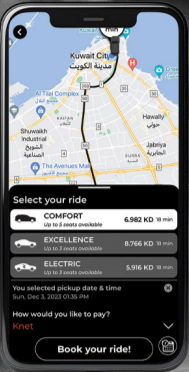



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**4** Burgan Bank sponsors 'The Workout' fitness experience during Ramadan



**10** Gulf Bank officially launches Neo account to motivate kids to save



**15** USA win CONCACAF Nations League title by beating Mexico



Ramadan Kareem	
Fajr	: 04:26
Shrooq	: 05:46
Dhuhr	: 11:54
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:03
Isha	: 19:20

# UNSC demands immediate Gaza truce

## Zionists besiege Gaza hospitals, bar UNRWA from aid deliveries

### Amir invited to Arab Summit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a written letter from Bahraini King Hamad bin Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa inviting him to the 33rd regular session of the Arab League Council at the summit level, due in Manama in May. The letter was handed to HH the Amir by Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Ali Al-Malki at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

**GAZA:** The UN Security Council for the first time on Monday demanded a ceasefire in Gaza, with the United States, the Zionist entity's ally which has vetoed previous bids, abstaining. The resolution, which demands an "immediate ceasefire" for the ongoing holy month of Ramadan that leads to a "lasting" truce, went through, with all other 14 Security Council members voting yes.

In Gaza, Zionist forces fought Hamas fighters on Monday including around at least three major hospitals, raising fears for the patients, medics and displaced people trapped inside. Troops and tanks have encircled Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, the territory's biggest, for a week and more recently moved on the Al-Amal Hospital in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, as aid agencies have voiced alarm about civilians caught up in the fighting. The Red Crescent on Sunday said military vehicles had also surrounded the nearby Nasser Hospital.

As combat raged on, technical talks have continued in Qatar towards a truce and hostage release deal, and the UN Security Council was set to convene later in the day for a vote on a new ceasefire

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: A Palestinian boy mourns over the covered body of a child, killed in overnight Zionist bombardment, at the Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 25, 2024. — AFP

#### RAMADAN KAREEM

### Long life is a blessing

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

**A** long life in which a believer continuously performs righteous deeds is better for him than death. Abu Bakrah Nufaei bin Al-Harith (RA) narrated that a man asked, "O Messenger of Allah, who is the best of the people?" He replied, "He whose life is long and his deeds are good." The man then asked, "Then who is the worst of the people?" He replied, "He whose life is long and his deeds are evil." (Al-Albani rated it as Sahih Lighairi (authentic by being corroborated by narrations that carry the same meaning), see Sahih At-Tirmidhi # 2, 330)

Among the lessons we learn from the above-quoted hadith (prophetic narration) is that the longer a person lives while being obedient to Almighty Allah, the closer he becomes to Him (Allah), because every good deed that he performs in his long life brings him closer to Almighty Allah, and thus the All-Loving Allah continues to love him.

At-Tayyebi (may Allah have mercy on him) said, translated as: "Times and hours (to a person) are like capital to a trader, so he should trade in what yields profits. The more capital he invests, the more profits he earns. Whoever works for what benefits him, wins and attains success, and whoever wastes his capital, incurs great, evident losses." (Kitabul-Eiman)

We have to understand that living in both favorable and unfavorable conditions is called 'part of life', but smiling and staying positive in both prosperity and adversity is called the 'art of life.' When you are going through a hardship and you start wondering where is Almighty Allah, just remember the teacher is always quiet during the test or exam, and with Almighty Allah are the perfectly incomparable best examples.

When Almighty Allah decides to open the gates of prosperity for someone, He tests him or her first. Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "If Allah intends good (or prosperity) for someone, He afflicts him (first) with trials and tribulations." (Al-Bukhari # 5, 645)

Continued on Page 6

### Work to begin on first labor city in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Municipality officially handed over on Monday the site of the first integrated residential city project for low-income workers to the investing company to begin implementation in Subhan, covering an area of 40,000 sq m to accommodate 3,000 workers. Director-General of the Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous said in a press statement "the project is one of the important projects that will contribute to eliminating the phenomenon of bachelor housing in residential areas".

The municipality emphasized its efforts to develop integrated residential complexes for workers, starting with this workers' city that includes all services, and social, recreational and commercial activities to meet the requirements and needs of this workforce. He explained that one of the most important components of the project is the presence of 16 residential complexes, each floor containing bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, lounges for relaxation, laundry service rooms and personal storage rooms.

It also includes two commercial complexes consisting of restaurants, cafes and shops, in addition to



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality and Kuwait Real Estate Company officials sign a contract on March 25, 2024, observed by municipal and finance ministry officials. — KUNA

administrative and governmental buildings, a security guard building, a police station, government offices and a mosque, alongside recreational activities. Dabbous thanked the national cadres of engineers in the survey sector and project sector for their efforts in completing the final stage of this project.

The statement clarified that immediate delivery was made to Kuwait Real Estate Company to commence the actual construction of the integrated workers' residential city with technical, health, environmental and service standards to be implemented within a year and a half under the BOT system. — KUNA

"Kate has effectively been bullied into this statement," writer Helen Lewis wrote in US magazine the Atlantic. "The alternative — a wildfire of gossip and conspiracy theories — was worse." Britain's Daily Mail tabloid also lashed out, asking: "How do all those vile online trolls feel now?" If social media posts are to be believed, they are not too sorry.

Many on X, formerly Twitter, and TikTok claimed Kate's video message was an AI-enabled deepfake. Some users posted slowed down versions of the video to support the baseless claim that it was digitally manipulated, asking why nothing in the background — a leaf or blade of grass — moved. Others scrutinized her facial movements and speculated why a dimple, as seen in previous images, wasn't visible.

"Sorry House of Windsor, Kate Middleton (and) legacy media — I'm still not buying what you're selling," said one post on X. "Actually not sorry - you've all read 'The Little Boy That Cried Wolf' right?" And then there was misinformation about cancer itself, with posts falsely claiming that the disease was not fatal while comparing chemotherapy with "poison".

And how could anti-vaccine campaigners be left behind? Many of them jumped on the conspiracy bandwagon, baselessly linking Kate's diagnosis to "turbo cancer," a myth linked to COVID-19 vaccines that has been repeatedly debunked. "There is no evidence to support the 'turbo cancer' lie," said Timothy Caulfield, a misinformation expert from the University of Alberta in Canada. Conspiracy theorists "are cruel grifters marketing fear (and) misinformation," he added.

Continued on Page 6

#### NEWS IN BRIEF

##### 3-month ban on carton exports

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of the Public Authority for Industry Abdullah Al-Jouan on Monday announced a ban on export and re-export of carton waste for three months. The ministry said in a statement that the minister's decision is in line with the approach to recycle cardboard boxes. Carton is a basic material for Kuwaiti factories and provides some products for the local market at reasonable prices, it said, noting that local factories need up to 30,000 tons of cardboard per month. It also indicated the factories' need for cartons cannot be met without recycling waste. — KUNA

##### Maatouq reappointed UN advisor

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) said on Monday that its Chairman Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq has retained his position as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' special advisor for the eighth consecutive year. Maatouq said he was thankful for the UN chief's trust in him, and it was a recognition of Kuwait's efforts towards regional and global humanitarian endeavors and important partnership to achieve UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Maatouq has served as the UN chief's advisor since 2017. He also served as the UN Secretary General's envoy for humanitarian affairs for four years from 2012 to 2016. — KUNA



Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq

##### 273K expected to travel during Eid

**KUWAIT:** Some 273,000 people are expected to travel during the Eid Al-Fitr holidays on 2,037 flights from Kuwait International Airport, the Directorate General for Civil Aviation said on Monday. Official spokesman of the DGCA Abdullah Al-Rajhi told KUNA most travelers will head to Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Istanbul and Doha. He affirmed Kuwait airport is ready to receive travelers and facilitate their journey. Rajhi also revealed the coming summer season will witness several airlines traveling to and from Kuwait airport, including from India and Italy. — KUNA



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# Kuwait's Zakat House builds residential village in Yemen

## Direct-Aid Society distributes food baskets in south Yemen



**ADEN:** The Undersecretary of Marib Governorate, Abdrabbuh Muftah, inaugurated Sunday Khawla residential village, which consists of 53 units for the displaced and is funded by the Kuwaiti Zakat House, as part of the "Kuwait Next to You" campaign. In a press statement during the opening ceremony, the Yemeni official praised the humanitarian role of the government and people of Kuwait and its humanitarian interventions in supporting the displaced in Yemen.

He pointed out that the village includes all services, including a school, a health unit, a mosque, and a water well. He also expressed his thanks and appreciation to Kuwait for its constant support for the Yemeni people at various stages and circumstances, appreciating this generous humanitarian gesture from the Kuwaiti Zakat House in this holy month.

**2,200 food baskets**

In another development, Kuwait's Direct-Aid



Kuwait's Direct-Aid Society launches a campaign to distribute 2,200 food baskets to the needy in the governorates of Aden and Hadhramaut, south of Yemen.

Society launched on Sunday a campaign to distribute 2,200 food baskets to the needy in the governorates of Aden and Hadhramaut, south of Yemen. This campaign is part of the Kuwait is By Your Side relief aid campaign, which is entering its ninth year. The Direct-Aid regional manager in Yemen, Ali Batit, told KUNA that the campaign would provide food baskets to the needy, noting that there were around 15,000 Yemenis suffering from harsh conditions, disease, and other plights. He affirmed that the Direct-Aid Society would continue to work with local Yemeni entities to distribute aid, saying that the aid would reach all those in need. — KUNA



ADEN: Khawla residential village built for the displaced Yemenis. — KUNA photos

## Ramdan and politics

In my view

Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Parliamentary elections during Ramadan often bring about a familiar scene: Gossip, lies, fraud and possibly bribery, whether overt or concealed. This unfortunate reality underscores the nature of political battles, where narratives are often embellished with exaggerations and falsehoods about opponents rather than focusing on achievements.

Throughout history, politics worldwide has been built on deception. In the past, German politicians during the Nazi era famously embraced the motto "lie...lie so the people will believe you." Truthful politicians who speak positively about their opponents are rare, as such honesty may not secure victory in elections. The driving force in politics is self-interest. Politicians advocate for democratic freedom, yet often resort to buying votes and making false promises to secure seats in the National Assembly. Justice is selectively applied, serving the interests of those in power while neglecting fairness when it inconveniences them.

Many candidates resort to various tactics to secure votes, whether through eloquent speech or behind-the-scenes bribery. As the poet Al-Mutanabbi said: "You have neither horses nor money; Let the speech be happy if the situation is not." Some align themselves with political parties or religious groups, turning a blind eye to their shortcomings in pursuit of personal gain. The elections during Ramadan prompt reflection on the sacrifices made by the electorate. Those who support candidates based solely on affiliations risk betraying their trust. Accepting bribes, whether monetary or in the form of promises, is a betrayal of national values, especially during the holy month.

Despite these challenges, there is hope for integrity among some who prioritize principles over personal gain. Perhaps, this year's Ramadan elections will bring about a different outcome, with candidates who uphold moral values and fear Allah. The question remains: Will politics overshadow the spirit of Ramadan, or will Ramadan prevail over political expediency? The answer lies in the choices made by both politicians and the people, and it's a question worth pondering.

## Municipality removes 114 camps in Jahra, Ahmadi

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Municipality's supervisory teams have removed some illegal camps in the Jahra and Ahmadi governorates. The team removed 114 camps, while 35 camps were voluntarily removed. 231 warnings were also issued. The spring camping season officially ended on

Friday. Kuwait Municipality appreciated the response and cooperation of the owners of licensed camps to voluntarily remove their camps after the end of the official camping period. The municipal teams will continue their work at all camp sites to ensure that there are no violations.



## Humanitarian societies boost Jordan activities

**AMMAN:** Since the beginning of Ramadan, Kuwait's charities have augmented humanitarian activities in Jordan to support refugees in the area and contribute to improving their living conditions. In the presence of and under the patronage of Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Mari, the Nama charity society held a ceremony to honor 143 Quran memorizers of orphaned Syrian refugees. Nama's Khaled Al-Shamri told KUNA after the ceremony that this is to honor the children's achievements and to further encourage them.

Al-Shamri affirmed Nama's intent on providing sufficient care to orphaned children and hailed the role Kuwaitis play in supporting such endeavors. Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), in cooperation with its Jordanian counterpart, organized a fast-breaking event for some 600 orphans in Al-Aqaba. The event included the distribution of Eid clothing coupons as well as entertaining shows and contents for the children. Throughout the month, KRCS gave out around 15,000 fast-breaking meals



Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan attends a ceremony where 143 Quran memorizers were honored. — KUNA photos

and will continue to do so for the rest of the month.

As for Rahma Society, it distributed some 2,500 food baskets to 12,000 Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Its Arab sector chief, Abdullah Al-Ajmi, took note of the coordination with local charity organiza-

tions to facilitate the effective distribution of aid. The International Islamic Charity Organization, alongside Al-Ghara local charities, put together a fast-breaking project that included the distribution of 700 food baskets. — KUNA



Charity organizations facilitate effective distribution of aid.



Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributes iftar meals to orphans in Jordan.



Kuwaiti Ambassador honors Syrian refugees.

## KRCS distributes iftar meals to Palestinians

**GAZA:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Monday its preliminary action plan for the iftar (breaking fast) project, providing 30,000 warm meals to displaced Palestinians in southern Gaza. The Director General of the Palestinian Wafaa Capacity Building and Microfinance Foundation, Muhaisen Al-Atawna, said in a statement to KUNA that the KRCS "distributed 30,000 warm meals to displaced Palestinians in Deir Al-Balah, Khan Yunis, and Rafah in the south of Gaza."

This is the first phase of the iftar project in Ramadan, Al-Atawna emphasized, with consecutive phases ahead that include distributing food parcels and aid relief to fasting Palestinians during the catastrophic conditions forced on them by the Zionist occupation. Al-Atawna highlighted that the Iftar project during the Holy Month reinforces the Palestinians' resilience amidst the Zi-

onist occupation's Gaza siege and deliberate obstruction of food and aid relief, spreading famine and debilitating poverty.

He extended his gratitude towards Kuwait, its

Amir, government, people, charity organizations, and humanitarian authorities for their contribution and provision of food to Palestinian families in Ramadan, spearheaded by the KRCS. From the beginning of

the war on Gaza in October 2023, the KRCS provided relief aid, aid caravans, and medical teams to lessen the burden brought upon the Palestinians by the Zionist occupation's on-going siege. — KUNA



GAZA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society provides 30,000 warm meals to displaced Palestinians in southern Gaza. — KUNA photos



# Amir receives FM, ambassador to Nigeria and senior officials

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya at Bayan Palace, where he presented Kuwait's newly appointed Ambassador to Nigeria, Salem Al-Muzain, who took the constitutional oath. On Sunday, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, at Bayan Palace, along with the Deputy Commander of the Kuwait National Guard, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. Also, His Highness the Amir received the newly appointed Civil Aviation President Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Humoud Al-Sabah. — KUNA



## Amir congratulates president of Greece

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations on Monday to the President of Greece, Katerina Sakellaropoulou, on the occasion of her country's national day. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the president wellbeing and Greece further progress and prosperity. Also, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a similar cable of congratulations to the President of Greece, Katerina Sakellaropoulou. — KUNA

## PM welcomes Oxford Center for Islamic Studies' director



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received on Monday at Bayan Palace the visiting director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in the United Kingdom Dr. Farhan Nizami and his accompanying delegation. — KUNA

## Minister, officials discuss elections coverage plans

**KUWAIT:** On Sunday, Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi discussed with the ministry's officials the progress of the plan to cover the National Assembly elections and facilitate the work of media professionals participating in coverage from inside and outside Kuwait. The Undersecretary of the Ministry, Dr. Nasser Muhaisen, said in a statement to KUNA that the meeting discussed the launch of "a renewed era" as a slogan for the media campaign of the Ministry of Information for the 2024 National Assembly elections.

