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## SAUDI CROWN PRINCE, KUWAIT P.M. CONFER ON SHARED GOALS

# Talks reinforce Saudi-Kuwait relations



Photo by Saudi Press Agency  
Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud receives His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

ICJ deposition submitted

### Kuwait reaffirms pledge to ecosystem protection

BRUSSELS, March 23, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait on Friday submitted a written deposition to ICJ registry on its commitment to ecosystem protection. The document, presented by Ambassador to the Netherlands Ali Al-Thifeeri at The Hague-based International Court of Justice, came upon a request by the UN General Assembly, according to an embassy statement.

Through the deposition, Kuwait is seeking to reaffirm fulfilling commitments, protocols and international agreements it signed vis-a-vis climate protection. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Imad Al-Atiqi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and Kuwait's Governor to OPEC Mohammad Al-Shatti had significantly contributed in producing the deposition.

Commitment reaffirmed

JEDDAH, March 23, (KUNA): Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, received His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, on an official visit to the sisterly Kingdom.

During the meeting, held late Thursday night, His Highness the Prime Minister conveyed the best regards of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his wishes of everlasting prosperity and progress for the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

His Highness the Amir expressed gratitude to Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman for the kind invitation for the visit, saying his visit reflects the deep-rooted historical relationship and fraternity between both nations.

The visit falls in the framework of constant consultation and coordination to serve the interests of both brotherly nations, he pointed out.

The meeting reviewed the aspects of the growing cooperation and integration in various areas, and reaffirmed shared commitment to

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### Opinion

## Thank you, Abu Faisal ... but where are the zakat funds for those in debt?

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

THANK you, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah (Abu Faisal), for the generous gesture you bestowed upon those in debt among the daughters of Kuwait for whom life has been tough.

Some of them trusted their husbands and fell under pressure from them, because of which they issued dud cheques and were consequently thrown into prison.

This is the first time an Interior Minister is doing something like this. In fact, it is the first time the suffering voices of these women are being heard and responded to, especially since some of them were subjected to great injustice. This happened after their husbands made them take loans but were unable to repay them. After they divorced, the husbands moved on with the loan amounts they obtained from their divorced wives, and the latter were left with the burden of repaying the loan. Due to their inability to do so, they were thrown into prison.

May Almighty Allah bless you, Sheikh Abu Faisal. You have proven that you honor the position you have, and you work in accordance with the humanitarian teachings upon which Kuwaiti society was built. However, the truth must be put before everyone.

In such humanitarian cases, there is no room for evading responsibility. Therefore, we ask - What about the money from zakat funds? Why does it go abroad when those closest to you are more deserving of such funds? Aren't the oppressed and those in debt in Kuwait more deserving of it? Why is this money spent on aid, some of which are questionable, and projects are established in some countries, until it has become a permanent destination for workers in those funds? Also, when there is aid and projects for some African countries, is it usually limited, as if it is a drop in the ocean of what is paid to some countries?

A significant segment of Kuwait has been plagued by debtors after being lured by usurers and merchants who sought to accumulate illicit wealth, and the law was on their side. Some of them even placed the responsibility on the creditor who was greedy and did not do due diligence before lending his money, which is in accordance with the Sharia rule.

However, there are some who cheated on this principle when they enacted laws that serve those with special interests who want to seize people's lives.

These laws no longer exist in any other country, and the Sharia ruling grants the debtor the right to obtain zakat to pay off his debts.

According to the verse, "Zakat is only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and (for) the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is Knower, Wise."

Yes, the debtors who are stranded and find themselves behind prison bars are Kuwait's eternal problem, and they will remain so.

The laws must be changed in Kuwait similar to Jordan, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and other Arab and Western countries. They made the preservation of rights more just and imposed on the creditors to be more cautious and not throw people in prison. On the other hand, the principle followed in Kuwait is "take him and cuff him."

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### Ramadan Timings

Iftar ..... Sunday ..... 18:02  
Imsak ..... Monday ..... 04:24

## Amir condemns Moscow terror, sends condolences



People light candles in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in Moscow, in the center of Simferopol, in Russian-held Crimea, Friday, March 22, 2024. (AP)

Death toll 133

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (Agencies): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has sent a cable of condolences to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing heartfelt solace for the victims of the terrorist attack at a concert facility in the Russian capital.

His Highness the Amir affirmed the State of Kuwait's strong condemnation of this ugly terrorist act that targeted innocent people. He wished the injured quick recovery and the deceased His Almighty's mercy.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing heartfelt solace for the victims of the terrorist attack at a concert facility in the Russian capital.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed strong condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist attack that targeted a commercial complex in the Russian capital, Moscow, leaving dozens dead and injured.

In a statement, the ministry, while emphasizing the State of Kuwait's condemnation of this

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### Biometric drive strengthens global security cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The establishment of a comprehensive biometric fingerprint database, initiated by the Ministry of Interior, is poised to significantly enhance security cooperation not only within the Gulf region but also globally, fostering connectivity with Interpol, Arab nations, and particularly the Gulf states, reports Al-Rai daily.

This development will help in identifying individuals sought by security agencies or implicated in legal matters, while concurrently reducing instances of individuals attempting to enter the country by altering data on their passports.

The sources disclosed that Kuwait's prompt action in conducting fingerprinting for its population and instituting a three-month timeframe commencing from March 1 was in alignment with Gulf-wide coordination efforts.

This initiative was also spurred by other nations' urgency to finalize security integration and information exchange, thereby mitigating issues related to nationality duplication.

The Ministry of the Interior told the daily that the biometric fingerprinting before the impending deadline is for all those mandated to undergo this process and must proactively fulfill this requirement to prevent any disruptions to their ministry-related transactions.

It has been noted that approximately 1.7 million persons have already completed or updated their data.

Furthermore, the issue of dual nationality has become a focal point of shared concern among Gulf nations, and puts a financial burden alongside other socioeco-

conomic challenges.

The implementation of biometric fingerprinting is expected to facilitate the resolution of this matter by simplifying the identification of individuals holding multiple nationalities, who may exploit varying identities and documents during cross-border movements.

The sources underscored collaborative efforts among Gulf nations to address this issue by leveraging advanced security measures, including biometric fingerprinting, which will serve as an authoritative means of identification for all applicants. It was highlighted that this requirement has become a fundamental prerequisite for travelers entering or exiting numerous countries worldwide.



KUNA photo  
United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres arrives at Al Arish International Airport, before his visit to the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, March 23, 2024.

### Newswatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Saturday the State of Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist attack in Kandahar Province, southern Afghanistan, which caused the injury and death of a number of innocent civilians.

In a press statement, the ministry affirmed Kuwait's principled and firm stance, rejecting all forms of terrorism and its causes.

It extended sincere condolences and sympathy to the Afghan people and to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. (KUNA)

**UNITED NATIONS:** The U.N. Security Council is set to vote on a resolution demanding a humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but the United States warned the measure could hurt negotiations to halt Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza. (AP)

The resolution, put forward by the 10 elected council members, is backed by Russia and China, who vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution Friday that supported "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. (AP)

**ISTANBUL:** Turkiye is planning to launch the satellite, Turksat-6A, into space in early July, Industry and Technology Minister Mehmet Fatih Kacir has announced.

In remarks published by the local press on Saturday, the minister said the satellite was under testing at the space systems center in Ankara.

Turksat is the first locally made satellite, he said, indicating that the launch would be during the week starting on July 8. (KUNA)

### World rallies behind Princess of Wales after 'cancer' reveal

LONDON, March 23, (AP): Support poured in from around the world Saturday for Kate, the Princess of Wales, after she revealed in a candid video message that she is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer following major abdominal surgery.

The princess's poignant video, in which she spoke about the "huge shock" and "incredibly tough couple of months" for her family after her diagnosis, came after weeks of frenzied speculation on social media about her health and well-being.

"This of course came as a huge shock, and William and I have been doing everything we can to process and manage this privately for the sake of our young family," Kate said in the video, which was recorded Wednesday in Windsor.

"It has taken us time to explain everything to George, Charlotte and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them, and to reassure them that I am going to be OK," she added, referring to her three young

children.

Kate, 42, did not say what type of cancer was discovered after she underwent what she described as "major" abdominal surgery. She said she is now in the early stages of preventative chemotherapy, and is "getting stronger every day."

The royal said it had been thought that her condition was non-cancerous, until post-surgery tests revealed the diagnosis. The announcement will at least partly tamp down the intense and sometimes fantastical speculation and conspiracy theories about her condition that have multiplied on social media since Kensington Palace announced in mid-January that she had been hospitalized for unspecified abdominal surgery.

Hashtags including "WeLoveYouCatherine" and "GetWellSoonCatherine" were trending Friday on X, formerly Twitter, while political leaders and cancer survivors sent messages of support.

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This screen grab taken from a video released by the BBC Studios on Friday March 22, 2024, shows Britain's Kate, the Princess of Wales recording her message announcing that following her abdominal surgery in January "tests after the operation found cancer had been present." Kate, said Friday she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. (AP)



## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 04:30 Asr ..... 15:23  
 Sunrise .. 05:49 Maghrib .. 18:01  
 Zohr ..... 11:55 Isha ..... 19:18

# Local

BIOMETRIC/FINGERPRINT APPOINTMENT: <https://meta.e.gov.kw/En/>

## Weather

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with moderate to fresh southeasterly wind, with speeds of 20-55 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times and a chance for rising dust.

**By Night:** Rather cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 15-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	26	17
Kuwait Airport	26	15
Abdaly	25	11
Jahra	26	15
Salmiyah	23	18
Nuwaib	26	16
Wafra	26	13

## HH PM sends congratulatory cable to Pakistan president

# HH the Amir of Kuwait congratulates Pakistan on National Day

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Saturday a cable of congratulations to the President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari on his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere wishes of progress and development to the leadership and Pakistani people.

stani people.

### PM congratulates

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent on Saturday a cable of congratulations to the President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari and their people, on his country's national day.

### Pakistan Embassy marks National Day

A prestigious flag-hoisting ceremony was organized in the Embassy of Pakistan on the occasion of 84th National Day of the country. Ambassador Malik Muhammad Farooq hoisted the Pakistani national flag in the presence of a large gathering of Pakistani community members from all walks of life.

During the ceremony, special messages from the President, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan were read out. In their messages, the President and Prime Minister reminded the vision and determination of our forefathers. Special homage was paid to the commitment and sacrifices made by Qauid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his companions, who worked tirelessly towards transforming Allama Iqbal's dream into reality.

The leadership remembered the

struggle of Kashmiri brethren in pursuit of self determination and freedom from Indian occupation forces. They expressed solidarity with the victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza and called for immediate cessation of senseless brutality against unarmed Palestinian women, children and the elderly.

In his remarks, Ambassador Malik Muhammad Farooq felicitated all fellow Pakistanis and highlighted the significance of the National Day of Pakistan. He also paid tribute to our forefathers, whose sacrifices led to the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. He said that we are celebrating Pakistan Day in the Holy month of Ramadan - the month in which Pakistan came into being.

In the end, prayers were offered for peace, progress and prosperity of our homeland.



Top and above: Some photos taken at the event



Lewis

### 'Women having say is priority'

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis has affirmed that empowering women and girls is a top domestic and international priority for the British Government, and an important component of the British Embassy's work in Kuwait, reports Al-Qabas daily.

She said: "We believe that enabling women and girls to achieve their potential and participate in the social, political and economic life of their communities is the key to unlocking a happier, healthier and more prosperous world."

She revealed that "during my time in Kuwait, I have had the pleasure of meeting many highly educated, talented and successful Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti women - many of whom are mothers."

### Other Voices

## 'Kardoush'... and nationality saga

By Ahmad alsarraf

Only a handful of National Assembly representatives, excluding those who have left, retired, or opted out, have demonstrated unwavering commitment to their legislative and oversight duties.

These individuals possess strong argumentation skills, articulate clarity in their statements, maintain integrity, exhibit genuine reformist zeal, and actively engage in committee work.

Among them stands Ahmad Al-Fadl, a former representative and current candidate. Despite facing opposition and criticism, his dedication to parliamentary duties and potential for leading the next phase are undeniable.

Additionally, other deserving members from the previous Assembly include Jinan Bushehri, Marzouq Al-Ghanem, and Abdul Wahab Al-Issa. Conversely, individuals like Khaled Al-Mudhaf, with questionable conduct, remain in memory.

In his notable election seminar, candidate Al-Fadl addressed a concerning case involving the manipulation of Kuwaiti nationality, highlighting the saga of the Syrian individual known as Kardoush. This narrative, reminiscent of a television drama unfolded as Kardoush falsely claimed affiliation with one of Kuwait's tribes.

Exploiting this deception, he and his extensive family, comprising numerous wives, children, and in-laws totaling 150 individuals, managed to secure millions from state funds. However, Kardoush's elaborate scheme unraveled when his fraudulent activities came to light, leading to significant debts and ultimately his flight from the country.

There are thousands of people like Kardoush and others among us. He is



alsarraf

definitely not an anomaly.

Former MP Muhammad Haif, some time ago, through Al-Rai newspaper, called on citizens to report negative or immoral phenomenon, that is spying on them and to inform the authorities!!

In response to the alarming trend of forging official documents and offering substantial bribes to obtain state citizenship, authorities issued a statement urging citizens to report any related information.

However, this was met with criticism, with many viewing it as an attempt to downplay the severity of the issue. Additionally, the argument that revoking the citizenship of counterfeiterers could negatively impact real estate prices was deemed far-fetched and lacking in credibility.

The individuals opposing the Interior Ministry's decision, and even threatening to interrogate the minister, are often the same ones who claim religious adherence. They are also the ones responsible for various financial discrepancies, such as the loss of 15 billion dinars from citizens' loans, advocating for pension increases, and organizing costly medical trips, particularly during the summer.

This group has shown little concern for the welfare of future generations and has turned a blind eye to issues like exam fraud involving 40,000 students.

The Minister of the Interior, supported by leadership, has taken a bold and commendable step that has not been seen in decades. His efforts to combat nationality forgery are crucial for the integrity of the country. It is imperative that such actions continue to yield positive results, as living in a country plagued by a significant number of counterfeiterers undermines its stability and security.

Whoever opposes the decisions to reveal the files of forgers is most likely a forger like them, or covering up for a forger.

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## How to benefit from KAC discounts?

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait Airways Corporation has clarified that ticket pricing for a single flight is based on the seats and classes on the airplane; starting from the discounted prices up to the highest-priced seats in accordance with the system in force in all airline companies, reports Al-Anba daily.

On its official account on the social

networking site 'X', Kuwait Airways announced the prices and the method of benefiting from the discount it offered recently. It also affirmed that most of the discounted prices have been availed by customers due to the high demand for the offer.

Kuwait Airways also affirmed that it is fully prepared to respond to everyone's inquiries through its customer service unit.

## MoE starts disbursement of bonus

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: In implementation of the directive of Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani to immediately complete all pending files, especially the delayed disbursement of certain incentives, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs Matrouk Al-Mutairi has announced that the disbursement of incentives for teachers and administrators in charge of correcting test papers, confidential printing presses and adult education started on Thursday, reports Al-Anba daily.

Affirming the disbursement of various types of incentives will be completed next week, Al-Mutairi disclosed that the

statements regarding the remuneration of control workers (scientific and literary sections) among the educational, administrative, supervisory and leadership staff will be transferred to the Central Bank and then deposited into the accounts of all eligible employees on March 24.

He stated that as per the instruction of Al-Adwani, the Ministry of Finance approved the transfer and enhancement of some remuneration items; which include incentives for test correction, confidential printing presses, scientific and literary controls, shifts, adult education, administrative supervision, and all others that have not been paid for a while due to lack of funds.

# Progress made in Schengen visa for Kuwaitis; 'exemption or five years'

Gaza tragedy likely to end soon: FM Al-Yahya

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya says progress is being made regarding the Schengen visa for Kuwaiti citizens through multiple avenues. Either an exemption will be granted or a solution similar to the arrangement with Britain will be pursued, which would entail a long-term online visa for a period of five years.

Regarding the upcoming European parliamentary elections in June and the Kuwaiti movements, he revealed that invitations were received from more than one party.

Al-Yahya said this in a press statement after he received for two days at the Al-Yahya Diwan in Mansouriyah. On the first day, citizens were received, and on the second day, members of the diplomatic corps were received.

He said, "We are almost done with Canada, as there are some small conditions yet to be finalized. They sent conditions, which were directed to the official government agencies. They are currently with the Ministry of the Interior to complete the file, which will happen before summer".

Regarding the visit of the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council and his support for this file, Al-Yahya said, "He represents the Gulf group. There is comprehensive coordination with the Gulf countries. God willing, we will do what is best for the people."

Also, he explained that all the vacancies in the Kuwaiti embassies in a number of countries have been filled. There is a plan to fill them according to criteria that were set in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Ministers for leaders both inside and outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All these conditions have been completed and were presented to the Council of Ministers yesterday. It will be implemented in the near future.

He said, "We began movements more than two months ago through which we participated in a number of conferences in the Islamic Conference, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and the Munich Security Conference, in addition to the Human Rights Council.

In the speeches we delivered at these conferences, we focused on Gaza and our concern for our people in Palestine.

The issue is extremely important and within the concerns of our political leadership. We have also focused on resuming donations and aid from the International Agency for the Relief of Palestine Refugees. Thank God, many countries have affirmed their pledges for the upcoming shares, the first of which is Canada, Germany, and Sweden among others.

Stopping the war is a basic criterion and it seems that there are breakthroughs. We also hear that there are agreements that will be concluded at the end of it, God willing, in the coming weeks."

Regarding US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's visit to the region and the presence of pressure to stop the war, the minister said, "There is pressure from all sides including the European and Arab countries, and at the highest level.

There are breakthroughs soon, and the steps taking place in the region, either Arab, Gulf, Islamic, or even European, can no longer tolerate the massacres that are taking place in Palestine.

The Americans have their own calculations and elections. These conditions will be in the interest of the Palestinian people in the near future."

Regarding receiving citizens and the diplomatic corps in the Al-Yahya Diwan, the minister expressed his happiness with these meetings, adding, "God willing, they will continue during Ramadan or on other occasions. Diwaniya is an im-



Al-Yahya

### UNCSW concludes 68th session

## Strategy eyed in path to achieve gender equality, societal justice

NEW YORK, March 23, (KUNA): The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) concluded the work of its 68th session, by focusing on followed policies and strategies to accelerate achieving gender equality and societal justice.

Acting Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs Dr. Maryam Al-Azmi, said in a statement to KUNA Saturday, after her participation in the session that started on March 11 and concluded Friday, that they discussed empowering women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening financing institutions from the perspective of Gender.

The session also discussed reviewing the obstacles and challenges facing women on their path of development, in

addition to social protection systems and opportunities to benefit from public services and sustainable infrastructure for the purposes of achieving equality.

Al-Azmi affirmed Kuwait's commitment to the economic empowerment of women in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the UN sustainable development goals, stressing the need for women to have ambition, perseverance, and confidence in their abilities to reach their goals.

The Kuwaiti delegation participating in the session, which was headed by Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah, also included diplomatic attache Zainab Al-Mansouri and the third secretary of the Permanent Delegation of Kuwait to the UN Wafiq Al-Mulla.

### Travelers to Holy Lands spiral

## Umrah ticket rates could hit KD 700

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The number of travelers to the Holy Land to perform Umrah doubled in the first 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan; while ticket prices increased to as high as KD300 and employees in travel agencies revealed ticket prices will rise up to KD700 in the last 10 days of Ramadan, reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting a reliable source from Kuwait International Airport.

The source told the daily that the number of flights to Jeddah, Taif and Madina reached 25 per day; revealing that the demand for Umrah destinations increased by 30 percent compared to previous years.

The daily obtained information that

ticket prices in the first 10 days of the holy month ranged from KD150 to KD250 on normal days, and reached KD300 at the end of the week.

A number of employees in the tourism and travel sector said the prices will double in the last 10 days of Ramadan, hinting that prices will range from KD350 to KD700. They affirmed that the travel agencies have prepared attractive packages including tickets, accommodation and transportation; specifying options for the pilgrims in terms of suitable accommodation as well as the provision of breakfast and suhour meals.

Regarding land trips, the prices range from KD100 to KD150 including visa, hotel and transportation.

important matter and in Kuwait it is called small parliaments. Here, all Kuwaiti issues and issues of concern to the citizens, the world and the region in general are discussed."

In conclusion, he said, "The atmosphere this year is different with the presence of a new government under His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem. There are also elections in Ramadan. This year is considered busy and hot, and we hope its results will be good for the people of Kuwait."

8,646 seats available: According to academic sources, the Deanship of Ad-

missions at Kuwait University has finalized the allocation of 8,646 seats for the upcoming academic year, 2024-2025. These seats were distributed across various colleges within the university, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The University Council is set to convene a meeting Sunday to deliberate on several important matters, including the proposed university admission policy by the dean-ship and the criteria for student transfers.

Sources revealed that the allocation of admission seats was carefully distributed among the colleges, with the College of Engineering and Petroleum receiving the highest share at 1,201 seats, followed by Science with 1,200 seats, Arts with 1,130 seats, and Education with 1,000 seats.



## Ramadan is ideal time to invest in morals, values: 'Read Quran'

"IT is time for me to write about what my pen was unable to write at that time, and my letters were unable to express. I was reading the biography of the purest man on the face of the earth, and the most honorable of God's creation, upon him be the best prayers and peace, who said, 'I wished I had met my brothers,' his companions said: 'Aren't we? Your brothers?' He said: You are my companions, but my brothers are those who believed in me but did not see me," columnist, educational consultant and certified trainer in the field of childhood and adolescence,"



Al-Mudhaf

**Nada Muhallal Al-Mudhaf**, wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily. "So I remembered the visit of gifted youth to me from the Joint Talent Academy School in the Royal Camp, which I held in the winter, in the presence of a crowd of children, aged 15-16 years, and in one of the exercises I gave them to discuss aspects of personality development: 'What is the personality that I would like to have; to contemporize it? What is the best book you have read? So the answers are that they wished they had been contemporary with the best Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, and the best book is the Qur'an.'"

"Indeed, for the majority of memorizers of the Holy Qur'an, memorizing the Qur'an did not hinder their studies and academic excellence. There is no doubt that the blessing, God willing, will enhance and bless them, and increase their excellence and study."

"Where are we today regarding the morals of the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, who wished to see us? Let go of idealism."

"Tell me today, you are a guardian, whether you are a father or a mother, a principal, a teacher, or a coach. Where are we in terms of humility, compassion, patience, containment, and all the fine Islamic morals?"

"Ramadan is a very beautiful opportunity, and its blessings are showered upon us every day. There is still plenty of time to seize this holy month in investing in those morals and values, instilling them in the souls of our children, and making sure to read the Noble Book of God in the month of Ramadan and other than the month of Ramadan, so that it may be light, illumination, and blessing for us."

### Also:

"The term identity, which is linguistically derived from the third-person pronoun 'he,' with its social meaning, is a description of the concept of a thing for the purpose of inferring it. Through this, the symbolism of this thing and its relationship to a society is clarified. In order to arrive at the identity of this 'thing,' we must research its origins. And its foundations and that is indicative of the mind and its sensory tools, and not just by transferring from what is prevalent," columnist **Sadiq Qasim** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Based on the above, we can say that the Kuwait Towers, which now constitute a national identity, have become a symbol of our country since the time of the establishment of those towers in the seventies of the last century until now, and they can be taken as one of the greatest icons of our Arabian Gulf, and accordingly, during Saddam's brutal invasion, Saddam's decimated army tried to attack these towers, but his tanks were unable to topple even a single stone from this edifice, whose steadfastness at that time expressed the steadfastness of the entire Kuwaiti people, in those difficult days."

"But what are the meanings of these Kuwait Towers? What is her identity? What is the reason for designing it this way? What are you talking about? I ask questions of this kind, because I am amazed that there are officials in the state that have distorted the identity of the Kuwait Towers, out of ignorance and lack of knowledge and this is what amounts to obliterating the national identity of a distinctive civilizational symbol."

"I saw, in a television segment presented during a previous celebration of National Day, that the design of the three Kuwait Towers came to reflect the shapes of 'the incense burner, the sprinkler, and the 'kohl,'" but I was not convinced by this interpretation, especially since the shape of the incense burner in the past did not resemble the shape of what is in the current Kuwait Towers, and if the large tower was indicative of the incense burner, so its design must be different from the current one, and closer to the incense burner that I know. As for the middle tower, if it represents the sprinkler, then the ball in this case must be placed at the bottom of the tower and not in the middle, in order to actually mimic the shape of the sprinkler and the giant lighting pole, which may resemble the shape of a 'koh, if we ignore its unique architecture."

"I remember, from my university days, that one of my distinguished professors told me that the Kuwait Towers were designed to reflect the Kuwaiti economy, which was previ-

ously built on extracting and selling pearls. The three towers symbolize the 'point' of the needle in the pearls, and the different sizes of the balls indicate the nature of the different sizes of the pearls."

