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*Ramadan Kareem*

Fajr	: 04:43
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# Amir 'captain of the ship': PM

## Draft bill on soft loans to be presented to new National Assembly



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah attends the graduation ceremony of diplomats at Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute on March 10, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on Sunday, addressing a fresh batch of diplomats, said: "Ahead of you are many missions to take on, then sail off to a brighter future for Kuwait." Praising Almighty Allah for a leadership that believes in its sons and daughters' potential, HH the Premier stressed that the 1962 constitution was the offspring of such a belief.

The ceremony at Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute saw the graduation of the 8th and 9th batches, with Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, his deputy Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and senior ministry officials attending. The government, noted HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad, is working on manifesting on the ground the vision of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of a "just, safe and sustainable" country, with HH the Amir as the "captain of the ship". HH the Amir's recent visits to GCC countries held historic, geographic and strategic inevitabilities, noted the prime minister, while highlighting the economic dossier among member states as well.

HH the Prime Minister also said Sunday efforts to improve citizens' standards of living must be given precedence in the co-operation between the government and the new National Assembly. "The government planned for cooperation with the outgoing parliament on this matter, but unfortunately the parliament was dissolved for transgressing the sovereign status, which is known to everybody," he said.

The government will pursue its efforts to improve the standards of living of citizens materially and morally by enhancing their confidence that the state is serious in addressing all forms of corruption and crimes, HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad pointed out. The government studied with the technical departments the plans for providing soft loans and improving the benefits of pensioners in collaboration with the Public Institution for Social Security, he revealed.

The consultations resulted in a positive attitude to the regulation of soft loans that will benefit pensioners and ensure the sustainability of sovereign funds, he said. "We arrived at a conclusion that a draft

legislation on this issue will be tabled to the upcoming National Assembly soon after being elected in the coming weeks," HH the Prime Minister added.

Yahya congratulated the newly appointed diplomats on joining the diplomatic corps. He witnessed the oath-taking of 19 diplomats who were promoted to the diplomatic and consular corps under Article 21/1962 after they completed the training and academic program at the diplomatic Institute. The minister expressed his trust in the new diplomats' qualifications, hoping they would dedicate their careers to the benefit and representation of Kuwait and its people abroad.

He advised them to abide by the set rules and laws, national values and basic principles of Kuwait's diplomacy, explaining that they might encounter potential challenges on their diplomatic journeys, especially during the current global and regional unrest. Yahya reiterated his good wishes and success to the new diplomats under the wise leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**10 more candidates register**

KUWAIT: Ten candidates filed nomination papers on Monday to run in the April 4 snap polls, with candidates calling the upcoming elections "pivotal". Out of 50 members of the dissolved Assembly, 46 have registered to seek re-election, three have said they are not running, and one remains unregistered so far with two days to go. The number of candidates stands at 204.

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**Bitcoin zooms to record**

LONDON: Bitcoin raced to an all-time peak above \$72,000 Monday as the world's most popular cryptocurrency won further support on greater trading accessibility and dollar weakness. The virtual unit struck \$72,234 as dealers also eyed an upcoming industry event that traditionally boosts bitcoin's price. — AFP (See Page 8)

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**£117m for UK Muslim sites**

LONDON: The UK government said Sunday that it would provide £117 million (\$128 million) to bolster security at mosques and other Muslim sites including schools and community centers across the country over the next four years. "Anti-Muslim hatred has absolutely no place in our society," Home Secretary James Cleverly said. — AFP (See Page 5)

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**SBI ordered to publish data**

NEW DELHI: India's top court on Monday ordered State Bank of India (SBI) to publish details of previously anonymous political donations made in the form of controversial electoral bonds — with the disclosures to be made before upcoming national polls. Chief Justice Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud gave the SBI until March 12 to comply, warning if the bank failed to do so it risked being charged with "willful disobedience". — AFP (See Page 6)



FOZ DO IGUAÇU, Brazil: Brazilian Muslims celebrate the beginning of Ramadan and demonstrate in support of the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip in front of the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque in Parana State in southern Brazil on March 9, 2024. — AFP

## Ramadan brings no relief amid Zionist genocide in Gaza

GAZA: Gaza's deadliest war showed no signs of abating as the holy month of Ramadan began Monday amid a grueling humanitarian crisis that has pushed much of the territory to the brink of starvation. UN and aid groups say only a fraction of the supplies needed for Gaza's 2.4 million people have been allowed in since the Zionist entity placed it under near-total siege after Oct 7.

As the Muslim world welcomed Ramadan with the customary daytime fast, many Gazans awoke to bombardment that saw residents once more search through the rubble of destroyed homes for survivors and bodies. "The start of Ramadan has been sad and covered in darkness, with the taste and stench of blood everywhere," said one displaced.

Continued on Page 6

## Kate apologizes over edited pic

LONDON: Catherine, Princess of Wales on Monday apologized and admitted to editing an official portrait of her released by the palace, after AFP and other agencies withdrew the image. Kate, 42, has not been seen in public since attending a Christmas Day church service, and underwent abdominal surgery in January, fueling speculation about her health, particularly online.

Her Kensington Palace office on Sunday sought to dispel rumors by distributing an official photograph said to have been taken by her husband Prince William of her with their three children. But questions quickly emerged of the Mother's Day portrait of a smiling Kate, casually dressed and seated in a garden chair. — AFP (See Page 7)



**RAMADAN KAREEM**

## Oppression and injustice

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Islam was revealed to protect the natural rights of all human beings, their inalienable rights to religion, life, mind, progeny, lineage, honor and property. Violating these rights for any reason without a just cause is a major sin in Islam. According to Islam, dhulm, translated as injustice is the misplacement of things by conferring upon undeserving people the rights belonging to others, and elevating those who are not qualified over the noble and qualified ones in position or power — or other honors — for ulterior motives.

Regarding injustice that manifests in misappropriating people's wealth resorting to various schemes, Almighty Allah tells us the following in the Noble Quran, translated as: "O you who believe, do not illicitly consume each other's wealth! But, rather, let there be free trade with (mutual) consent among yourselves. And do not kill one another. Indeed, Allah is ever Merciful to you." (An-Nisa'a — Women 4: 29-30)

Note that everything that Almighty Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forbade is morally reprehensible. We learn from the above-quoted verse that 'mutual consent' means that the exchange should be free of undue pressure, fraud and deception or under pressure — among other qualities. Furthermore, one should not kill others for the purpose of taking their wealth or property illicitly.

Almighty Allah has prohibited oppression and injustice to Himself, and so, we should avoid them. Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari (Companion of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) related that Almighty Allah said in Al-Hadeeth Al-Qudsei (statements issued by Allah, but rephrased by Prophet Muhammad PBUH who attributes them to Allah): "O My servants, I have forbidden injustice for Myself, and made it forbidden among you. So, do not oppress (and treat unjustly) one another." (Muslim # 2, 577)

If Almighty Allah, to Whom belongs everything on earth and in the heavens, confirms to us that He will not oppress anyone whatsoever, what about you and me? Those who continuously oppress people and treat them unfairly, if they do not repent, they will face hardships in various ways on Judgment Day. Jabir bin Abdullah (RA)

Continued on Page 6



# New subject 'National Education' introduced to foster patriotism

## Kuwait's IICO offers scholarship funding to students in Malaysia



KUALA LUMPUR: The International Islamic charitable organization in Kuwait provides financial support to Arab school students in Malaysia. – KUNA photos

**KUWAIT:** The Minister of Education, and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Adel Al-Adwani directed the formation of a committee to establish a new subject called "National Education," aimed at fostering patriotic values among students. The Ministry said in a press statement Sunday that Al-Adwani decided to form a committee comprising spe-

cialized personnel tasked with identifying the grades intended to teach this subject to students. The committee will develop a curriculum and teaching plan for "National Education" for each grade level according to set standards, the ministry added.

In another development, the Kuwaiti-based International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) offered funding for

students in need studying in Arabic merit schools in Malaysia as part of the 'My Right to Learn' project. In a statement, the Development and Human Relief Society (INSAN) in Malaysia, which is implementing the project and is registered with Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Monday that the project was funding hundreds of students in seven different Arabic

schools across Malaysia.

The statement added that the 'My Right to Learn' project included more than 3,000 students who participated in various activities and honored the top achievers with prizes and scholarships in the closing ceremony. In a previously recorded speech, IICO Deputy General Director Ibrahim Al-Bader affirmed the

importance of funding such projects that help provide educational opportunities to students, which aligns with the organization's strategies. Counsellor at Kuwait's Embassy in Malaysia, Bader Al-Sager, Dean of the Arab Diplomatic Corps in Malaysia, Ambassador Adel Bahameed, and other heads of charity organizations attended the ceremony.

In my view

## Are you looking for change?

Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Each year, during the month of Ramadan, many people attempt to benefit from this distinguished period to seek positive changes in their lives. However, it is likely that many will fail in improving their lives, as those who seek change only during special occasions often face challenges. A few years ago, I attended a course about the kaizen method in management. Kaizen is a Japanese approach to change and development that emerged following Japan's defeat in World War II. The Japanese applied this method to various aspects of life, from lifestyle to factory management.

Interestingly, this method succeeded in creating successful management despite the challenges faced by a people devastated by defeat and lacking essential production tools. What is the kaizen method that brought about such transformative change? Kaizen is a Japanese word composed of two parts — "kai," meaning change, and "zen," meaning better. The term signifies continuous improvement, a philosophy created by Taiichi Ohno to guide industrial and financial establishments and be implemented in all aspects of life.

This successful method is built on the principle of continuous change, emphasizing that change should not be temporary or a onetime replacement of a method. Instead, it should be a constant and ongoing process, regardless of its scale. The kaizen method became renowned for its slow and continuous approach to change, recognizing that most individuals struggle to make major changes abruptly.

Kaizen teaches us why we often fail when attempting to link our changes to religious or social occasions. True change doesn't occur simply because we desire it during specific events. Instead, it happens when we genuinely believe in change and practice the correct method. We all seek changes in our lives, identifying certain traits we wish to overcome. However, we may lack the method to address these shortcomings. The Kaizen method guides us in eliminating shortcomings in our lives, factories and management. When we remove obstacles hindering progress and production, success becomes attainable.

I recommend studying the kaizen method to anyone seeking positive change. It successfully lifted a nation out of weakness and transformed it into a strong, developed nation. Having spent significant time with the Japanese, I can attest that the kaizen method has shaped the Japanese people into individuals who embrace change and achieve success.

As we enter this month of Ramadan, which aims to train us in patience, let us consider that change is a gradual process. If we genuinely want to change, let Ramadan be the start of a continuous journey toward improvement. Patience acquired during this month can guide us in sustaining positive changes throughout the years of our lives, recognizing that change is an ongoing process that requires dedication and practice.

## Women today: The changing dynamics

By Zainab Al-Mashoor

**KUWAIT:** Women have fought tirelessly to secure their rights and freedoms, and in a world that continues to evolve, societal expectations regarding women's roles still vary widely. From expecting too much of a working woman to accepting and embracing their independence, the perspectives are diverse. Kuwait Times spoke to both men and women to gather their insights on these changing dynamics.

Amal, a 65-year-old woman, wasn't allowed to complete her studies due to the mindset prevailing in the old generation and early marriage customs. However, Amal didn't give up and self-educated, becoming a very knowledgeable person. She emphasized how amazing today is better than yesterday and urged women to take advantage of the opportunities given to them.

Betra, who craved the independence of choosing her own path, remarked: "Society expects us to be the complete package. Women are always expected to be

available, whether it's managing family and household duties or being emotionally, mentally and physically present. Regardless of our accomplishments, being a woman always comes with additional burdens."

Hassan remarked: "Women are the backbone of society," adding being able to fulfill numerous responsibilities is an achievement in itself. He believes that women play a crucial role in societal functioning. Conversely, Aziz believes that a woman's place is within the home, nurturing and raising the family. He contends that despite women's independence, their primary role remains domestic.

Donia highlighted how modern society perceives women as capable individuals who can achieve their goals, and pointed out advancements in the GCC region, where women are now managers, leaders and run for elections. "Today, society views women as strong, where she devotes herself to every responsibility she gets, whether being successful at work or being a friend, daughter, wife and mother," she stated. Donia also noted the expanding scope of women's rights, enabling them to pursue any profession of their desire.

While Salma still suffers from gender discrimination and lack of appreciation, she stressed on the need for women's advocacy. "They need to understand that women are delicate and emotional but also capable and



compassionate."

Farah emphasized the prevailing misconception that women still rely on men for tasks like changing tyres and fulfilling other needs, asserting that women are fully capable of handling such tasks independently. She stressed the importance of women recognizing their own abilities, noting plenty of educational resources available, including workshops and technology, to facilitate learning and self-sufficiency.

These diverse perspectives reflect the ongoing discourse surrounding women's roles in society, acknowledging both progress and the need for continued advocacy towards women's empowerment.

Ramadan greetings

### French Embassy

Claire Le Flécher  
French Ambassador

As the holy month of Ramadan begins, I would like to express (on behalf of the French Embassy) my sincere wishes of happiness, health and fraternity to the Kuwaiti people and Muslims around the world. Ramadan is a month of meditation, tolerance, peace and spirituality. I also know that Ramadan is an opportunity to show solidarity and compassion to the people who are suffering. On this occasion, my heart goes out to the victims of the continuing conflicts, to the refugees and displaced populations. In Ra-



madan, family and friends gather and share unforgettable moments: Diwanis, Girgian and Ghabqas. This is my third Ramadan as a French Ambassador to Kuwait and I am particularly moved to share these moments of great conviviality and generosity. To you and your families, in Kuwait, in France, and in the world, I wish you a beautiful Ramadan.

### Indian Embassy

Dr Adarsh Swaika  
Indian Ambassador

On the advent of holy month of Ramadan, I extend heartfelt wishes of Ramadan Mubarak to everyone and pray for health, safety, and prosperity of all. I extend my warmest regards to the leadership of the State of Kuwait, our dear Kuwaiti friends, and the entire Indian community in Kuwait, as well as to our fellow Indians back home. Ramadan epitomizes a time for introspection, patience, gratitude, love, humility, and self-discipline. It serves as a gentle reminder of our duty to serve the less fortunate and marginalized members of society. Moreover, it underscores the principles of equality and compassion, fostering a collective commitment to the betterment of our communities.

In India, with its rich tapestry of diverse religions and cultures, Ramadan holds special significance as the month showcases the



vibrant mosaic of our nation, which is home to the world's second-largest Muslim population. It is revered as a time of great auspiciousness, showcasing India's ethos of unity in diversity, where individuals from varied socio-cultural and religious backgrounds co-exist harmoniously. May this sacred month of Ramadan be abundant in kindness, harmony, and compassion, strengthening the bonds of unity across all strata of society. Once again, I extend my warmest Ramadan Mubarak wishes to all our dear friends in Kuwait and beloved brothers and sisters from India. Ramadan Kareem!



ADEN: Kuwait's Society for Humanitarian Action opens a village called Jaoula, in the Yemeni governorate of Lahj. – KUNA photos

## Kuwait builds 20 housing units for Yemeni orphans

ADEN: Kuwait's Society for Humanitarian Action has opened a village called Jaoula, in the Yemeni

governorate of Lahj, in Tuban district, that consists of 20 housing units, a school, a health center, and a water project, with the aim of distributing livelihoods to people in need, ongoing for the 9th year. The Springs of Goodness Foundation has announced a project involving the construction of housing units, a school, a health center, a mosque, and an integrated water project.

The project includes rehabilitation, submersible pumping systems, and solar systems for all

village facilities. Deputy Governor of Lahj, Awad Al-Salahi, expressed gratitude to the State of Kuwait, its leadership, government, and people for their support and projects that touch people's lives. He affirmed that the project aims to provide a safe haven and housing for orphans living in harsh conditions in Lahj, with the local authority promising to provide the necessary support to ensure the success of the project and improve living conditions. — KUNA





## Local

# Solutions to accelerate electric vehicle adoption in Kuwait amid challenges

## Less than one percent of passenger cars are EVs

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait currently holds the lowest global ranking in electric vehicle (EV) adoption, with less than one percent of passenger cars being EVs, as observed by Andri Ottesen, Assistant Professor at the Australian University of Kuwait. There are only 450 registered EVs in Kuwait, he said. This low rate is primarily attributed to the absence of public fast-charging stations, high electric car prices, and several other factors, as emphasized by Ottesen during his interview with Kuwait Times.

### Challenges hurdling

Ottesen expanded upon the challenges outlined in his research paper titled 'Attitudes of Drivers towards Electric Vehicles in Kuwait', co-authored by Basil Alzougool, Associate Professor at the Arab Open University of Kuwait (AOU) and Sumayya Banna, Assistant Professor at AOU. He emphasized a major obstacle for individuals aspiring to own electric vehicles in Kuwait: The shortage of public fast-charging stations capable of efficiently charging EVs in under 20 minutes.

He noted Kuwait currently has only 40 stations, all of which operate slowly, taking nearly four hours to fully charge a car. He attributed this slow rate to the extreme heat conditions in Kuwait, which hinder the stations' ability to function at full capacity. "We are currently exploring solutions to cool them down for optimal performance," Ottesen stated, referring to collaborative efforts with the ministry of electricity and water to address this issue.

Another significant challenge is the high price of EVs, which are approximately 30 percent more expensive than gasoline cars due to the addition-

al cost of their batteries. Ottesen highlighted that even those willing to invest in EVs remain hesitant due to uncertainty regarding battery durability, particularly in Kuwait's harsh climate.

