



**5** Pope 'improving' after night in hospital with breathing issues



**9** Take your eyes off your mobile phone, says inventor, 50 yrs on



**16** Fury, sadness in Indonesia after FIFA pulls Under-20 World Cup



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:20
Shurooq	05:40
Dhuhr	11:52
Asr	15:23
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Isha	19:23

## Sheikh Khaled named Abu Dhabi crown prince, Sheikh Mansour VP

Two new deputy rulers of Abu Dhabi named • Amir sends congratulations

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates' president named his eldest son as crown prince of Abu Dhabi late on Wednesday, making him the oil-rich Gulf monarchy's likely next leader. President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan tapped Sheikh Khaled, 41, his jujitsu-loving son, as crown prince of the UAE's richest emirate.

It was part of the biggest political shake-up since Sheikh Mohamed, 62, sometimes known as "MBZ", became president last May following the death of his half-brother Sheikh Khalifa. MBZ's brother Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed, the owner of Manchester City football club, became UAE vice-president, joining Dubai's ruler and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum in the role.

Two other brothers of the president – Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed, the UAE's national security adviser and chairman of the ADQ sovereign wealth fund, and Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed – became deputy



Sheikh Khaled bin Mohammed Al-Nahyan



Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan

ty rulers of Abu Dhabi, which controls the bulk of the country's oil reserves.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable on Thursday to Sheikh Mansour, Sheikh Khaled, Sheikh

Hazza and Sheikh Tahnoon, expressing his best wishes and success on their new posts. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

The UAE, one of the world's biggest oil-producers and an ally of the United States, Russia and China alike, has become a major power in the Middle East as traditional heavyweights such as Egypt and Iraq fell back in recent years. Sheikh Khaled's appointment was welcomed by other Gulf rulers including fellow energy giants Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as leaders of the UAE's six other emirates.

"This move (appointing his son rather than a brother as crown prince) has been anticipated. It follows (the) lineal model apparent elsewhere in the Gulf... provides for more stability and smoother successions," Gulf commentator Bader Al-Saif, assistant professor of history at Kuwait University, said in a tweet.

Sheikh Khaled has served as a member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council and as chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Office, and sits on the board of state oil giant ADNOC. He has been closely involved in youth and environmental projects as well as sport, promoting jujitsu and helping bring NBA basketball games to Abu Dhabi.

Abdul Khaleq Abdallah, a professor of political science from the UAE, said Sheikh Khaled had already represented his father on trips abroad as part of his preparations for leadership. With his father still in the early days of his presidency, Sheikh Khaled still has time to learn, he said. "He was being groomed for this job. Everybody that closely watched him over the years knows that he's ready for it and he's fit for the job," Abdallah told AFP. "He's earned the trust of his father. He comes across as very easy with people, he mingles well which is very important for a future leader." — AFP

### RAMADAN KAREEM

## Loving Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us that we need to work hard to overcome hate, rather than stoop so low to the level of those who promote hate. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "And not equal are the good deed and the bad deed. Repel (evil) by the (deed) which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity, (will become) as though he was a devoted friend." (Fussilat 41: 34)

As the embodiment of the Quranic values, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had shown, in many instances, how to rise above hate and enmity. He emphasised that forgiveness is greater than revenge, perseverance is larger than retaliation, and love is better than hate.

Muslims are commanded to love the Messenger (PBUH) and emulate him in everything that he said, did, and approved of. There are many things that we ought to do to prove our love for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Here, I will share with the reader only three of them. They are:

1. To believe in the message he conveyed to us (the Noble Quran), and its teachings verbatim. This entails reciting, studying, and implementing the commands of the Creator revealed through His Noble Messenger (PBUH). Belief in the Noble Quran is just one part of faith: implementing its rulings in your life is another. Almighty Allah tells us what can be translated as: "Indeed, this Quran guides (humanity) to what is more upright and gives glad tidings to the believers who perform righteous deeds, that for them there is a great reward (of everlasting delight in Paradise) awaiting (in the Hereafter)." (Al-Isra'a 17: 9)

Uthman bin Affa'n (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "The best among you is he who learns the (Noble) Quran and then teaches it." (Al-Bukhari # 5, 027)

Continued on Page 6

## 31 killed after fire rips through Philippine ferry

**MANILA:** At least 31 people died and 230 were rescued after a fire engulfed a ferry in the southern Philippines, authorities said Thursday. The Lady Mary Joy 3 was travelling from Zamboanga City on Mindanao Island to Jolo Island in Sulu province when the fire broke out late Wednesday, prompting passengers to jump overboard, disaster officer Nixon Alonzo said.

Rescuers, including the Philippine Coast Guard and fishermen, saved 195

passengers and 35 crew as the blaze ripped through the ferry off Baluk-Baluk Island in Basilan province. Basilan Governor Jim Salliman said 31 bodies had been retrieved, including 18 found inside an air-conditioned cabin. Photos released by the coast guard showed one of its vessels spraying water on the burning ferry as personnel in smaller boats plucked people from the dark water.

Firefighter Jayson Ahijon, who was among the passengers, said people panicked as fire and thick smoke overwhelmed the vessel. Some jumped overboard before putting on lifejackets. "It's beyond my imagination, the fire was spreading so fast," Ahijon, 36, said. Ahijon said he and several coast guard officers helped other passengers to

Continued on Page 6



HADJI MUHTAMAD, Philippines: This handout photo taken on March 30, 2023 shows people walking towards the burnt passenger ferry Lady Mary Joy 3 after it was towed to the shore in Basilan province. — AFP

## Yousaf sworn in as Scotland's new leader

**EDINBURGH:** Humza Yousaf was sworn in as Scotland's first minister on Wednesday, becoming the first Muslim leader of a government in western Europe but already facing unrest in his party. At 37, Yousaf is also the youngest leader yet of the Scottish National Party (SNP), and is vowing to reinvigorate its flagging campaign for independence. But after he won the race to succeed the long-serving Nicola Sturgeon on Monday, his leadership was already being ques-

tioned after defeated rival Kate Forbes refused to serve in his cabinet.

The outgoing finance minister was offered a more junior role by Yousaf, despite coming close to victory. She ended with 48 percent of the preferential votes of SNP members to his 52 percent. Yousaf's allies claimed Forbes declined because she wanted to devote more time to family life after recently giving birth. But in press reports, her supporters were scathing about the job offer.

Yousaf named Shona Robison as his deputy first minister. She will also replace Forbes in the finance secretary role. As part of Sturgeon's government, Robison steered through contentious legislation on gender self-identification that has now been blocked by the UK

Continued on Page 6



EDINBURGH: Leader of the SNP Humza Yousaf poses with the Great Seal of Scotland after being sworn in as First Minister at the Court of Session on March 29, 2023. — AFP

## Weapons to wasabi: Fighter runs sushi cafe

**IDLIB:** A Russian jihadist has traded his weapons for wasabi by opening a small sushi restaurant in war-torn Syria's rebel-held northwest, as the conflict wanes and fighters look for other income. Islam Shakhbanov, 37, from Russia's Muslim-majority Dagestan republic, said he headed to Syria in 2015 "to take part in jihad".

But after years of war, the Damascus government has regained control of most of the country and Syria's main frontlines have largely frozen, putting many foreign fighters out of a job.

"In the end I opened this sushi restaurant," the goateed man told AFP, standing near a banner displaying a fish, with slogans in Arabic, English and Russian. Wearing a warm vest, and with a dark winter cap on his head, Shakhbanov said he fought alongside jihadist factions and the Faylaq al-Sham rebel group until about five years ago.

Faylaq al-Sham is an Islamist group that has acted as Turkey's proxy during several Turkish military campaigns on

Continued on Page 6



IDLIB: In this picture taken on Jan 29, 2023, Islam Shakhbanov, a fighter from Russia's Dagestan republic, stands at the entrance of his sushi restaurant. — AFP



## Local

# US Army, Kuwaiti partners inaugurate five warehouses

## Climate controlled facilities to protect equipment, trucks and tanks



KUWAIT: Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Kuwait James Holtsnider participates in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the completion of warehouses. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider speaks with military personnel at the ceremony.

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The US Army and Kuwait partners celebrated on Wednesday the completion of five logistics warehouses at a cost of \$27 million at Camp Arifjan. On the sidelines of the Army Prepositioned Stock (APS)-500 series warehouses' ribbon-cutting ceremony, Col Naval Staff Abdullah Waleed Al-Zawawi stressed Kuwait's keenness to follow up on military events and be fully prepared for all threats at the regional or global level.

Zawawi revealed the logistics warehouses project was co-financed by the Kuwaiti and US sides according to the DCA agreement, noting this is not the first co-financed project. "There are continuous exercises between the Kuwaiti and US armies and joint coordination for annual training from September to April. The last exercise was the "Al Tahreer" exercise with the participation of the Kuwait land force with the US army, and there are future exercises planned. The Kuwaiti army is always present and efforts are exerted by Kuwaiti soldiers and officers," he added.

"It is very important to be here for the opening of APS-500 series warehouses that symbolize our partnership commitment with Kuwait. We are investing in such facilities to have our equipment ready to support our Kuwaiti partners and others around the region," US Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider said.

"The weather can be difficult outside, so it is important to protect our equipment. That is why the warehouses are important. Both US and Kuwait governments worked together and partnered in their funding. These facilities are air-conditioned and climate controlled to protect more than 500 pieces of equipment, trucks and tanks," he said.

Holtsnider pointed out the US will continue to invest in the region to improve and upgrade its pres-

ence, revealing the US army has more warehouses in the pipeline. "If you look around the region, you will continue to see challenges in several places; that is why we continue to work with our partners including Kuwait on combining training exercises and making sure we have the needed ability," he said.

He noted the US army recently held an exercise with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to be able to respond to future problems. "The warehouses also support the humanitarian side, where they allow us and Kuwaiti partners to store humanitarian supplies to respond to events like the earthquake in Turkey," he said.

During his opening remarks, TAE USACE Commander Lt Col Richard Childers said: "We keenly understand the opportunities available to us and our Kuwaiti partners to help find solutions to the region's most complex challenges to help build the capacity needed to deter and respond to regional threats and promote lasting stability for generations to come."

He added: "These five warehouses are more than just storage facilities. They are a symbol of security and demonstrate achievable military integration and bilateral security cooperation. These warehouses are the product of close collaboration between the Kuwaiti armed forces, the ministry of defense and the US Army Corps of Engineers. When you choose the corps of engineers, you are getting quality sustainable infrastructure and you are getting a faithful, reliable partner committed to delivering winning engineering solutions."

Childers indicated that these warehouses will provide critical environmental protection for the equipment needed to rapidly respond to contingencies and will allow for the support of integrated training to occur at a higher frequency during medium and large-scale exercises with regional partners.



Commander Colonel Thomas Boland gives a speech during the ceremony.



Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider signs on the ribbon of the opening ceremony.

401st AFSB Commander Col Thomas Boland explained the importance of the warehouses. "These warehouses will provide indoor protective storage from environmental elements to over 500 pieces of army preposition rolling stock and materiel, increasing the army's ability to rapidly project combat power and deliver readiness to warfighters globally. These new warehouses are the new benchmark and a clear improvement to storing equipment outside in the desert-like environment," he said.

He revealed the project of the warehouses started as a vision to provide greater responsiveness to the geographical combatant commander (GCC) and increase readiness at the tactical point of need within the theater. "Construction of the 320,000 square feet of useable space began in January 2020 at a price tag of \$27 million that our host nation partners graciously provided as part of our DCA. Without the

commitment of our reliable and steadfast partners, we would not be here today. The Kuwaitis have graciously supported American forces in this country going 32 years now," Boland said.

Boland noted the shared interest and mission with partners – while APS is a cornerstone to project power in the Middle East, ensuring that US forces deployed in support of operations in Southwest Asia have what they need when needed, as well as sending a clear signal of the US' unwavering commitment to the collective security interests of partners in the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

The construction of the five warehouses was approved by the chief of staff of the Kuwait armed forces and the Kuwait ministry of defense. The US APS program is part of the US army's strategy to maintain combat-ready equipment in strategic locations around the world.

### News in brief

#### Deputy FM heads Diplomatic Affairs meeting

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi headed on Thursday a meeting of the Diplomatic Affairs Council for diplomats and General Consul at the ministry. Assistants to the foreign minister attended the meeting, which highlighted various topics on the agenda. — KUNA

#### Sri Lankan ambassador raises domestic workers' fees

**KUWAIT:** The Sri Lankan ambassador has raised the cost of recruiting domestic workers from KD 350 to KD 476 which is specified by the commerce ministry. According to market specialists, the cost of contracts for domestic workers from Sri Lanka is not less than KD 500 through agents, in addition to the price of insurance and travel costs.

#### One dead, another injured in Jahra car crash

**KUWAIT:** A car crash between two vehicles on Jahra Road on Thursday has resulted in the death of one person and the injury of another. The public relations and media department at the Kuwait Fire Force said: "We received a report about a car accident on Jahra road, after which a team of Jahra fire station went to the scene of the accident. Upon arrival a death and an injury were recorded, and the deceased's body as well as the injured person were sent to the concerned authorities for further attention."

#### Disability laws must be amended: KDSC

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of Kuwait Disabled Sport Club (KDSC) Shafi Al-Hajiri said the country is heading towards a new period that requires cooperation from everyone to present suggestions for the amendment of some of the articles of the law pertaining to disabilities. Concerned parties need to find solutions for true inclusion of disabilities that can serve Kuwaiti society, he added. Hajiri was speaking during the Ramadan Ghabqa the club held at its premises in Hawally in the presence of honorary Chairwoman Sheikha Sheikhha Al-Abdallah Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah and Head of the Disabled Friends Team Sheikha Suhaila Salem Al-Sabah. Director General of Public Authority for the Disabled Affairs (PADA) Dr Bibi Al-Amiri, Deputy Director General of PADA Dr. Nahid Al-Ateeqi and other sponsors of the disabled were also present.



## Revival of Islamic Heritage Society launches iftar project

**KUWAIT:** The Revival of Islamic Heritage Society launched its 2023 iftar project in partnership with the Awqaf General Secretariat. "The project provides people in need with necessary help for them to be able to fast in this holy month, and so that financial constraints won't stop them from fulfilling their religious duties," said Nawaf

Al-Sane, Coordination Department Director at the society. The project also falls in line with the basic Islamic principle of social cooperation, and help draw a smile on the faces of people in need, he added. As part of the project, the society will be distributing iftar meals in Kuwait and other countries including Indonesia.



Nawaf Al-Sane

## New tent sale site to open before camping season

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Municipality announced the provision of a new site for the sale of tents, following the removal of the current market in the Al-Rai area after the end of the camping season.

"The site was isolated from the area of the Friday market to be used to temporarily sell tents and land supplies as a substitute for the previous tent market," the municipality announced.

The alternative site was chosen to be close to the site of the previous tent market given the support of the Kuwait Municipality for this activity and to preserve the interest of those engaged in the activity of selling tents and national crafts.

The new site will ensure that this service will still be provided to citizens throughout the year to meet their needs for tent products and land supplies. The new market will be open before the next camping

season. The provision of service at the new site is temporary until the municipality completes all procedures for offering the former tent market site project for investment and ensuring good management of the new project.



## Kuwait participates in UNESCO lecture on open science

**PARIS:** Kuwait has participated in the open science lecture to face global challenges organized by UNESCO at their headquarters in Paris. Permanent delegate to UNESCO Dr. Adam Al-Mulla, a participant in the lecture, said: "The session focused on the importance of implementing the UNESCO recommendations on open science, which calls for sharing scientific discoveries and developments in an effort to unite nations.

Attention must be given to science practices that enhance openness, transparency and inclusion that already exist on a global scale, while stressing the importance of strengthening international cooperation and cooperation with multiple stakeholders in order to close digital and knowledge gaps."

"The concept of open science is inclusive. It includes different practices aimed at allowing free access to knowledge. In science, there are basic values that must be upheld in order to make science accessible to society and extend the principles of openness to the entire process of scientific research.

Kuwait's active participation in the international dialogue on open science comes from its belief in the importance of international cooperation to achieve sustainable development around the world," he clarified.

The participation of the State of Kuwait, represented by Ambassador Al-Mulla, focused on important mechanisms to benefit from scientific developments around the world through the Global Framework for Open Science in Facing Pandemics and Crises.

Kuwait has submitted, during the Executive Council of UNESCO at its 215th session, a draft resolution on the global framework for open science in facing pandemics and crises in partnership with Saudi Arabia, which was unanimously adopted by member states.

"Open science can reduce inequality and contribute to responding to urgent challenges posed by the pandemic by opening the doors of knowledge. It means the open access of publications, data, and scientific output in addition to open-source software, educational resources, and technology such as tests and vaccines," Al-Mulla explained.

With regard to the COVID pandemic, he said: "The pandemic has highlighted the need to enhance scientific cooperation between countries and to guarantee the basic right to universal access to scientific progress and its benefits at a time when rumors run rampant and false information spreads quickly. It is absolutely essential that we boost trust in science." —KUNA



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti and Ahmad Al-Majid are shown with Zain and Suffix teams.



Zain's campaign promotes a healthy and active lifestyle during the holy month.

# Zain kicks off Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge

## Initiative aims at promoting an active lifestyle during holy month

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced the kick-off of the second season of the Zain Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge, organized by Suffix, the leading sports management company in Kuwait and the region. The initiative aims at encouraging community members of all ages to take on a healthy and active lifestyle during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Zain supports this unique initiative in line with its corporate strategy to shoulder sports and health pro-

grams within the community. The company regularly intensifies its efforts to encourage everyone to adopt a healthier and more active lifestyle throughout the year, and especially during the Holy Month.

The Zain Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge runs from March 29 to April 10 at Phase I and offers people of all ages a great opportunity to join by speed-walking or running at their own time and pace. Participants would collect distance points and compete to top the

leaderboard, and those who want to earn extra points can join the special workouts held at the park.

After signing up, participants collect their armbands from a machine at the park. The armbands feature a chip that tracks and registers each participant's kilometers as they pass through the solar-powered smart arch. The leaderboard screen shows everyone's progress in real time so every participant can check their standing and compete for a higher place.

The challenge targets both males and females from all ages to encourage them to keep fit and adopt a healthy and active lifestyle, not only during the Holy Month, but throughout the year.

Zain's social campaign during Ramadan features a wide range of interactive programs, spanning health, sports, humanitarian, religious, and entertainment activities to share the blessings of the Holy Month with the community as a whole.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday credentials of the newly appointed Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait, Sheikh Salem. Sheikh Salem expressed best wishes and success to the new ambassador. - KUNA



KUWAIT: This photo shows people going for a picnic outside the third Kuwait Wall in 1946. The wall, which was erected in the 1920s, stretched for about five miles or eight kilometers. During that time, an estimated 50,000 people lived in Kuwait. Bedouins pitched their tents outside the wall as they travelled in and out of Kuwait for trade. (Source: 'Picture Post Magazine', volume 32, London, 1946. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)

## How to bootstrap a startup with marketing

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: The COVID pandemic and financial crisis affected many people's financial security, after they lost their jobs or their businesses failed. People came to realize that creating an additional source of income has become necessary. But despite realizing the importance of this issue, problem lies in how to start, when to start and which business will succeed. Therefore, Husaina Shabbir, copywriter and lead generation expert, told Kuwait Times about the essentials that people need to stick to, to realize their plans.