"What is strange is that such a great edifice of great importance to the state, everyone differs in defining its identity and the purpose of its design? This is what prompted me to research the issue of this disparity. I started with tourism projects, and I found that one of its officials had stated to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the towers were designed in the form of 'the incense burner, the sprinkler, and the kohl.'" I personally am not convinced by this statement, which has been recorded on the Wikipedia website. As a fact, and in the curricula of the Ministry of Education in Kuwait as well, which repeated the same words."

"I began to research the origin and basis of the topic, and I found that the idea of the Kuwait Towers began in 1965. They were water tanks that were architecturally designed in the shape of mushrooms to feed the surrounding areas instead of transporting water through sump tank vehicles. Six sites were identified for it in Kuwait at that time, and the most important of the six sites was the one in front of Dasman Palace, as the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (may God have mercy on him) ordered that the design of the towers in front of the palace located on Al-Khaleej Al-Arabi Street be different from the rest of the sites, so the Danish architect was chosen."

"Melini Bjorn designed these towers. Melini mentioned this in the book 'The Art of History,' and said: 'The design of these towers came to reflect the contemporary renaissance of Kuwait and technology that serves humanity' (pp. 40-41)."

"This was confirmed by what was stated in the brief project memorandum, which was prepared in 1976 by the project contractor, the Swedish company VBB. It was specifically stated in the fifth item of the memorandum: 'The Kuwait Towers are a symbol of technological progress, and that they indicate the renaissance of the strong Kuwaiti economy.'"

"I address the gentlemen responsible for the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, and finally the gentlemen in charge of tourism projects, with my hope to resolve the issue of the identity of the Kuwait Towers, by conveying the correct information through the available media about that lofty symbol of Kuwait, which has not been determined."

"We must focus on what is happening in our schools in terms of public cheating, to the point where we are watching (our children) go out on media channels bragging about having cheated in tests, or brazenly attacking their school administration and monitoring committees for putting pressure on them and not letting them cheat," columnist **Walid Ibrahim Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Now we reached a more difficult stage, with students vandalizing the cars of teachers and school principals who prevent them from cheating!"

"Last week, I was very happy when the Court of Appeal ruled in a historic ruling that a male and female citizen be imprisoned for two years with hard labor for running and masterminding a 'gang' to help students cheat by leaking high school exam papers."

"The court also ruled to imprison two teachers for 6 months for photographing exam questions, creating groups via WhatsApp to sell the questions, and making huge illegal profits from selling the questions!"

"The court also proved that one of the suspects transferred 177,000 dinars to a company account in one day to camouflage his suspicious activity in selling high school question papers."

"What is painful is what makes you think a thousand times before breaking the laws. This ruling requires more oversight, referral to the prosecution, protection of school administrations and examination committees from student threats by referring the accused to the prosecution, without compromising."

"The educational process has collapsed in recent years through miserable educational outcomes after the spread of public cheating in government and the private sector schools, to the point that our schools have begun to produce students who do not succeed except through private tuition and a generation that does not know how to form a small sentence."

"It is a shared responsibility between home and school. Whenever understanding exists, the outcome is positive, and whenever discord and lack of follow-up exist between the two parties, there is joint destruction."

"For those who want to know the extent of fraud in the country, and those who return with unworthy certificates from abroad, especially doctorate certificates, should research the number of forged certificates and go to the Higher Education Administration to check the equivalency of the certificates."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



Ministry teams at one of the shops.

## 5 shops selling fake items shut

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) has administratively shut down five shops in Salmiya for selling counterfeit goods, reports **Al-Jarida** daily. The ministry revealed that a substantial quantity of goods bearing counterfeit trademarks of renowned international firms was confiscated during the operation.

An emergency team promptly conducted a thorough inspection, verified the counterfeit items, and proceeded with immediate closure of the shops. Legal procedures have been initiated

against the violators as part of the ministry's commitment to combating intellectual property infringement. Emphasizing the ongoing vigilance of the Ministry, regular inspection tours are conducted daily to ensure compliance with regulations and safeguard consumers from fraudulent practices.

This decisive action underscores the government's dedication to upholding intellectual property rights and protecting both consumers and legitimate businesses from the harms of counterfeit goods.

# Pledge to reform delinquent juveniles behavior, reintegrate them in society

'Faith, family bonds, patriotism pivotal strategies'

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Abdulaziz Sari, Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Assistant Undersecretary for the Social Welfare Sector, reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to reforming the behavior of juvenile delinquents and reintegrating them into society using internationally recognized methods and standards, reports Al-Jarida daily.**

This declaration was made during a group breakfast organized by the Juvenile Welfare Department in collaboration with Al-Kandara Mabaret for delinquent juveniles and their families at the Social Evaluation House.

Sari emphasized the importance of instilling religious faith, patriotism, and strengthening family bonds as pivotal strategies for behavior modification among juvenile delinquents.

He underscored the significance of nurturing respect for the family unit, citing family disintegration as a primary factor contributing to juvenile delinquency.

Dr. Jassim Al-Kandari, Director of the Juvenile Welfare Department, outlined the department's strategic goals, with behavior modification for delinquent juveniles and reconciliation within fractured families being paramount. He highlighted the technical work plan executed by social and psychological professionals from the national workforce, yielding positive outcomes on psychological and social fronts for delinquent juveniles.

During Ramadan, the department intensifies efforts to cultivate religious consciousness among juvenile offenders, emphasizing the importance of honoring parents as a cornerstone of moral development.

Al-Kandari expressed gratitude to Al-Kandara House for their humanitarian support and collaboration in organizing group breakfasts with the families of juvenile inmates, fostering familial bonds and encouraging juveniles to honor their parents.

The Ministry of Social Affairs remains committed to its mission of rehabilitating juvenile delinquents and promoting social cohesion within families, guided by principles of compassion and respect for human dignity.

**Questionnaire halted:** In response to widespread criticism, the Ministry of Education has announced the discontinuation of a questionnaire sent to teachers and administrators across educational regions, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

Ministry spokesperson Ahmad Al-Wahida emphasized the ministry's commitment to aligning research efforts with ethical standards and societal values.

Following directives from Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, the decision to halt the questionnaire reflects a dedication to scientific integrity and respect for public morals. Al-Wahida highlighted the importance of conducting research in a manner consistent with Kuwaiti societal norms and values.

The move comes after educators condemned the questionnaire's content, which included inquiries deemed incompatible with Kuwaiti morals and religious principles. The Kuwait Teachers Association called for an immediate investigation into the matter, denouncing the questionnaire as a violation of educational standards and societal values.

As the Ministry of Education strives to uphold ethical standards in the educational system, the decision to discontinue the questionnaire underscores a commitment to fostering a positive moral environment in Kuwaiti society.

## Security, traffic plan set to tackle 'girgian' issues

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Interior has announced its security and traffic plan for the holy month of Ramadan,

which includes providing a number of fixed and mobile security patrols in all governorates to ensure the security and safety of everyone, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

In a press statement, the ministry's Public Relations and Security Media General Department advised the public to avoid holding special events for Ramadan in residential areas and squares. It emphasized the need to avoid using entertainment vehicles, popular bands and food carts in these areas; which could lead to the closure of internal roads, obstruction of traffic movement and exposing children's lives to danger, considering that 'Girgian' is fast approaching (it is held in the middle of the holy month).

The ministry urged parents to monitor their children, not to rely on domestic workers, and to follow security and traffic instructions and guidelines.

The ministry said it will continue communicating with the public at all times in order to achieve the desired goal, while taking all legal measures against violators.

It also called on vehicle drivers to pay attention and reduce speed, especially when plying through internal roads. It underscored the need to focus on the road to ensure the safety of all road users.

## 3 customs employees held

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: According to security sources, the Criminal Security Sector's Drug Control General Department, under the guidance of the Assistant Undersecretary for Criminal Security Affairs Major General Hamid Al-Dawas and Brigadier General Mohammad Qabazard, arrested three customs employees for facilitating the entry of bags packed with Lyrica pills two weeks ago.

The sources explained that some among these employees admitted that they received money for facilitating the entry of these bags.

They have been referred to the Public Prosecution for investigations.

## Shopping mall theft

# Gang of six beat young man, steal cash, phone

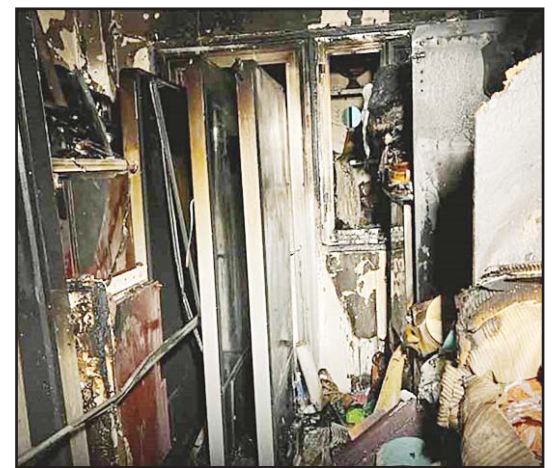
KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Personnel from the Saad Al-Abdullah Criminal Investigation Department have opened an investigation to identify six people who are accused by a young man of beating him after luring him to his office in the Saad Al-Abdullah area and then robbing him of 180 dinars, an olive-colored iPhone 13 Pro, and an Apple watch, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The victim specified the name of the person who hosted him inside the Diwaniya, as well as his phone number. Accordingly, contact has been established with the Deputy Public Prosecutor.

**Theft in shopping mall:** A well-known shopping center in the Sharq area has filed a complaint with the area police station accusing two unknown persons of stealing goods worth 500 dinars, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The complainant did not say whether the theft has been documented by a CCTV camera.

**Finger stuck in blender:** Friday evening, fire brigades dealt with an accident in which a child's finger got stuck in a food blender, reports **Al-Rai** daily. The firemen sought the help of a local hospital to free the hand.



Destruction caused by the fire.

## Fire in Sharq flat

Firefighting teams controlled an apartment fire in a building in the Sharq area on Friday, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

The fire was dealt with and extinguished. The incident did not result in any significant injuries.

## 'We will combat drugs'

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait has confirmed its commitment to combat drugs, including psychotropic substances, in accordance with the basic principles of society stemming from the Constitution issued in 1962 and the legislation on combating drugs and psychotropic substances and regulating their use, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Director of the Legal Affairs and Investigations Department at the Ministry of Health Dr. Ali Al-Khudair made the above statement in the context of discussing the sixth item of the work in the 67th session of the United Nations Committee on Drug Control.

He said Kuwait has established an addiction treatment center specialized in providing medical services to citizens and expatriates suffering from addiction.

He disclosed the center also provides medical follow-up services by visiting clinics with new or previous addiction cases -- around 51,480 cases; indicating that no deaths were recorded in the center last year.

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Al-Hajraf outlines Kuwait's vision for sustainable water management

# Kuwait calls for global cooperation on World Water Day

## 'Awqaf' launches registration for scholarship for foreign students

Ministry launches 7th Al-Nour Quranic competition

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

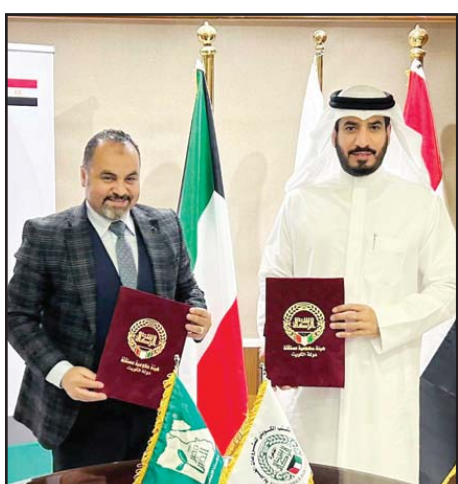
KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Foreign Relations, announced recently the launch of registration for cultural scholarships for foreign students who are not residing in the State of Kuwait at Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) for the academic year of 2024/2025, revealing that the deadline for registration is April 20.

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the ministry Dr. Bader Al-Mutairi visited the Ramadan Center at the Duaij Al-Sabah Mosque in Sabahiya, affiliated with the Ahmadi Mosques Department, to check on the center's preparations and the services it provides to worshippers.

During the visit, Al-Mutairi praised those in charge of the center, and the efforts of all responsible for commemorating the blessed nights in all mosques.

Furthermore, Director of the Ahmadi Mosques Department Thamer Al-Satlan expressed his gratitude to the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb, and to the Undersecretary Dr. Bader Al-Mutairi for supporting the Ramadan centers with all their needs and providing comfort to the worshippers.

In a speech he gave during Al-Mutairi's visit, Al-Satlan explained that there are four Ramadan centers in Ahmadi Governorate, which are the Duaij Al-Sabah Center in Sabahiya, the Saud



KUNA photo  
The Kuwaiti Office for Charitable Projects signed an agreement with Misr Al-Kheir Foundation on Thursday to finance charitable projects in Egypt with a financial donation of USD 10 million provided by Kuwait Finance House.

Al-Jalal Center in Egaila, Al-Sarhid and Al-Jabri Center in Mangaf, and the Ibn Taymiyyah Center in Sabah Al-Ahmad.

During the Ramadan nights, these centers host an elite group of reciters and imams who perform Taraweeh prayers and present scientific and jurisprudential lectures to the masses of worshippers.

In addition, the Supervisor of the Rehabilitation and Correction Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Saleh said the department began its supervisory role in the performance of Taraweeh prayers

from the first day of Ramadan in the mosques of the correctional institutions of the Ministry of Interior.

Al-Saleh revealed that reciters and sheikhs certified in Qur'an lead the worshippers among inmates in the public prison, the central prison, and the guidance and rehabilitation center for men, as well as for the inmates in the women's prison, in coordination with the General Guidance Department.

He indicated that the department launched a set of religious and cultural activities and programs to revive the divine Ramadan rituals in a spiritual atmosphere, stressing that it gives great attention to the correctional institutions sector to rehabilitating and correcting the behavior of inmates to integrate them into society in a decent manner.

Meanwhile, the Director of the Rehabilitation and Correction Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Nasser Al-Ajmi announced that the department launched the 7th Al-Nour Quranic competition for members of the halfway house and residents of the addiction treatment center and rehabilitation wards under the supervision of the department, in line with its work plan and the goals that are hoped to be achieved with these groups.

In a press statement issued recently, Dr. Al-Ajmi explained that the competition aims to encourage those who are recovering to relate to the Qur'an, recite it, and memorize whatever they can from it, as well as occupy their time with what is productive and useful, and seize the stations of faith of the month of Ramadan.

The department provides incentive prizes to the participants and those who excelled among them, after they memorized the parts and surahs of the Qur'an selected for the competition. All of this is aimed to achieve a dignified return to society and their proper integration into it.

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Dr. Salem Al-Hajraf, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, emphasized the imperative of enhancing water security and fostering collaborative efforts to address common global challenges, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Speaking on World Water Day, celebrated under the theme "Water for Peace," Al-Hajraf underscored that water is not merely a commodity subject to competition, but a fundamental human right deserving universal respect.

Al-Hajraf's remarks conveyed Kuwait's commitment to securing its water needs through innovative approaches, dating back to the establishment of the world's first seawater desalination plant in 1951. Kuwait's participation in World Water Day reflects its dedication to managing this vital resource sustainably.

Highlighting the ministry's ongoing efforts, Al-Hajraf outlined projections for increasing water demand and detailed plans to meet future requirements, with

water production expected to reach one billion imperial gallons per day by 2035. He also highlighted Kuwait's alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 6, which aims to ensure universal access to clean water and sanitation by 2030.

Despite challenges such as high consumption rates, Al-Hajraf affirmed the ministry's commitment to enhancing water management through the adoption of renewable energy and advanced technologies. By promoting conservation and efficiency in water treatment, transportation, and storage, Kuwait aims to mitigate the global water crisis and contribute to sustainable development goals.

World Water Day serves as a global call to action, urging collective efforts to address freshwater challenges and promote responsible water stewardship. Through collaboration and innovation, nations can work together to safeguard this essential resource for present and future generations.



KUNA photo  
Signing of the agreement between the Kuwait Red Crescent and the Jordanian Red Crescent and the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization.

### Cooperative agreement signed

## Kuwait and Jordan charities agree to boost humanitarian aid to Gaza

AMMAN, March 23, (KUNA): Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) on Thursday concluded a cooperative agreement with the Jordanian National Red Crescent Society (JNRCS) and Jordanian Hashemite Charitable Organization to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Speaking to KUNA on this occasion, Kuwaiti Ambassador in Amman Hammad Al-Marri said the signing of the deal is part of Kuwaiti-Jordanian cooperation aiming at helping the population of Gaza, which has been launched since the Israeli occupation aggression on the enclave.

He added that both countries' political leaderships attach much attention to relief and humanitarian action with a view to supporting Palestinians in Gaza amid grave human rights violations committed by Israeli occupation forces.

He noted that Kuwait has launched an airlift to help Gazans at the behest of Jordanian King Abdullah II, in parallel with the Gulf country's air bridge via Egypt's Al-Arish International Airport.

For his part, Secretary-General of the Jordanian Hashemite Charitable Organi-

zation Dr. Hussein Al-Shibli said that the deal reflects a joint action mechanism to help the population of Gaza in various domains, mainly relief, food and medical ones.

Speaking to KUNA, he highly commended the cooperation between the KRCS and JNRCS as being "sustainable and permanent", noting that this agreement aims at bolstering and maintaining joint cooperation and exerting more efforts to deliver aid to the Palestinian territory.

For his part, Director-General of the KRCS Abdulrahman Al-Oun said in a statement to KUNA that the agreement is meant to promote bilateral cooperation and to meet the directives of the political leadership to help the Palestinian people.

He reiterated his society's interest in increasing humanitarian and relief aid to the population of Gaza through crossing points and airdropping.

JNRCS Chairman Mohammad Al-Hadid told KUNA that the trilateral deal reflects societal partnership and is intended to boost humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

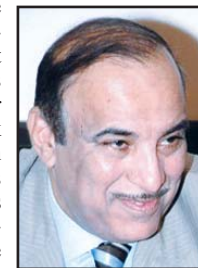
### Distinguished societies honored

## GCC carries out over 2,000 events during 9th Gulf Cancer Awareness Week: official

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Secretary-General of the Gulf Union for Cancer Control and Chairman of the Cancer Nation Awareness (CAN) Campaign Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh revealed that more than 2,000 events in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries were carried out during the 9th Gulf Cancer Awareness Week.

In a speech he gave recently after honoring the distinguished Gulf society that won the Excellence Competition, Dr. Al-Saleh explained that the union has always held the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week with the participation of 19 Gulf societies that carry out various programs throughout the week to raise awareness about cancer diseases. This cooperation resulted in a noticeable increase in Gulf awareness, and contributed to reducing the percentage of those who say that cancer is an incurable disease from 65 percent to 45 percent. It also increased the percentage of those who believe in the importance of early detection from 50 percent to 70 percent.



Dr Al-Saleh

### Imprint

The Gulf cancer awareness weeks have become an imprint on the awareness process. This year included for the first time an award for the distinguished association in its activities during the week, with the aim of stimulating and encouraging innovation and diversity. This award was won by the Saudi cancer control charitable society in Al-Ahsa called Tafaul Society.

Meanwhile, Head of the coordinating committee Dr. Hessa Al-Shaheen praised the successes achieved by the Gulf Week throughout its nine-year run.

She highlighted that increasing the awareness rates achieves high recovery rates.

Dr. Al-Shaheen stressed the importance of advocating for the adoption of lifestyles that include proper nutrition and exercise, which reflects positively on physical and psychological health.

She revealed that this year's program included 60 scientific, social, sporting, artistic and entertainment events, targeting all segments of society, indicating that the events focused on sharing messages, posts and videos via social media and other media forms.

Dr. Al-Shaheen expressed appreciation for the great cooperation between the GCC countries in raising awareness about cancerous diseases, by first identifying the risk factors associated with them, their initial signs, early detection, and treatment in the initial stages.


### Awareness




She affirmed the importance of the family's role in prevention, and praised the role of Kuwaiti and Gulf public benefit societies and the private sector in raising cancer awareness in the GCC countries.

In addition, the representative of the Tafaul Society Dr. Fouad Al-Jaghman said, "Through community partnership, Tafaul contributed to making this happen based on its strategic goals with steady steps.

The society spread its pillars in several places and moved to branch stations, heading to the Ihsa Al-Khair areas in its cities and villages, with a variety of programs and activities with three lectures, five awareness exhibitions, and three walking initiatives, with a number of participants exceeding 1,500.

The society's aim is to mitigate the effects of the disease, raise the level of community health awareness, achieve institutional excellence, innovation and sustainability in the association, and enable the system of institutional communication and volunteer work."


  
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## Council committee approves MoH's proposal and allocate medical center site

# Panel okays MoD's request for Air Force Command site reduction

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Committee in the Municipal Council, during its meeting recently headed by Nassar Al-Azmi, approved the Ministry of Defense's request to reduce the area of the Air Force Command site in the central area (Sabhan).

The committee referred to the executive body the letter sent by the undersecretary of the Ministry of Health regarding the 56th report of the Health, Social and Labor Affairs Committee on the proposal submitted by member Dr. Mohammad Al-Huwaila.

Meanwhile, the Ahmadi Committee of the Municipal Council retained the request of the Ministry of Electricity, Wa-

ter and Renewable Energy to reallocate the main electricity transfer station in Fahaheel Block 4.

It invited the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy to attend its next meeting.

The committee approved the Ministry of Health's request to allocate a medical center site within Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City Block A3, with a landing strip for air ambulance and medical evacuation.

It referred to the executive body the British University's request regarding the Egaila area to address and coordinate with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. It asked the municipality to provide its technical opinion regarding the impact of the future project on the area.

## Thank you,

Continued from Page 1

We reiterate our appreciation and gratitude to Sheikh Abu Faisal who donated his money for the payment of some fines. He ordered that some of the inmates be released, tied with an electronic bracelet, and returned to their families. Nevertheless, this matter requires a radical treatment to end this ongoing crisis.

Therefore, we place it before the guardian to make sure families remain together and maintain cohesion, so that they do not disintegrate and result in multiple crimes.

## Talks reinforce

Continued from Page 1

opening wider horizons for the historical relations under the wise leaderships of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his brothers King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

Both sides discussed the latest developments on the regional and international arenas and the stances of both countries on them, His Highness the Prime Minister said.

He appreciated the balanced policy of Saudi Arabia and the efforts of its wise leadership to promote security and peace in the region and beyond.

The meeting gathered, from the Saudi side, Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al Saud and Minister of State and Cabinet Member Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and, from the Kuwaiti side, Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Upon concluding the visit, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah expressed his deep gratitude to the Kingdom, its government, and its people for their warm hospitality. He departed from Jeddah on Friday, leaving behind wishes for the everlasting stability and prosperity of Saudi Arabia.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah arrived on Thursday in Jeddah City on an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Upon arrival, His Highness the Premier was received by Deputy Governor of Makkah Al-Mukarramah Region Prince Saud bin Mishal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Minister of State and Cabinet Member Prince Turki bin Mohammed bin Fahd bin Al Saud, Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al Saud, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Kuwait's Consul General in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mohammad Saud Al-Mutairi.

Kuwaiti Ambassador in Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah underlined Thursday the significance of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah's visit to the kingdom to further developing bilateral relations to wider horizons.

Speaking to KUNA on the occasion, Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser said that the visit is of special importance since it comes following His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to the kingdom, and it is the first visit by His Highness the Prime Minister since he assumed his post.

He added that the tour comes in the context of His Highness the Amir's visit and implementation of the Kuwaiti-Saudi Statement, which was adopted following His Highness the Amir's visit.

He concluded by saying that under the direction and determination of both countries' leaderships and the two peoples' resolve, their bilateral cooperation would certainly lead to progress and prosperity.

## Amir condemns

Continued from Page 1

terrorist act and its rejection of violence in all its forms, calls on the international community to stand up to these terrorist acts that target civilians.

The State of Kuwait extends its condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims and to the Russian Federation, government and people, and wished a speedy recovery to all injured in this attack.

Meanwhile, Russian authorities detained 11 people, state media reported Saturday, after gunmen stormed a concert hall in Moscow in a grisly attack that left at least 133 people dead.

Russia's Investigative Committee said four of those detained were directly involved in the attack that left the sprawling shopping mall and music venue smoldering with a collapsed roof.

Russian agencies appeared to suggest the attack was linked to Ukraine even though the Islamic State group claimed responsibility in a statement. A U.S. intelligence official told The Associated Press that U.S. agencies had confirmed that that group was responsible for the attack.

The four suspects were stopped in the Bryansk region of western Russia, "not far from

the border with Ukraine," Russia's Investigative Committee said. They planned to cross the border into Ukraine and "had contacts" there, state news agency Tass said, citing Russia's FSB. The head of the FSB briefed President Vladimir Putin on the arrests on Saturday, according to Tass.

