



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Speech of 'Negatives are fading, achievements are coming'

THE speech of His Highness during the last ten days of Ramadan was different from the usual rhetoric of previous years, as it offered a fresh perspective.

The speech dotted the i's and crossed the t's in all matters related to Kuwait and its institutions. He outlined a clear vision for the future based on his active follow-up, guidance, and strong leadership, with a firm stance on accountability for any official who strays from the path of legal and executive integrity.

In his speech, His Highness highlighted both the achievements that have been realized and those still underway, stressing that progress is achievable if there is willpower, determination, honesty, and the application of a national conscience.

He was clear when he said, "The negatives are fading, and the achievements are coming. We must remain patient to reap their fruits soon."

All of the negative issues mentioned were evident to the Kuwaiti people, who have called for their resolution for decades.

The ruler listened to the voice of his people and directed all state agencies to enforce the law in all matters within their jurisdiction so that there would be no injustice.

In this context, His Highness urged his fellow citizens to "resolve to open a new chapter, guided by the spirit of love, optimism, tolerance, understanding, and the abandonment of all harmful practices that threaten the national fabric."

There is no doubt that the stability and security of nations begin with society leaving behind the causes of discord. As His Highness ordered, "the

coming period will be marked by reform, construction, and successes for the benefit of the nation and its citizens."

It is only fair that citizens respond to the aspirations of their Amir by working to achieve these goals, and support their leadership, which is exerting every effort to fulfill its promises. This can only become a reality if there is a collective effort that prioritizes the national public interest above personal desires.

Over the past decades, we have experienced many bitter moments. There have been successes, but the negatives were often overshadowed by the blending of personal interests with the public good.

The vocabulary used in His Highness's speech, along with the optimism felt by Kuwaitis, affirms that we have a ruler unlike any other. This ruler is not only capable of turning his words into action but also ensures diligent follow-up and holds accountable those who must answer for their actions. He plants flowers, the fragrance of which wafts throughout the country.

It is important for all officials to adhere to the vision His Highness the Amir has outlined, particularly in areas that promote sustainable development.

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New Minister of Electricity and Water takes constitutional oath before Amir



Amiri Diwan photo

HH the Amir, in the presence of HH the Crown Prince, receives Acting Prime Minister, who presented the newly-appointed Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy.

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace, Monday, Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem who took the constitutional oath before His Highness the Amir as the new Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy.

Present at the ceremony were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah and senior state officials.

Earlier, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed a Decree appointing Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem as Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy.

According to article one of the decree, Al-Mukhaizeem would be assigned to the post of Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy.

Article two of the decree tasked the Cabinet to implement the decree on the date of its issue, revoke all that was contrary to it. It will be published in the official gazette.

Profile of Dr. Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem - Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy:

Born in 1977, Dr. Al-Mukhaizeem holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Kuwait University, which he earned in January 1999, and pursued his postgraduate studies in the US.

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Amiri Diwan photo

Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem takes the constitutional oath before His Highness the Amir as the new Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy.

Arrests made as raffle fraud suspicion grows

Prize distribution suspended amid manipulation claims

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: An Egyptian woman was arrested at Kuwait International Airport on Monday while attempting to leave the country, following suspicions surrounding her recent raffle win.

According to security sources, the woman had transferred ownership of the prize — a car — to her husband, also of Egyptian nationality, before he rushed her to the airport in an apparent attempt to help her flee to Egypt. Further investigations revealed that she does not hold a driver's license, raising concerns about the legitimacy of her win. Her husband was also arrested

earlier in the day for questioning regarding his potential involvement in the alleged fraud.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched an official investigation into suspected manipulation in one of the Kuwait Shopping Festival raffles, Al-Seyassah daily reported. Undersecretary Ziad Al-Najem has referred the case to the Public Prosecution for further examination.

Sources revealed that the referral letter highlighted suspicions that a ministry representative may have manipulated the prize draw, an allegation that, if proven, could damage consumer trust and the credibility of such events.

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KUNA photo

Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya receives US Ambassador Karen Hideko Sasahara.

Kuwait FM, US envoy discuss bilateral ties

Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met Sunday the US Ambassador to the country, Karen Hideko Sasahara, in the Minister's office at the General Diwan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, they touched on the close bilateral relations and the existing strategic cooperation between Kuwait and US as well as a number of topics of common interest. (KUNA)

Profits in key entities

Kuwait's 2025/2026 budget deficit set at KD 6.3 billion

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Decree-Law No. 14/2025 has been issued to define the budgets of ministries and government departments for the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Revenues have been estimated at KD 18,231,486,000, and expenditures have been projected at KD 24,538,000,000, which results in a deficit of KD 6,306,514,000 for the fiscal year of 2025/2026, reports Al-

Seyassah daily.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Al-Youm official gazette published decrees for the budgets of 39 independent and affiliated government entities for the same fiscal year, with expectations of profits recorded in only a limited number of these entities.

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3 Kuwait foils bid to smuggle big cache of drugs

5 Ex-undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah passes away at 78



9 WBD and OSN forge strategic partnership to accelerate their MENA growth plan



9 Boursa Kuwait approves distribution of over KD 16 million in cash dividends for 2024 at its Annual General Assembly

Public services financing up 215% year-on-year

By Mahmoud Shendi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Local banks' financing for the public services sector for citizens and residents saw a significant increase of KD 94.3 million, or 341.6 percent, in January 2024. This amounted to KD 122 million, compared to KD 27.6 million in December 2023 on a monthly basis.

Financing increased by 215.8 percent year-on-year, or KD 83.3 million, compared to KD 38.6 million in January 2024. Total financing for the public services sector in 2024 reached

approximately KD 478.6 million.

According to monthly statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait, the accumulated balance of financing for the public services sector provided by local banks increased by six percent or KD 47.1 million in January 2024. This brought the total to KD 823.5 million, compared to KD 776.4 million in December 2023.

The balance also saw a year-on-year increase of KD 325.4 million, or 65.3 percent, compared to KD 498.1 million in January 2024.

Data from the Central Bank of Kuwait revealed that deposits in lo-

cal banks increased by KD 648 million, or 1.2 percent in January 2024, reaching KD 53,823 billion, compared to KD 53,175 billion in December 2024.

Government deposits declined by KD 100 million or 1.9 percent, reaching KD 4,983 billion, compared to KD 5,083 billion in December 2024.

Private sector deposits increased by KD 176 million or 0.4 percent, to KD 37,776 billion in January, compared to KD 37.6 billion in December 2024.

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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Tuesday 18:03
Imsak Wednesday 04:25

NewsWatch

CAIRO: The League of Arab States underlined on Monday enhancing consumer protection through legislative frameworks that would help Arab states arrive at enhanced national consumer protection legislations.

A league-issued statement indicated that this on occasion of the Arab Consumer Protection Week and in line with the Greater Arab Free Trade Area.

The League's Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Ali Al-Malki explained that the first edition of the Arab Consumer Protection Week took place in 2023 in Oman with the theme of protecting young Arab consumer to build promising future. (KUNA)

RAMALLAH: At least 61 Palestinians have been killed and more than 134 others injured in Israeli occupation airstrikes on different areas in the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours, said health authorities.

The latest casualties have brought the death toll of the renewed Israeli occupation aggression since March 18 up to 730 martyrs and the injured up to 1,376, Gaza health authorities said in a press release. (KUNA)

CAIRO: Egypt denied any claims on accepting plans to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip in exchange for economic aid, reiterating its firm rejection of any attempts to displace Palestinians from the Strip.

"Egypt's foreign policy has never been based on 'bargaining' its or the Arab world's highest interests for any form of compensation, under any circumstances," the Egyptian State Information Service (SIS) said in a statement on Sunday.

KFAED backs Bahrain's Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Highway with \$32.4 million

MANAMA, March 24, (KUNA): The

Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and Bahrain's government signed on Sunday a loan agreement estimated at KD 10 million (about USD 32.4 million) to fund the second phase of developing the project of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Highway.

The project aims to back Bahrain's social and economic development through evolving one of the main vital highways in the capital. It is expected to partake in achieving some sustainable development goals, including infrastructure, and enhancing local cities and communities' sustainability as well as reducing carbon emissions caused by traffic.

The scheme also includes expanding Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Highway from three to four lanes in each direction along 11 km, in addition to set-

ting up five bridges. The scheme's total cost is evaluated at USD 404.4 billion, and the KFAED covers about 8 percent of this cost.

Under the deal, the loan agreement, with a term of 20 years and a grace period of eight years, will be repaid in 24 semi-annual installments.

The loan carries an interest rate of three percent per annum, with an additional 0.5 percent per annum fee to cover administrative costs and services related to the loan agreement. It is the 22nd loan offered by the fund to Bahrain.

The deal was signed by Acting Director General of KFAED Waleed Al-Bahar and Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa, in the presence of Kuwait's Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



KUNA photo

Acting Director General of KFAED Waleed Al-Bahar and Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa during the signing of the loan agreement.

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:29	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:48	Maghrib ..	18:01
Zohr	11:54	Isha	19:19

Local

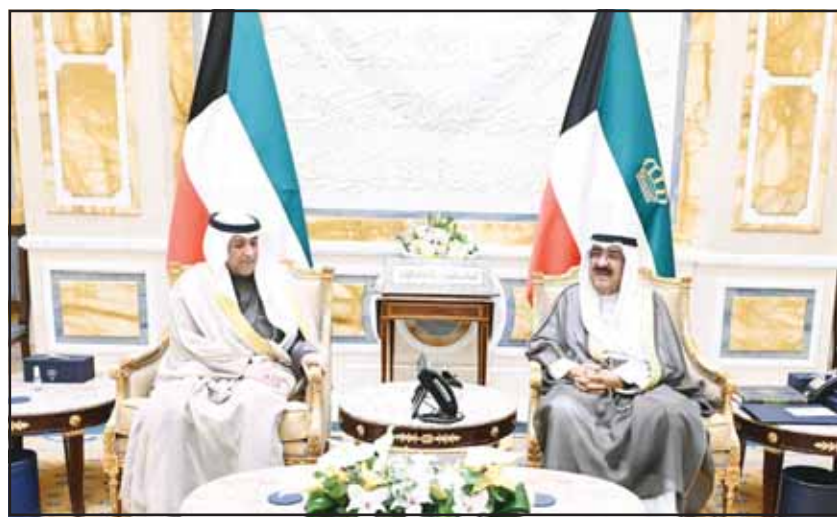
Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light to moderate freshening at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-45 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

By Night: Rather cold to cold

Weather

with light to moderate northwest- erly wind, with speeds of 12-35 km/h.	Bubyan	22	10
	Jahra	26	14
	Failaka Island	23	15
	Salmiyah	22	16
	Ahmadi	21	10
	Jal Aliyah	24	10
	Nuwaisib	25	13



Amiri Diwan photo
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi.

HH Amir receives GCC Chief

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Monday Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace on Monday. (KUNA)

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace on Monday. (KUNA)

31,000 Kuwaitis visited Baku in 2024: Karimov

'Kuwait-Azerbaijan ties strategic, on right track'

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Kuwait Emil Karimov affirmed that his country's relations with Kuwait are strategic and progressing at a rapid and advanced pace at all levels.

In a press statement on the sidelines of the Iftar he hosted recently, Karimov said the official and public relations between the two countries are strong and deep in political, cultural, religious and other fields.

He pointed out "there has been remarkable development in our bilateral relations. The first round of political consultations between the two countries was held at the beginning of this year."

He revealed that his country's foreign affairs minister will head the del-

egation to the third session of the Joint Bilateral Committee, which will be held on April 29.

He also cited the first-of-its-kind visit of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah to Azerbaijan to attend the Climate Conference held in the capital, Baku, last year, which he affirmed was a success. He added the meeting between His Highness and Azerbaijani President strengthened the friendly relations between the two countries.

He reiterated that his country welcomes Kuwaiti tourists; disclosing that more than 31,000 Kuwaitis visited his country last year. He affirmed the presence of infrastructure to receive Kuwaiti tourists; and that his country has many cities and tourist sites, in addition to the availability of direct flights.



Emil Karimov

Foolproof security around Grand Mosque

Police, volunteers on site to help young, old worshippers



Securitymen discussing strategic plans.



Qiyam prayers in progress inside the Grand Mosque.



Photos by Mohammad Morsi
A policeman guides the traffic at the Grand Mosque.

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: As mosques across the country are crowded with worshippers seeking forgiveness and pardon during the holy month of Ramadan, the Ministry of Interior has been deploying patrols from various security sectors around these mosques -- especially the Grand Mosque, whose number of worshippers continues to increase day by day and is expected to reach its peak during the remaining nights of the holy month -- to protect them and ensure smooth entry and exit for visitors.

The newspaper reviewed the ministry's security preparations around the Grand Mosque. Director General of the Civil Defense Department Brigadier Gen-

eral Nabil Hussein Al-Shatti confirmed that the department worked with various sectors in the ministry and other State institutions in securing the mosques during the last 10 days of Ramadan.

He said the department's personnel and vehicles were deployed to the Grand Mosque and a number of other mosques, in addition to the deployment of approximately 120 volunteers at the Grand Mosque and 50 at other mosques, as well as Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), which operates under the supervision of the department.

He disclosed that the volunteers provide all the necessary facilities to worshippers, as well as the required care and attention for the elderly and people with special needs. He added these volunteers serve the worshippers during these blessed nights of Ramadan. He added the department oversees the evacuation process in emergency situations, Allah forbid, and also the evacuation of missing persons.

Meanwhile, Assistant Director of the Capital Rescue Patrols Brigadier General Mishaal Al-Shahman said that as per the directive of acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf; the ministry has taken security and traf-

fic measures to implement the security plan to ensure the safety of worshippers, and ease their entry to and exit from the mosques.

During his recent visit at the Grand Mosque with officials from the Emergency Patrols, Public Security, Traffic, Civil Defense and Investigation sectors; Al-Shahman told the newspaper that "the Capital emergency patrols are deployed at all intersections around the Grand Mosque, the parking lots and markets, to secure these areas during the last ten days of Ramadan."

He explained that the presence of security personnel including female police officers is intended to assist and protect worshippers, and harness all resources to enable them to perform their prayers without facing difficulties in reaching the mosques. He stressed "it is our duty to assist them and our primary job is to care for the people."

He urged worshippers to avoid crowding after completing the prayer, so they can head to their vehicles with ease.

Assistant Director of Traffic Awareness at the General Traffic Department Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Bu Hassan affirmed that the department has prepared a proactive plan for the last 10 days of Ramadan. He revealed

this plan includes deploying field security personnel to mosques, particularly those with large number of worshippers like the Grand Mosque.

He added the department is coordinating with the Grand Mosque administration to transport worshippers to and from designated parking spaces before and after prayers.

He revealed that 27 buses have been provided to transport worshippers from three locations -- Sharq Market, square opposite Al-Sanabel Tower, and square opposite Sharq Police Station. "Two locations have been allocated for the elderly and people with special needs in the parking lots of Al-Manakh and Al-Tujar markets, opposite the Grand Mosque. Transportation of worshippers begins at 10:00 pm," he stated.

He continued saying that the ministry, in cooperation with various security sectors, mobilized all resources to ensure the safe arrival of worshippers to mosques, especially on the 27th night of Ramadan when a large number of worshippers usually flock to the Grand Mosque.

He called on worshippers to park their vehicles properly; and to refrain from blocking others, parking on sidewalks or blocking entrances and exits.



Photo by Mohammad Morsi
Devotional prayers during the 'Qiyam' late night prayer at the Grand Mosque.

Huge turnout at Kuwait mosques

Worshippers ask for forgiveness on 24th Ramadan night 'qiyam'

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: In an atmosphere of humility and tranquility, thousands of worshippers flocked to the mosques to perform the Qiyam (night) prayer on the 24th night of the holy month of Ramadan asking Allah the Almighty to accept their worship and grant them forgiveness.

The Grand Mosque hosted approximately 11,300 worshippers -- 6,300 men and 5,000 women. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Barrak led the first four rak'ahs (units) of prayers, while Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nafees led the second four rak'ahs.

Between the first and second four rak'ahs; Dr. Mohammad Al-Usaimi delivered a sermon on the virtue of praying for children's guidance, righteousness

and success. He emphasized that the righteousness of the head of the household greatly contributes to the righteousness of his children.

At Bilal bin Rabah Mosque, where prayer began at 11:00 pm Sheikh Bader Al-Haim led the first four rak'ahs, while Sheikh Mohammad Shams Al-Din led the second four rak'ahs.

The concerned authorities provided all the necessary facilities to ensure the comfort of worshippers. Entry and exit points were organized in all mosques, contributing to the smooth performance of the prayer.

Medical teams were deployed near the Grand Mosque to deal with emergency situations, while security forces regulated traffic in the area surrounding the mosque to guarantee the safe entry and exit of worshippers.

Call for regular checkups to maintain kidney health

KUWAIT CITY, March 24 : Dr. Anas Al-Yousef, President of the Kuwait Nephrology Association and Head of the Kidney Unit at Amiri Hospital, underscored the importance of regular medical checkups for maintaining kidney health; particularly for individuals with risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, frequent painkiller use and a family history of kidney disease, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In observance of World Kidney Day recently, the association is hosting an event at the Avenues Mall to address public inquiries regarding kidney disease and fasting during Ramadan.

