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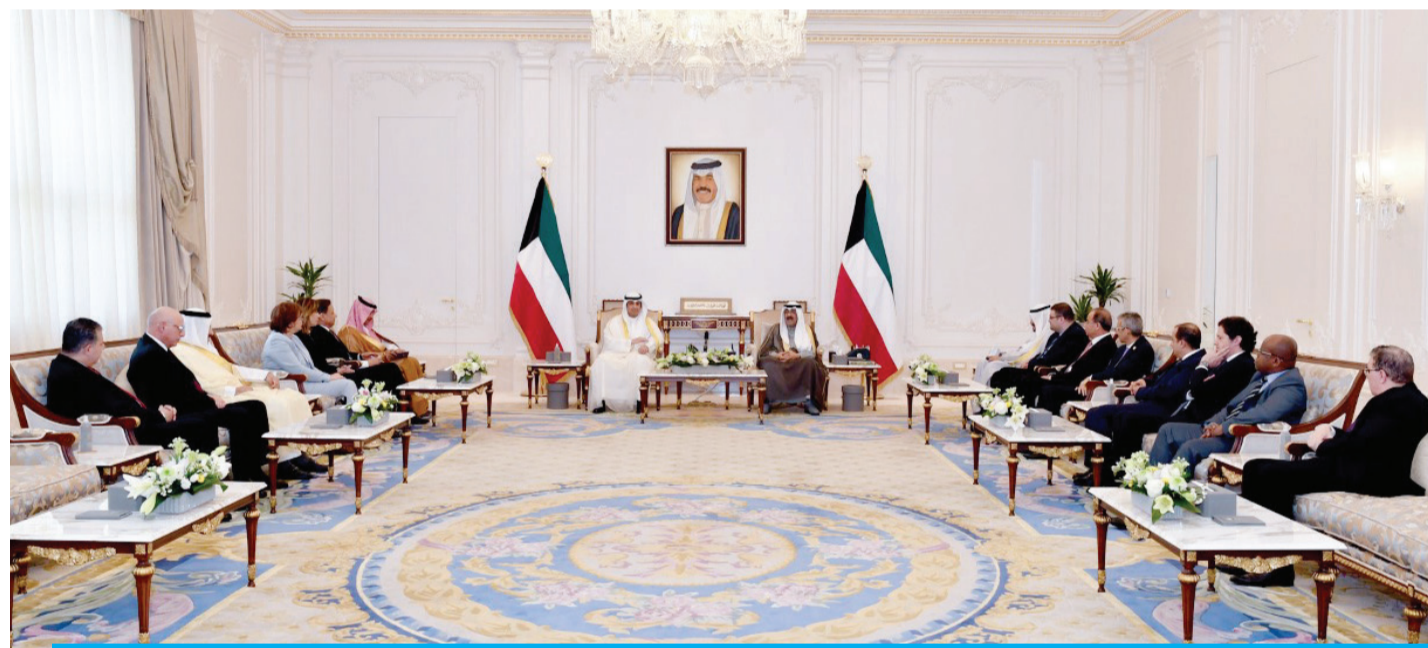


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## Deputy Amir urges Arab media to promote truth, counter falsehood

Sheikh Mishal reiterates Kuwait's strong support to Palestinians



KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives GCC and Arab information ministers at Bayan Palace on March 15, 2023. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stressed on Wednesday that media outlets in the Arab region had a great responsibility to promote truth and counter the spread of falsehood and misinformation. This came during a reception at Bayan Palace of GCC and Arab information ministers partaking in meetings of 98th permanent Arab Media Committee and 16th Executive Office of Arab Information Ministers.

During the reception - attended by Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi - HH Sheikh Mishal delivered a speech welcoming the GCC and Arab officials to Kuwait. Sheikh Mishal affirmed that media, in its various forms, had played an integral role in bolstering cultural exchange and building bridges amongst nations. He stressed that media should focus on reflecting the truth no matter the medium used, whether traditional or the latest technology.

HH Sheikh Mishal called on participants to realize their potential and use their posts

to fend rumors and propagate actual news developments, which in turn lessens strife and conflict. Putting the Palestinian cause and countering terrorism at the top of the agenda of the meetings was a great choice to help deliver this just message to the world, he affirmed.

Sheikh Mishal reiterated Kuwait's strong support to the Palestinian people in establishing an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with international laws and norms. As for terrorism, HH Sheikh Mishal called on the ministers to focus on youth and use their media tools to steer them away from misleading ideologies and notions.

Minister Mutairi delivered a speech affirming ministers would be heeding HH the Deputy Amir's calls for unity against all that might negatively affect GCC and Arab societies. Head of the Diwan of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Head of the Crown Prince's Office Jamal Al-Thiab and Undersecretary at the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa were present at the reception. — KUNA

### News in brief

#### Ramadan to 'start on March 23'

KUWAIT: Al-Ojairi Scientific Center said Ramadan will begin on March 23, 2023, as the month of Shaaban will be of 30 days this year. "The visibility of the moon will be nearly impossible" on Shabaan 29, the center announced, as it will set 13 minutes before the sun. — KUNA

#### MoI cautions against weather

KUWAIT: The interior ministry on Wednesday called on drivers and seafarers to exercise caution due to unstable weather, in addition to the warnings of the meteorological department of the possibility of rainfall in different parts of the country. The ministry also called on everyone to call 112 when facing any emergency, and to check for weather updates on the website [www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw). — KUNA

#### Pompidou to set up Saudi museum

PARIS: The Pompidou Centre in Paris has signed an agreement to help create a modern art museum in Saudi Arabia's Al-Ula heritage site, dedicated to Arab artists, it said Wednesday. The agreement with Saudi Arabia was signed at the weekend in the presence of the kingdom's culture minister, Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan, and his French counterpart Rima Abdul Malak. — AFP

#### Floods kill 14 in Turkey

ISTANBUL: Flash floods killed at least 14 people living in tents and container housing across Turkey's quake-hit region on Wednesday. Several more people were swept away by the rushing water, which turned streets into muddy rivers in areas hit by last month's 7.8-magnitude quake.

### Saudi could invest in Iran 'very quickly'

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia could start making investments in Iran "very quickly" after they agreed to restore diplomatic ties, the Saudi finance minister said on Wednesday, despite sweeping US sanctions against the Islamic republic. Mohamed Al-Jadaan said there were "a lot of opportu-

nities" in Iran and that he couldn't see any reason to prevent investments taking place between the two Gulf heavyweights.

"I would say quickly," he told the Financial Sector Conference in Riyadh, when asked how soon Saudi Arabia could start making "significant" investments in Iran. "When people really stick to the principles of what was agreed, I think that that could happen very quickly." In a surprise, Chinese-brokered announcement on Friday, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to work towards restoring ties and reopening diplomatic missions within two months.

The oil-rich rivals, who are on opposing sides in conflicts across the Middle East, severed relations in

2016 after Saudi's execution of a Shiite cleric triggered violent protests. Iran has been under renewed US sanctions since then president Donald Trump abandoned a landmark nuclear agreement between Tehran and major powers in 2018. Saudi Arabia, a longtime US ally, has said it supports the sanctions, which target key areas, including oil.

But Jadaan said: "There is no reason for (investments) not to happen. I mean, Iran is our neighbor and has been and will continue to be for hundreds of years. So I don't see any issue that would prevent the normalization of the relationship across investments... as long as we stick to the agreement, you

Continued on Page 6

### Police halt bid to arrest Khan after clashes

LAHORE: Pakistan police halted an attempt to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan Wednesday, ending a siege of his residence after violent clashes with hundreds of his supporters. Police and paramilitary rangers retreated from Khan's home in the Zaman Park suburb of Lahore and abandoned a series of roadblocks and checkpoints leading to the area.

"The police and rangers sent to harm Imran Khan were pushed back by the people," his official Pakistan

Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party tweeted, along with video of supporters celebrating outside his house. Police had fought pitched battles with Khan's supporters throughout the night, firing fusillades of teargas and dodging rocks thrown by angry crowds.

A Lahore High Court order seen by AFP told police to "halt the operation forthwith and withdraw" pending the result of a hearing in Islamabad over the arrest warrant for Khan. Khan was ousted from office by a no-confidence vote last year, and has been snarled in dozens of legal cases as he campaigns for early elections and a return to office.

"The reason why this is happening is not because I broke any law. They want me in jail so that I cannot contest elections," he told AFP

Continued on Page 6



LAHORE: Former Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan speaks during an interview at his residence on March 15, 2023, while displaying teargas shells fired by riot police during clashes. — AFP

### Russia races to salvage US drone in Black Sea

MOSCOW: Moscow said Wednesday it would try to retrieve the wreckage of a US military drone that crashed over the Black Sea in a confrontation that Washington blamed on two Russian fighter jets. Russia also warned against "hostile" US flights as tensions

simmered and Russia denied its Su-27 military aircraft had clipped the propeller of the unmanned Reaper drone.

Kyiv meanwhile countered that the incident over international waters was evidence the Kremlin wants to draw the United States into the conflict in Ukraine. "I don't know whether we'll be able to retrieve it or not but it has to be done. And we will certainly work on it," Russian Security Council secretary Nikolai Patrushev said in televised remarks.

The crash on Tuesday, which Washington said was the fault of reckless

Continued on Page 6



This handout photo shows an MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicle flying over the Nevada Test and Training Range on Jan 14, 2020. — AFP





# Domestic helpers playing significant roles in Kuwait

## 'She has become part of the family'

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** The advantage of having a healthy and high-quality living environment is based on a structured daily life maintained by "invisible" work that plays a major role in making life seamless. Accomplishing domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and keeping an eye on children are fundamental services that domestic helpers offer to many families in Kuwait. This improves families' daily lives at different levels, so having a domestic helper is a very common phenomenon among Kuwaiti families.

Om Ahmed, a housewife who has been assisted by her domestic helper for more than 10 years, told Kuwait Times about her household worker's role in dedicating efforts to support the family by helping with domestic responsibilities. "Her work provides comfort to everyone and not only myself as a matriarch, because she saves us the time and effort needed to do chores. Consequently, she provides us with better chances to spend quality time with each other and boost productivity for life's demands and responsibilities," she said.

Domestic helpers lift a heavy burden from family members, which makes their homes a place for comfort and relaxation. For her domestic helper's significant role in ensuring that the home is in good condition, Om Ahmed counts her as a family member who has an impact on the children's upbringing.

"The necessity of her role is undeniable as she makes a big difference. She has become part of the family, as she takes care of cleanliness, prepares food and also raises the children. Many kids see



Flora



domestic workers as their second mother and learn so many things from them. Without her, being responsible for a family becomes exhausting and very demanding, which affects the stability and coherence of the family," Om Ahmed said.

Domestic helpers enable parents to enjoy a break from looking after their homes and children without stress, due to leaving them in caring hands. This makes domestic workers' role essential in helping society's growth and development, as they take part in creating a healthy place for homeowners and children to grow and have time and energy to succeed in their careers or education, each according to their responsibilities.

Flora, a domestic helper in Kuwait, shared her experiences with Kuwait Times. She shed light on both positive and negative things about working as a

domestic helper in Kuwait. "The positive things about working as a domestic worker in Kuwait is that I have good employers. My employers treat me as a member of the family, which shows that they appreciate my efforts. Another positive thing is that I can support my family back home," she said.

Being a domestic worker requires a strong and healthy body because it demands a lot of effort, so falling sick is a struggle for domestic workers, besides the fact that they are away from their families, which makes them unable to be physically attentive. This raises concerns in case any problem befalls them. According to Flora, recognizing her job and showing appreciation is essential and rewarding. "I struggle when I get sick, or when I have some family issues back in my home country," she said.

### News in brief

#### Lawmaker warns against 'environmental crimes'

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of the Parliamentary Environment Committee MP Dr Hamad Al-Matar warned against "environmental crimes" at the sewage treatment station of the ministry of public works in Kabd. Matar criticized the volume of sewage water left over and considered it an environmental problem that is worse than the tyre issue and held several government departments responsible. "We were commissioned by the National Assembly, so I held a field visit, and we hold everyone responsible," he said. He added many camps are in close proximity to the place, calling on the Municipality to remove the camps to safeguard people's health. "This is a joint responsibility between Kuwait Municipality, Public Works Ministry and Environment Public Authority, and all will be held responsible. It is not possible to remain silent towards this environmental crime." Matar said the sewage water affects underground water, and the solution is in treatment and recycling.

#### Ministry to fire 1,900 non-Kuwaiti teachers

**KUWAIT:** The Education Ministry issued a notice that it will end the services of around 1,900 non-Kuwaiti teachers at the end of the current academic year in implementation of the Kuwaitization policy. "The concerned sectors have handed over these notices to educational districts to transfer them to the workplaces of these teachers in schools and inform them of the termination of their services as of June, after handing them the notice," the ministry announced. The specialties of the teachers include around 14 subjects, namely, Arabic, Islamic education, craft, computers, English, history, geography, biology, science, social studies, geology and art education, in addition to forensic sciences and social psychology. Ahmadi educational district has the most terminated teachers, followed by the Capital educational district, Farwaniya, Jahra, Hawally, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, religious education and special education.

#### MILSET Asia to organize student summit in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Asia Office of the International Movement for Leisure Activities in Science and Technology (MILSET) plans to hold its second conference for talented students in Kuwait this May. Commencing the preparations for the sideline training courses on Wednesday, Adnan Al-Meir, deputy head of MILSET Asia Office, said the event will gather 96 high school students, males and females, who excel in chemistry, physics, biology and geology. "The conference aims to foster the scientific skills of grade-II students through lectures, training courses and workshops," he told reporters. The Kuwait Ministry of Education is working with MILSET office in Kuwait to work out a host of activities and programs for fostering the creative skills of students, Al-Meir added. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatma Al-Salem receives her counterpart at the Oman News Agency (ONA) Ibrahim Al-Azri. —KUNA photos



**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatma Al-Salem welcomes Qatari Ambassador Ali Al-Mahmoud.

## KUNA, ONA director discuss bolstering ties

**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatma Al-Salem and her counterpart at the Oman News Agency (ONA) Ibrahim Al-Azri met on Wednesday to discuss ways to bolster cooperation between the two media entities. During the reception of Al-Azri and the accompanying delegation at KUNA's headquarters, Director Dr Al-Salem welcomed ONA representatives' visit to the agency, affirming that Kuwait News Agency would provide all of its assets to help boost media cooperation between the two sides.

She reiterated KUNA's desire to develop its news and journalistic capabilities via using the latest technologies to deliver the latest media updates to the masses. She commended the level of cooperation with ONA, saying that it would reflect positively on the development of cooperation amongst GCC media outlets. ONA's director Al-Azri lauded the cooperation with KUNA, saying that both outlets were eager to pursue more venues of cooperation in the future. He commended the media message propagated by KUNA, indicating that it was one of the most prominent news agencies in the region.

#### Qatar envoy

Also, Director General of Kuwait News Agency and Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Al-Mahmoud held talks on ways to boost relations, especially in media, along with cooperation between both countries' news agencies. During the meeting, Dr Al-Salem highlighted the importance of exchanging media visions and experience between Kuwait and Qatar to achieve a prominent media position regionally and internationally, stressing KUNA's keenness on enhancing media cooperation with Qatar through its different media agencies especially Qatar News Agency (QNA).

She also praised the competence and efficiency of Kuwaiti and Qatari media figures and journalists, which in turn positively reflects on the media discourse of the two countries. The Qatari

ambassador praised the importance of KUNA's media role in highlighting the depth of both countries' brotherly relations and fruitful cooperation in the media fields through specialized and diverse news materials that reflect these relations. He also praised KUNA's credibility in performing its media mission with full freedom and responsibility reflecting pioneering Kuwaiti media at Gulf, Arab and international levels amid technological and social media challenges.

#### Addressing challenges

Arab media must address the challenges of the ever-shifting technological landscape to bring accurate, timely, and reliable news, Director General of Kuwait News Agency said on Wednesday. Speaking at a seminar on the challenges facing Arab media in the era of technological revolution - an event organized by Kuwait University (KU) and Information Ministry, Dr Al-Salem said that official and organized media must take heed of their social role as bringers of truths and spreaders of social awareness. KUNA, for instance, launched last December an extensive campaign against illicit drugs and narcotics in utter conviction of its media role in the process of combating drugs, she revealed.

Taking notice of public opinion online might provide media outlets with a general idea of what people want to read, watch, or hear, Dr Al-Salem noted, adding that online media was an evergrowing sphere that requires focus and attention on part of regular media outlets. She went on saying that dealing with news via social media had changed the game completely, requiring from journalists and media personnel to acquire some new skills to follow up on developments and write news.

Providing his input to the seminar, head of Egypt's Supreme Council for Media Regulation, Karam Jabr said dealing with the ever-changing media was necessary; otherwise, many outlets would be left behind. Having a balance of meeting the public demand and pursuing objective journalism are very hard to achieve, but Arab media must seek this path to win the trust of the people, he affirmed. He called for preparing future journalists, especially university graduates, to meet the demands of the new media to usher in the new age of trustworthy and reliable journalism. —KUNA

In my view

## History versus telling the truth



By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

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**H**istory is the memory of states. - Henry Kissinger. There is no argument that writing history is something very sensitive, as it presents events experienced by nations and countries. It should present events honestly, as it is supposed to be, away from any ulterior motives or interests, so that these events become a witness of eras and periods. The best job a history writer can do when he is not able to bring out the truth, is not to write.

It is out of honesty to keep silent than to forge history or celebrate falsehood. History has standards and basics that are supposed not to be changed regardless of excuses and reasons. It is not possible to make all stories equal; rather the distinguishing factor of oral story is knowledge about many mental and ethical matters. You think a little about your daily life with your family, job and friends. You consider how many times the truth was manipulated that you were witness to. But you kept silent about it, and people dealt with it as a truth, although it is purely a lie!

There are tools a researcher cannot ignore while writing history with its periods and eras. It is his knowledge about sciences that support the science of history, because it is uncommon to find a researcher in history who knows philosophy, or is knowledgeable about sociology, and for sure he will not be ignorant about the science of politics, as well as other sciences the researcher cannot ignore such as the theories of old and new Arab criticism. Also, it is important, before anything else, for a researcher and history writer to be known for being honest and wise, and these two traits are the ones to lean on before getting into scientific research and any science.

Writing history is a great responsibility that may constitute forging truths and injustice to things the researcher deals with, so the credibility principle is the base from which he moves. If a researcher is under certain pressure to change the structure of the historic event to be discussed and documented, it is wise the researcher does not write about this event at all, because to be absent while keeping your ethical standards is better than being insulted and thrown in the basket of suspicions!

## Recognizing first signs of cancer

**KUWAIT:** Secretary General of Gulf Federation for Cancer Control (GFCC) Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said 18 training courses were held with the aim of recognizing the first signs of cancer, as part of an intensive program sponsored by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) from January until March 2023.

Dr Saleh said the GFCC secretariat carried out the courses ahead of the month of Ramadan, as more than 320 trainees participated including primary care doctors, dentists and nurses in cooperation with specialized departments at the ministry of health. He said the training courses raise the level of knowledge towards cancer in Kuwait and gives them the necessary experience to recognize the first signs of tumors, which reduces the time between tumor discovery and transferring the case to specialists, and this reduces the number of late cases.

Dr Saleh said the courses began 12 years ago, with successful cooperation with the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN). He said 1,356 primary care doctors, 1,343 dentists and 2,409 nurses were trained and appreciated the effective role of primary care doctors, dentists and nurses, with oncologists to benefit from their experience in early diagnosis of cancer.

Dr Saleh thanked KFAS for its support of its belief in the importance of training specialized cadres to serve the society, particularly in the health field. He also thanked Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization for giving points for continued medical education as an encouragement for trainees' participation.



Local

# Kuwait calls for unifying efforts to combat drugs

## 66th session of UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs

VIENNA: Kuwait stressed the importance of unifying international efforts to fight narcotic drugs across the world. This came in a statement by Chief of Kuwait's General Directorate for Drug Control Colonel Mohammad Qabazard to KUNA on Tuesday on the sidelines of the 66th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

The annual conference gathered delegates from more than 120 countries. Col Qabazard stressed Kuwait's commitment to the provisions of international law and the treaties related to combating drugs. He indicated that there is a firm tendency in Kuwait to combat this deadly scourge and protect society, lauding great importance paid by the country's officials to combat drugs, especially through continuous coordination with all brotherly and friendly countries.

Kuwait has harnessed all potential and made joint efforts to combat drugs that resulted in seizing a large number of drugs in 2020, he said, stressing the importance of exchanging information between the Gulf, Arab, regional and international anti-drug agencies. Confronting drugs requires boosting social, economic, health and cultural cooperation, he stated.

A Kuwaiti delegation is partaking in the 66th session that is led by Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria and its permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna Talal Al-Fassam. Director-General of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Ghada Waly warned against increasing risks of drugs across the globe. She stressed the necessity of addressing challenges caused by this scourge.

