of proportionality, significant CASPs should be subject to both stricter requirements and enhanced supervision: neither of the two is catered for by MiCA," Elizabeth McCaul, European Central Bank supervisory board member, wrote in a blog post this month.

There have also been claims that the regulation would block innovation but McGuinness dis-

missing interest rate repayments on mortgages as a result of the Federal Reserve's aggressive cycle of hikes to tackle above-target inflation. Existing home sales — which make up the majority of US home sales — were down 2.4 percent in March from a month earlier, to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.44 million, the NAR announced in a statement.

Sales fell 22 percent from March last year, when existing home sales reached 5.69 million.

The popular 30-year fixed rate mortgage in the United States has risen by almost 1.3 percentage points over the last month to 6.27 percent, according to the home loan finance company Freddie Mac.

"The market is clearly implying that it is sensitive, even to small changes in mortgage rates," Yun said in a press briefing on Thursday morning.

The Shanghai event is the first time most international industry executives have been back in China since the COVID-19 pandemic. With domestic brands streets ahead in the crucial electric vehicle sector, BMW has pushed the message that "China is the place to be".

"Munich is where we come from, but China is where we are at home," executive Frank Weber told a news conference Tuesday. Almost 70 percent of BMW's latest operating system contains functions specific to the Chinese market and the company has tripled its research and development there in the past three years, BMW said.

But the ice cream debacle has sparked online outrage against BMW and reportedly provoked conflicts offline, too. A video posted to Weibo showed someone placing a bag full of ice creams by a booth at the show shouting: "Free for Chinese people!"

In another incident, a woman livestreamed a confrontation between herself and security guards — said to have taken place at the Mini booth — with streaming comments that claimed "BMW is hitting people!" AFP has contacted Mini for comment.

"BMW executives never expected an ice cream to cause such a big disturbance," one internet user wrote. — AFP



**WASHINGTON:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (center right) hosts a dinner for Latin American and Caribbean Finance Ministers at the US Treasury Department in Washington, DC. — AFP

While both countries have agreed to boost communication on macroeconomic issues, along with cooperation on climate and debt distress, Yellen said "more needs to be done."

"We call on China to follow through on its promise to work with us on these issues — not as a favor to us, but out of our joint duty and obligation to the world," she added. — AFP



**STRASBOURG, France:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a debate on the need for a coherent strategy for EU-China relations, as part of a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP

missed the suggestion. "What we believe is that having a regulatory framework allows the industry to evolve in a more cohesive and safer environment," she said.

She added that she hoped the rules would become a model for other countries. The rules will progressively come into force from July 2024 after EU member states formally nod them into law. The EU is also preparing to introduce proposals for a digital euro later this year. — AFP

The median price for existing homes fell slightly in March to \$375,700, led by the continued decline in prices in the West of the country.

Home prices saw increases in some regions including the Midwest and Northeast, but they were significantly smaller than the decrease in prices in the West. "With overall consumer price inflation calming and rents expected to decelerate from robust apartment construction, the Federal Reserve's monetary policy will surely shift from tightening to neutral to possibly loosening over the next 12 months," Yun said in the statement. The financial markets expect the Fed to begin lowering interest rates later this year, but Fed officials insist they will keep interest rates high until there are clear signs that inflation is falling back towards the Fed's long-term target of two percent. — AFP



**SHANGHAI:** People visit a Lexus booth during the 20th Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition in Shanghai on April 20, 2023. — AFP

## Saudi leads MENA, Egypt second in start-up funding

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia led the Middle East and North Africa region in attracting the highest number and value of venture capital investment for its start-ups in the first quarter of 2023, while the UAE led in terms of the number of exits, a report has said. The kingdom was the most funded for start-ups in the three months to March, attracting \$359 million out of the total \$818 million capital for the Mena region, the report compiled by start-ups platform Magnitt showed.

Egypt came in second with \$284 million, followed by the UAE at \$152 million, the report found. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounted for the highest number of deals, at 30 each in the first quarter, according to Magnitt, followed by Egypt at nine. The region recorded 94 transactions in the first quarter, down by 55 per cent compared with the same period last year, and the lowest since the fourth quarter of 2018.

"The rise seen in Saudi Arabia and Egypt was mostly backed by Floward, Nana, and Halan's \$100 million-plus mega deals all closed in the second month of 2023," Magnitt said. "Removing the impact of those deals rearranges the ranking, putting the UAE ahead of its Mena peers with UAE's Tabby and Qlub's \$58 million and \$25 million landing among the top five deals in the region."

Gulf countries are investing in growing an entrepreneurship ecosystem as they look to diversify their economies and fuel post-pandemic growth. Total financing from venture capital funds in the Middle East surged 132 per cent to almost \$2 billion last year, with the total number of deals up 5 per cent to 410, according to Magnitt.

The UAE aims to become home to 20 start-ups valued at more than \$1 billion by 2031, in its push to become a regional centre for innovation and entrepreneurship. Last year, the country launched the Entrepreneurial Nation initiative, which aims to offer support through a series of public-private partnerships that help entrepreneurs to set up operations in the Emirates, expand their businesses, export products and tap into online sales. — Agencies



## Business

# Tesla profits fall on vehicle price cuts

## Revenue plunge amid growing EV competition; shares slide

**NEW YORK:** Tesla reported a drop in first-quarter earnings Wednesday as price cuts at Elon Musk's electric vehicle company boosted demand but hit profit margins. Profits came in at \$2.5 billion, down 24 percent from the year-ago period on revenues of \$23.3 billion, which were up 24 percent.

Shares fell on the results, which were in line with Wall Street expectations for earnings per share, but showed a lower profit margin than expected. Faced with more EV competition from other automakers, Tesla has undertaken a series of price cuts in 2023, most recently over the last 24 hours on some models in the United States. The company said its profit margins had been trimmed at "a manageable rate," as it pointed to a "unique opportunity for Tesla" while signaling more price cuts ahead.

Tesla has argued that its head start in the EV market makes it "a cost leader" as rivals ramp up.

In a conference call with analysts, Musk described the price cuts as related to macroeconomic factors, saying the intention was to sell more autos, even at lower profit margins. Musk pointed to the Federal Reserve's string of interest rate increases as de facto price hikes, adding that worries about a recession and job loss mean "people will generally postpone a big purchase like a new car."

But as a result of the price cuts, Tesla's operating margin fell to 11.4 percent from 16 percent in the prior quarter. Musk and other Tesla executives were asked repeatedly on the conference call about their outlook for profit margins. But they avoided setting a target, saying it partly depends on factors outside of their control, such as the price of key commodities.

### Premium brand?

Investors who are bullish on Tesla's strategy see the price cuts as a way to grow its market share at a time when rivals are also ramping up production amid cost pressures. But skeptics have said the pricing strategy raises questions about Tesla's long-term profitability, undermining the company's presumed exceptionality and suggesting that it should be valued like other automakers on Wall Street.

## Nokia signals lower customer spending after mixed results

**HELSINKI:** Finnish telecom giant Nokia reported Thursday a lower-than-expected rise in earnings in the first quarter as economic headwinds affect spending by its customers.

The telecommunications equipment maker, which is locked in a battle for 5G networks with Swedish rival Ericsson and China's Huawei, said its net profit jumped 32 percent to 289 million euros (\$317 million). But its earnings per share amounted to six cents, weaker than the seven cents expected in a survey of analysts by financial data firm FactSet.

"We are starting to see some signs of the economic environment impacting customer spending," chief executive Pekka Lundmark said in a statement. "Given the ongoing need to invest in 5G and fiber, we see this primarily as a question of timing; nevertheless we will maintain our cost discipline to ensure we can successfully navigate this uncertainty,"

## Stock markets slip on auto woes, economy fears

**LONDON:** Global equities slid on Thursday on auto sector woes and economic fears about the prospect of more interest rates aimed at cooling high inflation. Share prices of carmakers were hit hard after Tesla posted tumbling first-quarter profits as steep price cuts ate into margins at Elon Musk's electric auto company. European indices followed Asia into fresh losses after a tepid session on Wall Street, while oil prices fell further and the dollar declined. "European markets are in the red on Thursday in what continues to be a choppy week of trading driven by economic and interest rate uncertainty," said analyst Craig Erlam at trading firm Oanda.

Stubbornly high UK inflation and worries over more central bank moves to tame rampant consumer prices dented markets on Wednesday. Higher borrowing costs curb consumer spending and ramp up the cost of credit for businesses and individuals alike, derailing economic activity.

"Investors are once again worried about the outlook for the global economy," added Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell. "Markets have stalled over the past few days, with the latest corporate updates failing to move the dial."

### Carmakers hit the skids

Shares in French giant Renault shed almost seven percent despite strong first-quarter earnings, while peer Stellantis sank four percent. In Frankfurt, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen each skidded about

## TSMC reports unexpected jump in Q1 earnings

**TAIPEI:** Taiwanese chip behemoth TSMC reported an unexpected jump in first-quarter profits on Thursday, tempering concerns that it would be hit by a slowdown in global demand.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company operates the world's largest silicon wafer factories and produces some of the most advanced microchips used in everything from smartphones and cars to missiles. It is regarded as a global economic bellwether because its chips are used in such a wide array of devices. Net profit for the first quarter of 2023 hit TW\$207 billion (\$6.8 billion)

Tesla's price cuts have put the company on a "razor's edge between maintaining its brand prestige while simultaneously attempting to grow volume," said Jessica Caldwell, analyst at Edmunds.

"Buyers have previously vocalized being drawn to Tesla because they felt connected to Elon Musk's larger-than-life persona and mission and wanted to be associated with an edgy and anti-establishment brand," Caldwell said. "As Tesla continues to ramp up volume, it will be held to even more of the standards expected of the mainstream car company that it's become, as opposed to the upscale, niche brand it used to be."

### Polarizing figure

In its press release, Tesla said newer plants in Texas and Germany are ramping up. It also said factory tooling was on track for the Tesla "Cybertruck," an unorthodox model that has generated fanfare. Chief Financial Officer Zach Kirkhorn said there had been an improvement in logistics costs and in some commodities like lithium. He predicted commodity costs overall would moderate in the second half of 2023.

Currently listed as the world's second wealthiest person behind LVMH Chief Executive Bernard Arnault, Musk has increasingly spread his efforts well beyond the auto sector. Besides heading both Tesla and Twitter, Musk recently filed papers to establish the X.AI artificial intelligence corporation based in the US state of Nevada, according to business documents.

Musk is also the founder of SpaceX, which has scheduled for Thursday the first test flight of Starship, which is "designed to send astronauts to the Moon, Mars and beyond," according to the venture's website. As Musk's profile has risen, he has become a much more polarizing figure within American society. The share of Americans who view Musk favorably has risen to 42 percent, compared with 34 percent three years ago, according to YouGov polling data. But the share of negative views has also risen to 33 percent from 18 percent, according to the data.

Shares tumbled 5.8 percent to \$170.10 in af-

Lundmark added. The deployment of 5G infrastructure in India offset a slowdown in North American spending, helping net sales grow 10 percent to 5.9 billion euros. Its comparable operating margin — a profitability yardstick — declined to 8.2 percent, down from 10.9 percent the year before.

"The results were a little bit of a mixed bag. It was under consensus estimates," Atte Riikola, an analyst at equity analysis firm Inderes, told AFP. The mobile networks unit performed in line with expectations while network infrastructure did better than expected, he said.

But, he added, "all in all, I think it was a little bit of a disappointment." Despite the mixed results, Lundmark said Nokia remains on track to "deliver another year of growth in 2023."

"Our outlook is unchanged with the expectation that profitability in the second half of the year will be stronger than the first half," Lundmark said. In its own results statement on Tuesday, Ericsson said it would step up its cost-cutting plan as it expects customers to "remain cautious" amid a "choppy environment". Nokia and Ericsson have faced stiff competition from Huawei but the Chinese company has faced restrictive measures in Western countries, led by the United States. — AFP



**NEW YORK:** A trader on the floor at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York during the opening bell. — AFP

three percent lower. "Margins/demand being stuffed is not just Tesla-specific. More price cuts to come affects all," Finalto analyst Neil Wilson told AFP.

Elsewhere on Thursday, Swedish truck-maker Volvo saw jumping first-quarter orders and upgraded its annual sales forecast. In the telecoms sector, Finnish group Nokia reported weaker than expected earnings as cash-strapped consumers reined in spending.

