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Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince is greeted upon his arrival in Cairo to attend the Extraordinary Arab Summit.

## Kuwait Amir Representative arrives in Egypt for Extraordinary Arab Summit

CAIRO, March 4, (KUNA): The Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheik Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah arrived in Cairo, Egypt, on Tuesday along with an accompanying delegation to participate in the Extraordinary Arab Summit.

His Highness the Crown Prince was received by Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports Ashraf Sobhi and Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Assistant Foreign Minister Ambassador Bader Saleh Al-Taneeb, Ambassador of Kuwait to Egypt Ghanem Saqer Al-Ghanim, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Ambassador Ahmad Al-Baker, and Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the League of Arab States Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Presidential advisor Dr. Mohammad Al-Habbash said on Monday that the Palestinian vision, to be discussed at Cairo's Extraordinary Arab Summit, must be unified for both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Speaking to KUNA, Dr. Al-Habbash affirmed that the importance of maintaining a unified vision for the future of Palestine, which should end occupation and give Palestinians their rights.

He affirmed that Palestinian participation

in the summit would focus on maintaining the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, allowing the entry of humanitarian aid, and giving the Palestinians the chance to rebuild their homes and future without displacement.

The extraordinary Arab Summit in Cairo on Tuesday will highlight efforts to refute the displacement of Palestinians from their lands and attempts to eliminate their just cause.

As the US Trump administration is suggesting a deal that would see the expulsion of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and possibly elsewhere, Egypt and Arab Leaders are offering a plan to rebuild the war-torn Gaza Strip.

Al-Ahram newspaper revealed the three-stage Egyptian plan, which would be reviewed during the summit, consisted of zones to host displaced Palestinians within Gaza. It also called for opening the way for Arab contractors to take over the rebuilding of Gaza with Palestinian involvement as well as assigning an administrative committee to run Gaza for six months in coordination with the Palestinian authority.

These details were also present in the press conference between Egyptian Foreign Minister Bader Abdulatty and Palestinian counterpart Hamad Mustafa.

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## Fully refurbished Shuwaikh Beach to open in early April

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The fully refurbished Shuwaikh Beach, which is affiliated with Kuwait Municipality, will open with its new look in early April, coinciding with the celebration of Eid Al-Fitr.

The beach development and beautification project, which extends 1.7 kilometers, was implemented through the KD3 million donation from the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK). It was completed within the specified period of 11 months, starting May 2024.

The project covers the area from Al-Watiya Beach to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). It consists of four main spots that complement each other to provide everything the beach-goers need for walking, exercising, swimming and recreation; while ensuring sustainability in terms of the design, implementation and materials.

The first spot consists of sports fields, recreational areas and a large green space; the second consists of an extended sandy beach area with wooden benches in the middle; the third includes a closed garden with green spaces and dense trees that provide shade; and the fourth includes paths for walking and bicycles with some trees in the middle.

## Kuwait targets 1b imperial gallons water output by '35

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr. Adel Al-Zamel says Kuwait's water production will reach approximately one billion imperial gallons per day by 2035, according to the ministry's future plan.



Dr. Al-Zamel

In a speech he gave on the occasion of the Arab Water Day, Dr. Al-Zamel explained that the challenges in the country's water security sector still continue, particularly the high rates of consumption.

The ministry has taken serious steps toward improving water management and conservation, including adopting modern, advanced technologies with high efficiency in water production, treatment, transportation, and storage.

Kuwait's participation in Arab Water Day highlights its commitment to securing its water needs through innovative methods dating back to 1951 when the country's first seawater desalination station, the Shuwaikh Station, was established, being the world's first of its kind at that time.

Dr. Al-Zamel affirmed that Arab Water Day serves as a valuable opportunity to combine efforts on water-related issues and accelerate progress in this vital sector.

He highlighted that the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, since its establishment in November 1962, has worked hard to achieve its objectives and align with Kuwait's vision, which

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# KFF urges caution at home for a 'blaze-free' Ramadan

Unattended stoves, overloaded outlets pose danger



Photo by Samer Shiqer

Traffic congestion builds up on both lanes as Kuwait faced rainfall on Tuesday, slowing down movement across the roads.

Spring breezes and crisp nights next week

## Dramatic weather shift to last until Saturday

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Weather forecaster at the Meteorology Department in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said the country will be affected by a low-pressure area; hence, the intermittent rainfall from Tuesday evening until Saturday.

In an interview with the newspaper Al-

Qarawi explained that the rainfall will vary in intensity, ranging from light to moderate, with the possibility of thunderstorms on Wednesday and Thursday in different parts of the country. He added the southeasterly winds will intensify, reaching speeds of up to 50 kilometers per hour, which may increase dust and cause waves to rise to six feet.

Looking ahead to next week, Al-Qarawi

indicated that the weather will be spring-like, with rainfall expected on Saturday. "From Sunday onwards, temperatures will become more moderate, with warm days and cooler evenings," he revealed.

Regarding the upcoming holidays, he stated that the weather will be warm during the day with a summery atmosphere; while the evenings will be cooler with more crisp temperatures.

KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA): Brigadier General Mohammed Al-Gharib, Director of Public Relations and Media at the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), has emphasized the importance of fire safety during Ramadan, warning of potential hazards due to increased use of stoves and electrical appliances.

Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Monday, Al-Gharib stressed the need for preventive measures, including checking gas connections, turning off stoves after use, and avoiding flammable materials near open flames. He also warned against overloading electrical outlets and advised keeping fire extinguishers and fire blankets readily available.

To enhance safety, he urged the installation of smoke detectors, proper ventilation when using coal, and keeping children away from kitchen hazards. He also called on families to educate domestic workers on fire safety protocols and to contact emergency services at 112 in case of any incidents.

Al-Gharib urged the public to follow the KFF's safety guidelines to ensure a safe and accident-free Ramadan, wishing Kuwait and its people protection from harm.

## Ramadan Timings

Iftar ..... Wednesday ..... 17:51  
Imsak ..... Thursday ..... 04:49

## NewsWatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrar Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Tuesday UAE Ambassador to the country, Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi, where they touched on the bilateral ties between the two country and the latest regional and global developments. (KUNA)

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates' Federal Supreme Court rejected appeals Tuesday on behalf of dozens of dissidents convicted in a mass trial that faced widespread international criticism.

The Emirates' state-run WAM news agency reported the decision by the Supreme Court's State Security Chamber, which decided to wait to issue a ruling over a separate appeal by prosecutors until April 8. (AP)

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon's president ended a visit to Saudi Arabia Tuesday where he discussed regional affairs with the kingdom's crown prince after which both countries said Israeli troops should withdraw from south Lebanon and only the Lebanese state should have weapons.

The visit by Joseph Aoun, the first by a Lebanese head of state to the oil-rich kingdom in eight years, improves ties between the two countries that have been cold for years over Iran's influence in Lebanon. (AP)

## Real estate deals soar in February

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Real estate trading activity in February 2025 showed a remarkable growth, with 30 percent increase in the value of transactions and 15.6 percent in the number of deals from Feb 2-24.

During this period, 479 deals were conducted with a total value of KD363 million, compared to 404 deals worth KD252.4 million in January.

According to the monthly report from the Real Estate Registration and Documentation departments at the Ministry of Justice, there was a significant rise in both the number and value of real estate deals in various sectors compared to February 2024.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the report, which showed a 51.8 percent increase in the value of real estate trading in February 2025 compared to the same month in the previous year, which had 315 deals.

All real estate sectors -- private, investment, commercial and craft -- witnessed remarkable growth in the value and volume of transactions compared to February 2024 as follows:

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## Massive road maintenance in Abdullah Al-Mubarak commences, says minister

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan has announced the ongoing radical maintenance work on roads in Abdullah Al-Mubarak, as part of the new contracts for highway and internal road repairs.

These contracts encompass 18 major road maintenance projects in the six governorates.

Al-Mashaan explained that maintenance works will be carried out in stages, starting with the most affected areas and progressing to those with lesser damage.

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Volunteers prepare free meals for people in need at Al-Mubarakiya market in Kuwait City, Kuwait, March 2, 2025. During Ramadan, charities, mosques and generous individuals offer Iftar meals at various locations across the country. (Xinhua)

## Railway phase 1 gets SAB's okay

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) approved on Feb 20, 2025 the contract of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) for the detailed design study and preparation of railway tender documents (first phase) at a cost of KD 2.426 million for a period of 365 days.

Sources said SAB stated in the approval letter that "there should be no delay in the project implementation", indicating the approval period is 90 days maximum.

Sources added SAB also stipulated that the amended financial offer for the tender dated Feb 13, 2025 should be an integral part of the contract documents, including the costs of basic and optional services.

It is worth mentioning that the first phase of the project is the connection with the Gulf, the path of which extends from the southern border with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Nuwaiseeb) to the passenger station in Kuwait City, behind Kuwait International Airport on the Seventh Ring Road and extends North through the Silk City to Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.

This phase includes 111 kilometers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) route in Kuwait, in addition to 154 kilometers to reach Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.



**8** NBK hosts panel discussion on 'Let's Be Aware' campaign at PIC

**9** Gulf Bank distributes Iftar meals at Souq Al-Mubarakiya as part of its Ramadan program

**9** Zain Alshuoor Ramadan campaign kicks-off with food supplies initiative



## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 04:52 Asr ..... 15:20  
 Sunrise .. 06:10 Maghrib .. 17:49  
 Zohr ..... 12:00 Isha ..... 19:06

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 15-42 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

**By Night:** Cold and cloudy to

## Weather

partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 15-42 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec		
Kuwait City	21	10	Abdaly	21
Kuwait Airport	20	06	Bubyan	20
			Jahra	21
			Failaka Island	20
			Salmyyah	21
			Ahmadi	20
			Jal Aliyah	20
			Nuwaisib	20

## Vacate chalets in Doha West by March 31, Finance tells owners

Minister rejects plea to extend lease for 6 months

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The Ministry of Finance has started sending notifications via the Sahel application to users of the Doha West chalets, instructing them to vacate the properties and hand them over to the ministry by March 31, 2025.**

This step is based on a letter sent by the Kuwait Municipality to the Ministry of Finance in January, along with Municipal Council's Resolution No. MB/F6/164/06/2024/D3 to approve the allocation of the area stretching

from the borders of the Doha West Power Station to the borders of the Jahra Nature Reserve for the development of the Jahra Coastal Front Project (Corniche).

The Ministry of Finance confirmed that it will work on vacating 116 chalets and handing them over to the Kuwait Municipality as soon as the process of terminating the contracts of chalet users is complete.

Meanwhile, sources from the Kuwait Municipality revealed the reasons behind the delay in taking serious action to remove chalets obstructing the Jahra Corniche project, which covers a total area of 5.8 million square meters.

They explained that one of the main reasons for the delay was the appeal made by some chalet owners to the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, requesting

a six-month extension for their leases. However, this request was rejected due to its negative impact on the project's timeline, as it is one of Kuwait's major development projects.

The project is expected to create approximately 25,000 job opportunities and will be a big step toward achieving Kuwait's 'New Kuwait 2035' vision.

After the chalets are vacated by the beginning of April, the Kuwait Municipality's Projects Department will begin preparing the project's conditions booklet. This will be in preparation for offering the project to the private sector in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations, with plans to begin this process in the second half of 2025.

In addition, coordination with the Environment Public Authority will take place at every phase of implementation.



KUNA photo

'Makshat 3' achieves remarkable success by attracting more than 250 thousand visitors. The tourist spot will reopen on Eid after remaining shut during Ramadan for maintenance and development.

### '250,000 visited tourist spot'

## 'Makshat 3' to remain shut in Ramadan for repairs: Al-Ajmi

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA):** Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi affirmed today, Monday, that the (Makshat 3) project has successfully attracted more than 250,000 visitors, citizens, residents, and GCC nationals since its launch in November 2024, noting that this turnout reflects its distinction as a leading recreational and tourism destination.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Ajmi said that (Makshat 3) will suspend visitor reception during the holy month of Ramadan to conduct maintenance and development work in preparation for the next phase, confirming that the project will reopen on the first day of Eid Al-Fitr with a fresh look and enhanced features to enrich the visitor experience.

He explained that the project was fully funded by the National Cooperative Projects Committee without imposing financial burdens on the state treasury, supported by exceptional efforts from the Cooperative Societies Union, pointing out that (Makshat 3) exemplifies a fruitful partnership between the public and private sectors, based on an integrated strategy of effective planning, comprehensive execution, innovative media promotion, and continuous monitoring to improve performance and visitor experience.

Al-Ajmi further stated that (Makshat 3) has bolstered the national economy by stimulating local spending and invigorating tourism and entertainment-related sectors, leading to increased sales for restaurants, cafes, and shops, while creating numerous direct

and indirect job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth, entrepreneurs, and owners of small and medium enterprises, thereby enhancing the project's positive economic impact.

He affirmed that the project aligns with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the Sustainable Development Goals, noting that it provided a comprehensive recreational environment with diverse activities catering to all age groups.

He highlighted that the third edition of (Makshat) saw an expansion of its infrastructure, with the number of restaurants and cafes increasing to over 30, the expansion of the traditional cafe to enhance the heritage experience, and the allocation of 60 family rest areas to ensure visitor comfort, alongside additional events during official holidays that contributed to attracting more visitors.

Al-Ajmi pointed out that the project adopted cutting-edge technologies for event management, developing an advanced online booking system through its official website and the (EVENTAT) app to streamline entry and organization, in addition to using sophisticated tools to monitor performance, measure visitor satisfaction, and analyze data to refine future event planning.

He expressed appreciation for the close cooperation with government entities, including the Ministries of Interior, Information, and Health, and the General Fire Directorate, which provided distinguished services to ensure visitor comfort and safety, stressing that this support was pivotal to the project's success.

Al-Ajmi affirmed that (Makshat 3) stands as a model to be emulated in transforming ambitious ideas into economic successes, noting that its significant financial revenues during its operational period underscore its economic viability and open broad prospects for future development to strengthen Kuwait's position as a prominent regional recreational and tourism destination.



Dr. Al-Ajmi

## Car snatched from female doctor at knife-point in mall car parking

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** The deputy public prosecutor has instructed the criminal security officers to urgently locate and arrest an unidentified individual who stole a doctor's vehicle at knife-point, reports Al-Anba daily.

He also ordered the distribution of a description of the stolen vehicle and the suspect, along with directives for its recovery.

A security source reported that a female citizen, born in 1973, who works as a doctor at a government hospital, filed a complaint at Shamiya Police Station. She stated that after leaving a shopping mall in Shuwaikh Administrative Area, she went to the parking lot where an unknown man approached her, brandishing a knife and demanding the car keys, threatening her not to resist. The doctor, in fear of the threat, handed over the keys, and the assailant fled with the vehicle. She provided detailed information about the car.

Capital Investigations Department officers examined the crime scene, reviewed security footage to quickly identify the suspect and utilized artificial intelligence technology to expedite the investigation.

A case of robbery by force was filed and classified as a felony.



**Drugs found on man:** Emergency response teams in Hawally Governorate referred a man, born in 1998, to the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) after discovering two Lyrica pills and a pack of Shabu in his possession, reports Al-Anba daily.

This step is part of an ongoing investigation to determine how the young man obtained the narcotics.

A security source revealed that the Ministry of Interior's Operations Unit received a report about an individual seen walking in Hawally in an erratic state, appearing to be under the influence. An emergency patrol was dispatched to the scene and quickly apprehended the young man. Upon searching him, the authorities found two Lyrica pills and a pack of Shabu hidden in his clothing. The young man then admitted to taking a dose of Shabu, which caused him to lose his balance.

## Kuwaiti woman, Asian man perish in separate accidents

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** A Kuwaiti woman in her fifties died and two individuals sustained injuries when two vehicles collided in Al-Oyoun, Jahra on Monday evening.

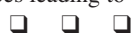
According to informed sources, firefighters from the Jahra Industrial Fire Station rushed to the location after receiving information about the accident. They dealt with the location before handing it over to the concerned authorities.

The body of the deceased was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, and the injured were referred to the nearest hospital. A case has been filed regarding the accident.

Meanwhile, an Asian man, in his 40s, died in a two-vehicle collision on Jahra Expressway, opposite Ibn Sina Hospital.

A security source revealed that the Operations Unit of the Interior Ministry received a report about the accident. Immediately, security and ambulance personnel were dispatched to the location, the source affirmed.

Upon arrival at the scene, the security officers and medical emergency workers discovered that the Asian already succumbed to his wounds. His remains were referred to the Forensic Medicine Department. A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances leading to the fatal accident.



**Court depts relocated:** Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait has issued a decision to relocate all departments of the Court of First Instance, the Court of Appeals, and the Court of Cassation from their current location at the Palace of Justice to the new Palace of Justice building, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decision also includes the transfer of the Family Court departments - Capital, First Instance and Appeal - to the new building from Sunday.

## Kuwait asks world to help end Israeli atrocities in Gaza

**GENEVA, March 4, (KUNA):** The State of Kuwait has called on the United Nations Human Rights Council and the international community to take a clear and firm stance against the Israeli occupation's blatant violations of international humanitarian law and the UN Charter. Kuwait expressed deep concern over the ongoing situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the obstruction of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

This appeal was made in a speech by the Permanent Delegation of Kuwait to the United Nations and other international organizations, delivered by Counselor Nasser Bader Al-Ramzi, during discussions on the comprehensive report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Al-Ramzi urged the UN Human Rights Council to adopt effective measures to ensure the immediate cessation of these violations. He reaffirmed Kuwait's unwavering support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 borders, in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In addition, Al-Ramzi emphasized the importance of upholding Sudan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. He called for peaceful dialogue among all parties in Sudan and stressed the necessity of providing humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people.

Highlighting regional stability, Al-Ramzi



Counselor Nasser Bader Al-Ramzi.

KUNA photo

underscored the need to preserve Syria's unity and respect its sovereignty to maintain security and protect national institutions. He also called for lifting sanctions imposed on Syria.

Furthermore, Al-Ramzi strongly condemned hate speech and acts of desecration, including incidents of burning the Holy Quran. He reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to supporting the role of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in promoting and safeguarding funda-

mental human rights.

The Kuwaiti representative called for the enactment of legislation that strengthens human rights protections and fosters constructive international cooperation to ensure a more just and equitable world.

Reiterating Kuwait's steadfast commitment to human rights, Al-Ramzi denounced the politicization and double standards in addressing global human rights issues.

## Court acquits duo of collaborating, assisting in forgery of official documents

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** The Criminal Court, presided over by Justice Nayef Al-Dahoum acquitted two individuals of collaborating and assisting in the forgery of an official document -- an industrial craft license.

Case files indicate that there is a dispute over the lease contracts of shops located on a plot in Shuwaikh Industrial Area. One of the defendants, an investor in the shops, was accused of refusing to vacate the shops, claiming he has a valid new lease contract.

Attorney Bashar Al-Nassar, lawyer for the investor, argued that there was no forgery of official documents and that the testimony provided by the employee in charge of registration was false.

He pointed out contradictions in the statements of the informant and his witness, as well as discrepancies in the testimony of the government agency's employee.

The court ultimately ruled in favor of the defendants, citing the inconsistencies and contradic-

tions in the evidence and testimony presented.



**Biometrics exemptions:** The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has exempted employees with disabilities, or those responsible for caring for a disabled person, from the fingerprint attendance requirement during the month of Ramadan, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The ministry has suspended the reduction of working hours for certain cases, including medical council members, pregnant employees, and breastfeeding employees, in addition to the 15-minute grace period for female employees at the start and end of their scheduled workday.

The ministry has informed its employees that presence-proving fingerprint should be recorded within 60 minutes after the expiration of two hours and one minute from the start of the official workday for the aforementioned cases.

In addition, employees working evening shifts from 6:45 pm to 11:30 pm are exempt from the fingerprint attendance requirement during their work hours.

### Other Voices

## The 'Palestinian laboratory'

By Ahmad alsarraf

**I**srael released Nael Barghouti after he spent 45 years in prison as a freedom fighter. However, there are still some among our own people who shamelessly continue to sympathize with the Zionist entity, and justify its actions under the pretext that Hamas is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood Group. They insist on refusing to differentiate between a fundamental disagreement with Hamas's ideology and positions, and the Palestinian right to a free and secure state. It seems they have little desire for Palestinians to enjoy a free and secure homeland, for reasons that are no longer a mystery.

Jewish-Australian freelance investigative journalist Antony Loewenstein recently released his book titled "The Palestinian Laboratory".

Few people in our countries, especially those concerned with the issue, have heard of this book, which was first published nearly a year ago. In his book, Loewenstein exposes Israel's crimes, not only within its own borders but also against many peoples governed by merciless dictatorial regimes. These regimes import weapons, mass surveillance devices, and abuse systems from Israel.

According to the book, Israel ranks ninth globally in exporting weapons, spying systems, surveillance, and eavesdropping technologies.

It highlights how Israel has benefited from its occupation of Palestinian territories by using it as a testing ground for developing its weapons. With a population of seven million people, the occupied territories serve as an illegal laboratory, where these individuals are subjected to experiments, all of them monitored by highly advanced systems.

Consequently, Israel managed to collect a tremendous amount of information about every Palestinian citizen, and it resorted to hiring vast storage capacities from Google and Amazon to store the collected data.

The Israeli military-industrial complex

uses the occupied Palestinian territories as an open field to test the effects of weapons and surveillance technologies before exporting them to many countries around the world. This unethical exploitation has provided Israel with great experience in controlling the population of any country through surveillance, home demolitions, long-term imprisonment of Palestinians, and the abuse of highly advanced systems and high-tech tools such as the Pegasus spyware, all used in a brutal manner.

The book has been praised by leading international intellectuals and politicians as a tragic and sordid record of how Israel, once seen as a moral model in their eyes, has transformed into a supplier of the most brutal tools of sabotage in world history.

It highlights Israel's disregard for ethics and its insistence on treating the Palestinian people as human laboratory subjects for criminal experiments.

Loewenstein based his book and the television report on certified research, studies, and interviews with a wide variety of Palestinians and former Israeli security officials. The video link is available at the end of this article.

The renowned intellectual Noam Chomsky commented on the book, stating that it is highly recommended for reading because it exposes the hidden and shocking face of Israeli colonialism and the way it uses its oppression of the Palestinians to strengthen its military and security industries, in blatant violation of global human rights principles.

Prominent and independent Jewish intellectuals have regarded the book as a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand the horrific story of how Israel established its technological economy, built on spyware, drones, and horrific devices that enable it to enslave the Palestinians and deprive them of their basic rights, including the right to possess their own nationality in their homeland.

These are testimonies from prominent Jewish witnesses, including Israelis. Yet, there are still those among us who are unashamed to openly express their support for Israel!

Here is the link to the book: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=621255920843995>



email: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

## MoE stresses need to close fiscal '24/'25 fund accounts

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** The Financial Affairs Sector at the Ministry of Education issued a circular to the assistant undersecretary for Public Education Affairs stressing the need to close the financial accounts for fiscal 2024/2025, as per the circular of the Ministry of Finance regarding the preparation of the final accounts of government agencies.

The circular underscored the need for specifying the expenses and revenues for each fiscal year in accordance with the specified procedures. It called for providing the Financial Administration with all claims due for the aforementioned fiscal year no later than March 16, 2025 to ensure their payment from the budget of the current fiscal year.

It also emphasized the need to collect dues owed by the concerned authorities before the end of the fiscal year to avoid any delay in closing the accounts and ensuring commitment to the approved financial systems.



# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## Fraud and scams in Ramadan, and victims run in hundreds

"IN OUR Islamic religion, there are many virtues and noble morals that have amazed even Western atheists. I wanted to write about this at the beginning of Ramadan, but we were shocked by some incidents, so it is better to inform the people so that they would be cautious and protect themselves."

**Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"An example of this is that weak-willed people exploit religion and occasions to plunder people's money. Electronic fraud gangs have found an opportunity in the month of Ramadan to lure more victims, trap them and steal their bank balances.