The attack came just days after Putin cemented his grip on power in a highly orchestrated electoral landslide. The attack was the deadliest in Russia in years and came as the country's fight in Ukraine dragged into a third year.

Shortly after the attack, some Russian lawmakers pointed the finger at Ukraine. Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, denied any involvement.

"Ukraine has never resorted to the use of terrorist methods," he posted on X, formerly Twitter. "Everything in this war will be decided only on the battlefield."

Images shared by Russian state media Saturday showed a fleet of emergency vehicles still gathered outside the ruins of Crocus City Hall, which had a capacity of more than 6,000 people in Krasnogorsk, on Moscow's western edge.

Videos posted online showed gunmen in the venue shooting civilians at point-blank range. The roof of the theater, where crowds had gathered Friday for a performance by the Russian rock band Picnic, collapsed in the early hours of Saturday morning as firefighters spent hours fighting a fire that erupted during the attack.

In a statement posted by its Aamaq news agency, the Islamic State's affiliate in Afghanistan said it had attacked a large gathering of "Christians" in Krasnogorsk. It was not immediately possible to verify the authenticity of the claim.

A U.S. intelligence official told the AP that U.S. intelligence agencies had gathered information in recent weeks that the IS branch was planning an attack in Moscow, and that U.S. officials had privately shared the intelligence earlier this month with Russian officials.

The official was briefed on the matter but was not authorized to publicly discuss the intelligence information and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Messages of outrage, shock and support for those affected have since streamed in from around the world.

On Friday, the U.N. Security Council condemned "the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack" and underlined the need for the perpetrators to be held accountable. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the terrorist attack "in the strongest possible terms," his spokesman said.

Meanwhile, in Moscow itself, hundreds of people stood in line Saturday morning to donate blood and plasma, Russia's health ministry said.

Putin, who extended his grip on Russia for another six years in this week's presidential vote after a sweeping crackdown on dissent, had publicly denounced the Western warnings of a potential terrorist attack as an attempt to intimidate Russians. "All that resembles open blackmail and an attempt to frighten and destabilize our society," he said earlier this week.

In October 2015, a bomb planted by the Islamic State downed a Russian passenger plane over Sinai, killing all 224 people on board, most of them Russian vacation-goers returning from Egypt. The group, which operates mainly in Syria and Iraq but also in Afghanistan and Africa, also has claimed several attacks in Russia's volatile Caucasus and other regions in the past years. It recruited fighters from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

## World rallies

Continued from Page 1

"She has been subjected to intense scrutiny and has been unfairly treated by certain sections of the media around the world and on social media," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said. "She has shown tremendous bravery with her statement." White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Friday "we are incredibly sad" to hear the "terrible" news.

King Charles III, who is also undergoing treatment for an unspecified type of cancer, said in a statement that he was "so proud of Catherine for her courage in speaking as she did." Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, who have been estranged from the royal family since their move to California in 2020, said they wished "health and healing for Kate and the family."

Until Friday there had been little information about Kate's condition, and her months-long disappearance from public view fueled a flurry of rumor-mongering about the "missing" future queen.

Officials had only said that Kate's surgery in January was successful and recuperation would keep the princess away from public duties until April.

Feelings of distrust about the royals gained ground earlier this month after Kate acknowledged that she had edited an official photo released to mark Mother's Day in the U.K. The photo, which was meant to calm and reassure the public, triggered a backlash after The Associated Press and other news agencies retracted the image over concerns it was manipulated.

Even a video published last week by The Sun and TMZ that appeared to show Kate and William shopping near their home did not dispel the negative coverage, with some armchair detectives refusing to believe the video showed Kate at all.

# 'Kuwait's 2023 imports show slight increase compared to previous yr'

Report highlights detailed breakdown by product category

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Foreign trade data showed that Kuwait imported various goods including live animals and animal products at a total cost of KD572.17 million in 2023 -- a slight increase compared to KD569.87 million in 2022, reports Al-Anba daily.

These imported items include live animals at KD54.72 million compared to KD56.94 million in 2022; edible meat, entrails and limbs at KD229.34 million compared to KD241.04 million in 2022; fish, crustaceans, mollusks and other aquatic invertebrates at KD66.8 million compared to KD66.1 million in 2022; dairy products, bird eggs and natural honey at KD220.8 million compared to 205.46 million in 2022; tea, coffee, coffee mate and spices at KD65 million compared to KD62.64 million in 2022; fruits and vegetables at KD152.4 million compared to KD149.17 million in 2022; sugar and sugar products at KD47.7 million compared to KD47.78 million in 2022; cocoa and its preparations at KD60.7 million compared to KD62.2 million in 2022; medicines at KD578 million compared to KD487.134 million in 2022; perfumes (aromatic oils, resin extracts and perfume or softening preparations) at KD258.74 million compared to KD232.46 million in 2022; books, printing and publishing products, handwritten manuscripts, reproductions and designs at KD12.7 million compared to KD11.87 million in 2022; synthetic hair at KD21.16 million compared to KD20.35 million in 2022; shoes at KD130 million compared to KD127.43 million in 2022; head coverings at KD7 million compared to KD6 million in 2022; pearls, precious and semi-precious stones and precious metals at KD660.65 million compared to KD752.53 million in 2022; machines, appliances, electrical equipment and their parts, audio and video recording and broadcasting devices and their accessories at KD1.08 billion compared to KD1.03 billion in 2022; ships, boats, and buoys at KD12.16 million compared to KD14.7 million in 2022, and children's toys at KD55.54 million compared to KD58.96 million in 2022.

## Zain Ramadan Challenge aids health, fitness

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Zain, in partnership with Suffix, has launched the Zain Ramadan Challenge for the third consecutive year at Al Shaheed Park. This renowned sports program encourages individuals of all ages to stay physically active and exercise throughout the month of Ramadan, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The initiative kicked off at Al Shaheed Park with the presence of Walid Al-Khashti, CEO of Relations and Corporate Affairs at Zain-Kuwait, and Ahmed Al-Majed, CEO of Operations at Suffix, along with officials from both companies and enthusiastic participants from diverse age groups.

Zain's continued support for this unique sports program aligns with its commitment to promoting health and fitness, especially during Ramadan. The challenge has garnered significant success in previous seasons, attracting thousands of participants eager to adopt a more active lifestyle during fasting, which offers numerous health benefits.

Running from March 20 to 29, the Zain Ramadan Challenge at Al Shaheed Park provides an opportunity for participants to walk or run at their own pace within the park premises.

Participants can track their performance electronically using chips provided upon registration, with their progress displayed live on screens at the park. Special exercises and activities are also available to earn additional points and foster a spirit of competition.

Beyond walking and running, the challenge includes various sports activities such as group exercises, health club demonstrations, and special events like the International Day of Happiness celebration and races for children and individuals with Down syndrome. The initiative aims to promote the importance of physical activity during fasting and encourage participants to maintain a healthy lifestyle beyond Ramadan.



KRCS during the distribution of Ramadan baskets in Lebanon.

KUNA photo

## Move aims to alleviate some of economic burdens

# KRCS distributes Ramadan food baskets to Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian refugees

BEIRUT, March 23, (KUNA): Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) began distributing Ramadan food baskets to Lebanese families and Syrian and Palestinian refugee families in Lebanon to mark the holy month of Ramadan.

Relief Coordinator at the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) Youssef Boutros told KUNA Friday that the distribution is in collaboration with LRC and covers areas such as Zahle in eastern Lebanon, Arsal in the northeast, and Akkar in the north, spanning 10 days to reach as many families as possible.

The baskets contain essential and various food items to support families during the holy month, aiming to alleviate some of the economic burdens they face, he pointed out.

This initiative is seen as a generous gesture filled with humanitarian values, enhancing a sense of brotherhood and solidarity among

Arabs, especially amidst the ongoing challenges in the region, he noted.

He underscored that these Ramadan baskets also provide support to Lebanese families as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees who struggle with limited resources to meet their living expenses.

On his side, Lebanese citizen Saleem Abu Akr from Zahle expressed gratitude to Kuwait and its people, as well as KRCS, for their continuous care for Lebanese people and refugees in Lebanon, particularly during Ramadan.

KRCS' humanitarian initiatives have become a staple, especially amidst Lebanon's economic crisis, which has placed heavy burdens on families, he said.

Similarly, Tayseer Hamadeh, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon with a family of 10, commended the consistent presence of KRCS during Ramadan, saying that refugee

families have come to rely on their humanitarian initiatives.

He mentioned the increasing difficulty faced by refugee families due to Lebanon's economic pressures and rising living costs, underlining the importance of Ramadan baskets in fulfilling their essential needs.

It is worth noting that the KRCS' activities extend beyond regular aid throughout the year to include humanitarian and relief initiatives necessitated by emergency situations, as seen last month when they extended assistance to Lebanese families and Syrian refugees affected by flooding in northern Lebanon caused by heavy rains.

Additionally, the organization will distribute Eid clothing and continue its ongoing project, the "Bread Project," which has been providing bread to thousands of Lebanese and Syrian refugee families for years.

## 10-day 'Arena Challenge' event concludes

# 'We are keen to build partnerships and support initiatives for youth dev in various fields: PAY

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): The Public Authority for Youth affirmed its keenness to build partnerships and enhance cooperation with state institutions, civil society and the private sector directly related to youth, and to support all initiatives related to the social, health, sports, cultural and educational aspects of their important role in youth development. The official spokesperson for the General Youth Authority, Asrar Al Ansari, said in a press statement on Friday, after the conclusion of the "Arena Challenge" event, which was held under the authority's sponsorship in the 360 Mall and lasted for 10 days, that these activities work to enhance societal values and encourage the practice of sports for all.

Al Ansari stated that this event witnessed the attendance of more than 10,000 participants over its days, as it included holding sports competitions and challenges and holding a series of educational dialogues that addressed topics of



Al Ansari

Al-Badr

interest to young people, such as sports, types of injuries, weight loss, healthy nutrition, and other matters related to sports and health. She explained that the authority considers community partnerships one of the most important tools to achieve its vision of empowering and developing youth, appreciating the fruitful cooperation with those in charge of this event and their efforts made to make its goals a success.

For her part, one of the organizers of the event, Bashayer Al-Badr, stated in a press statement

## Bank supports cancer patients with Umrah trip

# Commercial Bank provides financial support to Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to social responsibility and sustainability by providing financial support to the Kuwaiti Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The bank organized an Umrah trip for cancer patients, aiming to uplift their spirits and alleviate their pain.

Amani Al-Waraa, Deputy Director General of the Corporate Communication Sector, empha-

sized the bank's dedication to collaborating with public benefit associations and non-profit organizations that cater to patients and individuals with special needs.

She highlighted the importance of extending support to such initiatives to help patients overcome challenges and difficulties.

The initiative reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to humanitarian causes and its belief in making a positive impact on society. By sponsoring the Umrah trip, the bank seeks to contribute to the

well-being of cancer patients, boost their morale, and provide them with a meaningful experience.

Expressing gratitude for the support, the management of the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer extended their appreciation to the Commercial Bank of Kuwait.

They conveyed their wishes for continued success and prosperity for the bank and its employees, recognizing the significance of their contribution to the community.



## World News Roundup

## Europe

## Slovaks head to polls

## Poland's govt readies new self-defense law

WARSAW, Poland, March 23. (AP): Poland's government has prepared new legislation to boost the nation's capacity for self-defense, including more funding for first aid courses, better public warning systems, and more emergency shelters, officials said Friday.

Ministers of defense and of the interior said the bill was prompted by the war that neighboring Ukraine is fighting against Russia's aggression. Russia has recently captured territory in the east, while Ukraine is running critically low on ammunition.

The legislation will be put before Parliament probably in May, after consultations with the public and with local authorities, ministers said.

"Because of the developments that we can see across our eastern border, we are talking here about extreme situations ..., about an armed conflict," said **Marcin Kierwiski**, minister of the interior and administration.

Poland is one of Ukraine's staunchest supporters on the military and the humanitarian levels and has taken in almost 1.5 million refugees.

Defense minister **Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz** said they were presenting the bill "in order to deter, not to frighten anyone, but we must be ready for every potential situation."



Kierwiski

**Slovaks head to polls:** Slovaks headed to the ballots Saturday to elect a successor to **Zuzana Čaputová**, the country's first female president and a staunch backer of Slovakia's neighbor Ukraine in its fight against Russia's two-year invasion. She is not seeking a second term.

Peter Pellegrini, a close ally of Slovakia's populist Prime Minister **Robert Fico**, is considered a favorite in the race for the largely ceremonial post of president. He leads a field of nine candidates in the first round of the presidential election to become the country's sixth head of state since Slovakia gained independence in 1993 after Czechoslovakia split in two.

Polls will close at 2100 GMT and results are expected Sunday.

If no candidate gets a majority, which is expected, the top two finishers will go through to a runoff on April 6.

**Hungary's Orbán congratulates Putin:** Hungary's populist prime minister, **Viktor Orbán**, has congratulated Russian President **Vladimir Putin** on his victory in an election whose outcome was never in doubt after systematic crackdowns on dissent.

Orbán, widely seen as Putin's closest ally in the European Union, sent the letter of congratulations on Thursday after the release of official election results in Russia, according to his press chief. The Hungarian leader was the only head of a EU country to congratulate Putin on his reelection, which will extend his nearly quarter-century rule of Russia by another six years.

Putin's landslide victory was widely criticized by Western leaders, who characterized the result as pre-ordained in Russia's repressive political system. The EU criticized the election as taking place in a "highly restricted environment exacerbated also by Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine."

**Russia court rejects Navalny's mom suit:** A Russian court has rejected a lawsuit filed by the mother of **Alexei Navalny**, the Russian opposition stalwart who died in prison in February, that claimed he received inadequate medical care, a close Navalny colleague said Thursday.

**Ivan Zhdanov**, head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation that was started by Navalny, said the court in the town of **Labytnangi**, near the Arctic prison where he died, turned down the suit because it said only Navalny himself could be the plaintiff.

"Alexei filed claims against the colonies many times for failure to provide medical care. The claims were denied. Now that he was killed, his family's claim is being denied with mocking wording," Zhdanov said on the Telegram messaging app.

**Spanish regional leader under pressure:** A Spanish judge has opened an investigation into alleged fraud and false documentation against the partner of **Madrid's** powerful rightwing regional president, **Isabel Díaz Ayuso**, who has recently faced a wave of calls to resign over several controversies.

The move Friday is certain to put more pressure on her party, Spain's main conservative opposition **Popular Party**, to take action against her.

**Ayuso**, who is seen as a possible future party leader and prime ministerial candidate, has come under fire in recent months on several fronts. Last week, news reports said the Spanish tax office was investigating accusations of tax fraud against her partner, **Alberto González Amador**.

**British man sentenced to life:** A British IT worker who befriended and worked for an older couple, poisoned them with fentanyl and monitored their death with his cellphone was sentenced Friday to a minimum 37 years in prison.

The sentencing of **Luke D'Wit**, 34, came two days after he was found guilty of murder in the deaths of **Stephen and Carol Baxter**, 61 and 64, last April at their home in **West Mersea**, 70 miles (113 kilometers) east of London.

During the six-week trial at **Chelmsford Crown Court**, jurors also heard that D'Wit had created a fake will on his phone to make him a director of their shower mat company, a day after he killed them. He even monitored them remotely as they died from his deadly concoction.

**2 held over Irish gas station explosion:** Two men were arrested Friday in connection with a gas station explosion in 2022 that killed 10 people and tore apart the heart of a village in northwestern Ireland, police said.

The blast shattered **Creeslough**, County Donegal, a village of 400 near Ireland's rugged Atlantic coast. The **Applegreen** gas station and a building that housed the town's main shop and post office were destroyed and an adjacent apartment building was damaged. Flying debris shattered windows in nearby cottages.

Four men, three women, two teenagers and a 5-year-old girl were killed. Eight people were injured. Ireland's police force, **An Garda Síochána**, said two men in their 50s were in custody but released no details about their alleged connection to the deadly eruption.



US Rep Kevin Hern, R-Okla., chair of the Republican Study Committee, (center), is joined by, from left, Rep. Rich McCormick, R-Ga., Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., Rep. Ben Cline, R-Va., and Rep. Eric Burlison R-Mo., as they meet with reporters to announce their response to President Biden's 2025 budget, at the Capitol in Washington, on March 21. (AP)

## Politics

## Johnson faces threat of ouster from Greene

## US Senate passes \$1.2 trillion funding package

WASHINGTON, March 23. (AP): The Senate passed a \$1.2 trillion package of spending bills in the early morning hours Saturday, a long overdue action nearly six months into the budget year that will push any threats of a government shutdown to the fall. The bill now goes to President **Joe Biden** to be signed into law.

The vote was 74-24. It came after funding had expired for the agencies at midnight, but the White House sent out a notice shortly after the deadline announcing the Office of Management and Budget had ceased shutdown preparations because there was a high degree of confidence that Congress would pass the legislation and the president would sign it on Saturday.

"Because obligations of federal funds are incurred and tracked on a daily basis, agencies will not shut down and may continue their normal operations," the White House statement said.

Prospects for a short-term government shutdown had appeared to grow Friday evening after Republicans and Democrats battled over proposed amendments to the bill. Any successful amendments to the bill would have sent the legislation back to the House, which had already left town for a two-week recess.

But shortly before midnight Senate Majority Leader **Chuck Schumer** announced a breakthrough.

## Difficult

"It's been a very long and difficult day, but we have just reached an agreement to complete the job of funding the government," **Schumer** said. "It is good for the country that we have reached this bipartisan deal. It wasn't easy, but tonight our persistence has been worth it."

While Congress has already approved money for **Veterans Affairs**, **Interior**, **Agriculture** and other agencies, the bill approved this week is much larger, providing funding for the **Defense**, **Homeland Security** and **State** departments and other aspects of general government.

The House passed the bill Friday morning by a vote of 286-134, narrowly gaining the two-thirds majority needed for approval. More than 70%

of the money would go to defense.

The vote tally in the House reflected anger among Republicans over the content of the package and the speed with which it was brought to a vote. House Speaker **Mike Johnson** brought the measure to the floor even though a majority of Republicans ended up voting against it. He said afterward that the bill "represents the best achievable outcome in a divided government."

In sign of the conservative frustration, Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Greene**, R-Ga., initiated an effort to oust Johnson as the House began the vote but held off on further action until the House returns in two weeks. It's the same tool that was used last year to remove the last Republican speaker, **Kevin McCarthy** of California.

## Bill

The vote breakdown showed 101 Republicans voting for the bill and 112 voting against it. Meanwhile, 185 Democrats voted for the bill and 22 against.

Rep. **Kay Granger**, the Republican chair of the House Appropriations Committee that helped draft the package, stepped down from that role after the vote. She said she would stay on the committee to provide advice and lead as a teacher for colleagues when needed.

Johnson broke up this fiscal year's spending bills into two parts as House Republicans revolted against what has become an annual practice of asking them to vote for one massive, complex bill called an omnibus with little time to review it or face a shutdown. Johnson viewed that as a breakthrough, saying the two-part process was "an important step in breaking the omnibus muscle memory."

Still, the latest package was clearly unpopular with most Republicans, who viewed it as containing too few of their policy priorities and as spending too much.

"The bottom line is that this is a complete and utter surrender," said Rep. **Eric Burlison**, R-Mo.

It took lawmakers six months into the current fiscal year to get near the finish line on government funding, the

process slowed by conservatives who pushed for more policy mandates and steeper spending cuts than a Democratic-led Senate or White House would consider. The impasse required several short-term, stopgap spending bills to keep agencies funded.

## Also:

**WASHINGTON:** Speaker **Mike Johnson** is at risk of being ousted after hard-right Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Greene** filed a motion to vacate Friday.

It's the same political dynamic that removed the last Republican speaker, **Kevin McCarthy**, just five months ago when far-right conservatives revolted over his compromise with Democrats to prevent a federal shutdown. But this one faces steeper odds, with less public GOP support, at the moment.

As the House left town for a two-week spring recess, with no imminent vote scheduled on removing the speaker, the punishing threat hangs over Johnson, of **Louisiana**, as the far-right flank once again seizes on the tactic, a disruptive tool used to make demands and leverage their own priorities.

"We've started the clock to start the process to elect a new speaker," the **Georgia** congresswoman said on the Capitol steps.

**ANNAPOLIS, Md:** A **Maryland** congressman who is running for Senate has apologized for what he said was the inadvertent use of a racial slur during a budget hearing.

Rep. **David Trone**, a Democrat, said he confused the word he used with another one as he spoke about tax rates. The congressman made the comment while saying corporate tax rates didn't influence how he conducted business.

Trone later issued a written statement to apologize.

"While attempting to use the word in a hearing, I used a phrase that is offensive," he said.

Trone is running for the Democratic nomination in a Senate race to replace retiring Sen. **Ben Cardin**. He is running against **Angela Alsobrooks**, who is running to become the state's first **Black US** senator. She is the chief executive of **Prince George's** County, in the suburbs of the nation's capital.



The Danish royal couple, King **Frederik X** and Queen **Mary** arrive for the opening of the exhibition **FREDERIK 10** - King of Tomorrow at the **Amalienborg Museum** in **Copenhagen** on March 21. (AP)



Strain

Drake

## America

**Texas bus-truck collision kills 2:** A cement truck veered into a school bus carrying more than 40 pre-K students returning from a field trip to a Texas zoo Friday, killing a boy on the bus and a man in another vehicle, authorities said.

Officials said the bus rolled over on the highway in the rural outskirts of **Austin**, where a heavy presence of emergency vehicles shut down traffic for hours. The roof of the bus was crumpled, and much of another vehicle nearby was pulverized. Personal items were strewn across the road.

Four people in critical condition were airlifted from the crash site. Six others with potentially serious injuries were transported by ambulance, said **Kevin Parker**, division chief **Austin-Travis County** Emergency Medical Services.

An ambulance bus transported about 10 other patients to a children's hospital with minor injuries, **Parker** said. Passengers on the bus included 44 students and 11 adults, according to the **Hays Consolidated Independent School District**. (AP)

**Student's body found in river:** **Riley Strain**, a University of Missouri student who went missing in Tennessee's capital for nearly two weeks, has been found dead in a river, police announced Friday. No foul play is suspected, investigators said.

**Metro Nashville** police officials confirmed that **Strain's** body had been recovered from the **Cumberland River** about 8 miles (12.8 kilometers) west of downtown at around 7:30 a.m.

Police Chief **John Drake** told reporters that workers on the river initially found **Strain's** body and alerted authorities. Medical examiners later confirmed it was **Strain**, he said. Police department spokesperson **Don Aaron** said an autopsy will be conducted Saturday.

"We have reports that normally under these circumstances ... with his height and weight, he could have surfaced between 14 and 20 days," **Drake** said. "This is the 14th day. So we were really expecting to find him." (AP)

**Nat'l Guard helps battle fires:** The West Virginia National Guard joined in battling wildfires Friday that have scorched more than 6.25 square miles (16 square kilometers) in the state and destroyed several homes.

Two **Blackhawk** helicopters dropped water from buckets on the fires in steep, wooded terrain in **Hardy County**, the **National Guard** said on social media. The

lightweight, flexible buckets hold up to 630 gallons (2,385 liters) of water.

The fires began earlier this week amid gusty winds and low relative humidity.



A **Rockingham County** fire engine drives down **Peake Mountain Road** during a wildfire on March 20, near **Rawley Springs, Va.** The **West Virginia National Guard** joined in battling wildfires on March 22 that have scorched more than 6.25 square miles (16 square kilometers) in the state and destroyed several homes. (AP)

In **Virginia**, more than 100 fires popped up Wednesday, many of them in the central part of the state, forcing the closure of sections of **Skyline Drive** and the **Appalachian Trail**. A fire ban was put in place for all of **Shenandoah National Park**. Fires also were reported this week in neighboring **Maryland**. (AP)

**'Trump has nearly \$500m':** **Donald Trump** claimed on Friday to have almost a half-billion dollars in cash but said he'd rather spend it on his presidential run than on the \$454 million civil fraud judgment against him in **New York**. The former president vowed to fight the verdict "all the way up to the US Supreme Court if necessary" as the state gears up to potentially seize some of his assets if he doesn't pay the hefty tab.

Trump has been trying to get a state appeals court to excuse him from a requirement that he provide financial guarantees showing he's good for the money while he appeals the staggering verdict.

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee didn't provide any documentation for his cash claim, and his lawyers have suggested it's not feasible to tie up so much cash on a bond while also keeping his businesses running and meeting other obligations. Among them, according to financial records: a condition on one of his property loans that he maintain a minimum liquidity of \$30 million. (AP)



## Lat/Am

## Machado names sub

## US vice president visits Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, March 23, (AP): US Vice President **Kamala Harris** visited Puerto Rico on Friday as part of a whirlwind trip to tout the federal aid the US territory has received following deadly hurricanes and attend a Democratic fundraiser.