Husaina Shabbir

Shabbir began with a statement on building a business that is most likely going to be successful — "crisis builds miracles". She said that this completely resonates with startups' budget and funding crises and issues. For a good startup, Shabbir highlighted the importance of brand positioning; once startups nail their brand positioning by

rightly and diligently understanding their target audience and using that in their brand messaging, they can sell their product faster.

### How exactly is brand positioning done

According to Shabbir, brand positioning is a marketing approach to identify the place you want to oc-

cupy in the minds of your customer and how it separates you from your competitors and rivals. To define your brand positioning, you need to understand and build your audience avatars. A lot of businesses make the mistake of thinking they can target everyone in a certain region or demographic, but that's not realistic. To truly understand your audience and create a strong brand positioning, you must research.

The key to understanding brand positioning lies in how well you can define and build audience avatars for targeting. To create a brand positioning and understand your audience, you need to dive deep through scientific research and methods. You need to know and study market reports, behavior pattern

of your target audience, know and study the exact words (customer vocabulary) they use, and know and study the motivations that will drive sales or trigger their minds.

### Seems complicated?

Shabbir further simplifies the steps to understand and research the audience. She said the first step is to look up research reports and industry studies. The trick here is to find them on Google by using keywords such as market/product/service. This way, you will find the goldmines and hidden gems that normal searches won't disclose. The second step is to define your segments. This step dives deep into

the target audience. For this step, Shabbir advised to not be generic. Curate your target audience according to their behavioral pattern. For example, a generic segment in real estate selling would be home buyers. This way your brand messaging will address everyone and persuade no one.

### So how to define segments?

According to Shabbir, you can do this by defining them according to their behavior and psychological preferences. For instance, for real estate selling, the ideal avatars can be any of these: Lifestyle upgraders - people seeking better lifestyle comforts. Investors - people seeking return on their investments in property. Working professionals - people seeking to invest for the first time in property. In this way, you can understand different people's pains/gains, anxieties/fears and goals/aspirations. Now you can target specifically and create strategies that focus on triggering directly their minds.

This was an example of behavioral segmentation. Sometimes, you can also segment by demographics, seasons and patterns - but that works better for media selection and targeting and to some extent in your messaging. Hence, true segmentation should be behavioral. The third step that Shabbir listed is to listen to your defined target audience.

### How?

Shabbir said that you can know them through direct interviewing, social listening, search reviews, feedback, survey and forum threads on media platforms. Using these ways, you can mimic how your customer expresses their pain and gain and use the words in your marketing messages and strategies. She also emphasized that your marketing is not about you but about your customers. The fourth step according to Shabbir is to identify the motivations your brand can trigger. She said that after segmenting your target audience and listening to their conversations, it's time to define the motivation your brand will trigger while offering your product or services to them. This is the actual part where you position your brand according to the motivation factors that drive sales and revenues.



KUWAIT: Businesses should try to research to create a strong brand positioning and understand their audience.

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken on March 29, 2023 shows a cargo ship cruising in the Gulf waters off the coast of Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## News in brief

Government to credit  
delayed bedoon salaries

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, has ordered to credit delayed salaries for bedoons working in the military before Eid Al-Fitr either on or before April 19, 2023. The decision comes in coordination with the Central Agency for the Remedy of Illegal Residents Situation (CARIRS), the defense ministry announced.

Government employees to  
get early salaries for Eid

KUWAIT: The finance ministry has contacted the Central Bank of Kuwait requesting to credit salaries for the month of April on Tuesday, April 18. The decision was made on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. The memo to the central bank requested that the bank credits salaries for all government agencies and employees on the specified date.

Dusty, rainy weather  
expected this weekend

KUWAIT: The Meteorological Department said the weather this weekend will fluctuate between rain and dust with heavy winds, in addition to a wider gap between high and low temperatures. Meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said: "Friday afternoon, the air depression gradually recedes, allowing an air rise accompanied by a moderate to relatively cold air mass, especially late at night. Moreover, active winds, with a speed of more than 60 kilometers per hour will cause dust, which leads to a decrease in horizontal visibility sometimes, especially in open areas, with sea waves rising to more than seven feet." "The weather at night will be cold and partly cloudy, with northwesterly moderate to brisk winds, with speed sometimes strong, especially over coastal areas, between 25 and 60 kilometers per hour causing dust, and the expected minimum temperature will be between 15 and 18 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be moderate to high, with wave heights between 4 and 7 feet," he added.

# MoH, KMA prioritize supporting physicians

## KMA proposes attracting Kuwaiti doctors to rural areas

KUWAIT: Kuwait places developing the quality of health services provided to citizens at the top of its priorities, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi said Wednesday. Awadi affirmed the ministry's keenness to provide support to all medical staff in order to raise the level of medical services provided. The remarks came at the Ramadan Ghabka held by the Kuwait Medical Association.

President of the Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) Dr Ibrahim Al-Tawalah said he appreciates the efforts of the minister and his unlimited support to increase the admission quota in board programs at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS). The quota was increased last December when the Ministry of Health announced fifty percent more seats for the programs compared to the previous year.

Tawalah thanked the minister Wednesday for backing a raise in the compensation received by doctor educators, which was also announced in December. Tawalah had told media last year that requests for a raise had been refused by previous ministers prior to Awadi's approval. The need for a larger compensation was the reason why some specialized physicians were reluctant to participate in training programs, which reflected poorly on the number of doctors enrolling in these programs.

Compensation has since been raised from KD 300 to KD 500, said Tawalah Wednesday. He pointed out that the association was also successful in lobbying for enforcing Article 80 of the law pertaining to practicing medicine in Kuwait, which guarantees compensation for physicians' working shifts and training courses. Demands to enforce the law dates as far back as 2013, but it was first enforced last June following an April 2022 ministerial decision.

The association continues to support physicians, he said, through advocating for revising the current regulations surrounding the compensation for those working overtime. The association has also submitted a proposal to the government that would guarantee allowances to Kuwaiti physicians for environmental, infection-related and screen-related damages. Suggestions to incentivize Kuwaiti doctors to work in rural areas are on the table, as well, said Tawalah. Awadi praised the distinguished level of medical professionals



Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi

in Kuwait, noting the great importance that the ministry attaches to preserving the rights of doctors, providing them with a suitable environment and encouraging continuous professional development. He said he appreciates the constructive cooperation between the ministry, the Kuwait Medical Association and all medical professions associations in the country. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi (left) is shown at the Ramadan Ghabka held by the Kuwait Medical Association. — KUNA

## NBK honored for efforts in serving Kuwaiti society

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Association for Learning Differences (KALD) has honored National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) for its significant social responsibility contributions, particularly in supporting education, students and young talent. This honoring demonstrates NBK's clear footprint in serving the Kuwaiti society, in continuation of its unwavering approach and culture to deliver on its CSR commitments.

This came on the sidelines of KALD's eleventh talent show held at the American University in Kuwait (AUK), with the participation of the families of students from several schools, to celebrate the talents and abilities of their children who gave performances on stage including recital of poetry, singing, acting and playing music.

The honoring trophy was received on behalf of the bank by Senior Public Relations Officer at NBK Joanne Al Abdul-Jaleel, who in turn honored the participating schools and the show's winners, with the participation of the jury consisting of the Actress Elham Al-Fadala, Director Youssef Al-Hashash, Director Yarub Bourhama and Dr Yacoub Al-Khubaizi. The participating students came from eight schools including: Dasman Bilingual School, Al Maarefa Model School, Umm Hani Civil School (for Special Needs), Sadeem Model School, Universal Civilizations Academy School, Manarat School, Jon Kuwait School and Kuwait English School.

"We are proud of our participation in all civil society activities, especially those that provide care for our children and bring happiness and joy to them and their families," Abdul-Jaleel said.

"NBK is committed to deliver on its CSR commitments as the largest private sector in-

stitution by actively participating in various initiatives and events aiming to achieve development of society," she added.

Abdul-Jaleel noted that NBK's CSR contributions cover many areas including healthcare, culture, education and charity, which all aim to achieve equality among all segments of society and provide equal opportunity for everyone to take part in achieving sustainable development for our society.

Since founding, National Bank of Kuwait has been demonstrating firm commitment with CSR culture as one of its top priorities to serve all segments of society. To this end, it made significant investments to support the community across various fields, and launched many important programs covering various areas like education, healthcare, employment, training, nurture of national talent, social welfare and support programs, as well as sports initiatives and environmental activities.



KUWAIT: Senior Public Relations Officer at NBK Joanne Al Abdul-Jaleel receives the trophy from Founder of KALD Amaal Al-Sayer.



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Disabled woman seeks exit from life in Belgium

## Russia detains US journalist on espionage claims



BRASILIA: Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro (R) gesturing during a meeting with the party's lawmakers at the Liberal Party headquarters in Brasilia on March 30, 2023. —AFP

# Bolsonaro returns to Brazil since election loss

## Homecoming is a high-stakes bet for ex-president

**BRASILIA:** Three months after leaving for the United States in the final hours of his term, Brazil's ex-president Jair Bolsonaro returned home Thursday to reenter politics—complicating life for his successor and nemesis, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The far-right ex-army captain, who skipped town two days before Lula's inauguration on January 1, arrived back in Brasilia on a commercial flight from Orlando, Florida.

Scores of supporters waving the Brazilian flag—one of Bolsonaro's symbols—were at the airport arrival area to welcome him, shouting and singing the national anthem, despite authorities' moves to block a planned welcome rally. "We've been waiting for this moment for a long time. We've been looking forward to it since January 1," Eva Melgaco, a 46-year-old beautician, told AFP.

However, Bolsonaro left discreetly through another exit. Flashing a thumbs-up to TV cameras, he entered a motorcade that headed for the headquarters of his Liberal Party (PL), flanked by police cars. The homecoming is a high-stakes bet for Bolsonaro, who

faces legal trouble on various fronts in Brazil—notably for his alleged role in inciting supporters who invaded the halls of power on January 8 in a failed bid to oust Lula, the veteran leftist who beat him in a divisive election in October.

Tension was high in Brasilia, where the exuberant crowd of around 200 supporters at the airport was guarded by a heavy police deployment. Authorities said if necessary they were prepared to lock down the central plaza that is home to the presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court, where Bolsonaro backers rioted on January 8.

Bolsonaro, 68, is set to start a new job next week as honorary president of the Liberal Party, earning 41,600 reais (around \$8,000) a month. The ex-president (2019-2022), who recently rented a house in a gated community in Brasilia, has said he plans to criss-cross Brazil "doing politics" and "upholding the banner of conservatism." But "I'm not going to lead any opposition," Bolsonaro told CNN Brasil as he prepared to board his flight. "You don't have to oppose this government. It creates the opposition by itself."

### Return of the 'Messiah'

The Liberal Party appeared ready to keep the arrival low-key, saying Bolsonaro would travel from the airport to party headquarters, where his wife, Michelle, party president Valdemar Costa Neto and "other authorities" would be waiting to greet him in a closed-door event. But hardline Bolsonaro backers had made viral calls on social media for supporters to turn out en masse to welcome the man they call "Messiah"—or "Messias," Bolsonaro's middle name.

Some supporters called for one of the ex-president's trademark motorcycle rallies, vowing: "Brasilia will come to a halt." "Let's pave the way for Bolsonaro's return to the presidency," YouTube star-turned-Congressman Gustavo Gayer said in a video, calling for a massive turnout.

Bolsonaro's return could reenergize the opposition, which has been weakened by his self-imposed exile and the widespread backlash to the violence and destruction of the January 8 riots. "We've had five months of a basically dismantled opposition. Now, Bolsonaro's return to Brazil looks set to unite the right," political analyst Jairo Nicolau of the Getulio Vargas Foundation told AFP.

"That could make a big difference. Lula will have to govern with a united opposition."

### Legal trouble

But Bolsonaro faces numerous legal woes. They include no less than five Supreme Court investigations that could potentially send him to jail—including for allegedly inciting the January 8 riots—and a recent scandal over allegations he tried to illegally import and keep millions of dollars' worth of jewelry given to him and his wife by Saudi Arabia in 2019. Police summoned Bolsonaro Wednesday to give a deposition in the Saudi jewels case on April 5, officials told AFP. He also faces 16 cases before Brazil's Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE), which could strip him of his right to run for office for eight years, taking him out of the 2026 presidential race.

Bolsonaro has admitted he could face trouble. Assessing his odds at a meeting with Brazilian business leaders in the United States earlier this month, he acknowledged he could be declared ineligible to run for office. "But they won't send me to prison, unless there's some kind of arbitrary decision," he said. —AFP

## Pope 'improving' after night in hospital

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis's health is improving after spending a night in hospital with a respiratory infection, the Vatican announced Thursday, saying the 86-year-old had eaten breakfast, read the newspapers and even done some work. The pope "rested well during the night. His clinical picture is gradually improving and he is continuing his planned treatment", spokesman Matteo Brunni said in a statement.

"This morning after breakfast, he read some newspapers and resumed work. Before lunch, he went to the little chapel of the private (hospital) apartment where he prayed and he received the Eucharist," Pope Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Wednesday for what the Vatican said were pre-planned checks.

It later revealed he had complained of breathing difficulties and was diagnosed with a respiratory infection, but not COVID, and required "a few days" of hospital treatment. The Argentine pontiff, who earlier this month marked 10 years as head of the Catholic Church, has suffered a number of health issues throughout his life, including having part of one of his lungs removed at age 21.

While keeping a busy schedule and travelling widely, he has for the past year used a wheelchair due to knee pain, and admitted last summer he had to slow down. His admission to hospital sparked widespread concern, particularly after unconfirmed reports that he arrived in an ambulance. Francis was forced to cancel Thursday's engagements,

and there are now questions over his presence at services for the upcoming Holy Week and Easter, the most important period in the Christian calendar. Preparations are already underway at the Vatican for this weekend's Palm Sunday celebrations.

### 'Always the fear'

At his weekly audience on Wednesday morning, just hours before his admission to hospital, the pope appeared in good spirits, smiling as he greeted the faithful from his "popemobile". But he was pictured grimacing as he was helped getting onto the vehicle—a photo that made all the major front pages of Italy's newspapers on Thursday.

News of the pope's hospitalisation made global headlines and sparked prayers among many of the estimated 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide—including US President Joe Biden. Biden, only the second Catholic president in US history, urged attendees at a White House reception to "say an extra prayer" for the pontiff.

His health was also on the minds of visitors to the Vatican on Thursday. "There is always the fear, and yet it seems that everything is calm for now," said Tina Montalbano, a 60-year-old tourist guide. "I hope he recovers very soon and can celebrate the Easter period here in St Peter's."

Francis was admitted in July 2021 to the same Rome hospital for 10 days for an operation on his colon after suffering from a type of diverticulitis, an inflammation of pockets that develop in the lining of the intestine. In an interview in January, the pope said the diverticulitis had returned. In 1957, at age 21, Francis had part of one of his lungs removed, but he has said he made a full recovery.

### Resignation rumours

Francis has repeatedly said he would consider stepping down if his health required it, following the example of his predecessor Benedict XVI. The Ger-

man theologian, who died on December 31, shocked the world in 2013 by becoming the first pope since the Middle Ages to resign.

Francis has cautioned, however, that papal resignations should not be the norm, and said in an interview in February that the idea was currently not "on my agenda". Despite his health issues and advancing age, Francis—a Jesuit who seems most happy being among his flock—continues to travel internationally.

Earlier this year, he visited South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, drawing huge crowds. Next month, he is due to visit Hungary and meet Prime Minister Viktor Orban. In the past decade, Francis has sought to forge an image of a more open, compassionate Church, although has faced internal opposition, particularly from conservatives. —AFP



ROME: Pope Francis is helped get up the popemobile car as he leaves on March 29, 2023 at the end of the weekly general audience at St. Peter's square in The Vatican. —AFP

## Nine dead in crash of two US Army helicopters

**WASHINGTON:** Two US Army Black Hawk helicopters crashed in Kentucky during a training mission, killing nine soldiers, a military spokesman said Thursday. The helicopters belonged to the 101st Airborne Division, whose spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Hoefler said the nine soldiers had died. The crash occurred at around 10:00 pm (0300 GMT) Wednesday in Kentucky's Trigg county, northwest of Fort Campbell, the base said.

"The crewmembers were flying two HH60 Blackhawk helicopters during a routine training mission when the incident occurred," it said in a statement, adding that the incident is under investigation. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear tweeted that he would be "traveling to Fort Campbell to support our troops and their families after last night's tragic incident."

Beshear had earlier said on Twitter that Kentucky police and emergency management were responding, saying: "Please pray for all those affected." Fort Campbell is home to the 101st Airborne Division, the US Army's only air assault division. Nicknamed the "Screaming Eagles," the division was activated in August 1942 and gained renown during World War II in the D-Day landings and the Battle of the Bulge. More recently the division has seen action in Iraq and Afghanistan. —AFP

## At least 13 killed in India temple collapse

**NEW DELHI:** At least 13 devotees were killed and more than a dozen rescued on Thursday after they fell into a well at a Hindu temple in India, officials said. More than 25 worshippers plunged into the stepwell — a stair-lined communal water source — after the floor covering it collapsed in the central city of Indore.

"Police recovered 11 bodies from the well and two

people succumbed to their injuries at the hospital," Narottam Mishra, Madhya Pradesh home minister, told reporters. Mishra said an investigation had been launched into the mishap and the families of the dead would be compensated.

Police official Manish Kapoor told AFP rescue efforts were continuing and that the injured were moved to government hospitals for treatment. Television footage showed emergency workers using ropes and ladders to reach those trapped in the well in Madhya Pradesh state.

Other videos showed the caved-in floor and mangled steel bars, and policemen using ropes to seal the area. Temples across India were brimming with devotees on the occasion of Ram Navami, the birthday of the Hindu deity Lord Ram. —AFP



INDORE: Rescue and security personnel carry a devotee on a stretcher who was injured after the floor covering a stepwell collapsed at a temple on March 30, 2023. —AFP

## International

# Zionist entity strikes near Damascus wound two soldiers: Defence ministry

## Zionist court acquits man 13 years after murder conviction

**DAMASCUS:** Zionist entity carried out missile strikes near Damascus early Thursday that wounded two soldiers, Syria's defence ministry said. During more than a decade of war in Syria, Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters, as well as Syrian army positions.

Explosions were heard in the Syrian capital early Thursday morning, an AFP correspondent reported. "At around 01:20 am, the Zionist enemy carried out an aerial aggression from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights targeting several positions in the vicinity of Damascus," Syria's defence ministry said.

It did not provide any details on the targets but said the strikes wounded two soldiers and caused material damage. Syria's air defences intercepted several missiles, the ministry added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the strikes targeted positions of pro-Iran groups, adding that a building south of the capital was destroyed.