Al-Yousef told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that kidney failure ranks among the most common chronic diseases globally, with its incidence among adults ranging from 10 to 15 percent. He said kidney disease is often silent in its early stages; showing few or no symptoms, and is typically diagnosed through laboratory tests.

He revealed that there are currently about 2,450 dialysis patients in Kuwait, with 88 percent receiving hemodialysis and 12 percent undergoing peritoneal dialysis, which is equally effective as hemodialysis.

He added there was a record number of kidney transplants in Kuwait last year, with 149 procedures performed at the Hamed Al-Essa Organ Transplant Center. "This impressive figure reflects the high level of expertise and readiness of the transplant team in Kuwait," he confirmed.

To prevent kidney disease, Al-Yousef stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle; including controlling blood sugar and blood pressure, achieving and maintaining an ideal weight, exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, refraining from smoking, and minimizing the use of painkillers.

Draft law on co-ops still under review: ministry

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: According to sources at the Ministry of Social Affairs, the draft law on Cooperative Societies is still under review by the Fatwa and Legislation Department, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

They explained that the proposed law focuses on enhancing administrative oversight of cooperative societies to ensure stricter regulation and management.

The draft law stipulates that the board of directors of each cooperative society will consist of seven members: three elected and four appointed. The appointed members will be selected by the Minister of Social Affairs, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Finance, with each minister appointing one member.

Kuwaitis generous: Dr Al-Huwailah

KD 4mln received to pay off debts

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah announced that the ministry has received a KD 4 million donation, equally divided between the Zakat House and the family members of the late Issa Al-Othman, in support of the National Campaign for Debtors.

Dr. Al-Huwailah explained that these contributions align with the noble directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, who advocates for localizing charity efforts and directing proceeds within the country. The initiative aims to ease

the financial burden on indebted citizens and their families, and reinforces the value of social solidarity, a core trait of Kuwaiti society.

She expressed pride in the spirit of giving that defines the people of Kuwait, and commended the participation of individuals, institutions, companies, and charity societies, all of which reflect a strong sense of social responsibility.

Dr. Al-Huwailah encouraged everyone to support the campaign to help achieve its humanitarian and national objectives.

She explained that applications for assistance this year are processed through the central aid platform, which eliminated the need for in-person visits to the ministry.



KUNA photo
A volunteer presents a gift to a needy woman.

IICO launches bazaar for needy families

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): The International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) on Sunday launched its fifth-of-its-kind bazaar in an effort to ease the burdens of needy in the country ahead of Eid Al-Fitr.

Through this charitable initiative, the IICO is seeking to promote altruistic and humani-

itarian activities, which are essential to ensuring the provision of varied humanitarian assistance to the needy on the part of Kuwaiti volunteers. The three-day bazaar is primarily meant to answer the principal necessities of needy families, involving foodstuff, clothes and footwear, along with gifts and toys.



Kuwait & US ties much more solid than official's utterance

"We do not slander, even if others slander us. We do not let our arrogance make us to deviate from proper etiquette. Rather, we speak calmly and approach matters from the natural perspective," Lawyer and Kuwaiti author **Nafie Hourri Al-Dhafiri** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Therefore, the statement of the US secretary of Commerce cannot be viewed as alarming. It was based on 100 percent false information and was more of a populist statement than a statement specifying if there is a problem between two countries."



Nafie Al-Dhafiri

"On this particular point, Kuwaiti-American relations are much more solid than a statement uttered by a minister, even if he is close to the US President and his political elite.

"Secondly, Kuwait is not ungrateful. Rather, it has long held onto gratitude and has operated accordingly, particularly with the United States. Most Kuwaiti investments are located in the United States, and it is also one of the first countries to invest in US Treasury bonds.

"Third: We will not return to the figures that others previously presented in their entirety, especially regarding the cost of the Liberation War. The minister has gone too far in this regard, to the point of demonstrating his ignorance of the facts.

"This is particularly true when he claims that the war cost the United States \$100 billion. The United States never paid that amount. Rather, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, specifically Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, paid more than \$54 billion. The cost of the war was approximately \$61 billion. The lower figure, which did not exceed \$5 billion, was paid by Washington, which in return secured reconstruction contracts.

"Fourth: Kuwaiti customs duties are uniform on all goods imported from around the world -- at five percent. This refutes the minister's claim that Kuwait is exploiting the increase in duties on American goods. Rather, he must acknowledge that Kuwait imports \$3.4 billion from the United States, while its exports to the country amount to \$1.7 billion. This means there is a significant imbalance, and the balance is tipped in Washington's favor.

"Fifth: In Kuwaiti-American relations, there is no backdoor policy. Everyone understands that paths are open at all levels. If Secretary Howard Lutnick wants to promote an idea, he has missed the door he wanted to knock on, or if he wants American popular propaganda, he is sailing in a leaky boat.

"Sixth: It is clear that the current US administration is launching many smoke bombs in all directions, trying to capitalize on this by catching advantages that have proven unsuccessful in recent months, whether in Canada, Mexico, Greenland, Panama or Gaza.

"Based on this, which kind of response is Kuwait required to give?"

"First: Address the American mind in a language it understands, through a Kuwaiti public relations team that knows American society well.

"Second: Present realistic facts and figures through organized, skillful work in the American media.

"Third: Respond in commercial language, in accordance with international and American conventions and laws.

"Fourth: Consider that the shared strategic interests between the two countries are far greater than the excesses of some current or former ministers or diplomats. Had this statement also come from a former minister or diplomat, it would have been better to ignore it.

"Fifth: Returning to the aforementioned ingratitude alluded by the minister, it demonstrates a lack of familiarity with historical facts, especially since the man who held the first presidential position in Washington when Kuwait was liberated, George H.W. Bush, is from the same Republican Party as Lutnick and the current US administration. No one from 1991 until recently mentioned the figures he cited, which means this statement is his own, and this is a mistake that can be remedied.

"It remains to be said that many statements are made from time to time. We must be aware of what is hidden in these words. We should not be shaken, for Kuwait remains Kuwait, and no one can provoke it.

"Finally... May Allah protect Kuwait."

Also:

"Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development bid farewell to the year 2024 by signing a loan agreement on Dec 19 amounting to KD 5.2 million to finance the electricity production project in Tajikistan. We have no

right to object, but we understand the Fund's diplomatic policy," **Khaled Ahmad Al-Tarrah** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The Fund is Kuwait's political arm, providing aid and soft loans around the world. It is the same Fund that has a remarkable enthusiasm for financing mega-projects around the world. However, its media policy is colorless, tasteless and lacks muscle. It is a soft media policy!"

"The people who benefit from mega-projects are unaware of their development details and the policy on soft or 'good' loans. The Iraqi invasion demonstrated this. The words of 'friends' did not help Kuwait, nor did the countries and people who benefited from development projects and generous loans!"

"In the past, some quarters interpreted the stance of some countries benefiting from the Fund's projects as 'Arab abandonment', and supported the Iraqi invasion. This was due to the negligence of the Kuwaiti media, which did not address the people of those countries and those benefiting from Kuwaiti aid.

"It is not right to justify everything that has happened and will happen because of the 'people's ignorance' of all that Kuwait has provided to their countries in building schools, hospitals, roads and other massive projects, which have yielded lucrative returns for various countries and peoples.

"I am not one to reopen wounds, but I am committed to identify and analyze important historical periods in Arab and Kuwaiti history, particularly the 'abandonment' of Arab countries and peoples that accompanied the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, in terms of fanning public enthusiasm in support of the occupation and denying Kuwait's legitimate rights!"

"Kuwaiti aid is public, not charitable donation. It is, in fact, soft loans to friendly or needy countries. Therefore, there is no justification for the 'confidentiality' of Kuwaiti development policies directed at these countries and their peoples. The primary goal is to achieve the well-being of the people, not specific regimes.

"A futile and unfair comparison dominated the Kuwaiti media, political and public debates during the invasion. This comparison focused on what the tyrant Saddam Hussein offered to some Arab regimes, which had adopted a pro-invasion stance by 'printing' books and school notebooks bearing the name of the dictator of Baghdad.

"Meanwhile, the generous Kuwaiti aid was not present in the mind and conscience of the beneficiaries due to the failure of the Fund's media policies, as well as the official media, particularly the failure to adopt a systematic and harmonious media campaign to communicate with the peoples of the beneficiary countries.

"It is clear that the Fund has not learned from the painful media lessons and shocking surprises, both at the official and public levels in and outside Kuwait.

"This is due to various fallacies and grave errors committed by large segments of the Arab population before their regimes. These errors are due to several reasons, including the responsibility of the Kuwaiti governments before the invasion, particularly at the media and political levels.

"The source of 'ignorance' regarding Kuwait's development role before the invasion was primarily Kuwaiti, officially Kuwaiti. The justification that 'this ignorance lies in Kuwait's unwillingness to announce these donations on the ground that they are secret charitable works' is also incorrect.

"Kuwait's development aid, in terms of supporting infrastructure and parallel projects in many countries, should have been accompanied by a media policy and an equally high level of engagement with the beneficiary populations, before their political leaders.

"This is especially true given that many of these leaders previously benefited financially from Kuwait's development projects, but were even exploited for non-developmental purposes!"

"The Fund launched a single media initiative to mark HH the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's visit to the United Kingdom after he assumed the position, and the fund froze on that initiative!"

"We submitted numerous comments, suggestions and reservations about the Fund's media policy, but the media plans and policies, as well as the approach to thinking and planning, remained unchanged. Is the Fund waiting for another 'failure' to address media ignorance?"

— **Compiled by Mohammad Wangengi**



Deputy Chief of General Staff of Kuwait Army Air Vice Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Military Attache of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Kuwait, Brigadier General Farhan Al-Shathri in his office.

KUNA photo

Dep. Army Chief meets Saudi military attache

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): Deputy Chief of General Staff of Kuwait Army Air Vice Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah held, Sunday, discussions with the Military Attache of the Kingdom

of Saudi Arabia in Kuwait, Brigadier General Farhan Al-Shathri, on military affairs.

In a press statement, the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army stated that the Deputy Chief of General Staff

received the Saudi Military Attache in his office, and that the meeting included an exchange of cordial discussions and a review of key issues of mutual interest, particularly in military affairs.

Kuwait foils bid to smuggle big cache of drugs

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): Kuwait's Coast Guard police forces have foiled an attempt to smuggle large quantities of illegal drugs into the country through the territorial water, the Ministry of Interior said in a statement Sunday.

It pointed out that three Iranian drug smugglers were arrested in the operation.

The seized drugs are: 125 kilograms of hashish, nine hashish sticks, eight Lyrica strips, and five bags of pills, the Ministry said, estimating its market value at nearly half a million Kuwaiti dinars.

The arrested and the seized items were referred to the relevant authorities to take the necessary legal action against them, it concluded.

Drop seen in citations issued weekly by Mol's Traffic Dept

Lesser number of juveniles caught driving: report

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The weekly statistics issued by the General Traffic Department, headed by Brigadier General Jamal Al-Foudari, revealed a decrease in direct traffic violations last week, dropping below 30,000 with a total of 29,936 citations issued, reports Al-Anba daily.

This comes just a month before the new traffic law is set to take effect on April 22.

The stats also revealed a drop in the number of minors detained for driving without driving licenses, with only 11 minors arrested last week.

Traffic accidents have remained consistent, with 1,448 accidents reported between March 15-21. Of these, 207 accidents resulted in fatalities or injuries, while the remain-

ing 1,241 accidents only caused material damage.

The stats explained that 46 violators were referred to the traffic detention center for committing serious violations. During the campaigns, 34 vehicles, including 19 vehicles and 14 motorcycles, were impounded. In addition, 17 individuals were arrested, including those reported as absconding, violators of residency laws, and wanted persons.

The breakdown of the arrested individuals is as follows:

- 14 expatriates reported as absconding
- 3 expatriates for violating residency laws
- 12 individuals wanted in connection with cases or by security authorities (e.g., investigations)
- 2 individuals for possessing narcotics
- 2 individuals found in an abnormal state and referred to the Drug Control General Department

In addition, 18 vehicles involved in "breach of trust" or reported stolen were confiscated.

In terms of the departments with the highest number of violations, the statistics revealed the following:

- Hawalli traffic officers: 5,334 violations (highest)
- Farwaniya traffic officers: 5,258 violations
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer traffic officers: 4,448 violations

- Jahra traffic officers: 3,799 violations
- Ahmadi traffic officers: 3,762 violations
- Highway Traffic Department: 3,432 violations

- Capital traffic officers: 3,316 violations
- Special tasks officers: 430 violations
- Security Inspection officers: 151 violations

It is worth noting that the Operations Sector, led by Major General Yousef Al-Khadha, oversees both the General Traffic Department and the Emergency Police Department.

Oil ministry's complaint against top officials dismissed

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Criminal Court upheld the decision of the Public Prosecution to dismiss the Ministry of Oil's complaint against former director of Environment Public Authority Sheikh Abdullah Al-Humoud and former director of the Public Authority for Industry Abdulkarim Taqi.

The court cited a lack of evidence to support the charges of causing damage to public funds, as the decisions in question were approved by the Mu-

nicipal Council.

The Public Prosecution had previously dismissed the complaint, which alleged damage to public funds amounting to KWD 220,000. The case involved the transfer of used car tires to Salmi and the allocation of plots to recycling companies. The investigation was conducted by former MP Bader Al-Mullah during his tenure as a National Assembly member and Minister of Oil.

□ □ □
Court annuls PADA order: The Administrative

Court has annulled the decision of the Medical Committee at the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA), which refused to classify a female citizen as visually impaired.

The citizen filed a lawsuit, stating that she is suffering from permanent visual impairment, as proven by the medical reports she submitted.

According to the case files, the plaintiff filed a statement of claim and requested the annulment of the administrative decision issued by the Medical Committee that she has no visual impairment.



KFF photo

A KFF inspector issues a citation.

Cars, boats picked up

KFF tours many buildings issues violations citations

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) conducted an inspection campaign of several buildings and facilities to ensure compliance with safety requirements, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The campaign resulted in the detection of several violations and issuance of citations against facilities and buildings that failed to meet the safety standards set by the KFF.

□ □ □

Cars, boats picked up: The Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality announced that a campaign conducted by the Public Hygiene and Road Occupancy Department of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality resulted in the removal of 21 abandoned and scrap vehicles, boats, buses, and mobile grocery trucks, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A total of 108 citations were issued, and 97 removal notices were posted on abandoned cars, buses, and mobile grocery trucks, urging owners to relocate them before they were removed by the Municipality. In addition, 71 old garbage containers were replaced with new ones.

One dead as fire breaks out in Jleeb apartment

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Fire broke out in an apartment in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on Monday morning, resulting in the death of an individual.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), firefighters from Sumud and Ardiya fire stations rushed to the location and extinguished the fire. The site was handed over to the concerned authorities, and the body of the deceased was referred to the Forensics Medicine Department.



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Municipality flags violations in private nurseries and institutes

KD 148mln deficit in Municipality's new budget

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Municipal Council, chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri, will discuss the executive branch's response to the question of member Walid Al-Dagher about private institutes and nurseries in private residential areas in its session.

Kuwait Municipality has identified 41 violating private institutes and nurseries in Farwaniya and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates, and 17 in the Capital and Jahra governorates. The Municipality is still identifying the violating private institutes and nurseries in Hawally and Ahmadi governorates.

The Municipality's response also defined the legal basis that allowed private nurseries and institutes to operate in private residential areas, citing Law No. 22/2014 regarding private nurseries.

Article Three of the law stipulates that "in all cases; private, investment and commercial residential areas may be used to operate private nurseries, subject to the provisions of Article Two of the same law and the executive regulations on the licensing controls for opening private nurseries in private, investment and commercial residential areas, after obtaining the approval of the neighbors, provided that nurseries licensed at the time of the implementation of this law continue to operate within the limits of the relevant regulations and decisions."



Al-Mahri

The Municipality clarified the licensing controls for using private, investment and commercial residences for the operation of private nurseries. The most important of these controls is that no more than three nurseries may be licensed per residential plot in private residential areas, provided that one of them is a nursery for people with special needs.

Furthermore, the plot must be located in a service area and parking spaces must be provided, commensurate with the number of vehicles used by the nursery. The entire building must be used as a nursery, not for residential purposes or any other activity. The basement should not be used at all.

Paragraph Six of Article 12 of the law's executive regulations stipulates that municipal approval must be obtained for the nursery location, including the specific plots whose approval is required.

The Municipality then clarified that nurseries may be established in private residential areas after obtaining its approval and that of neighbors in the area to be licensed, in accordance with the controls governed by the executive regulations of Law No. 22/2014.

It also indicated that residential buildings in private and model residential areas must not be used for purposes other than private housing, with the exception of nurseries; while the establishment of private institutes is not permitted in these buildings and legal action must be taken against those who committed violations, if any.

The Municipal Council will also talk about the recommendations of the Jahra Governorate Committee regarding the location of the tree belt planned for implementation around Al-Mutlaa Residential City and the site of the old car scrapyard.

Meanwhile, the Committee for Persons with Disabilities at the Municipal Council held its second meeting for the third session on Sunday, chaired by Farah Al-Roumi.