Her visit comes days after US President Joe Biden launched a campaign targeting Latino voters ahead of the November general elections. While those in Puerto Rico cannot vote in US presidential elections despite being US citizens, more than 5 million Puerto Ricans live in the US mainland.

Accompanying Harris for the roughly five-hour visit to the island were US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Adrienne Todman. Welcoming them was Gov. Pedro Pierluisi, a Democrat whose New Progressive Party has long pushed for statehood.

Harris' first stop was to visit a new home in the northern municipality of Canovanas, located near the capital. It had been destroyed after Hurricane Maria hit the island in September 2017 as a powerful Category 4 storm, killing nearly 3,000 people in its aftermath.

En route, the motorcade passed people holding their phones up as it went by. Some onlookers leaned out of their cars to take photos as they waited for the motorcade to pass, while others stood outside businesses and homes as the motorcade continued. One girl held a sign imploring help to fix their home.

"I see we are making a difference. There is still more work to do," Harris said as she stood on the lawn of the new home draped with a large Puerto Rican flag. "We are ambitious. Yes, we are impatient."

It was Harris' first visit to Puerto Rico as vice president. She visited as a US senator in 2017 after devastating hurricanes Irma and Maria pummeled the island.

Harris said one of the ongoing challenges Puerto Rico faces is intermittent energy sources, with outages still occurring daily since Maria razed the power grid.

**Machado names substitute:** Venezuelan opposition powerhouse María Corina Machado on Friday named a substitute to her presidential bid while she fights a government ban on her running for office.

The announcement comes as Machado faces increasing political repression from the government of President Nicolás Maduro as well as pressure from foreign leaders and fellow government opponents to abandon her candidacy.

Machado made the announcement two days after authorities arrested two of her campaign staffers and issued warrants for seven more, accusing them of links to an alleged anti-government plot.

She told reporters that college professor Corina Yoris will be registered as an opposition faction's presidential candidate ahead of a Monday deadline. The presidential election is set for July 28.

"Today is a great day and we have taken a big step, a great step, for the electoral victory in which we will defeat Nicolás Maduro," Machado said from her campaign headquarters in Venezuela's capital, Caracas. She said Yoris is "a person with my full confidence, honorable, who will carry out this process with the support and trust of everyone."

As of the announcement, Machado said, Yoris was not subject to a ban on running for office.

**Obrador won't fight drug cartels:** Mexico's president said Friday he won't fight Mexican drug cartels on US orders, in the clearest explanation yet of his refusal to confront the gangs.

Over the years, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has laid out various justifications for his "hugs, not bullets" policy of avoiding clashes with the cartels. In the past he has said "you cannot fight violence with violence," and on other occasions he has argued the government has to address "the causes" of drug cartel violence, ascribing them to poverty or a lack of opportunities.

But on Friday, while discussing his refusal to go after the cartels, he made it clear he viewed it as part of what he called a "Mexico First" policy.

"We are not going to act as policemen for any foreign government," López Obrador said at his daily news briefing. "Mexico First. Our home comes first."

López Obrador basically argued that drugs were a US problem, not a Mexican one. He offered to help limit the flow of drugs into the United States, but only, he said, on humanitarian grounds.

**'More than 33K fled in 13 days':** More than 33,000 people have fled Haiti's capital in a span of nearly two weeks as gangs continue to pillage homes and attack state institutions, according to a new report from the UN's International Organization for Migration.

The majority of those displaced have traveled to Haiti's southern region, which is generally peaceful compared with Port-au-Prince, which has an estimated population of 3 million and remains largely paralyzed by gang violence. "Attacks and generalized insecurity are pushing more and more people to leave the capital to find refuge in provinces, taking the risks of passing through gang-controlled routes," IOM said in its report released late Thursday.

Scores of people have been killed and some 17,000 people overall left homeless since the gang attacks began on Feb. 29, with gunmen targeting police stations and the main international airport that remains closed. They also stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons and released more than 4,000 inmates.

**65 migrants bodies found in Libya:** The UN's migration agency expressed alarm Friday over the discovery of a mass grave containing the bodies of at least 65 migrants in the deserts of western Libya.

Earlier this week, Libya's criminal investigations authority reported the grave had been found in the Shuayrif region, 350 kilometers (220 miles) south of the capital, Tripoli.

On its Facebook page, it said 65 bodies of unidentified migrants had been unearthed from the grave, samples were taken for DNA testing and the bodies were reburied in a specified graveyard for later investigation.

The UN's International Organization for Migration said the nationalities of the discovered migrants and the circumstances of their deaths was not known, but that they likely died while being smuggled through the desert.



In this photo provided by the Philippine Coast Guard, Filipino scientists reach sandbars called Sandy Cay at the disputed South China Sea on March 21. Chinese coast guard ships, backed by a military helicopter, tried to dangerously block but failed to stop two Philippine government vessels carrying scientists from reaching two barren sandbars called Sandy Cay in the disputed South China Sea, Philippine officials said Friday. Inset: In this screen grab from video provided by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, a Chinese coast guard ship uses water cannons and closely maneuvers beside a Philippine resupply vessel Uniazh May 4 as it approaches Second Thomas Shoal, locally called Ayungin shoal, at the disputed South China Sea on March 23. (AP)

## Asia

## Former Filipino congressman arrested in East Timor

## China hits Philippine boat with water cannons

MANILA, Philippines, March 23, (AP): Chinese coast guard ships hit a Philippine supply boat with water cannons Saturday in the latest confrontation near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, causing injuries to its navy crew members and heavy damage to the wooden vessel, Philippine officials said.

The United States and Japan immediately expressed their support to the Philippines, as well as alarm over Chinese forces' aggression off the Second Thomas Shoal, which has been the scene of repeated confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels over the past year.

The far-flung shoal has been occupied by a small contingent of Philippine navy and marines on a marooned warship since 1999, but has been surrounded by Chinese coast guard and suspected militia vessels in an increasingly tense territorial standoff. It's the second time the Philippine boat Uniazh May 4 has been damaged by the Chinese coast guard's water cannon assault in March alone.

The repeated high-seas confrontations have sparked fears they could degenerate into a larger conflict that could bring China and the United States into a collision.

Washington lays no claims to the busy seaway, a key global trade route, but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations, which China has criticized.

The US has also warned repeatedly that it's obligated to defend the Philippines - its oldest treaty ally in Asia - if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

## Deliver

Escorted by two Philippine coast guard ships, the Uniazh May 4 was en route to deliver supplies and a fresh batch of Filipino sailors to the territorial outpost in the shoal at dawn Saturday when they were blocked and surrounded by Chinese coast guard ships and suspected militia vessels.

"Their reckless and dangerous actions culminated with the water cannoning of Uniazh May 4, causing severe damage to the vessel and injuries to Filipinos onboard," a Philippine government task force dealing with the territorial conflicts said without elaborating.

grooming his eldest child for the presidency.

Museveni's son, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, has recently been holding rallies around the country, in violation of a law barring serving army officers from engaging in partisan politics. But Kainerugaba says

his activities - including the recent launch of an activist group known as the Patriotic League of Uganda - are nonpartisan and aimed at encouraging patriotism among Ugandans.

Kainerugaba was promoted to his new post

late Thursday, according to a military statement. Two of his closest advisors have been given ministerial posts in a reshuffle of government ministers, also announced late Thursday, fueling speculation that Museveni supports Kainerugaba's political activities. (AP)

**Algeria sets election for Sept:** Algeria will hold its next election on Sept 7, giving first-term President Abdelmajid Tebboune more than five months to campaign should he decide to seek a second term leading the oil-rich north African nation.

Tebboune's office announced the date in a statement Thursday after meeting with a group that included high-ranking members of Parliament and the constitutional court as well as its independent election authority.

Only Zoubida Assoul of the Union for Change and Progress has come forward to challenge Tebboune, who has not officially announced plans to seek reelection as president of the country of 44 million people which is facing mounting political and economic challenges. The announcement took the nation by surprise as elections in Algeria had been expected to take place in December 2024, raising speculation among observers about the rationale for the change.

Assoul, a 67-year-old lawyer, is best known for defending political prisoners and said three weeks ago in her announcement that she was running because she felt "confident in the possibility of changing the course of things." (AP)



Presidential candidate Amadou Ba addresses supporters in Dakar, Senegal on March 22. (AP)



Museveni



Sall

## Africa

**Electoral silence in Senegal:** The Senegalese people observed on Saturday electoral silence as a prelude to presidential elections due on Sunday following two weeks of heated campaigns by the nominees.

Up to 19 candidates have been jostling to win the Senegalese minds and hearts and occupy the presidential post for a five-year mandate.

The head of the Independent Election Commission, Abdullah Silla, said in a statement broadcast by the Senegalese news agency that the commission observers and representatives of the nominees would be present at the ballot stations. This is the first time that such elections are held without the nomination of the president, he said.

President Macky Sall had delayed the elections that were originally set on February 25, however, the constitutional council had intervened, amid public protests, annulling the president's decision and ordering that the voting must be held before the end of his tenure. Later on, he set the balloting on March 24.

The election general directorate reported that the elections would be supervised by 2,457 observers including 1,568 national observers and 889 foreign ones. (AP)

**2 killed, 23 hurt in stampede:** Hundreds of students in northern Nigeria rushed to get food donated to their school by the government to help ease hardship, resulting in a stampede that left two dead and 23 others injured, school authorities said Friday.

Africa's most populous country is facing one of its worst economic crises in decades, triggered by surging inflation and a declining local currency. They followed the introduction of new monetary policies by President Bola Tinubu, who since his election last year has set out to stabilize the economy and attract foreign investment.

The students of Nasarawa State University near the nation's capital, Abuja, had gathered to receive bags of rice donated by the state government. The situation got out of control following a crowd surge, university spokesperson Abraham Habu Ekpo said. It is not the first time this year that distribution of food has triggered a deadly stampede, as citizens in the country of more than 210 million people are becoming more desperate because of growing hunger and job losses. (AP)

**Uganda prez promotes son:** Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni on Thursday appointed his son as top commander of the military, a controversial move in a country where many have long believed Museveni is



Opposition leader María Corina Machado holds a press conference accompanied by Corina Yoris, in Caracas, Venezuela on March 22. Machado on Friday named Yoris as a substitute to her presidential bid while she fights a government ban on her running for office. (AP)



	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts				
UAE	-	DFM	+2.74	4,280.35	PAKISTAN	-	KSE 100	-241.20	65,178.75
JAPAN	-	Nikkei	+72.77	40,888.43	PHILIPPINES	-	PSEI	-81.25	6,881.97
UK	-	FTSE 100	+48.37	7,930.92	EUROPE	-	Euro Stoxx 50	-21.16	5,031.15

# Business



KPC echoes commitment to providing safe oil supplies.

KUNA photo

## Oil price falls to \$85.39 per barrel

## KPC echoes commitment to providing safe oil supplies

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah has restated KPC's unwavering commitment to providing safe supplies of crude oil and environmentally friendly oil byproducts.

Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah made the remark during a debate held on the sidelines of the CERAWEEK 2024 conference, hosted by Houston City in the US state of Texas from March 18-22, the KPC said in a press release.

He said the KPC is a national oil corporation but of international significance and regards its customers as partners, based on decades of deep trade relations, thus becoming a reliable global supplier.

CERAWEEK 2024 is considered the most significant international oil conference since it weighs the economies and policies of the world oil industry, according to the release. Several senior Kuwaiti oil officials are partaking in debates held on the sidelines of the global oil gathering.

Also:

**KUWAIT CITY:** Kuwait oil price dropped by 87 cents to settle at USD 85.39 per barrel Friday compared to USD 86.26 pb Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said on Saturday.

In international markets, forwards of the Brent crude fell by 35 cents to settle at USD 85.43 pb and those of the West Texas Intermediate crude dropped by 44 cents to reach USD 80.63 pb.

# Kuwait's renewable energy ambitions face challenges

Nation aims for 22 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23:** A recent report by "Arabian Gulf Business Insight" sheds light on Kuwait's ongoing challenges in transitioning to clean energy, despite the nation's announcement of a 20-year renewable energy strategy, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Despite possessing approximately 7% of global oil reserves, Kuwait remains one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the Gulf region.

The country aims to counterbalance its significant oil production capacity, exceeding 3 million barrels per day, by achieving renewable energy capabilities of around 22 gigawatts by 2030.

However, experts suggest that Kuwait's progress in renewable energy projects remains sluggish. Robin Mills, CEO of Qamar Energy Company, highlighted Kuwait's missed opportunities in advancing large-scale renewable energy initiatives, including the Al Shaqaya project.

Mills emphasized Kuwait's favorable solar and wind energy potential and the potential benefits of reducing air pollution and cutting costs through renewable energy adoption.

Governance challenges and historical reliance on oil revenues have hindered Kuwait's transition to renewable energy, according to Tadhg O'Donovan, chief energy scientist at Heriot-Watt University Dubai.

Meanwhile, analysts predict significant growth in solar energy capacity across the Middle East, with solar energy projects expected to increase substantially. Countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are poised to lead this growth, while Oman and Algeria have already initiated tenders for solar energy projects.

Despite these projections, Kuwait has yet to feature among the top 10 countries in the region in terms of the value of renewable energy projects under implementation. Saudi Arabia leads the pack with renewable energy projects exceeding \$10 billion, followed by the UAE, Egypt, and Morocco.

Kuwait's challenges underscore the need for concerted efforts to overcome governance obstacles and expedite the implementation of renewable energy initiatives, aligning with global trends towards sustainability and environmental stewardship.

## Government efficiency key to Kuwait's competitiveness

# Kuwait ranks 38th globally, fifth in Arab world on Global Competitiveness Index

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23:** Kuwait has secured the 38th position globally and fifth in the Arab world on the Global Competitiveness Index for the year 2023, showcasing significant advancements in key competitive factors, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The government efficiency, a pivotal aspect of the index, is evaluated through five sub-indicators: public finance, tax policy, institutional framework, business legislation, and social framework.

The annual global competitiveness report, issued by the Global Competitiveness Center of the Institute for Administrative Development, aims to assess countries' capacity to foster a conducive environment for competitiveness. The evaluation is based on countries' adeptness in resource management to ensure prosperity for their populace. The report encompasses 64 countries, selected based on the availability of comparable international statistics and cooperation with local partner institutes for reliable data collection.

This year's report stands out for its collaboration with a global network of partner institutes in 56 countries. The competitiveness ranking relies on 335 criteria derived from extensive research, economic literature, international, regional, and national sources, as well as inputs from the business community, government agencies, and academics.

Continual review and updates of standards are undertaken to incorporate new theories, research, and evolving global economic dynamics.

The report serves to illuminate nations' strengths and weaknesses, identifying areas for enhancement in economic, political, and social domains. It aids policymakers in prioritizing key competitiveness issues to rejuvenate productivity, spur growth, and elevate living standards.

However, companies operate in a national environment that enhances or hinders their ability to compete domestically or internationally – this area of research is called "country competitiveness", and this is what the Global Competitiveness Taxonomy covers.

**The following are the most prominent recommendations:**

- Providing an integrated electronic portal to serve the business and investment sector to contribute to supporting the wheel of economic growth, raising the domestic product, and facilitating the operations of the import and export system to raise the level of economic performance in the country.

- Developing training and professional development methods, to raise the level of performance of workers in all sectors of the country, build national capabilities and competencies, and develop relevant performance indicators, to ensure the quality and efficiency of government services.

- Establishing an advanced and sustainable digital infrastructure that keeps pace with global ambitions and developments and consolidates the country's position globally, by enhancing cooperation with leading countries and international organizations in this field.

- Diversifying the production base and stimulating private investment through privatization and activating partnership between the public and private sectors.

- Adopting a comprehensive qualification program for all entities in the field of project planning, assessing the entities' ability to plan and implement, and adopting an accounting system, to ensure achieving quality in the implementation of these projects.

- Enacting laws and legislation to address the imbalance, achieving balance in the demographic composition, and developing planning policies to modify the current composition.

- Applying best practices in sustainable investment, to enhance the competitiveness of the Kuwaiti financial market, with the aim of attracting more foreign investments to it.

- Supporting investment in the knowledge economy to achieve high added value, and create the appropriate environment to unleash creative energies, with the aim of contributing to reforming the economy in an innovative way, to increase competitiveness potential and drive economic growth.

## Firm improved ROI & dividend recommendations

# Kuwait Parks Company reports 32% surge in net profit for FY23

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23:** Adwan Al-Adwani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Parks Company (KPC), announced that the company has achieved a net profit of approximately 1.4 million dinars for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2023, reports Al-Qabas daily.

This marks a significant increase of about 32% compared to the previous fiscal year 2022, during which the company recorded a net profit of 1.014 million dinars.

The return on investment also saw a notable improvement, with a return of 6.85 for 2023, compared to 5.18 for 2022. Additionally, the return on shareholders' equity stood at approximately 4.9%, while the return on assets was reported at 4.5%.

In light of these positive results, the Board of Directors has recommended the distribution of dividends to shareholders. The proposed distribution includes cash dividends of 2% of the nominal value of the share (equivalent to 2 fils per share) and bonus shares of 5% of treasury shares (5 shares for every 100 shares).

Al-Adwani expressed gratitude to the company's shareholders for their continued trust and support. He commended the company's assets and investments while assuring shareholders of the board's commitment to enhancing these assets and improving returns in the forthcoming years.

The announcement reflects Kuwait Parks Company's strong financial performance and strategic focus on delivering value to its shareholders through prudent financial management and sustained growth initiatives.

## Other Voices

### Al-Zour Refinery faces production cuts

## Kuwait crude oil output to hit 4 million in 2040!

By Kamel Al-Harami  
Independent Oil Analyst

According to the statement issued by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) last week, our current production is capped at 2.4 million barrels per day due to two voluntary reduction cuts totaling about 238,000 barrels in 2023 and 2024. Our three local refineries are operating at 1.4 million barrels per day, and an additional three refineries are currently operational in Oman, Vietnam, and Italy, with a combined capacity of about 600,000 barrels per day. Therefore, KPC's refining capacity stands at two million barrels per day. Consequently, there isn't much net Kuwaiti crude oil remaining for global sale.



Al-Harami

This formidable challenge facing KPC makes it unlikely for us to make significant progress in discovering new oil reserves or increasing our production. One temporary solution may be to reduce refinery cuts, as we are currently doing with our latest Al-Zour refinery by cutting its throughput by 200,000 barrels to free up crude oil for sale.

However, KPC did not provide details on the progress towards achieving its target of four million barrels, such as reaching three million barrels net of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), excluding the Neutral Zone, for example. It also did not address

whether we have halted the decline in crude oil production or how we are meeting the demands of our long standing customers.

It is disheartening to witness the decline in our primary source of income and the inability to increase our crude oil production. This raises recurring questions about our policy with OPEC+ regarding our commitment to reducing production at a time when Kuwait is in need of every barrel, as we are barely meeting our own foreign and domestic obligations.

Despite cutting our production once last year, we find ourselves compelled to reduce it again this year, resulting in the need to cut production at the Al-Zour refinery by 200,000 barrels per day to meet our crude oil sales obligations. Meanwhile, other OPEC+ members not only refuse to cut production but also exceed their established quotas, depriving us of additional funds while we face deficits in our budgets by the end of the financial year.

Predicting crude oil production for 2040 in 2024 is projecting too far ahead. KPC should have instead informed the USA about Kuwait's production for a nearer term such as for 2026-2027 or even shorter periods. Or it should wait for about six years to achieve such a figure, considering the uncertainties regarding the fate of fossil fuels and the development of alternatives to oil, or after figuring out when KPC can achieve a production level of three million barrels without taking into consideration the production from the Neutral Zone.

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## Kuwait's digitalization devotion sighted

## IDC's CIO Summit to explore AI's role in digital innovation

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23:** As Kuwait's digital economy continues its rapid expansion, International Data Corporation (IDC) is excited to announce that its IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024 will take place on May 13 at the Courtyard by Marriott Kuwait City. Addressing the theme 'The Future of IT: Rethinking Digitalization for an AI Everywhere World', this transformative event will facilitate in-depth discussions around AI's impact on digital innovation and the evolving role of the modern CIO.

Supported by Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), the summit will feature a distinguished lineup of speakers and thought leaders at the forefront of digital transformation. Dr. Ammar H. AlHusaini, Acting Director General of CAIT, will deliver the opening address, setting the stage for a day of insightful discussions and strategic insights.

The Kuwaiti government's steadfast commitment to advancing its digital agenda, in alignment with the Kuwait Vision 2035 and Kuwait 2040 Upstream Strategy, underscores the nation's dedication to embracing emerging technologies and driving innovation across both public and private sectors. With organizations in Kuwait increasingly investing in generative AI (GenAI) use cases, the IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024 will serve as a timely platform to explore the evolving role of AI in shaping the future of IT.

Jyoti Lalchandani, IDC's Group Vice President and Regional Managing Director for the Middle East, Türkiye, and Africa, expressed his enthusiasm about the summit, stating: "In today's era of GenAI-driven disruption, technology leaders are reimagining the strategic implications of AI across various facets of digitalization. From enhancing customer experiences to optimizing operational efficiency and ensuring sustainability, AI is poised to revolutionize the business landscape. Against this backdrop, the IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024 will empower technology leaders with the knowledge and strategies required to adopt an 'AI every-

where' mindset and embrace AI as a central pillar of their organizations' tech agendas."

Dr. Ammar H. AlHusaini, Acting Director General of CAIT, echoed these sentiments, stating: "I am delighted to announce our role as Strategic Partner for the IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024, a testament to our commitment to driving the digital transformation landscape in the country. This event underscores our dedication to shaping the future of IT, where artificial intelligence will undoubtedly play a pivotal role. Kuwait is witnessing an accelerated digital journey, with many government-led initiatives being announced daily to support citizens and businesses, and the country's rapid adoption of AI is reshaping various aspects of businesses, education, healthcare, government entities, and broader society. This highly anticipated event will empower IT leaders in their digital journey and our aim is to foster constructive dialogue between leading tech companies in the region and influential ICT decision makers."

With a comprehensive agenda featuring expert-led sessions, panel discussions, and technology focus groups, the summit will offer a holistic perspective on the challenges and opportunities shaping the digital landscape. From app modernization strategies to fortifying enterprises in the digital-first economy and leveraging AI and analytics for digital transformation, the event will address key themes critical to today's IT leaders, with Steven Frantzen, IDC's Senior Vice President and Regional Managing Director for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, presenting a highly anticipated keynote on the topic 'Rethinking Digitalization for an AI-First World'.

The IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024 is expected to attract over 250 of Kuwait's foremost IT and telecom leaders, digital government pioneers, regulators, and industry luminaries. Together, participants will explore the current state of the digital economy, identify key challenges, and chart a course for future success in the AI-driven era.



hundreds of thousands of financial aid applications need to be fixed

The U.S. Education Department said it has discovered a calculation error in hundreds of thousands of student financial aid applications sent to colleges this month and will need to reprocess them - a blunder that follows a series of others and threatens further delays to this year's college applications.

A vendor working for the federal government incorrectly calculated a financial aid formula for more than 200,000 students, the department said Friday. The information was sent to colleges to help them prepare financial aid packages but now needs to be recalculated - even as the department works through a backlog of more than 4 million other financial aid applications.

A statement from the Education Department says the problem won't affect 1.3 million applications that were processed correctly and distrib-

uted to colleges this month. Officials said they have fixed the error and it "will not affect future records."

It's unlikely that many students, if any, received financial aid offers based on the incorrect information since the department only began sending records in the last two weeks. Once colleges receive that information, it usually takes several weeks to assemble financial aid packages.

Students applying for college have been left in limbo this year as they await the Education Department's overhaul of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The form, known as FAFSA, is used to determine eligibility for federal Pell Grants, and colleges and states use it to award their own financial aid to students.

The update was meant to simplify the form but took months longer

than expected. It gives colleges less time to make financial aid offers to students, and it gives students less time to decide where to enroll.

"This is another unforced error that will likely cause more processing delays for students," said Justin Draeger, president and CEO of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

After so many delays, he added, "Every error adds up and will be felt acutely by every student who is counting on need-based financial aid to make their postsecondary dreams a reality."

The latest misstep has to do with the Student Aid Index, a new formula used to determine students' level of financial need after they submit the FAFSA application. For some students, the department forgot to factor in certain financial assets including investments, savings and total cash, according to an agency memo sent to colleges on Friday. (AP)

Move to potentially net former president billions

Trump's social media company approved to go public

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP): Donald Trump is returning to the stock market, and the former president stands to reap a sizeable payout in the process.

Shareholders of Digital World Acquisition Corp., a publicly traded shell company, approved a deal to merge with the Trump's media business in a Friday vote. That means Trump Media & Technology Group, whose flagship product is social networking site Truth Social, will soon begin trading on the Nasdaq stock market.