Syria's foreign ministry condemned the strikes, accusing Zionist entity in a statement of trying to "escape internal divisions", as the country faces a severe domestic crisis over controversial judicial reforms. While Zionist entity rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to extend its footprint in the war-torn country.

Last month, an Zionist air strike killed 15 people in a Damascus district that houses state security agencies, the Observatory said at the time.

Last week, an Zionist missile strike destroyed a suspected arms depot used by Iran-backed militias at Syria's Aleppo airport, the war monitor said.

On March 7, three people were killed in an Zionist strike on the same airport that put it out of service. It reopened three days later. The Syrian war broke out in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful anti-government protests, and escalated to a deadly armed conflict that pulled in foreign powers and global jihadists. Some 500,000 people have been killed and around half of Syria's pre-war population has been forced from their homes.

Meanwhile, an Zionist court on Thursday acquitted a man convicted of murdering a schoolgirl 13 years ago, reigniting mystery around the case that gripped the country. "The Nazareth district court today acquitted... defendant Roman Zdorov of the murder of Tair Rada," the court said in a statement. Rada



**SAKHNIN:** Protesters wave Palestinian flags during a demonstration marking the annual Land Day in the northern Arab-Zionist town of Sakhnin on March 30, 2023. Land Day commemorates the events of March 30, 1976, when Zionist troops shot and killed six people among Arab Zionists and Palestinians protesting land confiscations. — AFP

was found with a slit throat and in a pool of blood in a bathroom stall of her high school in Katzrin, a town in the Zionist-occupied Golan Heights, in December 2006. She was 13 years old.

Zdorov, a Ukrainian resident of Zionist entity who had been working in construction at the school, was arrested days after, and charged at the same Nazareth court based on evidence and a confession he later retracted. He was convicted in 2010 and sentenced to life in prison.

Expert opinion on the knife used saw the supreme court order a retrial, and in 2014 the Nazareth dis-

trict court once again found him guilty, a ruling the supreme court upheld the following year on appeal.

In 2021 the supreme justice granted Zdorov the right to another retrial at the Nazareth district court, releasing him to house arrest for the duration of the process that ended Thursday with two of the three judges ruling him innocent of Rada's murder.

The judges who acquitted him cited "firm and reasonable doubt" in Zdorov's guilt, and that "the prosecution failed to prove the defendant's guilt", according to the verdict. Sitting with his wife and son in the courtroom, Zdorov burst into tears when

the head of the panel said he was not guilty, freeing him more than 16 years after he was first imprisoned.

In brief remarks to the media after the proceedings ended, Zdorov thanked his supporters. "The truth has emerged victorious," he said. Rada's mother, Ilana, who for years had doubted Zdorov's guilt, pointed a finger at the state prosecution, who she claimed built a case around the wrong man. "For the first time justice has been made," she said of Thursday's ruling. "The next stage is to start looking for the murderers, and we know where to go," she added, without elaborating. — AFP

## Russia detains US journalist on espionage claims

**MOSCOW:** A US journalist working for the Wall Street Journal has been arrested in Russia on charges of spying for Washington, Russia's FSB security services said on Thursday. The announcement marks a serious escalation in the Kremlin's efforts to silence perceived critics, a crackdown that gained momentum following Russia's military operation in Ukraine last year.

The FSB said they had "halted the illegal activities of US citizen Evan Gershkovich," saying the Wall Street Journal reporter was "suspected of spying in the interests of the American government". The Wall Street Journal said it was "deeply concerned for the safety of Mr. Gershkovich" and the international media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said it was "alarmed by what looks like retaliation".

RSF said Gershkovich "was investigating on the military company Wagner"—a mercenary group playing a prominent role in Russia's campaign in Ukraine. The FSB confirmed that Gershkovich, 31, was working with press accreditation issued by the Russian foreign ministry.

It said he had been detained for gathering information on Russia's "military-industrial complex". "The foreigner was detained in Yekaterinburg while

attempting to obtain classified information," the FSB said, referring to a city in central Russia 1,800 kilometres (1,100 miles) east of Moscow.

Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged that Gershkovich had been "caught red handed". Before joining The Wall Street Journal Gershkovich worked for AFP in Moscow. A fluent Russian speaker, he was previously a reporter based in the Russian capital for The Moscow Times, an English-language news website. His family immigrated to the United States from Russia when he was a child.



**Evan Gershkovich**

### Media crackdown

"The problem is... the fact that the way the FSB interprets espionage today means that anyone who is simply interested in military affairs can be imprisoned for 20 years," Russian political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya said on social media in response to the detention.

Several US citizens are currently in detention in Russia and both Washington and Moscow have accused the other of carrying out politically-motivated arrests. The FSB in January opened a criminal case against a US citizen it said was suspected of espionage but did not name the individual. — AFP

## Turkey to vote on Finland's NATO bid

**ANKARA:** Turkey was set on Thursday to become the final NATO nation to approve Finland's membership of the US-led defence alliance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ratification is all but certain after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ended months of negotiations and blessed Finland's candidacy earlier this month.

Erdogan controls parliament through an alliance with a right-wing party. Most opposition lawmakers also support the bid. Turkey's ratification will leave Finland—which has a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) border with Russia—with only a few technical steps before it becomes the 31st member of the world's most powerful military bloc.

Finland and its neighbour Sweden ended decades of military non-alignment and decided to join NATO last May. Their applications were accepted at a June alliance summit but the bids still needed to be ratified by all the members' parliaments—a process that stalled with Turkey and Hungary.

Erdogan put up stiff resistance to Sweden's candidacy because of a series of long-standing disputes. The Hungarian parliament ratified Finland's NATO membership on Monday after months of diplomati-

cally charged delay. It was expected to approve Sweden's bid during the current session ending June 15.

A spokesman for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Wednesday called on Sweden to "clear the air" and address "an ample amount of grievances" for parliament to ratify its bid. Sweden still hopes to join the alliance in time for a July summit in Vilnius. Most analysts believe that Turkey will only vote on its candidacy after the country's May general election.

NATO was created as a counterweight to the Soviet Union at the onset of the Cold War era that began immediately after World War II. The bloc has gone through waves of expansion that brought it ever closer to Russia's borders.

Its reach into east and southern European countries that were once under Moscow's effective control infuriated the Kremlin and created growing strains in its relations with Washington. President Vladimir Putin cited the threat of NATO expanding into Ukraine as one of his main reasons for launching the war 13 months ago.

But the conflict has had the opposite geopolitical effect from the one envisioned by Putin. Ukraine is now receiving tanks and other heavy weapons from NATO members that it hopes to use in a new counter-offensive planned for the coming weeks or months.

Finland never seriously discussed membership of the alliance until Putin went to war. The Kremlin at first appeared to play down the significance of the bloc reaching a new stretch of Russia's northwestern border. But Russia has stepped up its diplomatic rhetoric in recent weeks. — AFP

## Loving Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)...

### Continued from Page 1

2. To love his Sunnah (sayings, acts, and approvals): The Majestic Allah tells us what can be translated as: "O you who believe, obey Allah and the Messenger, and those from among you who are invested with authority (over you)." (An-Nisa'a 4: 59)

According to Islam, Almighty alone is the focus of loyalty and obedience. And obedience and loyalty to Almighty Allah constitute the cornerstone of worship in Islam. Another basic principle of the Islamic way of life is obedience to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Obedience to prophets and messengers is a proof of obeying our Creator (Allah).

## 31 killed after fire rips through...

### Continued from Page 1

safety, including a baby they put in a bucket and lowered over the side of the boat. The captain ran the vessel aground as the fire spread "so many more could survive since it would be easier to swim to shore". Commodore Rejard Marfe from the Philippine Coast Guard told AFP. Salliman said at least three children, including a six-month-old baby, were among the dead. Authorities also said 14 people were injured.

It is not clear how many people are still missing.

3. To study his seerah (biography) and encourage others to do so: Every Muslim should study the biography of the Prophet (PBUH) to learn more about his compassion, love, dedication, sincerity, elegance, and exalted character – among others. Almighty Allah tells us what can be translated as: "There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and (who) remembers Allah often." (Al-Abza'b 33: 21)

Aisha, wife of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH), was asked about Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) moral character about which she said, "His moral character was an embodiment of the (Noble) Quran." (Shuaib Al-Ar'naout rated it as saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh Al-Musnad # 25, 813, see also Shar'h Mush'kil Al-Athaar # 4, 435) — Courtesy of the TIES Center

Salliman said the number of passengers on the vessel exceeded the 205 listed in the ship's manifest. Marfe said four members of the coast guard and an unknown number of army personnel were on board but not listed in the manifest. "We're still getting the data in Coast Guard Station Zamboanga because that's where they originated in order to determine if there are still missing people," he said.

Marfe said coast guard investigators were on their way to inspect the ferry and determine the cause of the fire. Survivors were taken to Zamboanga and Basilan, and the injured were treated for burns, Salliman said. The Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, is plagued by poor sea transport, with its badly regulated ferries prone to overcrowding and accidents. — AFP

## Yousaf sworn in as Scotland's...

### Continued from Page 1

government. Scotland's new cabinet includes five members under the age of 40 and, for the first time, a majority of women.

"I have made clear my belief Scotland's government should look as much as possible like the people we represent," Yousaf said in a statement. "As well as being the first ever first minister from a minority ethnic background, I am pleased that a record number of women have agreed to serve, as well as a significant blend of younger and more experienced members." Other key roles include Michael Matheson as health secretary, Jenny Gilruth for education, and Angela Constance as justice and home affairs secretary.

The new first minister was sworn in at the Court of Session, Scotland's highest tribunal. Yousaf vowed to "well and truly serve His Majesty King Charles" III, despite his stated support for abolishing the monarchy in favour of an elected head of state for Scotland. UK

## Weapons to wasabi: Fighter...

### Continued from Page 1

Syrian soil. It has also been the source of pro-Ankara mercenaries sent to battle in Libya on the side of the UN-recognized government. The group fought fierce battles against the Russian-backed Syrian regime in Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia provinces, and is considered close to the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak congratulated Yousaf in a phone call shortly after the new SNP leader was confirmed as first minister by the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday.

Yousaf said the call had been "constructive" – but that he had stressed to Sunak that "the democratic wishes of Scotland's people and parliament" should be respected by London. Sunak said that the two governments should work together on day-to-day policy matters including the economy and healthcare, according to Downing Street. Addressing the UK parliament in London on Wednesday, Sunak's Scotland Secretary Alistair Jack noted that Yousaf had called for the SNP's independence drive to go into "fifth gear".

"I would gently remind him that most Scots actually want him to put it into reverse – to work with the United Kingdom to tackle the issues that really matter to them," Jack said. Recent surveys show around 45 percent of Scots back their nation leaving the UK – the same minority recorded in a 2014 referendum which London insists settled the matter for a generation. The UK Supreme Court last year ruled that Sturgeon's government could not hold a new referendum without London's approval. — AFP

Shakhbanov said he had lived in countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, and was inspired to open "Sushi Idlib" after sampling Japanese cuisine during his travels. He boasted it was the first sushi restaurant in the conservative enclave, Syria's last main rebel bastion where many people depend on humanitarian aid. Rebel-held Idlib is home to about three million people, around half of them displaced by 12 years of war. The enclave is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the former Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, and other rebel groups – some of whom count fighters from central Asia and the Caucasus among their ranks. — AFP

## International

# Roadside bomb attack by Pakistan Taliban kills four policemen

## Five officers at the station, driver of the personnel carrier wounded

**PESHAWAR:** Four policemen were killed by a roadside bomb as they scrambled to protect a police station under siege by Taliban militants in northwest Pakistan, officials said Thursday. Pakistan has witnessed rising attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) since the Afghan Taliban retook Kabul in 2021, and police are increasingly on the frontline of Islamabad's bid to quell the movement.

TTP fighters launched a heavy-weapons assault early Thursday on a police station in Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which abuts the border with Afghanistan. Four officers, including a deputy superintendent, were killed by a bomb as they rushed towards the fight in a "planned act of terrorism", senior local police official Muhammad Ashfaq told AFP.

Deputy superintendent Iqbal Mohmand was known as an "exceptional poet", Ashfaq said. "He was always the centre of attention during poetic festivals," he said. The TTP claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement on Thursday and accused Mohmand of "brutally" killing its fighters. It said there were no TTP casualties.

The TTP is a separate movement from the Afghan Taliban, however they share a common lineage and ideology. Senior local administration official Tariqullah, who goes by one name, said the bomb pierced the ar-

moured personnel carrier that was carrying the officers around 3 kilometres (2 miles) from the police station.

Five officers at the station, as well as the driver of the personnel carrier, were wounded, Tariqullah said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Twitter the attack "has left my heart heavy with sorrow". "Our police officers and soldiers have made unforgettable sacrifices in the war against terrorism," he said.

The TTP have long targeted law enforcement officials, who they accuse of conducting extrajudicial executions. The TTP was founded in 2007, when Pakistani militants fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan splintered off to focus attacks on Islamabad as payback for supporting the US invasion after the 9/11 attacks.

They controlled swaths of northwest Pakistan at the height of their power but were largely routed by the military after a 2014 school raid that killed nearly 150 people, mostly pupils. Attacks have been steadily rising since the Afghan Taliban's return in Kabul, and Islamabad says the TTP are launching assaults from Afghan soil.

A shaky six-month ceasefire between the TTP and Islamabad failed in November. In January, more than 80 officers were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a mosque inside a police compound in the northwestern city of Peshawar. —AFP



**LAKKI MARWAT:** Relatives and security officials gather around the coffins of policemen who were killed by a roadside bomb in Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on March 30, 2023. —AFP

## Disabled woman seeks exit from life in Belgium

**BRUSSELS:** Half-paralysed from birth, partially sighted and now losing control of the limbs that still move, 43-year-old Lydie Imhoff is seeking an escape from life. Her native France is still wrestling with the ethical, moral and legal questions surrounding euthanasia—but neighbouring Belgium has already adopted it. And Imhoff has made up her mind to make sure that, when the time comes, she can end her life on her own terms.

"My head works, but my body is leaving me. I will not wait to become a vegetable before taking action," she told AFP as she initiated the journey towards death. "Before I had the upper hand over my disability, but now I don't at all." With euthanasia still forbidden despite an intense national debate in France, Imhoff has come to see Belgium as an "emergency exit" for when she eventually wishes to die.

But that emergency exit still has a lock and a gatekeeper—she has come to Brussels to meet a psychiatrist to explain her final decision. And, in order that her experience might contribute to debate about euthanasia in the two countries, she allowed AFP journalists to sit in.

Strapped into a wheelchair, and accompanied from her home in the eastern French town of Besancon by her carer, she talks for 45 minutes.

### Partial paralysis

It is a painful story, her upbringing marked not only by her disabilities but also sickness and violent abuse within her own family. The account is also dotted by charming moments of humour, as when she disconcerted her interviewer by talking of her "little free-roaming flatmate"—her pet rabbit.

Imhoff arrived in the world catastrophically early after her mother's five-and-a-half month pregnancy and immediately suffered a debilitating stroke. The premature birth left her paralysed down the entire left side of her body.

In adulthood she did not let her handicap keep her from her hobby, horse-riding, but in 2009 she suffered a heavy fall causing cranial trauma and a spinal injury. "Seventeen fractures in all," she said.

Consulting Imhoff's medical records, her interviewer Dr Marc Reisinger finds a diagnosis of "tetraparesis", an illness that wastes the limb muscles. She does not want to end her long fight right away, but is concerned that her symptoms are spreading, her muscle spasms more frequent.

The trigger for seeking a consultation in Belgium, where euthanasia can be legally sought, came when she lost sensation in the right hand she uses to read braille. "I was devastated. My fingers are all that remain to retain an autonomous existence."



**BRUSSELS:** Lydie Imhoff sits on her wheelchair as she waits before a consultation with psychiatrist Marc Reisinger in Brussels, Belgium. —AFP

To underline the point she demonstrates her struggle to take a sip of water on her own from a glass or a bottle, which she must grasp in the crook of her arm. She admits that she created a psychological shell to insulate her from her pain, but said it's not easy to maintain that facade as certain body parts succumb to agony.

Dr Reisinger is convinced that she meets the criteria set to have her life ended. "For me it's OK," he said. "I think that we are going to be able to help you do what you want to do, when you want to do it." The Belgian law, passed in 2002, decriminalises euthanasia and allows a lethal injection if two doctors, a general practitioner and a specialist agree. —AFP

## Sporadic clashes as Kenya opposition stages protests

**NAIROBI:** Sporadic violence broke out in Kenya on Thursday, the third day of opposition demonstrations to protest at the government and the high cost of living. Security was tight, with police in riot gear patrolling the capital Nairobi after fierce clashes erupted during similar protests on Monday.

On Thursday, dozens of people in the congested Nairobi neighbourhoods of Mathare and Kibera engaged police in running battles, throwing rocks and burning tyres while officers responded with tear gas. In opposition leader Raila Odinga's lakeside bastions of Kisumu and Homa Bay in western Kenya, protesters also hurled rocks at police and lit bonfires in the middle of the road.

Odinga has called for protests every Monday and Thursday, accusing President William Ruto of stealing last year's election and of failing to control the surging cost of living. The demonstrations -- declared illegal by the government--have turned violent on previous days, with police firing tear gas, water cannon and occasionally live bullets, while looters have gone on the rampage.

Two civilians have been killed and 51 police officers and 85 civilians injured, according to government figures. The international community and religious leaders have called for calm, voicing fears that the violence could degenerate into the ethnic post-election fighting witnessed after the 2007 election that claimed the lives of more than 1,100 people.

"We are deeply concerned by the recent unrest and violence as well as destruction of places of worship and private property," eight foreign embassies, including the United States and former colonial power Britain said in a joint statement Wednesday. "We therefore call on all leaders and all Kenyans to maintain peace, show restraint, and work toward a swift resolution for the common good of Kenya." The African Union also appealed Tuesday for calm and political dialogue to put paid to chaos.

### 'Portrait of anarchy'

On Wednesday, Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki vowed that anyone "irrespective of the political party" inciting public disorder or disturbing the peace would face prosecution. "The current portrait of anarchy, and the unfolding criminal madness must stop," he said in a statement. "The unfolding situation portends grave danger to the rule of law and the stability of our country."

On Monday, police fired tear gas in Nairobi and Kisumu to disperse crowds, and also aimed canisters at Odinga's convoy and cars carrying journalists. At least 2,000 looters descended on former president Uhuru Kenyatta's vast farm on the outskirts of Nairobi, stealing sheep and cutting trees before setting a section of the property on fire, police said. Kenyatta backed Odinga's candidacy in the presidential poll in August last year after falling out with his former deputy Ruto.

Gangs also targeted Odinga's gas company Spectre International Ltd in Nairobi. Many Kenyans are struggling to put food on the table, battling high prices for basic goods as well as a plunging local currency and record drought that has left millions hungry.

Inflation was running at 9.2 percent in February with food inflation at 13.3 percent. The Central Bank of Kenya on Wednesday raised its benchmark lending rate by 75 basis points to 9.5 percent, auguring costlier loans for Kenyans.

During the election campaign, Ruto portrayed himself as champion of the downtrodden and vowed to improve the lot of ordinary Kenyans. But he has since removed subsidies for fuel and maize flour—a dietary staple.