Furthermore, Ottesen pinpointed another factor hindering the widespread adoption of EVs in Kuwait: Restrictions imposed by landlords on tenants, who predominantly comprise expatriates, the majority of the population. These restrictions prevent them from installing home amplifier boxes essential for cutting charging time from around 30 hours to six hours. Consequently, EV ownership is mostly restricted to Kuwaiti citizens who own their homes.

### Suggestions for potential solutions

To address these challenges, Ottesen, along with the authors, proposed several solutions. Firstly, they recommended that the government provide financial incentives for purchasing EVs, such as eliminating import taxes and exempting EVs from value added tax when introduced in Kuwait, as well as providing at least one EV fast-charging station at every petrol station by 2024, funded by the government. Additionally, car dealers should offer a 12-year warranty on battery life. Regarding landlords, they should be prohibited from banning the installation of home wall boxes, with Ottesen likening it to the ease of installing a washing machine.

On the other hand, the Council of Ministers praised the organization of the Kuwait General Authority for Sports (Kuwait Sports Day) event held last Saturday on the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah bridge under the patronage, presence, and participation of the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and a number of ministers and ambassadors of brotherly and friendly countries, in addition to the participation of citizens and residents of all age groups and people with special needs, noting the importance of exercise for all and its positive impact on human health.

In this regard, the Cabinet expressed its thanks and appreciation to the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, the Minister of State for Communications Affairs, Dawood Sulaiman Maarafi, members of the General Authority for Sports, and all entities that contributed to the success of the



Electric Cars getting charged.

Ottesen pointed out the unique features of electric cars, which exhibit a remarkable positive impact on the environment by producing zero emissions of CO2 and harmful gases, requiring minimal maintenance due to having fewer moving parts compared to gasoline cars, offering incredible high speed, and providing a quiet operating engine.

Therefore, these features made the authors

conclude that overcoming the underlying obstacles could indeed revolutionize EV sales, with solid proof of up to 50 percent of surveyed drivers expressing interest in switching to EVs. This transition could significantly reduce Kuwait's carbon footprint, potentially altering its global ranking in per capita CO2 emissions, as demonstrated by the results of the paper.

## Cabinet congratulates leaders, residents as Ramadan begins

**KUWAIT:** The Council of Ministers held its weekly meeting on Monday, chaired by the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji stated the following: At the beginning of its meeting, the Council of Ministers extended its highest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the noble Kuwaiti people and residents on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

## Kuwait, Jordan enjoy deep-rooted relations

**AMMAN:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Marri, said on Monday that Kuwait and Jordan enjoy great and solid bilateral relations thanks to the political leaders of the two countries. This came in a statement by Al-Marri to KUNA after his meeting with Prince El Hassan bin Talal, during which they discussed strengthening the relations between Kuwait and Jordan and ways to develop relations in various fields. Ambassador Al-Marri pointed out that the meeting touched on a number of issues and topics of common interest, especially the Palestinian cause, the recent developments in Gaza, and the violent attacks the Palestinians are facing. He stressed that these meetings come within the framework of strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries, which have deep and historical relations. — KUNA



AMMAN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Marri holds talks with Jordan's Prince El Hassan bin Talal on Monday during which they discussed strengthening the relations between Kuwait and Jordan. — KUNA

## OIC chief extends Ramadan greetings

**JEDDAH:** The Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Husein Ibrahim Taha, extended on Sunday warm congratulations and felicitations to the Muslim world on the advent of the blessed month of Ramadan. In a press release, the OIC said the Secretary-General extended his greetings to the entire Muslim world on the occasion of the month of goodness and blessings. Taha prayed to the almighty Allah to send forth His blessings and security on the Muslim world in this generous month, leading to the end of crises and conflicts throughout the length and breadth of the Muslim world.

The Secretary-General highlighted the OIC's grave concern as it diligently follows the ongoing Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip, which is languishing under starvation, blockade, and bombardment by the Zionist occupation forces, making the current conditions difficult for women, children, and the elderly. The Secretary-General expressed his wish that Allah would grant victory and support to the Palestinian people and liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque from the clutches of the Zionist occupation, and that he would make Ramadan a definitive turning point, bringing hope for a ceasefire and ending all the war against the Palestinian people.

The OIC chief also expressed wishes that would bring stability to Sudan and let security and harmony spread in the Muslim communities in non-OIC Member States, thus contributing to strengthening and deepening societal peace and international security. The Secretary-General emphasized that, in addition to being the month of fasting and night prayers for the entire Muslim community, Ramadan is also an opportunity to practice values of goodness, mercy, and mutual support, nurturing the soul and spreading the spirit of peace. He urged that hands of support should be lent to the needy and those in difficult conditions in refugee and displacement camps. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti photographer wins best travel photo

**BERLIN:** The Arab Union for Tourism Media (AUTM) announced on Sunday that Kuwaiti photographer Mohammad Al-Kanderi shared the travel photo of the year 2024 for his "Wadi Durbat" photo, which was featured in an article published by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) with Iraq's Hikmat Al-Ayashi. Al-Kanderi, who works at KUNA as an editor, saw his win in the Berlin International Tourism Trade (ITB), one of the biggest global travel fairs, for his publication dubbed (Wadi Durbat... for the picturesque nature of Salalah).

This year's competition saw 16 participants from the Arab world, said AUTM's board in a statement, and awards were given in various categories like best travel report, best travel short video, and best travel photo. A judging committee was formed to evaluate the submissions by the contenders. Some of the criteria include accuracy of information, influence, promoting tourism in Arab countries, and more. — KUNA

sports event for their efforts in organizing the distinctive sports event.

On the other hand, the Cabinet reviewed the recommendation of the ministerial education, health, and youth committee on the preservation of heritage and historical buildings and sites in Kuwait, and the Cabinet decided to instruct the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters to accelerate the implementation of its plans and programs to rehabilitate these heritage and historical buildings to be tourist and cultural landmarks in the country.

The ministers also reviewed a number of recommendations in the minutes of the meeting of the ministerial legal affairs committee on agreements and memoranda of understanding between the state of Kuwait and a number of brotherly and friendly countries, with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations and joint cooperation between the state of Kuwait and those countries in various fields. — KUNA



Mohammad Al-Kanderi



egories like best travel report, best travel short video, and best travel photo. A judging committee was formed to evaluate the submissions by the contenders. Some of the criteria include accuracy of information, influence, promoting tourism in Arab countries, and more. — KUNA



Best travel photo. — KUNA photos

## Equal nights and days first time in Ramadan in 33 yrs

**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center announced that Kuwait will, on Saturday, March 16, be on equal nights and days of 12 hours each, coinciding with the blessed month of Ramadan for the first time in 33 years. The director of the Space and Astronomy Museum at the center, Khaled Al-Jumaan, said on Monday that the sunrise on the 16th of this month will be at 5.57 am and sunset at 5.57 pm, so that the day will begin to increase gradually and the feeling of its length will be more noticeable.

Al-Jumaan explained that there will be equality of night and day in Kuwait at the equator by four days, but their equality varies from one region to another due to geographical location. According to astronomical calculations, based on simulating reality in the planetarium, the spring equinox this year will coincide with the month of Ramadan for the first time in 33 years. He stated that the Hijri year is known to be shorter than the Gregorian year and that the number of days of the Gregorian year is 11 days more than the number of days of the Hijri year, so the month of Ramadan advances every year by 11 days in the Gregorian year.

He pointed out that the date of the month of Ramadan varies according to the four seasons, as its timing changes during 33 lunar years to complete a full cycle, which explains why Muslims fast once in winter, then another in autumn, sometimes in summer, and another in spring. He pointed out that the four seasons are related to astronomy and also the inclination of the earth's axis of rotation at the level of its orbit around the sun, which is classified in astronomy within the rotation of a celestial body around a star and the changes that occur in each of them.

Al-Jumaan said that the equinox occurs only twice a year, the first in March (the spring equinox) and the second in September (the autumnal equinox). What Kuwait is witnessing during this period is a transitional period from one season to another. He pointed out that the difference in seasons is the result of the Earth's rotation around the sun during the year in an orbit whose plane is inclined at the Earth's equator at an angle of approximately 23.5, which is the same angle between the Earth's axis of rotation around itself and its axis of rotation around the Sun. — KUNA

## Medics to undergo resuscitation course

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi issued a ministerial decision to oblige pediatricians and nurses at the intensive care departments (for premature babies) to obtain a training course certificate (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) accredited by the American Heart Association (AHA) and the American Institute for Safety and Health (ASHI) upon appointment and promotion.

The Ministry said in a press statement on Monday that the decision comes within the framework of keenness to raise the efficiency of medical staff and the level of services provided to pediatric patients based on the government's action plan to upgrade the level of health services and facilitate citizens' access to services with the best quality standards.

This decision is based on the Ministerial Decision (No. 63 of 2024), which requires all doctors, dentists, pharmaceutical services, and auxiliary medical services from employees of hospitals, specialized centers, and primary care centers affiliated with the Ministry and employees in the private medical sector to receive training courses for cardiopulmonary resuscitation. — KUNA



## Ramadan healthy tips



## Stay hydrated

Drink plenty of water between iftar and suhoor to prevent dehydration during fasting hours. Keeping your body hydrated is essential for maintaining energy levels, supporting digestion, and preventing headaches or fatigue.

## Eat balanced meals

Include a variety of nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins in your meals to stay nourished. Eating a balanced diet provides your body with the essential nutrients it needs to function properly and keep you feeling satisfied throughout the day.

## Limit sugary foods

Avoid excessive consumption of sugary snacks and desserts to maintain stable energy levels throughout the day. While sweets may provide a quick energy boost, they can lead to rapid blood sugar spikes followed by crashes, leaving you feeling tired and irritable.

## Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A picture dating back to the 1950s shows the grass trade via camel's back in the streets of Kuwait. — Photo from the collection of Ali Al Rais Center of Research and Studies on Kuwait, provided by Mohdzakaria Abu El Ella, researcher in the heritage ministry of information.

# Ministry of Information to launch new digital platform

## Platform will integrate all of Ministry's content digitally

KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for Media Services and New Media Sector, Saad Al-Azmi, announced Sunday the launch of the new digital platform (51) on May 12, which will integrate all of the Ministry's content digitally. Al-Azmi's statement came during a press conference held to announce the details of the platform and its launch, which will coincide with the anniversary of the launch of Kuwait Radio on May 12, 1951, in cooperation with Fasttelco.

He stressed that the team will persist in their efforts until the upcoming launch, ensuring diverse content, including Ramadan programs, on Kuwait TV's digital platform until the transition to the new platform (51), whose goal is to embrace modern media technologies. Al-Azmi described the platform as a gateway to innovative digital content, transcending traditional methods and offering effortless access to television and radio content. It enables users to enjoy timeless archival pieces and live broadcasts of all Kuwait TV channels and radio stations.

Emphasizing its family-friendly design, he highlighted adherence to Ministry of Information regulations

and the platform's reflection of Kuwaiti cultural values and creativity in media, art, awareness, sports, and drama. It serves Kuwaiti media history and authenticity. He pointed out the platform's significance in maximizing the state's financial resources for the Ministry of Information through private sector collaboration. It is projected to generate a substantial return of KD 5.050 million over five years, along with 10 percent of net advertising profits and subscriptions.

Additionally, the Ministry will retain ownership of its archive and trademark, ensuring control over platform content. On her part, Nouf Al-Mashaan, representing Fasttelco, emphasized the significance of collaboration between the private and government sectors in advancing services. Leveraging their technical expertise and infrastructure, she highlighted their leadership position in delivering an unparalleled media experience. Al-Mashaan noted that their project opens doors to Kuwait's rich visual and audio archive, accessible worldwide, promoting not only Kuwait's history and culture but also the Arabic language.

She expressed pride in cooperating with the Min-

istry of Information and other government agencies, underscoring their commitment to exploring opportunities for a prosperous media future aligned with a common vision. Engineer Issa Dharyan, Director of Engineering Communications at the Ministry of Information and Deputy Chairman of the Coordination Committee for the Ministry of Information Digital Platform, said the launch of this platform has become imperative due to the abundance of media materials, some of which are beneficial while others spread ideas unsuitable for society.

Dharyan highlighted that the Platform 51 digital platform, leveraging the Ministry of Information's rich cultural heritage and extensive media expertise, will offer secure, purposeful media content embedded with ethical values and crafted to appeal to various demographics based on age and interests. He emphasized the platform's embodiment of genuine community partnership between the government and private sectors, enriching television, radio, and electronic media content while staying abreast of rapid developments in digital and modern media. — KUNA



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Multi-color Arabian knives set on a stand. — KUNA photos



An employee assembling swords at the factory.

## Arabian blades signify chivalry and bravery

MANAMA: Since ancient times, Arabian blades have signified chivalry and bravery and were used to fend off attackers and protect oneself from harm. Nowadays, the steeped history of the Arabian blade continues to be appreciated throughout the region and particularly in the Gulf, with many still produced by blade-smiths regardless of gender. On this subject, KUNA explored the process of making swords, daggers, and knives in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which to this day is forged by skilled and talented hands.

Blade manufacturing in Bahrain dates back to around 1783, said Zohour Al-Sayegh, a woman bladesmith who inherited the craft from her ancestors, told KUNA. Al-Sayegh affirmed that blades played a huge part in the history of the region as well as the tradition built around it, and these days, blades adorn households throughout the Gulf region in remembrance of the glorious past. Matters such as the weight of the person and their

stature dictated how a blade was forged, she indicated, noting that Arabian blades were used in the current times in celebrations, whether they were weddings, national occasions, or other festivities.

Al-Sayegh revealed that there were protocols and social considerations governing the forging of blades, noting that in wedding celebrations, blades for the grooms should be made differently from the ones made for in-laws, friends, acquaintances, and family members. Some blades were meant to be held with the left hand so that the right one might be extended in a gesture of peace, said Al-Sayegh, providing further insight into the social intricacies of the profession.

The Arabian sword, for instance, is unique in design from the hilt to the tip of the blade, and it rarely gets confused with other types of blades from across the globe, she pointed out. She said that blades usually weighed between six and eight kilograms, noting that some types of swords signified the rank of a swordsman back in the olden days. On the process itself, Al-Sayegh indicated that sword-making took around three to four months of hard work and mastery, depending on the type of blade produced. In regards to daggers and knives, the bladesmith said that men and women used to carry such weapons for daily usage and event protection. — KUNA



Golden color knives adorned with interesting designs and textiles.



Traditional knives and accessories.





Zionists freeze aid worker visas in devastated Gaza

## Frankfurt lights up for Ramadan in first for Germany

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KRASNODAR, Russia: In this photo by Russian state media, President Vladimir Putin operates a flight simulator during a visit to an aviation school on March 7, 2024. — AFP photos



A man casts his ballot at his home during early voting for Russia's presidential election on March 10, 2024.

# Putin set for coronation in vote with no opposition

**'We won't tolerate any criticism of our democracy. Our democracy is the best': Putin spokesman**

MOSCOW: Vladimir Putin is set to secure another six-year term as Russian leader this weekend in a vote the Kremlin says will show society is fully behind his assault on Ukraine. In power as president or prime minister since the final day of 1999, Putin has quashed all forms of opposition and dissent, exerting a level of domestic control that ensures the result is in no doubt. Victory in the March 15-17 contest will allow him to stay in the Kremlin until at least 2030, longer than any Russian leader since Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century. The poll comes at a time of high confidence for the former KGB agent. Russia's troops in Ukraine have chalked up their first battlefield gains in months.

And Putin's most strident critic, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison colony last month. Though Putin is blasted as a pariah in the West, the Kremlin says the vote will show that Russians at home are unified behind him and his offensive. "He has no rivals

at the moment and cannot have any," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last year. "Nobody can realistically compete with him," he said.

### 'Important elections'

Despite the ceremonial undertones, the Kremlin takes the electoral process seriously. Moscow has poured resources into a campaign designed to whip up enthusiasm for Putin. The president has toured the country and was filmed flying in the cockpit of a supersonic nuclear bomber, burnishing his tough-guy credentials.

"These elections are very important for the Kremlin," Chatham House fellow Nikolai Petrov told AFP. "It is needed to demonstrate that Russians overwhelmingly support Putin" during the military offensive, he said.

The Kremlin is aiming to secure a higher level of support for Putin than in his previous four election wins. In 2018, official results showed he got 77.5

percent of the vote. Even with no real competition, that contest was marred by widespread accusations of ballot-stuffing, fraud and forced voting.

This year Putin will officially face three other contenders — Kremlin-approved candidates designed to give a facade of competition. Anti-Putin politician Boris Nadezhdin was blocked from standing after tens of thousands of Russians backed his surprise bid to run on a pro-peace message.

### 'No doubt'

The Kremlin had previously allowed a liberal candidate to run in what analysts once called Russia's "managed democracy". Now the term they use is "autocracy" — or "totalitarian". Ballots will also be cast in the four Ukrainian regions Moscow claimed to have annexed in 2022, as well as the Crimean peninsula, seized in 2014. Moscow is no longer worried about trying to present the vote as a legitimate democratic

exercise to the West, or even Russian society, Petrov said. "The most important thing ... is that political elites should not have any doubts that Putin is really supported by the vast majority of Russians," he said.

Less than a year after an aborted mutiny by mercenary boss Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Kremlin will want to show possible rivals and successors that Putin is secure on his throne. From exile and behind bars, Russia's remaining opposition figures still hope they can spoil the procession.

