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*Ramadan Kareem*

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# Zionists kill 7 aid workers in Gaza

World powers condemn strike • Al Jazeera slams moves to ban broadcasts



GAZA: (Left) United Nations staff members inspect the remains of a car used by US-based aid group World Central Kitchen that was hit by a Zionist strike the previous day in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on April 2, 2024. (Center) People gather around the bodies of World Central Kitchen workers at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah. (Right) A man displays British, Polish and Australian passports next to the bodies. — AFP photos

**RAMADAN KAREEM**

## Don't just activate the pause button

By Shaimaa Elkhohi

One day I heard a lot of young people say to me "now why does Islam say everything is haram, haram, haram." Actually, this is not true. Islam doesn't say everything is haram, but when there's so much haram and corruption around us, it looks like Islam has forbidden everything. This is because we are living in the time about which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned us that sins would be taken lightly.

Since Ramadan is the month of fasting, but that is only a part of it. It is the month of the Noble Quran, the month of tears and regret, the month of forgiveness, the month of tranquility, the month of goodness and the month of mercy, wherein we practice self-restraint and we do what Allah ordained. From that standpoint, "don't just activate the pause button" on your sins; rather let them completely go. Delete them. Let Ramadan be the chance, the starting point to get rid of your sins and bad habits. Don't postpone repentance (tawbah). Don't just put your sins aside, instead, let them end for good with no intention to return to them.

A sin in Ramadan is greater than a sin in a month other than Ramadan, a sin in the Haram of Makkah is greater than a sin outside the Haram. From this perspective, evilness of sins increases during certain days and places, the punishment is greater for these sins. It weighs heavier and greater than it would in other months.

The word Ramadan is derived from the Arabic root word "Ar-Ramadh" which refers to the intensely scorching heat of the sun. Thus, Ramadan is the month wherein the sins of the believers are burned by their righteous deeds. Now, let's move to the most significant question, which is "How can one stop sinning during Ramadan?"

If you intentionally and willingly commit a sin, repent and ask All-Loving Allah, humbly to forgive you. To stop sinning, especially in Ramadan, requires self-discipline, mindfulness and a sincere intention. At the same time, we need to remember that no one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes.

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GAZA: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted Tuesday the Zionist entity's military had killed seven aid workers with a US charity in an air strike in Gaza. World Central Kitchen had already said a "targeted attack" by Zionist forces on Monday had killed the group, which included Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian employees.

AFP TV footage showed the roof of a vehicle emblazoned with the group's logo had been punctured, alongside the mangled wreck of other vehicles. The White House was "heartbroken", US National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on X, stressing that aid workers "must be protected as they deliver aid that is desperately needed".

Zionist strikes continued throughout the territory with the health ministry in Gaza saying 71 people were killed between Monday and Tuesday. The Zi-

onist military on Monday ended a two-week operation around Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa, which left the complex in ruins and killed hundreds.

Netanyahu has promised to push on with the war to destroy Hamas despite nightly street protests at home demanding he step down. He has also faced some pushback from staunch ally the United States. The White House said in a statement Monday it had once again expressed concerns to the Zionist entity about a planned offensive in Gaza's crowded southern city of Rafah, and the Zionist entity had pledged to "take these concerns into account".

The right-wing Zionist leader also moved Monday to ban broadcasts from the Zionist entity by the Qatar-based news channel Al Jazeera, which he labeled a "terrorist channel". The broadcaster, several of whose journalists have been killed and wounded in the war,

called his comments a "dangerous, ludicrous lie".

The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 32,916 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza. A spokesman for Gaza's civil defense agency said 300 people had been killed in and around Shifa hospital. Gaza has been under Zionist blockade since the start of the war, with the United Nations accusing the Zionist entity of preventing humanitarian aid deliveries and warning of "catastrophic" hunger.

US-based WCK has been working to unload food brought to Gaza by sea from Cyprus. The bodies of its staff were taken to a hospital mortuary in the central town of Deir al-Balah, an AFP photographer reported. One of them was laid on a makeshift stretcher, wearing a top with the WCK name and logo.

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GAZA: Members of a Kuwaiti medical delegation are in Gaza to support the healthcare system. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti medics in Gaza to support healthcare system

GAZA: A second Kuwaiti medical delegation entered Gaza on Monday through the Rafah border crossing to support healthcare in Gaza by conducting surgical operations on injured Palestinians. The head of the delegation and deputy general manager of Kuwait Society for Relief Omar Al-Thuwaini told KUNA that the delegation entered Gaza on Sunday and was set to continue its operations for seven straight days.

The main reason for the visit is to "reinforce the broken healthcare system in Gaza", said Thuwaini, pointing to moral and psychological support with 11 medical doctors participating with specialties ranging in surgery, ophthalmology, urology and neurosurgery. He added the delegation carried seven tons of medical supplies to aid the medical team in Gaza.

Thuwaini affirmed that this mission was possible thanks to Kuwait's relentless and ongoing support towards Palestine and its people, hoping that it would succeed in relieving affected Palestinians. The first Kuwaiti medical delegation entered Gaza last month and was the first of its kind, sent by Kuwait Red Crescent Society. — KUNA

comment on Monday's strike in Damascus, which fueled Middle East tensions already inflamed by the Gaza war and violence involving Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Iranian state media said 13 people were killed in the strike in which, according to Tehran's ambassador, Zionist F-35 fighter-jets fired six missiles that levelled the five-storey consular building adjacent to the embassy. The building was reduced to a mountain of rubble by the blasts which blew out windows in nearby buildings and incinerated cars parked on the roadside in a leafy and upscale suburb of the city.

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## Iran vows to punish Zionists for deadly strike on embassy

TEHRAN: Iran warned its archfoe the Zionist entity on Tuesday that it will retaliate for an air strike that killed seven Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals, and destroyed its consular annex building in the Syrian capital. The Zionist entity declined to

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**Public holiday on Election Day**

KUWAIT: Thursday, April 4, will be a public holiday in Kuwait due to the National Assembly elections, the Cabinet announced during its weekly session held at Bayan Palace, calling on voters to elect members of the parliament. — KUNA

**Electoral silence to begin**

KUWAIT: Electoral silence for the 2024 National Assembly elections begins Wednesday, April 3, at noon and ends on Thursday, April 4 (Election Day), the ministry of information said. The electoral silence will be for a period of 24 hours, with programs, interviews, reports, polls and other material related to elections will not be broadcast. Media messages can only encourage citizens to cast their votes and provide information on where to vote. — KUNA

**CSC: Eid holiday on April 9-13**

KUWAIT: The holiday for Eid Al-Fitr will be on April 9-13, the Civil Service Commission announced on Tuesday. It said work at government institutions would be suspended during this period except entities of a specialized nature, which would continue to operate according to their own capacities. — KUNA

**New dates for Gulf Cup in Kuwait**

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football Association announced on Tuesday the Gulf Football Association decided to amend the dates of the Gulf Cup 26 hosted by Kuwait to Dec 21, 2024 to Jan 3, 2025, from the previous dates of Dec 13 to 26. The Gulf Cup will be held in Kuwait for the fifth time. Kuwait also holds the record for the most Gulf Cup titles with 10 wins. — KUNA

## Local

# Zain awards the winners of its third Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge

Over 800 participants of all ages joined the competition's third season



Ahmad Al Majed honors Waleed Al Khashti in recognition of Zain's support.



Hamad Al Musaiibeh joins in awarding the winners.

**KUWAIT:** After 9 thrilling days, Zain awarded the winners of its third Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge that came in strategic partnership with Suffix Events. This year, over 800 participants joined the exciting competition to compete, collect kilometers, and top the leaderboard. The winners were celebrated at Alshaheed Park - Phase I, joined by Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al Musaiibeh, Suffix Chief Operations Officer Ahmad Al Majed, Zain and Suffix teams, and the first place winners in each category.

The competition's third season was a great success, with over 800 participants joining in four different age groups each for males and females: 20 years and below, 20-34 years, 35-49 years, and 50+ years. In addition, the Zain Kids Race was joined by over 280 children, and over 50 participants with special needs joined the Down Syndrome Day race. The challenge ran for 9 consecutive days at Alshaheed Park and offered people of all ages a great opportunity to join by speed-walking or running at their own time and pace. Participants collected distance points based on how many kilometers they covered and

competed to top the leaderboard. Those who wanted extra points joined the special workouts held at the park.

Zain's support to this unique sports initiative for the third year running sprung from the company's strategy to support health and sports programs in the community, especially during the Holy Month. In its past seasons, the Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge was highly successful with thousands of adults and children joining in to promote a healthier, more active lifestyle during the month of fasting.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners,

including Suffix, joined its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign featured a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continued throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year's initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people.

## Media campaign an essential tool in 2024 elections

**KUWAIT:** As the date approaches for the 2024 National Assembly elections on April 4, candidates running for parliament intensified their campaigns through different venues, including the media, essential for those eager to secure a seat in parliament. Media campaigns play an integral role in candidates' bids to reach parliament, and KUNA explored this issue by interviewing academics.

Advertisement-heavy media campaigns tend to be the main medium through which candidates try to reach their constituents and are essential for their chances to reach the National Assembly, professor of anthropology at Kuwait University (KU), Dr. Yaqoub Al-Kanderi, told KUNA. In addition to regular media channels, social media—with their far-reaching influence—were added to the advertisement arsenal of candidates due to their direct connection with the voters, he added.

With all said and done, media campaigns might backfire on candidates if they choose to deliver controversial messages to the masses, causing them to lose their race, he affirmed. Dr. Al-Kanderi stressed that media campaigns, whether online or through other methods, must be balanced and take into consideration issues of importance to eligible voters for the candidates to succeed in their parliamentary quest.

Professor of Psychology at KU, Dr. Hamad Al-Tayyar, touched on the psychological impact of media campaigns on the voters and candidates' chances to win a seat in parliament, noting that there were several factors that contributed to the delivery of a successful campaign. Body language, the tone of voice, as well as verbal and vernacular skills, are some of the skills that candidates must learn to lure voters to them, he affirmed.

He noted that mastering communication and showcasing crowd-connection skills might also attract voters who were still on the fence about whether to vote or not. Nowadays, media have become more far-reaching in their influence on voters, especially with the advent of social media platforms, affirmed Dr. Hussein Ibrahim, a professor of public relations and media at KU.

The message must be clear to voters even with the latest technology at their disposal, said Dr. Ibrahim, adding that intensifying media campaigns and utilizing important communication skills would have a strong influence on how voters cast their ballots come Thursday. At the end of the day, the main reason for the success of a media campaign all boils down to having the right message delivered to candidates, as he pointed out. — KUNA

## Is political advertising in elections truly effective?

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** From street billboards and social media advertisements to public gatherings and personal interactions, every parliamentary election brings with it relentless competitive efforts of candidates trying hard to reach as many voters as possible. However, as election day approaches, a critical question remains: To what extent do these advertising efforts shape voters' behavior and decisions? Surprisingly, research suggests that their direct influence on individuals' voting decisions may be more limited than commonly assumed.



A Kuwaiti casts his votes in this file photo.

Dr. Jassem Al-Qaseer, a mass communications professor at Kuwait University, asserted that political campaigns during elections have proved to have minimal influence on voters' behaviors and preferences. He draws

## Charisma 'crucial in addressing voters'

**KUWAIT:** Experts believe that parliamentary nominees should consider dedicating concern to their body language, their charisma, and their rhetoric to enhance their chances of winning the electorate's minds and hearts. Dr. Khaled Al-Qahs, a media professor at Kuwait University, said in an interview with KUNA that body language entails facial expressions such as grief and joy, anger and surprise, while the hand movement may affirm the rhetoric in addition to various other signals such as salute. As to the eyes, they mirror concern and concentration.

Head movements such as nodding and rejection also emit messages, he said, affirming that body language in general is helpful to send the hopeful message clearly to the audience. Charisma is a synonym for attraction, acceptance, and influence, and these are traits that must be enjoyed by people who deal with public affairs or those who need to invoke confi-

dence and persuade others. As to the media rhetoric during the elections, Dr. Al-Qahs said it has found new realms, such as online messages and podcast interviews.

However, he called on the hopefuls to address their supporters at the electoral headquarters and the diwanias, with emphasis on wide masses ahead of the electoral silence. Dr. Bassam Al-Jassaf, a media figure, said among the body language skills of the candidate are visual communication, restraining sentiments of agitation, standing postures, affirming the necessity of the charisma that manifests self-confidence, leadership's personality, the capability of listening and communicating, sincerity, transparency, competition, inspiration, and a calm voice.

Dr. Leila Shahrour, a former adviser to the minister of information, said the body language accounts for 93 percent of the address component, adding that physical status con-

upon insights from "The People's Choice", a book examining voters' decision-making processes during the 1940 US presidential election.

The book revealed that only 8 percent of voters reported being directly persuaded following exposure to political campaigns. Additionally, it mentioned other factors influencing decision-making, notably word-of-mouth communication within social circles. This includes interactions with family members, friends and individuals within one's social and professional networks, where people turn to their political expertise to form their own opinions.

Dr. Nasser Al-Mujaibel, an assistant professor of media and communication at KU specializing in political campaigns since 2006, pointed out the candidate's prior political experience as another critical influencing factor. According to him, the impact of campaigns often depends on whether the candidate is a former member of parliament or a new deputy. If the candidate has previously served as an MP, their past actions would greatly influence how they are perceived by the public.

Qaseer, on the other hand, observed that in Kuwait, familial or tribal preferences play a more significant role in affecting political decisions, especially due to the voting system where each voter can only cast a single vote for one candidate. He believes that this electoral system reinforces citizens' tendencies to support candidates from their family or tribe. While Qaseer highlighted the significant role of familial or tribal preferences in Kuwait's political landscape, Mujaibel argued for its diminishing influence, particularly among younger voters. He observed that nowadays, young people are increasingly attracted to



Dr. Jassem Al-Qaseer

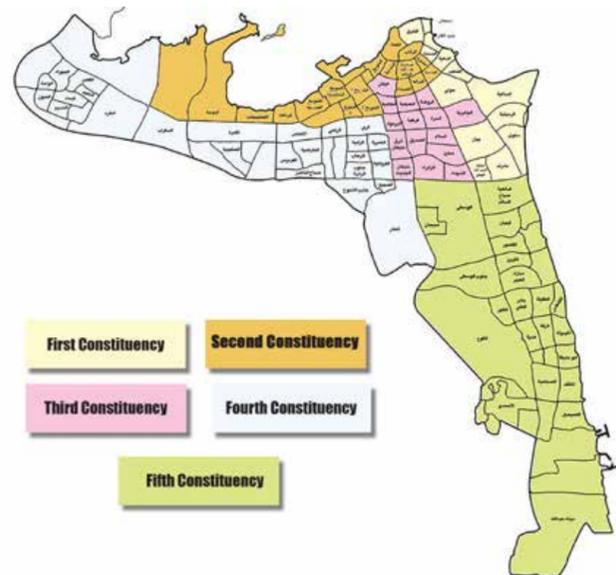


Dr. Nasser Al-Mujaibel

candidates whom they find persuasive, regardless of familial or tribal ties. He referred to this phenomenon as a "free vote", wherein individuals make their voting decisions based on their personal beliefs or views rather than being compelled to adhere to specific party affiliations. Mujaibel emphasized that this trend explains why candidates who do not belong to large tribes or prominent families can still get a significant number of votes.

Utilizing digital media to reach these individuals is crucial, Mujaibel added, highlighting how just a three-minute video of a candidate on social media can hold more influence than a half-hour public candidate statement. He also noted its unique ability to reflect honest and transparent feedback from the public by freely sharing their negative or positive comments about the candidates, a feature that is rarely found in traditional communication tools such as public gatherings (diwanias).

Conversely, Qaseer argued the impact of these media tools primarily often only resonates with individuals who have minimal interest in politics or lack exposure to political expertise. Consequently, targeting them presents an opportunity to effectively shape their opinions and decisions, given their vulnerability to campaign messaging.



stitutes 55 percent and the voice 38 percent. The candidate's voice, way of talking, visual communication, and

physical stature are all basic factors that contribute to forming an impression about him or her. — KUNA

## Kuwait observes electoral silence on Wednesday

**KUWAIT:** Electoral silence will be observed from noon on Wednesday until the end of balloting on Thursday, in line with Article 22 of the election law of April 2024. According to this law, all nominees' campaigns must stop 24 hours before the polling; thus, all advertisements, interviews, promotions, reports, or opinion polling must stop.

The media's role during this period is restricted to encouraging citizens to vote, providing them with information about the ballot centers and the constituencies, and making distinctions between the information and electoral bulletins.

Jassem Kamal, secretary of the Kuwait Journalists Association, said in a statement to KUNA that the electoral silence is perfectly sound and is observed in many countries around the world. It had been tested in Kuwait several times and proved useful for attaining justice for the nominees.

Kamal has indicated that the media is a key tool for the nominees, forming public opinion, transferring the facts to the voters, and promoting the candidates' programs. The electoral silence stems from the media's influence and provides the electorate with the freedom to choose their favorites. The Kuwait Journalists Association, he has added, has been holding contacts with the local press and ordinary citizens to encourage casting the ballot "and choose a new future for Kuwait through a new assembly."

Meanwhile, Dr. Mohammad Al-Tamimi, a law professor at Kuwait University, said in remarks to KUNA that according to the law 61/2007 on the audio-visual media and the law 3/2006 about publications and publishing, the relevant

minister, usually the minister of information, is entitled to prohibit the media broadcasts according to the rules set in the relevant executive laws. Faisal Al-Sewagh, the head of the Kuwait Electronic Media Union, said that electoral silence is observed in countries with democratic histories, indicating the need for it to create adequate atmospheres for the voters and ensure that the media abstain from affecting public opinion.

The electoral silence is aimed at enabling the voters to practice their franchise freely and attaining justice in the nominees' competition. He called on the media to use the silence period to educate the voters and stimulate citi-



Jassem Kamal



Faisal Al-Sewagh



Dr. Mohammad Al-Tamimi

zens to go to the ballot stations to partake in the 2024 polls. He alluded to the latest speech by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, urging the citizens to practice their franchise and contribute to a better future for the country. — KUNA

## Local

# Youth lay out demands from future parliament

## Opinionated and hopeful, young Kuwaitis are ready to vote

By Passant Hisham and Nebal Snan

**KUWAIT:** With each new parliament in Kuwait arises a collective hope for progress, especially among the youth, who yearn for a better tomorrow. Ignoring their concerns overlooks a vital segment of society, which holds the potential to bring the nation forward. When asked about the primary issues they aim for the new parliament to address, young Kuwaitis emphasized challenges such as education, poor road infrastructure and women's rights.

Among the diverse opinions expressed by these young individuals, education stood out as a primary concern for them, as emphasized by Hammad Al-Dousari, who said: "As students progress from elementary school through high school and college, they often pass without truly acquiring any knowledge." He stressed the urgent need for a complete transformation of the entire educational system. Particularly, he called for stricter oversight on academic staff members in universities, preventing them from treating students in an unfair manner, including unjust grading practices and biases based on personal issues.