"The method used by these fraudsters is to display advertisements about providing housemaids for those who need such services during the month of Ramadan for five hours a day at KD80 per housemaid per month, for example. When the customer responds and chooses a housemaid from the advertisements, he is asked to pay KD2 through a link on the mobile phone, and then his bank account is hacked and his balance is seized.

"According to the head of the Kuwaiti Information Security Association, Dr. Safaa Zaman, fraud attempts spread with the advent of Ramadan by sending incorrect links to fake charitable organizations, or links to donate Iftar meals, and committees outside Kuwait, all of which are fake according to what the association has confirmed.

"An Arab woman mentioned how she was subjected to an electronic fraud operation during the last Ramadan, after she contacted one of the numbers attached to an advertisement for providing services. An employee responded to her and offered her workers of different nationalities, and when she settled on one of them, she received a call from a local number asking her to pay KD2 through a link. As soon as she clicked on the link and completed the payment, she was surprised by messages that she received, deducting an amount of KD1,340 from her account that was transferred to a local account, then the other party's mobile phone was turned off.

"She added that after discovering the fraud, she went to the police station and then to the Public Funds Prosecution, where she filed a case. There, she met many victims who were subjected to similar fraud operations, and it turned out that the gang operates outside Kuwait.

"We have mentioned examples of fraud and deception, including the hundreds of Kuwaitis and expatriates entered a real estate exhibition and found a company that dazzled people with luxurious decor, good reception and a good-looking employee, who promised to buy houses in America and rent the houses to them for a 20 percent commission. Each of them paid \$50,000 and it turned out that the houses were damaged and taxed, and could not be sold or lived in, and were located in an area where crime is rampant.

"In July 2021, about 350 Kuwaitis resorted to members of the National Assembly with a complaint in which they asked for help to recover their money from a Turkish company with which they had contracted to buy residential villas in Turkey in 2013, through its office in Kuwait, which closed its doors after receiving millions of Kuwaiti dinars and transferring the money to Turkey. They said: 'We tried to get our rights by filing lawsuits in Turkish courts, but we haven't got anything till date.'"

### Also:

"Make it a historic moment in your life... truly, an opportunity like no other in this blessed month to seize it and earn its priceless rewards," columnist **Waleed Ibrahim Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"How many people were here yesterday and are no longer with us today... and how many souls prayed and wished to witness the days of Ramadan to fast and pray, but their wish was not granted..."

"And how many souls disobeyed, were arrogant, and tyrannized, yet today, by God's grace, they are still with us, living through this month of fasting, obedience, and mercy, perhaps to have the door of acceptance and forgiveness opened for them by the Almighty!"

"The doors of paradise have once again been opened before us, with the abundance of good deeds rising to the heavens, so that the Lord may free His servants from the fire. Do not miss this opportunity, which may never come again.

"How many people, may God protect us, thought they would witness this month again in their lifetime, only to forget their Lord during the time they lived, becoming arrogant and tyrannical, and then leaving this world suddenly with their deeds, passing away without experiencing Ramadan to correct their path and seek mercy and forgiveness.

"Sadly, there are those who believe that Ramadan came solely for fasting from food and drink, neglecting prayer, remembrance, zakat, charity, and recitation of the Quran. They spend the days of the month asleep in the morning, indulging in card games, watching foolish TV shows, and following the

notorious "fashionista" world!

"As Sheikh Mohammad Saleh Al-Munajjid says, "Whoever fasts only from food and drink, their fast is a habit. Whoever fasts from the forbidden, refrains from immorality, and fears Allah, their fast is an act of worship. Whoever fasts from sins and breaks their fast with acts of goodness, they are a satisfied faster. Whoever fasts from shameful acts and breaks their fast with repentance, they are a righteous faster. Whoever fasts from backbiting and slander and breaks their fast with Quran recitation, they are a wise faster.

"Fasting is the bridle of the pious, the shield of warriors, and the gardens of the righteous and the near ones to Allah. Fasting is for the Lord of the worlds, so do not be like the masses who fast only from food, drink, and intimacy. Rather, elevate your level by avoiding forbidden words and actions, and then elevate yourself further to fasting by restraining yourself from anything other than the remembrance of Allah and His worship."

"We had hoped to experience these blessed days with hearts and souls free from hatred, grudges, and dirty political conspiracies. We wished for the language of killing and destruction to cease in our daily lives, which, politically, have become filled with misery, killing, displacement, oppression, and devastation.

"However, the tyrants and oppressors believed they had seized control of the earth and everything on it, thinking they could annihilate the oppressed peoples and extinguish their resistance forever. Yet, they are gravely mistaken. As Allah says: "...And those who have wronged will know what kind of return they will return." (Quran)

"Blessed Ramadan to you all... We ask Allah to accept our acts of worship and deeds, grant us victory over those who oppose us, and protect us from those who harbor evil intentions towards the Muslim Ummah."

□ □ □

"I had recently received a forwarded news item. Even though I am uncertain about its source, I found it quite intriguing as it is in line with one of my wishes that I hope will be realized. The message read: Orders to review the bank accounts of all former MPs, ministers, and officials without exception," columnist **Dr. Turki Al-Azmi** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Accepting money, either as a 'gift' or 'donation' from public or private funds, is considered an indirect bribe, irrespective of the justification.

"This news brought to mind reports published years ago about the inflated bank accounts of some MPs.

"The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, 'What is the matter with the worker we send, who returns saying, 'This is for you, and this is a gift for me'? Would it not be better for him to stay in his father's or mother's house and wait to see if any gift comes to him?'"

"Any bank account that shows a huge increase in its balance should, as a matter of necessity, be investigated to determine the source of those funds, including those belonging to public figures.

"If you have a legitimate business and can verify the source of your funds with real invoices, not fake or fabricated ones, then there is no problem, and may God bless you with more.

"However, for those who, by virtue of their positions or due to 'celebrity propaganda', receive money that 'inflates their balance', I believe it is important for society to protect itself by activating accountability, as has been done in neighboring and even non-neighboring countries.

"I pray that justice is served in holding accountable those who have deposited large sums into their accounts without providing clear evidence showing the source of those funds and what they are in exchange for.

"For the record, even in business, the actual level of sales and product prices are known, and marketing alone cannot generate large sums of money or unexpected financial boosts, as seen in some bank accounts.

"God curses the briber and the bribed", those who steal public and private funds, launder money, and whitewash it... Will the hope of recovering and confiscating these funds after a long wait ever come true? Tracing the money is an easy task for holding the "hidden thief" accountable, as the country's interests must always come first.

"The most dangerous thing happening around us is the 'hidden thief'. Some try to corrupt people's minds by spreading poison and rumors, while others exploit their positions to amass wealth through 'gifts or commissions' in pursuit for wealth. Whether transferred to their bank accounts locally or abroad, all accounts can be traced, and there are systems in place for this.

"We want to cleanse the country of both the 'hidden thief' and the 'exposed thief' as quickly as possible, in order to achieve integrity and dedication in work, which is one of the pillars of institutional, social, media, and political reform."

— **Compiled by Mahmoud Attiyeh / Simi K. Kutty**



Ahmad Al-Dawas



Undersecretary of the National Guard, Lieutenant General Engineer Hashem Al-Rifai, during his visit to the members of the Second Facilities Protection Battalion of the First Protection Brigade, who are tasked with securing the National Control Center.

KUNA photo

## National Guard wins praise for securing vital sites

Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti National Guard (KNG) Lt. Gen. Hashim Al-Rifai expressed the Command's appreciation to the role of Guard's personnel in securing vital sites, stressing the need for vigilance

in their duties

This came in a statement by the KNG, following a visit by Al-Rifai to the Second Protection Brigade, tasked with safeguarding the National Control Center. He con-

veyed the congratulations of KNG's Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the KNG Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Ramadan. (KUNA)

# Kuwait, Qatar joint operation thwarts bid to smuggle drugs

Syrian recipient nabbed; 75,000 'Captagon' pills seized

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA):** Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior and in cooperation with the General Department of Drug Control in Qatar thwarted a major smuggling attempt of a huge shipment of psychotropic drugs (Captagon), said the ministry Monday.

In a press release, the General Department of Security Relations and Media

at the Ministry of Interior stated that the details of the incident go back to secret information received indicating the existence of a criminal network active in smuggling large quantities of Captagon from a European country to the Gulf region, where it was confirmed that Kuwait was the targeted destination.

Based on the investigation, it became clear that the shipment would be smuggled via airfreight, and immediate coordination was made with the General Administration of Customs - Search and

Investigation Department.

It pointed out that a Syrian national was arrested when he was about to receive the shipment.

It also noted that the seized quantity was inventoried and it turned out to be approximately 75,000 Captagon pills. The suspect and the confiscated items were referred to the competent authorities to take the necessary legal measures.

The Ministry of Interior appreciated the effective role played by the Qatari security authorities in this operation, praising the close security cooperation between the two countries.

## Fake detective on prowl to rob expats in their homes

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** The Criminal Security Sector in the Interior Ministry is currently compiling cases of expatriates robbed by an individual posing as a detective, reports **Al-Anba** daily quoting a reliable source from the security sector.

The source revealed that the suspect, who frequently visits expatriate homes, claims to be conducting investigations; then steals their money and valuables. The investigation began after Hawally detectives arrested a suspect born in 1997, who confessed to targeting expatriates for robbery due to his unemployment and financial needs.

The suspect claimed that he had an expatriate accomplice, who allegedly provided him with information about expatriates who kept large sums of money, allowing him to rob

them. However, detective investigations later proved that the suspect's story was fabricated. In truth, he randomly targeted expatriates' homes, threatening them with deportation before stealing money and valuable items; such as silver, gold rings, watches and mobile phones, the source added.

According to the source, the case that led to the suspect's arrest was registered after two expatriates, born in 1961 and 1964, filed a report at the Hawally Police Station on Feb 12. They stated that an unidentified individual entered their home in Hawally, Block Seven, pretending to be a detective and stole KD1,400 from one of them, the source disclosed.

The source confirmed that detectives quickly took action, using surveillance cameras and artificial intelligence technology to locate the sus-

pect's residence. The suspect was arrested some days ago, and when presented to the victims in a lineup, they identified him without hesitation, the source stated.

During interrogation, the suspect admitted to the crime, explaining that he was unemployed and in urgent need of money. He also stressed that he has no connection to law enforcement. When asked about the stolen money, he said he already spent it, the source elaborated.

The source went on to say that the suspect also alleged that an expatriate of the same nationality as the victims assisted him; but upon investigation, it was revealed that this alleged accomplice left Kuwait more than a month ago on a personal vacation, disproving the suspect's claim that he had been waiting for him outside the targeted residence on Feb 12.



Municipality photo

Municipality starts removing all the temporary tents set up in various governorates of Kuwait.

## KFA officials acquitted in 'false news' spread case

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** The Court of Appeals Monday upheld the verdict issued by the Criminal Court, which acquitted former president of Kuwait Football Association Haif Al-Daihani, his deputy Ahmed Aqla, and the association's Secretary-General Salah Al-Qanaei.

They had been facing State Security charges for broadcasting false news and portraying Kuwait in a negative light, which were linked to the events surrounding the Kuwait-Iraq match during the 26th Gulf Cup.

On November 25, the Criminal Court had ruled to acquit Al-Daihani, Aqla, and Al-Qanaei of all charges related to this State Security case.

It is worth highlighting that the Public Prosecution had previously detained the three defendants for 21 days before referring them to the Central Prison.

□ □ □

**Pay comp, PADA told:** The Administrative Court has canceled the decision issued by the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) to exclude a Kuwaiti citizen, who suffers from the loss of sight in one eye, from the disabled list.

The court instructed PADA to issue a certificate of medium visual impairment for the citizen and to pay all his entitlements and allowances.

The counsel representing the citizen, Lawyer Abdul Aziz Arab, explained that the court's ruling was in favor of his client in line with recent principles established by the Court of Cassation. These principles stipulate that individuals with vision in only one eye should not be excluded from the disabled list.

He said the court affirmed his client's right to receive the same entitlements as those who have been classified with medium disabilities in previous years.

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## Healthcare aid boost for MS, arthritis patients

# Namaa Charity launches new health initiatives

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Namaa Charity, in collaboration with the General Secretariat of Endowments, has announced the launch of new health projects aimed at providing treatment for underserved patients, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The projects are funded by the Endowment Fund for Health Development, in line with donor conditions, and seeks to enhance social solidarity and healthcare in Kuwait.



Walid Al-Kandari

Director of the Public Relations Department Walid Al-Kandari confirmed that these projects will focus on patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) and rheumatoid arthritis, as the high costs of their treatments make this initiative a critical humanitarian and societal

necessity.

He explained that Namaa Charity is dedicated to localizing charitable work by offering health, educational, and relief services within Kuwait, ensuring sustainable support for needy communities. These initiatives are in line with New Kuwait 2035 vision, which aims to improve healthcare services, and achieve the third objective of the Sustainable Development Goals, which focuses on ensuring good health for all. The strategic partnership

between Namaa Charity and the General Secretariat of Endowments strengthens the delivery of sustainable programs in health, education, and social care.

Al-Kandari concluded his statement by reaffirming Namaa Charity's commitment to executing its health and development projects.

He called for continued support for these humanitarian initiatives that embody the values of charity and solidarity in Kuwaiti society.

## Kuwait set to ink strategic AI data center agreement with Microsoft

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Minister of State for Communications Omar Al-Omar will hold a press conference on Wednesday at 12:30 pm at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers building regarding the signing of a strategic agreement to establish a data center that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in collaboration with Microsoft and the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

# Jaber Hospital achieves international accreditation for surgical excellence

Kuwait's first healthcare facility to receive SRC recognition

KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA): The Ministry of Health announced that Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital has added a new achievement to its record of successes, with the Surgery Department obtaining accreditation for excellence in safety, effectiveness, and efficiency from the American Surgical Review Corporation (SRC) in the fields of minimally invasive surgery, colon and rectal surgery, and urology.

The Head of the Surgery Department at the hospital, Dr. Sualeiman Al-Mazidi, confirmed in a press statement on Monday that this achievement affirms the development of Kuwait's healthcare system and reflects the continuous commitment to providing advanced surgical services according to the highest international standards. He noted that Jaber Hospital is the first healthcare facility in Kuwait to receive this accreditation in these specialties.

He added that the hospital provides an integrated medical environment that supports surgical excellence through the latest advanced devices and technologies, including robotic surgeries, which improve surgical outcomes and reduce recovery periods. This accomplishment is part of ongoing medical and healthcare advancements that strengthen Kuwait's position on the global map of medical excellence.

Dr. Al-Mazidi emphasized that this accreditation highlights the efficiency of the national medical and surgical teams at the hospital, which includes an elite group of specialized surgeons working in accordance with the latest international protocols.

He expressed his deep gratitude to the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi, and the Undersecretary of the Ministry, Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, for their continuous support and dedication to enhancing the quality of healthcare services, which played a crucial role in achieving this milestone.

He also extended his sincere appreciation to his colleagues in the Surgery Department, the hospital administration, and all relevant sectors in the Ministry for their ongoing support and collaboration. He praised the team spirit and joint efforts that contributed to this success.

Dr. Al-Mazidi stressed that this



Excellence in surgical performance.



Surgical team at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital.

KUNA photos

achievement would not have been possible without the collective dedication to providing the best medical services to patients, adhering to the highest standards of quality and safety.

He further noted that this is not the first recognition for the department, as it has previously obtained similar accreditations from SRC in the fields of endocrine surgery, obesity and metabolic surgery, plastic surgery, and

breast disease treatment. This underscores the department's continuous commitment to maintaining the highest standards of quality in surgical care.

He emphasized that this new accreditation serves as an incentive to further advance the field of surgery and solidify Jaber Hospital's position as a leading medical institution that delivers world-class healthcare services.

SRC is a global non-profit organization based in North Carolina, USA, specializing in evaluating and accrediting surgical institutions based on strict standards to ensure patient safety and enhance the efficiency of surgical procedures. Through its programs, SRC works to improve the quality of surgical services and support hospitals in achieving medical excellence.

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The Cooperative Sector in the Ministry of Social Affairs has initiated supervision over the allocation of areas designated for the Kuwait Farmers Union in the central cooperative markets throughout the country, reports Al-Jarida daily.

These areas, known as the 'Kuwaiti Farmers Corner', constitute 30 percent of the total market space and are intended to showcase local agricultural products for the benefit of the union. This initiative aims to enhance opportunities for marketing local produce, ensure their availability, support Kuwaiti farmers, and contribute to food security while increasing the presence of national products in cooperative markets.

According to sources from the ministry, the newly formed teams from the Cooperative Sector have started field inspections to monitor the extent of cooperatives' adherence to a recent ministerial decision aimed at promoting local agricultural products. These inspections will focus on ensuring compliance, with the ministry emphasizing its commitment to taking legal action against the boards of directors of cooperatives that fail to comply. Penalties for non-compliance will be enforced gradually, starting with a warning, followed by the suspension of the cooperative's bank accreditation, and potentially escalating to a judicial seizure or even the dissolution of the board if non-compliance persists.

The aforementioned decision mandates that cooperative societies must

purchase at least 75 percent of their agricultural product needs directly from local suppliers by participating in daily auctions at approved marketing outlets. These transactions must be documented through computerized invoices to ensure transparency and improve the efficiency of sales and purchasing operations.

In related news, the daily obtained information that the ministry intends to form an investigation committee to scrutinize the operations and financial records of a cooperative society in Ahmadi Governorate.

This committee will review all administrative and accounting documents to ensure their integrity and identify any violations or mismanagement. It will also investigate any misconduct by those responsible for managing the cooperative and its employees during the investigation period. A report detailing violations, the individuals responsible, and proposed legal actions will be submitted to the undersecretary of the ministry within one week of the committee's formation.

Sources from the ministry affirmed that the committee's work will be confidential. "Members are prohibited from disclosing information or sharing their findings publicly. All departments within the cooperative sector and the relevant cooperative society are required to provide the investigation committee with any requested documents or data. Failure to do so will result in legal consequences for those involved," sources added.

## MPW and PART announce road maintenance plan for Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The Ministry of Public Works and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) announced their plan for road maintenance works during the holy month of Ramadan, including vital roads and residential areas in various governorates; with the aim of improving the infrastructure and raising the efficiency of the road network, reports Al-Anba daily.

The plan of PART includes the maintenance of Abdally Road, intersection of the Fourth Ring Road with Morocco Road, Fahheel Road opposite Mishref and Salwa, overpass along the Fourth Ring Road intersection going towards Salmiya, Fourth Ring Road from the intersection of Morocco Road to the intersection of Damascus Street, Subiya Road, Salmi Road going towards Kuwait City, and the Seventh Ring Road from kilometer 24 to kilometer 27 in both directions.

For the weekly maintenance schedule (March 1-6, 2025); the ministry's maintenance work in residential areas covers several governorates as follows:

Jahra: Al-Qasr (Plots 1, 2, 3), Al-Naem (Plot 3), Saad Al-Abdullah (various locations)

Mubarak Al-Kabeer: Abu Fatira (Plots 1, 3, 4, 6), Al-Qurain (Plot 2), Mubarak Al-Kabeer (Plot 3)

The Capital: Al-Faiha (Plots 1, 7, 8), Kaifan (Plot 2), Jaber Al-Ahmad (Plot 1)

Ahmadi: Al-Aqila (Plots 1, 3, 4), Fahad Al-Ahmad (Plots 3, 4), Ahmadi (First Zone), Sabahiya (Plots 2, 3, 4, 5), Sabah Al-Ahmad (Plots C3, C4)

Hawally: Salwa (Plots 6, 11, 12), Bayan (Plots 6, 7, 10), Mishref (Plot 7), Jabriya (Plots 10, 12), Salmiya (Plot 12)

Farwaniya: Abdullah Al-Mubarak (Plots 8, 9), Al-Ardiya (Plots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11), Al-Firdous (Plot 2), Khaitan (Plots 1, 2), Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh (Plot 2)

Both the ministry and PART called on road users to follow the instructions related to road closures and openings, affirming the continuation of maintenance works on all expressways to improve driving quality and ensure the safety of road users.

## 7,000 job seekers await CSC's next move

# Major government job promotions & retirements set for post-Eid shake-up

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Promotions to supervisory positions in several government agencies, including the Civil Service Commission (CSC), will be announced after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources affirmed that the lists for retirement referrals are ready, and several leaders and supervisors in government agencies will be notified that the retirement policies will apply to them. In accordance with established procedures, individuals who receive such notifications will submit their resignations after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, following the receipt of their excellent work bonuses. Subsequently, the vacant positions will be filled through promotions, sources explained.

Also, more than 7,000 Kuwaitis -- including graduates from Kuwait University, Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), private universities and study missions -- are awaiting the CSC's announcement regarding the opening of registration for the 90th employment period. This announcement is expected in March, as confirmed by CSC Chairman Dr. Issam Al-Rubaian on Jan 15. "Under the current registration conditions, not only university graduates but also those with qualifications below a university degree can apply," sources clarified.

Furthermore, individuals who have resigned from government positions under specific criteria are also eligible to register. Sources reaffirmed that the CSC's systems already contain the data of these graduates, enabling them to register their interest in obtaining a job in government agencies.

In a related development, sources told the daily that comprehensive reforms to the central government employment registration conditions have become an urgent necessity. These changes are expected to benefit citizens seeking government jobs, expedite their employment, enhance productivity and efficiency in government agencies, and contribute to long-term economic development. These changes are also aimed at reducing school dropout rates, sources revealed.

Sources said the registration conditions, which were originally issued in 1999, have already been amended to allow for four registration periods per year instead of two. "However,

further radical revisions are necessary to address the evolving needs of the labor market, prevent educational dropouts, reduce the backlog of waiting applicants, and promote the shift toward private sector employment. For example, the current rules permit citizens with only a high school diploma or less, without any additional training, to register for government jobs, provided a full year has passed since their last employment. This includes those who have a high school diploma but no training, specifically those over the age of 25, including married, divorced or widowed citizens, regardless of gender," sources added.

Sources expressed concern that such provisions might lead some students to believe that a high school or intermediate qualification, or even no qualification at all, is sufficient to secure a job. "This perception could discourage them from completing higher education, resulting in higher dropout rates. It was emphasized that revising and updating these conditions is crucial to safeguarding young people's potential, preventing early school leavers, and reducing the financial temptations that might push students to abandon their studies. Such changes are also essential to avoid creating a surplus of unskilled workers and encourage a more specialized workforce," sources stated.

Sources warned that these policies may undermine the value of higher education, reducing public awareness of its importance as a tool for both professional and personal growth. "As a result, those with lower qualifications may find themselves at greater risk of unemployment in the long term, as their opportunities for professional advancement are often more limited compared to those with higher degrees. Furthermore, focusing too heavily on employing individuals with intermediate and secondary qualifications could decrease workforce efficiency, negatively affecting both productivity and long-term economic development," sources elaborated.

In another development, sources revealed that at least 480,000 employees will benefit from the new electronic services of the CSC, which are available through its smartphone application and automated systems. "The new application has begun its gradual rollout, and government agencies must connect to the integrated systems of the CSC to ensure that their employees can access the services and complete transactions directly from their mobile phones. This revision aims to improve readability, clarity and coherence; while maintaining the original content and intent of the message," sources added.



The wells project in Yemen.

## IICO implements two projects worth USD 440,000 in Jerusalem and Yemen

KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA): The International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) announced the implementation of two projects- renovating homes for 15 Palestinian families in Jerusalem and providing potable water to 30,000 beneficiaries in Yemen, at a total cost of USD 440,000 (approximately KD 135,000), as part of its efforts to enhance quality of life, stability, and human dignity.

In a press statement, the organization affirmed that it funded the (Shelter) project in Jerusalem to renovate and improve living conditions for 15 impoverished Palestinian families at a cost of about USD 320,000 (around KD 98,000), underlining its commitment to fostering social stability and ensuring a dignified life for beneficiaries. It noted that the project has created a safe and healthy housing environment, particularly for children, the elderly, and vulnerable groups.