They want anti-Putin Russians to form huge queues outside polling stations on the final day of voting. Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, says the show of dissent could spook Putin. The Kremlin appears unfazed. "We will hold the kind of elections that our people need," Peskov said earlier this month, dismissing those who describe the vote as neither free nor fair. "We won't tolerate any criticism of our democracy. Our democracy is the best." — AFP

## UK earmarks £117m to bolster security at Muslim sites

LONDON: The UK government said Sunday that it would provide £117 million (\$128 million) to bolster security at mosques and other Muslim sites including schools and community centers across the country over the next four years.

The pledge by the Home Office comes amid a surge in anti-Muslim hate incidents in the UK since the outbreak of the Zionist war in Gaza last October. "Anti-Muslim hatred has absolutely no place in our society," Home Secretary James Cleverly said in a statement. "We will not let events in the Middle East be used as an excuse to justify abuse against British Muslims."

The security measures will include technology such as CCTV, alarm systems and perimeter fencing. A further £31 million will also be made available to ensure the protection of democratic processes and institutions in response to growing extremist threats.

Tell MAMA, a group monitoring hate crimes against the Muslim community, said last month that it had recorded 2,010 hate incidents during the last four months.

It was the largest recorded number of cases in a four-month period, the group said, and up from 600 incidents over the same period in 2022-2023, a rise of 335 percent. They included abusive behavior, threats, assaults, vandalism, discrimination, hate speech and anti-Muslim literature.

Of the total number, Tell MAMA said 1,109 of the reported incidents occurred online. Women were the target in 65 percent of cases, the group added.

A Jewish charity, the Community Security Trust (CST), has also reported a sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Britain since last October. The charity, which monitors anti-Semitism in Britain, recorded 4,103 "anti-Jewish hate incidents" last year, its highest annual tally since 1984.

That represented a 147 percent increase on the 1,662 incidents recorded in 2022. In February, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged to provide more than £70 million over the next four years to protect Jewish community sites. — AFP

## More Boeing woes as 50 injured after issue on flight

WELLINGTON: Twelve passengers were hospitalized Monday after a technical problem on a LATAM flight from Sydney to Auckland caused the plane to dip violently, the airline and first responders told AFP Monday. At least one person was in serious condition after flight LA800 — a Boeing 787 Dreamliner — experienced an unspecified "technical event" over the Tasman Sea.

Passengers told New Zealand media that the plane quickly lost altitude, flinging some towards the ceiling. "People flew through the air because they weren't wearing their seatbelts" a passenger told public broadcaster RNZ. "Some people got pretty injured. People were really scared as well," the unidentified man said, his voice shaking.

## 5 skiers found dead, 1 missing in Swiss Alps: Police

SION: Five of six cross-country skiers who went missing in the Swiss Alps over the weekend have been found dead, police said Monday, with the search still on for the last person. The group of skiers, aged 21 to 58 and including five members of the same family, left the luxury ski resort town of Zermatt Saturday with the goal of reaching the tiny village of Arolla later that day, but never arrived.

As a storm set in, the skiers went missing in the vicinity of the Tete-Blanche mountain, at an altitude of over 3,500 meters (11,480 feet) above sea level. The weather conditions were "catastrophic", with freezing temperatures and a significant avalanche risk, Christian Varone, head of Wallis cantonal police told reporters.

A person who had gone to pick up the group in Arolla sounded the alarm shortly after 4 pm (1500 GMT) on Saturday. An hour later, a member of the missing group managed to reach the rescue services by mobile phone, allowing them to pinpoint where to search for the skiers.

Varone said rescue workers had pulled out all the stops to try to reach them, but that the dire weather conditions had long prevented helicopters and teams of expert skiers and mountaineers from reaching the area. "We were trying the impossible," he said, adding that the mission had pushed its efforts "to the extreme, extreme limit", but were

A spokesperson for the Chile-based airline said "a technical event during the flight" had "caused a strong movement". "The plane landed at Auckland Airport as scheduled," the airline said, adding it "deeply regrets any inconvenience and discomfort this situation may have caused". It was not immediately clear what caused the incident.

Gerard Campbell of the St John New Zealand ambulance service said medics were first made aware of the problem as the plane descended into New Zealand's largest city. A phalanx of more than a dozen ambulances and other medical vehicles rushed to the scene to treat the wounded.

"Our ambulance crews assessed and treated approximately 50 patients, with one patient in a serious condition and the remainder in a moderate to minor condition," Campbell said. "Twelve patients were transported to hospital," he said, after earlier putting the number at 13. At least three of those treated were cabin crew.

### 'Gathering information'

Mobile phone footage posted by the NZ Herald

showed concerned crew and passengers attending to one injured woman while flight attendants asked if there was a doctor aboard.

Data from airline tracker FlightAware showed the plane lost altitude about two hours into the three-hour flight. US plane-maker Boeing has suffered a series of safety issues in recent years, including fatal Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines crashes of 737 MAX planes.

Boeing is still reeling from a near-catastrophic incident in January when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight. Boeing representatives were not immediately available for comment.

New Zealand's Transport Accident Investigation Commission said it was "aware of the reported incident" and was "gathering further information to inform a decision as to whether to open an inquiry". The incident could be investigated by Chilean authorities if it was found to have occurred in international airspace. LATAM said passengers destined for Santiago would now leave New Zealand on Tuesday evening. — AFP



EVOLENE: Helicopters are seen during the search operation for six cross-country skiers who went missing in the Swiss Alps. — AFP

forced to turn around to avoid "seriously endangering the lives of the rescue workers". "Sometimes you have to bow before nature."

On Sunday, a team consisting of two rescue workers, a doctor and a mountain police officer, was finally able to be dropped off by helicopter nearby, police said. "At around 9:20 pm, it reached the Tete-Blanche sector, where it discovered the bodies of five of the six people who were missing," it said in a statement.

The search is meanwhile continuing for the last

member of the group. "As long as there is hope we will keep going ... while remaining realistic in view of the conditions this person has been in for the past 48 hours," Varone said.

Police have yet to reveal the identities of those involved, only saying that the five family members were from Wallis canton and the sixth person from the canton of Fribourg. Wallis lead prosecutor Beatrix Pilloud told reporters that an investigation had been launched to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident. — AFP



## International

## Swedes prepare for possibility of war

After centuries of non-alignment, officials urge 'peace damaged' public to be 'mentally' ready

**STOCKHOLM:** Tinned food, a portable water filter and medicine: survival expert Harry Sepp shows his Stockholm neighbor the supplies she would need to get through the first days of a war. "Everything you see here is something the state recommends everyone should have to manage on their own for at least 10 days," Sepp, a pensioner who gave prepper courses for more than 20 years, explains.

On the cusp of the country's NATO membership, and faced with an increasingly belligerent Russia, Sweden's army chief Micael Byden alarmed many of his compatriots in January when he urged them to consider their own preparedness. "Swedes have to mentally prepare for war," he said. Sepp tells AFP the remarks were "necessary". "Remember the situation at the time of the pandemic," he says, recalling supply shortages. At his neighbor's apartment, he insists on the need for a wind-up radio.

"Most important is the radio, because if you don't get any information about what's happening ... you'll wonder all the time how long this situation will go on." His neighbor Rebecca, a mother of three who didn't want to give her last name, tries to take in his advice. "You can prepare all that stuff but that doesn't mean you will be mentally prepared for a war," she says.

Sweden's military has been boosting its preparedness since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. The country reintroduced limited conscription in 2017, reopened a garrison on the Baltic Sea island of Gotland in 2018, and has massively increased defense spending after slashing it during the post-Cold War period.

Most significantly, Sweden dropped two centuries of military non-alignment



**STOCKHOLM:** Survival expert Harry Sepp shows the supplies that are needed to get through the first days of a war on February 23, 2024. — AFP photos



Sepp (left) shows his neighbor, Rebecca, how to prepare for war at home.

to join NATO. Swedish authorities also reactivated the country's so-called "total defense" — comprising civilian and military defense — in 2015, bolstering efforts further after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Among other things, it appointed a minister of civil defense. "The underpinning value is that everybody can contribute and has a duty to contribute" to the country's defense, says Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, director of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB).

#### Water for three days

"If you are healthy, you are obliged to care for yourself for a week," she says, noting that the state would help the weakest first. The brochure "If Crisis or War Comes" was sent to 4.9 million

households in 2018 and translated into 14 languages. It will be updated by the end of the year.

Sweden has not gone to war in more than two centuries, leaving the population so poorly prepared for the possibility that there is even a Swedish term for it: "fredsskadad", or peace damaged.

For the generations born after the end of the Cold War, the prospect of conflict is entirely new. As with its military defense, Sweden maintained its civil defense throughout the Cold War, but scaled both back after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

A poll commissioned by MSB after Byden's remarks showed that a third of the 1,000 people surveyed were now more worried about the possibility of war, especially young people. One in

three also said they had begun to consider how to prepare at home. Home preparedness for war is however "a very long process to change", says Herman Andersson, a researcher at the Swedish Defence Research Agency.

He cited a study he conducted which showed that more than half of Swedes only have enough drinking water at home for three days in case of a power outage, a level that remained unchanged between 2018 and 2022.

Martin Svennberg, a 52-year-old IT engineer, has been a "prepper" for five years. "We've been living in peace for so long that we have forgotten all the bad things with war," he tells AFP. He was "really happy that finally someone in politics dared to say that we could be in trouble".

Svennberg contributes to a website about "prepping" and makes YouTube videos and podcasts, which have grown increasingly popular since Byden's remarks. "Taking the step to actually be prepared is huge," he says.

Since the concept of war is daunting, he suggests people start by considering what they would need if their home were ravaged by fire. "We call that a 'personal apocalypse' and that's a good start to get prepared."

Svennberg considers MSB's recommendation to have enough food to last seven to 10 days insufficient. "One week is a good start but I recommend one month or even three months of storage." "Take it in small steps. Every time you buy groceries, buy something extra," he suggests. — AFP

## Zionists freeze aid worker visas in devastated Gaza

**JERUSALEM:** Along with cumbersome border checks and relentless Zionist bombardment, the humanitarian response in war-ravaged Gaza faces a new challenge: a de facto freeze on visas for many international aid workers.

Zionist authorities have stopped issuing new visas or renewing old ones for foreign employees of international NGOs, most of whom occupy senior positions, according to three senior humanitarian officials and a body representing more than 80 groups.

As of Thursday, 57 aid workers' visas had expired since the war broke out on October 7, while 42 more "will expire in the coming few weeks", said Faris Arouri, director of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), whose members work in the Palestinian territories.

At least 50 requests for new visas — for staffers ramping up the response to worsening humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank — have gone nowhere, Arouri said. "The total is close to 150 positions that we urgently need as of two months ago, not tomorrow," Arouri said. "We see it as part and parcel of a larger-scale (Zionist) blockade on aid operations and humanitarian aid both in the West Bank and Gaza." The United Nations has also been affected, with scores of visa applications currently "unanswered", a UN official told AFP, requesting anonymity given the sensitivity of the issue. Zionist foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat told AFP there was "a change of procedures ... regarding the issuing of visas to the NGOs" and that the issue "will be resolved in the near future".

Grim reports of Gazans subsisting on leaves and animal fodder as children succumb to malnutrition have focused attention on dramatic shortages of food aid, to say nothing of medicine and other essentials. While no one believes granting visas to international aid workers would immediately alleviate



**KHAN YUNIS:** Palestinians walk past a destroyed UN car after returning briefly to Khan Yunis to check on what remains of their homes on March 7, 2024. — AFP

suffering in Gaza, the visa freeze has left 15 organizations without country directors in the Zionist entity, Arouri said, making what little work they can do even more difficult.

Work visas for international NGOs require a recommendation letter from the entity's Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, which has not issued any since August, three senior humanitarian officials told AFP. Since October, the ministry said it would not be able to issue new recommendation letters, but foreign aid workers were granted a blanket visa extension until February 8, the officials said. No further extension has been announced.

The country director of one NGO working on water and sanitation in Gaza and the West Bank,

whose visa has expired, said it is possible to stay in the Zionist entity by obtaining a document confirming an application for a new visa has been submitted. But the country director said humanitarian officials holding this document cannot travel to Gaza and the West Bank.

"It really hinders the coordination and effective management of our Gaza operations," the country director said, speaking on condition of anonymity to avoid jeopardizing relations with the Zionist government. Meanwhile, some aid workers who have applied for visas have been ordered to leave the country, with no word on when they might be able to return. "It's never clear," the country director said. "It's like everything is a grey zone." — AFP

## India bank ordered to publish anonymous election bond data

**NEW DELHI:** India's top court on Monday ordered the state-run bank to publish details of previously anonymous political donations made in the form of controversial electoral bonds — with the disclosures to be made before upcoming national polls. Last month, the Supreme Court had outlawed the scheme, under which individuals and companies could anonymously buy electoral bonds, saying it "infringes upon the right of information of the voter".

Electoral bonds have been a key method of political funding, allowing donors to give anonymously through certificates purchased from the State Bank of India (SBI). Critics condemned the campaign financing method as an opaque way to funnel "black money" to parties, but supporters say it provides better regulation than cash donations, which are still legal. The SBI had requested an extension on publishing the bond details until June 30 — by which time the general election would have been completed.

Nearly a billion people are eligible to cast ballots in the elections, likely to be held in April and May, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi widely expected to win a third term in power. But Chief Justice Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud gave the SBI until March 12 to comply, warning if the bank failed to do so it risked being charged with "willful disobedience". The SBI had argued it needed more time to prepare the "complex" payment details, but the court said the information was "already available" within the bank.

The initial court order on February 15 argued that information about political party funding was "essential for the effective exercise of the choice of voting". It ruled that the SBI must submit details of each bond — including who purchased it — since April 2019 to the Electoral Commission, which must publish those details on its website by March 13. — AFP

## Oppression and injustice...

Continued from Page 1

related that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: "Beware of injustice (and oppression). For oppression will be darkness on Judgment Day. And beware of stinginess: for it destroyed those who preceded you. It incited them to shed blood and make lawful what was unlawful." (Muslim # 2, 598)

In the above-quoted hadith (prophetic narration), the darkness alluded to mean that on Judgment Day, every person will have to cross a bridge, which will be over the Hellfire, in order to enter Paradise. The person's good deeds will act as a light so that one crosses the bridge easily and enters Paradise. If someone oppresses others, or is an unrepentant disbeliever, or a hypocrite, or a Muslim with very few good deeds, then they will not receive this necessary brightness to cross the bridge. The darkness in the above-quoted hadith also refers to a variety of horrendous events that will unfold on Judgment Day from which an oppressive or unjust person will suffer severely.

The oppressed person's supplication is readily accepted by Almighty Allah: Abu Huraira (Companion of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: "The supplication of three categories of people is never turned back: A fasting person until he breaks the fast, a just leader, and the supplication of the oppressed person

(treated unfairly). That supplication is raised above the clouds by Almighty Allah, the gates of heaven are opened for it, and the Lord says, translated as: "By My Might, I will Rescue you in due time (even if it takes a while)." (Al-Albani rated it as authentic in Sahih At-Tirmidhi # 3, 598)

It is clear from the above-quoted Hadeeth and others that Almighty Allah will always answer the supplication of the oppressed even if the oppressed person is an unbeliever or a sinner. Justice is a universal right for all people in Islam. People have the right to be protected in their religion, lives, mind, family/honor and property. If we fail to fulfill their rights, then we have surrendered our fate to their supplication.

No matter how strong a tyrant of an oppressor is, time will come when he/she will be devoid of all the powers they wielded, and nothing will be of benefit to him/her. He will surrender to Almighty Allah willingly or unwillingly. Almighty Allah tells us in the Noble Quran, translated as: "And humbled will be (all) faces to the Infinitely Living (Allah), the Self-Sustaining and Self-Subsisting. And truly failed is the one laden with evil-doing. But whoever performs righteous deeds, and is a believer, he will have no fear of being wronged or defrauded." (Taha 20: 111 – 112)

Finally, injustice and oppression are the most heinous crimes plaguing human societies. The misuse of power in the form of money, authority, weapons, and media - among others - has led to the violation and misplacement of rights, resulting in the suffering of the innocent. The ruination and failure of oppressors is an inevitable divine promise, and a universal law. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

## Ramadan brings no relief amid Zionist...

Continued from Page 1

Palestinian man, Awni Al-Kayyal, 50. "The (Zionist) occupation does not want us to have any joy during Ramadan. We do not have any food for our iftar table," he said, referring to the fast-breaking evening meal.

A Cyprus government spokesman said a Spanish charity ship with food aid was set to sail from the island within hours to the coastal Gaza Strip, where the UN has repeatedly warned of famine. The non-governmental group Open Arms said its boat would tow a barge with 200 tons of food, which its partner the US charity World Central Kitchen would later unload on Gaza's shores.

Fighting meanwhile raged on across Gaza, with the health ministry saying at least 67 people were killed over the past 24 hours. The Hamas government media office said separately that more than 40 air strikes targeted homes in Khan Yunis, Gaza City and other areas. Multiple countries airdropped aid into northern Gaza on Sunday, but the United Nations' aid coordinator for the area has said boosting supply by land would be far more effective. Some of the food packages smashed open on impact, leaving residents picking through the dirt to salvage what they could. AFP TV images showed.

The war has killed 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza. Weeks of talks involving US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators failed to bring about a truce and hostage exchange deal ahead of the intended target of the start of

Ramadan. Both sides have blamed each other for failing to reach a deal, after the Zionist entity demanded a full list of surviving hostages and Hamas called for the Zionist entity to pull out all its troops from Gaza.