And last week, Kenya's energy regulatory body announced a hike in electricity prices from next month, despite Ruto insisting in January there would be no such increase. —AFP

## Malawi's cyclone toll to reach 1,200 as hopes fade

**LILONGWE:** The death toll from Cyclone Freddy in Malawi is slated to surpass 1,200 after authorities said Thursday hundreds of missing people would be declared dead as hopes of finding survivors fade. Freddy dumped six months' worth of rainfall on southern Malawi in six days earlier this month, triggering floods and mudslides that swept away homes, roads and bridges in a record-breaking deluge.

At least 676 people died and 538 are still missing, according to authorities. On Thursday police said those missing would be presumed dead upon completion of rescue operations, which were still ongoing in some areas.

"We are still reaching out to some places that were previously inaccessible," police spokesman Harry Namwaza told AFP. "When we are done with the process, then it will be the appropriate time for us to declare that the missing are presumed dead."

The department of Disaster Management Affairs has said rescue efforts are scaling back. "Looking at the number of days that have gone by, the possibilities of finding anyone alive are slim," disaster



**BLANTYRE:** File photo taken on March 17, 2023 shows Malawi Defence Force, (MDF) soldiers and civilians work to recover body of a victim of a mudslide which resulted due to heavy rains resulting from cyclone Freddy during an MDF and Malawi Police Service rescue operation at Manje. —AFP

management commissioner Charles Kalemba said on Wednesday. Sniffer dogs in the hard-hit city of Blantyre have been decommissioned, as crews on the ground felt they "had done the best that they could", he said. Cyclone Freddy first struck southern Africa in late February, hitting Madagascar and Mozambique, leaving Malawi unscathed. The storm then moved back out over the Indian Ocean, where it

Doctors used "full infection control measures" at the two hospitals where the case was treated, first in Whangarei on the North Island, then in nearby Auckland, the health ministry said. "Person to person transmission of rabies is extremely rare, almost unknown, so there is no risk to members of the public," the ministry said in a statement.

Rabies is usually spread by the saliva of an infected animal that bites someone. The patient, who was not identified, was suspected of having the disease when first admitted to hospital in early March.

Laboratory results later confirmed it was the

Sikh-majority northern state of 30 million people for days, arresting more than 100 of his followers and banning gatherings of more than four people in places.

After reported sightings in Delhi, in the video posted on social media on Wednesday, Singh called the police operation an "attack on the Sikh community". "I was neither afraid of arrest earlier, nor am I now. I am in high spirits. Nobody could harm me. It is the grace of God," he said. There has been no independent verification of the video but there were few doubts that it is genuine.

The manhunt has sparked protests by Sikhs outside Indian consulates in Britain, Canada and the United States, with demonstrators smashing windows in San Francisco and reportedly vandalising a Gandhi statue in Ontario. India has summoned top US, British and Canadian diplomats in New Delhi to

draw more power from the warm waters before making a rare course reversal to salam into the mainland a second time.

The overall toll of the cyclone across all the countries impacted could reach almost 1,400 if all of Malawi's missing are to be declared dead. The storm killed 165 people in Mozambique and 17 in Madagascar, according to the United Nations. —AFP

first-ever case of rabies in New Zealand, home to five million people.

"New Zealand does not have rabies in its animal or human populations, and this case does not change our rabies-free status," the health ministry said.

"Travellers should be aware, however, that there are thousands of rabies cases reported in humans around the world each year, including a number of countries in our part of the world," said director of public health Nick Jones. He urged people to get vaccinated before travelling to countries where rabies is common. —AFP

complain and press for improved security at Indian missions in their countries.

Singh's video was posted on Twitter accounts based in Britain and Canada, which the social media company took down in India following government requests, reports said. Twitter has also blocked for Indian users the accounts of several prominent Sikh Canadians who criticised the crackdown, including MP Jagmeet Singh, as well as several journalists, according to the reports.

Punjab—which is about 58 percent Sikh and 39 percent Hindu—was rocked by a violent separatist movement for Khalistan in the 1980s and early 1990s in which thousands of people died. India has often complained to foreign governments about the activities of Sikh hardliners among the Indian diaspora who, it says, are trying to revive the insurgency with a massive financial push. —AFP

## NZ reveals first-ever rabies death

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand revealed its first-ever rabies case Thursday, saying the viral disease had killed a patient who caught it abroad but there was no risk to the public.

## Fugitive Sikh separatist taunts police in video

**AMRITSAR:** A firebrand fugitive Sikh separatist has posted a video taunting Indian authorities after a fruitless almost two-week manhunt involving thousands of police and internet shutdowns. Amritpal Singh has risen to fame in recent months demanding the creation of Khalistan, a separate Sikh homeland, the struggle for which sparked deadly violence in the 1980s and 1990s.

Punjab police have been hunting Singh since March 18, cutting off mobile internet in the

# Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2023

## Will strategic payroll alternative solve wage disparities of citizens?

### Project proposed in 2015 by CSC still awaits implementation

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** The strategic payroll alternative is a project that was proposed in 2015 by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to have similar salaries among Kuwaiti citizens who work in the public sector as long as they have the same qualifications, degrees and positions. This project was welcomed by large segments of Kuwaiti citizens, especially those who work in sectors that don't pay high salaries compared to other sectors, such as oil and gas.

Since the CSC proposed this project, there have been many opposing voices who said this move does not achieve justice for citizens who work in a highly demanding jobs, compared to others who do not, warning there will be a huge turnover in many sectors if wages will be equalled, according to previous statements made by officials in the oil sector.

But calls have been rising recently to implement the project due to price hikes affecting consumables and essential goods around the world including Kuwait as a result of inflation and political issues. Some have called for raising salaries in specific sectors and jobs to support citizens instead of using the strategic payroll alternative due to its huge impact on the country's budget.

#### Wages cost

Earlier this month, chairman of the budgets and final accounts committee Adel Al-Damkhi said recruitment represents 56.7 percent of the country's

budget, stressing it is a technical issue that will have a great financial impact. He pointed out the recruitment cost used to have a supplementary budget, but now the budget has to include a figure, revealing that "KD 500 million was set in the previous budget to employ 23,000 Kuwaiti citizens".

According to labor market data issued by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) in Feb 2022, the average salary of citizens in Kuwait increased by more than 9.3 percent, amounting to KD 127 (\$410.03) in the last six years, as it reached by the end of Sept 2021 KD 1,490 compared to KD 1,363 for the same period in 2015.

Therefore, despite the stability of oil prices so far, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on global prices of raw materials, will Kuwait succeed in implementing the strategic payroll alternative project without impacting the country's budget and achieve justice for citizens?

#### The positive impact

Former member of the advisory committee of the project Abdullah Al-Abduljader stated earlier at a conference at Kuwait Economic Society (KES) that if this project was implemented when it was proposed in 2015, it would have resolved several main problems in the country such as unemployment and achieved justice in wages.

CSC proposed the payroll project and provided a basic salary schedule, considering it as one of



**KUWAIT:** According to labor market data issued by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) in Feb 2022, the average salary of citizens in Kuwait increased by more than 9.3 percent amounting to KD 127 (\$410.03) in the last six years.

the proposed solutions to reform budget expenditures. It also said it will provide a sustainable system that provides fairness and transparency in the salary scale among citizens if it is implemented and

updated. The project's main goal according to CSC is to manage growth in payroll expenses, encouraging high level of performance and increasing fairness and transparency, as mentioned previously.

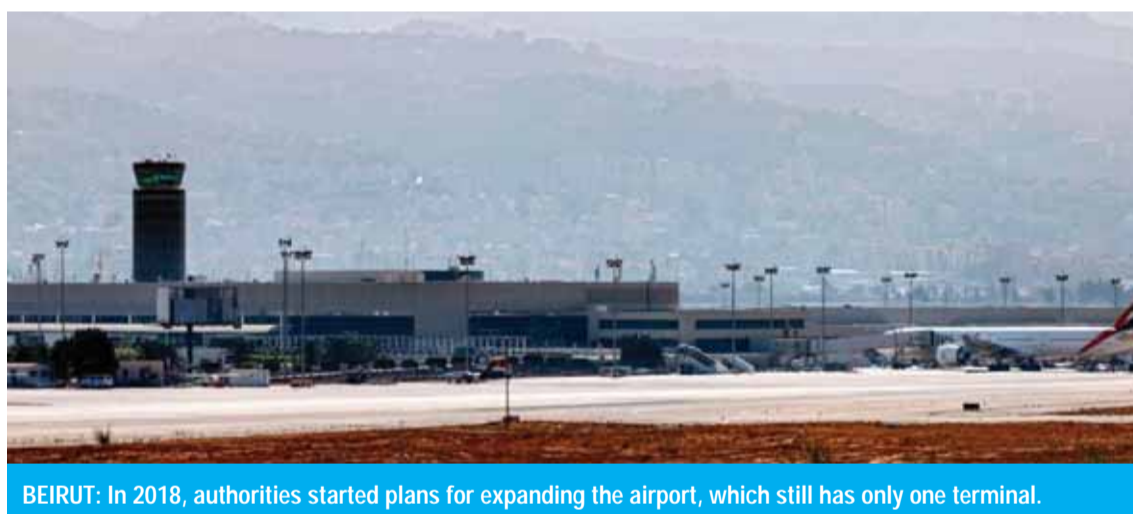
## Lebanon scraps controversial airport expansion

**BEIRUT:** Cash-strapped Lebanon has scrapped a deal for a second terminal at Beirut's international airport, the transport minister said Thursday, after critics raised transparency concerns in the \$122 million project.

Lebanon "will not proceed with the contract", Public Works and Transportation Minister Ali Hamieh said on Twitter, adding that the decision came "following legal controversy". Some had questioned how a caretaker government with limited powers could announce such a major infrastructure project, in a country where entrenched political barons are accused of systemic corruption.

Civil society organizations and lawmakers noted the absence of a tender process and a lack of involvement of the Public Procurement Authority. Jean Eliech, head of the authority, said "the contract did not pass through" the regulatory body as required under a 2021 law. Last week 10 civil society groups, including Transparency International Lebanon, warned of "serious abuses" in the procurement law's application which "opens the door to corruption and nepotism".

The government, which has been operating in a caretaker capacity since legislative elections last



**BEIRUT:** In 2018, authorities started plans for expanding the airport, which still has only one terminal.

May, announced the second terminal project last week, to be carried out by private company Lebanese Air Transport and Irish firm daa International. Hamieh had said the private sector would fund project, which would have created "around 2,500 jobs", with the firms to operate the terminal for 25 years.

Lebanon plunged into an economic crisis in 2019, that the World Bank has dubbed one of the planet's worst in modern times. The meltdown has pushed most of the population into poverty while the political elite, widely blamed for the country's financial collapse, has failed to take action.

The International Monetary Fund last week

warned the country was "at a very dangerous moment", criticizing slow progress on reforms needed to unlock billions in emergency loans. Along with a caretaker government, the country has also been without a president for almost five months amid political deadlock. Amid persistent political deadlock, the country has been without a president for almost five months, while the government has operated in a caretaker capacity since May last year.

The economic meltdown has pushed most of the population into poverty while the political elite, widely blamed for the country's financial collapse, has failed to take action. — AFP

## China's economy showing 'strong momentum': Li

**BEIJING:** China's economy is showing "strong momentum" despite a challenging global environment, Premier Li Qiang said Thursday, promising to bolster support for business as the country emerges from strict COVID controls that hampered GDP. Li's speech at the Boao Forum, a high-profile meeting on China's southern Hainan island, was his first to an international conference since being appointed Beijing's number-two official in early March.

"China's economic growth shows strong momentum," Li told top politicians and business leaders. "Judging from the situation in March, it is better than in January and February," he said, referring to a period when China saw a surge in COVID-19 infections following the lifting of strict pandemic controls.

China set an economic growth target of "around five percent" this month, one of its lowest in decades as it emerges from strict zero-COVID rules. One of President Xi Jinping's most trusted allies, Li has warned that the goal will not be "easy" to achieve. And in his speech Thursday he said Beijing would focus on preventing major financial risks, promising further state support to a private sector still reeling from a regulatory crackdown on the property, technology and private education industries. "We will launch a series of new measures to expand market access," he said, without offering details.

"We will optimize the business environment... so that state-owned enterprises dare to improve their business, private enterprises dare to venture into it and foreign companies dare to invest." China will continue to "prevent major risks", he continued, saying Beijing would "firmly hold the bottom line" against "systemic risks" to economic stability. Li's comments come in the face of international banking sector worries and rising concerns about debt-fueled development programs favored by China's local governments. The premier also reiterated Beijing's calls to avoid what it calls "a new Cold War" and to resist protectionism.

China has been vocal against western sanctions on traditional allies including Russia, North Korea and Iran. "We insist on resolving differences and disputes between countries through peaceful means, and jointly safeguard world peace and tranquility," he said.

According to state news agency Xinhua, Li on Wednesday met International Monetary Fund head Kristalina Georgieva during the forum, which has pitched itself as Asia's answer to the World Economic Forum's annual gathering of global leaders in Davos. Also attending are Spanish Prime minister Pedro Sanchez, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Singapore leader Lee Hsien Loong. — AFP

## EU deal to nearly double renewable energy by 2030

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union reached a deal Thursday to almost double the share of renewables in the 27-nation bloc's energy consumption by 2030 amid efforts to become carbon neutral and ditch Russian fossil fuels. The provisional political agreement, which was reached after nightlong negotiations between the EU parliament and states, seeks to raise the share of renewable energy to 42.5 percent, from 22 percent today.

The EU has set an ambitious target to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. The move also comes as the EU has sought to slash its dependence on Russian fossil fuels after Moscow cut gas supplies last year and the bloc placed bans on seaborne crude and other petroleum products from the country.

The figure is a compromise between the 45 percent share for renewables that was sought by EU lawmakers and the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, and the 40 percent preferred by the states. The previous target for 2030 had been set at 32 percent.

The proposed directive seeks cutting red tape for renewable energy projects. The goal is to "fast-track the deployment of renewable energies" as part of the EU's plan "to become independent from Russian fossil fuels, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine", said a statement from the Council of the EU which represents the bloc's governments. Companies have complained that red tape has slowed the development of such infrastructure.

The agreement includes hydrogen, nuclear power and biomass on the list of sources of renewable en-



**LE POULIGUEN, France:** In this file photo taken on December 9, 2022, the sun sets over an offshore wind farm, off the coast of the French Western city of Saint-Nazaire. — AFP

ergy along with solar and wind technology. Biomass derives from organic material such as trees, plants and urban waste, and includes the burning of wood to produce electricity.

Scandinavian countries defend the practice, but it is criticized by environmental groups over concerns about its impact on forests. Pascal Canfin, chairman of the European Parliament's environment committee, said the agreement sets strict rules on using biomass.

"The use of biomass is better regulated even if the parliament wanted to go further," Canfin, of the centrist Renew political group, said. Markus Pieper, of the right-wing European People's Party, said the agreement makes biomass "100 percent green".

Canfin said the deal also "recognizes the specific role of nuclear (energy) which is neither green nor a fossil fuel". The inclusion of nuclear power was

hotly debated in recent weeks.

France, a major producer of nuclear energy, and its allies wanted "low-carbon hydrogen", which is made using nuclear energy, to have the same status as hydrogen made from renewables such as solar and wind power. A group led by Germany had been opposed to including hydrogen produced from nuclear power over concerns it would slow investments in renewables.

A deal was finally reached after Sweden, which holds the rotating EU presidency, proposed a compromise. Canfin said the deal means that France will be able to use nuclear energy and not be forced to build renewables infrastructure to produce hydrogen for industry and transport.

"It was an absolute condition for France to support the final agreement," Canfin said. — AFP



Business

# Take your eyes off your mobile phone, says inventor, 50 years on

## Martin Cooper says people are little obsessed with cell phones

DEL MAR, US: The problem with mobile phones is that people look at them too much. At least, that's according to the man who invented them 50 years ago. Martin Cooper, an American engineer dubbed the "Father of the cell phone," says the neat little device we all have in our pockets has almost boundless potential and could one day even help conquer disease.

But right now, we can be a little obsessed. "I am devastated when I see somebody crossing the street and looking at their cell phone. They are out of their minds," the 94-year-old told AFP from his office in Del Mar, California. "But after a few people get run over by cars, they'll figure it out," he joked.

Cooper wears an Apple Watch and uses a top-end iPhone, flicking intuitively between his email, photos, YouTube and the controls for his hearing aid. He gets his hands on the latest model every time it is updated, and gives it a thorough road test. But, he confesses, with several million apps available, it can all feel a bit much. "I will never, ever understand how to use the cell phone the way my grandchildren and great grandchildren do," he says.

Cooper's iPhone—which he says he likes to use mostly to speak to people—is

certainly a very long way from the weighty block of wires and circuits that he used to make the very first mobile phone call on April 3, 1973. At the time he was working for Motorola, leading a team of designers and engineers who were engaged in a sprint to come up with the first properly mobile technology and avoid being squeezed out of an up-and-coming market. The company had invested millions of dollars in the project, hoping to beat out Bell System, a behemoth that dominated US telecoms for more than a century from its inception in 1877. Bell's engineers had floated the idea of a cellular phone system just after World War II, and by the late 1960s had taken it as far as putting phones in cars—partially because of the huge battery they needed.

But for Cooper, that didn't represent real mobility. At the tail end of 1972, he decided he wanted a device that you could use anywhere. So with the entire resources of Motorola at his disposal, he pulled together experts on semiconductors, transistors, filters and antennae who worked around the clock for three months. By the end of March, they had cracked it, unveiling the DynaTAC—Dynamic Adaptive Total Area Coverage—phone.

"This phone weighed over a kilo—

about two and a half pounds—and had a battery life of roughly 25 minutes of talking," he said. "That was not a problem. This phone was so heavy, you couldn't hold it up for 25 minutes." That very first phone call didn't have to be long. It just had to work.

And who better for Cooper to call than his rival? "So here I am standing on Sixth Avenue (in New York) and it occurred to me I had to call my counterpart at The Bell System... Dr. Joel Engel. "And I said, 'Joel, this is Martin Cooper... I'm talking to you on a handheld cell phone. But a real cell phone, personal, portable, handheld.' "There was silence on the other end of the line. I think he was gritting his teeth."

Those first mobile phones were not cheap at around \$5,000 per handset, but they granted early adopters—who Cooper says included people trying to sell property—an edge. "It turns out that what real estate people do is they show people houses, or they answer the phone for new clients. "Now they could do both at the same time; it doubled their productivity."

And mobile phones continue to improve people's lives. "The cell phone has now become an extension of the person, it can do so many more things," he said. "And in that regard, we are just at the



DEL MAR, US: Engineer Martin Cooper holds a contemporary copy of the original cell phone he used to make the first cell phone call on April 3, 1973, in Del Mar, California on March 20, 2023. —AFP

very beginning. We're just starting to understand what that could do. "In the future, we can expect the cell phone to revolutionize education, it will revolution-

ize healthcare. "I know that sounds like an exaggeration, but I want you to know within a generation or two, we are going to conquer disease." —AFP

## 'Dumbphone' fans disconnect in face of smartphone rule

SAN FRANCISCO: Shunning his smartphone for a "dumb" one changed the way Jose Briones engages with the world—and he likes it that way. The 27-year-old Colorado resident turns to CDs when he wants music, instead of streaming it. When he has to get someplace, he prints out directions before setting out or, if needed, falls back on the sometimes-forgotten practice of asking a stranger which way to go.