Dr. Muhaisen said that the preparations of the news sector were also reviewed, as a daily television program was allocated before Election Day to raise a number of topics related to the elections and host a number of specialists and academics. He added that the ministry's plans were for continuous coverage of the elections from the beginning until the announcement of the final results. — KUNA



## German Embassy promotes cultural exchange

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, the German Embassy to Kuwait invited local media representatives to an iftar gathering to boost cultural exchange and understanding between communities. German Ambassador Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz said that this year Kuwait and Germany celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations. "The 60 years of economic, cultural, scientific and interpersonal relationships find their expression today in a continued flow of visitors, lively personal contacts, frequent exchanges and friendships forged over time," he said.

Regarding mutual interests, he revealed: "German cars have run on Kuwait's roads from the very beginning of our relationship and the lively fan communities in our two countries celebrate their motor obsession together. Horse and dog-breeding is another shared passion that has brought Arabian thoroughbreds to Germany and German Shepherd dogs to Kuwait. German technologies are providing energy, comfort, IT solutions and life science technologies to Kuwait and Kuwaiti investments are supporting many industrial sectors in Germany. Kuwaiti citizens enjoy their vacations in Germany and Europe and are most welcome guests for us."

The German ambassador added that the developing areas of cooperation will require all of Germany's attention, explaining that in times of climate change,



German Ambassador  
Hans-Christian  
Freiherr von Reibnitz

energy transition challenges and global water scarcity, there are ample opportunities to jointly look at developing solutions together and Germany stands ready to join efforts, in line with future visions of Kuwait's development. "In the meantime, both our countries are working to elevate our bilateral relationship to new heights through a strategic dialogue between our foreign ministries," von Reibnitz said.

Concerning upcoming events, he revealed that at the end of April, the embassy will mark the beginning of summer with an event for German companies in Kuwait and they envisage more events this autumn, once the summer heat abates. Meanwhile, he commended the Kuwaiti tradition of visiting diwanis, noting that this year marked the second consecutive year with a significant increase in the number of visited diwanis, totaling 28, belonging to prominent Kuwaiti families, lauding the diverse topics discussed in these gatherings about political and social issues.

Amidst the tense situation in the Middle East, von Reibnitz highlighted his country's foreign minister's ongoing efforts to seek a resolution to the Gaza war, emphasizing Kuwait's stance on ending the bloodshed. He revealed Germany's humanitarian engagement in Gaza and the West Bank since October 2023, with increased humanitarian support for the civilian population in Gaza by more than €160 million to a total of around €240 million to date. In this crisis, it thus remains the largest humanitarian donor to the Palestinian territories.



German Ambassador poses for a group photo with local media.



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## Benefits of fasting



## Weight loss

Fasting aids in weight loss and positively so. Apart from the considerable change in weight, people also notice a reduction in inflammation, their waist sizes, and body fat without harming the body muscles. Even sporadic fasting has been proved to show these effects.

## Increased insulin sensitivity

Fasting could reduce your risk of getting diabetes. Research has proved that fasting just once a week and consuming just water that day can lower the odds of suffering from diabetes. Not only this, fasting reduces cholesterol levels and blood pressure as well.

## Boosts immunity

Prolonged fasting can reinvent your immune system. When the body is starved of food over a period of time, to conserve energy, it recycles immune cells, providing you with a new fighting force against diseases.

## Detoxification

When the body is fasting, it tries to throw out anything and everything that is consuming energy without providing any benefits. Due to this, the toxins stored in the body are excreted. Research points at a raised level of endorphins, the hormones that make us feel good and happy after fasting.



## Burgan Bank sponsors 'The Workout' fitness experience during Ramadan

Part of Burgan Bank's comprehensive social responsibility program

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced that it will be sponsoring 'The Workout' fitness experience, powered by Fohgah App and coach Salah Al-Shatti, as a strategic partner. The fitness event is scheduled to take place on three consecutive Fridays during the holy month of Ramadan at Al-Assima Mall's rooftop and track area, with weekly prizes for competition winners.

This sponsorship is part of Burgan Bank's efforts to promote a sports culture in Kuwait and comes under the umbrella of the Bank's comprehensive social responsibility program, which aims to encourage community members to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives. "The overall health of our community remains one of our top priorities, which continues to drive plenty of our social responsibility efforts," said Talal Hamed Al-Ayar, Senior Officer – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, commenting on the Bank's latest collaboration with Fohgah App.

"With the abrupt change to our eating habits in Ramadan, it's not uncommon that even the most committed athletes may struggle to keep up with

their usual workout routine. That's why we are honored to be sponsoring the latest fitness event The Workout, by Fohgah App and the renowned fitness coach Salah Al-Shatti. The event is designed to encourage participants of all fitness levels to engage in a fun competition every Friday with a chance to win a weekly prize and enjoy a night of athletic fun with their favorite team partner."

"We are truly delighted to be collaborating with Burgan Bank once more, following last month's successful FERYA food event that garnered a lot of interest from visitors and participants alike," said Mohammad Al Mashan, Co-Founder of Fohgah. "We look forward to achieving more success under the umbrella of our strategic collaboration with the Bank." The Workout is open to males and females above the age of 16, with a maximum capacity of 20 participants per event. During each event, 10 teams of two will compete for the highest score, with a winning team announced every week.

In line with its comprehensive social responsibility strategy, Burgan Bank previously sponsored numerous sporting events, including the eighth



Mohammad Al Mashan



Talal Hamed Al-Ayar

edition of Flare Festival and the Kuwait Crown Prince Cup 2022/2023 final. It also continues to sponsor several prominent Kuwaiti champions, such as Tareq Al-Qallaf, the wheelchair-fencing Paralympic world champion, and Olympians Yaqoub Al-Youha, Mudhawi Al-Shammari, Ebrahim Al-Dhafeeri, Amal Al-Roumi, Abdulmohsen Al-Ali, and Jude Tawfeeq.

# CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times management and staff  
convey their deepest condolences to

**Sahar Moussa and Khalid Abdullatif  
Abdulrahman Al-Kandari**

on the sad demise of his grandmother

**Hafsa Ahmad Al-Harbi**  
Wife of Abdulrahman Mohammad Al-Kandari

*May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her*



London still awaits Olympics' promised 'affordable' housing

## Simon Harris to become Ireland's youngest PM



MOSCOW: A man suspected of taking part in the Moscow attack that killed 137 people is escorted by officers prior to his pre-trial detention hearing at the Basmanny District Court on March 24, 2024. — AFP photos

# Moscow attackers in custody

## Kremlin refuses to comment on IS links to attack which killed 137

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin refused to comment Monday on the Islamic State group's claims that it was behind the deadliest attack in Russia in two decades, as rescuers searched for bodies amid the rubble of the burnt-out Moscow concert hall. At least 137 people were killed when gunmen in camouflage stormed Crocus City Hall, shooting spectators before setting the building on fire in the most fatal attack in Europe to have been claimed by Islamic State jihadists.

The group has said several times since Friday that it carried out the attack, and IS-affiliated media channels have published videos of the gunmen inside the venue shooting concert-goers.

But in his only public remarks on the massacre, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday pointed to a possible Ukraine connection, and no senior Russian official has commented on the IS claims.

"The investigation is still ongoing. No coherent version has yet been voiced," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday when asked why Russia had not addressed IS's claimed involvement. We are talking only about preliminary data. No version has been put forward yet," he added. Officials expect the death toll to rise further, as rescuers were searching the site for remains on Monday and 97 are still in hospital.

**'Dealing with threats'**

Putin has no plans to visit the site of the attack, on the northwestern edge of Moscow, Peskov said.

He will hold a meeting with Russia's security chiefs, government officials and the heads of Moscow and the Moscow region later Monday. The Kremlin also on Monday expressed confidence in the country's powerful security agencies, as questions swirl over how they failed to thwart the massacre despite public and private warnings by the United States' intelligence apparatus. "Special services are working tirelessly, dealing with all the threats, all the challenges facing our country and society," Peskov said.



DONETSK: People light candles during a memorial gathering in Donetsk, Russian-controlled Ukraine, on March 24, 2024.

Putin, a former Soviet spy, headed the FSB briefly before becoming president and takes pride in its reputation as a team of feared intelligence operators.

A Moscow court has remanded four suspected gunmen in custody on "terror" charges, accusing them of being the assailants who stormed the concert hall and then set it on fire on Friday night. They face life in prison, though some Russian officials have called for the lifting of a moratorium on the death penalty to deliver even harsher sentences. The Kremlin said Monday that it was not involved in discussions about possibly bringing back capital punishment.

**Bloodied faces**

In a series of late-night court hearings in Moscow that ran into the early hours of Monday, the four men — with bruises and cuts on their swollen faces — were dragged in amid dozens of reporters who had assembled

at the capital's Basmanny district court. FSB officers wheeled in one of the suspects to the hearing on a gurney, his eyes barely open. Peskov refused to comment on reports and videos on social media that showed bloody interrogations of the suspects after they were arrested on Saturday. The court identified them as Muhammadsobir Fayzov, Shamsidin Fariduni, Rachabalizoda Saidakrami and Dalerjon Mirzoyev. Russian state media said they were all citizens of Tajikistan. Two of them pled guilty, the court said. There has been no update on seven others Russia said it arrested in connection with the attack.

**Removing rubble**

At least 137 people, including three children, were killed, according to the latest toll by Russian investigators. After walking through the theatre shooting spectators, the gunmen set fire to the building, trapping many inside. Victims died both of gunshot wounds and smoke inhalation, according to Russia's Investigative Committee.

More than 5,000 people were in the concert hall when the gunmen stormed in ahead of a sold-out rock concert, Russian state media cited a spokesperson from the venue owner as saying Monday. Rescuers will continue sifting through the rubble and clearing debris at the site until Tuesday evening, said Andrey Vorobyov, governor of the Moscow region. "The task is to remove the rubble to make sure there are no bodies underneath," Vorobyov said in a Telegram post.

Putin on Saturday vowed "retribution and oblivion" to the "terrorists, murderers and non-humans" who carried out the "barbaric terrorist act". He said the four assailants had been arrested while trying to flee to Ukraine, where they had secured a "window" to cross the border.

**Mourning**

The FSB has said the gunmen had "contacts" in



This combination of pictures shows (Clockwise from top left) Rachabalizoda Saidakrami, Dalerjon (alternatively spelled Dalerzhon) Barotovitch Mirzoyev, Muhammadsobir Fayzov and Shamsidin Fariduni.

Ukraine, without providing more details. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has denied any Ukrainian involvement.

The United States, which on March 7 warned about an "imminent" attack in Moscow by "extremists", has said IS bears "sole responsibility". On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron warned Russia against "exploiting" the attack to blame Kyiv.

Russia observed a day of national mourning on Sunday, with dozens coming to lay flowers at a memorial to the victims, and tribute posters were erected on the sides of buildings and at transport stops across the country.

Russian schools were holding special lessons on "terrorism," on Monday, with children wearing white ribbons in honor of the victims, state TV presenters said in a news bulletin. — AFP



JERUSALEM: A Christian worshipper walks down a road, overlooking the Dome of the Rock mosque at the Al-Aqsa mosque complex, during the traditional Palm Sunday procession.

## Gaza Christians ask for peace on Palm Sunday

**GAZA:** The faithful walked slowly in a procession past the stone facade of Gaza's only Catholic church on Palm Sunday, gathering to pray for peace as war raged around them. Holy Family Church's tranquil courtyard, filled with dozens of children and older people, belied the humanitarian crisis happening beyond its gates in Gaza City. Inside the church, worshippers in their dress clothes lined the wooden pews decorated with palm fronds for the service marking the start of Easter week.

"Our celebration of Palm Sunday is an opportunity

for hope, goodness and peace for us and for the entire world," said a young man speaking from the pulpit. "In order to renew our hearts and make them full of love, giving and peace," he said, dressed in an ankle-length red robe. Solemn-looking altar boys in the front row listened quietly, while parishioners with drawn faces after months of war filled the other rows.

The church in northern Gaza is a short drive from Al-Shifa hospital and its neighborhood, where heavy combat has raged between Zionist troops and Hamas fighters. A recent UN-backed assessment said Gaza's northern area would fall into Hamas by May unless there was urgent action.

Heavy combat has made it particularly difficult to get emergency food aid to the some 300,000 the UN estimates are still in the area. "This year, we don't have the heart to celebrate," Nabila Saleh, a sister at the Holy Family church told AFP. "It's true that we decorat-



GAZA CITY: Palestinian Christians gather at the Roman Catholic church of the Holy Family on Palm Sunday in Al-Zaitoun neighborhood on March 24, 2024. — AFP photos

ed, but we don't feel the joy of other years." The Zionist entity claims its war on Gaza is aimed at destroying Palestinian group Hamas, which staged an attack on the south of the entity in October 2023 which resulted in about 1,160 deaths, according to an AFP tally based on official Zionist figures.

**'Really heartbreaking'**

Though Holy Family's facade, courtyard and worship area inside the church are mostly intact, the site has been deeply affected by the fighting.

Christian families from Gaza have found refuge inside and in December the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem reported two Christian women were killed by Zionist fire at the church. The Zionist army said it had "no reports of a hit on the church", stressing it "does not target civilians, no matter their religion". Far from Gaza, Palestinian Christians marked Palm Sunday in

Jerusalem with the fate of the people trapped by war weighing heavily upon them. Thousands walked from Bethphage Church into the Old City, recreating Jesus's arrival during which crowds laid palm fronds at his feet. "It is very sad," said worshipper Hanan Nasrallah, 62. "Hopefully God will bring peace to everybody and next year hopefully everybody will celebrate together."

Palestinian Christians also criticized tightened movement restrictions on those in the occupied West Bank, which they said prevented many from joining on the festivities in Jerusalem. "Many of my friends from the West Bank, they weren't able to come," said 30-year-old Palestinian Hanna Tams, a dancer and choreographer. "The (Zionist) authorities are not giving them permission," he said, calling it "really heartbreaking". "I wish people in Gaza all the best and I wish they were safe and I wish they were here with us," he added. — AFP

## International

# Simon Harris to become Ireland's youngest PM

## Harris calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza, says to pursue 'more sustainable' immigration policy

**ATHLONE, Ireland:** Simon Harris is set to become Ireland's next prime minister after the governing Fine Gael party appointed him as its leader on Sunday, following an uncontested election.

The 37-year-old said it was the "absolute honor of my life" to be appointed party leader, and his rise to the country's top job is expected to be confirmed when the Irish parliament returns from recess early next month.

He will take over from Leo Varadkar, who announced his resignation on Wednesday in a move pundits described as a "political earthquake" in the EU member. "After seven years in office, I am no longer the best person for that job," said Varadkar, 45.

"My reasons for stepping down now are personal and political, but mainly political," he added, without elaborating. Within hours, Harris had secured endorsements for a leadership bid from a majority of Fine Gael party colleagues, prompting his potential rivals to rule themselves out.

With nominations closing at 1300 GMT Sunday and no challengers emerging, party official Willie Geraghty declared Harris as winner hours later at a convention in Athlone, west of Dublin.

Deputy party leader Simon Coveney said the new



**ATHLONE, Ireland: New Fine Gael leader Simon Harris speaks at a convention in central Ireland on March 24, 2024, after being declared leader and de facto prime minister-in-waiting. — AFP**

leader, and prime-minister-in-waiting, was a "really charismatic" politician who was "ideally placed" to revive his ailing party's fortunes.

Upon his coronation, Harris told the center-right party's members that he would repay their faith with "hard work, with blood, sweat and tears, day in and day out with responsibility, with humility and with civility."

Setting out his priorities, Harris insisted that

Fine Gael "stands for law and order" and told members he wanted to "take our flag back" from nationalists, to loud cheers.

He also said that he would pursue a "more planned and sustainable" immigration policy, following increased tension over the issue, and that he would "fight against the dangers of populism". On the international front, he called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and condemned Russia's "horrific illegal invasion of Ukraine".