### More accountability

Addressing such critical issues requires the involvement of parliament members who demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to creating meaningful change. Abdelrahman Al-Thafiri noted. However, he believes that this change should extend beyond that and include improvement of Kuwait's poor road infrastructure.

"Why isn't anyone held responsible for compensating me in case of any damage to my car caused by the deteriorated roads?" he questioned, asserting that MPs must exercise their constitutional authority by holding ministers accountable for their ineffective systems. "I have the right to ride on well-maintained roads, especially considering we reside in one of the wealthiest countries in the world," he added.

Likewise, Khaled Al-Abdulhadi called for constant monitoring of MPs to ensure greater transparency and credibility, especially among members who often make false promises, setting unrealistic expectations for the public. For him, the issue of quality of life is the most prevalent, as he advocated for improvements in current living standards. "It's not just about salary increases or debt relief. What truly matters is access to quality services at reasonable prices," he remarked. A call for more freedom of opinion and expression, especially through communication channels, was demanded by Sara, who chose to disclose only her first name. She also emphasized the necessity of amending audiovisual laws.

### Women's representation

Since the introduction of women's suffrage in 2005, the number of female candidates vying for a seat in the National Assembly has not been signif-



icant, especially given that women make up more than 51 percent of Kuwait's eligible voters. Looking at the past five parliamentary elections, women have not made up more than 8.5 percent of the total number of candidates.

At 5.2 percent, the percentage of female candidates vying for a seat in the 2024 National Assembly has reached its lowest since 2020. For some Kuwaiti youth, the underrepresentation has not gone unnoticed. "Women need to be represented by women who can voice their concerns," said Sara. Eman Al-Shayaa said many female-centric issues that fly under the radar because they require women to advocate for them, such as the segregation between men and women in public places and the rights of children of Kuwaiti women. From Sara's observations, society is "hesitant" to give women a chance due to systemic social inequalities and Kuwait's highly debated one-vote system. A paper on women's electoral participation in Kuwait published in 2021 by a researcher based at the London School of Economics and Political Science has revealed similar findings.

"The issue is entrenched into Kuwait's political and social system. Women can't enter diwanias like men do, for example. So they naturally have less traditional interaction with people when compared to men," said Anwar Al-Rouqi, a Kuwaiti journalist with extensive experience covering Kuwaiti parliamentary elections. Rouqi is referring to the gathering spaces which are integral to Kuwaiti culture where men usually discuss political, economic and social issues. "If we assume the number of women MPs increases by three or even four seats, we can't expect major changes because participation will likely be limited to certain social groups where interaction between men and women is more common."

### 'We don't want them'

The performance of female MPs in the past two parliamentary sessions has been strong enough to encourage women who are considering wading into politics, whether they agree with the MPs' political views or not. There's also no denying that there have been few, but notable, successful candidates coming from conservative backgrounds. One of them is



Kuwait National Assembly

Moudhi Al-Mutairi, said Rouqi, who got more votes from men than women, which is a positive sign that society might be coming around.

Youssef Abu Ghazaleh said encouraging women to run needs to start from an early age. "I don't think women have had enough time to prove themselves," he said. "Destigmatize genders interacting with each other in every facet of their life. You are encouraging people to fear the other gender." Shayaa is for introducing a quota that would guarantee women a certain percentage of seats in parliament.

While the notion of a woman parliamentarian is beginning to become accepted in Kuwait, it is maybe less so in more conservative and tribal sections of society. "A woman's political role is more effective as a voter, especially in our bedouin society," said Seeta Al-Ajmi, a student. "Women can ensure their demands reach lawmakers by voting for the right person. As a society, it's a bit difficult for a woman to get a seat in parliament. So it's better if she saves herself the trouble instead of splitting the vote." Thafiri said he's against women's participation in governance. "We don't want them. This is coming from experience and not just empty talk," he said, referring to infrastructure issues left unresolved by previous female officials.

### Slashed in half

The drop in women representation may also be a reflection of another overall downward trend, says Rouqi. Kuwaitis, both male and female, are increas-

ingly choosing not to run for a National Assembly seat since 2016. At 454, 2016 saw the largest number of candidates in the past five elections, not counting those who were disqualified or who decided to drop out after registration.

In 2024, the number of candidates who initially registered to run for the election before disqualifications was nearly half of that eight years ago, at 252. Rouqi says the drop in candidate numbers is likely nothing to worry about. "It's a sign of political maturity whereby not anyone is running for the election," said Rouqi. With more than 70 candidates in this year's election having been MPs in previous sessions, Rouqi says newcomers may predict they have no chance of winning and choose to wait until the next vote. Rouqi added that people might be discouraged by the political situation over the past few years, which has been more or less stagnant since the 2020 National Assembly election, when the opposition took nearly half of parliament's seats.

Rouqi expects no drastic changes in this year's parliament given the profile of the candidates. But there will likely be stronger opposition to the majority, leading to more confrontation between lawmakers. He predicts the parliamentary term will likely be short and a new election will be called next year. The hope for a "stable parliament" is still alive for Sara. "The previous parliament was very short — seven or eight months. The situation we're in is very difficult," she said.

## Minister inspects medical preparations ahead of elec-

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi checked on the medical preparations at polling station headquarters for the 2024 National Assembly elections. The Ministry said in a press statement on Tuesday that Minister Al-Awadhi was briefed on the necessary preparations for the medical clinics in all electoral committees to keep pace with the elections scheduled on Thursday.

Undersecretary of the Ministry Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and Assistant Undersecretary for Health Care Affairs Dr. Nadia Al-Jumaa accompanied the minister. The minister was given a detailed explanation about the medical preparations of the operations room equipped with all means of communication to follow up on any development during voting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi checks on the medical preparations at polling station headquarters. — KUNA photos

## Voting ensures adequate, good representation

By Khaled Alabdulhadi

**KUWAIT:** Abstention from voting is a method commonly used by people to show disdain or disassociation with the election process; however, voting is a right ensured by the constitution to ensure adequate representation of society. Two days before the elections, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stressed the importance of voting, its necessity and why it is a tool that people should not squander.

He stressed the importance of choosing representatives that represent Kuwaiti citizens and not choosing those who aim at achieving personal interest or fabricating crises or compromising constitutional constants. "Your right choice is your way to build the future of your country and your generations," he said. "Don't betray your vote, and the candidate should speak in what satisfies the Almighty, has well-spoken dialogue which avoids harming of others, inciting sentiments and emotions of voters at the expense of the nation and citizens," he said.

An Amiri decree was issued in February dissolving the National Assembly in accordance with article 107 of the constitution and based on violations by some MPs. Some people have recently become more inclined to abstain from voting by casting an invalid vote or simply not showing up. This is usually viewed as an expression of indifference, either because a previous candidate has let them down, they can't find a candidate worthy of representing them, or they feel that the process isn't benefiting them.

While abstention can be a message, it also has its consequences. The parliament will then only represent adamant voters, while those who abstained will not be represented. Therefore, voting is necessary to achieve a parliament that reflects everyone. HH the Amir stressed the importance of not abstaining from voting. "Whoever boycotts is wasting his constitutional right and has not made their choice in good faith. After that, voters cannot blame anyone for the low outputs, poor performance and lack of achievement. Everyone should not pay attention to advocates of division and strife," HH the Amir said, stressing citizens must stand in one line to protect Kuwait and its people.

Voters should choose a candidate that will benefit society as a whole by ensuring the correct choice is made. Statistics of the elections affairs department of the ministry of interior have shown the total number of male and female citizens who are entitled to vote is 834,733 — 405,948 males and 428,785 females.

## Traditional modes of campaigning remain 'vital'

**KUWAIT:** Amid anticipation and excitement, the upcoming 2024 National Assembly, held during the month of Ramadan, is seen as proving grounds for candidates to showcase their agendas and reach the much-coveted seat at parliament. While election campaigns in current times focus on spreading candidates' ideas and convictions through social media and fast-spreading video content, traditional modes of campaigning remain essential for candidates and voters alike.

Speaking on the issue at KUNA, head of the political science department at Kuwait University (KU), Dr. Haila Al-Mukaimi, said that due to elections being held during the holy month of Ramadan, it would be understandable that voters might feel a bit less energetic as a result of the spiritual and social-gathering nature of the month. However, the academic pointed out that holding meetings with voters directly, despite fasting, remains a key component of the election cycle and a vital means for candidates to connect with voters, she added.

She pointed out that elections in Kuwait garnered attention from countries in the region and elsewhere, touting on this occasion the highly transparent nature of elections in the country. Back to the direct

connection between candidates and voters, Dr. Al-Mukaimi said that by being face-to-face with eligible voters, candidates could directly address their concerns and aspirations without any obstructions or obstacles. On her part, professor of international relations Dr. Masouma Al-Mubarak affirmed that voters were highly interested in engaging with election campaigns, searching for all venues to directly converse with candidates on real-life platforms, whether forums, meetings, or other types of gatherings.

She argued that Ramadan would have a positive impact on the electoral process due to the presence of many eligible voters in the country during the holy month. She noticed that voters were flocking to election headquarters to see their potential candidates and ponder their agenda and messages. Dr. Al-Mubarak called on candidates to avoid quarreling and focus on national unity and service to the people, indicating that the advent of Ramadan, a month of fasting, prayers, and good deeds, might help to heighten people's spirituality of goodness.

Also providing his input, Dr. Hussein Murad, an associated mass communications professor at Kuwait University (KU), stressed the vitality of election headquarters for candidates, saying that social



Dr Masouma Al-Mubarak



Dr Hussein Murad



Dr Ahmad Al-Kanderi

media presence was not enough to lure voters. He indicated that some headquarters have also become places for Taraweeh prayers during the occasion of Ramadan, which highlights the special nature of this election, similar to the one held in 2013.

He said that voters were keen on attending rallies at candidates' headquarters, adding that without them, any election would lose its oomph. Similarly, mass communications and public relations professor at KU, Dr. Ahmad Al-Kanderi, said that the presence of many eligible voters in the headquarters of parliament hopefuls reflected Kuwaitis' deep democratic convictions. Traditional methods of campaigning still remain key in luring voters due to their straightforwardness, and that is a vital component, he said, pointing out that candidates could spice up their campaigns by boosting their social media presence, which is also part of the election lore. — KUNA

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# Arab envoys discuss Zionist genocide, starvation policy

CAIRO: Permanent representatives to the Arab League will hold an extraordinary meeting on Wednesday to discuss actions amidst the Zionist occupation's genocide, policy of starvation, and forced displacement against the Palestinian people. The meeting, at the request of Palestine and to be chaired by Mauritania, would be held in light of the occupation's threats to launch an offensive on the city of Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, which housed over 1.5 Palestinian people, Arab League Assistant Secretary General Hussam Zaki said in a statement Tuesday.

He said the Zionist occupation's refusal to abide by UN Security Council resolutions for a ceasefire and allow entry of humanitarian aid, citing the recent UNSC

resolution 2728, which called for an immediate ceasefire during Ramadan. The Arab representatives will also discuss the Zionist occupation's non-compliance with the International Court of Justice's ruling over the aggression on Gaza. More than 32,800 Palestinians have been killed and 75,300 others injured in Zionist occupation attacks on the Palestinian territory since October 7.

In another development, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi has condemned and denounced the targeting of Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital Damascus. In a statement, the GCC chief underlined the importance of abiding by international law and treaties, including the protection and safety of diplomatic missions. Earlier, several casualties

and injuries occurred after a Zionist missile attack that targeted the Iranian consulate building in the Mezzeh neighborhood of Damascus.

Also, the Arab League on Tuesday condemned the aggression on the Iranian consulate building in Damascus. The aggression is a clear breach of Syria's sovereignty and a new dangerous violation by Zionists of international law, namely the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations on Respecting Diplomatic Headquarters, the Arab organization said in a statement. It warned of the dire consequences of Zionist practices, aimed at expanding the scope of the war in the region and pushing it into chaos. It also called for an immediate halt to the war and the daily crimes perpetrated by Zionists. — KUNA

## Ramadan Tips

### Ramadan: The spiritual significance of fasting

Many question the purpose of Ramadan and fasting, and the reasoning is quite clear in Islam. Ramadan fasting is more than just refraining from consuming food and drink; rather, it is a transformative journey towards attaining Taqwa (God-consciousness). As stated in the Holy Quran, "O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous" (Quran 2:183). This verse emphasizes that fasting is a means of spiritual purification and moral elevation. By refraining from worldly desires, Muslims aim to strengthen their relationship with Allah and increase their awareness of His presence in their lives.

#### Virtues of self-discipline

Fasting instills a sense of self-discipline and control over one's desires, which are essential virtues in Islam. By refraining from food, drink and other physical comforts during daylight hours, Muslims learn to harness their inner strength and resist temptation. This practice of self-discipline extends beyond abstaining from food; it encompasses refraining from negative behaviors such as gossip, anger, and dishonesty, in addition to encouraging self-control too. Through fasting, individuals cultivate a heightened awareness of their actions and strive to align them with the teachings of Islam.

Moreover, fasting creates a profound sense of gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon us by Allah. As we experience hunger and thirst, we become acutely aware of the privileges we often take for granted, such as access to food, clean water, and shelter. The act of fasting reminds us of the struggles and challenges of the less fortunate and encourages us to share our blessings with those in need. In the words of Imam Ali, "Blessed is he whose own faults preoccupy him from noticing the faults of others and whose own hunger preoccupies him from envying the plenty of others."



### Kuwaiti envoy, Iraq official discuss ties

BAGHDAD: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq Tareq Al-Faraj held discussions with Iraqi Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for bilateral relations Ambassador Mohammad Bahr Al-Ulum on Monday regarding bilateral relations. Ambassador Al-Faraj stated to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the discussions revolved around issues of shared interest, and ways to develop bilateral relations to serve the peoples of the two neighboring countries. — KUNA



Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika inaugurates a new Indian consular application center at Jahra.

### Indian Embassy opens consular center in Jahra

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika inaugurated a new Indian consular application center (ICAC) at Jahra, Kuwait on April 1, 2024. The new ICAC will also be managed by embassy's outsourcing partner BLS International. The Jahra ICAC will be the 4th such ICAC in Kuwait. The other three are in Kuwait city, Fahaheel and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, a press release issued by the Indian Embassy said. Starting from April 1, 2024, the consular, passport and visa services will operate at Building No 27, Al-Khalifa Building, 2nd floor, Office 3 & 14, Block No 93, Jahra from Saturday to Thursday (9am to 2pm).

The Jahra ICAC is another step towards faci-

lating Indian visas for Kuwaitis as well as various consular services for Indian nationals including amnesty-related travel documents residing in areas of Jahra and its neighboring areas up to Abdali. The new facility is expected to further streamline the application process, reduce waiting time, and ensure a seamless experience for all applicants. It is part of Indian government's steadfast commitment to make public services more accessible, hassle-free and technology-driven, the release added.

It may be noted that the number of Kuwaiti visitors to India have been increasing over the years. The Embassy issues multiple-entry Indian tourist visas generally within a day to Kuwaiti and third country nationals. In the year 2023, around 10,000 visas were issued by the embassy. For more information and updates on the services offered at the new Consular Application Centre, please visit Embassy's official website (www.indembkwat.gov.in) or website of M/s BLS (www.blsinternational.com/india/kuwait/).

## In my view

### Mohammad Al-Sharekh: Lover of Arabic language



Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

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Our Arabic language is a queen crowned over all languages. If Arabs were not weak and divided — and some even hostile to the language — Arabic speakers would be found everywhere and in all arenas, proud of its pronunciation and the beauty of its meanings. Like any crowned queen, Arabic has keepers who guarantee her noble, prestigious life and guards to keep her out of harm's way. Throughout history, these keepers have worked hard to preserve it and teach people about its origins. This beautiful language has knights of various ranks who defend it and work hard to spread it, making it easily accessible.

However, these knights have faced significant challenges as the Arab nation regressed in front of other nations for various reasons. This regression enabled enemies to besiege the greatest outstanding trait of this nation — its language, the key to the religion chosen by the Lord of creation. The more our opponents control our nation, the more darts are directed at our language. Sometimes they use trickery or power, and sometimes they invest in certain members of the Arab nation or minorities living among us, making them the 'stabbers' of our language and promoters of foreign cultures at the expense of Arabic. Despite these efforts to undermine the Arabic language, it has resisted fiercely, carried in a preserved book no human can hide or misrepresent.

We recently lost one of the knights of our Arabic language, Mohammad Abdulrahman Al-Sharekh. Sharekh, who founded the Sakher company for computer programming in 1982, was among the major defenders of Arabic in front of the army of haters. He realized the world was heading towards computer culture and that the best service for Arabic was for computers to speak it. He introduced Arabic to the computer for the first time in history and received three patents in this field: Light recognition of alphabets, automatic translation from Arabic to English and pronunciation in Arabic. Sharekh, a knight of special rank, deserved the King Faisal International Award for the service of Islam, among eight other major awards. His loss is not like losing a famous person for a simple reason: His impact on the nation will remain as long as the heavens and earth exist. Congratulations to him for this great achievement, as whoever serves the language of the Holy Quran will attain glory.



Kuwait charity launches humanitarian aid for needy groups. — KUNA photos

### Kuwait charity launches humanitarian initiative

KUWAIT: Kuwait-based International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) has launched a fresh humanitarian initiative aiming at extending aid to several needy countries and areas, primarily the Gaza Strip. The endeavor comes to mark the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims often seek to step up their religious and altruistic activities, IICO's Deputy General Manager for Communication Ibrahim Al-Bader said in a press statement on Monday.

It embraces an integrated health center intended to serve 2,000 beneficiaries in Niger, along with five new mosques in Bangladesh, India, and Niger, Al-Bader elaborated. It is also meant to offer humanitarian aid to orphans in Palestine, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan, he said, adding that top priority was given to the population of the Gaza Strip during the holy month in general and the last 10 days in particular, in a bid to ease the anguish of poor families, medics, and orphans.



Kuwaiti medical delegation in Gaza to support the healthcare system.

Meanwhile, a second Kuwaiti medical delegation entered Gaza on Monday through Rafah Crossing Point to support healthcare in Gaza by conducting surgical operations for injured Palestinians. The head of the delegation and deputy general manager of the Kuwait Society for Relief, Omar Al-Thuwaini, stated to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the delegation entered Gaza on Sunday and was set to continue their operations for seven straight days. — KUNA



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Netanyahu vows to ban Al-Jazeera broadcasts

## WHO reports sharp rise in newborn deaths in Gaza

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GAZA: Relatives and friends mourn the death of Saif Abu Taha, a staff member of the US-based aid group World Central Kitchen who was killed by Zionist strikes that hit a convoy of the NGO delivering food aid in Gaza a day earlier, during his funeral in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on April 2, 2024. - AFP

# World powers condemn Zionist air strike on Gaza aid workers

### UK PM 'shocked', US says 'heartbroken and deeply troubled'

PARIS: The United States and Britain led international criticism Tuesday of a deadly Zionist military strike in the Gaza Strip that killed seven charity staff as they unloaded desperately needed aid brought by sea to the war-torn territory.