It added that in Shaqra city, Abyan



Shelter project in Jerusalem.

KUNA photos

Governorate, Yemen, it executed a project to supply drinking water by drilling two 30-meter deep artesian wells equipped with solar-powered submersible pumps, alongside a modern 2,000-meter water network and elevated storage tanks, at a cost exceeding USD 120,000 (about KD 37,000).

The organization stated that this project has alleviated the suffering of 30,000 beneficiaries who previously faced water scarcity and limited access, reducing waterborne diseases and easing the daily burden on women and children who had to travel long distances to fetch water.



Continued from Page 1

## Real estate

■ Private real estate: 29.7 percent increase in value and 33.2 percent in the number of deals;  
 ■ Investment real estate: 56.7 percent increase in value and 33.9 percent in the number of deals;  
 ■ Commercial real estate: 86 percent increase in value and 44.4 percent in the number of deals;  
 ■ Craft real estate: 97 percent increase in value and 89 percent in the number of deals.

This growth indicates a robust performance in the real estate sector in multiple market segments.

## Kuwait Amir

According to the outcome from the press conference, the Egyptian minister indicated that the plan was devised in coordination with the Palestinian authorities, the UN, the World Bank, the UNDP, and other international players.

Speaking to KUNA on this issue, Egyptian journalist and Arab affairs expert Osama Ajaj said that it was important to face President Donald Trump's plans for the Gaza Strip, indicating that the Egyptian plan was based on grounded facts and very much achievable.

He touched on the small-scale Arab summit, which was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 21 with the participation of five GCC countries, Jordan, Egypt, saying that the cornerstone of the Egyptian plan was based on its outcomes.

The timetable for the Egyptian plan range from three to five years, he revealed, noting that finding suitable housing for Palestinians and repairing and rebuilding infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli occupation's 15-month assault was the most prominent features of the plan.

He estimated the value of such plan and for early recovery was at around USD 50 billion, a number suggested by the UN and the World Bank.

Ajaj stressed that gathering the required sum of money was a regional and international obligation if a true solution was the end goal.

He affirmed that the Egyptian stance on the Palestinian cause was unwavering, indicating that resettling Palestinians and placing them in other countries was out of the question.

Back to the urgent summit, Ajaj affirmed that it would come out with important decisions including an insistence on the Palestinian authority playing a key role in Gaza's transitional phase.

It would also address the Israeli occupation's ongoing aggression on some cities the West Bank, which Ajaj deemed as an attempt to eliminate the Palestinian cause once and for all.

Ajaj reiterated that the summit would also insist the two-state solution as the only way for peace in the Middle East.

## Kuwait targets

plays a key role in the growth and development of the nation's population and service projects.

Dr. Al-Zamel indicated that water demand is projected to reach 800 million imperial gallons per day by 2035.

He expressed his gratitude to the ministry's employees, particularly the young men and women of Kuwait, for their unwavering commitment and professionalism in performing their work under challenging circumstances to ensure the delivery of water services to all beneficiaries in the best possible way.

It is noteworthy that the Arab world celebrates Arab Water Day on March 3 every year. The League of Arab States, through the Arab Ministerial Water

Council, has dedicated its efforts to implementing the council's recommendations and enhancing practical activities related to water resources in Arab countries.

This year's theme, "Sustainable Water Towards a Better Water Future", focuses on managing water resources sustainably, ensuring justice and equality, and reducing water poverty in Arab countries.

The Arab Water Day highlights the importance of promoting a culture of water conservation to ensure the long-term sustainability of water resources.

## Massive road

She said the Ministry of Public Works will closely supervise and monitor the progress of these repairs, indicating a committee has been formed to select the supervising engineers and conduct tests to ensure effective management and high standards in the execution of the work.

She reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to continue implementing road maintenance projects throughout the country, ensuring that the work meets international standards for quality. She pointed out that investing in infrastructure plays a crucial role in driving economic growth, enhancing the quality of life and supporting sustainable development.

In a related development, Eng. Mohammad Al-Moussawi from the Supervision Department for the Farwaniya Governorate Project (Area Two) affirmed that the ministry's teams are currently overseeing the maintenance works in blocks Two and Four, including the installation of five-centimeter thick asphalt layer.

He urged citizens and expatriates to stay informed about upcoming road closures by consulting the General Traffic Department to avoid traffic congestion and guarantee smooth commute during the maintenance period.



PM Diwan photo  
Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

# MoE warns against delays in lawsuit correspondence

Ministry enforces 15-day legal response rule

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The Ministry of Education issued a circular to all its sectors, departments and units on the need to abide by the rule regarding the speed of responding to correspondence related to lawsuits filed by or against the ministry; while providing the defense and necessary documents to the Legal Advice and Legislation Department well in advance of the court sessions.**

The circular indicated that the postponement of ses-

sions do not exceed 15 days, after which the cases are reserved for judgment and this requires the coordinated efforts of all concerned parties to make sure that documents are submitted on time.

The circular also stressed that disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who causes delay in responding to correspondence from the Legal Sector, as this has a direct impact on the cases related to the ministry.

The Legal Sector in the ministry warned about the noticeable delay by some sectors in responding to correspondence from the Cases Department, which may expose the ministry to fines or judgments against it due to failure to submit the required documents in a timely manner.

In this context, acting Undersecretary of the ministry Mansour Hamoud Al-Dhafiri issued a directive to prioritize responding to correspondence related to lawsuits and to ensure that the required documents are completed within a period not exceeding 15 days.

## Ministerial inspection ensures quality

# Drainage works in Jabriya on track

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Assistant Undersecretary of the Maintenance Engineering Sector at the Ministry of Public Works Eng. Asaad Sarhan has conducted an inspection tour at the project site in Jabriya, Block 10 (Contract No. 10), reports Al-Anba daily.**

This project includes the replacement of rainwater drainage lines and

asphalt treatment works, in compliance with the directives of Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan.

The purpose of the inspection tour was to assess the progress of the project, and ensure that it adheres to the highest technical standards and quality requirements.

Sarhan stressed the importance of meeting the project's timeline, which

is crucial for developing the infrastructure of the area and the efficiency of its rainwater drainage system.

This tour is part of the ongoing efforts of the ministry to oversee periodic maintenance projects in various areas, ensuring that all work meets the highest safety and quality standards; while adhering to the best technical specifications.



Photos during the 15th International Invention Fair awarding ceremony.

# Kuwait University triumphs at Middle East Invention Fair, garnering multiple medals

**KUWAIT CITY, March 4:** As part of its ongoing commitment to supporting scientific research and innovation, a group of distinguished academic staff members from Kuwait University participated in the 15th International Invention Fair in the Middle East, which was organized by the Kuwait Science Club on February 16-19.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, this participation witnessed prominent scientific achievements that showcase the high quality of research and patents registered under the name of Kuwait University.

The university's Research Sector took the initiative to invite researchers with patents registered in its name to participate in this prestigious event.

Four academic staff members from Kuwait University participated with five patents at the 15th International Invention Fair in the Middle East, achieving remarkable success and recognition for their research excellence and leadership in their respective fields.

The awards and medals presented were as follows:

- Prof. Dr. Bader Shafaqa Al-Enzezi received the 'Gold Medal with Honors' and the 'Arab Academy for

Science, Technology & Maritime Transport Award'.

- Dr. Nawaf Faisal Al-Juwaihel and his research team, including Dr. Nasser Al-Sayegh, Dr. Hussein Bahzad, and Dr. Ali Al-Sayegh, won the 'Gold Medal'.

- Dr. Abdullah Mohammed Abdullah and his research team, consisting of Eng. Sheikha Khaled Al-Masoud, Eng. Amina Al-Awadhi, Eng. Munira Al-Ghannam, and Eng. Asma Al-Enezi, were awarded the 'Bronze Medal'.

- Dr. Yaqoub Abdulrahman Hashem and Dr. Ahmed Ali Al-Shamasi received the 'Silver Medal'.

- Dr. Nawaf Faisal Al-Juwaihel and his research team, including Dr. Nasser Al-Sayegh and Dr. Abbas Hamoud, were also awarded the 'Silver Medal'.

The Research Sector also covered all financial costs related to the participation of these researchers, affirming its commitment to supporting distinguished researchers and stimulating innovation within the academic community.

In a related development, the Research Sector nominated two patents from Dr. Mohammad Al-Ansari of the College of Medicine and Dr. Osama Al-Omar of the

College of Engineering and Petroleum.

The nominations were made based on specific criteria and in coordination with the Patent Office of the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf to participate in the exhibition.

Their participation resulted in notable achievements:

- Dr. Mohammad Al-Ansari was awarded the 'Gold Medal with Honors' and the 'WIPO Award for Kuwaiti Inventor'.

- Dr. Osama Al-Omar and his research team, including Eng. Nyazo Chris and Eng. Ahmed Omar, received the 'Silver Medal'.

These achievements highlight Kuwait University's commitment to enhancing the scientific research environment and supporting inventors. In line with its vision to improve the quality of scientific research registered under its name, the university aims to stimulate innovation as a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development. These successes further reflect the prestigious position the university holds in the field of scientific research, both locally and internationally.



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Some Americans fear for country's future

## Trump to stand before Congress, offers divided nation accounting of first weeks

WASHINGTON, March 4, (AP): US President Donald Trump will stand before a joint session of Congress on Tuesday to give an accounting of his turbulent first weeks in office as a divided nation struggles to keep pace, with some Americans fearing for the country's future while others are cheering him on.

It will be the latest milestone in Trump's total takeover of the nation's capital where the Republican-led House and Senate have done little to restrain the president as he and his allies work to slash the size of the federal government and remake America's place in the world. With a tight grip on his party, Trump has been emboldened to take sweeping actions after overcoming impeachments and criminal prosecutions.

The White House said Trump's theme would be the "renewal of the American dream," and he was expected to lay out his achievements since returning to the White House, as well as appeal to Congress to provide more money to finance his aggressive immigration crackdown.

"It's an opportunity for President Trump, as only he can, to lay out the last month of record-setting, record-breaking, unprecedented achievements and accomplishments," said senior adviser Stephen Miller.

Democrats, many of whom stayed away from Trump's inauguration in January, were largely brushing aside calls for boycotts as they struggle to come up with an effective counter to the president.

Instead, they chose to highlight the impact of Trump's actions by inviting fired federal workers as guests, including a disabled veteran from Arizona, a health worker from Maryland and a forestry employee who worked on wildfire prevention in California. They also invited guests who would be harmed by steep federal budget cuts to Medicaid and other programs.

"Rather than focusing on American families and kitchen table issues, President Trump's first month in office has focused on tax cuts for billionaires, paid



The Capitol on March 3, 2025, in Washington. (AP)

for the very people he promised to help," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement.

Trump also planned to use his speech to address his proposals for fostering peace in Ukraine and the Middle East, where he has unceremoniously upended the policies of the Biden administration in a matter of just weeks. On Monday,

Trump ordered a freeze to U.S. military assistance to Ukraine, ending years of staunch American support for the country in fending off Russia's invasion.

Trump was tightening the screws after his explosive Oval Office meeting Friday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as the U.S. leader tries to pressure the erstwhile American ally to embrace peace talks with its invader.

In the Middle East, negotiations to extend a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas have stalled, with Trump floating the permanent displacement of Palestinian civilians in Gaza and a U.S. "takeover" of the territory, straining partnerships with countries in the region and undoing longtime American support for a two-state solution to end the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The backdrop of Trump's speech will also be new economic uncertainty unleashed after the president opened the day by placing stiff tariffs on imports from the country's neighbors and closest trading partners. A 25% tax on goods from Canada and Mexico went into effect just after midnight Tuesday - ostensibly to secure greater cooperation to tackle illicit fentanyl trafficking - triggering immediate retaliation and sparking fears of a wider trade war. Trump also raised tariffs on goods from China to 20%.

The whole scene for Trump's speech was a marked contrast to his final State of the Union address in his first term. Five years ago, Trump delivered his annual address just after the Senate had acquitted him during his first impeachment trial and before the COVID-19 pandemic had taken root across society. Tuesday's address is not referred to as a State of the Union because he is still in the first year of his new term.

The president planned to use his high-profile moment to press his efforts to reshape the country's approach to social issues, as he looks to continue to eradicate diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the country and to roll back some public accommodations for transgender individuals.

## Senate confirms McMahon to lead Education Department

WASHINGTON, March 4, (AP): The Senate voted Monday to confirm former wrestling executive **Linda McMahon** as the nation's education chief, a role that places her atop a department that President Donald Trump has vilified and vowed to dismantle.

McMahon will face the competing tasks of winding down the Education Department while also escalating efforts to achieve Trump's agenda. Already the Republican president has signed sweeping orders to rid America's schools of diversity programs and accommodations for transgender students while also calling for expanded school choice programs.

At the same time, Trump has promised to shut down the department and said he wants McMahon "to put herself out of a job."

The Senate voted to confirm McMahon 51-45. A billionaire and former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, McMahon, 76, is an unconventional pick for the role. She spent a year on Connecticut's state

board of education and is a longtime trustee at Sacred Heart University but otherwise has little traditional education leadership.

McMahon's supporters see her as a skilled executive who will reform a department that Republicans say has failed to improve American education. Opponents say she's unqualified and fear her budget cuts will be felt by students nationwide.

"Americans believe in public education," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, said before the confirmation vote. "They don't want to see the Department of Education abolished. If the Trump administration follows through on cuts to education, schools will lose billions in funding."

At her confirmation hearing, McMahon distanced herself from Trump's blistering rhetoric. She said the goal is to make the Education Department "operate more efficiently," not to defund programs.

She acknowledged that only Congress has the power to close the department, and she pledged to preserve Title I money for low-income schools, Pell grants for low-income college students, and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Yet she suggested some operations could move to other departments, saying Health and Human Services might be better suited to enforce disability rights laws.



McMahon

## US pauses military aid to Ukraine while pressuring Zelenskyy to move toward quick end to war

WASHINGTON, March 4, (AP): President Donald Trump on Monday directed a "pause" to US assistance to Ukraine as he seeks to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to engage in negotiations to end the war with Russia.

The move comes just days after a disastrous Oval Office meeting in which Trump and Vice President JD Vance tore into Zelenskyy for what they perceived as insufficient gratitude for the more than \$180 billion US has appropriated for military aid and other assistance to Kyiv since the start of Russia's invasion on Feb 24, 2022.

A White House official said Trump is focused on reaching a peace deal and wants Zelenskyy "committed" to that goal. The official added that the U.S. was "pausing and reviewing" its aid to "ensure that it is contributing to a solution." The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the assistance.

The order will remain in effect until Trump determines that Ukraine has demonstrated a commitment to peace negotiations with Russia, the official said.

The halting of military aid comes some five years after Trump held up congressionally authorized assistance to Ukraine as he sought to pressure Zelenskyy to launch an investigation into Joe Biden, then a Democratic presidential candidate. The moment led to



US President Donald Trump welcomes Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House in Washington on Feb 28. (AP)

Trump's first impeachment.

In the leadup to the 2024 election, Trump vowed a quick end to the war in Ukraine, even once boasting that he could bring a halt to the fighting in one day. He has shown increasing frustration with Zelenskyy over the war while simultaneously expressing confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom he has long admired, can be trusted to keep the peace if a truce is reached.

Trump earlier on Monday slammed

Zelenskyy for suggesting that the end of the war likely "is still very, very far away." Zelenskyy had suggested it would take time to come to an agreement to end the war as he tried to offer a positive take on the US-Ukraine relationship in the aftermath of last week's White House meeting.

"This is the worst statement that could have been made by Zelenskyy, and America will not put up with it for much longer!" Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform, respond-

ing to comments Zelenskyy made late Sunday to reporters.

Trump, at a White House event later Monday, referred to Zelenskyy's reported comments and asserted the Ukrainian leader "better not be right about that."

Zelenskyy later took to social media in an effort to further explain his thinking. He did not directly refer to Trump's comments, but underscored that it "is very important that we try to make our diplomacy really substantive to end this war the soonest possible."

"We need real peace and Ukrainians want it most because the war ruins our cities and towns," Zelenskyy added. "We lose our people. We need to stop the war and to guarantee security."

Trump administration and Ukrainian officials had been expected to sign off on a deal during Zelenskyy's visit last week that would have given the U.S. access to Ukraine's critical minerals in part to pay back the U.S. for aid it has sent Kyiv since the start of the war. The White House had billed such a pact as a way to tighten U.S.-Ukrainian relations in the long term.

Vance, in an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity that aired Monday evening, said European allies were doing Ukraine a disservice by not pressing Zelenskyy to find an endgame to the war.

## Meet overshadowed by Trump's annexation remarks

### Charles welcomes Canada's Trudeau for talks

LONDON, March 4, (AP): Britain's King Charles III welcomed Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday as the monarch faces criticism in Canada over being silent about US President Donald Trump's repeated suggestion that the US annex its northern neighbor.

While royal officials did not provide details about the private talks at the monarch's royal residence Sandringham, the king and Trudeau were expected to discuss Trump's comments that Canada should become the 51st state.

Charles is the head of state in Canada, a member of the Commonwealth group of many former British colonies and territories. Trudeau on Sunday said "nothing seems more important to Canadians right now than standing up for our sovereignty and our independence as a nation."

Britain's monarchs must remain politically neutral, but the Canada issue shows how delicate that balancing act can be.

"The Government of Canada should ask the Head of State to underscore Canadian sovereignty," former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney posted on X.

Trudeau flew to London to join an emergency defense summit on Ukraine over the weekend, where British Prime Minister Keir Starmer outlined plans to end the war in Ukraine and rallied European counterparts to throw their weight behind



Britain's King Charles III, (right), meets Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, England on March 3. (AP)

the country as US backing of Ukraine appeared in jeopardy.

The king's meeting with the Canadian leader came after Charles met Sunday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to show solidarity with Ukraine after Trump lashed out at Zelenskyy in a heated exchange in the Oval Office.

Starmer told lawmakers on Monday he held talks with Trudeau over the weekend and was "able to assure him of our strong support for Canada."

Meanwhile, Charles has invited

Trump to come for a state visit. Starmer delivered that invitation to Trump in Washington last week, noting it was an "unprecedented" honor since Trump already had been given the royal treatment by Queen Elizabeth II during his first term.

Starmer insisted to lawmakers on Monday that the US and Britain have "the closest of relationships," and that it would be "a huge mistake at a time like this to suggest that any weakening of that link is the way forward for security and defense in Europe."



People hold a banner that reads: 'Corruption kills' during a Serbia's parliament session in Belgrade, Serbia on March 4. (AP)

## 3 Serbian lawmakers hurt as smoke bombs thrown in parliament

At least 3 lawmakers were injured on Tuesday, one of them seriously, after chaotic scenes in Serbia's parliament, during which smoke bombs and flares were thrown.

Lawmakers were scheduled to vote on a law that would increase funding for university education, but opposition parties insisted the session was illegal and should first confirm the resignation of Prime Minister Milos Vučević and his government.

The Parliamentary chaos started about an hour after the session started with opposition blowing whistles

and holding up a banner reading "Serbia has risen so the regime would fall!"

Video footages from the assembly hall showed a clash first between lawmakers and later flares and smoke bombs being thrown. Serbian media said eggs and water bottles also were thrown. Officials later said three persons were injured in the disturbance.

Parliament speaker Ana Brnabic accused the opposition of being a "terrorist gang." She said one of the injured lawmakers was in a serious condition. (AP)

## EU ponders \$841b plan to beef up defenses to counter possible US disengagement

BRUSSELS, March 4, (AP): The chief of the European Union's executive on Tuesday proposed an 800 billion euro (\$841 billion) plan to beef up defenses of EU nations to lessen the impact of potential U.S. disengagement and provide Ukraine with military muscle to negotiate with Russia following the freeze of U.S. aid to the embattled nation.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the massive "REARM Europe" package will be put to the 27 EU leaders who will meet in Brussels on Thursday in an emergency meeting following a week of increasing political uncertainty from Washington, where President Donald Trump questioned both his alliance to the continent and the defense of Ukraine.

"I do not need to describe the grave nature of the threats that we face," von der Leyen said.

Key to the quandary of EU nations has been an unwillingness to spend



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a media conference on the defense package at EU headquarters in Brussels on March 4. (AP)

much on defense over the past decades as they hid under the U.S. nuclear umbrella and a sluggish economy, which

creates challenges for a quick ramp-up of such spending.

Von der Leyen said the first task is to loosen the fiscal constraints the EU puts on budgetary spending to "allow member states to significantly increase their defense expenditures without triggering" punishing rules aimed at keeping deficits from going too far into the red.

"So if member states would increase their defense spending by 1.5% of GDP on average, this could create fiscal space of close to 650 billion euros (\$683 billion) over a period of four years," von der Leyen said. This would be topped up by a loans program of 150 billion euros (\$157 billion) to allow member states to invest in defense.

She said military equipment that needs to be improved includes air and missile defense, artillery systems, missiles and ammunition, drones and anti-drone systems and cyber preparedness.



Police and emergency services are deployed during a major operation in the city center of Mannheim, Germany on March 3, following an incident in which one person was killed and others injured when a car rammed into a crowd, German police said. (AP)

## Driver to face probe in tragic Germany crash that killed 2

MANNHEIM, Germany, March 4, (AP): Investigators on Tuesday will question a driver who allegedly rammed a car into a crowd in the southwestern German city of Mannheim, killing two people and injuring 11. Andreas Stenger, head of the State Criminal Police Office, told German news agency dpa that police hope the interview with the perpetrator will lead to information about a motive for Monday's attack. Mourners left flowers in the city's center to honor the victims.

The suspect is a 40-year-old German man from the nearby state of Rhineland-Palatinate who was detained and is in a hospital after being injured, State Interior Minister Thomas Strobl of Baden-Württemberg, which includes Mannheim, told dpa on Monday. Strobl later told reporters in Mannheim that "as far as the specific motivation of the crime is concerned, we have no indication of an extremist or religious background at the moment. The motivation could rather be based in the person of the perpetrator himself."

German police and prosecutors said Monday at a joint news conference that the driver intentionally rammed his car into people and is being investigated for murder and attempted murder. Five of the 11 injured were seriously wounded.

Police and prosecutors said the driver shot himself in the mouth when he was arrested and had to undergo medical treatment at a hospital.



## INTERNATIONAL

## Artificial intelligence and economy likely to be among top issues for China's legislature

BEIJING, March 4, (Agencies): Harnessing the power of artificial intelligence and shoring up the economy are among the issues expected to top the agenda when China's legislature meets Wednesday in Beijing.

Almost 2,900 delegates have arrived in Beijing for the annual session of the largely rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress. Concomitantly, an advisory body of business leaders, athletes and academics, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, convened Tuesday. The two bodies' concurrent meetings are known as the Two Sessions.

The weeklong parliamentary session, though largely ceremonial, helps to signal government priorities for the year. Premier Li Qiang is expected to announce an economic growth target of around 5%, in line with the past couple of years.

The meetings come as China's economy struggles with sluggish consumption, a lengthy property crisis, ballooning government debt and a possible renewed trade war with the United States. On Tuesday, Beijing announced additional tariffs of up to 15% on imports on US farm products including chicken, pork, soy and beef. The move came in retaliation for an increase in flat US tariffs on Chinese products - from 10% to 20% - that came in effect at the same time.

"Undoubtedly, the adverse impacts



The opening meeting of the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) is held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China on March 4. (Xinhua)

brought by the external environment have deepened, and China's economy still faces some difficulties and challenges," said Lou Qinjian, spokesman for the National People's Congress in a news conference ahead of the session.

"Internationally, rising economic and political uncertainties make it harder to stabilize external demand. Domestically, demand is insufficient, and some enterprises are experiencing operational difficulties," he added.

The government is expected to announce some measures to boost consumption such as increasing the deficit ratio from 3% to 4%, though massive stimulus is unlikely.

Harnessing the power of artificial intelligence may also feature in policy announcements.

Lou described China's breakthrough DeepSeek AI model, unveiled earlier this year, as an example of the country's "innovative and inclusive approach to technology."