### Formidable to-do list

With Fine Gael and its government coalition partners — center-right Fianna Fail and the Green Party — forming a majority in the Dail (the Irish parliament), Harris will be formally elected as premier on April 9 when the Dail returns.

Harris will become Ireland's youngest ever "taoiseach" (pronounced "tee-shock" — a Gaelic word for "chieftain" or "leader") beating Varadkar who was 38 when he took the role in 2017.

Harris' dramatic procession to the job of taoiseach crowns a meteoric political career. Born in 1986, he grew up in a small town near Dublin where he got a first taste for politics when cam-

paing for disability services for his autistic brother. He entered the youth branch of Fine Gael at the age of 16, was elected to parliament as a 24-year-old in 2011 and appointed health minister in 2016 aged just 29.

"In many ways, my career has been a bit odd ... life came at me a lot faster than I expected it to," he told Hot Press magazine in a 2022 interview. "He has huge energy and huge ambition," a Fine Gael party colleague told the Irish Times newspaper this week.

The new taoiseach will face a formidable to-do list, including tackling housing and homelessness crises amid intensifying criticism of government policy on asylum seekers.

With a reputation for slick communication and social media skills, Harris will also urgently seek to galvanize his struggling party which lags third in polls as key elections loom.

Ireland votes in both local and European parliament ballots on June 7, while the next general election must be held by March 2025. Fine Gael slumped to third place at the last general election in 2020, well behind the largest party, the leftist-nationalist Sinn Fein — former political wing of the paramilitary IRA — who still lead in polls. — AFP

## 11 Rohingya found dead after Indonesia boat capsizes: Officials

**MEULABOH, Indonesia:** The bodies of at least 11 Rohingya refugees have been recovered off Indonesia's westernmost coast after their boat believed to be carrying around 150 people capsized last week, officials said Monday.

The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys, often in flimsy boats, to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia. Indonesian rescuers called off the search for any remaining Rohingya refugees on Friday after 75 were rescued, despite reports from some survivors that dozens of people were swept away when their boat and another trying to help them capsized days earlier.

The head of the local search and rescue opera-

tion, Muhammad Fathur Rachman told AFP nearly half-a-dozen Rohingya were found dead at sea 14 nautical miles (26 kilometers) from shore.

"Six more bodies are being evacuated right now," he said by phone on Monday afternoon. "They were all women. We heard about the bodies from a fisherman. The bodies will be taken to the hospital."

Earlier on Monday, United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) officials told AFP five bodies had been recovered in recent days.

On Thursday, authorities staged a dramatic rescue of 69 Rohingya who had been adrift at sea for weeks before the boat capsized, with many found clinging to the hull of the overturned vessel. Six others were rescued by fishermen on Wednesday.

From mid-November to late January, 1,752 Rohingya refugees, mostly women and children, landed in the Indonesian provinces of Aceh and North Sumatra, according to the UNHCR.

The UN agency said it was the biggest influx into the Muslim-majority country since 2015, driven by worsening conditions in squalid camps in Bangladesh and the continuing threat of violence in the Rohingya's native Myanmar. — AFP



**MEULABOH: A police officer carries a Rohingya refugee child as they disembark from a rescue vessel after they were rescued from their capsized boat on March 21, 2024. — AFP**

## Mexico president says Trump wall idea 'doesn't work'

**WASHINGTON:** Mexico's president said in an interview broadcast Sunday that Republican Donald Trump's mantra that the US-Mexico border should be walled off is a nonstarter, reiterating his view that only huge US foreign policy changes will stem illegal migration.

Asked by CBS's "60 Minutes" whether Trump, if elected in November, would build the promised wall, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said "no." "It doesn't work!" he said, speaking through a translator.

The president said that when Trump was last in office and seeking to build a wall, he highlighted for his US counterpart that smugglers had been able to dig tunnels under barriers already in place. Trump "stayed quiet, and then he started laughing and told me 'I can't win with you,'" Lopez Obrador said.

The Mexican president's remarks on Trump as well as Joe Biden come as the two US political foes face a rematch of their 2020 bout, with illegal immigration once again an explosive campaign issue.

Trump and his Republican party have attempted to bludgeon Biden over recent record numbers of migrants crossing the southern US border, while the Democrat faces backlash in his own camp over negotiations to tighten immigration policy.

Lopez Obrador, 70, said that after a request from Biden, he helped to secure a temporary dip early this year in the surge of undocumented migrants trying to get into the United States.

He said that was partly due to Mexico being "more careful" about its own southern border, and that he had enlisted the help of Central American leaders. "However, that is a short-term solution, not a long-term one," he said, adding that Mexico wants "the root causes to be attended to, for them to be seriously looked at."

Lopez Obrador has told the White House that Washington should spend billions each year to alleviate poverty in Latin America, ease sanctions on the far-left governments in Venezuela and Cuba and grant legal status to millions of Mexicans living in the United States.

Without such sweeping reforms, though, "the flow of migrants ... will continue," Lopez Obrador said. Responding to growing Republican demands for the border to be closed off as an emergency solution, Lopez Obrador cited the economic dependency each country has for the other.

"You would not be able to buy inexpensive cars if the border is closed. That is, you would have to pay \$10,000, \$15,000 dollars more for a car. There are factories in Mexico and there are factories in the United States that are fundamental for all the consumers in the United States and all the consumers in Mexico."

The president, who leaves office later this year, was also pressed on several domestic issues in the interview, notably a recent scandal in which he revealed the personal phone number of a reporter.

When asked why he would do such a thing in a country where reporters are frequently harassed and murdered, Lopez Obrador said he "had no intention of harming her," but was "responding to a libel."

"Imagine what it means for this reporter to write that the president of Mexico has connections with drug traffickers ... And without having any proof. That is a vile slander," he said. — AFP

## UNSC demands immediate Gaza...

### Continued from Page 1

demand. Almost six months into the war, global concern has mounted over the threat of famine in Gaza, and on Zionist plans to invade the crowded far-southern city of Rafah. UN chief Antonio Guterres, on a crisis visit to the Middle East, has pleaded for an end to the "non-stop nightmare" for the 2.4 million people trapped in Gaza's worst-ever war.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who leads a coalition including ultra-nationalist parties, has vowed to go ahead with a Rafah invasion even without Washington's support. US Vice President Kamala Harris stressed on ABC TV that a Rafah invasion would be "a huge mistake" and, when asked whether she would rule out "consequences" for the Zionist entity, replied that "I am ruling out nothing".

The health ministry in Gaza Strip on Sunday put the total Palestinian death toll at 32,333, most of them women and children. Bombardment and fighting in Gaza killed another 72 people overnight, according to the ministry. More than 50 airstrikes rained down on

the Gaza Strip, said the Hamas government press office.

Food and water shortages have deepened the suffering, especially in northern Gaza where residents, mostly women and children, were waiting in line to fill up jerrycans and buckets in Jabalia. "We don't even have food to give us the energy to go to collect the water — let alone the innocent children, women and the elderly," said one man, Bassam Mohammed Al-Haou. Another local man, Falah Saed, said "we are suffering a lot from water shortages because all the pipes and pumps have stopped working since the beginning of the war".

Palestinians living near Al-Shifa have reported hellish conditions, including corpses in the streets, constant bombardment and the rounding up of men, who are stripped to their underwear and questioned. The Al-Shifa raid was in its eighth day. The Zionist entity has said the operation will continue until the last fighter is "in their hands", signaling an extended presence at Al-Shifa, which troops also raided in November. At Al-Amal Hospital, the Palestinian Red Crescent said Zionist forces had surrounded all entrances and prohibited hospital staff from leaving.

The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said the Zionist entity had definitively barred it from making aid deliveries in northern Gaza, where the threat of famine is highest. — AFP

Christmas Day church service and undergoing abdominal surgery in January. Conspiracy theories exploded after the princess admitted to editing a Mother's Day family portrait, a move that prompted news agencies including AFP to withdraw it.

Conspiracy theorists went down a new rabbit hole when a subsequent video emerged showing Kate strolling in a market with her husband, baselessly asserting that she had been replaced by a body double. "When it comes to an institution as old and opaque as the royal family, public distrust creates an appetite for a lot of sleuthing," Dannagal Young, from the University of Delaware, told AFP.

Social media hashtags about the princess gained such virality that many users began using them to promote unrelated posts about topics that receive far less traction, including human rights abuses in India and the Middle East. What made the frenzy worse, researchers say, was a culture of royal secrecy and the seemingly botched PR strategy of the palace. — AFP

## Long life is a blessing...

### Continued from Page 1

Every person and every creature will taste death at a designated time and place. Almighty Allah says, translated as: "Every soul will taste death and you will be given your (full) recompense on the Day of Judgment. So, whoever is kept away from the Hellfire and is admitted to Paradise, then he will have attained success." (Al' Imran — the Family of Imran 3: 185)

Do not desire death due to a calamity or misfortune: Anas bin Ma'lik (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "None of you should wish for death because of a calamity that has befallen him. But if he must do something (about it); he should rather say, 'O Allah, keep me alive so long as life is good for me, and cause me to die if death is better for me.'" (Al-Bukhari # 5, 671 + Muslim # 2, 680)

In another hadith, Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: "None of you will enter Paradise by virtue of his good deeds." His Companions asked, "Even you, O Allah's Messenger?" He replied, "Even me, unless Allah encompasses me with His Grace and Mercy. Therefore, do what's right and observe moderation. Moreover, none of you should desire death; for perhaps he is a righteous person who, if he lives longer, he will increase in righteousness and performing good deeds, and if he is an evildoer, perhaps he may seek Allah's Pleasure by repentance." (Al-Bukhari # 5, 673)

We understand from the above quoted two hadiths that what counts are not the years that a person lives on earth, but rather what he does in those years that brings him Almighty Allah's Pleasure. In whatever situation a person is, let him or her not lose hope in the Infinite Mercy of Almighty Allah. Aisha RA (wife of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) related that someone said to the Proph-

et (PBUH): "So-and-so has died and thus she has rested (from the troubles of the world)." Upon hearing that, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) got angry and said, "Indeed, the one who rests (after death) is the one who is forgiven (by Allah).'" (Al-Albani rated it as sahih (authentic) in As-Silsila As-Sahihah # 1, 710)

If desiring death is denounced in Islam, why then did Jesus' (PBUH) mother desire to die? About that issue, Almighty Allah tells us in the Noble Quran: "And the birth pangs drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said, 'Oh, alas for me! Would that I had died before this and become a thing utterly forgotten!'" (Maryam — Mary 19: 23)

Exegetes of the Noble Quran maintain that she desired to die for credible reasons, which are:

a. She was concerned that evil people would spread a malicious scandal against her, capitalizing on the public feeling of outrage because she conceived out of wedlock. They didn't fully understand that miracle because they were not fully aware of the Divine Powers. (Tafseer Al-Waseet by At-Tantawi)

b. She was concerned about losing respect and being of less impact in enjoining good and forbidding evil because after people had known her as a pious and righteous woman, they now viewed her a fornicator — God forbid! (Tafseer Al-Waseet by At-Tantawi)

c. She was afraid that some people would ignorantly engage in scandalizing her and others would maliciously do it, which would result in them amassing a lot of sins. She didn't want to be a reason for people to amass sins from which, if they would fail to repent, they would be punished. (Ibn Katheer)

Conclusion: It is makrooh (abhorred and denounced) for a Muslim to wish for death if the reason for that is some worldly harm that has befallen him. Rather, he should patiently persevere and seek Almighty Allah's help. — Courtesy of Kuwait Society for Cultural Dialogue

## Conspiracies still linger after Kate...

### Continued from Page 1

The proliferation of wild theories highlights how facts are increasingly under scrutiny on a misinformation-filled Internet landscape, an issue exacerbated by public distrust of institutions and traditional media. The same distrust, researchers say, has tainted online conversations about serious issues, including elections, climate and healthcare. "People don't trust what they are seeing and reading," Karen Douglas, a professor of social psychology at the University of Kent, told AFP. "Once a seed of doubt has been sown, and people lose trust, conspiracy theories are able to gain traction."

The rumor mill surrounding Kate spiraled since she retreated from public life after attending a

## International

# London still awaits Olympics' promised 'affordable' housing

## Olympic Park 'gentrification on steroids' — an island of affluence in a sea of poverty'

**LONDON:** More than a decade after London hosted the Olympic Games, cranes are still everywhere in and around the Olympic Park in Stratford, where an array of buildings are under construction. But most of the "affordable" housing for the east London area, which like much of the British capital has seen gentrification in recent years, is still to be delivered.

The 2012 Summer Games — widely seen as a roaring success — were held primarily at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Newham, one of the city's poorest boroughs. Heavily industrial in the 19th century, the factories, workshops and nearby docks had declined by the 1960s and 1970s, leaving behind polluted land and an increasingly deprived population.

Bidding for the Olympics, the organizers' promise was clear: the Games would provide the "enduring legacy" of regenerating "an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there". That included plans to build tens of thousands of homes, particularly social housing at so-called affordable rates, alongside new amenities. But critics say the transformation taking place is not living up to the pledges made over affordability.

### 'Disappointing'

Nearly 12 years after the global showcase, new residents continue to stream into newly built homes in the area. Cafes and gyms have appeared alongside a superb Olympic swimming pool.

The park's green spaces are perfect for joggers and walkers, while a big Westfield shopping center has opened. A new railway line arrived in 2022, taking passengers to and from central London in 15 minutes. The Victoria and Albert Museum, the Sadler's Wells dance venue and the BBC will all soon be opening branches in the park, while universities are also moving in.

Local resident Julia Johnson, 33, relocated from central London two years ago with her partner. "The apartments are high-quality design. The neighborhood is lovely," the project manager said as she walked her dog.

But Johnson pays £2,300 (\$2,900) a month for a two-bedroom flat — a similar rate to some of the city's central districts. "In other blocks friends are paying £3,000," she noted, adding that many of her neighbors work in the well-paid tech sector.

University College London researcher Penny Bernstock said the "key beneficiaries of London's Olympic housing legacy have been wealthier professional groups", which was "disappointing".

### Priced out

Nearly 12,400 homes have been built in and around the Olympic site, but only around 1,000 — less than 10 percent — are social housing units, according to figures from the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). It acts as the planning authority for the area around and including the Olympic Park.

"If you consider the money spent, the commitment to leaving a legacy for local communities that was central to London's bid, and the housing in that area, it is a scandal," Bernstock said. "The park has been described as gentrification on steroids — an island of affluence in a sea of poverty." Newham has some of the poorest neighborhoods not only in London but the entire UK. Many of those living in the shadow of the former Olympic site still face dilapidated conditions and poor prospects, while suffering fallout from Stratford's transformation.

Narjiss Kadiri, a 45-year-old housewife, lives just beyond the park. She rented a private flat in the area with her husband and their five children, initially for £1,000 a month, which then was increased to £1,400. The rent leapt to £1,800 when she moved out two years ago, after securing a £600-a-month social housing flat following an 18-year wait. "A lot of couples I knew dropped out and left London," she said.

### Dilemma

In Newham, rental rates surged by 58 percent between 2012 and 2019 and by 20 percent over the last three years, the biggest rise of any Lon-



STRATFORD: A photograph taken on November 23, 2023 shows the construction site of residential buildings at the Olympic Park, in Stratford, east London. — AFP

don borough. In 2023, the average rent for a flat there was £1,850. Demand for social housing in Newham was the second highest in England in 2022, according to Bernstock's research. The increases are "particularly problematic given the income profile of Newham residents", she said. "There is evidence of an Olympic effect, with the borough experiencing some of the highest house price growth in the owner-occupied and privately rented sector in London," Bernstock added.

Mark Robinson, a manager at LLDC, recognized the contradictory "dilemma" of such large-scale regeneration. "You invest vast amounts of money into

the area, you increase land value, as a result rents rise, and then the people you wanted to help are in danger of being priced out," he said.

Robinson said construction would continue for another 15 years and include thousands of "affordable" homes.