Results from US regional banks were also in focus after last month's turmoil saw three go under and Credit Suisse taken over. Markets have in recent days been optimistic that central banks, and particularly the US Federal Reserve, will be able to wind down their rate-hiking drive soon after data showed inflation slowing down. But investors have been jolted by news this week of UK inflation surging more than 10 percent on-year in March owing to soaring food costs. The news has fanned bets that the Bank of England will hike rates again at its next meeting in May. — AFP

compared to TW\$203 billion for the same period a year earlier, a 2.1 percent increase. But the figure was 30 percent short of record fourth-quarter profits of US\$9.7 billion posted in January.

At the time, TSMC had said it expected a slowdown in sales. Analysts had also predicted a drop, saying the company would likely fall short of its 2022 Q1 earnings. CEO C. C. Wei said Thursday that the company's second-quarter performance would be impacted by slowing consumer demand.

"While we forecast only a gradual recovery for the semiconductor industry in the second half of 2023, TSMC's business in second half of this year is expected to be stronger than the first half, supported by customers' new product launches," Wei said at an earnings call. The company has been hit by an ongoing economic slowdown dampening demand as well as a raft of US export controls aimed at preventing China from obtaining advanced chips. — AFP



**SEOUL:** Visitors look at a Tesla Model X during a press preview of the 2023 Seoul Mobility Show at the KINTEX exhibition hall in Goyang, South Korea, on March 30, 2023. — AFP

## KIPCO signs binding agreement to sell its stake in GIG to Fairfax for KD 263.7 million (\$860m)

### KIPCO acquires, scales and exits businesses when the time is opportune: Group CEO



**KUWAIT:** Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah addresses the company's annual general assembly meeting.

**KUWAIT:** KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – announced that it has entered into a binding implementation agreement to arrange for an off-market trade with Fairfax Financial Holdings to sell KIPCO's 46.32 percent stake in Gulf Insurance Group (GIG).

The price per share is KD 2 for a total of KD 263.7 million (\$860 million) from which will be deducted KIPCO's share of cash dividends that may be distributed by GIG for 2022. The deal is contingent on the buyer obtaining the necessary regulatory approvals and, depending on the timing of the execution of the off-market trade, profit from the sale is expected to be in the range of KD 70-80 million.

The announcement was made by KIPCO's Board Member and Group Chief Executive Officer, Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, during the company's Annual General Assembly Meeting. The AGM witnessed the election of the Board of Directors for the next three-year term.

Commenting on the agreement, Sheikha Dana said: "As a holding investment company, KIPCO's strategy is to acquire, scale and exit companies when the time is opportune. This deal is the culmination of three decades of value creation and growth. Our journey in the insurance business has been a journey of success. Since becoming our partners in 2010, we have worked with Fairfax to build a strong insurance provider that operates in 13 markets. We believe that the company will continue to grow under Fairfax and will remain a leading player in the MENA insurance market."

Following the AGM, KIPCO's Group CEO presented a review of the company's activities in 2022 and its outlook for 2023 to an audience of shareholders, financial analysts and institutional investors.

### 2022... The year of transformation

Sheikha Dana said that the year 2022 was, indeed, a year of transformation for KIPCO. Following the successful completion of the merger with Quraish Petrochemical Industries Company (QPIC), KIPCO's portfolio is now more diversified, with new sectors including energy, foodstuff, healthcare, manufacturing and logistics. As a result of the merger, KIPCO's capital increased 91.2 percent to KD 508.8 million.

The strong performance of the core companies contributed to strong results at the holding level.

KIPCO's net profit for 2022 increased 44 percent to KD 25.2 million (\$82.3 million), with total revenue from operations was up 47 percent to KD 1.06 billion (\$3.5 billion). Shareholder equity increased 81 percent to KD 590.5 million.

KIPCO's milestones, besides the merger, include issuing six-year senior unsecured bonds worth KD 165 million, the largest KD-denominated issue to date. Rating agencies viewed the merger as credit positive. In line with global best practices, KIPCO issued its first Sustainability Report during the past year.

### Performance of group companies

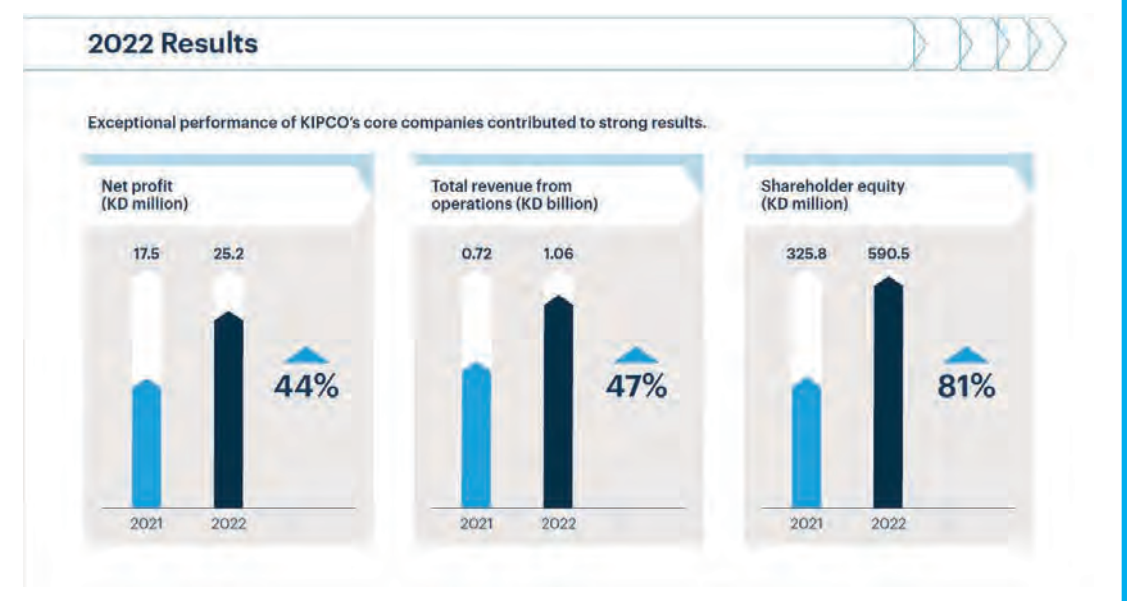
In 2022, KIPCO's core companies delivered positive performance. Burgan Bank's net profit increased 15 percent to KD 52.1 million (\$170 million). Gross Written Premium for Gulf Insurance Group went up 52 percent to KD 831.7 million (\$2.72 billion).

As for SADAFCO, net profit for the nine month period ended December 31, 2022 came to \$58.1 million (KD 17.8 million), an increase of 50 percent. Meanwhile, United Real Estate posted a net profit increase of 168 percent at KD 3.4 million (\$11.1 million). Revenue from fees reported by Kamco Invest saw a 2.5 percent increase.

Jordan Kuwait Bank registered a 140 percent increase in net profit for the year. NAFESCO's net profit increased 18 percent to KD 6.8 million (\$22.2 million), while KARO registered a 103 percent increase in net profit to \$59 million (KD 18.1 million). As for ATC, net profit was up 32 percent at KD 7 million (\$22.8 million). United Education Company, meanwhile, saw a 14 percent growth in profit.

### Efficiency and effectiveness

Commenting on the outlook for 2023, KIPCO's Group CEO said: "The positive performance delivered by our core companies during the year has contributed to our efforts to ensure that KIPCO is a streamlined investment holding company that is both efficient and effective. Moving into 2023, several measures have been taken to minimize the impact of market volatilities and high interest rates, and we are confident that we have put in place a strong base that will allow us to move towards a more promising and sustainable future."





# Global bond yields retreat amid US banking tremors

## GCC sovereign yields track global peers lower



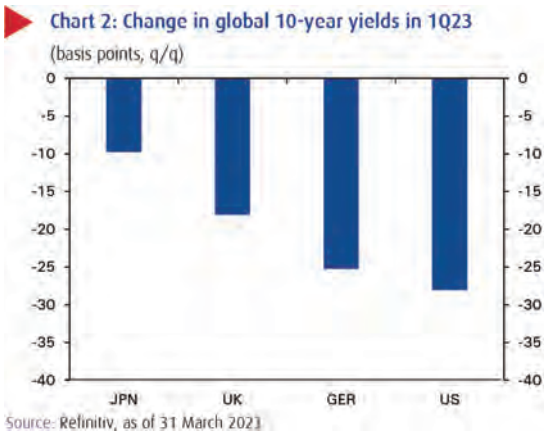
KUWAIT: Global benchmark bond yields fell sharply during 1Q23 as the risks of a US recession increased. The US bank failures have fueled fears about tightened credit and liquidity conditions, along with persisting risks about the health of the commercial real estate market, causing a domino effect. The market expects interest rates to soften later this year, boosting bond prices.

In addition, the incoming economic data continue to be weaker, raising hopes of a sustained disinflationary trend. GCC sovereign yields fell too, taking global cues. Going into 2Q, bond yields remain relatively soft despite ticking up recently, with worries of a recession lingering. Swelling concerns about the deteriorating economic backdrop could further boost bonds' usual "safe-heaven" appeal, pressuring yields. Inversely, volatile commodity prices, including oil, present uncertainty for the inflation rate trajectory, keeping bond markets on tenterhooks.

Meanwhile, GCC debt issuance increased further during 1Q23, as regional governments and companies raised \$21.3 billion in debt, following \$17.2 billion in 4Q22. As usual, the new issuance was dominated by sovereign/quasi-sovereign sales in Saudi Arabia.

### Recession worries put interest rates on a falling trajectory

Headline inflation in developed economies has started to ebb as the impact of tightened monetary policies takes place and energy costs decline versus a year ago. However, core inflation remains elevated and has yet to soften as much. Most central banks continued to push policy interest rates up, albeit

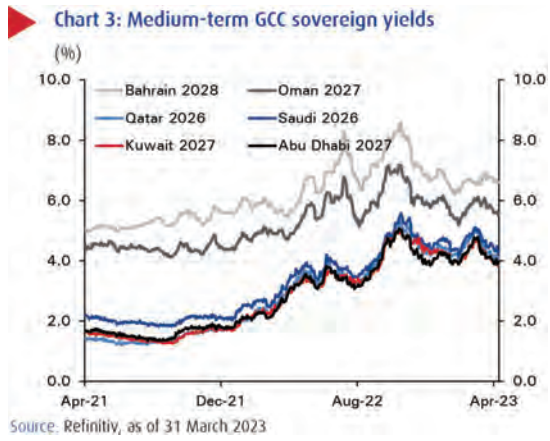


down shifting the pace versus 2022. The Fed raised rates by 25 bps each in its last two meetings, while the ECB delivered two equal increments of 50 bps during 1Q. The latest hikes came despite still-developing turmoil in the US and European (Credit Suisse fiasco) banking industry. However, expectations are building that the current rate-hike cycle is nearing its end as the disinflation process continues.

Bond yields initially rose in early March on a hawkish Fed stance. But they subsequently gave up those gains, as the failure of the US-based Silicon Valley Bank worsened jitters about a recession and a potential credit crunch, driving yields lower in the second half of the month. For now, a full-blown banking crisis seems unlikely, with deposit outflows reversing the trend in recent weeks, implying relative stability in the banking sector. Bonds may become volatile if contagion fears resurface, leading to materially squeezed liquidity and credit conditions. But any strong responses from policymakers – as seen in late March – will help ease liquidity, restore confidence, and stabilize yields.

The drop in developed market yields in 1Q23 was led by US treasuries (10Y yield down 28 bps), followed by German Bunds (-25 bps) and UK gilts (-18 bps). Japanese government bond yields also declined from the Bank of Japan's (BoJ) ceiling of 0.5 percent. The change in leadership at the BoJ initially fueled a rally in yields but faltered on ambiguity about a potential change in the BoJ's ultra-loose monetary policy.