The committee discussed the letter of Kuwait Society for the Follow-up of Disabled Affairs regarding the special session for persons with disabilities, as well as the letter of appreciation and gratitude from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the chairman of the council.

It returned to the executive branch the proposal of members Farah Al-Roumi and Sharifa Al-Shalfan about the regulations for preparing facilities and buildings to ease the movement of persons with disabilities, in coordination with the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA).

In another development, Kuwait Al-Youm on Sunday published Decree-Law No. 16/2025 linking the Kuwait Municipality's budget for fiscal 2025/2026.

Articles One, Two and Three of the Decree-Law indicate that expenditures in the Municipality's budget are estimated at KD 228,964,000; including items for employee compensation, goods and services, other expenses and transfers, and the purchase of non-current assets. Revenues are estimated at KD80, 659,000; including taxes, fees, goods, services and others. Therefore, the expenditures exceed revenues by KD148,305,000.



Al-Seyassah photo

Eng. Farah Al-Roumi chaired the committee meeting, in the presence of Eng. Alia Al-Farsi, Eng. Munira Al-Amir, Dr. Hassan Kamal and Sharifa Al-Shalfan.



The Embassy hosted a flag-hoisting ceremony to mark Pakistan's 85th National Day.

Ambassador calls for renewed commitment

Pakistan Embassy marks 85th National Day

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: A flag hoisting ceremony was organized at the Embassy on the occasion of 85th National Day of Pakistan. Ambassador Dr. Zafar Iqbal hoisted the Pakistan national flag in the presence of large gathering of Pakistani community members from all walks of life.

During the ceremony, special messages from the President, Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister of Pakistan were read out. In their messages, the leadership paid homage to the commitment and sacrifices made by the father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his companions, who worked tirelessly towards transforming Allama Muhammad Iqbal's dream into reality.

The leadership affirmed steadfast support for the people of Jammu & Kashmir and Palestine, who continue their struggle for self-determination. Pakistan urges the international community to take immediate



Ambassador Dr. Zafar during the 85th National Day of Pakistan commemoration.

and decisive steps to ensure the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, allowing the people of Jammu & Kashmir and Palestine to decide their future. The leadership also paid homage to our armed forces and law enforcement agencies who have made immense sacrifices to protect our

homeland, and we salute their bravery and dedication.

In his remarks, Ambassador Dr. Zafar Iqbal 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 Subcontinent.

Indian, Filipino nationals remain dominant

Kuwait domestic worker population drops by 6.3 percent, report reveals

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Domestic workers constitute 25.3 percent of the total expatriate workforce in Kuwait, according to a report issued by the Al-Shall, reports Al-Jarida daily

Data released by the Central Statistical Bureau revealed that the number of domestic workers in Kuwait reached approximately 740,000 as of the end of the third quarter of 2024, which is a decrease of about 6.3 percent compared to the same period in 2023. These domestic workers are divided into 411,000 women and 329,000 men.

The Philippines leads in the number of female domestic workers, with approximately 149,000, down from 193,000 at the end of the third quarter of 2023.

Indians top the list of male domestic workers, numbering around 219,000, which is a decrease from 251,000 at the same time last year.

The Central Statistical Bureau did not provide an explanation for this huge discrepancy in figures between the two years.

India leads in the number of domestic workers of both sexes, accounting for 43.2 percent of the total workforce, followed by the Philippines at 20.4 percent.

Overall, four nationalities - India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh - represent approximately 91.4 percent of the total number of domestic workers out of ten nationalities.

The remaining six nationalities make up the other 8.6 percent, with Nepal holding the highest share of 6.1 percent and Sudan the lowest at 0.2 percent.

Among the ten countries exporting domestic workers, four are from Africa. Benin leads with one percent of the total, followed by Ethiopia at 0.8 percent, Mali at 0.3 percent, and Sudan at 0.2 percent.

When combining domestic worker

figures with other categories of expatriate workers by nationality, the total number of Indian workers is approximately 887,000.

Despite a decrease of around 32,000 male expatriates in the family sector, this still accounts for 30 percent of the total workforce, including Kuwaiti workers, and about 35.4 percent of the total expatriate workforce, meaning Indians lead in both categories.

Egyptian workers are in second place, with a total workforce of approximately 479,000, unchanged from the end of the third quarter of 2023. They represent 16.3 percent of the total workforce and around 19.3 percent of the total expatriate workforce.

Kuwaiti workers rank third, with approximately 451,000, compared to 449,000 at the end of the third quarter of 2023. This represents 15.4 percent of the total workforce, a percentage that may increase if military personnel are included in the figures.

As of the end of last December, the total Kuwaiti workforce was approximately 505,000, according to data issued by the Public Authority for Civil Information. This figure differs from those provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Al-Shall does not offer an explanation for the discrepancy, suggesting that the higher figure may include military personnel and the unemployed.

Bangladesh ranked fourth, with a total workforce of approximately 270,000, up from 257,000 at the end of the third quarter of 2023. This represents 9.2 percent of the total workforce and about 10.9 percent of the total expatriate workforce.

The Philippines ranked fifth, with a total workforce of approximately 213,000, down from 260,000 at the end of the third quarter of 2023. This accounts for 7.3 percent of the total workforce and approximately 8.6 percent of the total expatriate workforce.

Stronger programs to foster lifelong healthy habits

Health and Education ministries overhaul PE curriculum to combat chronic illnesses

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Ministry of Health is coordinating with its Education counterpart to develop the Physical Education curricula in all educational levels as part of a broader initiative to address the chronic non-communicable diseases issue, reports Al-Anba daily.

The Health Ministry asked the Ministry of Education to review the current health and physical education concepts in the curricula, with the goal of updating them to be in line with the national strategy for combating chronic diseases.

In its response, the Ministry of Education confirmed that the existing

physical education curricula cover a wide array of physical activities, as well as health and nutrition topics. These concepts are taught through a teacher's guide and reinforced through practical classroom activities to raise health awareness and foster positive, healthy behaviors among students.

The ministry also affirmed that the curricula consist of vital topics related to physical fitness, participation in various sports, maintaining overall health, combating obesity and body deformities, and providing basic first aid skills to address potential health emergencies that students may encounter.

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Tributes pour in

Ex-undersecretary of Foreign Affairs
Khaled Al-Jarallah passes away at 78

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov expressed his sadness over the passing of former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah.

He described Al-Jarallah as a towering Kuwaiti diplomatic figure who devoted his life to serving his country with sincerity and dedication. He praised Al-Jarallah's wisdom and sound judgment, noting his prominent role in strengthening Kuwait's position on the regional and international stage throughout his long tenure at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman Dr. Saleh Al-Kharousi offered his condolences; describing Al-Jarallah as a statesman and diplomat who combined extensive knowledge and understanding of international relations with affability, good character and kindness. He highlighted Al-Jarallah's full support and cooperation in strengthening bilateral relations between Oman and Kuwait, as well as his commitment to preserve the achievements of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Former Ambassador of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to Kuwait Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Fayez expressed his deep sadness at the loss of his friend and colleague. He described Al-Jarallah as a true supporter, friend and reference on many issues; as well as a natural diplomat whose skills were honed during his many years of working with HH the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Former Senegalese Ambassador Abdul Ahad Mbake offered his condolences to Kuwait and the diplomatic community; indicating that Al-Jarallah was considered a school



The late Khaled Sulaiman Al-Jarallah, former undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

of diplomacy, and respected by everyone for his wisdom and insight in resolving issues.

Bulgarian Ambassador Dimitar Dimitrov expressed his sadness at the passing of Al-Jarallah, citing his contributions to the development of bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Kuwait. He considers Al-Jarallah an example of a dedicated diplomat who greatly contributed to strengthening Kuwait's international relations.

Albanian Ambassador Ilir Hysa expressed his deep sadness at the passing of Al-Jarallah, describing him as an example of a committed diplomat who dedicated his life to serving his country. He praised Al-Jarallah's wisdom and insightful vision in dealing with international challenges and his high level of ethics and professionalism.

Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain Salah Al-Maliki offered his sincere condolences and deepest sympathy to the political leadership, government of Kuwait and family of the deceased. He stressed that Al-Jarallah was a loyal and faithful diplomat, who was true to his promise to serve his country and its leadership.

He lauded the professionalism, honesty, loyalty, balance and prudence of Al-Jarallah whom he regards as one of the most important pillars of the graduates of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Diplomatic School.

Municipal Council approves roads, parks, power and housing projects

Temporary walkway near Kaifan schools moves forward

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Municipal Council, chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri, held its 15th regular session for the third legislative term on Monday.

The council approved the following during the session:

- Request of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) to construct a road linking the university campus in Abdullah Al-Mubarak with the Seventh Ring Road;

- Proposal of Municipal Council Vice Chairman Khaled Al-Mutairi to expand the entrance and exit at the Gate Two of Sabah Al-Salem University City;

- Request of Turki Abdullah Al-Nuwaihed to purchase and add an area on Plot No. 29 in Block 15, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh;

- Request of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy to allocate a site for the establishment of a secondary transformer station in Qurtuba;

- Letter of Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Abdullatif Al-Mishari approving the minutes of the council meetings held on Feb 10, 2025 and March 10, 2025;

- Recommendation of the Capital Governorate Committee to coordinate with the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) in order to expedite the implementation of the parks project in Qurtuba. This is in accordance with the letter submitted by Qurtuba Mayor Abdul-Mohsen Mohammed Al-Hussaini regarding the designated parks in the cadastral plan for Qurtuba.

Meanwhile, the Jahra Governorate Committee presented two recommendations as follows:

- Assign the Municipality to remove violations, obstacles and all impediments to the implementation of

the tree belt project around Al-Mutlaa Residential City within two months;

- Expedite the allocation of the remaining portion of the old car scrapyard as an expansion of the housing project and to provide alternative buildings located in the expanded area in preparation for their handover to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW).

Also, the council referred the executive authority's response to the question of member Walid Al-Dagher about private institutes and nurseries in private residential areas to the Legal Committee for discussion.

It also postponed discussion on the Injaz Market project and the proposal of member Alia Al-Farsi to provide sustainable public restrooms in certain tourist and entertainment sites throughout the country. The proposal was referred to the concerned authority for technical advice.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality has approved the proposal of Municipal Council member Abdullatif Al-Da'i to allocate a three-meter-wide

section of the sidewalk adjacent to Fahad Al-Askar Elementary School -- between Ishbiliya Girls Elementary School and Andalusia Park in Block Seven, Kaifan -- to be used as a temporary walking path.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the Municipality's statement approved by its acting Director General Manal Al-Asfour, stipulating adherence to the requirements contained in the responses of the members of the Public Facilities and Services Subcommittee at its meeting on Nov 5, 2024 and the need to coordinate with them prior to implementation.

In addition, the Ministry of Public Works was authorized to specify the dimensions and width of the walkway in real-world conditions; such that the width does not exceed three meters and does not fall below two meters under any circumstances.

It is worth mentioning that the Municipality is authorized to modify the dimensions or width of the walkway if it conflicts with any facility in the area or for regulatory reasons.

KIB shares iftar meal with security guards at Joint Banking Complex

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently organized its annual initiative of sharing an iftar meal with security staff at the Bank and Joint Banking Complex, as part of its comprehensive corporate social responsibility strategy and commitment to humanitarian values.



Al-Suwaidan

This initiative comes in appreciation of the security guards' continuous efforts at work and reaffirms KIB's dedication to supporting and fostering a spirit of solidarity within the Kuwaiti community. Speaking on the occasion, Basil Al-Suwaidan, General Manager of the Information Security, Privacy and Anti-Fraud Department at KIB, said: "This annual initiative reflects the Bank's steadfast commitment to social responsibility and reinforces the values of solidarity and appreciation that KIB strives to instill in the community. Security staff play a vital role in ensuring a safe work environment and maintaining operational continuity. It is our duty to recognize their efforts and share these Ramadan moments, fostering a spirit of connection and



Group photo from the event

mutual respect."

Al-Suwaidan added that, in line with its main slogan, 'Bank for Life', KIB continues to implement community initiatives that create a tangible positive impact. He highlighted that the Bank's Ramadan campaign features various humanitarian activities aimed at supporting different segments of society, aligning with its strategy to promote sustainable de-

velopment and uphold humanitarian values.

He concluded by emphasizing that social responsibility is an integral part of the Bank's culture. Through its diverse programs, KIB seeks to foster a spirit of giving and community engagement, reaffirming its commitment as a key partner in supporting charitable and humanitarian initiatives in Kuwait.

Continued from Page 1

Speech of

His Highness has clearly identified key sectors such as health, education, and housing as essential to this development. Sustainable development can only be achieved through modernized laws, and His Highness has directed the government to "complete the preparation of legislation and laws whose implementation will demonstrate to citizens the government's commitment to the nation's interests and their own. In addition, the government is tasked with following up on the implementation of agreements and memoranda of understanding to achieve strategic partnerships."

No loyal citizen of this nation doubts that the points raised in the speech during the last ten days of Ramadan should be in the minds of every citizen and official. These include respecting the law and its strict enforcement, as well as confronting any attempts to undermine national unity, which is the most important pillar of a nation worthy of the loyalty and dedication of its people.

Indeed, the speech of the last ten days serves as a clear plan of action with lofty directives. His Highness was explicit in directing the government to work towards achieving these goals, stating that we "look forward to implementing them in the near future." In essence, it was a speech on "planned negatives and future achievements."

Arrests made

In response to the controversy circulating on social media, the ministry issued a statement confirming that it had taken immediate legal steps to verify the claims. It also announced the temporary suspension of prize distributions and is coordinating with relevant authorities to complete the investigation and audit process.

The ministry reiterated its commitment to ensuring the transparency and integrity of government raffles, emphasizing that it would take strict action against any violations that could undermine public confidence.

Additionally, the Criminal Investigations Department has arrested an employee of the ministry in connection with the case. The suspect has been referred to the Public Prosecution as investigations continue.

In light of the ongoing investigation, the management of the Ya Hala Kuwait Shopping Festival issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to transparency, integrity, and fairness in all its activities. The festival has temporarily suspended the distribution of prizes for the eighth raffle draw to verify its compliance with legal standards, in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The statement emphasized that all raffle draws are conducted under the supervision of the Ministry, with full participation from relevant government agencies. Ministry representatives oversee the entire raffle process independently, ensuring that the draws are free from external interference.

To ensure full public accountability, all draws are documented and broadcast live on Kuwait's state television and streamed on the festival's YouTube channel, with coverage also provided across various news outlets and social media platforms.

The festival management also pledged that upcoming draws will continue to adhere strictly to legal regulations and government guidelines. They called on authorities to take the strictest legal action against any attempt to undermine the process and stressed that these measures are essential to maintaining public trust and safeguarding the festival's esteemed reputation.

In conclusion, the Ya Hala Festival management expressed gratitude to participants and the public for their trust, affirming that transparency, credibility, and fairness would always remain the core values of the Kuwait Shopping Festival.

Kuwait's 2025/2026

The budgets for various government entities for the 2025/2026 fiscal year are as follows:

- National Assembly: KD 33,843,000
- Kuwait Municipality: KD 228,964,000
- Public Authority for Civil Information: KD 44,478,000
- Kuwait Fire Force: KD 220,445,000
- Public Investment Authority: KD 57,754,000
- Public Authority for Applied Education and Training: KD 329,959,000
- Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources: KD 113,886,000
- Palace Authority: KD 23,432,000
- National Bureau for Human Rights: KD 2,762,000
- Abdullah Al-Salem University: KD 31,280,000
- Medical Liability Agency: KD 3,726,000
- Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority: KD 11,264,000
- Kuwait University: KD 417,181,000
- Public Authority for Housing Welfare: KD 569,802,000
- Public Authority for Roads and Transportation: KD 5,317,000
- National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises: KD 8,934,000
- Public Authority for Sports: KD 91,478,000
- Environment Public Authority: KD 31,702,000
- Public Authority for Disability Affairs: KD 216,571,000
- Public Authority for Manpower: KD 707,108,000
- Public Authority for Food and Nutrition: KD 26,236,000
- Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority: KD 10,259,000
- Public Partnership Authority: KD 3,836,000
- Public Authority for Youth: KD 14,996,000
- Central Authority for Public Tenders: KD 14,830,000
- Public Authority for Industry: KD 63,015,000
- Kuwait Ports Authority: KD 58,311,000
- Public Authority for Social Security: KD 5,695,320,000

Meanwhile, the expected revenues are KD 7,871,862,000. The surplus of revenues over expenditures, totaling approximately KD 2,176,000,000, will be added to the reserve funds. The Central Bank of Kuwait holds KD 64,886,000. Therefore, the total expected revenues are KD 141,978,000, with profits reaching KD 77,092,000, to be disposed of in accordance with Article 17 of Law No. 32/1968.

The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and its subsidiaries are projected to generate KD 22,854,846,000 in revenues, with expected profits of KD 214,279,000.

KUNA has KD 13,584,000, the Communications and Information Technology Authority has KD 32,335,000, and the Credit Bank holds KD 34,548,000.

Revenues for the Kuwait Credit Bank are expected to be KD 144,036,000, with profits of KD 109,488,000.