Briones is far from alone in reconnecting with the analog world by relying less on finding life's solutions via the internet on his phone. He hasn't for-

saken the internet entirely however: Briones helps moderate a Reddit forum devoted to so-called dumbphones, which had 17,000 thousand "enthusiasts" as members as of Monday.

"People who want to regain their time and attention, and have a deeper more purposeful life, I think that is who this message is resonating with," Briones told AFP. Dumbphones, also referred to as feature phones, are essentially throw-back handsets without big screens and a mountain of apps.

They are reminiscent of the pre-iPhone era when mobile phones allowed users to call another line, an astounding breakthrough made when the first mobile phone call was dialed on April 3, 1973 -- 50 years ago. An array of handset makers cater to that market with feature or "minimalist" phones that go beyond just calls and text messages to allow for a couple of apps. A Reddit forum member with the screen name Melanin\_King0 told of finding it easier to cope with mental

strain and of feeling better overall since switching to a dumbphone about three weeks ago.

"When I was constantly on my smartphone, I felt like my brain would fog up," Melanin\_King0 said in an exchange with AFP. "It would be harder to do anything and scrolling on Instagram's Reels and TikTok was sapping my motivation." Another Reddit user said that carrying a smartphone caused "background anxiety" and more superficial connections with friends and family.

The young hipster crowd is also giving dumbphones a try, thinking of them as cool or retro, according to Briones. Many members of the "dumbphones" forum have made the switch away from smartphones but keep some conveniences such as email, Spotify, Google Maps, or Microsoft Teams, Briones noted. But "not many people come and say they want to keep TikTok, Instagram and Facebook," Briones said. —AFP



LITTLETON, US: Jose Briones speaks to a coworker while using what he refers to as a dumbphone at his apartment in Littleton, Colorado. —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 30 MARCH 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,051	1,056	1,065	1,048	17	17,379,460	-4	-0.40%	-2.00%	1,055	1,068	15.7	1.96	3.3%	1.01
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	287	298	298	287	11	10,170,552	9	3.10%	-5.10%	294	303	15.0	1.30	3.4%	1.27
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	187	187	189	185	4	17,121,096	0	0.00%	-4.60%	186	194	23.8	0.58	2.1%	1.16
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	218	221	221	213	8	3,393,110	1	0.50%	0.90%	217	222	17.2	0.79	3.7%	1.27
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	824	826	831	819	12	39,254,586	2	0.20%	0.40%	825	834	25.2	1.87	1.8%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	659	643	659	619	40	59,139,466	-8	-1.20%	-19.40%	620	649	46.2	2.54	0.9%	1.14
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	122	120	124	120	4	2,405,447	-5	-4.00%	-21.10%	119	123	105.3	0.55	4.2%	1.83
204	National Investments	Financial Services	239	241	245	236	9	2,316,971	0	0.00%	1.70%	237	244	21.9	0.96	18.8%	1.85
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	120	123	129	116	13	50,724,834	3	2.50%	9.80%	122	126	20.8	0.73	0.0%	0.96
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	110	105	110	101	9	10,873,394	-4	-3.70%	-8.70%	101	106	10.6	0.75	2.3%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	129	132	133	128	5	15,557,052	2	1.50%	-0.80%	128	136	9.9	0.95	5.7%	1.65
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	58.7	55.7	58.7	55.0	3.7	1,403,076	-1	-2.50%	-25.60%	55.5	57.1	-	0.35	16.0%	1.24
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	109	109	109	105	4	12,102,855	1	0.90%	0.90%	108	111	13.5	0.76	2.7%	1.09
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	745	728	747	721	26	3,944,993	-17	-2.30%	-14.20%	725	745	14.8	1.57	1.9%	1.05
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	100	100.0	101	99.0	2	13,444,236	0	0.20%	1.40%	99	104	14.2	0.61	3.0%	0.61
501	National Industries	Financial Services	194	195	199	193	6	2,742,436	1	0.50%	-10.10%	190	202	10.9	0.86	5.7%	1.51
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,099	1,095	1,110	999	111	1,223,919	-4	-0.40%	-9.90%	1,090	1,149	10.6	1.05	5.5%	1.04
506	HEISCO	Industrials	588	587	597	574	23	1,299,357	-4	-0.70%	-4.20%	576	590	18.4	1.46	3.5%	0.77
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	760	782	785	758	27	1,938,135	24	3.20%	-2.30%	777	790	7.9	1.53	7.8%	0.92
603	Agility	Industrials	615	621	627	606	21	17,426,642	8	1.30%	-13.80%	618	634	40.3	1.13	2.7%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	537	540	547	533	14	14,645,792	0	0.00%	-4.10%	528	546	12.0	1.91	6.5%	0.77
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,829	3,891	3,920	3,750	170	1,201,316	62	1.60%	10.50%	3,840	3,930	9.2	3.50	10.4%	0.63
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	200	187	200	185	15	1,047,766	-2	-1.10%	-7.90%	184	195	-	0.80	0.0%	1.19
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,865	1,810	1,865	1,808	57	355,996	-37	-2.00%	-4.70%	1,780	1,820	19.9	10.93	4.4%	1.40
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	74	77.0	78	74	4	25,488,112	2	3.20%	1.10%	77	80	9.8	0.91	6.2%	1.34
821	Warba Bank	Banking	222	228	229	220	9	12,171,309	5	2.20%	-3.00%	221	229	30.5	1.20	1.3%	1.09
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	379	366	380	360	20	4,990,204	-13	-3.40%	-6.90%	360	375	-	1.11	4.3%	0.50
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	355	369	369	351	18	6,015,072	13	3.70%	-0.30%	362	371	23.6	1.48	2.8%	0.72
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	176	177	177	173	4	1,669,060	1	0.60%	-5.90%	175	178	13.2	1.64	10.3%	0.49
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,788	1,795	1,830	1,772	58	518,719	7	0.40%	-12.50%	1,770	1,840	20.0	5.49	4.7%	1.03
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	902	920	945	877	68	3,272,524	19	2.10%	14.30%	900	950	12.6	3.45	6.3%	0.32

\* As of end of week closing

## Business

# Dhaman urges Arab countries to improve position in sovereign ratings, risk indices

## Gulf countries, then Jordan, Morocco and Egypt keep leading Arab rankings

KUWAIT: Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) urged Arab countries to put in place urgent and comprehensive plans to improve their status in sovereign ratings and political, economic, financial and operational risk rating indices issued by specialized world monitoring and rating agencies, by means of forming high-level specialized committees comprising all state bodies concerned. They would undertake proposing necessary reforms and measures and coordinate with existing research teams that issue these indices.

In the editorial of Dhaman's first quarterly bulletin for 2023, issued on Thursday, Director-General Abdullah Ahmad Al-Sabeeh underlined the corporation's willingness to give a hand in this regard, due to the paramount significance of sovereign rating and risk indices to show how much regional and international multinational companies and finance, investment and trade corporations are interested in Arab countries, and thus determining their quota of investment, finance and commercial inflows, which are considered the core

element of comprehensive development.

Al-Sabeeh elaborated that based on its realization of the significance of these ratings, the corporation pursues the region's only accurate monitoring of more than 27 indices issued by 14 international sovereign, credit and risk rating agencies, revealing relative stability during 2022 in sovereign Arab rating and political, economic, financial and operational risk rating, thanks to many regional developments and factors, primarily the continued considerable rise in oil prices by more than 41 percent compared to the previous year, and relative calm in several regional flashpoints.

### The key results come as follows:

- The sovereign rating of nine Arab countries stabilized, with the improvement of the rating of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman against the decline in Tunisia's rating, in addition to the change in the future vision of four countries, according to the four leading international agencies.

- The Gulf countries, then Jordan, Morocco and Egypt, continued to keep

leading Arab rankings in most ratings of risk indices.

- The average global ranking of Arab countries improved in the Fitch and PRS indices for measuring the political, economic and financial country risks in the short, medium and long terms, as well as in the trade and investment risk indices of Dun & Bradstreet and Credendo agencies.

- The ranking of most Arab countries stabilized in the various risk rating indices of Coface, Allianz Trade, and Japan's Nixie Agency.

- The Gulf countries and Morocco topped the Arab countries in the Atradius index of country risks by the end of 2022.

- The average ranking of Arab countries improved in the Global Peace Index, with an improvement in the situation in 13 countries.

The Director-General noted that the expected rating of the Arab countries for 2023 in the indices of those global agencies will be contingent upon the efforts of the Arab countries to promote their political, security, economic and financial stability, together with a set of external factors, the most im-



Abdullah Ahmad Al-Sabeeh

portant of which come as follows:

- The success of regional and international consensus among the influential parties in promoting relative stability in the causes of Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Libya and Palestine.

- The fate of ongoing efforts exerted to promote rapprochement between the Arab countries on the one hand and their

regional neighbors, mainly Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia, on the other hand.

- The ability of Chinese and international mediation to halt the Russian-Ukrainian war, or at least to ensure a temporary truce that paves the way for a settlement that precludes potential war spillover, especially amid dwindling tensions between the United States and China over the Taiwan file.

- The ramifications of the recurrent hike of US interest rates on US and international banking conditions, as well as on emerging economies, especially Arab ones.

- The future of Arab-American relations in light of 2024 US presidential election results.

Based in Kuwait, the Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) was established in 1974. It comprises as members all Arab countries and four joint Arab financial institutions. It provides specialized insurance services against credit and political risks with a view to facilitate the inflow of foreign direct investments into Arab countries and backing Arab exports and imports.

## US Fed accepts SVB regulatory failings in hearings

WASHINGTON: US regulators charged with overseeing Silicon Valley Bank before its collapse this month said Wednesday that they shared in the blame for its rapid failure, after it took excessive interest-rate risk. "I think that any time you have a bank failure like this, bank management clearly failed, supervisors failed and our regulatory system failed," the Federal Reserve's vice chair for supervision Michael Barr told the House Financial Services Committee.

"I think we as the regulators of the institution had responsibility," Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation chair Martin Gruenberg said during the hearing, while also blaming SVB's management for its failure. Barr, Gruenberg and Treasury undersecretary for domestic finance Nellie Liang were on Capitol Hill for their second day of Congressional hearings on the dramatic failure of the Californian lender.

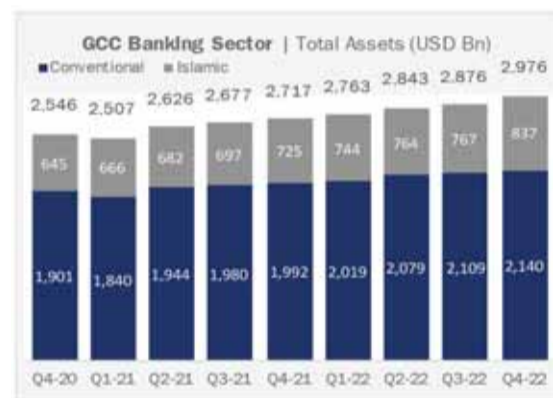
SVB's collapse earlier in March following a bank run sparked a broader sell-off of banking stocks by concerned investors which led to the fall of another regional lender, Signature Bank, and the merger under pressure of Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse. Wednesday's hearing comes a day after Senators accused regulators of failing to do enough to prevent Silicon Valley Bank's fall, despite knowing it was over-exposed to the risk of rising interest rates. —AFP

## Kuwait leads lending growth among GCC banks: KAMCO report

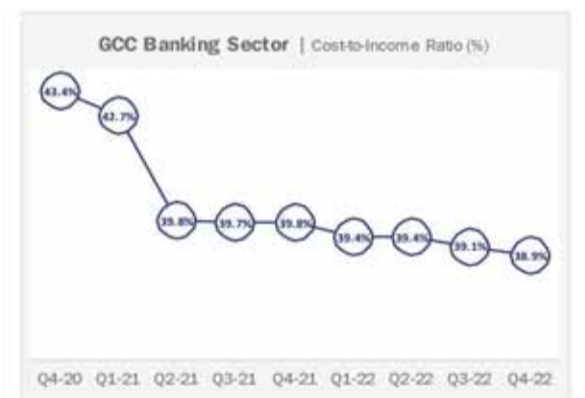
KUWAIT: Lending growth continued to remain strong in the GCC during Q4-2022 resulting in record high loan books at the end of the quarter. Aggregate gross loans reached \$1.87 trillion, up 3.2 percent q-o-q and 8.9 percent y-o-y, mainly led by strong growth across the GCC, barring a marginal decline for Bahraini banks. Kuwaiti banks reported the strongest q-o-q growth in lending mainly led by KFH takeover of AUB and the associated consolidated gross loan book for both the banks. Qatari banks were next with a growth of 3.2 percent in gross loans that reached \$603 billion after four out of seven listed banks in Qatar reported higher q-o-q gross loans.

The trend in net loans was similar with listed banks in all GCC countries reporting higher q-o-q net loans at the end of Q4-2022, barring Bahraini banks that reported a 0.3 percent decline. Aggregate net loans at the end of the quarter reached \$1.77 trillion registering a growth of 2.8 percent or \$48.7 billion.

Credit growth in the GCC remained strong during Q4-2022 despite higher interest rates, indicating strong economic activity and business confidence in the region. Manufacturing activity data from Bloomberg (Markit Whole Economy Surveys) showed PMI figure at one of the highest levels recorded recently for Saudi Arabia at 59.8 during February-2023 and elevated in the case of UAE at 54.3 and at 51.9 for Qatar. Central bank data on credit growth in the region showed higher q-o-q lending for all regional central banks barring Bahrain that reported a decline of 2.2 percent and UAE, which reported a marginal drop of 0.2 percent. GCC central banks data showed that after months of marginal activity, Qatari banks reported the biggest lending growth during the quarter at 3.5 percent during Q4-2022 as compared to a decline in



Source: Reuters, Company Financials, Kamco Invest Research



lending during the previous quarter.

Saudi Arabia continued to report strong growth during the quarter at 1.4 percent, although the pace of growth declined considerably and was the smallest since June-2019. The growth in the case of Kuwaiti banks was also modest at 0.9 percent q-o-q and was the smallest growth since Q4-2020, while credit growth reported by Oman central bank came in at 1.2 percent during Q4-2022. Aggregate credit facilities in Qatar reached QAR 1.3 trillion at the end of Q4-2022 mainly backed by 9.0 percent growth in lending to the Real Estate sector followed by 5.5 percent and 5.4 percent growth in lending to services and public sector. The broader GCC banking sector is expected to see only a limited indirect impact from the ongoing banking sector crisis in the US and Europe.

### Minimal impact

The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in the US had only marginal impact with minimal exposure of banks only in the UAE, while most of the other countries in the GCC remained unaffected. The bulk of the exposure was from various startups and VCs that had accounts with SVB that may now bank with local banks, although under increased scrutiny.

Various central banks in the region also an-

nounced that banks have limited exposure to SVB. A report from S&P showed that out of the 19 GCC banks the agency rates, the aggregate exposure to the whole of US was 4.6 percent of assets and 2.3 percent of liabilities at the end of 2022. The report said that GCC banks normally have limited lending activity in the US and most of the assets that these banks hold are invested in high-credit quality instruments or with government instruments. In terms of exposure to Credit Suisse (CS), the bulk of the impact was on the holders of ATI issued by CS that saw a complete write-off of around \$17 billion. The overall global market for ATI was also affected as additional funding became more difficult from this market for the global banking sector. In terms of shareholders of CS in the GCC, Saudi National Bank (SNB) had acquired 9.9 percent stake in the bank late last year for \$1.5 billion. After the UBS acquisition, this stake is said to be worth \$280 million, according to a MarketWatch report. Rising interest rates in the US and its almost full replication by most GCC central banks during 2022 resulted in higher aggregate net interest margin (NIM) for the GCC banking sector. NIM for GCC banks averaged at a multi-year high of over three percent during Q4-2022 despite partially reflecting the higher interest rates as bulk of the rate hikes were made during the second half of the year.

## China property giant sees first annual loss since 2007

BEIJING: Chinese property giant Country Garden reported its first annual loss in fifteen years on Thursday, blaming persistent headwinds in the property market and the COVID-19 pandemic. China's property sector has been weakened by a slowing economy and a regulatory crackdown in recent years that narrowed developers' access to credit. Country Garden—the nation's biggest developer in terms of sales—recorded a loss of 6.1 billion yuan (\$887 million) for 2022, according to a stock exchange filing on Thursday.

It is the company's first full-year loss since its 2007 listing on the Hong Kong stock exchange, and a sharp drop from the 26.7 billion yuan profit it recorded for 2021.

China's property sector experienced a "harsh winter" in 2022, the group said in its filing, pointing to the "continued impact of COVID-19". China's housing market, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of GDP, remains in a slump, having been dealt a hefty blow by Beijing's crackdown on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation starting in 2020.

Real estate sales have since fallen in multiple cities and several developers are struggling to survive, with homebuyers last year refusing to pay mortgages on incomplete properties. Strict restrictions and sudden lockdowns imposed as part of China's zero-COVID policy disrupted construction and further dampened consumer confidence. But authorities have signaled a relaxation of the property crackdown in recent months, with the government in January announcing it would ease financial conditions for a list of developers deemed to be healthy.

Country Garden, which was part of that list, said on Thursday it believed the property market had "bottomed out and can look forward to a recovery". —AFP



LONDON: Nearly half of British workers are at risk of burnout as the cost-of-living crisis adds to anxiety, with work-related stress costing the British economy £28 billion (\$34 billion) last year, a study said.

## Survey: Nearly half of British workers at risk of burnout

LONDON: Nearly half of British workers are at risk of burnout as the cost-of-living crisis adds to anxiety, with work-related stress costing the British economy £28 billion (\$34 billion) last year, a study said Wednesday. The report, published by French insurer AXA and UK think tank CEBR, found that Britons took a total of 23.3 million sick days last year due to poor mental health.

Researchers quizzed 30,000 adults across 16 European, Asian and American nations.

"Burnout and work-related stress is a significant issue for the UK economy," the study concluded. Some 21 percent of Britons surveyed were classed as "struggling" or in emotional distress.

That compared with 17 percent in the United States, 14 percent in Japan and Ireland, 11 percent in Belgium and ten percent in China and France. In Britain, a further 26 percent of respondents were "languishing", or not in a positive state of mind. "People

in the UK are more likely to be struggling with their mind health compared to any other country surveyed," the study added.

"This means almost half of the UK are currently not in a positive state of mental wellbeing and at risk of burning out, which is having a significant impact on the economy and businesses." Britain's cost-of-living crisis was a key contributor to work-linked anxiety, as soaring inflation slashes the value of salaries. Almost half of Britons surveyed felt "overwhelmed and uncertain" over the future.