The Fed remains steadfast in achieving its 2 percent inflation goal and does not expect to reduce

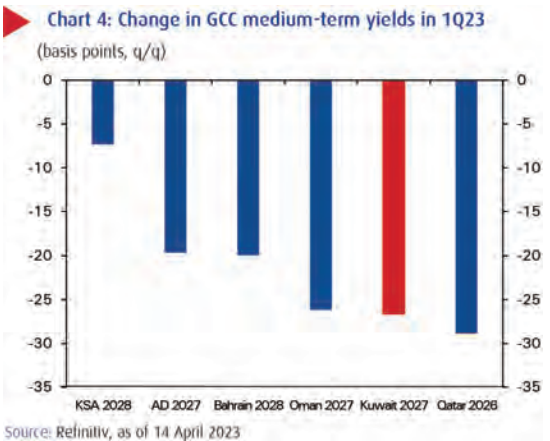


rates this year. The markets, however, hold an alternate view and believe the Fed will relent amid deteriorating economy, with expectations of at least a 50 bps rate cut factored in current yields. No change in the Fed's stance (in case of renewed/sustained inflationary pressures) may drive volatility in bond markets. In contrast, continued weakness in economic releases and a further loosening in the labor market would help move more funds into relatively safer assets, including benchmark bonds, sending yields lower.

### GCC sovereign yields

Medium-term sovereign bond yields in 1Q23 retreated for the second consecutive quarter, with Qatar and Kuwait leading the drop, declining by 29 bps and 27 bps, respectively. Saudi Arabia, usually the largest issuer in the region, recorded a smaller fall in yields (-7 bps) during 1Q, despite an upgrade in its credit rating by S&P to 'A/A-' with a stable outlook citing significant progress on reforms and a structural improvement in non-oil segments. Given an overall solid improvement in the sovereign profile of Saudi Arabia, the country's bond prices had rallied strongly in 4Q22, resulting in lower yields and a narrower spread over US benchmark bonds. However, in 1Q23, the spread widened again, as the yield on Saudi Arabian bonds fell by less than the decline in the US and other GCC countries.

Looking ahead, the appeal of the regional bond market remains intact, as stronger balance sheets amid elevated oil prices and sustained progress on reform-oriented policies provide a



better view of the long-term economic outlook. As such, GCC bonds are likely to be relatively well supported in case of any heightened uncertainty in the global bond markets.

GCC domestic and (USD) Eurobond gross issuance gained momentum in 1Q, rising to \$21.3 billion from \$17.2 billion in 4Q22 and \$11.8 billion in 3Q22. The region's outstanding debt stood at \$611bn at the end of 1Q23, up slightly from the previous quarter. Overall, the near-term need to raise debt is lower, given elevated oil revenues and improved fiscal balances. Nonetheless, regional governments, particularly Saudi Arabia, have been taking advantage of a narrowing spread over benchmark US bonds (although spreads widened recently, they remain attractive on the back of improved fiscal positions). Locking in better pricing, and issuing significant amounts of new bonds and sukuk, partly to refinance existing debt.

As usual, sovereign issues from Saudi Arabia and the UAE comprised the bulk of debt offerings in 1Q23. The Saudi government issued \$10 billion euro bonds in 5, 10.5, and 30-year tranches. While Saudi-owned PIF raised its second green bond in four months, issuing \$5.5 billion in three tranches of maturity in 7, 12, and 30 years, receiving bids worth \$32bn. In addition, the Saudi government continued with its domestic sukuk issuance program, selling \$2.8bn new sukuk, down from \$3.3bn in the previous quarter.

The Emirate of Sharjah also raised \$1 billion in green bonds in 1Q. Among notable corporate issuance, UAE's First Abu Dhabi Bank issued \$600 million bonds, maturing in 5.25 years.

## South Africa braces for dark winter as energy crisis bites

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa, the continent's most industrialized country, is in the grip of an energy crisis that critics say is much deeper than the authorities openly acknowledge.

The periodic electricity blackouts are expected to reach a critical stage as winter arrives in the Southern Hemisphere and sends energy demand soaring, experts warn.

### What is happening

Over the past 15 years, South Africa's electricity crisis has been deepening, with power shortages blamed on insufficient investments in the country's ageing coal-fired power plants. The crisis has worsened over the past 12 months, with the country spared the debilitating rolling blackouts, known as load shedding, only on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and a handful of other occasions. To manage the shortfalls, the state-owned power company Eskom imposes daily scheduled rationing to cope with the production shortfalls. But more recently the power cuts have lengthened, and many people are forced to endure blackouts of up to 12 hours a day.

### What's being done

Under pressure to end the power cuts, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared in February a National State of Disaster, a legal move introduced to prioritize efforts to address the problem.

He also appointed an electricity minister, Kgo-

sientsho Ramokgopa, with the sole task of ending the blackouts. But Ramokgopa, a civil engineer and former mayor of Pretoria, has run into a series of obstacles, analysts say. Not least, the state of disaster was revoked after about two months, even though electricity supply has yet to improve. In recent days power supplies have plummeted to levels even below the output officially communicated by the government, analysts say, denouncing an attempt by authorities to assuage public fury. "They are containing public anger and frustration," said energy expert Adil Nchabeleng.

### Winter fears

The South African winter, which runs from June to August, can get cold, with temperatures plunging below zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas. Ramokgopa has already warned people to brace for a dark and cold winter. The treasury, meanwhile, has said the debt-saddled Eskom cannot borrow more funds for the next three years and needs to find the resources for badly needed repairs and refurbishments on its own. "I'll be brutally honest. It's going to be an exceptionally difficult winter," Ramokgopa told journalists in Pretoria last week.

### Worst case

The energy situation is so dire that experts warn the country could be on the brink of a widespread collapse of its electricity grid. "Winter is going to be disastrous this year if nothing drastic is done now to return back to operation the current units that are out," Nchabeleng told AFP.

"We are sitting in a catastrophe right now," he said, adding that the grid risked being stretched "to the point of its collapse". Eskom, which provides the bulk of South Africa's electricity, can guarantee supplies of 27,000 megawatts, the



SANTA MONICA: Carolina Arguillas Navas, Global AR Strategy at Snap Inc., speaks during the 2023 Snap Partner Summit at the Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, California, on April 19, 2023 where the focus was on immersive augmented reality experiences and tech for people attending music concerts. — AFP

## Snapchat seeks path to profit without losing its way

SANTA MONICA: Snapchat parent Snap on Wednesday unveiled new tactics including the increased use of artificial intelligence in its struggle to expand beyond the app's loyal user base and reach profitability. Snap chief Evan Spiegel, who cofounded the Southern California-based company in 2011, opened its annual conference with word that an average of 750 million people use the image-centric messaging service each month.

In more than 20 countries, Snapchat reaches the vast majority of those who range in age from 13 to 34, Spiegel said. But unlike Meta, with its "family" of apps including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, Snap has never made enough money from advertising to turn an annual profit.

Last year, Snap's net loss tripled to \$1.43 billion and it laid off a fifth of its workforce. Tools and products presented on Wednesday were intended to attract audience-winning creators to the platform, get users paying for subscriptions, and convince partners such as advertisers that the app is a place to be. However, Snapchat must be "careful not to stray too far from its roots" as an ephemeral, fun messaging service as it seeks ways to make money, warned Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg.

Snapchat needs to find a balance between private exchanges, "public spaces," and the sense of "community and intimacy" that it has cultivated since its inception, the analyst added.

A decade ago, Snapchat came on the scene with an intentionally ephemeral product — images that disappear after a short period, an idea that was copied by other platforms. Users invented "stories," a way for them to put "Snaps" taken through any given day together into a visual tale. The service was a pioneer in using images instead of words to communicate, and playfully augmenting what cameras see using artificial intelligence "lenses." But, "no one is talking about" Snapchat because "they are not relevant," Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi told AFP. — AFP

## France to speed debt reduction through cuts, growth

PARIS: The French government said Thursday that public spending cuts and hoped-for faster growth would help it slash its annual budget deficit and public debt, one of the highest in the eurozone. It is time to "cool off" public spending, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told reporters, adding that "this is about France's European credibility".

Stretched by the government's "whatever it takes" response to the coronavirus pandemic and massive support to consumers and industry through recent peaks in inflation, France's budget deficit hit 4.7 percent of GDP in 2022 and is forecast higher this year, at 4.9 percent.

Le Maire said he aims to slash it to 2.7 percent of output in 2027, the end of President Emmanuel Macron's second term. That is 0.2 percentage points lower than his previous target and well within the European Union's limit for normal times of 3.0 percent.

The plan is partly supported by a

more optimistic growth forecast, at 1.0 percent this year, 1.6 percent in 2024 and 1.8 percent by 2027. And the finance ministry will now strive to reduce total public debt from its current 112 percent to 108 percent of GDP over the same timeline, several points lower than previously called for. Far above the notional European limit of 60 percent, France's debt-to-GDP ratio was behind only Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain by the third quarter of 2022, according to Eurostat.

Inflation remains the target of aggressive interest rate hikes by the European Central Bank, as it is well above Frankfurt's target of 2.0 percent for the 20-nation eurozone.

Paris is confident that price growth will begin to slow in the coming months, while predicting an average figure for this year of 4.9 percent, up from its previous forecast of 4.2 percent.

The pace was slightly higher last year, at 5.2 percent — although France managed to keep inflation lower than many fellow single currency users with lavish subsidies for items including energy. Le Maire's Thursday figures will be presented to the European Commission as part of France's "Stability Program" filed by EU member states every spring. — AFP

## Asian chip makers must cut soaring emissions: Greenpeace

PARIS: The energy required to make chips for electronics, used in everything from smartphones to AI hardware and cars, will skyrocket this decade, Greenpeace said on Thursday. This requires major firms to commit to seriously cutting emissions, the activist environmental NGO said.

The global semiconductor manufacturing industry is projected to emit 86 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2030 — more than double Portugal's total emissions in 2021 — Greenpeace said in a new report. The group flagged high electricity consumption by semiconductor manufacturers as one of the major reasons behind rising emissions from the global electronics industry.

Its report focused on companies with operations in East Asia, home to major global semiconductor manufacturers that include Apple chip supplier Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing (TSMC) and Samsung Electronics, South Korea's largest chipmaker. Electricity grids



new electricity minister has said. But summer demand peaked at 32,000 MW, and in winter it can soar to 37,000 MW — raising the prospect of dire cold for millions of people.

### Economic impact

Since the start of the year, South Africans have had just a single day of uninterrupted electricity supply — on the eve of demonstrations called by opposition parties to protest the blackouts. "At the moment there really is no light at the end of this tunnel," said Lungile Mashele, an independent energy economist, saying the country was "in a precarious position". Eskom's chairman, Mpho Makwana, told Newzroom Afrika television last month that it would take 18-24 months to end the blackouts, saying "There is no shortcut".

The outages continue to hold back economic activity, with economists warning that growth could contract significantly, possibly plunging the country into recession. The International Monetary Fund projects that real GDP growth will drop to just 0.1 percent for 2023, mainly impacted by the power cuts, from two percent last year. — AFP

in East Asia are highly dependent on natural gas and coal-fired power generation, Greenpeace said. None of the companies analyzed in the report has climate commitments in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recommendations to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, nor to adopt 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, the report said.

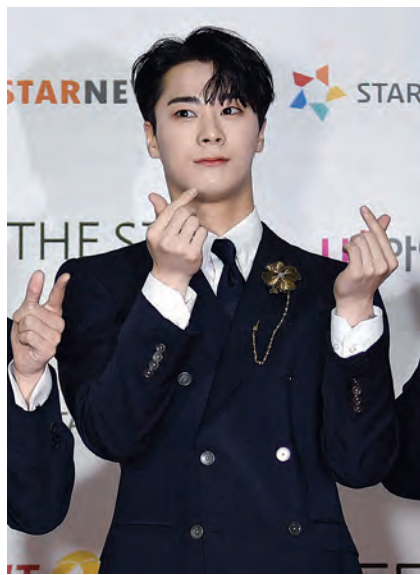
"Most electronics industry suppliers studied have set long-term targets for carbon reduction, but their timelines do not reflect the level of ambition that is necessary in the face of catastrophic climate change," it said.

Greenpeace said TSMC's electricity consumption was projected to grow the most among all the semiconductor manufacturers studied — 267 percent by 2030, when it will consume as much power as roughly a quarter of Taiwan's population. Samsung Electronics has not made firm 2030 climate commitments for its South Korea operations, Greenpeace said, despite 75 percent of its electricity consumption happening on home soil. Samsung announced last year a commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions across all global operations by 2050. — AFP



## Lifestyle

## K-pop star Moonbin of boy band Astro dies at 25



This picture shows Moonbin, a member of K-pop boy band Astro attending a red carpet event of the Asia Artist Awards in Seoul. —AFP photos



This picture shows members of K-pop boy band Astro attending a red carpet event of the Asia Artist Awards in Seoul. —AFP photos



A man walks past an electronic board as a portrait of Moonbin (top), a member of K-pop boy band Astro, is seen on the board outside a funeral hall at a hospital in Seoul.