The Insurance Regulatory Unit has KD 5,237,000, and the Development Fund has KD 27,967,000.

Revenues for the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development are expected to be KD 281,416,000, with profits of KD 253,449,000.

The Zakat House has KD 22,088,000, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research has KD 46,149,000, and the Capital Markets Authority has KD 37,967,000.

New Minister

obtaining a master's degree in Computer Science and Engineering from University of California, San Diego, in March 2001.

He completed his Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from Yale University in December 2003, followed by a Master of Philosophy in Electrical Engineering in December 2004, and completed his PhD in Electrical Engineering in June 2007.

Dr. Al-Mukhaizeem has held several key positions in Kuwait's education sector, he was the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education from 2018 to 2023 and was Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Arabian Gulf University during the same period.

He chaired the Ministry of Higher Education's Scholarship Committee and the committee for equivalency of Post-Secondary degrees from 2018 to 2023.

He was also the Acting Secretary-General of the Council of Public Universities (2022-2023) and as an Associate Professor in the Department of Computer Engineering at Kuwait University (2012-2015).

Dr. Al-Mukhaizeem was also a member of several governing bodies, including:

- The Council of Public Universities (2021-2023)
- The Board of Trustees of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (2019-2023)
- The Board of Directors of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (2018-2023)
- The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (2018-2023)
- The Board of Trustees of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (2015-2023)
- The Board of Directors of Kuwait University (2018-2019)

He was also a board member of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017-2021) and a member of the Executive Council of UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (2015-2021).

Dr. Al-Mukhaizeem was also actively involved in educational development, as:

- A member of the Supreme Council of Education (2015-2019)
 - A board member of the National Center for Education Development (2015-2019)
 - A general assembly member of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2015-2018)
 - Director General of the National Center for Education Development (2015-2018)
- Dr. Al-Mukhaizeem was a visiting faculty member at Yale University in 2009 and served as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Engineering at Kuwait University from 2007 to 2012.

He also worked as a teaching assistant for multiple courses at Yale University and University of California, San Diego, between 1999 and 2007.

Throughout his career, he has received numerous awards, including:

- The Excellence in Work Award from the Deanship of Admission and Registration at Kuwait University (2012)
- The Young Researcher Award from the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University (2010)
- The Young Researcher Award in Applied Sciences at Kuwait University (2010)
- Second place in the Scientific Poster Day competition at the College of Engineering and Petroleum, Kuwait Univer-

Required

Office Admin Asst / Trading Department Secretary

- Drafting Official Emails / letters
- Coordinate meetings and appointments
- Maintain physical and digital filing
- Maintain projects list and contact list
- Ability to multi-task and have good organizational skills
- Knowledge in MS Office
- Good command in English
- Transferable Residence
- Preferred Male only

Please send your CVs to clic@clicq8.com

Chartered Accountant

Mrs. Rabea Saad Al Muhanna

Crowe Al Muhanna & Co.

As Bankruptcy Trustee of

Palm Palace Restaurant Co.

(W.L.L)

Persuant to the decision issue by the Bankruptcy Administration In applications No. 44 / 2024 Bankruptcy dated 29 / 10 / 2024.

She is hereby inviting all creditors to submit their claims, along with the supporting documents to the trustee address mentioned below within a period of 30 days starting from the date of this announcement, no claim will be accepted after the end of legal tenor.

for more information :

Crowe Al-Muhanna & Co.
Sharq, Khaled bin Al-Waleed Street,
25 February Tower, 27 Floor
Tel : 22942740 Ext. 4022 - 4013

AOC tries to broaden appeal within Democratic base spoiling for fight

Schumer rejects call to step down as Senate Democratic leader despite criticism

WASHINGTON, March 24, (AP) US Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer says he won't resign his post, despite pressure from some in his party after he voted to move forward with a Republican spending bill that avoided a government shutdown.

"Look, I'm not stepping down," Schumer said in an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press" that aired Sunday. The New York senator said he knew voting for the bill backed by Republican President Donald Trump would spark "a lot of controversy."

"I did it out of pure conviction as to what a leader should do and what the right thing for America and my party was," he said. "People disagree."

Democrats last week were confronted with two painful options: allowing passage of a bill they believe gave Trump vast discretion on spending decisions or letting funding lapse. After Schumer said he'd vote to advance the spending measure, 10 Democrats supported breaking the party's filibuster and allowing the bill to pass.

Schumer's move has sparked outrage from some Democrats and progressive activists who protested at his office and called on him to resign his position. They said they'd like to see him face a primary challenge - perhaps from New

York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The uproar prompted Schumer last week to postpone his book tour amid a series of planned progressive demonstrations.

Schumer isn't up for reelection until 2028. He told NBC that the spending bill that funds the government through September was "certainly bad."

But he argued that not voting to provide the funding would have been "15 or 20 times worse." He called his action "a vote of principle," arguing that "sometimes when you're a leader, you have to do things to avoid a real danger that might come down the curve."

In an interview that also aired Sunday on ABC's "This Week," Vermont Democratic Sen. Bernie Sanders criticized Schumer and other members of Democratic Senate leadership. But he abruptly ended the interview when asked about Ocasio-Cortez potentially being elected to the Senate.

"I don't want to talk about inside-the-beltway stuff," Sanders said.

Another outspoken progressive, Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., said on CNN's "State of the Union" that "There is no doubt that there is anger there, and people were very, very disappointed in the Senate."

Khanna said the anger stemmed



US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, and fellow Democrats, (from left), Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt, Sen Gary Peters, D-Mich, and Sen Patty Murray, D-Wash, criticize President Donald Trump for his plan to shut down the Education Department, during a news conference at the Capitol, in Washington on March 6. (AP)

from Senate Democrats not seeking concessions for their support of the GOP-backed spending package - including possible limits on government spending and job cutting efforts being led on Trump's behalf by billionaire Elon Musk.

Asked if he'd support Ocasio-Cor-

tez challenging Schumer during a 2028 Democratic Senate primary in New York, Khanna said the decision to run was up to the congresswoman.

"I haven't talked to her directly," Khanna said.

He added: "But here's what I will say: The American people are fed up

with the old guard. There needs to be a renewal."

Also:

DENVER: Bernie Sanders stepped onto a stage in downtown Denver, surrounded by tens of thousands of cheering supporters in what he described as the biggest rally he had ever addressed. The Vermont senator put his hand on the shoulder of the woman who had introduced him, a signal for her to stay on stage.

"She has become an inspiration to millions of young people," Sanders said of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, recounting her biography from a girl who helped her mother clean houses and later became a bartender before emerging as political insurgent who ousted a powerful New York Democrat in a US House primary.

The crowd began a chant of her well-known moniker: "AOC! AOC!"

In a leaderless Democratic Party out of power in Washington, Ocasio-Cortez has a message and a connection with a segment of liberals feeling disenchanted with both parties. Now, in her fourth term, the 35-year-old congresswoman is working to broaden her appeal beyond her progressive, anti-establishment roots.

Hitting the road last week with Sanders for his "Fighting Oligarchy" rallies, she is addressing people who disagree with her and reframing the divide in the Democratic Party not as progressive versus moderate, but as those going after Republican President Donald Trump and those being more cautious.

"No matter who you voted for in the past, no matter if you know all the right words to say, no matter your race, religion, gender identity or status," Ocasio-Cortez said to thousands in a rally at Arizona State University. "No matter even if you disagree with me on a few things. If you are willing to fight for someone you don't know, you are welcome here."

Her instinct to brawl is well-matched to the restlessness of the Democratic base, much of which sees top party officials like New York Sen. Chuck Schumer as not confrontational enough.

"We're lacking leadership right now, and we really just need someone to take the reins and tell us what to do," said Kristen Hanson, a 41-year-old small business owner from Phoenix, whose search for a call to action brought her to see Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez. "I'm not in politics, but I would be very happy to follow a leader who I believe in."

But that instinct also irritates some elected Democrats.

True friend: Gov Cox

Former Utah rep Mia Love dies

SALT LAKE CITY, March 24, (AP): Former US Rep Mia Love of Utah, a daughter of Haitian immigrants who became the first Black Republican woman elected to Congress, died Sunday.

She was 49.

Love's family posted news of her death on Love's X account.

She had undergone recent treatment for brain cancer and received immunotherapy as part of a clinical trial at Duke University's brain tumor center. Her daughter said earlier this month that the former lawmaker was no longer responding to treatment.

Love died at her home in Saratoga Springs, Utah, according to a statement posted by the family.

"With grateful hearts filled to overflowing for the profound influence of Mia on our lives, we want you to know that she passed away peacefully," her family said. "We are thankful for the many good

wishes, prayers and condolences."

Utah Gov Spencer Cox referred to Love as a "true friend" and said her legacy of service inspired all who knew her.

Love entered politics in 2003 after winning a seat on the city council in Saratoga Springs, a growing community about 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of Salt Lake City. She later became the city's mayor.

In 2012, Love narrowly lost a bid for the House against the Democratic incumbent, former Rep. Jim Matheson, in a district that covers a string of Salt Lake City suburbs. She ran again two years later and defeated first-time candidate Doug Owens by about 7,500 votes.

Love didn't emphasize her race during her campaigns, but she acknowledged the significance of her election after her 2014 victory. She said her win defied naysayers who had suggested that a Black, Republican, Mormon woman couldn't win a congressional seat in overwhelmingly white Utah.

She was briefly considered a rising star within the GOP and she kept her distance from Donald Trump, who was unpopular with many Utah voters, while he was running for president ahead of the 2016 election.



Love

US holds separate talks with Russian and Ukrainian representatives to discuss proposed ceasefire

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, March 24, (AP): US negotiators worked to hammer out details of a proposed partial ceasefire in Ukraine on Monday, meeting with representatives from Russia a day after holding separate talks with the Ukrainian team. Each side has accused the other of undermining efforts to reach a pause in the 3-year-old war.

Kyiv and Moscow agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after US President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders, but the parties have offered different views of what targets would be off-limits to attack.

While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he would also like to see railways and ports protected.

Talks Monday are expected to address some of those differences, as well as a potential pause in attacks in the Black Sea to ensure the safety of commercial shipping.

US and Russian representatives began meeting in the morning in the Saudi capital, Russia's state Tass and RIA-Novosti news agencies reported. The US and Ukrainian teams met on Sunday in Riyadh, and more contacts were



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters put out the fire following a Russian attack in Donetsk region, Ukraine on March 24, (AP)

expected, though it was not clear when. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday the Russian military is fulfilling President Vladimir Putin's order to halt attacks on energy facilities for 30 days.

Peskov accused Ukraine of derailing the partial ceasefire with an attack on a gas metering station in Sudzha in Russia's Kursk region. Ukraine's military General Staff rejected Moscow's accusations and blamed the Russian military for shelling the station, a claim Peskov called "absurd."

Meanwhile, Russian troops launched a new barrage of drones, including decoys, into Ukraine overnight on Monday, according to Ukraine's air force, causing some damage and injuries.

Before the latest attack, Zelenskyy said in a televised statement Sunday evening that "since March 11, a pro-



Students standing in the rain during a memorial ceremony in the schoolyard of the Joseph-Koenig high school in Haltern, Germany, ten years after 16 pupils and two teachers of the school died in the Germanwings crash in the French Alps on March 24. (AP)

Families mark 10th anniversary of Germanwings crash

Victims' relatives traveled to the scene in the French Alps of the crash of Germanwings Flight 9525 10 years ago Monday, while hundreds of people gathered in silence to mark the anniversary in a German town that was home to an 18-member school group on board the doomed plane.

The plane took off from Barcelona, Spain on the morning of March 24, 2015, and was supposed to land in Dusseldorf, Germany. But it never arrived because, investiga-

tors said, the plane was deliberately downed by the co-pilot, Andreas Lubitz. All 150 people on board were killed.

The victims included a group of 16 students and two teachers from a high school in the western German town of Haltern am See who were flying home from an exchange trip to Spain.

Also killed were two babies, a pair of acclaimed German opera singers and a member of an Argentine rock band, three generations

of the same family, a vacationing mother and son, a recently married couple, people on business trips and others going home. Most came from Germany and Spain, though the victims came from 17 different countries in total.

Many victims' families traveled to the crash site in southeastern France. In the nearby village of Le Vernet, local officials and Carsten Spohr, the chief executive of Germanwings parent Lufthansa, laid flowers. (AP)

Danish police fly extra forces to icy island

US Second Lady Vance to visit Greenland

WASHINGTON, March 24, (AP): Danish police sent extra personnel and sniffer dogs to Greenland as the icy island steps up security measures ahead of a planned visit this week by US Second Lady Usha Vance, the chief spokesman for Denmark's national police said.

René Gyldensten said Monday the extra officers, deployed the day before, were part of regular steps taken during visits by dignitaries to Greenland, a self-governing, mineral-rich territory of American ally Denmark.

Citing office procedure, Gyldensten declined to specify the number of extra police flown on the chartered flight. News reports put the number at dozens of officers.

Vance's visit comes at a time when President Donald Trump has suggested the United States should take control of Greenland.

Greenlandic news outlet Sermitsiaq posted images of two US Hercules workhorse military aircraft on the tarmac Sunday in Nuuk, the capital, adding that the planes later departed.

Vance will leave on Thursday and return Saturday, a statement from her office said. She and one of her three children will be part of a US delegation that will "visit historic sites" and "learn about Greenlandic heritage."



Usha Vance attends a campaign rally on Nov 1, 2024, in Selma, NC. (AP)

On her visit, Vance will attend the Avannaata Qimussertu, Greenland's national dogsled race, featuring about 37 mushers and 444 dogs. The statement said Vance and the US delegation "are excited to witness this monumental race and celebrate Greenlandic culture and unity."

Media outlets in Greenland and Denmark reported that Vance would be accompanied by Trump's national

security adviser, Mike Waltz. The White House and the National Security Council did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Trump had mused during his first term about buying the world's largest island, even as Denmark, a NATO ally, insisted it wasn't for sale. The people of Greenland have also firmly rejected Trump's plans.

Austria uncovers Russian-steered campaign to spread disinformation about Ukraine

VIENNA, March 24, (AP): Austrian authorities said Monday that they uncovered a Russian-steered campaign aimed at spreading disinformation about Ukraine following the detention in December of a Bulgarian woman accused of spying for Russia.

Austria's domestic intelligence agency unearthed evidence of the operation as it analyzed devices found in a search of the woman's home, the Interior Ministry said in a statement. It said the investigation showed that a few weeks after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a cell working for Russian intelligence was set up and planned a large-scale disinformation campaign in German-speaking countries, particularly Austria.

The group was active online but also used stickers and graffiti with content such as far-right symbols and nationalist statements meant to look like pro-Ukrainian activists were responsible for them, according to the Interior Ministry.



Outside view of the Russian embassy in Vienna, Austria, on March 19, 2010. (AP)

Canada's premier, opponent kick off election

TORONTO, March 24, (AP): New Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and his Conservative opponent said U.S. President Donald Trump must respect Canada's sovereignty as they kicked off their election campaigns Sunday against the backdrop of a trade war and Trump's annexation threats.

Carney announced a five-week election campaign before the vote on April 28.

"We are facing the most significant crisis of our lifetimes because of President Trump's unjustified trade actions and his threats to our sovereignty," Carney said.

"President Trump claims that Canada isn't a real country. He wants to break us so America can own us. We will not let that happen," he added.

The governing Liberals appeared poised for a historic election defeat this year until Trump declared a trade war. He has repeatedly said Canada should become the 51st U.S. state and has acknowledged he's upended Cana-



Canada Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks to media at Rideau Hall, where he asked the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and call an election, in Ottawa on March 23. (AP)

nadian nationalism that has bolstered Liberal poll numbers.

"They want our resources. They want our water. They want our land. They want our country. Never," Carney said at a rally in Newfoundland.

The election campaign for 343 seats or districts in the House of Commons will last 37 days. Although other parties are running, the Liberals and the Conservatives are the only two that have a chance to form a government. The party that commands a majority in Parliament, either alone or with the support of another party, will form the next government and its leader will be prime minister.

Carney replaced Justin Trudeau, who announced his resignation in January but remained in power until the Liberal Party elected a new leader following a leadership race.

The opposition Conservatives hoped to make the election about Trudeau, whose popularity declined as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged.

'Trump must respect sovereignty'

INTERNATIONAL

'Thai officials secretly planned to deport Uyghurs'

Thailand's PM faces no-confidence vote

BANGKOK, March 24, (AP) — Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on Monday faced a no-confidence motion in parliament as the opposition alleged she was being unduly influenced by her father, a former prime minister, and is mismanaging the country.

Paetongtarn, who took office last year, is expected to survive her first no-confidence vote on Wednesday with the backing of her ruling coalition that makes up the majority of the House of Representatives.

The head of the opposition in parlia-

ment, Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, said Paetongtarn had failed to address many of the country's chronic problems including the slumping economy, air pollution, crimes and corruption. He said her administration was serving the interests of her family and her father, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a popular but highly controversial political figure.

Paetongtarn heads the Pheu Thai Party, the latest in a string of populist parties affiliated with Thaksin, who was ousted in a 2006 military coup, fled into exile and recently returned to Thailand.