Borough-wide, the Games have led to "some good things", Bernstock acknowledged. "They have built fantastic schools because they wanted to attract families to the area and improve educational activities," she said. Meanwhile crime levels on Stratford's outskirts have fallen. "The area is much safer than it was before the Games," Kadiri said. — AFP

## Philippines summons Chinese envoy over 'aggressive actions'

**MANILA:** The Philippines said Monday it had summoned a Chinese envoy over "aggressive actions" by the China Coast Guard and other vessels near a reef off the Southeast Asian country's coast, while Beijing lodged its own complaint.

Deputy foreign ministers from the two countries later held a phone call in which China urged Manila to "pull back from the brink" and stop "provoking trouble at sea", Beijing said. Beijing and Manila have a long history of maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea and there have been repeated confrontations between their vessels near disputed reefs in recent months.

The latest incident took place Saturday near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands during a regular Philippine mission to resupply Filipino troops garrisoned on the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded navy ship.

The Philippines said the China Coast Guard blocked its supply vessel and damaged it with water cannon, injuring three soldiers. The China Coast Guard has defended its actions, describing them as "lawful regulation, interception and expulsion" of a foreign vessel that "tried to forcefully intrude" into Chinese waters.

Manila conveyed its "strong protest against the aggressive actions undertaken by the China Coast Guard and Chinese Maritime Militia against the rotation and resupply mission undertaken by the Philippines in Ayungin Shoal," the Department of Foreign Affairs said on Monday, using the Filipino name for Second Thomas Shoal.

It said the Philippine embassy in

Beijing also lodged a similar protest with the Chinese foreign ministry. "In these demarches, the Philippines stressed, among others, that China has no right to be in Ayungin Shoal," the foreign affairs department said. "The Philippines demands that Chinese vessels leave the vicinity of Ayungin Shoal and the Philippine exclusive economic zone immediately."

On Monday, China's embassy in the Philippines said it had complained to Manila over what it called the "illegal intrusion" of the Southeast Asian country's ships into its waters. In the later phone call, Chinese vice foreign minister Chen Xiaodong said bilateral relations were "currently at a crossroads".

The Philippines must "pay serious attention to China's concerns, pull back from the brink, and return as soon as possible to the correct track of resolving differences with China through negotiation and consultation," Chen said.

Second Thomas Shoal is about 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the western Philippine island of Palawan, and more than 1,000 kilometers from China's nearest major landmass, Hainan island. It is the same location where there have been recent collisions between vessels belonging to both countries, as well as water cannoning by the China Coast Guard.

### Cooling diplomatic relations

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.



The United States, which has a mutual defense pact with Manila, has denounced the attack. It came days after visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States stood by its "ironclad" commitments to defend longtime ally the Philippines against armed attack in the South China Sea.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro on Monday challenged Beijing to seek arbitration, which he said was the "best way of solving a legal dispute sustainably". "That's why they don't like that," Teodoro told reporters.

Relations between Manila and Beijing have cooled under Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos as he seeks to deepen cooperation with the United States and regional neighbors, while standing up to Chinese aggression towards Philippine vessels.

Chinese and Philippine officials agreed in January on the need for closer dialogue to deal with "maritime emergencies" in the South China Sea, including Second Thomas Shoal.

But Manila said Monday that China's "aggressive actions call into question its sincerity in lowering the tensions and promoting peace and stability in the South China Sea."

Despite the attack, Philippine officials said the damaged vessel and a coast guard escort ship that came to its aid later deployed rigid-hull inflatable boats to deliver its cargo and personnel to the Filipino outpost.

Filipino soldiers stationed on the shoal live on the crumbling BRP Sierra Madre and require frequent resupplies for food, water and other necessities as well as transport for personnel rotations.

Apart from supplies and equipment, the Philippine military said six navy personnel were delivered to the BRP Sierra Madre on Saturday, replacing one soldier who was recently evacuated on medical grounds. The damaged supply boat and its escorts sailed back to port after completing their mission, the task force said. — AFP

## Pandemic accord talks at loggerheads as time ticks away

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization's 194 member states have spent two years working towards a new international accord on pandemic preparedness and response.

The final round of talks on a landmark pandemic accord faces a frantic last push this week, with countries still pulling in different directions on how to handle future global health crises.

The last week of negotiations runs until Thursday with nations trying to hammer out an agreement to make sure the world is better prepared to deal with the next pandemic — or better still, stamp it out before it even happens. Here are the key factors at stake.

### Why a treaty?

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how ill-prepared the world was to tackle such a major crisis. Countries by and large dealt with the situation on a national basis.

Serious shortcomings at national and global levels hampered a timely and effective response. The existing International Health Regulations — which are being revised alongside the treaty talks — were found badly wanting. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who warned in 2018 that the world was unprepared for a pandemic, wants to end the cycle of neglect followed by panic.

Vaccine nationalism, jabs hoarding, lack of protective equipment (PPE), health workers exposed and exhausted, and wealthy countries dumping expiring stock on poorer countries under the guise of charity were just some of the flaws exposed by the last pandemic. Countries therefore decided in December 2021 to set down binding commitments on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

### What's in the draft?

The current draft, which remains far from finalized, has been winnowed down and revised from several previous versions. Negotiators are working on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

The objective "is to prevent, prepare for and respond to pandemics". It attempts to deal with the gross inequities that snagged access to vaccines, oxygen, PPE, tests and treatments.

It also seeks to ensure the early, safe, transparent and rapid sharing of samples and genetic sequence data of pathogens with pandemic potential.

It contains sections on surveillance, health system resilience, the health workforce, research and development, regional production, transfer of technology and know-how, access and benefit sharing, supply chains, procurement and distribution, regulation, implementation and sustainable financing.

### Where are talks stuck?

Equity, and the balance between obligations. WHO chief legal officer Steve Solomon admitted it "won't be easy to find common ground" in the remaining time.

"The good news is that key principles have been agreed: principles involving equity, fairness, solidarity, transparency and accountability," he said Thursday.

He said outstanding points were how better to prevent pandemics; share information, medicine and vaccines; secure supply chains; build global manufacturing capacity for those products; and sustainably finance such work. — AFP

## Japan must ignore past abductions for better ties: N Korea

**SEOUL:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister said Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has requested a summit with her brother, adding a meeting was unlikely without a policy shift by Tokyo.

Relations between the two countries are historically strained, including by a long-running kidnapping dispute and North Korea's banned weapons programs, but Kishida has recently expressed a desire to improve ties, which Pyongyang has hinted it is not opposed to.

Last year, Kishida said he was willing to meet Kim "without any conditions", saying Tokyo was willing to resolve all issues, including the abduction by North Korean agents of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, which remains an emotive issue in Japan.

"Kishida ... conveyed his intention to personally meet the President of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as soon as possible," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim Yo Jong — who is one of the regime's key

spokespeople — had hinted last month at a possible future invitation for the Japanese leader to visit North Korea. But she said the "history of the DPRK-Japan relations gives a lesson that it is impossible to improve the bilateral relations full of distrust and misunderstanding," without a substantive policy change on Tokyo's part.

She warned that were Japan to remain "engrossed in the abduction issue that has no further settlement" then Kishida's hopes of improving ties would not materialize. Kishida said Monday that he was not aware of the KCNA report, and did not directly comment on its contents, while calling top-level talks with North Korea "important".

"For Japan-North Korea relations, top-level talks are important to resolve issues such as the abduction issue," Kishida said in parliament, referring to kidnappings that took place in the 1970s and '80s. "This is why we have been making various approaches to North Korea at the level directly under my control, as I have said in the past."

### Kidnapping issue

North Korea admitted in 2002 that it had sent agents to kidnap 13 Japanese people in the 1970s and '80s who were used to train spies in Japanese language and customs. The abductions remain a potent and emotional issue in Japan and suspicions persist that many more were abducted than have been officially recognized.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (left) and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Sakie Yokota, 88, whose daughter Megumi is among the missing abductees, told Japanese media on Monday that she wanted the two countries to hold talks "as soon as possible". "I don't know if talks will take place, because it's North Korea, but I hope even a small step will be made. We really don't have much time left," she said.

Earlier this month, Atsuhito Isozaki, a North Korea expert and professor at Keio University, told reporters it would be "extremely hard" for Japan to accept the North's claim that the abduction issue is resolved. — AFP

## Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2024

## EU probes Apple, Google and Meta under new digital law

## Tech lobby slams EU 'rush' to probe US giants

**BRUSSELS:** The EU on Monday hit Apple, Google parent Alphabet and Meta with the first ever probes under a mammoth digital law, which could lead to big fines against the US giants. Among six firms named as market "gatekeepers" under the EU's landmark Digital Markets Act — along with Amazon, TikTok owner ByteDance and Microsoft — the companies have been obliged to comply with the new law since March 7.

"We are not convinced that the solutions by Alphabet, Apple and Meta respect their obligations for a fairer and more open digital space for European citizens and businesses," said the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton.

In a statement announcing the probes, the European Commission, the EU's antitrust regulator, said it suspects the measures the firms have put in place so far "fall short of effective compliance." One of the main tech lobbying groups, CCIA, whose members include the three giants targeted, lambasted the probes, accusing the EU of "jumping the gun" and acting too hastily.

The EU probes launched Monday into Apple, Google and Meta send a "worrying signal", one of the main tech lobbying groups said after the European Commission announced the first ever investigations under a new digital law. "The timing of these announcements, while the DMA compliance workshops are still ongoing, makes it look like the Commission could be jumping the gun," said the head of CCIA Europe, Daniel Friedlaender.

The EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, insisted regulators had "definitely" not rushed to probe the companies. Senior officials have acknowledged that changes are already taking place, but suggest they do not go far enough.

Under the new rules, the commission can impose fines of up to 10 percent of a company's total global turnover. This can rise to up to 20 percent for repeat offenders. In extreme circumstances, the EU can order the breakup of companies. Unlike the traditional rules that saw probes last for years, the DMA demands regulators complete any investigation within 12 months of its start.



**BRUSSELS:** EU commissioner for internal market Thierry Breton (right) and European Commission Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager (left) give a press conference in Brussels, on March 25, 2024. — AFP

tion within 12 months of its start.

Monday's probes are focused on whether Alphabet's Google Play and Apple's App Store are allowing app developers to show consumers offers, free of charge, outside of those app marketplaces. The commission fears that the measures the two companies have taken may not be fully compliant since they impose "various restrictions and limitations".

Alphabet is also under suspicion over whether Google search results favor its own services — for example, Google Shopping or Google Flights — over rivals. The EU slapped a whopping 2.4-billion-euro (\$2.6 billion) fine on Google in 2017 over similar claims of self-preferencing.

Google's director of competition, Oliver Bethell,

said Google had made "significant changes to the way our services operate in Europe", adding: "We will continue to defend our approach in the coming months." Apple said it was "confident" its plan complied with the DMA.

Apple is also under the spotlight over whether it allows users to easily uninstall apps on its iOS operating system, and the design of the web browser choice screen. Under the DMA, the gatekeepers must offer choice screens for web browsers and search engines to ensure users have more options.

Meta also faces problems over its ad-free subscriptions model, which has already been targeted by three complaints since it launched in November. European users can pay to avoid being tracked for

advertising but officials were not convinced. "We have serious doubts that this consent is really free when you are confronted with a binary choice," Breton told reporters.

Meta has faced an avalanche of legal problems in the EU over its data processing, including a 1.2 billion-euro fine last year for data privacy breaches. Meta defended its scheme. "We designed Subscription for No Ads to address several overlapping regulatory obligations, including the DMA," a spokesperson said.

In an additional move, EU regulators will also explore whether Amazon may be favoring its own brand products on the Amazon Store and whether Apple's new fee structure for alternative app stores "may be defeating the purpose" of its DMA obligations. An Amazon spokesperson said it was "compliant" with the DMA.

Monday's announcement is one more problem for Apple, which faces a glut of legal challenges on both sides of the Atlantic. Last week, the US Department of Justice sued Apple, accusing the company of operating a monopoly in the smartphone market.

That was just weeks after the EU slapped a 1.8-billion-euro fine on the iPhone maker for preventing consumers from accessing cheaper music streaming subscriptions.

"As we all know, data takes time to collect. What we see now, however, sends a worrying signal that the EU might rush into investigations without knowing what they're investigating," Friedlaender added. CCIA's members include Apple, Google and Meta. The EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, pushed back at the CCIA's claim. "We take stakeholder input as an important input. But of course it is up to us to take the decision about opening cases. It's for us to prove that something is wrong here," she told reporters in Brussels.

"I definitely do not think that this is rushed. I think it is very timely, reflecting the promises that have been given and the law that has been passed," she added. — AFP

## Burgan Bank partners with Daiya Co-op, City Hypermarket

**KUWAIT:** As part of its far-reaching Ramadan campaign, Burgan Bank announced that it will be collaborating with Daiya Co-Op and selective City Hypermarket branches across Kuwait to ensure that all Burgan customers enjoy a seamless and rewarding shopping experience during the holy month. This collaboration comes as part of the Bank's comprehensive strategy for elevating its banking journey and the overall card payment experience that comes with Burgan's full suite of tailored credit, debit, and pre-paid cards.



**Nasser Al-Qaisi,**  
Burgan Bank's GM –  
Retail Banking

As part of the collaboration, Burgan-branded check-out points will be available at Daiya Co-Op and City Hypermarket branches in Salmiya, Dasma, Manara, and Jahra. This initiative will allow Burgan cardholders to easily check out at the Bank's dedicated counters and receive an exclusively facilitated experience, along with branded merchandise. In



addition, they will be receiving co-branded plastic shopping bags and t-shirts.

"Today, a bank card can act as a pass for its holder to a realm of exclusive services and a premium experience; and that is exactly what we aim to offer our Burgan cardholders, especially during the holy month of Ramadan," Nasser Al-Qaisi, General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank, said. "Beyond using their card of choice to make a payment, we ensure that every Burgan cardholder

enjoys priority of service at every possible opportunity, guaranteeing a conveniently smooth purchasing experience every time."

Burgan Bank is committed to developing its card-based payment services through innovative solutions such as the virtual card, the biodegradable card, the Visa x-change card, and many more. It also continues to collaborate with the best service and product providers in Kuwait to offer Burgan cardholders an exclusive shopping experience.



**Saudi Arabia and Bahrain sign two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) focused on the future of transportation and road maintenance and safety, the Saudi Press Agency said on Monday. — SPA**

the benefit and prosperity of the two peoples and the two countries.

On this occasion, Minister Al-Kaabi praised the strong fraternal relations that link Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. He stressed Bahrain's keenness to enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields, especially in the field of transport and logistics services, and enhancing the strategic partnership between the two

kingdoms, which contributes to enhancing trade and developing the logistics sector in the region. The agency added that with regard to the memorandum of understanding in the field of road safety and maintenance, Minister Al-Hawaj said that the MoU comes within efforts to boost the exchange of experiences and cooperation between the two countries. It will contribute to achieving more joint cooperation in infrastructure development and road safety and maintenance by unifying efforts for continued progress, development and integration in a way that serves the aspirations of the two countries and peoples.

The minister explained that cooperation between the two parties will include the exchange of experiences and knowledge in everything related to road safety and the best modern technologies used to evaluate and maintain them, such as survey and evaluation systems, as well as the exchange of scientific and technical information and the exchange of visits by engineers, experts and technicians specialized in the field of roads and others.

He praised the fraternal bilateral relations between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their continued keenness to strengthen relations in various fields, including those related to joint work in Infrastructure development field. — KUNA

## Ericsson cuts 1,200 jobs in Sweden in 'challenging' market

**STOCKHOLM:** Swedish telecoms equipment giant Ericsson said Monday it was cutting 1,200 staff in Sweden, or 8.6 percent of its Swedish workforce, as it faces a "challenging" market for mobile networks.

The company said it "expects a challenging mobile networks market in 2024, with further volume contraction as customers remain cautious."