A source with knowledge of the ceasefire talks told AFP "there will be a diplomatic push especially in the next 10 days" with a view to securing a deal within the first half of Ramadan. The Islamic holy month this year is "all pain", said Ahmed Kamis, 40, in Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah, where around 1.5 million people have tried to find refuge but are still at risk from Zionist bombing. But even as many Palestinians did not know where to find their next meal, others still found ways to celebrate the start of the holy month, fashioning meagre decorations and distributing traditional fanous lanterns between their tents.

In Washington, President Joe Biden, who faces growing criticism for his steadfast support of the Zionist entity as the civilian death toll in Gaza soars, issued a statement marking the start of Ramadan. "This year, it comes at a moment of immense pain," Biden said. "As Muslims gather around the world over the coming days and weeks to break their fast, the suffering of the Palestinian people will be front of mind for many. It is front of mind for me."

Saudi Arabia's King Salman called in his Ramadan message for the international community to bring an end to the "heinous crimes" taking place in Gaza. "As we witness the arrival of Ramadan this year, our hearts are heavy with sorrow for the ongoing suffering of our Palestinian brothers facing relentless aggression," he said. "We call upon the international community to uphold its responsibilities to put an end to these heinous crimes and ensure the establishment of safe humanitarian and relief corridors." — AFP



International

# Kate apologizes for editing photo

## Mother's Day photo pulled from international agencies over manipulation concerns

LONDON: Catherine, Princess of Wales has taken responsibility and apologized for an edited official photograph that was recalled by a number of international news agencies over concerns it had been manipulated.

"Like many amateur photographers, I do occasionally experiment with editing. I wanted to express my apologies for any confusion the family photograph we shared yesterday caused," Kate wrote in a statement.

Britain's royal family faced mounting pressure on Monday to explain how an official photo of Princess Catherine had been altered, after AFP and other agencies withdrew the image.

Kate, 42, has not been seen in public since attending a Christmas Day church service, and underwent abdominal surgery in January, fueling speculation about her health, particularly online.

The family traditionally releases a family photo on Mother's Day, but this year's image came amid a backdrop of intrigue and confusion over Kate's extended absence following her January operation.

Kensington Palace said the photograph was taken by William, Prince of Wales. It appeared on the front pages of several British newspapers and websites before concerns about it were identified.

Questions later quickly emerged about the Mother's Day portrait of a smiling Kate, casually dressed and seated in a garden chair, surrounded by Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis. Closer examination showed specifically that Charlotte's left hand was misaligned with the sleeve of her cardigan.

AFP, Getty, the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters all have policies about distributing manipulated images, and pulled it, despite initially publishing the photograph provided by Kensington Palace.

"It has come to light that the handout issued by Kensington Palace today of Kate and the kids had been altered, therefore it was withdrawn from AFP systems," the agency said in a note to clients.

The AP said it had retracted the image because on "closer inspection, it appeared the source had manipulated the image in a way that did not meet AP's

photo standards". Reuters gave a similar statement.

### 'Damaging'

Many commentators suggested the furor had cast fresh doubt on palace reassurances about Kate's health and recuperation. Peter Hunt, a former BBC royal correspondent, said the situation was "damaging" for the family. "They knew there would be intense interest in any picture they released of Kate," he said. "Their challenge is that people will now question whether they can be trusted and believed when they next issue a health update."

Graham Smith, who heads the Republic pressure group calling for an elected head of state, added: "It's quite simple. Don't use their own photos. It's PR, not news."

Intense interest in Kate's absence comes from the fact that William — King Charles III's elder son — is heir to the throne, meaning she will be one day be queen. According to Kensington Palace, she was admitted to hospital on January 16 for planned surgery, then left on January 29, to recuperate at home until at least Easter on March 31.

The contentious photograph, published on all royal social media channels and widely picked up in Britain and across the world, was accompanied a message signed by Kate. "Thank you for your kind wishes and continued support over the last two months. Wishing everyone a Happy Mother's Day," it read. The message was signed "C" for Catherine.

### Health woes

British newspapers quickly changed their front pages late on Sunday to reflect the brewing controversy. Royal officials have not specified the nature of Kate's operation but have said it was not cancer-related.

Earlier this month, a snatched photograph said to have been of Kate wearing sunglasses while being driven by her mother were published on the celebrity news site TMZ. The sighting, said to have been near William and Kate's Windsor home west of London,



UNITED KINGDOM: A combination of pictures shows a handout photo released by Kensington Palace of Catherine, Princess of Wales with her children, alongside a version highlighting several inconsistencies in alignments. — AFP



also failed to dampen conspiracy theories on social media about Kate's absence from the spotlight.

The announcement about Kate's hospital admission came just before another about her father-in-law's treatment for a benign enlarged prostate. It was then announced that he had been diagnosed with an unrelated — but so far unspecified — cancer, which

has forced him to cancel public engagements, barring some official meetings.

Charles, 75, has only been king and British head of state since the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022. His wife, Queen Camilla, 76, has since stepped up to take the lead as the royals' most senior figure at public events. — AFP



## Muslims gather to pray in NY's Times Square

NEW YORK: Dozens of Muslim worshippers gathered in New York's Times Square Sunday to mark the start of the holy month of Ramadan, with some displaying Palestinian flags in solidarity with people in Gaza.

They performed Tarawih, the Ramadan night prayers, against the backdrop of the bright LED advertising billboards that illuminate the Manhattan landmark. "It's good to come here as Muslims. I saw Muslims from everywhere — I was surprised, it's my first time here. I wanted to come and see the community," said one of the worshippers, Salman al-Hanafy, 20, a forklift operator from Cairo who wore a pristine white thobe.

More than 100 faithful gathered for the prayer meeting despite cold, windy conditions, with a vocalist chanting Nasheeds, and children reciting from the Quran, copies of which were offered to both Muslims and curious passersby.

"A lot of people are interested in the Quran, we have almost run out of French ones. It explains the importance of fasting during Ramadan," said Ahmad Yasar, 20, an IT student in New York as a mound of donuts were delivered to him and his team handing out the holy books.

Observant Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk during Ramadan and gather with family and friends to break the fast in the evening. It is also a month of prayers during which Muslims traditionally converge in large numbers at mosques, especially at night.

Organizers projected prayers from the Quran onto



NEW YORK: Members of the Muslim community gather at Times Square for the first Tarawih prayer of Ramadan on March 10, 2024. — AFP photos

a white sheet that was buffeted by the wind as giant ads for Broadway musicals and candy glowed overhead. Yasar said that communal prayer meetings were important to "raise awareness and show people what's going around the world" — including in Gaza.

Nearby a speaker had the red, white, green and black

colors of the Palestinian flag emblazoned on his hat, while a young boy in an electric wheelchair flew the banner.

New York has been the venue for dozens of protests, some pro-Palestinian and others pro-Zionist, since the Zionist war on Gaza and the attack staged by Hamas on the south of the Zionist entity last October. — AFP

## Hiroshima grapples with 'Oppenheimer' Oscars success

HIROSHIMA: "Oppenheimer" had a glittering night at the Oscars but in Hiroshima, devastated by the first nuclear bomb in 1945, the film about the weapon's creator is harder to stomach. "Is this really a movie that people in Hiroshima can bear to watch?" said Kyoko Heya, president of the Japanese city's international film festival, on Monday after the blockbuster won seven Academy Awards including best picture.

Christopher Nolan also picked up best director for the biopic, which was a huge hit worldwide last summer — except in Japan, where it was absent from cinemas. There was no official statement at the time, fueling speculation that sensitivities around the subject matter had kept the film off Japanese screens.

Around 140,000 people died in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki when the United States dropped atomic bombs on the cities, days before the end of World War II. The mega-budget "Oppenheimer" will finally be released in Japan on March 29, but Heya has organized a special screening on Tuesday for high school students.

The 69-year-old told AFP in the city's Peace Memorial Park near the bomb's hypocenter that she had found Nolan's movie "very America-centric". In the park, the ruins of a domed building stand as a stark reminder of the horrors of the attack, along with a museum and other somber memorials.

Heya was at first "terrified" about the prospect of screening it in Hiroshima, today a thriving metropolis of 1.2 million people. But eventually, she stopped questioning her decision. "I now want many people to watch the movie, because I'd be happy to see Hiroshima, Nagasaki and atomic weapons become the subject of discussions thanks to this movie," she said.

### 'Not unaccountable'

A screening will also be held in Nagasaki before the film's official release date. Yu Sato, a 22-year-old student at Hiroshima City University, said she felt "a bit scared" about how bomb survivors and their families would react to the Oscar-winning film.

"I have mixed feelings, to be honest," said Sato, who works with the survivors through her studies. "Oppenheimer created the atomic bomb, which means he made this world a very scary place," she said. "Even if he did not intend to kill many people, he cannot be seen as completely unaccountable."

Director Nolan has said he was inspired to make "Oppenheimer" after stumbling upon a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who oversaw the invention of the atomic bomb. The film became a sensation last year when it was released on the same day as "Barbie", spawning countless viral memes about the "Barbenheimer" phenomenon.

But those jokes sparked anger online in Japan, the only country to have suffered a wartime nuclear attack, and social media users were also quick to react to the "Oppenheimer" Oscars sweep. One user on X, formerly Twitter, called the movie's seven victories "overwhelming", asking: "What is this strength? It must be one heck of a masterpiece." Another questioned its frame of reference. "Maybe it's time someone made a film about atomic bombs from the perspective of Japan or a Japanese person." — AFP

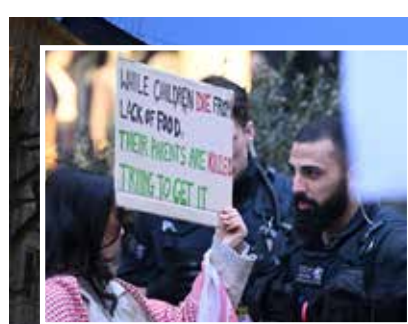
## Frankfurt lights up for Ramadan in first for Germany

FRANKFURT: The German city of Frankfurt switched on festive lights Sunday to celebrate the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, in what local media said was a nationwide first. A large sign reading "Happy Ramadan" and a display of lights in the shape of stars, lanterns and crescent moons were formally unveiled in an evening ceremony, illuminating a pedestrianized street in the city center lined with restaurants and cafes.

Local officials and German media said it was the first time a German city had put up street illuminations for Ramadan. Mayor Nargess Eskandari-Gruenberg called it a "beautiful gesture" that stood for "the peaceful co-existence of all people in Frankfurt". "In times of crises and wars, this lighting is a sign of hope for all people and strengthens cohesion in our diverse urban society," she said in a statement earlier this week.

The western city of Frankfurt, Germany's financial hub with a population of more than 750,000 people, is home to around 100,000 Muslims. The Ramadan lights reportedly cost the city at least 75,000 euros (\$82,000).

Ramadan street decorations were also on display in the city of Cologne for the first time, Bild newspaper reported, though those were financed by private donations rather than public funds. The Frankfurt



FRANKFURT: People take pictures of the Ramadan lights with their mobile phones. (Inset) A police officer talks to a woman with a placard, in an area where for the first time in Germany a street is illuminated to mark the month of Ramadan. — AFP

branch of the Coordinating Council of Muslims welcomed the street lights as a sign of "appreciation and recognition of the cultural and religious diversity of our international city".

But not all the reactions were positive. Robert Lambrou, a regional lawmaker from Hesse whose far-right AfD party has been riding high in opinion polls, condemned the Ramadan decorations as a "gesture of submission to Islam".

The idea to hang the lights came from city councilor Omar Shehata, from Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party. Shehata told the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper he had been inspired by London, which last year lit up for Ramadan for the first time. Responding to the AfD's criticism, he said: "Many people in Frankfurt stand united against right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism." — AFP



## Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024

# Bitcoin zooms to record beyond \$72,000

## Cryptocurrency wins support on greater trading accessibility, dollar weakness

LONDON: Bitcoin raced to an all-time peak above \$72,000 Monday as the world's most popular cryptocurrency won further support on greater trading accessibility and dollar weakness. The virtual unit struck \$72,234 as dealers also eyed an upcoming industry event that traditionally boosts bitcoin's price. Monday's spurt extended last week's record-breaking run when the currency bulldozed its way past the previous November 2021 pinnacle of \$68,991.

Bitcoin won further support Monday after Britain's Financial Conduct Authority watchdog said it would join US regulators by allowing the creation of crypto-related securities. US authorities earlier this year gave the green light to exchange-traded funds (ETFs) pegged to bitcoin's spot price, making it easier for mainstream investors to add the unit to their portfolio.

"This (FCA statement) suggests that crypto is going mainstream, and not just bitcoin but also other established coins," XTB analyst Kathleen Brooks told AFP. "We know that the demand is there, and this comes on the back of \$10 billion of inflows into bitcoin ETFs in the United States."

ETFs are widely regarded by commentators as proof of burgeoning crypto interest from institutional investors, further buoying investor enthusiasm. Bitcoin is created—or "mined"—as a reward when powerful computers solve complex problems to validate transactions made on the blockchain.

But the reward given to bitcoin

"miners"—those who contribute to the creation of the blockchain by validating transactions—is about to be divided by two. Next month's so-called "halving" has lent strong support to the unit's price in recent days and weeks by tightening supplies.

"Bitcoin has surged to a fresh all time high, boosted by strong ETF inflows and ahead of the April halving event," said City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta. "The crypto market has skyrocketed 350 percent from its 2022 low and shows little sign of stopping after the doors have been opened to institutional investors and as retail investors experience FOMO," she said in reference to a 'fear of missing out'.

Cincotta predicted that \$100,000 could become "the next natural target" but sounded a note of caution. "Bitcoin is extremely volatile and could drop just as quickly as it has risen," she warned.

Momentum came also from the weaker dollar as Friday's US jobs data firmed expectations that the Federal Reserve remained on track to start cutting interest rates in June. At its current price, bitcoin has soared almost 70 percent since January, when it stood at about \$43,000.

However, it slumped to \$15,000 in November 2022 following the collapse of crypto exchange FTX.

The digital currency has a finite number of units. Bitcoin's creator Satoshi Nakamoto has limited the maximum number of bitcoins to 21 million. An ongoing court case in London is



ISTANBUL: This illustration photograph taken on July 19, 2021 in Istanbul shows a physical banknote and coin imitations of the Bitcoin cryptocurrency. — AFP

seeking to determine whether Australian computer scientist Craig Wright invented bitcoin. Wright says that he is Nakamoto,

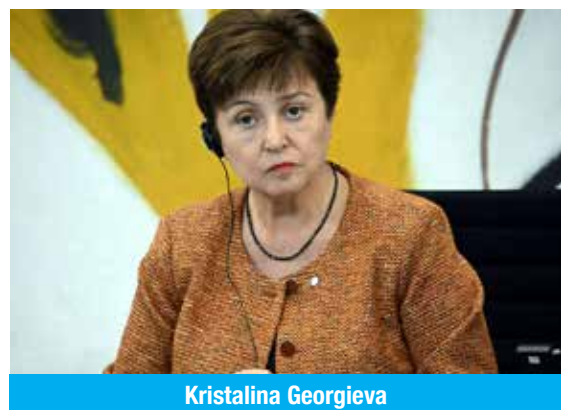
author of a white paper that introduced the cryptocurrency to the world in 2008. Crypto Open Patent Alliance (COPA), a

non-profit organization set up to keep cryptocurrency technology free from patents, is suing Wright over the claims. — AFP

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

## Germany backs Georgieva for second term



Kristalina Georgieva

FRANKFURT: Germany, Europe's largest economy, voiced its backing Monday for a second term for International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva, with finance minister Christian Lindner calling her "exactly the right person".

Georgieva has navigated the IMF "through difficult times over the last years", Lindner said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "I am convinced that she is exactly the right person to steer the institution through the challenges ahead and to strengthen the IMF as an advocate for structural reforms in our economies."

Bulgarian economist Georgieva, 70, said last week she would be "honored" to helm the Washington-based financial institution for a second term. Her current term ends on September 30.

Since she took office in 2019, the IMF has stepped in on numerous occasions to support countries facing significant financial hardship due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In an interview earlier this year, Georgieva told AFP that 2024 will be "very tough year" for fiscal policy, as countries look to tackle debt burdens accumulated during the pandemic.

Inflation is also likely to remain a challenge for many economies, including the United States, with central banks looking to loosen monetary policy without pushing up prices.

Under a controversial, decades-old agreement between Europe and the United States, the IMF has historically been led by a European, and the World Bank by a US citizen. Georgieva has received backing from key European allies in recent weeks, including France's finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, who told reporters on the sidelines of the G20 in Brazil that she was doing a "great job" running the IMF. —AFP

## Saudi's non-oil economy grows at rapid pace

RIYADH: The Saudi non-oil economy continues to grow at a rapid pace, achieving an increase of 4.4 percent in 2023, amid expectations that it will accelerate to more than 5 percent in the next two years, according to reports. In parallel, the decline in oil activities by 9 percent last year led to a contraction in real GDP by 0.8 percent.

In February, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan expected the Kingdom's non-oil GDP to grow by more than 4 percent, and to exceed 5 percent in the medium term. Non-oil GDP currently represents about 60 percent of actual GDP, up from 55 percent five years ago, according to a monthly report by the Jadwa Investment Company. In comments to Asharq Al-Awsat, experts said non-oil activities are still growing at an increasing pace thanks to the Kingdom's strategy to stimulate the private sector.