K-pop star Moonbin, a member of the boy band Astro, has died, his music label and South Korean police said Thursday, prompting an outpouring of grief from fans.

The 25-year-old singer was found dead at his home in southern Seoul late Wednesday, a spokesperson for the National Police Agency told AFP, adding that there was no evidence of foul play. Moonbin's label Fantagio Music also released a statement on Thursday confirming his death but without disclosing the cause. "On April 19, Astro member Moon Bin unexpectedly left our world and became a star in the sky," it said on Twitter.

It asked that people "refrain from speculative and malicious reports" so

that his family can pay their respects and honour him in peace.

The label's announcement prompted thousands of comments from grieving fans, many expressing disbelief.

"Rest in peace, Moonbin. I hope the stars and the moon treat you well. I hope they give you all the comfort and love," one wrote on Twitter.

"I can't focus on work now. This really hurts," wrote another. Moon Bin — who performed as Moonbin — was a member of the group Astro and also performed with a sub-group called Moonbin & Sanha.

He joined Fantagio's trainee programme at an early age and was an actor and child model before debuting with Astro in February 2016. Prior to his

passing, Moonbin & Sanha had been set to perform at the upcoming Dream Concert — one of the largest K-pop joint concerts in South Korea — in May.

The group had also been in the middle of their Diffusion Fan Con Tour across Asia, and had launched an official fan community page on Weverse — the global fandom platform from K-pop megastars BTS's agency HYBE — on Sunday.

"While no passing from any artist is ever to be expected, Moonbin's untimely passing was all the more shocking given how active the young star was, even the week of his death," Jeff Benjamin, Billboard's K-pop columnist, told AFP. "No one around him saw this coming, but what we

can keep is his undeniable smile," he added. "I've seen its brightness compared to the Cheshire Cat from 'Alice and Wonderland', and the wonderful music and performances he gave us."

#### Cut-throat business

Beneath the glitz and glamour, the K-pop industry is also known for its cut-throat competition, a lack of privacy, online bullying and relentless public pressure to maintain a wholesome image at all times and at any cost.

South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, citing an unnamed police official, reported that authorities believe Moon's death is a case of apparent suicide.

Several other young K-pop stars have died of suspected suicides in re-

cent years, including Goo Hara who passed in 2019. She had been abused by an ex-boyfriend who, after they split, blackmailed her over their sex videos.

The suspected suicide occurred a month after her close friend, K-pop star Sulli, took her own life after a long struggle with online bullying, prompting demands in South Korea for stronger punishments for cybercrimes.

Sulli's death echoed that of fellow K-pop star Jonghyun, who took his life in 2017 after battling depression.

"It's always the people who smile the most who suffer the greatest," one of Moon's fans wrote. "When the sky shines beautifully we'll think of you and when the stars shine bright we will think of you." —AFP

## Mexican poet Octavio Paz's legacy on display 25 years after death



Detail of one of the rooms of the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".



A man takes a photo of one of the works in the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".

A quarter century after his death, the cultural legacy of Mexican literary giant Octavio Paz is going on display at the poet's former home in Mexico City. The museum, which opened on March 31, showcases books, documents, works of art and personal items that belonged to Paz, who died on April 19, 1998 aged 84.

The collection is housed in the 17th-century mansion where the 1990 Nobel literature laureate lived with his second wife, the French artist Marie Jose Tramini. Not all of the items are yet on display, due to an ongoing legal process surrounding the assets left in the possession of Tramini, who died in 2018 without leaving a will.

When the rest of the collection is unveiled to the public will depend on how the legal procedures progress, Leticia Luna, director of the Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum, told AFP. In 1997, the Mexican government created the Octavio Paz Foundation to preserve and share his work.

But his death the following year and differences with his widow complicated the administration of the estate, to the point that the foundation disappeared in 2003. After Tramini's death, a group of intellectuals led by the French-born Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska asked for Paz's legacy to be declared national heritage.

The museum, located in the northwest of the capital, initially has seven rooms open to visitors. Five exhibit the furniture and possessions of the couple and two contain objects from Tramini's studio. Paz, an essayist, poet, translator, and diplomat, published more than 60 books.

At the age of 19 the budding author released his first book of poetry -- "Luna Sil-



People visit the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".



A man takes a photo of one of the works in the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".

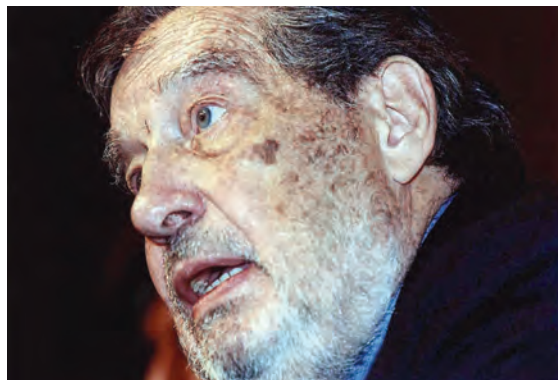
vestre" or "Forest Moon." He was best known in the English-speaking world for his 1950 book-length essay "The Labyrinth of Solitude," an explanation of Mexico's national character. Described by Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa as "one of the great figures of our time," Paz's work has been translated into more than 30 languages. Poniatowska had nurtured a close friendship with Paz since she was in her 20s.



A man takes a photo of one of the works in the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum" in Mexico City. —AFP photos



People visit the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".



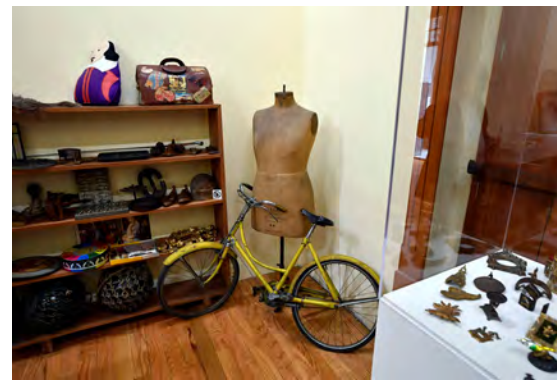
This file photo taken on August 01, 1996, shows Mexican writer and Nobel prize winner for literature Octavio Paz.

towska had nurtured a close friendship with Paz since she was in her 20s.

"He provoked great love and sympathy," she told AFP in an interview. "He liked to talk, discuss and was a born teacher, extraordinary," added Poniatowska, who was on Wednesday awarded Mexico's highest honor, the Belisario Dominguez Medal, by the Senate. In his youth



A security guard checks his mobile phone at the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".



Detail of one of the rooms of the "Casa Marie Jose and Octavio Paz museum".

Paz supported liberalism and Marxism, but later condemned socialist regimes. In 1968, he resigned from his position as ambassador to India in disgust over the massacre of protesting students in Mexico City in 1968. "Mexico has lost its greatest thinker and poet," the country's then president Ernesto Zedillo said following his death. —AFP



'The Cross of Wales' is displayed for a photograph ahead of a ceremony to bless the Cross at Holy Trinity Church in Llandudno, north Wales. —AFP

## King Charles III's coronation to feature 'Jesus relics'

A ceremonial silver cross containing shards said by the Vatican to be from the cross used to crucify Jesus Christ was blessed on Wednesday, before its use in King Charles III's coronation early next month.

Pope Francis gave the two fragments of the "True Cross", one 5 millimetres long and the other 1 centimetre, as a gift to mark the crowning of the monarch and his wife Camilla as queen on May 6. They have been fashioned into a tiny cross and incorporated into the overall design, visible

behind a rose crystal gemstone.

The Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John, blessed the new Cross of Wales before dignitaries and parishioners at a service in Llandudno, north Wales.

It will now be taken to London and be carried at the head of the coronation procession. The archbishop said the cross "speaks to our Christian faith, our heritage, our resources and our commitment to sustainability".

"We are delighted too that its first use will be to guide Their Majesties (Charles and Camilla) into Westminster Abbey at the coronation service."

Charles presented the Cross of Wales to the Anglican Church in Wales to mark its centenary.

It took designer Michael Lloyd two years to make and was crafted from recycled silver bullion, with fragments of Welsh timber and slate. After the coronation, it will be shared by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Wales.

Charles applied the king's mark of authentication -- a leopard's head -- to the silver elements of the cross during a visit to The Goldsmiths' Centre in London last year. —AFP



# France’s music hotspots, boosted by Brad Pitt

They are little corners of French paradise that draw British and American rock stars to record their masterpieces — with a little help from Brad Pitt. France has long had its share of famous music studios that have attracted not just local talent, but foreign bands hoping some of the country’s artistic heritage will rub off on them.

Some have fallen into disrepair, such as the famed Herouville chateau where Elton John, Iggy Pop and David Bowie recorded in the 1970s. Super Bear Studios welcomed Paul McCartney, Queen and Kate Bush before it was destroyed by fire in the 1980s. But others are getting a new lease of life. Miraval, a villa in the sun-kissed southern region of Provence, opened its studio in 1977 and saw Pink Floyd record part of “The Wall”, as well as albums by AC/DC, The Cure and Muse.

Largely abandoned, it was bought by Pitt and then-wife Angelina Jolie in 2008. Despite a bitter divorce wrangle over the property, Pitt oversaw a renovation of its music studio with the help of French sound engineer Damien Quintard.

“One day, I got a message from Brad Pitt, who wanted to see me the following week — I thought it was a joke,” said Quintard. Pitt, an amateur guitarist himself, told Billboard: “It was pretty dank in there. It hadn’t been touched since the 1970s, maybe the 80s. It needed a cuddle.”

The first artist to use the revamped, ultra-swish studio after its reopening last summer was Sade,



**Brad Pitt**  
who recorded her first and third albums there in the 1980s. “My goal is that magnificent creations come out of here, so judging the result will take time, like making wine,” said Quintard.

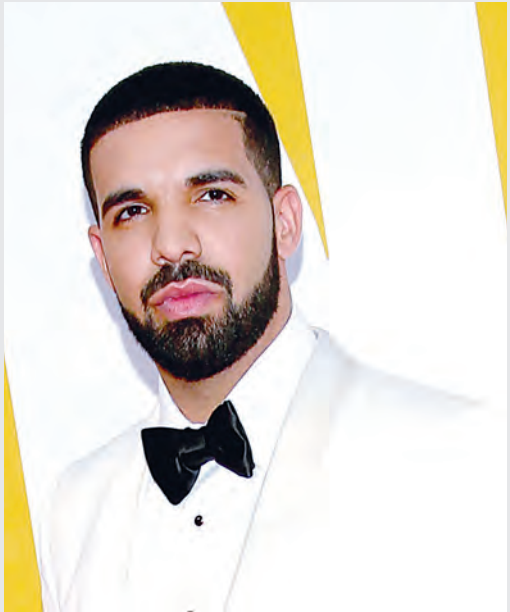
Arctic Monkeys to Rosalia  
Just outside Paris, famed recording location La Frette has a very different vibe — a 19th century manor that feels more like a home crammed haphazardly with equipment. Its cosy atmosphere

has attracted many stars over its 40 years, including Nick Cave, Arctic Monkeys and Marianne Faithfull. Luke Pritchard, singer with British pop-rockers The Kooks, was busy on a drumkit in its frontroom, alongside his wife and child, during a visit by AFP. British punks Idles recently passed through, but their aggressive sound did not translate into problems for owner Olivier Bloch-Laine.

“Their music is furious, but they are adorable,” he said. “Punks make you think of destruction, but their rooms were very tidy.” Paris has also been an international recording hub, of course, with historic places such as Davout graced by jazz greats such as Nina Simone, Keith Jarrett and Chet Baker.

There is a new address: Rue Boyer, which has already seen the likes of Pharrell Williams, Rosalia and Jack Antonoff since opening last year. Built on the site of an old porn studio, it was established by Victor Levy-Lasne and Maxime Le Guil, who run music production seminars, with guidance from US studio architect John Storyk, who designed Electric Lady Studios for Jimi Hendrix in the 1960s. One notable change from the studios of old — evident at both Rue Boyer and Pitt’s new Miraval — is the sunlight.

“A priority for Rosalia was that there should be lots of light during the day. Same for Jack Antonoff,” said Le Guil. “Me too — I’ve had enough of studio-bunkers.”—AFP



## Al-generated song imitating Drake yanked from streaming services

A new song created using AI software to imitate Canadian singers Drake and The Weeknd has been removed from streaming services after quickly racking up millions of listens and sparking debate over the new technology.