Thaksin has been at the heart of nearly two decades of deep political divisions pitting a mostly poor, rural majority that supported him against royalists, the military and their urban backers, who accuse him of threatening their status and that of the revered monarchy.

Also:

BANGKOK: In late February, representatives of a Thai Muslim organization brought a reassuring message to 40 Uyghur men terrified they were going to be sent back to China: The government had no immediate plans to deport them.

Less than 72 hours later, the men were on a plane bound for China's far west Xinjiang region, where U.N. experts say they could face torture or other punishment.

Thailand decided to deport the men more than a month earlier, while denying plans to do so to the public, lawmakers and Muslim religious leaders until almost the very end, according to testimony from parliamentary inquiries, interviews, meeting notes and voice messages. That gave the detainees and their advocates no chance to make a last-ditch appeal before they were bundled off and sent back to China.

Now, the Thai government is dealing with the fallout of a move that outraged human rights activists and allies. The decision is at the heart of Thai parliamentary inquiries and a diplomatic rift between Thailand and its biggest military ally.



Smoke rises from a forest in Imabari, Ehime prefecture, western Japan on March 24. (AP)

Wildfires in western Japan damage homes

Wildfires have hit several regions in western Japan, injuring at least two people, forcing dozens of residents to evacuate and damaging a number of homes as hundreds of firefighters battled the widening blazes in the mountainous areas.

The fires in the western towns of Okayama, Imabari and Aso broke out Sunday, quickly burning hundreds of hectares (acres).

Six homes have been damaged in city of Okayama, where a

fire started on Mount Kaigara and burned 250 hectares (600 acres) of the forest. In Imabari, in the Ehime prefecture on the main island of Shikoku, the fire left a firefighter slightly injured.

Firefighters and defense helicopters sprayed water but the blazes in the two prefectures had not been extinguished as of Monday afternoon.

Experts blamed dry weather and dried-up fallen leaves on the ground

in the forest as likely causes of the wildfires in Okayama and Imabari.

A smaller fire was detected in the mountainous village of Aso in the Kumamoto prefecture on the southern main island of Kyushu earlier Sunday, but it was extinguished early Monday, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. One person was injured slightly. Local media said the fire started while residents were burning trash. (AP)



Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, (center), answers questions from reporters on her arrival at the Parliament before a no-confidence debate against the prime minister in Bangkok, Thailand on March 24. (AP)

Leader promises to focus on tackling urgent matters

S.Korean PM Han reinstated as acting president after impeachment overturned

SEOUL, South Korea, March 24, (AP) — South Korea's Constitutional Court overturned the impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, reinstating the nation's No. 2 official as acting leader Monday while not yet ruling on the separate impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol over his shocking imposition of martial law late in December.

Many observers said the 7-1 ruling in Han's case did not signal much about the upcoming verdict on Yoon, as Han wasn't a key figure in imposing martial law. But the ruling could still embolden Yoon's staunch supporters and ramp up their political offensive on the opposition.

Speaking with reporters following his reinstatement, Han thanked the court for what he called "a wise decision" and promised to focus on tackling "urgent matters," including a fast-changing global trade environment, in an apparent reference to the Trump administration's aggressive tariffs policy. He also called for national unity, saying: "There's no left or right - what matters is the advancement of our nation."

South Korea has been thrown into huge political turmoil, since Yoon, a

conservative, declared martial law on Dec 3 and sent hundreds of troops to the liberal-controlled National Assembly and other places in Seoul. Yoon's decree lasted only six hours as enough lawmakers managed to enter an assembly hall and voted it down quickly.

The assembly impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, alleging he violated the constitution and other laws by suppressing assembly activities and trying to detain politicians. Yoon's impeachment made Han acting president until he was impeached in late December.

The unprecedented, successive impeachments that suspended the country's top two officials intensified domestic division and deepened worries about the country's diplomatic and economic activities.

Han, who attempted to reassure diplomatic partners and stabilize markets during his time as acting president, was accused in the impeachment motion of abetting Yoon's martial law declaration and obstructing efforts to restore the Constitutional Court's full membership and investigate Yoon's alleged rebellion.

The nine-member court at the time had three vacancies, but ousting Yoon



South Korean acting President Han Duck-soo (center), arrives to hold a briefing at the Government Complex in Seoul, South Korea on March 24. (AP)

would require support from at least six justices. After Han was suspended, his successor as acting president, Choi Sang-mok, appointed two new justices but left the ninth seat vacant.

Seven of the Constitutional Court's eight justices ruled to overturn or dismiss Han's impeachment. They ruled

the accusations against him weren't against the law or weren't serious enough to remove him from office or his impeachment motion didn't even meet a required quorum when it passed through the assembly. One justice upheld Han's impeachment.

The Democratic Party expressed

regret over the court's decision to reinstate Han and urged it to dismiss Yoon's case quickly. Yoon's office welcomed Monday's ruling, saying it shows again the opposition's abuse of impeachment motions were "reckless, malicious political offensive."

Observers earlier had predicted the Constitutional Court would rule on Yoon's case in mid-March, but it hasn't done so, sparking varied speculation on possible reasons.

"Today's verdict will give hope to Yoon's supporters for a similar fate and hope for Yoon's opponents for his ouster," said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. "But it's too soon to predict the court's verdict on Yoon because the specific details of both cases and allegations are different."

Kim said the the reinstatement of Han, a career bureaucrat, will bring more stability to South Korea compared to when his powers as acting president were suspended.

Massive rival rallies backing Yoon or denouncing Yoon have divided the streets of Seoul and other major cities in South Korea. Earlier surveys showed that a majority of South Ko-

reans were critical of Yoon's martial law enactment, but those supporting or sympathizing with Yoon have later gained strength.

Yoon argues that his martial law introduction was a desperate attempt to bring attention to the "wickedness" of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party which obstructed his agenda and filed many impeachment motions against senior officials. Yoon critics counter he likely tried to use military rule to frustrate possible special investigations into scandals involving him and his wife.

Senior military and police officers sent to the assembly have said that Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to prevent a floor vote to overturn his decree. Yoon says the troops' deployment was designed to maintain order.

If the court upholds Yoon's impeachment, South Korea must hold a presidential election to choose his successor. If it rules for him, Yoon will regain his presidential powers.

Yoon has separately been charged with rebellion in connection with his martial law decree, a charge that carries the death penalty or a life sentence if he is convicted.

Comedian's jokes about Indian state leader being investigated as potential defamation

NEW DELHI, March 24, (AP) — A comedian popular for his biting political humor is being investigated for possible defamation over jokes made about an Indian state leader who is an ally of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in yet another case raising questions over freedom of speech in the country.

Police in the western city of

Mumbai opened the investigation Monday against Kunal Kamra over a comedy skit referring to Eknath Shinde, the second highest elected leader of Maharashtra state, following a complaint filed by a politician from Shinde's Shiv Sena party.

Kamra had made the remarks in a comedy skit, but it was unclear

when the performance took place.

A video clip of the skit Kamra posted on his Instagram profile on Sunday showed him taunting Shinde in a parody song. Kamra's use of the term "traitor" particularly triggered Shiv Sena party workers and on Sunday they ransacked the studio where he had performed the skit.

Police are also investigating the vandalism.

One lawmaker from the party Sunday threatened Kamra, saying he would be chased by the party workers throughout the country. "You will be forced to flee India," lawmaker Naresh Mhaske warned Kamra in a video message.

Shinde has not commented about the matter, but Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said Kamra should apologize for his remarks.

"We respect freedom of expression, but recklessness will not be tolerated," Fadnis told reporters.

Kamra has made no comment on the investigation, but late Sunday he shared on his Instagram a picture of himself holding the Indian Constitution with caption: "The only way forward."



Police officers gather outside the building of the studio where Indian comedian Kunal Kamra allegedly made 'defamatory' remarks against Shiv Sena politician Eknath Shinde and was ransacked by Shiv Sena party workers, in Mumbai, India on March 24. (AP)

'China's claims in sea biggest fiction and lie'

China refutes claims of Duterte seeking asylum

BEIJING, March 24, (Agencies) — A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Monday that china has never received any asylum application from former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte or his family.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakuan made the remarks in response to media reports claiming that, according to "informed sources," Duterte had sought asylum from china before being arrested under an International Criminal Court warrant.

"Duterte's visit to Hong Kong was a private vacation," Guo told a daily news briefing, adding that the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HK-SAR) has issued an official response, and relevant Philippine parties have also commented on the matter.

Guo emphasized that certain claims from so-called "informed sources" are either fabricated or driven by ulterior motives. He urged the media to exercise discernment and avoid endorsing such claims without proper verification.

Also: **MANILA, Philippines:** The Philippine defense chief on Monday called China's expansive claims in the South China Sea as "the biggest fiction and lie" that no Southeast Asian country would accept and said that Chinese President Xi Jinping's aggressive policies have undermined the international goodwill fostered by his predecessors.

Defense Secretary **Gilberto Teodoro** fired off his latest tirade against China's increasingly assertive actions



Government officials including Philippine National Police Chief Rommel Marbil, third from right, listen while an earlier image of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte is presented during a hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Manila, Philippines on March 20. (AP)

in the region on the same day that the Philippine coast guard separately reported new incidents involving Chinese forces in the Scarborough Shoal, a hotly disputed fishing atoll in the disputed waterway.

A Chinese military helicopter appeared to have tailed, but didn't closely approach a Philippine lightplane undertaking a routine patrol on Monday over Scarborough. Chinese forces have separately installed a new floating barrier to prevent Filipino fishermen from entering a lagoon in the shoal, which lies off the northwestern Philippines,

Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela told an online news briefing.

There was no immediate comment from Chinese officials, but in the past, they have repeatedly asserted that Beijing has had sovereign control over the Scarborough Shoal and most of the South China Sea since ancient times.

An international arbitration panel invalidated China's expansive claims in a 2016 ruling based on the 1982 UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, but Beijing refused to participate in the Philippines-initiated arbitration and continues to defy the decision.

Violence in Haiti displaces 60,000 in past month: IOM

PANAMA CITY, March 24, (Xinhua) — Escalating violence in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, has forced nearly 60,000 people to flee their homes in the past month, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

"Gang violence, displacement and instability have plagued Port-au-Prince and much of the country for years, with each wave of attacks worsening conditions in the already vulnerable communities," the IOM said in a statement.

The security situation has deteriorated sharply in recent months, as escalating attacks against civilians are eroding the few remaining gang-free areas, it added.

More than 1 million people are now displaced across Haiti -- a figure that has tripled in the past year.

"This surge in displacement highlights the relentless cycle of violence devastating the capital," said Gregoire Goodstein, IOM's chief of mission in Haiti. "We have never seen such a large movement of people in such a short time."

Many families, already living in precarious conditions from previous displacements, are being uprooted repeatedly and forced to flee with nothing, he noted.

The IOM pledged to support displaced Haitians but warned of major challenges. "Resources are stretched thin, and humanitarian access is increasingly restricted due to insecurity, leaving thousands without adequate protection or essential services," the organization said.



Protesters run for cover from tear gas fired by police during a demonstration against insecurity in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on March 19. (AP)

Africa

Namibia prez announces team: Namibian President **Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah** has announced her new leadership team, including the appointments of Lucia Witbooi as vice president and Elijah Ngurare as prime minister.

Announcing the appointments on Saturday in Windhoek, the country's capital, Nandi-Ndaitwah, Namibia's fifth president, also introduced a sweeping restructuring of government ministries and agencies to enhance efficiency and streamline operations.

"As elected leaders, we have an immense responsibility to ensure that we consolidate democracy, peace, stability, and good governance in the country, as well as to expedite the delivery of quality public services to all Namibians," Nandi-Ndaitwah said in a statement. (Xinhua)



Nandi-Ndaitwah

6 Kenyan police reservists killed: Armed militants from

Somalia raided a Kenyan police camp near the border, killed six reservists and seized weapons, Kenyan police said Sunday.

Four other police reservists sustained serious wounds from the attack on a camp in Garissa county by al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab militants, police spokesperson Michael Muchiri said, adding that more police had been deployed to increase security in the area.

The militants shot and stabbed the reservists, ransacked the camp and took away weapons. An undisclosed number of militants also died in the attack, Muchiri said.

The area near the porous Kenya-Somalia border that has been repeatedly breached by militants.

The U.S. Embassy in Kenya last week issued an advisory for Americans not to travel to the area due to the risk of attacks and kidnappings. (AP)

Somalia plane crash kills 5: Somalia's aviation authority has confirmed that five people were killed when a cargo aircraft crashed on Saturday evening in the southwest of the country.

The Somali Civil Aviation Authority (SCAA) said the DHC-5D Buffalo, with registration number 5Y-RBA, went down at around 5:43 p.m. local time (1443 GMT), about 24 km southwest of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. (Xinhua)

KOTC awards KD 4.678 mln LNG maintenance contract

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Higher Procurement Committee for Tenders at Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KOC) and its subsidiaries has announced that, at the request of Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC), the tender for the supply of labor for maintenance and operation of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) branch in Shuaiba Industrial Area was awarded

to a general trading company for a total value of KD4.678 million.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) also confirmed the awarding of the tender for the supply of marine lubricants at KOTC to a private company for KD 4,924,492,000, based on the fact that it was the only bidder that met the technical and commercial conditions.

Business

Company extends partnership with CODED Academy for 4th year

Zain partners with Kuwait Codes to prepare the next generation of digital future leaders

'Eidid' delivery for elite customers'

ABK joins 'Eidid' initiative to offer Eid cash services

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its participation in the 'Eidid' initiative which aims to provide Eidia in various Kuwaiti Dinar denominations on the blessed occasion of Eid Al Fitr.

ABK clarified that Eidia will be provided to customers who visit any of the Bank's branches across Kuwait. Furthermore, ABK will be providing Eidia delivery service for its Elite customers. This is in addition to providing Eidia via the Bank's interactive teller machines (ITMs) in Al-Khiraan and AlZahra branches.

ABK's participation highlights the Bank's eagerness to provide convenient banking services to all segments of society.

On this occasion, Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, extended her greetings and said, "Our branches are ready to provide Eidia across the country and we aspire to ensure the best banking service and utmost satisfaction at all times. In order for customers to get their Eidia, they may visit ABK branches during official working hours."

Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that offers a wide array of personal, corporate, and private banking products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital.

Across the region, the Bank offers individuals and corporates the convenience of comprehensive banking and financial services in the Egyptian market through ABK-



Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK.

Egypt's network of 45 branches.

This is in addition to ABK's three branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the United Arab Emirates, servicing both Kuwaiti and Emirati individual and corporate clients.

ABK is a strong supporter of Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' awareness campaign. Through its various initiatives, the Bank aims to promote financial inclusion by educating Kuwaiti society about customer rights, responsibilities, and the different types of banking and special needs services. Additionally, ABK consistently provides strategic information on how to avoid banking and financial fraud, loan application requirements, digital services, and more.

For more information about ABK, please follow the Bank's Instagram account @abk_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Zain announced the continuation of its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Codes initiative in its new season, in collaboration with CODED Academy – the first coding academy in the Middle East. This initiative is one of the most prominent of its kind and is supported by Zain for the fourth year in a row, as part of its efforts to help prepare the next generation of digital future leaders in Kuwait.

The announcement came during a press conference held at the Kuwait University Cultural Center in Shadadiya, attended by Faisal Al-Duwaihees from Zain Kuwait's Corporate Affairs and Relations Division; Ahmed Marafi, Co-founder and CEO of CODED Academy; as well as Zain and CODED officials, and representatives of sponsors and supporters.

During the conference, Faisal Al-Duwaihees said: "Today, we continue the strategic partnership between Zain and Kuwait's leading coding initiative – 'Kuwait Codes' – in its new season. Zain has been an integral part of this success story throughout previous seasons, and we are proud to have contributed to empowering and training over 3,500 young Kuwaiti coders, whom we hope to see as the future digital leaders of Kuwait."

He added: "This support is an essential part of our corporate sustainability strategy, which includes numerous programs dedicated to developing the youth and education sectors. We carefully select these programs to ensure their objectives align with ours, as developing programming and digital skills among youth is a top priority for us. We are keen to contribute to delivering a new generation of capable local talents ready to lead the upcoming stage filled with challenges."

Al-Duwaihees also stated: "At Zain, we take pride in being part of CODED Academy's success story by supporting many of their outstanding training programs, such as 'Kuwait Codes,' 'Academy X,' and the 'Kuwait Hackathon.' We look forward to another successful and fruitful season and are excited to see the creativity of young Kuwaitis. We wish our colleagues at CODED continued success in their journey toward enabling innovation and creativity in the tech community."

During the conference, Ahmed Marafi said: "At CODED Academy, we are proud of our strategic partnership with Zain in the fifth edition of the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative, which has succeeded in training thousands of Kuwaiti students free of charge over the past years in high-demand tech and program-



Al-Duwaihees and Marafi at the press conference.



From the conference.

ming fields both locally and globally."

He added: "This partnership contributes to equipping youth with the necessary skills to compete on local and international levels. Through this collaboration, we aim to offer training opportunities that enable students to apply their skills practically and open new doors for them in the digital job market."

Marafi concluded by saying: "At CODED, we extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to Zain for their unlimited support. We highly value their efforts in empowering Kuwaiti youth with future skills and

always look forward to continuing this fruitful partnership that contributes to enhancing innovation and technological advancement in Kuwait."