Advisor and professor of commercial law Dr Osama Al-Obaidi explained that the stability and growth of non-oil activities at 4.4 percent, as well as government activities at a rate of 2.1 percent, underscore the success of Vision 2030 in reforming and diversifying the Saudi economy, as well as increasing the flow of foreign investments, sources said.

Al-Obaidi pointed to the revival of economic sectors, such as tourism, entertainment, culture and mining, as well as renewable energy and digital technologies, in addition to developments in sports activities, which have greatly contributed to the economy and the promotion of the Kingdom as a business hub. For-

## Germany braces for new week of strikes in rail, air travel

FRANKFURT: Germans faced more travel upheaval after train drivers announced Sunday a new 24-hour stoppage, hot on the heels of a strike announcement by Lufthansa cabin crew. The GDL train drivers' union said the latest strike affecting passenger services would start at 0100 GMT on Tuesday and last until 0100 GMT Wednesday.

For cargo services the strike would start a few hours earlier, the union said in a statement, blaming deadlocked talks with rail operator Deutsche Bahn. The walkout will be the union's sixth since November and comes less than a week after a 35-hour stoppage by its train drivers caused travel misery for thousands of rail passengers. Adding to the chaos, Lufthansa cabin crew are set to walk off the job at Frankfurt airport on Tuesday, and at Munich airport on Wednesday.

The German airline group was already hit by a two-day strike by ground staff last week, as workers press demands for higher pay.

Europe's largest economy has faced industrial action for months as workers and management across numerous sectors wrestle over terms amid high inflation and weak business activity.

The GDL union said Deutsche Bahn had failed to come up with an improved written offer by a Sun-



RIYADH: The Saudi non-oil economy continues to grow at a rapid pace, achieving an increase of 4.4 percent in 2023.

day evening deadline, a move that "inevitably leads to industrial action", GDL boss Claus Wesselsky said. Deutsche Bahn had called earlier Sunday for a fresh round of talks on Monday. "We are convinced that we will only succeed in reaching an agreement through dialogue at the negotiating table," said Deutsche Bahn's human re-

sources director Martin Seiler. As well as salary increases, the GDL union's key demand is a reduced work week of 35 hours, down from 38 currently, at full pay. Deutsche Bahn said it had made concessions amounting to up to 13 percent more pay, as well as the option of cutting the working week down to 37 hours starting in 2026. — AFP



FRANKFURT: Commuters walk along the platform past an ICE train during a train drivers strike at Frankfurt's main train station. — AFP

sources director Martin Seiler.

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## Business

# Gulf Bank launches 'A Step Towards Change' initiative jointly with Rawda, Hawally Co-ops

## The fifth stage of initiative aims to distribute 20,000 reusable bags

KUWAIT: Following the specified timeline, Gulf Bank has launched the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative, aimed at shifting societal habits by promoting the use of reusable bags, in partnership with Al-Rawda and Hawally Cooperative Society. Over the course of a week, the initiative involves distributing around 20,000 reusable bags at Mishref co-op, accompanied by various informative events.

Gulf Bank had earlier revealed the timetable for executing the initiative within the participating co-ops, which include Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan, and Mishref.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Sharrah, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are pleased at Gulf Bank to have partnered with Al-Rawda and Hawally Co-op for the fifth stage of our environmental sustainability initiative, 'A Step Towards Change,' which has been widely embraced and positively received by the members of the Cooperative Societies that have implemented it.

He continued, saying: "Our primary objective is to instigate a change in behavior within society, and we are working closely with Mishref Co-op to achieve this. Through the distribution of reusable bags and encouraging customers to reduce their plastic consumption, we hope to make significant progress."

Al-Sharrah conveyed optimism that this initiative would actively contribute to shaping government decisions and laws, compelling both institutions and individuals to minimize plastic usage. He further emphasized that this initiative is part of Gulf Bank's annual commitment to implement various initiatives aimed at reinforcing the principles of environmental sustainability within the community. Gulf Bank



Fahad Al-Sharrah and Abd Al-Mohsin Al-Nassar from Gulf Bank with the officials of the Al-Rawda and Hawally Cooperative Societies.

believes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and they found it fitting to initiate this program with selected major co-ops in Kuwait. Around 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to the selected co-ops, marking the first step towards changing behavior, and becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

He added, "This initiative is rooted in Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, with the goal of establishing principles of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. It aligns with the country's environmental strategy under the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035,' as

well as legislation related to the environment, laws safeguarding the environment, resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency improvement, utilization of renewable energy, and building and developing national capabilities in environmental work."

Omar Al-Ansari, a board member of Al-Rawda and Hawally Co-op, expressed his pleasure in partnering with Gulf Bank for the "Step Towards Change" initiative, emphasizing their commitment to fostering a societal shift towards re-

### Fahad Al-Sharrah:

We anticipate that the active involvement of the community in the initiative will drive legislation aimed at reducing plastic consumption.

Omar Al-Ansari: We are pleased to partner with Gulf Bank and are eager to contribute to changing societal behaviors.

ducing plastic consumption. He highlighted the alignment between Gulf Bank's initiative and the cooperative society's environmental protection endeavors. Additionally, he stressed the introduction of a "Fast Track" service by the Co-op for shareholders, who use reusable bags, with the intention of encouraging their ongoing usage.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

## Angola's economic recovery halted in 2023, says IMF



Angola is Africa's third-biggest oil producer. — AFP

WASHINGTON, DC: Angola's economic recovery in 2021/22 was nearly halted in 2023 by a double shock in the first half of the year, as the oil sector weakened, and the debt moratorium ended. Growth is estimated at 0.5 percent for 2023, with an estimated contraction in the oil sector of 6.1 percent and softened non-oil growth at 2.9 percent. Headline inflation increased significantly in 2023, to 20.0 percent y/y at end-December, driven by the depreciation of the kwanza and cuts in fuel subsidy in mid-2023, an IMF report said.

In response to the shock, the authorities tightened their fiscal stance in the second half of 2023, by cutting capital spending and related goods and services, and implementing the first phase of their fuel subsidy reform in June 2023, IMF Executive Board said concluding its Article IV consultation with Angola.

These policy measures resulted in overall and non-oil primary fiscal balances of -0.1 percent of GDP and -6.3 percent of GDP, respectively. Meanwhile, public debt-to-GDP is projected to have increased by 19 percent to about 84 percent of GDP in 2023, mainly driven by a significantly weaker exchange rate. The depreciation of the kwanza in June 2023 helped the economy adjust to lower oil exports and preserve international reserves, which remained at about 7 months of import coverage. The exchange rate has remained broadly stable since then.

Economic growth is projected to recover in the near-term, supported by improved oil production and the recovery in the non-oil sector. Inflation is expected to remain temporarily elevated in 2024 and to gradually decline thereafter, as the effects of the subsidy removal and the pass-through from nominal exchange rate depreciation diminish. Meanwhile, the primary fiscal balance is expected to improve and remain positive given the expected continuation of fuel subsidy reform; lower debt service starting in 2024; and the expected recovery in growth. Downside risks to the near-term outlook include a larger-than-expected decline in global oil prices and/or domestic oil production as well as a delayed implementation of the fuel subsidy reform. Upside risks would mainly stem from higher-than-expected oil prices.

Executive Directors agreed with the thrust of the staff appraisal. They recognized that Angola's economic recovery was nearly halted in 2023, as the oil sector weakened, and the debt moratorium ended. At the same time, risks to the outlook remain high, including heavy dependence on the oil sector, debt and banking sector vulnerabilities, and uncertain market access. Against this background, Directors emphasized the need for continued fiscal consolidation and structural reforms, supported by technical assistance from the Fund and other development partners, to maintain macroeconomic stability and foster diversified, resilient, and inclusive growth, the report added.

Directors agreed that continued fiscal consolidation and reforms are critical to strengthen fiscal and public debt sustainability. They welcomed the continued reduction of fuel subsidies in the 2024 budget and stressed the importance of sound implementation accompanied by timely and effective communication and well targeted mitigation measures. Directors also urged the authorities to accelerate the implementation of fiscal structural reforms to enhance budget credibility and contingency planning, as well as to strengthen revenue mobilization, expenditure prioritization, and debt management, the report added.

## Malaysia growth momentum slowing: IMF

WASHINGTON: Malaysia's growth momentum is slowing, albeit from a high base in 2022. Advanced estimates indicate 3.4 percent growth for 2023Q4, down from 8.7 percent in 2022. Growth is estimated at about 4 percent in 2023, driven by robust domestic demand, as exports weakened markedly due to the economic slowdown in major trading partners, the International Monetary Fund, said in a report.

Disinflation is taking hold, with average inflation falling to 2.5 percent in 2023, down from 3.4 percent in 2022. Malaysia's strong macroeconomic policy frameworks, including a track record of fiscal prudence and a credible monetary policy framework, have served the country well and have become more important as it undergoes important structural reforms. A history of costly and untargeted spending on subsidies is coming to an end, the IMF executive board said after concluding its Article IV Consultation with Malaysia.

Macro policies have appropriately tightened. Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) had increased the overnight policy rate (OPR) five times since May 2022 by a total of 125 bps to its pre-pandemic level of 3.0 percent. The OPR remained unchanged since May 2023 with the monetary policy stance currently broadly neutral. The 2023 Budget deficit target is expected to be met. The 2024 Budget appropriately charts the near-term consolidation path, targeting a decline in the overall deficit from 5 percent of GDP in 2023 to 4.3 percent in 2024, and down to less than 3 percent of GDP by 2026.

Resilient domestically driven growth and upside risks to inflation define the near-term outlook. Growth is projected to slightly accelerate to 4.3 percent in 2024, supported by resilient private consumption and investment and a rebound in public spending. Inflation is projected to pick up to 2.9 percent in 2024, pending uncertainty around subsidy reform. Over the medium term, the current account

## Finland's growth slowed due to war on Ukraine: IMF

WASHINGTON, DC: Finland's economy recovered swiftly from the pandemic, but growth slowed after Russia's war in Ukraine. Weak household income growth, falling house prices, higher interest rates, and low growth in Europe has caused activity to stall in Finland, with a contraction of 0.5 percent estimated in 2023, the IMF said in a report.

However, inflation has fallen to more normal levels and financial conditions appear to be easing. Structurally, adverse demographics and weak productivity, have resulted in low trend growth, weighing on public finances. A shallow recovery in economic activity is expected in 2024, as inflation pressure continues to ease and a modest recovery in real earnings support consumption. Growth is projected to improve to around 1½ percent in the medium term, partly due to an expected increase in investment and employment from the authorities' recent reforms. A combination of negative base effects and a growing output gap will keep average inflation below 2 percent in 2024. But uncertainty remains high. Downside risks to the outlook include: a resurgence of the energy crisis; an escalation of the war in Ukraine; further tightening of global financial conditions; or possibility of a deeper "balance sheet recession."

The executive board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded the Article IV consultation with Finland and endorsed the staff appraisal without a meeting.

"Finland's growth has stalled, with a modest recovery expected this year. Elevated interest rates, sluggish trading partner growth, and a declining housing market



People buy groceries at a market in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

surplus is expected to widen, as tourism recovers and improves the services balance.

Executive directors welcomed Malaysia's economic resilience, underpinned by strong fundamentals and the authorities' sound policymaking. Noting downside risks to the growth outlook and upside risks to inflation, Directors agreed that near-term macroeconomic policies should focus on preserving price stability and rebuilding buffers, while structural reforms should support medium-term growth and the path to high-income status.

Directors welcomed the recent enactment of the Public Finance and Fiscal Responsibility Act 2023 and the authorities' planned fiscal consolidation, which would help rebuild buffers. To support the consolidation path as well as the country's development and social needs, Directors called for credible and durable revenue mobilization measures and for spending prioritization. In this context, they encouraged the authorities to continue implementing the subsidy reform and to consider reintroducing

the Goods and Services Tax, which can help finance pro-poor spending, thereby offsetting its regressivity effects. Directors generally agreed that the central bank's broadly neutral, data-dependent monetary policy stance will help safeguard price stability. They cautioned against prematurely cutting policy rates, noting upside risks to inflation. Directors welcomed the central bank's measures to further develop FX markets and concurred that exchange rate flexibility and reserve adequacy should be preserved.

Directors welcomed the financial sector's soundness and the authorities' commitment to safeguard financial stability. They encouraged the authorities to continue monitoring highly leveraged households and small firms, and welcomed the updates to stress-test design to better capture emerging risks. Directors also encouraged the authorities to consider expanding, as needed, the macroprudential toolkit in a preventive manner. They welcomed the strengthening of AML/CFT frameworks and called for continued efforts on this front, the report added.



Russia's war in Ukraine is weakening the outlook for the Finnish economy and pushing up inflation.

are all weighing on activity. And despite a broadly resilient labor market, unemployment is expected to increase slightly, particularly as the construction industry cuts back on employment," it said. However, inflationary pressures are diminishing and an improvement in household purchasing power and loosening financial conditions will contribute to a modest recovery in the second half of the year. Economic growth is expected to be around ½ percent in 2024 and rebound to around 1½ percent in the medium term, driven by increase in investment and employment resulting from the labor market reforms. The external position in 2023 is assessed to be moderately weaker than implied by fundamentals and desirable policy settings.

The fiscal outlook has worsened due to higher discretionary spending and weaker growth. Increased expenditure in energy-related compensation, defense, high index-linked increases in social benefits, and support for Wellbeing Service Counties is expected to have increased the deficit to 2.5 percent of GDP in 2023. Meanwhile, debt ratio has climbed to 76 percent surpassing those of other Nordic countries. The wors-

ened fiscal outlook is expected to persist which puts public debt on a risky path over the medium term. Existing measures fall short of achieving the ambitious fiscal deficit target. The new government plans to adjust medium-term fiscal deficit by 2 percent of GDP through spending cuts and employment-driven fiscal gains, targeting overall fiscal deficit of 1 percent of GDP by 2027. However, consolidation will likely be diluted by new spending pressures and expected revenue shortfalls. Further measures are necessary to close the gap, as current policies would fail to curb the deficit and bring down the debt ratio.

Through a gradual but sustained adjustment, fiscal policy should be calibrated to reverse the public debt. A structural adjustment of around ¼ percent of GDP should begin in 2024, growing to ½ percent per year over the medium term, with the aim of balancing the budget by 2028. This would help place public financing on a more sustainable footing and make room for the expected increase in age-related spending. In addition to the recent reforms to social benefits, further spending cuts are required, including through efficiency gains from the Wellbeing Service Counties. These efforts should be supplemented with revenues measures such as excise tax indexation, expansion of carbon taxation, VAT rate standardization, and revising dividend taxation for non-listed companies.

Enhancing employment and productivity are essential for economic growth. The mission supports the government's efforts to boost employment through social benefit reforms, greater flexibility in the labor market, and lowering the labor tax wedge. The government should establish robust systems to closely monitor the impact of these reforms on employment. Additionally, policy should aim to improve higher education, lower skill mismatches, and more effectively attract and integrate international talent. While the government's commitment to invest in research and development is commendable, the plan should focus on catalyzing private sector funding.



## Business

# China caps key political meet with pledges to boost ailing economy

## Measures eyed to enhance employment, prop up property market

BEIJING: China's leaders on Monday wrapped up a week-long key conclave at which they admitted more was needed to revive a sluggish economy battered by an ailing housing market, poor domestic demand and record-high youth unemployment.

Top officials have been upfront about the myriad challenges China is facing, admitting that a modest five percent growth goal will not be easy and that "hidden risks" are dragging the economy down. But they have supplied few details about how they plan to tackle the problems.

Officials have also moved to strengthen powers to deal with threats to their rule and tightened a veil of secrecy around policymaking, scrapping a traditional annual press conference and vowing to include national security provisions in a raft of new laws. Delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC), China's parliament, including leader Xi Jinping, gathered at Beijing's Great Hall of the People to rubber-stamp legislation at 3:00 pm local time (0700 GMT) as the conclave came to an end.

Among the pieces of legislation approved was a revision to the Organic Law of the State Council, China's cabinet, which state media has said will aim to deepen the "leadership" of the ruling Communist Party over the government.

Delegates also approved the country's state budget and the national economic and social development plan for 2024. Only a handful of the body's almost 3,000 delegates voted against any of the motions.

Top lawmaker Zhao Leji declared the annual meeting closed. Speaking to media, representatives were uniform in their praise for the government.

Li Dexiang, representing southwestern Guizhou province, told AFP he believed the "government has a good grasp of reality". Delegate from eastern Jiangsu province Lyu Caixia said the experience of the parliamentary meeting "pushes one to go forward bravely".

"We are accelerating high quality development... all the way to the highest levels (of government)," she added. And Ling Youshi, a delegate from the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong, said she had experienced the "rigour of deliberating legislation" during her time at the so-called "Two Sessions".

The tightly choreographed event capped a week of high-level meetings that have been dominated by the economy, which last year posted some of its slowest growth in years.

On Saturday, ministers pledged to do more to boost employment and stabilize the country's troubled property market. "Workers face some challenges and problems in employment, and more effort needs to be made to stabilize employment," Wang Xiaoping, minister of human resources and social security, told a press conference. Housing minister Ni Hong added that fixing the property market—which long accounted for around a quarter of China's economy—remained "very difficult".