Meanwhile, Kuwait media outlets have been contributing extensively to the fight against narcotics and illicit drugs, chipping in heavily into the current nationwide campaign to rid society of such evils. Whether using regular broadcasting, or posting on social media, the campaign against narcotics truly became a social phenomenon reflecting Kuwaitis and residents' keenness on protecting their country.

Media had been playing an exceptional role in spreading awareness regarding the impact of illegal drugs on society, journalist and media figure Fayeze Al-Zaal said. Living in what seems like a hyperactive world required media outlets to step up their game especially when it comes to battling the alarming spread of narcotics in society, he said, adding that no matter the format, whether it was visual, paper, or audio, the fight against drug is an important task. He noted that with the advent of social media, the parameters had changed a bit, but still, media could manage to spread awareness even on a different platform. —KUNA



Chief of Kuwait's General Directorate for Drug Control Colonel Mohammad Qabazard

## PM welcomes Lebanese party leader

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, welcomed the visiting Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt and his accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace on Wednesday. His Highness the Prime Minister's Office Chief Hamad Bader Al-Amer and Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Ambassador Ahmad Abdulrahman Al-Baker were present at the meeting. —KUNA



## GCC cybersecurity federation mullied

KUWAIT: The Second GCC Conference on Cybersecurity recommended launching a GCC cybersecurity federation to draw up a unified strategy, set policies and follow up technological developments in fields of cybercrimes. In a press release, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Information Security Society, Dr Safaa Zaman said that the conference came with multiple recommendations to establish concrete projects related to information security and create a strong security base.

She stressed the need to expand the field of cybersecurity with the concerned authorities in the GCC countries, and the need to reformulate laws related to cybersecurity in a way that suits the rapid changes of technology. Zaman also pointed out that it was also recommended to establish an agreement between GCC countries to exchange basic data and replace foreign application with local application to ensure data protection and privacy. The Second GCC Conference on Cybersecurity was

launched on Tuesday, organized by the Kuwaiti Society for Information Security, holding more than 25 lectures and two panel discussions.

### EU security forum

In another development, the European Union has invited the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League, and the African Union among others to participate in the first edition of Schuman Security and Defense Forum in Brussels on March 20-21. The Schuman Forum will bring together the EU's closest partners in the field of security and defense to exchange on common security challenges and common responses, said a statement released Wednesday by the EU External Action Service.

The Forum is part of the EU's broader engagement to establish a more coherent and comprehensive network of relationships with international and regional actors and with bilateral partners around the world. The Schuman Forum will take place every two years, it noted. To be held under the authority of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, the Forum will bring together primarily Ministers of Defense from the 27 EU Member States and from 45 partner countries, as well as international and regional organizations with which the EU cooperates on security and defense matters. —KUNA

## US Charge d'Affaires lauds KRCS' efforts

KUWAIT: Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider of the US Embassy in Kuwait praised on Wednesday the efforts made by Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) in aiding disaster-affected people. In a statement after his meeting with KRCS' Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Holtsnider said that KRCS has many humanitarian accomplishments and it supported many people in need. He pointed out that he was briefed on the humanitarian programs that are being executed by KRCS in different parts of the world such as Turkey, Yemen, Somalia, Indonesia, Sudan, Bangladesh, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. He also mentioned the role of the association in helping families in need inside Kuwait in terms of relief, health and education. Al-Sayer said that he was pleased by Holtsnider's visit to KRCS, and it is considered very important. —KUNA



Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider of the US Embassy in Kuwait praised KRCS' Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer.

## MoI launches new fire trucks

KUWAIT: Kuwait First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah launched new fire trucks as part of a plan to open new fire stations and reduce response time in case of accidents. In a press statement on Wednesday, Kuwait Fire Force's public relations and media department said in a statement that the 55 new trucks were launched in the presence of head of the force Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mikrad. The trucks cover different areas including detecting hazardous materials and radiation, rescue boats and more, it added. The trucks are equipped with the modern navigation technologies and have the ability to fight fire effectively in a shorter time, which helps save lives and reduce damage. —KUNA



## OAPEC urges localizing modern technologies

KUWAIT: The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) urged the localization of modern technologies in various research centers in the member states to meet the challenges in the petroleum industry. This came during the 10th annual meeting of training and petroleum research institutes and centers in the organization's member states held on Wednesday, said OAPEC in a statement.

The officials also stressed strengthening cooperation between petroleum research and training institutes and centers in all research sectors, while identifying the problems facing the petroleum sector and working to solve them using innovative scientific methods, it added. In turn, OAPEC Secretary-General Jamal Al-Loghani called on petroleum research and training institutes and centers for cooperation in innovating technologies that contribute to developing the oil industry's performance and improving its competitiveness in global markets to enable it to keep pace with global trends and overcome potential challenges.

### Crude oil plunge

Meanwhile, Kuwait crude oil plunged \$3.24 during Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$80.54 per barrel compared with \$83.78 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. Brent futures also lost \$3.32 to \$77.45 pb and West Texas Intermediate dropped \$3.47 to \$71.33 pb. —KUNA





## Local

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## News in Brief

Road authority 2023/24  
budget could be revoked

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works could be taking back the budget allocated for road projects in the 2023/24 fiscal year from the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport, sources said. The finance ministry, sources said, is expected to discuss revoking the budget with representatives of the authority. The move coincides with the public works ministry's request to abolish the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport due to its failure to fulfill its purpose. The decision, if finalized, would be legitimate, the Fatwa and Legislation Department had said in response to a question from Minister Amani Bugammaz on the matter. The minister submitted the answer to the Council of Ministers to initiate the procedures for abolishing the authority.

Kuwait renews membership at  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

KUWAIT: Kuwait participated in the 146th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the Kingdom of Bahrain held from March 11-15. Member of the Parliamentary Division MP Khaled Al-Tamar said Wednesday he was satisfied with the achievements made by the Kuwaiti Parliamentary Division at the conference. He said Kuwait successfully renewed its membership in the union and represented the Arab group in three committees: the sustainable development standing committee, the United Nations affairs standing committee and the forum of women parliamentarians. He stressed the importance of parliamentary participation in regional and international forums in conveying the popular point of view towards various international issues. Kuwait's delegation is headed by the division's undersecretary Thamer Al-Dhafiri and members included Muhammad Al-Mahan, Hamad Al-Obaid and MPs Khaled Al-Tamar and Jenan Boushehri. — KUNA

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Rainclouds fill the horizon as the sun sets in Kuwait City on March 15, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Qurain Festival calls on Arab nations to support cultural NGOs

## Subsidies, training centers among proposals put forward by the festival

KUWAIT: The General Secretariat of the Qurain Cultural Festival published Wednesday a number of recommendations aimed at promoting civic cultural initiatives across the Arab region.

The proposals were released following the conclusion of the festival's two-day seminar. The seminar, which included 10 panel discussions, looked at how civic cultural projects in the Arab region could be integrated into the League's Comprehensive Plan for Arab Culture.

Wednesday's recommendations included a range of measures that, if approved, would support non-government organizations (NGOs) that take on cultural initiatives. For one, the secretariat supports establishing a fund designated for civic cultural projects under the oversight of Arab min-

istries of culture in collaboration with the private sector. They also advised governments to offer guarantees for loans financing such projects and subsidize or reduce rent for buildings housing NGOs. Training centers specialized in "effective cultural planning work" would be established in Kuwait to prepare people for jobs in the sector.

Other highlights included creating a consortium for NGOs across the region to be headquartered in Kuwait. The recommendations singled out for support projects aimed at the cultural enrichment of children. The secretariat also proposed the launch of a digital educational platform for young kids. It recommended Arab interior ministries to collaborate to loosen visa requirements for Arabs attending cultural events across the region.

The recommendations highlighted the need to modernize the Comprehensive Plan for Arab Culture, which was first announced in 1979 at the Conference of Arab Culture Ministers. According to an article by Kuwaiti researcher and writer Sulaiman Al-Askari, the implementation of the plan was led by Kuwait between 1981-1985. The plan's main objective is to unify Arab efforts in various cultural fields and nurture the Arab and Islamic cultural identity.

Arab researchers and intellectuals as well as representatives from the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the UNESCO contributed to the discussions leading to the proposals. The recommendations will be shared with the Arab ministers of culture for further deliberation. —KUNA



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Participants learn sadu weaving through a workshop held by Sadu House. — KUNA

## New generations rediscover old weaving method

KUWAIT: The art of Sadu weaving may be an old Bedouin tradition, but it's still thriving until today through workshops organized by Sadu House. This traditional weaving method uses materials such as the hair of camels and wool of sheep. The Sadu House offers workshops for the inquisitive younger generation to learn about this intricate craft. Participants are taught the flat weave warp-face technique to make pillowcases, Bedouin tents, handbags and much more. —KUNA



## Kuwait charities to offer iftar, food baskets in Ramadan

KUWAIT: Al-Najat Charity Society said Wednesday it will provide iftar meals for one million people in Kuwait and abroad. Similarly, Zakat House announced Tuesday that it will offer 7,000 iftar meals a day during the month of Ramadan at no cost. The meals, valued at 262,500 Kuwaiti dinars, will be distributed at more than 13 locations across the country. Every mosque will receive no less than 125 meals per day. Acting Director General of Zakat House Majed Al-Azmi said. Zakat House is also planning charity projects in 14 countries across Asia, Africa and Europe, which will be administered by local organiza-

tions trusted by Kuwaiti embassies in these locations.

Al-Najat's Chairman Mohammad Al-Ansari said the association is also planning a number of Ramadan projects through which it seeks to encourage humanitarian work in Kuwait. Ansari said the plan includes a project aimed at improving the living conditions of thousands of beneficiaries, in addition to distributing monthly and deducted financial assistance to families, Ramadan baskets, and basic household items. The project will also include campaigns in other countries to perform eye surgeries and dig wells, as well as relief and development projects, helping and sponsoring students, building schools, mosques and shelters for the elderly, he added.

Anyone looking to donate to Zakat House can visit the organization at any of its locations across the country from Sunday to Thursday during the morning and evening shifts. People can also give Zakat and Sadaqa through Zakat House's application and website at <https://www.zakathouse.org.kw/> —KUNA





**S Korean president  
hails 'step forward'  
in Japan ties**

## African students in Tunisia fearful after racist violence

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**IDLIB:** This aerial view shows people gathering for a rally to mark the 12th anniversary of the start of the uprising against Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad and his government in this rebel-held northwestern city on March 15, 2023. — AFP

# Thousands of Syrians mark 12th anniversary of anti-regime uprising

## Protests have claimed more than 500,000 lives and left millions displaced

**IDLIB, Syria:** Thousands of Syrians demonstrated in the war-ravaged country's rebel-held northwest on Wednesday, marking 12 years since the start of pro-democracy protests and rejecting any international "normalisation" with Damascus. The brutal repression of the 2011 protests, which began during the Middle East's Arab Spring uprisings, triggered a complex civil war that drew in foreign powers and jihadists. It has claimed more than 500,000 lives and left millions displaced internally and abroad.

In Idlib city, demonstrators waved revolutionary flags and held banners reading: "The people demand the fall of the regime" and "Freedom and dignity for all Syrians". The Idlib area is the last major rebel bastion outside the control of President Bashar al-Assad's Russian-backed forces.

"We have come to commemorate the anniversary of the revolution, this great memory in the heart of every free Syrian," protester Abu Shahid, 27, told AFP. "We are proud of the day we managed to break the barrier of fear and demonstrate against the criminal regime."

The rebel-held areas of Syria's north and northwest, controlled by Islamist groups and Turkish-backed fighters, are home to more than four million people, at least half of whom have been displaced from other parts of the country.

Protests also took place Wednesday in Tabqa, a Kurdish-held area of Raqa province in central Syria, an AFP photographer reported. On Wednesday in Moscow, Assad was meeting with his Russian counterpart and main ally, Vladimir Putin, whose military support from 2015 changed the course of the war. That, and assistance from Iran, allowed Assad to win back much of the territory lost earlier.

### 'Against a compromise'

Analysts say Moscow wants to bridge the diplomatic divide between Syria and Turkey, whose ties were cut soon after the war started. Both Damascus and Ankara see a common "enemy" in Kurdish groups in northern Syria, which Ankara calls "terrorists" but are backed by Washington.

Experts say Damascus is also looking to break out of its international isolation following the devastating February 6 earthquake that killed almost 6,000 people across Syria. Since the quake, several Arab leaders have made overtures to Assad's government. Demonstrators in Idlib staunchly opposed any moves to normalise Damascus's relations with countries in the region. "Even if all countries in the world normalise ties with the regime, we will continue and the revolution will continue," Salma Seif, 38, told AFP.

"I am against a compromise with a criminal regime," said another protester, Ali Hajj Sleiman. "How can I reconcile with the one who is the reason I am in a wheelchair?" he added.

### 'Not sustainable'

The situation for millions of Syrians in the country remains dire but UN agencies say they need more financial support to help them. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said Wednesday that "15.3 million people across the country" were assessed to be "in need of humanitarian assistance this year", the highest number since the start of the conflict.

But aid is "not sufficient or sustainable", it warned in a statement, calling for "a durable and comprehensive solution to end the conflict in Syria." The United Nations children's agency UNICEF said the conflict and earthquake had "left millions of children in Syria at heightened risk of malnutrition".

UNICEF said it needed \$172.7 million to provide "immediate life-saving assistance" for 5.4 million people impacted by the earthquake, including 2.6 million children. It lamented that its 2023 appeal in Syria was already "significantly underfunded" before last month's disaster.

The World Food Programme also warned that funding gaps risked forcing the UN agency to halt assistance to millions of Syrians. Without additional financing, "we will have to cut 3.8 million people from the eight million people (receiving assistance) by July," regional director Corinne Fleischer told a briefing in Dubai. She said food needs were at their highest since the start of Syria's war. "Six million people were on our list as food insecure around three years ago and now it's 12.9 million people," Fleischer said. — AFP

## Biden mourns with shooting survivors

**MONTEREY PARK:** President Joe Biden mourned Tuesday with Asian American survivors of a mass shooting in a Los Angeles suburb and wielded his limited powers to tighten firearms controls, while pressuring Congress to "do something big."

A somber president addressed the immigrant community in Monterey Park, praising their resilience and recalling characteristics of each of the 11 people slaughtered in January during Lunar New Year celebrations. He recalled the strength of a loving "matriarch," a karaoke singing grandmother, and the 72-year-old manager and dance teacher at the Star Ballroom where the massacre occurred. Applause broke out when Biden heralded Brandon Tsay, the 26-year-old who wrestled the gun from the shooter before he could open fire at a second ballroom.

"He found the courage to act," Biden said, also getting applause when he highlighted the best picture Oscar for "Everything Everywhere All At Once"—a sci-fi film centered on a Chinese American family that he said "made history."

Biden then urged Congress, where Republicans have pushed back for decades against stricter gun purchase laws, to take "responsibility" and to clamp down on the hugely popular semi-automatic, military style rifles most often used in mass shootings. "Ban assault weapons," he urged to cheers from the audience of around 200 people. "Do it now. Enough! Do something. Do something big."

### Background checks tightened

Of several measures enacted Tuesday by Biden, the most consequential was an executive order tightening rules on background checks. Polls show overwhelming popular support for a blanket rule requiring that anyone purchasing a firearm be checked for a criminal record.

However, Republicans in Congress argue this impinges on the constitutional right to own weapons and should be left up to individual states to decide. Currently, only federally licensed dealers—responsible for less than half of gun sales—are required to run background checks nationwide. In addition, some states have imposed their own additional requirements.

Biden's order directed the attorney general to clamp down on vendors failing to carry out the checks and also to clarify who qualifies as a dealer. The rule "directs my attorney general to take every



**MONTEREY PARK:** US President Joe Biden speaks on his efforts to reduce gun violence, at The Boys & Girls Club of West San Gabriel Valley, in Monterey Park, California. — AFP

lawful action possible to move us as close as we can to universal background checks without new legislation," Biden said. "It's just common sense to check whether someone is a felon or a domestic abuser before they buy a gun." Biden also said his executive order—an action a president can implement without congressional approval, though only through federal rather than individual state agencies—will also tighten the screws on irresponsible gun dealers. — AFP

## Dutch farmers set to turn protests into crucial votes

**THE HAGUE:** A new party of Dutch farmers aimed to plough up Prime Minister Mark Rutte's environmental plans on Wednesday in crucial elections that will shape the upper house of parliament. The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, or BBB) is hoping to ride a wave of recent protests against proposals to cut livestock numbers and close farms in order to reduce nitrogen pollution.

The Netherlands has been rocked by months of rowdy demonstrations in which farmers blockaded government buildings with tractors, winning support from international figures including former US president Donald Trump.

Opinion polls suggest the BBB, which was only founded in 2019 and has just one MP, could come second or even first in Wednesday's Dutch provincial elections as it taps into a strain of populist sentiment.

The regional elections in turn determine the com-

position of the new Dutch senate that will be formed in May, meaning the farmers could be in position to block legislation proposed by Rutte's coalition against the greenhouse gas. First exit polls will be released after the polls close at 9:00 pm (2000 GMT).

Rutte, the Netherlands' longest serving leader who has been in power since 2010, says he has "hope" the four-party coalition led by his centre-right VVD party can solve the issue. But farmers in the Netherlands—a nation of nearly 18 million that is the world's second largest agricultural exporter after the United States—say the government has ignored them. "We don't really feel heard," Erik Stegink, national president of the BBB and a pig farmer himself, told AFP. "Sometimes we don't even feel welcome in our own country anymore."

### Farmer protests

The farmers' protests and their symbol of an upside-down Dutch flag have attracted global attention, blocking highways, dumping manure on roads and rallying noisily outside politicians' houses. Thousands of farmers rallied in The Hague, the seat of the Dutch government, on Saturday. They also used tractors to blockade the location of a televised party leaders' debate in the town of Den Bosch on



**THE HAGUE:** D66 leader Sigrid Kaag casts her ballot to vote in the Provincial Council and the general boards of the water boards elections in The Hague, The Netherlands, on March 15, 2023. — AFP

the eve of the election. Tessel van der Veecken, a 21-year-old student voting in The Hague, said she was "not worried but curious" about the possibility of a BBB win. Voter Michael van Heck, 69, described the farmers as a "populist party", adding that he expected a "big victory from the BBB and I hope at least stable for the VVD (Rutte's party). — AFP

## Niger kill 30 jihadists, arrests 960

**NIAMEY:** Jihadist-hit Niger last week killed about 30 members of the Boko Haram group and detained 960 followers, most of them women and children, who had fled neighbouring Nigeria, official sources said.

State TV channel Tele Sahel said late Tuesday that on March 7 aerial surveillance spotted a "massive movement of people" along the Kamadougou Yoge River, which marks the border between the two countries, who were heading towards Lake Chad.

The report said they were members of the Boko Haram jihadist group, who were fleeing their hideout in Sambisa forest in northeast Nigeria after coming under pressure from their rivals, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). ISWAP split from Boko Haram in 2016 and rose to become the dominant group in the region's long-running jihadist turmoil.

It seized swathes of territory under Boko Haram control after leader Abubakar Shekau was killed in clashes with ISWAP in May 2021. Seeking to prevent the group from reaching Lake Chad and using its marshlands as a haven, the army tried to negotiate a surrender, using envoys and dropping leaflets, but eventually launched a dawn assault on March 11, Tele Sahel said.

"Around 30 terrorists were neutralised" and 960 other people, most of whom were women and children, were detained, taken to the town of Diffa and handed over to the Nigerian military authorities, it said. An elected official in Toumour, a village near the town of Bosso bordering Lake Chad, confirmed Wednesday that "a large number of Boko Haram" fleeing Sambisa had been intercepted on Niger's border "and handed over to the Nigerian authorities."

Another official said that many others, however, "are heading towards (the islands) on the lake, especially women and children, in terrible conditions." One of the poorest countries in the world, Niger is being assailed by two jihadist insurgencies.

One, in the southwest, came from neighbouring Mali in 2015, while the other, in the southeast, is a long-running spillover from Boko Haram's campaign in Nigeria. The group's violence has killed over 40,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes since 2009, according to the United Nations. — AFP



## International

# African students in Tunisia fearful after racist violence

## Over 100 students made emergency repatriations to Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea

**TUNIS:** Thousands of sub-Saharan African students in Tunisia are still fearful after a surge of racist attacks following comments by President Kais Saied against illegal immigration, and are seeking concrete steps to protect them.

The violence erupted after Saied blamed "hordes of illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa" for most crime in Tunisia and alleged there was a "criminal plot" to change the nation's demographic make-up. At the height of the wave of attacks last month, the "feeling of fear was overwhelming," said Christian Kwongang, president of AESAT, an association representing sub-Saharan African students in Tunisia.