The Kuwait Codes initiative aims to train high school and ninth-grade students in technology in a simple yet professional way across various fields. This year, it seeks to train 1,000 students in diverse technical areas that are in high demand both locally and globally, through a curriculum delivered by top instructors in a unique and enjoyable training environment.

The initiative offers innovative,

easily accessible programs that build participants' technical skills, inspire their ambition, and provide them with opportunities to excel and represent Kuwait as tech ambassadors. CODED Academy is committed to preparing them for the future by developing their abilities, supporting them with opportunities, and connecting them to a strong community of ambitious youth.

The initiative focuses on developing technical skills in several key areas, including app development, web development, cybersecurity, Python programming and data science, and artificial intelligence.

Lower inflation, policy shifts and improving growth prospects

By National Bank of Kuwait

■ Inflation dropped to 12.8% in February, paving the way for interest rate cuts starting April. The CBE is expected to lower rates by 2-3% initially and by another 3-5% later in the year, easing financing costs and boosting investment.

■ GDP growth is projected to accelerate to 4.0% in FY24/25, driven by a recovery in consumption. However, external risks, including limited exchange rate flexibility and widening current account deficits, pose challenges to sustained growth.

■ The fiscal deficit is expected to widen to 7.9% of GDP in FY24/25 from 3.6% of GDP in FY23/24, following normalization of revenue streams. Spending control and tax revenue growth are supporting fiscal discipline.

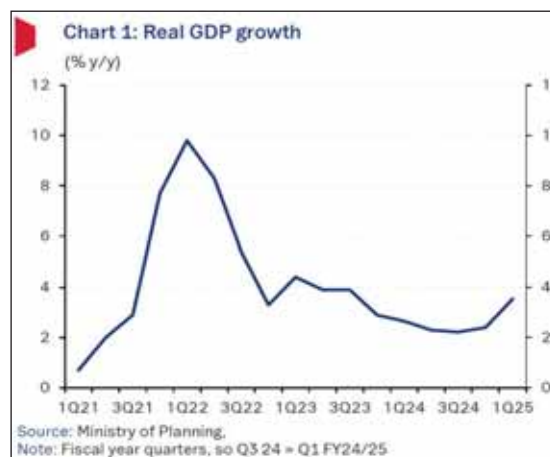
■ Foreign reserves inched up to \$47.4bn in February, while commercial banks' NFAs improved due to Eurobond issuances and EU funding. Egypt's 5-year Eurobond yields remain stable at 8.6%, signaling improved external investor confidence despite geopolitical tensions.

We see the economy now transitioning to a higher growth phase after an exceptionally challenging four years. Inflation has dropped sharply since last year's peak of nearly 36% to just under 13% in February, paving the way for monetary policy easing by the central bank potentially starting in April. This easing is critical to lower the cost of doing business, assist in the control of public spending and boost equity and FDI inflows. This in turn will support economic growth that we believe is improving on a recovery in consumption.

External sector dynamics are the key risk to Egypt's fiscal sustainability and economic growth profile, especially if the currency is not left to float properly. The IMF noted that the exchange rate is still fluctuating within a limited range and that more effort is required for stakeholders to perceive it as truly flexible. The current account deficit has widened on the back of a pick-up in imports, higher energy costs, and a drop in Suez Canal receipts. FX flexibility is crucial to maintain strong levels of reserves and commercial banks' net foreign assets (NFAs) that have so far been volatile and heavily reliant on FDI into the local currency debt.

The IMF on March 11 completed its fourth review of the Extended Fund Facility Arrangement (EFF), unlocking a further \$1.2 billion in financing and bringing total withdrawals under the \$8 billion EFF to \$3.2 billion. The IMF also approved access to \$1.3 billion under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility, but re-stressed the need for further structural reforms related to divestment, a more level playing field, governance and transparency.

Economic growth could reach 4.0% in FY24/25
Signs of improving growth are evident in both hard and soft data. GDP growth in Q1 FY24/25 (Jul-Sep 2024) rose to 3.5% y/y, comfortably above the previous quarter's gain of 2.4%. (Chart 1.) Private consumption was the key growth driver, expanding by 12.8% on a strong pick-up in imports (34%). Government consumption and gross capital formation contracted by 15% on average. We expect growth to accelerate in Q2 towards the 3.5-4.0% range and reach 4.0%



for the full year, a substantial rise on 2.4% in FY23/24. Indeed, survey data confirm better momentum continuing into this year, with the PMI activity gauge in expansion territory for two consecutive months in Jan-Feb, a first in more than four years. This was mainly driven by a recovery in local new order books boosted by cooling inflation. Firms also increased their input purchases at the sharpest rate in 3.5 years.

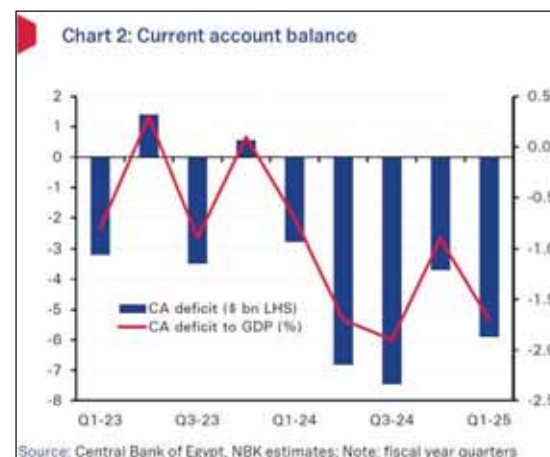
Current account deficit to remain large in FY24/25
The current account deficit will continue to widen as imports grow and Suez Canal revenues remain subdued. Latest figures show that deficit widened substantially to \$6 billion in Q1 FY24/25 from \$2.8 billion in Q1 FY23/24. This was mainly driven by a large increase in imports (to \$23bn from \$16bn a year ago) on the back of higher oil & gas imports (to \$5.4bn from \$2.9bn) and non-energy imports (+30% y/y to \$17.7bn).

On the positive side, non-energy exports increased by 18% and remittances almost doubled to \$8.3 billion in the same quarter. Meanwhile, in terms of services receipts, Suez Canal revenues plunged to \$0.9 billion from \$2.4 billion in the previous year as geopolitical tensions continued to discourage Red Sea trade flows.

With no clear sign of a pick-up in Suez Canal revenues, we expect the deficit to remain large at \$15-20 billion in FY24/25 and inflated by high energy import costs. The pick-up in economic growth is also likely to spur import increases. We reiterate our view that it is critical to maintain a flexible exchange rate to limit the ballooning of the current account deficit.

Commercial bank NFAs continue to see strong volatility

Foreign reserve levels at the central bank continued their slow upward trend, rising by \$129 million in February to \$47.4 billion, a 34% y/y increase. Commercial bank NFAs continued to see volatility on the back of outflows and inflows of foreign portfolio investments into the LCY debt market. The negative balance (deficit) of commercial bank NFAs narrowed to \$3.3 billion from \$6.4 billion due to



higher foreign assets (\$25.2bn) and lower foreign liabilities (\$28.5bn), with Egypt's \$2 billion Eurobond issuance and the EU's dispensing of EUR1 billion from its EUR7.4 billion financing package the major contributors. The slowdown in the global EM debt sell-off also allowed commercial bank NFAs to recover.

Despite heightened regional geopolitical tensions, yields on Egyptian sovereign debt have remained compressed and largely unchanged since last July, with 5-yr Eurobonds at 8.6% and 5-yr CDS spreads (a measure of default risk) at 578 bps. Moreover, the government's successful \$2 billion Eurobond sale, the first issuance in almost two years, was well-priced at 8.62% for the 5-yr notes and 9.45% for the 8-year note given the stresses the sovereign has been under over the last two years. Also a sign of confidence was the fact that the issuance was around 5 times oversubscribed (\$10bn). We expect the proceeds to be mostly used to plug part of the external financing gap which we estimate at \$10bn over the next 2 years starting March 2025.

Inflation has normalized after sharp February fall
Inflation, largely as expected, dropped sharply in February to 12.8% y/y from 24% in January, on the back of a favorable base effect. On a monthly basis, inflation slowed to 1.4% m/m from 1.5% m/m in January. Looking ahead to the rest of the year and beyond, our inflation expectations take into account the resumption of subsidy cuts to fuel (possibly including natural gas) and electricity. For 2025 and 2026, we think inflation will average 15% and 12%, respectively. The current inflation target set by the central bank is 7% (+/- 2%) for Q4 2026, which in our opinion could be achieved based on current trends.

Monetary easing cycle should commence in April
The Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) kept policy rates unchanged at 27.75% (discount rate) during the first eight months of FY24/25. However, with inflation having plunged, we believe that the CBE is more comfortable about pulling the trigger on interest rate cuts, likely as soon as its

next meeting in April. We think cuts of 2-3% are likely at the meeting followed by 3-5% in the second half of the calendar year. With the fall in inflation, real policy interest rates currently stand at 15% and will remain significantly high even after the CBE embarks on the easing cycle, possibly ending the year at around 8-9%.

Credit continues to grow even as inflation cools

Bank credit to private businesses expanded by 32% y/y on average for the Nov-Jan period (31% in the previous 3 months). Household credit growth was relatively unchanged at 23% versus 24% for the same period. In inflation-adjusted terms, corporate credit was up 8% y/y (4.6% for Aug-Oct). As for household credit, it also improved to -1% from -2.8% for the previous period. The increase in real credit comes in tandem with the pickup in economic activity and better PMI levels. With inflation expected to cool further, credit activity will be mostly driven by genuine economic activity rather than reflecting firms' catching up with price adjustments. That said, we do not see a resumption of the corporate capex cycle occurring before 2027, when economic activity rises closer to potential output levels. We expect credit to grow by 25% in FY24/25 (year-end) in nominal terms, which, while lower than the 32% recorded in FY23/24, will at least be 9-10% in real terms, compared to the previous -2%.

Strong fiscal discipline keeping the deficit under control

The government has so far released fiscal accounts for the period July – Nov FY24/25. The figures continue to show the adoption of tighter fiscal discipline, with the fiscal deficit narrowing to 3.3% of GDP from 4.7% for the same period of the previous year. The reading for the primary fiscal balance (excluding interest payments) was +1.0% of GDP, improving on the previous year's more modest surplus of 0.4% of GDP.

In terms of expenditures, at EGP1.38 trillion, annual increases were contained to about 10% y/y, which compares favorably to growth of 18% y/y in the previous year's outlay of EGP1.26 trillion. Wage, interest payments, and subsidies – representing 85% of total spending – were up by 20% y/y, 2.4%, and 35%, respectively. Total revenues rose by 36% y/y to EGP828 billion, mainly driven by large increases in tax revenues (+38%), which comprise about 87% of total government revenues.

We expect the government to resume cutting fiscal subsidies, after a six-month pause, especially fuels. Based on our calculations, the Fuel Automatic Pricing Committee could increase prices by 15-20% at its April meeting and follow this up with another round of price increases in the 3rd quarter of a similar magnitude to bring the cost recovery ratio to around 100% by end-2025.

For the full FY24/25, we expect the fiscal deficit to widen significantly to 7.9% of GDP from 3.6% of GDP in FY23/24 (the latter inflated by one-off revenues linked to the Ras El Hekma deal). A positive upside to this outlook would be the possibility of having another revenue-boosting mega deal this year, a lower interest rate environment that would mainly affect the last quarter of the year, and a recovery in Suez Canal revenues.

'Partnership affirms success of KIPCO's strategy of focusing on our streaming business'

WBD and OSN forge strategic partnership to accelerate their MENA growth plan

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) has announced a strategic minority investment in OSN Streaming Ltd., a subsidiary of OSN Group (OSN). Through this minority stake, WBD reinforces its commitment to the region's rapidly growing streaming landscape. The transaction will be completed in stages and is subject to customary conditions, including regulatory approvals.

This investment builds on OSN's market leadership in MENA's streaming industry. OSN has continued to evolve its offering, securing long-term partnerships with major global players, including its exclusive deal with HBO in 2022, and acquiring a majority stake in Anghami Inc. in April 2024.

Commenting on the deal, Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson of OSN, said:

"We are delighted to be announcing this deal between WBD and OSN, which reflects the importance that WBD places on working with the best creative talents, employing advanced technologies, and forging



Sheikha Dana Naser Al Sabah



Jamie Cooke - WBD



Joe Kawkabani - CEO of OSN Group



logos

and custodian of our content, making this union partnership a natural step for WBD. We recognize that alongside enjoying the latest global hits, regional audiences also want stories from and about the region that reflect their own cultures and experiences. Through this deal, we're delighted to announce that both OSN and Warner Bros. Discovery will invest in high-quality, locally produced content, ensuring a richer and more diverse offering for viewers."

Joe Kawkabani, CEO of OSN Group, commented:

"We are thrilled to welcome WBD as a strategic partner. As a global leader in entertainment, WBD brings unparalleled expertise, innovation, and a rich portfolio of iconic brands. This investment is a significant mile-

stone in OSN's growth journey, reinforcing our dedication to delivering unique and compelling content. It also bolsters our commitment to expanding our investment in local content, broadening its reach beyond MENA to global audiences."

At the same time, WBD's strategic investment reflects the company's prioritization of working with the best creative talent, advancing technologies, and forging key partnerships to fuel continued growth, with global streaming subscribers across Max and Discovery+ now standing at nearly 117 million. It also underscores its sustained expansion in the MENA region, reinforcing its presence in one of the world's most dynamic entertainment markets. Since establishing its regional office in Dubai in 2012, WBD has steadily deepened its footprint, bringing world-class entertainment to audiences across the region.

The transaction advisors included Kamco Investment Company K.S.C and the Abu Dhabi office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP for OSN Group, and A&O Shearman for WBD.

key partnerships that ensure continued growth, which is what OSN's streaming business provides to the region's viewers. This partnership affirms the success of strategy that KIPCO laid out to focus on and strengthen our streaming business, even in a competitive market en-

vironment. The transaction builds on OSN's strong growth trajectory and market leadership in MENA's streaming industry, strengthening its competitive position as one of the region's premier entertainment destinations."

Jamie Cooke, Executive Vice

President & Managing Director, Central Europe, Turkey and Middle East at Warner Bros. Discovery said:

"It's our goal to tell the greatest stories, whilst innovating our products and distribution channels. OSN has been a great partner

Boursa Kuwait approves distribution of over KD 16 million in cash dividends for 2024 at its Annual General Assembly

Boursa Kuwait confirms Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as its Chairman

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Boursa Kuwait Securities Company (KPSC) held its Annual General Assembly meeting for the year ended 31 December 2024 on Monday, March 24, 2025, which was chaired by Mr. Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi, at the Boursa Kuwait building.

During the meeting, the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 82 fils per share was approved, amounting to KD 16,463,611.5 (Sixteen million, four hundred sixty-three thousand, six hundred and eleven Kuwaiti Dinars and five hundred fils). Shareholders registered by the end of the record date of April 14, 2025, will receive their share dividends by the end of April 17, 2025, the company's scheduled payment date.

The meeting also witnessed the approval of all agenda items, including the Board of Directors' report, the Auditor's report, and the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024. Additionally, shareholders endorsed the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee reports and approved remuneration for the Board members as well as appointing Ms. Sheikha Adnan Al-Fulaij from Ernst & Young - Al-Aiban, Al-Osaimi & Partners as Auditor for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2025.

Boursa Kuwait's General Assembly also elected the company's Board of Directors for a new three-year term (2025-2027), resulting in the appointment of:

Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Talal Jassim Al-Bahar - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Khaled Waleed Al-Falah - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Jassem Hasan Zainal - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Yousef Faisal Al-Mannai - Non-Executive Board Member

Mr. Raed Jawad Bukhamseen - Independent Board Member

Ms. Dalal Jafaar Behbehani - Independent Board Member

Mr. Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi commented on the occasion, stating: "Despite the geopolitical tensions and economic challenges of 2024, Boursa Kuwait remained resilient and adaptable, delivering a strong recovery that highlights its financial strength and the effectiveness of its strategy. The company recorded a net profit of KD 18.18 million for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2024, a significant increase of 15.08% from the 2023 net profit of KD 15.80 million and its highest on record."

Al-Humaidhi further highlighted Boursa Kuwait's exceptional performance over the past year, noting a significant increase in the company's operating profit, which rose by 22.59% from KD 18.27 million in 2023 to KD 22.40 million in 2024. Total assets also grew by 6.11%, increasing from KD 118.89 million in 2023 to KD 126.15 million, while shareholders' equity attributable to Boursa Kuwait's shareholders increased by 5.17%, rising from KD 64.23 million to KD 67.55 million.



Bader Al-Kharafi



Hamad Al-Humaidhi



Mohammad Al-Osaimi

In addition, operating revenues saw notable growth as well, increasing by 18.36% from KD 30.68 million to KD 36.31 million, while earnings per share (EPS) grew by 15.08%, rising from 78.68 fils to 90.55 fils for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024.