Despite official pledges of fresh support, analysts say they are yet to see the kinds of big-ticket bailouts the flagging economy needs if it is to rebound. "Reviving the economy requires boosting household wealth and income, something China's leaders clearly aren't yet ready to do," said analysts at Trivium, a research firm specializing in China, in a note. And throughout the "Two Sessions", officials have ap-



BEIJING: Delegates leave after the closing session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 11, 2024. — AFP

peared reluctant to face questioning about the economic headwinds China is confronting.

Last week, they broke a decades-long tradition by scrapping a press conference by the premier—long a rare chance for foreign media to question the country's number-two official.

The topic was swiftly removed from search re-

sults on Chinese social media giant Weibo, as was a hashtag declaring "middle-class children have no future". Lawmakers have also vowed to adopt wide-ranging security laws in 2024 to "resolutely safeguard" the country's sovereignty, further expanding the Communist Party's powers to punish threats to its rule. —AFP

## Struggling Japan narrowly avoids technical recession

TOKYO: Japan narrowly avoided a technical recession in the second half of 2023, data showed Monday, but economists said the number four economy's performance remains in the doldrums. Gross domestic product inched up 0.1 percent between October and December from the previous three months, the cabinet office said.

This reversed an earlier preliminary estimate for a 0.1-percent contraction following negative growth of 0.8 percent in the third quarter. Technical recession is generally defined as two successive quarters of falling GDP. But the reading still fell short of 0.3-percent quarterly growth that economists had expected for the revision, according to a survey by Bloomberg News. The change reflected upgraded corporate investment, estimated to have risen 2.0 percent compared with the original projection of a 0.1-percent contraction.

But Japan's consumption, both in private and government sectors, contracted further than the earlier estimate. The latest report was "nothing to write



TOKYO: An electronic board displays a share price of the Nikkei index of the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. — AFP

home about," said Stefan Angrick, senior economist at Moody's. "Business investment has underperformed over the past year. Consumption spending has fallen for three consecutive quarters. And output is still lower than in the second quarter of 2023," he said.

"In all, Japan's economy is doing poorly," he said. The latest figures came as speculation swirls about

when the Bank of Japan may finally end its negative interest rate policy. This may come potentially as early as March 19 at the central bank's next meeting.

Japan has battled for decades stagnant growth and deflation, but economists say signs are increasing that prices may be rising enough for the BoJ to normalize its stance. —AFP

## Activists protest German Tesla plant expansion

FRANKFURT: Several hundred people demonstrated Sunday against plans by Tesla to expand its electric car factory near Berlin, citing environmental concerns. The protest came days after Tesla's Gruenheide site was forced to halt production after a nearby electricity pylon was set on fire in a suspected arson attack, causing a power outage at the plant. The act of sabotage last Tuesday has been claimed by far-left activists from the "Vulkangruppe" (Volcano Group), and federal prosecutors have taken charge of the investigation.

Sunday's protest was organized by a coalition of environmental protection groups including Extinction Rebellion, Nabu and Robin Hood. Organizers said more than a thousand demonstrators joined the protest, with local media putting the number at around 800 people. Organizers said they were calling for "a secure water supply" and

"real climate protection" and were protesting against Tesla owner Elon Musk's "capitalist sham solutions". Protesters oppose Musk's plan to expand the Gruenheide plant, south of Berlin, by 170 hectares (420 acres), from a current size of 300 hectares. The US company aims to double production to a million electric vehicles annually. The Gruenheide site is Tesla's only European factory.

But the plans have annoyed environmentalists and residents who worry about the deforestation required for the expansion, the impact on local water supply and an increase in road traffic in the area.

A local referendum recently saw more than 60 percent of respondents vote against the proposed expansion, though the vote was not legally binding. Annika Fuchs, a member of the Robin Hood environmental group who took part in the protest, said she wanted local authorities to respect the vote outcome. "It's really important to us that we take the opinion of citizens here seriously," she told AFP. Not all locals are against Tesla's plans however.

A smaller counter-protest was held Sunday in support of the Tesla factory, with participants citing economic benefits for the region. Regional news outlet RBB quoted police as saying some 200 people took part. —AFP



Counter-demonstrators are seen during a protest against the expansion plan for Tesla's electric car plant, the company's only European production site, near the plant in Gruenheide, east of the German capital Berlin on March 10, 2024. — AFP

## NBK's Ramadan program: Revitalizing interactive initiatives

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) revealed its annual 'Doing Good Deeds' program during the Holy month of Ramadan. For more than 30 years, the program comprises a series of activities and events aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity and charity in Kuwait.



Manal Al-Mattar

NBK's Head of Corporate Communications, Manal Al-Mattar, said that NBK's "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan" philanthropic drive, initiated by NBK since more than three decades, is leveraging interactive approaches this year. The program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity

in Kuwait. "NBK hopes to encourage a greater sense of responsibility during the holy month", Al-Mattar noted. NBK Ramadan Social Program 2024 includes distribution of Iftar meals via special convoys that will tour round different areas in the country.

NBK staff volunteers have already finalized all necessary arrangements for Ramadan. NBK staff volunteers will manage and supervise the distribution process and tours arrangements. Dates and water will be offered to fasters at the iftar time. NBK volunteers from different branches will be distributing the boxes of dates and water to fasters to avoid traffic accidents during iftar.

NBK will be launching a group of fun activities throughout the holy month including Dama and tennis tournaments in addition to organizing Girgean events for children. Various recreational activities will be held every weekend throughout the holy month.

NBK and Omniya will collaborate during Ramadan to collect empty plastic bottles in different mosques in Kuwait city. This initiative will save hundreds of cubic meters in Kuwait's landfills and save the environment knowing that plastic takes hundred years to degrade in landfills. NBK volunteers along with the Kuwait Fire Force team will distribute safety kit that included a fire extinguisher, fire alarm and first aid support ensuring that they adhere to regulations for safety.

## Telecom Italia tumbles despite debt-cutting plans

MILAN: Telecom Italia (TIM) plunged more than 9 percent on Monday morning on the Milan Stock Exchange, despite its attempts to reassure investors over its 2024-2026 strategic plan. After opening higher, Italy's largest telecoms company fell as much as 9.5 percent to 0.2009 euros, before recovering to being down about 4.3 percent, with the overall market 0.4 percent lower. The publication of TIM's three-year strategic plan on Thursday saw its shares plunge by 23.8 percent, before regaining some ground on Friday. The shares remain down 28 percent from the start of the month.

TIM issued a statement before the opening of the markets on Monday saying it intends to reduce its pro-forma net debt to around 7.5 billion euros (\$8.25 billion) at the end of 2024, thanks to the sale of its landline network to the American investment fund KKR. As the sale of the network is not expected to take place before June, it will continue to pay high interest rates, temporarily generating more debt. TIM held an extraordinary board meeting on Sunday after Thursday's massive daily fall. Financial director Adrian Calaza offered to step down, but his resignation was rejected by the board of directors, according to Italian media reports. —AFP

## Markets fall after strong US data, eyes on inflation

HONG KONG: Stock markets mostly fell Monday after a forecast-busting jobs report dampened US interest rate cut hopes, with attention now turning to the release of key inflation data this week. The selling followed a retreat in all three main indexes on Wall Street, while investors lowered their expectations for how many cuts the Federal Reserve would make this year.

However, analysts said that while the jobs figures were bigger than hoped, they would not likely cause policymakers to hold off lowering borrowing costs as unemployment ticked up to a two-year high. The reading "didn't necessarily amount to an 'all-clear' signal for the Fed, but there also didn't appear to be anything in it that would derail its plan to cut rates," said Chris Larkin of E\*Trade from Morgan Stanley. SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes added that "the US labor market seems to be in a comfortable zone—not too hot and not too cold". "Reminiscent of Goldilocks's 'just right' porridge." Traders are now factoring in three rate cuts this year, compared with six that were penciled in three months ago. The latest reading on the consumer price index on Tuesday is now in traders' view.

Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington, Mumbai, Bangkok, Taipei and Manila were all in negative territory. London, Frankfurt and Paris opened in the red. Japanese equities were weighed by a tech sell-off after losses for the sector in New York, while exporters also took a hit from a stronger yen as reports said the country's central bank was considering shifting away from its ultra-loose monetary policy soon.

There was little reaction to news that the economy had narrowly avoided a recession in the final months of last year. Hong Kong and Shanghai rose, however, following figures showing a bigger-than-forecast jump in Chinese consumer prices last month, while a report said regulators had called on large banks to provide more support for troubled property developer Vanke.

The data provided some much-needed good news for the struggling economy, though observers warned it continued to face headwinds. "Recovery in domestic demand will only be gradual, as households worry about their income and job prospects amid heightened economic uncertainty while consumer confidence remains low," said Kelvin Lam at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "Therefore, it is too early to say China has emerged from consumer deflation from just one data point." And Citigroup economists said in a note: "Much of the improvement could prove temporary rather than sustainable. —AFP



# Lifestyle



(Left) Sunrise Coigney and Mark Ruffalo —AFP photos



US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish and US singer-songwriter Finneas O'Connell

## Oscars red carpet

### Black, metallics, mermaids



Vanessa Hudgens

#### Red carpet politics

The Oscars is often a moment for political activism, and this year, the deadly conflict in Gaza was not far from the minds of the A-listers on the red carpet. Several nominees including Oscar-winning singer-songwriter Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas O'Connell, Mark Ruffalo, US actor Mahershala Ali, British actor and rapper Riz Ahmed, US director Ava DuVernay and producer Paul Giamatti wore red Artists4Ceasefire pins, in support of "an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Gaza." The pin features an orange hand with a black heart. "Anatomy of a Fall" stars Swann Arlaud and Milo Machado-Graner wore pins bearing the Palestinian flag.

#### Back in black

German actress Sandra Hueller, a best actress nominee for "Anatomy of a Fall" and the star of "The Zone of Interest," was ready for her Oscars close-up: she wore a stunning black Schiaparelli gown with a wide sculptural neckline. Presenter Rita Moreno, among the Hollywood elite with an EGOT—Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony—arrived in a black gown with ruffles at the neck and down the front. She told ABC her black wig was a tribute to the late Chita Rivera.

Colman Domingo—a best actor nominee for "Rustin" and one of the definite style stars of this awards season—looked sharp in a double-breasted Louis Vuitton tuxedo with slightly flared trousers, ornate silver buttons and lots of jewelry, including a stunning brooch in his bowtie. And "High School Musical" actress Vanessa Hudgens made a big statement with her black long-sleeved body-con gown: it showcased her baby bump as she announced her pregnancy with baseball player husband Cole Tucker.

#### Glittering metallics

One of the best ways to ensure attention on the Oscars red carpet is to



Puerto Rican actress Rita Moreno

dress a bit like the golden statuette—metallics are a timeless sure bet. Anya Taylor-Joy, who presented an award, wowed in a silvery strapless Dior gown with plenty of sequins and sparkle.

America Ferrera, a nominee for best supporting actress for her turn in "Barbie," combined two hot red carpet trends with her form-fitting sleeveless Versace dress—it's metallic and pink. Barbicore has been all the rage throughout awards season, especially among the stars of Greta Gerwig's surreal feminist fantasy about the iconic Mattel doll.

#### Mermaids

Like Bella Baxter, the character she plays in "Poor Things," Emma Stone—who won the best actress Oscar—went her own way stylewise, in a pale aqua, strapless Louis Vuitton ensemble featuring a wide peplum and a long skirt. Hailee Steinfeld also got the mermaid memo, wearing a gauzy aqua Elie Saab gown with a gilded bodice and scarf attached to her wrists like floating sleeves.

Oscar nominee, and pop star Ariana Grande—who will soon star in a two-part film adaptation of the popular Broadway musical "Wicked"—brought their Oz energy to the Academy Awards stage. Grande channeled her inner Glinda in a strapless pink cloud of a gown with voluminous sleeves from Giambattista Valli Haute Couture. Erivo meanwhile struck a very Elphaba chord in a dark green leather Louis Vuitton gown with a plunging neckline and ruffles down the back. Her pointy green nails completed the look.—AFP

#### 'Wicked' duo

Presenters Cynthia Erivo, a two-time



US actress America Ferrera



French actor Milo Machado-Graner (second left) and French actor Swann Arlaud (second right), wearing a Palestinian flag pin.



British actress and singer Cynthia Erivo



Emma Stone



US director Ava DuVernay (left) and producer Paul Giamatti



(Left) Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande





Producers of "Oppenheimer" British film producer Emma Thomas (center), US film producer Charles Roven (left) and British filmmaker Christopher Nolan accept the award for Best Picture onstage during the 96th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



Best Actress in a Leading Role for "Poor Things" US actress Emma Stone, Best Actor in a Leading Role for "Oppenheimer" Irish actor Cillian Murphy, Best Actress in a Supporting Role for "The Holdovers" US actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph and Best Actor in a Supporting Role for "Oppenheimer" US actor Robert Downey Jr pose in the press room.



(From left) US actor and presenter Actor Al Pacino, British filmmaker Christopher Nolan (also Best Director), British film producer Emma Thomas, and US film producer Charles Roven, pose in the press room with the Oscar for Best Picture for "Oppenheimer".

# 'OPPENHEIMER' SWEEPS UP AT OSCARS

"Oppenheimer" swept the board on Sunday at the Oscars, Hollywood's biggest night of the year, with seven awards including best picture and best director, crowning a triumphant year for filmmaker Christopher Nolan.



Swedish composer Ludwig Goransson accepts the award for Best Original Score for "Oppenheimer" onstage.

Nolan's masterful drama about the father of the atomic bomb, half of last summer's massive "Barbenheimer" phenomenon, also bagged acting prizes for lead Cillian Murphy and supporting actor Robert Downey Jr.

Nolan - a British-American film-

maker hailed as a generational talent - said that film as an art form still has room to grow.

"Movies are just a little bit over 100 years old. I mean, imagine being there 100 years into painting or theater," he told the audience at the Dolby Theatre.

"We don't know where this incredible journey is going from here. But to know that you think that I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me."

The haul was not quite complete - "Oppenheimer" was nominated for 13 prizes, but with seven statuettes on the night it is still one of the most awarded films in Oscar history.

Robert Downey Jr was recognized for his stellar performance as J. Robert Oppenheimer's political nemesis Lewis Strauss. "I would like to thank my terrible childhood and the Academy, in that order," Downey said after accepting the statuette.

Downey, who had been the butt of a joke by host Jimmy Kimmel about his well-documented drug problems, lavished thanks on his wife Susan for her support. "She found me a snarling rescue pet and loved me back to life," he said.

Nolan's cerebral take on the man he has called "the most important person who ever lived" also snapped up prizes for editing, cinematography and best original score.

It seemed fitting that the story of the development of nuclear weapons was recognized on a night where the drum-



(From left) Ben Kingsley, Matthew McConaughey, Forest Whitaker, Cillian Murphy, winner of the Best Actor in a Leading Role award for "Oppenheimer", Nicolas Cage and Brendan Fraser pose in the press room.

beat of war was never far away.

"We made a film about the man who created the atomic bomb. And for better or for worse, we're all living in Oppenheimer's world so I would really like to dedicate this to the peacemakers, everywhere," Murphy said as he accepted his award.

### He's just Ken

The other huge smash of 2023, Greta Gerwig's pop feminist blockbuster "Barbie," featured heavily through-

out the gala in Los Angeles.

While the movie, which grossed \$1.4 billion at the box office, only won one Oscar for best original song, the bubbly fun it generated provided fodder for the whole evening.

Supporting actor nominee Ryan Gosling brought the house down with a star-studded rendition of "I'm Just Ken," accompanied by Guns 'n Roses guitarist Slash, as well as some of his on-screen Ken pals like Simu Liu and Ncuti Gatwa.

The performance slid into a karaoke session as Gosling passed the microphone around to some of the A-list guests. Billie Eilish's "What Was I Made For?" was the winning song from the summer hit film.

The 22-year-old, who delivered a heartfelt rendition of the reflective song, now has two Oscars to her name after a previous win two years ago for James Bond theme "No Time To Die" with her brother and frequent collaborator Finneas O'Connell.



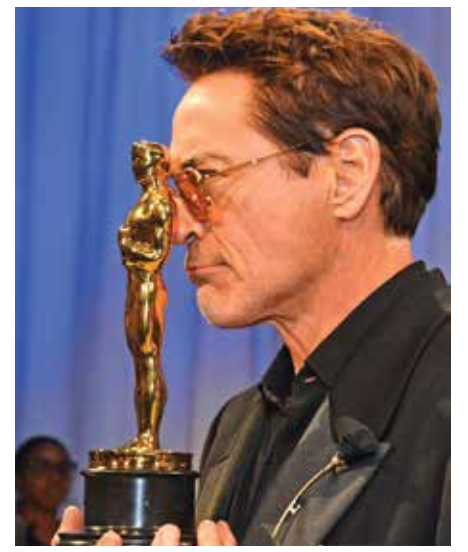
Irish actor Cillian Murphy accepts the award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for "Oppenheimer" onstage.



Actors Mahershala Ali, Christoph Waltz, Tim Robbins, Ke Huy Quan and Sam Rockwell pose with US actor Robert Downey Jr winner of the Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role for "Oppenheimer".



US actress Emma Stone accepts the award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for "Poor Things" onstage.



US actor Robert Downey Jr holds the Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role.



French director and screenwriter Justine Triet and Arthur Harari pose in the press room with the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay for "Anatomy of a Fall".



Dutch-Swedish cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema accepts the award for Best Cinematography for "Oppenheimer" onstage.



US actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph poses in the press room with the Oscar for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for "The Holdovers".





Winners of Best Animated Short Film for "War is Over! Inspired by the Music of John & Yoko" US writer and director Dave Mullins and US producer Brad Booker pose with family and Sean Lennon (left).