The delegates are also set to review a law aimed at improving market conditions for private enterprises, as part of the government's wider effort to signal support for the public sector to shore up growth.

Chinese President Xi Jinping met in February with business leaders, including Alibaba founder Jack Ma and Huawei CEO Ren Zhengfei, signaling support at the highest level of leadership.

"Xi realizes he needs the private sector to keep his underlying priorities chugging along," said Neil Thomas, a fellow on Chinese politics at the Asia Society Policy Institute.



An aerial drone photo taken on March 4, 2025 shows a flooded residential area after heavy rain in Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia. (Xinhua)

## Severe flooding strikes Jakarta, surrounding cities after heavy rain

Severe flooding hit most areas in Jakarta and its satellite cities on Tuesday after heavy rain poured over the regions since Monday evening, leaving thousands of houses submerged and hundreds of residents affected. Videos taken by residents showed severe flooding with water levels reaching rooftops and submerging entire cars. The floods also caused significant traffic congestion across the cities.

Local media reported that a joint team from the regional disaster management agency, fire department, and search and rescue team was deployed to the af-

ected areas to assist with evacuations and emergency responses.

Head of Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency, Dwikorita Karnawati, said the floods had been predicted in several regions across the Southeast Asian country.

"The heavy rain was caused by the detection of atmospheric waves such as the Equatorial Rossby wave and the Kelvin wave, followed by the formation of a low-pressure area and the convergence of several wind patterns from various directions," said Karnawati. (Xinhua)



Two Philippine Air Force FA-50 fighter jets fly during a joint patrol and training session with the US over the South China Sea on Feb 4. (AP)

## Philippine fighter jet, 2 pilots missing

A Philippine fighter jet with two pilots on board has lost contact during a night combat assault in support of ground forces battling communist insurgents in a southern province, and an extensive search is underway, officials said Tuesday.

The FA-50 jet lost communication during the mission with other air force aircraft around midnight Monday before reaching a target area. The other aircraft were able to return safely to an air base in central Cebu province after carrying out assaults, the air force said without providing other details for security reasons.

A Philippine military official told The Associated Press that the inci-

dent happened in a southern province, where a counterinsurgency mission against New People's Army guerrillas was underway. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the sensitive situation publicly.

"We are hopeful of locating them and the aircraft soon and ask you to join us in prayer during this critical time," air force spokesperson Col. Ma. Consuelo Castillo said.

The pilots could eject from the supersonic jets in case they encounter any problem that could lead to a crash. Rescuers could locate them if their emergency locating transmitters emitted signals. (AP)

## N.Korea threatens response to US carrier's deployment in South

SEOUL, South Korea, March 4, (AP): The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened Tuesday to launch high-profile provocations in response to the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in South Korea and other US military activities, which she slammed as "confrontation hysteria of the US and its stooges."

The warning by Kim Yo Jong implies North Korea will likely ramp up weapons testing activities and maintain its confrontational posture against the US, though President Donald Trump has said he would reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy.

In a statement carried by state media, Kim Yo Jong accused the US of clearly showing "its most hostile and confrontational will" to North Korea with the deployments of the USS Carl Vinson and other powerful US military assets and US-South Korean military drills this year.

"The DPRK is also planning to carefully examine the option for increasing the actions threat-

ening the security of the enemy at the strategic level to cope with the fact that the deployment of US strategic assets in the Korean Peninsula has become a vicious habit and adversely affects the security of the DPRK," she said, using the acronym of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Her statement suggests North Korea may test-launch powerful missiles designed to strike the mainland US or American military bases in the region, observers say. South Korea's Defense Ministry warned later it's ready to repel any provocations by North Korea based on a solid military alliance with the US. A ministry statement called Kim Yo Jong's warning "sophistry" meant to justify her country's nuclear development and future provocations.

On Sunday, the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group arrived in South Korea, the latest temporary deployment of a US strategic asset aimed at displaying the firmness of the US-South Korean military alliance in the face of North Korean threats and boosting interoperability of the allies' combined assets.

The US carrier's arrival came four days after North Korea conducted cruise missile tests, its fourth missile launch event this year.



Yo Jong



Soldiers cover M1167 HMMWV (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) anti-tank missile carriers during military drills in Pingtung County, southern Taiwan on Aug 26, 2024. (AP)

## Boost in defense spending coming: Taiwan

Taiwan's defense minister says the island is planning to boost military spending in the face of the "rapidly changing international situation and the escalating threats from adversaries."

Wellington Koo gave no figures but said President William Lai Ching-te was working with the ministry in consideration of enemy threats and urgent readiness needs, a reference to China's threats to invade the island, which it considers its own territory.

Those would "increase the proportion of the defense budget in relation to GDP," Koo said, in comments Monday that were em-

bargoed until Tuesday. Taiwan currently spends about 2.45% of its gross domestic product on its military.

"At the same time, in coordination with national security and foreign policy, the military will continue to deepen cooperation with the United States and other allied nations, expanding multilateral military exchanges to jointly uphold regional peace and stability," Koo said.

Taiwan sees a growing threat from China, which regularly sends ships and aircraft into areas near Taiwan. China is expected to announce its annual defense budget on Wednesday. (AP)



A boat transporting migrants departs the Caribbean coastal village of Miramar, Panama, for the Colombian border on Feb 27, as migrants return from southern Mexico after abandoning hopes of reaching the US in a reverse flow triggered by the Trump administration's immigration crackdown. (AP)

## Costa Rica and Panama coordinate to move southbound migrants, say officials

PEÑAS BLANCAS, Costa Rica, March 4, (AP): Costa Rica and Panama are coordinating to expedite southbound migrant transit through their countries along the same route that carried hundreds of thousands north in recent years, officials said Monday.

Both countries have struggled to find their footing in recent weeks in the new reality of migrants heading south, turned back by the closure of the United States border to asylum seekers since US President Donald Trump took office in January.

The security ministers from both

countries met Monday in Peñas Blancas, a border post between Nicaragua and Costa Rica where southbound migrants will board buses to a Costa Rican government facility at the Panama border.

From there Panama will bus them to its Darien province, which borders Colombia. Costa Rican Security Minister Mario Zamora said that the effort will focus on Colombians, Venezuelans and Ecuadorians who are trying to reach their countries. He said that by organizing the transportation they hope to protect migrants from human traffickers.

His Panamanian counterpart, Frank Ábrego, said the idea is to offer a more regulated transit across Costa Rica and Panama.

On Monday, small groups of migrants carrying backpacks crossed the Nicaraguan border into Costa Rica, cleared immigration, and boarded southbound buses.

Last week, southbound migrants boarded boats in a Panamanian port on the Caribbean sea to be carried to the Panama-Colombian border where they could continue south and avoid a treacherous land crossing of the Darien Gap.

## Farmers paid to switch crops

## Colombian prez aims to reduce drug violence

BOGOTA, Colombia, March 4, (AP): Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced a plan to reduce coca planting in a northeastern region rattled by rebel attacks by paying farmers while they switch to legal crops.

Petro said at a cabinet meeting that his government will seek to eradicate 25,000 hectares of coca

in the Catatumbo region within 140 days, as part of an effort to decrease violence and weaken rebel groups that profit from the cocaine trade. The region has approximately 55,000 hectares of coca crops and is one of Colombia's main producers of cocaine.

Petro said farmers in Catatumbo

will eradicate their coca plantings voluntarily and will be paid by the government while they transition to legal crops. He added that the Colombian military will continue to operate against rebels in the region while the government will try to improve roads that enable farmers to get legal crops to markets.

"Peace in Colombia depends on the voluntary decision of farmers who grow coca to eradicate their crops," Petro said in the meeting.

In January, more than 36,000 people were displaced from their homes in Catatumbo, a mountainous region of around 400,000 people that straddles the border with Venezuela.

Rebels from the National Liberation Army, or ELN, launched coordinated attacks against civilians they accused of being collaborators of a rival group known as the FARC-EMC.

An estimated 80 people were killed in the attacks, which prompted Colombia's government to suspend peace talks with the ELN and declare a 90-day emergency that allows it to limit some civil liberties in the area without congressional approval.

Petro has accused the rebels of trying to take over the region to control its coca crops and its drug-trafficking routes.



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro arrives in Congress to attend the swearing-in ceremony for President-elect Yamandu Orsi, on Inauguration Day in Montevideo, Uruguay on March 1. (AP)

## Rwanda-backed M23 rebels abducted 130 hospital patients in eastern Congo, says UN

DAKAR, Senegal, March 4, (AP): Rwanda-backed M23 rebels abducted at least 130 sick and wounded men from two hospitals in a major city in eastern Congo, the United Nations said Monday.

On Feb 28, M23 fighters raided the CBCA Ndoshio Hospital and Heal Africa Hospital in Goma, a strategic city they seized earlier this year, the U.N. Human Rights Office spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani, said in a statement.

The rebels took 116 patients from CBCA and 15 others from Heal Africa they suspected of being Congolese army soldiers or members of the pro-government Wazalendo militia.

In a lightning three-week offensive, the M23 took control of eastern Congo's main city Goma and seized the second largest city, Bukavu.



M23 rebels enter the centre of east Congo's second-largest city, Bukavu, and take control of the South Kivu province administrative office on Feb 16. (AP)

## Africa

**Nguema to run for president:** Gabon's military leader announced Monday that he would run as a candidate in the oil-rich central African nation's presidential election set for April 12.

Gen Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, who is interim president, led a 2023 military coup that toppled President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who many Gabonese accused of irresponsible governance and major embezzlement that risked leading the country into chaos.

"After careful consideration and in response to your numerous ap-

peals, I have decided to stand as a candidate in the presidential election," Nguema said during a speech to his supporters in the capital Libreville.



Nguema

In August 2023, soldiers proclaimed Nguema, who was the republican guard chief and a cousin of Bongo, as president of a transitional committee to lead the country. (AP)

**Refugees hurt in clashes:** At least four people sustained gunshot wounds as police clashed with protesters in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, in the country's north.

Thousands of refugees in the camp, which hosts people fleeing from conflict and drought in neighboring South Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi and Congo, protested Monday against food rationing due to funding constraints.

The World Food Program, which is in charge of food distribution at the refugee camp, said in last December the food rations for refugee camps were "at 45 percent of the minimum food basket due to resource constraints." (AP)



## Kuwaiti oil price down to \$76.13 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 4, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel decreased by 85 cents to USD 76.13 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared to USD 75.98 pb on Monday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday.

In international markets, Brent crude oil went down USD 1.9 to reach USD 76.62 pb, while West Texas crude dropped USD 1.39 to reach USD 68.37.

# Business

As the bank continues to strengthen its collaboration with the oil sector

## NBK hosts panel discussion on 'Let's Be Aware' campaign at PIC

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a panel discussion at Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) headquarters to promote banking awareness, enhance financial literacy among employees, and highlight the latest fraud tactics. The session focused on preventive measures and essential steps to safeguard against financial fraud, reinforcing NBK's commitment to fostering a more informed and secure banking environment.

This initiative reflects NBK's commitment to strengthening collaboration with oil sector institutions and working collectively to combat fraud and cybercrime. It also underscores the bank's support for the Central Bank of Kuwait's "Let's Be Aware" campaign—launched in partnership with Kuwait banks and Kuwait Banking Association—which stands as the largest financial awareness initiative of its kind in the region.

These visits exemplify NBK's ongoing commitment to promoting financial literacy across society. The "Let's Be Aware" campaign extends beyond fraud awareness, encompassing crucial topics such as maximizing the benefits of banking services and products, fostering a culture of savings and investment, and addressing other key financial issues.

Leveraging its long-standing and distinguished relationships with oil sector institutions, National Bank of Kuwait remains committed to fostering financial awareness and security. As part of this effort, the bank actively organizes visits, awareness sessions, and discussions designed to equip employees with a deeper understanding of fraud risks and the evolving tactics used by fraudsters to execute their schemes. As digital advancements and AI-powered banking services become more prevalent, the majority of transactions are now conducted via smartphones. This makes financial awareness more critical than ever, enabling individuals to make informed and secure financial decisions in an



NBK strengthens collaboration with oil sector institutions.

- NBK firmly believe that awareness is the first line of defense against fraud
- The bank is committed to supporting strategic initiatives that drive economic and social development

increasingly digital landscape."

NBK firmly believes that awareness is the strongest defense against fraud and remains committed to

amplifying its educational content across social media platforms to safeguard customers' interests, strengthen their trust, and ensure a secure banking environment.

With the rapid advancements in technology and artificial intelligence, financial fraud tactics have become more sophisticated, making proactive awareness and vigilance more essential than ever.

NBK emphasized the importance of staying vigilant against evolving fraud tactics to stay ahead of emerging threats. The bank urged customers to remain vigilant and leverage the advice and guidance it provides across all its digital platforms to safeguard their financial security. It was further explained that fraudsters are increasingly leveraging advanced artificial intelligence technologies to ensnare unsuspecting victims. In response, the bank remains committed to monitoring these sophisticated and deceptive methods, issuing timely public alerts, and outlining clear, actionable steps to minimize the risk of falling prey to fraudulent activities.

NBK remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting pivotal and strategic initiatives that serve the national economy and society. At the core of its strategy lies a strong emphasis on combating fraud and empowering customers through financial education, reinforcing trust and security in the banking sector.

NBK leverages its extensive capabilities, including its industry-leading digital platforms with the largest following among Kuwaiti banks, to maximize the reach and impact of the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign, ensuring its objectives resonate with the widest possible audience.

As a leading financial institution in the region, NBK actively organizes a wide range of events to educate the community on key banking sector issues. The bank also conducts specialized training programs to enhance its employees' expertise in combating fraud and financial crimes while leveraging its digital channels and social media platforms to raise awareness about cybercrime risks and fraud prevention.

## Saudi oil giant Aramco reports \$106 bln profit in 2024 amid lower energy prices

Crown Prince's mega projects may require more debt

DUBAI, March 4, (AP): Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil giant Aramco reported a \$106.25 billion profit in 2024 on Tuesday, down 12% from the prior year as lower energy prices now squeeze the kingdom's multi-trillion-dollar development plans.

Already, Saudi's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been digging a straight-line city in the desert for his \$500 billion project at NEOM in Saudi Arabia's western desert on the Red Sea. He also will need to build tens of billions of dollars' worth of new stadiums and infrastructure ahead of the kingdom hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

Meanwhile, he's also pledged potentially \$600 billion in U.S. investments to President Donald Trump to entice him to the kingdom on his first foreign trip as president. Saudi Arabia is also the possible venue for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin over Moscow's war on Ukraine.

All that and OPEC+ moving toward increasing production means Saudi Arabia likely will need to take on new debt to fund the crown prince's vast ambitions.

A filing on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange showed Aramco, formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., had revenues of \$436 billion in 2024. That compares to \$440.88 billion in 2023.

Aramco reported a \$121 billion annual profit in 2023, down from its 2022 record due to lower energy prices as well.

"The decrease was primarily driven by lower revenue and other income related to sales, higher operating costs, as well as lower finance and other income," Aramco said in its filing.

Stock in Aramco traded around \$7.33 a share Tuesday, down from a high over the last year of \$8.71. It has fallen over the past year as oil prices have dropped. Benchmark Brent crude is at \$73 - down 10% this year.

Aramco has a market value of \$1.74 trillion, making it the world's sixth-most valuable company behind Apple, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Amazon



Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil company Aramco and stock market officials walk under a screen displaying the value traded and the volume traded of Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) on the Riyadh's stock market in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Dec. 11, 2019. (AP)

and Alphabet, which owns Google.

Aramco will pay dividends of \$21.36 billion for the fourth quarter, which includes a far-smaller performance dividend of \$220 million. The company expects to pay dividends of \$85.4 billion this year, which is far lower and will further erode cash that Saudi Arabia's monarchy can expect for the year.

"Our strong net income and increased base dividend illustrate Aramco's exceptional resilience," Aramco CEO and President Amin H. Nasser said in a statement.

The Aramco results come as OPEC+, an alliance of the oil cartel and other energy-producing states, met online Monday and agreed to proceed with an increase in oil production starting in April.

It's the first oil production increase by the group since 2022 and likely will push down oil prices further.

The OPEC+ decision follows criticism by Trump of the cartel as well.

Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources, located close to the surface of its desert expanse, make it one of the world's least expensive places to produce crude. For every \$10 rise in the price of a barrel of oil, Saudi Arabia stands to make an additional \$40 billion a year, according to the Institute of International Finance.

The Saudi government owns the vast majority of the firm's shares. Saudi Aramco publicly listed a sliver of its worth back in late 2019 and has weighed offering more shares publicly.

### Production hike flexible, may be paused if market shifts

## Eight OPEC+ countries confirm gradual output rise

VIENNA, March 4, (KUNA): Eight OPEC+ countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Oman, reaffirmed Monday their decision to voluntarily raise their production as of April 1, 2025.

"Taking into account the healthy market fundamentals and the positive market outlook, they reaffirmed their decision agreed upon on December 5, 2024, to proceed with a gradual and flexible return of the 2.2 mbd voluntary adjustments starting on 1st April, 2025, while remaining adaptable to evolving conditions," OPEC

said in a statement after a virtual meeting of representatives of that eight countries at the OPEC today to review global oil market conditions and the future outlook.

"Accordingly, this gradual increase may be paused or reversed subject to market conditions. This flexibility will allow the group to continue to support oil market stability". Furthermore, the eight countries reiterated their collective commitment to full conformity with the additional voluntary production adjustments as agreed under the 53rd JMMC meeting on April 3, 2024.

They also confirmed their intention to fully

compensate for any overproduced volumes since January 2024, in accordance with the compensation plans submitted to the OPEC Secretariat, ensuring that all compensations are completed by June 2026.

They added that the countries with overproduced volumes have also agreed to frontload their compensation plans, so that more of the overproduced volumes are compensated in the earlier months of the compensation period, and will submit their updated compensation schedules to the OPEC Secretariat by the 17th of March 2025 which will be posted on the Secretariat's website.

Qatar leads region

## Arab economies account for 5% of global GDP: UN report

BEIRUT, March 4 (Xinhua): The Arab economy accounts for nearly 5 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), with Qatar being the richest country in the region, according to a new report released on Monday by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

Dubbed "Real sizes of Arab economies between 2017 and 2023," the report analyzes the results of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and the purchasing power parities (PPPs) of Arab currencies over seven years, from 2017 to 2023.

It reveals that the average per capita income in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries surpasses the world average. Qatar, ranked as the wealthiest Arab country, holds

the fourth spot globally, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 12th place and Bahrain in 26th. In contrast, Somalia and Syria have among the lowest per capita incomes worldwide.

Majed Skaini, the regional program manager of the ICP for the Arab region at ESCWA and the report's author, noted that while Qatar ranks as the richest in the Arab region by GDP per capita, it places third in terms of material well-being, measured by actual individual consumption per capita (AIC).

According to the report, the UAE ranks highest in the Arab region for material well-being, coming in 24th globally, followed by Kuwait in 37th and Qatar in 38th.

## Emirates Airline to launch Dubai-Shenzhen direct flight in July

DUBAI, March 4, (Xinhua): Emirates Airline of the United Arab Emirates announced Monday to launch daily direct flights between Dubai and Shenzhen from July 1, becoming the first Middle Eastern carrier to operate a daily flight to the southern Chinese city. According to the airline's media center, flight EK328 will depart Dubai at 10:05 a.m. local time and arrive in Shenzhen at 10:00 p.m., while EK329 will leave Shenzhen at 11:55 p.m., landing in Dubai at 3:40 a.m. Shenzhen will also be the first Chinese destination to feature Emirates' retrofitted Boeing 777-300ER.

Emirates Airline, which established direct air connectivity between Dubai and

China in 2002, currently operates flights to Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou.

Dubai saw 824,000 Chinese visitors in 2024, a 31 percent year-on-year increase. Adnan Kazim, Emirates Airline's deputy president and chief commercial officer, highlighted the airline's commitment to strengthening business and tourism ties with China. "Our expansion into Shenzhen opens new doors for business and economic exchange between this technological powerhouse and global markets," Kazim said, adding that he hoped the route would help to foster cultural bonds and unlock future economic potential.





Dr. Jassim Al-Kandari and Zain's team during delivery of the supplies.



The Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team



Zain's volunteers prepare the boxes.

**Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan campaign kicks-off with food supplies initiative**

Zain kicked-off its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, with the food supplies (Machla) initiative, providing essential supplies to underprivileged families and individuals through its strategic partners—the Social Care Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Kuwait Food Bank.

The food baskets were delivered with the attendance of Dr. Jassim Al-Kandari, Acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Social Care Sector at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Kuwait Food Bank officials, and members of Zain's team. In a demonstration of Zain's deep commitment to active community engagement, members of the Zain Alshuhoor-volunteer team—comprising employees from various departments—gathered at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh to prepare the food baskets. The volunteers sorted and packed various essential food items into boxes before

dispatching them to charitable organizations.

The baskets were delivered to the Social Care Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs, benefiting residents from care homes, the elderly, and people with special needs. Additionally, baskets were provided to the Kuwait Food Bank for distribution to underprivileged families across various areas in Kuwait.

Each year, Zain Alshuhoor continues to evolve and expand its programs and initiatives, fostering collaboration with different organizations across the country. The campaign reflects the spirit of giving that defines the Holy Month of Ramadan and embodies the deep-rooted values of generosity, compassion, and solidarity that characterize the people of Kuwait.



Group photo of Gulf Bank officials with Najla Al-Essa in the middle.



Part of the activities of distributing Iftar meals at Souq Al-Mubarakiya

'We are committed to leveraging all our resources to serve the community'

**Gulf Bank distributes Iftar meals at Souq Al-Mubarakiya as part of its Ramadan program**

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: As part of its Ramadan Program, "Our Traditions Bring Us Together," Gulf Bank distributed Iftar meals at Souq Al-Mubarakiya to those in need. The Bank will be distributing Iftar meals across various areas in Kuwait over a period of 20 days. This effort was made possible through a strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank and the dedicated participation of Gulf Bank's volunteer team, Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej.

On this occasion, Mrs. Najla Aleisa, Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, stated: "At Gulf Bank, we are proud to be an active part of our community, celebrating meaningful moments and supporting those in need, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. This initiative reflects our deep commitment to fostering social sustainability, both within the Bank and throughout the wider community."

Mrs. Aleisa expressed her appreciation for the Kuwait Food Bank's ongoing efforts in providing and distributing meals to those in need. She also

praised the longstanding partnership between Gulf Bank and the Kuwait Food Bank, now in its eighth consecutive year, highlighting its vital role in promoting sustainability within the community. "We look forward to continuing our collaboration on impactful charitable initiatives that promote social sustainability," she added.

She further emphasized that for 64 years, Gulf Bank has played an essential role in Kuwait's economic and social development, continuously leveraging its resources to support those in need. Mrs. Aleisa stated, "We understand the significant impact these initiatives have, especially during Ramadan."

Mrs. Aleisa reaffirmed Gulf Bank's strong commitment to sustainability, particularly social sustainability, through carefully curated initiatives that benefit both the Bank and the wider community. These efforts align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Kuwait Vision 2035.

She concluded: "As a financial institution, Gulf Bank remains committed to supporting key civil

society organizations, particularly the Kuwait Food Bank, for its outstanding humanitarian and social contributions. We strongly believe that the private sector has a vital role in raising awareness and driving meaningful change in these important areas."

Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the Bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

**4,100 aircraft turns expected in first year**

**Menzies Aviation secures 'major' Air India contract**

LONDON, March 4: Menzies Aviation, the leading service partner to the world's airports and airlines, has announced a major contract win with Air India, India's leading global carrier. Under the new three-year agreement, Menzies will deliver a full suite of ground handling and cargo services at eight locations across four continents.

The company will provide a mixture of passenger, ramp, de-icing and cleaning services at London Heathrow (LHR), Copenhagen Airport (CPH), Toronto Pearson International Airport (YYZ), Kuwait International Airport (KWI) and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). In the first year alone, Menzies is set to manage at least 4,100 turns, with significant growth anticipated over the course of the three years.