Released last Friday, “Heart On My Sleeve” was briefly available on platforms including Spotify and Apple Music before Universal Music Group (UMG) — which publishes both artists through its Republic Records subsidiary — said it violates copyrights and asked for its removal. The song features artificial intelligence (AI) simulating the voices of the two artists trading verses about actor and pop star Selena Gomez, who once dated The Weeknd. Its creator, known only as @ghostwriter, claims to have used software that was trained on their voices to make the track, posting: “I used AI to make a Drake song feat. The Weeknd.” “This is just the beginning,” he added on TikTok.

Universal Music Group, which controls about one third of the global music industry, is increasingly concerned about AIs using its songs to produce music similar to that of popular artists. Training AI software without artists’ permission “begs the question as to which side of history all stakeholders in the music ecosystem want to be on: the side of artists, fans and human creative expression, or on the side of deep fakes, fraud and denying artists their due compensation,” the company said in an email to AFP.

In March, UMG wrote to streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple, asking them to block AI services from extracting melodies and lyrics from their copyrighted songs, according to emails viewed by the Financial Times. With streaming services moving quickly to take down the most recent viral song, UMG told AFP on Tuesday it was “encouraged by the engagement of our platform partners on these issues — as they recognize they need to be part of the solution.”

“These instances demonstrate why platforms have a fundamental legal and ethical responsibility to prevent the use of their services in ways that harm artists,” the statement added. The use of AI in music is the subject of debate in the industry, with some denouncing copyright abuses and others praising its prowess. David Guetta recently used AI to add a vocal in the style of rapper Eminem to a song for a live show. But the French producer said he won’t release it commercially.

In an interview with the BBC, Guetta compared AI to instruments such as the electric guitar, bass synthesizer, drum machine and sampler that led to musical revolutions including rock ‘n’ roll and hip hop.—AFP



In this file photo two giant pandas on loan to Thailand from China, Chuang Chuang and Lin Hui, play together at Chiang Mai Zoo in Chiang Mai. —AFP photos



In this file photo two giant pandas on loan to Thailand from China, Chuang Chuang and Lin Hui, eat bamboo at Chiang Mai Zoo in Chiang Mai.

# Panda on loan from China dies in Thailand aged 21

A giant panda on loan from China to Thailand who captivated animal lovers through a 24-hour live broadcast of her antics died on Wednesday aged 21, said the zoo where she was housed. Lin Hui was the last of three pandas in Thailand and had lived in an air-conditioned enclosure at Chiang Mai Zoo since 2003, but was due to return to China in October.

The notoriously sex-shy bear and her mate Chuang Chuang — who died of a heart attack in 2019 — were part of Beijing’s so-called “panda diplomacy” programme. Zoo director Wutthichai Muangman said Lin Hui suffered a nosebleed on Tuesday and was in a critical condition by the evening, before dying in the early hours of Wednesday. “We helped her as much as we could until Lin Hui left us,” Wutthichai told reporters. Dejboon Maprasert, chairman of the Zoological Park Organisation of Thailand, said Chinese and Thai

experts would jointly conduct an autopsy. For years Lin Hui and Chuang Chuang struggled to conceive and were even shown “panda pornography” in an attempt to spice up their sex life.

Following artificial insemination, Lin Hui finally gave birth to Lin Ping in 2009, sparking panda mania in Thailand. Animal lovers in the country were glued to a live 24-hour “Panda Channel” broadcast between 2009 and 2012.

Fans took to social media Wednesday to express sorrow over the animal’s death. “I used to watch her on the TV all the time. She was my motivation. RIP Lin Hui,” one Twitter user wrote.

Srettha Thavisin, a prime ministerial candidate for the country’s opposition Pheu Thai Party, tweeted that the panda had brought much joy to Thais over the years. As Lin Hui’s health deteriorated, vets at the Thai zoo consulted Chinese experts in Chengdu on treatment options. On Tues-

day night the Chinese consulate in Chiang Mai sent officials to the facility. “During her 20 years in Thailand, Lin Hui was deeply loved by the Thai people and became an envoy of friendly exchanges between the people of China and Thailand,” the consulate said in a statement Wednesday.

Wutthichai said Thailand would have to pay a 15 million baht (\$435,000) insurance payout to China over the death. Giant pandas are known for their low sex drive and are among the world’s most endangered animals. They can live up to 30 years in captivity, while in the wild their life expectancy ranges from 15 to 20 years, according to the World Wildlife Fund. Chuang Chuang’s death four years ago sparked outrage on social media in China and Chinese authorities sent a team to investigate and jointly carry out the autopsy. Cub Lin Ping meanwhile was sent back to China in 2013 on a quest to find love.—AFP



## Man arrested after bathing in rhino pen at New Zealand zoo

A man was arrested at a New Zealand zoo on Wednesday after he broke into an enclosure and took a leisurely bath in a moat next to “startled” rhinos and antelopes. Social media footage of the incident in Auckland Zoo showed the man floating on his back, before washing his face and rinsing his hair.

The enclosure is home to rhinos and nyalas, a breed of spiral-horned antelope. The animals “were understandably startled by the intruder”, an Auckland Zoo spokesperson

said. The man was said to be in the water “for a number of minutes” before responding to instructions by zoo staff to get out of the moat and return to the visitor’s path. He was escorted off the premises and handed to the police.

Zoo director Kevin Buley said he was “very relieved” that there were no injuries to the animals or visitors of the zoo as a result of the incident. “We hope that the man involved gets the help and support that he very clearly needs,” he added.—AFP

# Baldwin film ‘Rust’ to resume filming this week

Filming will resume this week on Alec Baldwin’s “Rust,” producers said Tuesday, some 18 months after it was halted by the fatal on-set shooting of the movie’s cinematographer.

Hollywood star Baldwin was holding a Colt .45 gun during rehearsals for the film in the southwestern state of New Mexico when it discharged, killing Halyna Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza. Baldwin was charged with manslaughter, and has pleaded not guilty.

Principal photography will resume this Thursday at a new location in the northern US state of Montana. “The production will continue to utilize union crew members and will bar any use of working weapons and any form of ammunition,” said Melina Spadone, attorney for Rust Movie Productions, in a statement to AFP. “Live ammunition is -- and always was -- prohibited on set.” Producers announced in February that the low-budget Western would resume production this spring, with the deceased cinematographer’s widow, Matthew Hutchins, serving as an executive producer.

Baldwin agreed to terms with the New Mexico court that will allow him to complete filming of the movie, including a ban on his using guns or drinking alcohol. Director Souza, who is also returning, said



This handout image shows actor Alec Baldwin being processed after the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins at the Bonanza Creek Ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



US actor Alec Baldwin attends DreamWorks Animation’s “The Boss Baby: Family Business” premiere at SVA Theatre on June 22, 2021 in New York City. —AFP photos

in a statement at the time: “Though bittersweet, I am grateful that a brilliant and dedicated new production team joining former cast and crew are committed to completing what Halyna and I started.”

“My every effort on this film will be devoted to honoring Halyna’s legacy and making her proud. It is a privilege to see this through on her behalf.” A documentary will also be made, covering Halyna Hutchins’s life and the completion of the film. Both Baldwin -- a co-producer as well as lead actor -- and the film’s armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, who was responsible for the weapon on set, are facing charges of voluntary manslaughter.

If found guilty, they face up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine. A weeks-long preliminary hearing is set to begin in early May. Baldwin, 65, has repeatedly said he was told by the crew that the gun was not loaded. Dave Halls, the film’s safety coordinator and assistant director, who handed Baldwin the loaded gun, agreed a plea deal with prosecutors and was sentenced last month to six months’ probation.

The accident sent shockwaves through Hollywood and led to calls for a total ban on real guns on set. Industry experts have said there are already stringent safety rules in place, but that they were ignored.—AFP



## Lifestyle



Archaeologists from the Institut National de Recherches Archeologiques Preventives (Inrap - National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research) work on an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris.



Archaeologists work on an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris.

# Ancient necropolis unearthed next to busy Paris train station



A photo shows a skeleton from an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris.—AFP photos



An archaeologist works on an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris.



An archaeologist works on an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris.

Just meters from a busy train station in the heart of Paris, scientists have uncovered 50 graves in an ancient necropolis which offer a rare glimpse of life in the French capital's precursor Lutetia nearly 2000 years ago. Somehow the buried necropolis was never stumbled upon during multiple road works over the years, as well as the construction of the Port-Royal station on the historic Left Bank in the 1970s. However, plans for a new exit for the train station prompted an archaeological excavation.

Camille Colonna, an anthropologist at France's National Institute of Preventive Archaeological Research (INRAP), told a press conference that there were already "strong suspicions" the site was close to Lutetia's southern necropolis. The "Saint Jacques" necropolis, the largest burial site in the Gallo-Roman

town of Lutetia, was previously partially excavated in the 1800s.

However, only objects considered precious were taken from the graves, with the many skeletons, burial offerings and other artifacts abandoned. The necropolis was then covered over and again lost to time. The INRAP team discovered one section that had never before been excavated. "No one has seen it since antiquity," said INRAP president Dominique Garcia.

Colonna said the team was also "very happy" to have found a skeleton with a coin in its mouth, allowing them to date the burial to the 2nd century AD. The excavation, which began in March, has uncovered 50 graves, all of which were used for burial—not cremation, which was also common at the time.

## Ferryman of Hades

The remains of the men, women and children are believed to be Parisii, a Gallic people who lived in Lutetia, from when the town on the banks of the Seine river was under the control of the Roman Empire. The skeletons were buried in wooden coffins, which were now only identifiable by their nails. More than half were buried alongside offerings such as ceramic jugs and goblets.

Sometimes a coin was placed in the coffin, or even in the mouth of the dead, a common practice at the time called Charon's obol. In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of Hades, and the coin was considered a bribe to carry the souls of the dead across the river Styx. The archaeologists also found shoes inside the graves, identifying them by the

small nails that would be seen in the soles.

Colonna said the shoes were placed "either at the feet of the dead or next to them, like an offering". Jewelry, hairpins, belts were also discovered. The entire skeleton of a pig and another small animal was discovered in a pit where animals were thought to have been sacrificed to the gods. Unlike the excavation in the 1800s, this time the team plans to remove everything from the necropolis for analysis.

"This will allow us to understand the life of the Parisii through their funeral rites, as well as their health by studying their DNA," Colonna said. Garcia said that the ancient history of Paris was "generally not well known". The unearthed graves open "a window into the world of Paris during antiquity," he added.—AFP

## Russia releases first feature film shot in space

The first feature film shot in space premiered in Russian cinemas on Thursday, as Moscow exulted in beating a rival Hollywood project amid a confrontation with the West. "The Challenge" is about a surgeon dispatched to the International Space Station (ISS) to save an injured cosmonaut.

Russia sent an actress and a film director for a 12-day stint on the ISS in October 2021 to film scenes aboard the orbiting laboratory. The Russian crew beat a Hollywood project announced in 2020 by "Mission Impossible" star Tom Cruise together with NASA and Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has lauded the film, saying: "We are the first to have shot a feature film in orbit, aboard a spacecraft. Once again the first". The Soviet Union pioneered space travel and the film crew's mission added to a long list of firsts for Russia's space industry after several setbacks, including botched launches.

In "The Challenge" a surgeon played by 38-year-old Yulia Peresild — one of Russia's most glamorous



A woman walks next to the Russian Soyuz MS-18 space capsule which brought back to the Earth on October 17, 2021 Russian actress Yulia Peresild, in Moscow.—AFP

actresses — is sent to the ISS to save a cosmonaut injured during a spacewalk. Director Klim Shipenko, 39, who was in charge of camera, lighting and sound, brought back 30 hours of footage, 50 minutes of which were used in the final cut.

## 'We are Russia'

Peresild and Shipenko underwent training for four months before going to space on a Soyuz spacecraft accompanied by a cosmonaut.

The sequences were shot in the Russian module of the ISS and featured

cameo appearances by three Russian cosmonauts stationed there at the time. The camera followed Peresild moving through the cramped space, her blonde hair floating in zero gravity. Ahead of the film's release, the capsule which brought Peresild and Shipenko back to Earth was put on display in central Moscow. Tatiana Kulikova, who works at a factory in the city of Ufa, said she looked forward to watching the movie.