Amid what witnesses described as a "hunt for blacks", Kwongang recalled that "we had parents in tears who called us, worried about their children being arrested, with some detained for up to two weeks". Kwongang said his group documented more than 20 assaults against students, "including 10 with knives", and over 400 arrests. For more than two weeks it advised students to stop attending classes and only venture outside in case of emergency. At least 100 students made emergency repatriations, mostly to Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Niger, said Kwongang, who comes from Cameroon. "They left because of the wave of racism, arbitrary arrests and numerous cases of evictions" from housing, Kwongang said.

The violence has abated and students returned to classes on March 6. No physical attacks have been recorded since March 7, but "verbal attacks" persist and the foreign students remain on guard, said Kwongang. "We are in the observation phase," he said. "And we are waiting to see concrete things—for example, an acceleration in the granting of residence permits."

The violence was a "disaster for Tunisia", which had always been "a welcoming place", said Tahar Ben Lakhdar, director of the private ESPRIT university. Saied's comments represent "an enormous smear", said the 83-year-old, who stressed that they were also

entirely unjustified because "which country does not have foreigners in irregular situations?"

Some educational institutions have since implemented new protective measures—including setting up crisis units, bus transport, and having local students accompany sub-Saharan African students. Lakhdar said ESPRIT, which specialises in engineering and management courses, has 350 sub-Saharan Africans among its 14,000 students.

He said the university had established "a platform where each student who has a problem can report to dedicated lawyers". The government of the North African country has also promised to address the problem. Malek Kochlef, the Ministry of Higher Education's director of international coordination, said that "there were some very reprehensible attacks" but claimed that "they were isolated acts".

He told AFP the ministry had responded by establishing communication units and contact points in each educational establishment to report any incidents. Authorities have also moved to begin streamlining the granting of residency permits and promised the creation of an agency for the reception of foreign students, Kochlef added.

### Long 'an El Dorado'

The violence could harm the private education sector in Tunisia, a small Mediterranean country suffering economic crisis, and deep political divisions since Saied in 2021 dismissed the government and assumed wide-ranging powers. Sub-Saharan African students make up the "overwhelming majority" of international students in the private education sector and a "significant proportion" at public institutions, Kochlef said. International student numbers in Tunisia, mostly from other African countries, grew to 9,000 last year, a five-fold increase since 2011.

Kwongang said there were 8,200 sub-Saharan African students at Tunisia's universities and techni-

cal colleges at last count, in 2021. Ivorian student Paul Andre Moa said Tunisia had long been seen as an "El Dorado, a welcoming land with an excellent education system". It has attracted foreign students with favourable annual tuition fees starting at 3,000 euros (about \$3,200), a much lower cost of living and less strict visa requirements than in Europe.

But Kwongang said that, after the announcement of measures to reassure students, AESAT members were now waiting to see what practical effect they will have. He said students still faced close scrutiny from authorities and from police who are "one day asking for one document, the next day for another". Kwongang voiced "great concern" that enrolments will fall as many foreign students now hope to continue their studies "elsewhere, in Europe or Canada" and said he saw Tunisia's reputation as "severely damaged". — AFP



**TUNIS:** African and Tunisian students sit at the cafeteria in the campus of ESPRIT university, specialised in engineering and management courses, on March 13, 2023 in Tunis. Thousands of sub-Saharan African students in Tunisia are seeking safety assurances from authorities in the aftermath of a spate of racist attacks. — AFP

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## Blinken asks Ethiopia to strengthen peace on post-war visit

**ADDIS ABABA:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday urged Ethiopia to "deepen the peace" in the war-torn north as he moved cautiously to repair relations shaken by the brutal two-way conflict. The top US diplomat was paying his first visit to the long-standing ally since the war in Tigray, which claimed some 500,000 lives according to US estimates and led Washington to sever trade preferences with Africa's second most populous nation.

Opening a day of talks that will include a meeting with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Blinken sipped Ethiopia's celebrated coffee at the foreign ministry and said he hoped for better relations. "It is a very important moment, a moment of hope given the peace in the north that has taken hold," he said.

"There is a lot to be done. Probably the most important thing is to deepen the peace that has taken hold in the north." Blinken said he hoped to restore co-operation "with the goal of strengthening the relationship" with Ethiopia, home of the African Union, amid a push by President Joe Biden to deepen relations with Africa. Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen, receiving Blinken, said: "We have longstanding relations and it is time to revitalise them and move forward."

Following the meeting with Demeke, Blinken arrived at the Prime Minister's Office for talks with Abiy, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was once seen as at the vanguard of a new generation of forward-looking African leaders, but whose reputation later took a

beating in Washington over the war.

The violence erupted when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which once dominated Ethiopian politics, attacked military installations, prompting a major offensive by Abiy's government with backing from neighbouring Eritrea.

The TPLF briefly came close to marching on the capital but, beaten back by pro-Abiy forces, agreed to disarm under a November 2 accord negotiated in South Africa by the African Union with US participation. Molly Phee, the top US diplomat for Africa, told reporters before Blinken's departure that his visit would aim to "help consolidate" the peace in the north but that the relationship was not ready to go "back to normal".

A key wish of Ethiopia is a return to the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which gave it duty-free access for most products to the world's largest economy, but the United States has made no commitments. Abiy has pledged to restore basic services in war-ravaged Tigray, though it is impossible to assess the situation on the ground due to restrictions on media access. The Tigray war has been one of the deadliest in the 21st century with a US-estimated toll higher than that from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has drawn far more global attention.

Moscow has since gone on a diplomatic offensive in Africa, including in Ethiopia, hoping the continent will stay neutral rather than join Western sanctions against it. Russia's efforts follow years of inroads in Africa by China, which has also offered the continent's leaders relationships that are unencumbered by Western pressure on human rights. Soon after Blinken's visit, his third to sub-Saharan Africa, US Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia, three countries seen as committed to making progress on democracy. — AFP

## Putin hails Assad ties with Turkey mend brewing

**MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday was hosting Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad for talks as the Kremlin seeks to mend ties between Damascus and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The meeting follows the surprise announcement last week of a Chinese-brokered restoration of diplomatic ties between the Middle East's major rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Ties between Erdogan and Assad were severed after the outbreak of fighting in Syria and successful Kremlin mediation would give Putin diplomatic clout with Russia isolated internationally over the Ukraine conflict. "We are in constant contact and our relations are developing," the Russian leader told Assad at the televised start of their meeting, hailing "significant results in the fight against international terrorism".

Assad, who arrived in Moscow on Tuesday, voiced support for Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine and said the visit would mark "a new facet" in his country's ties with Moscow. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov earlier told reporters the talks would focus on bilateral ties but said "Turkey-Syria relations will certainly be touched upon in one way or another".

Syria's civil war in 2011 strained relations between Damascus and Ankara, which has long supported rebel groups opposed to Assad. Turkey severed diplomatic ties with Syria soon after the war began. Analysts say Moscow now wants to bridge the divide between the two countries that see a common "enemy" in Kurdish



**MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin meets his Syrian counterpart Bashar Al-Assad at the Kremlin on March 15, 2023. — AFP

groups in northern Syria, described as "terrorists" by Ankara and backed by Washington.

Erdogan has indicated he could meet with Assad, and their defense ministers met in Moscow in December, in the first such talks since the Syrian war began. Diplomats from Russia, Turkey, Syria and Iran are due to meet in Moscow this week to pave the way for a foreign ministers' meeting, according to Turkish media. Complex questions need to be resolved, however, particularly around the presence of Turkish troops in northern Syria.

Assad's government has been politically isolated since the start of the war, but he has been receiving calls and aid from Arab leaders after a February earthquake that killed tens of thousands in Turkey and Syria. "The Syrian people faced another very serious problem, a catastrophe, an earthquake... As true friends, we are trying to support you," Putin said. — AFP

## Saudi could invest in Iran...

Continued from Page 1

know, respecting sovereign rights, not interfering in other affairs." He added: "I think that there are a lot of opportunities in Iran, and we provide a lot of opportunities for them."

A Saudi official said Wednesday Chinese leader Xi Jinping approached Saudi Arabia's crown prince last year about Beijing serving as a "bridge" between the kingdom and Iran, jump-starting talks that yielded last week's surprise rapprochement. The initial conversation between Xi and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman took place during bilateral talks at a summit in Riyadh in December, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe how the deal - whose ripple effects could spread across the Middle East - took shape.

"The Chinese president expressed his desire for China to be a bridge between Saudi Arabia and Iran. His Royal Highness the Crown Prince welcomed this," the official said, later adding that Riyadh sees Beijing as in a "unique" position to wield unmatched "leverage" in the Gulf. "For Iran in particular, China is either No 1 or No 2 in terms of its international partners. And so the leverage is important in that regard, and you cannot have an alternative that is equal in importance," the official said.

Several other meetings also laid the groundwork for last week's talks in Beijing, according to the official. They included a brief exchange between the Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers during a regional summit in Jordan in late December; talks between the Saudi foreign minister and Iran's deputy president during the inauguration of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in January; and a visit by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Beijing in February.

China's role makes it more likely the terms of the deal will hold, the official said. "It is a major stakeholder in the security and stability of the Gulf," the official said. The agreement identifies a two-month window to formally resume diplomatic ties severed

seven years ago. It also includes vows for each side to respect the other's sovereignty and not interfere in the other's "internal affairs".

China's involvement raised eyebrows given Saudi Arabia's historically close partnership with the United States, though that relationship has been strained by issues including human rights and oil production cuts approved last year by the OPEC+ cartel. "The US and China are both very important partners... We certainly hope not to be... party to any competition or dispute between the two superpowers," the official said Wednesday.

US officials were briefed before the Saudi delegation travelled to Beijing and before the deal was announced, the official said. The talks in Beijing involved "five very extensive" sessions on thorny issues including the war in Yemen. Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized control of Yemen's capital in 2014, prompting a Saudi-led intervention the following year and fighting that has left hundreds of thousands dead and caused one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The Saudi official said the talks produced "concrete commitments" on Yemen, but he would not disclose them. "Iran is the main supplier of weapons, training and ideological programs and propaganda expertise to the Houthis and we are the main victim of these missiles and drones and other stuff. So Iran can do a lot and should do a lot," the official said, adding that Iran should stop "supplying the Houthis with weapons".

Riyadh is in "back channel" talks with the Houthis to revive a truce that expired in October and push towards a political settlement involving all Yemeni factions, the official said. "We also share a long border with Yemen, and certainly we will not tolerate any threat to our security from any place. And again, Iran can and should play a major part in promoting this and we hope it will," the official said.

The Beijing talks also saw the renewal of a commitment by both sides not to attack each other in the media, the official said. But the official said Saudi Arabia does not have control over Iran International, a London-based, Persian-language channel that Tehran considers a "terrorist organization". — AFP

## Police halt bid to arrest Khan...

Continued from Page 1

in an interview at his home. "This abduction had nothing to do with rule of law. It had everything against rule of law, the law of jungle to grab me and put me in jail and keep me in jail for months, because there was so many cases, they would have just kept me in jail. And the whole idea was to miss the elections."

On Wednesday morning hundreds of PTI supporters had ringed Khan's residence in the plush neighborhood, holding off fresh attempts by police to storm the premises. Video circulating on social media - much distributed by official PTI accounts - showed several bloodied supporters and others struggling to cope with tear gas. A PTI official tweeted that there was "an urgent need" for first aid kits at the Zaman Park neighborhood.

Khan later tweeted pictures of bullet casings purportedly collected from the scene, but a Punjab government official denied live rounds were fired. An official of the Islamabad High Court said Khan's legal team had been told to approach a lower court to seek a suspension of his arrest warrant and undertake for the former premier to appear in person at a hearing on Saturday.

## Russia races to salvage US drone...

Continued from Page 1

and unprofessional Russian conduct, further ratcheted up tensions between Moscow and Western allies, already searing over the Ukraine conflict. Patrushev said the incident was further proof that the United States is a direct party to fighting between Moscow and Kyiv and said Russia had a responsibility to "defend our independence and our sovereignty".

Khan, 70, had been summoned to answer accusations he did not declare gifts received during his time as prime minister, or the profit made from selling them. Officers first made an attempt to arrest him earlier this month, but said the politician was "reluctant to surrender", without offering further details. Khan has been pressuring the coalition government that replaced him, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, with popular rallies and daily addresses.

Sharif said on Wednesday that Khan considered himself "above the law". "He is defying each and every court of the country. It's naked defiance," he told reporters. Last year the former international cricket star was shot in the leg during a political rally, an assassination bid he blamed on Sharif. As the political drama unfolds ahead of an election due by October, Pakistan is in the grip of a stark economic downturn, risking default if help cannot be secured from the International Monetary Fund.

The security situation is also deteriorating with a spate of deadly attacks on police headquarters, linked to the Pakistani Taliban. "The standoff in Lahore reflects the worst state of affairs in the country," said Tauseef Ahmed Khan, an author, political analyst and human rights activist. "On one side, it is failure of police and the law enforcement agencies... on the other, this has been a new trend in the South Asian politics - that a political leader is defying the arrest by using his workers and supporters." — AFP

Russia's defense ministry said it had scrambled jets after detecting a US drone over the Black Sea and denied causing the crash. The Pentagon said the drone was on a routine mission when it was intercepted "in a reckless, environmentally unsound and unprofessional manner". Russia said the aircraft had lost control but White House national security spokesman John Kirby said the US "obviously" refuted the denial.

He added the United States was trying to prevent the fallen drone from getting into the wrong hands. "We've taken steps to protect our equities with respect to that particular drone - that particular aircraft," Kirby told CNN. — AFP



## International

# South Korean President Yoon hails key 'step forward' in Japan ties

## Yoon confident his new plan to compensate victims would work

SEOUL: South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday hailed growing cooperation with Japan on issues from North Korea to semiconductors, saying it was part of a historic "new chapter" for the two countries. Yoon will travel to Tokyo on Thursday, his first visit since taking office last year, which follows his controversial move to try and finally settle a bitter historic dispute over Japanese World War II-era forced labour.

Yoon said he was confident his new plan to compensate victims would work, telling media including AFP in a written interview that "the Japanese government will join us in opening a new chapter of Korea-Japan relations". Yoon's plan, unveiled this month, involves compensating Korean victims without Tokyo's direct involvement, which has enraged some victims who say this falls far short of their demand for a full apology and direct compensation from the Japanese companies involved.

"Japan has expressed deep remorse and heartfelt apology in regard to its past colonial rule through the position of its previous governments," Yoon said. Around 780,000 Koreans were conscripted into forced labour by Japan during its colonial rule of the peninsula from 1905 to 1945, according to data from Seoul. That number does not include Korean women forced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops.

Yoon is eager to lay the historic dispute to rest as he seeks closer ties with Tokyo—a key regional ally of Seoul's security partner Washington—in the face of growing threats from North Korea.

### 'Polycrisis'

Pyongyang last year declared itself an "irreversible nuclear state", with leader Kim Jong Un at the start of 2023 calling for an "exponential" increase in weapons production-including tactical nukes. South Korea will "never acknowledge North Korea as a nuclear state under any circumstances," Yoon said in the interview on Wednesday.

He pointed to reports of people starving to death in North Korea—which has been under a strict self-imposed blockade since the start of



SEOUL: File photo shows South Korean lawmakers and protesters hold placards during an anti-government rally denouncing South Korea's plans to compensate victims of Japan's forced wartime labour, at the National Assembly in Seoul. — AFP

the Covid pandemic in 2020. "The North Korean regime could easily resolve its food shortages if it injected the money it spends on nuclear and missile development into improving its people's livelihoods," Yoon said.

Both South Korea and Japan are ramping up defence spending and joint military exercises, which Yoon said were essential for regional and global stability. "There is an increasing need for Korea and Japan to cooperate in this time of a polycrisis with North Korea nuclear and missile threats escalating," Yoon said. "We cannot afford to waste time while leaving strained Korea-Japan relations unattended. I believe we must end the vicious cycle of mutual hostility and work together to seek our two countries' common interests."

### Trade curbs

But his moves to draw closer to Japan have been criticised as "insulting" to victims of forced labour by

South Korean activists, and run contrary to some court rulings. A landmark 2018 decision and other subsequent South Korean verdicts ordered companies including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to pay compensation to Korean victims—a move that sent ties with Japan to their lowest in years.

Following the ruling, Japan in 2019 imposed export controls on key industrial materials needed by South Korea's chip industry and removed the country from its "preferred trading nations" list. Seoul filed a complaint to the World Trade Organization. But both now appear to be moving to unwind tit-for-tat trade restrictions.

South Korea said this month it would halt its WTO complaint over Japanese export curbs. "Both Korea and Japan are key nations in such global supply chains as semiconductor production," Yoon said. "Stronger economic cooperation between Korea and Japan will likely contribute greatly to boosting global supply chains." — AFP

## Indonesia death toll rises to 50

JAKARTA: The death toll from a landslide on a remote Indonesian island rose to 50 with four people still missing on the last day of the search, an official said Wednesday. The landslide struck the island of Seran on March 6, killing scores of residents in a village and burying houses under mud and debris. "Until yesterday 50 people have been found dead, 49 of them have been identified while four others are still missing," local government spokesperson Patli Muhammad told AFP.

At least eight of the dead were children, according to local search and rescue teams scouring the island, located in the Natuna region between Borneo and Peninsular Malaysia. Nearly 3,000 residents remain displaced and were being evacuated to several shelters, according to local authorities. "They are afraid to go home because there are total blackouts in some villages," Muhammad said.

Officials are planning to meet later on Wednesday to determine whether to extend the search and rescue operation. During its rainy season, Indonesia is prone to landslides, which have been aggravated in some places by deforestation, with prolonged torrential rain causing flooding in some areas of the archipelago nation.

Meanwhile, a landslide triggered by heavy rains hit the city of Bogor, just outside the capital of Jakarta, late on Tuesday. At least two people were killed and four others are still buried under the mud, the country's disaster management agency said on Wednesday. Experts say the country's weather-related disasters are likely being made worse by climate change. — AFP



ATHENS: A protester holds a placard translating into "revolution - wherever it takes us" as high schools students gather in front of the Greek parliament during a protest organised by music and art schools over the country's worst rail tragedy that killed 57 people last week. — AFP

## Greek journalists strike over rail tragedy

ATHENS: Journalists in Greece on Wednesday staged a 24-hour walkout, part of two days of labour action this week over last month's rail tragedy that claimed 57 lives.

Journalists' union Poesy said the strike was in support of "the nationwide demand to assign responsibility for the (train) crime and take all measures" to prevent further loss of life. The accident occurred shortly before midnight on February 28 when a passenger train crashed into a freight train in central Greece after both were mistakenly left running on the same track.

Most of the passengers were students returning from a holiday weekend. Several people are still in hospital, and one passenger is still fighting for his life. A general strike will be held Thursday over the tragedy, which exposed decades of safety failings in Greek railways and has put major pressure on the conservative government ahead of national elections. The stationmaster and three other railway officials

have been charged, but public anger has focused on long-running mismanagement of the network and the country has been rocked by a series of sometimes violent mass protests.

On Sunday, about 12,000 demonstrators gathered outside parliament, while 5,000 took to the streets of the second city Thessaloniki, police said.

Greece's transport minister resigned after the crash and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has sought to soothe public anger by repeatedly apologising and vowing a transparent probe.

Acting transport minister Giorgos Gerapetritis this week said rail traffic will gradually resume from March 22. Gerapetritis and former transport ministers will appear before a parliament committee on Monday to answer MPs' questions on the tragedy.

With public anger mounting weeks before elections, Mitsotakis has seen a 7.5-point lead in polls cut to half in the latest surveys.

The PM has come under fire for initially pointing to "human error" for the accident and blaming the station master on duty at the time, who allegedly routed the trains onto the same stretch of track by accident. But railway unions had long been warning about problems on the underfunded and understaffed train network. Mitsotakis had been expected to set an April election date. Ballots are now expected in May. — AFP

## Rescuers rush to find survivors in cyclone-hit Malawi

BLANTYRE: Rescuers scrambled on Wednesday to reach survivors in Malawi's battered city of Blantyre, after Cyclone Freddy struck southern Africa for a second time, triggering floods and landslides that have killed more than 200 people. Weather conditions were expected to improve as the storm dissipated over land after days of torrential rains, but localised thunderstorms would persist, and flood levels remained high in some areas, hampering emergency efforts.

"We found people in the trees, on rooftops or on higher grounds," Red Cross Malawi spokesman Felix Washoni told AFP. "It's a challenge to reach them, water is high, and bridges are broken." Freddy returned to southeastern Africa at the weekend for a second time in less than three weeks, leaving behind a trail of death and destruction.

At least 190 people were killed in Malawi with 584 injured and 37 missing. The authorities in neighbouring Mozambique reported 21 deaths. Pope Francis offered prayers for the Malawi cyclone victims, during his weekly audience at St Peter's Square. "I pray for the dead, the injured, the displaced. May the Lord support the families and the communities hardest hit by this calamity," he said.