Menzies has also been appointed to deliver cargo warehouse services at four locations for the flag carrier airline of India including Kuwait International Airport (KWI), Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), Sydney Airport (SYD) and Melbourne Airport (MEL). Teams at the four locations is likely to handle approximately 9,000 tonnes of cargo in

the first 12 months of the new agreement.

Philipp Joeinig, CEO, Menzies Aviation, said: "We're excited to enter a new chapter in our relationship with Air India, expanding our footprint right across the globe. This latest win underscores the progress we are making on our ambitious growth plans and reflects the safe, secure and high-quality services that we offer our customers. We look forward to building our relationship with Air India, providing exceptional aviation services to its growing number of passengers over the next three years."

Founded over 90 years ago, Air India, India's leading global airline, flew more than 45 million passengers and transported 295,000 tonnes of cargo globally in the calendar year 2024. Based at Gurugram in northern India, Air India had placed the then largest-ever order for 470 new aircraft in 2023 and added 100 more aircraft to the numbers. Today, Air India group employs more than 30,000 people, operates over 300 aircraft and carries customers to 55 domestic and 48 international destinations across five continents.



Menzies Aviation wins major ground handling and cargo contract with Air India.

**Non-oil sector hits record 51% of GDP in 2024**

**Saudi Arabia's economic transformation progressing, growth prospects positive**

By National Bank of Kuwait

Non-oil economic growth averaged an impressive 4.8% in 2021-24, driven by unprecedented government-led investment in key strategic sectors as part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 development plan. In parallel, the government has, since 2016, embarked on a series of economic and fiscal reforms that have led to notable improvements in employment, productivity and the regulatory and business environment, facilitating the growth and diversification effort. Sustaining strong momentum in non-oil growth will depend on continued reform and domestic investment progress. Amid lower oil prices/production and elevated spending, we view the ongoing fiscal shortfalls and higher public debt as manageable for now, helped by a recalibration of project spending priorities and a larger role for the PIF in the domestic economy.

**Economic transformation is underway**

With the traditionally dominant oil sector constrained by Saudi Arabia's outsized OPEC+ production cut obligations in recent years, the non-oil economy has taken up the mantle and logged impressive growth rates. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, broader socio-economic gains have also been forthcoming. After a spell of strong growth, the non-oil sector's share of GDP reached a record high of 51% in 2024 according to official preliminary estimates. (Chart 1.) Non-oil growth was a solid 4.6% in Q4 2024, slightly higher than in the previous quarter (+4.3% y/y), pushing up growth for the full year 2024 to an estimated 4.3%. Monthly indicators, from private sector credit growth at a very robust 13% y/y in December 2024 to the purchasing managers' index (PMI) of private sector activity hitting a ten-year high in January 2025 (60.5), paint a positive picture of current conditions in the non-oil economy.

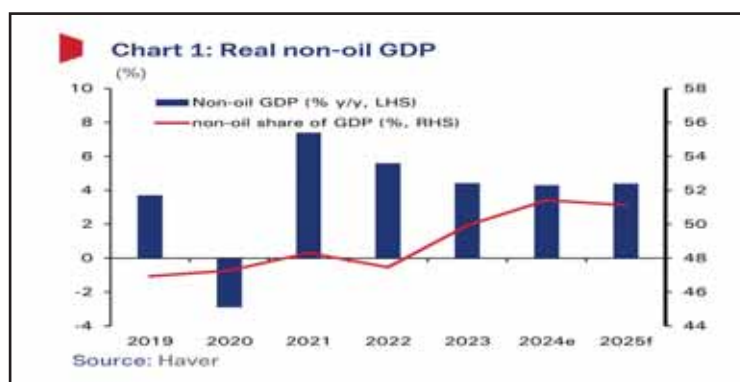
More noteworthy, however, is the breadth of progress being made, with output gains evident across a more diverse sectoral spread than before, including the wholesale and retail trade, construction, and the manufacturing and transport sectors.

The progress has been facilitated by a significant increase in domestic investment, a testament to the authorities' efforts to grow and diversify the non-oil economy through implementation of the National Investment Strategy (NIS) since 2021 under the auspices of the broader Saudi Vision 2030. The NIS seeks to invest SR12.4 trillion (\$1.3 trillion) via a combination of channels all with specific targets. These include the central government, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the "Shareek" program for large corporates, and through foreign investors (FDI). Sectors from entertainment and tourism to transport/logistics and manufacturing have been assigned specific development targets. The results have seen real gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) rise by 12% y/y on average in 2021-2023. In 2023, its share of GDP rose to 25.2%, the highest in the available series.

The expanding non-oil productive base, coupled with the Kingdom's Saudization and female labor inclusion policies, helped push Saudi unemployment to a near record low of 7.8% by Q3 2024 and female labor force participation rates up to 36% in the same quarter – exceeding the government's 30% target. Moreover, employment of Saudi nationals in the private sector rose to 51% in Q3 2024 from 46% in 2021. Higher employment alongside the introduction of more venues and activities supported robust private consumption (averaging 6.6% y/y between 2021-2023), which, together with the surge in investment, contributed to the strong non-oil growth outcome.

**Tourism receipts increasingly important for the new Saudi economy**

Visitor numbers witnessed impressive growth since 2020, rising from under 50 million to well above 100 million in 2023. Tourism spending increased to over SR250 billion in 2023 (\$67bn), equivalent to 14% of nonoil GDP, from 7.4% in 2021, mostly from inbound tourists on the back of a concerted effort by the authorities to overhaul the sector. This includes through the establishment of a



tourism development fund, improvements to the visa application process, investment in human capital, expanded air travel routes, marketing campaigns, and the hosting of sports and entertainment events, such as the Formula 1 race and international concerts. The development of natural and heritage sites, such as the Red Sea coastline, the Diriyah Gate and Al-Ula, has helped boost both domestic and inbound tourism, while continued development and modernization of the Holy sites and transport links supported further growth in religious pilgrimage, a large part of inbound tourism.

Rising tourism should continue to support growth and job creation within the wholesale and retail trade sectors. These grew by an impressive 8.3% y/y on average between 2021-2023 to become the largest contributor to non-oil GDP in 2023 at 15.3%.

**Manufacturing and mining sectors have high growth potential**

Saudi manufacturing (excluding petroleum refining) accounts for about 13% of non-oil GDP after putting in a strong performance in 2022-2023 (+7% y/y on average). The sector did contract in 2023 (-0.7%) on a combination of base effects and weaker petrochemicals demand in China, the kingdom's largest trading partner, but activity in 2024 looks to have rebounded, with output growing by an average of 2.6% during the first three quarters of 2024. The outlook is positive, as the sector is expected to expand its scope beyond downstream processes such as refining and petrochemicals to industrial and military equipment manufacturing, in line with NIS objectives. Renewable energy and metals and minerals mining also hold good potential. On the latter, the government introduced a mining investment law in 2021, which allowed for the issuance of exploration licenses to prospect and develop an estimated \$1.3 trillion worth of untapped natural resources. More than \$9.3 billion worth of metals and mining deals were recently signed with companies such as India's Vedanta and China's Zijin Group.

**Improving business environment lifts FDI**

FDI inflows amounted to SAR96 billion (\$25.5bn) in 2023, exceeding the NIS target of SAR83 billion (\$22bn) and achieving the NIS target of 2.4% of GDP. There had been a surge in FDI inflows in 2021 and 2022 due to the exceptional Aramco pipeline deals worth \$12.4 billion and \$15.6 billion, respectively. Inflows in 2023 were 50% higher than in 2022 after excluding the one-off inflows from the previous year. Over the past three years, FDI inflows have nearly tripled, reaching SAR112 billion (\$30bn) between 2021-2023 following the launch of the NIS. This compares to an average of SAR43 billion (\$11.5bn) during the preceding three-year period (2018-2020). The government is looking to secure \$100 billion (6% of GDP) in FDI per year by 2030. At the sectoral level, manufacturing has

tended to be the largest FDI recipient followed by the retail/hospitality, financial services, and transportation/storage sectors. FDI has also positively responded to the various government reforms and policies, including the requirement to establish a regional headquarters in the Kingdom to capitalize on government contracts and tax relief. A new investment law (January 2024) that facilitates the issuance of commercial licenses, safeguards investors' rights and simplifies the business startup and investment process has also helped, as have advancements in digitization, including the new Etimad procurement platform, which has significantly reduced delays in payments to contractors.

**Investment gains and good reform momentum**

While the latest budget (2025) from the Saudi Ministry of Finance is only mildly expansionary compared to previous ones, off-budget spending is expected to rise, mainly via the PIF, which plans to increase the level of investment nearly two-fold from \$40 billion to \$70 billion per year as early as 2025, according to the PIF governor. In parallel, ongoing reforms aimed at enhancing the effective execution of laws, streamlining procedures and fees, raising the participation of women in the labor force, facilitating access to land and finance, and improving governance should further promote private sector expansion, draw in more FDI and support overall productivity growth. Continued investment in human capital and digitization will also be important for unlocking the potential for further productivity gains. The reforms will help ensure continued progress towards macroeconomic targets under the Vision Realization Program, some of which have already been partially (or fully) achieved, enabling the impressive economic development seen in recent years. Some notable achievements include: a near tripling of non-oil public revenues since 2016 (baseline); increasing the share of non-oil exports from 18% to 24% of non-oil GDP; raising the contribution to GDP from the digital economy, SMEs and the overall private sector; notable advances in key global rankings related to logistics, business environment, governance, and competitiveness; ramping up the issuance of licenses in promising industries; and higher investment in human capital leading to productivity gains.

**Outlook positive, hinges on concerted investment drive, but downside risks evident**

The overall growth outlook is positive, underpinned by a strong investment drive, reform progress, rising FDI and employment, and promising momentum in strategic sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and transport/logistics. The government remains committed to maintaining a strong pace of investment spending, especially in the run-up to the 2027 Asian Cup, and other landmark events further out including the Expo 2030 and the FIFA World Cup in 2034. Against this background, we expect non-oil economic growth to remain robust at above 4% in 2025 from an estimated 4.3% in 2024.

In terms of downside risks, the threat of lower oil prices is the predominant one, and this would most likely reflect economic weakness in developing economies, especially China's given its importance as the engine for global oil demand growth. Lower oil revenues would stretch the government's fiscal position (it projects a deficit of SAR101 billion or \$27 billion for 2025), potentially leading to a scaling back of key projects and the pace of investment. This said, a sharp spending slowdown seems unlikely given alternate funding channels and still good financial space due to the involvement of a well-capitalized sovereign wealth fund, adequate reserves and relatively low debt-to-GDP. Another risk is a slower than expected pace of US interest rate cuts limiting rate cuts in Saudi as well, given the currency peg system, hitting potential growth in private spending, credit, the mortgage market and homebuilding. Finally, restrictive US tariff policies – the extent of which is still uncertain – could lead to higher imported inflation, weighing down on real growth.



As part of the extended partnership of over 10 years

# KFH honored for participating in International Invention Fair

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: As part of its commitment to supporting education, innovation, and scientific initiatives, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) concluded its participation in the 15th edition of the International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME) titled "Where Investors Meet Inventors". The event was held under the patronage of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and in the presence of His Excellency the Minister of Education, Dr. Jalal Al-Tabtabaei. KFH, the strategic partner of the

event, was honored by His Excellency the Minister of Education, Dr. Jalal Al-Tabtabaei with the presence of the Chairman of Kuwait Science Club, Talal Jassem Alkharafi. This recognition is an appreciation for KFH's efforts in fostering innovation by supporting initiatives and activities that aim to develop societal capabilities and showcase the work of young innovators. KFH Executive Manager Corporate Relations and CSR, Faisal Alsurayye said that KFH has been a strategic partner of IIFME for over 10 years. The Bank is also keen to



Faisal Alsurayye receives the honor from His Excellency the Minister of Education, Dr. Jalal Al-Tabtabaei.

participate in such exhibitions as a scientific platform through which investors and inventors meet, in addition to stakeholders, to promote scientific research for societal prosperity. Alsurayye pointed out that around 180 inventors from 42 Arab and foreign countries showcasing 230 inventions across diverse scientific fields participated in the 15th IIFME. 28 Kuwaiti inventors participate in the fair, showcasing 17 inventions across various scientific fields. They represent several educational and scientific institutions, including Kuwait

University, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. It is worth noting that KFH is a leader in supporting young innovators, honoring Kuwaiti creators with award-winning inventions at major exhibitions and competitions. Furthermore, KFH encourages young Kuwaitis and acts as a catalyst for their achievements. It also engages young entrepreneurs, offering ongoing support to help them succeed regionally and globally.

## Trump's tariffs on Canada & Mexico spark trade tensions

Experts warn of inflation as US tariffs expand

WASHINGTON, March 4, (AP): President Donald Trump's long-threatened tariffs against Canada and Mexico went into effect Tuesday, putting global markets on edge and setting up costly retaliations by the United States' North American allies.

Starting just past midnight, imports from Canada and Mexico are now to be taxed at 25%, with Canadian energy products subject to 10% import duties. The 10% tariff that Trump placed on Chinese imports in February was doubled to 20%, and Beijing retaliated Tuesday with tariffs of up to 15% on a wide array of U.S. farm exports. It also expanded the number of U.S. companies subject to export controls and other restrictions by about two dozen.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country would slap tariffs on more than \$100 billion of American goods over the course of 21 days. Mexico didn't immediately detail any retaliatory measures.

The U.S. president's moves raised fears of higher inflation and the prospect of a devastating trade war even as he promised the American public that taxes on imports are the easiest path to national prosperity. He has shown a willingness to buck the warnings of mainstream economists and put his own public approval on the line, believing that tariffs can fix what ails the country.

"It's a very powerful weapon that politicians haven't used because they were either dishonest, stupid or paid off in some other form," Trump said Monday at the White House. "And now we're using them."

The Canada and Mexico tariffs were supposed to begin in February, but Trump agreed to a 30-day suspension to negotiate further with the two largest U.S. trading partners. The stated reason for the tariffs is to address drug trafficking and illegal immigration, and both countries say they've made progress on those issues. But Trump has also said the tariffs will only come down if the U.S. trade imbalance closes, a process unlikely to be settled on a political timeline.

The tariffs may be short-lived if the U.S. economy suffers. But Trump could also impose more tariffs on the European Union, India, computer chips, autos and pharmaceutical drugs. The American president has injected a disorienting volatility into the world economy, leaving it off balance as people wonder what he'll do next.

"It's chaotic, especially compared to the way we saw tariffs rolled out in the first (Trump) administration," said Michael House, co-chair of the international trade practice at the Perkins Coie law firm. "It's unpredictable. We don't know, in fact, what the president will do."

Democratic lawmakers were quick to criticize the tariffs, and even some Republican senators raised alarms.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she's "very concerned" about the tariffs going into effect because of her state's proximity to Canada.

"Maine and Canada's economy are integrated," Collins said, explaining that much of the state's lobsters and blueberries are

processed in Canada and then sent back to the U.S.

The world economy is now caught in the fog of what appears to be a trade war.

Even after Trump announced Monday that the tariffs were going forward, Canadian officials were still in touch with their U.S. counterparts.

"The dialogue will continue, but we are ready to respond," Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair said in Ottawa as he went into a special Cabinet meeting on U.S.-Canada relations. "There are still discussions taking place."

Shortly after Blair spoke, Trudeau said Canada would impose 25% tariffs on \$155 billion Canadian (\$107 billion U.S.) worth of American goods, starting with tariffs on \$30 billion Canadian (\$21 billion U.S.) worth of goods immediately and on the remaining amount on American products in three weeks.

"Our tariffs will remain in place until the U.S. trade action is withdrawn, and should U.S. tariffs not cease, we are in active and ongoing discussions with provinces and territories to pursue several non-tariff measures," Trudeau said.

The White House would like to see a drop in seizures of fentanyl inside the United States, not just on the northern and southern borders. Administration officials say that seizures of fentanyl last month in everywhere from Louisiana to New Jersey had ties to foreign cartels.

Damon Pike, technical practice leader for customs and trade services at the tax and consulting firm BDO, suggested the responses of other countries could escalate trade tensions and possibly increase the economic pressure points.

"Canada has their list ready," Pike said. "The EU has their list ready. It's going to be tit for tat."

The Trump administration has suggested inflation will not be as bad as economists claim, saying tariffs can motivate foreign companies to open factories in the United States. On Monday, Trump announced that Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the computer chipmaker, would be investing \$100 billion in domestic production.

Still, it can take time to relocate factories spread across the world and train workers with the skills they need.

Greg Ahearn, president and CEO of The Toy Association, said the 20% tariffs on Chinese goods will be "crippling" for the toy industry, as nearly 80% of toys sold in the U.S. are made in China.

"There's a sophistication of manufacturing, of the tooling," he said. "There's a lot of handcrafting that is part of these toys that a lot of people don't understand ... the face painting, the face masks, the hair weaving, the hair braiding, the cut and sew for plush to get it to look just so. All of that are very high hands, skilled labor that has been passed through generations in the supply chain that exists with China."

For a president who has promised quick results, Ahearn added a note of caution about how quickly U.S. factories could match their Chinese rivals.

"That can't be replicated overnight," he said.



Piaget's Avenues Mall store showcases elegance and innovation.

'150 years of artistic heritage'

## Piaget unveils new boutique at The Avenues Mall

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: It exudes such a captivating allure! A sprawling expanse of shimmering gold greets the eye, symbolizing not only warmth and passion but also the quintessence of the Piaget DNA – embodying both the radiance of 'Gold' and the vitality of 'Sunshine'. Maison of Piaget proudly unveiled a resplendent new boutique at the Avenues Mall - Prestige, embodying radiance and nestled at the Ground floor.

The Avenues Mall boutique evolves around the new boutique design concept radiance designed by Rafael de Cárdenas which marks a new milestone in the history of Piaget's brand expression. Drawing inspiration from a wealth of Maison's historical archives dating back to 1874, meticulously curated design elements have been forged into breathtaking compositions, infusing the ambience with an exuberant blend of artistry and innovation. This includes an array of luminous gold hues, intricate stone textures, and opulent color palettes. Notably, the iconic Decor Palace court-style engravings graces every corner, epitomizing exquisite craftsmanship and ingenious detailing.

Alluring, golden and warm... Piaget unveils the new face of Piaget boutique at The Avenues Mall. This is back to basics for a Maison that, in 1959, turned 40 rue du Rhône in Geneva into a unique oasis, then called Salon Piaget, where people took the time to talk, share and create connections while admiring the detail of gold work or the beauty of a watch dial set with diamonds. There, each visitor could also shape and personalise the contours of their favourite watch at will, thanks to the Maison's 'Style Selector'. This attention to detail echoes the words of Yves Piaget, which still resonate today: "My friends become my clients and my clients become my friends".

Jewellers in the watch industry since 1874, Piaget is going back to its roots with the sensational material that electrifies its creative universe: molten gold, light that turns into matter. Worked in all its forms, carved



Boutique combines luxury, tradition, and modern elegance.

by hand by the Maison's master craftspeople into different textures, including the signature Decor Palace engraving, gold is irresistible, tactile, desirable and versatile, with many different faces. This unique savoir-faire, a true symbol of the Maison, is now reflected in the signature look of this alluring new concept designed by Rafael de Cárdenas, a New York based architect, designer and founder of his studio Rafael de Cárdenas, Ltd. From textures to colours, from shapes to details, Rafael de Cárdenas ignites this energy and radiance at the heart of Piaget, the Maison of Extraleganza.

Far from being merely a simple shining band, its façade subtly alternates forms and spaces between its golden monoliths and its glass windows, like a chain-link bracelet of a watch that constantly reveals fascinating new details. It is all about contrast. Unexpected meetings between materials, colors and stories that define a more intricate landscape. The first significant detail that visitors see when they step through the door is a mural in shades of green, blue and gold. The fresco, paying homage to the natural play of textures, colors and ornamental stones that are the real stars of Piaget's world. This can be found in

the reception room as well as in the VIP room, hidden to guarantee an intimate experience.

Another high point is the cabinet of curiosities or rather virtuosity, where time seems to stand still while one examines the treasures of the natural world, books and other varied objects that each have something to say about the world of Piaget. In every corner, even on the ceiling painted by the artist Julien Gautier, the air is almost mineral, charged with the raw and vibrant, energy contained in the shards of malachite, opal or turquoise that never cease to inspire the Maison's gemmologists.

Rich yet utterly harmonious, this artistic whole subtly reflects the curves of the Maison's iconic pieces, the abundance of its watchmaking tradition that began to incorporate jewellery, and the uniqueness of its DNA, which has been constantly expanding, from La Côte-aux-Fées to the rest of the world for more than 150 years. With flamboyant harmony poised between elegance and extravagance, the apt title "Maison of Extraleganza" takes on its full meaning, right down to the randomly shaped detailing on the windows, where the Maison's watches and jewellery creations also shine. These rare pieces are perfectly enhanced by Piaget architects.

Company to provide 1,500 Iftar meals

## Carrefour Kuwait offers up to 50% discounts for Ramadan celebrations

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: With the start of Ramadan, Carrefour, which Majid Al Futtaim owns the exclusive rights to operate in Kuwait, is making the season more rewarding with exceptional savings, exclusive promotions, and community-driven initiatives. With discounts of up to 50%, Carrefour Kuwait is ensuring that every home can celebrate Ramadan with ease and affordability.

Starting February 28, the campaign brings unbeatable discounts on a wide selection of fresh, consumer goods, and essential items, in addition to mobility, light household, and electronics.

Jean Abdessater, Head of Commercial & Operations for Carrefour Kuwait, commented: "Ramadan is a time of generosity, reflection, and unity. It's a time to come together, share, and show care. These values that are deeply ingrained in Carrefour's mission. For nearly 18 years, we've been at the heart of how our customers experience this special month, and this year, we are raising the bar to offer even greater value, convenience, and ways to give back."

Beyond savings, Carrefour remains committed to creating a positive, lasting impact for communities across Kuwait. In line with its dedication to be part of the community, the retailer has announced its initiative to offer 1,500 Iftar meals to Salmiya's largest mosque throughout Ramadan, providing meaningful



Carrefour Kuwait enhances Ramadan experience with promotions.

ways to connect with the community during the blessed month.

Abdessater added: "As a brand rooted in community,

we believe in the power of giving and the importance of supporting families in need. That's why we are proud to contribute to initiatives like providing those in need

with daily access to Iftar meals. By working together with our partners and customers, we strive to make a meaningful impact during Ramadan."



## House to be transformed into a film museum

### Brazil rejoices over first Oscar win for 'I'm Still Here'

RIO DE JANEIRO, March 4, (AP): When Spanish actress Penélope Cruz announced "I'm Still Here" as the winner of the international feature at the Academy Awards, millions of Brazilians roared at home and on the streets, where Carnival festivities have been ongoing since Saturday.

On Monday, as parties continued nationwide, many revelers took time to take a quick look at newspapers, peek on their social media and watch TV to rejoice even more for the country's first-ever Oscar victory. The film shows a family torn apart by the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for more than two decades.

"I promised I would watch 'I'm Still Here' again tonight if it won, right after I come back from a Carnival street party, wearing my Wonder Woman costume," said Fernanda Rocha, 38, a pharmacist and tourist from Brasilia. "I live in a city where the military almost helped former President Jair Bolsonaro throw a coup just two years ago. This movie is a win against that too."

Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes announced an expensive way to celebrate. His administration will buy the house where the film was shot in the upscale region of Urca, currently priced at 20 million

Brazilian reais (\$3.35 million) so it can be transformed into a cinema museum.

"We will make it public and open it for visitation, the place that brought Brazil's first Oscar in almost 100 years of the awards," Paes said in his social media channels.

Rio's O Globo and O Estado de S. Paulo, two of Brazil's most popular newspapers, had almost identical headlines: "At last, Brazil has an Oscar win." The South American country has had four other films nominated for Academy Awards: "Keeper of Promises" (1963), "O Quatrilho" (1996), "Four Days in September" (1998) and "Central Station" (1999).