Financial stress and concerns are costing UK businesses up to £6.2 billion alone in sick days and lost productivity, CEBR data also showed. Yet the study highlighted some improvement in the UK, with "a decline in the stigma associated with having a mental health condition" and an increase in respondents with "very good" mental health compared with the previous year. AXA UK chief executive Claudio Genial said it's concerning that so many people in Britain are struggling with their mental health. "Our findings show that not only does this have an impact on these individuals, it also comes at a huge cost to the economy and society as a whole," he said.

"There are positive signs... but it's clear that more needs to be done to support people at work and in their everyday life," he added. —AFP

## Nigeria's cash shortage eases after strike threat

LAGOS: A lingering cash crunch in Nigeria, which saw long lines of customers at banks and cash dispenser machines was easing on Wednesday after the central bank reissued old naira notes back into circulation. The queues at banks in Lagos and most cities had started disappearing since Monday as most customers began to be able to access physical cash.

The National Labour Congress (NLC) union movement had threatened strikes over the cash scarcity starting Wednesday, but on Tuesday announced they would postpone for two weeks to monitor how Nigerians were accessing cash. "Yes there is compliance, but the NLC... doubted the sustainability of that compliance," Joe Ajaero, NLC president told reporters. "We felt we have to monitor this compliance for the next two weeks." The cash shortages began in October when the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) gave a February 2023 deadline to change old 200, 500, and 1,000 naira bills for new redesigned ones.

The policy was intended to promote cashless transactions in a country where many businesses operate in the informal sector which relies on cash and hardly uses the banking system. According to the CBN, the policy was also aimed at mopping up excess cash outside the banking system, counter corruption as well as discourage ransom payments to bandits and kidnappers terrorizing the nation. The cash crisis also hit during campaigning for the February 24 election to choose the successor for President Muhammadu Buhari. Former Lagos governor Bola Tinubu won that ballot though opposition parties are contesting the results in court claiming vote rigging and other illegal activities.

Still, the implementation of the cash swap caused hardship for most Nigerians as long queues of depositors formed outside banks and ATMs. Some people slept outside banks with little hope of getting cash, which many Nigerians use for market shopping and transport. Protests broke out in several cities over the cash shortages. —AFP

Lifestyle



A model wears a 10.57 carat vivid pink diamond. —AFP photos



A model holds a 10.57 carat vivid pink diamond, with an estimated value of more than \$35 million, during a press preview at Sotheby's in New York City.

## Rare pink diamond worth \$35m set for auction in New York

A rare, vividly rosy-purple diamond, called the Eternal Pink and valued at \$35 million, is set to be auctioned off by Sotheby's as part of its Magnificent Jewels sale in New York in June.

The 10.57-carat stone is being marketed as the most valuable purplish-pink diamond ever brought to auction, with the highest ever pre-auction price per carat estimate, according to Sotheby's. "Its refined lines combined with the intensity of its color earn it a place as one of the world's most extraordinary gems," Tom Moses, executive vice president and chief laboratory and research officer at the Gemological Institute of America said of the cushion-cut diamond.

According to Sotheby's, the stone, which was mined in Botswana, is "comparable to ultimate masterpieces of art -- far rarer than a Magritte or a Warhol," thanks to its clarity and lack of imperfections. Pink diamonds are among the rarest and most sought-after gems in the world and considered a major draw for investors. The record for highest-ever auction price for such a stone is held by the CTF Pink Star, which was sold for \$71.2 million in Hong Kong in 2017. The Williamson Pink Star diamond, which sold for \$57.7 million in 2022, also in Hong Kong, holds the record for the highest price per carat, at nearly \$5.2 million. —AFP

## Beatles photos shot by Paul McCartney unveiled ahead of exhibition

A UK art gallery on Thursday released a handful of previously unseen photographs taken by Paul McCartney, ahead of a major display later this year showcasing how he captured Beatlemania through his own lens. The National Portrait Gallery unveiled the five photos from an archive of more than 250 images shot by McCartney between November 1963 and February 1964 which will feature in its exhibition opening in late June.

They include black-and-white self-portraits shot in a mirror in Paris, John Lennon also in the French capital, George Harrison wearing sunglasses in Miami Beach, and Ringo Starr in London. The exhibition, "Paul McCartney Photographs 1963-64: Eyes Of The Storm", will run for three months from June 28 to mark the famous London gallery's reopening after three years of refurbishments.

Curators have drawn from more than 250 photographs in McCartney's personal archive, taken on his Pentax camera, as the so-called Fab Four were being propelled to global stardom. McCartney called their exhibition at the country's foremost portrait space "humbling yet also astonishing".

"Looking at these photos now, decades after they were taken, I find there's a sort of innocence about them," he said in a statement released by the gallery. "Everything was new to us at this point. But I like to think I wouldn't take them any differently today."

"They now bring back so many stories, a flood of special memories, which is one of the



many reasons I love them all, and know that they will always fire my imagination." McCartney approached the gallery in 2020 about staging a display after stumbling across the images, which he thought were lost.

They chronicle a critical period in the evolution of the band, beginning with portraits taken backstage in Liverpool and culminating with their performance on The Ed Sullivan Show in New York for an audience of millions.

National Portrait Gallery director Nicholas Cullinan said the exhibition will give people a sense of what Beatlemania looked and felt like "for the four pairs of eyes that lived and witnessed it first-hand". "McCartney's intimate photographs have more in common with a family album, capturing people caught in off-guard moments of relaxation and laughter," he added. An accompanying book of photographs and reflections will be published on June 13. —AFP

# Sale of SHEA BUTTER brings hope to women in Mali



A woman sorts her products in a Karite butter shop in Siby. —AFP photos



A woman mixes the shea nut paste, which will be used to make Karite butter in Siby.



A woman spreads shea nuts out in the sun to dry as she starts the process of making Karite butter in Siby.

Niagale Camara places nuts into a basin, working with her colleagues at a cooperative near Bamako, Mali, to transform the fruit into a highly prized vegetable oil: shea butter. Shea, a tree indigenous to Africa, and whose fruit is collected almost entirely by women, is becoming an instrument of economic development in some of the poorest countries in the world.

According to the Global Shea Alliance, 16 million Africans living in the region from Senegal to South Sudan live or survive on its harvest -- mainly in rural areas. Mali is one of the world's leading producers along with Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Demand for the product has exploded in recent years, driven by Western consumers who increasingly want to buy products presented as organic and natural.

But the women in the cooperative of producers of shea butter at the rural community of Siby, despite having set up in 2003, are struggling to profit from this windfall. There are nearly 1,000 women working there. Permanent salaries earn them the equivalent of minimum wage each month, or around 45,000 CFA francs (70 euros). Temporary workers are paid by the task.

One of the advantages of the cooperative is that it has allowed women to have jobs "over all seasons, when their activity was previously limited to the rainy season," said Filling Koumare, the cooperative's sales manager.

Step by step, they transform the product. They peel it to extract the kernel. This is then crushed, washed and dried several times before being cooked in a pot to produce a dark liquid. What remains is filtered and cleared of impurities, resulting in the final oil, shea butter, which is used for making soaps and creams and sold in the village, the capital Bamako and to clients around the world, according to Kamissoko Kinimba Niara, accountant for the cooperative.

"When women make their sales, they get an income that allows them a bit of financial autonomy," said Assitan Kone Camara, president of the cooperative. "But one of the difficulties is the lack of support and the lack of means," she added. For Daouda Keita, mayor of the town, "It is crucial to support this structure in order to modernise it." Managers are demanding training and financial support, particularly for sales and marketing.



Women break open shea nuts which will be used to make Karite butter in Siby.



A woman cooks the shea nut paste to extract the oil, which will be used to make Karite butter in Siby.



A woman carries a bucket of shea nuts which will be used to make Karite butter in Siby.



Women work together to filter the oil extracted from the shea nut, which will be used to make Karite butter.



A woman spreads shea nuts out in the sun to dry as she starts the process of making Karite butter.



A woman mixes the shea nut paste, which will be used to make Karite butter.



A woman pours freshly made karite butter into container which will be sold in Siby.



A man uses a machine to grind shea nuts into a paste, which will be used to make Karite butter.



A woman empties a bucket of shea nuts which will be used to make Karite butter.



Women break open shea nuts which will be used to make Karite butter.



A woman mixes the shea nut paste, which will be used to make Karite butter.

## Lifestyle

# TITANOSAUR: Largest dinosaur ever to walk the Earth goes on display in UK

A cast of one of the largest dinosaurs ever to stride the Earth goes on display in London Friday, the first time the star exhibit has been seen in Europe since the original was discovered in Patagonia.

At 122 feet (37.2 metres) long, the titanosaur — named Patagotitan mayorum — only just fits into the exhibition hall at London's Natural History Museum. With its neck extended upwards, it would have been tall enough to poke its head into a five-storey building, according to researchers. Titanosaurs were the last remaining long-necked sauropod dinosaurs still thriving at the time the species went extinct.

Patagotitan will be a welcome replacement for the museum's longtime dinosaur attraction, the popular Diplodocus "Dippy" replica which was on display until 2017.

The new cast is a replica of one of six titanosaurs found after a farmer in the Argentinian region spotted a giant thigh bone sticking out of the earth in 2010, leading to excavations over a number of years. "They discovered a graveyard of these animals with six different individuals in the ground," Paul Barrett, the exhibition's science lead told AFP.

"Over about three years, they excavated all these bones... and were able to reveal that they had a new type of gigantic dinosaur... one of the largest animals that's ever walked the Earth," he added. The titanosaurs lived in the forests of modern-day Patagonia 100 to



95 million years ago during the Late Cretaceous period. Researchers estimate that in addition to its extraordinary length, it would also have weighed about 57 tonnes.

### Mysterious demise

The recently discovered herbivore would have had four column-like legs, and an extremely long neck and tail. To sustain itself, it would have need-

ed to eat around 130 kilograms (286 pounds) of vegetation every day.

All six dinosaurs, which were discovered at the same site, are believed to have died at the same time although the reason for their demise remains a mystery. "We don't know why they died... It could be that they were taken out by a flood. It could be they were taken out by some other environmental problem like maybe a drought," Barrett said, adding that research was ongoing.

Following the discovery in Argentina, dinosaur experts did 3D scans of each individual bone to create replicas made out of polyester resin and fibreglass, which they mounted on a steel structure. The giant cast took a firm in Canada more than six months to make, based on the scores of excavated fossil bones. The real bones would have been far too heavy to put on display, but the fact that they are replicas means visitors are allowed to touch the exhibit.

The replica arrived in London in 32 separate crates meaning "each piece had to be put together like a giant jigsaw puzzle," said Sinead Marron of the Natural History Museum. Marron said the wider aim of the exhibition was to "tell the story of how an animal like this grew up from an egg that's smaller than a football into this amazing 57-tonne giant." Interactive games and touchable replicas help bring the story to life.

Visitors will be able to touch the teeth of one of the titanosaur's predators or even step inside its internal organs to see how its lungs, heart and gut all worked together, she added. —AFP

## Australian scientists piece together toothy wombat ancestor

A chunky wombat ancestor with a powerful bite wandered Australia's once-lush Outback around 25 million years ago munching on fruit and nuts, fossils found by Australian scientists have shown.

A team of scientists from Flinders University pieced together fossils uncovered in Australia's remote Northern Territory to reveal the long-extinct marsupial named *Mukupirna fortidentata*.

The palaeontologists also identified an ancient possum named *Chunia* pledgei, which they said had "bizarre nut-cracker teeth".

"These curious beasts are members of marsupial lineages that went extinct long ago, leaving no modern descendants," said Arthur Crichton, from Flinders University's Palaeontology Laboratory.

"Learning about these animals helps put the wombat and possum groups that survive today in a broader evolutionary context."

The fossils were uncovered in several digs over the past decade, enabling the team to reconstruct the archaic animals back in the laboratory.

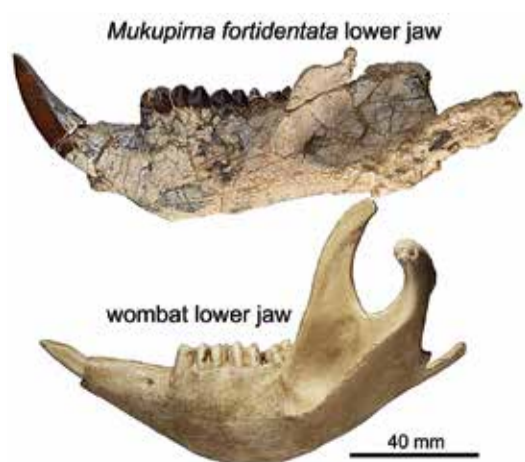
The wombat-like creature boasted a powerful bite, likely dined on tough fruits and nuts and was thought to weigh up to 50 kilograms (110 pounds), making it one of the largest marsupials alive at the time.

The creature is linked to *Mukupirna nambensis* -- discovered in 2020 -- a giant relative that would dwarf most of today's wombats.

Although it was unclear what drove the beast extinct, it disappeared during a period of changing climate as ancient forest regions in Australia's centre became increasingly arid, said Professor Gavin Prideaux, director of the university's palaeontology lab.

"While wombats were very successful over the succeeding period, the *mukupirnids* seem to have gone extinct sometime before the end of the late Oligocene (25-23 million years ago)," Prideaux said.

Less was known about the early possum of the *Ektopodontidae* family because it was a "tantalisingly rare" find, but it sported a lemur-like face with "very strange teeth", Crichton said. —AFP



This undated handout picture released by Flinders University shows the left lower jaw of the *Mukupirna fortidentata* (top) compared with that of the southern hairy-nosed wombat. —AFP

## DNA reveals mixed ancestry of medieval Swahilis

The first DNA recovered from members of the medieval Swahili civilisation has revealed that Africans and Asians were intermingling along the East African coast more than a thousand years ago, a study said Wednesday.

The authors of the study said it confirms ancient oral histories about the shared ancestry of Swahili people, as well as settling a "longstanding controversy" from colonial times about how much Africans contributed to the civilisation. Starting from the seventh century AD, the Swahili civilisation included the coastal regions of modern day Kenya, Tanzania, southern Somalia, northern Mozambique, Madagascar and the Comoros and Zanzibar archipelagos.

Millions of modern day people along these coasts identify as Swahili, and the language is one of the most widely spoken in the region.

For the study, an international team of researchers sequenced the DNA of 80 people who lived in different Swahili areas from 1250 to 1800 AD. They said that from around 1000 AD, up to half of the DNA was from overwhelmingly male migrants from Southwest Asia — around 90 percent from Persia and 10 percent from India.

The other half was almost entirely African women, according to the study published in the *Nature* journal. This timeline is consistent with the *Kilwa Chronicle*, which was passed down in Swahili oral

histories for centuries and tells of Persian migrants arriving from around 1000 AD.

It was also from around this time that Islam became a dominant religion in the region. The authors emphasised that the study also showed that the hallmarks of Swahili civilisation predated the arrivals from abroad.

### 'Africanness of the Swahili'

Chapurukha Kusimba, an anthropologist at the University of South Florida who has been working on the subject for 40 years, told AFP that the research was "the highlight of my career".

Kusimba said that colonial-era archaeologists seemed to believe that Africans "did not have the mental capacity" to build medieval Swahili infrastructure such as cemeteries, instead solely crediting foreign influence. But more recent research has shown that 95 percent of the material recovered from Swahili archaeological sites was "home-grown," including the architecture itself, Kusimba said.

He added that the latest study showed the "Africanness of the Swahili, without marginalising the Persian and Indian connection". David Reich, a study co-author and geneticist at Harvard University, said in a statement that "ancient DNA allowed us to address a longstanding controversy that could not be tested without genetic data



Young Swahili women photographed in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in 1900.

from these times and places". The DNA evidence shows that the intermingling was mostly Persian men having children with African women. This does not necessarily indicate "sexual exploitation" because of the matriarchal nature of Swahili societies, Kusimba said.

Reich said it was more likely that "Persian men allied with and married into local trading families and adopted local customs to enable them to be more successful traders". From around 1500 AD, the ancestors increasingly came from Arabia, the study said. —AFP

## Meatball from extinct mammoth unveiled by food tech firm



Vow created the mammoth meatball to demonstrate the potential of meat grown from cells, without the slaughter of animals.



A meatball made from flesh cultivated using the DNA of an extinct woolly mammoth is presented at NEMO Science Museum.

Food scientists on Tuesday unveiled a giant meatball made from lab-grown flesh of an extinct woolly mammoth, saying the protein from the past showed the way for future foods.

The glistening meatball was displayed under a glass bell jar by Australian-based cultivated meat firm Vow at the NEMO science museum in the Dutch capital Amsterdam.

But it is not ready to be eaten just yet, with the thousands-of-years-old protein requiring safety testing before modern humans can tuck in.

"We chose woolly mammoth meat because it is a symbol of loss, wiped out by climate change," Tim Noakesmith, co-founder of Vow, told AFP at the event. "We face a similar fate if we don't do things differently," including changing practices such as large-scale farming and how we eat, Noakesmith said.

Grown over a period of several weeks, the meat was "cultivated" by scientists who first identified the DNA sequence for mammoth myoglobin, a key protein that gives the meat its flavour.

Filling in some gaps in the sequence of the mammoth myoglobin by using genes from the African elephant, the mammoth's closest living relative, it was then inserted into sheep cells using an electrical charge.

### Tastes like chicken?

If that process doesn't put you off, then

the safety issues might. "I won't eat it at the moment because we haven't seen this protein for 4,000 years," said Ernst Wolvetang of the Queensland University's Australian Institute of Bioengineering who worked with Vow on the project.

"But after safety testing, I'd be really curious to see what it tastes like." The scientists slow-cooked the giant ball in an oven before browning the outside with a blowtorch.

"It smelt a bit like when we cook our crocodile meat," James Ryan, Vow's chief scientific officer told the audience Christopher Bryant, a British-based expert in alternative proteins told AFP prospective lab-meat lovers had nothing to fear from cultured meat.

"Unlike conventional meat, which comes from dirty and unpredictable animals, cultivated meat is produced with extreme precision in sanitised food production facilities," he said.

"Because of this, cultivated meat avoids the foodborne pathogens, antibiotics, and other contaminants frequently found in meat from animals," he told AFP.

### 'Meat redefined'

The mammoth meatball's display of the link between climate change and future foods comes as global meat consumption has almost doubled since the early 1960s, according to figures by the

UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Global livestock farming represented some 14.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans, the FAO said, as climate change warmed up the planet.

Meat consumption is projected to increase more than 70 percent by 2050, and scientists have increasingly been turning to alternatives such as plant-based meats and lab-grown meat.

Self-confessed "failed vegan" Noakesmith said his Sydney-based startup was not aiming to stop people from eating meat, but to "give them something that's better" and convert them to the idea of lab-created protein. "We chose to make a mammoth meatball to draw attention to the fact that the future of food can be better and more sustainable."