### Hope fading

Rescue workers warned that more victims were to be expected as they scoured destroyed neighbourhoods for survivors, even as hopes dwindled. "Four people from my family are still missing as they are buried in the mud," Alabu Wiseman, 24, said from a Blantyre school-turned-temporary-shelter.

The army and police were leading search and rescue operations, which the Red Cross said would continue for at least another two days. Many people perished in mudslides that washed away homes in Blantyre, the country's commercial capital.

Across Malawi, nearly 59,000 people have been affected and more than 19,000 displaced, with many now sheltering in schools and churches. Authorities counted at least a dozen clinics now accessible due to floods or damaged roads. The impoverished country is already grappling with the deadliest cholera outbreak in its history, which has killed over 1,600 people since last year. On Wednesday, markets and shops were reopening in Blantyre.

"I have two young daughters to feed," Daud Chitumba, 27, a minibus conductor told AFP as he headed to work at a local bus depot. His house was among dozens swept away by a mudslide in the township of Chilobwe. "We have to rebuild our lives and it starts with picking up the small pieces. So, I have to... try to do whatever I can to move forward," Chitumba said.

### 'Devastated nation'

President Lazarus Chakwera, who returned to Malawi on Tuesday after attending a UN conference in Qatar, was due to visit affected areas on Wednesday. "We have arrived to a devastated nation," he said in a statement, hailing the relief efforts by volunteers.

Some said that government assistance has been slow in coming. "We feel abandoned here," said Fadila Njolomole, 19. "Just yesterday, we lost two more people who went with the mudslide as they helped to dig up the bodies. People are hungry and tired. My best friend, her brother, sister and mother went with the mudslide and their bodies have not been found. It's devastating. You can't even mourn."

Cyclone Freddy smashed into landlocked Malawi early Monday after sweeping through Mozambique at the weekend but the tally was expected to rise. "We're still at an early stage...of tallying up the full impact of this cyclone," said UNICEF Mozambique spokesman Guy Taylor, adding that the toll "will probably increase". — AFP



BLANTYRE: People walk up a hill in Blantyre on March 14, 2023, following cyclone Freddy's landslide. — AFP



TEKNAF: A Rohingya family arrives for a meeting with the Myanmar officials in Teknaf on March 15, 2023. — AFP

## Myanmar team in Bangladesh for Rohingya return

TEKNAF: Myanmar officials were meeting with Rohingya refugees Wednesday in what Bangladeshi authorities said was the revival of a long-stalled effort to return the stateless minority to their homeland. Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

Both countries signed an agreement to return them later that year but little progress has been made, leaving the refugees to languish in squalid relief camps. Shamsud Douza, Bangladesh's deputy refugee commissioner, told AFP that a 17-member

team led by a senior official in Myanmar's immigration ministry arrived in the border town of Teknaf on Wednesday morning.

More than 700 Rohingya will be interviewed by the delegation to assess the suitability of their return to Myanmar, an official from the commission said. It was "the first time since 2017 a Myanmar team has arrived to interview in person the Rohingya refugees for repatriation," a senior foreign ministry official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We expect repatriation will start before the monsoon," he said, referring to the rains that inundate the region every June. The official insisted that no Rohingya would be returned against their will. A spokesman for Myanmar's junta confirmed the visit to AFP but said he could not provide details.

China is mediating between both countries on the renewed repatriation push and Beijing's ambassador to Dhaka, Yao Wen, told reporters Tuesday that repatriation would start "very soon". This month Chinese and Bangladeshi diplomats went on

a tour of Myanmar border areas to examine preparations for the return of refugees, Beijing's embassy in Myanmar said this week.

The repatriation plan agreed in 2017 failed to make any significant headway in the years since, partly over concerns the Rohingya would not be safe if they returned. Progress ground to a complete halt during the coronavirus pandemic and after the military overthrow of Myanmar's civilian government in 2021.

Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, home to most of the world's Rohingya before the 2017 crackdown, is also the site of an on-off insurgency between Myanmar's military government and the insurgent Arakan Army. Ismat Ara, a Rohingya woman scheduled to be interviewed by the Myanmar delegation, said she was unwilling to return unless it was safe to do so. "They have to ensure our safety," she said. "If they ensure the safety of our lives and if we are recognised as citizens, only then we will go to Myanmar." — AFP



## Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2023

## Credit Suisse shares sink as top shareholder rules out more cash

## Saudi National Bank says not to increase its stake in Swiss bank

ZURICH: Credit Suisse shares nosedived Wednesday after its main shareholder said it would not provide more funding, with reassuring comments from its chairman unable to calm the market panic. Switzerland's second-biggest bank, hit by a series of scandals, saw its share price go off a cliff after Saudi National Bank chairman Ammar Al-Khudairy said it would "absolutely not" up its stake, as European stock markets plunged amid renewed concerns about the banking sector.

That came after Credit Suisse's market value had already taken a heavy blow this week over fears of contagion from the collapse of two US banks and its annual report citing "material weaknesses" in internal controls. The bank's shares were soon in freefall on the Swiss stock exchange, hitting a low of 1.57 Swiss francs just after 1300 GMT-down 30.13 percent.

Amid the mounting panic, Credit Suisse chairman Axel Lehmann insisted at the Financial Sector Conference in Saudi Arabia Wednesday that the bank did not need government assistance, saying it "isn't a topic". He said it would be inaccurate to compare his bank's woes with the collapse of the US lender Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), due to the difference in regulation. "We have strong capital ratios, a strong balance sheet," Lehmann said, adding: "We already took the medicine," referring to the bank's drastic restructuring plan revealed in October.

**'Too big to fail'**

But his words appeared to do little to rein in the share fall, or stop fears from spreading beyond Switzerland's borders. French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne called Wednesday on the Swiss authorities to step in and "settle" the problem, adding that the French and Swiss finance ministers were due to speak in the next few hours. Analysts warned of

mounting concerns over the bank's viability and the impact on the larger banking sector, as shares of other lenders sank on Wednesday after a rebound the day before. "Where one big shareholder goes, others may follow. Credit Suisse now has to come with a concrete plan to stop outflows, and do it fast," IG analyst Chris Beauchamp told AFP.

Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at trading firm Finalto, agreed. "If Credit Suisse were to run into serious existential trouble, we are in a whole other world of pain. It really is too big to fail."

**Role of the regulators**

The Saudi National Bank became Credit Suisse's largest shareholder in a capital raise in November, launched to finance a major restructuring of the Zurich-based lender aimed at steadying the ship. But Khudairy said the kingdom's largest commercial bank would not be putting in any more money.

"The answer is absolutely not, for many reasons outside the simplest reason which is regulatory and statutory," he told Bloomberg TV. "We now own 9.8 percent of the bank. If we go above 10 percent, all kind of new rules kick in, ... and we are not inclined to get into a new regulatory regime," the chairman said. Crossing the 10 percent threshold would cause a stir in Switzerland, where shareholders have already seen their stake diluted during the capital increase and continue to see the value of their investment plummet.

In February 2021, Credit Suisse shares were worth 12.78 Swiss francs, but since then the bank has endured a barrage of problems and shed 83 percent of its market value. It was hit by the implosion of US fund Archegos, which cost it more than \$5 billion. Its asset management branch was rocked by the bankruptcy of British financial firm Greensill, in which some \$10 bil-



ZURICH: A woman is seen in silhouette walking past a branch of Switzerland's Credit Suisse bank in Vevey, western Switzerland, on March 15, 2023. Credit Suisse shares were in freefall on March 15, 2023 on the Swiss stock exchange, plunging 20 percent in morning trading to historic new record lows. —AFP

lion had been committed through four funds.

Credit Suisse is one of 30 banks globally deemed too big to fail, forcing it to set aside more cash to weather a crisis. The bank booked a net loss of 7.3 billion Swiss francs (\$7.8 billion) for the 2022 financial year. That came against a backdrop of mas-

sive withdrawals of funds by its clients, including in the wealth management sector—one of the activities on which the bank intends to refocus as part of a major restructuring plan. "The pressures on Credit Suisse have hit an already jittery market," Rabobank analyst Jane Foley said. —AFP

## KIF to distribute cash dividend of 50 fils per share

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The Ordinary General Assembly of Kuwait International Fair Company (KIF) approved the distribution of cash dividends of 50 percent of the nominal value of a share, ie, 50 fils per share, with a total value of KD 1.5 million, to its shareholders for the fiscal year ending on Dec 31, 2022.

Chairman of KIF Wael Al-Ibrahim said in a speech during the general assembly meeting that was held on Wednesday with an attendance rate of 100 percent that the financial results for the year ending on Dec 31, 2022 were good. The results indicate the company's competitive ability in achieving best performance in local and international markets by implementing the policies set by the board of directors despite the challenges arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic for the sector in organizing exhibitions and events. He added the company was able to fully return to operational activity within a short span of time.

Ibrahim explained the company has continued to work with complete flexibility with a focus on achieving long-term goals. Ibrahim indicated KIF is in the process of preparing a new strategic plan for the next five years. "It will be supported by diversity of our business models, in addition to maintaining the company's position and good reputation, which will qualify us to pursue growth plans during the coming years," he said.

Ibrahim also praised the effective role of the executive management and all employees of the company for



KUWAIT: (From left) Chairman of the Board of Directors at KIF Wael Al-Ibrahim, CEO of KIF Abdul Rahman Al-Nassar and representative of BDO Al-Nisf & Partners during the meeting on Wednesday.

implementing these plans in a professional manner that preserved the company's reputation and distinction.

CEO of KIF Abdul Rahman Al-Nassar said the features of the strategic plan for the next five years will focus on sustainability, business development and facilities, in addition to creating indirect investment activities within its site. He pointed out the strategic plan includes adding activities that include entertainment and entering the field of organizing conferences, indicating that it will see the light during the next six months, and its implementation will start from September.

Nassar clarified the ministry of health will vacate all its sites in the fairgrounds by the end of March, after which the company will take six months to rehabilitate those sites to return them to service, expecting the performance of Kuwait International Fair in 2023 will be better than last year.

cool to 2.9 percent by year-end, Hunt said.

He added: "The UK will not... enter a technical recession this year" after narrowly avoiding two successive quarters of contraction in 2022. The government said it would extend a subsidy on energy bills for a further three months after the invasion of Ukraine by oil and gas producer Russia sent them surging. "Continuing to hold down energy bills is part of our plan to help hardworking families with the cost of living and halve inflation this year," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement preceding the formal budget announcement.

The Conservative administration also announced increased childcare funding and other actions aimed at encouraging parents, the over-50s and others back into the jobs market. It is looking to fill 1.1 million staff vacancies—in part caused by a lack of EU workers following Brexit and owing to a record number of people classed as long-term sick.

The chancellor confirmed that workers could put more tax-free money into their private pensions, even if many will not have the disposable income to do so. "Reports of senior doctors retiring early due to the impact of pension tax allowances... have undoubtedly been of particular concern to the government given the pressures already on the health system following the pandemic," noted Tom Selby, head of retirement policy at AJ Bell. In neighboring France,

He added the company's operational financial indicators for the year 2022 express the success of its operational policies by developing several plans for the gradual return of full operational activity at the international exhibition grounds.

"The company was also able to achieve a good growth rate in terms of the volume of business and high performance at technical and administrative levels. It showed a degree of financial and operational stability, continued maintenance of the quality and specifications of our exhibitions and commitment to satisfying the needs of the organizers and participants," he said.

He added the company achieved a net profit of KD 3.03 million for the year 2022 with a profit of 101.03 fils per share, referring to the efforts of the company's employees to achieve these positive results and the best possible returns for shareholders.

## Global economy faces sustained challenges: OPEC

VIENNA: Despite "growth momentum, which is expected to carry over into 2023, the global economy will continue to navigate through challenges amid high global inflation," OPEC monthly report warned on Tuesday. The report added other challenges are "the likelihood of further rate hikes particularly in the eurozone and the US, high debt levels in many regions, and geopolitical uncertainties." "World oil demand growth in 2022 remains at 2.5 mb/d, broadly unchanged from last month's assessment," the report said.

Oil demand for OECD Americas and OECD Europe is adjusted lower, reflecting weaker-than-expected demand, but oil demand in Asia Pacific and non-OECD countries is revised higher, reflecting better-than-expected improvements in these regions. For 2023, the world oil demand growth forecast remains unchanged at 2.3 mb/d, with the OECD Americas and OECD Europe revised slightly lower, while China is revised higher, with jet/kerosene and gasoline leading demand growth," the report added. "The OPEC Reference Basket (ORB) value rose by 26c, or 0.3 percent, in February to average \$81.88/barrel. The ICE Brent declined by 37c, or 0.4 percent, to \$83.54/b and the NYMEX WTI fell by \$1.30, or 1.7 percent, to average \$76.86/b. —KUNA

## IEA: Russia's oil revenue sinks as sanctions bite

PARIS: Russia's oil-export revenue sank by almost half in February compared to last year as Western powers tightened sanctions on the country, the International Energy Agency said on Wednesday. The country earned \$11.6 billion from its oil exports last month after the European Union imposed a ban on Russian petroleum products alongside a price cap agreed with the Group of Seven and Australia, according to the IEA. This was down from \$14.3 billion in January and a 42 percent drop from \$20 billion in February last year.

Russia, however, was still shipping "roughly the same" amount of oil to world markets, according to the IEA, which advises wealthy nations. "This indicates that the G7 sanctions regime has been effective in not restricting global crude and product supplies, while simultaneously curtailing Russia's ability to generate export revenue," the IEA said. Russian oil exports fell by 500,000 barrels per day to 7.5 million bpd in February, with a big drop in shipments to the EU, but it was still near pre-war levels.

"Recent tanker tracking data suggest that Moscow has managed to re-route most of the barrels previously destined for the EU and US to new outlets in Asia, Africa and the Middle East," the IEA said. —AFP

## Strikes-hit Britain pledges \$114bn in cost-of-living budget

LONDON: Britain on Wednesday said its cost-of-living support for this year and next would total £94 billion (\$114 billion), as it forecast the UK to stay out of recession with inflation slowing sharply. "In the face of a cost-of-living crisis... we have demonstrated our values by protecting struggling families," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in a budget speech outlining extra support especially for energy bills and childcare.

It came as teachers, junior doctors, civil servants, BBC journalists and drivers on London's underground Tube railway staged the latest day of mass walkouts. Hundreds and thousands of public and private sector workers show little sign of ending strike action that began last year when rocketing inflation slashed the value of wages. "High inflation is the root cause of the strikes we have seen in recent months," Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt told parliament. "We will continue to work hard to settle those disputes but only in a way that does not fuel inflation."

UK inflation remains above 10 percent but should



LONDON: Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt poses with the red Budget Box as he leaves 11 Downing Street in central London on March 15, 2023. —AFP

the Senate at the weekend voted to approve a deeply unpopular reform to the country's pension system.

The headline measure is a hike in the minimum retirement age to 64 from 62, seen by many as unfair to people who started working young. Britain's retirement age of 66 is set to increase before the end of the decade, meaning a longer wait to access the state pension. Private pensions are available at an earlier age. —AFP



Business

# Gulf Bank to host 'Lead The Way' women empowerment conference on March 20

Salma Al-Hajjaj: 43.5% of Gulf Bank's employees are women

- Women hold 28 percent of leadership positions at Gulf Bank and we aim to increase that percentage
- Gulf Bank was a pioneer in establishing equality between men and women when it came to job benefits
- We are reaping the fruits of the Women of Wisdom (WOW) initiative that we launched back in 2017, with the aim of empowering and supporting women in the business world

- One of the first financial institutions to sign the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), which aligns with the bank's strategy for 2025 and Kuwait Vision 2035
- The implementation of Kuwaitization programs requires expanding talent pools and seeking the assistance of women to fill the needs and vacancies for some disciplines
- We are keen to cooperate and partner with prestigious international and local institutions that provide quality training programs

**KUWAIT:** The General Manager of the Human Resources Department at Gulf Bank, Salma Al-Hajjaj, affirmed the bank's keenness to empower women and support their career development, noting that women occupied 28 percent of the bank's leadership positions in 2022.



Salma Al-Hajjaj

Al-Hajjaj indicated in an interview that the percentage of female employees has reached 43.5 percent out of the total number of employees in the bank, and that by the end of 2021, Gulf Bank was a pioneer in establishing equality between men and women when it came to job benefits. The bank believes in equal income based on qualification and competence, and not gender.

She also noted that Gulf Bank was one of the first private sector companies to sign the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), which aligns with the bank's five-year strategy for 2025 and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Speaking on Women of Wisdom (WOW), Al-Hajjaj mentioned that Gulf Bank's female employees are reaping the benefits of the WOW initiative that was launched back in 2017 with the aim of empowering and supporting women in the business world - in terms of training, development and career advancement.

She also spoke about the bank's keenness to cooperate and partner with international and local institutions to provide quality training programs that contribute to the development of the bank's human talent. In addition to supporting the bank's direction towards empowering women, noting that several female employees from the bank, participated in a program organized by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to prepare managers for the board of directors' positions.

On the occasion of this month's International Women's Day, Gulf Bank decided to celebrate this special day differently this year, by organizing the 'Lead The Way' conference on March 20, at Grand Hyatt Hotel - 360 Mall, which will address the achievements of women leaders, discuss, and analyze the efforts of empowering women in Kuwait, and the modern-day challenges they face at work. The details are as follows:

**Women empowerment**

**Question: Gulf Bank pays significant attention to the issue of empowering women in society. What about the women within the Bank?**

Al-Hajjaj: Gulf Bank is keen to establish the principles of sustainability, which is why it has prioritized the issue of women empowerment inside and outside the Bank. This begins from the recruitment process to high-level training and development, to supporting their career paths to reach leadership positions. It is noteworthy that the number of women in our leadership positions reached about 28 percent in 2022, while their percentage has reached 43.5 percent out of the total number of employees in the Bank.

As part of Gulf Bank's efforts to fulfill its obligations and implement its undertakings, the Board of Directors, at the end of the year 2021, decided to cancel cases of discrimination between the Bank's male and female employees, and

to achieve full equality when it comes to job benefits. Gulf Bank was a pioneer in implementing this decision, which aligns with its five-year strategy for 2025 and Kuwait Vision 2035.

**Women of Wisdom (WOW)**

**Question: Gulf Bank launched the Women of Wisdom (WOW) program in 2017. How has it positively reflected the empowerment of women within the Bank?**

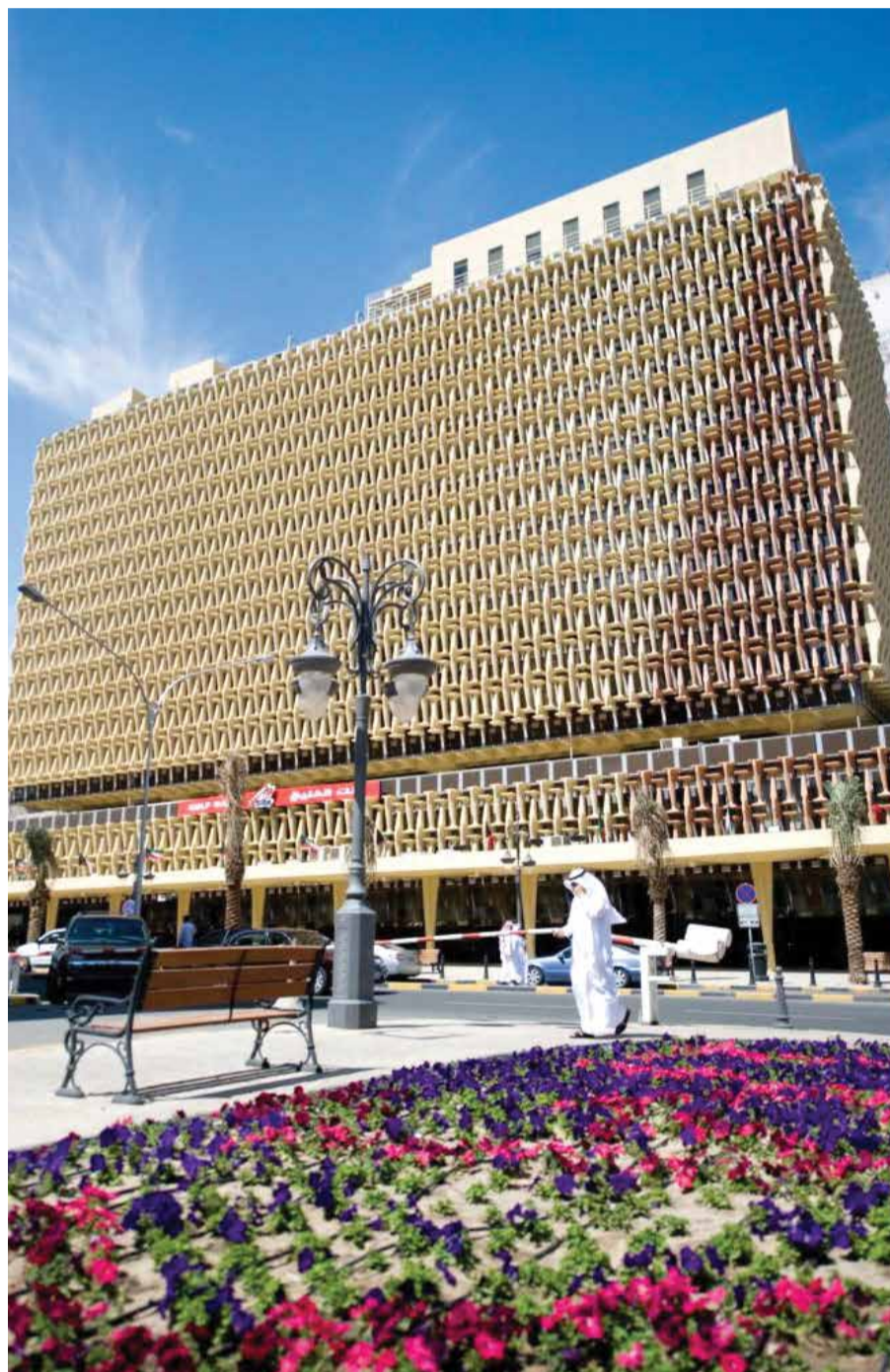
Al-Hajjaj: Studies and research have proven that companies that operate on the principle of gender justice have higher profits and productivity for several reasons - including an increase in diversity of opinions and viewpoints, which reflects positively on the services. Especially since we, as a Bank, provide services to consumers, and women are an integral part of these consumers.