#### Footage

Brazilian TV and social media repeatedly showed footage from the early hours of Monday, local time, with outbursts of joy across the nation and beyond, including at Rio's Sambadrome, a stadium where the glitzy Carnival parades take place every year, over the victory of the Walter Salles-directed film. And in Mexico, a TV broadcast team was seen dancing to celebrate the win.

The film's star, Fernanda Torres, was nominated

for best actress. Her defeat to Anora's Mikey Madison disappointed many Brazilians. "I'm Still Here" was also a nominee for best picture, another first for a Brazilian film. Those losses did not dampen the celebration over the international film Academy Award.

"This was our first, we want to soon have two just like our friends and rivals from Argentina," said Paulo Almeida, 30-year-old theater actor. "I am so very happy and hopeful that this will boost our movie industry for decades, just like it did for our neighbors."

Argentina has won the international feature at the Oscars with "The Official Story" (1986) and "The Secret in Their Eyes" (2010).

Brazilian media reported that Torres was invited to the "Champions Parade" of Rio's Carnival, which will take place Saturday with the top six performers at the samba school league. She has yet to confirm but hope among fans is high.

"She is the movie. We need to celebrate her as much as we can," said Vania Martins, a retired teacher. "Brazilian cinema deserved this win long ago. There's movies that were even better than 'I'm Still Here' and didn't even get nominated. I hope that this win puts a spotlight on a country that does great, great things for art too."



Salem Adra, brother of Palestinian activist Basel Adra, who won Best Documentary Feature at the Oscars for 'No Other Land', talks to his grandmother Sarah, 87, at her house in the West Bank village of Tuwani, Monday, March 3. (AP)

#### 'Stop ethnic cleansing'

### Oscar win sparks hope for Palestinian struggles

AL-TUWANEH, West Bank, March 4, (AP): Just last week, Israeli troops came and tore down a Palestinian family's shed in this remote, hilly corner of the West Bank, residents say. It was the latest instance of destruction targeting a collection of hamlets whose population is threatened with expulsion.

Palestinians in the Masafer Yatta area cheered the Oscar win of the documentary "No Other Land," which depicts life in the beleaguered community, and hoped it will bring them some help.

In al-Tuwaneh, one of the hamlets that make up Masafer Yatta, Salem Adra said his family stayed up all night for the Oscar ceremony. They watched as his older brother, Basel Adra, the film's co-director, came on stage to accept the award for best documentary.

"It was such a huge surprise, such joy," he said.

"No Other Land" follows Basel Adra as he risks arrest to document the destruction of Masafer Yatta at the southern edge of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, joined by his co-director, Israeli journalist and filmmaker, Yuval Abraham.

The joint Palestinian-Israeli production has won a string of international awards, starting at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2024. Five years in the making, it gained greater resonance amid Israel's devastating military campaign in Gaza that forced almost its entire population from their homes, as well as increasing raids in the West Bank that have caused the displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians.

At the same time, the film has raised hackles in Israel, scarred by the bloody Oct. 7, 2023 attack by Hamas that triggered the war.

#### Threats

Salem Adra, who at times helped his brother film for the movie, said he hoped the Oscar win "opens the world's eyes to what's happening here in Masafer Yatta."

"It's a win for all of Palestine and for everyone who lives in Masafer Yatta," he said.

He said that since the film was first released, threats and pressure against his family have increased. Their car has been stoned by settlers. After the movie won an award at the Berlin International Film Festival a year ago, the military returned over and over to the family home, and once detained his father, searching his phone and asking, "Why are you filming?"

The Israeli military designated Masafer Yatta as a live-fire training zone in the 1980s and ordered residents, mostly Arab Bedouin, to be expelled. Israel said the Bedouin did not have permanent structures in the area. But families say they have lived and herded their sheep and goats across the area long before Israel

captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war.

After a 20-year legal battle by residents, Israel's Supreme Court upheld the expulsion order in 2022. The around 1,000 residents have largely remained in place, but troops regularly move in to demolish homes, tents, water tanks and olive orchards - and Palestinians fear outright expulsion could come at any time.

Salem Adra said the latest destruction came Wednesday, when troops tore down the shed of a family in a nearby hamlet.

Standing on a stony ridge above al-Tuwaneh, Salem Adra said Jewish settlers backed by the military have set up 10 outposts around the village since Oct. 7, 2023.

#### Attacked

Shepherd Raed al-Hamamdeh, 48, led his herd of goats across the rocky land. He pointed to one outpost - with tents and a trailer flying the flag of an Israeli military unit - on the other side of a small valley. Farmers no longer tend the olive grove in the valley for fear of being attacked.

Al-Hamamdeh said the military uses drones to drive off herds if they get too close to the outposts. "Settlers attack. When we herd sheep, we can't go far as you can see. Only up to this point can we reach," he said. He pointed to the rubble of a house that he said settlers had destroyed, driving out the family and burning their furniture.

In Israel, the film garnered little media attention since its release - and what attention it did get has been angry. When it won the documentary prize at the Berlin festival, its Israeli director Abraham came under fire for an acceptance speech that called for an end to the war in Gaza without mentioning Hamas' initial attack and taking of the hostages held in Gaza.

In his Oscar acceptance speech, Abraham spoke of both. But that did little to calm criticism in Israel. Culture and Sports Minister Miki Zohar called the win "a sad moment for the world of cinema." He said the film distorted reality and accused its creators of using "defamation" of Israel as a way help promote the documentary.

In his acceptance speech Sunday night, Basel Adra called on the world "to stop the injustice and to stop the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian people."

He said he hoped his newborn daughter would "not have to live the same life I am living now ... Always feeling settler violence, home demolitions and forceful displacement."

On Monday, his brother Salem walked down from the ridge along with his 4-year-old son to a family home.

He checked the CCTV cameras the family has set up around the house to watch for settlers. They were still filming.

#### Film



Sean Baker accepts the award for best director for 'Anora' during the Oscars on Sunday, March 2, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

#### Indie cinema, bold storytelling take the spotlight

### 'Anora' win ushers Oscars into a new era

LOS ANGELES, March 4, (AP): Last fall, Sean Baker was sitting in a Manhattan restaurant, talking about a poll. The survey, about obscene scenes in movies and television, showed that Gen Z moviegoers were mostly turned off by obscenity in film.

"That broke my heart. I thought, there's something wrong here," said Baker. "You're OK with all the violence that's out there? Intimacy is a vital part of existence. Why don't you want to see intimacy in our stories?"

"I remember being on set and being like: We're pushing against that poll."

When Baker's "Anora" swept the 97th Academy Awards on Sunday, its five wins, including best picture, heralded a different kind of Oscar winner. "Anora," about a club dancer (Mikey Madison, the best actress winner) who marries the son of a Russian oligarch, is atypically sexually explicit for a best picture winner - a class that includes more staid movies like "The King's Speech" and "Driving Miss Daisy." A young woman's relationship to her own sexuality has not been, historically speaking, in the Oscars' wheelhouse.

But that's just one quality that makes "Anora" unique as a best picture winner. The film, made for \$6 million and distributed by Neon, was made with little interest in the mainstream. If anything, "Anora" was more oriented to the Cannes Film Festival, the French citadel of cinema, where it won the Palme d'Or last May - a prize that Baker said meant the most to him.

But, increasingly, these are converging movie worlds. In the last five years, four Palme d'Or winners have been nominated for best picture at

the Academy Awards, including Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" (also distributed by Neon), which became the first non-English language movie to win Hollywood's top prize.

"Anora," a film that inverts a Hollywood fairy tale like "Pretty Woman," is - like many of the winners on Sunday - an unabashedly modern movie and a film comfortable, even proud of the label of "cinema." In a movie industry where manufactured franchise stewardship rules the day, "Anora" was celebrated, in part, because it's the real deal.

#### Legacy

It's also a more traditional choice than it might seem. Baker, a filmmaker who has sworn off making a series, a studio film or anything for streaming, is an apostle of '70s cinema. At an Oscars that host Conan O'Brien called "the 97th Longform Content Awards," "Anora" - which shared some of the same Brooklyn streets as "The French Connection" - stood for upholding an increasingly threatened theatrical legacy, with Baker ardently defending a very old-fashioned thing: the big screen.

"Filmmakers, keep making films for the big screen. I know I will," Baker said from the Dolby Theatre stage. "Distributors, please focus first and foremost on the theatrical releases of your films. Parents, introduce your children to feature films in movie theaters and you will be molding the next generation of movie lovers and filmmakers. And for all of us, when we can please watch movies in a theater and let's keep the great tradition of the moviegoing experience alive and well."

The coronation of "Anora" was a triumph for independent moviemaking, but that's also been a

battle waged and won before. We've seen "The Hurt Locker" best "Avatar" and "Moonlight" defeat "La La Land." Last year's crowning of "Oppenheimer" was, if anything, an exception in a string of smaller best pictures that haven't fit the Oscar mold. "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the 2023 winner, was antic, lewd and about the furthest thing possible from "Oscar bait."

What was different this year was that the stiffest competition for "Anora" wasn't "Wicked" or "Dune: Part Two" or any other studio product. It was "Conclave" and "The Brutalist." All of the major award winners on Sunday hailed from movies made independently. At the Oscars, the studios are out of the picture.

That trend has been developing for years, but the 97th Academy Awards showed just how much things have changed. In the best animated category, where Universal and DreamWorks' "The Wild Robot" was the heavy favorite, "Flow," a wordless Latvian movie made with open-source software, triumphed instead.

"Any kid now has tools that are used to make these now Academy-winning films," "Flow" director Gints Zilbalodis said backstage. "So I think we're going to see all kinds of exciting films being made from kids who might not have had a chance to do this before."

That win, like those for "Anora," suggested the academy's international voters have emerged as a dominant bloc. When the academy, reacting to pressure to diversify its ranks, brought in new members in recent years, it cast a wide net overseas.

#### Variety

NASHVILLE: Carl Dean, Dolly Parton's devoted husband of nearly 60 years who avoided the spotlight and inspired her timeless hit "Jolene," died Monday. He was 82.

According to a statement provided to The Associated Press by Parton's publicist, Dean died in Nashville, Tennessee. He will be laid to rest in a private ceremony with immediate family attending.

"Carl and I spent many wonderful years together. Words can't do justice to the love we shared for over 60 years. Thank you for your prayers and sympathy," Parton wrote in a statement.

The family has asked for respect and privacy. No cause of death was announced.

Parton met Dean outside the Wishy Washy Laundromat the day she moved to Nashville at 18.

"I was surprised and delighted that while he talked to me, he looked at my face (a rare thing for me)," Parton described the meeting. "He seemed to be genuinely interested in find-

ing out who I was and what I was about." They married two years later, on Memorial Day - May 30, 1966 - in a small ceremony in Ringgold, Georgia.

Dean was a businessman, having owned an asphalt-paving business in Nashville. His parents, Virginia "Ginny" Bates Dean and Edgar "Ed" Henry Dean, had three children. Parton referred to his mother as "Mama Dean."

Dean is survived by Parton and his two siblings, Sandra and Donnie.

He inspired Parton's classic, "Jolene." Parton told NPR in 2008 that she wrote the song about a flirty bank teller who seemed to take

an interest in Dean. "She got this terrible crush on my husband," she said. "And he just loved going to the bank because she paid him so much attention. It was kinda like a running joke between us - when I was saying, 'Hell, you're spend-

ing a lot of time at the bank. I don't believe we've got that kind of money.' So it's really an innocent song all around, but sounds like a dreadful one."

Parton and Dean kept strict privacy around their relationship for decades, Parton telling The Associated Press in 1984: "A lot of people say there's no Carl Dean, that he's just somebody I made up to keep other people off me."

She joked that she'd like to pose with him on the cover of a magazine "So that people could at least know that I'm not married to a wart or something."

In 2023, Parton told AP Dean helped inspired her 2023 "Rockstar" album.

"He's a big rock and roller," she said. The song "My Blue Tears," which was written when Parton was with "The Porter Wagoner Show" in the late 1960s and early '70s, is "one of my husband's favorite songs that I ever wrote," she said. "I thought, 'Well, I better put one of Carl's favorites of mine in here.'" (AP)



N.YORK: Sunday night marked Hulu's first time airing the Oscars live. But its Academy Awards debut ended on a chaotic and

frustratingly premature note.

Hulu's livestream cut off in the final moments of the show - with two major award categories, best actress and best picture, still to be announced because of a scheduling system issue. Those viewing the awards ceremony on Hulu instead saw an error code message that stated the event was over.

Viewer outrage, predictably, ensued online. Fans, including those throwing Oscar-viewing parties, eagerly await the final, pivotal moments of Hollywood's biggest night. Hulu viewers missed Mikey Madison and "Anora" win the night's titles for both best actress and best picture in real time.

The Hulu stream also had a rough start, with a few users reporting issues logging on to the platform due to another technical problem. For some, that meant missing the show's musical intro performed by "Wicked" stars Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande.

Disney, which has run Hulu since 2019, apologized to viewers.

"Yesterday evening, we experienced technical and live stream issues on Hulu which impacted some Oscars viewers," the company wrote in a statement sent to The Associated

Press on Monday. "We apologize for the experience."

Disney added that a "full replay" of the event is now available on Hulu and Hulu on Disney+, the streamers' bundled offering. That replay includes the final moments of Sunday night's show.

Hulu's foray into the Oscars arrives as more streaming platforms are betting big on live programming of prominent events - from a handful of awards shows and pop culture moments, to major sports matchups like the Super Bowl.

But some have gone smoother than others. And Hulu's stumble on Sunday was not the first among similar endeavors from today's biggest streaming platforms.

Netflix users, for example, expressed frustrations with streaming and buffering problems before and during November's widely-watched, livestream fight between Mike Tyson and Jake Paul. And in 2023, the platform's "Love Is Blind" fans also saw a lengthy delay ahead of a reunion special originally set to air live. Meanwhile, CBS All Access, now Paramount+, reportedly crashed for many viewers at the start of the 2021 Super Bowl. (AP)



Parton



## Books

## Rescuing a baby hare: A lesson in living with wildlife

## Ngozi Adichie's latest novel marks a vibrant return

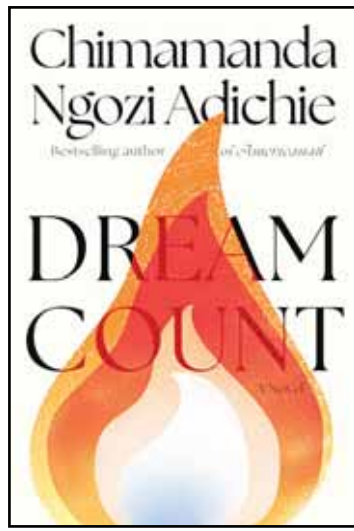
NEW YORK, March 4, (AP): Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Dream Count" feels like a homecoming. The Nigerian author's first work of long-form fiction in over a decade reminds us of the sharp wisdom and sturdy empathy that have made her one of the most celebrated voices in fiction.

At its face, "Dream Count" is about the emotional lives of four women living between Nigeria and Washington, D.C., each grappling with a search for purpose, stability and love. Deep into its pages, the book turns to darker questions of justice and exploitation when one character's life is irrevocably changed.

The novel begins with the perspective of Chiamaka, or Chia, a Nigerian-born woman who has spent her adulthood and career in America. Living alone amid lockdown in the pandemic, she begins to reflect on a cast of former romances - each one part of her "dream count," a loose tally she keeps of her efforts to find a complete, all-knowing love. Her voice and memories connect the many threads of "Dream Count" that follow.

In turns, the book shifts its focus to three other women and their dreams. There is Chia's friend Zikora, an ambitious lawyer who is desperate to be a mother, and Chia's brazen cousin Omelogor, a banker in Nigeria who has a crisis of confidence upon coming to America.

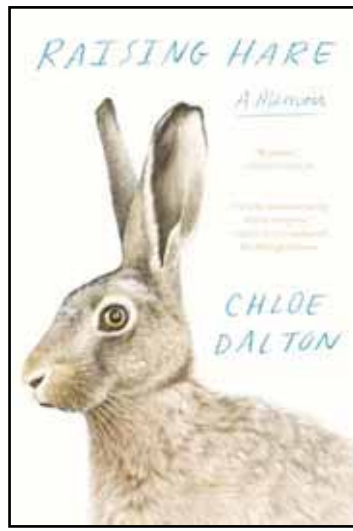
The novel starts to crackle with urgency and outrage when we meet Ka-



This cover image released by Knopf shows 'Dream Count' by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. (AP)

diatou, Chia's cook and housekeeper who also works as a maid in an upscale hotel. Far from the Guinean village of her youth, Kadiatou has finally found steady work and contentment in America when she is suddenly, horrifically assaulted by one of the hotel's prominent guests.

Adichie renders the moment of her assault in quick, shuddering details. Though Kadiatou is surprised to find her bosses believe her account, she soon learns that the rest of the world wants



This image released by Pantheon Books shows 'Raising Hare' by Chloe Dalton. (AP)

to say, as well. Reporters and photographers stake out her apartment within hours of the assault. Her body and life history are dissected as evidence in the lead-up to an international trial.

Kadiatou's tale isn't born completely of imagination. Nearly 15 years ago, a New York hotel housekeeper named Nafissatou Diallo came forward to accuse the then-leader of the International Monetary Fund of sexually assaulting her when she arrived to clean his room. Adichie explains in the nov-

el's endnote how she was hooked and gutted by Diallo's testimony. "Dream Count" is Adichie's way, she writes, of dignifying her story. "Imaginative retellings matter," she says. "Literature keeps the faith and tells the story as reminder, as witness, as testament."

The novel's undercurrent of politics hums louder in the aftermath of those scenes. This is, after all, a book by the same author of "We Should All Be Feminists." We see Chia's dream career as a travel writer hampered by American editors who would rather publish outdated stereotypes of Africans. The saucy, sharp Omelogor is willing to play in the corrupt games of powerful men to build her wealth, but feels ridiculed and dismissed in America for that same spirit.

One could question what purpose it serves for the novel to include Kadiatou's wrenching survival story alongside the tales of well-to-do women. Though Chia and her friends root for and support Kadiatou, they're ultimately embroiled in their own growing pains. At points, the novel's sense of time speeds up too quickly or fails to fully develop a thread.

But none of these weak points ever risks dampening the novel's vibrant energy. "Dream Count" succeeds because every page is suffused with empathy, and because Adichie's voice is as forthright and clarifying as ever. Reading about each woman, we begin to forget that we're separate from these characters or that their lives belong to fiction.

□ □ □

Chloe Dalton was taking a winter walk near her farmhouse when she encountered it: a tiny baby hare - known as a leveret - lying huddled and alone in the middle of a narrow country lane.

A London political adviser who was living in the English countryside during the pandemic, Dalton knew next to nothing about hares. Yet when she found that the leveret hadn't moved for hours, she decided to take it home and try to save it - despite her fears that by interfering she might hurt its ability to return to the wild.

What follows, as recounted in the new memoir, "Raising Hare," was an unexpected experiment in coexistence.

The book is part of a timely genre: true stories about people who open a window into the natural world through intense observation of one wild animal or species, often in their own backyard.

Think of Amy Tan's recent "The Backyard Bird Chronicles"; Catherine Raven's "Fox & I"; Sy Montgomery's "Of Time and Turtles"; Helen Macdonald's "H is for Hawk"; David Gessner's new "The Book of Flaco"; Elisabeth Tova Bailey's "The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating."

Unexpected connections with other species can feel comforting and important at a time when wildlife is so besieged. Nature feels very far away - yet here it is in your backyard. And maybe, these stories say, you can do something to help.

It's fascinating to learn along with Dalton as she looks for information about hares. She searches in books but finds little that's helpful. She's led to believe, for instance, that the leveret will remain aloof; instead, it comes to feel comfortable, jumping around with her and curling up against her while it sleeps. Yet it also leaves for long stretches beyond her garden wall, returning on its own inscrutable timetable.

Dalton has to trust her instincts. Insisting that the animal isn't a pet, she doesn't name it, calling it just "little one." She gives it free reign of her house and garden, making no demands and taking care never to startle it.

She describes the leveret's evolving behavior and body in painterly detail.

Her research into hares mostly reveals a history of sport and slaughter. Dalton notes their population's precipitous decline in England because of encroachment on their habitat (agriculture and its careless machines are particularly to blame.)

She notes changes in herself, too, as she adapts to a slower, simpler life. She begins to pay more attention to her wider natural surroundings. She notices predators, and watches the other hares beyond her wall.

"Raising Hare" is a plea for people to be gentler with other creatures, to grant them room to live.

"Coexistence," she writes, "gives our own existence greater poignancy, and perhaps even grandeur."

## Fashion



A model wears a creation as part of the Vaquera Fall/Winter 2025 collection presented, Monday, March 3, in Paris. (AP)



A model wears a creation as part of the Giorgio Armani Fall/Winter 2025-2026 Women's collection presented in Milan, Italy, Sunday, March 2. (AP)



A model wears a creation as part of the Vaquera Fall/Winter 2025 collection presented, Monday, March 3, in Paris. (AP)



A model wears a creation as part of the Giorgio Armani Fall/Winter 2025-2026 Women's collection presented in Milan, Italy, Sunday, March 2. (AP)



A model wears a creation as part of the Vaquera Fall/Winter 2025 collection presented, Monday, March 3, 2025, in Paris. (AP)

## Makes Sambadrome debut as songwriter

## Anitta celebrates Afro-Brazilian roots with samba song

## Variety

**SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic:** Dominicans on Monday celebrated **Zoe Saldana's** Oscar win for best supporting actress for her role in "Emilia Pérez," marking a moment of immense national pride.

Dominican President Luis Abinader took to X immediately after the actress received the award Sunday night, thanking her for being a worthy representative of Dominican culture.

"I congratulate you, Zoe Saldana, for becoming the first Dominican to win an Oscar," he wrote. "Your talent and dedication exalt our nation, thank you for carrying our flag high. You are a Dominican pride," Abinader said.

Minister of Culture Roberto Ángel Salcedo, a former film producer, echoed the sentiment. "We are deep-

ly proud of you. It is a well-deserved recognition of your career and your international success. Bravo, Zoe!" he said in a statement shared on social media. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** "James," Percival Everett's acclaimed reworking of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," is a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction.

Everett's version of Mark Twain's classic, now narrated by the enslaved title character, already won the National Book Award, the Kirkus Prize and the Carnegie Medal for fiction.

The other nominees announced Monday are "Pemi Aguda's" "Ghost-roots," Susan Muaddi Darraj's "Behind You Is the Sea," Garth Greenwell's "Small Rain" and Danzy Senna's "Colored Television."

"These five books moved us with their compassion, their imagination, their quiet artistry," according to a statement from the judging panel. "They view our world from oblique and unsettling angles while giving us new ways to comprehend the often unimaginable: illness, displacement, enslavement, exile. Yet they also burst with humor and light, with characters who gleam and sing from the page." (AP)



Saldana

**RIO DE JANEIRO, March 4, (AP):** Anitta has become a pop music sensation in her native Brazil and abroad, but Monday she had her first shot to prove herself on the country's biggest stage: the Sambadrome.

This year, the 31-year-old took on the new challenge of joining some of Brazil's most traditional samba artists as a songwriter for a Carnival parade in Rio de Janeiro.

Anitta is a songwriter for the Unidos da Tijuca samba school, the first to enter the Sambadrome avenue on Monday, the second of three nights of parades.

Every samba school must have a song that is repeatedly played for up to 80 minutes to support the theme behind its costumes and floats.

Unidos da Tijuca's theme is Logun Edé, the star's orisha - a deity in Afro-Brazilian religions that represents a force of nature. Last year, the singer lost thousands of followers on Instagram after she made a video to pay tribute to the Afro-Brazilian religion she practices, Candomblé.

Logun Edé is a young warrior respected by elders for promoting knowledge about their culture. Some of the song's lyrics go:

"With intense brightness/ I challenge the consensus/ restless and intense/ I am Logun-Edé."