This handout picture shows (from left) Austrian and German actor Christoph Waltz, US actor Robert Downey Jr, US actor Tim Robbins, US actor Sam Rockwell, US actor Mahershala Ali and US-Vietnamese Ke Huy Quan take a photo together backstage.



Canadian actor Ryan Gosling (center), British-US musician Slash (center right), US musician Wolfgang Van Halen and British musician Mark Ronson perform "I'm Just Ken" from "Barbie" onstage.

**Four wins for 'Poor Things'**  
In one of the few competitive awards of the evening, Emma Stone won best actress for her daring performance in the surreal, Frankenstein-esque "Poor Things," which won three other technical prizes. She pipped Lily Gladstone, who was bidding to become the first Native American to win an acting Oscar for her role in Martin Scorsese's crime saga "Killers of the Flower Moon."  
Stone, who previously won an Academy Award for "La La Land," paid tribute to the other women in her category, and the five women on stage who presented the category. Stone also beat out Sandra Hueller of Oscars sleeper "Anatomy of a Fall." But the French courtroom thriller did not go home empty handed, with a win for best original screenplay.  
Co-writer Justine Triet revealed backstage that the 50 Cent song that features heavily in the film was originally going to be a Dolly Parton track.

"But they refused to give us the rights," she told reporters. As well as the legacy of "Oppenheimer," there were several other reminders of the toll of human conflict.  
The United Kingdom scored its first-ever best international film Oscar with Auschwitz drama "The Zone of Interest," which also won best sound.  
Several nominees wore lapel pins calling for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, while sporadic protests erupted around the event's security perimeter.  
There were also references to the war in Ukraine, with a best documentary statuette for "20 Days in Mariupol," and a brief tribute paid to Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, the subject of last year's Oscar-winning documentary. — AFP



Canadian filmmaker Ben Proudfoot (center), US composer and pianist Kris Bowers (right) and Porche Brinker accept the award for Best Documentary Short Film for "The Last Repair Shop" onstage.

## Winners

- Best picture**  
"Oppenheimer"
- Best director**  
Christopher Nolan, "Oppenheimer"
- Best actor**  
Cillian Murphy, "Oppenheimer"
- Best actress**  
Emma Stone, "Poor Things"
- Best supporting actor**  
Robert Downey Jr, "Oppenheimer"
- Best supporting actress**  
Da'Vine Joy Randolph, "The Holdovers"
- Best original screenplay**  
Justine Triet and Arthur Harari, "Anatomy of a Fall"
- Best adapted screenplay**  
Cord Jefferson, "American Fiction"
- Best international feature film**  
"The Zone of Interest" (United Kingdom)
- Best animated feature**  
"The Boy and the Heron"
- Best documentary feature**  
"20 Days in Mariupol"
- Best original score**  
Ludwig Goransson, "Oppenheimer"
- Best original song**  
Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell, "What Was I Made For?" from the "Barbie" soundtrack
- Best cinematography**  
Hoyte van Hoytema, "Oppenheimer"
- Best film editing**  
Jennifer Lame, "Oppenheimer"
- Best makeup and hairstyling**  
"Poor Things"
- Best costume design**  
"Poor Things"
- Best production design**  
"Poor Things"
- Best sound**  
"The Zone of Interest"
- Best visual effects**  
"Godzilla Minus One" — AFP



US film editor Jennifer Lame poses in the press room with the Oscar for Best Film Editing for "Oppenheimer" flanked by actors Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito.



Josh Weston, Nadia Stacey and Mark Coulier, winners of Makeup and Hairstyling award for "Poor Things".



Cord Jefferson, winner of Best Adapted Screenplay award for "American Fiction".



British costume designer Holly Waddington accepts the award for Best Costume Design for "Poor Things" onstage.



US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish and US singer-songwriter Finneas O'Connell pose in the press room with the Oscar for Best Original Song for "What Was I Made For".



French producer David Thion (center) poses with the award for Best Original Screenplay for "Anatomy of a Fall".



## Sports

# Carey's 98 drags Australia home in New Zealand Test thriller

## NZ's wait for a first home Test victory over Australia goes on

**CHRISTCHURCH:** An unbeaten 98 from Alex Carey dragged Australia to victory over New Zealand by three wickets in a thrilling second Test on Monday to give the tourists a 2-0 sweep of the two-match series.

Carey and Mitchell Marsh have struggled for form but their formidable 140-run partnership rescued Australia at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch. New Zealand's wait for a first home Test victory over their neighbors in more than three decades goes on. "Something we spoke about today was keeping that scoreboard running, 200, 190, 180 (to get)," said Australia captain Pat Cummins, hailing Carey for his superb innings. "As a fielding side you do notice that, you do start feeling the pressure build up. "It's our strongest suit — we're all really positive batters."

Carey and Marsh produced a vital partnership when the tourists had their backs to the wall at 80-5 in their chase of 279. New Zealand captain Tim Southee said that partnership was the "big moment" in the Test.

The hosts losing the upper hand was the story of the series. "We've been able to make early in-roads in every innings, which is pleasing, but I guess on the back of that you want to be able to nail it down," Southee said.

"But that's what you get when you play the top side in the world. They bat deep." At 220-5, a nail-biting Test took another turn on Monday afternoon when Black Caps seamer Ben Sears claimed Marsh and Mitchell Starc in successive deliveries.

It left Australia needing a further 59 runs with

three wickets remaining. Skipper Cummins joined Carey to bring the tourists home. "I kept to a really solid game plan and read the conditions and read the bowlers," Carey said.

"I guess losing one wicket this morning was okay. We got through to lunch and then that's when the game opened up a little bit and the partnership started to flow." The series sweep earned Australia valuable points in the World Test Championship standings.

New Zealand were left deflated after starting the fourth day with high hopes of a first home Test victory over their rivals in 31 years. When Australia resumed the day at 77-4, after a one-hour delay because of rain, Marsh was dropped on 28 by Rachin Ravindra in the second over. Travis Head was out on the next ball from Southee. New Zealand were buoyant, aware that Marsh and Carey were struggling for form, with Marsh coming off back-to-back ducks.

Carey had compiled just 27 from his three previous innings in the series. The Australian pair found their touch when it mattered most. Rather than be cautious, they went on the attack at more than five an over in the morning session as batting conditions became easier with the ageing ball.

The breakthrough New Zealand desperately sought came after lunch when debutant Sears took his double. Marsh, who made 80 off 102 deliveries, went lbw and Starc followed first ball, caught at square leg by Will Young.

The hat-trick ball however was wide of the mark and the new batsman Cummins edged it for four. Carey had an anxious moment when given



**CHRISTCHURCH:** Australia's players celebrate after winning the series following their victory on day four of the second Test cricket match between New Zealand and Australia at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on March 11, 2024. — AFP

out lbw to Matt Henry on 19 but on review the ball tracker placed the ball outside leg stump. He gave few other chances in a 123-ball innings which

included 15 boundaries. For New Zealand, Sears took 4-90 while Henry's 2-94 gave him nine wickets for the Test. — AFP

## England left with plenty to ponder after India defeat

**LONDON:** England's comprehensive 4-1 Test series loss in India, culminating with an innings and 64-run defeat inside three days in Dharamsala last week, has left coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes with several difficult decisions.

They will, however, have plenty of time to conduct a thorough review, with their side not in red-ball action again until facing the West Indies at Lord's in July. AFP Sport looks at some of the key issues now confronting England in Test cricket:

### 'Refining' Bazball

If self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom, McCullum's post-series acceptance England will have to "refine" their approach was a start on

the road to recovery. 'Baz' McCullum and Stokes won 10 of their first 11 Tests in charge but have since lost seven of the last dozen.

Few disagree with the basic premises behind 'Bazball', an approach grounded on the idea of trying to free players from the fear of failure and taking the attack to the opposition. But there were times when England appeared to get carried away with their own rhetoric, notably when star batsman Joe Root was dismissed off a high-risk reverse scoop during a third-Test collapse in Rajkot.

It was notable that when Root reverted to type scores of 122 not out, 11, 26 and 84 duly followed. England might still have been beaten adopting a more nuanced approach — it is now 12 years since India lost a Test series on home soil — but it was still telling when former New Zealand captain McCullum said: "We will allow the dust and hurt to settle a bit and then use that to make changes we need to ensure we are a better version of what

we have started out as.

"We will have some time to reflect and come back bigger, stronger and more refined." 100 and out for Bairstow? Writing off Jonny Bairstow's Test career has often served only to inspire him to greater heights. But having now reached the landmark of 100 Test appearances, a feat all the more impressive given England have often appeared uncertain as to whether he should be their red-ball wicketkeeper or a specialist batsman, doubts about his five-day future have resurfaced.

The 34-year-old didn't once reach 40 during 10 Test innings in India, while Ben Foakes, a more skilled gloveman, impressed behind the stumps. England do have a ready-made middle-order replacement for Bairstow, with Yorkshire team-mate Harry Brook waiting in the wings.

England dropped Graham Thorpe after his 100th Test in 2005, with Kevin Pietersen given a Test debut in his place, and Bairstow may now suffer a similar fate.

### In a spin

One of the successes of the tour for England came with the form of youthful spinners Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir who, despite being plucked from virtual obscurity, took 39 wickets between them. But now there are concerns about what will happen to the pair when they return to England, where early season conditions often favor seamers over spinners.

That means counties can go into games with just the one slow bowler. Bashir will be up against England colleague Jack Leach, if fit following knee surgery, at Somerset while Hartley will return to a Lancashire side who have just signed Australia off-spinner Nathan Lyon.

"It will be frustrating if they weren't given opportunities at county level," said McCullum. "There's a very real possibility of that being the case but, without wanting to dictate to counties because they have their own agendas, I think you'd be slightly mad if you didn't give them more opportunities in county cricket." — AFP



**RIO GRANDE:** Brice Garnett of the United States (left) and caddie Chris Callas celebrate with the trophy after their win during a four-hole playoff against Erik Barnes (not pictured) of the United States during the final round of the Puerto Rico Open at Grand Reserve Golf Club in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. — AFP

## Garnett beats Barnes in playoff to win PGA Puerto Rico Open

**MIAMI:** Brice Garnett sank an eight-foot birdie putt on the fourth playoff hole to defeat fellow American Erik Barnes on Sunday and win the US PGA Tour Puerto Rico Open. Garnett, struggling at 40 just to keep his PGA playing rights in his first start of the season, outlasted Barnes to capture his second PGA victory, his first since the 2016 Corales Puntacana Championship in the Dominican Republic.

"I told somebody at home last week I wouldn't still be playing if I didn't believe I could do this," Garnett said, his voice cracking with emotion. "I just came with such a thankful heart this week. I was so excited for the opportunity to compete out here again."

Garnett and Barnes each turned in bogey-free final rounds to finish 72 holes deadlocked on 19-under par 269 at Grande Reserve Golf Club in Rio Grande to reach the playoff, Barnes shooting 68 and Garnett 69. Garnett thanked family, friends and coaches, admitting: "I think they probably believed in me more than I believed in myself the last two years. It's hard, but you know, this is why we do it." In the last round, Garnett left his birdie putt five feet short at 17 but rolled the par putt around the lip and in to stay level with Barnes. Garnett's third shot at the 18th in regulation hung on the lip of a greenside bunker, but he punched onto the green and sank a tense seven-foot par putt to force the playoff.

World number 535 Garnett and 452nd-ranked Barnes staged the entire playoff at the par-5 18th, where they both parred the first and third extra holes and birdied the second, Barnes from just outside 15 feet and Garnett from seven feet in response.

On the decisive fourth extra hole, Barnes found the back fringe with his third shot while Garnett landed eight feet from the hole. Garnett curled in his right-to-left birdie putt with a fist-pump flourish and Barnes, chasing his first PGA title, missed his seven-footer to end the longest playoff in tournament history.

"It's huge," Garnett said of the hard-fought triumph. "Three more years on this tour, some events that I get in, the opportunity to get in bigger events." Frenchman Victor Perez and Americans Jimmy Stanger and Hayden Springer shared third on 270. — AFP

## Cheltenham in rude health but in danger of losing racing fans

**PARIS:** The Cheltenham Festival is "critical" for the image and health of British racing though in "many ways the racing fan is being priced out" of this week's showpiece, William Woodhams, CEO of Fitzdares bookmakers, told AFP. The four day extravaganza which pitches the best of British jumps thoroughbreds against their Irish rivals gets underway on Tuesday. The Irish have dominated in the past few years and are expected to do so again this time with just 4/1 the

## Le Garrec shines as France eye resurgent England

**CARDIFF:** Nolann Le Garrec put his hand up as a worthy successor for Antoine Dupont's number 9 shirt with an all-encompassing display in France's 45-24 victory over Wales in the Six Nations. Le Garrec, 21, rightly won the man-of-the-match award for his performance behind a dominant pack, linking perfectly with Thomas Ramos as the clock wound down and the French turned the screw on the home side at Cardiff's Principality Stadium.

"We suffered in our first three matches, but we got back on track. We showed our good side and I hope that we will use that to finish the tournament well next week," said the Racing 92 scrum-half.

Dupont is absent from the France team, instead plying his trade with the French sevens rugby team in a bid to play at this summer's Paris Olympics. Maxime Lucu was seen as his natural successor, having played a replacement role at the Rugby World Cup.

But Lucu struggled in France's 38-17 defeat by Ireland and also the scrappy 20-16 victory over Scotland and 13-all draw with Italy. Against Wales, Lucu was named on the bench, with Le Garrec taking over the starting spot. "I am not someone who is very stressed but I was perhaps a little more tense than usual, I think that was evident in the first five minutes," acknowledged Le Garrec. Indeed, a scuffed pass from Le Garrec allowed Wales winger Rio Dyer to scamper in for his team's first try.

On the half-hour mark of a nail-biting match that saw a Le Garrec try — his first for France — push the visitors into a 20-17 half-time lead, the scrum-half drew gasps of breath. A messy ball back from a line-out saw the scrum-half scramble back and fling

price for them to saddle 18-19 winners of the 28 races.

Around 55,000 Irish turfists are expected — many hoping for revenge for the galling Six Nations defeat to England on Saturday — with crowds predicted to be over 70,000 per day. Woodhams, whose London-based firm is the oldest bookmakers in the world, is unequivocal about how pivotal the meeting is to not just his industry but to racing. "Critical," he said. "The racing world really wakes up for Cheltenham and we see our biggest turnover (it's our Olympics) on betting which continues for the next four months. "Many people 'down tools' for January and February but the proverbial belt is untightened in March!"

"In many ways it's a rather pagan experience with the roar of the crowd in the first race on Tuesday signifying the end of the miserable winter and start of life in the United Kingdom and Ireland." However, Woodhams, drawing on his experience of six years



**CARDIFF:** France's Maxime Lucu (C) dives over the line to score their fifth try during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Wales and France at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff, south Wales. — AFP

out an audacious one-handed, 30-metre spin pass behind his back.

"We watched the ball fly, the Welshman holding out his hand saying to himself 'is it mine, is it not mine?'... But it passed him by," France coach Fabien Galthie said. Thankfully for France, the ball found its way to Ramos and an attack was launched.

### Lucu on the scoreboard

Galthie praised not only Le Garrec's attacking abilities but also his pairing with Ramos, who played at fly-half rather than his preferred full-back posi-

tion. "When you play on the front foot, you have time, you have less pressure. He was constantly taking the game up. It's one of his major qualities," Galthie said of the Brittany-born half-back.

"He also put in some extras, working back in defence, scrapping down the lines. He was one of the players who really put his hand up. He answered the call." In a well-scripted ending for France, it was Lucu who had the final word as he crashed over for the last of his team's five tries, going some way to silencing his many critics since the start of the Six Nations. — AFP

### 'I cry'

Trainer Jamie Snowden, who has had a cracking season and has high hopes of adding to his two previous Festival winners, agrees with Woodhams - Cheltenham is a shop window to the world for the sport. "The Cheltenham Festival is a very important week," he told AFP. "It's a very special week for anyone lucky enough to have a winner there, as it is the Olympics of our sport." Snowden, though, acknowledges too there are "issues facing British racing, just like the problems facing most other sports, and industries."

"Really we could spend all day talking around these, but in a nutshell the racecourses should be contributing more to the sport," said Snowden. "There is of course room for optimism, as there are many aspects of the sport that are thriving, and it is the second biggest spectator sport behind football." — AFP



Sports

# Man City survive Liverpool 'tsunami' to leave title race on knife-edge

## Klopp confident his side will emerge infused with more belief in his final season

LIVERPOOL: Pep Guardiola said Manchester City survived a second-half "tsunami" from Liverpool to secure a 1-1 draw that leaves three sides separated by just one point at the top of the Premier League. Arsenal lead the way on goal difference from Liverpool with defending champions City just one point back in third.

Guardiola is still to win in front of a crowd at Anfield as City's only victory stretching back to 2003 remains in a behind closed doors clash in 2021. However, the visitors were the happier to escape with a point after Liverpool laid siege to the City goal after Alexis Mac Allister's penalty cancelled out John Stones' first-half opener.

The final Premier League clash between Jurgen Klopp and Guardiola did not disappoint as Liverpool roared back in a breathless second half despite being depleted by injury. Klopp's men could have regrets if they do not go on to break City's run of three consecutive titles, though, as they missed a plethora of chances to secure a crucial win and were controversially denied a second penalty deep into stoppage time.

"I think that is a game that defined what both clubs have been for many years," said Guardiola. "Sooner or later in this stadium it is like a tsunami!" A share of the spoils leaves Arsenal as the winners of the weekend as eight consecutive league victories have taken the Gunners top, but they travel to City in their next league match on March 31.

But Klopp is confident his side will emerge infused with more belief they can deliver the title in his final season after leaving City hanging on after the break. "Today I saw the best 53 minutes (second half) we had against Manchester City. It was excep-

tional how we played," said Klopp. "They were some of the best moments of my coaching career that we were able to do that against them. The only thing I need at the moment is that we are really in that race. On our performance today, I saw a team that is in the right position - now let's see what we can do."

Mohamed Salah was only fit enough for a place on the Liverpool bench alongside Andy Robertson, while Alisson Becker, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Ibrahima Konate and Diogo Jota were absent through injury. For a much-anticipated clash between two of the world's best teams, both goals came from simple defensive errors.

Liverpool were caught napping from a Kevin De Bruyne corner on 23 minutes and Stones' effort had too much power for Caoimhin Kelleher. The Reds recovered impressively after also receiving a gift-wrapped equalizer from the visitors at the start of the second half.

Darwin Nunez pounced on Nathan Ake's short backpass and was cleaned out by Ederson. Mac Allister was cool despite a long delay for Ederson to get treatment, that eventually forced him to be replaced by Stefan Ortega, and fired his penalty into the top corner.

### City cling on

Liverpool then poured forward as City were left clinging on. Salah and Robertson were introduced on the hour mark and the Egyptian nearly had an instant impact. Luis Diaz sliced a glorious chance wide when played clean through by Salah's pass.

Kyle Walker's last-ditch intervention denied Diaz once more before Salah flashed a shot wide.



LIVERPOOL: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder #11 Jeremy Doku (L) kicks Liverpool's Argentinian midfielder #10 Alexis Mac Allister during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester City at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

Ortega then had to be quick off his line to smother a shot from Nunez. Guardiola responded by sacrificing Julian Alvarez and Kevin De Bruyne, much to the chagrin of the Belgian who made his feelings known to his manager.

"I like it if he's upset, it's good," said Guardiola. "The game was not in our hands and I wanted something to give the game back to us a little bit." The introduction of Mateo Kovacic and Jeremy Doku steadied the City

ship and could have even gone on to snatch it.

Erling Haaland was kept exceptionally quiet by Virgil van Dijk, but he picked out Doku who fired off the inside of the post in the final minute of the 90. Liverpool were screaming for a second penalty deep into eight minutes of added time when Doku's high foot caught Mac Allister. But neither referee Michael Oliver nor VAR were interested and the title race was left tantalizingly poised. — AFP

## Madrid sweep past Celta to stay clear in La Liga

MADRID: La Liga leaders Real Madrid regained their seven-point cushion at the top on Sunday as they benefited from two own goals in a comfortable 4-0 home win over struggling Celta Vigo. Vinicius Junior turned in a rebound from Antonio Rudiger's header at the second attempt midway through the first half at the Santiago Bernabeu before a Celta side coached by former Madrid boss Rafa Benitez unravelled late on.

Rudiger powered another header against the bar which bounced back off Celta goalkeeper Vicente Guaita and over the line for an own goal, effectively sealing the points for the hosts with 11 minutes left. Guaita was then involved in a mix-up with Carlos Dominguez as the defender bundled a teasing Vinicius cross into his own net. Turkish starlet Arda Guler, whose debut season in Spain has been ravaged by injuries, came off the bench to grab his first Madrid goal in stoppage time as Carlo Ancelotti's side brushed off the absence of the suspended Jude Bellingham.

"I'm very happy, trying to be my best. The best part of the season is coming up, the good games, and I want to keep going like this. Hopefully staying clear of injuries, which have hampered me a bit this season," Vinicius told Real Madrid TV.

Bellingham, the league's top scorer this season with 16 goals, watched from the stands after an appeal against the England international's two-



MADRID: Real Madrid's Turkish midfielder #24 Arda Guler (L) scores his team's fourth goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and RC Celta de Vigo at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

match ban for his red card against Valencia last weekend was dismissed. Madrid played poorly in a 1-1 draw against RB Leipzig on Wednesday, but it was enough to see them through to the Champions League quarter-finals 2-1 on aggregate.

Vinicius was booked in that game for a spat with an opponent. The Brazilian again found himself in trouble on Sunday for angrily barging Oscar Mingueza after a couple of cynical tugs of Vinicius' shirt. "It was a very ugly incident. I think the referee was right to book both. What happened with Vini was a bit of frustration and it's normal," said Ancelotti. — AFP

to gift goals and the first goal was a big one but otherwise it was all positive.

"We pressed well, we were aggressive. Today we had the chance to go 12 points clear and that is our objective, to win the league as soon as possible and compete in every competition." Paris fell behind in the seventh minute when Hakimi was dispossessed inside his own box, allowing Diakite to set up Zimbabwe international Munetsi to score.

However, PSG — with the names on the back of their shirts written in Korean to mark the opening of a new club shop in Seoul — drew level in the 17th minute. Reims captain Abdelhamid scored an unfortunate own goal as he turned Hakimi's corner into the net under pressure from Ramos.

Portugal striker Ramos put PSG ahead two minutes later with his ninth goal of the season, finding the net with a deflected shot after the Reims defence failed to deal with a Lee Kang-in cross. Yet Will Still's Reims, who sit in mid-table, came back to equalize on the stroke of half-time when Emmanuel Agbadou picked out Diakite with a superb defence-splitting pass, and the young Ivory Coast striker beat PSG's stand-in goalkeeper Keylor Navas with a clinical finish. Luis Enrique sent on Mbappe in the 73rd minute, with Ousmane Dembele and Randal Kolo Muani also

introduced from the bench. Mbappe had several attempts to score but could not add to his 34 goals for the season in all competitions as PSG followed up recent league draws with Rennes and Monaco by dropping points again. — AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Uruguayan midfielder Manuel Ugarte (L) fights for the ball with Reims' Ivorian forward #22 Oumar Diakite (center) during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Stade de Reims at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

## Pulisic shoots Milan second as Juve held by Atalanta

MILAN: Christian Pulisic fired AC Milan up to second in Serie A with the only goal in Sunday's 1-0 win over lowly Empoli while Juve were held to an entertaining 2-2 home draw by Atalanta. US star Pulisic gave Milan a scrappy win with his eighth league goal of an encouraging debut season in Italy, a deflected strike off unfortunate Empoli defender Sebastiano Luperto.

The 25-year-old had a difficult time at Chelsea but since moving to Milan from London last summer he has scored 10 times in all competitions and set up six more. "It's a good feeling, it was good for us to get the three points. It wasn't a nice goal, it was a bit lucky but at the end of the day we take it," said Pulisic to DAZN.

"I feel like I'm in some of my best form, I've been given a lot of confidence and trust here from the staff, from my teammates, the city and the fans. So I'm feeling really, really good here." Stefano Pioli's side are 16 points behind their local rivals and champions-elect Inter Milan who beat fourth-placed Bologna on Saturday.

Milan now turn their attentions to Thursday's Europa league last-16 return leg with Slavia Prague, with a 4-2 lead from the home leg. Empoli are one point above the relegation zone but performed in a manner which suggested they should be good enough to avoid the drop with survival specialist Davide Nicola.

Milan took second spot off Juventus whose poor run of form continued against sixth-placed Atalanta in Turin. Teun Koopmeiners both opened and completed the scoring as Atalanta snatched a draw which left them four points behind Bologna who are in the final Champions League spot. Juve looked set to retake second from Milan when quick-fire goals from Andrea Cambiaso and Arkadiusz Milik put the hosts ahead in the 70th minute. Instead Juve are a point behind Milan after picking up just six from their last seven matches and going from title challengers to also-rans in the space of weeks. — AFP

## Mbappe on bench again as PSG held

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique defended his stuttering team after they were held 2-2 by Reims in Ligue 1 on Sunday, a third straight domestic draw which still allowed the reigning champions to go 10 points clear at the top of the table.

Kylian Mbappe was rested at kick-off after scoring both goals in PSG's 2-1 midweek win at Real Sociedad which saw them qualify for the Champions League quarter-finals 4-1 on aggregate. Without him, PSG fell behind to a Marshall Munetsi goal following an error by Achraf Hakimi.

They hit back and found themselves ahead thanks to a Yunus Abdelhamid own goal and a Goncalo Ramos strike, but Oumar Diakite's effort for Reims ensured a share of the spoils. It was at times a disjointed and error-strewn display from a PSG side showing six changes from the Champions League, and Reims were well worth their point.

"I didn't think the team was too relaxed at any point. I thought their mentality was just right," Luis Enrique said of his side's performance. "I never like

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

#### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

### Change of Name

I, **Jaseena** Niranganpara Moideen, holder of Indian Passport No. V7431461 do hereby change my children name from their birth certificate, Mohammed Ayaan Nellyparambil Tayathedil to Ayaan Mohammed passport No U0461164 (Ayaan as given name and Mohammed as surname) and from Mohammed Amaan Nellyparambil Tayathedil to Amaan Mohammed Passport No V1967065 (Amaan as given name and Mohammed as surname). I undertake to carry out

this name change in their birth certificates. (#5179) 11/3/2024

I, **Ali**, holder of Indian Passport No. W4667476 issued at Kuwait on 03/11/2022 permanent address house No.8, street No.1, Basti Ram Ki Badi, Udaipur, Pin - 313001, Rajasthan, India. Presently residing in Kuwait do hereby declare that my name will be read as Ali (as given name) Mashraqi (as surname) with immediate effect. (#5178) 9/3/2024





SAN DIEGO: Team USA celebrates winning the final of the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup final football match between the USA and Brazil at the Snapdragon Stadium in San Diego, California, on March 10, 2024. — AFP

## Horan scores goal as US down Brazil to win CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup

### Brazilians failed to register a single shot on target in the first half

LOS ANGELES: Lindsey Horan scored the only goal as the United States defeated Brazil 1-0 on Sunday to win the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup in California. US skipper Horan headed home in first-half injury time at San Diego's Snapdragon Stadium to settle a largely lacklustre finale to the 12-team tournament.

"I'm very very proud of the team right now," Horan said afterwards. "We grinded out that win, again. It was a difficult game, Brazil challenged us in a different way. I'm really proud of us finding a way to get a goal and finishing out the game and getting a trophy."

Horan meanwhile said the US would take heart from the tournament victory as they build towards this summer's

Olympics, noting the contributions of several younger players who have been drafted into the squad following last year's Women's World Cup last 16 exit. "You see some of them playing in their first final tonight, and it was an amazing tournament for them," Horan said. "Going into the Olympics we're going to see what they can do. I'm so proud because it looks like they're not young and inexperienced."

The Brazilians failed to register a single shot on target in the first half, with their best efforts a 10th minute free-kick from Dudi Sampaio that sailed over. Gabi Nunes also saw a speculative 15th-minute strike from the edge of the area go soaring into the stands.

The American women were similarly

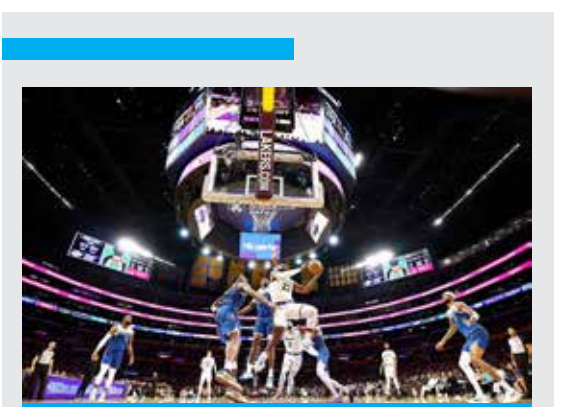
off-target in the first half, struggling to create much in the way of goal-scoring opportunities from open play. Horan had signalled her aerial threat in the 40th minute, stooping to direct a header that Brazil goalkeeper Luciana saved as it threatened to creep in.

At that stage, Horan's near-miss was the only US shot on target of the half. But the breakthrough finally came on the stroke of half-time. Trinity Rodman broke down the right flank before passing back to right-back Emily Fox in space.

Fox swung in an inviting deep cross to the back post and Horan was waiting to nod the header back across the goal to give Luciana no chance. The second half continued in much the same vein, with both sides creating little of note.

US interim coach Twila Kilgore overhauled the US attack with a flurry of substitutions, bringing on Sophia Smith, Lynn Williams, Jaedyn Shaw and Midge Purce. Those changes appeared to have delivered a second goal on 79 minutes when Williams pounced on a defensive mix-up to tuck away a confident finish.

But Williams had strayed just off-side and the goal was chalked off. Brazil triggered alarm bells in the US defence on 85 minutes when Geysse's clever flick from a free-kick floated just wide of Alyssa Naeher's post. Debinha sent a Brazilian free-kick just over the bar in stoppage time, while at the other end, Luciana saved a Korbin Albert shot. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers takes a shot against the Minnesota Timberwolves in the second half at Crypto.com Arena on March 10, 2024 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

## Sinner, Alcaraz demolish Indian Wells opponents

INDIAN WELLS: Reigning Grand Slam champions Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz turned in dominating performances on Sunday to roll into the fourth round of the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters. The two hottest young racquets in the sport showed no mercy in quick-fire victories, with Australian Open champion Sinner overwhelming Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-4.

"Almost perfect" Alcaraz, the reigning Wimbledon champion, stepped up his Indian Wells title defense with a 6-2, 6-3 victory over Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime. The world number two Spaniard allowed his Canadian opponent no room to move, reaching the fourth round with his eighth match win in a row at the event. A pair of women's veterans showed new life in maternity comebacks.

"It was almost the perfect match for me," said Alcaraz, who broke Auger-Aliassime's serve four times. "I moved well, played aggressive and had less mistakes." Sinner was equally ruthless as he attacked Struff, with the Italian winning his 17th match in succession dating to his country's Davis Cup victory in November. Sinner fired 27 winners past Struff, whose style gave the third seed a target on court. "We prepared very well. I tried to learn his moves," Sinner said. "I played well and served well under pressure." Overall I can be really happy about today, I felt really good on the court."

It was a welcome show of strength from Alcaraz, who hasn't won a title since winning his second Grand Slam with a stunning triumph over Novak Djokovic at the All England Club last year. He exited the Australian Open in the quarter-finals then lost in the semi-finals at Buenos Aires last month before spraining his ankle and retiring from his opening match in Rio de Janeiro.

"I played at a really high level of tennis, so much higher than the first round," the Spaniard said. Alcaraz



INDIAN WELLS: Iga Swiatek of Poland plays a forehand volley against Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic in their third round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 10, 2024 in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

may still be feeling the effects of the ankle, which has left him short of 2024 match play. "My confidence has gone down a little bit, I've been struggling during the practice every day," he admitted. "I'm trying to keep my confidence as high as I can." In other matches, fifth seed Andrey Rublev was knocked out 6-4, 6-4 by rising Czech Jiri Lehecka Alex de Minaur, seeded 10th, dominated Dubai finalist Alexander Bublik 7-5, 6-0. The Australian now plays sixth seed Alexander Zverev, a 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 winner over Tallon Griekspoor. Greek 11th-seed Stefanos Tsitsipas eliminated a home crowd favorite with his 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Frances Tiafoe, who reached the Californian quarters a year ago.

In WTA play, Iga Swiatek claimed quick revenge for a January loss as she hammered Czech Linda Noskova

6-4, 6-0 to reach the fourth round. The Polish top seed was defeated by the 29th-ranked challenger in an Australian Open third-round upset.

On Sunday, world number one Swiatek quickly recovered after going down an early break to the 19-year-old, levelling at 4-all and sweeping through the remainder of the third-round match. Swiatek will next face Kazakh Yulia Putintseva, who beat Madison Keys 6-4, 6-1.

The Pole said she learned from her loss to Noskova in Melbourne. "It was much smarter to think about how to just play against Linda rather than focusing on my mistakes," she said. "I was motivated to just play better and not make the same mistakes but to improve my game in some aspects." — AFP

## Davis makes NBA history in Lakers win over T-wolves

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis delivered a sensational game on the eve of his 31st birthday Sunday, scoring 27 points with 25 rebounds in the Los Angeles Lakers' 120-109 NBA victory over Western Conference high-fliers Minnesota.

Davis added five assists, a career-high seven steals and three blocked shots for the Lakers, who are locked in a battle for a play-in berth. The Timberwolves came into the game second in the West and slipped to third, one and a half games behind conference leaders Oklahoma City.

The Thunder thumped the Memphis Grizzlies 124-93 in Oklahoma City. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 23 points and rookie Cason Wallace added 23 off the bench for the Thunder, who won their third straight.

There was some bad news for Oklahoma City, however, as Jalen Williams exited in the second quarter with a sprained right ankle. The injury news looked even worse for the Houston Rockets, who rallied from a 13-point deficit to beat the Kings 112-104 in Sacramento.

But they saw their leading scorer Alperen Sengun leave the court in a wheelchair after he fell awkwardly while challenging Domantas Sabonis under the basket in the final minute. Rockets coach Ime Udoka said that Sengun was having X-rays on his right knee and the star center reportedly was scheduled for an MRI exam on his right knee and ankle on Monday.

Turkey's Sengun is averaging a career-high 21.2 points and 9.4 rebounds per game. "You hate to see that, especially so late in the game," Udoka said. "It doesn't diminish the win in general. I think it was one of our best road wins. (Sengun) had a huge part in that." — AFP