Therefore, we launched the Women of Wisdom (WOW) program as an internal initiative back in 2017, as a result of the Bank's vision, and direction, to empower and support women in the business world. The program provides networking opportunities for female employees through monthly gatherings, that are held with groups of females - with the aim of promoting transparent discussions on various topics related to work-life balance. The bank's ultimate goal is to support more women in their career paths, as they strive to reach leadership positions. This aligns with Kuwait Vision 2035, which aims to increase women contributions and presence in leadership positions.

**Training and qualification**

**Question: To what extent is the Bank interested in training and qualifying women to obtain leadership positions in the Bank?**

Al-Hajjaj: In relationship to Kuwaitization and job replacement programs, it was necessary to expand the talent pool available in the market, in order to fill the need and vacancies for certain disciplines. This standpoint has created an urgent need for female employees to work in the bank. Hence, with the increasing number of women in Gulf Bank, we are keen to cooperate and partner with international, and local, institutions to provide quality training programs. This is to contribute to the development of the bank's human talents and to support its direction towards empowering women. Female employees from Gulf Bank participated in a three-month training program, organized by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group, in cooperation



with the Tamayouz Foundation and Soroptimist Organization. For the second year in a row, we are proud of the participation of our female leaders in this program, due to the expertise it provides to trainees; especially women, as it opens new horizons for them in leadership positions.

**Women leaders**

**Question: Gulf Bank announced that it will be organizing a conference on March 20, based on the achievements of women leaders. What are the details of the conference?**

Al-Hajjaj: On the occasion of International Women's Day, that is celebrated annually in March, Gulf Bank decided to celebrate women differently this year, by organizing the 'Lead The Way' conference on March 20, at Grand Hyatt Hotel - 360 Mall. The conference will address the achievements of women leaders, discuss, and analyze the efforts of empowering women in Kuwait, and the modern-day challenges they face at work.

Organizing this conference comes as part of Gulf Bank's continuous efforts to support and empower women and help them reach leadership positions. Gulf Bank is one of the first private sector companies to sign the

United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), which aligns with the Bank's five-year strategy for 2025 and Kuwait Vision 2035.

**Agenda**

**Question: What is the agenda of the conference? Who are the most important speakers?**

Al-Hajjaj: The conference will be a mixture of interactive workshops, inspiring speeches, and thought-provoking panel discussions, which aim to shed light on women empowerment in Kuwait; as well as the role of institutions, and women themselves, in preserving their gains.

The conference consists of two workshops: The first one being exclusively for women, which will be presented by Kuwait University Professor, and Founder of SHORE Consultancy, Dr Amar Behbehani, who will discuss how women can remain emotionally and physically resilient as they progress to leadership positions. The second workshop will be presented by Global Brand Strategist and Reputation Risk Mitigator, Steve Brazell, who will provide deep insights and actionable strategies to develop, build, and grow a personal brand of value.

The conference will also be featur-

ing a keynote speech by Gulf Bank Board Member, Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar, in addition to an open panel discussion with: The General Secretary of the Supreme Planning and Development Council, Dr Khaled Al-Mahdi, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program, Hideko Hadzialic, and a Representative from MasterCard.

**Female employees**

**Question: Why is it important to organize this conference for Kuwaiti women and Gulf Bank employees in particular?**

Al-Hajjaj: At Gulf Bank, we believe that the issue of women empowerment in society, has witnessed remarkable progress in the last period. However, it still requires more effort - whether from the state, the private sector, or from the women themselves. Reaching leadership positions in our society is still difficult to some extent and obtaining leadership positions is even more challenging. The obstacles and difficulties do not end once leadership positions are obtained by females, and hence why we made it the key focus of the upcoming conference.

The 'Lead The Way' conference aims to develop a complete vision and a model to overcome the obstacles that women face in leadership positions, in order to preserve and build on their gains.

**Women empowerment  
An economic need**

Salma Al-Hajjaj emphasized that empowering women has become an economic need - as recent research proved that there is an economic return for companies that provide equal opportunities for both genders. Companies that follow this standard have increased levels of profitability, productivity, and innovation; and this is reflected positively on their reputation and market value.

**Supporting women to work  
in rare disciplines**

She added: "As part of its efforts to establish itself as a Bank of the future, and its ambitious plans for digital transformation, Gulf Bank has been keen to support women to work in rare disciplines - such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The bank has already succeeded in attracting many female talents for these disciplines, some of whom currently occupy leadership positions in the Bank. This helps reduce the gap between the number of men and women leaders."

**Supporting the elimination of  
violence against women**

Al-Hajjaj also mentioned that every year, Gulf Bank participates in the 'Orange the World' campaign - a global initiative launched by the United Nations to eliminate violence against women. The campaign begins on November 25, for a period of 16 days, and ends on International Human Rights Day, which falls on December 10. On this occasion, Gulf Bank lights up its head office building in orange throughout the campaign in support of eliminating violence against women and preserving their human rights.

## Gulf Bank organizes a new series of GB Masterclass

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of approaching the holy month of Ramadan, and as part of its continuous efforts to engage with the community, Gulf Bank organized a new GB Masterclass series, in cooperation with a group of experts specialized in various fields. The classes include a series of chapters, where each chapter highlights a specific discipline that is presented by a specialized expert. The aim is to develop the participants' capabilities, increase their skills, and enhance their knowledge.

The lasted Masterclass series offered a special course about hospitality during the month of Ramadan, in collaboration with the certified Hospital-

ity Trainer, Alia Madouh, who gave two lectures to 30 female participants in each lecture. The course dealt with many aspects and tips on preparing and assembling for the month of Ramadan, of which included: Arranging the living room, preparing the prayer corner, arranging flowers, and ways to prepare the Iftar table, sweets, and drinks after Iftar.

On this occasion, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications, Abdullah Al-Mulaifi said: "Gulf Bank is keen to interact and communicate with the local community throughout the year and across various occasions. Through the GB Masterclass, we are able to consolidate the principles of sustainability - and our position in the community - through a series of selected high-caliber programs."

He continued: "Gulf Bank's initiative to organize the GB Masterclass series stemmed from its keenness to engage with the local community, and we were keen to seek the assistance of specialized experts who possess extensive experience across the fields selected for this series."



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi

added: "We are proud of what we have achieved in terms of establishing an active presence in society throughout the year 2022. We look forward to more interactions with the public, through hosting initiatives that meet their needs and aspirations. This helps us achieve our goal

of engaging and interacting with the local community on a larger scale."

Al-Mulaifi also indicated that the Bank plans to host a new series every once in a while, exploring various specialties such as cooking, photography, flower arrangements, design and elegance, calligraphy, and other areas that the public are interested in learning more about. The duration of each class is two hours long. He

of engaging and interacting with the local community on a larger scale."

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

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



## Business

# China, Russia bolstering presence in Africa to tap its rich resources

## World's poorest countries face crippling debts: UN

**DOHA:** China and Russia are bolstering their presence in Africa to tap its rich natural resources, analysts say, amid grave warnings from UN agencies the world's poorest countries face accumulating crippling debts. "One out of every three major infrastructure projects in Africa is built by Chinese state-owned enterprises, and one out of every five is financed by a Chinese policy bank," said Paul Nantulya of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, an academic institution within the US Department of Defense.

Russia, a key arms exporter to Africa, is also making forays into the continent including through mining projects granted to the Wagner private paramilitary group, he said. At a UN-sponsored summit in Qatar of the Least Developed Countries this month, leaders condemned the treatment of their nations.

After Western countries reduced their infrastructure financing, it created a void that China and Russia stepped in to fill. "The Chinese saw the gap and decided to put their money in infrastructure," Nantulya said. But it mostly amounts to a "debt trap", warned Anna Borshchevskaya of the Washington Institute think tank. "China offers loans for expensive infrastructure projects, but they typically fail," she said. "When the countries can't pay the loans, China then takes control over strategic assets of a country." China, the world's number two economy, rejects practicing "debt-trap diplomacy" as an unfair criticism from Western rivals who have them-

selves burdened nations with huge debts. "Partnerships are built with friendship and good faith," Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said this month.

### 'Shiny deals'

Projects led by China in Africa include the Standard Gauge Railway linking the Kenyan port city of Mombasa to the Rift Valley, which cost \$5 billion and was financed 90 percent by Beijing. It is Kenya's biggest infrastructure project since independence and was opened in 2017. China is Kenya's second-largest lender after the World Bank. In December 2022, Tanzania signed a \$2.2 billion contract with a Chinese company to build the final section of a railway line aimed at linking the country's main port with its western neighbors.

Some China-funded projects have been profitable and sustainable, but the real benefit is to Beijing, with maintenance contracts that can run up to 99 years, said Nantulya. Chinese-funded projects are "designed to absorb Chinese labor", he said, which means they don't do much to reduce unemployment in Africa-although some governments insist on a quota for their own citizens.

During a visit to Senegal in January, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen sought to tout the benefits of a new "mutually beneficial" US economic strategy towards Africa. "Countries need to be wary of shiny deals that may be opaque and ultimately fail to actually benefit the people they were purportedly designed to help," Yellen said, alluding to China. "This

can leave countries with a legacy of debt, diverted resources, and environmental destruction."

### 'Victims'

Debt is not restricted to China and Russia alone, said Tetteh Hormeku of the Ghana-based African Trade Network, noting huge sums are owed to Western nations-including the former colonial powers who once controlled much of the continent. "About 50 percent of our debt is owed to Western commercial bond markets and multilateral agencies," he said at the Doha summit.

The 1990s debt crisis in Africa was caused by Western countries, not by China or Russia, said Nantulya. However, Chinese investments lack transparency compared with those from the West, which face greater scrutiny at home, he added. Russia too has been expanding its involvement in Africa through mining projects won by Wagner, which is also fighting in Russia's war in Ukraine. In January, the United States accused Wagner of "committing widespread human rights abuses and extorting natural resources" in African countries. Last month the European Union announced new sanctions on the group for "human rights abuses" in the Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan and Ukraine.

"Wagner is operating in undemocratic and authoritarian environments where corruption is just a way of life... because it knows that it can get away with a lot," said Nantulya. Experts also decried the environmental impact of Chinese and Russian projects on African



**DAKAR:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen touted the fruits of a mutually beneficial economic strategy towards Africa during her visit to Senegal in January. —AFP

countries. "China is the world's top emitter of greenhouse gases which contribute to climate change" and its Belt and Road Initiative "still finances coal-fired power plants abroad," said Borshchevskaya. "Russia's mining projects... have resulted, according to reports, in high levels of toxic metal compounds, pollution of groundwater resources, soil and vegetation," she added. In Liberia, these impacts are "grave", said Davestus James, head of Liberia's Center for Peace Building and Democracy on the sidelines of the Doha summit. Liberians had become "victims of their own resources", he added. —AFP

## South Korea to build 'world's largest' chip centre

**SEOUL:** South Korea said Wednesday it would build the world's largest chip centre using \$230 billion of private investment mostly from Samsung Electronics, as it seeks an edge in the global industry. The plan is part of the South Korean government's drive to invest heavily in six key technologies, including chips, displays and batteries, all areas where the country's tech giants are well-established already.

South Korea will "build the world's largest scale system semiconductor cluster in the capital areas using massive private investments worth 300 trillion won," President Yoon Suk Yeol said at an economic policy meeting. "Speed is important. The government will do its best to realize the cluster project," he added, according to a transcript provided by his office. Separately, Samsung said in a statement sent to AFP that it plans to invest 300 trillion won in the cluster area over the next two decades. South Korea's Industry Ministry said the cluster plan is due to be completed by 2042.

The vast majority of the world's most advanced microchips are made by just two companies: Samsung and Taiwan's TSMC. In May 2022, Samsung announced a massive 450 trillion won investment blueprint over the next five years aimed at making it a frontrunner in key sectors from semiconductors to biologics. Securing supplies of advanced chips has become a crucial issue internationally, with the United States and China locked in a fierce battle for control of the chips market. —AFP

## Boubyan launches Oasis Club digital prepaid card with Kuwait Airways

**KUWAIT:** As a part of its efforts to offer new and special services to its customers, Boubyan Bank announced the launch of Boubyan Visa Oasis Club digital prepaid card in collaboration with Kuwait Airways, making it the first digital prepaid card of its kind in Kuwait.

The Oasis-Visa Digital Prepaid Card was announced in a meeting attended by Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri, Chief Executive Officer - Consumer, Private, and Digital Banking and Abdullah Al-Mejhem, Chief Private Banking and Consumer Banking from Boubyan Bank, along with Dr Saeeda Jaffar, GM GCC VISA, and Meshal Al-Mutairi, head of Premium Customers Department at Kuwait Airways. In this regard, Al-Mejhem stated: "Boubyan Bank reiterates its uniqueness through its diverse and special offerings as well as its constant keenness on creativity and innovation coupled with the introduction of products and services, which are considered the first of their kind in Kuwait in an attempt to cater for the needs of customers in a smooth and simple manner."

Al-Mejhem expressed his pleasure to renew the partnership with Kuwait Airways through the launch of Visa Oasis Club Digital Prepaid Card, and to improve such a partnership on an ongoing basis, while confirming being closer to customers, which positively reflects on the services offered to them through reinforcing our strategic partnerships with various entities. He added: "The card is a new product that adds to Boubyan's collection of prepaid cards through which we aim to offer innovative solutions to our customers who have a passion for travel, allowing them to collect air miles on their spending inside and outside Kuwait."

Speaking about the new card, Al-Mejhem stated: "Getting the card is very easy as the customer can simply apply for it through Boubyan App by following very simple steps, without the need to visit the branch or even contact the Contact Center. This highlights Boubyan Bank's leadership in offering digital products and services to customers."



**KUWAIT:** Al-Tuwaijri and Al-Mejhem with Dr Jaffar and Al-Mutairi announce the launch of Visa Oasis Club digital prepaid card.

### Unique design for a unique customer

Al-Mejhem went on to add: "The card's design is special and comes with 4 different designs associated with the customer's tier in Oasis Club." He elaborated on the calculation of earned air miles by stating: "They are earned along with customer's purchases using Visa Oasis Club Digital Prepaid Card, entitling the customer to earn two miles per each Kuwaiti Dinar spent in Kuwait and 3 miles per each Kuwaiti Dinar spent outside Kuwait, and earned miles will be automatically transferred to the Oasis Club's membership by the end of every month."

On his part, Meshal Al-Mutairi, Head of Premium Customers Department at Kuwait Airways, stated: "We are pleased to partner with Boubyan Bank in launching one of its most important services and products offered to its customers through Oasis Club Program, which is one of the most flexible programs that add value to its members, and is an investment tool as well that gives them the opportunity to earn free miles on Kuwait Airways."

"The partnership with Boubyan Bank is prominent, and it serves cooperation between public and private sectors, which achieves the common interests of customers and the national economy in general. Kuwait Airways is cooperating with Boubyan Bank, among others, towards expanding our services that cater for our dear customers and provide them with

all the means of comfort and entertainment during their travels," Al-Mutairi added.

"Kuwait Airways gives customers a vast range of options including Kuwait Airways Holidays; customers can enjoy all the travel benefits they need such as hotel reservations, car rentals, etc., in addition to exclusive and exciting offers and discounts which are always offered by Kuwait Airways Holidays. We invite everyone to enjoy Oasis Club offers by joining our club for free," Al-Mutairi elaborated.

Al-Mutairi concluded by stating: "The partnership with Boubyan Bank is unique, and we will continue improving it so that everyone will be a winner. I would like to seize the opportunity to express my thanks and gratitude to all the officers of Boubyan Bank for making this partnership a success, wishing them further success in the future." "By partnering with Boubyan Bank and Kuwait Airways, Visa is bringing an innovative payment product with travel benefits that create real value for our cardholders. The Digital Oasis Club Prepaid Boubyan Visa card can be used at our more than 80 million merchant partners worldwide and with the peace of mind of being protected by Visa's global, secure network. As a prepaid card, Visa is also helping broaden access to payments for more customers in Kuwait, an important mission we share with our partners," said Shashank Singh, Visa's VP and General Manager for Kuwait and Qatar.



## Razouqi: Kuwait Airways soaring to excellence

**KUWAIT:** In continuation of its success in implementing its policies and plans, and as part of its endeavors to achieve further progress, Kuwait Airways organized its second employee engagement Beyond Excellence Forum 23, between the executive management and the company's employees to highlight the vision and transformation of the national carrier for the year 2030 and to plans on how to achieve the highest levels of service excellence.

During the event Capt Ali Dukhan, the Chairman of Board and Eng Maen Razouqi, the Chief Executive Officer presented awards for projects conducted in 2022 by Kuwait Airways employees that had a significant impact on its enhancement in

customer service, or increase in revenues, and or cost reduction. Speaking on the occasion, Capt Ali Dukhan, said: "Events of these sort show our appreciation to the hard working staff who dedicate themselves to positively raising Kuwait Airways quality of customer experience and assisting in making the company profitable."

Kuwait Airways Chief Executive Officer Eng MaenRazouqi added, "The Beyond Excellence initiative was launched by Kuwait Airways in the year 2022 and has attained various achievements, reaching its desired objectives, in the convergence of plans and proposals developed by the executive management with the employees. These have been fully implemented within a professional framework, commensurate with the vision set by Kuwait Airways' board of directors."

Razouqi added, "The tireless work done by the dedicated employees of Kuwait Airways over the past year and the success that has been achieved is only evidence of the integration between the Management and the employees in moving forward towards devel-

oping the Blue Bird and reaching broader horizons. During this forum, we have discussed ways to develop and improve services to our valued customers and to develop strategic objectives, and to complete the vision that extends to the year 2030. This includes producing more creative and ambitious ideas that contribute greatly to attaining the best levels of excellence in providing various and diverse services to meet the requirements of our customers." Razouqi continued by saying, "I encourage our employees to continue on this path in fulfilling the series of these achievements, as they have done in the past, during their services and have witnessed important achievements in the history of the company."

Razouqi also stated, "Kuwait Airways is on a steady pace towards achieving further success, as it continues to provide distinguished services and appropriate solutions to passengers. We have recently announced the launch of numerous new destinations, linking Kuwait to the world, which is through our young fleet of different types of aircraft with excellent technology that suits the aspirations of the Blue

Bird to achieve its desired objectives. This is in addition to the latest and diverse services launched by Kuwait Airways since the beginning of 2023, to provide comfortable services to our customers."

Razouqi explained, "In order to continue achieving our objectives and reach our motto of "Beyond Excellence", we must extend greater efforts and cooperation between the executive management and the employees. This will lead to achievements for the future generations, by developing talents and improving productivity through our capabilities and contributions, in addition to achieving positive results through transformation to profitability in the year 2025. Kuwait Airways has succeeded to attain digital transformation in various businesses between the operational and support departments which have been attaining growth and contributed towards implementing our strategic plans."

Razouqi concluded by saying, "We trust the efforts of the employees of Kuwait Airways and their dedication to develop the National Carrier towards further progress among other international airlines."