"In line with managing lower volumes, Ericsson today announces proposed staff reductions in Sweden," it said in a statement. Ericsson said the measure was part of global initiatives to reduce costs, including staff reductions, streamlining processes and reducing consultants, "while maintaining investments critical to Ericsson's technology leadership." It said it had initiated negotiations with unions for a "headcount reduction of approximately 1,200 in Sweden."

According to Ericsson, the company's Swedish organization employs around 14,000 people across all business areas. Globally, Ericsson has around 100,000 staff. Ericsson posted a sizeable loss in 2023 as a result of write-downs and restructuring costs, warning in January that it was expecting further market decline. Ericsson said it was 26.1 billion kronor (\$2.5 billion) in the red last year after making a 19-billion-kronor profit in 2022. The company, which is in a fierce competition over 5G networks with Finland's Nokia and Chinese high-tech firm Huawei, in February 2023 also launched a cost-cutting program that included eliminating 8,500 jobs. — AFP

## Markets drop as geopolitics, inflation weigh

**LONDON:** Leading European and Asian stock markets retreated Monday, as recent record heights gave way to concern over increased geopolitical tensions and stubbornly-high inflation according to traders. "Heightened tensions between Ukraine and Russia have brought a halt to the rally in equity markets seen last week," noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

"Investors were nervously watching proceedings from the sidelines, particularly as oil prices crept up once again." Moscow has escalated its aerial attacks on Kyiv, targeting key infrastructure in the wake of Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil facilities.

Russia is a key producer of oil, while the Zionist entity war on Gaza has given rise to worries about Middle Eastern crude supplies. The Kremlin has meanwhile refused to comment on the Islamic State group's claims that it was behind the deadliest attack in Russia in two decades, as rescuers searched for bodies amid the rubble of the burnt-out Moscow concert hall. — AFP

## Bahrain, Saudi sign two MoUs on transportation

**MANAMA:** Bahrain and Saudi Arabia on Sunday signed two memoranda of understanding in the field of the future of transportation and road safety and maintenance to enhance joint cooperation between the two countries in the transport and logistics services sector.

The Bahraini News Agency (BNA) said that the Bahraini side was represented in the signing by the Minister of Transportation and Communications, Mohammed Al-Kaabi, and the Minister of Works, Ibrahim Al-Hawaj, while the Saudi side was represented by the Minister of Transport and Logistics Services, Saleh Al-Jasser. The agency explained that the memorandum (the future of transport) aims to enhancing joint work, research and development in the field of future trends in transport and logistics services and exchanging experiences related to establishing, operating and maintaining modern modes of transportation and its infrastructure for

## Business

NBK Wealth Thought Leadership

# Evolving geopolitical landscape could affect GCC region, Kuwait

## Geopolitics and markets in 2024: A perspective

The year 2024 is set to witness a historic wave of elections in 80 nations, involving over 2 billion voters, including major countries. This democratic exercise will shape the global geopolitical landscape amidst increasing polarization, governance challenges, and geo-economic fragmentation. The outcomes of these elections will have implications for macroeconomics, financial markets, and international order, with potential effects on fiscal discipline and long-term sustainability.

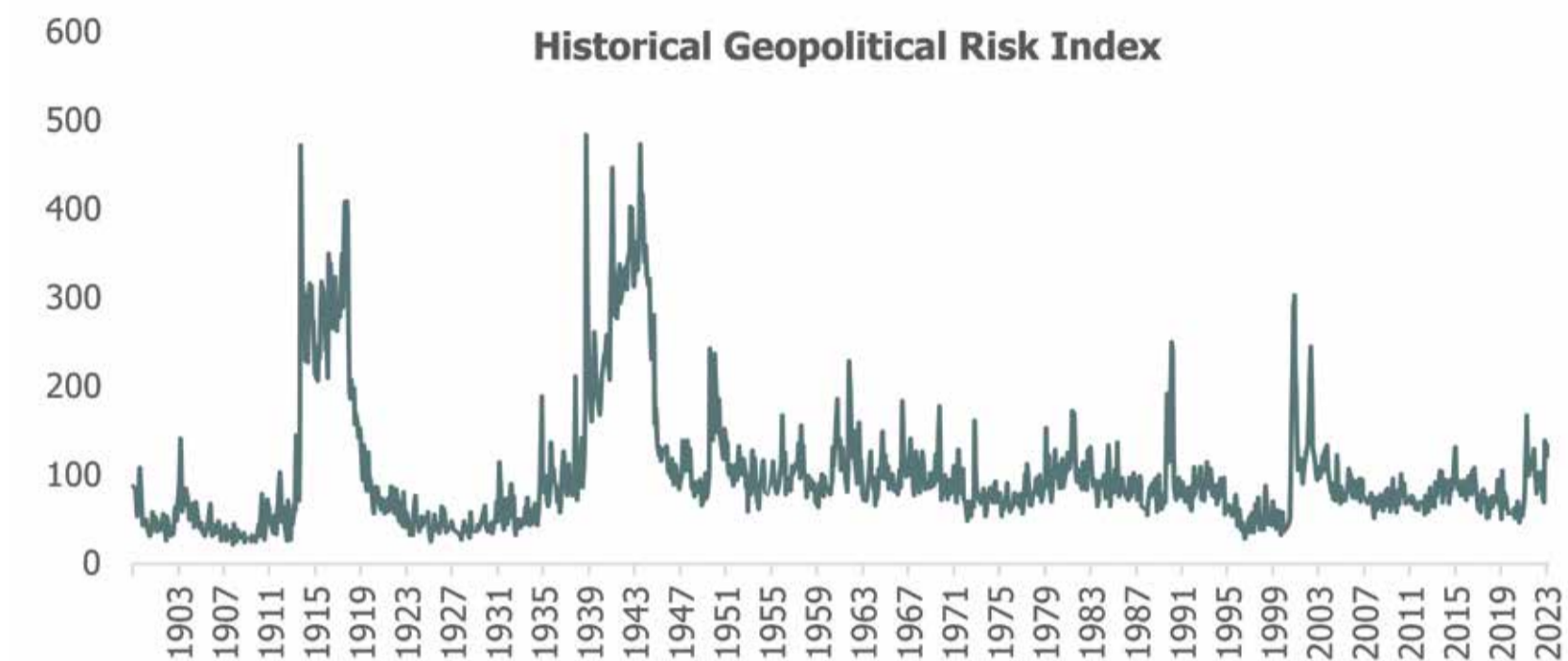
2024 is anticipated to be one of the busiest election years, with over 80 nations and territories, representing more than half the world's population, participating in the democratic process. Countries like India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, Mexico, and South



Africa, along with the European Union and the UK, are among those holding elections. Around two billion voters will be casting their votes. Some countries, such as Bangladesh, Taiwan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, and Egypt, have already conducted their elections.

The global geopolitical landscape is influenced by increasing polarization and governance challenges, leading to a shift in the balance of power. Geopolitical events, like the US presidential election, have a significant impact on global markets through changes in fiscal policies, trade relations, and regulatory measures. Geoeconomic fragmentation and power struggles can result in inflation, supply chain disruptions, and market volatility. The interplay between geopolitics and economics shapes market dynamics and international cooperation.

The ongoing geopolitical tensions have led to the formation of new alliances and blocs, challenging the existing global order. Regional conflicts and financial sanctions have increased, affecting economic stability.



Source: Caldara and Iacoviello GPR index

ty. The intertwining of geopolitics and economics has created winners and losers, with countries like India and Mexico adapting to changing trade patterns. The competition for technological dominance between China and the US, along with geopolitical rivalries, has reshaped global economic dynamics.

The upcoming global election cycle poses challenges to fiscal discipline in both Developed and Emerging markets due to the rise of populism and increased deficit spending. Public debt levels have surged, impacting long-term sustainability and market volatility. Geopolitical risks, combined with economic uncertainties, create a complex environment for businesses and investors, affecting market

cycles and investment decisions.

The US elections are crucial for global economic prospects, as shifts in policy areas like trade, fiscal stance, and regulatory policies can influence interest rates, currency markets, and equity markets. The potential outcomes of the US elections will have far-reaching implications on international relations and market dynamics. Geopolitical events can lead to changes in economic growth expectations, impacting asset valuations and market performance.

The evolving geopolitical landscape could affect the GCC region, Kuwait, through changes in oil prices and global trade dynamics. Diplomatic efforts and geopolitical stability play a key role in shaping

economic outcomes for oil-exporting countries. A peaceful international order can lead to positive changes in energy transition and economic cooperation, while geopolitical tensions may result in higher inflation and economic challenges.

In conclusion, the intersection of geopolitics, economics, and elections in 2024 will shape the global landscape and market dynamics. The outcomes of these elections will have implications for international cooperation, economic stability, and market performance. Navigating through geopolitical uncertainties and economic challenges requires a strategic approach and a forward-looking perspective to address the complexities of the modern world.

## Peruvian economy recovering after shocks, says IMF



Peruvian President Dina Boluarte, accompanied by her ministerial team, speaks during a press conference in Lima. — AFP

WASHINGTON, DC: The Peruvian economy had a slight contraction in 2023 due to multiple consecutive shocks, while inflation decelerated rapidly. Economic growth declined to -0.6 percent in 2023, due to climate-related shocks and social turmoil. Inflation is converging towards the target thanks to the BCRP's decisive monetary policy tightening, said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a statement. Strong supervision maintained financial stability. The fiscal position remained strong, although the fiscal deficit (of the non-financial public sector) reached 2.8 percent of GDP (above the fiscal rule target of 2.4 percent of GDP), reflecting a shortfall in tax revenues due to the economic slowdown. Led by sizable import compression and better terms of trade, the current account registered a surplus of 0.6 percent of GDP. International reserves remain at a comfortable level of about 28 percent of GDP, the IMF issued the statement following its mission's meeting with the Peruvian authorities and other counterparts during Feb 21 – March 7.

A rebound is expected in 2024 with growth converging towards its potential over the medium term. A strong recovery in agriculture and fishing after El Nino ends, ongoing momentum in mining, and a looser monetary policy (consistent with lower inflation) are expected to support a growth revival. However, only a modest recovery in private consumption and investment is expected, as political uncertainty continues to hamper consumer and business confidence. Real GDP is projected to grow by around 2.5 percent in 2024 with a negative output gap closing gradually until 2026. The current account is envisaged to return to a low deficit in 2024 as growth normalizes and to stabilize at about -1.5 percent of GDP in the medium term, the statement said.

Inflation is expected to decrease towards the middle of the target band, aided by the normalization of supply shocks and a negative output gap, while the BCRP continues with its easing cycle to bring the policy rate to a neutral level. — AFP

## IMF to extend credit facility to Rwanda

WASHINGTON, DC: Rwanda will have access to \$76.6 million under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) and \$88.9 million under the stand-by credit facility (SCF) arrangement, said International Monetary Fund following a review by its board. An IMF team, led by Ruben Atoyan, visited Kigali from March 11 – March 22, 2024, to discuss the authorities' policy priorities and progress on reforms within the context of the third reviews of Rwanda's Policy Coordination Instrument (PCI) and RSF, and the first review of SCF arrangement. Consideration by the board is tentatively scheduled for May 2024.

"Rwanda's growth momentum remained strong, notwithstanding the challenging external environment. The 2023 GDP growth continued to be robust at 8.2 percent year-on-year, on the back of strong performance in services and construction, as well as recovery in food crop production in the second half of the year," Atoyan said in statement.

Rwanda's inflation decelerated sharply in recent months. Headline inflation was 4.9 percent in February 2024, down from the peak of 21.7 percent in November 2022, owing to appropriately tight monetary policy stance and favorable developments in food prices as agricultural production rebounded at the end of last year.

The current account deficit widened due to strong food and capital goods imports, along with lower-than-expected coffee exports. The Rwandan franc depreciated by 18 percent against the US dollar in 2023, a necessary step towards facilitating the much-needed external adjustment. International reserves stood at 4.4 months of prospective imports at end-2023, providing a helpful buffer against external shocks.

"Despite the challenging environment, macro-economic policy performance through end-December 2023 remained in line with program objectives under the PCI/SCF arrangement. All quantitative targets were met, and reforms to advance expenditure rationalization, build resilience through social safety nets, and strengthen FX market functioning are progressing well. The authorities' commitment to implement climate-related reforms under

## Malawi seeks \$200m aid over El Nino risk

LILONGWE: Malawi's president appealed for \$200 million in food aid this weekend, saying millions of citizens faced starvation due to a drought linked to the El Nino weather phenomenon. President Lazarus Chakwera declared on Saturday evening a state of natural disaster in 23 of the 28 districts of the southern African country, following a government assessment of the damage to farmland caused by El Nino.

"In addition to delayed and erratic rainfall, these



KIGALI: IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva attends a tree plantation program in Kigali as part of Rwanda's commitment to fighting climate change.

the RSF arrangement continued to be strong, with measures to implement climate budget tagging, integrate climate risks into fiscal planning, and strengthen disaster risk management being on track to be completed in the coming weeks.

"While Rwanda's economic outlook continues to be positive, risks remain tilted to the downside. Deepening of geopolitical fragmentation, another spike in global energy and food prices, or slowdown in trading partners' growth would weigh on the outlook. Longer-than-expected tight global financial conditions could adversely affect the availability of external financing. Also, already committed grants under the UK Migration and Economic Development Partnership continue to face legal uncertainties and could result in some budget pressures and lower FX inflows if they do not materialize. As demonstrated by the poor harvests and floods last year, Rwanda's dominantly rain-fed agriculture is exposed to climate shocks.

"A carefully calibrated fiscal stance is necessary to cushion the effects of the 2023 May floods, while

also supporting the credible and balanced fiscal consolidation over the medium term. Comprehensive tax reforms that leverage synergies between tax policy and tax compliance will be critical to help create fiscal space for the country's much-needed developmental spending. Expenditure rationalization will need to focus on enhancing the efficiency of public investment, better targeting of subsidies, and digital delivery of public services. The medium-term fiscal framework should be improved by further strengthening fiscal risk management and enhancing the transparency of fiscal accounts.

"Monetary policy should anchor inflation around the center of the target band, while continued exchange rate flexibility will help absorb external shocks and support current account adjustment. Strengthening the FX intervention framework is needed to help develop the FX market and improve the effectiveness of monetary policy transmission. Monetary policy needs to remain forward looking and data-driven with a clear communication to anchor expectations, the statement added.

districts have faced insufficient rainfall, floods and prolonged dry spells, severely harming crops and food production prospects," Chakwera said in a national address. "This situation is devastating."

Neighbouring Zambia declared a national disaster in late February after drought devastated its agricultural sector. Major growing areas in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe received only 80 percent of average rainfall during the southern hemisphere summer from mid-November to February, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

President Chakwera said the Malawian government's initial assessment found that nearly two million farming households had been affected and 44.3 percent of national crop land has suffered damage.

He estimated that around 200 million dollars of

maize would be needed for a humanitarian response program and urged anyone, at home or abroad, in a position to provide resources to support the cause. "It would have been catastrophic even if this were the first disaster in recent years," Chakwera added. "Unfortunately, this marks the fourth time in four years that I have declared a state of disaster."

Malawi's Civil Society Agriculture Network (Cisanet) said on Sunday it supported the president's appeal but emphasized the importance of "aligning investments with climate-smart practices" and ensuring there was "transparency in resource allocation". El Nino is a natural weather phenomenon which is typically associated with increased heat worldwide, as well as drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere. It occurs every two to seven years and lasts between nine and 12 months. — AFP

## Business

# Gulf Bank launches Neo Kids account

## Account offers exclusive benefits to motivate children to save



Najla Al-Eisa poses for a photo with Gulf Bank team.



Activities and performances organized as part of the Neo Girgian celebration.

**Najla Al-Eisa: We are delighted to launch the Neo Kids Savings Account, which offers two aesthetically designed cards**

- Parents can open a Neo account for children up to the age of 14 without a minimum balance or fees.

- It provides a simple and secure way for parents to build their children's financial future, helping them learn the value of saving and financial responsibility from an early age.
- We recognize the importance of early banking engagement and strive to promote financial inclusion, and raise awareness about the importance of saving.