World Central Kitchen - one of two NGOs spearheading efforts to deliver aid by boat - said a targeted Zionist military strike on Monday killed Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian staff.

Washington, the Zionist entity's main ally, said it was "heartbroken and deeply troubled by the strike". "Humanitarian aid workers must be protected as they deliver aid that is desperately needed," US National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson wrote on X. Benjamin Netanyahu claimed the strike was "unintentional". The Zionist army has vowed to hold

an investigation and promised to "share our findings transparently".

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron - who has been increasingly critical of the Zionist entity's war in Gaza - said the country had "called on the Zionist entity to immediately investigate and provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened". UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "shocked and saddened" after learning that a Briton was among those killed.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese slammed the "completely unacceptable" attack, and called it a "tragedy that should never have occurred". He offered "sincere condolences" to the family of Australian volunteer Lalzawmi "Zomi" Frankcom, who was killed in the strike. "She just wanted to help out through this charity. That says everything about the character

of this young woman," Albanese said.

#### 'Indiscriminate killing'

The founder and leader of World Central Kitchen, celebrity chef Jose Andres, said he was "heartbroken and grieving for their families and friends and our whole WCK family". "The Zionist government needs to stop this indiscriminate killing," he wrote on social media. "It needs to stop restricting humanitarian aid, stop killing civilians and aid workers, and stop using food as a weapon."

The charity said it had coordinated its movements with the Zionist entity's army and was travelling in vehicles branded with its logo. It has paused its operations in Gaza. The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that "despite all the demands to protect ci-

vilians and humanitarian workers, we see new innocent casualties". "I condemn the attack and urge an investigation," he wrote on X.

Warsaw said it had asked the Zionist ambassador for "urgent explanations" about the incident, which killed one Polish citizen, and offered "condolences to the family of our brave volunteer". Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said the country had also opened its own inquiry into the aid worker's death.

Criticism also came from Beijing, which said it was "shocked" by the strike, and from Madrid, where Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called it a "brutal attack that has taken the lives of seven aid workers who were doing nothing but helping". The Zionist entity has prevented the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza since the start of its bombardment on October 7. - AFP



BRUSSELS: Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez arrives to attend a European Council summit at the EU headquarters in Brussels on March 21, 2024. - AFP

## Sanchez wants Spain to recognize Palestine this year: Reports

MADRID: Spain's left-wing government is determined for parliament to recognize Palestine by July this year, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said during a visit to Jordan, Spanish media reported on Tuesday. "We have to think seriously about doing it this semester," Sanchez told a group of Spanish journalists accompanying him on a tour of three Middle East countries, the media reported.

Sanchez had said on March 9 he would propose that parliament vote in favor of this recognition by the end of the current legislature, that is, by mid-2027. Then on March 22, Spain and three other nations - Ireland, Malta and Slovenia - issued a joint statement on the sidelines of a European Union leaders' summit in Brussels saying they were ready to recognize Palestine once the conditions for the setting up of a state were met.

Top-selling daily Spanish newspaper El Pais said Madrid's recognition of Palestinian statehood could happen during the campaign for the European Parliament elections, which in Spain will be held on June 9, or "in the weeks that follow".

The paper said Sanchez, who after Jordan will visit Saudi Arabia and Qatar, wants to "try to convince Arab countries that have not yet recognized the Zionist entity to do so".

Sanchez has repeatedly said the only solution to the Middle East conflict is the recognition of two states. Benjamin Netanyahu, whose governing coalition includes extreme right and ultra-Orthodox parties, has

## Deadly strike on Iran consulate 'crossed a line': Analysts

BEIRUT: A deadly strike by the Zionist entity against Iran's diplomatic mission in Damascus could trigger a spillover of the Gaza war across the region, an escalation Tehran had sought to avoid, analysts said. Monday's strike levelled the consular annex of the Iranian embassy and killed 13 people, including seven members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iranian state media reported. They included two senior commanders of the Guards' Qud Force foreign operations arm, Brigadier Generals Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, Iranian officials said.

Ali Vaez of the International Crisis Group called the attack "a significant escalation". "By targeting an Iranian diplomatic facility, the Zionist entity has crossed a line," he told AFP. After months of bombing Gaza, the Zionist now is now stepping up its operations against Iranian and pro-Iran commanders in Lebanon and Syria, a move observers fear could spiral into all-out war. Iran has denied prior knowledge of Palestinian militant group Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on the Zionist entity. But it is one of Hamas' top supporters and backs a plethora of armed groups that have attacked the Zionist entity in solidarity with Hamas, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has exchanged near-daily fire with the Zionist entity for months.

Although Iran has said it wants to avoid full-scale war, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned Tuesday that "The Zionist entity will be punished" for the Damascus strike, while President Ebrahim Raisi said the raid "will not go unanswered".

#### 'Towards escalation'

Bassam Abu Abdallah, who heads the Damascus Centre for Strategic Research and is close to the Syrian government, said that before Monday, "there were rules of engagement, but now it's an all-out war between the Zionist entity and the resistance axis".

Iran and its supporters use the term resistance axis to refer to its alliance with armed groups around the region which share its resolutely anti-Zionist and anti-American stance. "It is now clear that the trend is towards escalation," Abu Abdallah said, adding: "We could start to see increased attacks against US bases in Syria, Iraq or elsewhere." In late January, pro-Iran groups said they were suspending attacks against US troops in Iraq and Syria to avert a regional escalation, after both Baghdad and Tehran said they opposed the groups' campaign. On Tuesday, Hezbollah warned that the strike on the Iranian consulate "will not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge". -



LARNACA: Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides briefs media on the Gaza aid corridor, during a visit of the EU Parliament President Roberta Metsola at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) near Larnaca's international airport on April 2, 2024. - AFP

## Cyprus to press on with maritime aid despite deadly Gaza strike

LARNACA: Cyprus vowed Tuesday to maintain its Gaza maritime aid corridor despite the killing in a Zionist strike of seven aid workers unloading the humanitarian assistance in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

"The tragic events should not discourage us. We must double down on our efforts to provide more assistance as the needs dramatically escalate", said Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides at an aid coordination center in the port city of Larnaca. Earlier, government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbitis told reporters the deadly strike would not affect the initiative, but that "re-coordination will need to take place" due to security concerns.

The seven workers from the World Central Kitchen (WCK) charity were killed Monday by a targeted Zionist military strike while they were leaving a warehouse having unloaded aid delivered by ship. WCK said it had immediately paused its operations in Gaza. Benjamin Netanyahu admitted an "unintentional" strike and said there would be an investigation. Several countries, including the United States and Britain, condemned the strike.

By far the closest European Union member to the Gaza Strip, at around 360 kilometers (220 miles) to its north, Cyprus had pushed for several months to get the aid corridor underway. The first vessel, organized by the Spanish charity Open Arms and WCK, successfully delivered its cargo to Gaza on March 15 while the second, the Jennifer, arrived on Monday.

Tracking website Vesselfinder.com showed the craft returning to Cyprus on Tuesday. Christodoulides said on Monday that preparations were underway for a third voyage and that Cyprus was coordinating with the United States, which has sent military engineers to build a port in Gaza to facilitate aid deliveries.

Several countries have resorted meanwhile to airdropping aid into largely cut-off northern Gaza, where the United Nations says famine is looming. Aid groups have been critical, however, saying that airdrops and maritime deliveries cannot make up for the lack of aid being delivered overland, which is at a fraction of its pre-war levels according to the UN.

Christodoulides appeared to address those concerns, saying in Larnaca that the corridor was "not a substitute to other routes, namely the all-important land routes and the air drops. It is complementary to them". Speaking alongside Christodoulides, Roberta Metsola, the president of the European Parliament, called for an end to "hostilities" and said: "We must use all resources to get answers, to bring in more relief, and organizations like World Central Kitchen must be protected." - AFP

## International

# WHO reports sharp rise in newborn deaths in Gaza

## 'Many people do not even get to hospital'

GENEVA: Newborn mortality is rising sharply in the Gaza Strip amid the relentless Zionist strikes and siege, with babies being born underweight, the World Health Organization said Tuesday, citing medics on the ground. "From different doctors, particularly in the maternity hospitals, they're reporting that they're seeing a big rise in children born with low birth weight, and just not surviving the neonatal period because they're born too small," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said at a briefing in Geneva.

She said that at Kamal Adwan, the only pediatric hospital in northern Gaza, "at least 15 malnourished children are coming in per day, and the needs are just getting ever more severe".

The WHO is unable to establish precise statistics on child mortality because of the devastation in the Palestinian territory after six months of Zionist military bombardment, with Harris saying many people do not even get to hospital.

She cited a stabilization center set up last week, saying the inpatients were typically children with medical illnesses as well as malnutrition. "If you have got an underlying condition, malnutrition will kill you much more quickly, so they become the most urgent patients," she said.

On Monday, the Zionist army pulled out of Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital after a two-week military operation that left much of the complex in ruins and bodies scattered on the dusty grounds. At least 200 people were killed in the relentless campaign. The hospital was the biggest in the Palestinian territory.

"Al-Shifa Medical Complex is gone forever," its acting director Marwaan Abu Saadah said in a WHO video filmed at the scene. Harris added: "It's no longer able to function in any shape or form as a hospital." "Destroying Al-Shifa means ripping the heart out of the health system," she said, noting that it was a major hospital with 750 beds, 25 operating theatres and 30 intensive care wards. — AFP



GAZA: A relative carries the body of three-week old baby girl Sahar Musleh, who was killed in Zionist bombardment last March. — AFP



Students use umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun as they line up to wait for their classes outside their school in Manila on April 2, 2024. — AFP

## One killed, two injured by 12-year-old Finnish school shooter

HELSINKI: A 12-year-old opened fire Tuesday at a school north of the Finnish capital Helsinki, killing a fellow student and seriously injuring two others before being taken into custody, police said. The Viertola school in Vantaa, Finland's fourth-largest city, has around 800 pupils and 90 staff. Children in grades one to nine, or aged seven to 15, attend the school.

"Today, after 9:00 am, a shooting incident took place at a school... in which a sixth grader, a student of the school, died," Ilkka Koskimaki, chief

of the Eastern Uusimaa police department, told a press conference, adding that two others were "seriously injured".

Police had earlier said that both the suspect and the injured were 12 years old. They have opened an investigation into murder and attempted murder. A witness told the Ilta-lehti newspaper that shots had echoed across the schoolyard.

"At first I didn't understand it was a weapon. Then a terrible scream could be heard and children ran across the yard," the witness said. Images from the scene showed a large number of police officers at the school.

In an update, police said the suspect, who was carrying a gun, had been arrested in Helsinki in a "calm manner". Ilta-lehti published a video filmed from a passing car showing two police officers pin-

## Hundreds of Philippine schools suspend classes over heat danger

MANILA: Hundreds of schools in the Philippines, including dozens in the capital Manila, suspended in-person classes on Tuesday due to dangerous levels of heat, education officials said. The country's heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity.

The index was expected to reach the "danger" level of 42 degrees Celsius in Manila on Tuesday and 43C on Wednesday, with similar levels in a dozen other areas of the country, the state weather forecaster said. The actual highest recorded temperature for the metropolis on Tuesday was 35.7C, below the record of 38.6C reached on May 17, 1915. Local officials across the main island of Luzon, the central islands, and the southern island of Mindanao suspended in-person classes or shortened school hours to avoid the hottest part of the day, education ministry officials said.

The Department of Education was unable to provide an exact number of schools affected. March, April and May are typically the driest months of the year for swathes of the tropical country. This year

conditions have been exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon.

Primary and secondary schools in Quezon, the most populous part of the capital, were ordered to shut while schools in other areas were given the option by local officials to shift to remote learning. Some schools in Manila also reduced class hours. A heat index of 42-51C can cause heat cramps and exhaustion, with heat stroke "probable with continued exposure", the weather forecaster said in an advisory. Heat cramps and heat exhaustion are also possible at 33-41C, according to the forecaster. The orders affected hundreds of schools in the Mindanao provinces of Cotabato, South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat, as well as the cities of Cotabato, General Santos and Koronadal, Zamboanga regional education ministry spokeswoman Rea Halique told AFP.

Five schools in Mindanao's Zamboanga region also shut schools for the day, though local officials in the area did not recommend the suspension of in-person classes in other schools, the ministry said.

"At the Pagadian City Pilot School one (kindergarten) student and two in the elementary school suffered nosebleeds," Zamboanga regional education ministry official Dahlia Paragas told AFP. "All of them are back at home in stable condition and were advised to avoid exposure to the sunlight." Cotabato city experienced the highest heat index in Mindanao, reaching 42C on Monday and Tuesday, the state forecaster reported. — AFP

ning down a child by the side of a road in a residential area. Parents of the students told journalists the shooting took place in a classroom.

### 'Shocking' day

Police had urged the public to stay away from the area and remain indoors. "Do not open the door to strangers," they added in a statement. Shortly after noon, police had begun letting parents who were waiting outside the school inside to see their children, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

Finnish Interior Minister Mari Rantanen acknowledged the day had started in a "shocking way". "I can only imagine the pain and worry that many families are experiencing at the moment," she posted on X.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said he was "deeply shocked" and his thoughts were with the victims,

their relatives and the other students and staff. Finland witnessed two gruesome school shootings in the early 2000s.

In November 2007, an 18-year-old man opened fire at a secondary school in Jokela, around 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Helsinki, killing the headmaster and a nurse along with six students before turning the gun on himself.

A year later, in September 2008, 22-year-old Matti Juhani Saari killed 11 people at a vocational school in the western town of Kauhajoki. Since then, hundreds of schools have received shooting threats, according to an article published in the Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention. The article pointed to mental health problems as the main reason behind the increase. — AFP

## Zionists kill 7 aid workers...

Continued from Page 1

The group's CEO Erin Gore said: "I am heartbroken and appalled that we — World Central Kitchen and the world — lost beautiful lives today because of a targeted attack by the (Zionist army)." The aid group said the team was traveling in a "de-conflicted" area in a convoy of "two armored cars branded with the WCK logo" and another vehicle at the time of the strike. "Despite coordinating movements with the (Zionist army), the convoy was hit as it was leav-

ing the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route," it said.

The Zionist military said it was "conducting a thorough review at the highest levels to understand the circumstances of this tragic incident", adding it had been "working closely with WCK". Spanish charity Open Arms has been working closely with WCK on the aid deliveries from Cyprus, and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez demanded the Zionist entity explain the "brutal" strike. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese condemned the "completely unacceptable" attack. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "shocked and saddened" after learning that a Briton was among those killed. — AFP

will have for sinning.

- Practice self-control: Use this month as an opportunity to develop self-discipline, and control your desires as fasting will help you train your body and mind to resist temptation.

- Community support: Surround yourself with supportive and like-minded individuals who want to get closer to Almighty Allah.

Let Ramadan be the turning point, not just for Ramadan only, but for the whole year and the rest of your life. It may be your last chance. You may not witness the holy month of Ramadan again. Start reading the Holy Quran now. Start from now, even if only a verse a day. Start making your prayers regularly and promise yourself and Allah never to stop. Start at least one consistent good deed and never lag behind in performing it. Start giving charity and intend to pay your zakat this month.

Make a promise to help one person a day and don't forget the amazing rewards you will reap of these good deeds. Majestic Allah needs nothing from His servants. He only wants their obedience. You are the one who will gain. Take the chance now. Don't wait for tomorrow or for 'later on'. Change forever and always ask Almighty Allah, saying, "O Allah grant us the opportunity to witness Ramadan many times."

## Iran vows to punish Zionists for...

Continued from Page 1

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed that the Zionist entity "will be punished at the hands of our brave men. We will make them regret this crime and the other ones." Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi condemned the attack as a "clear violation of international regulations" which "will not go unanswered". "After repeated defeats and failures against the faith and will of the Resistance Front fighters, the Zionist regime has put blind assassinations on its agenda in the struggle to save itself," Raisi said on his office's website.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the strike. "The Secretary-General reaffirms that the principle of the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises and personnel must be respected in all cases in accordance with international law," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The UN Security Council was to discuss the strike later Tuesday at a meeting requested by Syrian ally Russia. Iran's mission to the United Nations warned that the strike could "potentially ignite more conflict involving other nations" and called on the Security Council "to condemn this unjustified criminal act".

Iran said the strike killed seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps members, including two commanders of its Quds Force foreign operations arm. Brigadier Generals Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi. Zahedi, 63, had held a succession of commands in the force in a Guards career spanning more than four decades. State news agency IRNA said the funeral ceremony of the IRGC members will be held on Friday coinciding with the annual Quds Day, which will see Iranian people taking to streets in support of Palestinians and against the Zionist entity.

A monitor of the more than decade-old Syrian conflict, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human

Rights, said the strike killed 14 people, none of them civilians — eight Iranians, one Lebanese and five pro-Iran Syrian fighters. The Zionist entity has long fought a shadow war of assassinations and sabotage against Iran and its armed allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah and other militant groups.

Hamas condemned the Damascus strike, which it described as a "dangerous escalation" in the wider conflict. Iran has also charged that the United States, the Zionist entity's main backer, bore responsibility, even as an unidentified US official quoted by the news site Axios insisted Washington "had no involvement" or advanced knowledge of it.

Iran's Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian said on X that the ministry had summoned a diplomat from the Swiss embassy, which looks after US interests in Iran. "An important message was sent to the American government as the supporter of the Zionist regime," he said in the post. "America must be held accountable."

At the blast site in Damascus, the facade of the Iranian embassy is adorned with a large portrait of Qasem Soleimani, a veteran Quds Force chief who was killed in a US drone strike just outside Baghdad airport in Jan 2020. Iran's allies voiced support for its position. "China condemns the attack," foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, adding "the security of diplomatic institutions cannot be violated, and Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity should be respected".

Iraq's foreign ministry condemned the attack as a "flagrant violation of international law" and warned of "more chaos and instability" in the region. Lebanon's Hezbollah group warned the Zionist entity would pay for killing Guards commanders, saying "this crime will not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge".

Russia blamed the Zionist air force for the "unacceptable attack against the Iranian consular mission in Syria". EU spokesman Peter Stano said that "in this highly tense regional situation, it is really of utmost importance to show restraint because the further escalation in the region is in no one's interests". — AFP

## Don't just activate the pause button...

Continued from Page 1

The key is to be sincere in our efforts to improve, to seek forgiveness when we falter and to strive to do better each day.

### Here are some steps we can follow:

- Make dua continuously and ask Allah (SWT) for guidance, strength and protection against sinning.
- Seek forgiveness: If you commit a sin, seek forgiveness from Allah (SWT) immediately, through sincere repentance, and make a firm commitment not to repeat it.
- Increase your awareness: Be conscious of your actions, thoughts and words and remember that Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection and self-improvement — among others.
- Engage in good deeds: Fill your time with acts of worship such as praying, reading the Glorious Quran, giving charity and helping others. The more you engage yourself in positive activities, the less time you

## International

# Netanyahu vows to ban Al-Jazeera broadcasts

## US says move would be 'concerning, if true'

**JERUSALEM:** Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Monday to use a fresh national security law passed by parliament to ban news channel Al-Jazeera from broadcasting in the country. The law, passed on Monday by 70 votes to 10, grants top ministers the power to ban broadcasts by foreign channels deemed a national security threat and to shut their offices.