Food scientists said Vow, which planned to launch its first product, lab-grown Japanese quail in Singapore in a few months "is an attempt to redefine what cultured meat is." "Instead of trying to normalise cultured meat, the mammoth meatball tries to stress how different the technology is," said Neil Stephens, a senior lecturer in technology and society at the University of Birmingham in central England. "It suggests a future where we eat meat that is completely different to the meat we eat today, made from species we've never been in contact with," he told AFP. —AFP

Lifestyle



Carl Gakran, 32, plants a pine tree in Jose Boiteux, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil.



Carl Gakran, 32, one of the creators of Project Zag (Araucaria in the native Xokleng language), holds Araucaria seedlings in Jose Boiteux, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil.—AFP photos



Dancing around a campfire in bright feather headdresses, a group of Indigenous eco-warriors prepares the painstaking process of planting the Brazilian pine tree, fighting to save the critically endangered species — and their way of life. The Xokleng Indigenous group, who live on a threatened reservation in south Brazil, depend on the Araucaria angustifolia tree for food, use its medicinal properties to treat illness and consider it a central element of their spirituality.



Carl Gakran, 32, shows an embryo of the pinion hedgehog, the fruit of the araucaria.

But the majestic evergreen, also known as the candelabra tree, is dangerously close to extinction: just three percent of the forests where it was once found survive today, according to the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa).

"Without the araucaria, the Xokleng do not exist," says Carl Gakran, a 32-year-old resident of the Birama-Laklano reservation. He is helping lead the effort to save the Brazilian pine by planting tens of thousands of seedlings.

If the tree goes extinct, "our people and our culture are at risk of extinction, too," he says, wearing a traditional headdress of red and blue feathers.

Standing up to 40 meters (130 feet) tall, with sweeping branches that fan out from the top, the tree lives to be about 400 years old on average. Its seeds, which resemble large pine nuts, are a staple food for the 2,200 Xokleng.



Vachecu Kopacan, 49, member of the Project Zag and one of the indigenous people who is constantly replanting the Araucaria tree, poses for a picture in Jose Boiteux.



BRAZIL'S INDIGENOUS GROUP FIGHTS TO SAVE ENDANGERED EVERGREEN

But it is also prized by loggers for its quality wood — helping drive it toward extinction, along with the clear-cutting of forests for farmland. Alarmed by its decline, Gakran and his wife, Gape, founded an organization to save it: the Zag Institute, after the Xokleng word for the tree. "This is our mother, our sacred tree," says Gape, 36, wearing a headdress similar to her husband's and nursing her baby daughter. "And we are its guardians."

Protection ritual

They estimate they have planted more than 50,000 seedlings so far.

It is a delicate, time-consuming and highly ritualized process. The seeds take around a year to germinate. Once planted, a young tree takes 12 to 15

years to produce seeds of its own.

Before planting them, the Xokleng perform a ritual, singing and dancing around a campfire to call for the seedlings' protection. Like many Indigenous peoples in Brazil, the Xokleng have suffered decades of persecution and the encroachment of farmers and loggers on their land. Their reservation, which they share with the Guarani and Kaingang peoples, is at the center of a massive legal dispute in Brazil.

The territory partly lost its protected status when a court ruled the Indigenous groups did not have the right to claim territory where they were not present in 1988, the year Brazil's current constitution was ratified.

The Indigenous groups argue they were forced to leave by Brazil's mili-

tary regime (1964-1985), and still have rightful claim to their ancestral lands.

The case became top news under far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who left office in December having followed through on his vow not to allow "one more centimeter" of Indigenous reservations in Brazil.

It has been appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, whose ruling could establish a precedent for all Indigenous lands in Brazil. The Xokleng see planting araucarias as another form of resistance. "I learned from my grandparents that Indigenous peoples are born to protect the land. We're the guardians of the Earth, the forests and the araucarias," says Carl. "We need everyone's help to protect them."—AFP



Members of several villages of the Xokleng ethnic group gather in a part of the village that was recently reintegrated for a pine tree planting ceremony in Jose Boiteux.



Vachecu Kopacan, 49, member of the Project Zag (araucaria in the native Xokleng language), poses for a picture in Jose Boiteux.



Aerial view of the Laklano indigenous land in Jose Boiteux.



Aerial view of the Palmeira village on the banks of the Hercilio river, one of the eight villages that make up the Xokleng Indigenous Reserve in Jose Boiteux, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

Why books could help empty France's prisons

Deep in the vast La Sante prison in Paris, law student Morgane is discussing the classic novel "The Outsider" by Albert Camus with one of the prisoners. Adama finds some of the language tricky, but said reading is a "lifeboat".

"It allows me to escape, to think of something else. I imagine the scenes in my head. It's as if I was directing a TV show," he told AFP.

Morgane is a volunteer with the charity "Lire Pour Sortir" (roughly: "Read to Get Out"), which sees reading as more than a metaphorical form of escape. It is championing reading as a way to tackle France's overflowing prisons, currently 20 percent over capacity.

Lack of vocabulary is "the number one determining factor in social inequality," said lawyer Alexandre Duval-Stalla, who set up the charity in 2015. "The more words you have, the better chance of a job, of inserting yourself into life," he told AFP.

A good vocabulary not only helps when speaking to judges, but can also prevent crimes in the first place, he said. "All this aggression and impulsiveness we find with criminals comes from being unable to express themselves."

Illiteracy

Adama's choice of Camus is apt. The Franco-Algerian writer's own mother was illiterate, with a vocabulary of only around 400 words. It was a barrier between them, despite his lifelong devotion. "The Outsider" also tells the story of a young man who ends up in prison facing the death sentence. Almost a quarter of France's 72,173 prisoners are illiterate, according to government figures.

French prisons are required to have libraries, but not librarians — who encourage reading, help detainees and organise cultural programmes.

Pressure is mounting. A new law, in force since January, scrapped automatic sentence reductions for good behaviour — detainees must now show they have engaged with a cultural or work programme. But lack of resources means many are unable to access the necessary programmes.

Lire Pour Sortir wants to help fill the gap and will double its volunteer network to 500 by 2024. But even then, it will still be in only 50 of France's 187 prisons.

Perspective

Books help perform the work that would ideally be done by psychologists if the resources existed, said Duval-Stalla. "Criminals rarely put themselves in another person's shoes. Books allow them to live the stories of other people, and that's very important. Words give you perspective and the tools for reflection," he said.

La Sante, which was recently renovated, could provide an example. Lire Pour Sortir runs its library and hired a professional librarian. Neat and tidy, with posters on the wall and an atmosphere of calm — it could be the library of a small village, if not for the bars on the windows and guards at the door. But with only 20 inmates permitted at a time, the waiting list is long. "We are victims of our own success," said its librarian Jean-Baptiste Devouassoux.

"We know what keeps people out of prison — a job, housing, a family," said Duval-Stalla. "But also the capacity to express and understand yourself — and that requires words."—AFP



Director Quentin Tarantino

Tarantino says script finished on his final film

Cult film director Quentin Tarantino said on Wednesday he has finished the script for what will be his "last" movie.

The US director of hit films including "Kill Bill", "Inglourious Basterds" and "Pulp Fiction" said he expected shooting to start on his 10th film later

in the year. "I have finished the script of what will end up being my last movie," the 60-year-old said while being questioned by Thierry Fremaux, director of the Cannes Film Festival, at the launch of his new book in Paris. "I imagine we'll probably shoot it I guess in the fall," Tarantino said. Tarantino has re-

peatedly said that he wants to retire after 10 films — counting the two lengthy episodes of "Kill Bill" as one.

The film, which will be called "The Movie Critic", will be set in 1977, he added. He denied rumours that it was a biopic of Pauline Kael — the New Yorker film critic who died in 2001 — and

said it was not devoted to any specific film critic. Tarantino's directorial debut came with "Reservoir Dogs" in 1992, a low-budget, brutal crime caper that became a cult smash and turned him into one of the industry's most influential filmmakers. — AFP

## Sports

# Bangladesh hammer Ireland, seal three-match series 2-0

## Shakib, Liton shine in record win over Ireland

CHITTAGONG: Shakib Al Hasan took five wickets and Liton Das hit a quick-fire half-century as Bangladesh hammered Ireland by 77 runs in the second T20 to seal the three-match series 2-0 in Chittagong on Wednesday. Liton hit a career-best 83 off 41 balls and Rony Talukdar made 44 off 23 as the two openers guided Bangladesh to 202-3 in a rain-reduced 17 overs. Shakib then claimed 5-22 to restrict Ireland to 125-9 and become the leading international wicket-taker in T20s, overtaking New Zealander Tim Southee's 134 wickets. Curtis Campher top-scored for Ireland with 50 but it came much too late. The visitors were never in the contest after Taskin Ahmed, who finished with 3-27, claimed a wicket off the first ball of the innings. Shakib then reduced Ireland to 43 for 6. Liton and Rony shared 124 runs in their opening stand, the best start by Bangladesh in a T20, after Ireland captain Paul Stirling won the toss and elected to bowl.

Liton, who hit 10 fours and three sixes, reached his fifty off 18 balls, the quickest T20 fifty for Bangladesh.

He surpassed Mohammad Ashraful's 20-ball half-century against West Indies in 2007. Leg-spinner Ben White earned Ireland their first breakthrough when he forced Rony to give a catch to Mark Adair at long on. White, the only Ireland bowler to give Bangladesh any trouble, also dismissed Liton in his next over before finishing with 2-28. However, Shakib (38 not out) and Towhid Hridoy (24) put on 61 runs for the fourth wicket to help Bangladesh put on a big total.

"That was a tricky day, no doubt about that... There were probably a few of the same errors from the previous couple of weeks. So a hell of a lot to work on," Stirling said. Bangladesh won Monday's opening game by 22 runs. The third match is scheduled at the same venue on Friday. The home side also won the preceding three-match one-day international series 2-0. Bangladesh "are a strong team wherever they play in the world", Stirling said. "We knew (the tour) was going to be tough. We probably didn't think it was going to be as one-sided as it has been," he said.—AFP



CHITTAGONG: Bangladesh's captain Shakib Al Hasan plays a shot during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between Bangladesh and Ireland on March 29, 2023. — AFP

## Jumbo-Visma's Laporte wins Dwars door race

WAREGEM: Jumbo-Visma's Frenchman Christophe Laporte won the Dwars door Vlaanderen cycling race in Belgium on Wednesday. Laporte pipped Movistar's Oier Lazkano in second place and EF Education-EasyPost's Neilson Powless in third after 183.7km (114 miles) of racing, for victory in the race whose title translates as Across Flanders. The event is seen as a warm-up to Sunday's Tour of Flanders, a part of cycling's classics program, the sport's most prestigious one-day events.

Laporte, 30, backed up last Sunday's win at the Gent-Wevelgem after being part of a break-away with 4km to go in northwestern Belgium. The proceedings included 11 climbs and eight cobbled sections near the French border. "A difficult day but a great day. All the team were great. I'm very happy to win again," Laporte said. "I was strong on the climbs and made the selections there. It was a good collaboration in the group," he added.

Spaniard Lazkano, 23, claimed the best result of his career, as Jumbo secured a third classic victory in less than a week thanks to Laporte's exploits. "I had always seen on my TV at home that these are beautiful races," Lazkano said. "I'm so happy with my second place here. It's amazing. Jumbo are having an amazing classics season and playing their cards very well," the Basque rider added.

American Powless repeated his feat from Milan-San Remo earlier this month and was confident of his chances at the weekend despite the presence of double Tour de France winner Tadej Pogacar, Wout van Aert and Mathieu van der Poel. "I think I'm still a dark horse for Flanders," Powless said. "There's going to be a much stronger field there so I look forward to the challenge and I hope I can have the same legs I had today on Sunday. "If I can, then I'm quite sure I can be in the mix," the 26-year-old added. — AFP

## Verstappen still feeling effects of Saudi illness

MELBOURNE: Double world champion Max Verstappen admitted Thursday he still wasn't fully over a stomach bug that hit him hard in Saudi Arabia, but is confident Red Bull will get a result in Australia this weekend. The 25-year-old Dutchman delayed his arrival into Jeddah two weeks ago due to illness and missed the media day before lining up for the first practice session on Friday.

He battled through the discomfort to finish the race second behind team-mate Sergio Perez after his victory in the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix. Verstappen on Thursday said the illness was so bad he could "barely walk" ahead of his departure for

## 'Your health in your steps 3'

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tomooh Sports Club in cooperation with Kuwait Special Olympics launched the health sports program themed "your health in your steps 3" during the month of Ramadan and will continue until the middle of April with 30 players participating. The program's idea relies on counting the number of steps the player takes



Jeddah and while better now, was still feeling the effects. "I was at home really ill and I could barely walk around and I felt like I was missing a lot," he said, detailing the extent of the illness for the first time. "I got to the weekend really believing it (the bug) was gone ... but when I jumped in the car in F1, even just one lap I felt like I had to recover for two laps just to be able to breathe normally. "So yeah, it definitely did affect me through the weekend which I didn't like. It was one of the first races where I just felt that I was physically limited and that's really frustrating when you're out in the car."

Despite improving since then, he is looking forward to the four-week break after Australia and before the next grand prix in Azerbaijan, to fully recover. "A couple of weeks ago I was not looking forward to it (the break) but then I got really ill ... so for me these weeks will be about getting back to full fitness." Verstappen is the hot favorite for Sunday's race at Albert Park, with Red Bull dominant so far this season, going 1-2 at the opening two grand prix.

during the competition period by using a special smart watch that was handed to the players. There is also measurements of the muscle and fat mass as well as weight and height of each player before the start of the program. Activities of the program include: walking 10,000 steps daily from 3:30 pm to 4:40 pm, followed by physical fitness exercises until 5:00 pm.

Valuable prizes will be given to the top three winners in each category in addition to the prize of the best daily number of steps. Chairman of the board of Tomooh Club Jasim Al-Nouri appreciated the turnover of players who are participating in the third edition of the program. Al-Nouri thanked the Public Authority for Sport for their support.

## There will be 'no LIV-PGA tensions at Masters'

WASHINGTON: Former Masters champions Bubba Watson and Patrick Reed said Wednesday they do not expect awkward moments and tension when LIV Golf and PGA Tour players meet at next week's Masters. Speaking ahead of this week's LIV Golf League event at Orlando, they and four-time major winner Brooks Koepka said the world's top players plan on routine situations at the year's first major at Augusta National despite the ongoing feud.

The Saudi-backed LIV series lured several big names from the PGA, prompting the PGA to ban those who jumped to the rebel series for record \$25 million purses and 54-hole events. While a court battle is set to play out into 2024, major tournaments have not restricted qualifying, making them the only stage where LIV and PGA players will face each other.

"I'm going to be honest, man. It's only awkward in the media," two-time Masters winner Watson said. "I've talked to people that are going to be there. "I'm going to sign up with (PGA players) Jason Day and Cam Young in the par-3. Some guys have already asked me to play some practice rounds." Watson says he's trying "to beat them all" while Reed, the 2018 Masters champion, says there's no battle for tour top honor, just the fight for the green jacket symbolic of Masters supremacy.

"The storylines are going to be obviously LIV versus PGA Tour and all that kind of stuff, but really at the majors, all the guys that come in, top players in the world are playing against each other no matter where they come from," Reed said. "It doesn't matter what tour they're on or anything. It's the top guys going and trying to play for one of the most coveted events in the world. "For us, at least for myself, it's going to be business as usual going out and playing. Would I like to have LIV be up at the top? Of course."

Koepka, still eligible for the Masters thanks to his most recent major triumph at the 2019 PGA Championship, said he often spends time with PGA major winners like Justin Thomas and Rory McIlroy near their homes in Jupiter, Florida. "That's one of the big things," he said. "Down in Jupiter, I was just with Rory and JT yesterday, and I think Keegan (Bradley) was there. We see each other quite a bit. "There are a lot of conversations. I was talking with Rory for probably about 30 minutes... no one is angry at anybody from what I've seen."

McIlroy has been a major supporter of the PGA Tour and the changes it has made to create more top-level events for bigger purses. "Protecting his entity, man," said Watson. "He's protecting his business, which is fine." Opposite sides of a business decision, Koepka said, will not mean animosity at Augusta. "I also don't think that means anything personal with any of us," Koepka said. "I've had relationships with them—I've known JT 13, 14 years old maybe. Rory for the last 10 years. It's not anything (like) we don't see each other normally." — AFP



Capitano team

## Saad Al-Tamimi Ramadan football tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Saad Al-Tamimi Ramadan football tournament continued for the second day as 64 teams kicked off the event at Masseila fields in Sabah Al-Salem area on Thursday. The teams include several former national team players and artists. Competitions were highly competitive. Participating



Shaaban Abbas

teams lauded the organization and level of the tournament which saw many professional and international players.

Misbahi team faced off against Future while Capitano played against Touman Al-Shimmari. Also, Rikilmi played against

Shabab; Doha played Al-Abrax on field number 4; Loulat Al-Waseel faced Al-Birak as Saad Al-Khateeb battled Al-Don at field number 3. Meanwhile, actor Shaaban Abbas aka "Shaboulla" said he is happy to be involved in this tournament.



Misbahi team

## Sports

# Barcelona reach Women's Champions League semis

## Barca thrash Roma 5-1; Arsenal beat Bayern

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona booked their place in the Women's Champions League semi-finals by thrashing Roma 5-1 on Wednesday as Arsenal came from behind to knock out Bayern Munich 2-1 on aggregate thanks to a 2-0 win at the Emirates. Tournament favorites Barca had been held to a slender 1-0 advantage from the first leg in the Italian capital last week. But last season's runners-up stormed into a 3-0 lead before half-time in front of 55,000 at the Camp Nou.

Swedish international Fridolina Rolfö struck twice in the first half either side of Mapi León's spectacular long-range effort. Asiat Oshoala netted from close range immediately after the break and Patri Guijarro headed home the fifth from a corner. Annamaria Serturini pulled one back for Roma against a Barcelona side who have won 100 percent of their games in the Spanish league and only suffered one defeat all season, against Bayern in the group phase.

Barca have now reached the semi-finals in five consecutive seasons and will face either defending champions Lyon or Chelsea in the last four. "We can't hide that our aspirations are at the max," said Barcelona coach Jonatan Giraldez. "Olympique (Lyon) and Chelsea are the best in Europe, it's a reality and it will be

difficult, but it's true that playing the second leg at home gives us a feeling of strength."

### Arsenal blow away Bayern

Arsenal overcame a 1-0 first leg defeat to reach the last four for the first time in 10 years in front of a record crowd of over 20,000 for a Women's Champions League game in England. Despite the absence of injured star forwards Vivianne Miedema and Beth Mead, the Gunners blew Bayern away in the first half. Frida Maanum levelled the tie with a blistering strike in off the underside of the crossbar on 20 minutes. Moments later Arsenal led as Stina Blackstenius had the simple task of rounding off a brilliant team move with a header into an unguarded goal from Katie McCabe's cross. Only some wasteful finishing from Jonas Eidevall's side meant there was a nervy finale.