The artists on Monday night paraded with the Unidos da Tijuca samba school, many of them dressed in the samba school's yellow and blue colors, with costumes representing not only the deity, but also the Borel Hill, a community in Rio's north side where the samba school is based. It is often caught in the crossfire between criminals and police.

Samba writer Diego Nicolau, a member of the Unidos da Tijuca songwriting team, said they had several online meetings with Anitta as the star traveled between concerts in New York and Europe. He added the singer set up a small studio in her hotel room to record vocals for the version that won the contest to be the school's 2025 samba.

Anitta's own Carnival festivities

began Friday in Salvador, where she and other singers led tens of thousands of fans atop behemoth sound trucks, known as electric trios - a Brazilian innovation that amplifies music and effectively does away with front-row seats, to make Carnival more accessible.

The next day, she drew about 550,000 people to a street party in the city of Sao Luis in northeastern Brazil.

When Unidos da Tijuca entered the Sambadrome, Anitta was leaving an event in metropolis Sao Paulo and published videos of herself in a van, singing and dancing to her own samba. Many of her fans said on social media they were frustrated with the star's absence.

"Where's Anitta?" several of them

asked as Unidos da Tijuca started its parade. "I only wanted to watch this because of her," another fan of the singer said on the social platform X.

The results of Rio's Carnival will be announced Wednesday, with each of the 12 top schools hoping for victory.

If Tijuca wins, Anitta will join a small group of top Brazilian music writers who have made it with the demanding fanatics of one of the country's most popular genres. Even if the school merely cracks the top six, Anitta will have another chance to parade with it on Saturday, at the so-called "Parade of Champions."

Hours earlier, she will host a post-Carnival street party, where more than 100,000 people are expected to turn out.

"These concerts during Carnival, we close the deals long before. I won the Tijuca samba contest in September, but I already had these scheduled concerts. There wasn't much I could do," Anitta told journalists on Feb. 26. "We will make history regardless, I am confident."



Anitta



## Bug ratio can predict severity of disease

## Out-of-balance bacteria is linked to multiple sclerosis: study

By Ashutosh Mangalam  
University of Iowa

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.



Multiple sclerosis is a disease that results when the immune system mistakenly attacks the brain and spinal cord. It affects nearly one million people in the US and over 2.8 million worldwide. While genetics play a role in the risk of developing multiple sclerosis, environmental factors such as diet, infectious disease and gut health are major contributors.

The environment plays a key role in determining who develops multiple sclerosis, and this is evident from twin studies. Among identical twins who share 100% of their genes, one twin has a roughly 25% chance of developing MS if the other twin has the disease. For fraternal twins who share 50% of their genes, this rate drops to around 2%.

Scientists have long suspected that gut bacteria may influence a person's risk of developing multiple sclerosis. But studies so far have had inconsistent findings. To address these inconsistencies, my colleagues and I used what researchers call a bedside-to-bench-to-bedside approach: starting with samples from patients with multiple sclerosis, conducting lab experiments on these samples, then confirming our findings in patients.

In our newly published research, we found that the ratio of two bacteria in the gut can predict multiple sclerosis severity in patients, highlighting the importance of the microbiome and gut health in this disease.

First, we analyzed the chemical and bacterial gut composition of patients with

multiple sclerosis, confirming that they had gut inflammation and different types of gut bacteria compared with people without multiple sclerosis.

Specifically, we showed that a group of bacteria called Blautia was more common in multiple sclerosis patients, while Prevotella, a bacterial species consistently linked to a healthy gut, was found in lower amounts.

In a separate experiment in mice, we observed that the balance between two gut bacteria, Bifidobacterium and Akkermansia, was critical in distinguishing mice with or without multiple sclerosis-like disease. Mice with multiple sclerosis-like symptoms had increased levels of Akkermansia and decreased levels of Bifidobacterium in their stool or gut lining.

## Explore

To explore this further, we treated mice with antibiotics to remove all their gut bacteria. Then, we gave either Blautia, which was higher in multiple sclerosis patients; Prevotella, which was more common in healthy patients; or a control bacteria, Phocaicola, which is found in patients with and without multiple sclerosis. We found that mice with Blautia developed more gut inflammation and worse multiple sclerosis-like symptoms.

Even before symptoms appeared, these mice had low levels of Bifidobacterium and high levels of Akkermansia. This suggested that an imbalance between these two bacteria might not just be a sign of disease, but could actually predict how severe it will be. We then examined whether this same imbalance appeared in people. We measured the ratio of Bifidobacterium adolescentis and Akkermansia muciniphila in samples from multiple sclerosis patients in Iowa and participants in a study spanning the U.S., Latin America and Europe.

Our findings were consistent: Patients with multiple sclerosis had a lower ratio of Bifidobacterium to Akkermansia. This imbalance was not only linked to having

multiple sclerosis but also with worse disability, making it a stronger predictor of disease severity than any single type of bacteria alone.

One of the most interesting findings from our study was that normally beneficial bacteria can turn harmful in multiple sclerosis. Akkermansia is usually considered a helpful bacterium, but it became problematic in patients with multiple sclerosis.

A previous study in mice showed a similar pattern: Mice with severe disease had a lower Bifidobacterium-to-Akkermansia ratio. In that study, mice fed a diet rich in phytoestrogens - chemicals structurally similar to human estrogen that need to be broken down by bacteria for beneficial health effects - developed milder disease than those on a diet without phytoestrogens. Previously we have shown that people with multiple sclerosis lack gut bacteria that can metabolize phytoestrogen.

Although the precise mechanisms behind the link between the Bifidobacterium-to-Akkermansia ratio and multiple sclerosis is unknown, researchers have a theory. Both types of bacteria consume mucin, a substance that protects the gut lining. However, Bifidobacterium both eats and produces mucin, while Akkermansia only consumes it. When Bifidobacterium levels drop, such as during inflammation, Akkermansia overconsumes mucin and weakens the gut lining. This process can trigger more inflammation and potentially contribute to the progression of multiple sclerosis.

Our finding that the Bifidobacterium-to-Akkermansia ratio may be a key marker for multiple sclerosis severity could help improve diagnosis and treatment. It also highlights how losing beneficial gut bacteria can allow other gut bacteria to become harmful, though it is unclear whether changing levels of certain microbes can affect multiple sclerosis.

While more research can help clarify the link between the gut microbiome and multiple sclerosis, these findings offer a promising new direction for understanding and treating this disease. (AP)

## Climate

## A climate-resistant crop transforming future

## As warming climate hammers coffee crops, this rare bean may someday be your brew

NZARA COUNTY, South Sudan, March 4, (AP) - Catherine Bashiam runs her fingers along the branches of the coffee tree she's raised from a seedling, searching anxiously for its first fruit buds since she planted it three years ago. When she grasps the small cherries, Bashiam beams.

The farmer had never grown coffee in her village in western South Sudan, but now hopes a rare, climate-resistant species will help pull her family from poverty. "I want to send my children to school so they can be the future generation," said Bashiam, a mother of 12.

Discovered more than a century ago in South Sudan, excelsa coffee is exciting cash-strapped locals and drawing interest from the international community amid a global coffee crisis caused mainly by climate change. As leading coffee-producing countries struggle to grow crops in drier, less reliable weather, prices have soared to the highest in decades and the industry is scrambling for solutions.

Experts say estimates from drought-stricken Brazil, the world's top coffee grower, are that this year's harvest could be down by some 12%.

"What history shows us is that sometimes the world doesn't give you a choice, and right now there are many coffee farmers suffering from climate change that are facing this predicament," said Aaron Davis, head of coffee research at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in London.

Excelsa could play a key role in adapting.

Native to South Sudan and a handful of other African countries, including Congo, Central African Republic and Uganda, excelsa is also farmed in India, Indonesia and Vietnam. The tree's deep roots, thick leathery leaves and big trunk allow it to thrive in extreme conditions such as drought and heat where other coffees cannot. It's also resistant to many common coffee pests and diseases.



Excelsa coffee cherries are harvested at a farm near Nzara, South Sudan on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025. (AP)

Yet it comprises less than 1% of the global market, well behind the arabica and robusta species that are the most consumed coffees in the world. Experts say excelsa will have to be shown to be practical at a much larger scale to bridge the gap in the market caused by climate change.

Unlike neighboring Ethiopia or Uganda, oil-rich South Sudan has never been known as a coffee-producing nation.

## Generation

Its British colonizers grew robusta and arabica, but much of that stopped during decades of conflict that forced people from their homes and made it hard to farm. Coffee trees require regular care such as pruning and weeding and take at least three years to yield fruit.

During a visit earlier this month to Nzara County in Western Equatoria state - regarded as the country's breadbasket - residents reminisced to Associated Press reporters about their parents and grandparents growing coffee, yet much of the younger generation hadn't done it themselves.

Many were familiar with excelsa, but didn't realize how unique it was, or what it was called, referring to it as the big tree, typically taller than the arabica and robusta species that are usually pruned to be bush-

like. The excelsa trees can reach 15 meters (about 49 feet) in height, but may also be pruned much shorter for ease of harvesting.

Coffee made from excelsa tastes sweet - unlike robusta - with notes of chocolate, dark fruits and hazelnut. It's more similar to arabica, but generally less bitter and may have less body.

"There's so little known about this coffee, that we feel at the forefront to trying to unravel it and we're learning every day," said Ian Paterson, managing director of Equatoria Teak, a sustainable agroforestry company that's been operating in the country for more than a decade.

The company's been doing trials on excelsa for years. Initial results are promising, with the trees able to withstand heat much better than other species, the company said. It's also working with communities to revive the coffee industry and scale up production. Three years ago it gave seedlings and training to about 1,500 farmers, including Bashiam, to help them grow the coffee. The farmers can sell back to the company for processing and export.

Many of the trees started producing for the first time this year, and Paterson said he hopes to export the first batch of some 7 tons to specialty shops in Europe. By 2027, the coffee could inject some \$2 million into the economy, with big buyers such as Nespresso expressing interest. But production needs to triple for it to be worthwhile for large buyers to invest, he said.

That could be challenging in South Sudan, where lack of infrastructure and insecurity make it hard to get the coffee out.

One truck of 30 tons of coffee has to travel some 1,800 miles (3,000 kilometers) to reach the port in Kenya to be shipped. The cost for the first leg of that trip, through Uganda, is more than \$7,500, which is up to five times the cost in neighboring countries.



Scientists of the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT) under the Chinese Academy of Sciences discuss the progress of their experiment in Shenzhen, south China's Guangdong Province, Feb. 22, 2025. (Xinhua)

## Breakthrough study

## 'Engineered bacteria' offers hope for cancer treatment

SHENZHEN, March 4, (Xinhua) - A new study by Chinese scientists has uncovered the mechanism behind bacterial cancer therapy using a genetically engineered bacterial strain in a breakthrough that offers new hope for the development of next-generation cancer therapies.

The findings of the joint research team from the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT) and the Shanghai Institute of Nutrition and Health, both under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, were published online by the journal Cell.

Exploring the use of antitumor bacteria in cancer therapy dates back to the 1860s. Despite this long history, clinical application of bacterial-based cancer therapy has faced significant challenges in terms of safety and efficacy.

Recent advancements in synthetic biology have enabled the development of novel antitumor bacteria, creating new avenues for immuno-oncology research. However, such bacteria's practical application has been hindered by the unclear mechanisms by which they evade host immune defenses while activating antitumor responses, according to Liu Chenli, one of the project's leading scientists from SIAT.

In this study, researchers engineered an attenuated strain of bacteria, named Designer Bacteria 1 (DB1), which efficiently survives and proliferates in tumor tissues while being

cleared in normal tissues, achieving a remarkable "tumor-targeting" effect as well as "tumor-clearing" effect.

To understand how DB1 simultaneously achieves these effects, researchers investigated the interactions between the bacteria and tumors. They discovered that DB1's antitumor efficacy is closely linked to tissue-resident memory cytotoxic T cells within the tumor, which are reinvigorated and expanded following DB1 therapy. In addition, in tumors, DB1 can slow down the migration of neutrophils, which helps with the survival of bacteria in the "target."

They also found that the signaling molecule, interleukin-10, plays a crucial role in mediating these effects, with efficacy depending on the high expression of interleukin-10 receptor on the T cells and neutrophils in tumors only.

"Our findings illuminate a crucial, yet previously unresolved mechanism in bacterial cancer therapy. This mechanism not only provides valuable insights but also serves as a guiding principle for the design of engineered bacteria, enhancing safety and efficacy," Liu said.

The researchers validated this therapy in various animal models, and the results showed that this synthetically bioengineered bacteria significantly inhibits the growth, recurrence and metastasis of multiple types of tumors.

## Action urged

## Global obesity in kids tripled

SYDNEY, March 4, (Xinhua) - Half of Australian children and adolescents aged five to 24 are forecast to be obese or overweight by 2050, with a third expected to fall into the obesity category, according to new research published on Tuesday, the World Obesity Day.

The global study led by Australia's Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCR) projects a sharp rise in obesity rates. With substantial growth expected over the next five years, experts called for immediate actions to help reverse this looming public health crisis.

About 2.2 million Australian children and adolescents will be obese, and 1.6 million Australians under the age of 24 will be overweight within the next 25 years, according to the research published in The Lancet.

Worldwide, obesity among individuals aged 5 to 24 surged threefold between 1990 and 2021, increasing by 244 percent to reach 174 million. By 2021, a total of 493 million children and adolescents were classified as overweight or obese, it said.

## Nutrition

The researchers called on governments to allocate resources to urgent, multi-sectoral five-year strategies addressing the factors contributing to obesity, including nutrition, activity, lifestyle and urban planning, which should be overhauled to encourage active lifestyles.

Young people in Australia have undergone one of the most rapid shifts toward obesity globally. According to the study, girls are already more frequently classified as obese rather than overweight.

"Children and adolescents remain a vulnerable population within the obesity epidemic," said Jessica Kerr from the MCR, adding prevention is key as obesity rarely resolves after adolescence. This massive challenge will place a multibillion-dollar strain on both the healthcare system and the economy.

Health complications linked to a high BMI, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, respiratory issues, fertility concerns, and mental health struggles, will not only affect children and adolescents now but also have lasting consequences into adulthood. It may even increase the risk of obesity and lower the quality of life for future generations, Kerr said. The findings offer hope that this trend can be prevented if decisive measures are taken before 2030, she said.

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### Short trip to Dubai was not ideal: Klaasen

## Familiar surrounds for New Zealand for Champions Trophy semifinal against SA

LAHORE, Pakistan, March 4, (AP): After going through all the tangled scheduling, New Zealand returns to its recent favorite venue in Pakistan when it takes on South Africa in the second semifinal of the Champions Trophy in Lahore on Wednesday.

The complex scheduling of the tournament, especially at the tail end of the group stage, saw both South Africa and Australia flying out to Dubai in the knowledge that one team would have to return to Pakistan once the semifinal matchups were confirmed after India played its last group game against New Zealand on Sunday.

The exhausting itinerary was because the Indian government refused permission for its team to travel to Pakistan due to political reasons. This left the ICC, Pakistan Cricket Board and the Board of Control for Cricket in India with no other option but to go for a hybrid model and organize all of India's matches in Dubai, including the semifinal and March 9 final if it qualifies.

India trumped New Zealand by 44 runs, which meant Australia stayed in Dubai for the Tuesday's semifinal against India. South Africa returned to Pakistan with Heinrich Klaasen admitting the short trip to Dubai was "not ideal".

"We knew that there was a big possibility that we might have to fly up and down," Klaasen said. "It's not ideal for the bodies, but at least we had some time to get out and walk around and get loose and just had some nice steak, to be fair."

"We knew it's going to happen and it's part of the scheduling so two teams had to do it, and unfortunately, we were one of them." New Zealand and India were the only two teams in the eight-team tournament which played all their three group matches as rain washed out two games in Rawalpindi, while Australia's final group game against Afghanistan also ended without a result when heavy rain left the outfield too soggy during Australia's run chase.

It's now almost a month since New Zealand arrived in Pakistan and they have happy memories of Gaddafi Stadium where it beat both South Africa and Pakistan in a tri-nation series ahead of the Champions Trophy.

New Zealand is quite familiar with the slow nature of the wickets in Lahore, which might not turn as much as the wickets in Dubai, with Glenn Phillips and Kane Williamson both notching centuries in two high-scoring games during that warm-up series.

But New Zealand will be wary of South Africa's first-choice bowling unit as Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen didn't play in the tri-series but can trouble batters on any pitch.

New Zealand romped to two big wins against host Pakistan at Karachi and against Bangladesh at Rawalpindi as they were not only clinical with the bat and ball, but took some splendid catches in the field. However, despite excelling in all the departments in Pakistan, their batters looked vulnerable against spinners with nine wickets falling to slow Indian bowlers on Sunday.

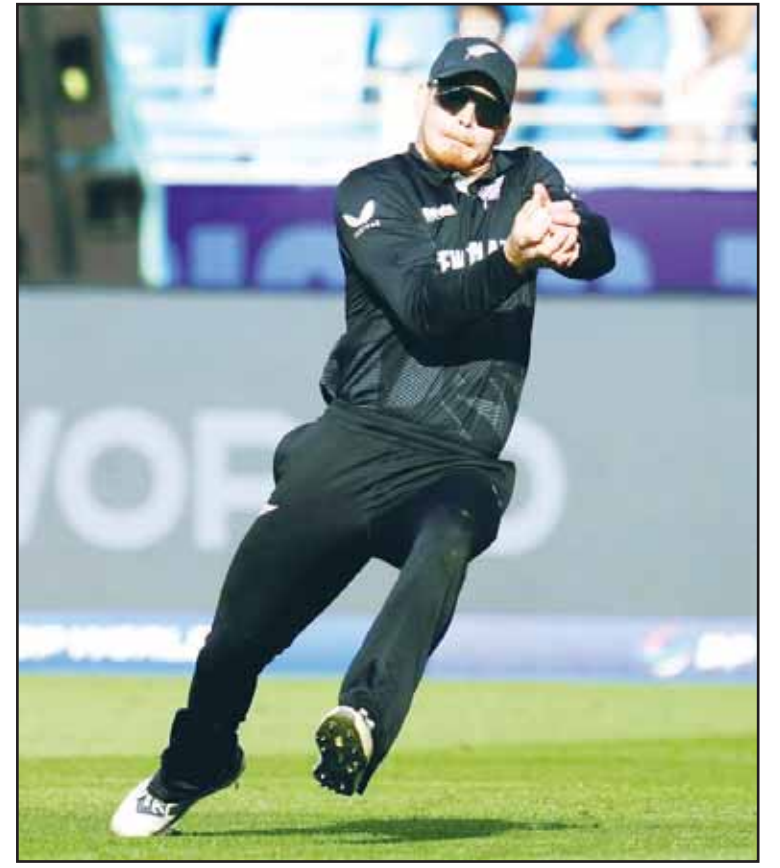
South Africa flattened both Afghanistan and a ragged England in the group games, but its crunch match against Australia was washed out in Rawalpindi and a point from that game was enough for them to top the group.

Just like New Zealand, the South African top-order batters are also in a rich vein of form. Opening batter Ryan Rickelton led the way with his maiden ODI hundred against Afghanistan in the opening game, while Klaasen returned from an elbow injury to smash a quickfire half century against England.

The Proteas will be playing their third successive knockout game in an ICC tournament and hope to go one better than last year's loss to India in final of the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

"The nerves are a little bit less because we have a little bit more experience in the semifinal department now," Klaasen said. "We just had some bad luck here and there and one or two games that didn't go our way, but we've been playing good cricket."

"It's the rewards that we're seeing now. The boys are holding a little bit more composure in the bigger moments in the game."



New Zealand's Glenn Phillips takes the catch to dismiss India's Mohammed Shami during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and New Zealand at Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

## Forest reaches FA Cup quarters



Nottingham Forest's Ola Aina, left, and Ipswich Town's Conor Townsend battle for the ball during the English FA Cup fifth round match between Nottingham Forest and Ipswich Town at the City Ground, Nottingham, England. (AP)

### Sels stops Ipswich in shootout

NOTTINGHAM, England, March 4, (AP): Goalkeeper Matz Sels was the hero for Nottingham Forest as he saved the last penalty in a shootout to take his team past Ipswich Town and into the quarterfinals of the FA Cup.

The teams were tied 1-1 after 90 minutes and extra time and the first nine takers all converted their penalties in a nail-biting finale.

Then Sels dived to his left to stop Jack Taylor's kick and guarantee Forest a last-eight tie at Brighton.

The shootout followed a gripping game at City Ground that was tighter than the teams' Premier League positions suggested.



Nottingham Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels celebrates after winning the penalty shootout during the English FA Cup fifth round match between Nottingham Forest and Ipswich Town at the City Ground, Nottingham, England. (AP)

The home side has been the league's surprise package and sits third on the table, above Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United.

But it was Ipswich, third-to-last in the league, that took the lead eight minutes into the second half when George Hirst converted a back post header.

Forest got back on level terms when Ryan Yates met Anthony Elanga's inviting cross from the right and headed home.

Yates had a second goal disallowed just minutes later, and Callum Hudson-Odoi hit the bar with a long-range effort seven minutes from time. Although both sides pushed forward for a winner, especially in the end-to-end half hour of extra time, it went to penalties.

"It was the only penalty I was in the right corner (for)!" Sels said. "In penalties, one of the goalkeepers is going to be the hero. I am happy. Looking forward to the weekend now."

### Best of the Rest

**Sarrazin recovering well:** French skier Cyprien Sarrazin says he is recovering fast after his head injury in December but remains unsure about whether he will return to competitive skiing.

Sarrazin underwent surgery for bleeding near the brain after crashing during preparations for the World Cup downhill in Bormio, Italy.

Two months after the crash, Sarrazin told L'Équipe newspaper on Monday he is making progress quicker than expected.

"It's going really well," said Sarrazin, who enjoyed his best campaign on the World Cup circuit last season with four victories - three downhill and one super-G.

"I made some pretty meteoric improvements at the start and I'm aware that I was close to disaster, so I'm looking at the positives," he said. "Above all, I'm taking my time. Progress has been faster than expected. I still have double vision, which bothers me when I look down. But physically I'm getting back into shape."

Sarrazin, who has yet to recover completely from the crash, said he wants to resume skiing but maybe not as a professional racer.

"I feel I've still got that fire in me," the 30-year-old said. "But, once again, I'm aware of what I've been through and I want to take my time before announcing anything. Given recent developments, I'm not against a comeback, there's always something that drives me." (AP)

### Flagg, Duke beat Wake Forest

## Montana rallies past Eastern Washington for share of 13th Big Sky regular-season title

MISSOULA, Mont., March 4, (AP): Sophomore Money Williams came off the bench to score 23 points, rallying Montana to an 83-72 victory over Eastern Washington and earning the Grizzlies a share of their 13th Big Sky Conference regular-season title.

Montana (22-9, 15-3) shares this season's title with Northern Colorado but will be seeded second in the conference tournament beginning Saturday in Boise, Idaho. The Grizzlies receive a first-round bye and will play the winner of the first-round matchup between No. 7 seed Northern Arizona and the eighth-seeded Eagles (10-21, 6-12).

The Bears will square off on Sunday against the winner of Saturday's matchup between No. 10 seed Sacramento State and No. 9 seed Weber State.

Freshman Cooper Flagg had 28 points, eight rebounds and seven assists in possibly his final home game, helping No. 2 Duke beat Wake Forest 93-60 to clinch at least a share of the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title.

Fellow rookie Kon Knueppel added 17 points for the Blue Devils (27-3, 18-1), who led by 13 at halftime and then blew the game open midway through the second half.

The 6-foot-9 Flagg, a potential No. 1 overall NBA draft pick, checked out with 3:34 left. He greeted coach Jon Scheyer with a high-five and a hug as Duke's "Cameron Craziest" chanted "One more year! One more year!"

Efton Reid III and Ty-Laur Johnson each scored 14 points to lead the Demon Deacons (20-10, 12-7). L.J. Cryer scored 22 points and No. 3 Houston won its ninth straight game

with a 65-59 victory over Kansas.