"We are Russia, and Russia is always ahead," the 45-year-old told AFP. The film was a joint project of space agency Roscosmos and top Russian TV network Channel One, whose boss Konstantin Ernst, did not hide his joy in beating Hollywood.

"We are all fans of 'Gravity'," Ernst told reporters on Monday, referring to the Hollywood blockbuster starring Sandra Bullock and George Clooney. "But our 'Challenge' shot in actual weightlessness shows that was just CGI" in Hollywood films, he said, referring to computer-generated imagery.

According to Ernst, the film cost less than a billion rubles (\$12 million), although the price tag of the entire project has not been revealed.—AFP



Veterinarians examine elephant Noor Jehan at the Karachi Zoo in Karachi.

## Ailing Pakistan elephant may be euthanized after collapsing

Animal experts will decide in coming days whether an ailing elephant at a zoo in Pakistan needs to be euthanized after it collapsed in its pen last week and has since failed to stand up, officials said. The 17-year-old African elephant underwent emergency treatment for a tumor in Karachi on April 5, but collapsed days later and has since lain stricken on its side. The pitiful plight of Noor Jehan is being shared by animal rights activists on social media in Pakistan and abroad, prompting calls for the zoo to be shut down.

Pakistan's zoos are frequently accused of disregarding animal welfare, and in 2020 a court ordered the only facility in the country's capital to close because of its decrepit state. Noor Jehan's fate now lies with a committee waiting for the arrival of Amir Khalil, the Austria-based chief vet of animal charity Four Paws International. Khalil, who led the team that treated Noor Jehan for the tumor, told AFP he wanted to have "one last try" at helping the pachyderm recover. "We will fight till the last for her recovery, and the rest is in the hands of Allah," said Kanwar Ayub, the director of Karachi Zoo. "We are diligently following Four Paws instructions for Noor Jehan's treatment." Noor Jehan is still eating despite being on her side, pin-pricked by drips and regularly doused with water to cool her down. "Her condition remains critical and uncertain," Four Paws said. Vet Khalil said the focus would likely shift to Noor Jehan's pen pal, Madhubala, with the hope of finding her better accommodation.

"We will do what we can for Noor Jehan but really we need to move the other animal," he said. In 2019 Islamabad's zoo was shut down after drawing international condemnation for its treatment of an Asian elephant named Kaavan. Kaavan was later airlifted to retirement in Cambodia in a project spearheaded by US popstar and actor Cher, and carried out by Four Paws.—AFP

## Pixar's 'Elemental' to close Cannes festival

The latest Pixar film, "Elemental", will get its world premiere as the closing film of the Cannes Film Festival next month, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

The new animation -- set in Element City where residents made from fire, air and water live together -- will screen out of competition on May 27, ahead of a staggered release around the world in June.

It is the fourth Pixar film selected to premiere at Cannes, following "Up" in 2009 -- the first animated film ever selected as the festival's opening

film -- as well as "Inside Out" in 2015 and "Soul" in 2020 (though that edition was ultimately cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

"As we all emerge from our pandemic cocoons and come together in story rooms, animation dailies and impromptu brainstorming sessions, it's a joy and honor to have Pixar back on La Croisette," Pete Docter, Pixar's chief creative officer, said in a statement.

Cannes director Thierry Fremaux said the film encourages viewers "to think about our lives in such a powerful way".—AFP





## Sports

# Novak Djokovic tested but prevails in Banja Luka opener

## Assche, youngest player in the world's top 100 at number 87

**BANJA LUKA:** Novak Djokovic battled back from a set down to beat French teenager Luca Van Assche 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2 in his opening match in Banja Luka on Wednesday. The world number one squandered three set points in the opener before Van Assche took the tie-break, but Djokovic broke twice in the second set to force a deciding set.

He dropped serve right away to start the third set but then broke Van Assche twice in a row, with Djokovic grasping control to eventually put away his 18-year-old opponent. "It wasn't easy. This probably will rank as the slowest court and slowest conditions I've ever played in. I didn't expect this to be so slow," said Djokovic.

"I couldn't put any ball past him. He was on every single ball for a set and a half until I started to get some rhythm going and some tempo." He added: "I'm happy with the way I finished the match. Of course I can always play better but a win is a win."

Djokovic praised his opponent as a "very promising player". "He (Van Assche)

has a bright future ahead of him, especially on this surface, he is very fast and agile", the 35-year-old said. "It's normal to expect that new, young players will emerge, generational change is a normal thing in every sport, but I didn't want to lose to an 18-year-old. It was definitely an additional motivation for me."

Former French Open junior champion Van Assche, the youngest player in the world's top 100 at number 87, had served Djokovic ample warning of his potential by beating Stan Wawrinka in round one.

Djokovic said Monday his elbow was not in "ideal condition" following a third-round exit last week at the Monte Carlo Masters, during which he was broken eight times by Lorenzo Musetti. After Wednesday's match, Djokovic said his elbow was "fine... holding up well".

"These conditions are not ideal for joints and my elbow... but I am glad that I managed to endure. I am healthy and eager for new victories." Van Assche earned the first break of the match for a 5-4 lead

but failed to serve out for the set. He then saved three set points at 5-6 before eventually taking a surprise lead.

For the second set Djokovic disposed of the black compression sleeve on his right arm he also wore in Monaco, sweeping through without offering Van Assche a single break opportunity. Despite falling behind to begin the third set, Djokovic recovered swiftly and sealed victory after two hours and 38 minutes.

During Wednesday's press conference, Djokovic also mentioned, jokingly, a possible future career as a coach. Asked whom he would like to coach, Djokovic replied, smiling: "(Nick) Kyrgios", with whom he once had an icy relationship.

"If I could coach Kyrgios, he would probably win five Grand Slams. But it would cost him a lot of money, too much money." The Serb, who is bidding for a record 23rd men's Grand Slam title at the French Open next month, will play countryman Dusan Lajovic or Gregoire Barrere of France in the quarter-finals. — AFP



**BANJA LUKA:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a backhand return to France's Luca van Assche during their tennis singles match at the Sprska Tennis Open ATP 250 series tournament in Banja Luka. — AFP

## Nadal plagued by injury woes in record career

**PARIS:** Rafael Nadal's Grand Slam title collection stands at 22 but if it wasn't for a succession of problems with his ankles, knees, elbow, wrists and now his hip, the figure would have been even more impressive.

In his career, which has stretched over 20 years, the Spaniard has missed 11 Grand Slams and withdrew mid-tournament at the majors five times. Now a hip injury, suffered at the Australian Open in January, has placed the 36-year-old's future in serious jeopardy.

"We find ourselves in a difficult situation," said Nadal on Thursday after announcing he was withdrawing from the Madrid Masters, a key warm-up ahead of the French Open which starts in a little over five weeks' time.

"In principle it was supposed to be a recovery period of six to eight weeks and now we're around 14." He added: "The reality is that the situation is not what we would have hoped for." When Nadal claimed a 14th French Open by thrashing Casper Ruud in the 2022 final at Roland Garros, he revealed he had required daily pain-killing injections in his foot to see out the two-week event.

He then underwent a radical surgical procedure, having the nerves burned in his foot to eradicate the pain. Nadal then swept into the Wimbledon semi-fi-



**MELBOURNE:** File photo taken on January 18, 2023 Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts as he competes against Mackenzie McDonald of the US during his men's singles match on day three of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

nals but an eagerly-anticipated showdown with Nick Kyrgios was shelved after the Spaniard failed to recover from an abdominal strain.

Fast forward to this year's Australian Open where he was hampered by a hip injury during his shock second-round loss to Mackenzie McDonald. It was his earliest exit from a Slam since 2016. He has been out of action since, even seeing his proud record of 18 unbroken years as a top-10 player end in March.

His wife Mery was in tears in the Melbourne crowd while his coaching team could hardly dare to look. For Nadal, it was familiar territory. A left foot

problem caused him to miss Wimbledon, the US Open and the Olympics in Tokyo in 2021 and Nadal did not return until the build-up to the 2022 Australian Open, which he went on to win for the second time, 13 years after his first.

But after losing to Taylor Fritz in the Indian Wells final, the Spaniard had to skip the start of the clay-court season in Monte Carlo and Barcelona with a rib stress fracture. He has already missed those two events again in 2023.

### 'Can't give deadlines'

Many pundits consistently predicted Nadal would struggle to enjoy a long career due to his gruelling style of play but he proved them wrong time and again. Nadal's first injury-enforced absence from the ATP Tour came as a 16-year-old in 2003 when he hurt his elbow in a fall during training and had to miss the French Open. He has been forced to sit out at least one tournament in every year of his career. Nadal even played briefly with bandaged fingers after burning himself accidentally at a restaurant in 2011, while he also missed the end of the 2014 season due to appendicitis.

Despite missing so many events, Nadal's will to win has seen him lift 92 titles and win 1,068 matches on tour. "It hurts as always," said Nadal after his defeat to McDonald in Australia. "But in the end, the glass is getting fuller," he added in Spanish, a phrase that means getting fed up or reaching your limit.

"I've never been in a position to complain, life has given me so many positive things that I have no right to complain." On Thursday, he added ruefully: "I can't give deadlines because if I knew I would tell you, but I don't know." — AFP



**JAIPUR:** Rajasthan Royals' Devdutt Padikkal (R) watches the ball after playing a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Rajasthan Royals at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. — AFP

run-out today." Avesh dismissed the big-hitting Shimron Hetmyer but impact player Devdutt Padikkal took charge and attempted to revive the chase with his quickfire 26 but it was in vain.

Avesh got Padikkal caught behind in the final over and sent back Dhruv Jurel for nought to be on a hat-trick denied by Ravichandran Ashwin. Rajasthan, inaugural IPL winners in 2008, began the match with a maiden over from New Zealand left-

arm quick Trent Boult, who returned figures of 1-16.

Ashwin took two wickets, including the dangerous Mayers after the left-handed opener struck his third fifty of the season following a sluggish start. Rahul was the first to go after an unconvincing 39 in a 82-run opening stand with the left-handed Mayers. Stoinis and West Indies star Nicholas Pooran, who hit 29, put on 45 runs for the fifth wicket to help the team cross 150. — AFP

## Sabalenka beats Krejcekova for third time in 2023

**STUTTGART:** World number two Aryna Sabalenka got her clay court season underway with a straight sets victory on Wednesday over Barbora Krejcekova in the pair's fourth meeting of 2023. Australian Open champion Sabalenka saw off her 12th-ranked Czech rival 6-2, 6-3 in just 75 minutes to become the first player into the quarter-finals. Sabalenka, the runner-up in Stuttgart to Ashleigh Barty in 2021 and Iga Swiatek last year, had lost to Krejcekova in Dubai this season but gained revenge at Indian Wells and Miami. Wednesday was their first career meeting on clay and Sabalenka was rarely threatened.

She hit 10 aces and never faced a break point as she cantered to her 21st win of the season, behind only Jessica Pegula and Elena Rybakina, who have each won 22 matches so far this year. Wimbledon champion Rybakina reached that mark Wednesday with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Germany's Jule Niemeier.

Coco Gauff also got her clay court season underway with a tough, mistake-ridden three-set win over Veronika Kudermetova. The 19-year-old American, runner-up at the French Open last year, came through 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3) to set up a last-16 clash with another Russian player, Anastasia Potapova.

World number six Gauff committed 53 unforced errors with 24 winners, while Kudermetova hit 80 unforced errors to 35 winners. There were 15 breaks of serve in total. "That was a close one," said Gauff. "I had opportunities in that match. I mean, again, I'm not expecting an easy match. She's been playing better and better each week."

"I think that I'm just going to have to keep that aggressive mindset, especially against her, someone who can come up with some big shots." After easing through the first set, Gauff was 3-0 and 4-2 in the second before 13th-ranked Kudermetova mounted a comeback. In the decider, Gauff served for the match at 5-3. Kudermetova again hit back before the American prevailed in the tiebreak. Top-ranked Swiatek starts her title defence on Thursday against highly-regarded Zheng Qinwen, the world number 25 from China. Swiatek arrived in Germany having missed the Miami Open and Billie Jean King Cup qualifiers with a rib injury. "I'm not injured anymore, so that's the most important thing for me," said reigning French and US Open champion Swiatek. — AFP

## Schumacher family plan legal action over fake AI quotes

**MUNICH:** Michael Schumacher's family said Thursday they were planning legal action against German magazine Die Aktuelle for using an artificial intelligence programme to generate fake quotes from the seven-time Formula One champion.

