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**2** Iftar saem a traditional act of kindness and generosity

**8** Significant progress in Burgan Bank's strategy of transformation and change

**16** Kuwait aims to ready skiers for 2026 Winter Olympics

**Ramadan KAREEM**

Fajr	: 04:20
Shrooq	: 05:40
Dhuhr	: 11:52
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:05
Isha	: 19:23

## No end to Gaza massacres

### Kuwait welcomes ICJ measures to address Zionist violations in Gaza



GAZA: Relatives mourn over the body of a Palestinian man killed in Zionist attacks at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on March 28, 2024. — AFP

GAZA: Heavy clashes and explosions shook Gaza, witnesses said on Saturday, as the Red Crescent reported several people killed during the latest chaotic aid distribution in the territory's north, where famine looms. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved a new round of talks on a Gaza truce between the Zionist entity and Hamas, after a binding UN Security Council resolution last Monday demanded an "immediate ceasefire".

A subsequent ruling by the world's top court ordered the Zionist entity to ensure aid reaches civilians, whose desperation was again laid bare Saturday. In its ruling, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague said it had accepted South Africa's argument that the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza required the Zionist entity to do more, with famine now "setting in".

Kuwait's foreign ministry welcomed on Friday the ICJ order. The ministry called for forcing the Zionist occupation to immediately implement the ICJ measures and work to provide protection to Palestinian people from Zionist malpractices and violations. It also emphasized the need for allowing unhindered humanitarian aid access to all of Gaza's population considering the catastrophic living conditions and massive destruction there.

This requires an immediate end to the Zionist oc-

cupation genocidal war on the occupied Palestinian territories in line with the recent UN Security Council resolution no. 2728 which called for an immediate stop to Zionist military operations in the Gaza Strip and allowing unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to the Strip.

Kuwait urged the international community to press the Zionist occupation to urgently and fully implement the ICJ provisional measures and the UN resolutions and to allow the entry of humanitarian aid by all means and through all crossing points to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestine Red Crescent said five people were killed and dozens injured by gunfire and a stampede during an aid delivery in Gaza's north. Eyewitnesses told AFP that Gazans overseeing the aid delivery shot in the air, but Zionist troops in the area also opened fire and some moving trucks hit people trying to get the food.

Fighting has not eased — including around the territory's largest hospital — and the latest toll from the health ministry in the Gaza Strip said at least 82 more people were killed in the previous 24 hours. The Hamas press office reported more than 50 Zionist air strikes over the past day, with civilian houses targeted across the coastal territory, as well as tank fire in the Gaza City area and southern Gaza.

Continued on Page 6

**RAMADAN KAREEM**

### The last 10 days and nights of Ramadan-I

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

We are in a month of magnanimous goodness, great righteousness and abundant blessings. The blessed month of Ramadan is highly praised in the Noble Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is the month of the Holy Quran and goodness, and the month when people return to their Creator in a unique demonstration of faith.

The last 10 days and nights of Ramadan are a time of spiritual cleansing and purification and hold great significance as Almighty Allah shows immense mercy to His creation. These special days and nights are a chance to benefit from the immense blessings of Ramadan and seek salvation before the month comes to an end.

The Noble Quran was revealed in the Night of Power, which falls on any of the last odd nights of the month of Ramadan. About that, Almighty Allah tells us, translated as: "Indeed, We (Allah) sent down (this Quran) on the Night (of Empowering) Decree. And what will make you realize what the Night of (Empowering) Decree is? The Night of (Empowering) Decree is better than a thousand months..." (Al-Qadr - The Night of Power 97: 1 - 3)

Almighty Allah has conferred upon us various blessings on many occasions and especially during the Night of Power or the Night of (Empowering) Decree. Any act of worship that you sincerely perform to seek Almighty Allah's pleasure will be rewarded as though you performed it more than one thousand months.

Exerting utmost efforts in worshipping the All-Loving Allah: Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan out of faith and expecting rewards from Allah, his past sins will be forgiven. And whoever stands in

Continued on Page 6

### 52 killed in Zionist strikes on Hezbollah in Syria, Lebanon

BEIRUT: The death toll in Zionist air strikes on Syria has risen to 52, including 38 government soldiers and seven members of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, a war monitor said Saturday. Friday's strikes fueled concerns of a wider regional conflagration. They targeted "a rocket depot belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah" near the Aleppo airport in northern Syria, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It was the latest deadly raid on Iran-backed forces in Syria, where Hezbollah has been backing the government in its fight against opponents since the 2011 Syria civil war erupted. Zionist strikes on targets in Syria have increased since the Zionist entity's war against the Hezbollah-allied Hamas group in the Gaza Strip broke out on Oct 7. Zionist raids also regularly target Hezbollah in Lebanon in retaliation for cross-border fire.

Friday's strikes killed 38 Syrian soldiers, seven Hezbollah members and seven Syrian pro-Iran fighters, the Observatory said, up from a total of 44 according to an earlier toll. The number of Syrian soldiers killed was the highest in Zionist strikes since



NAQOURA, Lebanon: Mourners and clerics surround the flag-draped caskets of four people killed in an overnight Zionist strike on this southern Lebanese border town on March 28, 2024. — AFP

the war with Hamas broke out, said the war monitor, which relies on a network of sources in Syria.

The Zionist entity rarely comments on individual strikes, and has neither confirmed nor denied the raids on Syria. But the Zionist military has said it killed the deputy head of Hezbollah's rocket unit in Lebanon, Ali Naim, whose death the Iran-backed group confirmed. Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on social media that he visited the Zionist entity's north on Friday "to closely examine another successful termination like the one that was executed this morning", in Lebanon and Syria.

Continued on Page 6

### Climate change is slowing heat waves, prolonging misery

WASHINGTON: Climate change is causing heat waves to slow to a crawl, exposing humans to extreme temperatures for longer than ever before, a study published in Science Advances said Friday. While previous research has found climate change is causing heat waves to become longer, more frequent and more intense, the new paper differed by treating heat waves as distinct weather patterns that move along air currents, just as storms do.

For every decade between 1979 to 2020, researchers found heat waves slowed down by an average of eight kilometers an hour per day. "If a heatwave is moving slower, that means heat can stay in a region longer, so that has effects on communities," senior author Wei Zhang of Utah State University told AFP.

The researchers divided the world into three dimensional-grid cells and defined heat waves as a million square kilometer zones where temperatures reached at least the 95th percentile of the local his-

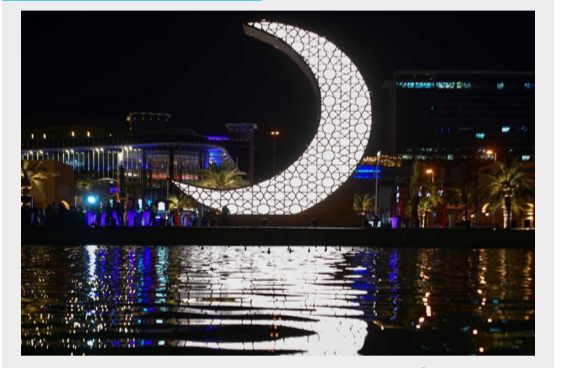
torical maximum temperature. They then measured their movement over time in order to determine how fast the hot air was moving.

They also used climate models to determine what the results would have looked like absent human-caused climate change, and found man-made factors loomed large. "It's pretty clear to us that a dominant factor here to explain this trend is anthropogenic forcing, the greenhouse gas," said Zhang. The changes have accelerated in particular since 1997 and in addition to human causes, weakening upper atmospheric air circulation may play a part, the paper said.

The duration of heat waves also increased, from an average of eight days at the start, to 12 days during the last five years of the study period. "The results suggest that longer-traveling and slower-moving large contiguous heat waves will cause more devastating impacts on natural and societal systems in the future if GHG keep rising, and no effective mitigation measures are taken," the authors wrote.

Zhang said he was worried by the disproportionate impacts on less-developed regions. "In particular, cities that don't have enough green infrastructure or not many cooling centers for some folks, in particular for the disadvantaged population, will be very dangerous," he warned. — AFP

**NEWS IN BRIEF**



**Kuwait sets crescent record**

KUWAIT: Kuwait has set a record for the world's largest illuminated Ramadan crescent at Al-Kout Mall in Fahaheel. The crescent is 15 meters high and the feat was approved by the Guinness Book of World Records. The crescent, an initiative of the private sector, was unveiled in a ceremony held under the patronage of Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb.

**US census gets MENA category**

WASHINGTON: The next US census and federal government forms will include new options for race and ethnicity including a category for people of Middle Eastern or North African origin, officials said. The changes, the first in nearly three decades, were announced by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and published in the Federal Register on Friday. People of Middle Eastern or North African origin did not previously have a distinct category and would be classified as "White". — AFP

**OpenAI unveils voice-cloning tool**

SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI on Friday revealed a voice-cloning tool it plans to keep tightly controlled until safeguards are in place to thwart audio fakes meant to dupe listeners. A model called "Voice Engine" can essentially duplicate someone's speech based on a 15-second audio sample, according to an OpenAI blog post sharing results of a small-scale test of the tool. OpenAI said that partners testing Voice Engine agreed to rules including requiring explicit and informed consent of any person whose voice is duplicated using the tool. — AFP



## Local



A cook carefully scoops vegetables from a simmering pot. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Workers prepare iftar meals.

# Iftar saem initiative a traditional act of kindness and generosity

## 'Bo Rashed project' targets those in need

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** As the Maghrib prayer approaches during Ramadan, a familiar scene unfolds on the streets of Kuwait. People step out of their cars at different locations across the city, each carrying boxes packed with free iftar meals. As these vehicles arrive, a crowd of random strangers eagerly gathers around them, awaiting their share to break their daylong fast.

Among the many dedicated individuals behind these acts of kindness and generosity is Thamer Al-Dakheel, founder of the "Bo Rashed project" for iftar saem meals, now in its fifth consecutive year of service. The project's activities extend beyond the streets of Kuwait, reaching those in need in their homes, mosques and various organizations, distributing nearly 60,000 meals each Ramadan.

Every day, in the heart of Industrial Ardiya, the central kitchen brings together around 100 individuals with diverse roles, including cooking, packaging and other



Thamer Al-Dakheel

tasks. They start working from 10 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, striving to complete the designated meals on time. Each day brings a different main course, ranging from chicken machboos to meatballs to chicken biryani, all meticulously prepared.

Once prepared, these dishes are carefully packed into meal boxes, each including a minimum of half a chicken or 200 grams of meat, complemented by side items like fruit or oriental sweets, alongside essentials such as water, milk and dates. All meals are thoughtfully packaged in containers suitable for microwave heating. Following this, they are distributed by a



A huge platter overflowing with chicken pieces.



A worker sorts vegetable platters at the kitchen.



People eagerly waiting by a car to receive their meal boxes.

diverse team of volunteers including Muslims, Christians, women and men alike.

Despite the challenges posed by rising supply costs attributed to the current conflicts, difficulties in importing chicken and scarcity of meat, the Bo Rashed project has remained committed to maintaining an affordable price. Each meal box is priced at just KD 1.5, ensuring accessibility to all. Individuals interested in purchasing these meal boxes can do so by booking through the number: 99120004. They can specify whether they intend to distribute the meals themselves or if they prefer the project to handle distribution on their behalf.

Dakheel recounted how the idea of the project began as a personal endeavor, stemming from his own experience of having a medical condition that prevented him from fasting. Thus, he was keen on feeding those who were in need instead. Over time, the initiative grew bigger, drawing support from his friends, family and network of connections who all wanted to contribute to this cause. Now, Bo Rashed's initiative has partnered with one of the country's leading catering companies, ensuring that the food meets the highest health quality standards.



Two men chat as they receive their meal boxes.

## 2nd election held in Ramadan in Kuwait's parliament history

**KUWAIT:** The 2024 National Assembly elections, scheduled for April 4, are considered the second elections held during the holy month of Ramadan in Kuwait's parliamentary history, Kuwaiti media figures noted. In interviews with KUNA, they noted that the first election held during Ramadan was for the 14th legislative term on July 27, 2013, whereas a by-election was also held during Ramadan in the 10th constituency on December 7, 2000.

The editor-in-chief of Al-Anbaa Newspaper, Youssef Al-Marzouq, said that the holy month of Ramadan has special rituals and traditions, and this is the second Ramadan to witness elections following the 2013 National Assembly elections. He added that, based on previous experience, fasting does not effect active participation in the democratic process, as the turnout in the 2013 elections held in July reached about 52 percent, although it was held during summer break and people were fasting.

He continued that the Kuwaiti voter is aware of the importance of taking part in the elections for the country's higher interests, and it is no surprise that Kuwaiti citizens are committed to their national entitlement. He continued that the fatigue of fasting will not stop the



Dheiran Abu Al-Khail



Dr. Khaled Al-Qehs

Kuwaitis from performing their electoral and national duties, and voting will not have an impact on their worshipping and prayer rituals, stressing that Kuwait deserves their full commitment.

For his part, mass communications professor at Kuwait University (KU), Dr. Khaled Al-Qehs, said that due to the special rituals of Ramadan, social media play an important role in the electoral process for both candidates and voters. He added that many Kuwaitis prefer to be in the country with their families during Ramadan; therefore, it could result in a higher turnout on election day.

He stressed the importance of candidates directly connecting with their voters and focusing on creating a mature media message on social media platforms and establishing a unique campaign on news platforms. He noted that a well-planned media and electoral plan is required on election days by the candidates' campaigns to encourage the participation of the voters.

Dheiran Abu Al-Khail, Secretary General of the Ku-



Youssef Al-Marzouq

wait Journalists Association (KJA), said the voters were occupied at the start of Ramadan with social activities, which delayed the launch of campaigns for candidates. Candidates, he said, should urge all voters to participate in the upcoming elections and to vote for whoever they see will honor their aspirations. He said candidates should raise awareness among voters about the importance of what he considered "national duty."

Abu Al-Khail urged candidates to convey their messages through all kinds of media.

### The Justice Ministry prepares

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice has formed a field team supervised by Undersecretary Hashem Al-Qallaf to prepare 123 schools to be premises for 764 polling stations for the upcoming National Assembly elections slated for April 4. Five schools would be allocated for the five main electoral committees and 118 schools for polling stations in the five constituencies: 16 for the first one, 18 for the second, 22 for the third, 28 for the fourth, and 34 for the fifth, the Ministry said in a statement. All polling stations would be headed by judges and prosecutors, it said, referring to preparing for all the needs of judicial authority members and heads of the polling stations. — KUNA

## GCC unveils its vision for regional security

**RIYADH:** Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jassem Al-Budaiwi has unveiled a strategic vision for protecting the security, peace, and prosperity of the countries in the Arabian Gulf region. Based on shared stances on regional and international issues, the GCC states have approved the vision for maintaining security and stability in the Gulf region and contributing to international security, he said at a function to declare the vision.

The objectives of the vision include building strategic regional and international partnerships, ensuring stability of the oil market, promoting maritime security and the freedom of shipping, combating climate change, securing the vital economic resources of the GCC states, maximizing benefits from the economic and investment potentials, and securing sustainable prosperity for the peoples of the region, he revealed.

Al-Budaiwi noted that the protection of regional security is not only a political commitment but a moral responsibility as well. He highlighted the significance of dialogue, cooperation, and respect for the viewpoints of other parties in facing the common security challenges on regional and international levels. The GCC states maintain a firm stance in support of international peace and security, he said, recalling the commitment, stated by GCC leaders at the Doha Summit, to addressing the political, security, and economic challenges within and beyond the Gulf region. — KUNA

## Envoy underscores the significance of Ramadan traditions

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Samih Hayat, held a Ramadan Ghabga, on Thursday, attended by officials and the heads of diplomatic missions of Asian countries accredited to the country at his Diwan in the Shaab area. In his welcoming remarks, Ambassador Hayat emphasized the significance of introducing the ambassadors and diplomats to Kuwaiti Ramadan traditions, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage, adding that it was also an opportunity for exchanging conversations and getting to know each other between heads of Asian diplomatic missions away from formalities and daily work.



Ambassador Samih Hayat takes a group photo with ambassadors and other officials.



Local

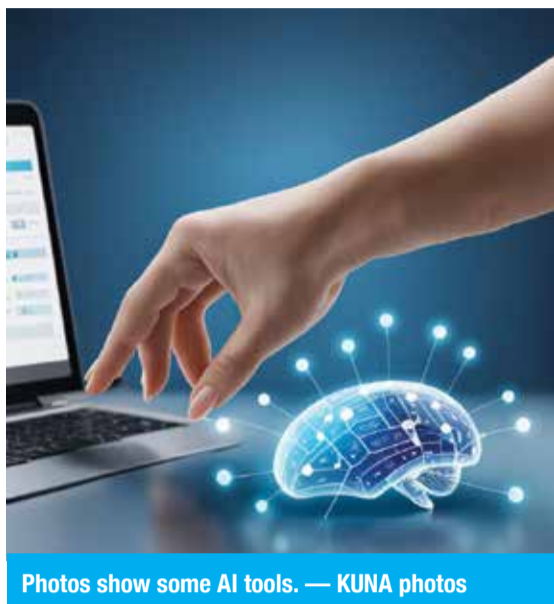
# AI 'an effective tool' in electoral opinion polls

## Candidates use artificial intelligence to analyze data, enhance opinion polls

**KUWAIT:** Artificial intelligence is the latest tool for enhanced measurement of public opinions in electoral campaigns. Some experts believe that public opinion polls, over the past years, have lost much of their value because many people have shifted to digital means to express their views. In Kuwait, AI has noticeably evolved in the health, educational, and information sectors, as well as at the level of the smart government.

And, with the approach of the National Assembly elections, AI has become basic in the campaigns for some nominees. These candidates have been using artificial intelligence to analyze data, enhance opinion polls for a better understanding of the would-be voters' interests, and guide the electoral campaign according to an explicit strategy. Candidates can employ AI to enhance their campaigns' strategies for winning the minds and hearts of the electorate; however, such an approach warrants adherence to moralistic and electoral norms and principles.

The available tools include techniques for rapid automatic data analysis, unlike conventional opinion polls, where data about individuals is collected directly through questionnaires and interviews. The AI is capable of analyzing and predicting the data precisely and rapidly, tracking public trends, and offering forecasts. In the electoral process, artificial intelligence can play a pivotal role with respect to analyzing the data, such as the polls, studying tentative results, electorate conducts, and guiding the campaign by targeting the would-be voters with precision and addressing them with



Photos show some AI tools. — KUNA photos



messages, the contents of which appeal to their interests and concerns.

Some politicians in Kuwait believe that artificial intelligence facilitates data analysis and helps in combating fake news and information. Moreover, it can enable seat seekers to assess the would-be voters' conduct, trends, and political tendencies. Furthermore, the AI can be used for analyzing social media websites and examining interactions among the electorate, thus helping in guiding the campaign

and specifying the most important districts.