Netanyahu was quick to single out Qatar-based channel Al-Jazeera. "The terrorist channel Al-Jazeera will no longer broadcast from the Zionist entity. I intend to act immediately in accordance with the new law to stop the channel's activities," Netanyahu said on X. The broadcaster slammed the ban as "part of a series of systematic Zionist attacks to silence Al-Jazeera", including the killing of one of its most prominent journalists in the region while covering an Zionist raid in May 2022.

In a statement, the network said Netanyahu had launched a "frantic" and "disgraceful" campaign of accusations against the network, vowing to continue its "bold" coverage of the war. Two network correspondents have been killed during the conflict and the broadcaster's office in the besieged Palestinian territory has been bombed. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said the law "contributes to a climate of self-censorship and hostility toward the press, a trend that has escalated since the Zionist entity-Gaza war began".

At least 95 journalists and media workers have been killed since the Zionist bombings on October 7, according to the group, marking "the deadliest period

for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992".

In January, the Zionist entity said an Al-Jazeera staff journalist and a freelancer killed in an air strike in Gaza were "terror operatives". The following month, it accused another journalist with the channel who was wounded in a separate strike of being a "deputy company commander" with Hamas.

Al-Jazeera has fiercely denied the Zionists' allegations and accused it of systematically targeting Al-Jazeera employees in the Gaza Strip. Hamas said in a statement that the ban showed that the Zionist entity "desperately seeks to obscure the truth of its heinous crimes". White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said "if it is true, a move like this is concerning".

### 'Independent'

Broadcasting in both English and Arabic, Al-Jazeera bills itself as the "first independent news channel in the Arab world". Launched in Doha in 1996, the network says it has more than 70 bureaus around the globe, with 3,000 employees and an audience in 430 million homes. Qatar, which funds Al-Jazeera, also serves as a base for Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

Tensions between the Zionist entity and Al-Jazeera have only grown since October 7. Al-Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael al-Dahdouh, was wounded in a Zionist military strike in December that killed the network's cameraman. His wife, two of their children and a grandson were killed in the October bombardment of central Gaza's Nuseirat refugee camp. His eldest son was the Al-Jazeera staff journalist killed in January



**GAZA CITY:** Al-Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Al-Dahdouh prays during the funeral of his son Hamza Wael Dahdouh, a journalist with the Al-Jazeera television network, who was killed in a Zionist air strike in Rafah in the Gaza Strip on January 7, 2024. — AFP

## NATO at 75 is stronger, but also under threat

**BRUSSELS:** The NATO military alliance marks its 75th anniversary on Thursday, reinvigorated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine - but menaced by the growing threat from Moscow and the specter of Donald Trump. In 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron slammed the US-led alliance - set up after World War II to face off against the Soviet Union - as suffering from a "brain death".

Now, four-and-a-half years later, the alliance has grown to 32 members with the addition of Sweden and Finland after what Macron described as the "electroshock" of Russia's all-out assault in 2022. In response, NATO has ramped up troop numbers on its eastern flank and put in place new plans to deal with any Russian attack.

"NATO has been re-energized after the invasion of Ukraine," said James Black, assistant defense and security director at RAND Corporation, a US think tank. "In two years NATO has grown bigger, with more ambition in the scope of its activities, more forces in eastern Europe."

The refocus on its old nemesis Moscow has given the alliance a clear sense of purpose after some questioned whether it was still needed at the end of the Cold War. That process started back in 2014 when Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine - but it kicked up several gears with 2022's full-scale invasion.

Just six months before Russia piled its forces into Ukraine, NATO was still grappling with its disastrous US-led withdrawal from Afghanistan that allowed the Taliban to sweep to power. Since the start of the war in Ukraine - which is pushing to one day join NATO - its members have sent weaponry worth tens of billions of dollars to Kyiv. But the alliance has carefully avoided getting dragged into a direct conflict with Russia that risks turning nuclear.

With Moscow's forces now gaining the upper hand on the battlefield and Western weapons deliveries to Kyiv dwindling, there are fears NATO countries could be next in Russia's sights if the Kremlin manages to grind out a win in

## Donald Trump posts \$175 million bond in civil fraud case

**NEW YORK:** Embattled former US president Donald Trump posted a \$175 million bond in his New York civil fraud case Monday, a court document showed, avoiding asset seizures while his case winds through the appeals process.

Last week, a New York appeals court cut a \$454 million bond payment he was originally required to make, reducing the sum to \$175 million and giving him 10 days to pay a bond in that amount. The nearly half billion sum he originally owed had raised the possibility that New York authorities would move to seize Trump assets if he could not pay, but the reduction - and his finding a company to put up the bond, as announced Monday - has given him breathing room.

"I greatly respect the decision of the appellate division and I will post \$175 million in cash and bonds or security or whatever is necessary very quickly, within the 10 days," Trump said at the time. The lifeline came from a California outfit called Knight Specialty Insurance Company, which announced the bond in a document released by the court Monday.

The 77-year-old real estate magnate, who has once again clinched the Republican nomination, received the fine after Judge Arthur Engoron found him and his two adult sons guilty in a non-jury trial,



**BERLIN:** People hold a banner reading "NATO out - out of the NATO" as they participate in the Easter march peace demonstration along the Karl-Marx-Street in Berlin, on March 30, 2024.

Ukraine. "If aid decreases and Ukraine is under pressure to negotiate and accept a bad peace, that would increase the danger of an aggressive Russia," said Black. "That's why it is essential to support Ukraine now. It's an investment for NATO tomorrow."

### Trump time-bomb?

But Russian leader Vladimir Putin is not the only threat looming over NATO. Last month former US president Trump rocked allies by saying he would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to any NATO country not meeting its financial obligations.

The comments from the volatile Republican candidate in this year's US election unleashed a political firestorm as they plunged into doubt Washington's commitment to allies should Trump beat incumbent Joe Biden in November. "The real problem with Trump is his unpredictability," said Camille Grand, a former senior NATO official and current fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank.

ruling that they and his family company lied about the value of assets, deceiving banks and insurers. They were accused of having inflated the valuation of properties such as Trump Tower and a building at 40 Wall Street in New York by billions of dollars to obtain more favorable bank loans and insurance terms. Engoron's decision resulted in a \$454 million judgment against Trump although the ex-president is appealing the order to make him pay it.

Trump is in prosecutors' crosshairs for a series of alleged crimes, ranging from falsifying business records in a hush money case to trying to overturn the 2020 election, when he became the first president in modern US history to refuse to concede and stoked a mob of supporters to march on Congress.

### Attacking family members

On Monday the New York judge presiding over Trump's trial for allegedly making pre-election hush money payments to a porn star expanded a gag order against him to include the family of those involved in the case.

The move comes after the Republican presidential candidate lashed out at Judge Juan Merchan and his daughter in a series of posts on Truth Social. "This pattern of attacking family members of presiding jurists and attorneys assigned to his cases serves no legitimate purpose," Merchan wrote. "It merely injects fear in those assigned or called to participate in the proceedings, that not only they, but their family members as well, are 'fair game' for defendant's vitriol."

Trump faces charges of falsifying business records for payments made by his lawyer Michael Cohen on the eve of the 2016 presidential election to

"The withdrawal of the US from NATO is not even necessary. All it takes is a tweet or a statement like: not a single American soldier will die for an ally like Lithuania."

In a pre-emptive move, NATO has showcased the steep increase in countries meeting their target of spending two percent of GDP on defense, up to an expected 20 nations this year from just three in 2014.

Diplomats at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels remain sanguine about Trump's prospective return having come out of his first term with NATO in better shape. They say one way to convince the United States that NATO remains relevant is to step up the attention it pays to China, a key concern for Washington.

But, despite increased European spending on defense, many believe that NATO would not work without the might of the United States. "If the US backs out of this then we can't manage it," said one European diplomat, on condition of anonymity. "Europe is stepping up the pace but it will be some time before it could ever come close."



**NEW YORK:** Former US President Donald Trump arrives at 40 Wall Street in New York City on March 25, 2024. — AFP

porn star Stormy Daniels to make sure she did not publicize a sexual encounter.

The case will kick off on April 15 and marks the start of the first ever criminal trial of a former president. Asked by reporters if he would take the witness stand, Trump has said he "would have no problem testifying." Trump now has four criminal indictments to his name and faces 88 felony counts for a wide variety of alleged criminality. — AFP

## Malaysia hunts for more suspects after arresting Zionist

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's security forces have launched a manhunt for more suspects after arresting a Zionist man caught with six handguns and 200 bullets, police said Tuesday. "We are looking for more than two people and it includes both locals and foreigners," police inspector-general Razarudin Husain told reporters.

The Zionist man, identified by police as Shalom Avitan, was arrested on March 27 at a hotel in the capital Kuala Lumpur following a tip-off. Police said Avitan arrived from the United Arab Emirates on March 12 with a French travel document.

After his arrest, he told authorities he had come to Malaysia to look for another Zionist due to a family dispute. Some media reports have claimed he was connected to a crime syndicate. "Police are investigating all angles including whether he is a spy. We want to know his motive of coming to Malaysia and having six handguns," Razarudin said, adding that security has been bolstered for the country's leaders.

The guns and bullets were bought from an unemployed Malaysian couple who obtained them from neighboring Thailand, according to Razarudin. The couple and another Malaysian have been arrested.

Muslim-majority Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with the Zionist entity and has long supported Palestinian statehood. There are about 600 Palestinian refugees in the country, according to the UN refugee agency. In 2018, a Palestinian scientist was shot dead by the Zionist entity's Mossad spy agency as he walked to a Kuala Lumpur mosque for dawn prayers. — AFP

## Venezuela releases YouTube influencer

**CARACAS:** A popular Venezuelan YouTube influencer who was arrested on suspicion of terrorism has been released, the government said Monday. Police arrested the US-based video creator - whose full name is Oscar Alejandro Perez Martinez but who goes by Oscar Alejandro - at Caracas airport on Sunday as he was about to travel to Canaima, the national park that is home to Angel Falls, the world's tallest waterfall.

He was released on condition he make himself available to prosecutors and the courts if they summon him, Attorney General Tarek William Saab said on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. The family of Perez Martinez said he had been accused of "activities related to terrorism."

Saab said the influencer was arrested over a video he published on social media which, the attorney general said, shows a "financial building" and "urges that it be blown up with explosives." He was referring to a video in which Perez Martinez shows part of a building housing computer servers that are used by Venezuela's banks.

Narrating the video, he says: "Get a load of this: if a bomb were thrown at this building, the whole national banking system would collapse." Following his release, Perez Martinez, who has nearly two million subscribers on YouTube and more than 580,000 followers on Instagram, posted a video describing his arrest as the "worst 32 hours" of his life.

"I told the judge that I deeply love my country and anything I said on my social networks was taken out of context... because I would be incapable of issuing a call that would affect my beloved people of my country and disturb public order," he said. "In no way did I want to call for terror," he said. His videos document his visits to tourist sites around the world and his interactions with locals. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2024



TUNIS: An employee serves pastry to a customer at a bakery in Tunis during Ramadan on March 29, 2024, amid a shortage of sugar supplies in the country. — AFP photos

# Sugar shortage darkens Tunisian Eid festivities

## Soaring inflation denting Tunisians' purchasing power

**TUNIS:** In downtown Tunis, dozens of customers stand in a long queue snaking out of a supermarket to buy sugar, essential for the end of Ramadan celebrations eight days away. The key ingredient for traditional sweets served to mark the end of the Muslim holy month is now being rationed to one to two kilograms per customer per week. "I never thought that one day we would form a queue in Tunisia to buy sugar," said Lamia Bouraoui, 58. Like other basic foodstuffs in Tunisia, sugar is subsidized by the state.

But the dearth of funds in the North African country's public coffers has made it and other culinary essentials like flour and semolina scarce since late 2022. For the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadan, families throughout North Africa make copious amounts of sweets and pastries that often last for days.

Without enough sugar, "we are deprived this year of this pleasure," added Bouraoui. Some, like Sami, 40, queue for sugar accompanied by family members to increase the rations his family can enjoy.

"One day we queue for flour, another for semolina and another for sugar," he said. The shortage has also dealt a blow to bakeries. "We rely on sugar in everything we do," Chokri Bouajila, a bakery worker in Tunis, told AFP. "If we have sugar, we can work, otherwise we can't do anything." Bouajila, who specializes in Tunisian traditional sweets, said customers have been buying less and less of his pastries.

Over the past few years, Tunisians have seen their purchasing power greatly diminish thanks to inflation, a recession and rising unemployment. The country of 12 million is grappling with debt worth about 80 percent

of its entire economic output, and inflation averaging between eight to 10 percent a year. A third of its population is estimated to be living under the poverty line.

At the shopping centre, the queue only gets longer. "I've been here for the past 35 minutes," said 40-year-old Hassna, another customer waiting in line for sugar. "Why are we going through all this? How did we get here?" "Let us thank God", a man standing nearby told her, "we are in a better situation than our brothers in Gaza who are dying of hunger". Nonetheless, others hope to make the best of the country's latest challenge. Nayla, a shopper making her way around the mall, said she would rather change her habits than get in line for sugar, pointing out that it was hardly the healthiest ingredient. "Bitter coffee doesn't bother me anymore," she said. —AFP



TUNIS: Employees make sweets at a bakery in Tunis during the holy fasting month of Ramadan amid a shortage of sugar supplies in the country.

## Will Musk help Trump with cash, not just tweets?

**WASHINGTON:** Elon Musk, one of the world's richest people, says he won't directly back Joe Biden or Donald Trump in the US election — but one look at his X feed makes clear his heart is with the Republican. Trump, meanwhile, needs cash — burdened with millions of dollars in legal troubles, he is also gearing up to fight what will be the most expensive election in US history.

So could Musk ride to Trump's rescue? In a recent interview with former CNN anchor Don Lemon, the owner of X, formerly Twitter, said he was "leaning away" from Biden, but maintained that it was "unlikely" he would contribute to any campaign. If he chose to back a candidate, "I will provide a very detailed explanation of why I am endorsing one or the other." For close Musk watchers, however, this seemed to edge away from a firm pledge days earlier to stay above the fray.

It came as Trump is picking up the phone to call multi-billionaires, hoping they will open their checkbooks and come to his rescue, according to The Washington Post. Cold-calling those richer than him is not something Trump enjoys, but the former president is trailing Biden badly in fundraising and the campaign has still eight months to go.

Two of the world's most public, and controversial, figures, Trump and Musk have not always seen eye to eye. Trump, for one, is not a believer in electric cars such as those that Musk, who is also chief at Tesla, has championed — he has ridiculed them for being inconvenient and dependent on government subsidies. During his 2016-2020 presidency, Musk kept his distance — though that was before his public tilt to the far right.

Musk also flirted with Trump alternatives in the Republican primary, expressing support for Florida governor Ron DeSantis and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy before they flamed out. Observers agree that Trump has remained quiet on Musk's transgressions in hope for his money. The Washington Post revealed that Musk attended a breakfast for billionaires in Florida last month where the former president pitched a group of donors.

That provoked swift speculation — but Musk said "it was just breakfast," and that nothing more came out of it. If Musk wanted to help Trump more directly, he could hand over limitless cash anonymously, according to US election laws. Called "dark money" by its critics, Musk could bankroll a candidate incognito via specially-created



NATIONAL HARBOR, US: Former US President and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump attends the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) meeting in National Harbor, Maryland. — AFP

ated nonprofits called Super PACs.

"These groups can run ads that literally say, 'vote for Trump'" without any required disclosure on the source of the money behind them, said Shanna Ports, senior legal counsel at the Campaign Legal Center. Another avenue is to contribute after the fact: Musk could help erase Trump's debts after the election, and thereby avoid filing the current White House occupant.

A rumor circulated in recent weeks that Trump was also pitching Musk to buy his social media platform Truth Social, and combine it with X. Truth Social's parent company went public last week, with shares initially soaring on Wall Street. That meant Trump, who has nearly 80 million shares in the venture, has holdings now estimated in the billions, meaning he may be less desperate for cash. But that wealth is on paper only, and financial experts warn that the mega-valuation could vanish if Trump ever tries to sell his shares. Money aside, Musk's political inclinations give Trump a clear boost.

His presence on social media is often rife with unfounded conspiracy theories, disinformation and right-wing talking points that align with Trump, especially on immigration. They also take place on a platform he owns — where he has free rein to promote (or demote) certain content. The US Federal Election Committee has received complaints in the past when platforms were perceived as biased, though it never acted on them. "Those combined create a combustible moment for us where the experience on Twitter (X) is in the hands of a haphazard erratic billionaire who gets bored and uses it to promote his own views," said Nora Benavidez, senior counsel at the watchdog Free Press. Donations or not, "Musk's influence is incredibly powerful," she added. —AFP

## Gold hits record peak, Europe stocks wobble

**LONDON:** Gold prices nailed another historic peak Tuesday over the growing prospect of interest rate cuts later this year, while European equity markets wobbled as traders returned following the long Easter holiday weekend. The haven precious metal advanced as high as \$2,266.85 per ounce in morning London deals to extend its blistering record-breaking run, driven also by geopolitical tensions in Europe and the Middle East.

Oil extended Monday's gains as traders fretted also over supplies and Zionist entity's war against Hamas in Gaza. Gold is "pushing sharply higher as we move within two months of the expected June kick-off for European Central Bank, Bank of England, and Federal Reserve easing", said Scope Markets analyst Joshua Mahony. Many of the world's major central banks are tilting toward cutting interest rates as inflationary pressures subside somewhat. City Index analyst Matthew Weller noted that the price of gold tends to move inversely with interest rates.

"When interest rates fall, gold becomes relatively more attractive compared with fixed income assets such as bonds, which offer weaker returns in a lower interest rate environment," noted Weller.

In equities trading, London and Paris climbed but Frankfurt lapsed into negative territory in subdued deals following the Easter shutdown. All three main stock markets were closed on Friday and Monday for the long holiday weekend. In Asia, Hong Kong stocks rallied as Asian traders also returned from an extended weekend break to forecast-beating Chinese factory data that lifted hopes for the world's number-two economy, though other Asian markets were mixed.

A stronger-than-expected reading on US manufacturing and prices paid kept sentiment in check and sparked questions about the Fed's timeline for cutting interest rates. Focus is now turning to the release of US jobs figures at the end of the week, which could have a bearing on the central bank's decision-making in light of a recent batch of above-par inflation readings.