Al-Humaidhi continued, "This year marked a pivotal milestone in Boursa Kuwait's journey, as the company celebrated its tenth anniversary - a decade of transformative growth and remarkable achievements that have strengthened the Kuwaiti capital market as a cornerstone of the national economy. The company continues to develop the market, enhance sustainability and reinforce its role as an integral cog within Kuwait's financial ecosystem. Guided by a clear vision and an ambitious strategy, Boursa Kuwait remains committed to contributing to the country's broader economic vision and firmly establishing itself as the gateway to Kuwait's economy and the promising opportunities it offers."

Mr. Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi expressed his deep gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for his unwavering efforts to ensure Kuwait's stability, prosperity and the growth of the national economy. He extended his sincere thanks and appreciation to the shareholders of Boursa Kuwait Securities Company for their continued trust and support of Boursa Kuwait and its goals, emphasizing that their contributions have greatly enhanced the company's position as a prominent financial market in the Middle East and paved the way for sustained growth and prosperity, enabling the company to play a significant role in the diversification and growth of the national economy, contributing substantially toward achieving Kuwait's vision of becoming a leading financial, cultural and investment hub in the region.

Al-Humaidhi also expressed gratitude to the members of the Board of Directors and Executive Management for their invaluable contributions to the company's strategic trajectory, highlighting their significant role in elevating and developing Kuwait's capital market through wise guidance and extensive expertise and extended special appreciation to all Boursa Kuwait employees for their active contributions toward achieving the company's strategic objectives and long-term aspirations.

Mr. Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer also commented on the company's results for 2024, saying, "In 2024, the Kuwaiti capital market demonstrated remarkable growth, with traded volume surging by approximately 73.08%,

from 39.57 billion shares in 2023 to 68.48 billion shares, and the value traded rising by 42.85%, from KD 10.38 billion to KD 14.83 billion. Additionally, market capitalization reached KD 43.58 billion, marking an 8.24% increase from the 2023 total of KD 40.26 billion."

Al-Osaimi also highlighted the increase in foreign turnover activity in the market, which increased to 15.5% of the total turnover activity in 2024, marking a 27.5% increase from 2023's 12% of turnover activity. Meanwhile, institutional investors continued to be key contributors, making up 61% of the total turnover in 2024.

Al-Osaimi added, "As part of its continuous efforts to increase the issuer base in the market, Boursa Kuwait successfully listed Beyout Investment Group Holding Company in the "Premier" Market. This listing, in addition to the upgrade of two companies from the "Main" Market, brought the total number of companies listed on the company's flagship market from 31 in 2023 to 34 in 2024 and increased its market capitalization by 11.02% from KD 31.82 billion to KD 35.33 billion."

"The "Premier" Market continued to play a pivotal role in driving market activity, recording approximately 29.31 billion shares traded at a total value of KD 9.78 billion across 1.96 million transactions. This represented 65.93% of the total traded value and 42.79% of the total traded volume on Boursa Kuwait, reaffirming the "Premier" Market's position as the main engine of market activity and a preferred destination for investors. Additionally, foreign ownership reached KD 5.30 billion, accounting for approximately 14.93% of the market capitalization in the "Premier" Market," Al-Osaimi said.

Meanwhile, the "Main" Market played a significant role in enhancing overall market liquidity, with a market capitalization of KD 8.25 billion and 109 listed companies. It traded over 39.13 billion shares, valued at approximately KD 5.05 billion across 1.95 million transactions. This accounted for 34.05% of the total traded value and 57.14% of the total traded volume in the Kuwaiti capital market, highlighting its crucial role in expanding investment opportunities and strengthening market depth. Additionally, the "Main" Market index increased by 24.01% in 2024, while the "Main 50" index rose by 24.04%.

Al-Osaimi praised Boursa Kuwait's ongoing efforts to enhance market infrastructure, highlighting the company's continued collaboration with Kuwait Clearing Company throughout 2024, which included carrying out a series of tests initiated

in the previous year to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Central Counterparty Clearing (CCP) system. These efforts also involved verifying the readiness of brokerage firms to handle settlement operations in coordination with the Central Bank of Kuwait and local banks, preparing these firms for qualification under the CCP framework.

The Boursa Kuwait CEO concluded his statement by expressing his sincere gratitude to the Chairman and the Board of Directors for their unwavering support of the company's strategy and operations, which has played a pivotal role in guiding Boursa Kuwait toward achieving its ambitious goals. Al-Osaimi also extended his heartfelt appreciation to all employees, whose commitment and dedication have been the driving force behind the company's ongoing series of successes.

He also thanked the Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Clearing Company, and brokerage firms for their expertise, professionalism, and valuable contributions, which have profoundly impacted all aspects of the market's development and success.

Al-Osaimi reiterated the company's commitment to expanding its product offerings, improving market efficiency, and enhancing market accessibility and emphasized the company's strategic pillars of transparency, corporate governance, and enhanced liquidity as fundamental tenets to highlighting leading listed companies, strengthening investor confidence and reinforcing Kuwait's capital market as an engine of innovation, sustainable growth, and leadership in the region.

Following its 2024 General Assembly, Boursa Kuwait announced that its Board of Directors unanimously approved the formation of the new Board, appointing Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi Chairman of the Board for a three-year term spanning 2025 to 2027. Mr. Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari was named Vice Chairman for the same period.

The Board of Directors extended its sincere thanks and appreciation to outgoing Chairman Mr. Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi, the first Chairman to lead Boursa Kuwait following the completion of the first phase of its privatization, praising his outstanding leadership and pivotal role in transforming Boursa Kuwait into a cornerstone of the national economy and a success story within the country's financial landscape. His tenure was marked by several milestone achievements, most notably the company's highly successful initial public offering, which was oversubscribed by more than 850%, followed by its listing in the "Premier" Market.

Regarded as one of Kuwait's

- Approval of the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute dividends of 82 fils per share
- Election of new Board of Directors for a three-year term

prominent business leaders, Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi brings over 20 years of experience across the financial, banking, industrial, and telecommunications sectors. He has been a member of Boursa Kuwait's Board of Directors since its privatization in 2019, during which he chaired the Executive Committee and held a seat on the Nominations and Remuneration Committee—roles that enabled him to play a central role in shaping the company's strategic direction and reinforcing its governance framework.

His appointment as Chairman marks the beginning of a new chapter for Boursa Kuwait, defined by a forward-looking and ambitious vision as he leads the company toward greater growth and innovation with a strong focus on enhancing the Kuwaiti capital market's efficiency and boosting its investment appeal.

Commenting on his confirmation as Chairman, Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said, "I would like to thank the Board of Directors for their trust and confidence in confirming me to lead Boursa Kuwait at this pivotal moment in its journey. This phase demands a renewed commitment to advance the capital market and strengthen its position on both the regional and global stages. My goal is to accelerate the development of innovative products, services, and financial instruments that enhance market performance and provide added value to all stakeholders."

"I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the noble address delivered by His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah — may Allah protect him — on the occasion of the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan. His words inspired hope and optimism for a brighter future for our beloved nation, as we look forward to a promising phase of reform, development and significant achievements for the State of Kuwait," Al-Kharafi said.

"Guided by His Highness's vision, Boursa Kuwait remains unwavering in its commitment to contributing to the State's ambitious agenda, which calls for the collaborative efforts of all sectors to achieve economic diversification, strengthen financial stability and lay the foundations for a long-term, prosperous and sustainable future," he added.

"The privatization of Boursa Kuwait has demonstrated that a clear vision and professional management can drive real transformation in the structure of financial markets and elevate the profile of the Kuwaiti capital market among local and international investors. With a highly skilled and dedicated team in place, Boursa Kuwait is well-positioned to complete its development journey, adopt global best practices and continue enhancing the overall market ecosystem," he said.

Al-Kharafi also confirmed Boursa Kuwait's unwavering commitment to fostering a competitive investment environment, emphasizing the company's determination to introduce new financial products and instruments as well as enhance governance and transparency to align with global best practices.

"We are preparing for the launch of exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and a fixed-income trading platform, which will include bonds and sukuk, in the second quarter of the year. We are also planning to implement the Central Counterparty (CCP) system and lay the groundwork for the introduction of financial derivatives in the future. These initiatives will undoubtedly enhance the market and create new investment opportunities for a wider range of investors," he stated.

Al-Kharafi also expressed his appreciation for the distinguished efforts of H.E. Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Abdullah Al-Ajeel, whose extensive experience in the financial sector continues to serve as a vital asset to the State of Kuwait. His previous roles as Head of the Financial Controllers Bureau and a member of the Board of Commissioners at the Capital Markets Authority enabled him to play a pivotal role in shaping the regulatory and legislative frameworks governing the Kuwaiti capital market and in implementing policies that have contributed to its growth and development.

"His Excellency's expertise is a significant advantage to the financial sector," Al-Kharafi said. "Boursa Kuwait remains committed to fostering a constructive and strategic partnership with him in support of the continued development and advancement of the national capital market."

Al-Kharafi also extended his congratulations to the newly appointed Chairman and members of the Capital Markets Authority's Council of Commissioners, expressing his best wishes for success in their new roles. He noted his confidence in the depth of expertise and experience within the new Council, emphasizing that their leadership will play a key role in reinforcing the capital market environment and driving its continued development forward.

"Boursa Kuwait greatly values its strong partnership and close collaboration with the Capital Markets Authority, which remains a cornerstone in advancing the development of the market and enhancing its attractiveness to investors. We look forward to continuing this productive cooperation as we work toward achieving our shared strategic objectives of driving sustainable growth and aligning with the highest global standards."

Distinguished Career

In addition to his new role at Boursa Kuwait, Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi is the Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Mobile Telecommunications Company (Zain Group). He is also a board member at several prominent regional and international financial and industrial institutions, including Vice Chairman of National Investments Company (NIC), Vice Chairman of Gulf Cable & Electrical Industries and Vice Chairman of Diamond International Motors Company.

Additionally, he is a member of the Board of Directors of Foulath Holding in Bahrain, the Middle East Advisory of UK-based Coutts & Co., the Kuwait-British Friendship Society and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)'s Sustainability Board for the Middle East and North Africa.



Indian Heritage unveils latest store in Al Sabahiyah.

A blend of tradition and contemporary elegance

Indian Heritage opens new retail store at Warehouse Mall, Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Indian Heritage, a name synonymous with exceptional textiles, ready to wear designs and handicrafts, has unveiled its latest retail destination at Warehouse Mall in Al Sabahiyah, Kuwait. The grand opening ceremony, held on February 22, marked a significant milestone in the brand's expansion in the region. The event was attended by distinguished members of the diplomatic corps adding to the excitement of this momentous occasion.

With this new store, Indian Heritage reinforces its commitment to bringing the richness of India's artisanal craftsmanship with a blend of Kuwait fashion influences closer to shoppers in Kuwait. The store spans over 200 sqm and showcases an extensive collection that blends the timeless elegance of traditional designs with contemporary flair. This new store promises to become a go-to destination for fashion lovers who want to try



Authentic Indian textiles & fashion now at Warehouse Mall.



a new outfit regularly.

Indian Heritage is well-regarded for offering high-quality products at

competitive prices, and the new store is no exception. Shoppers can expect a wide array of items that combine in-

tricate craftsmanship at good prices. Whether you're looking for a statement piece for a special occasion or

daily trendy ready to wear, Indian Heritage has something to suit every taste.

This store opening marks just the beginning of Indian Heritage's expansion journey in Kuwait. After successful openings in Oman and Bahrain the brand is now set to enter the Saudi Arabian market, further solidifying its mission to make India's rich heritage and craftsmanship accessible to the world.

The Indian Heritage store at Warehouse Mall is ready to welcome shoppers who are eager to discover a world of exceptional fashion, home furnishings, and accessories. With its perfect blend of quality, affordability, and authenticity, the store is sure to captivate the hearts of those who appreciate fine craftsmanship and timeless style.

Don't miss out on this exciting new shopping experience! Visit Indian Heritage at Warehouse Mall and explore a diverse range of products that bring the essence of India's vibrant culture to Kuwait.

Warba Bank announces AlSunbula draw winners

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Warba Bank, recognized as the leading bank in corporate and investment banking in Kuwait, announced the winners in the weekly AlSunbula draw as part of the account's 2025 campaign which offers exceptional rewards, giving twenty customers a chance to win KD1,000 each week and a grand prize of KD 250,000 for a winner in each of the six grand draws held throughout the year. This campaign comes as part of the bank's ongoing efforts to provide innovative, Sharia-compliant banking solutions that align with the aspirations of the local market.

Winners of the Weekly AlSunbula Draw

The latest weekly draw was conducted in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Warba Bank employees. The 20 winners, each receiving KD 1,000, are: Ms. Amina Mohammad Ahmad Al-Ansari, Ms. Nihad Ali Hassan Abdul Khalif Al-Najjar, Mr. Abdullah Mohammad Abdullah Al-Qaoud, Mr. Talal Mohammad Hilal Al-Daihani, Mr. Sultan Sayyah Faisal Al-Zuabi, Mr. Bader Hussein Mohammad Karam, Mr. Ahmad Abdullah Fahd Al-Lafi, Mr. Nabil Abdullah Bader Al-Bader, Mr. Mohammad Abdul Rahman Ali Al-Omairi, Mr. Khalaf Barghash Khalaf Al-Failakawi, Mr. Mohammad Homoud Nasser Al-Radhan Al-Mousa, Mr. Walid Wasmi Sawi Al-Shamri, Mr. Ibrahim Thamer Ibrahim Al-Rashidi, Mr. Saud Abdul Aziz Yaqoub Bu Haïmad, Mr. Mohammad Batti Hamad Al-Zuabi, Mr. Faisal Saleh Mahmas Al-Otaibi, Mr. Ibrahim Al-Baz Mustafa Al-Baz, Mr. Malfi Barak Mizer Al-Azmi, Ms. Amira Mubarak Noman Al-Bathali, Mr. Amer Zaal Saleh Al-Enzi.

Commenting on this year's AlSunbula campaign, Mr. Abdulaziz Saud Al-Bakhait, Area Manager of the Retail Banking Group at Warba Bank, stated: "AlSunbula's 2025 campaign reaffirms Warba Bank's commitment to enriching our customers' banking experience. Given the remarkable success of last year's campaign, we have further elevated the benefits that this account offers, expanding the number of winners and increasing the total value of prizes. In addition to these rewards, AlSunbula offers exceptional features, including a seamless savings experience through advanced digital services that simplify daily transactions."

Al-Bakhait further emphasized that Warba Bank has consistently introduced innovative financial solutions over the years, reflecting its strategic vision for expansion and growth, while placing customers at the core of its priorities. He high-

lighted that this vision is embodied in the bank's slogan, 'We Hear You, Let's Own Tomorrow,' which emphasizes proactively understanding and fulfilling customers' evolving needs through innovative and integrated solutions.

Speaking of AlSunbula's 2025 Campaign, Al-Bakhait stated: "This year's campaign offers customers the unique advantage of saving while having the opportunity to win, effectively doubling the benefits they receive. The campaign is designed to offer a seamless digital experience through the Warba app, where customers can efficiently manage their accounts, track their savings, and participate in draws effortlessly. The account also provides an ATM card and additional rewards that enhance the value of savings. To qualify for the weekly draws, customers must maintain a minimum balance of KD 500 for one month, and for the grand draws, a balance of KD 500 must be maintained for two consecutive months."

Banking through the Warba App

Warba Bank's mobile app allows customers to manage their savings and participate in Al Sunbula draws with ease and flexibility. New customers can also open an AlSunbula account electronically through the Customer Onboarding service in just five minutes, without the need to visit a branch. This is made possible by Warba Bank's advanced automated system, a unique feature in the Kuwaiti banking sector.

Leading in Digital Solutions

Warba Bank's strategy is focused on expanding digital banking services and developing innovative products that deliver an integrated and advanced banking experience to its customers. The bank's digital transformation is not limited to AlSunbula account, as it continues to introduce pioneering services, including the "Afaq" unified Gulf transfer service, which facilitates faster, easier, and more secure payments and transfers across the GCC.

A Firm Commitment to the Community

Warba Bank is one of Kuwait's leading Islamic banks, having achieved remarkable success in a short period by focusing on providing cutting-edge digital banking services for individuals and businesses. Additionally, it is one of the local banks with the largest number of shareholders, making it deeply connected to all segments of society. This success underscores Warba Bank's ongoing commitment to shaping a financial future that aligns with customers' aspirations, preserving heritage with a forward-looking vision.

The Conversation

Musk, Trump media push back against global digital laws

Global clash over social media regulation intensifies

By Yasmin Curzi de Mendonça
University of Virginia

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

Social media platforms tend not to be that bothered by national boundaries.

Take X, for example. Users of what was once called Twitter span the globe, with its 600 million-plus active accounts dotted across nearly every country. And each of those jurisdictions has its own laws.

But the interests of national regulatory efforts and that of predominantly U.S.-based technology companies often don't align. While many governments have sought to impose oversight mechanisms to address problems such as disinformation, online extremism and manipulation, these initiatives have been met with corporate resistance, political interference and legal challenges invoking free speech as a shield against regulation.

What is brewing is a global struggle over digital platform governance. And in this battle, U.S. platforms are increasingly leaning on American laws to challenge other nation's regulations. It is, we believe as experts on digital law - one an executive director of a forum monitoring how countries implement democratic principles - a form of digital imperialism.

The latest manifestation of this phenomenon occurred in February 2025, when new tensions emerged between Brazil's judiciary and U.S.-based social media platforms.