On the other hand, critics warn that AI can be employed to breach privacy; thus, there must be a mechanism to safeguard the data and ensure its usage in a legal and moralistic manner. It can also be employed to resist bids to misguide the electorate via social media. The opponents allude to the US experience, where authorities have warned of the misuse of AI to deceive citizens in the coming presidential elections due in November. — KUNA



Ambassador of Azerbaijan poses for a group photo with local media representatives.



## Azerbaijan looks to enhance ties with Kuwait

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Azerbaijani Ambassador to Kuwait Emil Karimov stated that the strong and historical ties between Kuwait and Azerbaijan pave the way for further strengthening bilateral relations across various sectors. During an iftar held by the embassy for local media, the ambassador said "With a focus on tourism, food, and education, both countries are poised to enhance collaboration and mutual exchange of expertise."

He noted that 30,000 Kuwaiti tourists visited Azerbaijan during the past year. Regarding the trade between the two countries, the ambassador said that the volume of trade exchange for the year 2023 reached \$665,000 and Azerbaijan is keen to increase trade exchange with Kuwait. He said the Kuwaiti side has expressed an interest in importing food products from Azerbaijan, signaling a desire to diversify its sources of agricultural goods and strengthen economic ties to enhance trade relations.

To deepen cultural understanding and foster people-to-people connections between the two countries, he said that there are plans to organize numerous cultural events throughout the year in Kuwait, pointing out that there is an interest to enhance cultural cooperation between the two countries. "There is a joint Kuwait-Azerbaijan government-level com-



mittee and we are about to hold the third meeting of the joint committee this year in Kuwait," he revealed.

The Azerbaijani ambassador said "Cooperation with Kuwait in the field of mine clearance in Azerbaijan presents an exciting opportunity to leverage the expertise and experience for which Kuwait is renowned. We aim to benefit from its specialized knowledge," he added. On the other hand, Ambassador Karimov said that Azerbaijan plays a major role in securing energy for European countries, noting, "We have many projects to transport goods from east to west. The 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP29) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that will convene this year 2024, will take place in Azerbaijan.

Regarding Kuwaitis owning property in Azerbaijan, the ambassador said that they can own real estate, but they cannot own the land unless it is under the name of an Azerbaijani company, or a Kuwaiti-owned company in Azerbaijan. Regarding the current situation in Palestine, the ambassador emphasized Azerbaijan's call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, underscoring the urgency to halt the devastating conflict that has claimed thousands of civilian lives.

He highlighted Azerbaijan's proactive steps, including the establishment of a representative office in Ramallah, signaling robust ties with Palestine. Furthermore, the embassy in Kuwait actively engages in charitable initiatives, such as participating in a charity bazaar recently to support the humanitarian efforts aimed at saving children in Gaza.

## Kuwait's oil exports to Japan down 36.7%

**TOKYO:** Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in February declined 36.7 percent from a year earlier to 5.11 million barrels, or 176,000 barrels per day (bpd), down for the fifth consecutive month, government data showed Friday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.2 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 10.6 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil in the reporting month fell 7.1 percent year-on-year to 2.45 million bpd, down for the third month. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 96.7 percent of the total, down 1.4 percentage points from the year before. The United Arab Emirates was in the top spot, with imports from the country growing 19.1 percent from the year before to 1.08 million bpd, followed by Saudi Arabia with 931,000 bpd, down 18.5 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 134,000 bpd and Ecuador fifth with 42,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's third-biggest oil consumer after China and the US. — KUNA

## Police foil attempt to smuggle hashish

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Interior said the law-enforcers were able to arrest six drug traders while attempting to smuggle 350 kg of cannabis into Kuwait by sea. Acting on security tips and surveillance, the criminal investigations department and the General Administration for Drug Control, in collaboration with the Coast Guard Corps, were able to intercept a boat carrying the illicit drugs in 13 bags inside the territorial waters of Kuwait. The six suspected drug smugglers have been put in custody pending legal measures against them, according to a statement from the Ministry's General Directorate of Security Relations and Media. — KUNA

## Arabs urge end to Gaza aggression

**CAIRO:** The Arab Parliament on Saturday called on the international community to intervene immediately and halt Zionist aggression on Gaza and stop coercive displacement of the Palestinians and secure entry of aid into the beleaguered strip. Marking the 48th Land Day anniversary, the

Arab Parliament demanded that the international community and the influential stakeholders shoulder their political, legal and moral responsibilities, reject and condemn the occupation entity's settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It urged for a final settlement to the question by ending the occupation of all Palestinian territories, establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, allowing return of the Palestinians in diaspora and resolve the refugee plight. The Arab Parliament denounced the settlement policies, carried out by the Zionist occupation entity in the occupied Palestinian territories, that contravene the international legitimacy resolutions and affirmed the illegitimacy of all forms of settlement activities in all the territories including Jerusalem.

The ongoing aggression on Gaza and the abhorrent siege of the strip aim at eliminating the identity of a whole people, it said. This anniversary has fallen while the Palestinian people in Gaza continue to be subjected, since October 7, to genocide, coercive displacement, massacres and full-fledged war crimes that have taken thousands of innocent lives.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry welcomed Friday the International Court of Justice new order which included additional provisional measures to address the Zionist occupation violations of the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip. In a statement, the Ministry said that the ICJ new measures came within the framework of lawsuit filed by the Republic of South Africa concerning the Zionist occupation violations in the Gaza Strip of obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Participants take a group photo after the event.

## Quran necessary to build a strong Muslim personality

**KUWAIT:** The Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (RIHS), Sabah Al-Nasser Suburb Branch in Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Complex, organized a closing ceremony in honor of the winners of the Ramadan competition for memorizing and reciting the Holy Quran. It was held at the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Complex under the patronage and presence of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

He stressed the importance of memorizing the Holy Quran for young children, adding that memoriz-

ing the Holy Quran is the fortress of the formation of a strong Muslim personality, spiritually, morally, and cognitively. "Memorizing the Quran represents honesty, mercy, and justice, as these are the foundations of building a good person," Sheikh Mubarak said, adding that memorizing the Quran and educating oneself on its values and principles is one of the most important reasons for opening mental perceptions and cognitive growth, in addition to the happiness and psychological comfort felt by the memorizer.

For his part, the Chairman of the Administrative Board of Sabah Al-Nasser Branch, Bandar Al-Mutairi, said he is keen to continue providing everything that benefits the people of the region and promotes building their personalities religiously and socially. "We appreciate the annual sponsorship of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah for the Ramadan competition for memorizing and reciting the Holy Quran," he added.



GAZA: A Palestinian girl carries water at a makeshift camp for displaced people in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 30, 2024. — AFP

## Ramadan health tips

## Build your sleep schedule

Waking up for suhoor early in the morning might make it challenging to sleep the recommended 7 to 8 hours at a time. Therefore, build your sleep schedule in advance and try to include naps throughout the day in order to provide your body with more energy.

## Protect yourself from the sun

In order to prevent yourself from dehydration or sunstroke, wear loose, light and light-colored clothing while exposed to the sun.

## Restructure your working day

Fasting can make it difficult to maintain concentration throughout the day, so it's best to tackle demanding tasks in the morning while you have energy from your suhoor meal. Shift routine tasks to later in the day when the effects of fasting begin to creep in.

## Exercise in the evening

Avoid doing physical tasks in the afternoon when the temperature is high and your energy levels begin to drop. Instead, exercise later in the evening when you have energy from your iftar meal and can rehydrate adequately. Swap high-intensity workouts for low-impact training that demands less energy and stress on your body. Walking is a great way to improve or maintain your overall health. Just 30 minutes a day can increase cardiovascular fitness, strengthen bones, reduce excess body fat, and boost muscle power and endurance.



## Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Carpenters make sailing ships during the pre-oil era in Kuwait. - Photo from KOC archive, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

Minister signs MoU  
with British hospital

## MoH seeks to draw world medical staff to Kuwait

LONDON: Kuwait Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London, with Kuwaiti Ambassador in the UK Bader Al-Awadhi attending. The Kuwaiti Health Office's Chief, Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Rasheed, and the minister's accompanying delegation attended the event. Speaking to KUNA, the minister said the MoU aims at sharing expertise, reducing the number of overseas patients, drawing world medical staff to Kuwait, creating co-operation opportunities, and training Kuwaiti medics.

He commended the hospital as being one of the most significant European hospitals for incurable diseases, children's cancer, organ transplants, and intractable surgeries. The minister hoped that such endeavors would re-

flect on health care quality for citizens and residents in Kuwait as part of the Kuwaiti political leadership's attention to patients and to providing better health services to them.

He added that his field tour of the British hospital, visits to Kuwaiti patients, and meetings with their families would promote the Health Ministry's humanitarian role, whether at this hospital or other hospitals. For his part, Chief Executive of the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH), Mathew Shaw, said the partnership with the Kuwait Health Ministry was launched in 2010 and has witnessed numerous mutual visits and training of Kuwaiti medics.

He added that this partnership would contribute to providing more exchanges of expertise and upgrading the quality of health services for children. Great Ormond Street Hospital



Kuwait Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London.

(GOSH) is one of the world's leading children's hospitals. Since its formation in 1852, the hospital has been dedi-

cated to children's healthcare and to finding new and better ways to treat childhood illnesses. — KUNA



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A KAC aircraft in Kuwait skies. — KUNA photos

KAC sets schedule  
for summer flights

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways on Saturday declared the schedule of its summer flights, with a concentration on high-demand destinations in the June-September period. Chairman Abdulmohsen Al-Fagaan said in a statement that the company would operate additional flights to some destinations, namely London, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Geneva, to cope with the anticipated large number of passengers.

Some of the most favored summer destinations are Antalya, with two trips a week; Bodrum, with three; and Trabzon, with three, in addition to

Sharm Al-Sheikh, with two per week.

Also, the top desired destinations are Malaga, three flights per week, and Nice, twice, he said, noting that the number of summer trips would reach 54, in addition to the other constant flights. The KAC will inaugurate the large aircraft, a Boeing 300-777 B, to fly to most European countries to enable clients to benefit from the Royal and business-degree services. — KUNA



Abdulmohsen Al-Fagaan

Kuwait Times  
Established 1961  
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Zuma survives crash  
blamed on ruling party

'Daunting task' ahead for cranes clearing bridge debris

Page 6

Page 7

## Biden's fundraiser rakes in \$25m

Hundreds protest Biden's support for Zionist entity; Obama, Clinton come to his defense

NEW YORK: US President Joe Biden was joined in New York on Thursday by his predecessors Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at a blockbuster fundraising event where he collected \$25 million to go towards his re-election bid. The Democrat's bumper evening took place at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan, around an hour's drive from where his Republican rival Donald Trump had earlier attended a wake for a New York police officer killed on duty.

But the fundraiser was punctuated by several protests inside the massive auditorium, with attendees rising at several different moments to shout over the discussion, referencing Biden's backing of the Zionist entity in the war that has killed more than 30,000 people in Gaza. "Shame on you, Joe Biden!" one yelled.

Obama and Clinton offered a presidential perspective of the Gaza crisis that stressed the political realities of being in the White House. A president needs to be able to support the Zionist entity at the same time as fighting for Palestinians to have more access to food, medical supplies and a future state, they said.

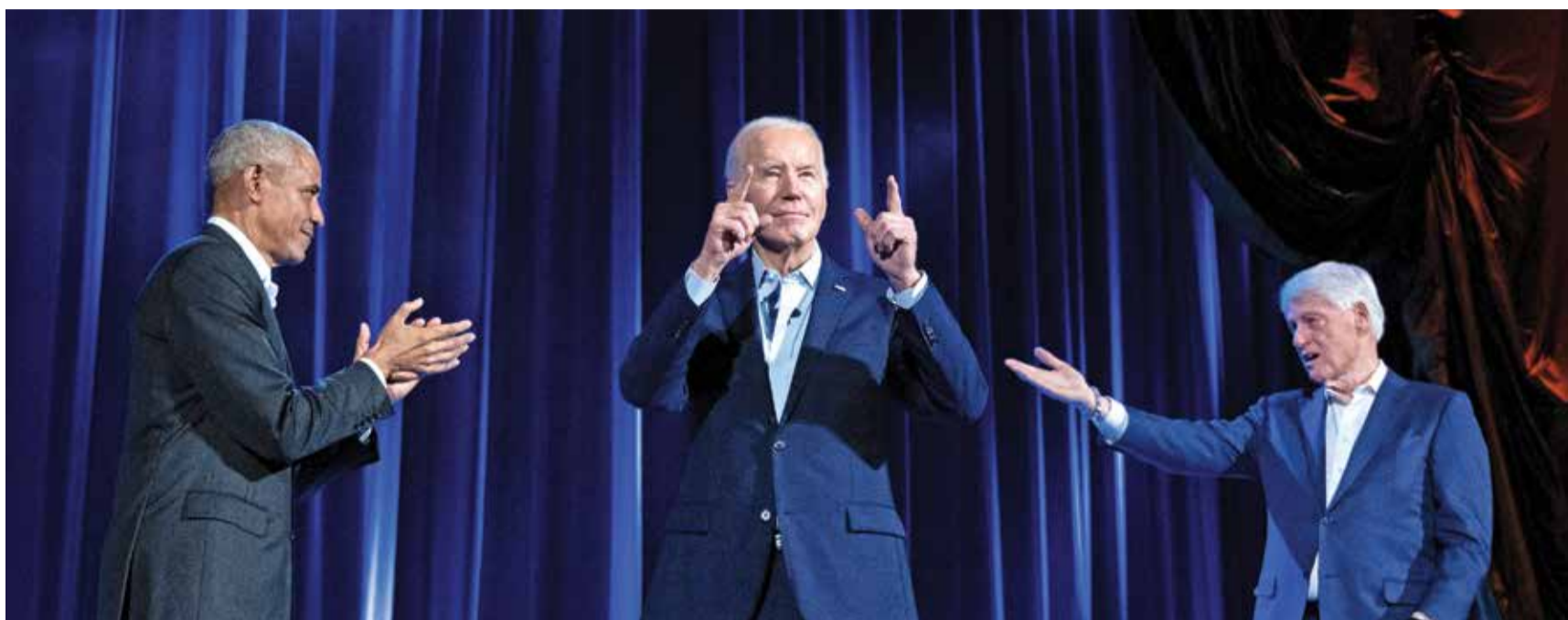
"It's a lonely seat," Obama said. "One of the realities of the presidency is that the world has a lot of joy and beauty, but it also has a lot of tragedy and cruelty." People "understandably, oftentimes, want to feel a certain purity in terms of how those decisions are made," he said. "But a president doesn't have that luxury."

When a protestor inside the theater interrupted Obama, the former president snapped back: "You can't just talk and not listen... That's what the other side does." The pair of former presidents also defended Biden's handling of the economy, which gets low ratings in national polls. Clinton said Biden's economic numbers have significantly outpaced Trump's administration. "I believe in keeping score," Clinton said. "He's been good for America" and deserves another term.

Before the event, the three leaders' motorcade passed hundreds of protesters demonstrating against The Zionist war on Palestinians Gaza, another sign that some young voters and other progressives who voted for Biden in 2020 are furious about his staunch backing of the Zionist entity in its response to the Hamas October 7 attack.

### 'Glitzy fundraiser'

Biden's campaign team announced ahead of the



NEW YORK: Former US President Barack Obama (left) and former US President Bill Clinton (right) cheer for US President Joe Biden during a campaign fundraising event at Radio City Music Hall in New York City on March 28, 2024. — AFP

event a "record" collection of more than \$25 million, noting it was more than Trump had raised for the whole of February. Thursday's event had a celebrity tinge.

Singers Queen Latifah and Lizzo, among others, warmed up the room before the 42nd, 44th and 46th presidents of the United States sat down for a question-and-answer session moderated by comedian Stephen Colbert. Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour was also in attendance.

The discussion mixed serious topics with jokes, and ended when Obama and Clinton joined Biden in donning aviator sunglasses, Biden's favorite accessory. Trump's campaign spokesperson, Steven Cheung, had blasted on social network X the "glitzy fundraiser ... with their elitist, out-of-touch celebrity benefactors."

### 'Numbers don't lie'

Earlier in the day, Trump made a short statement af-

ter attending the wake of police officer Jonathan Diller, who was shot and killed on Monday during a traffic stop. "We have to stop it. We have to get back to law and order," said the 77-year-old billionaire, who refrained from criticizing his 81-year-old rival directly.

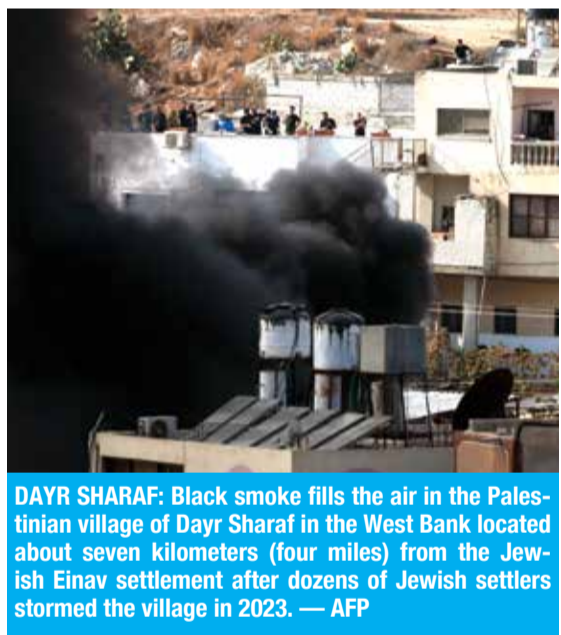
Trump devotes much of his campaigning to attacks on illegal immigration and criticizing Biden for being lax on policing. The White House said Biden had called New York Mayor Eric Adams on Thursday to offer his condolences over Diller's killing. The Democrat has not been in contact with the officer's family but "grieves" with them, his spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said, adding that the president "has stood with law enforcement his entire career and continues to stand with them." Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday that Biden was "deeply grateful for the sacrifices police officers make to keep our communities safe."

Biden and Trump, who faced off at the ballot box in

2020, are guaranteed to win their respective parties' nominations for the November presidential election this summer. The star-studded fundraiser for Biden, however, underscored his party's ability to drum up cash.

According to NBC News, guests at the event could pay \$100,000 for a photo with the trio. "The numbers don't lie: today's event is a massive show of force and a true reflection of the momentum to reelect the Biden-Harris ticket," Jeffrey Katzenberg, the campaign's chief fundraiser, said in a statement, referring to Vice President Kamala Harris.