**Al-Dukhan and Razouqi honor one of the winning projects.**



## Business

# In conflict-scarred Libya, young robotics fans see hope in hi-tech

## 'All-girl team' believes technology could help women get ahead

**TRIPOLI:** Youssef Jira, a fresh-faced 18-year-old in a hoodie, has big ambitions in a Libyan society where youthful creativity has long been sacrificed to dictatorship and violence. He wants to encourage other young people to use hi-tech to help modernize the divided and conflict-scarred country.

Jira, with a bandana around his head, is one of a group of young tech fanatics who took part in a robotics competition in a suburb of Tripoli this month. "We want to send a message to the whole of society, because what we've learned has changed us a lot," Jira said at the rare event.

Libya has seen more than a decade of stop-start conflict since a 2011 NATO-backed revolt toppled strongman Muammar Gaddafi with myriad rival militias, foreign powers and multiple governments vying for influence. The country remains split between a supposedly interim government in the western capital, Tripoli, and another in the east nominally backed by military chief Khalifa Haftar.

Unlike Libya's politicians, the young participants worked together at the school gymnasium where the competition took place. Jira said he had gained new skills and learned about teamwork in pursuit of a common goal.



TRIPOLI: Libyan students attend a local robotics competition in Tripoli on March 4, 2023. — AFP

### 'New horizons'

The event had the air of a high school sports competition, with fans cheering on their teams who worked in a pen on the gym floor, against a backdrop of banners promoting "Lybotics" and the "First Tech Challenge" as Egyptian pop music played. The robots were nothing fancy: small wheeled contraptions, their electrical guts exposed. They made jerky movements as they maneuvered around the pen. But event coordinator Mohammed Zayed said such projects help "open new horizons" for young Libyans.

"This is not just about simple robots," he said. "These young people also had to manage their relationships and work towards inclusion, unity and peace." Zayed said the event aimed to "prepare the workers of the future and make the country aware of the importance of technology and innovation".

Under Gaddafi's 42-year rule, the education and development of young people was not a priority and universities emphasized the leader's views on poli-

tics, the military and economics. After years of violence, a period of relative calm since a 2020 ceasefire has allowed some to dream that Libya can start moving forward, despite the ongoing political split. At the competition, family, friends and even government officials joined the effort to promote tech culture and the start-up spirit, particularly among youth. The event, funded by an international school and private sponsors, had been envisaged since 2018 but repeatedly delayed because of unrest and then the COVID pandemic. Around 20 teams competed, many of them with members of groups often marginalized in Libya's conservative society: women, migrants and the disabled.

### All-girl team

Shadrawan Khalfallah, 17, a member of an all-girl team, said she believed technology could help address challenges from climate to health, but also help women get ahead.

"We set up our team to make our society evolve and show that we exist," she said, handing out stickers bearing the word "Change". Libya is rich in oil, but decades of stagnation under Gaddafi and the years of fighting have shattered its corruption-plagued economy and left its population mired in poverty. Little public money goes into science and technology, but Nagwa Al-Ghani, a science teacher and mentor to one of the teams, said this needs to change and could help give Libya "a better image".

"We need it if we want our country to develop," she said, adding that education is the starting point. They face numerous challenges, but authorities in the capital Tripoli talk of "new initiatives" for digital development, with a focus on young people. "Libya lacks nothing, neither human resources, nor intelligence, nor the determination of the youth," government spokesman Mohammed Hamouda told AFP at the event. "What's missing is long-term stability and a strategic vision to support young people." — AFP

## China retail sales up in New Year

**BEIJING:** Chinese retail sales rebounded in January and February as Beijing abandoned its suffocating zero-COVID policy, reopening borders and ending mandatory quarantine, and the country celebrated the Lunar New Year holiday. The 3.5 percent growth, released by the National Bureau of Statistics, came in line with expectations and was much better than the 1.8 percent drop suffered in December, indicating the world's number two economy was picking up after years of painful restrictions. And with Beijing this week announcing it will resume issuing tourist visas, there is a hope for a further improvement this year. China usually releases January and February economic data together to ensure they are not skewed by the long Chinese New Year holiday.

Fixed-asset investment also showed an improvement, rising 5.5 percent in January-February-beating forecasts of 4.5 percent growth-as the government poured billions of dollars into building new railways and industrial parks, NBS data showed. However, industrial output expanded 2.4 percent-below the 2.6 percent expected. "Production and demand have improved significantly, and employment and prices are generally stable," the NBS said in a statement.

"The economy is showing signs of stabilization and recovery." China has set an economic growth target of "around five percent" for 2023, one of the lowest in decades. But Premier Li Qiang has warned that even this was "not easy" to achieve as a grinding property crisis continued and global demand slowed.

In a sign of the troubles facing the property sector, the NBS figures showed investment in real estate fell 5.7 percent in January-February as it continues to feel the effects of a government crackdown to curb risky borrowing by developers. The unemployment rate rose to 5.6 percent in February, up 0.1 percentage points from the previous month, with that for 16-24-year-olds at 18.1 percent. The government has warned that a global slowdown will hamper the country's recovery from pandemic-era damage. China's exports for January and February fell 6.8 percent compared to the year before, due to low global demand. Zhiwei Zhang from Pinpoint Asset Management said: "The economic data released today confirmed the recovery in China was well on track. This is consistent with the strong credit growth released earlier." — AFP

AFP. Armed soldiers were deployed at railway stations as well as the port as the government attempted to restore minimum services. Dock workers had a tense standoff with the military inside the port, but there were no reports of clashes.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said 20 trains operated to bring office workers to the capital, but unions said it was less than five percent of the daily services. State-run buses were also operating, the president's office said, but only a few of them were seen on the roads while attendance in schools, offices and factories had dropped sharply on Wednesday. The strike came despite a ban imposed by Wickremesinghe last month, and warnings that violators could lose their jobs. Trade union spokesman Haritha Aluthge said talks with the authorities overnight ended inconclusively forcing them to go ahead with Wednesday's work stoppage.

Professionals have also joined the trade unions in protesting against the sharp increase in income taxes since January. "Anyone who violates the essential services order will face the full force of the law," cabinet spokesman Bandula Gunawardana had warned ahead of the nationwide action.—AFP

## Economic Society writes open letter to next Cabinet

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Economic Society (KES) has written an open letter addressed to the upcoming Cabinet, according to a press release issued by KES on Wednesday. The KES said in the letter that it is aware of the state of general frustration that prevails on the political scene. Kuwait Economic Society has over successive occasions issued recommendations not to squander public funds, because it is inviolable and its protection is the duty of every citizen.

"What we always strive for in our successive statements is an old approach, values and striving for the loyal sons of Kuwait to preserve the country's wealth and resources. The time has come for this approach to be inherited by all segments of society, led by public benefit associations, each according to its specialization", as described by the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah - may his soul rest in peace," the letter said.

### The general budget 2023/2024

The ministry of finance issued the draft preliminary budget for the fiscal year 2023/2024, which estimates a fiscal deficit for the second time in a row of KD 6.8 billion (13 percent of GDP), as a result of higher expenditure allocations amounting to KD 26.3 billion (+11.7 percent compared to the previous budget). Revenues reached KD 19.5 billion (-16.9 percent compared to the previous budget). Accordingly, oil revenues decreased by 19.5 percent from KD 21.3 billion to KD 17.1 billion.

Accordingly, it is expected that the budget will achieve a very small surplus in the end, amounting to about KD 600 million (1 percent of GDP) in the event that oil prices are stable in the current situation (\$90 per barrel compared to \$70 per barrel). The deficit may reach more than KD 6 billion. Although the expected rise in government expenditures will support demand in the near term, it also adds to the pressures of fiscal sustainability in the long-term, especially in the context of continued over-reliance on volatile oil revenues (88 percent of total revenues).

We cannot overlook an important factor. The pillars of a decent life constitute education, health and infrastructure. Compared to the unprecedented size of the budget, only KD 122.4 million was allocated to cover the costs of medicines in the ministry of health and KD 35 million for spending on road engineering and highway maintenance.

The rise in oil prices today following the Russian-Ukrainian war is unsustainable and in the last five years, budget imbalances are clear and cannot be overlooked. The reports of the Audit Bureau, as well as other economic reports, indicate there is a clear lack of seriousness on the part of state ministries to expedite the implementation of projects included in the development plan in the state budget.

This inflates the deficit and weakens the pace of completion. This includes the gross mistakes of state ministries in estimating their projects.

It is clear that the government is unable to collect its revenues from companies and individuals amounting to KD 2.2 billion as well as from companies that have been delaying in paying taxes since 2009! We cannot ignore the lack of seriousness in paying attention to the collection of punitive fines of companies that fail to implement government tenders.

### Preserving public funds

The responsibility of Kuwaiti Economic Society is to support all opinions based on sound economic foundations for issues on the scene, spread sound economic awareness and educate the general public about economic issues that have a great impact on all shareholders in general. We spare no effort in defending public money. Therefore, we must say these basic points in order to feel the spirit of national responsibility. In view of the rapid changes in the global economic arena and the challenges resulting from the economy in general, we encourage everyone to protect public money through investigation committees.

KES had issued recommendations in the past to correct the waste mentality in which matters were managed in the country in the past two decades. Waste does not have to be financial, but it is also administrative as well. In this regard, the KES would like to recall its statement issued in this regard on October 13, 2017, which was based on keeping politics out of technical and economic opinion in order to safeguard public funds and protect the interest of shareholders in a fair manner.

In conclusion, we must stop the policy of squandering the wealth of this country as it is not the private property of anyone to feed on the wealth of the country and its future generations.

NOTE: The article is part of an open letter issued by the Kuwait Economic Society addressed to the upcoming Cabinet.

### KAMCO INVEST OIL MARKET REPORT

## Fears of contagion from US banking crisis hit oil market

**KUWAIT:** Oil prices remained under pressure after the biggest banking sector crisis in the US since 2008 resulted in investor panic in almost all global asset classes and triggered a flight to safety to asset classes like gold and silver. Investors remained concerned about the possibility of a fresh financial crisis amid the prevailing uncertainty in the market despite assurances from the US government as well as support for the banking sector. Rates hike expectations for the rest of the year also underwent a drastic sentiment change as some economists now expect the Fed to lower its aggressive policy and implement merely one 25 bps hike this year followed by rate cuts during the second half of the year. Brent crude futures traded below the \$80/b mark for the first time in more than two months and put contracts options rose to the highest level since mid-August on 13-March 2023 indicating lack of confidence in a near term rally.



Oil bets showed a complete reversal from a previous data that showed bulls outpacing bears by most in four years, according to ICE Futures Europe data. Crude oil prices were also affected by recent inflation data from China that could indicate a weaker-than-expected recovery in oil demand this year, whereas a modest GDP growth forecast announced last week also casted doubts on extent of demand growth from China. Indicators on the oil demand front remained

mixed with China showing higher demand for refined products while gasoline consumption in the US declined to seasonal averages after seeing the largest decline in three months last week.

A note from FGE also showed an expected increase in jet fuel demand in China starting from the end of this month led by higher summer travel demand. OPEC's secretary general also pointed out the divided demand globally at a recent conference and added that while Asia is experiencing strong demand growth, the trends in Europe and the US are a concern. He reiterated that lack of new investment in the sector to expand capacity is threatening global energy security. On the supply side, the EIA in its latest Short Term Energy Outlook, said that global liquid fuel output is expected to outpace demand in 2023 and 2024.

On the other hand, Bloomberg data showed Russian seaborne crude oil flows rebounded mainly led by higher purchases by India, although the importer has said it would not breach the price cap sanctions imposed on Russia. Weekly data on US crude oil production showed flattish trend after a decline of 100 tb/d during the week ended 3-March-2023 to reach 12.2 mb/d. Oil production in the OPEC, according to Bloomberg data, showed an increase of 120 tb/d mainly led by higher production in swing producers Nigeria and Libya.

The monthly increase in the CPI was higher than expected at 0.5 percent vs. estimates of 0.4 percent, according to Bloomberg. The higher-than-expected inflation once again bought back expectations of a 25 bps hike next week vs. no hikes that were expected after the banking crisis erupted in the US. Average crude oil prices showed mixed trend during February-2023 vs. January-2023, although the changes were largely minimal. OPEC crude basket averaged at \$81.88/b with a growth of 0.3 percent. The increase in Kuwait crude grade was similar at 0.3 percent and averaged at \$83.19/b while average Brent declined by 0.4 percent during the month to \$82.5/b.

Consensus expectation for Brent crude oil showed minimal changes as compared to last month, with marginal cuts for estimate in Q1 - 2023 and an upgrade for Q4-2023. EIA, however, expects a decline in prices after slashing its estimates for Brent spot prices from \$83.63/b in the STEO last month to USD 82.95/b in its latest report. The price forecast for 2024 were kept unchanged at \$77.57/b, according to EIA.

## Strike grips Sri Lanka as unions protest IMF bailout

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka deployed armed troops as trade unions crippled hospitals, ports and banks Wednesday to protest against high income taxes imposed as a precondition for a crucial IMF bailout.

Schools cancelled term tests and outpatient departments at hospitals closed due to the work stoppage that involved more than 40 trade unions. Fewer vehicles were seen on roads. Dockers at the main sea port in Colombo stayed away while air traffic controllers joined the combined industrial action to carry out "go slow" for two hours affecting at least 14 international flights. "All considered, our work-to-rule was for two hours, but we will consider a full-blown strike if the government does not roll back the new tax rates," Rajitha Seneviratne, secretary of the air traffic controllers' association, told



COLOMBO: Patients wait for the treatment at a government hospital in Colombo on March 15, 2023. Bankrupt Sri Lanka's hospitals were crippled and transport disrupted on March 15 as trade unions protested against the doubling of taxes to qualify for a crucial IMF bailout. — AFP



## Lifestyle | Features

## BTS absence hurting global K-pop growth: HYBE chairman

Making megastars BTS do their South Korean military service is slowing the global growth of K-pop, the chairman of the septet's agency HYBE said Wednesday. The boyband are widely considered South Korea's biggest-ever cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums

including global ratings and album sales—now showed declining demand for K-pop. "The absence of BTS is the first reason," Bang said. "I think it's very clear that the fact BTS is not active as a team is playing the biggest role in bringing about this change in numbers," he told a forum in Seoul.



In this file photo South Korean K-pop boy band BTS member J-Hope poses for a photo session during a press conference on BTS new album "BE (Deluxe Edition)" in Seoul.



In this file photo South Korean K-pop boy band BTS member Jin poses for a photo session during a press conference on BTS new album "BE (Deluxe Edition)" in Seoul.

around the world and dominating the charts while raking in billions for the country's economy and building a global legion of fans known as ARMYs.

But all able-bodied men in South Korea must serve at least 18 months in the military and, after a years-long debate about whether BTS deserved an exemption, Jin, the oldest member of the group, enlisted in December. Bang Si-hyuk, chairman of HYBE and the mastermind behind BTS, said figures-

BTS are the most prominent K-pop figures globally, he said, adding: "the market narrows significantly when BTS is taken out." His comments come days after HYBE suspended a controversial bid to acquire control of rival SM Entertainment, ending a lengthy, high-profile feud over the company's management. He was accused of a hostile takeover and seeking to monopolize K-pop, but Bang defended his move as a solution to K-pop's slowing growth.



In this file photo South Korean boy band BTS, also known as the Bangtan Boys, pose on the red carpet at the 28th Seoul Music Awards in Seoul.— AFP photos

## J-Hope next

HYBE announced last month that a second BTS member, J-Hope, has "initiated the military enlistment process", with local media reporting he was due to enlist in April. On Sunday, J-Hope appeared on a late night music talk show on KBS and said goodbye to fans, telling them: "I will be back soon from the military." Since their debut in 2013, BTS have been credited with generating billions for their country, as

well as boosting the image and soft power of South Korea—now a global cultural powerhouse.

They have been invited to speak at the United Nations, and to meet US President Joe Biden at the White House. But analysts have questioned what the future holds for the group after all seven members complete their military service. Some male K-pop stars have struggled to resume their careers after military service in a cut-throat industry where artists are easily replaceable.

"Obviously, I think it's true that enlisting in the military means the continuity of a person's career or their value as a national asset is damaged," said HYBE chairman Bang. "However, I think it's a completely different matter for an individual to happily accept the duty of the military," he added, saying he was "happy" about the decisions by the BTS members.— AFP

## Harvey Weinstein will not face retrial on deadlocked rape charges



Harvey Weinstein

Convicted rapist Harvey Weinstein will not be retried for alleged attacks on two women, a judge in Los Angeles ruled Tuesday, after a jury was unable to reach a verdict on the charges. The former movie mogul was convicted last year of raping a European actress in a Beverly Hills hotel a decade earlier. He was jailed for 16 years, a sentence he will serve after he completes a 23-year sentence imposed by a New York court.

But the jury in Los Angeles deadlocked on charges relating to two oth-

er women and prosecutors on Tuesday said they felt unable to proceed with a new trial. Superior Court Judge Lisa Lench granted the defense's motion to dismiss the remaining charges. A lengthy trial heard how the "Shakespeare in Love" producer had forced himself on young actresses trying to find a foothold in Hollywood.

Prosecutors said Weinstein exploited and abused women for years, and long enjoyed impunity because of his then-powerful position in the industry.

Bombshell allegations broke against him in 2017, launching the #MeToo movement and paving the way for hundreds of women to fight back against sexual violence in the workplace.

Dozens of women have now accused Weinstein of predatory behavior. The disgraced producer has long maintained his innocence and is appealing against his convictions in New York and Los Angeles. — AFP

## New research claims Leonardo da Vinci was son of a slave

Leonardo da Vinci, the painter of the "Mona Lisa" and a symbol of the Renaissance, was only half-Italian, his mother a slave from the Caucasus, new research revealed on Tuesday. Da Vinci's mother had long been thought a Tuscan peasant, but University of Naples professor Carlo Vecce, a specialist in the Old Master, believes the truth is more complicated. "Leonardo's mother was a Circassian slave... taken from her home in the Caucasus Mountains, sold and resold several times in Constantinople, then Venice, before arriving in Florence," he told AFP at the launch of a new book.

In the Italian city, she met a young notary, Piero (Peter) da Vinci, "and their son was called Leonardo". The findings of Vecce, who has spent decades studying da Vinci and curating his works, are based on Florence city archives.

They have formed the basis of a new novel, "The Smile of Caterina, the mother of Leonardo"—while also shedding new light on the artist himself. Any new discovery about da Vinci is hotly contested by the small world of experts who study him, but Vecce insists the evidence is there. Among the documents he found is one written by da Vinci's father himself, a legal document of emancipation for Caterina, "to recover her freedom and recover her human dignity".

## 'Spirit of freedom'

This document is dated 1452, and was presented Tuesday at a press conference at the headquarters of publishing house Giunti in Florence. It was written by "the man who loved Caterina when she was still a slave, who gave her this child named Leonardo and (was) also the person who helped to free her", Vecce said.

His assertion offers a radical change of perspective on da Vinci, who was believed to have been the product of an affair between Peter da Vinci and a different woman, young Tuscan peasant Caterina di Meo Lippi. Born in 1452 in the countryside outside Florence, da Vinci spent his life travelling around Italy before dying in Amboise, France in 1519, at the court of King Francis 1.

Vecce believes the difficult life of his "migrant" mother had an impact on the work of her brilliant son. "Caterina left Leonardo a great legacy, certainly, the spirit of freedom," he said, "which inspires all of his intellectual scientific work".

Da Vinci was a polymath, an artist who mastered several disciplines including sculpture, drawing, music and painting, but also engineering, anatomy, botany and architecture. "He doesn't let anything stop him," Vecce said.

Some may consider the idea that this epitome of a "Renaissance man" was the product of such a union too good to be true. But Paolo Galluzzi, a da Vinci historian and member of the prestigious Lincei scientific academy in Rome, said it is "by far the most convincing".

Speaking to AFP, he highlighted the quality of the documents discovered by his colleague, adding that there "must remain a minimum of doubt, because we cannot do a DNA test". Galluzzi said he was also not surprised. The period into which da Vinci was born marks "the beginning of modernity, the exchanges between people, cultures and civilizations which gave birth to the modern world", he said. — AFP



Visitors contemplate the Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa (la Joconde) painting in July 1945 in Paris, after precious artworks have been returned to the Louvre after being stashed away during the Second World War. — AFP

## Rock legend Lou Reed's tai chi book to be published

Rock pioneer and poet Lou Reed began writing a book in 2009 on an art at the heart of his lifestyle: tai chi. But the project went unfinished, remaining a collection of scattered notes when the groundbreaking musical experimentalist died in 2013 aged 71, after complications from a liver transplant. Those unpublished writings, including conversations with his fellow artists, friends and tai chi practitioners, come out this week, a decade after his death.