The magazine had claimed it had an interview with the motorsport legend—the first since he suffered a serious brain injury in a 2013 skiing accident in the French Alps. On Wednesday, the magazine published the "interview", revealing afterwards it had been generated by artificial intelligence.

The article included quotes attributed to Schumacher, discussing his family life since the accident and his medical condition. A family spokeswoman confirmed to AFP that they planned legal action, without giving further details.

The family has carefully guarded the 54-year-old's privacy since the accident. Schumacher has not been seen in public since the injury and little information has been given publicly on his condition. Reports suggest Schumacher has memory, movement and speech problems and is being cared for at home near Geneva.

"Private is private", as he always said," Corinna Schumacher, Michael's wife, said in a 2021 Netflix documentary. "Michael always protected us and now we are protecting Michael." Schumacher's seven Formula One titles is equal best alongside Lewis Hamilton. The German recorded 91 Grand Prix victories, second only to Hamilton's 103. Michael's son, Mick, 24, is also a Formula One driver and currently a reserve driver with Mercedes. — AFP

## Woods has another surgery on damaged right leg

**LOS ANGELES:** Tiger Woods said Wednesday he has had another surgery on his lower right leg, which was severely injured in his 2021 car accident. A post on the 15-time major champion's official Twitter feed said he underwent a "subtalar fusion procedure to address his post-traumatic arthritis from his previous talus fracture".

The subtalar joint is located just below the ankle joint, and a fusion can relieve pain. No timetable was given for Woods's return, although the statement

called the surgery, performed by Dr. Martin O'Malley at HSS Sports Medicine in New York City, a success.

Woods most recently competed at the Masters, where he withdrew early in the third round complaining of a return of painful plantar fasciitis in his foot. The ailment, inflammation of the tissue band on the bottom of the foot, had caused him to pull out of the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas in November.

Woods had battled to make the cut at Augusta National, where weather delays made the event even more challenging, but was visibly limping at times on the storied course where he has won five times. Woods has competed in just five tournaments since his February 2021 car crash near Los Angeles, completing 72 holes only twice. He played four rounds in his surprise return to golf at last year's Masters and at the Genesis Invitational PGA Tour event at Riviera Country Club in February. He withdrew from the 2022

PGA Championship after making the cut and missed the cut at the British Open at St. Andrews last year.

There was no indication in Wednesday's statement if Woods would be fit for the next major of the year, the PGA Championship at Oak Hill May 18-21. He reiterated at Riviera in February that his competitive schedule would be extremely limited, saying he hoped to play in all four majors and perhaps "a couple" of other events. At Augusta this month he acknowledged that he wonders each time he plays the Masters if it will be his last time there. "I don't know how many more I have in me," he said, adding that he felt "very lucky" to still have his right leg.

"It has been tough and will always be tough. The ability and endurance of what my leg will do going forward will never be the same. That's why I can't prepare and play as many tournaments as I like. "But that's my future and I'm OK with that." — AFP



## Sports

# Under-pressure PSG boss Galtier ‘working’ for next season

## PSG are easing towards a record-breaking 11th Ligue 1 title

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain coach Christophe Galtier insisted Thursday he is planning for next season despite a disappointing maiden campaign in charge and recent allegations of racist remarks. PSG are easing towards a record-breaking 11th Ligue 1 title and can move 11 points clear of second-placed Marseille when they visit rock-bottom Angers on Friday.

But they have lost eight matches in all competitions since the World Cup, including home and away defeats in a tame Champions League last-16 exit to Bayern Munich. The domestic league title is the only major trophy still in their sights in the closing weeks of the season.

Galtier has also denied claims he made racist comments while in charge of Nice last term, revealed in a reported email sent by then Nice director Julien Fournier. “Am I convinced I’ll be the coach next season? I plan to be the coach of PSG next season,” Galtier said.

“I’m very focused on work... I’m very active with the staff, with the players. I know the importance of going for this title... “I also plan for the future.” Galtier masterminded Lille’s shock Ligue 1 triumph ahead of PSG in 2021 but winning that trophy again would only meet the lowest of expectations in the capital.

Lionel Messi is set to leave the club at the end of the season and was booed by fans at the Parc des Princes earlier this month. Neymar has been out injured since February, while speculation remains

about Kylian Mbappe’s future.

“We are working with (football advisor) Luis Campos on the make-up of the squad next season,” said Galtier. “The changes we want to make to improve the squad, to maybe have more variety in our game... To have better balance.”

PSG were in fine form before the break for the Qatar World Cup but questions have been raised about the players’ commitment since. As well as their latest Champions League debacle, Paris were dumped out of the French Cup in the last 16 for the second straight season by Marseille.

“We must not forget that it has been a unique season, with the greatest international competition right in the middle,” added Galtier. “We will have to analyse what happened in the first part of the season and the second part.”

Elsewhere this weekend, third-placed Lens host fourth-placed Monaco in a crucial match in the battle for Champions League qualification on Saturday. The principality club are two points behind Lens in the race for a top-three finish, with Marseille just one point further ahead, occupying the second and final automatic qualification spot.

### Player to watch Alexandre Lacazette

The former Arsenal striker has been key to Lyon’s recent revival with five goals in as many league matches since returning from injury. Laurent Blanc’s side have put together a seven-match

more than he could chew. Those doubts have now disappeared. “He is perhaps the best rider of all time,” said Denmark’s Mattias Skjelmose who was second on Wednesday. “You only see someone like him emerge once a century.” Third-placed Mikel Landa claimed “there was no way to beat Pogacar”. “He’s over and above the rest of us and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Just three weeks ago, Mathieu van der Poel was going for a third consecutive win at the Tour of Flanders, a race seen by many hardcore fans as an unofficial world championship. Van der Poel, however, could only watch as Pogacar’s series of attacks on the many cobbled hills allowed the Slovenian to win.

“I can live with second today,” said Van der Poel. “Second to a rider like that is okay.” Pogacar hinted that his growing reputation meant that while he was receiving accolades he was also getting few favours. “We had to do it all on our own today, nobody else would work,” he said. There was a similar scenario on the Tour de France in 2022 when his defiant will to win stages, as well as the main overall prize, backfired

record holder Kaylee McKeown, who capped an impressive championships that saw her try her hand at different strokes. “I’m happy with the time but also wish it was a lot faster than it was,” said O’Callaghan. “I felt dead in the end, I’m not going to lie. My legs were gone.”

In choosing to race freestyle, McKeown opted out of the 200m backstroke after setting a new world record just weeks ago at the New South Wales state championships. In her absence, 16-year-old Jaclyn Barclay took the honours in 2:11.50 -- a long way outside McKeown’s 2:03.14 world best.

Chalmers, who came second to American arch-rival Caeleb Dressel in Tokyo, having won gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics, showed he remains a serious player over the distance. The 24-year-old touched in 48.00, holding off fast-improving teenagers Kai Taylor—who won the 200m title—and Flynn Southam, who came second and third. — AFP

a May 19 deadline set by FIFA for hopeful host nations to formally submit bids. The United States has hosted the Women’s World Cup twice before, in 1999 and 2003, while Mexico has never held the tournament. If successful, the tournament would take place one year after the 2026 men’s World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

“The United States has always been a global leader for the women’s game and we would be honored to co-host the world’s premier event for women’s soccer along with Mexico,” US Soccer president Cindy Parlow Cone said in a statement.

“Hosting the 2027 Women’s World Cup provides us an incredible opportunity to cap off two historic years



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (L) and Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe take part in a training session at club's training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris on the eve of the L1 football match against Angers. — AFP

unbeaten run in Ligue 1 to close within five points of fifth-placed Lille and give themselves hope of qualifying for Europe.

Lacazette has netted 19 league goals in total this season, just one fewer than joint top-scorers Mbappe and Jonathan David. — AFP

## ‘Once a century’ Pogacar hailed by cycling rivals

**HUY:** Tadej Pogacar was Wednesday hailed as a “once in a century” talent who can become cycling’s greatest star after the two-time Tour de France champion claimed his 12th win of the season in the Fleche Wallonne.

The 24-year-old Slovenian was the youngest Tour winner in 116 years when he clinched his first major title on his debut in 2020. After lifting a second Tour de France in 2021, Pogacar swore to widen his horizons to try and conquer the tough one-day scene, which few Grand Tour riders have ever succeeded in doing.

However, when he was beaten at the Tour of Flanders in 2022, and then came second at the Tour de France, it appeared he might have bitten off



HERVE: Slovenian Tadej Pogacar of UAE Team Emirates celebrates on the podium after winning the 86th edition of the men's race ‘La Fleche Wallonne’, a one day cycling race (Waalse Pijl - Walloon Arrow), 194.2 km from Herve to Huy on April 19, 2023. —AFP

as Denmark’s Jonas Vingegaard beat him to the title. “This is racing, expect me continue,” said Pogacar. “I’ll go away and consider all this and see how we play it next year.” — AFP

## O’Callaghan upsets Titmus to take Australia 200m title

**GOLD COAST:** Mollie O’Callaghan upset Tokyo Olympic champion Ariane Titmus to seize the 200m freestyle crown at the Australian championships Thursday, while Kyle Chalmers took out the men’s 100m title. Titmus, who won the 400m and 800m on Queensland’s Gold Coast, was pipped at the post in a stacked field by O’Callaghan, the world champion over 100m who touched in 1:55.15. Only Canadian star Summer McIntosh and American great Katie Ledecky have gone faster this year.

Shayna Jack was third ahead of backstroke world



GOLD COAST: Australia’s Mollie O’Callaghan reacts after winning the final of the women’s 50m backstroke event during the Australian swimming championships on the Gold Coast. —AFP

## US, Mexico to jointly bid for Women’s WCup

**LOS ANGELES:** The United States and Mexico will bid to co-host the 2027 Women’s World Cup, the football federations from the two countries said on Wednesday. US Soccer and the Mexican Football Federation (MFF) announced their plans one month before

of World Cup soccer in the CONCACAF region, helping us continue to grow the game among our confederation associations,” Parlow Cone added.

MFF president Yon de Luisa said staging the tournament would be a catalyst for women’s football in Mexico. “It is with pleasure that we are teaming up again with the US Soccer Federation in the pursuit of this World Cup for our region, which will undoubtedly be historic,” de Luisa said. The host for the 2027 World Cup is expected to be decided at the FIFA Congress in May 2024. The US-Mexico bid will face competition from a joint bid by Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands as well as bids from South Africa and Brazil. — 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
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Change of Name

I, QUTBUDDIN, holder of passport No. Z2690395 do hereby change my name to QUTBUDDIN (as given name) HAKANI (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name QUTBUDDIN HAKANI and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C 3506)

I, Kashim, S/O Samsher holder of passport No. R5455215 and H.No N559 Gali No. 19 Saurabh Vihar Jaitpur South Delhi-110044, changed my name to Kashim Khan, for all future purposes. (C 3507) 19/04/23

I, SAVIO DSILVA, holder of Indian passport No U0617810 having permanent

address House No. 9 UdelPontemol po Curchorem, South Goa, Pin:403706, Goa, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name SAVIO and Surname DASILVA. (C 3509) 21/4/2023

I, HUSAIN S/O ESMAIL AMARJI (Current name in passport) holder of Indian passport no. U0751052 having permanent address Ward No. 22, Shabbir Mohallah n Sagwara, Rajasthan, pincode No. 314025 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name HUSAIN and surname AMARJI. (C 3508) 20/04/2023