Biden has better-stocked campaign coffers than his Republican opponent, who is using some of the funds raised from his supporters for legal expenses in the multiple court cases he is facing. Trump's trial for allegedly covering up 2016 hush money payments to a porn star when he was running for his first term in office begins in New York on April 15. — Agencies



DAYR SHARAF: Black smoke fills the air in the Palestinian village of Dayr Sharaf in the West Bank located about seven kilometers (four miles) from the Jewish Einav settlement after dozens of Jewish settlers stormed the village in 2023. — AFP

## Dutch hostage drama ends in arrest of suspect

EDE: A hostage drama in the Netherlands that lasted several hours ended without bloodshed on Saturday as all four hostages were freed and police took the suspect into custody. Authorities said there was no reason to suspect a "terrorist motive" for the ordeal, which took place at a night spot popular with young people in the central Dutch town of Ede.

Police said they received reports of a potential hostage situation at 5:15am (0415 GMT) at the Cafe Petticoat, with local media saying a "confused" man burst in as staff were clearing up after a party. The man was armed with "several knives" that he showed to the hostages, prosecutor Marthyne Kunst told reporters at a news conference in the town hall.

Police are also investigating a black backpack he was carrying with him, amid reports that the hostage-taker had threatened to use explosives. Authorities later confirmed there were in fact no explosives in the backpack.

Police spokesman Anne Jan Oosterheert said officers were on the scene within minutes, immediately opening negotiations with the man. "Luckily that all went well," he said, declining to offer details of the negotiations.

The suspect is known to the police and has a previous conviction for threatening behavior. Investigations are under way as to his motive and psychological state, Kunst said. "Great respect and appreciation for police, emergency services and special forces who brought the hostage situation ... to a successful conclusion," said outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte. "I wish everyone affected a great deal of strength to deal with these intense and dramatic events," he added.

### 'Terrible situation'

The incident sparked a major deployment including riot police and explosives experts. Police cleared the town center and evacuated the residents of some 150 buildings near the cafe. Trains were diverted away from the town as a precaution.

Hours after the ordeal began, an initial group of three people was released, pictures from public broadcaster NOS showing them exiting the building with their hands in the air. The fourth hostage was freed shortly afterwards, with the suspected hostage-taker then arrested.

NOS images showed a man kneeling on the ground with his hands behind his back, as officers restrained him with handcuffs. "A terrible situation for all these people. My concern and thoughts go out to them and their loved ones. I hope that the situation is now resolved quickly and safely," said Ede mayor Rene Verhulst. "Emotions are high" in the town, said the mayor, saying it had been "a very intense Saturday morning."

He said he would soon be visiting the hostages, who were employees of the cafe. "They were confronted by a man who said he had explosives in his bag and threatened them with knives. They are completely shocked," Verhulst said.

The Netherlands has seen a series of terror attacks and plots but not on the scale of other European countries, such as France or Britain. In 2019, the country was stunned by a shooting spree on a tram in the city of Utrecht that claimed four lives.—AFP

## US denies claims it eased Zionist settler sanctions

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury Department pushed back on Friday against claims it had eased sanctions against West Bank settlers after pressure from the Zionist entity's finance minister.

The US recently sanctioned seven Zionist settlers and two farming outposts in the West Bank in response to a surge in violence, freezing their assets and preventing them from carrying out financial transactions with US banks and individuals.

Earlier this week, a Zionist widely-read free Hebrew language daily reported that the Biden administration had "dramatically" softened its sanctions against these individuals after pressure from the Zionist entity's finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich.

Simcha Rothman, a politician from Smotrich's ultranationalist Religious Zionism party, later shared a screenshot of the article on social media, congratulating Smotrich for pushing the US to understand that its sanctions had "crossed the line." On Friday, the US Treasury Department published the letter it had sent to the Zionist authorities on Tuesday in response to questions from Zionist banks about "subsistence payments for persons sanctioned under this authority."

The letter said Zionist banks could still process transactions for sanctioned individuals "that are ordinarily incident and necessary to basic human needs or subsistence," as long as they did not involve "the US financial system or US persons."

This step, which was "consistent with Treasury's approach across multiple sanctions programs," included staples like food, healthcare, basic housing and taxes. "(Zionist) banks would also not be exposed to sanctions risk for processing transactions for expenses essential for the survival of animals on farms that are blocked as a result of a designation of their owners," it added. A Treasury spokesperson told AFP that the Biden administration still "fully intends to enforce" the sanctions, adding that "humanitarian exceptions" exist for all US sanctions programs.—AFP



### Join Our Team

Kuwait Airways Job Vacancies Announcement

Kuwait Airways announces the vacancy for the job listed below in accordance with the following specific requirements and specifications:

Required Job	Qualifications	Required Experience
Legal Director	Law Degree from a recognized university by the State of Kuwait.	Minimum of 15 years' experience in legal field, with at least 6 years in a senior supervisory position in legal and insurance activities, preferably within an airline company.

### General Terms:

- Priority in appointment shall be for eligible Kuwaitis who meet the requirements.
- The applicant is required to be proficient in Arabic and English (Reading & Writing & Speaking) and proficient in computer applications
- A minimum of 70% is required to pass the English language test.
- The applicant must successfully pass a set of tests with specified success rates in order to qualify for a personal interview.
- Applicants shall be subject to the necessary conditions for appointment in accordance with the rules and regulations at Kuwait Airways.
- University degrees that are not recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait will not be considered.
- Applicants must demonstrate good conduct and behavior and must not have been convicted in any case prejudicial to honor or honesty.
- Applicants will be subject to personal interviews and the necessary tests, and in the event of equal ratings, comparison between them will be made according to the following standards of Civil Service Commission Resolution No. (4) of 2001 and in their order:
  - Holding a grade of (90%) or higher for the qualification.
  - Whomever graduated first.
  - Age seniority.
  - Married applicants are preferred over single status applicants.
- Submission and receipt of the application do not imply acceptance. Any application that fails to meet the specified conditions will not be considered, and the company reserves the right to decline or not respond to the applicant.

### How to apply:

Applications shall be submitted on the website: careers.kuwaitairways.com. This shall be within 15 days from the date of publishing this announcement.

Documents to be attached to the website:

- CV.
- Educational Qualification and professional certificates approved and equivalency approved by the official authorities in the State of Kuwait.
- Copy of Civil ID/ Passport
- A certificate from The Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) and Career Progression.
- Experience certificates
- To whom it may concern certificate from military service (If applicable)

Applications that do not meet the requirements or incomplete applications shall be excluded, and this exclusion in itself is considered an official apology without the need to notify the applicant.

## International

# 'Daunting task' ahead for cranes clearing bridge debris

## Operation expected to take months as search for bodies of 4 missing workers adds complications

**BALTIMORE:** Three heavy lift floating cranes arrived in Baltimore harbor on Friday to begin what Maryland's governor described as a "remarkably complex operation" to clear crumpled girders from a collapsed bridge taken down by an errant container ship. "To see it up close, you realize just how daunting a task this is," Maryland Governor Wes Moore told a news conference after touring the disaster scene in a boat.

Migrant groups meantime honored the six Latino construction workers who lost their lives when the Dali container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge long before dawn Tuesday, toppling it with stunning speed. The six were part of a pothole repair team. "I am here to say that we immigrants are essential," said Erika Aleman, a construction worker from Honduras who lives in Baltimore.

Vessel traffic through the busy Port of Baltimore has been suspended indefinitely, causing disruptions to trade spanning the globe, and Moore warned that recovery would be lengthy. "We cannot rebuild the bridge until we have cleared the wreckage," Moore said. "This is going to be a long road." The complexity of the recovery dismayed those involved. "We have to figure out the right plan to be able to break that bridge up into the right-sized pieces that we can lift," US Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath said.

Twisted bridge trusses weighing thousands of tons still entrap the damaged container ship. The Chesapeake,

a 1,000-ton lift capacity derrick barge, and two smaller crane barges arrived in Baltimore harbor, the Navy said, and a fourth crane barge will arrive next week.

The work of clearing tons of steel debris from the deep waters of the Patapsco River is made more delicate by the fact that the bodies of four workers have yet to be recovered. The four missing workers are believed to have been killed when the Singapore-flagged, 1,000-foot (300-meter) Dali lost power and careened into a bridge support column.

### Removing debris

The federal administration has approved \$60 million in emergency funding for the cleanup and recovery operation, while the cost of building a new bridge could ultimately hit \$1 billion. The operation will likely take place in three phases: trusses from the bridge removed to allow one-way traffic into and out of the port; bridge segments on the ship lifted so the ship can be moved; and then steel and concrete debris from the river bed cleared.

The project will likely take months, though one analyst told the US Naval Institute that the channel could be reopened for limited traffic in as little as one month. The Army Corps of Engineers, which is leading the effort, said it has activated an emergency plan to deploy more than 1,100 engineering, construction, contracting and operations specialists.

### Shipping diverted

The accident had a rapid impact



**BALTIMORE:** Workers and labor officials hold a press conference to honor families and victims of the March 26 collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 29, 2024. — AFP

on cargo shipping — and on the jobs of an estimated 8,000 people employed directly at the major port — with auto, coal and sugar shippers immediately affected. Cruise lines were also hit. Royal Carib-

bean, one of four cruise lines to use the Baltimore terminal, said it had rerouted a returning liner, the Vision of the Seas, to Norfolk, Virginia.

Abe Eshkenazi, CEO of the Association

for Supply Chain Management, told CNN that the country's supply chains were more resilient today thanks to work done after the COVID-19 pandemic caused huge shipping delays. — AFP

## Peruvian president's home raided in luxury watch probe

**LIMA:** Peruvian authorities raided President Dina Boluarte's home on Saturday as part of an ongoing corruption investigation related to undisclosed luxury watches. According to a police document obtained by AFP, about 40 officials were involved in the raid, which was searching for Rolex watches that Boluarte had not publicly declared. The raid "is for the purpose of search and seizure," police said.

The embattled president did not appear to be home at the time. Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzen slammed the raid as an "intolerable outrage" and "disproportionate and unconstitutional." Authorities launched an investigation into Boluarte this month after a news outlet drew attention to pictures of her sporting luxury watches at public events.

Saturday's raid, a joint operation between the police and the prosecutor's office, was broadcast on local television channel Latina. Government agents could be seen surrounding the house in the Surquillo District of the capital Lima while officers blocked oncoming traffic.

The surprise, early-morning raid was requested by the public prosecutor and authorized by the Supreme Court of Preparatory Investigation. It came after prosecutors refused Boluarte's request for more time to respond to a subpoena demanding she furnish proof of purchase for her watches.

### 'Clean hands'

Already facing declining approval ratings, Boluarte has been plunged into a fresh political crisis with the launch of the probe into whether she has illegally enriched herself while in office. If she is indicted in the case, a trial could not take place until after her term ends in July 2026 or she is impeached, according to the constitution.

Dozens of journalists descended on the

president's house on Saturday but prosecutors and officials at the scene did not respond to questions. The Peruvian president's office also did not react immediately.

The scandal erupted after local news outlet "La Encerrona" reported in mid-March that Boluarte had worn various Rolex timepieces at official events. The outlet drew attention to the watches with pictures dating from December 2022, when Boluarte took office.

The government comptroller later announced it would review Boluarte's asset declarations from the past two years to search for any irregularities. Boluarte, 61, has staunchly defended herself. "I entered the Government Palace with clean hands, and I will leave it with clean hands," she said last week.

Responding to questions about how she could afford such expensive timepieces on a public salary, she said they were a product of working hard since she was 18 years old. The lawyer and former vice president became Peru's first woman president after leftist leader Pedro Castillo tried to dissolve



**LIMA:** Police leave President Dina Boluarte's house during a raid ordered by the Attorney General's Office as part of a preliminary investigation on March 30, 2024. — AFP

Congress and rule by decree, leading to his quick ouster and arrest. Violent protests demanding Boluarte step

down and fresh elections be held followed, with almost 50 people killed in the ensuing crackdown. — AFP

## 52 killed in Zionist strikes on...

Continued from Page 1

The Zionist army would keep up its operations against Hezbollah everywhere, he said, adding: "We will make them pay a price for every attack that comes out from Lebanon." Hezbollah, which has a powerful arsenal of rockets and missiles, has exchanged near-daily fire with the Zionist military since Hamas' unprecedented October attack on the Zionist entity.

"Syria and Lebanon have become one extended battleground from the (Zionist) perspective," Riad Kahwaji, head of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis, told AFP. "(Zionist) warplanes hit targets in both countries almost daily in a sustained effort to destroy Hezbollah military infrastructure and to also tarnish the group's image," he said. "(Zionist) strikes have clearly escalated in size and depth" in Lebanon, he added.

Syria's foreign ministry condemned the Aleppo raids, which it said killed and wounded "a number of

civilians and soldiers". Damascus allies Russia and Iran also slammed the Zionist strikes. Moscow said they were "categorically unacceptable" while Iran said they were a "violation of Syria's sovereignty" and "a serious threat to regional and international peace and security". According to Kahwaji, "Syria is the main supply route linking Iran with Hezbollah in Lebanon".

"(The Zionist entity) has been hitting this supply line and destroying arms depots and eliminating IRGC leaders in Syria," he said, referring to Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Friday's strikes were the second on Syria in 24 hours. Syrian state media said "two civilians" were killed in a "(Zionist) air attack that targeted a residential building" on Thursday. The Britain-based Observatory said the target was the Sayyida Zeinab area, a stronghold of pro-Iran armed groups including Hezbollah, south of the capital.

The fighting has displaced tens of thousands of people in southern Lebanon and in the Zionist entity's north, where the military says 10 soldiers and eight others have been killed. Analyst Lina Khatib said "(the Zionist entity) is increasing the pressure on Hezbollah, the Syrian army, and other Iran-backed groups in Syria and in Lebanon, knowing that it is not in their interest to escalate the fight". —AFP

the last 10 nights began, Allah's Messenger (PBUH) used to stay awake at night (for prayer and devotion), and would awaken his family. (In the process), he tightened his loincloth, alluding to exerting more efforts in observing prayers and other acts of worship with more vigor." (Muslim # 1,174)

From the above-quoted narrations, we understand that we are expected to follow our beloved Prophet's example, entering these last 10 days and nights of Ramadan with a renewed sense of commitment and unflinching devotion to worshipping Almighty Allah not only in these days but in all aspects of our lives. We can make the most of the last 10 days and nights of Ramadan and show our devotion by exerting ourselves to perform as many good deeds as possible, such as reading or reciting the Noble Quran, staying awake at night for optional prayers, giving zakat (compulsory charity), giving zakat al-fitr (fast-breaking zakat for the poor to feast on Eid day), and normal charity and supplication to Almighty Allah — among others.

Our supplications during the last 10 days of Ramadan are exceptionally special. An-Nouman bin Basheer (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, translated as: "Dua (supplication) is the essence of worship." (Al-Albani rated it as authentic in Sahih At-Tirmidhi # 2,969)

(To be continued)



**LONDON:** Pro-Palestinian activists and supporters wave flags and hold placards as they march during a protest on March 30, 2024 calling for a ceasefire in the Zionist war on Gaza. — AFP

## No end to Gaza massacres...

Continued from Page 1

The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 32,705 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. Netanyahu's office said new talks on a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release will take place in Doha and Cairo "in the coming days... with guidelines for moving forward in the negotiations". Talks had appeared deadlocked despite a push by the United States — which provides billions of dollars in military aid to the Zionist entity — and fellow mediators Egypt and Qatar to secure a truce for the fasting month of Ramadan, now more than halfway through.

Saturday's aid delivery chaos is the latest incident of its kind in north Gaza, where a UN-backed report has projected famine by May unless urgent intervention occurs. The report released on March 19 warned

that half of Gazans are feeling "catastrophic" hunger. The Zionist entity's allies, and the UN, have blamed the Zionist entity for limitations on the aid flow. With limited ground access, several nations have begun aid airdrops, and a ship was expected to depart Saturday from Cyprus with the second cargo of food assistance. ICJ rulings are binding but it has little means of enforcement.

On Saturday, the Zionist military said it was continuing operations around Gaza's largest hospital Al-Shifa for a 13th day. Most of the Palestinian territory's hospitals are not functioning and its health system is "barely surviving," the United Nations humanitarian agency, OCHA, said. On Saturday Hamas said that in addition to the ongoing Al-Shifa operation, Zionist troops continued "aggression" against Nasser Hospital and "besiege" Al-Amal Hospital in the same city.

Gaza's Christian minority are marking Easter weekend, but in Jerusalem fewer pilgrims were visible. "There is a deep sadness you can feel in the air," John Timmons, of Australia, said on Good Friday. — Agencies

## The last 10 days and nights of...

Continued from Page 1

qiyam (late night Prayer) in Laylatul-Qadr (the Night of Empowering) Decree, out of faith and expecting Allah's rewards, he will have all of his previous sins forgiven." (Al-Bukhari # 38 + Muslim # 760)

Performing i'tikaf (seclusion): Many Muslims choose to spend the last ten days and nights of Ramadan in seclusion (i'tikaf), where one solely focuses on worshipping Almighty Allah, and refrains from involvement in worldly affairs. It is a time to reflect, increase worship and to increase one's religious knowledge — among others — seeking closeness to the Majestic Allah. I'tikaf is a great opportunity to reconnect with Almighty Allah in solitude. It is also a time to implement good religious practices which can be carried on throughout the whole year.

Aisha (RA) narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to exert more efforts in devotion to Almighty Allah's worship to a greater degree during the last 10 days and nights of Ramadan more than any other time. (Sahih Muslim # 1,175)

In another narration, she said, translated as: "When

## International

# S African ex-president Zuma survives car accident blamed on ruling party

## Former leader hit by car hours after being banned from running in coming election

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma survived a car accident overnight when his vehicle was struck by a drunk driver, but his newly created opposition group accused the ruling ANC party of being involved in the incident.

"Two car accidents in a space of a year and a half, both accidents committed by purported 'drunk drivers' who manage to drive directly into President Zuma's motorcade", a spokesman for Zuma's uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party said in a statement. "This looks like a deliberate attempt to assassinate President Zuma," said the spokesman, Nhlamulo Ndhlela.

Ndhlela said the party had "been monitoring and observing a sequence of inter-related events" that have happened to Zuma under the "Cyril Ramaphosa government", after Zuma announced in December that he would be campaigning for the MK party in bid to relaunch his political career.

Zuma, a former veteran of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), was forced out of office in 2018 under a cloud of corruption allegations but still wields political clout. The car accident happened on Thursday just hours after electoral officials barred

Zuma from standing in the May 29 general election, further stoking tensions ahead of the vote.

The driver's car "collided with former president Mr Jacob Zuma's official armored state vehicle", the South African Police Service (SAPS) said. A 51-year-old man was arrested in KwaZulu Natal province "for drunken driving, as well as on a charge of reckless and negligent driving", SAPS said. Zuma, 81, and his bodyguards escaped uninjured and he was taken to his place of residence. On Wednesday, the ANC filed a new court application against MK after losing an initial bid to have the party disqualified.