Leah Williamson and Caitlin Foord missed glorious chances to extend the lead, while Lotte Wubben-Moy hit the crossbar. But Arsenal held out to extend Bayern's wait to win the competition. Chelsea hold the upper hand ahead of Thursday's blockbuster quarter-final clash after the English champions won 1-0 away to Lyon in the first leg. Wolfsburg also hold a 1-0 lead in the other quarter-final over Paris Saint-Germain ahead of the second leg in Germany. — AFP



**LONDON:** Arsenal's Swiss defender Noelle Maritz (rear left) fights for the ball with Bayern's Serbian forward Jovana Damjanovic during the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-final second-leg match between Arsenal and Bayern Munich on March 29, 2023. — AFP

## Sinner eases into Miami Open semis

**MIAMI GARDENS:** Italy's Jannik Sinner eased into the semi-finals of the Miami Open after a comfortable 6-3, 6-1 win over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori on Wednesday. The game was delayed for two hours by rain with Sinner 2-0 up in the second set but the stoppage did nothing to change the momentum of the match.

In the last four, Sinner will face the winner of the other quarter-final between world number one Carlos Alcaraz and American Taylor Fritz which was postponed due to heavy rain on Wednesday and is expected to be played on Thursday. The 23-year-old Ruusuvuori was the first Finnish player to feature in a Masters 1000 quarter-final since Jarkko Nieminen a decade ago, but he came up against Sinner in determined mood. The 21-year-old from South Tyrol has not dropped a set so far in Miami and he is coping well with the first break point of the match, holding in the fourth game.

The Italian, who has not lost to a player outside the top 50 this year, never looked back after that brief threat, breaking the Finn's serve for 3-2 and again to win the set. An early break in the second further established his control of the match and while the rain made him wait for victory, he needed just 74 minutes on court to finish off the 54th-ranked Finn. "I just won the important points, especially in the first



**MIAMI GARDENS:** Jannik Sinner of Italy plays a backhand against Emil Ruusuvuori of Finland in their quarterfinal match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 29, 2023. — AFP

set, and I am happy with my level today," said Sinner. "After the rain, the condition was different and I think I adapted well," he added.

With his 20-4 record, Sinner could face another semi-final meeting with Alcaraz who beat him in the last four in Indian Wells earlier this month. While Sinner said he would see both the Spaniard and Fritz as challenging opponents, it is clear he would relish the chance of revenge against Alcaraz, who also beat the Italian en route to the US Open title in September. "I would be happy to play again him again because I look forward to these kind of matches. I feel like he makes me a better player," he said. — AFP

los Sainz disappointed. While Ferrari have been competitive in qualifying, they have been unable to convert the form to race day, an issue that has frustrated Leclerc. "I think that in qualifying we've been quite good since the beginning of the season. Where we need to focus on is the race, where our car is extremely 'peaky'," he said.

"When all the conditions are right, we seem to be able to extract the performance out of our package. But whenever the conditions are changing a little bit with a heavier car, when you see a little bit more the limitations of the car, that's where you struggle, so we are trying to focus on that. "I do believe we will be quite close in qualifying (in Melbourne). I hope so, but I think the picture in the race will be quite similar (to previous grands prix)," he added.

Meanwhile, veteran Fernando Alonso said Thursday he was brimming with confidence heading into the Australian Grand Prix, but was cautious about whether Aston Martin could maintain their red-hot early season form. The Spanish star, who won in Melbourne 17 years ago piloting a Renault, has secured stirring podiums at both races so far this year, with only the dominant Red Bulls of Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez quicker. For the 41-year-old two-time world champion, the most experienced Formula One driver in history, it has been a welcome change of fortune after a series of fruitless years. "At the moment, we are extremely happy with the performance of the car obviously," he said. — AFP

## 'No miracles' from Ferrari in Australia

**MELBOURNE:** Charles Leclerc cautioned Thursday against expecting any "miracles" from Ferrari at the Australian Grand Prix, in stark contrast to last year when he was the runaway winner. The 25-year-old clocked a commanding victory at Albert Park in 2022, leading from start to finish, having also won the season opener at Bahrain to be the early championship leader. But it is a different scenario this time as Ferrari struggle with power and reliability issues.

"Yeah, good memories, but looking at this year we are not coming into this race in the same situation as we were last year," Leclerc admitted. "I think clearly our performance is not as good as last year but we are working massively to try and come back to the front," he continued. "I don't think there will be any miracles for this weekend but after that we've got three weeks' break (before Azerbaijan) and we will try to use it in the best way possible in order to bring upgrades as quickly as possible on the car."

Ferrari were not only comprehensively beaten by both Red Bulls in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, but also outpaced by Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso and both Mercedes. It left Leclerc - who started with a 10-place grid penalty - and teammate Car-



**MELBOURNE:** Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc plays swingball in the Paddock ahead of the 2023 Formula One Australian Grand Prix at the Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne on March 30, 2023. — AFP

## Spurs' Paratici handed worldwide FIFA ban

**LONDON:** Tottenham managing director of football Fabio Paratici has been given a worldwide ban by FIFA that could end his time with the north London club. Paratici was handed a 30-month ban from Italian football in January after his former club Juventus were found guilty of false accounting. The 50-year-old Italian was sporting director and managing director at Juventus before joining Tottenham in June 2021. His initial ban only applied to his homeland, meaning he was free to continue working at Tottenham, where he was involved in Sunday's departure of manager Antonio Conte and the start of the search for a new boss.

But a statement issued by FIFA on Wednesday threatened to cut short his spell at Tottenham, with the global governing body saying: "FIFA can confirm that following a request by the Italian FA (FIGC), the chairperson of FIFA disciplinary committee has decided to extend the sanctions imposed by FIGC on several football officials to have worldwide effect." Both Paratici and Juventus have appealed against the initial decision. Tottenham published a lengthy interview with Paratici on Tuesday in which he insisted Conte's exit was "the right decision for everyone".

Paratici said the club were "focused" on backing interim head coach Cristian Stellini as they try to qualify for the Champions League by securing a top-four finish in the Premier League. Tottenham said they are seeking further clarification from FIFA as they believe Paratici's ban would not kick in until his appeal has been heard. "We are urgently seeking further clarification from FIFA as to the details of the extension and its variance from the FIGC sanction," Spurs said in a statement.

"We should like to make clear that when Fabio conducted the interview on club channels yesterday neither he nor the club had any indication of this decision being made by FIFA, based on the fact the FIGC sanction was taken on 20 January 2023 and remains subject to an appeal on 19 April 2023." Tottenham are currently fourth in the Premier League but only two points above fifth-placed Newcastle, who have two games in hand.

The Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust (THST), responding to the extension of Paratici's ban, on Wednesday called for Spurs chairman Daniel Levy to reassure fans about the future of the club. "This news adds further to the extremely concerning situation at the club," the THST said in a statement. "No manager, no director of football and uncertainty around our star player and our end of season finish. Fans deserve to hear a clear statement of strategy from THFC so they can be reassured by the board on their plan to bring success and stability to the club." — AFP



**MIAMI GARDENS:** Sorana Cirstea of Romania plays a forehand against Aryna Sabalenka in their quarterfinal match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 29, 2023. — AFP

## Cirstea upsets Sabalenka in WTA Miami quarters

**MIAMI:** World number two Aryna Sabalenka suffered a shock straight sets Miami Open quarter-final loss to resurgent Romanian Sorana Cirstea, who reached her first WTA 1000 semi-final in a decade. Cirstea, ranked 74th in the world, triumphed 6-4, 6-4 against the Australian Open champion to secure her first WTA 1000 semi-final since Toronto in 2013.

The 32-year-old is enjoying an upturn in form since taking on Swede Thomas Johansson as her coach, reaching the quarter-finals at Indian Wells and beating world number four Caroline Garcia of France in both legs of the "Sunshine Swing." In her first meeting with the big-serving Belarusian, Cirstea looked comfortable and composed as she broke Sabalenka's first service game.

The 24-year-old from Minsk, who is now based in Miami, broke back to make it 4-4 but Cirstea swiftly got back in front and held to win take the opening set with her opponent looking visibly irritated and frustrated as she labored in the early afternoon heat and humidity. Again, Cirstea broke on her opponent's first serve game and then at 5-4 up, she survived two break points before a superb

ace down the middle gave her match point, which she converted when Sabalenka went long.

The veteran reacted with a broad smile and a fist pump and conceded she was surprised by the victory. "I am a bit speechless," she said. "I came out hoping that it would be a really tough match. I tried to hold my ground. I'm very happy with my performance today, it is a bit unexpected to be honest." "I had confidence in my game. I knew I was playing well, and I knew that if I come out swinging and being aggressive, I would have my chance," she added.

"I'm very happy to get the win against Aryna, because she has been playing great lately. She's probably one of the two or three best at the moment. So this gives me a lot of confidence." Sabalenka, whose year began with victory at the Australia Open before she reached the final in Indian Wells, losing to Elena Rybakina, said she had struggled with the heat. "It definitely wasn't my best match. I was struggling a lot with the conditions, like heat. I felt like balls were flying too much and I couldn't find control," she said.

"I was just trying to do my best 'til the last point. I just couldn't adjust to these conditions unfortunately. "The first three months of the year were fantastic for me. I'm just proud of the consistency of my game and I have to keep working, keep improving," said the Belarusian. In the last four, Cirstea will face the winner of the quarter-final between Ekaterina Alexandrova and Petra Kvitová which was postponed due to heavy rain and will be moved to Thursday. — AFP

## Mavericks' woes deepen

### Kings end record-breaking playoff drought; Davis sparks Lakers win

**LOS ANGELES:** The Sacramento Kings ended their record-breaking 17-year NBA playoff drought on Wednesday as the Dallas Mavericks' chances of reaching the postseason suffered a blow with a crucial loss to Philadelphia. Sacramento, who had not advanced to the playoffs since the 2005-2006 season - the longest streak of futility in NBA history - clinched their postseason berth with a 120-80 rout of the Trail Blazers in Portland.

Malik Monk led the Kings' scoring with 19 points while four other players made double digits, including rookie Keegan Murray, whose 13 points included his 188th three-pointer of the season - a new NBA record for a rookie. Murray expressed satisfaction that the Kings have finally ended their long wait for a playoff berth, 12 months after finishing 12th in the Western Conference with a 30-52 record. "We've had really good teams throughout that 17 years and I think this one exemplifies all of them," Murray told ESPN. "It's really cool to be on this team but we know we have a lot more to do." The Kings sit in third place in the West on 46-30, trailing Denver and Memphis.

But while Sacramento are now looking forward to a playoff campaign, the Dallas Mavericks risk missing the postseason altogether just a year after reaching the conference finals. The Mavericks slumped to a 116-108 defeat to Philadelphia, with the 76ers overturning a 12-point deficit as Joel Embiid inspired a fourth quarter rally to end a three-game losing streak. Embiid led the scoring with 25 points, nine rebounds and four

assists as Philadelphia outscored the Mavericks 27-17 in the final quarter to seal the win.

James Harden added 15 points with 12 assists on his return from injury while Tyrese Maxey finished with 22 points for the Sixers. Dallas are now 11th in the Western Conference at 37-40, with only five regular season games remaining. Luka Doncic led the Dallas scoring with 24 points while Kyrie Irving finished with 23. However Dallas were left ruing

a feeble fourth quarter shooting performance, making just seven of 19 from the field as the Sixers pulled away down the stretch.

Doncic refused to concede defeat in the Mavericks playoff push. "We still have chances, we shouldn't give up yet," Doncic said. But the damage for Dallas was compounded by the fact that two of their nearest rivals for a place in the play-in tournament - the Los Angeles Lakers and Oklahoma City Thunder - both won on Wednesday.

#### Davis sparks Lakers

LA bounced back from Sunday's home loss to Chicago by taming the Bulls on the road in the Windy City, winning 121-110. Anthony Davis produced

a dazzling display for the Lakers at both ends of the court with 38 points, 10 rebounds, two steals and two blocks. LeBron James added 25 points while Austin Reaves scored 19 points and D'Angelo Russell chipped in with 17.

The Lakers are eighth in the Western Conference with a 38-38 record. Oklahoma City meanwhile occupy 10th place in the West - the last of the play-in spots - after a last-gasp 107-106 victory over the Detroit Pistons. Jalen Williams was the hero for Oklahoma City with a layup in the final second to clinch a crucial win for the Thunder. Williams finished with 27 points to lead the Oklahoma City scoring, with LuGuentz Dort adding 20.

In Phoenix, Kevin Durant returned from injury to help the Suns claim a 107-100 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves. Durant finished with 16 points in what was his long-awaited home debut in Phoenix, while Devin Booker led the Suns scorers with 29 points. Elsewhere on Wednesday, Jrue Holiday erupted for 51 points as the Milwaukee Bucks downed the Indiana Pacers 149-136 on the road. Holiday's masterpiece came from 20-of-30 shooting while Giannis Antetokounmpo added 38 points and Brook Lopez 21 as Milwaukee edged closer to locking down the top seed in the Eastern Conference.

In New York, the Knicks ground out a 101-92 victory over the Miami Heat to remain within touching distance of clinching a playoff berth. But the win was overshadowed by an injury to Knicks star Julius Randle, who hobbled off the court in the second quarter after suffering a sprained left ankle. In Memphis meanwhile, Russell Westbrook delivered a vintage performance with 36 points and 10 assists as the Los Angeles Clippers outgunned the Grizzlies 141-132. Robert Covington also starred for the Clippers, shooting seven of seven from three-point range in a 27-point haul off the bench. Ja Morant led the Memphis scoring with 36 points. — AFP



PHILADELPHIA: Joel Embiid #21 of the Philadelphia 76ers is guarded by Ja-Vale McGee #00 of the Dallas Mavericks during the fourth quarter at Wells Fargo Center on March 29, 2023. — AFP

### Ferguson and Wenger inducted into Premier League Hall of Fame

**LONDON:** Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson and ex-Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger on Wednesday became the first managers to be inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame. The two men locked horns during a period of intense rivalry starting in the 1990s, winning 16 English top-flight titles between them. Ferguson, 81, is the most successful manager in Premier League history, guiding Manchester United to 13 titles, while Wenger won the competition three times with Arsenal, including going unbeaten in the 2003/04 season.

Ferguson, who managed United for more than 26 years, won the inaugural

Premier League title in 1992/93 to deliver the Red Devils' first league success since 1967. Six players managed by Ferguson have already been inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame—David Beckham, Eric Cantona, Roy Keane, Wayne Rooney, Peter Schmeichel and Paul Scholes. "It's an honor when you receive recognition like this," said Ferguson, who retired in 2013 after winning his 13th title.

"However, it's not just about me as a person. It's about the job at Manchester United and the bond we had over many years, so I'm also proud for the club, the staff and my players." Wenger arrived at Arsenal in 1996 as one of the first foreign managers in the Premier League, staying at the club until 2018. The Frenchman implemented a revolutionary football philosophy, bringing a focus on nutrition and sports science to the English game. He was committed to playing attractive, attacking football, winning the title in 1997/98, his first full season with the club.

Wenger oversaw an astute transfer

strategy, including scouting abroad for talent—fellow Hall of Fame members Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira were two of his key players. "To share this with Sir Alex is a great honor for me," said the 73-year-old, who is currently FIFA's football development chief. "It's like two boxers—you fight like mad and go the distance together. At the end of the day, you have respect and it will be a great opportunity to meet with him, share a good bottle of wine and memories of our old battles."

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said the two managers brought "unparalleled levels of success" to their clubs. "The dominance of Manchester United under Sir Alex remains unmatched after he guided them to an incredible 13 titles across 21 Premier League seasons," he said. Masters added: "Arsene was an innovator who was well ahead of his time... and the Invincibles season is not only one of the greatest accomplishments in English football, but sport in general." — AFP



NYON: This handout picture shows Alex Ferguson of Scotland (right) speaking to Arsene Wenger of France during the UEFA 2015 Elite Club Coaches Forum at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland. — AFP

### Fury, sadness in Indonesia after FIFA pulls WCup

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian football players, fans and pundits reacted with anger and sadness Thursday after FIFA pulled the Under-20 World Cup from the host nation weeks before it was due to kick off, following protests against Zionist participation. The humiliating loss came after two influential governors advocated banning Zionists from the competition.

Indonesia and Zionist entity do not have formal diplomatic relations, and support for the Palestinian cause in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation runs high, fuelling local opposition to hosting the Zionist team. FIFA's decision to find a new host—thereby nixing Indonesia's automatic qualifying spot—puts the country's most popular sport back in the doldrums and facing another bout of isolation as it recovers from a stadium stampede that killed 135 people last year.

Some of the archipelago nation's football prodigies took to social media with fury and heartbreak after losing the chance to play at what FIFA bills as the "tournament of tomorrow's superstars". "Energy, time, sweat, and even blood we have put in, but in a moment failed because of political reasons. Here's our big dream that you've destroyed," wrote 19-year-old striker Rabbani Tasnim.

An Indonesian FA video showed players with heads bowed and their coach in tears after receiving the news late Wednesday that FIFA would seek a new host. "We, the players, are now affected, not just us but all footballers," said 18-year-old striker Hokky Caraka. Head coach Shin Tae Yong said he was "heartbroken" and "tired" after preparing the team for more than three years for the youth football showpiece. On Thursday morning, flower boards for the players popped up outside the FA headquarters in central Jakarta, including one that read "do not give up on your dream".

Indonesians inundated the Instagram page of



JAKARTA: This handout picture taken and released by the Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) shows members of Indonesia's Under-20 team and officials reacting after FIFA announced the cancellation of the Indonesia 2023 FIFA Under-20 World Cup football tournament at a hotel in Jakarta. — AFP

Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo—one of the leading candidates in next year's presidential election—with negative comments after he opposed Zionist participation. Bali governor Wayan Koster had also joined the anti-Zionist chorus and around a hundred conservative Muslim protesters held an anti-Zionist rally in Jakarta this month. Koster on Thursday cited the occupation of Palestinian lands and "threat and security" concerns for rejecting Zionist participation, comparing his call for a ban to Russia's exile from the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

#### 'Very painful'

The Democratic Party of Struggle, the powerful nationalist ruling party of President Joko Widodo and Koster, in a statement expressed regret about

the decision but said it had sought for Zionists to play its games in "the nearest neighboring country". But there was popular support for the tournament—which the country was handed in 2019 - with many viewing it as a source of national pride. Jakarta pledged to guarantee Zionist participation despite its pro-Palestinian stance, but opposing voices became too loud for FIFA.

"This is truly a very painful incident for the Indonesian people. Those who made the noise and made us fail... must be held accountable," said Akmal Marhali, an expert at football watchdog Save Our Soccer. Indonesian officials said losing the tournament could cost the country hundreds of millions of dollars. FIFA threatened further sanctions and could exclude Indonesia from 2026 World Cup qualifiers that begin

in October. It was banned for a year in 2015 over government interference. But for Indonesia's fervent fans, it was the loss of their first ever major football tournament that hurt the most.

"I am very disappointed because it has been my dream to watch Indonesia hosting a global football event," said 40-year-old supporter Jarnawi, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. The game in the country has long been dogged by shaky infrastructure and fan violence. But it was the clash of politics and sport that ultimately cost it the tournament many had long hoped for. "We are talking about youths who want to play soccer. They do not have any more interests," said pundit Justin Lhaksana. "Why is this issue blindly mixed with political games?" — AFP