Trump is set to own most of the combined company - or nearly 79 million shares. Multiplying that by Digital World's closing stock price Friday of \$36.94, and the total value of his stake could be nearly \$3 billion.

The greenlight arrives at a time the presumptive Republican presidential nominee is facing his most costly legal battle to date: a \$454 million judgment in a fraud lawsuit.

But Trump won't be able to cash out the deal's windfall immediately, unless the company's board makes changes to a "lock-up" provision that prevents company insiders from selling newly issued shares for six months.

Trump's presidential campaign did not immediately respond to request for

comment.

When a publicly traded shell company agrees to buy a private company, the target company takes its place on a stock exchange once the combination is approved by shareholders. If recent activity in Digital World's stock is any indication, shareholders of Trump Media could be in for a bumpy ride.

Many of Digital World's investors are small-time investors who are either fans of Trump or trying to cash in on the mania, instead of big institutional and professional investors. Those shareholders helped the stock more than double this year in anticipation of the merger going through. But on Friday, the shares lost almost 14%.

Trump's earlier foray into the stock market didn't end well. Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts went public in 1995 under the symbol DJT - the same symbol Trump Media will trade under. By 2004, Trump's casino company had filed for bankruptcy protection and was delisted from the New York Stock Exchange.

Ahead of Friday's approval, Digital World's regulatory filings listed many of the risks its investors face, as well as those of the Truth Social owner once Trump Media also goes public.

One risk, the company said, is that

EU seeks to impose tariffs on Russian grain

BRUSSELS, March 23, (AP): The European Commission wants to prevent Russia from using farm products as a tool to wreak havoc on the EU market and is moving to impose tariffs on grain imports from Russia and Belarus.

The tariffs are also aimed at denying Russia revenue, because they will effectively suppress exports to the EU, the commission said.

Imports of cereals, oilseeds and derived products from Russia and its Belarus ally are just about 1% of the overall size of the EU market, with domestic suppliers providing the bulk.

But with angry farmers already wor-

ried by the increase of cheap Ukrainian imports, the EU fears Russia will be encouraged to take advantage of the tense situation to further destabilize the 27-nation bloc.

"This shortfall in supply will be filled partially by EU's domestic production and, therefore, benefit EU farmers who will be able to sell in the EU," the commission said. "In addition, the shortfall is expected to be partially filled by imports from third countries which traditionally supply the EU market such as the U.S., Brazil, Ukraine, Serbia, or Argentina."

EU imports of cereals, oilseeds and

derived products from Russia including wheat, maize, and sunflower meal were 4.2 million metric tons in 2023, worth 1.3 billion euros. In comparison, EU suppliers provide 300 million metric tons per year.

The tariffs are designed to be high enough to discourage Russian imports. Under the European Commission's plan, which can be adopted quickly since it only requires around two thirds of member countries to agree, the duties will either reach 95 euros per metric ton, or increase prices by at least 50%.

In addition, Russia and Belarus will

no longer have access to any of the EU's WTO quotas on grain that offer better tariff treatment for some products.

"We propose the imposition of tariffs on these Russian imports to mitigate the growing risk to our markets and our farmers," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

"They will reduce Russia's capacity to exploit the EU for the benefit of its war machine. And we maintain our commitment to preserving global food security, especially for developing countries."

Trump would be entitled to vote in his own interest as a controlling stockholder - which may not always be in the interests of all shareholders. Digital World also cited the high rate of failure for new social media platforms, as well as Trump Media's expectation that it

would lose money on its operations "for the foreseeable future."

Trump Media lost \$49 million in the first nine months of last year, when it brought in just \$3.4 million in revenue and had to pay \$37.7 million in interest expenses.

DWA's shareholders also voted Friday to approve a slate of seven people, including the former president's son, Donald Trump Jr., to hold seats on Trump Media's board. Among the others are former Republican Rep. Devin Nunes, who would also be the

company's CEO; Robert Lighthizer, who served as Trump's U.S. trade representative; Linda McMahon, who ran the Small Business Administration under Trump; and, Kashyap "Kash" Patel, a White House national security aide during the Trump administration.

Alleges monopoly on smartphone mkt

US Justice Department sues Apple

WASHINGTON, March 23, (AP): The Justice Department on Thursday announced a sweeping antitrust lawsuit against Apple, accusing the tech giant of engineering an illegal monopoly in smartphones that boxes out competitors, stifles innovation and keeps prices artificially high.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in New Jersey, alleges that Apple has monopoly power in the smartphone market and leverages control over the iPhone to "engage in a broad, sustained, and illegal course of conduct."

"Apple has locked its consumers into the iPhone while locking its competitors out of the market," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. Stalling the advancement of

the very market it revolutionized, she said, it has "smothered an entire industry."

Apple called the lawsuit "wrong on the facts and the law" and said it "will vigorously defend against it."

The suit takes aim at how Apple allegedly molds its technology and business relationships to "extract more money from consumers, developers, content creators, artists, publishers, small businesses, and merchants, among others."

That includes diminishing the functionality of non-Apple smartwatches, limiting access to contactless payment for third-party digital wallets and refusing to allow its iMessage app to exchange encrypted messaging with competing plat-



Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, center right, speaks with Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk, center left, as they pose for a group photo in front of the Atomium during an Nuclear Energy Summit at the Expo in Brussels, Thursday, March 21, 2024. Leaders of European Union countries and other organizations meet for a one day summit on Thursday with the aim of highlighting the role of nuclear energy, reducing the use of fossil fuels, enhancing energy security and boosting economic development. (AP)

Leaders from over 30 countries meet in Brussels to promote nuclear energy

BRUSSELS, March 23, (AP): In the shadows of a massive monument glorifying nuclear energy, over 30 leaders and delegations from around the world backed the idea of using the controversial energy source to help achieve a climate-neutral globe while providing countries an added sense of economic and security independence.

Such a summit would have been unthinkable a dozen years ago after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, but a warming planet creating a need to phase out fossil fuels and the war in Ukraine laying bare dependence on Russian energy have turned the tide in recent years.

"We have to do everything possible to facilitate the contribution of nuclear energy," said Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. "It is clear: Nuclear is there. It has an important role to play," he said.

The one-day meeting is being held next to the 1958 Atomium, the 102-meter (335-foot)-tall construction of the nine iron atoms, which sought to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the wake of the nuclear bomb explosions at the end of World War II and their use as a geopolitical deterrent ever since.

Fatih Birol, executive director International Energy Agency, tried to rein-vigorate that peaceful mission.

"Without the support of nuclear power we have no chance to reach our climate targets on time. Renewables will play the major role in terms of electricity, especially solar supported by wind and hydropower," Birol said. "But we also need nuclear power especially in those countries where we don't have major renewable potential."

"We have to do whatever we can to increase the current nuclear capacity, which is currently only less than

10% of global electricity generation," he said.

In Europe, France is the leader in nuclear energy and accounts for about two-thirds of its overall provisions.

French President Emmanuel Macron said that "thanks to the nuclear model, France is one of the few countries that exports its electricity, which is an opportunity."

"We should be much more concerned about, for example, CO2 emissions, which have a direct impact on you and me and on our health every day," he said. "Our priority must be to get out of coal and gas and move towards nuclear power and renewable energy."

The devastating impact of a nuclear accident, like the 1986 one in Chernobyl, Ukraine, was barely a talking point at the meeting. Outside the meeting, environmental groups sought to highlight the dangers of the technology and convince leaders that renewable energy sources like wind and solar were much more practical and worthwhile.

Building nuclear plants takes many years and projects are often marred by cost and deadline overruns, and environmentalists stressed that point with demonstrations outside the summit center.

"Nuclear, all the evidence shows, is too slow to build. It's too expensive. Much more expensive than renewables," said Lorelei Limousin of Greenpeace. "The government must focus on developing renewable energy, energy savings, the real solutions that work for people like home insulation, public transport - not nuclear energy fairy tales."

Thursday's meeting was to be a strategic planning session without any practical outcome expected.

It specifically seeks to stop Apple from undermining technologies that compete with its own apps -- in areas including streaming, messaging and digital payments -- and prevent it from continuing to craft contracts with developers, accessory makers and consumers that let it "obtain, maintain, extend or entrench a monopoly."

The lawsuit - filed with 16 state attorneys general - is just the latest example of aggressive antitrust enforcement by an administration that has also taken on Google, Amazon and other tech giants with the stated aim of making the digital universe more fair, innovative and competitive.

"The Department of Justice has an enduring legacy taking on the biggest and toughest monopolies in history," said Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, head of the antitrust division, at a press conference announcing the lawsuit. "Today we stand here once again to promote competition and innovation for next generation of technology."

Antitrust researcher Dina Srinivasan, a Yale University fellow, compared the lawsuit's significance to the government's action against Microsoft a quarter century ago - picking a "tremendous fight" with what has been the world's most prosperous company.

"It's a really big deal to go up and punch someone who is acting like a bully and pretending not to be a bully," she said.

President Joe Biden has called for the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to vigorously enforce antitrust statutes. While its stepped-up policing of corporate mergers and questionable business practices has met resistance from some business leaders - accusing the Democratic administration of overreach - it's been lauded by others as long overdue.

The case seeks to pierce the digital fortress that Apple Inc., based in Cupertino, California, has assiduously built around the iPhone and other popular products such as the iPad, Mac and Apple Watch to create what is often referred to as a "walled garden" so its hardware and software can seamlessly offer user-friendly harmony.

The strategy has helped Apple attain an annual revenue of nearly \$400 billion and, until recently, a market value of more than \$3 trillion.

UK inflation 'heading' in the right direction



A woman walks in front of the Bank of England, at the financial district in London, on March 23, 2023. The Bank of England is widely expected to indicate Thursday March 21, 2024 that interest rates could be cut in the coming months following news that inflation across the U.K. is falling faster than expected. (AP)

BoE isn't ready to cut rates

LONDON, March 23, (AP): The Bank of England kept its main interest rate unchanged at a 16-year high on Thursday and avoided signaling, unlike other central banks, when it might start to cut even though inflation has dropped sharply from multidecade peaks.

The decision to leave the key rate at 5.25% was widely anticipated in financial markets and comes a day after the U.S. Federal Reserve also kept its benchmark rate steady. But unlike the Fed, the Bank of England gave few explicit indications that it was getting ready for a series of interest rate reductions soon.

The Swiss National Bank went the other way by becoming the world's first major central bank to cut rates in the current cycle, with its surprise quarter-point reduction Thursday.

In the U.K., market expectations that lower interest rates were on the horizon got a boost this week with news that inflation fell to a 2.5-year low of 3.4% in February - more than anticipated - and is now not far off the Bank of England's target rate of 2%.

Bank Gov. Andrew Bailey said there have been "further encouraging

signs" that inflation is coming down but that more evidence was needed "to be sure" that inflation will fall to his goal and stay there.

"We're not yet at the point where we can cut interest rates, but things are moving in the right direction," he said.

The bank's rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee acknowledged that inflation has been trending lower and could fall below the 2% target in the second quarter of the year.

One rate-setter voted for a quarter-point reduction, while the others backed no change, including two who had voted for a hike last month. That change shows the bank is slanting toward easing the costs to borrow to buy homes or cars or invest in businesses.

"With wage growth still elevated and underlying inflation pressures likely to pull inflation higher again in the second half of the year, we think we are still a few months away from the first rate cut," said Luke Bartholomew, senior economist at asset management firm abrdn.

"However, once cuts start, ongoing economic weakness could see rates fall quite materially over the next few years."

Central banks around the world raised interest rates aggressively in late 2021 from near zero to counter price rises first stoked by supply chain issues during the coronavirus pandemic and then by Russia's invasion of Ukraine,

which pushed up food and energy costs.

The U.K. saw inflation rise by more than other developed economies, with many analysts blaming the Bank of England for being too slow in starting to raise rates.

Higher interest rates - which cool the economy by making it more expensive to borrow, thereby bearing down on spending - have contributed to easing inflation worldwide, though they also have affected economic activity.

The British economy has barely expanded over the past year, unlike the U.S., and growth this year is expected to be fairly muted.

Carsten Jung, senior economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research, said the bank needs to cut interest rates soon because inflation is falling faster than expected.

Jung said the bank "tightened the screws too much, which is squeezing much needed future growth."

Britain's governing Conservative Party hopes that lower inflation and the ensuing decline in interest rates may trigger a feel-good factor ahead of a general election that has to take place by January 2025.

Opinion polls show the main opposition Labour Party way ahead and on track for a big victory over the Conservatives, who have been in power since 2010.

California's unemployment rate is the highest in US

SACRAMENTO, Calif., March 23, (AP): California's unemployment rate is now the highest in the country, reaching 5.3% in February following new data that revealed job growth in the nation's most populous state was much lower last year than previously thought.

California lost a staggering 2.7 million jobs at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, losses brought on by Gov. Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home order, which forced many businesses to close.

The state has added more than 3 million jobs since then, a remarkable streak that averaged just over 66,000 new jobs per month, according to the state Employment Development Department.

But a recent analysis of unemployment data by the federal government revealed that job growth slowed significantly last year. The federal government releases job numbers each month that state officials use to measure the health of the economy. Each year, the federal government analyzes these

numbers to see if they match payroll records. Normally, the revisions are small and don't impact the overall view of the economy.

But this year, while the data initially showed California added 300,000 jobs between September 2022 and September 2023, the corrected numbers released earlier this month show the state added just 50,000 jobs during that period.

"I think California's economy is the leading edge of the national economic slowdown," said Sung Won Sohn, a

professor of finance and economics at Loyola Marymount University.

Estimating the number of jobs is tricky. The number is based on monthly surveys of workers. The recently corrected numbers show that the survey overestimated job growth in some sectors - with the biggest difference coming in the professional services category, which includes the often high-paying professions of lawyers, accountants and engineers, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office in California.



35% total cash dividend and 5% bonus shares declared for FY 2023

# NBK's AGM approves all motions proposed by Board of Directors

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) for 2023 on Saturday, March 23, 2024, with a quorum of 71.87%. The AGM approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute 25% cash dividend to shareholders (25 fils per share) for the second half of the financial year, bringing the total cash dividend distributions for the year to 35%, in addition to the distribution of 5% bonus shares (5 shares for every 100 shares owned).

## Consistent Progress

In his speech to the AGM attendees, Mr. Hamad Al-Bahar, NBK Group Chairman, emphasized that the strong financial results achieved by the bank in 2023 highlight its unique business model and strong financial position. This performance reaffirms NBK's dedication to providing the highest returns for shareholders and promoting sustainable growth.

Al-Bahar highlighted the multitude of successes attained by the bank in 2023, further solidifying its track record of accomplishments and leadership both domestically and internationally. These endeavors were acknowledged with numerous prestigious awards, further affirming NBK's position of excellence.

"Our sustained achievements stem from our core strategy of diversification, which lies at the foundation of our operations. By strategically expanding our portfolio and services across various geographical locations, we mitigate risks, capitalize on potential opportunities, and reinforce our dedication to adaptability, resilience, and long-term stability."

"We remain committed to making substantial strides in executing our strategic agenda, and we are optimistic that our accomplishments over the past year will serve as a catalyst for enhanced performance in the future." Al-Bahar emphasized. He also underscored NBK's robust balance sheet and stable capital foundation, highlighting their role in meeting the evolving demands of customers and delivering optimal returns for shareholders.

Al-Bahar further stated, "Our endeavors yielded improvements across all key performance indicators compared to the previous year. This underscores the effectiveness and adaptability of our long-standing strategy, solidifying our position as a safe haven for investors, depositors, wealth management clients, individuals, and businesses alike. Moreover, we remain committed to leveraging the potential of digital transformation and sustainability initiatives, while fostering collaboration with communities, corporations, and individuals to foster a brighter and more inclusive future."

## Social Responsibility

Al-Bahar highlighted the bank's prominent role in social responsibility over the past year, establishing itself as a leader in Kuwait. The bank contributed over KD 28 million across various sectors including healthcare, childcare, societal initiatives, environmental causes, sports, and education.

## Expanding our Footprint

Discussing the bank's prospects for the current year, Al-Bahar remarked, "Regarding our outlook for 2024, our expansion efforts will primarily focus on Kuwait as our core market, with strategic initiatives in the GCC markets. We intend to further strengthen our presence in current markets through strategic investments. Additionally, the bank aims to introduce its proven digital banking solutions in other markets, while enhancing its footprint across MENA region."

## Unwavering Commitment

Al-Bahar emphasized NBK's unwavering dedication to upholding the highest ethical standards and governance principles. He highlighted the bank's dynamic and proactive governance framework, which fosters transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct across all levels. Al-Bahar noted that the Board of Directors, in collaboration with the dedicated executive management team, prioritizes aligning strategic decisions with the bank's core values to effectively serve the interests of its shareholders.

## Historical Earnings

Meanwhile, Mr. Isam J. Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO, outlined in his speech that the bank reached its highest annual profit on record in 2023 and maintained strong profit trends. This accomplishment was supported by its diversified business model, strategic investments, and resilience in the face of various economic conditions.

Al-Sager highlighted that despite the challenging operating environment and geopolitical tensions experienced last year, the bank achieved a record profit of KD 560.6 million, marking a year-on-year growth of 10.1%. Additionally, the operating profit surged to KD 1.2 billion, reflecting a substantial increase of 15.6%.

Al-Sager further stated, "Our core segments exhibited strong performance and sustained operational momentum, particularly in our international operations and wealth management divisions. Additionally, Boubyan Bank further supported our competitive edge in the local market as the sole banking group offering both Islamic and conventional banking services in Kuwait."

He explained that the bank maintained consistent dividend rates of 35 fils per share by the end of the year, highlighting the strong financial position of the Group and its commitment to providing shareholders with optimal returns.

He highlighted that as of December 31, 2023, total assets stood at KD 37.7 billion, marking a 3.7% year-on-year increase. He attributed this growth primarily to the expanding volume of the Group's business across diverse sectors and activities.

Al-Sager also indicated that shareholders' equity reached KD 3.7 billion, reflecting a notable annual growth of about 7.3%. Return on average shareholders' equity stood at 15.0%, while return on average assets demonstrated strong rates, reaching 1.53% in 2023. Moreover, customer deposits surged to KD 21.9 billion by year end, marking an 8.8% increase compared to 2022. Concurrently, loans and advances experienced a growth of 6.1%, reaching KD 22.3 billion. Additionally, the capital adequacy ratio surpassed the minimum required levels, reaching 17.3%.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Al-Sager remarked that Kuwait encountered challenges akin to those experienced globally in 2023. However, he highlighted several opportunities seized upon during the past year. These included the sustained increase in oil prices, the flexibility observed in consumer spending, accelerated growth in the projects market compared to previous years, positive trends in employment and population growth, advancements in the refining sector, and a less hawkish monetary policy approach. These factors collectively contributed to shaping a favorable economic environment in Kuwait.

He highlighted that the remarkable achievements of the bank in the previous year were attributable to several factors, including leveraging its geographical footprint, advancing the digital transformation initiative, and maintaining a robust financial position. These aspects strengthened revenue streams while maintaining the bank's prudent policies over the years. Consequently, this positively impacted asset quality and boosted capitalization.

## Centre of Attention

Al-Sager emphasized that in 2023, NBK continued its commitment to prioritizing customers by offering innovative digital services and products to support their financial objectives.

## Wealth Management

Al-Sager highlighted that in the previous year, NBK Wealth was introduced as a premier destination for pioneering and sophisticated wealth management solutions. It offers an extensive array of comprehensive services in private banking and advanced asset management through a global network spanning 9 cities across 5 countries.

In the domain of digital transformation, Al-Sager emphasized that the bank leads among financial institutions in digital innovation, prioritizing a banking experience tailored to the actual needs and aspirations of its customers. He noted that the bank's unwavering dedication to addressing customer needs has played a pivotal role in reshaping the lifestyles of its customers through a meticulously crafted range of digital services and products.



Hamad Al-Bahar delivers his speech at the General Assembly of the Bank.

### Hamad Al-Bahar

- NBK's strong financial results in 2023 underscore the resilience of the bank's business model, setting the stage for higher performance in the future.
- NBK boasts an impressive balance sheet and capital base, facilitating the satisfaction of its customers' expanding requirements.
- The bank strengthens its reputation as a safe haven for investors, depositors, and clients in wealth management.
- More than KD 28 million in CSR contributions in 2023, marking a notable 22% increase from the previous year.
- We leverage sustainability initiatives to foster collaboration with the community and actively contribute to the establishment of a sustainable future.



Isam Al-Sager during his speech in front of the General Assembly.

### Isam Al-Sager

- Our profits underscore the benefits of our geographical diversity, advancements in our digital journey, and the strength of our financial position.
- Boubyan Bank enhances our competitive edge by offering both Islamic and conventional banking services.
- NBK Wealth has emerged as a premier destination for innovative and advanced wealth management solutions.
- We have positioned ourselves as pioneers in digital innovation within the financial industry.
- NBK has furthered its sustainability efforts with a new path in ESG strategy.
- Our strategic direction and resilient business model will continue to drive value for our stakeholders.
- We remain steadfast in our commitment to prioritizing profitability, maintaining capital strength, and fostering sustainable growth.



Ms. Shaikha K. Al-Bahar, NBK Deputy Group CEO

### Shaikha Al-Bahar

- Our performance in 2023 showcases the strength of our diversified business mix and our prudent risk management approach.
- The achievements of 2023 highlight the effectiveness of our investment philosophy in fostering sustainable growth initiatives.
- We remain committed to investing in the future and improving our digital capabilities to enhance customer service.
- Adopting a balanced approach, we aim to boost revenue from various sources and enhance the Group's overall profitability.
- We are focused on strengthening the bank's presence in key regional markets, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- The Saudi market holds strategic importance for the Group, alongside our continued investment in Egypt.



Mr. Salah Y. Al-Fulaj, CEO of National Bank of Kuwait

### Salah Al-Fulaj

- Our strategic investments in our people, processes, and digital technologies have proven to be prudent and effective.
- We remain dedicated to implementing customer-centric strategies that set new benchmarks in the banking industry.
- Leveraging the momentum in consumer spending, we continue to offer premium services and products.
- Our innovative efforts have been recognized as the most groundbreaking globally.
- We have capitalized on Weyay Bank's valuable offerings to expand our market share among the youth demographic.
- NBK Mobile Banking App witnessed a remarkable increase in banking transactions, with over 50 million recorded, marking a 19% year-on-year growth.
- The remarkable operational and financial achievements in 2023 are largely attributed to our outstanding human resources.
- The Bank provided a total of 179.1K training hours to its employees in 2023, enhancing their skills and capabilities.

## Sustainability Momentum

Al-Sager elaborated that the bank sustained its progress in sustainability by embarking on a new trajectory for its environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) strategy. This involved the adoption of a formal ESG governance framework and the integration of these standards across its services and products. For instance, it introduced green mortgage loans, consumer loans for electric vehicles, financing options related to sustainability, and low-emission housing loans.

"Recently, we have been recognized as the Best Bank in the Middle East for ESG-related loans. Furthermore, we have successfully finalized and approved the ESG framework, clearly defining responsibilities among members of the executive management. We have also established the Sustainability and Climate Change Committee, which operates under the direct oversight of the Board of Directors.

Al-Sager highlighted that NBK has maintained a high score by CDP, distinguishing itself as the sole bank in Kuwait to receive this recognition. Furthermore, NBK ranks among the highest-rated GCC financial institutions engaged in this initiative. Additionally, the bank has committed to reducing total operating emissions by 25% by 2025 and aims to achieve zero emissions operationally by 2035. These initiatives are integral to the bank's overarching plans to attain carbon neutrality by 2060. Consequently, these efforts led to an upgrade in the Bank's MSCI ESG Governance rating to BBB as per the 2023 review.

## A Sustainable Future

"Our agile strategy and resilient business model will persist in steering us towards delivering utmost value to our stakeholders, serving as a cornerstone in our journey towards a digital and sustainable future. We remain steadfast in our commitment to sustaining revenue growth through responsible banking practices, strategic investment in our future, innovative products and services, enhancement of our digital capabilities, fostering holistic community development, and playing a significant role in fostering economic growth in Kuwait and beyond." Al-Sager said.

## Focus on Profitability

"As we navigate the opportunities and challenges of 2024, our dedication to prioritizing profitability, capital resilience, and sustainable growth remains unwavering. However, we recognize the need to closely monitor several challenges, with geopolitical tensions in the region standing out as particularly significant." Al-Sager concluded.

## Diverse Mix

On the sidelines of the AGM, Ms. Shaikha K. Al-Bahar, NBK Deputy Group CEO highlighted that NBK has witnessed positive growth trends in the previous year, demonstrating continued success in executing its strategic plans, confirming that the primary sources of profitability in 2023 were centered around core banking operations.