The ANC says that MK's name and logo are similar to those of the now disbanded apartheid-era military wing of the ANC once led by Nelson Mandela, and that this could deceive or confuse voters. Zuma's daughter Duduzile Zuma took to X to allege that the car collision was not a coincidence. "Please don't insult our intelligence, we are not supporters of Ramaphosa", she wrote.

### 'High spirits'

"The police minister who is responsible for the

former president's protection unit has not upgraded his vehicle for eight years and he is the same person that has previously uttered messages around burying Zuma," the party spokesman Ndhlela told AFP.

He also noted what he called "dangerous and reckless statements" made by ANC politicians towards Zuma, including a provincial official saying that "Zuma will be in hospital before elections".

As the May election approaches, the ANC is at risk of dropping below 50 percent of the vote for the first time since it came to power at the end of apartheid in 1994.

The party is bleeding support amid a weak economy and allegations of corruption and mismanagement. The driver of the other vehicle in Zuma's crash is expected to appear in court on Tuesday.

Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail in June 2021 after refusing to testify to a panel probing financial corruption and cronyism under his presidency. He was freed on medical parole just two months into his term. But his jailing sparked protests, riots and looting that left more than 350 dead in South Africa's worst violence since the advent of democracy.



Former South African President Jacob Zuma

When asked about Zuma's condition since the crash, Ndhlela told AFP: "He is in high spirits as always and was in laughter this morning about the accident." "But it does not mean he took it lightly (or that) he is not aware of what's happening." "Mr Zuma is in church today praying that the devil does not come into MK," he said, referring to the ANC. — AFP

## Erdogan's obsession is winning Istanbul in Turkey election

ISTANBUL: Recapturing Istanbul, the "jewel" of Turkey, in Sunday's local elections has become President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's obsession ever since losing the country's economic capital to the opposition in 2019. Erdogan's route to Turkey's presidency was launched in Istanbul, where he was elected mayor in 1994, and his allies held the city until Ekrem Imamoglu of the secular Republican People's Party (CHP) wrested control five years ago. As soon as he clinched re-election as president last May, Erdogan launched the campaign to reclaim the city of 16 million people.

### 'The jewel, the treasure'

"Are we ready to win back Istanbul?" he asked an enthusiastic crowd while perched on a bus in front of his residence. With two days to go before the vote, avenging the loss of Istanbul appears to be the most important issue for Erdogan's party. "Istanbul is the jewel, the treasure and the apple of our country's eye," he said at a rally in the city a week before the elections.

Erman Bakirci, a pollster from Konda Research and Consultancy, summarized the importance of the city with the saying that "winter doesn't come to Turkey until it snows in Istanbul". Bakirci also recalled Erdogan once saying: "Whoever wins Istanbul, wins Turkey."



ISTANBUL: A ferry passes election posters depicting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his party's candidate for Istanbul mayor, Murat Kurum. — AFP

The Turkish president named former environment minister Murat Kurum as his mayoral candidate, entrusting him to reconquer Istanbul and consolidate his power. According to the latest polls, however, Imamoglu has a slight lead.

### Resentment

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

Without ever saying his name, Erdogan, who is omnipresent on Turkey's television screens, regularly launches jabs at the mayor. Erdogan calls him a "part-time mayor" consumed by his presidential ambitions.

Many observers say Imamoglu's re-election on Sunday could bolster his standing ahead of the next presidential elections in 2028, when he is widely expected to run. Berk Esen, an associate professor at Sabanci University in Istanbul, told AFP that Imamoglu "can meet thousands of voters on a daily basis" while on the campaign trail and put himself "in the headlines". By winning Istanbul, he said, "Erdogan really hopes to end that". — AFP

## TV detective seeks to woo Turkish voters

ANKARA: Erdal Besikcioglu, adored in Turkey for his TV role as troubled Ankara police detective Behzat C, will be playing a different role this Sunday when he seeks to win over a conservative suburb of the capital in local elections. In the long-running TV series, Besikcioglu plays a complex but ultimately decent man, who, despite being discredited by his superiors, continues to take on a rotten system stuffed with venal officials.

His character is so popular it is hard to tell whether the enthusiastic crowds at his campaign rallies are cheering the candidate or the commissioner. The decision of the main center-left opposition CHP party (Republican People's Party) to make Besikcioglu its candidate for mayor of Etimesgut surprised many because he had never previously expressed any political ambition.

But the campaign novice has shown a real talent for connecting with voters in the sprawling suburb of 620,000 inhabitants that has been a bastion of the conservatives for two decades. In the cafes of Etimesgut, he greets young locals with a cheery "La!",

Ankara's version of "Bro" and one of Detective Behzat's stock phrases.

"I greet people like a family member — the one they welcomed into their homes via their TV screens for all those years," he explained as he glad-handed shopkeepers in one of Etimesgut's main streets.

Around him, an adoring crowd of young people and veiled women jostled for a selfie with their hero, who played the part of an idealistic governor in another TV series. For his fans, Besikcioglu is already "our mayor".

Some pundits compare him to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was a hugely popular actor and comedian before he took on the serious role of running his troubled country. "On screen, I try to portray leaders as they should be. Now the time has come to put those ideas into practice," Besikcioglu told AFP.

In Etimesgut, the desire for change and fresh faces plays in his favor. "The current mayor is clinging to power, just like Erdogan," said 56-year-old housewife Derya Egin, in reference to the long-



ETIMESGUT: Republican People's Party candidate Erdal Besikcioglu takes a selfie with teenagers in Etimesgut, Ankara's suburb, on March 20, 2024, during his election campaign. — AFP

time president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "We need a change," Besikcioglu's critics say he doesn't have a political plan. "He's mainly proposing cultural activities. That's great but it's not enough," said a local who asked to remain anonymous.

The election contest between Besik-

cioglu and incumbent mayor Enver Demirel is set to be a tough fight. But Detective Bezat says he's not bothered. "I don't look at the opinion polls," he said dismissively. "I'm an artist, first and foremost, for the people here. With God's help, I'll be their mayor too." — AFP

## Pro-Kurdish candidate fights anti-migrant sentiment in Turkey

BOLU: A pro-Kurdish candidate, who lost his arm in prison during a police raid after a hunger strike in 2000, has turned three decades of social activism into a fight against the anti-migrant sentiment dominating local elections in Turkey.

Veli Sacilik, 47, made a name for himself with a 2017 photograph of demonstrations in Ankara against a civil service purge, where he is seen struggling with his left arm against riot shields. Now the former prisoner is fighting anti-refugee rhetoric which dominates the campaign for municipal elections on March 31 in the city of Bolu in northwestern Turkey.

Standing for the pro-Kurdish Dem (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party) party, Sacilik wants to "offer a democratic alternative" for his city which he says is "stuck between racism and a rent economy".

The debate on Turkey's 3.3 million Syrian refugees has virtually disappeared since the May 2023 presidential election, except in Bolu, where Sacilik's opponents have built their campaign on

anti-migrant sentiment. One such opponent is the outgoing mayor Tanju Ozcan of the main opposition CHP party, known for displaying an anti-Syrian refugee banner at Bolu's entrance.

"Tanju Ozcan is a populist. If you don't fight against wars and for the environment, you can't solve immigration issues," said Sacilik, accompanied by his Kurdish running mate, Birsan Bas. "We are the candidates of the anti-populists, the young and the urban poor." Despite Syrian refugees making up just 1.2 percent of the city's population, Ozcan has tried to pursue anti-migrant policies including a failed attempt to charge them ten times more for water or to withdraw business permits. Ozcan did not respond to a request for an interview with AFP.

### Multiple identities

At first glance, everything seems to pit socialist Sacilik against his conservative and veiled running mate or "co-chairwoman" Bas. But Sacilik sees these differences as an asset to politics rather than a disadvantage. Indeed co-chairing, where a political position is jointly occupied by a woman and a man, became integral to the Kurdish political tradition following the struggle of the Kurdish women's movement in the 1990s. "As a man and a woman, Alevi and Sunni, disabled and able-bodied, secular and conservative, we

embrace all identities," he said smiling.

Their alliance also opens doors to working-class conservative districts of Bolu, home to almost 20,000 voters of Kurdish origin. "Here, most women are made to stay at home, and they are even afraid to have their photo taken without their husband's permission," said Bas. "I talk to them about women's rights and reassure them."

### Constant threat

Many residents, however, still fear being seen with pro-Kurdish candidates. Attacks on shopkeepers and workers of Kurdish origin across several Turkish cities in 2015 are still fresh in people's minds. "I have been in Bolu for 30 years, my children were born here, they don't even speak Kurdish but my restaurant was stoned by my neighbors," said an anonymous shopkeeper.

Dem, formerly the Pro-Kurdish People's Democratic HEDEP party, is a successor to the leftist HDP, which Freedom House has said "suffered legal and even physical attacks from the Turkish authorities". Dem is now the third-largest political party, but the HDP's former leader Selahattin Demirtas remains imprisoned after facing "terrorism" charges in 2016.

"Nationalism is on the rise in Bolu because of the mayor's populist rhetoric," said Metin, a student of Kurdish origin. "Even some teachers look



BOLU: Candidate of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party Veli Sacilik (center) and his running mate Birsan Bas (left) meet local residents on March 4, 2024. — AFP

at us sideways."

For Ozkan Ustun, co-president of the health workers' union, prevailing racism prevents people from talking about "unreported employment, environmental problems, transport or the risk of earthquakes in Bolu". Bolu's emblematic storks no longer stop in the city because of deforestation and the construction of an irrigation basin, Ustun added. The outgoing mayor "announced that he doesn't want any more immigrants, so the migratory birds won't come any more," joked Sacilik. — AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024

## Burgan Bank achieves significant progress in its long-term transformation strategy in 2023

### Shareholders approve distribution of 6 fils cash dividend, 5 percent bonus shares

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank held its 60th Annual General Assembly Meeting and 37th Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting on 30/3/2024 at the bank's headquarters with a quorum of 80.507 percent.

During the meeting, the bank's Board of Directors (BOD) presented the shareholders with the financial results for the year ending Dec 31, 2023. The shareholders also agreed to the distribution of 6 fils cash dividends per share in addition to 5 percent bonus shares for the fiscal year 2023.

In his AGM speech, the Bank's Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah said: "2023 was one of the most pivotal years in the history of Burgan Bank, which is nearing its fifth decade, wherein we lay a long-term strategic foundation for the bank's transformation and development, along with setting a new vision and mission. Burgan Bank has maintained a solid financial foundation and a resilient operating model; looking ahead, we shall adopt a sustainable growth approach in our key markets to deliver on the future growth potential of the bank."

He added: "The new strategy requires investing heavily in our operations, to fortify the Bank's digital and technological infrastructure and to develop its human capital. It's also vital to focus on balancing between the efforts to speed up our growth pace and effective risk management."

The bank's Chairman also commended the tangible advancement that the Bank achieved during 2023 in terms of implementing its long-term strategy of transformation and change. The bank recorded stable revenues of KD 222 million in 2023, while net income reached KD 135 million. Operating profit was reported at KD 106 million while the bank's net profit reached KD 43.5 million.

He added that Burgan's two key performance indicators, capital and asset quality, reflect the tremendous progress made by the bank. The bank's common equity tier 1 (CET1) ratio increased by around 270bps to 13.5 percent and its capital adequacy ratio (CAR) increased by 320bps to 20.0 percent.

The Chairman noted: "Burgan Bank continued to place the strategic asset allocation as its top priority within its comprehensive strategy for transformation while strengthening its business in Kuwait. This priority is reflected in the sale of Bank of Baghdad (BoB) and the sale of 52 percent of its stake in Burgan Bank Turkey (BBT) in 2023."

Moreover, he explained that "the Bank worked on a comprehensive restructuring in 2023, which included many appointments and promotions at the executive management level, to cement its position among the most advanced and influential banks in Kuwait."

On his part, Tony Daher, Group Chief Executive Officer of Burgan Bank, pointed out that focusing on investing in developing human capital is an essential element of Burgan Bank's new strategy, as the Bank continues, among its priorities, to allocate sizable resources to developing its employees and enable them to occupy leadership positions. This came as a clear indication of Burgan's commitment to continuously developing human capital and advancing the Bank towards transformation and change.

In 2023, Burgan Bank was awarded the Great Place to Work certificate and was ranked among the Best Workplaces in Asia, whereby it came 27th on the 'Large Organizations' list. The bank was chosen among the list of the 20 Best Workplaces in Kuwait for the year 2023. These rankings and accolades are considered high-level recognition that testifies to the Bank's dedication to developing its human capital and continuing to allocate significant investments to the growth and development of its employees, thereby maintaining its position as one of the best workplaces for ambitious and highly experienced national caliber in the Kuwaiti banking sector.

By the end of 2023, the Kuwaitization ratio in Burgan Bank reached 83 percent, exceeding the regulatory requirements by more than 13 percent, noting that this percentage is considered among the highest across the Kuwaiti private sector, whether in banking or other markets. Kuwaitis also made up 95 percent



Burgan Bank Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah delivers his speech during the AGM.



Burgan Bank Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah

Burgan Bank Group Chief Executive Officer Tony Daher

Burgan Bank Chief Executive Officer, Kuwait, Fadel Abdullah

of the total appointments of last year, while women constituted about 48 percent of the Bank's total workforce during the year 2023, which confirms Burgan's commitment to gender equality in its human capital acquisition and development.

Daher added: "We have begun implementing our comprehensive strategy for transformation and change, and the year 2023 has paved the way for what we seek to establish as Burgan Bank's way of providing banking services."

"Within the framework of its new vision, Burgan Bank seeks to continue developing its businesses and services, which includes continuing to expand the customer base to serve individuals, companies, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through a wide and diverse range of products. Furthermore, the Bank's new vision includes keeping pace with the latest technologies in the global financial industry, providing our customers with modern and advanced financial solutions, and improving their overall bank-

ing journey by elevating it to higher and more personalized levels," he said.

Daher stated that enhancing the customer experience is an essential pillar of Burgan Bank's new strategy, which is why the Bank continued, in 2023, its unwavering efforts to provide the various customer segments with a distinguished banking experience by relying on an integrated approach driven by innovation in providing banking solutions.

He also added: "We seek to combine our digital transformation efforts with our firm commitment to adopting modern methods in applying the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles in order to provide our customers with an advanced banking experience that is more comprehensive and personalized. Digitization is an essential part of our strategy to achieve our goals of enabling customers to carry out innovative and sustainable banking operations." For his part, Fadel Abdullah, CEO - Kuwait at Burgan Bank, said: "In 2023, the Bank launched many

unique services at the regional level, such as Tjarati Pay, in addition to launching a new range of innovative and conscious banking cards, such as the eco-friendly biodegradable cards as well as others that support the Braille language. This is in addition to launching a new virtual card to keep pace with the transformation in the banking industry and to offer it as an eco-friendly digital option that is faster and more secure than traditional bank cards."

He also stated that the Bank expanded its digital payment offers during 2023 by launching various services such as Google Pay and Apple Pay to enable customers to complete their payments in a safe and contactless manner via Android and iOS platforms. It was also the first to implement Visa solutions in the Central Europe, Middle East, and Africa (CEMEA) region, allowing cardholders to easily register to many digital wallets and e-commerce platforms using the Burgan Bank mobile banking application.

Fadel pointed out that as part of his steadfast commitment to elevating Burgan's high-income customers' banking experience, the Bank announced the launch of the new Elite package for its distinguished customer segment, which provides them with a wide range of benefits and the most innovative, advanced, and elegant banking services. In addition, the Bank reintroduced its Premier package with new and better features. Burgan Bank also revamped its flagship savings and draw account, Kanz, which is considered one of the best and strongest of its kind in the market, in order to reward its customers and increase their chances of winning valuable prizes.

The Chairman concluded his statement by thanking the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) for their continued support of Burgan Bank and the Kuwaiti banking sector in general. He also thanked the BOD of Burgan Bank, the executive management, shareholders, customers, and all employees across departments, for their continuous contributions to the development of the Bank.



Burgan Bank shareholders attend the annual general body meeting.





## Business

# IMF approves \$820 million as part of Egypt bailout program

## IMF action arrives at a time of mounting difficulties for Egyptian economy

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund announced on Friday the immediate disbursement of \$820 million to the Egyptian government, part of an augmented plan to aid the nation's stumbling economy. The IMF's Executive Board validated the payment as part of a \$3 billion aid program granted at the end of 2022. The IMF action, repeatedly postponed and eagerly awaited by the Egyptian government, arrives at a time of mounting difficulties for its economy.

The Board also approved a \$5 billion extension announced at the beginning of the month, bringing the Fund's total lending to Egypt to \$8 billion.

In a news release, the IMF said that the Egyptian government has achieved all the objectives set out in the first two stages of the aid program, with the exception of the level of its foreign currency reserves.

"The authorities have significantly strengthened the reform package," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said in the release. "Recent measures toward correcting macroeconomic imbalances, including unification of the exchange rate... and significant tightening of monetary and fiscal policies, were difficult, but critical steps forward," she added.

Earlier this month, Egypt's central bank raised rates by six percentage points to 27.75 percent to combat inflation and bring the official exchange rate

closer to the black market rate, causing the Egyptian pound to plunge 40 percent in one day, following a 50 percent fall over the last few months.

Nearly two-thirds of Egypt's 106 million inhabitants live below or just above the poverty line, and the country is facing a drop in foreign currency earnings, whether from tourism - hit by the pandemic, then the war in Ukraine and now the war in the Gaza Strip - or problems along the Suez Canal. Attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden have reduced dollar revenues from the canal, a crucial passage for world trade, by 40-50 percent since the start of the year, the IMF said.

Since taking power in 2013, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has embarked on a series of megaprojects which, economists believe, have not generated new revenues but severely limited the state's financial capacity. Between 2013 and 2022, Egypt's foreign debt rose from \$46 billion to more than \$165 billion, according to World Bank data, making it the second country most at risk of default behind war-torn Ukraine.

However, the IMF is fairly optimistic for the coming fiscal year, forecasting economic growth will rise 4.4 percent, compared with 3 percent for the current fiscal year ending June 30. — AFP



WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund announced on Friday the immediate disbursement of \$820 million to the Egyptian government, part of an augmented plan to aid the nation's stumbling economy.

## NBK's Dajani appointed as Chairman of Arab Bankers Association

KUWAIT: The Board of Directors of the Arab Bankers Association - London, has elected Fawzi Dajani, Managing Director of National Bank of Kuwait (International) plc, to serve as the new Chairman of the Association, succeeding Abdulaziz Al-Khereiji.



Fawzi Dajani

sociation, expressing his commitment to advancing its mission of fostering excellence and innovation within the Arab banking sector. He emphasized the importance of collaborating with members and partners to drive positive change and progress in the industry.