**KUWAIT:** In its commitment to providing the best products and services to all customer segments, Gulf Bank officially launched the Neo Kids Savings Account during a special event organized by the bank on the occasion of Girgian, at Homz Mall, in the presence of a large number of bank officials and a gathering comprising both children and parents.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, said, "We are delighted to launch the Neo savings account for children which is the revamped version of the 'Nassour' account. This corresponds with the substantial advancements observed by the bank and its commitment to delivering high-quality products and services."

She highlighted Gulf Bank's acknowledgment of the importance of initiating connections with customers at a young age to promote financial inclusion across society and raise awareness about the importance of saving. The Neo account, which offers two aesthetically designed cards in either red or blue to cater to both boys and girls, comes with exclusive benefits aimed at motivating them to save.

She explained that the Neo account provides a simple and secure way for parents to build their children's financial future, helping them learn the value of saving and financial responsibility from an early age. It is worth noting that the account is suitable for all children up to the age of 14, and parents can open the account without a minimum balance or fees at all Gulf Bank branches.

Al-Eisa mentioned that Gulf Bank's efforts do not stop at providing the best and most advanced banking solutions and services to all customers, especially children. These efforts reflect the bank's ongoing commitment to solidifying its leading position in Kuwait as a bank of the future.

She further highlighted Gulf Bank's diverse range of savings accounts tailored to meet the needs of various segments of society. These include electronic savings accounts, Gulf savings accounts, golden investor accounts, and the Al-Danah Millionaire account. The Al-Danah account offers the world's largest prize linked to a bank account, with a value of KD 2 million in the annual draw, and KD 1 million in the semi-annual

draw, alongside monthly and quarterly draws.

Al-Eisa concluded her statement by extending an invitation to all customers to enjoy a unique experience and high-quality digital services. Gulf Bank distinguishes itself as one of the most user-friendly, efficient, and best financial institutions in the local banking sector, equipped with new technology that exceeds customer expectations. It's also worth mentioning that the Neo Girgian celebration witnessed a large turnout of parents with their children, who enjoyed various activities, diverse performances, and games. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at



Red and blue NEO account cards.

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



## Spanish judge halts suspension of Telegram

**MADRID:** A Spanish judge on Monday reversed course and halted his controversial order to temporarily suspend messaging app Telegram in the country pending a police report on the company. Judge Santiago Pedraz of Spain's High Court, which handles sensitive cases, on Friday ordered a "temporary suspension" of Telegram after media companies complained it was violating their intellectual property rights by allowing users to upload their content without permission.

Consumer rights group Facua criticized the ruling as disproportionate, warning it would cause "enormous damage" to millions of users of the platform, and the app has continued to operate in Spain. "It is as if they shut down the internet because there are websites that illegally host content protected by copyright," said Facua general secretary Ruben Sanchez.

But on Monday the judge halted his order to suspend the service pending a police report on the platform and "the impact the temporary suspension could have on users", the court said.

Telegram is an encrypted messaging platform that also allows users to set up their own channels to broadcast content. Pedraz issued the suspension order after officials in the Virgin Islands, where Telegram is registered as a business, failed to respond to a July 2023 court request for information.

The media companies—which Facua named as Mediaset, Atramedia, Movistar and Egeda—complained their material was being used on Telegram without their consent. The court wanted information that would allow it to identify who was behind the accounts in question. In Friday's order, the judge said it was the lack of cooperation from the Virgin Islands that had led him to take this "precautionary measure".

The order met the principles of "necessity, appropriateness and proportionality", he added. "No other measure exists that can stop a repeat of the actions denounced," he argued. Telegram says it has 700 million monthly active users across the world. — AFP

## Nissan unveils plan to cut EV production costs

**TOKYO:** Japanese auto giant Nissan said Monday it will slash production costs for next-generation electric vehicles by 30 percent as it competes with fast-growing Chinese rivals. By 2030, Nissan aims to make electric models at the same price as traditional combustion engine cars, the company said as it announced a new mid-term strategy.

The firm also unveiled a target to sell one million more vehicles annually worldwide in three years' time. While pledging to improve the firm's bottom line globally, CEO Makoto Uchida said Nissan has experienced some difficulty in the Chinese market.

"Honestly speaking, we have struggled there in terms of sales volume. In the last five months, things have improved somewhat. But still, our capacity remains excessive," he said at a news conference.

"By working with joint venture partners (in China), we will continue to optimize our production levels and work with products that allow us to grow in the

market," Uchida said. "We are focused on providing what Chinese customers want." Nissan said it would achieve "significant" cost reductions in producing cutting-edge electric models "through grouped 'family' development, with vehicle production under the approach starting in fiscal year 2027". "Family" development refers to the use of common components in various vehicles.

Nissan also said it would reduce the cost of next-generation EVs by 30 percent by "integrating powertrains, utilizing next-generation modular manufacturing, group sourcing, and battery innovations". This month Nissan and rival Honda said they were exploring a strategic partnership in electric vehicles to face up to a "once-in-a-century" industry upheaval—a move analysts said was aimed at catching up with Chinese competitors.

China overtook Japan as the world's biggest vehicle exporter last year, helped by its global dominance in electric cars. Bolstered by strong government support,



**YOKOHAMA:** This photo shows a general view of the gallery of cars at the global headquarters of Japanese automaker Nissan Motor in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture. — AFP

Chinese EV firms have stolen a march on more established rivals. Japanese giants including Toyota and Nissan have also been more cautious than their Chinese counterparts like BYD on EVs, banking instead on hybrid models.

Nissan said Monday it aims to launch

30 new models over the next three years, 16 of which would be "electrified". "If you look at our product portfolio, in the future the number of ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles will decline, but they are very important for our business," Uchida said. — AFP

## New data show more wider global gender gap: WB

**WASHINGTON:** The global gender gap for women in the workplace is far wider than previously thought, a groundbreaking new World Bank Group report shows. When legal differences involving violence and childcare are taken into account, women enjoy fewer than two-thirds the rights of men. No country provides equal opportunity for women—not even the wealthiest economies.

The latest Women, Business, and the Law report offers a comprehensive picture of the obstacles that women face in entering the global workforce and contributing to greater prosperity—for themselves, their families, and their communities. It expands the scope of its analysis, adding two indicators that can be critical in opening up or restricting women's options: safety from violence and access to childcare services. When those measures are included, women on average enjoy just 64 percent of the legal protections that men do—far fewer than the previous estimate of 77 percent.

The gender gap is even wider in practice. For the first time, Women, Business and the Law assesses the gap between legal reforms and actual outcomes for women in 190 economies. The analysis reveals a shocking implementation gap. Although laws on the books imply that women enjoy roughly two-thirds the rights of men, countries on average have established less than 40 percent of the systems needed for full implementation. For example, 98 economies have enacted legislation mandating equal pay for women for work of equal value. Yet only 35 economies—fewer than one out of every five—have adopted pay-transparency measures or enforcement mechanisms

to address the pay gap, the report said.

Effective implementation of equal-opportunity laws depends on an adequate supporting framework, including strong enforcement mechanisms, a system for tracking gender-related pay disparities, and the availability of healthcare services for women who survive violence.

"Women have the power to turbocharge the sputtering global economy," said Indermit Gill, Chief Economist of the World Bank Group and Senior Vice President for Development Economics. "Yet, all over the world, discriminatory laws and practices prevent women from working or starting businesses on an equal footing with men. Closing this gap could raise global gross domestic product by more than 20 percent—essentially doubling the global growth rate over the next decade—but reforms have slowed to a crawl. WBL 2024 identifies what governments can do to accelerate progress toward gender equality in business and the law."

The implementation gap highlights how much hard work lies ahead even for countries that have been instituting equal-opportunity laws. Togo, for example, has been a standout among Sub-Saharan economies, enacting laws that give women roughly 77 percent of the rights available to men—more than any other country in the continent. Yet Togo, so far, has established only 27 percent of systems necessary for full implementation. This rate is average for Sub-Saharan economies.

In 2023, governments were assertive in advancing three categories of legal equal-opportunity reforms—pay, parental rights, and workplace protections. Still, nearly all countries performed poorly in the two categories being tracked for the first time—access to childcare and women's safety.

The weakness is greatest in women's safety—where the global average score is just 36, meaning women enjoy barely a third of the needed legal protections against domestic violence, sexual harassment, child marriage and femicide. Although 151 economies have laws in place prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, just 39 have laws prohibiting it in public spaces. This often prevents women from using pub-



lic transportation to get to work.

Most countries also score poorly for childcare laws. Women spend an average of 2.4 more hours a day on unpaid care work than men—much of it on the care of children. Expanding access to childcare tends to increase women's participation in the labor force by about 1 percentage point initially—and the effect more than doubles within five years. Today, only 78 economies—fewer than half—provide some financial or tax support for parents with young children. Only 62 economies—fewer than a third—have quality standards governing childcare services, without which women might think twice about going to work while they have children in their care. Women also face significant obstacles in other areas. In the area of entrepreneurship, for example, just one in every five economies mandates gender-sensitive criteria for public procurement processes, meaning women are largely cut out of a \$10-trillion-a-year economic opportunity. In the area of pay, women earn just 77 cents for every \$1 paid to men. The rights gap extends all the way to retirement. In 62 economies, the ages at which men and women can retire are not the same. Women tend to live longer than men, but because they receive lower pay while they work, take time off when they have children, and retire earlier, they end up with smaller pension benefits and greater financial insecurity in old age.



A Palestinian climber scales a rock wall at a site in Wadi al-Ghul. — AFP photos



A Palestinian climber scales a rock wall at a site in Wadi al-Ghul.

## PALESTINIAN CLIMBERS DEFY WARTIME OBSTACLES TO SCALE WEST BANK CLIFFS

As Palestinian climber Faris Abu Gosh encouraged his friend ascending a limestone cliff in the occupied West Bank, the war raging in Gaza momentarily slipped from his mind. Scaling rock faces has offered solace since the fighting erupted, but he and his friends have also had to face mounting challenges in what was already not an easy place for their budding climbing community.

tinian and Italian climbers were geared up in Wadi al-Ghul, a West Bank river valley that turns lush and green with winter rain. As much as Palestinian climbers enjoy this recently opened spot for its natural beauty, they also appreciate its location far from Zionist settlements, which are considered illegal under international law.

And when Zionist troops are in the area, “we feel safer when foreigners

Shaheen, president of the Palestine Climbing Association.

“It was really hard, and it is still very hard,” she added, describing a widespread feeling of insecurity in the West Bank. Climbers have to travel on dirt roads and make long detours, Shaheen said, noting they might have to drive 90 minutes just because they cannot cross a 50-metre (160-foot) stretch of road that is only for settlers.

One of the climbers, Tariq Kaabna, told AFP a Zionist soldier had just that morning taken a water bottle from him and dumped its contents into Kaabna’s backpack. At the Ein Qiniya site, near Ramallah, “there has been an increase in settlers and soldiers going into the area,” said Abu Gosh, who hails from the Qalandia refugee camp.

“Once the climbers were kicked out of the climbing site for military purposes. This stuff actually wasn’t happening before,” he added. Ein Farah, a canyon filled by a river in winter time, has been closed to all climbers by the Zionist park authorities since the beginning of the war.

Though located in the West Bank just 15 kilometers (9 miles) east of Jerusalem, the site was declared the Zionist nature reserve named Ein Prat, a practice that rights groups have labelled as a roundabout way of restricting Palestinian access to West Bank land.

### ‘Nothing could help us forget’

The West Bank’s rocky topography offers massive potential for establishing or “bolting” new routes, dozens of which have been opened over the past 15 years. However, climbing’s physicality brings the Palestinian sporting community further into the land struggle that has



A Palestinian climber poses for a picture as he prepares to scale a rock wall at a site in Wadi al-Ghul.



Palestinian climbers prepare to scale a rock cliff at a site in Wadi al-Ghul.



Yet, they have simply adapted, finding detours around new Zionist checkpoints or ways to avoid the heightened risks of confrontations with soldiers or settlers living in the surrounding hills. “For the last seven years I’ve been completely obsessed with climbing and developed my entire life around it,” said Abu Gosh, a 22-year-old physiotherapy student.

On a recent Saturday, a dozen Pales-

come climb with us,” said Abu Gosh. “Soldiers usually don’t bother white people.”

### Increased military presence

At least 435 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist forces or settlers in the West Bank. “In the first month, it was almost impossible to leave certain towns and villages, because the Zionist army closed the roads,” said Heba

## New Zealand's glaciers shrinking faster, scientist warns

New Zealand’s glaciers are shrinking as ice melts at an accelerating rate, a top government scientist warned Monday after concluding a monitoring expedition in the country’s Southern Alps. The country’s climate institute conducts a yearly aerial “snowline survey”, which helps to chart how much ice the nation’s glaciers have lost.

“Overall, the snowline has been rising and in the most recent years we’re seeing that rise accelerate, so we’re experiencing a continued trend of glacial ice loss,” said principal scientist Andrew Lorrey in a statement.

Lorrey, from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, said many once-grand glaciers now appeared “smashed and shattered”. Government scientists have been monitoring the health of the country’s glaciers for almost 50 years. They fly over dozens of so-called “index glaciers” and use them as a barometer for the thousands of glaciers in harder-to-reach parts of New Zealand’s South Island.

“We flew to the southern-most glaciers, ones that we’ve not seen since 2018,” said Lorrey on the back of this year’s trip. “One is now two thirds of the



A glacier sits between mountains covered in snow in the Mount Aspiring National Park located near Queenstown on the South Island of New Zealand.—AFP

size it was on our last visit,” he added.

The institute said that New Zealand had experienced seven of its hottest years on record over the past decade. Even if this trend was to be reversed, Lorrey said that many glaciers were too far gone to be saved.

“Even if we got a few cooler seasons, they wouldn’t be enough to undo the damage that’s already been done,” he said. “That’s how stark it is, and it’s not just happening in New Zealand but all over the world.” New

Zealand’s glaciers are unique in that many of them are accessible to tourists. Franz Josef Glacier and Fox Glacier are among New Zealand’s most lucrative tourist drawcards.

“They hold tremendous value, but I worry that they won’t be around for our children to enjoy,” Lorrey said. “The message remains the same: we must tackle the issue of rising greenhouse gases if we are to save our glaciers from melting away.”—AFP

## ‘Ghostbusters’ ices out competition as ‘Dune’ worms its way above \$570 million

“Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire” scared its way to the top of the North American box office this weekend, taking in an estimated \$45.2 million in what one analyst called a “unique and impressive opening.”

“Only four other comedic series in the last 27 years have lasted five episodes,” analyst David A. Gross said, with ticket sales for the latest entry in Sony’s comedy series coming in “well above average for the genre.” Still, with a \$100 million budget, “Frozen Empire” has a way to go to reach profitability.

Co-written by Jason Reitman, whose father Ivan Reitman directed the original “Ghostbusters” in 1984, the film teams a new cadre of ghost catchers (Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon) with the veterans (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson) as they take on a frightening deity trying to launch a new Ice Age.

Meanwhile Warner Bros.’ sci-fi epic “Dune: Part Two,” about war and survival in an inhospitable sand-covered planet, again managed a strong second place, taking in an estimated \$17.6 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

It has now earned \$233.3 million in the US and Canada and \$341 mil-

lion internationally, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported. In third, dropping two spots from last weekend, was Universal and DreamWorks Animation’s martial arts comedy “Kung Fu Panda 4,” at \$16.8 million.

“Immaculate,” a new psychological horror film from indie studio Neon and starring Sydney Sweeney, placed fourth at \$5.4 million.

Sweeney, a graduate of hit TV series “Euphoria” and recent rom-com “Anyone But You,” plays a nun who -- despite her virginity -- becomes pregnant. Other nuns in her remote Italian convent at first treat her as the next Virgin Mary -- but then things start getting creepy -- very creepy.