Hong Kong's stock market was the star performer, piling on more than two percent on the first day of trading since Thursday as investors cheered data showing China's manufacturing grew more than forecast last month. Wall Street ended Monday mixed after the Institute for Supply Management's gauge of factory activity showed expansion for the first time in March, after 16 straight months of contraction.—AFP



NEW YORK: The Fearless Girl bronze sculpture by Kristen Visbal stands in front of banners of the newly-formed and independent General Electric (GE) companies at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on April 2, 2024. — AFP

## Business

# Japan unveils \$3.9bn in subsidies for next-generation chip venture

## Rapidus seeks to become a big player in chip sector again

**TOKYO:** Japan announced up to \$3.9 billion in fresh subsidies Tuesday for next-generation semiconductor venture Rapidus, as it seeks to become a big player in the chip sector again. Motivated by geopolitical concerns surrounding Taiwan, Japan is vying with the United States and Europe to attract chipmakers with massive subsidies ahead of a predicted revolution in artificial intelligence. Rapidus involves a host of Japanese firms including Sony and Toyota, and is collaborating with US giant IBM with the aim of mass-producing two-nanometer logic chips in Japan from 2027.

The world's biggest chipmakers, including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), are racing to reach full production for their 2nm-process chips, which will be installed in everything from smartphones to AI hardware. "The Rapidus project is extremely important (as it concerns) state-of-the-art semiconductors that can influence the competitiveness of Japan's industry as a whole," Japanese economy ministry official Hidemichi Shimizu told reporters.

Tokyo has already said it is making up to four trillion yen (\$26.4 billion) in state sweeteners available to help triple the sales of domestically produced chips to more than 15 trillion yen by 2030.

Rapidus, which began building its facility in the Hokkaido region in September, had already secured 330 billion yen in public money in addition to the 590 billion yen announced on Tuesday.

Tokyo is hoping to bring back the 1980s glory days

when Japanese firms such as Toshiba and NEC dominated the microchip market. Competition from South Korea and Taiwan saw Japan's global market share slump from more than 50 percent to around 10 percent.

In February, chip behemoth TSMC opened a new \$8.6 billion factory on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu. The Japanese government pledged to pay more than 40 percent of the costs for the facility. Lured by more Japanese government support, TSMC has announced a second facility, which will make more advanced chips, and is reportedly eyeing a third and possibly a fourth.

Others getting state funds include Japan's Kioxia and Micron of the United States. TSMC's new facility is also part of a push by the firm to diversify production away from Taiwan. China claims the self-ruled island as its own territory and has not ruled out taking it by force.

TSMC is building a second factory in the US state of Arizona and plans another in Germany, its first in Europe. But despite the US government offering subsidies of \$52.7 billion for the sector, the Arizona facility has been delayed and has seen disputes with unions.

The new TSMC plant in Japan took a relatively short 22 months to build, earning praise from the firm's founder Morris Chang, 92, who made a rare overseas trip to open the plant. However, there are concerns about whether Japan, whose population is the world's second oldest and is shrinking, will have enough workers. — AFP



**TOKYO:** Rapidus Corporation President Atsuyoshi Koike speaks during a press conference in Tokyo on April 2, 2024. — AFP



**BELFORT, France:** The logo of US giant General Electric is pictured on the Belfort plant, eastern France. — AFP photos



**WASHINGTON:** CEO of General Electric (GE) Larry Culp speaks at the Semafor World Economic Summit in this April 12, 2023 file picture in Washington, DC.

## Swan song for GE as it completes demerger

**NEW YORK:** The US conglomerate General Electric, co-founded more than 130 years ago by Thomas Edison, is opening a new chapter in its history on Tuesday: its break-up into three independent entities which will then concentrate on their disparate core businesses. The group announced its "spin-off" project in November 2021, which was to be carried out in several stages.

An initial split took place in January 2023 with the creation of GE HealthCare, bringing together all the health care activities. The official finalization of the separation comes Tuesday, with General Electric disappearing in favor of GE Vernova, dealing with energy activities, and GE Aerospace, the new name of the late GE. They will be listed in New York, one on Nasdaq and two on the NYSE.

There will be no holding company, and the three firms will publish their results independently of one another. "As independently run companies, the businesses will be better positioned to deliver long-term growth and create value for customers, investors and employees," General Electric explained in 2021 when it announced the demerger.

Among the "many reasons" for the spin-offs were a desire to simplify the company by getting rid of non-core activities and improving performance by withdrawing from low-growth

or low-profitability sectors, Neil Saunders of GlobalData told AFP.

"Within this there is usually always a value play that either bolsters the share price or creates more value for investors and owners," he said. "Managing multiple divisions across disparate areas is harder for a board of directors," he continued, adding: "It is also harder in terms of communicating vision and strategy to investors."

The conglomerate 3M — which manufactures scotch tape and post-it notes, among other things — has also taken the route of General Electric's demerger: In July 2022, it announced the separation of its health-related activities. The new company, named Solventum, began trading on the NYSE on Monday.

"This is an important day for 3M and Solventum," 3M chief executive Mike Roman said in a statement.

"Both companies are positioned to pursue their respective growth and tailored capital allocation plans," he added. Like GE, which distributed all the shares in GE Vernova to the conglomerate's shareholders, 3M distributed all the shares in the new company to its shareholders.

Both firms gave one share in the "child company" for every four shares held in the "parent company."

However, the parent company can still retain a stake, usually with the intention of monetizing it at a later date. This is what General Electric did with GE HealthCare, in which it retained a 19.9 percent stake. However, its spinoff GE Aerospace now holds just 6.7 percent of the company, according to a spokeswoman for the group.

"It won't be GE Aerospace's intent to hold this in perpetuity," she told AFP. According to McK-

insey, an ancillary business that has become independent can develop further by doing business with companies that are competitors of its former "parent company." Other big names on Wall Street have also chosen in recent years to spin off certain activities. For example, the giant Johnson & Johnson has retained its business-to-business activities and created the listed Kenvue for its consumer products.

And in June 2021, the breakfast behemoth Kellogg announced its intention to split into three companies, but in the end opted for just two: WK Kellogg for cereals, and Kellanova for snacks, which came into being in October 2023. "Kellogg's is a good case in point with the company splitting off its low-growth cereals business from the very fast-growing snacks business," said Saunders from GlobalData. "But it's not without its disadvantages."

These include the loss of economies of scale resulting from the sharing of certain structural functions like accounting and human resources, or a size effect, as is the case in health insurance. According to CNBC, some thirty-six spin-offs are planned worldwide by 2024. On March 19, British hygiene and food giant Unilever announced its intention to spin off its ice cream businesses — including Ben & Jerry's and Magnum — following disappointing sales in 2023. "A demerger of Ice Cream is the most likely separation route," the company said at the time, adding it was seeking above all to "maximize returns for shareholders."

In Unilever's case, the aim is simplification, Neil Saunders said, because ice cream operates on "a very different operating model" from Unilever's other products. — AFP

## Clean hydrogen a key part of future energy system: WB

**WASHINGTON, DC:** Clean hydrogen is widely seen as a key component of the global energy transition, notably for its potential to decarbonize hard-to-abate sectors, such as heavy industry (cement, steel, and chemicals), and heavy-duty transport (trucking, shipping, and aviation).

A global hydrogen economy will change the geopolitics of energy and could become an engine for sustainable economic growth in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). Several EMDCs are well positioned to become first movers in the development of this new value chain, both for domestic consumption and for export. Many countries have already issued strategies and roadmaps to operationalize their ambitions, a report prepared by the World Bank said.

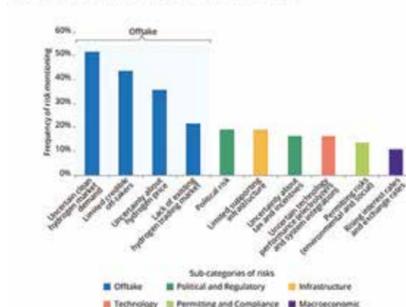
As a next step, well-aligned policies adapted to those strategies are necessary to leverage private financing and mitigate the risks of first movers' investments. The cost of clean hydrogen is a major sticking point in its widespread adoption and deployment. While most attention to date has focused on innovation strategies to lower technology costs, financing costs have received less attention. This report analyzes the importance of the cost of financing, identi-

fies the project risks that drive up such financing cost, and proposes risk-mitigation measures. The report describes how governments can support deployment by reducing the costs of both technology and financing. Successful projects in the coming years will typically require a combination of strong sponsors, robust regulation, long-term offtake arrangements, and financial support, the report said.

Governments have a key role to play in this early phase. Hydrogen policies on both the supply side and the demand side must be well integrated for the greatest effect and efficiency. A careful selection of early hydrogen projects can reduce the need for government financing. Clean Hydrogen Production Must Grow Twenty-Fold by 2030 Realizing hydrogen's potential means first replacing today's fossil fuel-based hydrogen production with a cleaner variety.

To meet the 2050 climate goals, today's levels of clean hydrogen production must increase 20-fold through 2030. Today, less than 3 "Clean hydrogen" includes hydrogen produced from fossil fuels coupled with carbon dioxide capture and storage (combustion based) or carbon storage (pyrolysis based). These are also known as low carbon hydrogen or "blue hydrogen." Hydrogen produced from water electrolysis using renewable electricity or from biomass is known as renewable hydrogen or "green hydrogen." "Conventional hydrogen" refers to fossil fuel-based production without carbon dioxide capture and storage.

Top 10 Identified Risks for Clean Hydrogen Projects in EMDCs



newables while the rest would be of the low carbon variety. Clean hydrogen today is more expensive than conventional hydrogen produced from fossil fuels.

This cost gap is the main factor why clean hydrogen projects are often viewed as unviable. Rule of thumb cost estimates for best-in-class projects with optimistic assumptions in favorable locations is \$1/kilogram (kg) to produce conventional hydrogen, \$2/kg for low carbon hydrogen, and \$3/kg for renewable (green) hydrogen, respectively, though clean hydrogen (hydrogen from fossil fuels with carbon capture/storage) can already compete under certain favorable circumstances. Costs vary widely, however, especially for renewable hydrogen. Some EMDCs can be among the lowest-cost producers of clean hydrogen worldwide owing to their favorable renewables resource endowment. Moreover, their resource potential is very significant.

## GCC markets come under pressure

**DUBAI:** The GCC stock markets were under some pressure and saw mixed performances. Geopolitical tensions, oil price volatility, and monetary policy expectations could continue to affect sentiment.

The Saudi stock market experienced some volatility but stabilized around its lowest level since early March following a period of correction. Leading stocks displayed mixed performance, with Aramco on the downside along with STC and Riyad Bank. However, the Saudi stock market could see a potential for a rebound, supported by the gains in oil prices and solid market fundamentals.

The Dubai stock market was seeing some volatility after a small rebound and could remain exposed to some risks and could find some resistance near its previous high. The real estate sector supported the market for the last two sessions with stocks such as Emaar Properties standing out, while the financial sector experienced mixed performances.

The Abu Dhabi stock market was nearly flat, hovering close to its support level. The energy and financial sectors moved in opposite directions leaving the market without much support. The Qatari stock market returned to the downside after a small rebound yesterday weighed by the banking sector.

## Shares in Country Garden suspended in Hong Kong

**HONG KONG:** Trading in debt-ridden Chinese property developer Country Garden was suspended in Hong Kong on Tuesday, days after it postponed the release of its 2023 results. The firm is among a number of China's largest developers battered by a crisis in the country's property sector and struggling under a mountain of debt, fuelling concerns about the stability of the world's second-largest economy.

"At the request of the company, trading in the shares of the company on the stock exchange will be suspended... pending publication of the 2023 Annual Results," Country Garden said in a Hong Kong exchange filing. The real estate behemoth on Thursday postponed the expected release of its 2023 results, saying it "needs to collect more information to make appropriate accounting estimates and judgments".

"Due to the continuous volatility of the industry, the operating environment the group (is) confronting is becoming increasingly complex," the statement added. Chinese property firms Modern Land, Central China Management and Ronshine China were among several other firms whose shares were also suspended in Hong Kong. Country Garden in 2022 suffered its first full-year loss — more than 6 billion yuan (\$844 million) — since listing in 2007.

The company has defaulted on offshore payments and is facing a winding-up petition in Hong Kong.

The petition, filed in February, came weeks after Hong Kong's High Court granted a similar petition against developer Evergrande, kickstarting its offshore assets liquidation and management replacement. Country Garden — China's seventh-largest developer in terms of sales last year — has incurred debts estimated in June at 1.36 trillion yuan (\$191 billion). — AFP

## Business

# NBK receives Brandon Hall Group's coveted Bronze Excellence Award

## Award for 'Best Advance in Compliance Training' for 2023



Emad Al-Ablani receives the Brandon Hall Group's Excellence Award.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) received the coveted Brandon Hall Group Bronze Medal for its excellence in the "Best Advance in Compliance Training" in the Learning and Development program, acknowledging its outstanding training and development programs.

The award was presented to Emad Al-Ablani, GM – head of Group Human Resources by the representative of IQAD, the leading digital learning solutions provider at NBK HQ. Brandon Hall Group employed an extensive set of criteria to select the winners of the 2023 Excellence Awards. These criteria were developed based on an assessment of the success of the compliance training in satisfying learning objectives and aligning with the business environment.

They also examined whether the program's design was rooted in a well-defined business goal and effectively supported compliance objectives. Furthermore, they ensured that compliance training positively influenced both organizational goals and learning outcomes and that the program produced quantifiable benefits and outcomes. Finally, these criteria sought to establish if the overall compliance training program positively impacted both learners and the organization.

Brandon Hall Group is a prominent global research organization headquartered in the United States. For over 21 years, the company has been dedicated to recognizing exceptional initiatives and best practices in various areas, including education, leadership development, the promotion of diversity and inclusion, and numerous other aspects related to human resources.

The Brandon Hall Awards for Excellence in Human Resources Management were initiated over two decades ago and remain a pioneering recognition program in education and development. These awards consistently draw participation from companies spanning various industries and regions worldwide, includ-

ing government entities, private businesses, joint ventures, and non-profit organizations. Their enduring prestige and widespread recognition underscore their profound importance and esteemed reputation on the global stage.

The compliance training program stands as a crucial initiative in collaboration with IQAD, NBK's digital learning partner, tailored to meet the training requirements of employees and facilitate their comprehension and adherence to the bank's policies and procedures, as well as relevant laws and regulations. The program's training content is engaging, interactive, and extensive, incorporating various teaching approaches such as videos, simulations, and assessments. These methods ensure a more comprehensive understanding and practical application of compliance requirements.

NBK Training and Development Department continually adapts its initiatives by recognizing the evolving requirements of the group's workforce. This includes introducing new educational opportunities to foster an open work culture and cultivating an environment that inspires employees to innovate and unleash their creativity.

NBK is consistently seeking inventive methods to streamline learning and improve its accessibility to benefit employees, all while placing a significant emphasis on the practical implementation of the acquired knowledge. Furthermore, NBK has cultivated exclusive training programs through collaborations with prestigious universities and institutions worldwide over the years. This strategic partnership ensures the delivery of exceptional, top-quality training tailored to meet the diverse needs of employees across various functional levels within the NBK Group.

For more information about the Brandon Hall Group's Bronze Medal of Excellence, please visit the website: <https://excellenceawards.brandonhall.com/hcm/>

## Market remains cautious as bitcoin moves sideways

By Rania Gule

The price of Bitcoin (BTC) is not trending in a specific direction and began trading on Tuesday at \$66,325, as the market remains cautious and in a state of anticipation with the approaching expected halving event. Meanwhile, Ethereum's (ETH) price awaits the next signal from Bitcoin to move, while Ripple's (XRP) price continues to be significantly influenced by developments in the court.

It is worth noting that now, about three weeks before the halving event, major Bitcoin holders or so-called "whales" have joined the retail market in preparation for this historic event. One whale transferred 1,000 BTC tokens worth \$68.54 million from the Bitfinex exchange to a new unknown wallet. Additionally, an inactive address containing 500 bitcoins worth about \$34.72 million was activated after 11.7 years. Another whale transferred 1,500 bitcoins worth \$103.08 million from one unknown wallet to another.

It is believed that institutions and whales have bought more than 12,000 bitcoins, most of which were on Coinbase and Kraken, and then moved them to private wallets. It is also believed that small investors are still taking advantage of every rise by taking profits, while the wealthy buy every dip, which explains the recent price volatility and instability.

The monthly close last week above the \$70,000 level could be a positive signal; however, further upward movement is needed to maintain gains above this level to confirm the signal.

Trader sentiments are also mixed, with two opposing views suggesting that the correction from the new all-time high may have ended and a new upward acceleration is expected, or that a deeper decline is still imminent. Especially after Bitcoin's price declined during the early days of the current month, reaching its lowest level at \$68,200. This move witnessed nearly \$250 million in total liquidation across the market. This comes as the market enters Bitcoin's mid-month, with just three weeks remaining until the event.

Miners are on standby and deliberate movements are being made, as evidenced by the high Bitcoin (BTC) fragmentation rate. This means that the total computational power used for Bitcoin mining has significantly increased, indicating that more miners are currently participating in the network.

It is necessary to note accurately that the April 1st drop saw Bitcoin's price exit its lowest levels on March 27th to below \$68,500. Now the burden lies on traders and investors to maintain stability above this range for the continuation of the upward trend. *NOTE: Rania Gule is market analyst at XS.com*

## Shell back in court in landmark Dutch climate case

THE HAGUE: Shell will square off with seven environmental groups in a Dutch appeals court Tuesday, with climate activists accusing the multinational oil giant of failing to implement a landmark 2021 judgment. Judges at The Hague District Court ruled three years ago that Shell must reduce its carbon emissions by 45 percent by 2030, as it was contributing to the "dire" effects of climate change.

The ruling was seen as an "historic" victory for climate change campaigners as it was the first time a company had been made to align its policy with the 2015 Paris climate change accords.

Shell, which called litigation "ineffective" to address climate change, is appealing the 2021 ruling, while environmental groups accuse the oil giant of failing to take action.

A new study "reveals that Shell will continue to invest billions of dollars in (new) oil and gas projects for decades to come," said Milieudefensie, the Dutch branch of Friends of the Earth, which originally brought the case.

"In addition, Shell has announced it will lower its climate ambitions, willingly choosing to ignore its role in addressing the climate crisis," Milieudefensie said ahead of the hearings, scheduled for four days this month. The study, done by Milieudefensie and fossil fuel research group Oil Change International, added that London-based Shell "also made the final decision to approve construction of 20 major oil and gas projects, including six in 2023 alone."

"The scientific basis on which we've founded our claims against Shell has only solidified," Milieud-

## US manufacturing expands for first time since Sept 2022

WASHINGTON: US manufacturing expanded last month for the first time since September 2022, according to industry data published Monday, with positive demand and strong output helping to snap 16 straight months of contraction.

The data underscores the enduring strength of the US economy despite elevated interest rates, which is good news for Joe Biden as he seeks to talk up his record ahead of the November presidential election. But it also highlights the challenges the US Federal Reserve faces as it debates when to start cutting interest rates in a way that doesn't cause a fresh surge in inflation.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said its manufacturing index hit 50.3 percent last month, pushing it above the 50-point mark that sepa-

already suffering fans.

"The misery at Ajax continues and cannot be stopped... It is almost impossible to comprehend," the association said in a blog post. Kroes himself admitted it was "not the wisest decision" but said he had intended to send a "positive signal to radiate confidence in the club".