"He started it, we wanted to finish it," Laurie Anderson, the composer and artist who was Reed's longtime partner, told AFP. "The Art of the Straight Line" features essays and riffs by Reed, a meditation on his three decades as a dedicated tai chi practitioner. The ancient Chinese tradition helps reduce stress and anxiety and is often described as "meditation in motion," according to the leading medical center Mayo Clinic.

The book offers insight into the gentler facets of the once hard-living Velvet Underground frontman, whose deadpan demeanor and cantankerous interactions with the press meant his testy side occupied a fair amount of the public's attention. "Not to get too flowery here but I want more out of life than a gold record and fame," he wrote. "I want to mature like a warrior."

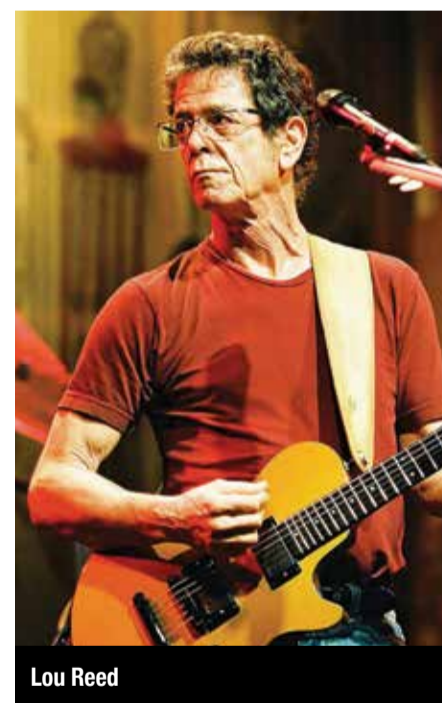
"I want the power and grace I never had a chance to learn. Tai chi puts you in touch with the invisible power of, yes, the universe. Change your energy, change your mind." Reed fostered a long collaboration with Master Ren Guang Yi, studying for hours most days when he wasn't touring. He was so committed to the practice that he took his final breaths while "doing the famous 21 form of tai chi with just his musician's hands moving through the air," Anderson said at the time of his death.

Reed began studying tai chi in the 1980s when he was still heavily into drugs, according to Anderson. The prolific artist behind classics including "Walk on the Wild Side" and "Sweet Jane" also penned the frank "Heroin," an agitated depiction of the experience of using. "Not the greatest time to start, but you know, what's a bad time to start?" said Anderson, who was married to Reed at the time of his death. "He was very, very persistent," she said, referring to his tai chi practice. "He managed to keep going for decades and become very, very proficient."

## 'One big power chord'

Reed was not alone as a rock star who was into tai chi, but he was an early devotee when the ancient practice became popular in the United States. "It's all one big power chord in a certain way," Anderson laughed, when asked how tai chi corresponded to rock. "They're running along the same frequency." She recalled seeing members of Metallica do tai chi with Reed, adding that "they were very fascinated by it."

The alt-rock icon and heavy metal band collaborated on the 2011 album "Lulu." "Lou was, like, kind of their grandmaster" both in terms of the record and "how to be kind of a grand old man," Anderson said.



Lou Reed

"These are no longer bad boys," she said, explaining that tai chi "teaches you how to get old, in a country where old people are kind of made fun of." Releasing Reed's writings on his beloved practice was a natural progression that followed his decades of promoting its benefits.

He "was not shy about talking to people about it," Anderson said. "He was looking at people going, 'You have terrible posture. Have you ever done tai chi? You're a wreck,'" she laughed. "He did that to his surgeon before he'd done his liver transplant... this is the guy who's just about to take a knife to him." But it came from a genuine desire to help, she said: "He was the most supportive person you can imagine." "He really wanted in every way to improve his life," Anderson said. "It was really inspiring." "He was not someone who would sit around and mope about how bad things were." — AFP

## 'Almost ballet': Keanu Reeves brings 'John Wick' to Paris

Keanu Reeves is back with the fourth chapter of his mega-hit gun-frenzy franchise "John Wick" next week. He sees its expertly coordinated action scenes as "almost ballet". "It was always a dream of mine to act in Paris, and to be back was amazing," the jovial 58-year-old film star told AFP on a recent trip to the French capital.



Keanu Reeves

The last time he worked here, more than 35 years ago, it was for a very different project: the period drama "Dangerous Liaisons". These days, he is best known as the brutal but elegantly suited assassin John Wick, whose latest outing features bravura stunt scenes at tourist hotspots like Montmartre, the Trocadero and the Arc de Triomphe.

"To be able to go to the places that we did with 'John Wick: Chapter 4', like filming in front of the Sacre-Coeur and the steps up to it in Montmartre, to be in the canal underneath the city, to be on the streets shooting at night—it was very special." He likes the physicality of the filmmaking. "I like a good action film," he said. "We use digital technology, but we're more into the flesh-and-blood, visceral celebration of the movement of bodies, of the violence—it's almost ballet, you know."

## Reaching the limit

It came as something of a surprise that John Wick—the man taking revenge for the murder of his dog in the first installment in 2014 -- has turned into such an iconic role for Reeves. Famously, the franchise is helmed by Reeves's stunt double from "The Matrix", Chad Stahelski. "The role in 'The Matrix' was a wonderful, life-changing experience in my youth, and John Wick is that for my elder years, for my fifties," Reeves said.

Approaching 60, is he getting too old for all those painful-looking fight scenes? "I'm getting close! Did we reach the limit? I don't know," he said. "What we do is not easy... I need to train for months before we do it. I have to have teams of stunt people." "John Wick" takes its inspiration primarily from classic Hong Kong action films, with added visual cues from European and Hollywood noir thrillers.

Beyond the high-level stunts, Reeves says it's the internal tension of the main character that keeps audiences captivated. "John Wick the man and John Wick the assassin... they're almost at war with each other, but they're also connected," Reeves said. "That interplay, that tension I think is fascinating." — AFP



# The Saudi designer to the stars

Indian actress Deepika Padukone arrives for the screening of the film "Ash is Purest White (Jiang hu er nv)" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.



Saudi fashion designer Mohammed Ashi

In this file photo US model Madison Headrick arrives for the screening of the film "La Belle Epoque" at the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.



Thai model Peechaya Wattanamontree



In this file photo taken on January 28, 2018 Cardi B arrives for the 60th Grammy Awards in New York.

He has dressed celebrity royalty around the world from Beyonce and Deepika Padukone to Zendaya and Cardi B but for years few of Mohammed Ashi's clients knew he was Saudi Arabia's first big-name designer. "In the 90s I was the only designer from Saudi. But I never said I was Saudi. I wanted the clothes to be out front, not me," Ashi told AFP in a rare interview at his Paris studio. It is partly shyness-he still prefers not to be photographed himself-but also the fact that Western fashion was largely taboo in public, certainly for women, when he was growing up in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s.

Ashi made his career abroad, training in the United States and working for Givenchy and Lebanese couturier Elie Saab before settling in France. Now, with Saudi Arabia going through momentous social changes, he has been welcomed home as a mentor for its Fashion Commission, set up in 2020 to help build a homegrown industry. "A few months ago, I was invited publicly to talk in Saudi for the first time, and so many people came up to me afterwards. I'm getting recognition from the younger generation that I never expected," he said. "They're giving scholarships to people for something that was prohibited when I was growing up. It's an iconic moment," he added.

### Fashion capital?

Critics of the country's de facto ruler, Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, see the easing of social restrictions as a PR campaign designed to distract from continued human rights abuses. But there is no doubting the opportunities it has opened up for young creatives, such as 27-year-old Reem Alsabhan, whose outfits now grace local events. "From the beginning of my studies, I kept repeating a sentence I really believed, even if it surprised people: Riyadh will become one of the most important fashion capitals," she told AFP at her Riyadh workshop. "Now the signs of this future are beginning to appear." Previously unthinkable pub-

lic events-concerts, galas, the new Red Sea Film Festival-mean Saudi Arabia now has red carpets on which to show off Alsabhan's designs. Nonetheless, the foundations of the industry were laid much further back, said Burak Cakmak, head of the Saudi Fashion Commission. "Many local creatives have built fashion

### 'A journey'

For Ashi, it makes sense that Saudi Arabia should become a fashion hub since, he says, its oil wealth has been keeping European labels afloat for decades. Saudi Arabia takes "60 or 70 percent of French couture", especially wedding dresses, he said.

Cannes. A highlight was seeing Beyonce in his extravagantly ruffled fuchsia gown at a memorial show for Nelson Mandela. Though proud of being a role model for young Saudi designers, he still prefers to see himself as "a citizen of the world". Stopping to show the detail of an elaborate lace couture dress,



In this file photo US model Noel Capri Berry arrives for the screening of the film "Aline, The Voice Of Love" at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

businesses in the past 20, 30 years for the local market but didn't feel the need to tell their stories abroad-or dare to do so," he told AFP. "That allowed the system to build up in a controlled way... and now people can see there are hundreds of brands, very connected to their culture but also inspired by the rest of the world."

"Most of the big French houses rely on this but they don't like to talk about it because they don't want to be seen as just tailors-they want to be a 'brand'." Ashi's diary is a hectic whirl of client fittings and preparations for the next haute couture week. His outfits show up on red carpets from the Oscars to

he said: "The pattern was done in London, the fabric in Italy, the embroidery in India and it was assembled here in Paris. "It's a journey for these clothes to happen, just like me." — AFP

## Zara owner Inditex posts record profit

Zara owner Inditex, the world's biggest fashion retailer, reported record profits for 2022 despite halting operations in Russia and soaring global inflation. Net profit reached 4.1 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) last year, a 27 percent jump from 2021, said Inditex, whose eight brands include younger fashion chain Pull&Bear and upmarket label Massimo Dutti. Sales also hit a re-

cord, surging 17 percent to 32.6 billion euros. "The excellent results of 2022 show the strength of our business model," said Inditex chief executive Oscar Garcia Maceiras.

Inditex, like many other Western companies, closed up shop in Russia last year following the invasion of Ukraine and sweeping Western sanctions against Moscow. The group shut its 514 stores in Russia, its second biggest market after Spain. The shops were sold to Emirati group Daher, which has business interests in retail and real estate, in October. Inditex also overcame a surge in production costs that has hit manufacturers as inflation soared following Russia's assault on Ukraine.



Spanish textile giant Inditex CEO Oscar Garcia Maceiras gives a press conference to announce Inditex group 2022 earnings at the headquarters in Arteixo, in the northwestern Spanish region of Galicia.

The Spanish group underwent a leadership shake-up last year, with Marta Ortega, daughter of multi-billionaire founder Amancio Ortega, taking over as chairwoman. The company said it expects further growth in 2023, with sales between February 1 and March 13 already up 13.5 percent compared to the same period last year. — AFP

In this file photo people pass by a Zara shop announcing discounts on the first day of the winter sales in Barcelona. — AFP photos



## Barca to wear Rosalia 'Motomami' logo on Clasico shirt

Barcelona will wear a logo from Spanish pop singer Rosalia on their shirt for this weekend's El Clasico against Real Madrid, in place of the Spotify symbol, the Catalans said on Wednesday. It is the second time this season Barcelona have changed their shirt for the Clasico, wearing Canadian rapper Drake's "OVO Owl" logo at the Santiago Bernabeu in October, with Madrid winning 3-1. As part of Barcelona's sponsorship deal agreed in 2022 with music streaming platform Spotify, worth around 280 million euros (\$299 million) across four years, the club can put different artists in the spotlight on their shirt.

Rosalia is one of Spain's most successful singers and has twice been named the country's woman of the year by Forbes. The image on the front of Barcelona's shirt will be her "Motomami" logo, which was the name of her third studio album, released in 2022. "Barca and Spotify have picked Rosalia because it is a year ago this month that her album Motomami was released, a record that has stretched the boundaries of contemporary music," Barca said before Sunday's game at Camp Nou.



"Rosalia was the top streamed born in Spanish territory artist worldwide on Spotify in 2022, and plays of her songs on the service increased by 110% year over year. "In 2022 she was the most played female artist in the city of Barcelona." The club did not sell replica shirts with the Drake logo on but are releasing 1899 editions of this strip, as well as 22 limited edition jerseys with glow-in-the-dark lettering, retailing at 1,999.99 euros (\$2,136) each. Barcelona's women's team will also wear the special Motomami kit in their clash with Real Madrid on March 25 in Liga F. — AFP



# Bucks clinch NBA playoff berth; Nuggets fall again

## Los Angeles Lakers get back to winning ways

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks became the first team to clinch an NBA playoff place on Tuesday after holding off a late rally from the Phoenix Suns to complete a 116-104 road victory in Arizona. Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 36 points with 11 rebounds and eight assists as the Bucks brought up their 50th win of the regular season to cement their grip on first place at the top of the Eastern Conference.

Antetokounmpo was backed by 21 points from Brook Lopez while three other Milwaukee players finished in double figures. The Bucks now lead the Eastern Conference by three games from Boston with a 50-19 record as the regular season enters its final stretch.

But it needed a late burst of scoring by Milwaukee to make sure of victory, the Bucks stitching together a 24-9 run in the final seven minutes of the fourth quarter to pull clear after the Suns had edged into a 95-92 lead with 8min 47sec remaining. Devin Booker led the Suns scorers with 30 points while Deandre Ayton finished with 16 points for the hosts. At the top of the Western Conference, meanwhile, the Denver Nuggets slumped to a fourth straight defeat as Fred VanVleet kept the Toronto Raptors' playoff hopes alive with a virtuoso display in a 125-110 victory.

Toronto point guard VanVleet finished with 36 points, including eight three-pointers, with seven assists and three steals to give Toronto a crucial win as they aim to remain in contention for a place in the postseason. The Raptors went on the front foot from the outset, pouring in a franchise record 49 points in a remarkable first quarter to leave conference leaders Denver shellshocked. Although a late rally saw Denver close to within six points in the fourth, Toronto went on a late run

to pull away once more and complete a wire-to-wire victory at the Scotiabank Arena.

### 'We're in chill mode'

Denver coach Michael Malone had stern words for his team after the defeat. "I need to find some guys who are ready to fight with me, because right now we're in chill mode," Malone said. "And we can't be in chill mode with 13 games to go in the season. We've got to find a way to get our swagger back and get back to playing Denver Nugget basketball."

In other games Tuesday, the Los Angeles Lakers got back to winning ways after Sunday's defeat to the New York Knicks with a comprehensive 123-108 road win over the New Orleans Pelicans in the Big Easy. With LeBron James sidelined, Anthony Davis once again stepped up for the Lakers with 35 points and 17 rebounds while Malik Beasley put on a three-point shooting clinic, making 7-of-12 attempts from beyond the arc in a 24-point haul. The win keeps the Lakers firmly in contention for a playoff place with just under four weeks of the regular season remaining.

"We're just trying to stay alive," Davis said afterwards. "We came out with a mindset of having this as a must-win game." Davis had been determined to produce a big performance against his former club, after blaming himself for the Lakers' 112-108 loss to the Knicks on Sunday. "Everybody did their job (on Sunday) except myself. That was on me," Davis said. "I never want to have a performance like I did the other night and let my team down. I wanted to come out tonight and make a difference."

In Portland, the in-form New York Knicks overcame a 38-point display from Damian Lillard which included eight three-pointers to overpower



PHOENIX: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks loses the ball as he drives against Josh Okogie #2 of the Phoenix Suns during the second half of the NBA game at Footprint Center on March 14, 2023. —AFP

the Trail Blazers 123-107. Immanuel Quickley had 26 points, Julius Randle 24 and RJ Barrett 22 on a night when six Knicks players broke double figures. Cleveland meanwhile kept up their pursuit of Philadelphia in the Eastern Conference with a

120-104 win over the Charlotte Hornets in North Carolina. Evan Mobley led the Cavaliers scorers in the absence of Donovan Mitchell with 26 points as Cleveland improved to 44-27 to remain fourth in the East. —AFP

## Mexico down Britain in World Baseball Classic; Canada back on track

LOS ANGELES: Mexico defeated Great Britain 2-1 on Tuesday to stay on course for a place in the World Baseball Classic quarter-finals as Canada got their campaign back on track with a 5-0 defeat of Colombia. Britain, playing in the tournament for the first time, pulled off an upset on Monday with a defeat of Colombia in Pool C. But any hopes of a repeat against a Mexico team who stunned the star-studded United States side on Sunday was snuffed out in a tense duel in Phoenix.

Mexico took the lead in the bottom of the second inning when Alexis Wilson's single scored Isaac Paredes. Britain pulled level in the top of the sixth when BJ Murray Jr singled to shortstop Alan Trejo, allowing Chavez Young to scamper home from third base to tie the game at 1-1. Mexico regained the lead in the next inning, with Wilson again coming up clutch with a line drive to left field to score Trejo for the winning run.

Canada, Mexico and the United States are all level with two wins and one defeat heading into the final round of fixtures in Pool C. Mexico and Canada face off against each other on Wednesday where a victory for either side will guarantee a quarter-final berth. The United States will face Colombia in their final group game where a win will ensure their safe passage. Canada warmed up for Mexico with a comfort-

## Alcaraz, Swiatek roll into Indian Wells quarters

INDIAN WELLS: Top seeds Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek eased into the Indian Wells quarter-finals on cue on Tuesday as in-form Daniil Medvedev defied injury in a wild three-set win over Alexander Zverev. Alcaraz, the world number two who can regain the top ranking with a win this week, had a short night's work on Stadium Court as Britain's Jack Draper retired with an abdominal injury with the Spaniard up 6-2, 2-0.

World number one Swiatek, meanwhile, had the last word in most of the long rallies as she powered past 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu 6-3, 6-1. Their smooth progression was a stark contrast to the drama earlier in the day, when Medvedev shook off a second-set fall and badly twisted ankle to beat Zverev 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 to push his ATP win streak to 17 matches. The world number six, coming off ATP wins in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, rolled his right ankle and lay on the court for several minutes before limping to his chair.

Zverev, who suffered three torn ankle ligaments at last year's French Open, looked on in concern, but after the injury was examined and taped by medical staff Medvedev continued and turned

## Constitution Hill romps to victory

LONDON: Constitution Hill demolished his Champion Hurdle rivals to register a dominant victory on the opening day of the Cheltenham Festival on Tuesday. The 4-11 favorite, unbeaten over hurdles for trainer Nicky Henderson and jockey Nico de Boinville, finished nine lengths clear of second-placed State Man. De Boinville flicked the reins on the turn for home and Constitution Hill kicked up a gear, powering up



PHOENIX: Anfernee Seymour #9 of Team Great Britain catches a fly ball as Jaden Rudd #3 and Darnell Sweeney #24 back up the play in the fifth inning of the World Baseball Classic Pool C game against Team Mexico on March 14, 2023. —AFP

able win over Colombia but the victory was marred by an injury to star first baseman Freddie Freeman.

The Los Angeles Dodgers ace exited in the fourth inning with what looked like a hamstring strain. Canada manager Ernie Whitt revealed later that Freeman would miss Wednesday's crunch clash with Mexico. "He felt something on one of his swings, his

second at-bat," Whitt said. "So again we would do that to anyone if there's discomfort or something like that, we're going to take them out," Whitt said. In Pool D, Venezuela rolled to their third straight win of the tournament - and a place in the last eight - with a 4-1 win over Nicaragua. The Dominican Republic thrashed Israel 10-0 in the day's other game. —AFP

the match around. "In the beginning it was quite painful, so I was more concerned and focused on my ankle than the game," Medvedev said. "Then that actually helped me a little bit to play better. For the rest of the match, adrenaline was probably kicking in. So it was not easy to walk, that's why I was limping, but to move was easier."

He saved all 10 break points he faced in the second set, grabbing a 4-1 lead on the way to victory in the tiebreaker. Up an early break in the third, Medvedev wasted a match point as he was broken in the 10th game. Zverev couldn't build on that, however, and Medvedev held at love to clinch the win after three hours and 17 minutes. Ankle allowing, Medvedev was scheduled to face 28th-ranked Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina-a 6-3, 6-4 winner over Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin on Wednesday. Alcaraz will have a day off before facing Felix Auger-Aliassime, who saved six match points-three in the third-set tiebreaker-in his 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Tommy Paul. Not that Alcaraz will need the rest after his 46-minute outing. "This is not the way anybody wants to win a match," Alcaraz said. Swiatek's match followed a familiar pattern, with last year's French and US Open winner feeling out her opponent over a few close games before pulling away for a convincing win.

"I just feel like in these longer rallies I was the one who showed I can bring the pressure on defense and it's not easy to finish the rally. "She was actually doing the same," Swiatek said. "She was running to every ball and she played those slices which are tricky, but honestly I'm pretty happy with how positive I was and disciplined." She next faces Romania's



INDIAN WELLS: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain in action against Jack Draper of Great Britain during BNP Paribas Open on March 14, 2023 in Indian Wells, California. —AFP

Sorana Cirstea, who battled to a 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 victory over fifth-ranked Caroline Garcia of France. Men's defending champion Taylor Fritz defeated Hungarian Marton Fucsovics 6-4, 6-3 in a tense match that belied the straightforward scoreline. Fritz will face Italian Jannik Sinner, who beat three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka 6-1, 6-4. Britain's 2021 champion Cameron Norrie beat seventh-ranked Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-4 to line up a clash with American Frances Tiafoe, a 6-4, 6-4 winner over Chilean qualifier Alejandro Tabilo. —AFP

head said his family, who are mourning his 13-year-old son Jack who was killed in a riding accident last year, felt the support from the Cheltenham crowd.