He will oversee the strategic direction of the Arab Bankers Association - London, working closely with the Board of Directors and executive team to further strengthen the Association's position as a leading authority in Arab banking and finance. Dajani has been a board member of the Arab Bankers Association - London since 2008 and served as Vice Chairman of the Association in 2018.

The Arab Bankers Association - London was founded in 1980 as a non-profit organization with its headquarters in London. It stands as a prominent financial institution within the banking industry, comprising members employed in banks and related entities operating within the financial sectors across the Arab world and the United Kingdom. Through an outstanding array of programs and events, the Association fosters improved relations, information sharing and understanding between Arab and British private and public financial sectors.

## Turkish Airlines returns to Libya after a decade

ISTANBUL: Turkey's flagship carrier, Turkish Airlines, has resumed flights to Libya's capital, almost 10 years after they were suspended over security concerns in the conflict-torn country. The airline's chief executive, Bilal Eksi, attended a ceremony at Mitiga International Airport on Thursday to mark its first flight to Libya since 2015. "We are delighted to start flights again to Libya, with which we have historical ties," Eksi said.

"We will continue to bring cultures together in Africa, as in many continents," he added. A company spokesman told AFP on Friday that Turkish Airlines will operate flights to Tripoli three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Turkish Airlines flies to 130 countries and 346 destinations.

Libya is still struggling to recover from years of war that followed the overthrow and death of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The country's rule is split between rival administrations - Tripoli in the west and Benghazi in the east. Turkey has backed the Tripoli government but Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said in February that Ankara would soon reopen its consulate in Benghazi. "We want Libya to resolve its problems through dialogue. We also do not want the current existing division between the east and west to become permanent," he said back then. — AFP

## Fed's inflation fight remains on track: Powell

WASHINGTON: The recent rise in US inflation hasn't stalled the Federal Reserve's ongoing fight against rising prices, Fed chair Jerome Powell said Friday, shortly after the publication of fresh government data. Powell spoke shortly after the Commerce Department released data showing the Fed's favored inflation gauge rose at an annual rate of 2.5 percent in February, up 0.1 percentage points from a month earlier.

But so-called "core" inflation, a closely-watched measure that strips out volatile food and energy costs, eased slightly. "The report that came out this morning is pretty much in line with our expectations," Powell told a conference in San Francisco, adding that the US central bank remained on track to hit its long-term inflation target of two percent. He said that while the recent inflation data were higher than the Fed would have liked, the February figures were "definitely more along the lines of what we want to see."

"We didn't overreact to the good data we had the second half of last year," he said. "And you won't hear us overreacting to these two months that are higher." Powell also addressed the question of where interest rates could settle over the longer term, suggesting they were unlikely to return to the historic lows seen after the 2008 global financial crisis. "We don't really know where rates are going to go back to when this whole thing is over," he said.

The US central bank's favored measure of inflation edged higher last month on the back of rising fuel prices, according to government data published Friday, but another gauge stripping out volatile food and energy prices continued to ease.

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose at an annual rate of 2.5 percent in February, up 0.1 percentage points from a month earlier, the Commerce Department said in a statement. The figure was in line with the median forecasts in a survey of economists conducted by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal.

US financial markets were closed for the Good Friday holiday. Goods prices rose 0.5 percent last month, while the costs of services increased by 0.3 percent. Much of the February increase in the cost of goods came from energy prices, which rose 2.3 percent from January on the back of a range of factors, including a recent decision by the OPEC+ alliance to extend daily supply cutbacks through the end of June. On a monthly basis, PCE inflation eased slightly from January, rising by 0.3 percent. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Iraq to import electricity from Jordan

BAGHDAD: Iraq said Friday a power line would soon bring electricity from Jordan to the border area as authorities aim to diversify energy sources to ease the country's chronic outages. With its generating capacity ravaged by decades of conflict and underinvestment, Iraq has long relied on imports of both gas and electricity from neighboring Iran. The 340-kilometre (210-mile) power line from Jordan will officially start operating on Saturday, the electricity ministry said in a statement. In a first phase, it will provide 40 megawatts (MW) of power to the Al-Rutbah area near the border. Its capacity will then be boosted to 150 MW and finally 500 MW to cover "several large parts" of Anbar province, west of the capital Baghdad.

#### Lufthansa staff win hefty pay rise

FRANKFURT: Lufthansa's ground staff will get average pay rises of 12.5 percent under a deal reached after a series of crippling strikes, the German airline giant said Thursday. The carrier and union Verdi, which represents some 25,000 ground staff, finally reached an agreement Wednesday, averting the threat of fresh walkouts over the Easter break. The 12.5-percent increase was in line with Verdi's demands, and will be implemented in two stages over two years. Employees will also receive bonuses to help combat high inflation of 3,000 euros, and improvements in other areas including extra holiday pay and flexible working hours.

#### Vietnam Q1 growth hits five-year high

HANOI: Vietnam's economy grew by 5.66 percent on-year in the first quarter, according to official data published Friday, boosted by strong exports. It is the communist country's strongest Q1 growth since 2019, but still well off Standard Chartered Bank's forecast of 6.1 percent. "The country's socio-economic situation in the first quarter of 2024 achieved positive result despite many uncertainties in the world economy," the General Statistics Office (GSO) said in a statement. The industrial and construction sector expanded by 6.28 percent, while the service sector grew 6.12 percent compared with the same period in the previous year. A major global manufacturing hub, Vietnam also earned \$93 billion from goods exports in the first quarter, up 17 percent year-on-year. — AFP

#### Brazil jobless rate inches up

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's unemployment rate rose slightly between December and February, hitting 7.8 percent, the second consecutive rise after a period of decline, according to official figures published Thursday. The Latin American giant had enjoyed nine consecutive drops in unemployment before the rate - measured in rolling quarters - crept up again between November and January to 7.6 percent. However, the rate is lower than what it was at this time last year, when it stood at 8.6 percent. Currently, 8.5 million people are unemployed in the nation of over 200 million people, according to the IBGE statistics agency. Last year Brazil grew at 2.9 percent, slightly down from three percent growth in 2022. — AFP

#### Inflation slows in France

PARIS: Inflation in France eased further in March while it accelerated but remained low in Italy, official data showed Friday, fuelling hopes of interest rate cuts in coming months. French inflation fell to 2.3 percent, down from 3.0 percent in February, according to provisional figures from the INSEE statistics institute. Food price inflation slowed sharply last month to 1.7 percent compared to 3.6 percent in February while tobacco prices increased by 10.7 percent, down from 18.7 percent in the previous month. Consumer price rises slowed on a monthly basis to 0.2 percent in March in the eurozone's second largest economy after a 0.9 percent increase in February. — AFP



The Arab Bankers Association - London, renowned for its dedication to promoting cooperation, sharing expertise, and advancing professional growth within the Arab banking sector, elected Dajani for his wealth of experience. His extensive banking background positions him well to lead the association's strategic endeavors forward. Dajani expressed his delight at his appointment as Chairman of the As-



HAVANA: People queue to buy food in Havana on March 27, 2024. — AFP

## Food crisis leaves Cubans in anguish over next meal

HAVANA: One thought lingers all day in the mind of Diana Ruiz: How will the Cuban mother feed her 6-year-old son, a dilemma faced by parents across an island hit by blackouts and food shortages. "The first thing I say when I get out of bed is, what am I going to give my son to eat? And when I go to bed, what can I give him for a snack, or for his breakfast?" Ruiz tells AFP from her home in Nuevo Vedado, a central district in Havana.

The 31-year-old Ruiz, who is four months pregnant, moves in the narrow space between her cupboard, which holds some rice and a few rolls of bread, and a fridge containing more rice, a pot with a little stewed meat, containers of water and some juice. "That's all there is," she says hopelessly in her house where she also lives with her blind father. A clamor over food shortages and blackouts led hundreds of people to demonstrate in at least four Cuban cities on March 17, the largest protests since historic anti-government marches on July 11, 2021. The unusual demonstrations erupted first in Santiago de Cuba, the island's second largest city, which has endured up to 13 hours a day of blackouts. Many of the protesters were women.

Days later, President Miguel Diaz-Canel attributed the unrest to "an accumulation of long blackouts that greatly annoy the population." Food shortages, he added, were due to "fractures in the timely distribution of the basic food basket." A human rights group, Justicia 11J, reported this week that it tallied 17 arrests related

to the protests, while Spain-based Prisoners Defenders told AFP it has documented the detention of 38 people, six of whom were released.

Authorities in 2023 said a lack of hard currency impeded imports required to provide basic food rations at highly subsidized prices to the island's 11 million people.

Meanwhile, according to official figures, agricultural production fell 35 percent between 2019 and 2023. In February, Cuba requested for the first time support from the UN World Food Programme to guarantee the supply of milk to children, after announcing it would not be able to complete that month's rations.

At the beginning of the year, authorities also struggled to deliver bread due to delays in wheat shipments from abroad and breakdowns in four of the country's five mills - resulting in the country meeting only about a third of total demand. Although the capital does not suffer the long blackouts affecting the rest of the island, for many people food arrives in dribs and drabs. "They come in small quantities, one pound today and in X days another pound," says Aracely Hernandez, 73, a resident of Bacuranao, a town on the outskirts of Havana.

The retiree says she receives a pension of 1,500 pesos (\$12.50 at the official exchange rate) and that a package of chicken costs her 3,000 pesos outside the rationing system. "You have to squeeze and pedal hard because everything is very expensive," she laments.

Since 2021, private stores also offer milk, bread, chicken and other basics, but at prices that are out of reach of those earning an average wage. Mired in its worst economic crisis in three decades, the island is experiencing an inflationary spiral. In 2021, prices shot up 70 percent, followed by increases of 39 and 30 percent the following two years, a surge not seen before during the more than six decades of communist rule on the island. — AFP

## Business

# Gulf Bank distributes food baskets 'Machlat Ramadan' to underprivileged families

As part of bank's Ramadan initiatives, in collaboration with the Food and Relief Bank



Najla Al-Eisa with Gulf Bank officials and Kuwait Food and Relief Bank volunteers.



Gulf Bank team members distribute Ramadan magazines.

**KUWAIT:** For the seventh consecutive year, as part of its diverse range of activities and initiatives organized during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank distributed food baskets "Machlat Ramadan" to underprivileged families, in collaboration with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank.

Najla Al-Eisa, Gulf Bank's Chief Marketing Officer, affirmed Gulf Bank's ongoing dedication to organizing a wide array of activities and initiatives throughout the holy month of Ramadan. She emphasized that these initiatives reflect the bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility, which is deeply ingrained in its pioneering efforts aimed at fostering sustainability principles within the community.

She added: "We are pleased to collaborate with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank in supporting underprivileged families who face difficult circumstances. Through this partnership, we were able to distribute both iftar meals and

## Najla Al-Eisa: Supporting underprivileged families reflects the bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility

food baskets to those families.

She highlighted that providing food baskets to these families helps alleviate some of their burdens during this month, especially amid increasing living expenses. She further noted that the baskets consist of various food items, enough to sustain them for several days.

Al-Eisa also pointed out that this initiative is among Gulf Bank's charitable activities during the holy month of Ramadan, showcasing the bank's longstanding engagement with the community spanning sixty years. She emphasized its integral role in Kuwait's economic and social history.

She emphasized that Gulf Bank continues its

strong commitment to sustainability programs, at societal, economic, and environmental levels, through numerous carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the bank and the community, in line with its 2025 strategy and in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Eisa stressed Gulf Bank's unwavering dedication to sustainability programs across societal, economic, and environmental levels. This commitment is evident through a variety of carefully selected initiatives that mutually benefit both the bank and the community. This particular initiative aligns with the bank's 2025 strategy, the United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals, and Kuwait Vision 2035. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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

## Canada's Trudeau on back foot over carbon tax

**OTTAWA:** Polluters should pay up, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau insists. But pressure is mounting to scrap his signature climate policy, a federal levy on CO2 emissions, as ordinary Canadians see the law increase their own cost of living.

The levy, applied to a myriad of fossil fuels used by both industry and consumers, is scheduled to rise from Can\$64 to Can\$80 (US\$48 to US\$59) per metric ton of carbon on April 1, in a bid to see Canadians slash their total carbon emissions by 40-45 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. But it's adding to household costs at the same time that people are feeling the bite from inflation.

Seven provinces have asked the government to pause or cancel the increase, which would add about three cents per liter (quarter gallon) to the price of gasoline. Newfoundland Premier Andrew Furey—a liberal from Trudeau's own party—was the latest this month to join his conservative peers in seeking a reprieve "at least until inflation stabilizes." Saskatchewan, meanwhile, is refusing to collect and remit the tax to Ottawa.

In some ways Trudeau has already caved to pressure, issuing in October a three-year exemption of the tax on home heating oil. The Atlantic region, where 24 Liberal House of Commons seats are at stake, benefits the most from the change. In parliament recently, a mushroom farmer's hefty gas bill became the focal point of sparring match between Trudeau and his main rival, conservative leader Pierre Poilievre—who vowed to "axe the tax" if he defeats the Liberals in elections next year.

Mike Medeiros paid Can\$16,668.39 for the federal carbon tax on his February natural gas bill that hit a total of Can\$62,441.95. His Osgoode, Ontario, farm employs 160 workers producing 200,000 pounds of mushrooms per week, and uses 1.3 million cubic meters of natural gas per year to sterilize and control the heat and humidity in 50 growing rooms. By contrast, the average Canadian home uses 2,400 cubic meters of gas.

By the time the carbon tax increases to \$170, set for 2030, "our carbon tax costs for heating alone will be half a million dollars," Medeiros told AFP. "I can't absorb that cost." Ottawa has rolled out more than 10 climate plans since 1990 but all have failed to achieve their goals, making Canada an outlier among G7 nations, with its greenhouse gas emissions rising 13.9 percent to 670 megatons from 1990 to 2021.

The environment commissioner in November said its latest efforts could also fall short of the 2030 target, despite government assurances. According to the Angus Reid Institute, a public opinion research group, Canada's soaring cost of living is the top concern for 56 percent of Canadians, outweighing climate change, which polls as the top concern for 31 percent of respondents.

And 40 percent of those polled want the carbon tax abolished versus only 27 percent who say it should increase as planned. Ottawa waitress Rima Sab, 54, said she doesn't like paying the federal levy, but supports it. "The carbon tax sucks. But climate change sucks more," she said. "If we don't do something now, what will be left for my kids?" During a visit to oil-rich Alberta, Trudeau called out "short-term thinker politicians" opposed to the levy that is projected to account for one third of Canada's emissions reductions, telling reporters "doing the right things today... will deliver a better future."

In a letter to wayward provinces, he said carbon pricing is "the most efficient way to reduce emissions across the economy" while adding only 0.1 percent to inflation.

Most Canadians get a carbon rebate or "more money back than they pay," he added, while "the devastating effects of floods, wildfires and droughts are escalating costs annually" for all. — AFP

## Impact of Baltimore port closure on global supply chains

**PARIS:** The bridge collapse that closed the Port of Baltimore has raised concerns about the disaster's potential impact on the global supply chain. Authorities have warned that extensive work is needed before the major port can reopen following Tuesday's catastrophic cargo ship collision, which has blocked the harbour's entrance.

Here is a look at what it could mean for global trade:

### A major car terminal

Baltimore is among the top 20 ports in the United States by tonnage and number of containers handled, according to the US Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Last year, it handled a record 1.1 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEU) of containers—a measure of volume for shipping containers.

Container imports via Baltimore amounted to 2.1 percent of the total for all US ports, according to Allianz Trade. Its location deep within the Chesapeake Bay make it a "second-tier American port," said Paul Tourret, director of French maritime industry institute ISEMAR.

The port hosts transatlantic traffic, including small ships from northern Europe and the Mediterranean as well as some shipping lines from the Indian Ocean, Tourret said.

But it is a key hub for the auto industry. Its private and public terminals handled 847,158 autos and light trucks last year, more than any other US port for the 13th year in a row, according to Maryland state figures. It also ranked first for farm and construction machinery, as well as imported sugar and gypsum, and second for coal exports.

### Alternative routes

German auto giants Volkswagen and BMW said their operations were not affected as the locations of their facilities were still accessible to ships. US rival Ford said it had found alternative routes. But the terminal for Mercedes-Benz is no longer reachable by sea as it is located behind the collapsed bridge.

The company told German media it is looking into alternative routes.

"The blockade of the Port of Baltimore will have little impact on trade between the USA and Europe," Patrick Lepperhoff, principal at Inverto consultancy, wrote in a note. "In the last quarter of 2023, around 260,000 standard containers were loaded and unloaded at the port.

This volume can be diverted to the neighboring ports" such as New York and Norfolk, Virginia, he wrote said.



BALTIMORE, United States: A group of investigators aboard the cargo ship Dali that crashed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP

### Coal and cobalt impact

The port closure is expected to primarily impact US exports of coal and imports of cobalt, according to ratings agency S&P Global. Access to coal export terminals of CSX Curtis Bay and Consol Marine Terminal has been blocked, it said. The accident is expected to disrupt coal exports from Baltimore for 10 to 15 days but market participants suggested it would have "limited pricing impacts amid well-stocked markets", S&P added. Coal exports from Baltimore jumped to 28 million short tons in 2023, mainly due to growing demand from Asia, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

"Even before the port's closure, we were expecting much slower growth in

total US coal exports in 2024, of just one percent," the EIA said. "The interruption in operations in Baltimore may affect the volume of exports this year," it added. Baltimore's cobalt stocks were already under pressure due to strong demand for the mineral, a key component for electric car batteries and high-tech devices.

Yemeni rebel attacks on ships in the Red Sea have also caused delays as shipping companies have had to divert vessels to the longer and costlier route around southern Africa. While the bridge incident will have "little to no impact" on US refined oil products, shipping fuel supplies "could tighten" on the Atlantic Coast as vessels refuel outside Baltimore, S&P said. — AFP

## Fallen crypto tycoon Bankman-Fried gets 25-yr sentence

**NEW YORK:** Disgraced cryptocurrency wunderkind Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in jail on Thursday—a stunning descent for a figure who seemed poised to lead an emerging sector less than two years ago.

US District Judge Lewis Kaplan said the defendant, who became known by his initials "SBF," had shown no "real remorse," even in his final pre-sentencing remarks in which the former billionaire raved "a series of bad decisions" but did not acknowledge knowingly violating financial laws.

Bankman-Fried said "mistakes were made, but never a word of remorse for the commission of a terrible crime," said Kaplan, who characterized the violations as "brazen" and called out the defendant for his "exceptional flexibility" towards the truth. Kaplan set a sentence of 25 years in prison, followed by three years of supervised release. The defendant also was ordered to pay \$11 billion, an amount reflective of what Bankman-Fried effectively stole from other parties, according to Kaplan's calculations.