Emanuel Sharp added 12 points off the bench, including two free throws that pushed Houston's lead to 63-59 with 20 seconds left. The Cougars (26-4, 18-1 Big 12) went 4 of 4 from the foul line down the stretch.

Cryer had 18 points on 7-of-13 shooting in the first half as Houston took a 30-27 lead into the break.

Milos Uzan finished with 10 points for the Cougars, who had already clinched their second consecutive outright Big 12 regular-season title. Mylik Wilson had 10 points, six assists and five rebounds.

Tyler Bilodeau scored 19 points to lead UCLA to a 73-69 victory over Northwestern after the Bruins nearly blew a 14-point lead in the final three minutes.

Back-to-back dunks by Bilodeau gave UCLA a 68-54 lead with 3:07 remaining. UCLA had three turnovers and a failed one-and-one in the next five possessions. The Wildcats chipped away at their deficit and got within 68-65 on Ty Berry's 3-pointer with 33 seconds left. After another turnover by the Bruins, Berry's driving layup made it 68-67.

Sky Clark made one free throw for the Bruins with 21 seconds left, then William Kyle III's steal helped the Bruins ice the win as Northwestern was forced to foul and the Bruins finished it off with four made free throws. Eric Dailey Jr. scored 12 points, Aday Mara had 11 off the bench and Clark 10 for UCLA (21-9, 12-7 Big Ten). Mara added 10 rebounds for his second career double-double.

## Ex-SA captain McCarthy named new Kenya head coach

NAIROBI, March 4, (Xinhua): Former South Africa captain Benni McCarthy has been appointed head coach of Kenya's national football team.

McCarthy, who flew into the country last week to take up the role, was officially presented by the Football Kenya Federation (FKF) in the capital Nairobi on Monday.

The 47-year-old former striker has signed a two-year deal and takes over from Turkish Engin Firat, who resigned last December.

"I am honored to take on this role and excited about the journey ahead with the Kenya national team. I have studied the talent in this country, and

I believe there is immense potential," McCarthy told journalists in Nairobi.

Joining McCarthy's technical bench are Vasili Manousakis as assistant coach, former South Africa international custodian Moeneeb Josephs as goalkeeper coach, and Pilela Maphosa as performance analyst. All three have also signed two-year contracts.

FKF president Hussein Mohammed expressed confidence in the new technical team.

"After a rigorous selection process, we are confident that McCarthy is the right person to lead our national team forward," Mohammed said.

"His experience, vision, and commitment to developing Kenyan football align perfectly with our ambitions," he added.

McCarthy and his team will immediately take charge as Kenya prepares for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers against The Gambia and Gabon this month.

"I look forward to working with the players, the federation, and the passionate Kenyan fans to achieve success," McCarthy pledged.

The South African's last coaching role was as assistant coach at English Premier League side Manchester United last year.

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Team 5.30 wins the title; Team USC settles for runner-up

## Fourth edition of IBAK Chairman's Cup concludes with thrilling matches



The Team 5.30 champion of the tournament.



IBAK Committee.

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The Indian Badminton Association Kuwait (IBAK) successfully conducted the 4th edition of Chairman's Cup at its Salwa Gym (Saad Al Awzi School) on 27th & 28th Feb 2025. This year's Chairman's Cup 2025 showcased exhilarating matches and fierce competition among 6 teams. The event brought together badminton enthusiasts and community members, highlighting the spirit of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

After an action-packed series of matches, Team 5.30 emerged as Champion of the tournament demonstrating exceptional skill and teamwork throughout the competition. Team USC displayed remarkable performance and resilience, securing up the runner-up position. It was indeed a battle of nerves between both the teams where at the end Team 5.30 reaped the trophy with a 3-2 lead.

This tournament consisted of 6 teams - IBAK Torpedoes, IBAK Arrows, Vikings, Team 5.30, IBCK and Team USC and was played in a round robin format. Each tie had 5 matches, 1 Professional Men's Doubles, 1 Advance Men's Doubles, 1 Above 50 Men's Doubles, 1 Intermediate Men's Doubles and a Mixed Doubles. 4 teams out of 6 teams are advanced into the knockout stage.

During the final battle while Team 5.30 took lead by winning the Professional Men's Doubles but Team USC took the lead by winning both the Advance Men's Doubles and Above 50 Men's doubles. Team 5.30 again levelled up the score by winning the Intermediate Men's doubles. Team 5.30 sealed victory by winning the decider match of the tie, the Mixed Doubles.

Team Vikings lost to Team 5.30 and IBAK Torpedoes to Team USC respectively in the semi-finals. IBAK Chairman's Cup 2025 Teams standings - 1. Team 5.30 - Winner. 2. Team USC - 1st Runner Up. 3. IBAK Torpedoes - Semi Finalist. 4. Vikings - semifinalist

The Chairman's Cup 2025 prize distribution was done by Dr Manimara Chozhan - Chairman IBAK along with other IBAK committee members.

IBAK is committed to improve to badminton in Kuwait. Looking ahead, plans are already underway for the upcoming international badminton tournament, The IBAK Diamond League which is scheduled for 31st March 2025, 1st & 2nd April 2025. IBAK can be reached at [www.ibakwt.org](http://www.ibakwt.org) or [ibakcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:ibakcommittee@gmail.com)



Runner-up-USC



1st runner-up IBAK Torpedoes.



Semifinalist - Vikings

## Al-Arabi faces tough Al-Seeb test

East Bengal takes on Arkadag

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Al-Arabi continues its campaign in the Asian Challenge League Championship, facing Oman's Al-Seeb at 9:30 pm today at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium in the first leg of the quarter-finals. Meanwhile, in another quarter-final clash, India's East Bengal will take on Turkmenistan's Arkadag at 7:00 pm at Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan Stadium in Kolkata.

Al-Arabi advanced to this stage as the best runner-up among the three groups in the West Asia region. Hosting Group B matches last October, the team finished second after a 0-1 loss to Kyrgyzstan's Abdish Ata, followed by a 2-0 victory over Maldives' Mazia and a thrilling 3-2 win against Arkadag in the third round. The "Green" secured qualification based on goal superiority over Abdish Ata and Lebanon's Al-Najma from Group A.

On the domestic front, Al-Arabi enjoys technical stability and currently shares the lead in the Zain Premier League with Kuwait Club, both sitting at 44 points, with six rounds remaining.



Al-Shatti directs the players in the last training sessions.

Head coach Nasser Al-Shatti aims to make an impact at the continental level by securing a strong result that boosts the team's chances of reaching the semi-finals. He will rely on a mix of local talents and professional players capable of achieving this goal.

However, Al-Seeb holds a psychological edge, having eliminated Al-Arabi from the AFC Cup in September 2022 with a 2-1 victory in the West Asia semi-finals. The Omani club,

which topped Group C with a perfect record, is currently in excellent form. A former AFC Cup champion (2022), Al-Seeb leads the 2024-2025 Omani Professional League after 15 rounds and is on course to claim its fourth league title.

The second leg of the quarter-finals will take place on March 12, followed by the semi-finals on April 9 and 17. The tournament's final, a single-match showdown, is set for May 10, 2025.

## Al-Awadat extends Kazma stay after impressive performances

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: Kazma announced that it has renewed the contract of Jordanian international Anas Al-Awadat for another season.

Al-Awadat initially joined Kazma during the winter transfer window on a short-term deal until the end of the current season. However, his impressive performances in a short span convinced the club's management—following a rec-

ommendation from the technical staff—to extend his contract for another year.

The talented midfielder began his career with Al-Wehdah, progressing through all age-group teams before making it to the first team. He played a key role in the club's success, contributing to multiple championship wins. Before joining Kazma, he also had a brief professional stint with Kuwait's Al-Nasr.

## Lyon to sanction coach Fonseca after heated clash with referee

LYON, France, March 4, (AP): French club Lyon says it sanction Paulo Fonseca after the coach lost his temper and confronted a referee in an extraordinary outburst of rage during a league match at the weekend.

Fonseca was sent off deep in stoppage time during a 2-1 win against Brest for angrily reacting to a potential Brest penalty.

After receiving his red card, Fonseca confronted referee Benoît Millot and leaned in very close to his face before being pushed away by Lyon captain Corentin Tolisso. Fonseca tried to confront the referee a second time and was restrained by a couple of Lyon players.

Fonseca has been summoned by the

French league's discipline committee and is facing a lengthy suspension.

Lyon general director Laurent Prud'homme said on Monday that Fonseca will be sanctioned by the club without elaborating.

"We are not proud of what he showed yesterday," Prud'homme said. "It was a sudden outburst and that should not happen again, but he then apologized."

The Portuguese coach apologized immediately after the game and Prud'homme said he also wrote to match officials to say sorry.

"We did not ask him anything, he did it on his own," Prud'homme added.

Millot said Fonseca's behavior was unacceptable.

## Bravo named Velez interim manager

## Messi named in provisional Argentina squad for qualifiers

BUENOS AIRES, March 4, (Xinhua): Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi was among 33 players included in a provisional Argentina squad for World Cup qualifiers against Uruguay and Brazil.

Uncapped pair Claudio Echeverri (Manchester City) and Santiago Castro (Bologna) were also named on a preliminary list for the matches later this month, the Argentine Football Association said on its official website.

But there was no place for defender Marcos Acuna, who was overlooked after a series of poor performances for River Plate in Argentina's top flight.

Argentina will meet Uruguay in Montevideo on March 21 and Brazil in Buenos Aires four days later.

The reigning World Cup and Copa America champion currently leads the South American zone standings with 25 points from 12 games, five points ahead of second-placed Uruguay.

□ □ □

Former Velez Sarsfield winger Marcelo Bravo will take charge of the Argentine top-flight club on an interim basis, the Buenos Aires outfit said on Monday.

The announcement followed the resignation of Sebastian Dominguez on Sunday in the wake of a 2-0 home defeat to Huracan. The result left Velez last in Group B of Argentina's Primera Division Apertura tournament with just two points from eight games.

Bravo, who played for Velez's first team between 2003 and 2005, will be joined by assistant coach Patricio Pisano as well as physical trainers Ivo Paciello and Martin Polo, Velez said in a statement.

According to local media reports, Julio Cesar Falcioni and Carlos Talvez are the frontrunners to assume the vacant position on a permanent basis.

Dominguez guided Velez to one victory, one



In this file photo, Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi (10) heads the ball during the first half of a CONCACAF Champions Cup soccer match against Sporting Kansas City in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (AP)

draw and six losses after taking charge of the club in January.

It marks a sharp reversal of fortunes for the club, which secured its 11th Argentine top-flight title in December. Bravo's first-game in charge will be a home clash against San Martin on Friday.

□ □ □

Former Argentina international midfielder Guido Pizarro has been appointed manager of Tigres UANL for the rest of the Liga MX Clausura season.

In a statement, Tigres said the 37-year-old - who until Sunday had been a part of Tigres' first-team squad - had ended his playing career to assume the position.

"Guido Pizarro has decided to retire as a Tigres player. Also, due to his career, leadership and preparation, the board has made the decision to name him as the new coach of our team," the statement read.

Pizarro replaces Serbia's Veljko Paunovic, who was sacked despite the team's strong start to the Mexican top-flight season.

In a press conference on Monday, Pizarro denied reports that Paunovic had lost the support of the players.

"I join in thanking Paunovic and his coaching staff, who have given everything so that the institution continues to achieve its objectives," he said.

Capped four times for Argentina, Pizarro spent 11 years at Tigres over two spells. He had been captain since 2019 and recently received his coaching pro-license from the Mexican football federation to go with a degree in sports management.

"I've been feeling for a long time that I am more of a coach than a player," he said. "I wanted to take this step and I'm ready. My goal is to make Tigres a leading team in all fields." Pizarro's first game in charge will be Tuesday's away clash against Cincinnati in the round of 16 of the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

Tigres is third in the 18-team Liga MX Clausura standings with 19 points from 10 games, seven points behind leader Leon.

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Empoli's Youssef Maleh, left, battles for the ball with Juventus' Khephren Thuram during an Italian Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Juventus and Empoli at the Allianz Stadium in Turin, Italy. (AP)

# Sports

## Kuwait Oly team begins training for the West Asian Championship

KUWAIT CITY, March 4: The manager of the Kuwaiti Olympic team, Jarrah Al-Atiqi, announced that the Blues will begin training next Sunday on the subsidiary field of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. Under the guidance of Croatian coach

Dario Pesic, the team is gearing up for the West Asian Under-23 Championship, set to take place in Muscat, Oman, starting March 19.

Al-Atiqi confirmed that the Olympic delegation will depart for Muscat on March 13 to continue its training camp ahead of the tournament.

He added that the draw placed Kuwait in Group Four alongside the Jordanian team. The group winner will face the winner of Group Three in the next round, while the runners-up will also compete against each other.

Al-Atiqi emphasized that the West Asian Championship is a crucial part of the team's preparation for the Asian Cup qualifiers, scheduled for September. He expressed his hopes for the Blues' success in the upcoming challenges.



Jarrah Al-Atiqi

## Saudi Arabia to host AFC U-17 Championship

RIYADH, March 4: Saudi Arabia is set to host the AFC U-17 Championship from April 3 to 20, featuring 16 teams competing in the cities of Jeddah and Taif.

This edition of the tournament introduces a new format, with the top eight teams earning qualification for the FIFA U-17 World Cup, which Qatar will host from November 5 to 27, 2025. The upcoming World Cup will make history as the first to feature 48 teams.

The draw, held last January, placed host nation Saudi Arabia at the top of Group 1 alongside Uzbekistan, Thailand, and China. Group 2 consists of Japan, Australia, Vietnam, and the UAE, while Group 3 features South Korea, Yemen, Af-

ghanistan, and Indonesia. Group 4 includes Iran, Tajikistan, Oman, and North Korea.

Saudi Football Federation President Yasser bin Hassan Al-Misahl welcomed the participating teams, expressing his hopes for a competitive tournament that reflects the strength of Asian football.

Al-Misahl emphasized that Saudi Arabia's hosting of the AFC U-17 Championship is part of its broader commitment to staging major sporting events. He credited the Kingdom's leadership for its support of the sports sector, particularly football, and praised the Ministry of Sports for its efforts in ensuring the success of such prestigious tournaments.



One of the stadiums hosting the Asian Championship.

## Best of the Rest

**Al-Nassr draws at Esteghlal:** Cristiano Ronaldo was absent as Al-Nassr of Saudi Arabia and Esteghlal of Iran drew 0-0 in the first leg of the AFC Champions League Elite second round on Monday.

It was a frustrating evening in Tehran for Al-Nassr without the 40-year-old Ronaldo, who has collected five UEFA Champions League titles with Manchester United and Real Madrid.

Jhon Duran, signed from Aston Villa in January, came closest to scoring and former Liverpool star Sadio Mane had chances but Esteghlal goalkeeper Seyed Hossein Hosseini was in fine form.

"I am satisfied with the performance of the players," Al-Nassr coach Stefano Pioli said. "It is important to remember that there is another game." The return match takes place in Riyadh on March 11, with the winner advancing to the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere, Al-Wasl of the United Arab Emirates drew with Al-Sadd of Qatar 1-1.

**Juventus moves into 4th:** Juventus survived a first half scare to come back and beat lowly Verona 2-0 and move into fourth place in Serie A. Khephren Thuram, Federico Gatti and Randal Kolo Muani all had chances for Juventus in the first half and it almost went in a goal down at halftime but Tomáš Suslov's spectacular 30-meter strike was ruled out for offside.

Instead, the home side was clinical in the second period and it got the all-important opener after 72 minutes.

Verona had all 10 men in the penalty box but the defense left Thuram unmarked and he elegantly stroked home Andrea Cambiaso's cut back from the left.

Teun Koopmeiners scored the second a minute from time to secure a fifth straight Serie A win for the Turin club.

Juventus moved two points above Lazio. Verona was in 14th place, four points above the relegation zone. (AP)

**La Liga postpones game:** Spanish authorities postponed Monday night's league match between Villarreal and Espanyol due to heavy rain. The decision was taken just moments before kickoff at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica with thousands of spectators already in the ground. La Liga said it will announce a new match date soon.

The cancellation came with Spain being deluged by inclement weather, four months after more than 200 people died in floods in nearby Valencia following record rainfall. (AP)

**'Bleed for success':** Newly appointed Pumas UNAM manager Efraim Juarez has told his players they must be prepared to "bleed" as the club bids to resurrect its Liga MX title hopes.

Juarez took charge of his first training session on Monday, two days after signing a contract with the struggling Mexico City-based club.

"To be a champion you have to be prepared to bleed and that's what we're going to do," Juarez said in a video of a team meeting posted on social media. "Those who commit to this cause have to be prepared to give everything, 100 percent. That's what you have to do to be a champion," added the 37-year-old, who replaced Gustavo Lema after a 4-2 defeat to Tijuana. (Xinhua)

## Gilgeous-Alexander scores 51, OKC tops Rockets for 50th win



Portland Trail Blazers' Anfernee Simons, left, goes up for a shot against Philadelphia 76ers' Andre Drummond during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Philadelphia. (AP)

## Kings dominate Mavs, who lose Irving to left knee sprain

**OKLAHOMA CITY, March 4, (AP):** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 51 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder defeated the Houston Rockets 137-128 on Monday night for their 50th win of the season.

Gilgeous-Alexander reached 50 points for the fourth time this season, all in the past seven weeks. The NBA's scoring leader finished with at least 40 for the ninth time in 2024-25. He made 18 of 30 field goals, went 5 of 9 on 3-pointers and hit all 10 of his free throws.

Jalen Williams added 24 points for the Thunder (50-11).

Cam Whitmore matched career highs with 27 points and 11 rebounds, and Reed Sheppard added a career-best 25 points for the Rockets.

Houston was without injured Alperen Sengun (lower back soreness), Amen Thompson (right shoulder), Dillon Brooks (bruised right knee), Fred VanVleet (strained right ankle) and Tari Eason (lower left leg).

Houston's largest lead was nine points early in the second quarter, but the Thunder rallied to lead 63-62 at halftime behind 28 points from Gilgeous-Alexander.

**Kings 122, Mavericks 98**

In Dallas, Zach LaVine scored 22 points and DeMar DeRozan added 20, each sitting out the fourth quarter, as the Sacramento Kings beat Dallas with the Mavericks losing Kyrie Irving late in the first quarter to a left knee sprain. The Kings have won four consecu-

tive games while the Mavericks have dropped two straight and four of five.

Sacramento played without Domantas Sabonis, the NBA's top rebounder, who suffered a grade 1 left hamstring strain in the first minute of Saturday's win at Houston. Sabonis will miss at least one week.

Jonas Valanciunas made his first start since being acquired by the Kings on Feb. 5 and had 14 points and nine rebounds in 23 minutes through three quarters.

Irving landed awkwardly after being fouled on a drive to the basket and immediately grabbed his leg, remaining on the floor for multiple minutes. He was helped to the free-throw line and sank both shots before being helped to the locker room.

**Hawks 132, Grizzlies 130**

In Memphis, Caris LeVert made a layup as time expired, finishing with 25 points as the Atlanta Hawks rallied to beat the Memphis Grizzlies.

Desmond Bane had his first career triple-double for Memphis, but Dyson Daniels stole the ball from him with 3.8 seconds remaining. LeVert got the ball and streaked down the floor for a layup that beat the horn, confirmed after an officials' review.

LeVert had 16 points in the fourth quarter.

Zacharie Risacher scored 27 points for Atlanta. Onyeka Okongwu had 16 points and 12 rebounds, while Trae Young had 12 points and 15 assists.

Bane led Memphis with a season-high 35 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. Luke Kennard had 17 points.

**Warriors 119, Hornets 101**

In Charlotte, Stephen Curry had 21 points and 10 assists in his annual homecoming game, and the Golden State Warriors pulled away in the sec-



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry shoots over Charlotte Hornets center Mark Williams during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Charlotte, N.C. (AP)

ond half to defeat the Charlotte Hornets for their sixth win in seven games.

Curry, who was raised in Charlotte and played at nearby Davidson College, finished 6 of 14 from the field and made three 3-pointers.

The Hornets appeared determined not to let Curry beat them in the first half and repeatedly blitzed the 11-time All-Star with double-teams. Curry responded by finding open teammates for easy buckets and had nine assists at halftime.

Buddy Hield scored 22 points and Brandin Podziemski added 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Warriors, who were coming off a 126-119 loss at Philadelphia on Saturday.

**Heat 106, Wizards 90**

In Miami, Bam Adebayo had 19 points and 15 rebounds to break Miami's franchise record for double-doubles, and the Heat cruised to a victory over the NBA-worst Washington Wizards.

Adebayo, in his eighth season with Miami, reached the milestone with a rebound late in the second quarter. He has 222 double-doubles, one more than Rony Seikaly had in six seasons from 1988-94.

Wizards rookie Kyshawn George left with a jaw injury in the fourth quarter after taking an inadvertent elbow from Adebayo.

**Trail Blazers 119, 76ers 102**

In Philadelphia, Anfernee Simons scored 21 of his 34 points in the second half, and the Portland Trail Blazers beat the Philadelphia 76ers.

Simons shot 13 for 26, including 6 for 11 from beyond the arc. Shaedon Sharpe added 20 points, a career-high 11 rebounds and five assists.

Andre Drummond finished with 25 points, 18 rebounds and two steals for the 76ers. Justin Edwards added 16 points and six rebounds.

The Trail Blazers trailed 61-56 at the half but outscored the 76ers by 22 points in the second half.

**Pistons 134, Jazz 106**

In Salt Lake City, Cade Cunningham had 29 points, nine assists and four steals, and the Detroit Pistons beat the Utah Jazz for their 10th win in 11 games.

Ausar Thompson added 17 points and was 7 for 7 from the field, while Jaren Duran was also perfect at 5 for 5 en route to 16 points and 12 rebounds.

Kyle Filipowski finished with a career-high 25 points and added eight rebounds for the Jazz. Collin Sexton had 16 points and three steals.

## Wirtz on everyone's lips ahead of all-German Champions League clash

### Benfica, Barca meet again just 6 weeks after thriller

MADRID, March 4, (Xinhua): FC Barcelona visits Lisbon on Wednesday for the first leg of its Champions League last-16 away match to Benfica.

The game comes less than two months after the two teams met in arguably the most exciting of all the matches in the group stage of the tournament, which saw Barcelona come back to win 5-4 after trailing 3-1 and 4-2 on a chaotic night that saw Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha each score twice, with Raphinha sprinting half the length of the pitch to score the winning goal in the sixth minute of injury time.

Hansi Flick's side has returned to form in Spain since the end of January and is now top of the table, with a one-point lead over Atletico Madrid and three points over Real Madrid, who face each other in Europe on Tuesday night. Barcelona enjoyed a comfortable 4-0 win at home to Real Sociedad on Sunday, in a game that was made much easier in the 17th minute when the visitor had defender Aritz Elustondo sent off.

With the game under control, Flick was able to take off players such as Pau Cubarsi, Pedri, Raphinha, Dani Olmo and Ronald Araujo, while central defender Inigo Martinez was able to watch the entire game from the bench.

All of those players, with the possible exception of Araujo will start on Wednesday night, while Frenkie de Jong is likely to return in central midfield for Marc Casado.

The future of Bayer Leverkusen's Florian Wirtz has become an obsession in German football, while the 21-year-old is keeping his plans under wraps.

When reigning Bundesliga champion Bayer Leverkusen faces current leader Bayern Munich on March 5 and 11 in the UEFA Champions League round of 16, speculation about Wirtz's future will intensify due to Bayern's recent attempts to woo the forward. Wirtz is under contract with Leverkusen until 2027.

Bayern board members Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Uli Hoessner have praised the forward, increasing tensions between the two clubs. Rummenigge called Wirtz "the country's best," while Hoessner said it is his wish to sign him whenever "the door opens even a single millimeter."



Real Sociedad's Igor Zubeldia, right, blocks a shot by Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Real Sociedad at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)