He said he would not accept the decision and regretted the damage it was causing to the club. The latest developments are yet another distraction for Ajax, which suffered the worst-ever start to a Dutch top flight season, briefly propping up the Eredivisie table, with fans' frustration boiling over into violence.

The club of Johan Cruyff, Marco van Basten and Dennis Bergkamp, Ajax have fought back somewhat since those dark days but still sit in an unfamiliar fifth place in the Dutch top flight. A humiliating 28 points behind arch-rivals PSV Eindhoven, four-time European Cup champions Ajax have some work to do to even qualify for European football next season. — AFP



The Hague District Court ruled three years ago that Shell must reduce its carbon emissions by 45 percent by 2030, as it was contributing to the "dire" effects of climate change.

fensie's lawyer Roger Cox said ahead of the hearings. "In court it's facts that matter. That's why I am confident that we can once again convince the judges that Shell needs to act in line with international climate agreements," he said in a statement.

Shell hit back ahead of the hearing, denying it was ignoring the 2021 court ruling. Apart from the ruling giving the petroleum giant until 2030 to implement the judges' orders, it was investing some "10 to 15 billion dollars between 2023-25 in low-carbon energy solutions," Shell said. This represented 23 percent of its total capital expenditure, the multinational added.

"Shell agrees with Milieudefensie that urgent action is needed to combat climate change," it said in a

statement. "We just have a different view of how to achieve that goal." "We do not believe that a court ruling against one company is the right solution for the transition to cleaner energy," the multinational said. Shell said it believed the 2021 verdict "was ineffective and even counterproductive in tackling climate change," but denied it was ignoring it.

"If this judgement is upheld, it will have far-reaching consequences for Dutch business, employment and the Dutch investment climate," it warned. The 2015 Paris accords committed all nations to cut carbon emissions to limit warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels and encouraged them to go down to 1.5 degrees. — AFP



An employee makes respiratory masks in a family-owned medical equipment factory in Miami, USA. — AFP

Oxford Economics US economist Matthew Martin wrote in a note to clients.

"Comments from panelists in March paint a rosy picture, with strong demand and expectations for improvement," he said. "Increased demand should not lead to a sustained surge in prices, as seen during the pandemic," he added, pointing to the low backlog of orders and supply constraints that remain "seemingly undisturbed". — AFP

## Ajax suspends CEO over insider trading suspicions

THE HAGUE: Ajax announced on Tuesday they were suspending CEO and chairman Alex Kroes on suspicion of insider trading, piling more woe on the Dutch giants who have endured a horror season. The club said they had learned that Kroes bought more than 17,000 Ajax shares a week before his intended appointment was announced on August 2, 2023.

"The Supervisory Board sought external legal advice, which indicates that he likely engaged in insider trading. Insider trading is a criminal offence," the club said in a statement. The club's supporters' association said the news came as a "bombshell" to

## Survey: NEOM top choice for expat homebuyers in Saudi

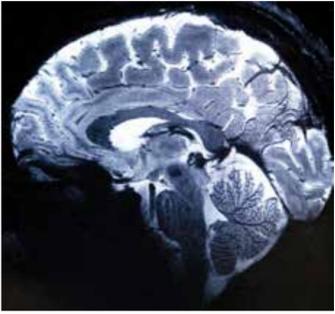
RIYADH: NEOM has been identified as the most preferred Giga project among expatriates living in Saudi Arabia, with 29 percent expressing a desire to purchase homes there, a survey done by global property consultancy Knight Frank said. The survey, part of Knight Frank's inaugural Destination Saudi report, places Jeddah Central and King Salman Park as the second and third choices, with preferences standing at 15 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

The comprehensive survey involved 241 expatriates, aiming to gauge their real estate investment interests within the Kingdom. A significant portion of the respon-

dents (56 percent) have resided in Saudi Arabia for over a decade, and a majority (76 percent) are employed in the private sector. The interest among expatriates in NEOM's specific areas is notably divided, with The Line attracting 42 percent, and Sindalah Island 19 percent, the survey said. Despite high interest, budget considerations could present a challenge for both expatriates and developers. The survey indicates that 87 percent of expatriate respondents have a budget under SR3.5 million, with 32 percent looking to spend below SR750,000. However, 41 percent of those with budgets under \$1 million remain interested, suggesting a willingness to adjust their financial plans.

According to the survey, the probability of making a residential purchase in a preferred Giga project remains high among expatriates, with 72 percent indicating they are likely to proceed with such investments. The average budget for an expat purchasing a home in a Giga project stands at SR2.7 million, significantly higher than budgets allocated for properties elsewhere in the Kingdom. — Agencies

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2024



This image made with the Iseult Magneton 11.7 T MRI shows a brain during a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exam simulation at the Neurospin facilities in the Paris-Saclay Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA - Commissariat à l'énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives) centre in Gif-sur-Yvette. — AFP photos



A volunteer takes part in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exam simulation.



## World's most powerful MRI scans first images of human brain

The world's most powerful MRI scanner has delivered its first images of human brains, reaching a new level of precision that is hoped will shed more light on our mysterious minds—and the illnesses that haunt them. Researchers at France's Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) first used the machine to scan a pumpkin back in 2021. But health authorities recently gave them the green light to scan humans. Over the past few months, around 20 healthy volunteers have become the first to enter the maw of the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine, which is located in the Plateau de Saclay area south of Paris, home to many technology companies and universities.

"We have seen a level of precision never reached before at CEA," said Alexandre Vignaud, a physicist working on the project. The magnetic field created by the scanner is a whopping 11.7

teslas, a unit of measurement named after inventor Nikola Tesla. This power allows the machine to scan images with 10 times more precision than the MRIs commonly used in hospitals, whose power does not normally exceed three teslas.

On a computer screen, Vignaud compared images taken by this mighty scanner, dubbed Iseult, with those from a normal MRI. "With this machine, we can see the tiny vessels which feed the cerebral cortex, or details of the cerebellum which were almost invisible until now," he said. France's research minister Sylvie Retailleau, herself a physicist, said "the precision is hardly believable!" "This world-first will allow better detection and treatment for pathologies of the brain," she said in a statement to AFP.

### Lighting up the brain's regions

Inside a cylinder that is five meters

(16 feet) long and tall, the machine houses a 132-tonne magnet powered by a coil carrying a current of 1,500 amps. There is a 90-centimetre (three-foot) opening for humans to slide into. The design is the result of two decades of research by a partnership between French and German engineers.

The United States and South Korea are working on similarly powerful MRI machines, but have not yet started scanning images of humans. One of the main goals of such a powerful scanner is to refine our understanding of the anatomy of the brain and which areas are activated when it carries out particular tasks.

Scientists have already used MRIs to show that when the brain recognizes particular things—such as faces, places or words—distinct regions of the cerebral cortex kick into gear. Harnessing the power of 11.7 teslas will help Iseult to "better understand the relationship

between the brain's structure and cognitive functions, for example when we read a book or carry out a mental calculation," said Nicolas Boulant, the project's scientific director.

### On the trail of Alzheimer's

The researchers hope that the scanner's power could also shed light on the elusive mechanisms behind neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's—or psychological conditions like depression or schizophrenia. "For example, we know that a particular area of the brain—the hippocampus—is implicated in Alzheimer's disease, so we hope to be able to find out how the cells work in this part of the cerebral cortex," said CEA researcher Anne-Isabelle Etievre.

The scientists also hope to map out how certain drugs used to treat bipolar disorder, such as lithium, distribute

through the brain. The strong magnetic field created by the MRI will give a clearer image of which parts of the brain are targeted by lithium. This could help identify which patients will respond better or worse to the drug.

"If we can better understand these very harmful diseases, we should be able to diagnose them earlier—and therefore treat them better," Etievre said. For the foreseeable future, regular patients will not be able to use Iseult's mighty power to see inside their own brains. Boulant said the machine "is not intended to become a clinical diagnostic tool, but we hope the knowledge learned can then be used in hospitals". In the coming months, a new crop of healthy patients will be recruited to get their brains scanned. The machine will not be used on patients with conditions for several years. —AFP

## Maryse Conde: Daring storyteller who explored black identity

French writer Maryse Conde, who died on Tuesday at the age of 90, became one of the greatest chroniclers of the struggles and triumphs of the descendants of Africans taken as slaves to the Caribbean. But the writer born in the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe did not pen her first book until she was nearly 40, and it triggered a controversy that saw authorities in several countries order the copies destroyed. The mother of four, who once said she "did not have the confidence to present her writing to the outside world", was in her eighties before she won a major award, in 2018.



French writer Maryse Conde poses in her house in Gordes, southern France.—AFP

The New Academy Prize—rushed into existence in Sweden when the Nobel Literature Prize was halted over a rape scandal—praised how Conde "describes the ravages of colonialism and post-colonial chaos in a language which is both precise and overwhelming". By then the francophone novelist, with close cropped grey hair, was confined to a wheelchair with a degenerative disease. But she was delighted, saying in a video message that the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, which is part of France, was normally "only mentioned when there are hurricanes or earthquakes".

### Called out African dictators

As well as tackling racism, sexism and a multitude of black identities over 30 books, Conde was one of the first to call out the corruption of newly independent African states. Her first book "Heremakhonon", which means "Waiting for Happiness" in the Malinke language of West Africa, caused a scandal in 1976 and three West African countries ordered the copies destroyed. "In those days, the entire world was talking of the success of African socialism," she later wrote. "I dared to say that... these countries were victims of dictators prepared to starve their populations."

She found popular and critical success with novels like "Segu" and "I, Ti-tuba, Black Witch of Salem", but Conde still felt snubbed by the French literary establishment, never winning its top prizes. There was belated recognition in 2020, when President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute to "the fights she has waged, and more than anything this kind of fever she carries within her," awarding her the Grand Cross of the National Order of Merit.

### Black awakening

Conde's life was almost as eventful as one of her historical novels. Born on February 11, 1934, as Maryse Boucolon, she grew up the youngest of eight children in a middle-class family in Guadeloupe, a French island in the Caribbean, and only became aware she was black when she left to go to an elite school in Paris when she was 19. Growing up, she had not heard of slavery nor Africa, and her mother—a schoolteacher—banned the use of Creole at home.

Her literary imagination had been fired by Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights", which she later transplanted to the Caribbean in "Windward Heights". In Paris her mind was opened to questions of identity when she met the Martinique writer and politician Aime Césaire, one of the founders of the negritude literary movement that sought to reclaim black history and reject French colonial racism.

But unlike him, Conde was a passionate believer in independence from France. "I understand that I am neither French nor European," she said in a 2011 documentary. "That I belong to another world and that I have to learn to tear up lies and discover the truth about my society and myself."

### Dramatic life

Conde fell for a Haitian journalist, who left her when she got pregnant. Unmarried and with a small boy, she gave up on university. Three years later she married Mamadou Conde, an actor from Guinea, and they moved to the west African country. It fulfilled a need to explore her African roots, but life in the capital Conakry was tough. "Four children to feed and to protect in a city where there is nothing, it was not easy," she recalled.

Her marriage to Conde fell apart and she moved to Ghana and then Senegal, eventually marrying Richard Philcox, a British teacher who became her translator and, she would say, offered her the "calm and serenity" to become a writer. She followed the scandal of "Heremakhonon", which centred on a Caribbean woman's disillusioned experience in Africa, with her "Segu" novels, set in the Bambara Empire of 19th-century Mali. —AFP

## Brown bear numbers grow in Pyrenees: France

The population of brown bears in the Pyrenees mountains, which had been threatened with extinction, keeps growing, French authorities said Tuesday. Bears had nearly disappeared from the Pyrenees when France began a reintroduction program in the 1990s, importing them from Slovenia. Activists see bears as integral to preserving a fragile mountain ecosystem that is under threat from human activity and climate change.

But the presence of bears in the mountain range straddling the border of France and Spain has led to increasing tensions with farmers because of the threat they pose to their livestock. "With a minimum of 83 individuals detected in 2023, the size of the brown bear population is gradually continuing to increase in the Pyrenees," the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB) said. By comparison, there were 76 bears across the region in 2022.



The presence of the omnivores has also been observed in Andorra and on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, in the regions of Catalonia, Aragon and Navarre. The figures are based on data collected by the Brown Bear Network, which includes OFB staff and specialist associations.

The genetic analysis of hair and faeces as well as photographs and videos are used to estimate the number of bears. The OFB report said that last year the number of bear attacks on livestock in the French Pyrenees had risen five percent from the previous year, while the number of animals killed had fallen by seven percent. In a statement, associations from the Brown Bear Network welcomed the increase in the population, but expressed concern about "growing inbreeding" and called on the government to "bring in new blood". More than 85 percent of bears born since 1996 are the offspring of one male, Pyros. In 2020 and 2021, four bears were killed illegally. They have not been replaced. —AFP



Pete Doherty (left) and Carl Barat of The Libertines perform on the Other Stage during the Glastonbury festival near the village of Pilton in Somerset, southwest England. — AFP

## The Libertines recall their happiest and darkest days in Paris

There were many times when the idea of an album by The Libertines in 2024 would have seemed an impossible proposition, and yet here they are—and only a little late. "Sorry. We're an hour behind schedule," the band's manager tells AFP ahead of an interview with band leaders Peter Doherty and Carl Barat. "But, hey, it used to be day or a week late," he adds with a chuckle. In town to promote new album "All Quiet on the Eastern Esplanade", out on Friday, there is another delay when Doherty is told he can't enter the venue with his dog, Gladys.

But the softly spoken singer smiles and produces a doctor's note: "He's an emotional support dog," he says, and all is well. Gladys—who often appears on-stage with the band—is part of the very public rehabilitation of the former infant terrible of British indie rock, now several years clear of his addiction to hard drugs. Times have certainly changed since the band's chaotic origins around their debut, 2002's "Up the Bracket", when concerts would often degenerate into mini-riots. Doherty was not a reliable figure in those days—and it was a no-show in Paris in December 2004 that led the band to break up.

His memories of that night are blurry. "They told me you were in a cross-Channel ferry cos you hung up the phone," Doherty says to Barat as they recall the moment for AFP. "They said you'd lost reception cos you were going through a storm. That was the last time we spoke for six or seven years." Barat corrects him. They were in the dressing room where Doherty had failed to show. "The worst gigs were when Pete wasn't coming, which was a painful experience," Barat says.

### 'Tattered standard'

Earlier memories of running around Paris are happier. "We had matching brown brogues, second-hand Burberry

macs and Palestine scarves, running up and down the cobbled streets utterly in a reverie of the flaneur life, those little green book stalls by the river, completely over-stimulated," says Doherty. "Carl has always been obsessed with the Moulin Rouge so it was just two kids in a candy store." And there were dark moments.

"I've done some gigs where I just needed money at the last minute so I arranged to play somewhere and you'd end up with no PA system, guitar wasn't working, I'd fall unconscious halfway through the gig and the crowd would destroy the bistro or whatever and you'd end up in jail for the night," says Doherty. "Turned out to be quite good anecdotes but horrible nights." The first single on their new album, "Run Run Run", recounts the tale of an ageing boozier still enjoying nights on the lash, suggesting they aren't ready to give up their care-free youth just yet.

But there are political flashes—a pointed song about the vexed question of immigration, "Merry Old England", and references to a passing Queen on "Shiver" ("The old girl's gone away, As the tattered standard hits the ground"). An unlikely influence was a bonding trip the band undertook to Jamaica at the start of the album-writing process.

"Jamaica was far away from all the influences and all the good noises and bad noises," says Barat. "As it happened, it was the Queen of England's funeral while we were there. It was very surreal to see that from an ex-colony." As well as some ecstatic moments of music in a local church ("incredible drummers and people enraptured"), it was also the simple pleasure of reuniting after years of separation and uncertainty. "We were just reconnecting as old mates," Doherty concludes wistfully. —AFP



In this picture Thai tourists pose for a group picture during their visit to the Kart-e-Sakhi Shrine in Kabul. — AFP photos

## Totality ready: US braces for April 8 solar eclipse frenzy

US communities along the path of the April 8 total solar eclipse are preparing for the year's biggest astronomic event, with millions of visitors expected to brighten local economies—and snarl up logistics. Near the US-Canada border in Burlington, Vermont, which is set to experience the totality just before 3:30 pm (1930 GMT), many hotels have been sold out for months. The few remaining rooms, which typically go for around \$150 a night, show online prices of \$600-\$700 for the night of the eclipse.



The City of Dripping Springs, Texas, prepares for the solar eclipse with a set of larger than life glasses on display at Veterans Memorial Park. — AFP

"I don't know that we'll have anything quite like this again," Jeff Lawson, a vice president in the chamber of commerce, told AFP. Lawson marveled at his city's "incredible luck" at an opportunity "quite literally falling out of the sky into your lap." If skies are clear, the small city of 40,000 could see its population double for the day, with visitors arriving by car, train and even private jet, Lawson said. An estimated 32 million people live inside the "path of totality"—under which the Moon will fully block out the Sun—with an additional 150 million residing less than 200 miles (320 kilometers) from the strip, NASA says.

### Traffic jams

Preparations for the big day began years ago, Matt Bruning of the Ohio Department of Transportation told AFP. He said the agency reached out to counterparts along the last major US eclipse, in 2017, and "one of the things that we heard resoundingly was it's never too early to start planning." Despite those efforts, there will inevitably "be delays, there will be heavy congestion," he warned.

Businesses are leaping into the bonanza with special events and in Cleveland, where local officials expect some 200,000 visitors, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame plans a four-day "Solarfest" of live music. The Perryman Group, a Texas-based research firm, estimates direct and indirect economic impacts of this year's eclipse could reach \$6 billion.

This year's path of totality is about 115 miles wide, wider than in 2017. It begins in western Mexico, arches up through the US cities of Dallas, Indianapolis, and Buffalo, before ending in eastern Canada. Many schools along the path will be closed or letting students out early, including in Cleveland and Montreal. Several airlines have advertised flights scheduled to pass under the eclipse, while Delta has even planned two special trips along the path of totality, the first of which sold out in 24 hours, the company said. NASA warns that only in the path of totality—and only during the few minutes of the actual totality—is it safe to look at the eclipse without eye protection.

### 'Cosmic coincidence'

Almost all of the United States will get to experience a partial eclipse, but UCLA astronomer Jean-Luc Margot says the trip to see the totality is definitely worth the hassle. "If you have a 99 percent partial eclipse, that is a completely different experience than being in the path of totality," he told AFP.

He will be accompanying a group of UCLA alumni to view the eclipse in rural Texas, after similar trips in 2017 to Oregon and to Chile in 2019. When people finally see the eclipse, they "tend to be emotional," Margot said. "It is such a beautiful event. It's due to this complete cosmic coincidence, that the angular size of the Sun and the angular size of the Moon are about the same."