Thursday's sentencing followed the November 2023 conviction by a federal jury in New York of Bankman-Fried, who once made the cover of financial magazines and financed splashy Super Bowl television ads in 2022. Although lower than the 40-50 years sought by the government, the Justice Department praised the sentence.

"Today's sentence... is an important message to others who might be tempted to engage in financial crimes that justice will be swift, and the consequences will be

severe," said US federal prosecutor Damian Williams. Bankman-Fried's parents, Stanford law professors Joseph Bankman and Barbara Fried, said in a statement: "We are heartbroken and will continue to fight for our son."

Bankman-Fried had soared to the top of the crypto world, becoming a billionaire before age 30 and turning FTX, a small start-up he cofounded in 2019, into the world's second largest exchange platform. But in November 2022, Bankman-Fried's breakneck rise came crashing down, with a deluge of customer withdrawals following revelations that billions of dollars had been illegally moved from FTX to Bankman-Fried's personal hedge fund, Alameda Research.

In remarks to the court, defense attorney Marc Mukasey characterized Bankman-Fried as a well-intended, "awkward math nerd," rather than a cold-hearted figure like notorious Ponzi scheme operator Bernie Madoff. "It's obviously a serious offense, but Sam was not a financial serial killer who set out to hurt people," Mukasey said. During the hearing, Bankman-Fried expressed regret about the firm's demise, which also affected many colleagues. They "built something beautiful," Bankman-Fried said. "And I threw it all away. It haunts me every day. I made a series of bad decisions." Bankman-Fried said he was anguished that FTX victims had not been compensated—something he said "begs a question of why they haven't been paid back."

But federal prosecutor Nicolas Roos, speaking after Bankman-Fried, said the defendant continued to play down his crimes, noting the impact was "not a bloodless financial loss on paper." Roos described "immediate" financial harm to FTX victims, including one investor in Portugal whose daughter was born the day before FTX imploded and a married couple of retirees who were forced to go back to work.

Kaplan agreed with key arguments from the government. The judge had begun the hearing by rejecting the defense's efforts to persuade the court



NEW YORK: FTX's former CEO and founder Sam Bankman-Fried arrives at the US federal courthouse in New York. — AFP

to consider billions of dollars worth of recoveries through the FTX bankruptcy as lowering the size of the fraud. Kaplan called out Bankman-Fried for witness tampering and enumerated at least three specific instances where he had given false testimony.

"When he wasn't outright lying, he was often evasive, hair-splitting, dodging questions," Kaplan said of Bankman-Fried's testimony. The Justice Department had developed its sentence recommendation in part to account for the risk that Bankman-Fried could engage in further fraud if released too quickly.

While stopping short of the government's full sentence, Kaplan agreed that a free Bankman-Fried would pose a risk. Bankman-Fried could say "that mistakes were made. Other people were to blame. The bankruptcy people screwed up," Kaplan said. "It doesn't take too much imagination to see the outline" of another narrative. "But there is a risk that this man will be in a position to do something very bad, and it's not a trivial risk," said Kaplan, calling a lengthy sentence necessary to "disable" Bankman-Fried. — AFP

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024



French pastry chef and creative director of Valrhona chocolaterie Frederic Bau poses at Valrhona chocolaterie in Paris. — AFP photos



A photograph shows a pure fondant dessert with 'blond' chocolate, oven-roasted apples and a Tahitian vanilla cream prepared by French pastry chef and creative director of Valrhona chocolaterie Frederic Bau at Valrhona chocolaterie.



Pastry chef from Nice Philippe Tayac prepares tartlettes with hazelnuts and 'blond' chocolate.

## Blond vs pink: French-Swiss battle for 'fourth' chocolate



Pastry chef from Nice Philippe Tayac prepares tartlettes with hazelnuts and 'blond' chocolate.

### Swiss competition

Despite efforts, Valrhona has not managed to convince French lawmakers to reopen its legal definitions. So blond remains formally just another type of white chocolate, which was the last to be legally recognized — after dark and milk chocolate—after its invention in the 1930s by Switzerland's Nestle.

And France's Alpine neighbors are not waiting to be beaten to the punch on a fourth variety. Valrhona's key competitor in the world of professional-grade chocolate, Swiss giant Barry Callebaut, launched a marketing campaign in 2017 for its own fourth type: this one bright pink and derived from Ruby cocoa beans grown in Ecuador, Brazil and Ivory Coast.

Barry Callebaut calls its Ruby chocolate "the biggest innovation in chocolate in 80 years". The company was diplomatic when asked about the rivalry by AFP, saying in a statement: "The best chocolate in the world is the one that gives you a moment of indulgence—no matter where it was produced and no matter the color."—AFP



A 'blond' chocolate, prepared by French pastry chef Frederic Bau.



French pastry chef Frederic Bau prepares a pure fondant dessert with 'blond' chocolate, oven-roasted apples and a Tahitian vanilla cream .

A fourth chocolate—"blond"—has been slowly making inroads into French confectionery, but has failed to win official recognition and faces competition from a pink Swiss variety. Blond choccy was born from an accident. French pastry chef Frederic Bau was demonstrating his skills at an exhibition in Japan, and left his white chocolate warming a little too long in a bain-marie... four days, to be precise.

"By chance, by magic... it became blond! This chocolate appeared with an incredible color and smell", recalls Bau, who is creative director for chocolaterie Valrhona. Bau immediately smelled the commercial potential of this happy blunder, but it took seven years of testing to perfect its unique aromatic qualities and consistency.

The recipe remains a secret but has been officially registered by Valrhona, and is sold under the name Dulcey since 2012. However, the basic chemistry is well-understood. It is the "Maillard reaction", a sequence of chemical reactions between amino acids and reducing sugars, causing browning and aromas that are close to toasting.

To taste, blond chocolate has the milky fattiness of white chocolate but is much less sweet, with a soft caramel flavor and an aftertaste of roasted coffee. French pastry chefs tend to snub white chocolate, associating it with the big slabs they gobbled as children. But blond opens up new possibilities.

"It's very different from other chocolates. It gives a very biscuity, very delicious taste," Nice-based pastry chef Philippe Tayac told AFP, who combines it with hazelnuts for a tartlet. Bau combines it as a pure fondant dessert with freshly roasted apples and a Tahitian vanilla cream, and he also recommends "breaking it up" with more distinct fruity combinations, such as citrus or red fruit.



French pastry chef Frederic Bau prepares a 'blond' chocolate.



French pastry chef Frederic Bau prepares a 'blond' chocolate, oven-roasted apples and a Tahitian vanilla cream.



French pastry chef Frederic Bau prepares a 'blond' chocolate.



French pastry chef and creative director of Valrhona chocolaterie Frederic Bau prepares a 'blond' chocolate, oven-roasted apples and a Tahitian vanilla cream at Valrhona chocolaterie in Paris.



A 'blond' chocolate, prepared by French pastry chef Frederic Bau.



A pastry chef prepares tartlettes with hazelnuts and 'blond' chocolate.



An interior view of Valrhona chocolaterie.

## Lifestyle

# Vienna's wacky Hundertwasser museum gets even greener



A worker is seen in the inner courtyard of the Hundertwasser House, an apartment building, one of the city's most visited sites and designed by Austrian visual artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, in Vienna, Austria.--AFP photos

Friedensreich Hundertwasser would have no doubt approved. Austria has made its "first green museum" -- entirely dedicated to the work of the maverick artist and ecological trailblazer -- even greener. The colorful Kunst Haus Wien in Vienna has ditched fossil fuels for an entirely renewable in-house hydro-thermal energy system using a well in its courtyard.

The museum -- where Hundertwasser used to stay on the top floor -- draws more than a hundred thousand visitors a

with nature. In one of his manifestos he railed against "rationalism in architecture", declaring that "the straight line is godless".

#### Protests

Born Friedrich Stowasser in Vienna in 1928, Hundertwasser designed more than 30 architectural projects all over the world including incinerators, thermal baths and toilets. Starting out as a painter, he developed an almost obsessive interest in spiral forms.



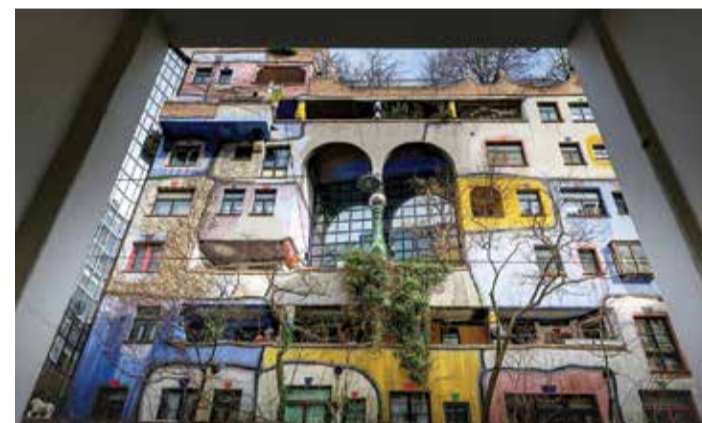
A visitor looks at a scale model displayed at the Kunst Haus Wien.



A woman poses in front of the Hundertwasser House, an apartment building, one of the city's most visited sites and designed by Austrian visual artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser.



A woman rests on a bench outside Kunst Haus Wien.



The Hundertwasser House, an apartment building, one of the city's most visited sites and designed by Austrian visual artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, is pictured.

Impossible to categorize, he wore mismatching socks and gave speeches naked to protest against modern cities. "From the early 1950s, he had very strict ecological thoughts, and opposed cities full of concrete and tarmac," Hirsch said.

An early advocate of recycling, Hundertwasser "reused everything", telling his students "never to throw away any pigments, colors, papers", the expert added.

Hundertwasser lived frugally and designed his own composting toilets to save water. He was still painting, "earning his passage" to his adopted homeland New Zealand on the Cunard liner Queen Elizabeth 2 -- having not wanted to fly -- when he died of a heart attack at 71. He was buried there under a tulip tree he planted himself.--AFP



A model and equipment of a Humus Toilet and plant-based purification systems are on display at the Kunst Haus Wien.



Visitors look at art works displayed at the Kunst Haus Wien.



A photo taken in Vienna shows Spittelau incinerator designed by Austrian visual artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser.



A street light is pictured outside Kunst Haus Wien.



The Hundertwasser House, an apartment building, one of the city's most visited sites and designed by Austrian visual artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser.

## Jihad among record number of unique baby names in Scotland

Scotland saw a record number of names given to only one baby last year, with Banksy, Daemon and Jihad among them, the National Records of Scotland said on Thursday. Boy, Demigod, Howl and Shady were also among the 2,362 unique names given to boys. Alloy, Costly and Pasty were among the 2,983 unique names for girls.

For more conventional names, Isla returned as the top name for girls, with Luca the most popular for boys, said the agency, which compiles population statistics in Scotland. "There are more names in use today than there were in previous generations," said NRS statistician Philippa Haxton.

"The number of different names for boys reached a new all-time high

in 2023, as did the number of unique names given to only one child in the year." Luca's popularity has grown since the release of the Pixar movie of the same name in 2021, while new parents also appear to have been influenced by last year's big screen blockbusters.

Cillian and Margot--after "Openheimer" actor Cillian Murphy and "Barbie" lead Margot Robbie--moved up 24 and 57 places to 99th and 106th respectively in the overall list. Scotland's population was estimated at a record 5.4 million, according to the last census in 2022.--AFP

## Video game giant Embracer sells 'Borderlands' maker to Take-Two

Swedish video game group Embracer said it was selling Gearbox Entertainment, the developer of the popular first-person shooter franchise "Borderlands", to US company Take-Two for \$460 million. Embracer chief executive Lars Wingefors said the sale, to be completed by the end of June, was "an important step in transforming Embracer into the future with notably lower net debt and improved free cash flow." The sale would reduce the company's net debt by around \$300-327 million, the group said in a statement.

Gearbox will join a Take-Two line-up that includes the likes of "Grand Theft Auto" maker Rockstar Games and 2K, the studio behind "NBA 2K". Embracer, which also owns the "Tomb Raider" licence, acquired Gearbox in February 2021 in a deal potentially worth up to \$1.4 billion as part of an acquisition spree that lasted several

years. The Swedish firm said it was now divesting Gearbox Software, Gearbox Montreal, Gearbox Studio Quebec and game titles including the space Western "Borderlands", "Tiny Tina's Wonderlands", "Homeworld", "Risk of Rain", "Brothers in Arms", and "Duke Nukem". Embracer will retain selected companies, including Gearbox Publishing San Francisco, as well as the publishing rights to the "Remnant" franchise, "Hyper Light Breaker" and other unannounced game releases.

All of its retained assets will be integrated into other parts of Embracer Group, it said. In June 2023, the Swedish firm announced a vast restructuring program which included the closing of studios and cancelling game projects. The restructuring program was meant to transform the company "from our current heavy-investment mode to a highly cash-flow gener-



active business," Wingefors said when it was announced. Earlier this month, Embracer announced it was ceasing all Russian operations with the sale of US-based subsidiary Saber Interactive, which controls several game development studios in Russia and Eastern Europe.--AFP

## Lifestyle

## A-bomb saga 'Oppenheimer' finally opens in Japan

Oscar best picture winner "Oppenheimer" was finally released on Friday in Japan, where its subject - the man who masterminded the creation of the atomic bomb - is a highly sensitive and emotional topic. The US blockbuster hit screens in the United States and many other countries in July at the same time as "Barbie", inspiring a viral phenomenon dubbed "Barbenheimer" by moviegoers.

But while "Barbie" was released in Japan in August, "Oppenheimer" was conspicuously absent from cinemas for months. No official explanation was offered at the time, fuelling speculation the film was too controversial to be shown in Japan - the only country to have ever suffered a wartime nuclear attack.

Around 140,000 people died in Hiroshima and 74,000 in Nagasaki when the United States dropped atomic bombs on the cities in August 1945, days before the end of World War II.

At a large cinema in central Tokyo where "Oppenheimer" was showing on Friday, there was none of the prominent promotional material that might be



A woman walks past a poster for the film 'Oppenheimer' in Tokyo. — AFP

expected for a global megahit.

Instead only one small poster advertised the film, which was shot on a \$100 million budget and collected nearly \$1 billion at box offices worldwide.

"It is a long, three-hour movie, but I watched it attentively, because it was so powerful," audience member Masayuki Hayashi, 51, told AFP after the film. Japanese distributors may have

chosen to avoid a summer release close to the bombings' anniversary, said 65-year-old Tatsuhiya Yue.

But "it would have been unthinkable if a movie which describes how the weapon was developed didn't show here", he said. "The movie arrived late, but I think it was good that it finally opened in Japan."

## 'America-centric'

The film tells the story of US physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who oversaw the bomb's invention. It drew rave reviews and was the most decorated title at this month's Oscars, scooping seven awards including best director for Christopher Nolan and best actor for star Cillian Murphy.

But in Hiroshima, the city devastated by the first nuclear bomb, the biopic's Academy Awards success met a mixed reaction. Kyoko Heya, president of the city's international film festival, told AFP after the awards ceremony that she had found Nolan's movie "very America-centric".

"Is this really a movie that people in Hiroshima can bear to watch?" she asked. Today the city is a thriving metropolis of 1.2 million people, but the ruins of a domed building still stand as a stark reminder of the horrors of the attack, along with a museum and other sombre memorials.

Heya said that after much reflection, "I now want many people to watch the movie." "I'd be happy to see Hiroshima, Nagasaki and atomic weapons

become the subject of discussions thanks to this movie," she said.

Last year, viral "Barbenheimer" memes sparked anger online in Japan, where media reports have highlighted critics who say the film does not show the harm caused by the bombs.

"There could have been much more description and depiction of the horror of atomic weapons," bomb survivor and former Hiroshima mayor Takashi Hiraoka, 96, said at a special screening in the city earlier this month.

"Oppenheimer" was also shown at a preview event in Nagasaki, where survivor Masao Tomonaga, 80, said he had been impressed by the movie.

"I had thought the film's lack of... images of atomic bomb survivors was a weakness," said Tomonaga, who was two when the second bomb was dropped and later became a professor studying leukaemia caused by the attacks. "But in fact, Oppenheimer's lines in dozens of scenes showed his shock at the reality of the atomic bombing. That was enough for me." — AFP

## Trailblazing Black Oscar winner Louis Gossett Jr dies at 87

Louis Gossett Jr, the first Black man to win a best supporting actor Oscar for his performance as a hard-man drill instructor in "An Officer and a Gentleman," has died. He was 87.

Gossett's family said he died Thursday night in Los Angeles without stating the cause, multiple US media outlets including CBS News reported.

Gossett appeared in more than 60 movies, and in 1983 became the third Black actor - after Hattie McDaniel and Sidney Poitier - to win an Academy Award, for his supporting role as a stern gunnery sergeant in Taylor Hackford's "An Officer and a Gentleman."

The movie also netted the actor a Golden Globe, and he later picked up another supporting actor Globe for "The Josephine Baker Story," as well as an Emmy for the eight-part smash-hit ABC miniseries "Roots."



Black Oscar winner Louis Gossett Jr

The New York native, who announced in 2010 that he had prostate cancer, cultivated a tough guy image that paid dividends in a slew of action movies, including "Iron Eagle" (1986) and "The Punisher" (1989).

Gossett chronicled his painful experiences as a trailblazing Black actor in his memoir, "An Actor and a Gentleman," including his first trip to Los Angeles in the 1960s when he was pulled over by police four times during a single car journey. "The only time I was really free was when the director said 'action' in front of a camera or on the stage and that's when I flew," he told The LA Times in 2008.

## 'Someone with history'

Divorced from his third wife in 1992, Gossett lived in Malibu, California and raised two sons. He was born in Brooklyn, New York on May 27, 1936, and cut his teeth on stage, appearing in "Take a Giant Step," which was selected as one of the 10 best Broadway shows of 1953 by The New York Times.

He won a part in the 1959 Broadway production of Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" before making his Hollywood debut alongside Poitier in the film version two years later. His other credits include "The Deep," "Blue Chips," "Daddy's Little Girls," "Firewalker" and "Jaws-3D." Gossett Jr came to wide attention on the small screen, winning an Emmy for his turn as the slave Fiddler in "Roots," a cultural phenomenon that drew more than 100 million viewers for its finale in January 1977.

He was nominated for television's top prize six more times, including for his portrayal of Anwar Sadat in the 1983 miniseries "Sadat." He told entertainment industry bible Variety in 2015 that his role in the TV movie as the Egyptian leader who made peace with Israel was his favorite.

"It was a challenge to play someone with history like that. His spirit was very much like Mandela's. He transitioned from a hawk to a dove," he said.