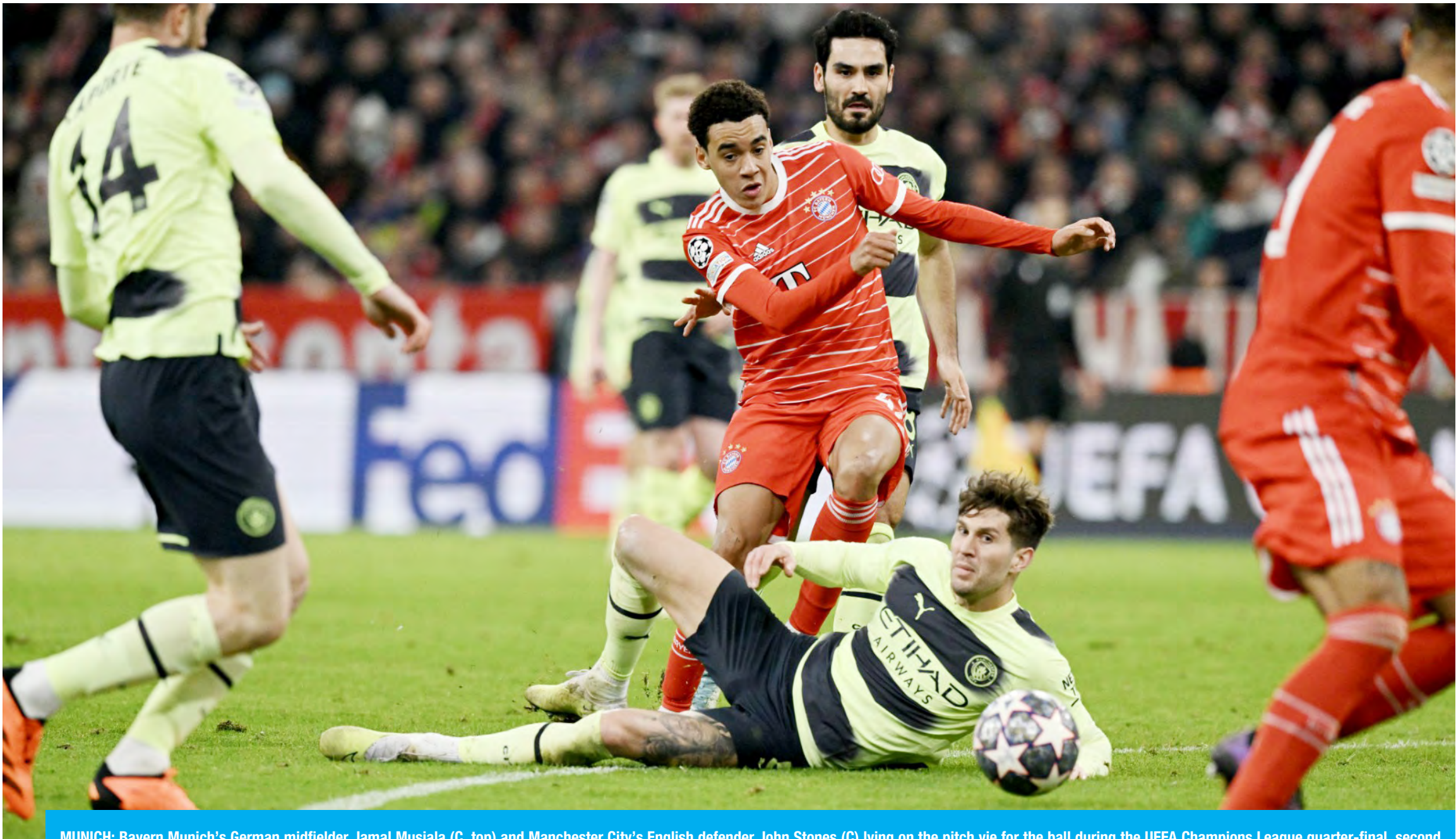
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## Man City book Real Madrid semi-final clash

‘City are in best shape, with best players in the best league’



MUNICH: Bayern Munich’s German midfielder Jamal Musiala (C, top) and Manchester City’s English defender John Stones (C) lying on the pitch vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final, second leg football match between Bayern Munich and Manchester City in Munich. — AFP

**MUNICH:** Manchester City will face Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals for the second straight season after Erling Haaland scored in a 1-1 draw which secured a 4-1 aggregate last-eight win over Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

The Norwegian missed a first-half penalty but muscled his way upfield midway through the second half, lashing past Bayern goalkeeper Yann Sommer for his 48th goal in 41 appearances this season. Bayern scored a late penalty through Joshua Kimmich but were again haunted by their inability to make possession and chances count.

City will play in the semis for the third straight year but face a rematch with manager Pep Guardiola’s old foe Real, who scored two late goals to spectacularly turn the tie their way on the way to eventually winning the title last season.

“The semi-final again... the experience that we have in the competition, the players feel it a lot, they want to

do really well,” Guardiola told BT Sport. Bayern sacked previous coach Julian Nagelsmann in favour of Thomas Tuchel earlier this month despite a perfect record in the Champions League this season but have since been eliminated from Europe and the German Cup.

“If we can’t take positives from this match, we would have a problem,” Tuchel, whose side are only two points clear of Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga title race, told DAZN. “At the moment, City are in the best shape, with the best players in the best league in the world.”

Guardiola, so often criticised in the Champions League for tinkering with his side, named the same XI that won the first leg 3-0 in Manchester. Tuchel made two changes, opting for the creativity of City loanee Joao Cancelo at full-back and bringing back Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, the only recognised striker in the squad. Bayern, hoping to replicate previous miracle Champions League comebacks which start-

ed with an early goal, went on the attack from the outset. Bayern’s other former City star, Leroy Sane, chipped just wide on 17 minutes when through one-on-one with goalkeeper Ederson.

The six-time European champions received a massive let-off just a minute later in one of City’s first attacks thanks to a narrow offside call against Haaland. Dayot Upamecano, widely criticised for a nervous first-leg performance, initially saw red for bringing down the Norwegian with the goal in sight, but the card was immediately rescinded.

An animated Tuchel received a yellow for exchanging words with the assistant referee while theatrically applauding the decision. Bayern’s lack of confidence and fluidity up front was obvious just minutes later, when Sane, clean through again, cut the ball back to an off-balance Leon Goretzka.

Upamecano was in the thick of it once more with 35 minutes gone, handballing in the box, bringing

former Dortmund player Haaland to the spot in front of the home ultras. The Norwegian, however, blasted over, only his third miss from 36 penalty attempts, and his first for City.

Haaland made up for his error in the 57th minute when he burst away from Upamecano, who slipped, blasted the ball past Sommer and into the goal to cap off a quick City counter-attack. Bayern had the ball in the net on 73 minutes but French teenager Mathys Tel’s goal was ruled out for offside.

With seven minutes left, Kimmich converted a consolation from the spot after a Manuel Akanji handball. The winner of the City-Real tie will face either AC Milan or Inter Milan in the final in Istanbul on June 10.

For Bayern, the recriminations will begin on and off the field after City’s dominant display, with a frustrated Tuchel sent to the stands for picking up a second yellow in the final minutes. — AFP

## Inter set up all-Italian semi with AC Milan

**MILAN:** Inter Milan set up a blockbuster derby in the Champions League semi-finals on Wednesday after a 3-3 draw with Benfica saw the Italians through 5-3 on aggregate. Simone Inzaghi’s side will face local rivals AC Milan in the last four thanks to goals from Nicolò Barella, Lautaro Martinez and Joaquin Correa which ensured straight-forward qualification.

Both Milan giants are trying to become the first Serie A side to win Europe’s top club competition since Inter last lifted the trophy in 2010. “It was a big night for everyone at the club, and we deserved to go through over the course of the two legs,” said Inzaghi.

“The players were incredible over the two matches. Getting to the semi-finals is a dream and now that we’re here we want to go try and go all the way.” Inter had come into Wednesday’s clash in a miserable run of form in which their only win in their last eight games had come in last week’s first leg in Portugal.

The win set up two mouth-watering clashes with Milan next month after the Italian champions saw off Napoli on Tuesday night. It also snapped a three-match home losing streak in which Inter hadn’t scored a single goal and continued their impressive season in cup competitions while their league campaign flounders.

Martinez and Correa ended worrying goalscoring droughts with their strikes, as well as making sure that Fredrik Aursnes, Antonio Silva and Petar Musa netting for the away side made no difference to the outcome of the tie.

“We’re really happy, we’re really proud to represent the badge and this great club,” said Martinez. “We knew that this (going through) meant playing a derby in the semi-finals of the Champions League. I play this sport to win everything possible, I’m really



MILAN: Benfica’s Argentinian defender Nicolas Otamendi (R) collides with Inter Milan’s Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku during the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals second leg football match between Inter Milan and Benfica Lisbon. — AFP

happy to be in the semi-finals, this club deserves to be there,” Silva and Musa netted late on for Roger Schmidt’s team when Inter had already long made sure that they would be tussling Milan for a place in the June 10 final in Istanbul. If there were any pre-match nerves among the sell-out San Siro crowd they were soon eased as Inter immediately played like the team in two cup semi-finals rather than the one which has lost 11 times in Serie A.

They could have been ahead as early as the sixth minute when Lautaro wasted a great counter-attack by playing a poor pass to Federico Dimarco who was haring into the box. However Martinez redeemed himself for the opener, snaffling up possession after Edin Dzeko battled with the Benfica defence and exchanging passes with Barella who unleashed a perfectly placed curler with his left.

However a defensive lapse allowed Aursnes to pull Benfica on the night seven minutes before the break, the Norwegian midfielder left completely alone to power a header past Andre Onana. Inzaghi said before the match that Inter would not simply defend but they sat back as Benfica pushed for an unlikely passage to the next round. — AFP

## Grizzlies, Bucks bounce back, Nuggets see off Wolves

**LOS ANGELES:** The Milwaukee Bucks and Memphis Grizzlies bounced back to level their respective NBA playoff series’ with crucial victories Wednesday, as Jamal Murray delivered a 40-point masterpiece to give the Denver Nuggets a commanding 2-0 lead over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Top seeds Milwaukee shrugged off the injury absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo to thrash the Miami Heat 138-122 to tie their best-of-seven Eastern Conference series at 1-1. In the Western Conference playoffs, Memphis also overcame the loss of a star player—Ja Morant—before grinding out an attritional 103-93 win over LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers. Arguably the performance of the night however came in Denver, as the Nuggets’ Murray poured in 40 points in a 122-113 victory over the Timberwolves. Denver, the No.1 seeds in the West, now lead the series 2-0.

It was the latest milestone in Murray’s long road back from a serious knee injury. The 26-year-old point guard missed the entirety of the 2021-2022 campaign after undergoing surgery to repair torn knee ligaments in April 2021. Denver looked to be cruising to victory after leading 64-49 at half-time before a 40-point Minnesota third quarter turned the game on its head to leave the Timberwolves up by two. But Murray and Michael Porter Jr. combined for 23 fourth-quarter points to seal Denver’s victory.

“It was a passionate, heartfelt performance,” Denver coach Michael Malone said of Murray’s display. “Just the fact that he’s missed the last two post-seasons, just to have him back, and playing at that level—Jamal overall was terrific.”

Murray was almost outshone by Minnesota’s Anthony Edwards, who finished with 41 points in a los-

ing effort. In other games, Xavier Tillman scored 22 points and pulled down 18 rebounds in the Grizzlies’ win over the Lakers.

A bruising game saw the Lakers’ Anthony Davis suffer a cut on his right eyelid while James was drawn into a verbal back and forth with Memphis’s Dillon Brooks. The Grizzlies led by as many as 16 points on the way to a 59-44 halftime lead as the harried Lakers failed to find a way to get their offense firing. Davis blocked five shots in the first half but connected on just one of nine shot attempts. He finished with 13 points on four-of-14 shooting. James led all scorers with 28 points and Japan’s Rui Hachimura added 20 to become the first Laker to score 20 points off the bench in back-to-back playoff games since Magic Johnson in 1996.

But unlike in game one, there would be no late resurgence from the Lakers, the Grizzlies absorbing the Lakers’ second-half push. Jaren Jackson Jr., the newly named NBA Defensive Player of the Year, scored 18 points, Desmond Bane added 17 and Brooks chipped in 12. Tyus Jones, starting in place of Morant, added 10 and eight assists.

Tillman said the Grizzlies will summon a “road-warrior mentality” for game three of the best-of-seven series in Los Angeles on Saturday. Brooks made no apology for trash-talking James. “I don’t care—he’s old,” Brooks said of the 38-year-old James. “I poke bears.”

The Milwaukee Bucks barely noticed the injury absence of Greek star Antetokounmpo as they crushed the Miami Heat to level their series at one game apiece. With the talismanic Antetokounmpo missing after suffering a lower-back contusion in Sunday’s game-one defeat, the Bucks delivered a balanced offensive effort to overwhelm Miami.

The Bucks led from early in the first quarter and never looked back, sprinting out of reach after outscoring Miami 45-27 in the second quarter to lead by a whopping 81-55 at half-time. Milwaukee kept the scoring up in the third quarter, extending their lead to 36 points at one stage to make victory a formality.— AFP