Scientists have traditionally used the eclipses to observe the solar corona, an outer layer of plasma that's difficult to study due to the Sun's bright light, Margot said. New tools such as the space-based Parker Solar Probe have made such research less eclipse-dependent, but scientists will still be taking full advantage. —AFP

# 'A unique place': Foreigners visit post-war Afghanistan

His soldier son toured Afghanistan with insurgents in his crosshairs, but American traveler Oscar Wells has a different objective -- sight-seeing promoted by the Taliban's fledgling tourism sector. "It is a unique place, it touches my heart," the 65-year-old Indiana farmer told AFP, praising "its magnificent mountains" with "people living in the old way".

Marveling at the 15th century Blue Mosque in northern Mazar-i-Sharif, Wells is among a small but rising number of travelers coming to Afghanistan since the war's end. Decades of conflict made tourism extremely rare, and while most violence has now abated, visitors are

tourist Didier Goudant, a 57-year-old lawyer, of a country that Western governments warn against visiting. Security concerns worried Nayuree Chainton, the 45-year-old Thai owner of a travel agency in Bangkok, who made a trip for six days recently with a group to test the waters. "I feel safe despite the checkpoints in the cities," she said, during a visit to a shrine in the capital Kabul.

### 'Sharing a good image'

The number of foreign tourists visiting Afghanistan rose 120 percent year-on-year in 2023, reaching nearly 5,200, according to official figures. The Taliban

"like us are curious and want to be in contact with the population, to try to help them a little" said Goudant, on his second trip, which included skiing in central Bamian province.

He said part of his visits is making donations to local groups, something he describes as "small-scale humanitarian work" in a country that has seen foreign aid drastically shrink since the Taliban takeover. For Wells, there is a "sense of guilt for the departure" of US troops. "I really felt we had a horrible exit, it created such a vacuum and disaster," he said. "It's good to help these people and keep relations."



A Thai tourist poses for a picture during her visit to the Kart-e-Sakhi Shrine in Kabul.

### 'Bittersweet'

Untamed Borders brought around 100 tourists to Afghanistan last year, with a nine-day package starting in neighboring Pakistan costing \$2,850. The end of the fighting means tourists "can do more things", said founder James Willcox. "But on the other hand it is disruptive," he added, noting a woman tour guide with the company fled to Italy after the Taliban return.

While the Taliban government has shut girls and women out of education, and much of public life, foreign women are granted greater freedoms. For solo traveler Stefanie Meier, a 53-year-old American, who spent a month travelling from Kabul to Kandahar via Bamian and Herat in the west, it was a "bittersweet experience". "I have been able to meet people I never thought I would meet, who told me about their life," she said, adding that she didn't face any issues as a woman on her own.

She experienced "disbelief that people have to live like this", she added. "The poverty, there are no jobs, women not being able to go to school, no future for them". With little by way of official information, tourists band together on social media and messaging apps to trade tips.

While two airlines serve Afghanistan's major cities, backpackers prefer the bus,



In this picture Thai tourists leave after visting the Kart-e-Sakhi Shrine in Kabul.

confronted with extreme poverty, dilapidated cultural sites and scant hospitality infrastructure.

Their holiday under the austere control of Taliban authorities, without consular support after most embassies were evacuated following the fall of the Western-backed government in 2021. They must register with officials on arrival in each province, comply with a strict dress code and submit to searches at checkpoints by men armed with Kalashnikovs. Islamic State attacks also still pose a potential threat in the country.

"The first thing your loved ones say is: 'You're crazy to go there!'" said French

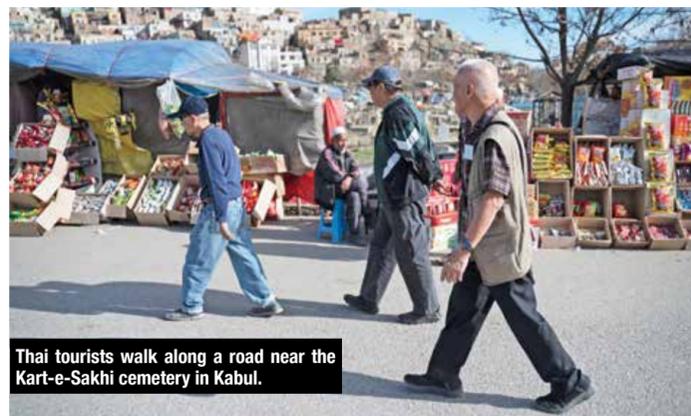
government has yet to be officially recognized by any country -- in part because of its heavy restrictions on women -- but it has welcomed foreign tourism.

"Afghanistan's enemies don't present the country in a good light," said information and culture minister Khairullah Khairkhwa. "But if these people come and see what it's really like... they will definitely share a good image of it," he said.

But Wells and Goudant -- on a trip with firm Untamed Borders, which also offers tours of Syria and Somalia -- describe their visit as a way to connect with Afghanistan's people. Tourists



Thai tourists visit the Kart-e-Sakhi Shrine in Kabul.



Thai tourists walk along a road near the Kart-e-Sakhi cemetery in Kabul.



Thai tourists register at the reception of a guesthouse in Kabul.



An Afghan guide takes a picture of a Thai tourist during a visit at the Kart-e-Sakhi cemetery in Kabul.

# Daniel Bruhl on playing Karl Lagerfeld: 'He walked like a matador'

**D**aniel Bruhl has the role of a lifetime as one of fashion's most iconic designers in "Becoming Karl Lagerfeld". He literally had to walk in the man's shoes to nail it. The show, which comes to Disney+ in June, follows the ponytailed couturier, whose ice-cold wit and groundbreaking designs for the likes of Fendi and Chanel made him a paragon of fashion up to his death at 85 in 2019.

Bruhl, 45, known from hits including "Good Bye, Lenin!", "Rush" and "Inglourious Basterds", said he had never invested so much "time, energy, passion and love" into a character. "He fascinated not only us Germans, but everyone in the world. The big question was always:



Spanish-German actor Daniel Bruhl poses on the red carpet prior to the 2023 Laureus World Sports Awards ceremony in Paris. — AFP

who is that funny, clever, intellectual man really behind that facade?" Bruhl is a polyglot, having grown up

with a Spanish mother, German father and French aunts. That was crucial for a role delivered entirely in French. Lagerfeld made his home in Paris, much to the chagrin of his native Hamburg.

"Of course the Germans were a little pissed that he left, but despite the arrogance and the jokes he made about Germany, we Germans still loved him," said Bruhl. The actor was actually photographed once by Lagerfeld: "I will never forget that—his intelligent eyes looking through the lens and how nervous I was being observed by him."

### 'Eureka moment'

Bruhl saw the danger of turning Lagerfeld into a "funny caricature". He did

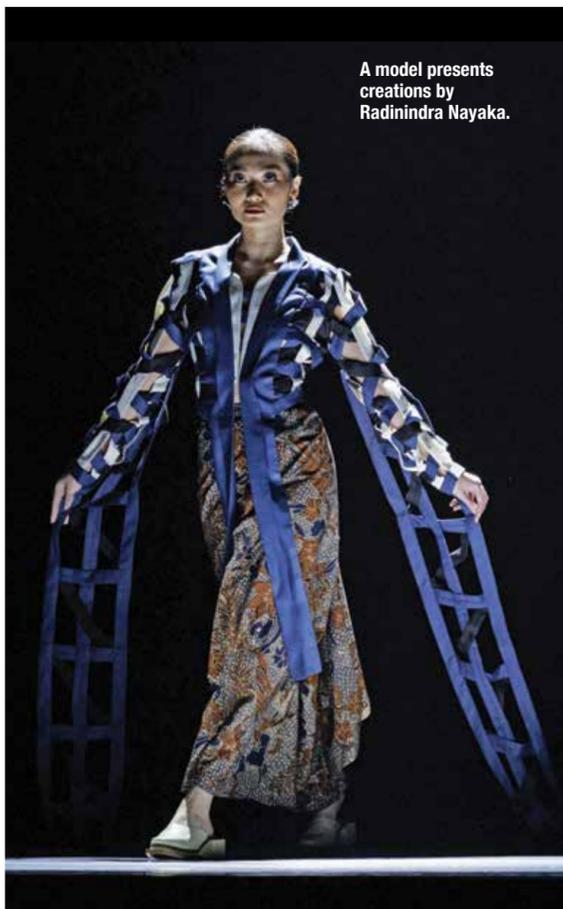
his best to emulate Lagerfeld's extreme aesthete tastes—re-reading Proust and romantic poetry, watching classic films that he loved like "Les Enfants du Paradis". "I tried my best... but the furniture, the posters, the photographs, the paintings, the books... to be such a perfectionist in aesthetics is something I absolutely share but obviously I'm useless in comparison," he said.

Preparing for the role meant hours of speaking to himself in French on walks around his countryside home. "There were only sheep and donkeys looking at me trying to be Karl Lagerfeld, and that was very comforting because I saw in their eyes that they believed it," he joked. The real break-

through came when he saw the costumes. "I thought: 'Jesus Christ' these are so much fun to wear!"

Lagerfeld's platform boots were a "eureka moment". "I was thinking of flamenco and bullfighters—my grandfather was big into bullfighting... When I see Karl Lagerfeld walk, I always think of a matador," said Bruhl. "That femininity and masculinity of the matador... I always had this 'Ole!' moment before a take that gave me the right tension between pride and strength but also tenderness and elegance." "Becoming Karl Lagerfeld" premieres at the Canneseries TV festival in April, and is released on Disney+ on June 7. —AFP

# INDONESIA FASHION WEEK



A model presents creations by Radinindra Nayaka.



People watch as a model presents creations from IKAT Indonesia by Didiet Maulana.



A model presents creations by Juu Yengky.



Models presenting creations by Rose Ma Lina x Defrico Audy prepare at the backstage.



Models present creations by Poppy Dharsono x Torang Sitorus.



A model presents a creation by Sopik Permana during the Indonesia Fashion Week.



A model presents creations by Cut Junischa.



Indonesian designer Ayu Dyah Andari (cenetr) walks with models presenting her creations during the Indonesia Fashion Week at the Jakarta Convention Center in Jakarta. — AFP photos



Models present creations from Ghea Resort by Amanda Janna.



A model presents creations by Karina Muhammad.

## Sports

# Boult stars for Rajasthan as Mumbai slip to third IPL loss

## In-form Riyan Parag hammered an unbeaten 54 off 39 balls

**MUMBAI:** Pace bowler Trent Boult returned figures of 3-22 to set up a crushing six-wicket victory for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL match against winless Mumbai Indians on Monday. Boult's sensational spell of left-arm pace helped restrict hosts Mumbai to 125-9, a total Rajasthan overhauled with 27 balls to spare for their third win of the season in three matches.

Five-time winners Mumbai, who named Hardik Pandya as captain in place of veteran Rohit Sharma, fell to their third loss to stay bottom of the 10-team table. Pandya had another unforgettable evening after he met with boos at the toss by the home fans, prompting presenter Sanjay Manjrekar to say "behave".

"Yes, a tough night, we didn't start the way we wanted to start," Pandya said after the loss. Pandya top-scored with 34 for Mumbai but admitted his wicket made them slip. "I wanted to counter, we were in a decent position to get us around 150-160," said Pandya. "But my wicket allowed them to get back more into the game, I needed to do a lot more."

In-form Rajasthan batter Riyan Parag hammered an unbeaten 54 off 39 balls for his second successive fifty as he steered the team to victory with two sixes and a four. But Rajas-

than bowlers ruled with Boult's lethal opening burst giving way to Yuzvendra Chahal's 3-11 with his leg-spin.

Boult claimed three wickets including Rohit in the space of four deliveries across his first two overs to silence the home crowd at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. Rohit, Naman Dhir and Brevis, all three got out for a first ball duck and another wicket by left-arm quick Nandre Burger made Mumbai slip to 20-4 inside four overs.

Boult got Rohit out caught behind on the fifth ball of his opening over and then trapped Dhir lbw before a hat-trick was avoided in the next over but the Kiwi sent back Dewald Brevis soon after. Brevis was sent as impact substitute in place of Dhir but the move flopped.

Burger had the left-handed Ishan Kishan caught behind with a nasty seaming delivery as the bowler leapt in the air in celebration. Left-handed Tilak Varma and Pandya counter-attacked in their 56-run stand as the left-right duo raised their fifty in 32 balls. Chahal broke the stand as he got Pandya to go for a big one only to be caught in the deep by substitute Rovman Powell and Mumbai lost their fifth on 76. Tim David made 17 and Mumbai hung on to play out their 20 overs. — AFP



**MUMBAI:** Rajasthan Royals' Trent Boult (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Mumbai Indians' Naman Dhir during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on April 1, 2024. — AFP

## Stokes rules himself out of England's T20 WCup title defence

**LONDON:** Test captain Ben Stokes has ruled himself out of England's T20 World Cup title defence, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Tuesday. The 32-year-old said he was skipping the tournament in the United States and the West Indies to make sure he could be a fully-fledged all-rounder in Test cricket. "Opting out of the IPL (Indian Premier League) and the (T20) World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said in an ECB statement.

Stokes's withdrawal was something of a surprise given that, when asked last month if he would participate in the T20 World Cup in June, he said he had "not even thought about that but I'm available". It is understood Stokes has not suffered any setbacks after briefly returning to bowling last month during a Test tour of India where England lost a five-match series 4-1.

There is no lingering discomfort in his left knee following surgery in November. But although he has long been one of England's leading multi-format cricketers, Stokes has decided to prioritize his role as Test captain, in the hope of being able to play a full role with both bat and ball during six Tests — three against the West Indies and three against Sri Lanka — in the upcoming home season.

The first Test against the West Indies at Lord's starts on July 10, less than two weeks after the June 29 T20 World Cup final in Barbados.

### 'Behind in bowling'

That congested Test schedule has prompted Stokes to follow up his withdrawal from the lucrative IPL T20 franchise tournament by also pulling out of the T20 World Cup in a major blow for England white-ball captain Jos Buttler and coach Matthew Mott. "I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket," Stokes said. He added: "The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling. I'm looking forward to playing for Durham in the County Championship before the start of our Test summer."

"I wish Jos, Motty and all the team the best of luck in defending our title." England begin that title defence against Scotland in Barbados on June 4, before further group matches against Australia, Oman and Namibia.

Stokes was a central figure as England won the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia. The left-handed batsman's 42 against Sri Lanka in Sydney took England into the knockout rounds, while his unbeaten 52 — his first fifty in international T20 cricket — secured victory over Pakistan in the final in Melbourne.

That match was the last of his 43 T20 international appearances, but had Stokes been available he would undoubtedly have been included in England's 15-man World Cup squad. Stokes delayed an operation on a longstanding left knee problem to play in last year's 50-over World Cup in India, where reigning champions England suffered an embarrassing exit before the knockout stages after winning just three of their nine group games.

After undergoing surgery at the end of last year, Stokes was an ever-present in England's 4-1 defeat in India although he sent down only five overs — all of them in the last Test, where the paceman bowled India captain Rohit Sharma with his first competitive delivery in some nine months.

After the two Test series at home to the West Indies and Sri Lanka, England will tour Pakistan and New Zealand. England then have a 2025 featuring two showpiece series, with five Tests at home to India followed by an Ashes tour of Australia. — AFP

## Pandya under fire from Rohit fans

**NEW DELHI:** Hardik Pandya has been facing the wrath of jeering fans in the Indian Premier League this season, with the Mumbai Indians struggling since he took charge from the much-loved Rohit Sharma. Five-time winners Mumbai replaced Rohit, who leads India in all formats, as captain before the IPL season started last month after the India all-rounder Pandya returned from Gujarat.

The homecoming has been tough for Pandya, who has been booed incessantly as his side slumped to three consecutive defeats, the latest at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium on Monday. In contrast, the Chennai Super Kings have reported a "seamless transition" of leadership after their old warhorse Mahendra Singh Dhoni handed over the captaincy to Rituraj Gaikwad on the eve of the IPL's 17th edition. Pandya's reception could not have been more different.

After being traded from Gujarat back to Mumbai for \$1.8 million, his immediate elevation as captain went down badly with the legions of Rohit fans. Rohit, 36, remains an icon in Mumbai after leading the team to five IPL titles since taking over from Australia's Ricky Ponting in 2013. Mumbai's winless record with Pandya in charge this season has done nothing to win over the fans in the cricket-mad country.

Pandya began with a loss at Ahmedabad, home of Gujarat Titans, who won the title in their inaugural season in 2022 under the Indian all-rounder's dynamic leadership.

## Pakistan Cricket Board talks mend captaincy crisis

**KARACHI:** Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Monday held crisis talks to resolve the row after sacked captain Shaheen Shah Afridi denied quotes backing his successor. Afridi, replaced by Babar Azam as skipper on Sunday, insisted he had not made comments backing his replacement that were quoted in a PCB statement.

On Monday, the PCB said Naqvi "held a meeting with the selection committee to talk about the team's selection ahead of the New Zealand T20I series". "The meeting was also attended by captain Azam," the PCB added without mentioning any separate meeting with Afridi.

## Singapore's only Olympic champion Schooling retires

**SINGAPORE:** Joseph Schooling, who famously beat his idol Michael Phelps in Rio to become Singapore's first and only Olympic champion, said Tuesday he was retiring from competitive swimming. Schooling made the announcement on social media eight years after stunning the world by beating American great Phelps to win 100m butterfly gold.

Schooling failed to qualify for the same event at Tokyo 2020 and his career started to ebb after winning gold medals in the 50m and 100m butterfly at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta. "Today marks the beginning of a new chapter — I will be retiring from competitive swimming," the 28-year-old said on Instagram.

### Fan wars

The 30-year-old had another forgettable evening on Monday against Rajasthan Royals, even being jeered at the toss by home fans, prompting presenter Sanjay Manjrekar to call on them to "behave". But the crowd kept up their hostility towards Pandya throughout, with Rohit gesturing to the fans to stop at one point.

Pandya, who was once regarded as a possible successor to the ageing Rohit to captain India's T20 team, admitted it was a "tough night". The tattooed star with his love for watches is still searching for a first win in charge at Mumbai, who are rooted to the foot of the 10-team table.

In their previous match, Mumbai's bowlers con-

ceded a league record 277 to Sunrisers Hyderabad as fans chanted Rohit's name throughout. Veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle drew a comparison with football. "What is happening with the IPL...is that the 'clannishness' has grown," Bhogle told Indian website Cricbuzz. "The more the rivalries are built up, the more people have something in it."

Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who plays for Rajasthan, said the fans needed to cool down. "People should remember which country these players represent — it's our country," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel. "Fan wars should never take such an ugly route."

### Chennai transition

He said IPL fans should look at how other countries behave. "Have you seen, for instance, Joe Root and Zak Crawley fans have a fight?" he asked. "Or Joe Root and Jos Buttler fans fight? It's crazy. Do you see Steven Smith fans fighting with Pat Cummins fans in Australia?" But in Chennai, the scenario is very different—with 42-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman Dhoni guiding new captain Gaikwad from behind the stumps.