He continued to work well into his 70s, appearing briefly on HBO's "Boardwalk Empire" and CBS shows "Extant" and "Madam Secretary," as well as NBC's "ER" and HBO superhero series "Watchmen." — AFP



Members of South Korean boy band NCT Dream (from left) Mark, Renjun, Jeno, Jaemin, Jisung, Haechan and Chenle pose for photos during a press conference to promote their new album "DREAM (J)SCAPE" in Seoul. — AFP photos

## Fan outcry over K-pop star's date highlights 'harsh' industry rules

Accused of "betraying" fans, subject to relentless online and real-world public abuse, K-pop star Karina recently issued a grovelling, handwritten apology. Her crime? Dating a South Korean actor. Her plight mirrors that of many K-pop stars before her, experts say, such as late singer Sulli, who have bemoaned strict behavioural controls and being held to impossibly high standards, as record companies seek to sell fans the perfect idol.

Dating "ruined" her career, Karina's fans claimed, with one particularly enraged admirer sending a truck with an electronic billboard to her agency that read: "Do you not receive enough love from your fans?" and: "Apologise, or you'll see album sales decline and empty concert seats."

The attacks prompted Karina, a member of the group Aespa, to post a handwritten note "to convey my sincere apologies to the fans". "An idol's persona is expected to be romantically available," said Stephanie Choi, a K-pop expert with the University at Buffalo's Asia Research Institute.

Especially for young women, who often start in the business as teenagers, there is a lot of "promotional emphasis on innocence and chastity", and it is hard for them to move past this, Choi told AFP. Western stars such as



Karina (second right) and other members of South Korean girl group Aespa attend the red carpet at the Mnet Asian Music Awards (MAMA) in Seoul on December 11, 2021.

Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus have also experienced blowback as they turn from girls to women in the public eye, but the business model of South Korean K-pop makes it particularly intense for local idols.

Dedicated super fans - epitomized by boyband BTS' so-called ARMY of global supporters - do huge amounts of "crucial unpaid labour" promoting music and voting in competitions, Keung Yoon Bae, a Korean studies professor at Georgia Institute of Technology, told AFP. But in return, they may expect their

idols to be held to "gruelling professional standards" which extend into their personal lives, with young female stars particularly vulnerable, Bae said.

"Purity and 'girliness' have remained important images, and unfortunately this can really backfire on the idols when they are discovered to be dating, drinking and smoking," she said.

## Business strategy

In the early 2000s, before K-pop swept to world recognition, dating was essentially banned for aspiring South

Korean pop stars. Park Joon-hyung, a member of popular K-pop band god, famously gave a tearful press conference in 2001 when he was asked to leave the group by his agency following reports he was in a relationship.

"If I'm guilty of one thing, it's that I met someone I love," he said. "I am 32, okay? I, Park Joon-hyung, am 32 years old and I have a girlfriend," he added, tearing up. Expectations have gradually relaxed, and many popular K-pop stars such as IU, SNSD's Sooyoung, Jiyeon and BoA, have confirmed relationships to the press.

But being open about one's relationship status is a privilege reserved for established stars, while newcomers in the competitive K-pop industry - like Karina - are discouraged from dating to avoid jeopardizing their popularity.

"The idea of dating or the potential to date a K-pop star is definitely used as a business and marketing strategy," Billboard's K-pop columnist Jeff Benjamin told AFP. Part of what makes new idols marketable and profitable is allowing fans to entertain the notion that "maybe, one of the fans may date the idol themselves -- as delusional of a thought as it may be," he added. — AFP

## Aya Nakamura brushes off far-right haters in new single

French rap star Aya Nakamura pokes fun at the haters in her single, "Doggy", released Friday in the wake of far-right uproar over rumours she may perform at the Paris Olympics.

"I don't have enemies, me / It's them that don't like me," raps the French-Malian artist, the most popular French-language musician in the world.

"A load of enemies but I don't even know them," adds the 28-year-old, known worldwide for hits like "Djadja" which has close to a billion streams on YouTube alone.

Streaming services put "Doggy" online Friday, though leaked excerpts have been circulating for years.

Nakamura has been at the centre of a storm ever since a French magazine published rumours she was asked by President Emmanuel Macron to perform a song by French singing legend Edith Piaf during the Games in July.

Neither side has confirmed wheth-



Aya Nakamura

er the report was correct, but it was enough to spark uproar from far-right politicians, including Marine Le Pen of the National Rally.

She told French radio: "It's not a nice symbol, honestly, it's another provocation from Emmanuel Macron", before going on to complain about Nakamura's "outfits, her vulgarity".

Nakamura has shrugged off her critics, addressing them on social media earlier this month: "I have the impression that I've made you discover Edith Piaf and that she's reincarnated in me. For the rest, whether they like me or not, that's their business." But the polemic means many fans and political supporters are now adamant that she sing at the Olympics. — AFP

## Hit TV satire reveals how Japanese society has changed

A time-travelling TV comedy with a bawdy middle-aged hero has become a big hit in Japan, juxtaposing the country's brash 1980s boom years with its more politically correct present day. In the series, titled "Extremely Inappropriate", the past isn't rose-tinted: there's smoking on the bus, and corporal punishment galore. But modern Japan doesn't get a free pass either.

When schoolteacher and father Ichiro Ogawa is catapulted from 1986 to 2024, he scandalizes millennials and Gen Z-ers with his disregard for their views on gender, family and labor rights. Implicit in his candid words is a question: is society today, with its good intentions around issues like diversity and work-life balance, really all it's cracked up to be? The show's satire of how Japan has changed over the decades has struck a chord with viewers young and old.

Last month, it became the first program made by major broadcaster TBS to top Netflix's most-watched list in Japan for three weeks running. Producer Aki Isoyama, who is 56, initially thought it would be "very challenging" to poke fun at today's progressive values without triggering a backlash from the public.

The show isn't meant as a verdict on the superiority of one era over the other, she told AFP. But one inspiration for her and screenwriter Kankuro Kudo, 53, was the idea that "life has become more difficult in some aspects today".

"Our society has certainly gotten better, but in a way more restrictive, too, with everything dictated by compliance and protocols," Isoyama said. Today, when something is pronounced unacceptable, "we often unquestioningly accept that explanation and refrain from saying or doing it," she added. "The show will hopefully make viewers stop and ask themselves: 'Why was it banned in the first place?'"

One 25-year-old fan, Mao Yamada, said the show is a reminder that "our society has become more accepting of diversity". "It's good we're now more mindful of things like sexual harassment," she told AFP, adding that she understands why some might feel "too many things are perhaps restricted and kept unsaid".

Workplace pep talks to Gen-Z hires are denounced as harassment in "Extremely Inappropriate", and an exasperated TV producer tries to censor everything said on air. — AFP

## Sports

## Hurricanes outclass Highlanders

## Super Rugby-leading Hurricanes maintain their dominant start

DUNEDIN: Cam Roigard scored a try, set up two others and limped off injured as the Wellington Hurricanes crushed the Otago Highlanders 47-12 to maintain their dominant start to the Super Rugby season. Scrum-half Roigard was a pivotal figure in a fast-paced match in Dunedin as the Hurricanes made it six wins from six, picking up a bonus point to stretch their lead atop the standings. The ruthless visitors lifted their season try tally to 33, crossing seven times against a Highlanders side who slumped to their fourth defeat.

Wellington were 28-0 ahead at halftime, with the last try before the break being scored by the lively Roigard, who was a constant menace with his probing runs.

Touted as the player most likely to replace the retired Aaron Smith at the base of the scrum for the New Zealand All Blacks, Roigard suffered a dislocated kneecap in the second half that forced him from the field. Captain Brad Shields hoped his 23-year-old game-breaker wouldn't be out for long but noted the Hurricanes have an excellent backup scrum-half in veteran Test player TJ Perenara.

"One thing we're pretty lucky with at the moment is

our depth. If you take one All Black off, you bring another All Black on," said Shields, who was enjoying his team's fast-paced style. "It's pretty cool, I can't complain at the moment. "We're pretty excited with where we are but there's a lot of season to go." The Auckland Blues also attacked with freedom to beat Moana Pasifika 47-8 at Eden Park, with All Blacks winger Mark Teale bagging three of their seven tries. Fly-half Stephen Perofeta crossed for a try and landed six conversions in a 16-point haul.

Fijian Drua made it three wins from three at home, although they had to ditch their customary free-wheeling style to beat the Western Force 31-13 at a waterlogged Churchill Park in Lautoka. The Fijian side scored three tries to two but were able to pull clear courtesy of 16 points off the boot of fly-half Isaiah Armstrong-Ravula. Force captain Nic White conceded his team were outplayed on a pitch that resembled a giant puddle following several days of heavy rain. "We wanted to play with structure in these conditions but the Drua just handled it better than us," White said. "This will feel like one we look back on that got away on us." — AFP



Cam Roigard

## Tomoooh Sports Club holds Girgian event for disabled

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Tomoooh Sports Club for Mental Disabilities held its annual Girgian celebration in cooperation with Kuwait Society for Guardians of the Disabled at Saleh Shehab School in Mishref. The celebration was attended by the "mother" of the disabled Al-Sheikha Sheikhah Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, chairpersons and board members of Tomoooh Club and Kuwait Society for Guardians of the Disabled in addition to a large number of members of both the club and society.

Al-Sheikha Sheikhah said she was pleased with the happy atmosphere as the disabled were enjoying the ceremony that revives "one of our old heritage customs, and contributes to connecting the present generations with their heritage that maintains the Kuwait identity". Al-Sheikha Sheikhah said various programs held as part of the celebration gave the opportunity to the disabled to display their talents and involvement with others in a show that embodied the importance of these activities and helped them integrate with the society.

She lauded the efforts of the club and Kuwait Society for Guardians of the Disabled in caring for

the disabled both socially and psychologically, adding that this initiative will help them qualify, reach the next level of championship in the sports field and make achievements in the name of Kuwait. Al-Sheikha Sheikhah thanked Chairman of the Board of Tomoooh Club Engineer Jassim Al-Nouri and KSGH Chairwoman Rihab Bouresli and members of both boards and all those who worked hard to make the celebration a major success. Secretary of the permanent committee for the rights of the disabled of the National Diwan for Human Rights Anan Al-Mutawaa commended the gathering and the organization of

the celebration which was 'a call to eradicate all social barriers'.

The celebration was a right platform for the disabled who were provided an equal treatment and social attention in a way that guarantees their self-reliance and self-esteem. "The cultural programs staged as part of the celebration helped them integrate with the civil society," he added. The celebration witnessed several programs such as songs, cultural entertainments, chants related to Girgian, bu-tebaila and bu-Jassoum. Gifts were also distributed to the participants.



PHOENIX: Hannah Green of Australia plays a tee shot on the 11th hole during the second round of the Ford Championship presented by KCC at Seville Golf and Country Club on March 29, 2024. - AFP

## Green fires sizzling 61 for Arizona LPGA lead

LOS ANGELES: Australia's Hannah Green went from under the weather to on top of the leaderboard on Friday, reeling off six straight birdies to cap an 11-under-par 61 to grab the lead at the LPGA Ford Championship in Arizona. "I wasn't really feeling that great overnight. Kind of have a bit of a runny nose and sore throat, so wasn't expecting that much which is maybe a good thing," said Green, who would go on to flip the script at Seville Golf and Country Club, where she's in search of her second title of the month. "I missed a short putt on the first and I was like, 'Oh, OK, that's fine. I really took advantage of the shorter holes we had. I also holed a couple really long putts ... Just had a really nice morning."

Green, who rattled in a 30-foot birdie to win the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore by one stroke earlier this month, hit 16 of 18 greens in regulation and needed just 25 putts as she built a 36-hole total of 14-under 130. She had a one-stroke lead over American Sarah Schmelzel and Taiwan's Chien Peiyun. Schmelzel had nine birdies in a sparkling nine-under 63 while Chien posted a five-under 65 to reach 131. It was another stroke back to South Korean Kim Hyo-joo and Spain's Azahara Munoz on 132. After four birdies on the front nine, Green opened the back with a birdie at the 10th, then birdied her last six holes - from the 13th through the 18th - to post a new career low on the LPGA.

It could have been even lower, but her eagle putt at the 18th lipped out and left her a tap-in for birdie. "I holed a really good putt on 17," she said. "It was probably 25 feet up the hill, and that was the one that I hit quite firm, so luckily it was kind of dead center, otherwise I probably would've been mooting past." Green said she also made some good "momentum putts," including a par-saving six-footer on the ninth. "I think making those little putts is just as good as making the 20-, 25-footers," she said. Green, ranked 19th in the world, said she was pleased to be able to take advantage of a "gettable" course, especially with conditions expected to change for the worse at the weekend. —AFP

## Finau seizes Houston Open lead; Scheffler streak ends

LOS ANGELES: Defending champion Tony Finau made four birdies and an eagle in his last seven holes to grab a two-stroke lead at the Houston Open on Friday as world number one Scottie Scheffler's streak of under-par rounds came to an end. Finau fired an eight-under par 62 to finish 36 holes at Memorial Park on nine-under 131, two clear of Argentina's Alejandro Tosti, who shot three-under-par 67 to reach the halfway stage at seven under. "I've played some nice golf the first couple days and the game's in a good place," Finau said. "Just don't overthink it, get some rest, be properly prepared, properly rested for the weekend." Finau started on the back nine and made a 10-foot birdie putt at 13, a birdie at the par-5 16th after reaching the green in two and a 13-foot birdie putt at 18, followed by his lone bogey of the day at the first.

Finau barely missed on a 31-foot eagle putt at the par-5 third and tapped in for birdie, then sank a 27-foot birdie putt at the fourth. He added 30-foot birdie putts at the sixth and par-3 seventh then holed out from just inside 40 feet to eagle the par-5 eighth and at the par-3 ninth rolled a 16-foot birdie putt past the hole to miss out on 61. "I knew what it was for - 61 would have been my lowest on the tour and the course record," Finau said. "I knew I was going to give it a run. I wasn't going to leave it short." —AFP



## Super Sinner sets up Miami final with Dimitrov

MIAMI: Italy's Jannik Sinner destroyed defending champion Daniil Medvedev 6-1, 6-2 in just 69 minutes on Friday to reach the final of the ATP Miami Open, where he will take on Grigor Dimitrov. Bulgarian Dimitrov made his third Masters 1000 series final after he beat fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4. The win means Dimitrov will return to the top ten in the ATP rankings for the first time since 2018, his 260 week wait is the third longest in the history of the rankings.

Sinner though will be the favorite against Dimitrov, after his display of power and skill at Hard Rock Stadium swept away Medvedev. The Italian had lost to the Russian in the Miami final last year but rallied from two sets down to beat him in the Australian Open final in January. The outcome was never in doubt this time as Sinner utterly dominated from the outset. Sinner broke Medvedev's first service game to go 2-0 up in the opening set, pinning the Russian in the corner at the end of a long rally before blasting a winner past him.

While the 22-year-old looked fresh and fired up, blasting with power from the baseline and inventive when he came to the net, Medvedev was struggling to just hold his serve and the Italian broke again in the fourth game, taking advantage of his fourth break point. A rattled-looking Medvedev finally held in the sixth game, but Sinner served out to love to complete a first-set rout in just 33 minutes. It was the same story in the second set, Sinner breaking to love to start. The Russian looked dejected after he went wide on a break point to fall to 4-1 down, one of a series of unusually poorly executed shots from the 28-year-old.

Sinner met little resistance on his way to serving out for the match and acknowledged that his emphatic win was helped by the out of sorts nature of his opponent's play. "I felt great on court today. Usually the more you go on in a tournament, the more comfortable you feel and I'm very happy about today's performance," he said. "I think Daniil didn't feel this well today. He made a lot of mistakes which he usually doesn't make, so I just took the chance. I was expecting a really tough match."



Al-Sheikha Sheikhah Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah celebrates with the disabled



## Different player, different person

Sinner has won five straight matches against Medvedev after having lost their first six encounters. Sinner, who enjoyed a run of 19 wins before losing to Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-final at Indian Wells, said he is now a very different proposition than when he missed out in the Miami final last year. "I'm a different player, a different person," he said.

Medvedev was blunt in his assessment of his performance. "He played good. I didn't play well enough. We could speak for hours but in the end I didn't play good enough, he played good, he won easy. That's the end of the story, to be honest," he said. The second semi-final was a much tighter affair which was decided by a handful of key moments. Dimitrov, who ousted world number two Carlos Alcaraz in the quarter-finals, broke when 5-4 up in the first set, Zverev mis-timing a return which ballooned out of court to hand the advantage to the Bulgarian.

The big-serving German was solid throughout the second set and while he wobbled at 6-2 up in the

tie-break he held on to win 7-4 and force a deciding set. With Dimitrov always busy, frequently going to the net, Zverev was relying on his baseline play to get him through. But he was broken in the seventh game when Dimitrov came towards the net, slipped but somehow managed an overhead volley while almost on the floor to win break point. The Bulgarian was buzzing with energy as he saw out the set and said his improvised winner had shown his mentality.

"I was not letting any balls pass through me... I just thought, OK, I'm seeing the ball, I am going to scramble for it. "It was a dogfight on both ends, we really went at each other after that first set," he said. Before defeating Alcaraz and Zverev, Dimitrov had also taken care of another top 10 opponent in Hubert Hurkacz and he said that the run showed he had found the consistency that has sometimes eluded him. "What is best above all is that I have been able to put those matches back-to-back. The consistency of beating top players, that to me is a way bigger success than anything else," he said. — AFP



FLORIDA: Jannik Sinner of Italy returns a shot against Daniil Medvedev during their match on Day 14 of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 29, 2024. - AFP

Sports

# Japan 'declared the winner', advance in WCup qualifying

## Hosts North Korea abruptly cancelled the match

**TOKYO:** Japan has been declared the winner of its cancelled World Cup qualifying match against North Korea by forfeit, the sport's global governing body told the Japan Football Association on Saturday. FIFA declared Japan the 3-0 winner of the second-round Group B match that had been scheduled to be played in Pyongyang on Tuesday. Hosts North Korea abruptly cancelled the match five days before it was due to be played, with the isolated country failing to give any reason.

FIFA announced after the cancellation that the qualifier would not be rescheduled because of a lack of space in the international football calendar. "The FIFA disciplinary committee informed us of its decision to forfeit this match as a 0-3 defeat for North Korea," the JFA said in a statement. Japan beat North Korea 1-0 in Tokyo nine days ago to make it three wins from three in their Asian qualifying group. They will now progress to the third stage

of qualifying for the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Coach Hajime Moriyasu said in the JFA statement that "important opportunities for players to compete were lost" because of the cancellation "But I take this positively as a step forward," said Moriyasu, who took Japan to the last 16 of the Qatar World Cup after wins over Spain and Germany. "We will build up our strength towards... the final qualifying round and the World Cup." — AFP



Japan's head coach Hajime Moriyasu

## NFL's Chiefs confirm signing of rugby star

**WASHINGTON:** Wales rugby standout Louis Rees-Zammit has signed a deal with the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, the two-time defending Super Bowl champions announced on Friday. "Rees-Lightning has arrived," the Chiefs posted on X with a lightning bolt emoji and a photo of the 23-year-old Welshman playing for his homeland in a "Chiefs Kingdom" welcome. "Hi Chiefs Kingdom. Louis Rees-Zammit here. Just signed. Can't wait to go and see you all at Arrowhead (Stadium)," Rees-Zammit said in a video clip posted on X.