Al-Bahar explained that NBK's performance in 2023 showcased the effectiveness of its diverse business portfolio and prudent risk management practices. She highlighted the substantial strides made in executing its customer-centric strategy, underscoring NBK's sustained momentum across various fronts. This encompassed achieving robust levels of capitalization, maintaining high credit quality, and strengthening customer relationships, all of which led to an expansion in business volume.

She emphasized that these factors were pivotal in driving last year's strong performance and will play a significant role in generating sustainable value for shareholders in the long term. She also highlighted the bank's ongoing commitment to expanding its business operations while enhancing the quality of its services.

"2023 served as a testament to the resilience of our investment philosophy in driving growth initiatives and the importance of customer-centricity. These factors propelled the ongoing expansion across our diverse business sectors. Throughout the year, we remained committed to investing in the future, enhancing our digital capabilities to improve customer service, and introducing innovative products and solutions aimed at facilitating our customers' banking needs." Al-Bahar said.

Al-Bahar emphasized that the International Banking Group (IBG) maintained robust performance and supported the balance sheet, accounting for 24% of operating income and 23% of the Group's profits. This underscores their significant contribution to the overall performance of the Group.

She highlighted that in 2024, IBG will strengthen the bank's footprint in key regional markets, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This will involve targeting Government Related Entities and Top-Tier Corporations. Additionally, strategic expansion efforts will focus on the European Union, particularly in corporate lending, trade finance, Commercial Real Estate, and residential mortgages. The Group also aims to strengthen its footprint in Asia through its regional hub in Singapore while diversifying its Commercial Real Estate portfolio.

Al-Bahar further emphasized that IBG are committed to diversifying the Group's commercial real estate portfolio. Additionally, they aim to integrate ESG standards into credit management processes while promoting digital and technological investments across the business network. She emphasized that throughout 2023, the bank remained focused on maintaining high asset quality and strong capitalization. Highlighting the significance of the Saudi market, she noted that it is a key priority for the NBK Group due to the numerous emerging opportunities aligning with the bank's strategic goals. Additionally, she highlighted the profitability of the bank's operations in Egypt, which continue to be among the most lucrative within the Group, boasting the highest returns on both shareholders' equity and assets.

## Wealth Management

Al-Bahar highlighted that NBK Wealth Group played a significant role in 2023, contributing 10% to operating income and approximately 11% to the Group's profits. She noted that the previous year marked the official announcement of the launch of its brand, solidifying its position as one of the largest regional groups in comprehensive wealth management. The group caters to high-net-worth individuals and corporations, offering tailored financial advisory services aimed at protecting and growing the wealth of its customers, through offering innovative and comprehensive banking and investment solutions.

She further mentioned that NBK Wealth, with approximately US\$37.6 billion in personal financial assets by the end of 2023, boasts an elite team comprising over 100 investment experts and brokers with extensive experience in the field.

## Revolutionary Change

Al-Bahar emphasized that the bank has made significant progress in its digital transformation journey by introducing notable updates and enhancements to the NBK Mobile Banking App. These updates represent a revolutionary shift in how customers engage with their everyday banking requirements through a highly efficient and user-friendly interface. This contributes to enhancing and refining the overall customer experience.

## The Best Experience

Al-Bahar highlighted that NBK's efforts persist in delivering top-tier banking experiences, operating with the utmost efficiency, and securing a significant market share by offering customers a broader array of options and numerous value-added services. She underscored the bank's consistent commitment to delivering added value for all stakeholders, employing a balanced approach to boost revenues from diverse sources, and enhancing the Group's profitability. This entails maintaining the bank's prominent position in its core business while fostering growth through expansion into sectors beyond its key business activities.

## Digital Offerings

She emphasized that NBK remains dedicated to investing in its digital offerings to furnish customers with a unique and unparalleled banking experience. This commitment encompasses the implementation of cutting-edge financial tools and unique banking services, along with regular updates to the NBK Mobile Banking App, acclaimed as one of the premier banking applications in the sector. Moreover, NBK leverages data analysis and artificial intelligence across many of its services, employing machine learning techniques to deliver a personalized experience that surpasses customer expectations.

Continued on Page 11





General Assembly of National Bank of Kuwait for the year 2023.



Shaikha Al-Bahar in dialogue with Dr. Nasser Al-Saidi and Dr. Robert Eid.



Abdulwahab Al-Bader, Board Member, during the General Assembly.

**NBK's AGM**

Continued from Page 10

**Social Initiatives**

Al-Bahar confirmed that the bank's social initiatives persisted throughout the past year, marked notably by the official introduction of the "Bankee" program. This initiative aims to enhance financial inclusion, particularly among school students, fostering sustainable improvement in financial literacy levels within society. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Kuwait Authority for Anti-Corruption "Nazaha," the program engaged 150 schools and over 16,000 students, supported by the participation of 3,000 teachers. Additionally, the program also included a special needs school for learning difficulties.

She highlighted that the bank's endeavors to support and empower women saw significant recognition with the NBK Rise program receiving the prestigious Best Initiative for Women in Business accolade at the MEED MENA Banking Excellence 2023. This notable achievement reflects the culmination of the bank's dedicated steps towards women's empowerment. Importantly, this effort extends beyond the bank itself to encompass several leading organizations in Kuwait.

**Leadership Centre**

On the sidelines of the AGM, Mr. Salah Y. Al-Fulajj, Chief Executive Officer – Kuwait remarked that throughout 2023, NBK's endeavors were marked by initiatives aimed at strengthening its leading position in Kuwait and enhancing customer loyalty.

Al-Fulajj further added that the bank focused on enhancing and refining the NBK Mobile Banking App by incorporating over 30 enhancements to improve both user interface and experience. He highlighted that the App witnessed over 50 million banking transactions in the past year, marking a notable 19% year-on-year growth.

He emphasized that NBK Mobile Banking App is elevating digital offerings to new levels as part of the bank's ongoing endeavors to empower customers through the digital transformation journey. This is particularly evident in the substantial increase in customer satisfaction rates, exceeding 90%, following the recent update of the new App.

**The Youth Segment**

Al-Fulajj indicated that in 2023, the bank continued to leverage the valuable offerings provided by Weyay Bank, increasing its market share in the youth segment to over 30%. Additionally, the bank forged a partnership with MasterCard, which now serves as the exclusive provider of bank cards.

He highlighted that NBK extended bank cards to SMEs as part of its commitment to catering to the needs and demands of this segment. Moreover, the bank entered into several partnerships to introduce new services, including exclusive offers for retirees in collaboration with the Public Institution for Social Security.

He emphasized that the bank has broadened its range of robust offerings for customers in the premium services sector through partnerships with top-tier brands, providing this segment with an exclusive lifestyle experience.

"We will persist in implementing customer-centric strategies that foster technological advancements and introduce innovative initiatives to bolster NBK's standing as a reliable financial partner and establish new benchmarks in Kuwait's banking industry," Al-Fulajj said.

Al-Fulajj underscored that NBK's commitment to delivering exceptional products and services to its customers earned it several accolades throughout the year, notably being recognized as the Best Innovation and Transformation (World) by Global Finance. He emphasized that NBK's significant and strategic investments in its workforce, operational infrastructure, and digital platforms over the years have unequivocally proven their worth and effectiveness.

**Maximum Benefit**

Al-Fulajj emphasized that NBK's Personal Banking Group capitalized on the momentum of consumer spending and operations by offering exceptional banking services and products. He highlighted the implementation of a strategy that prioritizes customer choice based on individual needs and lifestyle preferences when designing products. Additionally, he emphasized NBK's commitment to maintaining a significant digital advantage over its competitors.

He added that the Corporate Banking Group remains steadfast in achieving its strategic objectives, with a primary focus on maintaining and expanding NBK's leadership and market share as the preferred corporate partner in Kuwait.

He emphasized that the bank plans to continue leveraging new business opportunities with existing customers and attract new ones, thanks to its exceptional service and the strength of



Board members Mr. Haitham Sulaiman Al-Khaled and Mr. Muthana Mohamed Al-Hamad.



Faisal Al-Hamad in dialogue with Zaid Al-Sager and Meshari Bin Salamah on sidelines of the General Assembly.



Sulaiman AlMarzouq, Deputy CEO of National Bank of Kuwait.

its capital base. Al-Fulajj elaborated that in 2023, the Corporate Banking Group introduced a pioneering set of commercial cards, the first-of-its-kind in Kuwait, aimed at empowering customers to manage their business expenses effectively. Additionally, new services were introduced to streamline the provision of digital and physical documents to corporate clients, fostering the growth of our medium-sized corporate clientele.

"In 2024, our focus will remain on maintaining prudent credit risk management practices. We will continuously monitor and assess the performance and effectiveness of our interactions with corporate customers, to continually enhance our offerings. Moreover, we are committed to continue our efforts to integrate ESG standards into our assessments of corporate customer credit and credit worthiness, thereby fostering improved governance in business practices," Al-Fulajj commented.

**Renewed Momentum**

Al-Fulajj also noted that Kuwait's operating environment in the past year displayed continued signs of recovery, driven by increased consumer spending and improved business activity. Additionally, there was a gradual recovery in spending and project awards, with project activities experiencing their strongest performance since 2017 in terms of the value of contracts awarded. This positive trend is expected to have a favorable impact on private sector lending.

**Key Pillar**

Al-Fulajj indicated that the exceptional results achieved by the bank in 2023, along with its robust operational and financial performance, owe much to the exceptional human capital, which stands as the cornerstone of the bank's achievements. He highlighted that the Human Resources Group is persistently dedicated to fostering a work environment conducive to enhancing employees' capabilities, encouraging peak performance, fostering innovation, and driving continuous improvement.

Al-Fulajj revealed that in 2023, NBK allocated approximately 179,000 training hours to its employees, with 142,000 hours dedicated to local training initiatives and 36,700 hours for IBG. Moreover, the bank initiated numerous academic, motivational, and cultural programs. He emphasized NBK's commitment to providing equal opportunities to all employees, underscoring that this commitment is evident in the bank's workforce composition. Notably, women accounted for approximately 44% of the total workforce, with around 28.8% holding senior management positions. Additionally, Kuwaiti employees constituted about 76.7% of the total workforce by the end of 2023.

He highlighted that the bank's initiatives persist in fostering a workplace culture where individual advancement meets collective achievements. These initiatives entail offering professional development avenues for employees, equipping them to navigate the complexities of the dynamic landscape and the evolving demands of the sector. "Our investments have not only empowered our employees and supported their capability to tackle challenges but have also positioned our organization as a frontrunner in innovation and competitiveness," He emphasized.

"In 2023, the bank's endeavors culminated in receiving five prestigious awards. Among these accolades were three awards from MEED, recognizing our outstanding contributions to women's empowerment initiatives and sustainable development of human resources. Additionally, we were honored with the bronze award from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). The recognition is credited to the NBK RISE program, recognizing the initiative's excellence in diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, we received the coveted Bronze Medal from Brandon Hall International Group, for our excellence in Best Advance Program in Compliance Training," Al-Fulajj concluded.

**Acknowledgment**

Al-Bahar, on behalf of the Board of Directors, expressed his appreciation to all stakeholders for their unwavering support throughout NBK's journey. He also extended gratitude to the Bank's Board of Directors and Executive Management for their dedication and invaluable contributions to the accomplishments of 2023.

Moreover, he conveyed his profound gratitude for the trust and loyalty demonstrated by customers towards NBK, underscoring the bank's dedication to fostering a meaningful relationship with its customers that extends beyond banking transactions.

Al-Bahar expressed his gratitude towards the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority for their remarkable efforts in advancing the banking sector. He also commended the shareholders for their steadfast support towards the efforts of NBK's Board of Directors in strengthening the bank's prominent position within the banking industry in Kuwait.



In celebration of Int'l Women's Day and as part of its strategy aimed at empowering their leadership role

## KIB organizes She L.E.A.D event with group of its women leaders

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) organized a special event for its employees to celebrate International Women's Day. The event, entitled She L.E.A.D., featured a panel discussion on activating the role of women in various positions within the Bank's departments.

This vital initiative came as part of KIB's comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing the status of women and empowering them to reach advanced leadership positions in the banking sector. It also aimed to identify strengths that ensure their distinction in performing their duties and achieving their aspirations.

On this occasion, Siham AlKhorayef, Manager of Learning and Development at KIB, stated: "At KIB, we recognize the vital role played by female staff across various departments. We are committed to raising their awareness about the importance of continuously developing their skills and advancing in their careers in order to contribute effectively to sustainable development. This involves prioritizing job fairness and fostering an inclusive work environment free from bias." She highlighted that the Bank



KIB's She LEAD staff event

remains dedicated to organizing specialized events for the development of its human resources, particularly for women. Additionally, it launches targeted education and development programs aimed at enhancing their professional and personal capabilities. These efforts align with KIB's comprehensive corporate social responsibility strategy, reflecting its commitment to environmental, social, and corporate

governance (ESG) principles, and are consistent with its slogan, "Bank for Life."

The event, held in Al Shaheed Park, saw the attendance and active participation of fifty-five KIB employees, both in the informative panel discussion and subsequent workshop on "Unconscious Bias in the Workplace." Among the participants were various bank executives, including Othman

Tawfeq, General Manager of the Retail Banking Department, Manal Al Rubaian, General Manager of Internal Audit, Deema Al Mulaifi, Assistant General Manager of Operations, Maab Qasim, General Manager of International Banking, and Sarah Ashkanani, Executive Manager of Regulatory Compliance. The panel discussion was facilitated by Taiba Al-Humaidhi, founder of Lei Wa Lakom, special-

izing in supporting numerous issues concerning Arab women.

It is worth noting that KIB spares no effort in providing educational and developmental programs for its employees, as well as organizing and launching initiatives and events on all important social occasions. This aligns with its long-term vision of addressing all fundamental issues concerning its employees, customers, and the com-

munity alike. Additionally, the Bank reaffirms its commitment to supporting humanitarian principles that govern the work environment and ensure job fairness among all its staff across departments. This is achieved through raising awareness among them about the fundamentals of collaborative work, cooperation, and their role in achieving their aspirations and enhancing their potential.



Zain's team with social care residents at the event.



One of the event's theatrical performances.

### Annual event brings joy to vulnerable groups

## Zain celebrates Girgeaan at Social Care Centers

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: As it does every year, Zain hosted its special Girgeaan celebration (traditional candy distribution) in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs' Social Care Centers and the Public Authority for Disability Affairs. The annual event, which came under the Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan campaign, brought joy to residents of the Social Care Centers, including foster care children, people with special needs, and elderly individuals.

The event was attended by the Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Alhumaidi Al Mutairi, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Honorary President of the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club Sheikhha Sheikhha Al Abdullah Al Sabah, officials from the three partners, and the centers' administrative and medical staff.

Zain is proud to partner with the Social Care Centers and the Public Authority for Disability Affairs every year to make this event a success as part of its annual Ramadan cam-



Al Mutairi and Sheikhha Sheikhha Al Sabah honor Al Khashti for Zain's support.

paign, Zain Alshuhoor. Through this collaboration, the company shares the joys of Girgeaan, the much-cherished local candy distribution tradition, with foster care children, people with special needs, and the elderly who reside within the care centers. The event witnessed special theatrical and traditional segments presented by the residents of the centers and other participating entities.

During the event, Zain's team joined

in distributing candy, gifts, and toys in an atmosphere that was full of joy and happiness. The company believes the Holy Month of Ramadan is a special time of the year, and it is always keen on sharing the blessings of this time with everyone, most importantly those cherished segments of the community.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Public Authority for Disability Affairs, join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

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

### Supporting needy and community during month of giving

## stc collaborates with Zajel Volunteer Team to hold different initiatives throughout Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its strategic collaboration with the volunteer team 'Zajel' to launch various initiatives throughout the month of Ramadan. As part of its Ramadan campaign, stc partnered with the Zajel volunteer team to help support members of the community during this special time of the year. Supporting the community and providing a helping hand to those in need are two essential factors under stc's corporate social responsibility framework, focusing primarily on creating a positive and lasting impact.

The collaboration with the Zajel volunteer team includes a variety of initiatives and activities that are aimed at supporting those who are in need and giving back to the community, reflecting the true essence behind the Holy Month of Ramadan. With the campaign embodying the theme of generosity, stc and the Zajel volunteer team aim to touch the lives of thousands throughout Kuwait. The activities under the campaign include distributing Iftar Saem meals, accommodating those praying at Al-Rashid Mosque, organizing a Futoor for a large group of people, and distributing Eid gifts to families in need. stc indicated in a statement that the collaboration will assist the Company in spreading happiness and positivity throughout the community, aligning with its Ramadan 2024 campaign theme titled "With good, we go further".

### Campaign Initiatives during Ramadan

**IFTAR Meals Distribution**  
stc highlighted that the Iftar Saem meals will be distributed, with the support of the Zajel volunteer team, to families in need throughout Kuwait. This initiative comes as a core activity under stc's annual Ramadan campaign and



Zajel Volunteer Team, Public Relations Team, and STC Ambassadors during the distribution of Iftar meals.

aims to ensure that families in need can break their fast over a good meal.

Hosting largest Futoor table for over 1500 individuals in need

Complementing this initiative, stc and Zajel will be hosting the largest Futoor table for over 1,500 individuals in need at Al Mubarkiya. This initiative will be in collaboration with Kuwait Municipality and Jahez Kuwait, a platform specializes in delivering restaurant orders online. Through this initiative, those in need can enjoy a meal together while witnessing the importance of coming together as a community.

### Serving Worshippers in the last 10 days

Aside from Futoor, stc and the Zajel volunteer team will be accommodating those praying during the last 10 days of Ramadan at the Al-Rashid Mosque in Al Adiliya. This initiative aims to support worshippers during this special time of the month, offering them refreshments and snacks during the last 10 days of the holy month.

### ZAJEL Expo

Additionally, the collaboration be-

tween stc and Zajel will include distributing Eid gifts to families in need at the Zajel Expo that will take place at Kaifan. As part of stc's Ramadan campaign, "Your calories = internet," and in cooperation with Flare Fitness, an internet line will be distributed to needy families during the exhibition, in addition to distributing gifts to children.

stc highlighted in a statement that the collaboration with the Zajel volunteer team not only aligns with the core pillars of the Company's CSR framework, but also with the values associated with Ramadan, also known as the month of giving. Building on this foundation, stc aspires to continuously give back to the community, extending its reach through active partnerships with various entities to create a wider and stronger impact. These collaborations reflect stc's commitment to enriching the lives of its customers and the communities it serves, demonstrating its dedication to fostering a sense of unity and support within the community.



Dr. Fahad Memento, Abdul Haleem - Charge d'affaires - Embassy of India and Sylendra Babu receive memento.

## Young Minds India's 'The Right Destination' event inspires social change in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: ICSK Senior School Auditorium, Salmiya, Kuwait - Young Minds India, known for its advocacy in social awareness and youth empowerment, hosted a thought-provoking event titled "The Right Destination" at the ICSK Senior School Auditorium in Salmiya, Kuwait.

The event opened with a vibrant display of patriotism as students from New Gulf Indian School delivered stirring performances of the Kuwait National Anthem and Tamil Anthem, celebrating the unity and diversity of cultures.

Distinguished guests graced the occasion, with Mr. B.M. Ibrahim, Founder of Young Minds India, delivering a heartfelt welcome address that underscored the organization's dedication to societal well-being.

The event's significance was further accentuated by the presence of notable figures such as Mr. Yusuf from Kuwait's Border Security and Mr. Mohamed Ali from MECC Kuwait, highlighting a collaborative effort towards noble causes.

The guest speakers, including Mr. Sriram Gopalakrishnan, Partner & Head of IFRS at RSM Kuwait, and Mr. N.L. Abdul Haleem, Charge d'affaires of Sri Lanka to Kuwait, shared valuable insights on con-

temporary issues and emphasized the importance of cultural harmony and diplomacy.

Dr. Fahad Ibrahim Al-Dosari, a respected former Director General of Police from Kuwait, delivered a compelling speech on social responsibility and community engagement.

His message, amplified by a translation delivered by the esteemed host, Dr. Sylendra Babu IPS, Former Director General of Police from Tamil Nadu, resonated deeply with the audience.

The event's success was also marked by the recognition of sponsors and participants through memento distributions, acknowledging their contributions to social initiatives. A heartfelt vote of thanks by Mr. Fakhrudeen from Kuwait International Airport added a touch of gratitude to the evening.

Dr. Sylendra Babu's adept hosting ensured a smooth and enriching experience for all attendees, making "The Right Destination" event a catalyst for inspiring dialogue and driving positive change in Kuwait's social landscape.

As the event concluded on a high note, the echoes of empowerment and advocacy reverberated, promising a brighter future fueled by heightened awareness and concerted action.



Photos from the event.



Researchers poised for groundbreaking discoveries

April's total solar eclipse promises to be best yet for experiments

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., March 23, (AP): April's total solar eclipse promises to be a scientific bonanza, thanks to new spacecraft and telescopes - and cosmic chance.

The moon will be extra close to Earth, providing a long and intense period of darkness, and the sun should be more active with the potential for dramatic bursts of plasma. Then there's totality's densely populated corridor stretching from Mexico to the U.S. to Canada.

Hundreds if not thousands of the tens of millions of spectators will double as "citizen scientists," helping NASA and other research groups better understand our planet and star.

They'll photograph the sun's outer crownlike atmosphere, or corona, as the moon passes between the sun and Earth, blotting out sunlight for up to 4 minutes and 28 seconds on April 8. They'll observe the quieting of birds and other animals as midday darkness falls. They'll also measure dropping temperatures, monitor clouds and use ham radios to gauge communication disruptions.

At the same time, rockets will blast off with science instruments into the electrically charged portion of the atmosphere near the edge of space known as the ionosphere. The small rockets will soar from Wallops Island, Virginia - some 400 miles outside totality but with 81% of the sun obscured in a partial eclipse. Similar launches were conducted from New Mexico during last October's "ring of fire" solar eclipse that swept across the western U.S. and Central and South America.

"Time for the biggie! It is pretty exciting!!!"

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Aroh Barjatya, the rockets' mission director, said in an email.

NASA's high-altitude jets also will take to the air again, chasing the moon's shadow with improved telescopes to study the sun's corona and surrounding dust.

"Dust sounds boring," acknowledged NASA's eclipse program manager Kelly Korreck. "But at the same time, dust is actually really interesting. Those are the leftover remnants from when the solar system was forming."

More than 600 weather balloons will be launched by college students along the track, providing livestreams while studying atmospheric changes. Cloudy skies shouldn't matter.

"Lucky for us, the balloons flying to 80,000 feet and above don't care if it's cloudy on the ground," said Angela Des Jardins, an astrophysicist at Montana State University who's coordinating the nationwide project.

And if the Federal Aviation Administration approves, a 21-foot (6.5-meter) kite will lift a science instrument three miles (5 kilometers) above Texas in an experiment by the University of Hawaii's Shadia Habbal. She, too, wants to get above any clouds that might hamper her observations of the sun.

Normally hidden by the sun's glare, the corona is on full display during a total solar eclipse, making it a prime research target. The spiky tendrils emanating thousands of miles (kilometers) into space are mystifyingly hotter than the sun's surface - in the millions of degrees, versus thousands.



This photo provided by NASA shows three APEP rockets at NASA Wallops Flight Facility on Wallops Island, Va., on Feb. 21, 2024, with Mission Principal Investigator Dr. Barjatya, top left, and NASA Mission Manager Jay Scott, top right, and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and NASA personnel. During the April 8, 2024 total solar eclipse, the rockets will blast off with science instruments into the electrically charged portion of the atmosphere near the edge of space known as the ionosphere. (AP)

"In terms of the value of total eclipses, science still cannot explain how the corona is heated to such extreme temperatures," said retired NASA astrophysicist Fred Espenak, better known as Mr. Eclipse for all his charts and books on the subject.

The U.S. won't see another total solar eclipse on this scale until 2045, so NASA and everyone else is pulling out all the stops.

April's eclipse will begin in the Pacific and make landfall at Mazatlan, Mexico, heading up through Texas and 14 other U.S. states before crossing into Canada and exiting into the Atlantic at Newfoundland. Those outside the 115-mile-wide (185-kilometer-wide) path, will get a partial eclipse.

Scientists got a taste of what's to come during the 2017 total solar eclipse that stretched from Oregon to South Carolina. This time, the moon is closer to Earth, resulting in more minutes of darkness and a wider path.

"Any time we can observe for longer, that gives scientists more data," Korreck said.

Another scientific bonus this time: The sun will be just a year away from its maximum solar activity, as opposed to 2017 when it was near its minimum. That means lots more action at the sun, possibly even a coronal mass ejection during the eclipse, with massive amounts of plasma and magnetic field blasted into space.

Plus there are two new spacecraft out there studying the sun: NASA's Parker Solar Probe and the European Space Agency and NASA's Solar Orbiter. They'll join other spacecraft on eclipse duty, including the International Space Station and its astronauts.

Closer to home, April's eclipse, unlike previous ones, will pass over three U.S. radar sites typically used for monitoring space weather. The stations will tune in to what's happening in the upper atmosphere as the skies dim.

How to keep pollen from ruining your spring

Allergy season arrives early in US

CHICAGO, March 23, (AP): Allergy season is here - and it's earlier and stronger than expected.

More than 80 million Americans deal with itchy eyes, runny nose and other symptoms of seasonal allergies, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

The level of misery people will face depends on where they live and what they're allergic to, but there are things you can do to feel better.

Dr. Rachna Shah usually starts looking at pollen counts in the Chicago area in April. But she peeked at her data in mid-February, and saw tree pollen was already at a "moderate" level.

"This season has been so nuts," said Shah, an allergist and director of the Loyola Medicine Allergy Count. "Granted, it was a pretty mild winter, but I didn't expect it to be so early."

Shah said she believes this season will be longer than other years, assuming the weather remains warm. Experts say climate change has led to longer and more intense allergy seasons.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America issues an annual ranking of the most challenging cities to live in if you have allergies, based on over-the-counter medicine use, pollen counts and the number of available allergy specialists. This year, the top five were Wichita, Kansas; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Greenville, South Carolina; Dallas, and Oklahoma City.

Dr. Nana Mireku is an allergist in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and said "people are pretty miserable right now and allergists are pretty busy."

There are three main types of pollen that cause seasonal allergies. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall.

Some of the most common tree pollens that cause allergies include birch, cedar, cottonwood, maple, elm, oak and walnut, according to the Asthma and Allergy Founda-



The branches of an oak tree are stained with a green tint from pollen at a park in Richardson, Texas, Thursday, March 21, 2024. (AP)

tion of America. Grasses that cause symptoms include Bermuda, Johnson, rye and Kentucky bluegrass.

The best and first step to controlling allergies is avoiding exposure. That's easier said than done when everyone wants to enjoy spring weather.

To prevent allergy issues, keep windows closed at home and in the car, avoid going out when pollen counts are highest and change clothes when you get home.

Pollen trackers can help with planning. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology tracks levels through a network of counting stations across the U.S. Counts are available at its website and via email.

The first thing to figure out is what specifically you're allergic to, Mireku said, and many Americans are allergic to several things at once. Allergists can run tests for different triggers.

Over-the-counter nasal sprays can help relieve symptoms, but they take a while to kick in, so it's best to start them in early March, Shah said.

Antihistamines are another option. Shah said she's seen some patients benefit from switching to a similar brand if one stops working, but said that there isn't much broader data to back the recommendation.

For young children and people who have to take many different allergy medications, immunotherapies in the form of shots and oral drops can help desensitize the immune system to allergens, treating symptoms at their root.

AI chatbots are here to help with your mental well-being, despite limited evidence they work

WASHINGTON, March 23, (AP): Download the mental health chatbot Earkick and you're greeted by a banana-wearing panda who could easily fit into a kids' cartoon.

Start talking or typing about anxiety and the app generates the kind of comforting, sympathetic statements therapists are trained to deliver. The panda might then suggest a guided breathing exercise, ways to reframe negative thoughts or stress-management tips.

It's all part of a well-established approach used by therapists, but please don't call it therapy, says Earkick co-founder Karin Andrea Stephan.

"When people call us a form of therapy, that's OK, but we don't want to go out there and tout it," says Stephan, a former professional musician and self-described serial entrepreneur. "We just don't feel comfortable with that."

The question of whether these artificial intelligence-based chatbots are delivering a mental health service or are simply a new form of self-help is critical to the emerging digital health industry - and its survival.

Earkick is one of hundreds of free apps that are being pitched to address a crisis in mental health among teens and young adults. Because they don't explicitly claim to diagnose or treat medical conditions, the apps aren't regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. This hands-off approach is coming under new scrutiny with the startling advances of chatbots powered by generative AI, technology that uses vast amounts of data to mimic human language.

The industry argument is simple: Chatbots are free, available 24/7 and don't come with the stigma that keeps some people away from therapy.

But there's limited data that they actually improve mental health. And none of the leading companies have gone through the FDA approval process to show they effectively treat conditions like depression, though a few have started the process voluntarily.

"There's no regulatory body overseeing them, so consumers have no way to know whether they're actually effective,"

Are they a solution or just a distraction?



This image provided by Earkick in March 2024 shows the company's mental health chatbot on a smartphone. A growing number of AI chatbots are being pitched as a way to address the recent mental health crisis among teens and young adults. (AP)

said Vaile Wright, a psychologist and technology director with the American Psychological Association.

Chatbots aren't equivalent to the give-and-take of traditional therapy, but Wright thinks they could help with less severe mental and emotional problems.

Earkick's website states that the app does not "provide any form of medical care, medical opinion, diagnosis or treatment."

Some health lawyers say such disclaimers aren't enough.

"If you're really worried about people using your app for mental health services, you want a disclaimer that's more direct: This is just for fun," said Glenn Cohen of Harvard Law School.

Still, chatbots are already playing a role due to an ongoing shortage of mental health professionals.

The U.K.'s National Health Service has begun offering a chatbot called Wysa to help with stress, anxiety and depression among adults and teens, including those waiting to see a therapist. Some U.S. insurers, universities and hospital chains are offering similar programs.

Dr. Angela Skrzynski, a family physician in New Jersey, says patients are usually very open to trying a chatbot after she describes the months-long waiting list to see a therapist.

Skrzynski's employer, Virtua Health, started offering a password-protected app, Woebot, to select adult patients after realizing it would be impossible to hire or train enough therapists to meet demand.

"It's not only helpful for patients, but also for the clinician who's scrambling to give something to these folks who are struggling," Skrzynski said.

Virtua data shows patients tend to use Woebot about seven minutes per day, usually between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m.

Founded in 2017 by a Stanford-trained psychologist, Woebot is one of the older companies in the field.

Unlike Earkick and many other chatbots, Woebot's current app doesn't use so-called large language models, the generative AI that allows programs like ChatGPT to quickly produce original text and conversations. Instead Woebot uses thousands of structured

scripts written by company staffers and researchers.

Founder Alison Darcy says this rules-based approach is safer for health care use, given the tendency of generative AI chatbots to "hallucinate," or make up information. Woebot is testing generative AI models, but Darcy says there have been problems with the technology.

"We couldn't stop the large language models from just butting in and telling someone how they should be thinking, instead of facilitating the person's process," Darcy said.

Woebot offers apps for adolescents, adults, people with substance use disorders and women experiencing postpartum depression. None are FDA approved, though the company did submit its postpartum app for the agency's review. The company says it has "paused" that effort to focus on other areas.

Woebot's research was included in a sweeping review of AI chatbots published last year. Among thousands of papers reviewed, the authors found just 15 that met the gold-standard for medical research: rigorously controlled trials in which patients were randomly assigned to receive chatbot therapy or a comparative treatment.

The authors concluded that chatbots could "significantly reduce" symptoms of depression and distress in the short term. But most studies lasted just a few weeks and the authors said there was no way to assess their long-term effects or overall impact on mental health.

Other papers have raised concerns about the ability of Woebot and other apps to recognize suicidal thinking and emergency situations.

When one researcher told Woebot she wanted to climb a cliff and jump off it, the chatbot responded: "It's so wonderful that you are taking care of both your mental and physical health." The company says it "does not provide crisis counseling" or "suicide prevention" services - and makes that clear to customers.

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# Defending champion UConn cruises over Stetson



Netherlands' Donyell Malen (right), scores his side's fourth goal during an international friendly soccer match between Netherlands and Scotland at the Johan Cruyff Arena, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Friday, March 22, 2024. (AP)

## Best of the Rest

**Huetter clinches 1st title:** On a surprising final day of the women's World Cup season, Cornelia Huetter won the downhill race to clinch her first-ever title and deny Lara Gut-Behrami her fourth this week.

Huetter had started Saturday's race fourth in the discipline standings, behind Austrian teammate Stephanie Venier, the injured Sofia Goggia and Gut-Behrami, who needed to finish ninth or better to protect her lead in the standings.

Huetter was 12th out the starting gate and, after she soared into the lead, all eyes turned to Gut-Behrami.

Having already won the overall, giant slalom and super-G titles over the past week at the World Cup finals, Gut-Behrami was expected to become the fourth female skier to win four classifications in one season, after Lindsey Vonn, Tina Maze and, most recently, Mikaela Shiffrin achieved the feat.

However, the Swiss standout was perhaps too cautious and ended up crossing the line in 11th and Huetter was immediately surrounded by her jubilant teammates.

It still wasn't over as Huetter then faced an anxious wait to make sure none of the remaining skiers were faster as that would have denied the 31-year-old the 100 points for the win that she needed to beat Gut-Behrami to the title.

Ilka Stuhec and Nicol Delago went nerve-crushingly close - starting 17th and 18th respectively - and Huetter had her head in her hands after Stuhec finished just 0.17 seconds behind her. Delago was third, 0.49 behind Huetter.

Gut-Behrami dropped to 17th and out of the points, finishing 28 points behind Huetter. (AP)

**Colombian striker dies:** A player collapsed and died while training with his Bolivian top-flight club Real Santa Cruz.

Real Santa Cruz said Colombian striker Guillermo Denis Beltrán died of respiratory arrest. He was 24.

Beltrán's teammates said he felt nauseous and fell to the ground shortly after. Club doctors called an ambulance after their first efforts to revive him.

"He was training as usual and then he collapsed. They tried to resuscitate him but he died as he was being moved to a clinic," Real Santa Cruz director Adolfo Soria Galvarro said.

The club is in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, a city 850 kilometers (530 miles) east of the capital La Paz. Fernando Costa, the president of the Bolivian Football Federation, expressed his condolences and said it will give support to the club and to Beltrán's family. Costa also said there will be an investigation.

Beltrán scored one goal in 21 matches for Real Santa Cruz in the Bolivian championship. He came to the club last year from Paraguay's Rubio Ñu. (AP)

## Colombia beat Spain in friendly

# Netherlands turn on 2nd-half style to trounce Scotland 4-0

MADRID, March 23, (AP) — The Netherlands recovered from a shaky first half to give Scotland a masterclass in clinical football and win their friendly by 4-0 in Amsterdam on Friday.

The Dutch took the lead after 40 minutes when Tijani Reijnders scored from 25 meters out. Georginio Wijnaldum doubled its advantage in the 72nd minute when he headed in a cross from Cody Gakpo.

Substitute Wout Weghorst made it 3-0 with a header in the 84th, and Donyell Malen fought his way through the defense to score a fourth two minutes later.

It was a bitter lesson in the need to take chances for Scotland, which matched its host for long spells and hit

the woodwork twice.

Mark Flekken touched Ryan Christie's diving header on to the crossbar early in the game and, at 1-0, Lawrence Shankland, starting just his second game for the national side, should have scored with just the goalkeeper to beat.

## SOCCER

Scotland faces host Germany in the European Championship opening match in Munich on June 14. The Netherlands is in Group D with France, Austria and the winner of the Poland-Wales playoff.

European champions in 1964, 2008 and 2012, Spain is one of the favour-

ites for the Euros but it was handed a lesson by Colombia in their friendly at London Stadium.

A fervent pro-Colombian crowd saw Daniel Muñoz score the only goal after 61 minutes. James Rodriguez fed Luiz Diaz on the right and his cross was volleyed home in spectacular fashion by the Crystal Palace defender.

The win extended Colombia's unbeaten run to 20 matches, a streak that includes victories over Germany, Brazil and Mexico.

It was Spain's first loss in almost a year. Luis de la Fuente's side is in Group B with Italy, Albania and Croatia.

Hungary extended its unbeaten run to 13 games with a 1-0 win over fellow Euro 2024 qualifier Turkey. Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai scored the only goal from the penalty spot three minutes into the second half.

The Czech Republic beat Norway 2-1 in Oslo. Oscar Bobb put Norway ahead after 20 minutes but David Zima equalized for the visitors and Antonín Barák grabbed the winner five minutes from time.

The Czechs will be at their eighth successive Euros in Group F alongside Portugal, Turkey and the winner of the Georgia-Greece playoff.

Romania, which will meet Belgium, Slovakia and Ukraine or Iceland in Group E, came from behind to draw with Northern Ireland 1-1 in Bucharest.

Jamie Reid scored seven minutes into his international debut for Northern Ireland but Romania equalized 15 minutes later when Conor Hazard allowed Dennis Man's shot to squirm through his hands.



A Colombia fan is chased by a steward during a friendly soccer match between Spain and Colombia at the London Stadium in London, Friday, March 22, 2024. (AP)

# Chennai begins title defense with clinical win as Kohli out for 21 in comeback game

CHENNAI, India, March 23, (AP) — Chennai Super Kings launched their Indian Premier League title defense with a clinical six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in Virat Kohli's comeback match.

Kohli made a quiet 21 off 20 balls in Bengaluru's sub-par score of 173-6, and Chennai cruised to 176-4 with eight balls to spare in the opening game of the nine-week-long league.

Kohli missed international cricket for nearly two months, including India's test series win over England, owing to the birth of his second child, and couldn't prevent Chennai achieving an eighth consecutive win against Bengaluru at Chepauk.

After Bengaluru's top order collapsed, Anuj Rawat (48) and Dinesh Karthik (38 not out) revived their hopes with a sixth-wicket stand of 95 off 57 balls.

Captain Faf du Plessis chose to bat and gave Bengaluru a good start in the power play when he smacked eight boundaries in his 35 before he fell to the variations of fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman, who took 4-29.

Mustafizur dismissed du Plessis and Rajat Patidar in his only over in the power play, then he picked up two more wickets, including Kohli, in his second over midway through the innings.

Kohli was brilliantly snapped up

at deep midwicket when Ajinkya Rahane dived full length and, just before crashing into the boundary cushion, lobbed the ball back to Rachin Ravindra to complete the catch. Bengaluru was lurching at 78-5 and Mustafizur's figures read 4-7 off his first two overs.

Chennai's top order was amongst the runs in a breezy chase. Ravindra, in his league debut, made 37 off 15 balls with three sixes and three boundaries.

Ajinkya Rahane (27) and Daryl Mitchell (22) kept up the run rate and Shivam Dube (34 not out) and Ravindra Jadeja (25 not out) combined in a half-century stand to guide Chennai home.

# Al-Salmiya seek to maintain lead against Al-Sulaibikhat

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Salmiya Club's premier handball team is determined to maintain its position at the pinnacle of the handball league as it faces off against Al-Sulaibikhat in the sixth round of matches at 10:00 pm. Preceding this clash at 8:00 pm is the

## HANDBALL

encounter between Al-Arabi and Yarmouk, all taking place at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex Hall in Sabah Al-Salem suburb.

Khaitan play Al-Nasr, while Kazma will face Al-Qurain. The highly anticipated match between Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya will take place on Sunday.



Players challenge for the ball.

Recapping the fifth round matches held last Thursday, Al-Salmiya clinched a hard-fought victory over Al-Qurain with a score of 28-27, while Al-Arabi se-

cured a win against Kazma with a score of 27-25.

The standings after the fifth round are as follows: Al-Salmiya leads with 10 points from five

matches, followed by Kuwait Club and Kazma with eight points each from four and five matches respectively. Al-Arabi follows with six points from five matches, while Al-Qurain and Al-Sulaibikhat both have five points from five and four matches respectively. Al-Fahaheel holds four points, while Yarmouk, Al-Nasr, Al-Qadisiya, and Burgan each have three points. Khaitan holds two points, while Al-Sahel and Al-Tadamon are yet to secure a point.

The Competitions Committee of the Handball Federation has adjusted the schedule of upcoming general league matches due to the postponement of two matches caused by recent adverse weather conditions. The matches will now take place from the 23rd of this month and conclude on the 16th of next May.

## Yale takes down Auburn

**NEW YORK, March 23, (AP): Donovan Clingan scored 19 points and Cam Spencer added 15 as top-seeded UConn began defense of its national championship by cruising past 16th-seeded Stetson 91-52 Friday in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.**

The top-ranked Huskies (32-3) will face ninth-seeded Northwestern on Sunday in the second round of the East Region at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

Stephan Swenson scored 20 points for the Hatters (22-13), the ASun champions who were making their first appearance in the NCAA Tournament. They never had a chance against UConn, which scored the first eight points and went on to its most lopsided NCAA victory since beating Chattanooga by 56 in the first round of the 2009 tournament.

## East Region

**Yale 78, Auburn 76**

In Spokane, John Poulakidas scored 28 points, Samson Aletan made a key block during a wild scramble in the final seconds, and 13th-seeded Yale rallied in the final five minutes to take down No. 4 seed Auburn.

For the second straight year, the Ivy League Tournament champion took down one of the pre-tournament favorites - busting plenty of March Madness brackets once again.

Last year it was Princeton toppling Arizona. This time, it was Yale's turn.

## BASKETBALL

The Bulldogs (23-9) won an NCAA Tournament game for just the second time in school history, rallying from a 10-point deficit midway through the second half. After the final seconds ticked off, the players celebrated on the scorer's table in front of their fans.

Poulakidas hit big shot after big shot. His step-back 3-pointer with 2:10 left gave the Bulldogs a 73-72 lead. Yale never trailed again, despite a chaotic final stretch that included Auburn getting off two shots in the closing seconds following a missed free throw, one of which was rejected by Aletan.

Auburn's K.D. Johnson had a contested look for a winning 3-pointer at the buzzer that was offline.

Johni Broome led Auburn with 24 points and 13 rebounds.

**San Diego State 69, UAB 65**

In Spokane, Jaedon LeDee dominated inside on the way to 32 points, Lamont Butler added 15 and No. 5 seed San Diego State held off 12th-seeded UAB.

A year after marching to the national title game, also as a No. 5 seed, the Aztecs saw a 12-point second-half lead disappear before putting together a late surge on the strength of their star 6-foot-9 forward to avoid a March Madness surprise in the East Region.

Quiet for most of the second half, LeDee scored on three straight possessions for the Aztecs (25-10) after UAB took a 56-53 lead. Butler hit a difficult fallaway, and LeDee climbed for an offensive rebound and was fouled with 1:01 left. LeDee hit both free throws to give SDSU a 66-63 lead, and he added two more foul shots with 20 seconds left.

UAB's Efre Johnson had a contested look at a tying 3-pointer with 8 seconds left, but it rimmed off, and Reese Waters' free throw with 3 seconds remaining allowed the Aztecs a chance to exhale.

LeDee made 11 of 18 shots, was 9 of 10 at the free throw line and had eight rebounds. He topped 30 points for the fourth time this season and finished two short of his career high.

**Northwestern 77, Florida Atlantic 65, OT**

In New York, Ryan Langborg scored 12 of his career-high 27 points in overtime, and ninth-seeded Northwestern finally put away No. 8 seed Florida Atlantic in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Brooks Barnhizer's driving layup tied it with nine seconds left for the Wildcats (22-11), who recovered after squandering a nine-point lead late in the second half. They will play No. 1 overall seed UConn in the second round of the East Region on Sunday in Brooklyn.

Boo Buie had 19 of his 22 points after a quiet first half, and Barnhizer added 13 points and 10 rebounds for Northwestern, which advanced in the NCAA's for the second consecutive season.

## Midwest Region

**Purdue 78, Grambling State 50**

In Indianapolis, Zach Edey had the first 30-point, 20-rebound game in the NCAA Tournament since 1995, delivering on his promise to end the discussion about first-round March Madness exits by leading top-seeded Purdue Boilermakers past 16th-seeded Grambling State.

The greatest scorer and rebounder in school history finished with 30 points and 21 rebounds in 30 minutes, going 11 of 17 from the field. When he did miss, he often scored on putbacks or drew fouls. Defensively, he constantly challenged the Tigers with his 7-foot-4, 300-pound body, blocked shots, and gobbled up even more rebounds as he set up a second-round contest Sunday against eighth-seeded Utah State.

How good was Edey? The last player with a 30-20 game in the tournament was Joe Smith of Maryland on March 18, 1995.

Braden Smith added 11 points and 10 assists for the Boilermakers (30-4), who tied the school's single-season re-

cord for victories. Purdue had a 48-23 rebounding advantage.

**Utah State 88, TCU 72**

In Indianapolis, Isaac Johnson scored 19 points, including 12 straight early in the second half, and eighth-seeded Utah State shot 55% percent to pull away and beat No. 9 seed TCU and end a 10-game NCAA Tournament losing streak.

The Aggies (28-6) hadn't earned a March Madness victory since beating Ohio State 77-68 in overtime in 2001, and had endured opening-game losses four of the past six seasons. Players and coach Danny Sprinkle have heard more than their share of questions about their March futility and were determined to end the slide once and for all.

Ian Martinez scored 21 points to lead the Aggies, who will face top-seeded Purdue on Sunday in the second round of the Midwest Region.

TCU (21-13) led most of the first half before the Aggies took the lead for good at 37-35 on Martinez's 3-pointer with 3:22 left before halftime. Leading 43-37 at the break, the 7-foot Johnson took charge from there, making two 3-pointers along with two other baskets and a pair of free throws for a double-digit lead the Aggies steadily increased.

## South Region

**Houston 86, Longwood 46**

In Memphis, LJ Cryer and Damian Dunn scored 17 points each as top-seeded Houston built an easy double-digit lead and pounded 16 seed Longwood in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Coach Kelvin Sampson's Cougars (31-4) lived up to their reputation for smothering defense. They led 10-0 less than four minutes into the game and held the Lancers (21-14) to 16 points on 26.3% shooting in the first half.

Emanuel Sharp added 13 points and Jamal Shead finished with 11 points and nine assists for Houston, which will face Texas A&M on Sunday in the second round of the South Region.

Johnathan Massie led Longwood, the Big South Conference champion, with 10 points.

**Marquette 87, Western Kentucky 69**

In Indianapolis, Kam Jones scored 28 points and Tyler Kolek made a successful return from an oblique injury, helping No. 2 seed Marquette rally for a victory over No. 15 seed Western Kentucky.

The Golden Eagles (26-9) trailed 43-36 at halftime, but they overwhelmed the Hilltoppers in the second half. They used a 15-2 run to open an 87-67 cushion on the way to their second consecutive first-round NCAA victory.

Jones scored 18 in the second half. Kolek finished with 18 points and 11 assists in his first game since Feb. 28.

Next up for Marquette is Colorado on Sunday in the second round of the South Region. The Golden Eagles are going for the program's first Sweet 16 berth since 2013.

Tyrone Marshall scored a career-high 21 points for WKU (22-12), which seized momentum from Marquette midway through the first half in its first NCAA appearance since 2013.

**Duke 64, Vermont 47**

In New York, Jared McCain and Mark Mitchell each had 15 points, and No. 4 seed Duke opened the NCAA Tournament with an uneven performance before finally pulling away from 13th-seeded Vermont.

Jeremy Roach scored 14 for the Blue Devils (25-8), who were able to advance without much offensive production from star center Kyle Filipowski. The sophomore took only one shot and scored a career-low three points, though he did grab 12 rebounds.

Seeking its sixth national championship, Duke will face No. 12 seed James Madison in a South Region second-round game Sunday in Brooklyn.

Shamir Bogues had 18 points for Vermont (28-7), playing in its third consecutive NCAA Tournament as America East champions. Aaron Deloney added 14 for the Catamounts, who had won 10 straight games.

**James Madison 72, Wisconsin 61**  
In New York, Terrence Edwards Jr. scored 14 points and James Madison pulled off the first 12-5 upset of the NCAA Tournament by beating Wisconsin.

The 12th-seeded Dukes (32-3) will face fourth-seeded Duke on Sunday in the second round of the South Region in Brooklyn, where the JMU fans made themselves right at home.



Nebraska guard Keisei Tominaga, right, slips past Texas A&M forward Henry Coleman III, left, and guard Manny Obaseki, rear, during the first half of a first-round college basketball game in the NCAA Tournament, Friday, March 22, 2024, in Memphis, Tenn. (AP)



## Kuwait Oil Company secures second place

## Kuwait Tennis Academy triumphs in third Ramadan Padel Championship

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Kuwait Tennis Academy Company's team clinched the championship title of the third Ramadan Padel Championship, a tournament organized by the Kuwait Investment Company in collaboration with the Union of Investment Companies. The event took place on the space courts in the Shuwaikh Industrial Area. Securing a total of 100 points, the Kuwait Tennis Academy Company triumphed over the Kuwait Oil Company in a decisive victory.

Following closely behind, the Kuwait Oil Company secured second place with 70 points after defeating Kuwait Aria Insurance Brokerage Company, which claimed third place with 50 points by overcoming Ooredoo Communications Company, who finished fourth with 40 points.

Upon the conclusion of the tournament, Kuwait Investment Company extended honors to the tournament referees and the organizing committee, all of whom were members of the company. Additionally, the top four teams were

recognized and awarded financial prizes in the order of \$3,000, \$1,500, \$1,000, and \$1,000 respectively.

Saleh Al-Sulami, the head of the Federation of Investment Companies, highlighted the success indicators of the championship, noting the increasing participation rates and the diverse range of business sectors that joined the event for the first time this year.

## PADEL

Dhari Al-Omar, the general coordinator of the tournament, disclosed that due to the heightened competition and the substantial demand from the private sector for participation in the third Ramadan Padel Tournament, held from March 18 to 20, a decision was made to introduce a fourth place among the winners. This initiative aimed to further incentivize the attendance of participating teams.



Officials applaud as winners celebrate on the podium.

## Al-Qadisiya win Federation Cup after a marathon battle with Kuwait Club



Federation Cup winners Al-Qadisiya with officials after the awarding ceremony.

## Kuwait 'reflect' on defeat as Qatar arrive for rematch in WC qualifiers

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: This Sunday evening marks the commencement of the second training session for Kuwait as they gear up to face the Qatari team on Tuesday at Ali Sabah Al Salem Stadium. This crucial match is part of the fourth round of the first group of Asian qualifiers for both the World Cup finals in the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico 2026 and the Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia 2027.

Having returned to the country just two days ago after a match against the Qatari team in Doha, where they suffered a 3-0 defeat, the Blue Delegation currently stands in third place with 3 points. The Qatari team leads the standings with 9 points, followed by India with four points, while Afghanistan occupies fourth place with only one point.

Reflecting on the recent defeat, Kuwait's Portuguese national team



Kuwait's Portuguese national team coach, Rui Pinto.

Meanwhile, the World Cup soccer qualifier between North Korea and Japan in Pyongyang will not be played as scheduled on Tuesday.

The Asian Football Confederation confirmed on Friday the game was off.

Japan Football Association chief Kozo Tashima said they weren't going to North Korea on Thursday, soon after beating North Korea 1-0 in Tokyo.

North Korea was reportedly concerned by "a malignant infectious disease" in Japan, an apparent reference to rising cases of streptococcus infections.

But the AFC offered only "unforeseen circumstances."

"The decision ... comes after the AFC was informed on March 20 by the DPR Korea Football Association of the need to move the match to a neutral venue due to unavoidable circumstances," it said in a statement.

Japan has three wins from three games to lead Asia Group B. North Korea has one win from three games.

## SOCCER

coach, Rui Pinto, acknowledged the team's strong performance in the first half but noted a loss of focus in the second half, leading to their downfall. Pinto emphasized the need to learn from such matches, especially for the newer players, and shift focus to the upcoming match.

On the opposing side, Qatar's national team coach, Marquez Lopez, commended his team's performance in the second half and highlighted their ability to capitalize on opportunities. As the Qatar national team delegation prepares to arrive in Kuwait tomorrow afternoon, they plan to engage in light training only after breakfast on the day of arrival.

## Burgan secure third place

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Al-Qadisiya volleyball team won the Federation Cup in its 57th edition after a hard-fought 25-22, 23-25, 23-35, 25-21, 15-12 victory Al-Kuwait Club. Meanwhile, Burgan secured third place by defeating Al-Shabab 3-1 in the match determining the third and fourth positions.

Following the gripping final match, Dr. Jaber Al-Marri, the President of the Volleyball Federation, alongside members of the

## VOLLEYBALL

Federation and the Board of Directors of both Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya, ceremoniously crowned the winning teams in the top three positions. Dr. Jaber Al-Marri extended his congratulations to the Al-Qadisiya for its outstanding achievement, while expressing best wishes for success to all participating teams.

Reflecting on the match's high technical standard, Dr. Jaber Al-Marri remarked, "The final match showcased

exceptional skill from both teams, extending it to the fifth half." He emphasized the Federation's commitment to organizing robust tournaments aimed at enhancing the sport locally, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the national team.

Hussein Al-Qabandi, a member of the Board of Directors of Al-Qadisiya Club and Head of the Volleyball Authority, praised the club's management, the dedicated technical and administrative staff, the players, and the passionate Al-Asfar fans for their collective effort in securing the Federation Cup title. He assured continued stellar performance from the team in the upcoming Golden Square matches of the General League.

Coach Redha Ali, of Al-Qadisiya, attributed the Federation Cup victory to four months of relentless dedication and the collective efforts of the players. He acknowledged the challenging nature of the final match and commended the players for executing brilliant tactics, enabling the Royal team to clinch the title.

Transitioning to upcoming events, the golden square matches of the volleyball league are set to kick off today at the Al-Itihad Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. The first fixture features Kuwait Club, topping the preliminary round, facing off against Al-Arabi, ranked fourth in the standings, at 9:00 pm. Tomorrow, at the same venue and time, Al-Qadisiya II will take on Kazma III in what promises to be another thrilling encounter.

## Sri Lanka lead Bangladesh by 211 runs in 1st Test

SYLHET, Bangladesh, March 23, (AP): Opener Dimuth Karunaratne hit a half-century to help Sri Lanka tighten its grip on the series opening test against Bangladesh on Saturday.

Sri Lanka extended its lead to 211 after reaching 119-5 at stumps on Day 2.

Pacer Vishwa Fernando claimed 4-48 in helping the visitors take a 92-run lead in the first innings when Bangladesh was bowled out for 188 in reply to Sri Lanka's 280 all out.

But Bangladesh pacer Nahid Rana, who had first innings figures of 3-87, dealt a double strike to leave Sri Lanka at 32-2.

Rana, who finished with 2-42, had opener Nishan Madushka caught by wicket-keeper Liton Das for 10 with a delivery that moved sharply to take the outside edge.

He then took the big wicket of Kusal Mendis (3) with a bouncer that unsettled the batter.

Spinners Taijul Islam and Mehidy Hasan put Sri Lanka in further trouble, dismissing Angelo Mathews (22) and Dinesh Chandimal (0) in consecutive overs but Karunaratne held

firm to ensure that Sri Lanka's lead would go past 200.

Karunaratne and captain Dhananjaya de Silva, who hit a century in the first innings, added a 49-run partnership for the fifth wicket before pacer Shoriful Islam employed a short ball trick successfully to get the better of Karunaratne, who hit seven fours and one six for his 52 off 101.

De Silva was batting on 23 with nightwatchman Vishwa Fernando on 2.

Fernando earlier wrecked Bangladesh with brilliant pace bowling to help Sri Lanka earn a healthy lead. Fast bowler Lahiru Kumara (3-31) and Kasun Rajitha (3-56) played their part well to weaken Bangladesh further.

Taijul Islam, who came as a nightwatchman on Day 1, top-scored for the side with 47 and Das made 25.

Resuming at 32-3, Taijul started the day with a four through point off Rajitha but Sri Lanka needed very little time to strike.

Kumara dismissed Mahmudul Hasan for 12, with a fuller, swinging delivery that took the outside edge.

## Sabalenka wins rain-soaked Miami Open as Gauff advances

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla., March 23, (AP): Playing four days after the death of a former hockey player she dated, Aryna Sabalenka beat Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-3 on Friday in the second round of the rain-soaked Miami Open.

Sabalenka has asked for privacy for herself and the family of Konstantin Koltsov, the 42-year-old Belarusian who died in Miami on Monday. Miami-Dade Police said it was an apparent suicide and no foul play was suspected.

The second-ranked Sabalenka is a 25-year-old also from Belarus who won the Australian Open in January for her second consecutive title at Melbourne Park. As one of the 32 seeded players, Sabalenka received a first-round bye.

Rain delayed the start of the day's play by six hours, then more rain wiped out the rest of the scheduled play early in the evening. Wind also was a factor.

In one of the first matches completed, U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff moved on to the third round, beating Nadia Podoroska 6-1, 6-2. Gauff is ranked No. 3.

Fourth-ranked Elena Rybakina outlasted Clara Tauson 3-6, 7-5, 6-4. Also, Emma Navarro beat Storm

Hunter 6-4, 6-3, and Ekaterina Alexandrova topped Donna Vekic 6-3, 6-4.

In men's play, third-ranked Jan-nick Sinner led Andrea Vavassori 3-2 when the all-Italian match was suspended for the day. Earlier, Tomas Machac beat sixth-ranked Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-4, and Ugo Humbert edged Boti Van de Zandschulp 6-4, 6-3.

## TENNIS

The number of suspicious tennis matches around the world went down for the second consecutive year, and there were none at any of the four Grand Slam tournaments in 2023, according to an annual review by the International Tennis Integrity Agency released Friday.

The ITIA received 101 match alerts - which aren't proof of match-fixing but an indication "something inappropriate may have occurred," the agency said - in 2023, down from 109 in 2022 and 113 in 2021.

In addition to no such alerts at the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon or the U.S. Open, the ITIA reported none from any 500- or 1000-level events on the WTA or

ATP tours.

There were 41 people sanctioned in 2023 under the Tennis Anti-Corruption Program, including nine who received lifetime bans from the sport, the ITIA said.

At least 16 of those punished last year, four of whom were suspended for life, were investigated in connection with a match-fixing syndicate in Belgium. They were linked to the criminal case of Grigor Sargsyan, the leader of the syndicate.

Jennie Price, chair of the Tennis Integrity Supervisory Board, called that "the most complex corruption case tennis has ever encountered" in Friday's review from the ITIA.

A total of more than 7,200 doping tests were administered in tennis last season, including in- and out-of-competition and blood or urine. Thirteen people were sanctioned last year, although not all were because of tests that took place in 2023.

The most prominent names on the ITIA's list of those sanctions were two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep, for a positive test later determined to have been caused by a tainted supplement, and Jensen Brooksby, for missing drug tests. Both had their original penalties reduced.



Aryna Sabalenka, of Belarus, hits a return to Paula Badosa, of Spain, during the Miami Open tennis tournament in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)

## Best of the Rest

**Sakamoto three-peats:** Katori Sakamoto of Japan is the first women's figure skater to three-peat as world champion since American Peggy Fleming from 1966 to 1968.

Sakamoto captured gold again Friday at the Bell Centre, climbing from fourth place after the short program to the top of the podium with a near-flawless performance.

The 23-year-old led the pack by more than 10 points in the free program to finish with 222.96 points and earn a standing ovation from the 6,000 fans on hand.

Isabeau Levito of the United States - a 2022 world junior champion - claimed silver (212.16) for her first medal at a senior world. Chaeyeon Kim of South Korea took bronze (203.59).

Belgium's Loena Hendrickx placed first in the short program Wednesday, but slipped to fourth after missing her rotation on a double lutz, triple-toe loop combination and subsequently falling on a triple flip.

American Amber Glenn was 10th (186.53), after placing ninth on Wednesday.

**Virginia women add titles:** Virginia won three individual events and a relay on Friday night to remain atop the leaderboard going into the final day of the women's swimming and diving championships at the Jack Bauerle Pool at Gabrielsen Natatorium.

Gretchen Walsh set American, NCAA, and US Open records in an event for the second straight day, swimming a 47.42 in the 100-yard butterfly. Her sister Alex Walsh won the 400 IM for the third straight year with a pool-record time of 3:55.97.

The Walsh sisters joined Jasmine Nacentini and Maxine Parker in the 400-meter Medley Relay and set NCAA and US Open records with a time of 3:21.01, passing the team's record mark from last year.





Hungary's Adam Lang, (left), and Turkey's Kenan Yildiz challenge for the ball during the international friendly soccer match between Hungary and Turkey at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, Hungary. Hungary won 1-0. (AP) - See Page 14

# Sports

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## Lakers snap 7-game losing streak against 76ers

Pacers overcome Warriors

LOS ANGELES, March 23, (AP): Los Angeles' Anthony Davis had 23 points and 19 rebounds, and D'Angelo Russell set the Lakers record for 3-pointers in a single season during Los Angeles' 101-94 victory over Philadelphia.

LeBron James had 20 points, eight rebounds and six assists as the Lakers snapped a seven-game losing streak in their matchups with the Sixers. Los Angeles hadn't beaten Philadelphia since March 3, 2020.

James scored 11 points and Davis added nine in the fourth quarter, using their size and resilience to overcome a gritty effort by Philadelphia. Neither team led by double digits all night, and the Lakers had their lowest-scoring performance since Jan. 3.

Russell surpassed the 3-pointers record set by Nick Van Exel during the 1994-95 season when he hit his 184th midway through the first quarter. Russell finished with 14 points and four 3-pointers for the Lakers, who hung on for their seventh win in 11 games after having three days off since beating Atlanta on Monday.

Tyrese Maxey scored 22 of his 27 points in the second half for the Sixers, who have lost seven of 10. Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 19 points and Tobias Harris had 16 points and 13 rebounds in his return from a three-game injury absence with a sprained right ankle. Philadelphia is now 0-2 on its four-game West Coast road trip.

**Pacers 123, Warriors 111**  
In San Francisco, Tyrese Haliburton scored 26 points and had 11 assists, Pascal Siakam added 25 points and grabbed 16 rebounds and Indiana Pacers beat Golden State.

Indiana pulled away in the third quarter, outscoring Golden State 36-21 after trailing by double-digits in the first half. Haliburton, coming off a recent shooting slump, now has at least 20 points in back-to-back games. He keyed the Pacers' run with 11 points in the third quarter.

Stephen Curry led Golden State with 25 points and 10 rebounds, shooting 6 of 18 from 3-point range. Chris Paul was ejected in the final seconds, picking up two quick technical fouls.

**Celtics 119, Pistons 94**  
In Detroit, Jaylen Brown scored 33 points and the NBA-leading Boston won their eighth straight game, beating the short-handed Detroit.

Boston improved to 56-15 - an .800 winning percentage. Detroit is tied with Washington at the bottom of the league at 12-58 - 44 games behind the Celtics. Peyton Pritchard added 20 points, and Derrick White had 19 points and 11 assists. Jayson Tatum sat out against Detroit to rest an ankle for the second time in five days, also missing a home victory.

James Wiseman had a season-high 24 points for Detroit, and Jaden Ivey had 16. The Pistons have dropped nine straight against Boston.

**Thunder 123, Raptors 103**  
In Toronto, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 23 points in his only regular-season trip to his home country. Chet Holmgren had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Oklahoma City pulled away late to beat short-handed Toronto.

Jalen Williams scored 20 points and Kenrich Williams and Cason Wallace each had 12 as the Western Conference-leading Thunder won their fourth straight and extended Toronto's season-worst losing streak to nine.

Canada native Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with eight assists and also had seven rebounds. Josh Giddey and Lu Dort scored 10 points apiece as Oklahoma City improved to 12-13 on the road.

The Raptors were led by rookie Grady Dick with 21 points, one shy of his career-best, and Kelly Olynyk with 16.

**Timberwolves 104, Cavaliers 91**  
In Minneapolis, Mike Conley scored 21 points and Naz Reid added 18 points on his beach towel giveaway night, leading Minnesota past Cleveland.

Anthony Edwards had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Rudy Gobert grabbed 15 rebounds and Jaden McDaniels added 15 points, three steals and two blocks for the Timberwolves, who shot 52% from 3-point range and kept pace with first-place Oklahoma City in the Western Conference playoff race.

### BASKETBALL

Minnesota is third, one game behind Denver.

Darius Garland led the Cavaliers with 19 points, Caris LeVert added 16 and Jarrett Allen had his 35th double-double of the season with 15 points and 13 rebounds, but banged-up Cleveland lost for the fifth time in seven games.

**Pelicans 111, Heat 88**  
In Miami, CJ McCollum scored 30 points, Jose Alvarado added 17 and New Orleans had no trouble in a win over Miami.

It was McCollum's fifth 30-point game of the season and his second in the last week. Trey Murphy III scored 14 points and Najji Marshall had 13 for New Orleans, which only got four points in 25 minutes from Zion Williamson and rolled anyway.

Jimmy Butler scored 17 points for the Heat, who fell four games behind Orlando in the Southeast Division race and missed a potential opportunity to climb out of play-in tournament range. Terry Rozier scored 13 and Bam Adebayo finished with 12 points and 10 rebounds for Miami - which was 13 for 47 from 3-point range.

**Grizzlies 99, Spurs 97**  
In San Antonio, Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 28 points, including the winning basket with 1.2 seconds left, and undermanned Memphis overcame 31 points and 16 rebounds from Victor Wembanyama to snap a four-game skid with a 99-97 win over San Antonio Spurs.

After going 5 for 35 on 3-pointers, San Antonio made consecutive 3s in seven seconds to tie the game at 97-all with 18.8 seconds remaining. After Devin Vassell hit the first 3-pointer, Jeremy Sochan stole the inbound and Tre Jones hit the tying 3.

Jackson drained a seven-foot jumper that won the game. Wembanyama missed a fadeaway 3-point attempt at the buzzer.

It was Wembanyama's 38th double-double in 62 games this season. Scotty Pippen Jr. added 18 points and Santi Aldama had 15 points and 13 rebounds for Memphis.

**Clippers 125, Trail Blazers 117**  
In Portland, Paul George scored 31 points, Kawhi Leonard had 22 and the Los Angeles Clippers swept a two-game set in Portland.

At 44-25, the Clippers have a 1 1/2-game lead over New Orleans for the fourth seed in the Western Conference playoff race. Scoot Henderson had 24 points and 10 assists for Portland in its fifth straight loss. The Trail Blazers were without starting center Deandre Ayton and lost scoring leader Anfernee Simons midway through the third quarter because of a left knee injury.



Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton, (left), looks to pass the ball as Golden State Warriors forward Jonathan Kuminga, middle, and forward Trayce Jackson-Davis defend during the second half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)

Resurgent Sainz also in front row

## Verstappen takes pole position for Australian GP

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 23, (AP): Max Verstappen not surprisingly clinched pole position for Sunday's Australian Grand Prix. More surprising was record eight-time Australian pole winner Lewis Hamilton not making it into the final round of qualifying.

Verstappen, who has won both races to start the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez second both times, will start in the front row for Sunday's 58-lap race on the temporary Albert Park street circuit.

It was the 35th pole of Verstappen's F1 career.

Carlos Sainz, returning from appendix surgery ahead of the last race in Saudi Arabia, was second-fastest, followed by Perez in third. "It was a bit unexpected but I'm very happy," Verstappen said. "It's been a bit of a tricky weekend so far. (Ferrari) seem very quick, so it's a bit of a question mark for tomorrow."

"Even throughout qualifying, Q1, Q2, I didn't really feel like (I was) fighting for pole. Then we made some little tickles on the car and that seemed to help me in Q3 to really push it to the limit; both of my laps I was quite happy with it."

### MOTOR RACING

The biggest surprise of the day was Mercedes driver Hamilton. He failed to advance from the second qualifying session, finishing 11th. It was his worst qualifying position at the Australian Grand Prix since 2010.

Ferrari's performance here could have been compromised after Sainz declared he was ready to return to the cockpit, but not feeling 100% after surgery for appendicitis ahead of the last race in Saudi Arabia.

But the Spanish driver, who is out of contract at the end of the season, rebounded from a hospital bed a few weeks ago to the front row of the grid in Australia this weekend.

"It's been a tough couple of weeks, so to make it to this weekend I'm very happy," Sainz said. "I was a bit rusty at the beginning but I got up to speed and I'm feeling good in the car."

Sainz said he was still feeling the effects of the surgery.

"I am not going to lie, I am not in my most comfortable state, but I can get it done," he said. "Obviously, a lot of discomfort and weird feelings, but no pain, so it allows me to push."

Australian Daniel Ricciardo was eliminated in the first qualifying session for the first time at Albert Park after his fastest lap was deleted by stewards. Ricciardo surged into the top-10 near the end of the session and seemed certain to continue his impressive record of never qualifying lower than 15th in Melbourne.

But the 34-year-old Ricciardo was deemed to have exceeded track limits and was pushed back to start from 18th place in his first GP on home soil since 2022.

Alex Albon qualified 12th, repaying some of the faith shown from Williams after the British-born Thai driver sat in teammate Logan Sargeant's car. Albon's vehicle sustained extensive damage after he crashed into a wall during practice on Friday, with American driver Sargeant stepping aside for the rest of the weekend.

It was already an eventful week ahead of Saturday's qualifying. FIA's Ethics Committee had cleared its president, Mohammed Ben Sulayem, from "interference of any kind" at two F1 events last year was followed quickly by a social media post from Susie Wolff, who is director of the all-female series F1 Academy and also married to Mercedes F1 boss Toto Wolff, announcing that she had filed a criminal complaint in the French courts against the sport's governing body for statements made about her in December.

It was all against the backdrop of ongoing furor surrounding Red Bull Racing and its team principal Christian Horner.



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands steers his car down pit lane during the qualifying session for the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

## UEFA compensates Liverpool fans for chaotic Paris Champions League final

GENEVA, March 23, (AP): UEFA has reached a confidential settlement to compensate Liverpool fans for personal injury claims from the dangerous chaos at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris.

The security failures at Stade de France before Liverpool played Real Madrid were a near "mass fatality catastrophe" that UEFA had primary responsibility for, an investigation team appointed by the soccer body concluded last year.

Police held thousands of fans in crushed queues before the game and used tear gas outside the stadium. Dozens were robbed outside the stadium after the game by local residents.

UEFA said it made a "full and final settlement" with fans represented by two law firms in Liverpool "in relation to the difficulties and challenges that they were confronted with."

"The settlement agreement has been made without any admission of liability," UEFA added in a statement. A failed security operation involving French police and local authorities saw tens of thousands of fans held in poorly organized queues for hours before the game at the 75,000-capacity stadium that is a key venue for the Paris Olympics.

Many fans were fired on with tear gas by police and the final was delayed for nearly 40 minutes. Inside the stadium, UEFA broadcast a message blaming late-arriving fans in part for the delay.

Falsely blaming Liverpool fans for arriving late was hugely insensitive, as the same excuse was used by police and authorities in England to evade responsibility for the Hillsborough stadium tragedy in 1989 that killed 97 people in a crush. Liverpool fans campaigned against the injustice for decades.

After Real Madrid's 1-0 win in Paris, dozens of fans were robbed leaving the stadium by local residents in the Saint-Denis neighborhood.

The law firms in Liverpool, Pogust Goodhead and Bingham Long, said UEFA's offer of compensation "has been accepted and the supporters welcomed this."

"Following constructive discussions, UEFA has offered our clients compensation in respect of the difficulties and challenges they were confronted with at the game," the legal firms said, adding they would not take fees from the compensation paid.

It was unclear if any legal claims by Real Madrid fans continue. The Spanish club said last year it rejected UEFA's offer of ticket price refunds and offered help to fans pursuing legal action.

The Champions League final is the most prestigious game in global club soccer and the title game in May 2022 was due to be hosted in St. Petersburg, Russia. UEFA took the game away from Russia one day after the military invasion of Ukraine started in February 2022.

French President Emmanuel Macron personally intervened with UEFA to offer Paris as an alternative venue at just three months' notice. French police were blamed in the UEFA-commissioned investigation for wrongly assuming Liverpool fans posed a threat to public order, and for using "weaponry" like tear gas and pepper spray. The head of the Paris police operation at the game retired about six weeks later.



Macron

### SOCCER

## Ex-footballer Robinho jailed in rural 'penitentiary' for infamous inmates

SAO PAULO, March 23, (AP): Former footballer Robinho arrived early at the rural Tremembe penitentiary where he is expected to serve at least 40% of his nine-year sentence for rape.

The 40-year-old Robinho will spend the next 10 days alone in his cell, a common measure for the safety of rapists newly arrived at the prison, local authorities said.

Brazil criminal law says convicts such as Robinho could get a more flexible jail regime for good behavior in prison. He will be eligible in 2027, when almost half of his sentence has been served.

Tremembe penitentiary has about 430 inmates, and is 150 kilometers (93 miles) northeast of Sao Paulo. It is split between full-time prisoners such as Robinho, and those who are permitted to leave for the day and come back at dinner time to spend the night.

The sizes of the cells vary from eight to 15 square meters (86 to 160 square feet). Up to six inmates can be jailed in the biggest cells, according to the Sao Paulo state government. Tremembe has soccer pitches, an ecumenical room

and a library, among other assets. Visitors are allowed only at weekends.

Robinho was convicted and sentenced in Italy for raping a woman in a group assault in 2013, when he played for AC Milan. Italy asked Brazil to jail him in his home nation since he had already returned by the time he was convicted in 2017. Brazil doesn't extradite nationals, but allows convictions from foreign courts to be served here.

Robinho was jailed on Wednesday night after one of the country's highest courts ruled his sentence in Italy was valid in Brazil. He has an appeal pending at the Brazilian Supreme Court, as he seeks a retrial on the grounds of national sovereignty. His lawyer José Eduardo Alckmin told reporters on Wednesday the result of the appeal should come in April.

Tremembe has been the jail for many notorious inmates, including Alexandre Nardoni, who killed his five-year-old daughter by throwing her from the sixth floor of her building in 2008; serial rapist Roger Abdelmassih, a doctor; and one of Pelé's sons, Edson Cholbi do Nascimento, who was caught money-laundering.