And in fifth spot was Lionsgate’s “Arthur the King,” at \$4.4 million. Mark Wahlberg plays an adventurer who befriends an injured stray dog.

Rounding out the top 10 were: “Late Night With the Devil” (\$2.8 million) “Imaginary” (\$2.8 million) “Love Lies Bleeding” (\$1.6 million) “Cabrin” (\$1.4 million) “Bob Marley: One Love” (\$1.1 million)

—AFP



Gideon serves customers at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location in the Manhattan borough of New York City. — AFP photos



Cafe Manager Shray Campbell (left), with Chef Ariel and Assistant Manager Sarah greet customers at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.



Merchandise on sale at the Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.

# NEW CAFE IN MANHATTAN STAFFED BY NEURODIVERGENT WORKERS

A new French cafe is hoping to break into New York's notoriously competitive food scene while also offering opportunity to people with mental and cognitive disabilities. Cafe Joyeux is an "inclusive" chain of restaurants staffed by workers with autism and Down syndrome that has made a mark in France and other European countries and is now targeting the Big Apple.

The company's newest branch, Cafe Joyeux Lexington, has picked a cheery corner in the bustling Midtown business district for the company's American debut. Officially inaugurated on Thursday in parallel with World Down Syndrome Day, founder Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac told AFP he is "arriving very humbly" to Manhattan.

The social entrepreneur from Brittany opened the first Cafe Joyeux in Rennes, in the west of France, in 2017 with his wife Lydwine Bucaille. Since then, the company has opened 14 other restaurants in France, four in Portugal and one in Belgium.



Co-founder of Café Joyeux Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac poses at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.

The chain has hosted some high-profile visitors. The Parisian restaurant on the Champs-Elysees was inaugurated in 2020 by President Emmanuel Macron, while the Lisbon branch opened in



A staff chart on display at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.

2022 with a visit from Macron's Portuguese counterpart, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. Thursday's Manhattan opening is not expected to feature comparable luminaries, but the 21st Cafe Joyeux is hoping to leave a mark.

**Nonprofit model**

Though his company currently employs a total of 169 team members in Europe with disabilities, Bucaille-Lanrezac is clear about not wanting to "lecture the Americans." He described the New York offshoot of Cafe Joyeux as "an American project" established in a very American setting: among the businesses, banks, law firms, insurers and hotels located about 10 blocks north of Grand Central Station.

"We got help from specialists in inclusion, neurodivergence and cognitive disability, in particular AHRC and Autism Speaks, which have been active in New York for decades, and are

helping us to support our employees," explained the Frenchman.

It took more than two years to set up a local nonprofit organization to receive philanthropic support through tax-exempt donations, a model typically employed in the United States.

In one of the most expensive cities in the world, Cafe Joyeux has been "loaned" a retail unit for ten years at no cost by the real estate developer Boston Property Group.

The space, with capacity for about 30 guests, was decorated by French designer Sarah Lavoine and is now a place to enjoy Italian coffees and simple dishes created by chef Thierry Marx - at New York prices, of course.

To gain a foothold in the fast-casual food market, which is still experiencing a labor shortage in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Bucaille-Lanrezac recruited a non-disabled director and supervisors who will manage a team



Coffee for sale at the Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.

of 14 staff members with autism, Down syndrome and cognitive disabilities.

These include Peter Anderson Jr., a waiter, dishwasher and barista in his twenties who pointed out that "in a lot of places, you don't have any jobs that can support people with those types of disabilities." But "we have equal rights as (any other) person should be treated in working a job," he added.

**Many excluded from employment**

According to official statistics, there are seven million adults in the United States with mental and cognitive disabilities. Some 80 percent are excluded from the job market. While describing herself as autistic, Rachel Barcellona holds a university degree and won the Miss Florida pageant in 2023.

Nonetheless, "it's very hard for us to find a job," Barcellona told AFP. "Usually people won't hire us no matter how qualified or over-qualified we

are. If you just say 'I have autism' or 'I have Down syndrome' people won't hire (us) ... we are just seen as a burden and that's not fair." Bucaille-Lanrezac said his team in New York "has a chance to progress, to demonstrate that in the heart of a city with a very demanding and very busy clientele, they can create value and bring a good product and a high quality service."

Early supporters include customer Giovana Mullins. The 30-year-old, who works in the disability sector, complained about impersonal service at large coffee chains dominant in New York. Cafe Joyeux has a different vibe, she said. "As a customer walking in, even if you don't know what this coffee shop is all about, you come in and you feel the energy and you feel the joy" she said. — AFP



(From left to right) Co-founder of Café Joyeux Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac with employees Troy and Rachel from the US, Sebastiao from Portugal, Olivia from Belgium, Victoria and Anne from France and Cafe Joyeux Portugal CEO Filipa Pinto Coelho, pose for a photo shoot in Times Square in New York City.



Cafe Manager Shray Campbell (left) with employees Josh (center) and Noah serve food at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.



Rachel waves to customers at the Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.



Co-founder of Café Joyeux Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac (third left) poses with employees at Cafe Joyeux's Midtown location.

## Valentino and creative director Piccioli part ways after 25 years

Storied Italian luxury brand Valentino and longtime creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli announced they were parting ways.

Valentino and Piccioli said in a statement that the split after 25 years was a "joint decision to end their collaboration", as the company praised

the designer for his "vision, dedication and innovative spirit". Valentino said it would announce a new creative partnership soon.

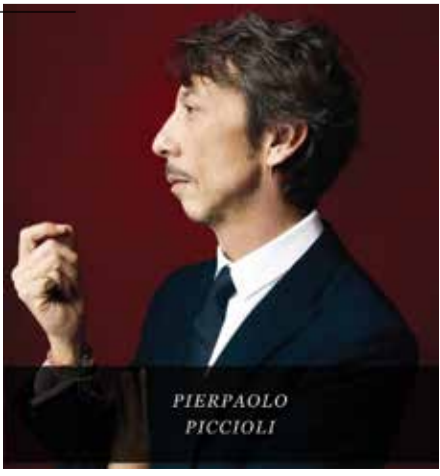
"I've been in this company for 25 years, and for 25 years I've existed and I've lived with the people who have woven the weaves of this beautiful story

that is mine and ours," said Piccioli.

Until 2016, Piccioli served as co-creative director with Maria Grazia Chiuri, before she moved on to the top spot at Dior.

Valentino is controlled by Qatar investment fund Mayhoola For Investments, while French luxury group

Kering has a 30 percent stake. The brand was founded in Rome in 1960 by designer Valentino Garavani and his business and life partner Giancarlo Giammetti. — AFP



Lifestyle



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki holds a box of chocolates as he poses for a photograph in his workshop.



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki prepares green tea chocolate ganaches.

When Yasushi Sasaki moved from Japan to Belgium at the age of 19, he spoke not a word of French and had no clue what he would do with his life. Last month, at the age of 52, he was named Brussels' chocolatier of the year by the prestigious Gault&Millau food guide -- no small triumph in a country that considers itself the homeland of chocolate.

"Whenever I go home to Japan and mention Belgium, people say to me 'Ahhh.... chocolate!' Sasaki told AFP.

Dubbed a "flavour wizard" by the food guide, Sasaki conducts his experiments in a little workshop behind his store, in the Brussels commune of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre. "Chocolate? From the moment I chose the profession it became my whole life," he said. "It's a hobby, a job, a pleasure." "I knew nothing, I started from scratch. But I think I made the right choice."

Originally from Nara, near the city of Osaka, Sasaki draws inspiration from his homeland -- but with a light touch. Not all Japanese flavours sit well with a chocolate ganache or praline.

"Green tea is very strong and marries very well. So does yuzu," the citrus fruit, he explained as he doled out tips to his team of young Japanese staff.

"Kaki and mandarin -- nope." Sasaki selects his suppliers with care. The green tea for instance comes from Kyoto, where he orders directly from a cousin who works in the sector.



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki holds a green tea chocolate ganache in his workshop.

With cocoa prices soaring, he is also careful to control costs. "We are artisans but we are also businesspeople," he said. "To keep working as artisans, we have to sell what we make."

**'My own way'**  
Sasaki may have learned the trade in

Brussels but he does not consider himself heir to a Belgian tradition. "I have my own way, my own taste," he said. "I know my strength is my own way, not copying other people."



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki spreads chocolate on a cake in his workshop.

Today, Sasaki exports his creations back to his home country, where sales peak around Valentine's day, the chocolate moment of the year in Japan.

As Easter draws near, he is readying for another big highlight of the chocolate calendar. Much as he is delighted to be honoured by Gault&Millau, Sasaki would



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki holds a tray of green tea chocolate ganaches in his workshop.



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki packages his green tea chocolate ganaches in his workshop.

have one word of advice for the guidebook -- to tip off its laureates before going public, so they have time to prepare.

"It's a huge impact all of a sudden," said Sasaki, whose turnover suddenly



Japanese chocolatier Yasushi Sasaki shows a jar of golden palliettes during preparation of green tea chocolate ganaches.

jumped by 20 to 30 percent. For now, though, Sasaki has no plans to expand. "I've been making chocolate for years. I'm just going to keep making good things, doing my thing," he said. —AFP

## Paris crowns champion waiters in one-of-a-kind 'cafe race'

Visitors to central Paris were treated on Sunday to the sight of hundreds of aproned waiters surging through the mediaeval streets, in a one-of-a-kind race designed to show off the profession months ahead of the Olympic Games. Men's winner Samy Lamrous and top waitress Pauline Van Wymeersch walked the two-kilometre (1.2-mile) route in 13 minutes 30 seconds and 14 minutes 12 seconds respectively -- each carrying a tray with a croissant, espresso and glass of water.

"We do this for 12 hours every day, including weekends and holidays," said Van Wymeersch, who works at cafe Le Petit Pont a few hundred metres (yards) from city hall. Her race-winning secret was "20 years on the job and good legs", she told AFP.

As well as their medals, both winners would receive a night's stay in a swanky hotel, said city water authority Eau de Paris, which sponsored the event. "Congratulations to everyone who took part," the body wrote on X (formerly Twitter), alongside a video of Lamrous panting for breath as he broke through the tape.

A jury was waiting at the finish line to judge both contestants' times and how much of their beverages might have slopped over an unbalanced rim.



Waiters and waitresses in work outfits take the start of a traditional "Course des cafes" (the cafes' race), in front of the City Hall in central Paris, on Sunday.—AFP photos

**'Question of concentration'**

Hundreds of spectators lined the route or applauded from roadside cafe tables as the servers, jaws clenched, piloted their trays through the streets, seeking to keep the precious cargo intact. Joshing as they went, some pulled off acrobatic movements with their trays as they slipped through a gap to overtake. "My thighs are a bit strained but it's mostly a question of concentration," said Lamrous.

"You have to keep it balanced with

all these people cheering you on. In the end, I managed to come back from behind, Paris style," he added of his first-place victory. First staged in 1914, the "course des garçons de cafe" (cafe waiters' race) was held on Sunday for the first time since 2011 -- four months before the city hosts the Olympics in July and August.

With the dismissive "garçon" ("boy") rarely used to refer to waiters nowadays, the challenge was re-baptised this year as the "course des cafes" or

"cafes race".

Unlike their Lycra-clad Olympic counterparts, the waiters wore white shirts, dark trousers and aprons provided by the organisers. The 200 contestants started and finished the race at city hall by the river Seine, sent on their way by mayor Anne Hidalgo. "I came here yesterday to scout things out," said Thierry Petit, who marked 40 years as a Paris waiter the day of the race. "Celebrating today, with all these people, in an Olympic year, really puts the wind in

my sails," he added. "This was a way to highlight our city's culture," said Pierre Rabadan, deputy mayor in charge of sports and the Olympics, who himself had a go at the race.

"A cafe or restaurant waiter is a really powerful icon of French culture," he added -- one many visitors will be looking forward to experiencing this summer. All the medallist waiters will be invited to the Olympics opening ceremony on July 26. —AFP



## Sports

# Gujarat edge Mumbai in IPL thriller to spoil Pandya's homecoming

## Samson hammers unbeaten 82 off 52 balls as Rajasthan Royals defeat Lucknow Super Giants

**AHMEDABAD:** Gujarat Titans edged out Mumbai Indians by six runs in an IPL thriller on Sunday as Hardik Pandya suffered a defeat as Mumbai captain after he controversially replaced Rohit Sharma. Rohit (43) and Dewald Brevis (46) shone in Mumbai's chase of their 169 target with a third-wicket stand of 77 but Gujarat's bowlers hit back to keep the opposition down 162-9 in Ahmedabad. Millions of Mumbai fans had slammed the franchise for the captaincy switch as Pandya made his IPL debut for Mumbai under Rohit and later led Gujarat to a title in their debut season in 2022 at the same venue.

But it was celebration at the world's biggest cricket stadium, named after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for new home team captain Shubman Gill who spoiled Pandya's homecoming. Commentators said close to 90,000 fans turned up at the 132,000 capacity arena.

Five-time champions Mumbai needed 48 from 36 balls with seven wickets in hand before going down to an opening loss. "We backed ourselves to chase those 42 runs but it was one of those days where we lost the momentum," said Pandya.

"It feels good to be back because this is one stadium you can enjoy, feel the atmosphere quite lively and obviously the crowd was full and they got a good game as well." Mohit Sharma took down Brevis, who came in as impact substitute, and then Tim David in successive overs before fellow quick Spencer Johnson struck twice in the 19th over to dent the chase further.

Rohit's wicket in the 13th over off Sai Kishore also proved to be key for Gujarat. Pandya attempted to go for the 19 runs needed in the last over with a six and a four off Umesh Yadav before being caught out on the third. "I think the way the boys held their nerve, and the way we bowled in the death overs, especially with the dew coming in, I thought it was special," said Gill.

### Samson blitz

Pandya, who has returned to competitive cricket after an ankle injury, bowled with the new ball and sent down three overs for 30 runs. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah came in first change to bowled Wriddhiman Saha with a trademark toe-crushing yorker and finished with figures

of 3-14 in four overs to keep down Gujarat to 168-6. His other two wickets included Sai Sudarshan, who top-scored with 45, and David Miller, who made 12. Bumrah was ably supported by IPL debutant and South African quick Gerald Coetzee, who took two wickets after joining the franchise for \$602,000 in the auction last year.

In the first match of the day, Sanju Samson led from the front as Rajasthan Royals defeated Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs in Jaipur. Captain Samson hammered an unbeaten 82 off 52 balls to steer inaugural IPL champions Rajasthan to 193-4 after they elected to bat first.

New Zealand quick Trent Boult then struck two early blows to rattle the Lucknow batting, which finished on 173-6 despite an unbeaten 64 by West Indies' Nicholas Pooran. Lucknow, who made the play-offs in the last two seasons since their debut alongside Gujarat Titans in 2022, lost regular wickets but skipper KL Rahul attempted to keep the chase on track in his 44-ball 58 despite his slow start.

The left-handed Pooran then took charge and along with Rahul put on 85 runs for the fifth wicket but the asking rate kept climbing. Rahul fell to Sandeep Sharma after his fifty and Marcus Stoinis' departure left Pooran with a lot to do in the final few overs.

Samson took on the opposition attack and built key partnerships including a 93-run third-wicket stand with Riyan Parag, who made 43. The Rajasthan innings witnessed a nearly 10-minute halt in the first over when a cable of the spidercam broke and technicians scurried to untangle the wires on the field. — AFP



**JAIPUR:** Rajasthan Royals' Nandre Burger bowls as Lucknow Super Giants' Devdutt Padikkal (R) looks on during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Rajasthan Royals and Lucknow Super Giants at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. — AFP

## 'I feel needed': Pakistan's Amir out of retirement

**LAHORE:** Fast bowler Mohammad Amir announced Sunday he was coming out of retirement and available for this year's Twenty20 World Cup, after Pakistan announced changes to its selection process which made him feel "needed".

Amir's precocious, stop-start career was halted in 2010 after he along with then-Pakistan Test captain Salman Butt and fellow pacer Mohammad Asif were banned for five years over a spot fixing scandal.