"You dream of the fairytale ending, but so often it doesn't happen. This is what she (the horse) deserves. She is just an unbelievable mare, and I'm just delighted," he said. "We've obviously had a terrible year with Jack and everything, and just the support people have given us... Most of it (the cheers as the horse came into the winner's enclosure) is for Honey, because she has been so unbelievable, but everyone has shown us so much support. "We're really grateful for that - it's been an incredibly tough time." —AFP



Japan's Shohei Ohtani

## Ohtani has World Baseball semis in his sights

TOKYO: Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani has been having a ball at the World Baseball Classic and is determined not to let Italy wipe the smile off his face in Thursday's quarter-final. Japan won all four of their first-round games in Tokyo and Ohtani appears to be relishing playing in his home country for the first time in five years. The Los Angeles Angels ace can be seen during games laughing and joking with teammates and teased the Tokyo Dome crowd that their cheers were not loud enough after he hit a home run against Australia.

Japan can reach the semi-finals if they beat Italy in Tokyo but any mistake will see their bid for a record third title come to an abrupt halt. Ohtani admitted that there will be pressure on him as Japan's starting pitcher but he urged his teammates to "go into the game with the same feeling that we always have". "It's simple-if you win you enjoy it, and if you lose it's frustrating," he told reporters on Wednesday. "We've won our four games so far so I've enjoyed them all." Ohtani is one of baseball's biggest names and his presence in Japan's team has pushed the country's media coverage of the tournament into the stratosphere.

Other players have also come in for huge attention, including American-born Lars Nootbaar, who has never played for a Japanese club but has become massively popular with fans. Ohtani said the buoyant atmosphere in the team was down to "a good balance". "There are senior players who are older than me and they have a serious attitude-there are a lot of good characters around," he said. "You don't need to do anything special to create a good atmosphere."

### 'Once-in-a-lifetime player'

Ohtani has earned comparisons with the legendary Babe Ruth for playing as both a pitcher and a hitter-something almost unheard of in baseball. He has enjoyed huge success since moving to Major League Baseball and was named American League Most Valuable Player in 2021.

He played as the starting pitcher in Japan's World Baseball Classic opening win over China and has also batted in every game so far. Japan manager Hideki Kuriyama said Ohtani will likely continue to play his unique two-way game against the Italians. "That's his style," said Kuriyama. "Of course we will have to have a final check on him tomorrow but he will play in the way Shohei Ohtani is known for." Italy made it to the quarter-finals after a chaotic end to Pool A, which was played in the Taiwanese city of Taichung. —AFP



Sports

# Morocco joins Spain-Portugal centenary 2030 World Cup bid

## War-torn Ukraine likely to be dropped from the bid

**RABAT:** King Mohammed VI of Morocco announced on Tuesday that his country had joined the bid by Spain and Portugal to host the centenary World Cup in 2030. The announcement means that war-torn Ukraine is likely to be dropped from the bid. King Mohammed made the announcement in a message delivered as he was named the winner of the African Football Confederation 2022 Award of Excellence in Kigali, where world governing body FIFA is holding its annual congress.

A spokesman for the Spanish football federation told AFP it would meet with its Portuguese and Moroccan counterparts in Kigali on Wednesday,

but made no mention of Ukraine. "The presidents will announce any news regarding the candidacy for the 2030 World Cup in Kigali," the spokesman added. Spain and Portugal declared their joint candidacy in 2021, before adding Ukraine to their bid last October.

In contrast to the distance between Ukraine, and Spain and Portugal, Morocco is separated from Spain only by the Strait of Gibraltar. A South American bid including Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile is set to challenge the Iberian bid, and Saudi Arabia hopes to lead a joint ticket with Egypt and Greece.

The World Cup has had joint hosts before. In 2002 Japan and South Korea shared the competition. In 2026, the finals will be played in the United States, Mexico and Canada, when 11 of the 16 planned venues will be in the US. The 2026 World Cup will expand from 32 teams to 48 and, under the format FIFA announced on Tuesday, will stretch to 104 matches, up from 64 in Qatar last year. Morocco was the other candidate for 2026 but finished a distant second in the voting. That was the fifth time Morocco had bid to host the finals after trying for 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010 World Cups.

Morocco had already said it planned to bid for

the 2030 World Cup, which has been held in Africa once, in South Africa in 2010. "This candidature will be a gathering of the best on both sides, and the demonstration of an alliance of genius, creativity, experience and means," said King Mohammed in his message, read by the Moroccan Minister of Sports Chakib Benmoussa. At the last World Cup, in December in Qatar, Morocco became the first nation from either Africa or the Arab world to reach the semi-finals. The first World Cup, in 1930, was hosted and won by Uruguay, which is making a joint bid with Argentina, Paraguay and Chile. — AFP



KUWAIT: Sports and media personalities pose for a group photo.

## Sports and media personalities meet

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** As many sports organizations in Kuwait are doing their best to return to their excellence of yesterday, some are looking for more financial support as acknowledged by member of parliament Faisal Al-Kandary. He said that it should be done under the supervision of concerned authorities in order for Kuwait sport develop and catch up with other countries.

"It is not realistic to allocate minimal amounts and ask sports federations to make achievements and progress in winning championships," he said, adding that there should be legislations in favor of athletes. Al-Kandary was speaking during a gathering of leading sports and media personalities. The meeting was organized by the Chairman of Triathlon Club and

Federation Rashed Al-Kandary on Tuesday evening.

MP Faisal Al-Kandary, Public Authority for Sports officials Hamid Al-Hazeem, Fahad Al-Mutairi, Former officials Saqer Al-Mulla and Ali Merwi attended the event. The gathering also included representatives from the football, basketball, volleyball, Karting, Taekwondo, bicycling, Winter games, Sea Club, Chairmen of Fahaheel, Burqan, Salmiya, Qurain and Sahel clubs. Al-Kandary said the current situation needs such gathering to bring athletes together in a friendly atmosphere.

Meanwhile, former Deputy Director General of PAS Saqer Al-Mulla thanked Rashed Al-Kandary for bringing the sport community together. "I am pleased with this gathering that brings those who are contributing to the development of Kuwait sport together. Kuwait sport will be better during the next five years through the activation of sports investment - and having financial income, implementing fulltime dedication for athletes as well as the professional system PAS officials are working on," he said.

It means that there will be 104 matches, a huge rise compared to the 64 games played in the 2022 tournament and an increase even on the original plan that the 2026 World Cup would feature 80 matches. FIFA's initial plan for 2026 was for 16 groups of three teams, from which the top two countries would advance to the last 32. The new decided format means the top two in each group will go through to the knockout round along with the eight best third-placed sides.

As a result, the finalists, and the teams finishing third and fourth, will play a total of eight games instead of the current seven. The decision comes after a dramatic and entertaining group stage at the tournament in Qatar convinced FIFA that a rethink to its original 2026 blueprint was needed. "The groups of four have been absolutely incredible until the last minute of the last match," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in December. — AFP

## IOC has 'last word' on Russia inclusion

**PARIS:** The head of the Paris Olympics organizing committee Tony Estanguet said in an interview to mark 500 days before the start of the Games that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would have the "last word" on whether athletes from Russian and Belarus will be allowed to compete next year.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, assisted by its ally Belarus, there have been calls from across the sporting world either to ban their athletes or have them compete under a neutral flag. Last week, however, the International Fencing Federation (FIE) became the first Olympic sport to reopen events to athletes from the two nations when it decided to allow fencers to compete in Olympic qualifying events, sparking outrage in Ukraine.

"The international federations are currently refining their qualifications, to know if Russian or Belarusian athletes will be allowed to participate in these qualifying competitions," Estanguet told AFP. "And then the IOC, depending on what the international federations have done, even if Russian or Belarusian athletes have qualified, will be able to say whether it will allow them to participate in these Games or not. "This decision has not been taken. And Paris 2024 is not in a position to decide."

Estanguet said the priority, however, was not the Olympics but "how the situation can be resolved quickly and how we can best support the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian athletes". The three-time Olympic gold medalist said he had discussed the Russia/Belarus question with French President Emmanuel Macron. "Of course there are exchanges between us and the president of the republic, and between the president and the IOC," Estanguet said. "Again, it is the IOC that has the last word." — AFP

## Arsenal target Europa, Premier League glory

**LONDON:** Mikel Arteta insists Arsenal will not down tools in the Europa League to help their bid to win a first Premier League title for 19 years. Arteta's Premier League leaders sit five points clear of second placed Manchester City with 11 games left. Bowing out of the Europa League could aid the Gunners' hopes of holding onto the lead in the title race as it would allow more recovery and preparation time. But Arteta does not share that view because the Arsenal boss is trying to restore a winning culture to a club mired in mediocrity for much of the past two decades.

Arsenal host Sporting Lisbon in the second leg of their Europa League last 16 clash on Thursday with the tie delicately balanced after a 2-2 draw in Portugal last week. "Our priority is the two competitions," Arteta said. "The best way to prepare for any competition is to win the previous match and having the confidence and the proper emotion to approach the next game." Arteta's philosophy has so far been proved right. Arsenal have won six and drawn one of their seven Premier League games immediately following their Europa League matches this season.

Despite arriving back in London in the early hours of Friday morning, the visitors cruised to a 3-0 win at Fulham on Sunday with the game won by half-time. It is master against the apprentice in the Premier League title fight as Arteta takes on his former boss in City manager Pep Guardiola. Arteta was Guardiola's assistant for three years between 2016 and 2019. The influence of Guardiola is clear to see Arsenal's style of play under Arteta, but also in the mentality the Spaniard is trying to instill. — AFP



LONDON: Fulham's Jamaican striker Bobby Decordova-Reid jumps a challenge from Arsenal's Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Arsenal. — AFP

## World Cup 2026 to feature 12 groups of four teams

**KIGALI:** The expanded 2026 men's World Cup in North America will start with 12 groups of four teams in a change from the original planned format of 16 groups of three, football's world governing body FIFA announced on Tuesday. The next World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will be the first to feature 48 teams, a sharp increase from the 32 sides at last year's tournament in Qatar. "The revised format mitigates the risk of collusion and ensures that all the teams play a minimum of three matches, while providing balanced rest time between competing teams," FIFA said.

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaifan	24849807
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Shamiya	24848913
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shuwaikh	24814507
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Chest Hospital	24849400	Nuzha	22526804
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Adan Hospital	23940620	Qadsiya	22515088
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Dasmah	22532265
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

### Clinics

### Change of Name

**I, Ismail**, holder of passport No. Z4825276, do hereby change my name to Ismail (as given name) Ali Husain (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Ismail Ali Husain and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3184) - 16-03-2023

**I, SHAIK MOHAMED ALAM SHAIKH MOHAMED HANIF** holder of Passport No. L3857198 do hereby change my name to ALAM MOHD HANIF PARANDE for all purposes. (C#3183) - 15-03-2023

**I, Michelle Henry Fernandes**, holder of passport no. T5337449, do hereby change my name to Michelle Antonet (as given name) D'Costa (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Michelle Antonet D'Costa and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3181) - 14-03-2023

**I, Shahnas Riyas**, decided to change my name in passport (T5333279) as Shehnaz Azmin, for all future purposes. (C#3180) - 14-03-2023

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Mr. Jibin Joseph, son of Mr. Joseph Payikkattu, resident of Payikkattu House, PO Kalanky, Ulikkal Via, Kannur - 670705, Kerala and Ms. Soniamol Kochupurackal Shyni, daughter of Mr. Sankarankuttan Kunjumon, resident of Kochupurackal House, Perumbaikadu P.O, Kottayam - 686016, Kerala both Indian Nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Kamal Singh Rathore)  
First Secretary (Community Affairs)  
and Marriage Officer,  
Embassy of India, Kuwait.  
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in



## Man City demolish Leipzig 7-0

Haaland equals a Champions League record



MANCHESTER: Leipzig's Portuguese striker Andre Silva falls to the ground after taking a shot during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second-leg football match between Manchester City and RB Leipzig on March 14, 2023. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Erling Haaland equaled a Champions League record with a five-goal haul to ease Manchester City into the quarter-finals at RB Leipzig's expense with a 7-0 win on Tuesday. Haaland also set a new club record for goals in a season of 39 in the process as Pep Guardiola's men reached the last eight for the sixth consecutive season with an 8-1 aggregate victory.

"My super strength is scoring goals," said Haaland. "A lot of it is being quick in the mind and trying to put it where the goalkeeper is not." Abu Dhabi-owned City are yet to go all the way in the Champions League, but they have never had a striker of Haaland's quality to make the difference in the latter stages before. At just 22 he now has 33 goals in 25 appearances in Europe's premier club competition. "Firstly, I'm proud to play in this competition, I love it," added Haaland. "Five goals! To win 7-0 is amazing."

The snowy weather was more akin to Haaland's homeland, but City did not freeze under the pressure and kept their Champions League dreams alive. The tie was delicately balanced after a 1-1 draw in eastern Germany three weeks ago, but a Leipzig side depleted by injury never looked like a match for their star-studded opponents. "That was an incredible performance," said Leipzig coach Marco Rose. "They didn't allow us to control the game at all, at no stage of the game. The bottom line is disappointing for us but they really deserved it."

Guardiola had kept Kevin De Bruyne in reserve for City's 1-0 win at Crystal Palace in the Premier League at the weekend and on his return to the starting line-up, the Belgian was back to his best. Ilkay Gundogan should have opened the scoring after just three minutes from De Bruyne's inviting cross. There was some fortune surrounding City's opener as VAR

spotted a handball against Benjamin Henrichs that led to a penalty that neither the City players nor the crowd even noticed.

### Denied record chance

Haaland fired low to Janis Blaswich's left to maintain his perfect record from the spot for City with his sixth penalty of the season. Two minutes later it was 2-0 as Haaland teed up De Bruyne, who smashed a shot against the bar, and then showed his speed and strength to power home a header from the rebound. Haaland had three before half-time as Ruben Dias rose highest to head Jack Grealish's corner onto the post and Amadou Haidara's attempted clearance ricocheted off City's number nine into the net.

Gundogan's classy finish into the far corner four minutes into the second half rubbed more salt into

Leipzig's wounds before Haaland started rewriting the record books. Firstly, he hammered home at the second attempt after Blaswich parried his initial header to match Tommy Johnson's record of 38 goals for City in the 1928-29 season. Haaland set a new mark with still three months of the campaign to go when he snaffled up another rebound after Blaswich saved from Manuel Akanji.

In the process, he moved level with Lionel Messi and Luiz Adriano's record of scoring five goals in a Champions League game. But Guardiola denied his star striker the chance of another record as he replaced him with Julian Alvarez with 25 minutes remaining. "If he achieves all these milestones at 22 his life would be boring," joked Guardiola on making the change. Instead, it was left to De Bruyne to have the final say as he curled a superb strike into the top corner in stoppage time. — AFP

### Inter Milan reach CL quarter-finals, frustrate Porto

PORTO: Inter Milan held off Porto in a gritty 0-0 draw on Tuesday to reach the Champions League (CL) quarter-finals, with a 1-0 aggregate triumph. The Italian side, three-time winners of this competition, progressed to the last eight for the first time since 2011. For the first time since 2006, both Inter and AC Milan have reached the quarter-finals. Clutching a one-goal advantage from Romelu Lukaku's last 16 first leg late winner, Inter set up to frustrate at the Estadio do Dragao.

Porto had the better of the game but only managed to test Inter goalkeeper Andre Onana on a few occasions and failed to make the last eight for the third time in their last five attempts. Their finest chances came in stoppage time at the end, when Mehdi Taremi and Marko Grujic both hit the woodwork and Marcano had an effort cleared off the line. "There are so many emotions right now, after so many years we are proud of this achievement," Inter midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu said.

"We made some mistakes but we did a great job, it was very difficult but I congratulate the team for the great job." Inter have faced criticism for their domestic form but Calhanoglu said this game provided a morale boost. "Anything can happen in the Champions League—this match restores motivation for us," he added. "We did a great job, we didn't score but we worked hard until the final whistle and we qualified." Inter coach Simone Inzaghi, aiming

to end a bad run of form away from home, started with Edin Dzeko and Lautaro Martinez up front, with first-leg match-winner Romelu Lukaku on the bench. Porto have a strong recent record against Italian sides, knocking out Juventus and Roma in recent years, but the Portuguese champions could not score against Inter in 180 minutes. They were unable to include veteran centre-back Pepe, 40, in the squad, shorn of their captain at the last minute.

Porto were also without Otavio, sent off at the San Siro, but Stephen Eustaquio stepped in for him and impressed. Matheus Uribe lashed a vicious strike just wide of Inter's goal early on, while Porto goalkeeper Diogo Costa made solid saves from Dzeko and Nicolo Barella. Sergio Conceicao's side were in the ascendancy for much of the first half and only a fine sliding block by Federico Dimarco denied Evanilson. The hosts might have taken the lead just before the break but Eustaquio could not reach Brazilian winger Pepe's tempting cross.

Grujic tested Andre Onana with a low drive as Porto's urgency rose, while Galeno also forced the Cameroon international into a save. Inter lost Alessandro Bastoni to an apparent hamstring injury, but held on tightly to their slim first-leg advantage. Milan Skriniar made his return from injury in the final stages as Inzaghi's side knuckled down and denied Porto at every turn.

Porto's first clear chance of the game arrived deep in stoppage time, when Marcano's effort was cleared off the line by Denzel Dumfries. The Portuguese side struck the woodwork twice in an agonizing finale, with Onana pushing Taremi's header onto the post, before Grujic nodded against the crossbar. "In the second half we were better, more possession and more opportunities—I still can't believe the ball didn't go in," Grujic said. — AFP

### Haaland's 5-goal haul 'warning to Man City rivals'

MANCHESTER: Manchester City are into the Champions League (CL) quarter-finals for a sixth consecutive season, but Erling Haaland's five-goal haul in a 7-0 destruction of RB Leipzig put Europe on warning that this time may be different for the Premier League champions. Pep Guardiola admitted before Tuesday's last 16, second leg that his reign at City will be defined by either winning or failing to win the Champions League despite his side's dominance of the Premier League in recent years.

Seven years on from Guardiola's arrival, City are still waiting for their first European crown. That is why they pushed the boat out on agents' fees and wages to win the race to sign Haaland from Borussia Dortmund for a bargain £51 million (\$62 million) last summer thanks to the Norwegian's buy-out clause. In just 35 games Haaland has already rewritten City's history books by scoring 39 goals in a single season.

More Champions League landmarks were reached on Tuesday as Haaland's five goals equaled the record shared by Lionel Messi and Luiz Adriano for the most in a Champions League game. In the process the 22-year-old also became the youngest player to pass 30 in Europe's premier club competition with 32 in just 25 appearances. "I was so tired after my celebrations," said Haaland. "My super strength is scoring goals."

City have not always possessed that clinical edge when it has mattered in the latter stages of the Champions League. Missed chances have been a common theme of Guardiola's European exits by the finest of margins. "He was so

hungry," said RB Leipzig boss Marco Rose, who coached Haaland at Dortmund. "He scored goals with the foot, with the head, he won second balls, he made deep runs. It all looked really simple tonight. It was a special night for him."

### 'It would be boring'

It could have been even more special had Guardiola not withdrawn Haaland with 25 minutes to go. "I told him I would love to score a double hat-trick, but what can I do?" added Haaland. Guardiola replied by joking his star striker's life "would be boring" if he broke all the records before his 23rd birthday. But what both player and manager have in common is a desire to finally make City European champions. Despite Haaland's stunning statistics, there have still been teething problems in his first season in England. At times he has cut a frustrated figure as runs in behind went unnoticed

by his teammates in Premier League defeats at Manchester United and Tottenham. But Guardiola has also insisted that Haaland adjusts to City's style by becoming an all-round striker just as capable of linking the play as of predatory finishes inside the box. "Today he scored five goals and I think he had 30 or 35 ball contacts. This is what we were looking for because we had the feeling when you are involved in the game defensively, offensively, when the ball comes to score a goal, you are more precise," Guardiola said.

"He can do it, but it is difficult to score goals when you don't touch the ball for 40 or 50 minutes. "Sometimes it's his fault because sometimes he doesn't move... but the other (times) it is our fault where we didn't find him." The fear for City's opponents at home and abroad is that those minor issues may have been ironed out in time for the final and most decisive three months of the season. — AFP



Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland