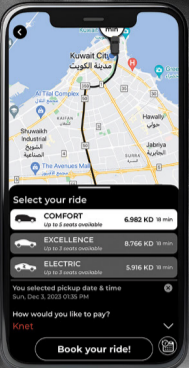



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| Isha    | : 19:19 |

# Oil ‘lifeblood of modern life’

## OPEC chief dismisses calls to abandon oil as ‘wrong and unrealistic’

Amir receives civil aviation chief



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, who presented to him the newly appointed Director of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation Sheikh Hmoud Mubarak Al-Sabah on March 24, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais described calls to abandon oil as “wrong and unrealistic”, because oil, which represents 31 percent of the global energy mix, has undoubtedly been the “lifeblood of modern life”. Ghais, in an interview with KUNA, said oil would continue to play an “important and vital” role in international markets for decades to come. “Abandoning it is not easy,” he added.

Ghais said oil occupies an important part in human life. “Oil and its products are used

in many of the vital daily activities of people regardless of their locations, nationalities, jobs or interests, such as transportation, travel, energy production and manufacturing,” he said. He highlighted the abundance of oil, adding that “oil is also easy to extract, refine and transport. All these factors have made oil extremely important since it was discovered decades ago. It nowadays plays a vital role in the global economy and it has become an integral part of our daily life. We also depend on it due to its supplies being secured.”

There have been many voices in recent years calling for abandoning oil under the excuse of protecting the environment,” Ghais said, warning of the severe consequences that the world could face if oil production were stopped. Therefore, he said, OPEC has launched awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of oil and its vital role in our daily life in English, Arabic, German, Spanish and Persian and many other languages.

Continued on Page 6

### Bader Al-Kharafi: Gulf Bank developing innovative strategy

KUWAIT: The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly of Gulf Bank was held on March 23, 2024, with a quorum of 79.16 percent. The board of directors is recommending a distribution of a cash dividend of 12 fils per share, and to distribute 5 percent bonus shares was approved during the meeting.

During his speech addressed to the shareholders, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi,



Gulf Bank Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gulf Bank, said: “I am proud of Gulf Bank’s excellent financial results for the year 2023, achieving the highest level of net profits

during the past decade. The increase in profitability was matched with an increase in dividends cash distributions to 12 percent, accompanied by bonus shares distributions of 5 percent.”

He mentioned that the bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait-focused strategy. It is steadily advancing towards its strategic objectives of delivering unparalleled banking services to customers, enhancing operational efficiencies, and upholding financial transparency and governance principles. These efforts are firmly rooted within the bank’s commitment to providing sustainable value to all stakeholders over the long run. (See Page 8)

RAMADAN KAREEM

Gate of Al-Rayyan for those who fast

By Yasmein Mohammad Salim

Who among us doesn’t aspire to enter Paradise? Paradise is the perfect bliss in the Hereafter that is prepared exclusively for the believers who work hard to inhabit it. As the Messenger of Allah (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) related that Almighty Allah said: ‘I have prepared for My righteous servants (such excellent things) that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of, and no human heart can ever think of.’” (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

To get a ticket to Paradise and enjoy the astonishing beauties and bounties there, one must be righteous, and make each day count towards seeking Allah’s Pleasure and observing the obligatory acts of worship as well as the optional ones. In Paradise, there are eight gates. One of the gates of Paradise is called the Gate of Al-Rayyan. This gate is reserved for those pious servants of Allah who fast often.

Our beloved Prophet (PBUH) talks about this gate in a hadith (prophetic tradition) saying, “In Paradise there is a gate called Al-Rayyan, through which those who used to fast will enter on the Day of Resurrection, and only they will enter it. It will be said, ‘Where are those who fasted?’ They will get up, and none will enter it but them. When they have entered, it will be locked, and no one else will enter.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

The virtue of fasting is so great in Islam that no other deed compares to it. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, translated as: “(Allah said), ‘Every good deed of Adam’s son is for him except fasting; it is for Me, and I will reward (the fasting person) for it.’ Verily, the smell of the mouth of a fasting person is better to Allah than the smell of musk.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari) Therefore, fasting is not just an act of abstaining from food, drink, and worldly pleasures, rather it is a way to attain opportunity of entering Paradise through the Rayyan Gate. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue



GAZA: A man carries children injured in Zionist bombardment at Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 24, 2024. — AFP

### UN chief slams Gaza ‘horror and starvation’

GAZA: Heavy fighting raged in Gaza on Sunday as the Zionist entity has vowed to push on with its ground war in the territory’s far south despite US objections and truce talks. UN chief Antonio Guterres said “horror and starvation stalk the people of Gaza” and urged an immediate ceasefire and the release of all captives held since Oct 7.

### Sudanese risk their lives to feed each other

CAIRO: Sameh Makki’s soup kitchen is barely 100 m from the market, but it can take two hours to make the journey through Sudan’s war-torn streets, often through hails of bullets. The 43-year-old, his family and local volunteers have risked everything to get supplies to feed around 150 families caught in the crossfire between the army and paramilitaries. “The only thing that matters is that people eat. If I had died while making that happen, so be it,” said Makki.

Continued on Page 6



GEDAREF, Sudan: Volunteers prepare food for internally displaced Muslim devotees for their iftar meal during the holy month of Ramadan on March 13, 2024. — AFP

#### NEWS IN BRIEF

Chances of rain until Monday

KUWAIT: Kuwait Meteorological Center forecast rainfall to continue at varying intervals from Sunday evening until the early hours of Monday. Director Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi expected chances of hail accompanied by wind exceeding 65 km per hour, leading to waves rising to more than seven feet. He said a gradual improvement in weather conditions would begin Monday afternoon, with chances of fog in some areas Monday morning. The ministry of education had announced switching to online schooling on Sunday at both public and private schools citing reports of unstable weather conditions. The highest rainfall recorded since Sunday morning at monitoring stations amounted to 8 mm at the Salmiya station, 3.7 mm at Rabiya station, 3.8 mm at Sabriya station and 3.4 mm at Wafra station, while Abdaly station recorded 2.4 mm. — KUNA

Sheep sold for KD 73,000

KUWAIT: A rare breed sheep was auctioned in Kabd for KD 73,000, attracting significant attention with more than five bidders competing for it. The sheep, imported as a young animal and raised in Kuwait, belongs to a distinguished lineage. The auction’s success suggested the potential for breeding similar sheep with lucrative resale value.

Court bars four candidates

KUWAIT: The court of appeals on Sunday upheld the election committee’s decision to disqualify four candidates, all former MPs, from running in the April 4 parliamentary polls. The four were barred for taking part in outlawed tribal primary elections. The election committee of the interior ministry has disqualified 14 candidates from contesting the polls over their criminal records. The case will now go to the court of cassation, whose rulings are final. Its verdict is expected later this week. The remaining 10 candidates did not challenge the committee’s disqualification.

# PM receives state officials



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received on Sunday Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. During the meeting, Sheikh Fahad presented to His Highness the newly appointed director of the Civil Aviation General Administration, Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah. — KUNA

## Minister launches national campaign to pay off debts

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Social Welfare, Family, and Childhood Affairs, Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, announced the launch of the national campaign (Your assistance is a joy for them) to pay off the debts, in line with the humanitarian role of Kuwait, the directives of the political leadership, and the instructions of the Council of Ministers on the importance of localizing charitable work inside the country.

Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah said in a speech to Kuwait Television on Saturday, "In the breath of this great month, the holy month of Ramadan, the month of goodness and giving, with the help of God and his good fortune, we announce the launch of the national campaign to pay off the debts for the second year in a row." He added that the campaign will be launched after the 15th of Ramadan, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, the Federation of Consumer Cooperative Societies, and the Federation of Kuwaiti charities and associations.

He pointed out that this work will once again present an honorable picture of charity work inside the country and the love of the Kuwaiti people for doing good, providing assistance to the needy, alleviating their worries burdened by debts, and bringing smiles and joy to the faces of many Kuwaiti families in need of assistance. Donors are invited from the public and private sectors, cooperative societies, as well as associations, charities, and individuals to participate in this campaign. — KUNA

# 397,600 Kuwaitis work in the public sector, 84.6% of total workforce

## Average salary of a citizen in the public sector is KD 1,600

**KUWAIT:** Until December 31, 2023, the number of Kuwaiti workers in the public sector reached 397,600 or 84.6 percent of the total workers, according to PACI. However, according to the Central Statistical Bureau this percentage scored 84.1 percent as of September 30, 2023. The number of Kuwaiti workers in the public sector in 1992 was about 103,000 workers. The rate of unemployment at that time ranged between 20-40 percent, according to World Bank estimates.

The national public sector employment increased about four times over 30 years. Nowadays, unemployment exceeded half of that number of workers and reached 6.0 percent. According to the estimates of the current government's program, its numbers do not differ from the numbers of previous governments, as there are 100,000 male and female citizens who will join the labor market within four years, most of them are graduates of a public education system with 4.8 years lagging behind the regular education level.

This means that most of them have no opportunity to compete for a job opportunity outside the public sector. According to population and employment data issued by the CSB until September 30, 2023, the average salary of a citizen in the public sector is KD 1,952 for males, about KD 1,364 for females and about KD 1,600 for both. A public sector employee has less working hours, has the right to buy out his vacations, and gets meritorious work award even in the absence of excellence, as in the results of the Ministry of Education, Public Works, and the Municipality, and multiple allowances, most of which are

nonsensical such as front-line award, the screen, committees, risks etc.

All of the above is acceptable if it is sustainable, if there is harmony between the reward and productivity, and if the minister or the parliamentarian who calls for increasing the incentives of a public office is the one who pays to finance it. Unfortunately, the reality is contrary to all of the above, and the result is victims or the young citizens who do not participate in a decision that will inevitably cause their unemployment, and perhaps their loss. In the short term, the available option is to control the lowest possible ceiling of public expenditures.

The most important provisions of this option are to eradicate their corruption, pursue their waste, and cease promoting the competitiveness of a public service. This is merely an introduction for the transition from the beginning of financial reform to economic reform. In the medium to long term, there is no alternative but to create a partnership with a strong, clean private sector, capable of competing in absorbing national workers, and later on able to support financial sustainability by creating a base for profits and income taxes.

This was the option that saved Communist China from a miserable reality in 1979. It started with a partnership in its agricultural sector. After the success of the experiment, other sectors followed suit in 1985. This means that creating an active partnership with the private sector is something that has nothing to do with emotions or ideologies; it is rather a rescue tool and exchange of interests. — Al-Shall Report



**KUWAIT:** People are seen along a promenade while the background shows a view of the Kuwait City skyline at sunset. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## UK, Kuwait celebrate years of partnership, plant trees

**KUWAIT:** The British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, stressed on Sunday the depth of deep-rooted relations between United Kingdom and Kuwait, which are rooted in 125 years of partnerships between the two countries. This came in a press statement made by Ambassador Lewis to Kuwait Press Agency (KUNA) during the Kuwaiti-British partnership tree planting event in the National Library of Kuwait Park in the presence of the Director General of the National Library, Siham Al-Azmi, and Sheikh Hala Al-Sabah.

Ambassador Lewis said that planting of the tree is an expression of the strength and depth in the relationship between the United Kingdom and Kuwait. The two countries considered last January as the "Year of Ku-



**British Ambassador Belinda Lewis**



**Siham Al-Azmi**

waiti-British Partnership" in celebration of 125 years of distinguished diplomatic relations.

In turn, the Director General of the National Library of Kuwait, Siham Al-Azmi, said that the planting of the Kuwaiti-British partnership tree came in celebration of 125 years of historical bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. Al-Azmi indicated that the National Library of Kuwait seeks to transform the National Library Park into a diplomatic park that contributes to strengthening relations and building bridges of cooperation with all friendly countries. — KUNA

Lahbib, with the presence of senior European, UN, and Arab officials. This year marks 60 years of Kuwaiti-Belgian diplomatic relations, Ambassador Al-Enezi, who also chairs Kuwait's missions to the European Union (UN) and NATO, said in a statement to KUNA, noting that Kuwait deeply appreciates Belgium's role in liberating Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti diplomat underlined Belgium's role in supporting Palestinians, as the country succeeded in issuing a resolution on ceasefire and allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza as part of the country's current presidency of the European Council. — KUNA

## Jaber Hospital plastic surgery unit obtains accreditation

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Head of the Plastic Surgery Unit at Jaber Hospital, Dr. Sarah Al-Youha, stated that the unit has obtained international academic accreditation. One of the initiatives involved is adhering to international protocols and meticulously recording and addressing complications arising within the department. To attain accreditation, the unit had surpassed specific benchmarks, including conducting over 1,200 surgeries and evaluating more than 10,000 cases since its inception. Initially led by Dr Salma Al-Hamad, who played a pivotal role in its establishment, the unit has expanded to include eight surgeons, namely Dr Hisham Burizq, Dr Heba Al-Khashnam, Dr Khalid Al-Tarrah, Dr Hussein Al-Mousawi, Dr Hussein Al-Qattan, and Dr Abeer Kalendar.

Several specialized units were introduced, such as operations to rectify children's deformities. Collaborating with doctors from various specialties, the unit established a cleft palate and craniofacial unit at Farwaniya Hospital, recognized by the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association under the leadership of Dr. Latifa Al-Kharafi. Additionally, the department now includes a post-mastectomy reconstruction unit and collaborates with the ENT department at Jaber Hospital to remove head and neck tumors, led by Dr. Maha Al-Jailani. There's also a breast surgery department overseen by Dr. Lamyaa Malak and Dr. Suleiman Al-Mazeedi. Cooperation extends to Adan Hospital's plastic surgery unit, particularly for lymphedema cases, under Dr. Muneera bin Nikhi's leadership. Dr. Youha attributed this American accreditation to the support of the Ministry of Health,



**Members of the plastic surgery unit at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital. — KUNA**

Health Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, and the administration of Jaber Hospital.

Meanwhile, Plastic Surgery Consultant Dr. Hisham Burizq emphasized the unit's cohesive atmosphere, facilitating significant achievements within a short period of time. The collaboration among all unit doctors, including Dr. Kalendar, enabled the formation of a specialized team for congenital deformities, which handles a considerable caseload with ministry backing. Further, by partnering with 11 medical specialties from various government hospitals, the unit established the first-of-its-kind harelip and head deformities unit at Farwaniya Hospital. The unit also participates in treating chronic lesions at Bayt Abdullah and operates a blood vessel malformation clinic at Mubarak Hospital. Dr. Burizq highlighted the unit's role not only in patient care but also in training doctors and conducting lectures to enhance trainees' knowledge.



**Kuwaiti Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Al-Enezi and Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib pose for a group during an Iftar banquet. — KUNA photos**

## Kuwait, Belgium share similar views: Envoy

**BRUSSELS:** Kuwait Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Al-Enezi said Kuwait and Belgium share similar views on human rights, democracy, and humanitarian aid. The remarks came during an iftar banquet the ambassador held late Friday in the honor of Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja

## Local

# Zain brings back one-of-a-kind drive-thru Girgian celebration

## Hundreds of vehicles visit Zain HQ in Shuwaikh to join the fun



Zain's team at the event.



Zain celebrated Girgian with a fresh and distinctive approach.

**KUWAIT:** Zain has brought back its highly anticipated drive-thru Girgian celebration in collaboration with Wainkoom for the second year running. Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh to join the one-of-a-kind celebration of the much-cherished local tradition of Girgian (candy distribution).

This event came under the umbrella of Zain's annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, which aims at sharing the joys and blessings of the Holy Month with the entire Kuwaiti community, especially with children and young people who shape its most vibrant segment. Ramadan brings a wonderful opportunity to experience local traditions like Girgian, which the company celebrates every year with a fresh and distinctive approach.

For the second year running, Zain brought back its drive-thru Girgian celebration at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh, which was widely received by families and children. For

two hours straight, hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ to join the fun and participate in the many segments the company had prepared. The event, which came in partnership with the creative minds at Wainkoom, is the only of its kind locally and has become a local sensation.

This year, many of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year's initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this holy month with the entire Kuwaiti people.



Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ in Shuwaikh.

## National Assembly: Democracy on display

**KUWAIT:** The 11th legislative term of parliament had an election involving 288 candidates and 327,287 eligible voters. It was held on June 29, 2006, in 25 constituencies. The first session was held on July 12, 2006, but the parliament did not finish the term and was dissolved on March 19, 2008. On July 17, 2008, elections for the 12th legislative term of parliament had 275 candidates running with 361,684 eligible voters from five constituencies. The first session was held on June 1, 2008. The house was dissolved on March 18, 2009.

The 13th legislative term's elections were held on May 16, 2009, with 210 candidates running with 384,790 eligible voters from five constituencies. The 13th legislative term saw the victory of four women for the first time in Kuwait's history: Dr. Maasouma Al-Mubarak, Dr. Rola Dashti, Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi, and Dr. Salwa Al-Jassar. The first session of the term was held on May 31, 2009, and the parliament was dissolved on December 6, 2011.

Elections were held on February 2, 2012, to elect members of parliament for the 14th legislative term, with 210 candidates from five constituencies and 400,296 eligible voters. The House held its first session on February 15, 2012, but the Constitutional Court considered a ruling on June 20, 2012, void because of irregularities in a decree that dissolved the 2009 parliament, and the court reinstated it. Elections for the 14th legislative term were held on December 1, 2012. Some 307 candidates ran in five constituencies with 422,569 eligible voters.

The House held its first session on December 16, but the Constitutional Court ruled on June 16, 2013, that elections were void and revoked the memberships of winning candidates. The 14th legislative term's election was again held on July 27, 2013. Some 321 candidates ran for parliament, with



KUWAIT: Kuwait's members of parliament attend a parliamentary session at the National Assembly in Kuwait City in this file photo. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

439,715 eligible voters casting their ballots in five constituencies. The first session of the term was held on August 6, 2013, but the house was dissolved on October 16, 2016.

Elections for the 15th legislative term were held on November 26, 2016, with 293 candidates partaking in the race and 483,186 eligible voters casting their ballots in five constituencies. The first session of the term began on December 23, 2016, and the final session was on October 20, 2020. Elections for the 16th legislative term of parliament were held on December 5, 2020, with 326 candidates running and 567,694 eligible voters covering five constituencies.

The first session was held on December 15, 2020, but the parliament did not finish the term and was dissolved on August 2, 2022. On September 29, 2022, the election for the 17th legislative

term was held with the participation of 305 candidates, while eligible voters amounted to 795,911 in the five constituencies. The 17th legislative term began its first session on October 11, but the constitutional court decided on March 19, 2023, to annul the 2022 National Assembly, which paved the way for the return of the 2020-elected parliament.

On May 1, 2023, a decree was issued to dissolve parliament. On June 6, 2023, the 17th legislative term re-election began with 207 candidates partaking and 793,646 eligible voters casting their ballots in the five constituencies. On February 15, 2024, a decree was issued to dissolve parliament. On February 27, the Cabinet set April 4 as the date of the National Assembly elections, and on March 2, Kuwait's official gazette published Decree No. 29/2024 inviting eligible voters to elect parliament members. — KUNA

## Mishal Al-Shamali, Kuwait's new Ambassador to India



KUWAIT: A decree was issued appointing Mishal Mustafa Al-Shamali as the new Ambassador of Kuwait to India. Shamali had previously served as Consul General at Kuwait's Consulate General in Shanghai, China.



Charity hands out 16,000 food baskets as part of one million Ifatr meals for the poorest families. — KUNA

## From wounds to words: Writing as a healing technique

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** In her quietest moments, when her emotions yearned for release, Sarah Al-Dhafiri found solace in the flowing ink her pen effortlessly etched upon the paper. "Writing exposed my wounds, yet only through it did my healing begin," she reflected. As a writer who discovered connection through the power of words, Dhafiri shares the profound impact that writing had on her, guiding others to embrace it as a therapeutic practice.

Since childhood, Dhafiri's introverted and calm demeanor often led her to bury her feelings in silence and solitude, unconsciously constructing barriers that distanced her from both herself and those around her. "I remember how incredibly challenging it was for me to verbally communicate with my family, which led me to write letters instead and tuck them under their pillows," she recalled. It was only when she discovered her pas-

sion for writing that her mode of communication was forever altered.

Deep within, everyone recognized Dhafiri's innate gift for writing, yet she herself came to realize that writing goes beyond mere skill or talent; it provides benefits to all, not only the creatively inclined. It's a practice crucial to embrace, she emphasizes, advising to pause briefly from our fast-paced daily routines and constant distractions, allowing our emotions and thoughts to surface. "Take just four minutes from your day and ask yourself one question: What am I feeling right now?" she suggested.

"Perhaps all you'll receive is a single word, a simple drawing, a question mark, or maybe you'll end up filling the entire page altogether. Day after day, you'll learn to better answer this question," she explained. Dhafiri firmly believes that with dedication and practice, that initial word might evolve into three pages, eventually restoring the long-lost connection with one's inner self.

As beautiful as the journey of expressive writing is, she admits that there's a darker side to it. It can be exhausting at times, as some won't easily bear to be entirely exposed to themselves, touching upon their points of weakness, shame, and fragility that no one has ever uncovered before. Hence, it demands readiness to meet with one's hidden layers, and all their underlying imperfections, through embracing complete transparency and honesty

with oneself. "There will be days that will stir your tears to fall," she noted, "but I view it as the ending point of a negative emotion, and the beginning of enlightenment."

For many, Dhafiri believes that writing might serve as a way of self-reflection and clarity. For others, it can provide a safe haven to unleash conflicting thoughts and find peace amidst chaos. Some use it to preserve cherished memories, while others weave future dreams and aspirations onto each page. Regardless of the approach, writing has its own way of providing relief.

However, for Dhafiri, it goes beyond that. "Writing is a path that I choose to undertake every day; it's the lens through which I see the world," she shared. "It defines me and gives purpose to my existence." As her eyes sparkled while uttering these words, Dhafiri urged everyone reading this to take that crucial first step in writing, allowing their pens to guide them on a journey of self-discovery before life slips away.



Sarah Al-Dhafiri

## Kuwait's Najat charity lays cornerstones of 3 villages in Yemen

**ADEN:** A delegation of Kuwait's Al Najat Charity has laid the cornerstones of three residential villages for Yemen's poor families in Taiz and Hodeidah governorates as part of the "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign for the ninth year in a row. Zayed Al-Qahatani, coordinator of society's Yemen projects, said every village contains 30 units, three classrooms, an equipped medical center, a drinking water project, a mosque, and an administrative office.

These villages would provide shelter and good services for orphans and poor families, he added in a statement to KUNA. Furthermore, the charity also handed out 16,000 food baskets as part of one million iftar meals for the poorest families, he noted. He went on to say that the charity continues to establish residential villages to meet the needs of thousands of displaced families who live in cottages and poor houses.

Meanwhile, Governor Hodeiha Al-Hassan Taher lauded the generous humanitarian support provided by His Highness the Amir, the Kuwaiti Government, and people in all domains. He stressed the importance of sustainable development and humanitarian projects, which serve orphans and poor people. — KUNA

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## Ramadan health tips

## Go offline

In this era of new media, the Internet surely has its good reputation; however, as much as the news updates and social hubs keep us better-informed, oftentimes the overflowing digital information pulls you in long enough to act as distractions. Wasting hours on the screen takes away the valuable time you could have spent on doing something more fruitful. Rather than scrolling through social media which can spark unhealthy thoughts like self-comparison, unplug from the virtual space and engage in real-world activities instead. Make yourself useful around the house with meal-prepping or be involved in the Ramadan community efforts around your neighborhood.

## Perform Sunnah prayers

Sunnah prayers are additions to the five compulsory daily prayers for Muslims. Although optional, it is highly encouraged to perform as many as you can during the holy month. As nightly hours tend to be quieter due to fewer distractions, you can utilize these moments of solitude and calmness to have one-on-one sessions with your Creator. Whenever you can, join the congregational Sunnah prayer of Taraweeh with family and friends at the mosque to get the most out of Ramadan blessings. Praying in mass offers better rewards, but you can always pray at home as well; what matters is you perform it with much khusyu' (wholeheartedly with immense concentration). If you have some time left after Suhoor, try spending it on at least one Sunnah prayer while waiting for the call of the obligatory dawn prayer.



## Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Kuwait's commercial streets in the 1960s. - Photo from KOC archive, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

## NBK shares Girgian happy moments with kids at NBK Specialty Hospital

### Bank helps children overcome pain and shine



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait holds its annual Girgian event at NBK Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit, at Al Sabah Medical district, to celebrate with the children the happy moments of Girgian and present them with felicitations and gifts.



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KUWAIT: On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held its annual Girgian event at NBK Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit, at Al Sabah Medical district, to celebrate with the children the happy moments of Girgian and present them with felicitations and gifts. Shaikha Al Bahar, NBK Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer, along with NBK Public Relations and NBK Family shared happy moments with children.

NBK has always considered supporting the children an essential part of its social and community outreach. Sharing with these children residing at NBK Hospital major social and religious occasions come as part of an extensive social outreach program specifically mapped out and implemented by NBK. NBK's visit to the hospital was emotional and overwhelming for both the children and NBK Team. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in the Kuwaiti society.

NBK Children's Hospital stands as a landmark for the bank's social initiatives towards children. NBK expanded the hospital's capacity and opened recently the only Stem Cell Therapy Unit for children in Kuwait, further expanding its hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases. Recently, NBK donated KD 13 million to the ministry of health to build a new full equipped medical building to increase the hospital's capacity.

Helping and supporting children and their families are integral parts of the Bank's culture and practices that reflect its deep commitment to its corporate social responsibility. Since its establishment, NBK has been at the forefront of supporting Kuwait's community through a range of education, health, sports and social initiatives. The establishment of NBK Children Hospital at Al Sabah Medical Area stands as one of many NBK initiatives for children.

NBK has undertaken several initiatives to support the healthcare sector in Kuwait, including the establishment of NBK's Children's Hospital at Al Sabah Medical Area, which provides medical care to underprivileged children. The hospital houses a number of clinics specialized in leukemia treatments, neurology, psychiatry and pediatrics as well as surgeries and operating theatres. In line with NBK Children Hospital's strategy to provide integrated care for patients, the hospital's management embeds the wellbeing of children and their families as a key part of the treatment programs and healthcare services.

To this end, the hospital organizes many various activities to ensure continuous communication with patients and their families, as well as to raise patients' satisfaction and encourage them to socialize and distract from the pains of treatment. On Mondays of every week



all year round, the hospital holds a fun activity for children treated at NBK's Specialized Hospital for Children, including inpatients and outpatients visiting the hospital for the necessary medical examinations to follow up on their health conditions.

NBK has also provided an indoor cinema for inpatient children to watch their favorite movies with their siblings. NBK also organizes 'I Dream to Be' program, which is the first of its kind for children in Kuwait hospitals who are facing life-threatening conditions. The initiative helps the children realize their 'dreams' in an effort to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing and help them fight the diseases. Through this program NBK helped many patients realize their dreams over the past years.

The hospital also provides a number of integrated social programs for children and their families as well as the medical staff to ensure an integrated benefit for all. This includes organizing weekly entertainment activities and the selection of "champion of the week", in addition to choosing "the nurse of the month". The hospital also organizes regular activities including "reading corner", library, reading sessions, visits and entertainment activities. This comes within the endeavors to support and care not only for children during their treatment journey, but also for the attending medical staff.



Trump’s family ruffles feathers in Serbia

Senegal votes for new leader after years of crisis



KRASNOGORSK: Mourners stand in a queue to lay flowers at a makeshift memorial in front of the Crocus City Hall in Krasnogorsk on March 24, 2024. — AFP photos

Russia mourns after Moscow massacre

Putin vows ‘retribution’ against ‘terrorist’ perpetrators

**MOSCOW:** Russia was observing a national day of mourning on Sunday after a massacre in a Moscow concert hall killed more than 130 people, the deadliest attack in Europe to have been claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group. Russian President Vladimir Putin has vowed to punish those behind the “barbaric terrorist attack”, saying four gunmen trying to flee to Ukraine had been arrested.

Kyiv has strongly denied any connection, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accusing Putin of trying to shift the blame onto them. “The whole country is in mourning with those who lost their loved ones in this inhumane tragedy,” public television channel Russia 24 said on Sunday morning.

Putin, in his only public remarks on the attack, made no reference to IS’s claims of responsibility. At least 133 people were killed when camouflaged gunmen stormed the Crocus City Hall, in Moscow’s northern suburb of Krasnogorsk, and then set fire to the building on Friday evening.

‘Machine guns, firebombs’

The Islamic State group on Saturday wrote on Telegram that the attack was “carried out by four IS fighters armed with machine guns, a pistol, knives and firebombs,” as part of “the raging war” with “countries fighting Islam”.

A video lasting about a minute and half apparently shot by the gunmen has been posted on social media accounts typically used by IS, according to the SITE intelligence group. The video appears to have been filmed from the lobby of the concert venue and shows several individuals with blurred faces and garbled voices, firing assault rifles with inert bodies strewn on the floor and a fire starting in the

background. The attack was the deadliest in Russia since the Beslan school siege in 2004. Russian officials expect the death toll to rise further, with 110 still in hospital. Rescue workers were still pulling bodies from the burnt-out building on Sunday as the nation mourned.

The emergency situations ministry has so far named 29 of the victims, the blaze having complicated the process of identification. The ministry on Sunday posted a video of heavy equipment arriving at the venue to dismantle damaged structures and clear debris.

‘Morally crushed’

On the streets of the capital on Sunday, there was shock and grief. “It is a tragedy. I was morally crushed,” Ruslana Baranovskaya, 35, told AFP. “People don’t smile ... everybody feels the loss,” said 73-year-old Valentina Karenina, a pensioner, standing on a street off Red Square, next to the Kremlin in the center of Moscow.

Museums, theatres and cinemas around the country closed, and billboards were replaced with memorial posters. Mourners continued to stream to the concert hall in the northwest Moscow to lay flowers at a tribute to the victims.

More than 5,000 people donated blood following the attack, officials said, with many standing in long queues outside clinics. Putin on Saturday had vowed “retribution and oblivion” to the “terrorists, murderers and non-humans” who carried out the “barbaric, terrorist attack.”

Several of his allies have called for the country to lift a moratorium on the death penalty — demands that have sparked concern among Kremlin critics.



People lay flowers and dolls at a makeshift memorial as Russia observes a national day of mourning.

Russia says it has arrested 11 in connection with the attack, including all four assailants. It has not named the shooters, but said they were all foreign nationals.

Putin points to Ukraine

Putin has pointed to a Ukraine connection and has not publicly addressed IS’s claim of responsibility in the 36 hours since the attack. “They tried to escape and were travelling towards Ukraine, where, according to preliminary data, a window was prepared for them on the Ukrainian side to cross the state border,” Putin said of the four attackers in a

televised address to the nation on Saturday — his only public comments so far.

Ukraine’s Zelensky, in his own evening address Saturday, dismissed the suggestion that Kyiv had been involved. “Putin and the other scum are just trying to blame it on someone else,” he said.

In Moscow, some doubted his claims that Ukraine was involved. “I’m not inclined to the version about Ukraine’s involvement ... this (attack) is more like those committed by Islamist extremists,” said Voniik Aliyev, a 22-year-old Muslim who often went to the concert hall. — AFP



JENIN: Mourners lower to the grave the flag-draped body of one of three men killed in a Zionist air strike that targeted a car in Jenin in the occupied West Bank on March 20, 2024. — AFP photos

Fasting and funerals: Violence darkens West Bank Ramadan

**JENIN:** Normally festive Ramadan nights have become rife with danger in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, said hospital director Wisam Bakr, as surging violence casts a long shadow over the Muslim fasting month. His hospital in the northern West Bank city of Jenin has been on the front line of the spike in violence since the Zionist entity began its assault on Gaza in October 2023.

Instead of breaking the daily Ramadan fast with family and friends, “at night we try not to go outside ... because the night is not safe,” said Bakr. “At any hour there may be a raid” by Zionist forces, he said.

As the Zionist pursues its withering military campaign, which it claims is aimed at destroying Palestinian group Hamas, violence in the West Bank involving Zionist forces or settlers — already rising before the war — has spiked to levels unseen in two decades.

Since October 7, the Jenin Government Hospital has received 44 people killed and 264 people wounded in Zionist raids, said the director Bakr. Beyond the casualties and damage the frequent mili-

tary operations have caused, residents of Jenin — a stronghold of Palestinian armed groups — said the violence has translated into quiet streets, subdued celebrations and anxiety.

“There are no people” on the streets, said Mohammed Omar, a sweets vendor who has spent his whole life in Jenin refugee camp, one of the West Bank’s most crowded and impoverished, and the site of repeated Zionist raids.

‘Afraid for my children’

According to Omar, the heavy atmosphere of this year’s Ramadan can be felt not just in the immediate aftermath of raids and strikes, but also on relatively quiet days. “People are staying in their homes, afraid of the bombing, and they don’t have money to spend,” he said.

Even if they did, they would likely have some trouble getting around, as many streets have been damaged and some rendered impassable by Zionist bulldozers carrying out demolitions. The Zionist entity routinely demolishes the homes of Palestinians accused of carrying out attacks, arguing that such measures act as a deterrent, while critics say this policy amounts to collective punishment.

Bakr said the violence and fear had taken a toll on the hospital’s staff and made for a much more reserved Ramadan. Their work is high-pressure, with casualties often arriving at night and overwhelming emergency

medics. “Nowadays I hurry up” to get home after the daily fast ends at sunset, “because I’m afraid not only for me, but for my children too,” Bakr said.

Recently, Zionist forces killed two men inside the hospital, in what the military described as “counter-terrorism activity” against “armed suspects”. In footage stored on Bakr’s phone, one of the men, Mahmud Abu Al-Haija, wearing jeans and a black sweater, is gunned down just outside the emergency ward, leaving a bright red streak of blood on the floor as others drag him away.

The man’s aunt, Farha Abu Al-Haija, told AFP that he was “neither a resistance fighter nor a weapon bearer”, and that he had run to the hospital seeking safety. Both of the slain men’s bodies were draped in green Hamas flags and adorned with headbands of the militant group’s armed wing for their funeral, AFP footage showed.

Farha Abu Al-Haija said she usually looks forward to Ramadan, but now her family and others “are missing a member”. “There is sadness, anger, pain.” At least 444 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist forces or settlers across the West Bank since October 7, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Mokhles Turkman was driving home from work on Wednesday, planning to break the fast with his family, when he heard a loud explosion — a strike the Zionist entity said had targeted Palestinian militants. — AFP



Palestinian men surround a destroyed car following a Zionist strike.

1 killed in Zionist strike on east Lebanon: Source

**BEKAA VALLEY:** A Zionist strike on a car near the Syrian border killed a man Sunday, a security source said, after overnight fire wounded four people in Lebanon’s east, according to an AFP correspondent.

The Zionist entity and Hezbollah, a militant group allied to Hamas, have been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire since the Gaza war erupted in October. But fears have surged of an all-out conflict in recent weeks, with the Zionists launching air strikes deeper into eastern Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah strongholds in the Bekaa valley area several times.

“(Zionist) fighter jets targeted a vehicle in the eastern Bekaa area of Suwairi, killing its Syrian driver,” a security source told AFP, requesting anonymity for security concerns.

Earlier on Sunday, Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency had said a strike on a vehicle in Suwairi injured the driver, before reporting that he had been killed. The NNA said he had been delivering food in a car that belonged to a supermarket owner.

Overnight on Sunday, an AFP correspondent said Zionist strikes targeted a Hezbollah center that had been deserted for some time, wounding four residents in nearby buildings. “The (Zionist) air force fired five missiles at a two-story inhabited building in Al-Osseira, on the outskirts of Baalbek,” he said, referring to the main city in the Bekaa valley.

The Zionist military said in a statement that fighter jets “struck a Hezbollah manufacturing site containing weapons in the area of Baalbek”. Later, Hezbollah said it fired “more than 60 Katyusha-type rockets” at two Zionist military positions in the occupied Golan Heights in response to the strikes.

The Zionist military also said “approximately 50 launches were identified from Lebanon toward (the north of the Zionist entity), a number of launches were intercepted while the rest fell in open areas”. The strike at Al-Osseira, some 100 kilometers (62 miles) from the Zionist-Lebanese border, ended a period of relative calm that had lasted around 10 days. Hezbollah began launching near-daily attacks against the Zionist entity on October 8 in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas in Gaza and said on Saturday it had carried out several more strikes. It says it will only end its attacks on the Zionist entity if there is a ceasefire in Gaza. — AFP

## International

# Senegal votes for new leader after years of crisis

## 7.3 million voters head to the polls with initial official results expected in the next few days

**DAKAR:** Senegal began voting Sunday for a new president in an unpredictable race following three years of turmoil and political crisis. Around 7.3 million voters are registered in the West African nation where two favorites have emerged: the governing coalition's former prime minister Amadou Ba and anti-establishment candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

They were both once tax inspectors but now appear to have little in common. Ba, 62, is offering continuity while the 43-year-old Faye promises profound change and left-wing pan-Africanism. Both say they will claim a first-round victory — but a second round looks probable with 15 other candidates in the field, including a sole woman, at a date yet to be decided. Former Dakar mayor Khalifa Sall, 68, is considered to have an outside chance.

"It's a symbolic and historic day for me because it wasn't easy to hold these elections, it was gained through a great fight," voter Mohamed Bop, 42, told AFP in Dakar. "So, I'm very relieved and proud," he added. The eventual winner will be tasked with steering traditionally stable Senegal out of its recent troubles, and managing revenues from oil and gas reserves that are shortly to start production. Voting will end at 1800 GMT and provisional results could be known overnight. The first official results are expected during the coming week. Senegal has traditionally been considered a beacon of democracy and stability in the coup-hit region, where Russia is strengthening its influence.

### Raucous campaign

Hundreds of observers will be out representing civil society, the African Union, the ECOWAS regional group and the European Union. A raucous campaign, lasting just two weeks after being shortened, followed a dramatic last-minute delay to the election date, originally scheduled for February 25.

## Philippines says 3 soldiers hurt by China water cannon

**MANILA:** Three Philippine troops were injured in the latest China Coast Guard water cannon attack on a Filipino supply vessel near a South China Sea reef, Manila's national security adviser said Sunday.

The Philippine government said Saturday's confrontation caused severe damage to the Unaizah May 4 vessel while it was on its way to deliver troops and provisions to a Philippine navy ship grounded atop the Second Thomas Shoal.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing off rival claims from other countries, including the Philippines, and an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

National Security Adviser Eduardo Ano said three navy personnel aboard the vessel were injured in Saturday's incident. The extent and nature of their injuries were not disclosed, though the military said the personnel were treated aboard a coast guard escort ship.

Four crew members were injured by broken glass in an earlier China Coast Guard water cannon attack on the same vessel on March 5. "This is just an ordinary rotation and resupply or provision operation but look at how the Chinese are reacting," Ano told reporters, according to an interview transcript shared with AFP. — AFP

## Oil 'lifeblood of modern life'....

### Continued from Page 1

Ghais, commenting on sectors that would be affected if the world stopped using oil, said the impact would extend to road, sea and air transport, ambulances, food production, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and equipment. "If oil disappeared, this would also affect the production of renewable energy, such as manufacturing of wind turbines and solar panels, as their production is linked to oil products," he said, adding that "lithium-ion batteries used in electric cars would also be affected".

Ghais highlighted further that "we would also be unable to produce soaps and toothpastes". It would also have catastrophic impacts on millions of people losing their jobs. It would also put manufacturing worldwide to a halt, slow global economic growth and worsen energy poverty in many countries as millions won't be able to secure the energy they need including electricity, he added.

Currently, around 2.3 billion people still lack access to clean cooking fuels and oil can play a role in providing energy to meet these critical needs, he noted. Ghais called for encouraging the development of the oil industry and the investments it requires, while improving the industry's environmental credentials. "This is OPEC's message to the world," he stated.

OPEC continues to receive support and praise for its reasonable calls and efforts to find realistic solutions amidst false information and biased narratives that lack any scientific merit calling for abandoning oil, Ghais said. There have been, he added, reports that oil demand would peak by 2030, "which are regrettably based on ideologies" pushing for abandoning oil and gas in general.

Reports by OPEC and international energy consultancies affirm the important and critical role of oil in the decades to come because of the anticipated growth in the world's population, which is expected to reach 9.5 billion by 2045, of which the majority will happen in developing countries, said Ghais. He

President Macky Sall's intervention to delay the presidential vote sparked unrest that left four people dead. Sall, who won praise abroad last year by renouncing a possible third-term bid, said he called off the vote over fears it would not go smoothly.

After weeks of political crisis, the country's top constitutional body stepped in and forced him to reset the date to March 24, despite clashing with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Sall's hand-picked would-be successor Ba has positioned himself as a last bastion against "bandits" and urged people to vote "for experience and competence instead of entrusting the reins of the country to adventurers".

"We don't need officials who need two years of apprenticeship," Ba said at his final campaign rally on Friday. "We need to consolidate what we have. We need to go even faster and further," he said, with a vow to create one million jobs in five years. But he must also face the darker side of Sall's legacy that includes mass arrests, persistent poverty and 20 percent unemployment, and thousands of migrants setting off on the perilous voyage to Europe each year.

### Radical reform

The recent unrest in Senegal was the latest chapter in episodes of violence since 2021, triggered partly by the stand-off between the firebrand opposition figurehead Ousmane Sonko and the state. Economic and social tensions, as well as concerns that Sall would run for a third term, also fueled the unrest that left dozens killed and hundreds arrested.

The election has also been fired up by a rapidly passed amnesty law that led to the March 14 release from prison of opposition leaders Faye and the charismatic Sonko. Although Faye is Sonko's deputy, he is only on the ballot because Sonko has been barred from standing and in voters' eyes, they are a package deal. Both have attacked Ba as "the greatest danger facing Senegal today".

## More than 130 kidnapped Nigerian children released

**ABUJA:** More than 130 schoolchildren kidnapped by gunmen in northwestern Nigeria earlier this month were released unharmed on Sunday, officials and the army said. The mass abduction in Kuriga, Kaduna state on March 7 was one of the biggest attacks on a school in years and sparked a national outcry over insecurity.

The army said the hostages were freed in the early hours during a rescue operation.

Spokesman Major General Edward Buba shared photos of children wearing dust-coated uniforms in buses. "The rescued hostages totaling 137 comprise of 76 females and 61 males. They were rescued in Zamfara State and would be conveyed and handed over to the Kaduna State Government for further action," he said.

Teachers and residents previously said around 280 pupils between the ages of eight and 15 were kidnapped when armed criminals known in Nigeria as bandits stormed the school on motorbikes.

Discrepancies between the number of people kidnapped and released are common in Nigeria due to unclear early reports and the return of those who go missing while fleeing attacks. But it was not clear why there was such a large difference between the figures this time. Buba told AFP that "all the captives had been rescued". He said no troops had been wounded but did not comment further, citing

said that OPEC projects global oil demand to reach 116 million barrels per day (bpd) in its base scenario and 120 million bpd in one of its alternative scenarios by 2045, and noted there should be adequate investments to provide for "these huge needs for energy and oil". "In order to secure the necessary oil supplies, we need to invest around \$14 trillion in different sectors of the oil industry by 2045," he said, which would support enhancing energy security and the development of technologies that help in reducing emissions.

Ghais noted that calls to stop using oil has caused panic and confusion. "We heard projections during the COVID-19 pandemic that global oil demand had reached its peak and it would soon start dropping. We are now in 2024 and all these projections proved to be wrong, as oil demand has been increasing on an annual basis, reaching record-breaking levels," he said.

OPEC, fulfilling its role by providing the world with secure, stable and environmentally friendly energy, has injected investments in the oil industry and other energy sectors, like renewables, as well as in technologies that can help in reducing emissions. "The organization's member countries believe in the importance of guaranteeing global energy security and reducing emissions," he said.

Member countries of OPEC have actively adopted initiatives and developed projects to support climate change mitigation efforts, Ghais noted, adding that OPEC has been an observer at the Conference of the Parties (COP) since the beginning. For example, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced at COP28 in Dubai a joint initiative aimed at reducing carbon emissions from gas and oil.

OPEC member countries, said Ghais, have abundant natural resources and vast expertise in oil and energy, which should be harnessed towards the development of innovative solutions to reduce emissions and ensure regular and reliable supplies of energy. Among the solutions, he said, were carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), enhanced oil recovery (EOR) using CO2, direct air capture (DAC) and emission reduction strategies to alleviate carbon intensity in oil's upstream, midstream and downstream sectors. — KUNA



**DAKAR:** People wait in front of a polling station in a school in HLM Grand Medine on the outskirts of Dakar, on March 24, 2024. — AFP

They have also questioned where his wealth came from, branding him a "billionaire civil servant" who "will be the president of foreign countries". Faye on Friday pledged to bring "radical reform" to Senegal, including renegotiations of mining, oil and gas and defense contracts, while at the same time offering assurances to foreign investors. "Henceforth we will be a sovereign state, independent, which will work with everyone, but in win-win partnerships", he said.

what he called the "ongoing operation".

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu welcomed the news and the "tireless dedication" of those who helped secure the children's release. Tinubu has faced growing pressure after promising to tackle Nigeria's many security challenges when he came to power last year.

"The president assures Nigerians that his administration is deploying detailed strategies to ensure that our schools remain safe sanctuaries of learning, not lairs for wanton abductions," his spokesman said.

Bandit gangs routinely attack communities, loot villages and carry out mass kidnappings for ransom in northwest and north-central Nigeria. The gangs have targeted schools and colleges in the past, but there had been a lull in these attacks before the Kuriga abductions. Troops had been searching forests for the pupils and relatives said the kidnappers demanded a large ransom — but Tinubu insisted he had ordered security forces not to pay up.

Kidnap victims in Nigeria are often freed following negotiations with the authorities, though a 2022 law banned handing over money to kidnappers and officials deny ransom payments are made. "The abducted Kuriga school children are released unharmed," Kaduna state governor Uba Sani said in a statement that did not specify how they were freed. "This is indeed a day of joy," he said, thanking "all Nigerians who prayed fervently for the safe return of the school children".

### Wave of abductions

Nigeria has recently been hit by a wave of mass abductions and many victims across the country are still missing. Last weekend, kidnappers seized more than 100 people in two attacks in Kaduna state. On Satur-

The pair are hoping to harness Sonko's charisma and popular appeal in a country where half of the population is under 20. Sonko has drawn a passionate following with Senegal's youth through his rhetoric on sovereignty, as well as attacks on elites, multinationals and colonial ruler France. Experts have warned of the potential for tensions to flare on Sunday and after — particularly if Ba wins in the first round, or Faye fails to reach the second. — AFP



**KURIRIGA:** A general view of Kuriga school in Kuri-riga on March 8, 2024, where more than 250 pupils were kidnapped by gunmen. — AFP

day, the army said it had rescued 16 pupils kidnapped just days after the Kuriga attack from a school in Sokoto, also in the northwest.

Hostage-taking has spiraled into a nationwide industry and some experts believe the country's economic crisis is now driving a rise in kidnappings as desperate Nigerians turn to crime for income. Nigerian risk consultancy SBM Intelligence said it had recorded 4,777 people abducted since Tinubu took office in May last year.

The mass kidnapping in Kaduna state and another in Borno state came almost 10 years after Boko Haram militants triggered a huge international outcry in 2014 by abducting more than 250 schoolgirls from Chibok in the northeast. — AFP

## UN chief slams Gaza 'horror and...

### Continued from Page 1

bombardment on Gaza City, the southern urban center of Khan Yunis and other areas. In Gaza's far-southern Rafah city, local resident Hassan Zanoun looked sadly at the remains of his building, reduced to a jumble of broken concrete and rubble by an airstrike.

"My children and I were sleeping here," he told AFP. "I was surprised, we didn't hear the sound of a rocket and suddenly everything was unleashed over our heads... strikes, screams. I got out from under the rubble, and my daughters got out from under the rubble too. What more can I say? Our neighbours are injured, we too are injured, the houses have collapsed over our heads."

The Zionist entity has faced ever greater global scrutiny and opposition to its military campaign as Palestinian civilian deaths have soared and its siege has brought widespread malnutrition and hunger. Guterres urged an end to the "non-stop nightmare" endured by Gaza's 2.4 million people in a visit on Saturday to the Egyptian border with the coastal territory.

## Sudanese risk their lives to...

### Continued from Page 1

Since the war began last April between the army of General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, tens of thousands have died and millions more have been forced to flee their homes. Initiatives like Makki's are some of the only ways that people survive as the impoverished country hangs on the verge of famine.

Makki fled to Egypt to get medical care for his daughter and left the soup kitchen in the care of his mother and young volunteers from the neighborhood. Like many of

He said "nothing justifies" either the Oct 7 attack or the "collective punishment" of Palestinians, and demanded the Zionist entity allow vastly more aid into Gaza. Writing on social media platform X, he said "horror and starvation stalk the people of Gaza. Any further onslaught will make everything worse. Worse for Palestinian civilians, for the hostages, for all people of the region. "It's more than time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire & the immediate release of all hostages."

Deadly fighting meanwhile rocked Gaza, where Hamas reported 21 deaths on Saturday at an aid distribution point on the outskirts of Gaza City. Hamas said they were killed by Zionist "tank fire and shells". Zionist forces also pressed on with their offensive in and around the Al-Shifa hospital complex. The army said it had avoided harm to civilians and medics, but the UN humanitarian office OCHA said "health workers have been among those reported arrested and detained". The Hamas government media office said 190 people had been killed in the operation, and 30 nearby buildings destroyed.

Tensions have grown between the Zionist entity and its traditional top ally the United States, which has called for greater efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. The main flashpoint is the Zionist entity's plan to push its ground invasion into Rafah city on the Egyptian border, where some 1.5 million Palestinians are living, mostly in overcrowded shelters. — AFP

his compatriots, he now coordinates donations from the Sudanese diaspora to send back to those trying to survive the fighting.

Shortly after the conflict's first shots rang out, young people began volunteering to cook in their homes, volunteer coordinator Abdel Ghaffar Omar told AFP in Cairo. The idea quickly spread and hundreds of self-funded "community kitchens" popped up across the country. They were able to use grassroots neighborhood youth groups called "resistance committees" that had previously organized pro-democracy protests and helped coordinate the COVID-19 response.

When war erupted, the committees created Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) to provide civilians in the line of fire with healthcare, evacuation help and food aid. — AFP

## International

## Trump's family ruffles feathers in Serbia

## Serbians angry over deal transferring site of 1999 NATO bombing to company owned by Jared Kushner

**BELGRADE:** A bombed-out building in Belgrade, which has stood as a national symbol of the 1999 NATO strikes on Serbia, might soon become a luxury hotel financed by Donald Trump's son-in-law — much to the anger of locals. Jared Kushner, who also served as an adviser to his father-in-law during his US presidency, confirmed in mid-March his plans to invest in luxury real estate in Serbia, including the old site of the Yugoslav army headquarters.

Serbian opposition member of parliament Aleksandar Jovanovic Cuta and an investigation by the New York Times revealed that the Serbian government was going to transfer the building and the surrounding land to a company owned by Kushner.

Leaked plans indicated the building will be replaced by three large glass towers a few meters from the Serbian defense and foreign ministries. The 99-year lease was given to Kushner's company free of charge, the New York Times said.

The sale of the building is a sensitive issue for Serbians as it has become an emblem of the 1999 US-led NATO aerial bombing campaign that put an end to the war in Kosovo. "Leaving it like this for another 200 years isn't really a solution," retired journalist Srdja Nikolic said. "But I am against the idea of giving it as a gift to anyone — particularly to those who initiated what happened."

## Symbol of 'struggle'

The bombing began on March 24, 1999, without the approval of the UN Security Council. It aimed to end Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic's bloody crackdown on ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo. It ended in June that year with the withdrawal of

Serbian forces from Kosovo, putting an end to the conflict that killed more than 13,000 people.

The ruined building "is evidence of the destruction of international law," Nikolic said, "destroyed in 1999 by the trampling of the United Nations Charter, with false excuses." Even in ruins, the building "represents our struggle, a difficult period that we navigated and from which we emerged victorious", said Sanja Handzic, a 28-year-old local dental technician.

The building, which was the headquarters of the old Yugoslav army, was declared a "cultural asset" by the Serbian government in 2005. Local resident Jasminka Avramovic, 66, remembers the day the building was hit by a bomb. "I was born in the Senjak district, near here. When they bombed here, I came to Sarajevo Street to pick up pieces of glass. I still have the pieces of glass as a souvenir. It was a catastrophe. They are not nice memories," she said.

"We have to rebuild it, it's ugly," the retiree said, "but what a magnificent idea" to give the building to the Americans, she remarked bitterly. "They are not really our friends. I wouldn't give it to them. If we have to give it away, we should give it to Russia."

## Memory of NATO bombings

The memory of NATO's bombings are everywhere in Serbia and a quarter of a century later, resentment towards the alliance is still strong amongst locals. The official death toll from the 11 weeks of bombardments has never been confirmed.

The figures range from 500 dead, according to the NGO Human Rights Watch, to 2,500, according to Serbian officials. "The memory of the 1990s is unpleasant," said Zoran Stosic, 83, "but we have to



**BELGRADE:** Cars drive past the bomb damaged building of the former federal military headquarters in Belgrade on March 19, 2024, which was destroyed 25 years ago. — AFP

leave these buildings as they are, because they remind us of those unpleasant times. It's not just the beautiful things that we should remember."

For him, rather than a luxury hotel, it should be a

place of remembrance. "We should preserve these buildings, conserve them, and turn them into a museum. To remind us the importance of peace, that these things should not happen again." — AFP

## Erdogan seeks win as Turkey heads to local elections

**ISTANBUL:** Turks will vote next Sunday in local polls as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, buoyed by a strong showing in last year's general elections, sets his sights on winning back Istanbul. The secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) seized back control of the city — Turkey's economic powerhouse — in 2019 for the first time since before Erdogan ruled it as mayor in the 1990s. Those watershed 2019 elections also saw the opposition win back the capital Ankara and keep power in the crucial Aegean port city of Izmir, shattering Erdogan's image of political invincibility.

Erdogan has entrusted his former environment minister Murat Kurum to run for mayor of Istanbul in the March 31 election. He is seeking to avenge the worst political defeat of his two-decade rule, when CHP arch rival Ekrem Imamoglu took the town hall.

The powerful president bounced back last year to win a tough presidential election that came in the throes of an economic crisis and a massive earthquake that claimed more than 53,000 lives in Turkey. Now, Erdogan has set his sights on winning back Istanbul — the city where he grew up and where he launched his political career as mayor in 1994.

Imamoglu edged out an Erdogan ally in a 2019 election that gained international headlines for being controversially annulled. He won a re-run vote by a massive margin that turned him into an instant hero for the opposition and a formidable foe for Erdogan.

## 'Glimmer of hope'

The 52-year-old is widely seen as the opposition's best bet at winning back the presidency from Erdogan's AKP party in 2028. "Imamoglu is an effective political operator and at this point in time represents one of the very few glimmers of hope for constituents who oppose Erdogan and the AKP," Anthony Skinner, director of research at geopolitical advisory firm Marlow Global, told AFP. But last year's poor general election showing fractured the opposition and prompted the pro-Kurdish DEM Party — the third largest in parliament — to put up its own candidates for next week's local elections. This could cost the opposition.

"The underperformance of the political opposition at the May 2023 elections demonstrated its failure to effectively challenge the political status quo



**ANKARA:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, addresses supporters during an election campaign rally ahead of the March 31 municipal elections. — AFP

and, by extension, the resilience and resourcefulness of Erdogan," Skinner said.

In 2019, the CHP's Imamoglu received support from a wide range of political parties that included the right-wing IYI, Kurds and Socialists who oppose Erdogan. But the lack of unity this time is likely to cost Imamoglu several percentage points.

## 'Biggest prize'

Erdogan is leading the AKP campaign and his rallies are broadcast daily on television, whereas the opposition candidates are given little airtime. They use social media instead. The Erdogan government's failure to bring soaring inflation of 67 percent under control could hurt his candidate Kurum's chances. "We will open the door of a new era on March 31," Erdogan told a huge rally in Istanbul on Sunday, hoping to unite supporters behind Kurum. "We will work a lot and win back Istanbul."

Berk Esen, an associate professor at Istanbul's Sabanci University, portrayed Istanbul as "the biggest prize in Turkish politics". He said winning back the city was extremely important for Erdogan, 70, who said these March local elections would be his last. "Obviously, this is his city," Esen said. "But it

## Global support

Following other warm words from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the White House, British newspapers hailed her courage. "Kate, you are not alone" read the front page of The Sun. The tabloid said it was "hugely comforting" to hear Kate say she was getting stronger. "Perhaps the world will now appreciate why so much secrecy surrounded her surgery in January," it added.

The Daily Mail tabloid denounced the "social media trolls who have been peddling disgusting conspiracy theories to explain her absence from public life". Finance minister Jeremy Hunt, whose younger brother died of cancer last year, told Sky News on Sunday that "the thing that really cut me to the quick was when she explained the hardest thing of all for people who've had cancer in their family, which is how you tell your kids".

Outside Kensington Palace in London, Nathaniel Taylor, a 24-year-old government worker, said: "I think it's really damning what happened to them, what the media has done, how they've reacted over these past couple of months. "I think some speculation is inevitable but the lengths people were going to try and make things up, it's just ... Hopefully people take a look in the mirror."

## Royal health woes

In her statement, Kate, as the princess is widely known, said the diagnosis was a "huge shock" and asked for "time, space and privacy" as she completes chemotherapy. In the video — recorded on Wednesday in Windsor, west of London, where the future queen and king live with their three young children — she insisted she was "well".

She said it had taken them time to explain the situation to Prince George, aged 10, Princess Charlotte, eight, and five-year-old Prince Louis, "and to reas-

sure them that I am going to be OK".

Buckingham Palace had announced on February 5 that tests had identified Charles had "a form of cancer", without giving further details. He has cancelled all public engagements except audiences with the prime minister and ambassadors and is working on official papers while receiving treatment.

He has been photographed several times since then and seen attending church. "There's no doubt at all that it's a very, very difficult time for the institution of monarchy," royal expert Richard Fitzwilliams told AFP. Kate was last seen at a public engagement on December 25. Kensington Palace announced on January 17 that she faced up to two weeks in hospital and several months' recuperation following abdominal surgery.

She was not expected to be ready to return to public duties until after Easter on March 31, a statement at the time said. But Kate disclosed that tests after the operation "found cancer had been present" and that she was now undergoing "preventative chemotherapy". Kensington Palace said she would return to official duties "when she is cleared to do so by her medical team". — AFP



**Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales.**

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## Klinton and Tonibler: Kosovo's war legacy enshrined in names

**PRISTINA:** With statues, American flags and streets named after US presidents, Kosovo's undying gratitude for the Western military intervention that pushed the Serbian government out of the break-away province is obvious at first glance.

But families also offered their own private thanks, with many naming their children born in the war's shadow after the leading American and British political leaders who backed the NATO campaign 25 years ago. "It is a special honor to bear this name. I am proud of it," said Klinton Gashi, a 24-year-old student at Kosovo's defense academy named after former US president Bill Clinton. The name, he explained, was "a sign of gratitude for what Clinton and the American people did for us during the war". The US-led campaign that began on March 24, 1999 ended a conflict that left more than 13,000 people dead — the vast majority Kosovo Albanians — in the final chapter of Yugoslavia's bloody collapse.

Gashi and other members of Kosovo's Generation Z are now maturing into adulthood with their lives so far charting Kosovo's turbulent history that has been largely dominated by tensions with Serbia. To help manage the neighbors' bitter relations and occasional unrest, a contingency of NATO troops remain stationed in Kosovo.

## 'The most we could do'

Western politicians and diplomats also regularly pass through Kosovo, with many hoping to broker a lasting settlement between Serbia and the Pristina government that would normalize ties. Others simply come to enjoy a proverbial victory lap, where they are lauded in public and private for their contribution to the war. During one such trip, Tonibler Dajaku was able to see his namesake — former British prime minister Tony Blair — in person during a whistle stop tour of Kosovo. "We are a small country, with small finances. We can never repay our allies other than by naming our children after their leaders," said the 20-year-old. "That is the most we could do. And that is very little."

Pro-Western sentiment remains extraordinarily high in Kosovo, where aspirations to one day join NATO and the EU remain complicated by the lack of formal recognition of the Pristina government by several of the alliance and bloc's members. "It is certain that without the intervention of NATO, none of us would not be here for this interview today. Nor would Kosovo be independent," historian and diplomat Syle Ukshini told AFP.

Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said the month of March remains a cherished spot on the calendar for many Kosovar Albanians. This year's anniversary of the war comes as tensions with Belgrade remain high following the ban of the Serbian dinar currency earlier this year.

Kosovo remains overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Albanians, but in the northern stretches of the territory near the border with Serbia, ethnic Serbs remain the majority in several municipalities. Despite its uncertain future, many in Kosovo have little doubt that the NATO intervention was a decisive moment during their violent past. "It would be a very difficult history for us as a nation, but also for the entire world, if the West sat idly by, not reacting against atrocities during the war," said Gashi. — AFP



**PRISTINA:** Klinton Gashi, a student at Kosovo's defense academy who was named after former US president Bill Clinton, poses in front of Clinton's statue. — AFP

# Business

MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024

## Al-Kharafi: Gulf Bank is in the process of developing an innovative strategy

AGM approves distribution of 12% cash dividends and 5% bonus shares for 2023



**KUWAIT:** The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly of Gulf Bank was held on March 23, 2024, with a quorum of 79.16 percent. The Board of Directors is recommending a distribution of a cash dividend of 12 fils per share, and to distribute 5 percent bonus shares was approved during the meeting.

During his speech addressed to the shareholders, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gulf Bank said: "I am proud of Gulf Bank's excellent financial results for the year 2023, achieving the highest level of net profits during the past decade. The increase in profitability was matched with an increase in dividends cash distributions to 12 percent, accompanied by bonus shares distributions of 5 percent."

He mentioned that the Bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait-focused strategy. It is steadily advancing towards its strategic objectives of delivering unparalleled banking services to customers, enhancing operational efficiencies, and upholding financial transparency and governance principles. These efforts are firmly rooted within the Bank's commitment to providing sustainable value to all stakeholders over the long run.

He added: "We are working hard to strengthen our systems and policies to ensure we achieve the highest standards of financial performance, and to remain at the forefront in providing innovative and reliable banking services." He stressed that the Bank will continue to achieve outstanding results and remarkable financial stability.

He continued: "The performance we have demonstrated over the past years highlights the trust the Bank enjoys in the financial markets and local banking sector, announcing that Gulf Bank is in the process of developing an innovative strategy for the forthcoming years focusing on enhancing financial and operational performance, and providing the best products and services."

Al-Kharafi expressed appreciation to the former Chair of Gulf Bank's Board of Directors, Jassim Mustafa Boodai, for his valued efforts and leadership, which played a pivotal role in driving exceptional growth across all performance indicators of the Bank. He conveyed his best wishes for Boodai's and extended his gratitude to all members of the Board of Directors, the executive management, and all employees for their contributions to the Bank's success.

### Success despite challenges

In his presentation of key performance indicators, the Acting CEO of Gulf Bank, Waleed Khalid Mandani, stated: "2023 was a successful year for Gulf Bank, full of achievements despite local and regional challenges."

He highlighted the Bank's continuous and steady approach towards exceptional revenue growth and profitability, while maintaining its high assets quality, through controlling non-performing loan ratios at their lowest levels and investing in the development of human capital.

He added: "We have also made significant progress in enhancing cost efficiency through precise evaluation, streamlining processes, and embracing digital innovation. These efforts have had a positive and noticeable impact on returns to our investors and delivered excellent services to our customers, thereby solidifying Gulf Bank's leading position in the local banking sector."

### Financial indicators

On a related note, Mandani outlined the key financial indicators for Gulf Bank during the year 2023, noting that the Bank achieved a 15 percent growth in net profits to reach KD 71.2 million,



### Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

- The Bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait-focused strategy while taking steady steps towards achieving its strategic priorities.
- We continuously strive to deliver sustainable value to all stakeholders over the long run.
- We are committed towards achieving high financial performance and maintaining our leadership in providing innovative and reliable banking services.
- Our performance over the years reflects the trust Gulf Bank enjoys in the local financial and banking segment.
- We thank Jassim Mustafa Boodai for his dedicated efforts during his tenure as Chair of Gulf Bank's Board of Directors.

compared to KD 61.8 million in 2022. Earnings per share also increased by 13 percent to 21 fils, while cash distributions increased from 10 fils per share in 2022 to 12 fils in 2023, with a payout ratio of 57 percent of net profit, alongside a 5 percent bonus share distribution.

He pointed out that the total loans and advances increased by 1 percent to KD 5.5 billion in 2023, with an increase of KD 68 million compared to 2022. Asset quality remained strong, with non-performing loans at 1.2 percent, supported by substantial coverage at 466 percent. Additionally, total credit provisions ended 2023 at KD 312 million with excess provisioning level above and beyond what is required by the IFRS9 accounting requirements by KD 125 million.

Furthermore, the regulatory capital adequacy ratio increased from 16.4 percent in 2022 to 18 percent in 2023, exceeding the minimum regulatory requirement of 14 percent. Mandani noted that Gulf Bank holds an "A" rating from the three major credit rating agencies. April 8, 2024 record date for cash dividend distribution Shareholders registered in the bank's records as of the record date, April 8, 2024, are eligible to receive cash dividends, with distribution set for April 18, 2024.

### Recognition

Bader Al-Kharafi stated: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Capital Markets Authority, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for their relentless efforts in supporting and enhancing the Kuwaiti banking sector. Additionally, I extend my thanks to all our customers, partners, and shareholders for their trust and support."

### Eco-friendly branch network

Gulf Bank launched its first eco-friendly branch in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area, marking the beginning of a comprehensive network transition towards sustainability. This initiative aligns with the bank's ongoing implementation plan, reflecting its commitment to embedding sustainability principles. Gulf Bank is confident that integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards into its practices and activities will enhance the customers'



### Waleed Khalid Mandani

- 2023 was a successful year for Gulf Bank, full of achievements despite local and regional challenges.
- The Bank continued its steady approach towards exceptional revenue growth and profitability, while maintaining its high assets quality.
- We have made significant progress in enhancing cost efficiency through precise evaluation, streamlining processes, and embracing digital innovation.

experience and promote sustainable products and services in the market.

### Prestigious awards

During 2023, Gulf Bank was recognized by several prestigious organizations. Gulf Bank was awarded with "Best Prepaid Card Program in Kuwait" award for 2023 during the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum, for the Gulf Bank Mastercard Prepaid Card. In addition, Gulf Bank was awarded two awards for "Best Training and Development" and "Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion" by the Middle East and North Africa Human Resources Management Summit 2023 signifying Gulf Bank's outstanding efforts in enhancing its employees' skills and achievements in promoting sustainability principles within the workplace. Furthermore, Gulf Bank was awarded "The Prestigious Excellence in Data Innovation" award by the 2023 Finnovex Awards Summit in recognition of its excellence in leveraging data to drive transformative change and create new opportunities in the banking industry.



Gulf Bank Annual Report 2023



Gulf Bank shareholders attending the general assembly meeting.



AL-AZRAKIYA, Iraq: Farmers set up the sprinklers on a farm in the village of Al-Azrakiya, in Iraq's central province of Anbar. – AFP photos

# Sprinklers, drip irrigation help Iraqis beat drought

## Farmers endure water scarcity worsened by upstream river dams in Iran, Turkey

**AL-AZRAKIYA:** After four years of drought, Iraqi farmer Mohammed Sami was about to abandon his father's parched land, but then a water-saving irrigation system revived his crops and his hopes. He is among hundreds of farmers in the country battered by heatwaves, scarce rain and depleted rivers to benefit from new water management systems brought by the UN World Food Programme.

The systems use automated sprinklers and drip irrigation to ensure scarce water is used in the most efficient way and is not lost as run-off or evaporated under the blazing sun.

"Since 2019, due to the water scarcity, we have been unable to farm the land," said 38-year-old Sami in his village of Al-Azrakiya in the central province of Anbar. Crushed by the drought that was turning his 10 donums, or about one hectare, of land into desert, Sami started working in a nearby city as a day laborer several years ago.

"I thought about giving up farming for good," he said. But then, two years ago, Sami's prospects changed, and his land has flourished again. The WFP helped with a new automated irrigation system

that waters his field for just two hours per day, two to three days a week.

"I now irrigate 10 donums with the same amount of water that I used for one donum before," he said, adding that his wheat harvest had shot up from seven to 12 tons per year. Last year the WFP project helped more than 1,100 farmers "in areas most affected by climate change and drought," said Khansae Ghazi from the UN agency's Baghdad office.

The new irrigation systems "use 70 percent less water than traditional methods such as flooding"—the vastly more wasteful method used for millennia. The modern techniques allow farmers to grow diverse crops year-round, also including barley, cucumber, watermelon and eggplant, and reduce "the reliance on unpredictable rainfall", the WFP said.

Iraq, still recovering from years of war and chaos, is one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, according to the United Nations. The site of ancient Mesopotamia, where civilizations flourished on the banks of the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Iraq now endures extreme water scarcity, worsened by upstream river dams in Iran



AL-AZRAKIYA, Iraq: A farmer adjusts a sprinkler, part of a new water management systems brought by the UN World Food Programme, on his farm in the village of Al-Azrakiya, in Iraq's central province of Anbar.

and Turkey. "Iraq is the Land of Two Rivers, its more than 7,000-year-old civilization has always relied on farming," said agriculture ministry spokesman Mohammed Al-Khazai.

"For decades, the country was afflicted by floods, not drought." But as rainfall has become more irregular and water more scarce, leaving aquifers depleted, many farmers have abandoned their plots in the new dust-bowl regions. During the

2021–22 season, the farm sector's productivity plunged by 36 percent from the previous year, said the WFP.


State authorities have restricted water use for agriculture to ensure sufficient drinking water for Iraq's 43 million people. To fight the problem, the ministry has also started offering sprinkler systems that farmers can pay off over a decade, with the state covering 30 percent of the cost.

"At first, it was difficult for the farmer to switch to modern irrigation," said Khazai.

But now the ministry hopes to boost harvests to more than six million tons of wheat in 2024, from five million last year. This would exceed Iraq's domestic needs and present a big jump from around two million tons in 2022. The UN agency warns there are limits to the gains brought by new techniques.

"While modern irrigation systems can significantly improve water efficiency and agricultural practices in Iraq, it may not be sufficient to tackle the complex issue of drought," it said.


But for now, farmers are happy with the gains they are seeing, among them Souad Mehdi in the village of Al-Azrakiya near the Euphrates, who said she has doubled her harvest. The 40-year-old grows wheat and barley in the winter and corn, tomatoes and eggplant in the summer on her one-hectare plot. "It used to take us two days to water our crops," she said. Now, she fills a basin with river water then turns on the sprinklers, a task that "doesn't take more than two hours". – AFP





شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY


## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT


WEEK ENDED ON 21 MARCH 2024


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| Market         | M. Cap (KD ml) | Last Close | WTD % | MTD % | YTD % | Quantity Traded | Value Traded | No. of Trades | P/E  | P/B | % of Total M. Cap |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|------|-----|-------------------|
| Premier Market | 37,008         | 8,117.16   | -0.4% | -0.5% | 8.6%  | 404,843,582     | 128,010,414  | 28,478        | 18.1 | 1.3 | 82.6%             |
| Main Market    | 7,806          | 6,121.01   | -0.2% | 0.6%  | 9.9%  | 223,825,624     | 31,004,775   | 14,942        | 12.8 | 0.8 | 17.4%             |
| All Share      | 44,814         | 7,415.81   | -0.4% | -0.3% | 8.8%  | 628,669,206     | 159,015,188  | 43,420        | 14.3 | 1.0 | 100%              |

| Sector                 | M. Cap (KD ml) | Last Close | WTD % | MTD % | YTD %  | Quantity Traded | Value Traded | No. of Trades | P/E   | P/B | % of Total M. Cap |
|------------------------|----------------|------------|-------|-------|--------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|-------|-----|-------------------|
| Banking                | 26,888         | 1,795.27   | -0.4% | -0.8% | 9.0%   | 120,582,974     | 57,200,998   | 9,536         | 17.2  | 1.3 | 60.00%            |
| Basic Materials        | 441            | 782.28     | 0.1%  | 0.3%  | 4.9%   | 2,657,798       | 1,614,574    | 865           | 10.4  | 2.3 | 0.99%             |
| Consumer Discretionary | 1,191          | 1,731.59   | 3.6%  | 3.9%  | 8.0%   | 32,400,920      | 12,619,754   | 4,429         | 12.7  | 1.5 | 2.66%             |
| Consumer Staples       | 224            | 735.74     | 2.9%  | 2.9%  | 11.7%  | 5,910,160       | 2,518,794    | 641           | 109.6 | 1.3 | 0.50%             |
| Energy                 | 216            | 1,036.09   | 0.2%  | 0.2%  | 9.2%   | 1,774,208       | 160,066      | 243           | 10.5  | 0.8 | 0.48%             |
| Financial Services     | 4,744          | 1,383.84   | -0.4% | -0.2% | 14.2%  | 292,502,783     | 39,912,863   | 11,730        | 18.2  | 0.9 | 10.59%            |
| Health Care            | 233            | 485.91     | 3.5%  | -0.1% | 0.8%   | 200             | 96,000       | 1             | 13.1  | 1.6 | 0.52%             |
| Industrials            | 3,452          | 1,011.89   | -1.1% | -0.3% | 11.5%  | 43,398,625      | 18,210,096   | 5,369         | 13.8  | 1.0 | 7.70%             |
| Insurance              | 1,044          | 2,554.03   | -0.1% | 1.3%  | 11.4%  | 8,744,518       | 629,400      | 895           | 10.4  | 1.2 | 2.33%             |
| Real Estate            | 2,766          | 1,300.98   | -0.5% | 1.7%  | 7.3%   | 105,057,425     | 18,198,640   | 6,553         | 16.9  | 0.7 | 6.17%             |
| Technology             | 27             | 1,935.15   | -0.7% | -4.7% | 234.6% | 86,518          | 22,691.17    | 33            | NM    | 2.3 | 0.06%             |
| Telecommunications     | 3,402          | 1,113.06   | -0.9% | -0.4% | 0.7%   | 14,388,448      | 7,730,594    | 2,869         | 10.1  | 1.4 | 7.59%             |
| Utilities              | 186            | 444.74     | -0.6% | -0.6% | -2.3%  | 1,164,629       | 196,623      | 256           | 14.8  | 1.5 | 0.41%             |

Top Gainers

| Stock     | Last Close | Change % | Volume     | Value      | Trades |
|-----------|------------|----------|------------|------------|--------|
| KCIN      | 1,415      | 15.51%   | 109,961    | 143,944    | 27     |
| IFAHR     | 1,120      | 7.69%    | 3,417,515  | 3,800,612  | 1,292  |
| MENA      | 41.9       | 7.16%    | 7,657,343  | 324,406    | 234    |
| TAHSSILAT | 51         | 7.14%    | 1,730,864  | 84,908     | 193    |
| KPROJ     | 132        | 5.60%    | 91,053,999 | 11,854,699 | 1,414  |

Top Volume

| Stock     | Last | Change % | Volume     | Value      | Trades |
|-----------|------|----------|------------|------------|--------|
| KPROJ     | 132  | 5.60%    | 91,053,999 | 11,854,699 | 1,414  |
| GFH       | 87.9 | 1.03%    | 51,835,023 | 4,507,460  | 1,380  |
| KFH       | 807  | -0.49%   | 29,471,691 | 23,799,954 | 3,063  |
| KIB       | 169  | -1.17%   | 20,942,723 | 3,549,156  | 631    |
| ALTUJARIA | 128  | 0.79%    | 19,887,285 | 2,560,704  | 649    |

Top Losers

| Stock   | Last Close | Change % | Volume     | Value     | Trades |
|---------|------------|----------|------------|-----------|--------|
| MRC     | 90.5       | -14.62%  | 125,333    | 11,949    | 47     |
| SENERGY | 33.9       | -8.87%   | 574,424    | 19,007    | 56     |
| GFC     | 74.3       | -8.04%   | 53,591     | 3,841     | 14     |
| KCEM    | 194        | -7.62%   | 19,859,367 | 4,005,983 | 1,014  |
| DALQAN  | 137        | -7.43%   | 703,133    | 97,551    | 132    |

Top Value

| Stock   | Last | Change % | Volume     | Value      | Trades |
|---------|------|----------|------------|------------|--------|
| KFH     | 807  | -0.49%   | 29,471,691 | 23,799,954 | 3,063  |
| NBK     | 971  | 0.41%    | 14,970,025 | 14,508,447 | 2,267  |
| KPROJ   | 132  | 5.60%    | 91,053,999 | 11,854,699 | 1,414  |
| MABANEE | 850  | -0.58%   | 7,731,842  | 6,489,614  | 1,339  |
| ZAIN    | 501  | -1.38%   | 11,243,565 | 5,643,071  | 2,158  |

UTILITIES 0%

TELECOM 5%

BANKING 36%

BASIC MATERIALS 1%

CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY 8%

CONSUMER STAPLES 2%

ENERGY 0%

FINANCIAL SERVICES 25%

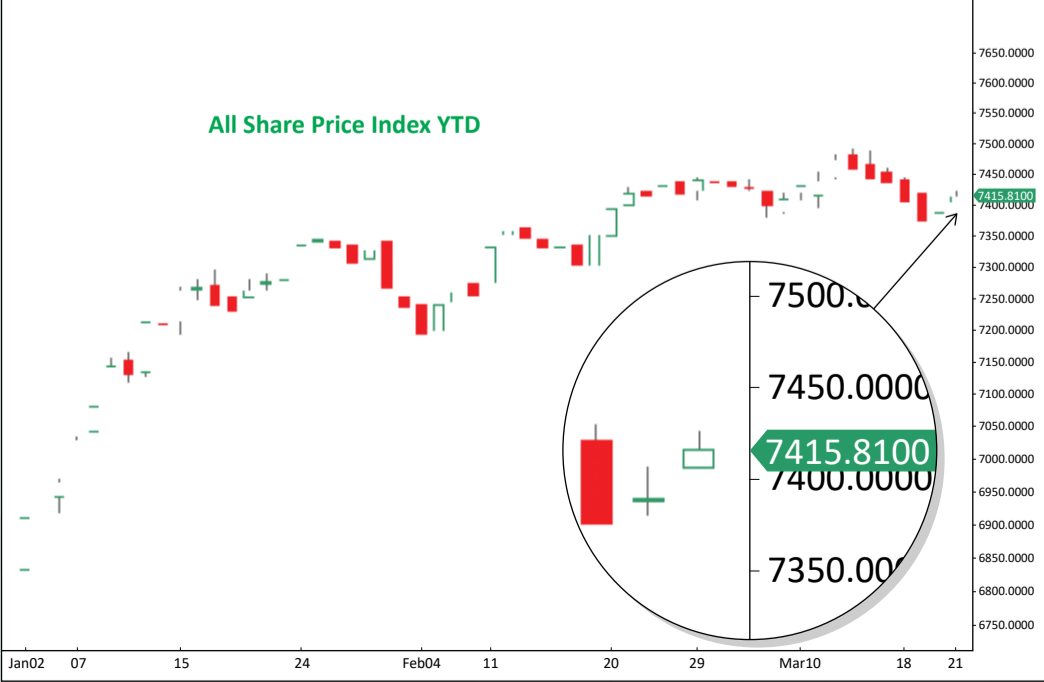
INDUSTRIALS 12%

REAL ESTATE 11%

INSURANCE 0%

VALUE TRADED

All Share Price Index YTD



Market Summary:

- Premier and Main markets volume and value dropped by 25% 35%, and 36% 41%, respectively.
- The Premier index rebounds from a critical resistance level, while the Main index still fluctuates.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7415, with support levels at 7379, 7318, and 7286, while resistance at 7417. The Premier index closed at 8117, with support levels at 8116, 8083, and 8044, while resistance at 8151. The Main index closed at 6121, with support levels at 6112, 6083, and 6058, while resistance was at 6153.

## Business

# IMF chief urges China to boost growth with ‘pro-market reforms’

## Economy beset by housing crisis, low domestic demand and high unemployment

**BEIJING:** The head of the International Monetary Fund on Sunday called on China to implement “a comprehensive package of pro-market reforms” to boost a sluggish economy beset by a housing market crisis, low domestic demand and persistently high youth unemployment. Chinese policymakers have so far resisted calls to juice the economy through massive government stimulus, instead stressing the need to pivot towards “high-quality” growth.

Speaking at the China Development Forum in Beijing on Sunday, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said the “transition from high rates to high quality of growth is the right fork in the road to take and China is determined to do so”.

The Bulgarian economist warned that “this transformation would not be easy”, but argued that “with a comprehensive package of pro-market reforms, China could grow considerably faster than a status quo scenario”, according to an official transcript of her speech. Beijing should

take “decisive steps” to reduce the amount of unfinished housing and give more space for “market-based corrections” in the crucial but heavily indebted real-estate sector, Georgieva said.

Authorities should also boost “the spending power of individuals and families” by beefing up China’s pension system and taking other steps to hone its vast social security apparatus, she added. Georgieva also pushed China to strengthen “the business environment and (ensure) a level playing field between private and state-owned enterprises”, a long-standing demand of overseas business groups operating in the Asian nation.

Top Chinese politicians have been outwardly bullish on the economy, with Premier Li Qiang telling Sunday’s forum that Beijing would “take practical, effective actions to promote high-quality development and inject positive energy... into the global economic recovery”. But GDP growth rates in China have been trending downwards for years, and Beijing this month set an annual target



International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Kristalina Georgieva speaks during the China Development Forum in Beijing on March 24, 2024. — AFP

of “around five percent” — significantly lower than the breakneck expansion rates that powered the country’s meteoric rise to prosperity.

Sunday’s forum was attended by some of the world’s highest-profile business figures, including Apple’s Tim Cook, who said he had enjoyed an “outstanding” meeting with Li. “I think China’s really opening up, and I’m so happy to be here,” the CEO of the United States’ largest smartphone empire told a reporter from CGTN, according to a video posted on one of the state-run broadcaster’s social media accounts.

In separate comments published online by state broadcaster CCTV, Cook said Apple would keep increasing its investment in research and development in China. He added that Apple’s flagship mixed-reality headset, the Vision Pro, would hit shelves in China by the end of this year, according to a social media post that carried his remarks in Chinese translation only.

Cook was in Shanghai to open a new Apple store this week, and on Friday discussed the company’s expansion plans in China with the country’s commerce minister, Wang Wentao. — AFP

## News in Brief

### McDonald’s stores shut in Sri Lanka

**COLOMBO:** McDonald’s stores across Sri Lanka shut Sunday after the US fast-food giant launched a legal battle with its local franchise holder over allegations of poor hygiene, court officials said. The Commercial High Court of Colombo ordered the closures until April 4, after the parent company accused the local franchise holder of failing to meet international hygiene standards. “The closure was ordered pending an investigation,” a court official said. He said lawyers for McDonald’s told the court that they had terminated a franchise agreement with local company Abans last week. The hearing is to resume in early April. — AFP

### Fitch downgrades China giant Vanke

**SHANGHAI:** Fitch downgraded the credit rating of major Chinese property developer Vanke on Friday, the second agency to do so in ten days as the country’s property sector grapples with unprecedented challenges. Some Chinese developers are on the verge of bankruptcy and lower property prices have deterred consumers from making investments. Vanke — long considered to be financially stable — was downgraded by Fitch on Friday from “BBB” to “BB+”, citing the group’s “weakened sales performance” and challenges accessing funding. “China Vanke’s ratings are constrained by its liability profile and funding access amid sizable and rising capital-market debt maturities in 2024 and 2025”, the US credit rating agency said. — AFP

### UK ups competition concerns

**LONDON:** Britain’s competition regulator Friday said Vodafone’s plan to merge its British mobile phone operations with those of Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison, risked higher prices for customers. The Competition and Markets Authority said it could deepen its probe, after launching in January an investigation into the deal, should the pair fail to address regulator concerns. The proposed tie-up, announced in June last year, is aimed at creating Britain’s biggest mobile operator with 27 million customers and to accelerate rollout of faster 5G connectivity. In a statement Friday, the CMA said it is “concerned the deal... could lead to mobile customers facing higher prices and reduced quality”. — AFP

### Vietnam recalls 6,000 VinFast EVs

**HANOI:** Vietnam’s leading electric car manufacturer VinFast has recalled almost 6,000 vehicles after a fault in their indicator system was discovered, the government has confirmed, in a fresh blow to the firm. The communist state’s first homegrown auto maker is hoping to compete with electric vehicle (EV) giants such as Tesla, and is trying to crack the global market. But VinFast has struggled to convince international drivers its EVs are reliable and high-quality, and earlier this year reported a \$2 billion loss for 2023 after missing sales targets. — AFP

### Aston Martin poaches Bentley CEO

**LONDON:** British luxury car brand Aston Martin Lagonda on Friday said Adrian Hallmark would become its chief executive, poaching him from German-owned peer Bentley where he has stepped down as CEO. Hallmark, 61, will take the wheel at Aston Martin by October 1, replacing Italian national Amedeo Felisa, who since May 2022 has helped steer around performance at the brand. The Briton will be the fourth chief executive in as many years at Aston, beloved by fictional British spy James Bond. “When Amedeo was appointed CEO, I spoke of him leading a new phase of growth and development,” Chairman Lawrence Stroll said of Aston’s current boss. “Two years on, we have delivered on that promise, as we near completion of our thrilling new product portfolio and move closer to our vision of becoming the world’s most desirable, ultra-luxury British performance brand,” he added in a company statement Friday. — AFP

## Global warming to raise food prices, inflation: Study

**PARIS:** Global warming and heatwaves are expected to further increase food prices and overall inflation across the world in future, according to new research from scientists and the European Central Bank. The impact will vary but be felt everywhere, especially in developing nations, said the paper published in the journal Communications Earth and Environment on Thursday.

Extreme weather — including heatwaves, droughts and floods — is becoming increasingly frequent as the climate heats up, taking a toll on key sectors of the economy, including farming and food production. For this new study, researchers from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and the European Central Bank drew on historical price and weather data from 121 countries between 1996 and 2021.

They found that rising temperatures due to climate change were predicted to drive up the cost of food worldwide between 1.49 and 1.79 percentage points every year by 2035.

The effect of future warming and heat extremes on overall inflation would be between 0.76 and 0.91 percentage points under a best and worst case scenario. “We find this strong evidence that higher temperatures, particularly in the summer, or in places that are hot, cause price increases mainly in food inflation but also in overall inflation,” Maximilian

## Zara owner Inditex workers protest after record profits

**MADRID:** Workers at Inditex’s Zara and other big name stores protested outside the company shops across Spain on Friday to demand better benefits after the world’s biggest fashion retailer reported record profits and raised shareholder payouts. Blowing whistles and waving union flags, around 100 people demonstrated outside the flagship Bershka store on Madrid’s main avenue, the Gran Via, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

“It seems very unfair to us because Inditex has had a huge profit. So we want it to redistribute that,” said Juan Becerra, a 44-year-old worker at an Oysho store in the Spanish capital.

Similar protests were held outside Inditex stores in seven other cities, including Barcelona, Seville and Valencia. The protests were organized by Spain’s two largest unions, UGT and CCOO, which want a bonus for Inditex workers with more than four years service and other benefits.

The unions say just over half of Inditex’s 27,000 employees in Spain have signed a petition demanding that “the group’s profits be returned in a fair and equitable manner to those who make them possible: all the group’s workers”. Monica Donoro, a CCOO representative, said negotiations with Inditex managers had stalled. “We are not making any progress. They are not listening to us,” she said. Inditex, which has seen a strong perfor-



A man carries a plastic bucket across the cracked bed of a dried-up pond in Vietnam’s southern Ben Tre province on March 19, 2024. — AFP

Kotz, one of the report’s authors from PIK, told AFP.

Kotz said the impact on food prices and inflation from future warming would be most felt in “regions that are already hotter” especially poorer and developing parts of the world.

Africa and South America would be the continents most affected, the study found. But the northern hemisphere would not be spared higher prices as a result of climate extremes, Kotz said.

“In those places in the northern hemisphere — mainly in the summer — that’s where those things will mainly happen. Whereas in the rest of the world, it will be more spread out across the year,” he said.



MADRID: Demonstrators blow whistles and hold signs as they take part in a demonstration called by unions from Inditex to ask for a better distribution of the group’s record profits, in front of a Bershka store in Madrid. — AFP

mance on Spain’s stock market over the past year, posted net profits of 5.4 billion euros (\$5.9 billion) in 2023, up 30 percent from 4.1 billion euros, the previous record, in 2022.

The company, whose eight brands include Pull and Bear and upmarket label Massimo Dutti, said it would pay shareholders a dividend of 1.54 euros, a

28 percent increase from 2022, and the highest in the group’s history. “We, the staff, have the impression that we are not taken into account, that our work is not recognized even though we contribute to generating the profits, which are so high, through our work,” Beatriz Aliaga, a 44-year-old Zara employee, told AFP at the Madrid demonstration. — AFP

ed step of banning a sitting president after a mob of Trump’s supporters attacked the US Capitol, following Trump’s repeated calls for his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden to be overturned.

His accounts have since been restored. Trump’s expected bounty stems from millions of shares he owns in Trump Media that are now worth billions with Friday’s vote to combine with Digital World, a shell company created specifically to combine with an operating business. However, such deals require principal shareholders such as Trump to hold the equity for six months before selling.

Shares of Digital World — which is expected to be renamed in Trump’s name — ended Friday’s session sharply lower at \$36.94, down 13.7 percent. DWAC was set up as a special purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, a shell company that goes public with the aim of merging with an operating entity.

DWAC’s investors prior to the deal included a relatively small share of institutional investors, according to public filings that suggest most holders are individual investors. The transaction drew criticism Friday from the watchdog Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), which point-

ed out that the largest holder in DWAC with about two percent was Susquehanna International Group, which is led by Republican donor Jeff Yass. “There’s a strong public interest in knowing the investors behind this deal that is poised to provide Trump a massive financial lifeline,” the group said on X, the former Twitter.

Trump, who has clinched the Republican nomination for this year’s presidential election, is appealing his \$355 million penalty, plus interest, after a New York court ruled that he, his sons and their family business lied for years about the value of his assets, deceiving banks and insurers.

A 30-day grace period to put up the money expires Monday, raising immediate questions about how Trump will respond. According to US media reports, New York Attorney General Letitia James has taken some preliminary steps to seize Trump assets in New York, but additional court actions would be needed if the properties were going to be taken. “This transaction has been kicking around for a while,” Usha Rodrigues, an expert in SPAC transactions at the University of Georgia School of Law. “The reason this closed is because he needs the money.” — AFP

## Stock listing offers windfall for Trump as deadline looms

**NEW YORK:** Shareholders approved a merger Friday to list Donald Trump’s social media venture on the US stock market, providing a potential financial lifeline to the former president as he faces possible seizure of his properties. After many previous delays, investors voted to approve the merger of Digital World Acquisition and Trump Media & Technology Group (TMTG) — owner of the Truth Social platform, company officials said on a webcast of the vote.

The action could potentially provide Trump some \$3 billion, as he faces a \$454 million court payment for his New York fraud case, although he may not be able to access the funds for several months.

The ex-president, who is running once-again for the White House, started Truth Social after he was booted from Facebook and Twitter in January 2021. The social media sites took the unprecedented-

## Business



Abdulaziz Al-Shaya and Adel Al-Majed with the attendees of Boubyan Bank's general assembly meeting.

# Boubyan Bank's AGM approves distribution of 8% in cash dividends, 6% in bonus shares

## Bank holds general assembly meeting for 2023 with 82% attendance

KUWAIT: Chairman of Boubyan Bank Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya, stated: "Boubyan Bank has successfully concluded its 5-year strategy 'Boubyan 2023', launched in 2019 that aimed at complete and positive transformation of its business operations. The bank has reaped the fruit of this strategy through accelerated growth across its financial indicators and market shares, the thing which reflects the robustness of the bank's financial position, the sustainability of its profits, and reinforces the bank's position as one of the major financial institutions regionally, and the third largest bank in terms of financing portfolio and total assets in the Kuwaiti market."

This statement came during the general assembly meeting of Boubyan Bank for the financial year ended December 31, 2023, with an attendance exceeding 82 percent. He emphasized: "With the conclusion of 2023, Boubyan Bank managed to have a record growth rate of 39 percent, while registering KD 80.4 million in net profits with an earnings per share of 18.8 fils, and the bank continued its precautionary approach by allocating KD 31.7 million in provisions. All this was the fruit of the bank's successful strategy 'towards perfection'."

Al-Shaya pointed out that all of the bank's key indicators witnessed a remarkable growth in 2023, where the total combined assets of Boubyan Bank Group increased to KD 8.4 billion at a growth rate of 7 percent. Moreover, the total of customers' deposits grew by 9 percent to reach KD 6.5 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 7 percent to reach KD 6.3 billion, and operating income grew by 8 percent to reach KD 218 million.



Adel Al-Majed

"What makes the results of Boubyan more significant are the core business and profitability practices of the Group, which were significantly reinforced by the bank in 2023 compared with the last financial year, while improving the NPL ratio, making it one of the lowest locally," he elaborated.

Al-Shaya went on to add: "Boubyan's strategy was successfully concluded with continued growth in terms of total assets and deposits, maintaining its position as the bank with the third largest financing portfolio and total assets in the Kuwaiti market, while continuing to achieve double digit profitability growth rates."

Al-Shaya sincerely thanked the shareholders, investors, and all Boubyan's customers for their confidence and loyalty to the bank, and reiterated the Board's full and ongoing support to the efforts of the bank's highly-professional executive management, which wisely steers the bank towards achieving the best results, while thanking all the bank's employees for their dedication throughout the past year.

### Approval of profit distribution

During the general assembly meeting, it was approved to distribute 8 percent in cash dividends and 6 percent in bonus shares to eligible shareholders who are registered with the bank's registers as at the end of the maturity date of April 24, 2024, and to allocate the same to shareholders on April 25, 2024.



Al-Shaya and Al-Majed during Boubyan Bank's general assembly meeting.

The Board of Directors has been authorized to dispose of the share fractions and amend this schedule in case the confirmation thereof is not announced at least eight business days ahead of the maturity date as stipulated and in line with the provisions of the Law.

Furthermore, the Ordinary General Assembly approved the recommendation of the Board of Directors to distribute dividends to shareholders at the end of the financial year or semi-annually, and authorized the Board to execute the decision of the General Assembly as per the percentages decided by the board.

### A year of leadership and solid performance

On his part, Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer, Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, stated: "Thanks to Almighty Allah, the past year witnessed the achievement of goals, milestones, and expansions, regionally and internationally, thanks to the solid pillars upon which the Group's vision and strategy are based. Hence, the bank managed to make its mark in the Islamic banking industry and to make a franchise that stands out from the competition, be they Islamic or conventional banks."

"During Boubyan's journey, the bank managed - through well-studied steps - to become a leading franchise despite the fierce competition among the banking sector's institutions, thus following a tailored path that reinforces customer satisfaction levels, leading to receiving a 96 percent customer-satisfaction score among all Islamic and conventional local banks. The bank's market share and its ongoing growth reflect the high levels in customer service and digital excellence, which are the fruit of the bank's clear strategy, professional executive team, and continued investment in our human resources with special focus on our national cadres", he added. He elaborated: "Our sustainable growth was the result of a well-studied approach towards investing in various business sectors, thus leading to significant growth in our consumer banking and corporate banking businesses, thanks to our focus on creativity and innovation, despite the fierce competition in the banking sector."

### Plans and goals

Al-Majed reiterated: "The bank will follow its unique strategic approach to maintain solid profitability and ongoing growth, based on its sound management and status, which qualifies it to benefit from its strong potentials and solid financial position to help customers benefit from growth opportunities in our favorite markets."

"As a part of Boubyan's vision and in line with the new brand identity refreshed in 2023, entitled 'Imagine the possibilities', we reiterate our commitment to supporting the state's development plans through financing projects, for corporates or retail customers, taking into consideration green financing. We are also targeting further regional and inter-

national expansion, as well as keeping up with the latest developments in the field of digital banking solutions and Islamic investments to better serve customers and the society", he pointed out.

### Governance

Al-Majed stated: "Governance is one of the pillars of the credit decision and giving an advantage to customers who have sound governance practices in place. Accordingly, Boubyan has been keen on applying the instructions and guidelines of CBK in that regard. This has been taken into consideration as well upon designing the banking applications which include a number of authorities for various management levels at companies, in addition to providing the possibility of internal monitoring by the company over the performed transactions in order to ensure the uninterrupted provision of secure and cutting-edge banking services."

"The concept of digital transformation in banking institutions has become associated to a great extent with the name of Boubyan, as the phrase 'for the first time in Kuwait' has been mostly synonymous with Boubyan Bank's innovative services and solutions in Islamic digital banking", Al-Majed added.

He went on to highlight: "Boubyan Bank's digital transformation strategy gained a significant momentum, being a real example for succeeding in being highly competitive regionally in digital services, and in changing the lives of our customers through our services and products. Our digital services' journey is very exceptional. It has seen us excel and climb to the top of the pyramid amid tough competition in the market for digital banking services which is growing rapidly."

Al-Majed went on to add: "Boubyan offers a group of innovative services, products, and digital solutions through its retail and corporate Apps. Such offerings add value to customers and show the bank's keenness to maintain its leadership in innovation to ensure supporting its customers, enriching their banking experience, and making things easier, especially amid the competition across various business sectors. This reflects the bank's ongoing approach to develop the digital infrastructure and to offer the best services in the field of digital payments."

In 2023, Boubyan inaugurated a number of new branches, bringing the number to 47 branches across Kuwait, which were fully upgraded and modernized as per the latest international systems and standards. The branches were well-manned with competent banking professionals along with all resources that guarantee customers enjoy a swift, convenient, smooth, and unique banking experience that keeps pace with the developments of banking services.

### Awards and international ratings

Al-Majed added: "In 2023, Boubyan received more than 20 awards, recognitions,

### Abdulaziz Al-Shaya

- Results reinforce the Group's key business standards and profitability in 2023 leading to significant growth of our financial results
- The bank's operational performance reflected positively on our solid financial position in the region, making us the third largest bank in the Kuwaiti market in terms of financing portfolio and total assets

### Adel Al-Majed

- Boubyan to follow its unique strategic approach to maintain solid profitability and ongoing growth
- Significant growth in consumer banking and corporate banking is the fruit of our investment in creativity and innovation

and international ratings from renowned global institutions across various domains and business sectors such as digital transformation, corporate banking, customer service, and customer satisfaction, which reinforced our banking leadership and emphasized the strength of the strategy the bank has been adopting since many years locally, regionally, and internationally."

Furthermore, our ratings from Moody's, S&P, and Fitch remain stable at A2, A, and A respectively. As for the ex-government support (or xgs) rating assigned by Fitch, the introduction of such new criteria communicates Fitch's view of the creditworthiness of Boubyan excluding assumptions of extraordinary government support. Boubyan was assigned the second highest rating in Kuwait as per such criteria.

### Nomo Bank: International expansion

In 2023, Nomo Bank, the digital bank of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, launched unique products and services that put it on par with top financial institutions, whereby it aspires to become the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom. Moreover, Nomo continues to make its mark in the Islamic digital banking sector through the recent launch of many products such as the multicurrency account, which allows customers to perform their banking transactions in six different currencies, enabling them to make payments in local currencies in more than 25 countries spanned across Europe and the Middle East within seconds using Nomo App, in addition to immediately benefiting from remittance and fund-transfer services, coupled with the possibility of automatically linking the account with Nomo Card and Apple Pay.

Nomo managed to position itself as one of the best Sharia-compliant property finance options in the United Kingdom, as it offers a group of integrated real estate, finance, and advisory services related to ownership of real estate properties in the UK market to its customers in Kuwait and the region, through partnerships with major real estate companies such as Ayan Real Estate, Blueprint, and Great Portland. Additionally, Nomo inked significant agreements such as the partnership with Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank "ADCB" and Al-Hilal Digital Bank to give citizens and residents of the UAE an opportunity to benefit from the innovative services and solutions by Nomo Bank through ADCB - Nomo and Al-Hilal Nomo Apps.

### Corporate banking

Al-Majed further reiterated: "In 2023, the Corporate Banking Group managed to make a significant milestone by diversifying and improving a number of products and services, and it is expected to begin to reap the reward of that as of 2024.

This targeted all companies across various

sectors in Kuwait, in an attempt to offer innovative and edge-cutting banking services, being the traditional concept limited to financing transactions, thus not only making it as a one-stop shop for all corporate banking needs, but also extending to provide services to customers and corporate vendors. Accordingly, this made the bank more inclined towards focusing on innovation in products and services, in addition to upgrading the bank's processes."

### CSR and human resources

Boubyan succeeded to stand out as an excellent role model in CSR and in the support of sustainability through many events and initiatives that made a clear mark and emphasized the bank's social excellence, as well as its ongoing plans, which were crowned with the "World's Best Islamic Bank for CSR" by Global Finance in recognition of the bank's prominent CSR role in supporting various segments of the society, which confirms that the bank is on the right track to reinforce sustainable development inside and outside Kuwait. During the past year, the bank's human resources proved themselves to be one of the key pillars of its continued success, as they embrace and adopt Boubyan's future vision, the thing which comes in line with the principle of diverse job roles at the workplace, which greatly contributes to the introduction of innovative and creative ideas and deliverables, which significantly increase the bank's productivity and profitability.

### Thanks & appreciations

Al-Shaya concluded his word during the general assembly meeting: "For myself and on behalf of the team of Boubyan Bank, I would like to express deepest thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect him, and HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister, for all their efforts towards the development and growth of our dear country, and to guarantee the stability and security of everyone who considers this blessed land home."

He added: "I would also like to express the deepest thanks to all the executives of the Central Bank of Kuwait, headed by Governor Basel Al-Haroon, who spared no effort to take the actions deemed appropriate to develop and safeguard the Kuwaiti banking system. I would also like to express deepest thanks to all the bank's esteemed shareholders and customers who have always been the key factor behind our success by supporting us in overcoming our challenges.

Moreover, I would like to thank all members of the Sharia Supervisory Board at the bank for their great efforts, and I would like to thank members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Management, as well as all the bank's employees for their cooperation, commitment, and keenness on supporting the bank for the benefit of the bank and its shareholders."



A snapshot of the attendance during Boubyan Bank's general assembly meeting.



Boubyan Bank shareholders during the general assembly meeting.



Adel Al-Majed answers a reporter's question on the sidelines of the AGM.

# 'I woke up in a demon world': How condition makes faces look distorted

When Victor Sharrah woke up one morning he was shocked to see that his housemate suddenly had pointed ears, gigantic eyes and a slashed mouth that stretched to the edges of his face.

Trying to remain calm, Sharrah took his dog for a walk, only to be met by people on the street who had similarly strange, twisted faces. "My first thought was that I woke up in a demon world," Sharrah told AFP in a phone call from his home in Clarksville, Tennessee.

"I really started freaking out," the 58-year-old chef said. He considered getting himself "committed to the psych ward". But Sharrah had not "totally lost his mind", as he feared. He suffers from an extremely rare visual condition called prosopometamorphopsia -- or PMO for short.

For people with this condition, faces appear distorted in a variety of ways. While Sharrah sees demons, some see elves, PMO researcher Antonio Mello told AFP. For some patients, one half of a face droops below the other. Others see purple or green faces, or ones constantly in motion. Sometimes the condition only lasts a few days. But more than three years after waking to that scary first morning in November 2020, Sharrah still sees "demons".



This image shows an artist's visualisation of researcher Antonio Mello illustrating facial distortions in a case of prosopometamorphopsia. —AFP

**'Traumatic'**

One aspect of Sharrah's condition makes him unique. Unlike other people with PMO, when he sees faces on flat screens they appear normal.

This allowed Mello and other researchers at Dartmouth College in the US to create the first "photo-realistic" images representing how people with PMO see faces, they said in research published in The Lancet on Friday.

To create the images, the researchers had Sharrah compare photos of Mello and another person displayed on

a computer screen with the distortions he could see on their real-life faces.

For other PMO patients, the faces on the photos would have also appeared distorted, making such a comparison difficult. Sharrah said that life with PMO is "far more traumatic than the pictures can convey".

"What people don't understand when they see those pictures is that in real life that face is moving -- gesturing and talking." The exact cause of prosopometamorphopsia remains unknown.

Jason Barton, a neurologist at the

University of British Columbia not involved in the new study, said that PMO is a "symptom, not a disorder," so could have multiple causes.

In most cases Barton has researched, "something happened in the brain that correlated with the onset of this abnormal experience", he told AFP.

Sharrah does have a lesion in his brain from an injury he suffered while working as a long-haul trucker in 2007.

But Mello said he did not believe this was related to PMO, because MRI scans showed the lesion is on Sharrah's hippocampus, a part of the brain "not associated with the face processing network". Only around 75 cases of PMO have been previously reported in scientific literature.

But Mello said that more than 70 patients have contacted his lab over the last three years alone. The terrifying nature of the condition mean it has often been misdiagnosed as schizophrenia or psychosis, he added.

**Adapting to demon world**

Sharrah only learned about PMO after posting about his experience on an online support group for people with bipolar disorder. It was a huge relief.

"It meant I wasn't psychotic, you know?" he said. Sharrah, who has perfect vision, had glasses custom made

with a green tint that decreases the extremity of the distortions. Red makes them "more intense," he said.

As well as colour, depth perception seems to play a role. Though Sharrah does not see face distortions on flat screens, they started to appear when the researchers had him wear a virtual reality headset, Mello said.

Sharrah said he has largely adapted to his strange new world, and no longer wears his green glasses.

"It's been three years, I've kind of gotten used to it," he said. But in crowded places such as Walmart, the army of demons around him can still be "overwhelming", he added. Because PMO patients know what they are seeing is not real, many face a difficult decision. Is it worth telling people how grotesque they look, at the risk of sounding crazy?

Some choose silence. Mello spoke of a man who has never told his wife of many years that her face now appears distorted to him. Sharrah said he shared his experience so that other people with PMO could avoid getting "institutionalised for psychosis".

"So they know what's going on -- and don't experience the trauma that I went through." — AFP

## 'Good boy!' Dogs do understand us, says new study

Whether dogs truly understand the words we say -- as opposed to things like tone and context clues -- is a question that has long perplexed owners, and so far science hasn't been able to deliver clear answers.

But a new brain wave study published Friday in Current Biology suggests that hearing the names of their favorite toys actually activates dogs' memories of those objects. "It definitely shows us that it's not human-unique to have this type of referential understanding," first author Lilla Magyari of the Eotvos Lorand University in Hungary, told AFP, explaining that researchers have been skeptical up to this point.



A dog carries a stick while out for a walk with its owner in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. —AFP photos

With a couple of famous exceptions, dogs have fared poorly on lab tests requiring them to fetch objects after hearing their names, and many experts have argued it isn't so much what we say but rather how and when we say things that pique our pooches' interest.

Yelling "Go get the stick!" and having a dog successfully bring the object back doesn't conclusively prove they know what the word "stick" means, for example. Even scientists who concede that dogs do pay attention to our speech have said that, rather than really understanding what words stand for, they are reacting to particular sounds with a learned behavior.

**Brain waves**

In the new paper, Magyari and colleagues applied a non-invasive brain imaging technique to 18 dogs brought to their lab in Budapest. The test involved taping electrodes to the dogs' heads to monitor their brain activity. Their owners said words for toys they were most familiar with -- for example "Kun-kun, look, the ball!" -- and then showed them either the matching object or a mismatched object.

After analyzing the EEG recordings, the team found different brain patterns

when dogs were shown matching versus mismatched objects. This experimental setup has been used for decades in humans, including babies, and is accepted as evidence of "semantic processing," or understanding of meaning.

The test also had the benefit of not requiring the dogs to fetch something in order to prove their knowledge.

"We found the effect in 14 dogs," co-first author Marianna Boros told AFP, proving the ability is not confined to "a few exceptional dogs." Even the four that "failed" may have simply been tested on the wrong words, she added.

**Case closed?**

Holly Root-Gutteridge, a dog behavior scientist at the University of Lincoln in England, told AFP that the ability to fetch specific toys by name had previously been deemed a "genius" quality.

Famous border collies Chaser and Rico could find and retrieve specific toys from large piles but were deemed outliers, she said.

But the new study "shows that a whole range of dogs are learning the names of the objects in terms of brain response even if they don't demonstrate it behaviorally," said Root-Gutteridge, adding it was "another knock for humanity's special and distinct qualities." The paper "provides further evidence that dogs might understand human vocalizations much better than we usually give them credit for," added Federico Rossano, a cognitive scientist at UC San Diego.

But not all experts were equally enthusiastic. Clive Wynne, a canine behaviorist at Arizona State University, told AFP he was "split" on the findings.

"I think the paper falls down when it wants to make the big picture claim that they have demonstrated what they call 'semantic understanding,'" he said, though he praised the "ingenious" experimental setup as a new way to test the full extent of dogs' "functional vocabulary."

For example, Wynne said, he needs to spell out the word "w-a-l-k" when he's in front of his dog -- lest his pet get excited for an outing there and then -- but he doesn't need to take the same precautions in front of his wife, whose understanding of the word goes beyond simple association.

"Would Pavlov be surprised by these results?" asked Wynne, referencing the famous Russian scientist who showed dogs could be conditioned to salivate when they heard a bell signaling meal time. "I do not think he would be." —AFP



Photos show an aerial view of Crawford Lake as a team consisting of scientists from Carleton University and Brock University gather sediment layer samples from the lake bottom at the Crawford Lake Conservation Area.—AFP photos

## No 'human era' in Earth's geological history, scientists say

Atop panel of geologists has decided not to grant the 'human age' its own distinct place in Earth's geological timeline after disagreeing over when exactly our era might have begun.

After 15 years of deliberation, a team of scientists made the case that humankind has so fundamentally altered the natural world that a new phase of Earth's existence -- a new epoch -- has already begun.

Soaring greenhouse gases, the spread of microplastics, decimation of other species, and fallout from nuclear tests -- all were submitted as evidence that the world entered the Anthropocene, or era of humans, in the mid-20th century.

But the proposal was rejected in a contentious vote that has been upheld by the International Union of Geological Sciences, the field's governing body said in a statement published on its website on Thursday. The decision "to reject the proposal for an Anthropocene Epoch as a formal unit of the Geologic Time Scale is approved", it said.

There is no avenue for appeal, though some involved in the voting committee have raised allegations over the conduct of the ballot and a perceived lack of due process. The union denied these assertions and called the outcome "a decisive

rejection of the Anthropocene proposal" by the field's pre-eminent experts. There were four votes in favour, 12 against and three abstentions, it added. Despite this, the Anthropocene would endure as a widely used term: "It will remain an invaluable descriptor of human impact on the Earth system," the union said.



**'Missed opportunity'**

In 2009 scientists began an enquiry that ultimately concluded that the Holocene epoch -- which began 11,700 years ago as the last ice age ended -- gave way to the Anthropocene around 1950.

They gathered a trove of evidence to show this, including traces of radioactive material found in the layered sediment of lakes, the global upheaval of plants and animals, and omnipresent "forever chemicals".

But opponents argued mankind had been reshaping the planet long before the 1950s, pointing to defining moments like the advent of farming and the industrial revolution.

Martin Head, who was part of the team that advocated for the Anthropocene, said there was "a myriad of geological signals" and lamented the way the process was handled.

"I feel this has been a missed opportunity to recognise and endorse a simple reality, that our planet left its natural functioning state in the mid-20th century," Head, a professor of earth sciences at Brock University in Canada, told AFP.

There was no disagreement that 'the age of man' had resulted in profound planetary changes, said Erle Ellis, an environmental scientist critical of the Anthropocene proposal.

But scientists weren't convinced this impact represented an epoch, no less one that definitively began only seven decades ago, said Ellis, professor of geography and environmental systems at the University of Maryland.

"The truth is, there was never a need for a firm boundary. It just wasn't the critical thing," he told AFP earlier this month after the proposal was first voted down. —AFP



A man throws a stick for his dog on the Grande Plage beach of Biarritz, France.

## 'Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga' to premiere at Cannes

**"Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga"**, the latest instalment of the post-apocalyptic franchise, will get its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on May 15, organisers said. The fifth film in the series stars Anya Taylor-Joy as Furiosa -- a character played by Charlize Theron in 2015's "Mad Max: Fury Road", which also premiered at Cannes in 2015.

She stars alongside Chris Hemsworth as the villain, Warlord Dementus, as Furiosa battles hostile gangs to make her way home. The latest entry, which is playing out-of-competition at Cannes, is again directed by the franchise's creator, Australia's George Miller.

It all began with an ultra-low-budget action film in 1979 that also launched the career of Mel Gibson, about a near-fu-

ture Australia facing societal collapse and oil shortages.

There were two sequels starring Gibson in the 1980s, before the franchise returned in 2015 with "Fury Road", a critically lauded blast of pure spectacle starring Tom Hardy that won six Academy Awards. Miller has had a very varied career, directing children's hits like "Babe" and "Happy Feet", as well as the mythological tale "Three Thousand Years of Longing", which debuted at Cannes in 2022.

The Cannes Film Festival runs from May 14 to 25, with Greta Gerwig as the head of its jury. The full line-up is due to be announced on April 11. —AFP



## Lifestyle



A visitor looks at the painting "La Lecture" (Reading - 1873) by French impressionist painter Berthe Morisot (1841-1895).



A visitor looks at the painting "Bal du Moulin de la Galette" (Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette - 1876) by French impressionist painter Auguste Renoir (1841-1919).

## Paris museum takes visitors back 150 years to Impressionism's birth

The Orsay Museum in Paris is marking 150 years of Impressionism from Tuesday with an unprecedented reassembling of the masterpieces that launched the movement, and a virtual reality experience that takes visitors back in time. Using VR technology, visitors to "Paris 1874: Inventing Impressionism" can take a plunge into the streets, salons and beauty spots that marked a revolution in art.

Through VR helmets, they can walk alongside the likes of Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Paul Cezanne on April 15, 1874, when, tired of being rejected by the conservative gatekeepers of the official art Salon, these rebellious young painters put on their own independent show, later seen as the birth of Impressionism. The Orsay has brought together 160 paintings from that year, including dozens of masterpieces from that show, including the blood-red sun of Monet's "Impression, Sunrise", credited with giving the movement its name, and his "Boulevard des Capucines" where the exhibition took place.

In rapid, spontaneous brushstrokes, the Impressionists captured everyday scenes of modern life, from Degas' bal-



A visitor stands in front of the painting "La Classe de Danse" (The Ballet Class - 1871) by French impressionist painter Edgar Degas (1834-1917).

let dancers to Camille Pissarro's countryside idylls to Auguste Renoir's riverside party in "Bal du Moulin de la Galette". They came to define the excitement and restlessness of a new, modern age emerging out of a devastating war with Prussia and a short-lived Parisian revolt a few years earlier.

"The Impressionists wanted to paint the world as it is, one in the midst of major change," said Sylvie Patry, co-curator of the exhibition. "They were interested

in new subjects: railways, tourism, the world of entertainment... They wanted to put sensations, impressions, the immediate moment at the heart of their painting," she added.

### 'Nuanced'

Thanks to loans from the National Gallery in Washington and other museums, it is the first time that many of the paintings — including Renoir's "The Parisian Girl" and "The Dancer"

— have hung together in 150 years. The exhibition also includes works from that year's official Salon, showing how the Impressionists rejected the stiff formalism of traditionalists and their obsession with great battles and mythological tales, but also how there was some cross-over, as all sorts of painters gradually adopted new styles.

"The story of that exhibition is more nuanced than we think," said Patry. "The artists all knew each other and had begun painting in this different style from the 1860s." Impressionism did not take off immediately: only some 3,500 people came to the first show, compared with 300,000 to the Salon, and only four paintings were sold out of some 200 works.

It would take several more exhibitions in the following years for the movement to make its mark. The Orsay exhibition runs to July 14 and moves to Washington from September. The virtual reality experience has been extended to the end of the Paris Olympics on August 11. — AFP



A visitor looks at the painting "La Balançoire" (The Swing - 1876) by French impressionist painter Auguste Renoir (1841-1919).



Visitors take part in a virtual reality experience as part of the exhibition 'Paris 1874 Inventing Impressionism' at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris. - AFP photos



A visitor stands in front of the painting "Le Berceau" (The Cradle - 1872) by French impressionist painter Berthe Morisot (1841-1895).



A visitor takes a photograph of the painting "Le Chemin de Fer" (The Railway - 1873) by French impressionist painter Edouard Manet (1832-1883).



Visitors stand in front of the painting "Les Dindons" (The Turkeys - 1876) by French impressionist painter Claude Monet (1840-1926).

## Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini dies at 82

Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini, a virtuoso of Chopin and Beethoven who enjoyed a decades-long collaboration with La Scala, died Saturday age 82, the Milan opera house announced. He had been in poor health in recent years and obliged to cancel some concerts.

La Scala called the pianist "one of the great musicians of our time and a fundamental reference in the artistic life of the theatre for over 50 years". From 1958 to his last recital in February 2023, Pollini played La Scala 168 times, it said, not including countless workshops with students and conferences.

"Pollini was an interpreter capable of revolutionizing the perception of composers such as Chopin, Debussy and Beethoven himself, and of promoting ... listening to the historical avant-gardes, above all Schonberg, and the music of today," said La Scala. Born January 5, 1942 in Milan into a family of artists, Pollini stormed the classical music scene in 1960 where, aged 18 and the youngest person in the contest, he won the Warsaw Chopin Competition.

Arthur Rubinstein, president of the jury, was famously to have said that the young prodigy "already plays better than any of us". Half a century later Pollini corrected Rubinstein's quote, saying "I played 'technically' better than any member of the jury."

"I always thought he said that to make fun of the colleagues on the jury. Someone doctored that statement by removing the 'technically' and it became an exaggerated compliment," Pollini said in a 2014 documentary. Instead of embarking straight onto the concert scene, Pollini put his career on hold to study, explaining that performing right away would have been "a little premature for me".

"I wanted to study, get to know the repertoire better, play the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms..." he said. He gradually extended his repertoire to include contemporary music, in particular that of Pierre Boulez and Luigi Nono, with whom he became close friends. He also collaborated with conductors from Riccardo Muti to Daniel Barenboim and Riccardo Chailly.

In the late 60s, Pollini participated in improvised concerts in factories and programs for students and workers at La Scala, conducted by his friend Claudio Abbado. Pollini made his first American tour in 1968. — AFP



Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini receives a medal at the awards ceremony of the 22nd Praemium Imperiale Awards in Tokyo on October 13, 2010. — AFP

## Award-winning Bosnian writer Abdulah Sidran dies at 79

Bosnian author and poet Abdulah Sidran, who screenwrote a Cannes-winning film by Serbian director Emir Kusturica, has died in Sarajevo, aged 79, local media reported at the weekend. Sidran, who died late on Saturday, penned the script for Kusturica's "When Father Was Away on Business", which won the Palme d'Or prize at Cannes in 1985. He also co-wrote Kusturica's 1981 movie "Do You Remember Dolly Bell?".

Born in Sarajevo in 1944, Sidran started publishing literary works, notably poetry, in the 1960s. He was an outspoken critic of the forces that have repeatedly torn the Balkans apart, including his native Sarajevo. "Persecution along political lines in one generation ... is transmitted to the next generations," Sidran said in an 2011 interview with a local TV station.

"It's the curse of the Balkans, the curse of our destinies that here ... the past is 'hotter' than the present." Sarajevo mayor Benjamina Karic paid tribute to Sidran, saying on Facebook: "We will remember you forever, for your

## 5 not-so-famous things about the Impressionist movement

As the art world marks 150 years since Impressionism burst onto the canvas in a blurry riot of color, here are five little-known facts about the wildly popular movement.

### 'Wallpaper pattern'

"Impressionism" was never meant as a compliment. While today works by artists such as Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas fetch eye-popping sums at auction, reviews after their inaugural 1874 exhibition in Paris were scathing. "A preliminary drawing for a wallpaper pattern is more finished than this seascape," wrote critic Louis Leroy about Monet's "Impression. Sunrise". It was Leroy who coined the name for the movement, intended as an insult. But the epithet stuck, and came to represent a revolutionary movement that no longer set out to accurately depict the world but to offer fleeting impressions of its beauty.

### Freedom in a tube

John Goffe Rand, a relatively obscure US painter, had a key influence on the movement when he had the idea of putting ready-to-use paint in small tin tubes. It may seem obvious today but for artists in the mid-19th century, the innovation made it significantly easier to take painting outside the studio.

Before, artists seeking the great outdoors carried their paints in pig bladders sealed with string, which had the unfortunate tendency to burst. Equipped with tubes, artists could sit for hours on the banks of the Seine, in a garden or a field and capture the fleeting plays of light and color. "Without tube painting, there would have been no Cezanne or Monet, Sisley or Pissarro," Renoir said at the end of his life.

### Snapshots of life

The venue of the 1874 exhibition — in the studio of photographer Felix Nadar — reflected the strong influence cameras had on the movement. Impressionism came of age at the same time as still photography, with tripods and cameras being set up next to painters' easels. Some artists dabbled themselves. Degas was an amateur photographer and Paul Cezanne used photographs as studies for some of his works. Monet's "Boulevard des Capucines" was painted from Nadar's balcony, with the blurred silhouettes of the crowd capturing the influence of early photographs.

### The muse who painted

Impressionism was dominated by men but the inaugural 1874 "Anonymous Society of painters, sculptors, engravers, etc" included one woman — Berthe Morisot. Her paintings drew little attention at the time but Morisot — today celebrated as an artist in her own right — was a famous face on canvas, as the muse of her brother-in-law, Edouard Manet. Manet, for his part, always refused to be identified with the Impressionist movement, though he had a huge influence on it and is widely considered one of its key painters.

### Monet, artist and patron

Cezanne holds the record for the most expensive Impressionist painting ever sold at auction but in the beginning he struggled to shift any at all. His luck changed at the 1874 exhibition, with his dark, tormented "The Hanged Man's House" finding a home. Two decades later, when he had his first solo show in Paris, a curious thing happened — he sold three paintings before the gallery even opened. — AFP



Bosnian writer Abdulah Sidran

testimony about the beauty, the soul and pride of the Bosnian man, about the values that make one a human."

Sidran had suffered serious health issues over the past year, leading him to withdraw from public and communicate only occasionally via social media. He was a member of the Bosnian academy of sciences and arts (ANUBiH) and received a series of national and international literary accolades. They include France's PEN centre Freedom Award for his book of poetry "Sarajevo Coffin" ("Sarajevski Tabut" in Bosnian), published during the country's 1991-1995 war. — AFP

# Pant's 'emotional' IPL return ends in loss as Russell shines

## Kolkata Knight Riders edged out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs in a thriller

**MOHALI:** Rishabh Pant's "emotional" return to elite cricket Saturday after a horror car crash was clouded by Delhi Capitals' loss to Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League. Chasing 175 for victory, Punjab rode on England all-rounder Sam Curran's 47-ball 63 to achieve their target with four wickets and four balls to spare at IPL's newest venue at Mullanpur in the northern Indian state of Punjab.

In the second match of the day, Australia's Pat Cummins lost on his IPL debut as captain as Kolkata Knight Riders edged out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs in a thriller at Eden Gardens. In match one, Punjab skipper Shikhar Dhawan began the chase with his brisk 22 before being bowled by fast bowler Ishant Sharma.

England's Jonny Bairstow had an unlucky dismissal when he was run out at the non-striker's end after the ball grazed bowler Ishant's finger and hit the stumps with the batsman short of his crease. But the left-handed Curran went to his half-century and put on a key 67-run fifth-wicket stand with fellow Englishman Liam Livingstone, who hit the winning six in his 21-ball 38, to steer the team home.

Curran, who was dropped on 33 by Tristan Stubbs, fell in the 19th over as Khaleel Ahmed struck on successive balls but Livingstone kept calm to bring up victory. The spotlight remained on India's Pant, 26, after the wicketkeeper-batsman took the field as captain of Delhi after 14 months away from top level cricket. "Really emotional time for me," Pant said at the toss after Delhi were invited to bat first. "Just want to enjoy the moment."

### 'Nervous' Pant

Pant, an attacking left-handed batsman, got a

standing ovation from the fans as he strode out to the middle after the fall of David Warner for 29. Pant hit a flowing cover drive for a boundary in his brief stay before a slower delivery from Harshal Patel had him caught at backward point while attempting a ramp shot.

"Personally I was pretty nervous but you have to go through this when you enter the field," Pant said after the loss. "This isn't the first time being nervous, but happy about that (return)." Pant crashed his Mercedes north of New Delhi before dawn in December 2022, suffering multiple injuries when the car rammed into a crash barrier, flipped over and caught fire.

He was rushed to hospital before being airlifted to Mumbai for further treatment and surgery. Pant has been on an intensive rehabilitation programme since the crash. He was replaced as skipper of Delhi Capitals by Warner of Australia and the team ended ninth in the 10-team table last year.

### 'Tough guy' Russell

In match two, Andre Russell hit an unbeaten 64 and took two wickets to trump Heinrich Klaasen's batting blitz of 63 in a high-scoring match. Russell steered Kolkata to 208-7 with his 25-ball knock and a 81-run stand with Rinku Singh after England's Phil Salt began the batting charge with his 54.

Klaasen took on the chase in the final three overs with a flurry off sixes including hitting Mitchell Starc for three over the fence in a 26-ball 19th over. But fast bowler Harshit Rana held his nerve to defend 13 in the final over after getting hit for a six on the first ball as he got two wickets including Klaasen.



**KOLKATA:** Kolkata Knight Riders' Andre Russell plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. — AFP

It was heartbreaking for Cummins, who took charge of Hyderabad after the franchise paid \$2.5 million for the 30-year-old fast bowler. Fellow Australian pace bowler Starc broke the record in the same auction when Kolkata shelled out \$2.98 million for the left-arm quick.

Starc endured a day to forget, however, getting hit for 53 runs off his four overs. "You do your planning, and you try to execute your plans," said Australian World Cup-winning captain Cummins on trying to contain Russell. "But he's a pretty tough guy to bowl to." — AFP

## Al-Kharafi wins fifth round of showjumping

**KUWAIT:** Rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi from Kuwait Riding Center won the title of the fifth round of Kuwait Equestrian Showjumping League Championship that was held at Kuwait Riding Center with a large number of riders from local clubs participating.

The championship was held under the umbrella of Kuwait Equestrian Federation (KEF), and under the patronage of Kuwait Olympic Committee, Public Authority for Sport, Zain Communications and KIB. Al-Kharafi ended in first place of the main eighth heat at the height of 140-145 cm in 73.30 seconds without a fault. He was followed by Nick Channing, Abdullah Al-Roudhan, Fawaz Al-Subaiee and Yara Al-Hindi.

Al-Kharafi won the seventh heat also at the height of 130-135 cm. Abdullah Al-Roudhan won the fourth heat at the height of 125-130 cm. Secretary of KEF Nabeela Al-Ali awarded the winners, as she congratulated riders on the return of local activities under the umbrella of KEF.

Meanwhile, a decision was issued and pub-



**Nabeela Al-Ali with the winning riders**

lished in the official Gazette revoked a previous ministerial decision number 29/2024 which cancelled the establishment of KEF and considered it null and void. The decision was issued following the complaint

119-5, the visitors lost nightwatchman Vishwa Fernando (four) early to Khaled Ahmed, before de Silva and Mendis took control.

De Silva brought his century into the game with a single off Mehidy, before he gave Bangladesh their first chance as Nahid Rana dropped him off Shoriful Islam on 101. Mehidy ensured the drop did not hurt the team more, soon ending de Silva's innings, with Zakir Hasan taking the catch at short midwicket.

Mendis put away a full toss of Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto to bring his own hundred off 171 balls just before the tea, when Prabath Jayasuriya was batting with him for 13. Mehidy removed Prabath Jayasuriya, who made 25, and Lahiru Kumara off successive deliveries to give Bangladesh some relief. Mehidy could have grabbed his fifth wicket if Liton Das did not drop Mendis on 133.

Mendis protected last man Kasun Rajitha to add 52 runs in the final wicket pair, piling misery on Bangladesh. Mendis hit Taijul Islam for three sixes in an over to reach his 150 and help the lead exceed 500 runs. Taijul dismissed Mendis finally to wrap-up Sri Lanka's innings. Sri Lanka have never lost a Test series to Bangladesh. The second and final match of the series will be played in Chittagong from March 30. — AFP



**MONTREAL:** Gold medalist Ilia Malinin of the United States (C) poses with silver medalist Yuma Kagiya of Japan and bronze medalist Adam Siao Him Fa of France during the victory ceremony the men's free program at the International Skating Union (ISU) World Figure Skating Championships in Montreal, Canada. — AFP

so hard for me to train and it was even a thought for me that I wouldn't be able to compete at the World Championships.

"And I'm just so glad I was able to achieve it here," he said. "There was a little voice in my head 'no matter what you have to keep fighting, you have to keep going, no matter how bad or how good you

of KEF against the 29/2024 decision. The federation announced the return of sports activities while the final championship of the current season will be held at the start of May.



**SYLHET:** Sri Lanka's Dhananjaya de Silva celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) during the third day of the first Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet on March 24, 2024. — AFP

feel you just have to know what you're capable of and stick to your muscle memory and the training you've been through."

Olympic silver medallist Yuma Kagiya of Japan took silver with a total of 309.65 points. His free skate featured three quadruple jumps but he fell after landing a triple Axel. European champion Adam Siao Him Fa of France claimed a stunning bronze, soaring from 19th after the short programme with a free skate that included four quadruple jumps and gave him a total of 294.39 points.

Two-time defending champion Shoma Uno of Japan, who led after the short programme, endured a disastrous free skate. He fell on his opening quadruple jump and botched two other landings. He was sixth in the free skate to finish fourth on 280.85 points and said that despite his inability to "three-peat" it was an "exhilarating experience overall."

American duo Madison Chock and Evan Bates successfully defended their ice dance crown to seal an undefeated season. The Montreal-based Chock, 31, and Bates, 35, finished with a total of 222.20 points to pip Canada's Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier, who finished second with 219.68.

Italy's Charlene Guignard and Marco Fabbri finished third with a total of 216.52. "We could not be more thrilled," Chock said after Saturday's win. "And to do it in our adopted hometown of Montreal — the support has been incredible." — AFP

## Saracens rout Harlequins as Newcastle lose

**LONDON:** Reigning champions Saracens thrashed Harlequins 52-7 in the English Premiership on Saturday, scoring eight tries against their London rivals in a display that surprised even boss Mark McCall.

In a match played in front of more than 60,000 spectators at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, the home of the Premier League football club, Saracens managed four tries in each half as they leapfrogged Harlequins into second place.

With Premiership leaders Northampton hammered 52-21 by Bristol on Friday, Saracens are now just three points behind the table-toppers ahead of next week's game away to the table-topping Saints. Only the top four teams at the end of the regular season qualify for the title-deciding play-offs.

"We weren't expecting the scoreline and weren't expecting the performance to be quite at that level," said Saracens supremo McCall after a match where his team showed no signs of rustiness following an eight-week break for the international Six Nations Championship.

"We understand, however, that sometimes when you are dominant it's not always reflected on the scoreboard — today it was," the former Ireland international added. Saracens surged into a 24-0 lead before half-time, with Sean Maitland scoring two tries while Alex Lewington and Theo Dan also crossed Harlequins' line.

Dan crossed again early in the second period and Saracens led 31-0 before Harlequins managed a consolation try through Alex Dombardt. But the Argentina duo of Lucio Cinti and Juan Martin Gonzalez added to Quins' agony before Alex Goode scored Saracens' eighth try.

Owen Farrell, the former England captain, marked his 250th appearance for Saracens with six conversions as a Quins team featuring England fly-half Marcus Smith were overwhelmed. Farrell will leave Saracens at the end of the season to join French club Racing 92 and McCall believes the 32-year-old playmaker is bowing out in style.

"Incredible, he played as good as I've seen him play for a very long time," said McCall. "It looked like it mattered to him and I think he's going to be like that for the rest of the season, hopefully." Elsewhere, Newcastle's new consultant director of rugby Steve Diamond's first game in charge ended with a 25-16 loss away to Exeter.

It was the Falcons' 13th defeat from as many league games this season and left them firmly rooted to the foot of the table. Newcastle scored a try after only 70 seconds, through wing Ben Stevenson, but Exeter managed four of their own as Greg Fisilau, Zack Wimbush, Scott Sio and Rusi Tuima as they maintained their bid for a top-four finish.

Diamond, however, was encouraged by his team's display. "Taking Newcastle from where they have been in the doldrums, not really being competitive — I thought we were competitive today against a good side who don't lose many at home," he said.

"With a little bit more skill and knowledge we'll be able to pick up some wins during the remainder of the season, and the lads are working hard," the former Sale boss added. — AFP

## Malinin jumps to win men's figure skating world title

**MONTREAL:** American Ilia Malinin produced six scintillating quadruple jumps, including a quadruple Axel, in the men's free skate on Saturday to capture his first figure skating world title. The 19-year-old nicknamed the "Quad god," who is the only skater to land a quadruple Axel in competition, dazzled with an array of breathtakingly executed jumps starting with his quad Axel and including a quadruple Lutz in combination with a triple flip and a quadruple toe loop in combination with a triple toe.

He added an unexpected triple-toe combination at the end to earn 227.79 for the free skate for a championship total of 333.76 points. With the crowd at Montreal's Centre Bell on their feet by the end of his routine, Malinin, who was third after a short programme he "wasn't happy about," acknowledged the cheers then collapsed to the ice before skating off to await the scores.

"I'm in shock right now," said Malinin, who said this week he had recently battled injuries and a dip in confidence. "The past couple of weeks have been

## Sports

# Endrick makes history as Brazil beat England to launch new era

## Youngest player to score for Brazil since Ronaldo in 1994

**LONDON:** Brazil's new boss Dorival Junior started his bid to revive the five-time world champions with a 1-0 win against England as teenage sensation Endrick bagged his first international goal in Saturday's friendly at Wembley. Coming off their worst period for over 60 years, Brazil hope Dorival Junior can trigger a revival in time to challenge for the 2026 World Cup. This was a first significant step in the right direction for the Selecao, who marked their manager's debut with victory against an England side expected to make a strong challenge to win Euro 2024.

On a cathartic evening for Brazil after their wretched 2023, it was fitting the highly-rated Endrick bagged Brazil's late winner. The Palmeiras forward, due to join Real Madrid in July, has been tipped to succeed Neymar as Brazil's latest superstar and his match-winning cameo appearance off the bench was a suitable coming of age moment in his third appearance.

Endrick stole the spotlight in the 80th minute when the teenager tapped in, defying England's appeals for offside after Vinicius Junior's shot was saved by Jordan Pickford. Aged 17 years and 246 days, Endrick is the youngest senior international goal-scorer at Wembley.

He is also the youngest player to score for Brazil since Ronaldo in 1994. "Time will tell how far he can go. We have to be calm and patient with him," said Dorival Junior. Endrick's emergence is a breath of fresh air for Brazil after an unusually stale period for the Selecao.

Snubbed by Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti and frustrated by the failings of two caretaker managers, Dorival Junior has been tasked with ensuring Brazil qualify for the World Cup. The 61-year-old left Sao Paolo to take charge of Brazil in January, moving into world football's most scrutinised job at a time when his country had just finished a calendar year with more defeats (five) than wins (three) for the first time since 1963.

Beaten in three consecutive World Cup qualifiers for the first time ever, Brazil face a nervous fight to qualify for the 2026 tournament. But in the dynamic display of Vinicius Junior, the emergence of Endrick and the combative performances of his team-mates, Brazil have cause for optimism at last.

England boss Gareth Southgate was impressed with the new Brazil, saying: "The difference was one moment of ruthlessness. "In the attacking third they have players of the very highest quality. The midfield three are all technical players as well. "They have got some fabulous forwards and you have to defend well. Endrick has finished off their goal. It's a good moment for him."

### Kane misses Belgium game

Brazil will aim to build on the momentum from their first win over England since 2009 in another friendly against Spain on Tuesday. England's spluttering performance featured few highlights, although Southgate will have been encouraged by a lively debut from Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon.

England were wearing their controversial new home shirt for the first time after criticism of manufacturer Nike's decision to change the colour of the St George's Cross on the kit. The debate about the shirt will soon be forgotten, but Southgate won't have fond memories of its debut as England lost at home for the first time in 21 games.

Southgate opted for Ollie Watkins instead of Ivan Toney as England's central striker, with Harry Kane not risked due to an ankle injury. But Watkins did little to suggest he could shoulder the burden if Kane were to be injured at the Euros. Adding to Southgate's



**LONDON:** England's defender #05 John Stones (R) pulls back Brazil's midfielder #07 Vinicius Jr (C) as he threatens to break away during the international friendly football match between England and Brazil at Wembley stadium in north London. — AFP

problems, England's stand-in captain Kyle Walker was forced off with a hamstring injury. "He is feeling something. We just have to assess it over the next couple of days," Southgate said.

Belgium's friendly visit to Wembley on Tuesday represents the last chance for England's fringe players

to impress before Southgate names his Euro squad. "I'm not down on the performance at all. Clearly I don't like losing but I thought there were lots of very good performances from players who have hardly played for England," said Southgate, who revealed Kane will not be fit for the Belgium game. — AFP

## Canada, Costa Rica seal Copa America berths with wins

**DALLAS:** Canada and Costa Rica booked their places at this year's Copa America on Saturday after winning their respective games in a CONCACAF playoff double-header in Texas. Canada advanced to the tournament after defeating Trinidad & Tobago 2-0 before Costa Rica came from behind to down Honduras 3-1 at the Toyota Stadium in Frisco.

Cyle Larin and Jacob Shaffelburg sealed victory for Canada, who will now face world champions Argentina

in the opening game of the Copa America on June 20. "It means a lot for us as a team, I'm happy I scored and to move forward to the Copa America," Larin said after the win. "It was a good performance by the guys. We knew it was going to be difficult to break them down but we stuck to the game, stuck together and got the win." Real Mallorca winger Larin fired Canada into the lead on 61 minutes, drilling a low shot into the bottom corner after good work by Tajon Buchanan down the right flank.

Substitute Shaffelburg made the game safe with Canada's second goal in stoppage time, collecting a pass from Jonathan David before unleashing a thunderous shot into the roof of the net from just inside the area. Canada's reward for Saturday's victory is a place in Group A of the Copa America alongside Lionel Messi's Argentina, Peru and Chile. Costa Rica, meanwhile, will line-up in Group D alongside Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay after their 3-1 win over Honduras.

An entertaining contest saw Honduras take the lead through Michael Chirinos's thunderous first-time volley from 25 yards that ripped into the Costa Rica net after 10 minutes. Orlando Galo then levelled for Costa Rica two minutes later, bundling home from close range after Honduras failed to clear a free-kick into the area.

Teenager Warren Madrigal then uncorked a spectacular long-range volley to fire Costa Rica into the lead on 56 minutes before Jefferson Brenes doubled 'Los Ticos' lead in the 62nd minute to make the game safe. The Copa America, South American football's international championship, has been expanded to include teams from CONCACAF this year and will be staged at venues across the United States. — AFP

## Austria, Germany score two of fastest international goals

**PARIS:** Austria's Christoph Baumgartner scored one of the fastest ever international goals inside seven seconds on Saturday and was then quickly followed by a similarly lightning strike by Germany's Florian Wirtz. Baumgartner, 24, went into the record books during a friendly match against Slovakia in Bratislava.

The Leipzig attacker drove through the home defence from kick-off, drifting past three players, before unleashing a 25-metre shot past Martin Dubravka in goal. "We've done this variation before, sprinting from kick-off at full risk. The sequence of steps somehow worked out so that I made the run," Baumgartner told Austrian public broadcaster ORF after the game which his team won 2-0.

"Of course it's really cool, I'm very happy. The fact that I hit it like that... it's of course sensational." He added: "I'm especially pleased that I was able to help the team. That's the most important thing about the goal."

Baumgartner's strike matched the previous record of seven seconds it took Lukas Podolski to score for Germany against Ecuador in May, 2013. The Austrian FA described Baumgartner's effort as the fastest goal in the history of international football.

"Of course we got off to a really good start, that goal by itself was probably worth the price of admission," said Austria coach Ralf Rangnick. "After that, we didn't play a good first half. The second half was much better."

Meanwhile, later Saturday, Wirtz was just as fast off the mark against France in a friendly in Lyon which Germany won 2-0. The Leverkusen player beat 'keeper Brice Samba with a superb shot under the crossbar.

"I don't think anyone understood or realised what was happening. We were all quite surprised, but there was obviously a lot of joy," Wirtz told German broadcaster ZDF after his first international goal. "You can't start a match any better."

Wirtz added that his team's lightning-fast start had been practised. "But for it to work so well and lead to this chance to score, it's great." The fastest goal scored in a World Cup was by Turkey's Hakan Sukur against South Korea in 2002 after 11 seconds. — AFP



**DECINES-CHARPIEU:** Germany's midfielder #07 Kai Havertz (C) celebrates after scoring Germany's second goal during the friendly football match between France and Germany, at the Groupama Stadium in Decines-Charpieu, near Lyon, on March 23, 2024. — AFP

## Rapid-fire Wirtz speeds Germany to a win against France

**DECINES-CHARPIEU:** Florian Wirtz grabbed his first international goal with a strike that will go down in the history books as his Germany side beat France 2-0 in an international friendly on Saturday. On the cusp of seven seconds 20-year-old starlet Wirtz stunned the crowd in Lyon to give Germany the lead, before Kai Havertz wrapped up the encounter just after half-time in an impressive display by the Euro 2024 hosts.

Toni Kroos, playing his first international since 2021, received the ball from kick-off and chipped it forward to Leverkusen playmaker Wirtz. Wirtz ventured forward and as he was not closed down, he unleashed a fierce dipping drive that left Brice Samba glued to the spot as the ball flew under the crossbar with the clock ticking to just seven seconds.

"I don't think anyone understood or realised what was happening. We were all quite surprised, but there was obviously a lot of joy. You can't start a match any

better," Wirtz said to German television channel ZDF. "But for it to work so well and lead to this chance to score, it's great."

If not for Christoph Baumgartner's lightning strike inside seven seconds earlier on Saturday, Wirtz's goal would have equalled the record for the fastest recorded international goal—scored in 2013 by compatriot Lukas Podolski.

Four minutes after the break, Havertz slotted the visitors into a two-goal lead that they never looked like relinquishing. Jamal Musiala was left with far too much space in the box when Wirtz found him with a long pass and the Bayern Munich youngster rounded Samba before laying the ball on a plate for the on-rushing Havertz.

France coach Didier Deschamps rang the changes on the hour mark but without Antoine Griezmann, missing his first international since 2017, the hosts lacked a cutting edge despite the presence of star striker Kylian Mbappe.

It was Julian Nagelsmann's charges who looked the more likely to score the next goal, with only fine saves by Samba denying debutant Maximilian Mittelstaedt and Thomas Mueller. France nearly halved the deficit in the 88th minute when Mittelstaedt mistimed a clearance on to his own arm, but Antonio Rudiger was on hand to hack the ball off the line and VAR then adjudged the handball inside the box to be unintentional. — AFP

## Spain 'contenders' at Euro 2024 but need 'time': De la Fuente

**LONDON:** Spain coach Luis de la Fuente insists his squad has the "raw materials" to make a title push at Euro 2024 where the former champions will be "contenders". The 62-year-old talked to AFP ahead of Friday's 1-0 defeat to Colombia in a friendly international at the London Stadium. As well as discussing the progress of his team, De la Fuente also lamented the arrests this week in a corruption investigation, the latest in a string of scandals that have ensnared the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF). "It is not good for Spanish football that attention is diverted to this other focus," said De la Fuente. The coach led Spain to Under-19 and Under-21 European titles and Olympic silver medal in Tokyo before taking over the senior team in 2022 and winning the Nations League in June 2023.

Spain are one of the six top seeds for the 24-team Euros in Germany this summer. "We are among the contenders who are going to fight for the trophy," said De la Fuente. "We have to try to live up to expectations and the expectation is we will compete to win."

"Winning at this level is very difficult because there are other teams that are well prepared, with very good players." "We have a very difficult group, with Croatia, Italy and let's not forget Albania, who topped their group, with a very brilliant coach, with very good players even if they are unknown to the general public," De la Fuente said. At the last Euros, Spain beat Croatia in the last 16 but lost to Italy, who took the title, in the semi-finals. "Both Croatia and Italy could be fighting for the top, and then you have France, Portugal, England, Germany," added the coach. De La Fuente has overhauled the Spain squad. In Friday's starting lineup only Aymeric Laporte also began Spain's last game in a major tournament - the round-of-16 loss to Morocco in the World Cup in December 2022.

"We have the raw materials to make a great team. What do we need? Time," De la Fuente said. Against Colombia, De la Fuente gave second-half minutes to 16-year-old Lamine Yamal, 17-year-old Pau Cubarsi and Nico Williams, a 21-year-old, who also came on as a 75th-minute substitute against Morocco in the World Cup only to be replaced in the last minute of extra time by penalty specialist Pablo Sarabia, who then missed his spot kick. On Friday, Yamal replaced the 31-year-old Sarabia after 72 minutes. — AFP



**LONDON:** Spain's coach Luis de la Fuente gestures while giving an interview to AFP in east London on March 22, 2024, ahead of Spain's friendly international football match against Colombia in London later in the day. — AFP

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

#### Industrial Shuwaikh

|                |          |
|----------------|----------|
| Qadsiya        | 24814764 |
| Dasmah         | 22515088 |
| Bneid Al-Gar   | 22532265 |
| Shaab          | 22531908 |
| Qibla          | 22518752 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22459381 |
| Mirqab         | 22451082 |
| Sharq          | 22456536 |
| Salmiya        | 22465401 |
|                | 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, Shaik Shameer** (old name) holder of Indian Passport No. R7706896, R/o 5/341, Kolimi Street, Rajampet, Annamayya DT, A.P. do hereby declared that I have changed my name as Shaik Shameer Basha (new name) S/o Shaik Ibraheem Basha.

(#5188) 24/03/2024



MELBOURNE: Winner Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr (front centre L) and second-placed Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc (front centre R) celebrate with their team after the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne on March 24, 2024. — AFP

## Sainz wins Australian GP in Ferrari 1-2 as Verstappen fails to finish

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes

MELBOURNE: Ferrari's Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix Sunday to snap Red Bull's winning start to the season after three-time world champion Max Verstappen sensationally failed to finish. The Spaniard, who had appendicitis surgery two weeks ago, took the chequered flag 2.3 seconds ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc, with McLaren's Lando Norris a bold third.

It was his third grand prix win and first since Singapore last year. "I'm happy to be in a one-two with Charles here. It shows that hard work pays off," said Sainz, who missed the last race in Saudi Arabia and was bed-ridden for a week afterwards.

"Life sometimes is crazy ... the podium in Bahrain, then the appendix, the comeback, the win. It's a rollercoaster but I loved it and I'm extremely happy." While he celebrated, it was a disastrous day for pole-sitter Verstappen, who limped out with smoke billowing from his car after being passed by

front-row partner Sainz on lap two.

The Dutchman blamed a brake issue for his first retirement in two years. "What we can see so far from the data is that as soon as the lights went off the right-rear brake just stuck on," he said. "It just caused the damage and it kept on increasing so it was also basically driving with the handbrake on."

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes, with the British seven-time world champion suffering engine failure on lap 17. To add to Mercedes' woes, teammate George Russell crashed heavily on the last lap with the car ending on its side.

Russell climbed out unscathed, with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso faulted for "potentially dangerous" driving over the incident and slapped with a 20-second penalty. Verstappen emphatically won the opening two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with both a Red Bull 1-2, and was hot favourite to make it three from three.

He had been aiming to match his own record set last year of 10 consecutive wins—one more than Sebastian Vettel in 2013 -- and was unbeaten in his last 18 starts from pole position. But while Verstappen was favoured to win, the Ferraris had proved highly competitive in practice and qualifying on the fast and flowing Albert Park track. Despite not being fully fit, Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year, topped Q1 and Q2 to fire a warning shot.

**'Incredible weekend'**

Oscar Piastri in the other McLaren was fourth ahead of Red Bull's Sergio Perez. Alonso dropped to eighth after his penalty with teammate Lance Stroll elevated to sixth and RB's Yuki Tsunoda to seventh.

Haas pair Nico Hulkenberg and Kevin Magnussen rounded out the top 10. "It feels good mostly for the team of course, first and second didn't hap-

pen since Bahrain 2022," said Leclerc. "Carlos has had an incredible weekend to come back from his surgery, he's done an amazing race."

Verstappen made a clean start and pulled clear of Sainz when the lights went out, with Norris holding onto third as they jostled for position. But his lead didn't last with Sainz opening his DRS on lap two to slice past before smoke started pouring out of the Red Bull and the Dutchman retired.

Sainz led from Norris and Leclerc before the first pit stops. Sainz put on fresh rubber on lap 17 and had a 2.6sec lead from Leclerc at the halfway mark, closely followed by Piastri and Norris. With no Verstappen to contend with, the Spaniard gradually built the gap as Norris passed Piastri to move into third. Leclerc pitted again and he came back out in fifth on hards, but quickly surged back to second. Sainz also pitted for a second time and retained his narrow lead to cruise home in front of 130,000 fans. — AFP

## Sabalenka exits Miami, Alcaraz starts in style

MIAMI: A traumatic week for world number two Aryna Sabalenka came to an end with a third round, three set loss in the Miami Open to Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina on Saturday. The 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 win for the 36th ranked Kalinina prompted Sabalenka, who had kept her emotions in check through both of her games at Hard Rock Stadium, to smash her racket violently into the court.

On Monday, Belarusian Sabalenka's former boyfriend, ex-NHL player Konstantin Koltsov, died in Miami after what police called an "apparent suicide". The pair had been in a relationship until recently and Sabalenka only announced they were no longer together following the death.

On Friday, she looked in control as she defeated her close friend Paula Badosa of Spain in straight sets. But given the late slot on the main stadium court, Sabalenka looked to be feeling the strain more as she struggled for any kind of consistency.

After losing the opening set, she utterly dominated Kalinina in the second, with her serve and powerful backhand too much for the Ukrainian. But once Kalinina broke in the third, Sabalenka's focus and composure deserted her and her opponent took full advantage.

"It's really tough with nerves. But I managed in the tough moments to deal with it," said Kalinina. "So I'm a little bit proud of myself today." World number one Iga Swiatek had no trouble in beating Italy's Camila Giorgi 6-2, 6-1 as the rain impacted tournament packed in the big names including postponed matches from Friday.

Sixth-seed Ons Jabeur suffered an upset with 21-year-old Russian Elena Avanesyan, ranked 65th in the world, running out a 6-1, 4-6, 6-3 winner. Elena Rybakina moved into the fourth round after a tight tussle with American Taylor Townsend. Townsend, ranked 11th, won a second set tie-break to set up a fiercely contested deciding set before she succumbed with the Kazakh winning 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4. In the ATP event, top seed Carlos Alcaraz was simply too much for his compatriot Roberto Carballes Baena as he powered to a 6-2, 6-1 win in 85 minutes.

Like Swiatek, Alcaraz is looking to complete the "Sunshine Double" after his victory in Indian Wells last week and the two-time Grand Slam winner looked in formidable form. The 20-year-old was on top from the start, powerful from the baseline but willing to approach the net as he hit 10 winners to one in the opening set. — AFP

## Celtics pass Bulls test to push NBA win streak to nine games

LOS ANGELES: The Boston Celtics pushed their NBA winning streak to nine games with a 124-113 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Saturday as the Houston Rockets won their eighth straight, 147-119 over Utah.

Sam Hauser made seven of the Celtics' 21 three-pointers, missing just once from beyond the arc on the way to 23 points. Al Horford also scored 23 while Jayson Tatum—back after sitting out a victory over the Pistons in Detroit on Friday—led the way with 26.

With Tatum back it was the turn of Jaylen Brown and Kristaps Porzingis to rest nagging injuries, but the Celtics didn't miss a beat. Horford drilled five three-pointers and the Celtics, who led 95-92 going into the fourth quarter relentlessly pulled away.

They took a 10-point lead on Tatum's finger roll layup with just over three minutes remaining and a Hauser three-pointer pushed the lead to 13 with 1:29 to play. DeMar DeRozan led all scorers with 28 points, but the Bulls dropped their second straight. "Playing teams like Chicago is a great test for the playoffs because of their ability to go on runs, their ability to impact the game on turnovers, points off turnovers, offensive rebounds, free throws," Celtics coach Joe

Mazzulla said. "They test you on the margins."

Mazzulla said Boston's 12-3 advantage in offensive rebounds and their ability to limit the Bulls to 11 free-throw attempts was a "recipe for success." The Celtics are now two wins away from equalling their season-best 11-game winning streak.

They pushed their league-best record to 57-14 and lead the Eastern Conference by 11.5 games over the Milwaukee Bucks. The Rockets, meanwhile, are fighting for their post-season lives. At 11th in the West they are one place outside the play-in tournament, 1.5 games behind 10th-placed Golden State. Their eight-game winning streak is their longest since 2019 and it owes plenty to Jalen Green, who scored 41 points less than a week after posting 42 in a win over Washington. "It won't really mean anything if we don't make the playoffs," Green said of his run of form.

Green drained seven three-pointers and Fred VanVleet hit 10 treys as the Rockets made 27 from beyond the arc in the dominant victory. VanVleet, who tied James Harden and Chandler Parsons for the Rockets' record for three-pointers in a game, finished with 34 points. "I felt good after the first shot," VanVleet said. "When it's going in like that, and you get good looks, teammates find you in good spots." The Rockets were already up 47-23 in the first minute of the second quarter when Houston's Jabari Smith Jr. and Utah's Kris Dunn traded punches after tangling up on court and were ejected. Houston coach Ime Udoka said he thought the altercation was a hangover from an ill-tempered exchange between the same two players in a January game.



CHICAGO: Dalen Terry #25 of the Chicago Bulls dunks in the second half against the Boston Celtics at the United Center on March 23, 2024 in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

In other games, Devin Booker scored 32 points to pace the Phoenix Suns in a wire-to-wire 131-106 victory over the Spurs in San Antonio. Kevin Durant added 25 points and Bradley Beal added 13 points and 12 assists for Phoenix, who are just a half-game ahead of the Sacramento Kings and Dallas Mavericks for the sixth and final automatic playoff berth in the West.

The Kings eked out a 109-107 victory over the Magic in Orlando, where De'Aaron Fox's 31 points included two free-throws that put Sacramento up by one with 21.2 seconds remaining. Keon Ellis added another free throw and Orlando's Paolo Banchero missed a three-pointer at the buzzer. — AFP