All three were also jailed by a UK court. Amir returned to play for Pakistan in 2016 but announced a shock retirement in December 2020 after he was not selected due to poor form. "I still dream to play for Pakistan! Life brings us to the points where at times we have to reconsider our decisions," Amir wrote on Sunday on social media platform X.

After "positive" talks with Pakistan Cricket Board officials, he said the PCB made him feel "that I was needed and can still play for Pakistan". "I declare I am available to be considered for upcoming T20WC," the 31-year-old added.

The World Cup will be held in the United States and the West Indies in June. Amir has represented Pakistan in 36 Tests, 61 ODIs and 50 T20Is. His international wicket haul stands at 259, with 59 coming in the game's shortest format.

Amir's experience would be vital for a team whose spearhead and skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi is struggling for form and Naseem Shah has only recently returned after missing the 50-over World Cup with injury.

His announcement came a day after all-round-er Imad Wasim reversed his own decision to retire four months ago and made himself available to play in this year's World Cup.

### 'No chairman'

Earlier on Sunday, newly elected PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi announced a seven-member selection panel, making the captain and head coach part of the process. "We have reorganized the selection committee with seven members but the different thing is that there will be no chairman," Naqvi told a press conference, adding that each member would have "equal powers". Former captain Mohammad Yousuf, Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq and Asad Shafiq — all played for Pakistan — will be joined by the current captain, the head coach and a data analyst. The committee will soon announce probabilities for a two-week training camp to be held at army base Kakul from Monday, Naqvi said.

Pakistan are without a head coach following their disastrous World Cup (50 overs) in India last year where they failed to qualify for the semi-finals. Afterwards Babar Azam stepped down from captaincy of all formats and was replaced by Shan Masood as Test captain and Shaheen Shah Afridi as T20I captain. The then-head coach Mickey Arthur was replaced by team director Mohammad Hafeez under whom Pakistan suffered a 3-0 Test white-wash in Australia and a 4-1 series defeat in a T20I series in New Zealand.

Naqvi on Sunday left open whether Shaheen will be retained as captain, saying the selection committee will make a final decision on its T20I captain after the training camp. — AFP

## Rajitha takes five wickets as S Lanka crush Bangladesh

**SYLHET:** Kasun Rajitha claimed his second five-wicket haul in Test cricket as Sri Lanka crushed Bangladesh by 328 runs on Monday in Sylhet to go 1-0 up in the two-match series. The visitors bowled out Bangladesh for 182 in their second innings after lunch on the fourth day, with Rajitha returning with 5-56.

Overnight batsman Mominul Haque scored 87 not out for Bangladesh to delay the inevitable, before Lahiru Kumara (2-39) took the final wicket. Fast bowler Rajitha claimed the wicket of Taijul Islam in the third over of the morning, trapping the left-hander in front for six.

Mominul, who hit 12 fours and a six, put on a dogged 66-run partnership with Mehidy Hasan Miraz for the seventh wicket before Rajitha struck again. Mehidy, on 33, edged Rajitha to Dhananjaya de Silva at second slip.

Rajitha took the wickets of Shoriful Islam (12) and Khaled Ahmed (zero) off consecutive deliveries after the break to complete his five-wicket haul. Vishwa Fernando was the other pivotal bowler for Sri Lanka with 3-36 as pacemen took all 20 wickets for the visitors in the game.

"The wicket had something for the fast bowlers," said Sri Lanka captain and player of the match de Silva. "We were talking about playing late, and what shots to play on this wicket. It paid off at the end of the day."

Taijul and Mominul resumed Bangladesh's innings at 47-5 after the top order collapsed in little over an



**SYLHET:** Bangladesh's Mominul Haque (R) plays a shot as Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis looks on during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet on March 25, 2024. — AFP

hour before the close of play on Sunday. "The wicket was good, there was movement early on," said Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto. "We have to improve our new-ball batting. A lot of work has to be done before the next Test, and we are going to have a plan to come back strongly."

Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series in Bangladesh, made 280 in their first innings and Bangladesh replied with 188. The visitors then made

418 with first-innings century-makers de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both reaching three figures for the second time in the match.

They were only the third pair from the same country to score centuries in each innings of a Test after Australia's Chappell brothers, Greg and Ian, and Pakistan's Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali. The second and final match of the series will be played in Chittagong from March 30. — AFP

## Macau horse racing enters its final furlong 'still in shock'

**MACAU:** For three decades Joe Lau has tied his racehorse training career to the rising and falling fortunes of the Macau Jockey Club, but in a few days it will all be over. On April 1, horse racing in the southern Chinese casino hub will be consigned to history after the club's concession from the government to operate racing was terminated.

The sport was in financial difficulties and no longer able to meet the "current development needs of society", said a government statement in January. Speaking outside the ageing racecourse, with glitzy casino resorts towering in the distance, Lau recalled the glory days, such as his sweep at the 2004 Hong Kong-Macau Interport Series, but he now feels "depressed" about the end of an era.

"(It's) like you felt the horse house on fire, and it shouldn't happen this way," Lau told AFP. "Riding is in my blood and this is my occupation." Macau held its first thoroughbred races in 1989, when still under Portuguese rule, and the sport found success after a takeover in 1991 by Stanley Ho, the late casino tycoon nicknamed "King of Gambling".

In recent years, the Macau Jockey Club — chaired by Ho's fourth wife Angela Leong — saw attendances fall and

racked up losses exceeding 2.5 billion patacas (\$310 million).

### 'Still in shock'

"In the late 1990s we were flying, we had 1,200 horses," said Geoff Allendorf, another long-time trainer in the city, which lies an hour to the west of Hong Kong by ferry. "At the present time we've got 200. That says a story in itself."

Despite the warning signs, some trainers and owners said they were taken aback by the 11-week window between January's closure announcement and the end of racing, with Allendorf calling the timing "abrupt". Trainers, jockeys and stable staff have written to Macau's leader demanding compensation for their lost livelihoods, saying the club's 570 employees would be dealt a heavy blow.

"Everybody's still in shock. It'll really hit home once we close down," Allendorf said. There is concern for the welfare of horses. Owners are negotiating with club management over costs of transportation and relocation, which must be completed before April 2025.

The Macau Jockey Club's chief operations officer, Ben To, would not comment on that, but conceded there were



**MACAU:** This photo taken on March 17, 2024 shows members of the public watching horses in the parade ring at the Macau Jockey Club. On April 1, horse racing in the southern Chinese casino hub will be consigned to history following an official announcement in January that the sport had declined in popularity and could no longer meet the "current development needs of society". — AFP

"still many things under discussion with the government and other parties".

### 'Falling apart'

Owner Jason Tam has a stable of six in Macau and is leading a group of owners seeking compensation from the Jockey Club. "This place is falling apart, this is what happens with poor management," he said, motioning at the peeling paint at the 400,000-square-metre track.

Hit hard by the pandemic and economic uncertainties, horse racing has faced a downturn in parts of Asia, with

Singapore announcing last year that 180 years of racing will end in October 2024. But owners such as Tam point to the soaring success of nearby Hong Kong, where racing saw an all-time high turnover of \$39 billion in 2022-23.

Six years ago, Macau's racing licence was extended by 24 years in return for \$190 million of investment by the Macau Jockey Club on renovations and non-gaming facilities, such as hotels. The investment never materialized, according to trainers and owners. In January the 2018 deal was terminated. — AFP

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MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks rebounds the ball during the second half against the Oklahoma City Thunder at Fiserv Forum on March 24, 2024 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

# Giannis leads Bucks over Thunder as 76ers beat Harden’s Clippers

## Anthony Edwards scores 23 points to seal T-Wolves’ triumph over visiting Warriors

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo sparked the Milwaukee Bucks over Oklahoma City in a Sunday showdown of NBA contenders while James Harden lost his first meeting with Philadelphia since the 76ers traded him. Antetokounmpo scored 30 points and grabbed a season-high 19 rebounds to lead Milwaukee over visiting Oklahoma 118-93.

Khristian Middleton added his second career triple-double - and first since 2018 - with 11 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for the Bucks, whose defensive effort kept the Thunder to a season-low point production on 37.1 percent shooting. “It was cool,” Middleton said of his rare feat. “My teammates were knocking down a lot of shots for me. It was a good win against a good team. But we’ve got to keep building on this for the rest of the season.”

Oklahoma City fell to 49-21, tumbling a half-game behind Denver for the Western Conference lead and a half-game ahead of third-place Minnesota. Milwaukee improved to 46-25, second in the Eastern Conference by three games over Cleveland.

Oklahoma City’s Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored only 12 points, his second-worst game total of the season. It snapped a 29-game run of at least 20 points a game for the NBA’s number two overall scorer, who is just ahead of Antetokounmpo.

“They were firing on all cylinders,” Gilgeous-Alexander said. “They have guys who have won a lot in this league. We had a chance to see where we stack up against that. Didn’t go our way, how we wanted to perform, but a lot of lessons learned.”

The Bucks outscored the Thunder 34-17 in the third quarter to pull away for good and opened the fourth on a 10-3 run to seal Oklahoma City’s fate. “It was our most connected game,” Bucks coach Doc Rivers said. “We were so physical. You could see it. Offensively we took what was there instead of forcing it.”

Harden, who forced a trade from Philadelphia to the Los Angeles Clippers last November, took a loss in the first meeting between the NBA clubs since the deal. Tobias Harris and Tyrese Maxey each scored 24 points to lead

the 76ers’ 121-107 road victory.

The Sixers, still without injured 2023 NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid, pulled ahead early and stopped a late fight-back for the victory. Harden had 12 points, going 0-of-6 from 3-point range, but the 34-year-old guard — a former MVP and three-time NBA scoring champion — added a game-high 14 assists.

Harden had been unhappy about not being traded in the off-season and was moved as part of a seven-player deal a few days after the campaign began. Kawhi Leonard and reserve Norman Powell each scored 20 points to lead the Clippers.

The 76ers improved to 39-32, one game behind Indiana for the sixth and last East playoff position outside the play-in games. The Clippers slid to 44-26, only a half-game ahead of New Orleans for fourth in the West.

New Orleans had 36 points from Zion Williamson, matching his season high, and 23 from C.J. McCollum in a 114-101 victory at Detroit, sending the league-worst Pistons (12-59) to a sixth consecutive

defeat. Williamson made 13-of-14 shots from the floor and 10-of-14 from the free throw line while adding seven rebounds and six assists to dominate.

**T-Wolves edge Warriors**

At Minnesota, Anthony Edwards scored 23 points, including three free throws in the final 12 seconds, to seal the Timberwolves’ 114-110 triumph over visiting Golden State. The T-Wolves swept the Warriors for the first season since 1997-98. Stephen Curry led Golden State with 31 points.

Anthony Davis scored 36 points and grabbed 16 rebounds while LeBron James added 26 points and 10 assists to spark the Los Angeles Lakers over visiting Indiana 150-145. Spencer Dinwiddie added 26 points and Austin Reaves had 25 for the Lakers in their top-scoring effort of the season while Pascal Siakam led the Pacers with 36 points. At Miami, Bam Adebayo had 15 points and 16 rebounds while Jimmy Butler added 15 points and reserve Haywood Highsmith contributed 18 points as the Heat routed visiting Cleveland 121-84. — AFP



PORTIMAO: Ducati Spanish rider Jorge Martin raises the trophy as he celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP race of the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao. — AFP

# Martin wins Portuguese MotoGP

**PORTIMAO:** Jorge Martin hit the front in the first lap and never relinquished his lead to win the Portuguese MotoGP on Sunday, in the second race of the season. Enea Bastianini was second and teenage rookie Pedro Acosta third. Martin took top spot in the standings from champion Francesco Bagnaia who crashed out after a collision with Marc Marquez in the wild final stages.

Bastianini, on a factory Ducati, started on pole but Martin, third at lights out, quickly took the lead on his Pramac Ducati going into turn one and dominated the race, making no errors. Martin, runner-up to Bagnaia in the championship last season, suffered a horror crash at Portimao in 2021 from which he needed several surgeries to recover. “Today I had no problems and I felt great... winning again is fantastic and I feel very competitive,” Martin told DAZN. “I was very focussed on the start, I knew it would be the key. “I am happy because I’ve worked a lot... on every detail to feel 100 percent.”

The exciting 19-year-old Acosta, on a Gasgas-Tech3, seventh in qualifying, overtook Brad Binder’s KTM and then six-time MotoGP world champion Marquez on a Gresini Ducati, to move into fifth. Italian defending double world champion Bagnaia kept Acosta at bay for a while, but the young Spaniard passed and gained a maiden podium after Maverick Vinales crashed out. — AFP

# Sinner survives scare to advance in Miami

**MIAMI:** World number three Jannik Sinner survived a scare from Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor as he moved into the fourth round of the Miami Open with a 5-7, 7-5, 6-1 victory on Sunday. The second-seed Italian, a two-time finalist in Miami, struggled against Griekspoor’s power play in the first set but turned the contest around after a rain break at 3-3 in the second set.

Sinner came out fighting and took the second before utterly dominating the third to book his place in the last 16. “I think even the first set was really close, but it (got) away,” said Sinner. “I think mentally I tried to stay strong, which I did, and I was in a tough situation today. After the rain came, I tried to come back a bit more aggressive, which I did, and obviously I’m really happy. It has been a tough day for me, but very happy about the result.”

Sinner will face Australian Christopher O’Connell, who emerged with a tight win over the USA’s Martin Damir 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5). Reigning champion Daniil Medvedev beat Britain’s Cameron Norrie 7-5, 6-1 and while he was happy with his performance he said that rapidly deteriorating balls were creating unusual games.

“It’s a bit strange. The court is pretty fast but the balls get old very fast. So at one moment in the rally, you feel like there isn’t much you can do. So you can’t go for the winner because the risk reward isn’t there. It’s the same for the

opponent, so we just hit, hit,” he told reporters.

There was an atmosphere akin to a South American World Cup football match for the clash between Chile’s 22nd-seeded Nicolas Jarry and Brazilian qualifier Thiago Seyboth Wild. After upsetting American Taylor Fritz on Saturday, Seyboth Wild was hoping for another scalp and he pushed the more experienced Jarry hard in front of a packed mostly South American crowd on the third court.

Jarry’s staying power proved decisive as he ran out 6-7 (1/7), 7-5, 6-3 winner. Hungarian Fabian Marozsan upset world number seven Holger Rune with a 6-1, 6-1 triumph in the second round. The convincing victory, in just 59 minutes, was a third win against a top-10 opponent in a Masters event for the 57th-ranked 24-year-old.

Marozsan dominated his Danish opponent from the outset, striking 23 winners and saving all three break points that he faced. The Hungarian’s two previous wins against top-10 opponents at this level came when he beat Carlos Alcaraz in Rome and Casper Ruud in Shanghai last year. “I enjoy playing at the highest level. I had a great day and enjoyed every moment on the center court against a very talented player,” said Marozsan. “I tried to put more pressure on him and I played very high intensity tennis and maybe he didn’t find the way to come back or do something different.” Marozsan will face Alexei Popyrin in the third round after the Australian beat Czech Jiri Lehecka 6-4, 6-4.

**Shelton fights through**

After three of the four top-ranked Americans exited the tournament on Saturday, Ben Shelton kept the Star Spangled flag flying in Florida with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Spanish



MIAMI GARDENS: Jannik Sinner of Italy returns a shot against Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands during their match on Day 9 of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

teenager Martin Landaluce. Shelton did not face a break point in the contest and won both sets with unstoppable aces down the middle.

“I thought I was pretty complete today,” said Shelton. “I thought I did a great job backing up my serve and usually when I have a lot of confidence and holding easily, the rest of my game continues to flow, and my confidence just grows. “I think that helps me a lot and puts a lot of pressure on the other guy.” In the third round, Shelton will be against 23rd seed Italian Lorenzo Musetti, who defeated Russian Roman Safiullin 7-5, 6-1. — AFP