Dhoni led the team to a record-equalling fifth title last year and has now eased into the role of mentor and player. The tournament holders won their opening two matches, before going down to Delhi Capitals, and Gaikwad has been lauded for his understated leadership. "To transition into the job is not easy, but he's done it seamlessly," Chennai head coach Stephen Fleming said. "We're using M.S. (Dhoni) as well, still as part of the decision-making." — AFP



**MUMBAI:** Mumbai Indians' captain Hardik Pandya (R) greets Rajasthan Royals' Riyan Parag (L) at the end of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

However sources confirmed to AFP any confusion after Afridi's statement denial had been removed and the former captain was shown shaking hands with Naqvi in a picture released by the PCB.

Twenty-nine Pakistan players are attending a training camp at army base Kakul in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province ahead of a five-match T20I home series against New Zealand starting from April 18.

The row developed following a PCB statement saying Afridi had "nothing but respect" for returning skipper Azam. "As a team player, it is my duty to back our captain, Babar Azam. I have played under his captaincy and have nothing but respect for him," he was reported to have said.

"I will try to help him both on and off the field. We are all one. Our aim is the same, to help Pakistan become the best team in the world."

Azam stepped down in November last year after Pakistan crashed out of the 50 over World Cup in the first round in India.

"I will try to help him on and off the field. We are

all one," Afridi was quoted as saying on the PCB's website on Sunday. But a source close to Afridi denied he had signed off on the statement that implied a harmonious transfer of the top job.

The source added Afridi resented being replaced after being in charge for just one Twenty20 series.

"This is not Shaheen's statement and he has contacted PCB to clarify this," the source told AFP. Fast bowler Afridi was in charge for Pakistan's 4-1 loss in a Twenty20 Series in New Zealand in January.

Afridi also captained Lahore Qalandars as they finished last in the T20 Pakistan Super League that ended two weeks ago.

Naqvi, also Pakistan's interior minister, has re-organized the selection committee in a bid to improve results in the forthcoming World Cup, also aiming to hire foreign coaches for the team.

Following the New Zealand series, Pakistan will play three T20Is in Ireland and four in England. The T20 World Cup takes place in the United States and West Indies in June. — AFP



**RIO DE JANEIRO:** (FILES) Singapore's Joseph Schooling poses with his gold medal on the podium of the Men's 100m Butterfly Final during the swimming event at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games at the Olympic Aquatics Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on August 12, 2016. — AFP

"I am filled with gratitude for every experience that swimming has brought into my life." The victories were exhilarating, the defeats humbling and together they have forged a resilience in me that I will carry forward into my next chapter."

In an interview with the Straits Times newspaper, Schooling said he had become complacent. "My mistake was the complacency to think that this will last forever because I'm so far ahead," he said. "Add on ego, add on pride. Add on that 'I'm never going to be shut down attitude'. That's a recipe for complacency. That's one of the lessons that I learnt."

Doubts were cast on his future when he pulled out of last year's Asian Games and Southeast Asian Games, saying he was "not at the level" to do his best. Schooling, who has performed two years of mandatory military service, was mired in controversy in 2022 after confessing to taking cannabis overseas.

Singapore has some of the toughest drugs laws in the world, and citizens can face up to 10 years in prison if found to have consumed illegal substances outside the city-state. — AFP

Sports

# Saul takes Atletico fourth with late Villarreal winner

## Atletico moved two points clear of Athletic with eight matches remaining

VILLARREAL: Saul Niguez slotted home an 87th minute winner to help Atletico Madrid to a 2-1 win over Villarreal on Monday, taking his team fourth in La Liga. Diego Simeone's side capitalized on Athletic Bilbao's defeat by La Liga leaders Real Madrid on Sunday to move back into the Champions League qualification places, even if they left it late.

Axel Witsel nodded Atletico ahead after nine minutes but Alexander Sorloth pegged back the visitors soon after half-time of an entertaining clash. Substitute Saul decided an even game in the final stages less than five minutes after coming on.

Atletico moved two points clear of Athletic with eight matches remaining, still trailing third-place Girona by seven points. "Saul entered the game well and scored a great goal," Simeone told Movistar. "I've put him on a bunch of times because I believe in him and I hope he can give us a lot."

Simeone said his team still needed to improve to lock down Champions League qualification for next season. "Athletic are having a very good season, Girona aren't giving up, and we have to improve," said the coach. "Pace of play and intensity decide things and we have to improve in that regard."

Witsel drew first blood with a fine header from

Rodrigo Riquelme's corner, twisting his body to meet the ball at the near post and direct it looping home at the far. The 35-year-old Belgian had only scored once before for Atletico, also against Villarreal last November.

Sorloth pulled Villarreal level five minutes into the second half with an accurate low finish from the edge of the box. Angel Correa flashed a shot narrowly off target and Alvaro Morata fired straight at Villarreal goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen, albeit from a wide angle, as Atletico scrambled to go back in front.

Jan Oblak saved a low deflected effort from Yerson Mosquera at the other end, with the game opening up. Eventually Saul stroked home from the edge of the box soon after coming on from the bench, and although Atletico had to nervously wait out a VAR check for a possible offside, the goal was given.

Villarreal came close to levelling deep in stoppage time when Bertrand Traore's cross evaded everyone and flew just past Oblak's far post. Defeat leaves Villarreal 10th in what has been an underwhelming season for them. "I'm happy, more for the win than for the goal, it was important," Witsel told Movistar. "(Simeone) will want us to do better, but he'll be very happy with the win." — AFP



VILLARREAL: Atletico Madrid's Argentinian forward #10 Angel Correa fights for the ball with Villarreal's Spanish defender #05 Jorge Cuenca and Villarreal's Spanish midfielder #16 Alex Baena during the Spanish League football match between Villarreal CF and Club Atletico de Madrid at La Ceramica stadium in Villarreal, on April 1, 2024. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Arsenal's Brazilian striker #09 Gabriel Jesus (L) fights for the ball with Manchester City's Swiss defender #25 Manuel Akanji during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Arsenal at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

## Arsenal may need perfect run-in to win Premier League

LONDON: Mikel Arteta said Tuesday that Arsenal may have to win all of their nine remaining Premier League games if they are to be crowned champions as he prepares for the "most beautiful part of the season".

The second-placed Gunners are two points behind leaders Liverpool ahead of a busy April schedule following Sunday's gritty goalless draw at title rivals Manchester City. Arteta, who is also preparing Arsenal for a Champions League quarter-final against Bayern Munich, urged his side to embrace the challenge, starting with Wednesday's game at home to relegation-threatened Luton.

"It's going to have to be really close to that," he told a pre-match press conference when asked if Arsenal need a 100 percent record from now on to

finish top of the table. "When you see the level and the consistency of the other teams and historically what is needed to win in this league, it's not going to be very far from that."

The Spaniard added: "This is where we want to be and now we want to take this opportunity and make it happen. We worked every single day with that enthusiasm and passion to make it happen and enjoying the moment as well."

"I see the team really flowing and they are really excited about playing each game and that has to drive this energy until the end. I am full of energy and it's the most beautiful part of the season." Arsenal's fixture against Luton is the first of eight matches this month, including the two clashes with Bayern.

Although they will be huge favourites to beat Luton, they needed an injury-time winner to leave Kenilworth Road with a dramatic 4-3 victory in early December. Asked about his memories of that game, Arteta said: "Especially how tough it was to win there, how difficult they have made it for every team... They deserve more credit than any other team in this league, how they've done it, what they transmit as a team and what they generated and it's going to be a really tough match." — AFP

## Roglic wins Tour of Basque Country first stage

BARCELONA: Primož Roglic started the Tour of the Basque Country in blistering fashion with a strong individual time trial performance on Monday to claim stage one victory, despite taking a wrong turn that cost him eight seconds.

The Bora-Hansgrohe rider beat out general classification contenders Remco Evenepoel, fourth, and Jonas Vingegaard, fifth, by 11 and 15 seconds respectively. UAE Team Emirates' Jay Vine came in second, seven seconds behind Roglic, while Mattias Skjelmose of Lidl-Trek was third, 10 seconds off the Slovenian veteran.

Roglic eased concerns over his form after a below par showing in Paris-Nice in March by setting a time of 12 minutes 34 seconds on the 10-kilometre run starting and finishing in Irun. Roglic claimed his first win with his new team despite failing to take the right turn late on and needing to go back, losing time but still prevailing.

"It's great, great to be here and (my) legs obviously were good, I felt strong, I made a bit of a mistake at the end and then I corrected it, luckily (it was) still enough," he said. Evenepoel also had a mishap on an eventful day, crashing on a corner early on but quickly got back on his bike and on his way.

"Everything went well until 200 metres but then I went on the ground, so a bit of a silly moment, my own mistake maybe," said the Belgian. "Of course, I was hoping to be a bit ahead today, but my crash was unlucky and this caused me to be a bit behind."

Briton Tom Pidcock (Ineos Grenadiers) withdrew from the race before the time trial began after crashing during a recon run and was taken to hospital for examination. Many of the favourites chose to compete in the first hour because of rain forecast later in the day, with the last departure scheduled for 1517 GMT.

It eventually arrived along with sleet and hail, disrupting those departing in the final stages. Ethan Hayter trailed Roglic by one second at roughly halfway but after the bad weather arrived he had to slow significantly and ended up ninth.

Tuesday's stage two takes riders 160km from Irun to Kanbo in France, with an elevation gain of 2,300 metres. The race should reveal the form of the top general classification cyclists ahead of the grand tours, except for Tadej Pogacar, who won the Tour of Catalonia in March and is not competing. — AFP

## Noura Al-Ruzaihan to partake in rhythmic gymnastics

KUWAIT: Kuwait's national rhythmic gymnastics team member Noura Al-Ruzaihan will participate in the International Sofia, Bulgaria Championship which will be held from April 4-7.

The Gymnastics Federation said Noura is preparing for the 20th Asian Juniors Championship to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The Federation said this is an important participation by Noura as it is considered a preparation for the continental event and expressed confidence in Noura to make yet another achievement for the sport.



Noura during a performance.

## Tight at the top as Ipswich lead Championship

LONDON: Ipswich were left with a slender one-point lead at the top of the Championship on Monday as the race for automatic promotion to the Premier League headed towards a thrilling finale. Leeds left it late to see off Hull 3-1 in the final Championship fixture of the day as they went second in the table, just a point behind Ipswich.

And Leicester reignited their bid for automatic promotion with a 3-1 win at home to Norwich. They ended the day in third place, a point behind Leeds and two adrift of Ipswich but with a game in hand. Only the top two clubs at the end of the regular season are guaranteed a place in the Premier League, with the teams finishing third to sixth involved in the post-season play-offs that determine the other promoted side.

Jeremy Sarmiento proved to be a 'super sub' after scoring a stoppage-time winner as Ipswich, briefly nudged off top spot by Leicester, returned to the summit with a dramatic 3-2 win at home to Southampton. It seemed as if goals from Che Adams and Adam Armstrong had put Southampton on course for victory following Leif Davis's well-struck opener for Ipswich. But Ipswich, who've now won 31 points from losing positions this season, again proved to be masters of the comeback. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752

Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

#### Hospitals

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

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## Inter beat struggling Empoli to close in on Serie A title

### Bologna cruised past Serie A's bottom side Salernitana 3-0

MILAN: Inter Milan took another step towards the Serie A title on Monday with a straightforward 2-0 win over struggling Empoli which maintained their 14-point lead at the top of the league. Federico Dimarco put Inter ahead after five minutes at the San Siro before substitute Alexis Sanchez sealed the points in front of delighted home fans with nine minutes remaining.

Monday's comfortable victory left Inter needing just 11 more points from eight matches to beat second-placed AC Milan to a 20th Italian league crown. Inter have a huge lead on their local rivals thanks in large part to academy product Dimarco, whose first-time strike from Alessandro Bastoni's neat clipped pass separated the hosts from their spirited opponents for most of the match. It was Bastoni's third assist in as many league matches and the Italy defender joked: "It was the worst of the lot, Dimarco's finish made it look much better!" "We're really happy with the win because we've just come off the international break and it's never easy winning after travelling around the world," added Bastoni.

Simone Inzaghi's side were far from the scintillating form they showed before being knocked out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid last month. But Inter have dropped only two points since the turn of the year and Monday's win was a good way to end what has been a difficult couple of weeks.

Francesco Acerbi was cleared late last month of racially abusing Napoli defender Juan Jesus, an ugly episode which dragged on through the international break as the Italy defender and Inter denied the accusation.

Acerbi started the game after avoiding a potential 10-match ban due to the Italian Football Federation's disci-

plinary tribunal deciding there wasn't enough evidence to punish him. A fourth straight defeat without scoring a goal left Empoli back in the relegation zone on goals scored, swapping places with 17th-placed Frosinone who drew 1-1 with Genoa on Saturday. "If that run had knocked our confidence you'd have seen it tonight with a bad performance but that didn't happen," said Empoli coach Davide Nicola.

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tom side Salernitana 3-0 to continue their charge towards a first-ever appearance in the Champions League. Stunning first-half strikes from Riccardo Orsolini and Alexis Saelemaekers and Charalampos Lykogiannis' fine finish in stoppage time ensured that Bologna would stay in fourth place, five points above Roma who were held to a goalless draw at Lecce.

Thiago Motta's side have won eight of their last nine matches and not only look a good bet to reach Europe's top club competition, but also have Juventus in their sights. Juve are just two points ahead of Bologna in third following their last-gasp defeat at Lazio on Saturday and have been dragged back into a battle for the Champions League.

Bologna currently sit in the final spot but Serie A is firmly in the running for an extra place in next year's revamped tournament, meaning fifth may well be good enough. Both Bologna and Roma host Juve before the end of the season. "We're doing really well at the minute, with the way that we're playing and the results we're



MILAN: Inter Milan's Italian defender #32 Federico Dimarco falls over Empoli's Ghanaian forward #11 Emmanuel Gyasi during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Empoli in Milan, on April 1, 2024. — AFP

getting," said Motta to Sky Sport. Although the seven-time Italian champions played one round in the old European Cup in 1964, the same year that they most recently won the Scudetto, they have never participated in the modern Champions League.

Last season's ninth place was the high-

est Bologna had finished in Serie A for over a decade and they are well on course for their best placing in years. "Obviously we're looking at the table but that's not what matters to us, what's important is putting in the work in training and the performances on the pitch," said Saelemaekers.

Stefano Colantuono could not turn around Salernitana's fortunes in his first match in charge, his team falling to their third straight defeat as they sink towards Serie B. Salernitana have not won a single game since the turn of the year and are 12 points from safety. — AFP

## Booker scores 52-point as Suns eclipse Pelicans

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker produced a 52-point masterpiece as the Phoenix Suns eclipsed the New Orleans Pelicans 124-111 in the NBA on Monday. Booker boosted Phoenix's hopes of overtaking New Orleans for an automatic playoff berth with a dazzling performance on the road at the Pelicans' Smoothie King Center. The Phoenix win — which ensured that the Minnesota Timberwolves have clinched a playoff spot — leaves the Suns just one win behind sixth-placed New Orleans. As things stand Phoenix are now 44-31 and on course for the Western Conference play-in tournament.

However New Orleans (45-30) face a nerve-wracking finale to the regular season, knowing that one slip could be fatal. All five of Phoenix's starters posted double digit points totals, with Kevin Durant finishing with 20 points, seven rebounds and three assists, and Jusuf Nurkic adding 19 points with 19 rebounds.

Zion Williamson led the New Orleans scoring with 30 points while Trey Murphy added 21. Elsewhere on Monday, Jayson Tatum and Sam Hauser both scored 25 points as the Boston Celtics romped past the Charlotte Hornets 118-104 in North Carolina.

Boston, who have already secured top spot in the Eastern Conference, were stung by the Hornets in a surprise upset defeat earlier this season. But despite trailing early on in Monday's game, there was little chance of a repeat defeat after the Celtics cut loose to open up a commanding 19-point advantage in the fourth quarter. Hauser's 25-point contribution off the bench included seven three-pointers while starters Kristaps Porzingis (20), Derrick White (19) and Al Horford (15) also made double figures.

### Taken for granted

Tatum said Monday's victory was cause for encouragement as the playoffs loom into view with less than a fortnight of the regular season remaining. "Last year we were so antsy to get back to the finals, that we had a few bad losses in the last few weeks of the



NEW ORLEANS: Larry Nance Jr. #22 of the New Orleans Pelicans rebounds the ball over Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns during the first quarter of an NBA game at Smoothie King Center on April 01, 2024 in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

season," Tatum said. "We may have taken some things for granted. "This year we've done a great job of not skipping steps and respecting every game, every day, trying to get better — as cliché as that sounds."

In Indianapolis meanwhile the Indiana Pacers boosted their hopes of locking an automatic playoff berth with a 133-111 rout of the Brooklyn Nets. Tyrese Haliburton led the way with 27 points while Jalen Smith had 17 points off the bench.

The Pacers improved to 43-33 to remain in sixth place in the Eastern Conference just ahead of seventh-placed Miami (41-33) who are on track to finish in the play-in tournament. The Pacers were always in control after erupting for 43 points in the first quarter, a display which helped them take a 28-point into

the break at half-time.

"When we're playing like that, fast and random, we can be tough to play against," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. Carlisle sounded a note of caution to his team however as they prepare for a rematch against Brooklyn on the road on Wednesday.

"We've got a real challenge on Wednesday with the way this went. We'll have to be ready, because they'll be ready. It will be a very good test." Brooklyn meanwhile are all but eliminated from postseason contention. The Nets are 29-47 and sit in 11th place in the Eastern Conference, trailing 10th-placed Atlanta (34-40). The Hawks edged towards a place in the play-in tournament with a 113-101 win over the Chicago Bulls on the road. — AFP

## Former NFL cornerback Davis dead

MIAMI: Former NFL player Vontae Davis, who abruptly retired from the sport in the middle of a game in 2018, was found dead on Monday at his home in Florida, police confirmed. Police said in a statement the 35-year-old former Miami, Indianapolis and Buffalo cornerback was discovered by a house assistant, adding preliminary indications found no evidence of foul play.

"This morning, Davie Police Officers responded to 6051 SW 178th Avenue in reference to a medical call," police in Davie, South Florida said in a statement. "Officers were called to the residence by the house assistant, who found the homeowner deceased. We can confirm that the deceased individual is Vontae Davis age 35."

"Preliminary information suggests that foul play is not involved." Davis spent 10 seasons in the NFL, beginning his career at the Miami Dolphins from 2009 to 2011 before joining the Indianapolis Colts in 2012, where he remained until the 2017 season.

In 2018 he signed a one-year deal with the Buffalo Bills, but dramatically retired from the sport at half-time during the Bills 31-20 defeat to the Los Angeles Chargers. In a statement after the game, Davis said he had realized his heart was no longer in the NFL.

"Today on the field, really hit me fast and hard: I shouldn't be out there anymore," Davis said in an Instagram post. "While I was on the field, I just didn't feel right. "It's more important for me and my family to walk away healthy than to willfully embrace the warrior mentality and limp away too late."

The Dolphins, Colts and Bills all posted social media messages of condolence to Davis's family and loved ones on Monday. "We are heartbroken by the sudden passing of former Dolphins CB Vontae Davis and extend our deepest condolences to his family & loved ones during this difficult time," the Dolphins wrote. — AFP