The NFL Network reported that Rees-Zammit, who played for English Premiership side Gloucester from 2018 until this year, has signed a three-year deal with a signing bonus and some portion of the deal guaranteed. That's a crucial part of the deal with NFL teams able to end contracts by dropping players. Rees-Zammit said in January he was leaving rugby union to explore an NFL career and became part of the NFL International Player Pathway Program, created in 2017 to help global athletes make their way into American football.

Rees-Zammit conducted a workout for scouts last week - one the Chiefs said included a 4.44-second 40-yard dash that would have ranked fifth among tailbacks at this year's NFL Scouting Combine for NFL Draft talent. The Welshman reportedly visited the New York Jets, Cleveland Browns and Denver Broncos as well as the Chiefs before settling on a desired new NFL home. He becomes the 37th player from the global talent program to sign an NFL contract and now hopes to become only the sixth to reach an active roster spot.

NFL clubs receive a training camp roster exemption for an international player and this year have a practice squad global berth available specifically for such a player as Rees-Zammit. NFL



Louis Rees-Zammit

teams are allowed to elevate international players from the practice squad three times during the season, providing more chances for players to develop and improve by facing top-level opponents in regular-season contests.

There's also a chance Rees-Zammit, being eyed as a rusher or wide receiver as well as on kick teams, could make the main roster depending on how well he performs in Chiefs training camp workouts and pre-season games. But it's a rare feat, thus far only achieved by Philadelphia offensive tackle Jordan Mailata of Australia, a former rugby league player; Washington defensive end Efe Obada, a Nigerian-born Briton; German fullback Jakob Johnson of

the Las Vegas Raiders plus former Washington defensive lineman David Bada of Germany and former Washington tight end Sammis Reyes of Chile.

Rees-Zammit, in a posting on the Chiefs website, said his favorite NFL player when he was a child was wide receiver DeSean Jackson, who played five seasons in Philadelphia under current Chiefs coach Andy Reid. Rees-Zammit might also be aided in his NFL dream by rule changes approved by NFL club owners this week regarding kickoffs, which were converted to a more rugby-style catching and run-back format with kicks from well behind a spread-out line - only Rees-Zammit would have the aid of blockers on kick returns. — AFP

## Five games that will decide EPL title race

**LONDON:** Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City are locked in a gripping Premier League title race heading into the final 10 games of the season for each club. Leaders Arsenal sit above second placed Liverpool on goal difference, with City one point behind the top two in third place. AFP Sport looks at five matches set to play a key role in deciding this season's champions.

### Manchester City v Arsenal, March 31

The biggest game of the title run-in comes at the Etihad Stadium immediately after the international break. A third defeat to the Gunners this season could be fatal to City's hopes of winning an unprecedented fourth successive Premier League crown. Arsenal beat Pep Guardiola's men 1-0 at the Emirates Stadium in October thanks to Gabriel Martinelli's late goal and also beat them on penalties in the Community Shield in August. Mikel Arteta's side have won their last eight league games, but City are unbeaten in 22 matches in all competitions and have not lost at home since November 2022.

### Manchester City v Aston Villa, April 3

If City can secure a priceless victory against Arsenal, they will have little time to celebrate as top-four hopefuls Villa visit the Etihad just three days later. Enjoying an unexpectedly strong campaign, former European Champions Villa are in fourth as they eye a first since the competition became the Champions League. Unai Emery's side stunned City in December when Leon Bailey's 74th minute goal sealed a 1-0 win. City are unbeaten since then, while Villa have maintained their grip on a top four berth despite a challenge from Tottenham.

### Manchester United v Liverpool, April 7

Liverpool will head to Old Trafford on a revenge mission after their painful 4-3 loss to their bitter rivals in the FA Cup quarter-finals. Jurgen Klopp's side led 2-1 and 3-2 near the end of normal time and extra-time respectively, but couldn't hold on as Amad Diallo's last-gasp winner ended the Reds' quadruple bid. Liverpool can still give Klopp a memorable farewell in his final season by adding the Premier League and Europa League to the League Cup they lifted in February. A first victory at Old Trafford since 2021



SHENLEY: Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta (right) reacts during a training session in Hertfordshire, England. — AFP

will be essential to Liverpool's attempt to equal United's record of 20 English titles.

### Tottenham v Arsenal, April 28

With so much at stake for these old rivals, there will be an extra edge to the always-feisty north London derby. Arsenal famously won the league at White Hart Lane to clinch the title in 1971 and 2004. They could take a major step towards another crown by beating their hated neighbors in the rebuilt stadium on the site of those historic triumphs. Arsenal, last crowned champions 20 years ago, have lost just one of the last six north London derbies, although they twice squandered the lead in a 2-2 draw at the Emirates in September. Revitalized in Ange Postecoglou's first season in charge, attack-minded Tottenham are certain to be on the front foot as they aim to finish in the top four.

### Aston Villa v Liverpool, May 11

Although Liverpool swept aside Villa 3-0 at Anfield in September, the Reds can expect a sterner test in the rematch. In what will be Klopp's final away league game as Liverpool boss, the German will look for a fourth successive victory at Villa Park. Villa last beat Liverpool in 2020 when their 7-2 rout prompted Klopp to admit his team had "lost the plot". With a first title in four years potentially within reach, Liverpool cannot afford a similar meltdown.

### Judgment Day

If there is still nothing to separate the title chasers after those matches, the final day of the season on May 19 features Arsenal hosting Everton, Manchester City facing West Ham and Liverpool taking on Wolves. — AFP

## Ipswich stay top of Championship; Leeds, Watford draw 2-2

**LONDON:** Ipswich were left top of English football's second-tier Championship on Friday after Leeds missed the chance to regain first place as they drew 2-2 at Watford. Conor Chaplin scored the only goal in the ninth minute as Ipswich won 1-0 away to Blackburn at Ewood Park following the international break, the midfielder starting and finishing a well-worked move. "Fantastic result, you have to enjoy every win you get in the Championship," said Ipswich manager Kieran McKenna. "The performance was mixed. I thought first half we started ever so well, big credit to the way we came out, especially after international duty, we imposed ourselves really well on the game."

Victory took Ipswich two points clear of Leeds, who could have recaptured top spot in the late kick-off. Instead Leeds had to twice come from behind at Vicarage Road to secure a draw that left them one point behind Ipswich and one ahead of third-placed Leicester in the race for promotion to the Premier League. Vakoun Bayo opened the scoring for Watford in the 31st minute before Leeds hit back six minutes later thanks to a superb finish from Crisencio Summerville. Watford regained the lead before half-time with another fine goal from Emmanuel Dennis.

Farke will take a point 'all day long' - Leeds' pressure was rewarded five minutes from time when Mateo Joseph's goal ensured a share of the spoils. "I will take this point all day long," said Leeds manager Daniel Farke, whose side featured a trio of Wales players who had suffered the heartache of failing to qualify for the European Championships following a penalty shoot-out loss to Poland. "I am really happy and proud of the boys."

The German added: "We had the worst possible international break. For us three players came back injured and three Welsh players had the disappointment of not being allowed to go to the Euros. We had not one first-team training session as a team." Earlier, Leicester's hopes of an immediate return to the Premier League suffered a fresh setback with a 1-0 loss away to Bristol City. City's Anis Mehmeti struck 17 minutes from time at Ashton Gate with a left-footed shot into the roof of the net. — AFP

## Northampton sink Saracens to extend Premiership lead

**LONDON:** Northampton bounced back from a humiliating loss to extend their lead at the top of the English Premiership with a 41-30 win over reigning champions Saracens on Friday. Last week, when the competition resumed after a two-month break for the Six Nations, the Saints suffered a shock 52-21 defeat by Bristol. Saracens, by contrast, thrashed London rivals Harlequins 52-7. Northampton, however, put the Bristol reverse behind them in fine style by running in five tries against Saracens at Franklin's Gardens.

They surged into an early 17-0 lead through early scores from Alex Coles and James Ramm before Saracens hit back to reduce the hosts' advantage to seven points at the break through a try from Theo McFarland. But Northampton produced a fine second-half display as Ramm, England wing Tommy Freeman and Ollie Sleightholme all crossed Saracens' line. The visitors did see England No 8 Ben Earl go over for a try and two late scores from Alex Lewington meant they left the East Midlands with a bonus point. Northampton are now seven points clear of second-placed Saracens, with the top four teams at the end of the regular season qualifying for the title-deciding play-offs.

In Friday's other Premiership clash, Newcastle suffered their 14th defeat in as many league fixtures this season, going down 19-13 at home to Leicester despite the Tigers being reduced to 12 men in the closing stages of an extraordinary match that featured more than 15 minutes of additional time. Brett Connon kicked Newcastle into an early lead before England scrum-half Jack van Poortvliet scored on his return for Leicester. Ben Redshaw crowned an excellent Newcastle backline move by slicing through the Leicester defense for a well-taken try before the Tigers responded with one of their own from Argentina star Julian Montoya.

Connon's penalty restored the Falcons' narrow lead to the delight of the Kingston Park faithful. But Ollie Hassell-Collins sped down the left wing for Leicester's third try and the Tigers held on despite late yellow cards for Charlie Clare, Freddie Steward, and James Whitcombe. The infringements helped extend the game long enough for England full-back Steward, sin-binned in the 84th minute, to return for the final minutes. Newcastle forced a succession of late scrum penalties inside Leicester's 22 but could not breach the Tigers' defense. — AFP

### Today's matches

English Premier League		
Liverpool v Brighton	16:00	beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports HD 3 TR
Manchester City v Arsenal	18:30	beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports HD 3 TR
Spanish League		
Celta de Vigo v Rayo Vallecano	15:00	beIN Sports HD 3 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max
Girona v Real Betis	17:15	beIN Sports 1 FR
Deportivo v Real Sociedad	19:30	beIN Sports HD 3 beIN Sports 1 FR
Real Madrid v Athletic de Bilbao	22:00	beIN Sports HD 3 beIN Sports 1 FR
German Bundesliga		
Augsburg v Koln	16:30	beIN Sports HD 5 beIN Sports HD 4 TR
Stuttgart v Heidenheim	18:30	beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max
Bochum v Darmstadt 98	20:30	beIN Sports HD 5 beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max beIN Sports HD 4 TR

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

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

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

**I, Mel**, holder of Indian passport no. N8554548 having permanent address Vill - Kothawar Aurahin post, Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, Pin code 222001, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under (given name) Mohd and (surname) Mel.

(#5191) 29/03/2024

**I, Cheruvu Thomas** (current name in passport) of Indian Passport No. V3747568, R/of H.No. 3/1445, Slonpuram, Kadapa town. A.P. India-516001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Siddavaram Thomas, S/O Raja Kumar (new name) previously called Cheruvu Thomas, S/o. Raja Kumar (Old Name)

(#5190) 27/03/2024

## Spurs overwhelm Knicks 130-126

Wembanyama's big night trumps Brunson's 61 points



SAN ANTONIO: Victor Wembanyama #1 of the San Antonio Spurs drives past Precious Achiuwa #5 of the New York Knicks in the first half at Frost Bank Center in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Sensational San Antonio rookie Victor Wembanyama scored 40 points and grabbed 20 rebounds to help the Spurs withstand a stunning 61-point performance from New York's Jalen Brunson in a 130-126 NBA overtime victory over the Knicks on Friday. French star Wembanyama became the first rookie to record a 40-point, 20-rebound game since Shaquille O'Neal had 46 and 21 in 1993. The 20-year-old added seven assists, two steals and a blocked shot as he and the Spurs spoiled a career night for Brunson - who finished one point shy of the Knicks' franchise record of 62 points in a game, set by Carmelo Anthony in 2014.

The scintillating show in San Antonio overshadowed Minnesota's 111-98 victory over the reigning champion Denver Nuggets that vaulted the Timberwolves into a tie for the Western Conference lead, alongside the Oklahoma City

Thunder - which beat the Phoenix Suns 128-103. The Nuggets dropped from first to third, one half-game behind the Timberwolves and Thunder.

Brunson notched the fifth-highest points total of this high-scoring season, but he missed a potential go-ahead three-pointer with 5.4 seconds left in overtime. Wembanyama's three-pointer with 1:12 left in overtime had put the Spurs up 128-124. After Spurs guard Tre Jones made two free-throws with 1.1 seconds left, Wembanyama came up with a steal and it was over. The Spurs, who won a third-straight game for the first time this season, scored 74 points in the first half and led most of the night.

But the Knicks, fueled by Brunson's 38 second-half points, grabbed the lead for the first time when Donte DiVincenzo's three-pointer made it 113-112 with 4:39 left in regulation. After a Wembanyama alley-oop dunk tied it at 119-119,

Brunson drove for a basket that put the Knicks up 121-119 with 1:14 left in regulation, but Wembanyama made two free throws to force overtime. "He's pretty special," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said of Wembanyama, adding that the Spurs' ability to withstand an "amazing" Brunson and the Knicks' late charge showed how much they have developed this year.

"All teams lose leads," Popovich said. "But how you come back from it is important and earlier in the year we would not have sustained our own execution, our own pace. You can see the maturity that they've developed during the season. (They) stayed strong when New York made a heck of a run." In Denver, Anthony Edwards scored 25 points, Mike Conley added 23 and Rudy Gobert finished with 21 points and 11 rebounds in a convincing victory over the Nuggets. An alley-oop dunk from Gobert

gave Minnesota a 6-5 lead less than three minutes into the contest and they never trailed again.

Nikola Jokic scored 32 points and pulled down 10 rebounds, but he and the Nuggets sorely missed point guard Jamal Murray, who missed a fourth-straight game with a sprained ankle. Nuggets coach Michael Malone said before the game that he believed Murray would be back "before the playoffs start." Oklahoma City, fueled by 23 points from Josh Giddey, rolled past Kevin Durant and the Suns despite the absence of All-Star guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who was again sidelined with a right thigh contusion.

### Rockets win 11th straight

Elsewhere, Kawhi Leonard and Paul George came through in the clutch for the Los Angeles Clippers, making back-to-back baskets in the final minute to seal a 100-97 victory over the Magic in

Orlando. The Houston Rockets shook off a slow start to push their winning streak to 11 games with a 101-100 victory over the Utah Jazz. The Brooklyn Nets drilled 25 three-pointers in a 125-108 home victory over the Chicago Bulls, tying the NBA record for treys in a half with 18 after the break. In Miami, the Heat thrashed the Blazers 142-82 for the most lopsided victory in franchise history.

In Indiana, Pascal Siakam scored 22 points and Tyrese Haliburton added 21 to lead the Pacers to a 109-90 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Siakam added 11 rebounds and Haliburton grabbed eight rebounds and handed out eight assists for the Pacers, who stepped it up defensively after falling 150-145 to the Lakers on Sunday. Anthony Davis scored 24 points with 15 rebounds and LeBron James added 16 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, but the Lakers were held to their lowest points total of the season. — AFP

## NBA fines 76ers' Nurse and Oubre for referee abuse

NEW YORK: Philadelphia 76ers head coach Nick Nurse and guard Kelly Oubre Jr. were each fined \$50,000 by the NBA on Friday for heated complaints after a missed call in a frustrating loss. The incidents came after the intense final seconds of Philadelphia's 108-107 home loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday. Oubre was driving to the basket when Paul George of the Clippers blocked his path and they made contact.

No foul was called and the final seconds ticked away, sparking the complaints and other actions by Nurse and Oubre that resulted in the punishments. After the game, referee crew chief Kevin Scott said that a video review showed a foul should have been whistled on George and Oubre should have been sent to the free throw line with a chance to win the game with less than a second to play.

But that came too late to prevent Nurse and Oubre from heated actions after the missed call robbed the Sixers of their chance to win. Nurse rushed onto the court to complain about not having the foul called, with assistant coaches restraining him from pressing his case. Nurse was fined for "aggressively pursuing and verbally abusing game officials" while Oubre's fine was for "verbally abusing and directing an obscene gesture toward game officials."

Oubre had to be pulled away after gesturing at all three officials but later apologized for losing his cool



Kelly Oubre Jr. of the Philadelphia 76ers

in the heat of the moment. "First and foremost, heat of the moment," Oubre said after the game. "This is an intense basketball game and we're not perfect. The refs aren't perfect. I want to apologize for just losing my cool." Seeing Nurse make his move made Oubre feel more confident about his own complaints, he said. "I saw Coach Nurse getting riled up and if our coach is going to fight for us and he's going there, then I'm right behind him," Oubre said.

"But at the end of the day, it wasn't cool. So I'll take whatever penalties come with that and you have to move on, but I got to be better in a sense." Nurse was matter-of-fact after the game, saying, "I thought it was enough contact to call. That's the way it goes sometimes." The 76ers, who have struggled without injured 2022-23 NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid, have fallen to eighth in the Eastern Conference at 39-34. The Clippers, 45-27, are fourth in the Western Conference, a half-game ahead of New Orleans. — AFP

## Kuwait gears up for '26 Winter Olympics

KUWAIT: Secretary General of Kuwait Winter Games Club (WGC) Mishal Flaiteh confirmed the club's pursuit of preparing national skiers for the upcoming Winter Olympic Games (Milano-Cortina 2026) in Milan by involving them in strong international competitions under the supervision of the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS). Flaiteh told KUNA Friday that player Faris Al-Obaid is currently competing in the International Winter Sports Championship hosted by the Hellenic Athletics Federation in the Parnassus resort, offering a vital chance to earn points for Winter Olympic qualification.

He mentioned that Al-Obaid prepared extensively for the championship by undergoing intense training in France, Switzerland, and Austria recently, expressing his hopes that both Al-Obaid and his teammate Abdulrahman Al-Wahaibi, who showcased impressive performances in tournaments in Switzerland and France earlier this month, will aim to continue this trend in upcoming competitions. In a phone call with KUNA, Al-Obaid expressed his satisfaction with participating in this championship, his second this season, as he aims to become the first Kuwaiti skier to qualify for the Winter Olympics, noting the continuous support of the club in his preparation and participation in major



Mishal Flaiteh

tournaments for the sport. This sport is costly due to equipment and the need for training in snowy areas, often requiring skiers abroad to develop their skills, yet Al-Obaid emphasized that dedicated Kuwaiti youth will strive for success in it. He reiterated his determination



Faris Al-Obaid

to spare no effort in achieving his goal despite all challenges, while expressing his wish for increased support and sponsorship for Kuwaiti players in this challenging sport, ensuring their skill development for success and achievement. — KUNA