Trump Media & Technology Group and Rumble filed a lawsuit in the U.S. against Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, challenging his orders to suspend accounts on the two platforms linked to disinformation campaigns in Brazil.

The case follows earlier unsuccessful efforts by Elon Musk's X to resist similar Brazilian rulings.

Together, the cases exemplify a growing trend in which U.S. political and corporate actors attempt to undermine foreign regulatory authority by pressing the case that domestic U.S. law and corporate protections should take precedence over sovereign policies globally.

At the core of the dispute is Allan dos Santos, a right-wing Brazilian influencer and fugitive from justice who fled to the U.S. in 2021 after De Moraes ordered his preventive arrest for allegedly coordinating disinformation networks and inciting violence.

Dos Santos has continued his online activities abroad. Brazil's extradition requests have gone unanswered due to claims by U.S. authorities that the case involves issues of free speech rather than criminal offenses.

Trump Media and Rumble's lawsuit attempts to do two things. First, it seeks to frame Brazil's judicial actions as censorship rather than oversight. And sec-

ond, it seeks to portray the Brazilian court action as territorial overreach.

Their position is that as the target of the action was in the U.S., they are subject to U.S. free speech protections under the First Amendment. The fact that the subject of the ban was Brazilian and is accused of spreading disinformation and hate in Brazil should not, they argue, matter.

For now, U.S. courts agree. In late February, a Florida-based judge ruled that Rumble and Trump Media need not comply with the Brazilian order.

The case signals an important shift in the contest over platform accountability - a move from corporate lobbying and political pressure to direct legal intervention in foreign jurisdictions. U.S. courts are now being used to challenge overseas decisions regarding platform accountability.

The outcome and the broader legal strategy behind the lawsuit could have far-reaching implications not only for Brazil but for any country or region - such as the European Union - attempting to regulate online spaces.

The resistance against digital regulation predates the Trump administration.

In Brazil, efforts to regulate social media platforms have long faced substantial opposition. Big Tech companies - including Google, Meta and X - have used their economic and political influence to lobby against tighter regulation, often framing such policies as a threat to free expression.

In 2020, the Brazilian "Fake News Bill," which sought to hold platforms accountable for the spread of disinformation, was met with strong opposition from these companies.

Google and Meta launched high-profile campaigns to oppose the bill, warning it would "threaten free speech" and "harm small businesses." Google placed banners on its Brazilian homepage urging users to reject the legislation, while Meta ran advertisements questioning its implications for the digital economy.

These efforts, alongside lobbying and political resistance, were successful in helping to delay and weaken the regulatory framework.

The difference now is that challenges are blurring the line between the corporate and the political.

Trump Media was 53% owned by the U.S. president before he moved his stake into a revocable trust in December 2024. Elon Musk, the free speech fundamentalist owner of X, is a de facto member of the Trump administration.

Their ascent to power has coincided with the First Amendment being wielded as a shield against foreign regulations on digital platforms.

Free speech protections in the U.S. have been applied unequally, allowing authorities to suppress dissent in some cases while shielding hateful speech in others.

This imbalance extends to corporate power, with decades of legal precedent expanding protections for private interests. The case law cemented corporate speech

protections, a logic later extended to digital platforms.

U.S. free speech advocates in Big Tech and the U.S. government are seemingly escalating this trend to an even more extreme interpretation: that American free speech arguments can be deployed to resist the regulation of other jurisdictions and challenge foreign legal frameworks.

For instance, in response to the European Union's Digital Services Act, U.S. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr, a Trump appointee, expressed concerns that the act could threaten American free speech principles.

Such an argument may have been fine if the same interpretation of free speech - and its appropriate protections - were universally accepted. But they are not. The concept of free speech varies significantly across nations and regions.

Countries such as Brazil, Germany, France and others adopt what legal experts refer to as a proportionality-based approach to free speech, balancing it against other fundamental rights such as human dignity, democratic integrity and public order.

Sovereign countries using this approach recognize freedom of expression as a fundamental and preferential right. But they also acknowledge that certain restrictions are necessary to protect democratic institutions, marginalized communities, public health and the informational ecosystem from harms.

While the U.S. imposes some limits on speech - such as defamation laws and protection against incitement to imminent lawless action - the First Amendment is generally far more expansive than in other democracies.

The legal battle over platform regulation is not confined to the current battle between U.S.-based platforms and Brazil. The EU's Digital Services Act and the Online Safety Act in the United Kingdom are other examples of governments trying to assert control over platforms operating within their borders.

As such, the lawsuit by Trump Media and Rumble against the Brazilian Supreme Court signals a critical moment in global geopolitics.

U.S. tech giants, such as Meta, are bending to the free speech winds coming out of the Trump administration. Musk, the owner of X, has given support to far-right groups overseas.

And this overlap in the policy priorities of social media platforms and the political interests of the U.S. administration opens a new era in the deregulation debate in which U.S. free speech absolutists are seeking to establish legal precedents that might challenge the future of other nations' regulatory efforts.

As countries continue to develop regulatory frameworks for digital governance - for instance, AI regulation imposing stricter governance rules in Brazil and in the EU - the legal, economic and political strategies platforms employ to challenge oversight mechanisms will play a crucial role in determining the future balance between corporate influence and the rule of law. (AP)

20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD 1,500 each

KFH announces the winners of Al-Rabeh draw

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the AlRabeh draw with 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD1,500 each for the 9th and 10th weeks of 2025.

The winners of KD 1,500 are: Khaled Al-Haran, Nainawah Al-Sealeek, Aeshah Al-Ghanim, Hossam Younis, Mohammad Rashed, Fahad Al-Khurainej, Hessah Al-Ajmi, Khaled Al-Bughili, Amer Saleh, Fayeze Al-Daihani, Anfal Al-Otaibi, Humoud Al-Daihani, Salem Al-Sabea, Fakhreiah Al-Hajri, Gehad Mohammad, Sameerah Al-Enezi, Khuloud Al-Otaibi, Sarah Al-Mutairi, Mona Al-Marri, Abdulaziz Al-Mansour.

The AlRabeh campaign provides prizes and draws that offer customers several chances of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign crowns 536 winners throughout the year.

The draw took place under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

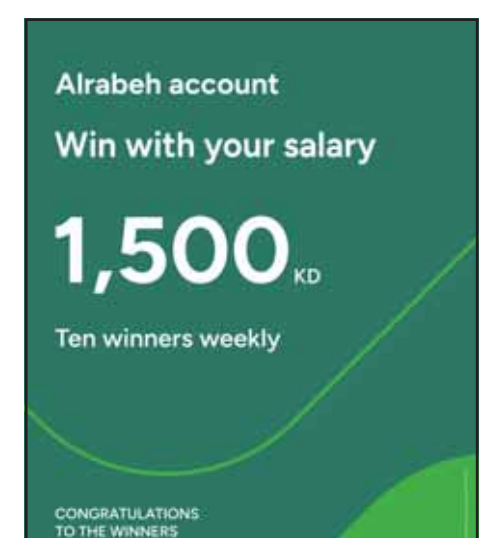
The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh

account is constant.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer can deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for K.D 1,500 for 10 winners each, 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and K.D 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals of KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.



The campaign visual

Comedian brings humor and hope amid Kennedy Center's uncertainty

Conan O'Brien accepts Mark Twain Prize for humor

WASHINGTON, March 24, (AP) — On a night when half a dozen people made jokes about this being the last-ever Mark Twain Prize, Conan O'Brien made sure the ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts ended on a high note.

O'Brien accepted the award for lifetime achievement in comedy Sunday night while acknowledging the backstage turmoil that hangs over the future of the cultural center in Washington.

O'Brien, 61, was named the 26th recipient of the Mark Twain Prize in mid-January, about three weeks before President Donald Trump upended the Kennedy Center by ousting longtime president Deborah Rutter and board chairman David Rubenstein. Trump dismissed the board of trustees and replaced them with loyalists, who then elected him as chairman.

On Sunday, O'Brien specifically thanked Rubenstein and Rutter — during an extended round of applause — and also Kennedy Center staffers who, he said, were "worried about what the future might bring."

He said the example of Mark Twain's own life and career was particularly resonant at this moment in American history.

"Twain hated bullies. ... He punched up, not down, and he deeply empathized with the weak," O'Brien said. "Twain loved America, but he knew it was deeply flawed."

A Mark Twain impersonator then emerged from the audience. After a back-and-forth debate with O'Brien, he joined him on stage and the pair slow danced for a while. They were then joined by a dozen more Twain impersonators and previous Twain Prize recipient Adam Sandler for a raucous rendition of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."

That musical ending capped off a night when the uncertain fate of the Kennedy Center itself was woven through the multiple tributes and testimonials to O'Brien.

"I think it would be insane not to address the elephant in the room," comic Nikki Glaser said on the red carpet before the ceremony. "It's in the air tonight. This night is about Conan, but it can be both."

Once the festivities began, Stephen Colbert joked that the Kennedy Center had announced two new board members: Bashar Assad, the ousted president of Syria, and Skeletor, a fictional supervillain.

John Mulaney quipped that the entire building would soon be renamed "the Roy Cohn Pavilion" after one of Trump's mentors. And Sarah Silverman made multiple Trump jokes that were too vulgar to print.

Trump, in announcing the Kennedy Center changes, posted on social media that those who were dismissed "do not share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture."

How that vision takes shape remains to be seen, but Trump has spoken about wanting to book more Broadway shows there and floated the idea of granting Kennedy Center Honors status to actor Sylvester Stallone and singer-songwriter Paul Anka.

Into this maelstrom stepped O'Brien, whose comedic persona has never been particularly political. The comic has always tended more toward goofiness and self-deprecation. But he has also leaned into sensitive societal issues at times. In 2011, O'Brien officiated a gay wedding live on his show, overseeing the marriage of his longtime costume designer Scott Cronick and his partner David Gorshein.

O'Brien vaulted into the spotlight from near-total obscurity in 1993 when he was chosen to replace David

Letterman as host of "Late Night" despite no significant on-camera experience. The former Harvard Lampoon editor had spent the previous years as a writer for "Saturday Night Live" and "The Simpsons," appearing on camera only as an occasional background extra in "SNL" skits.

He went on to host "Late Night" for 16 years, longer than any other host. O'Brien was later tapped to replace Jay Leno as host of "The Tonight Show," but that experiment ended in public failure. After seven months of declining ratings, NBC executives brought Leno back for a new show that would bump "The Tonight Show" back. O'Brien refused to accept the move, leading to a public spat that ended with a multimillion-dollar payout for O'Brien and his staff to exit the network in early 2010.

O'Brien went on to host another talk show on the cable station TBS, while launching successful podcasts and travel shows. He is currently on a late-career elder statesman hot streak. His travel series, "Conan O'Brien Must Go," drew popular and critical acclaim, with a second season coming. His recent gig hosting the Academy Awards was so well received that the producers announced they are bringing him back next year.

In the wake of Trump's takeover of the Kennedy Center, several artists, including the producers of "Hamilton" and actress and writer Issa Rae, announced they were canceling appearances at the venue.

Others have chosen to perform while making their sentiments known from the stage. Leftist comic W. Kamau Bell directly addressed the controversy in his performance just days after the shake-up. Earlier this month, cellist Erin Murphy Snedecor ended her set with a performance of the Woody Guthrie protest anthem "All You Fascists Bound to Lose."



Comedian Conan O'Brien walks out on stage at the start of the 25th Annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor Celebrating Conan O'Brien, Sunday, March 23, at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington. (AP)

Books

Deitch delivers

Twisty thrills in Killer Potential

LOS ANGELES, March 24, (AP) — When bestselling psychological thriller writer Paula Hawkins' "The Girl on the Train," 2015 stamps the cover of your debut novel with "A Thelma & Louise for our times," your career is off to a fast start.

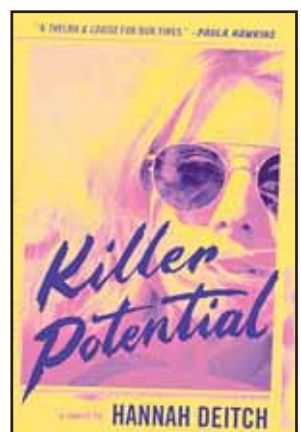
The same goes for the plot pace of Hannah Deitch's book, "Killer Potential," which opens at a breakneck clip and doesn't really slow down for about 200 pages. Evie Gordon is our narrator. She went to "a liberal arts school, stupidly expensive," and is now working as an SAT tutor in pricey California zip codes. Her first sentence is a gem: "I was once a famous murderess." The rest of the book reveals how she earned that appellation and the adverb "once."

The opening scene is at "The Victor House," which Evie describes in great detail — its "live-edge table cut from Portuguese wood," the "De Gournay hand-painted silk wallpaper," and the "aquamarine Moroccan tile in the bathroom." It's where Evie discovers the dead bodies of Dinah and Peter Victor, the mother with her face bashed in and the father floating in a koi pond.

Trapped

As Evie flees, she hears a voice crying out for help and rescues a woman trapped behind a door under a staircase, before coming face-to-face with her tutoring student, Serena. Thinking Evie and her accomplice are killers fleeing the scene of their crime, Serena attacks with a lamp and the scene ends with Evie smashing a vase against Serena's head before escaping with the mystery woman in Evie's car.

Cue the Hans Zimmer soundtrack for the next 100+ pages as Evie gets to know her partner in crime, who doesn't speak at first, traumatized by whatever happened to her in the house. Eventually we learn her name, Jae, and together they pull off a series of crimes, some petty (shoplifting, carjacking), some not (assaulting and shooting at a few men and boys who recognize them from TV). Throughout it all, Evie's inner monologue keeps readers engaged as she ponders things like how the language of courtship (Chase. Pursue. Stalk.) mirrors the language of hunting. It's clear after a while that Evie and Jae lust for one another and when that dam finally breaks, the novel takes on a torrid tone that feels authentic for two people on the run for weeks relying on only each other and their animal instincts to survive.



This cover image released by William Morrow shows "Killer Potential" by Hannah Deitch. (AP)

Film



This image released by Disney shows Rachel Zegler in a scene from 'Snow White.' (AP)

Disney's film faces poor reviews and mixed reception

'Snow White' fails to charm audiences

NEW YORK, March 24, (AP) — The Walt Disney Co.'s live-action, controversy-bedeveled "Snow White" opened in theaters with a sleepy \$43 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday.

With a budget above \$250 million, "Snow White" had set out with higher ambitions, particularly since it returns Disney to its very origins. The 1937 original "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" was the company's first animated feature, and paid for its Burbank studio lot.

But this "Snow White" struggled to find anything like a fairy tale ending. The runup to release was plagued by controversies over the film's handling of the dwarfs, who are rendered in CGI, and backlashes over comments by its star, Rachel Zegler. The PR headaches prompted Disney to pull back on its premiere.

Also working against the film, directed by Marc Webb: poor reviews. Critics were largely not impressed with Disney's latest live-action remake, with reviews coming in just 43% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes.

There's been a wide variance between the box-office performance of other "live-action" Disney remakes, but "Snow White" might mark a new nadir. Jon Favreau's photorealistic "The Lion King" (2019) didn't have great reviews, either, but grossed more than \$1.6 billion worldwide. "Snow White" opened

worse than "Dumbo" (a \$46 million opening in 2019) and well shy of "Cinderella" territory (\$67.9 million in 2015).

Overseas, "Snow White" added \$44.3 million for a global launch of \$87.3 million. But going into the weekend, "Snow White" had been eyeing a worldwide total closer to \$100 million — and a few weeks back, expectations were significantly higher.

The result will surely add to questions over Disney's long-term strategy of mining its vault for live-action remakes. In the pipeline are upcoming new versions of "Moana" and "Tangled." A live-action "Lilo & Stitch" launches in May.

Modernize

Efforts to modernize "Snow White," though, quickly ran afoul. In 2022, actor Peter Dinklage criticized the remake plans as "backward." Disney ultimately opted to drop "and the Seven Dwarfs" from the original's title, and animate the dwarfs. Some right-wing commentators targeted "Snow White" and Zegler's casting as an overly "woke" production. Delays and reshoots also ran up costs.

Disney, though, has recently steered a handful of films from modest starts to enviable final hauls. The Barry Jenkins-directed "Mufasa: The Lion King" opened with \$35.4 million domestically, but ultimately surpassed \$717 million worldwide.

"Snow White" will face little direct competition in the coming weeks. Audiences gave it a "B+" CinemaScore.

Warner Bros.' "Alto Knights," a period gangster film starring Robert De Niro in both lead roles, was a total misfire. The Barry Levinson-directed film, which cost about \$45 million to make, opened with just \$3.2 million from 2,651 theaters. The flop of "Alto Knights" followed another misfire for Warner Bros. with Bong Joon Ho's big-budget sci-fi "Mickey 17." In three weeks, it's tallied \$40.2 million domestically against a \$118 million budget.

"Magazine Dreams," starring Jonathan Majors as a disturbed aspiring bodybuilder, opened with \$700,000 for Briarcliff Entertainment in 815 locations. The film was dropped by Searchlight Pictures after Majors was convicted of two misdemeanor counts of assault and harassment against Grace Jabbari, his ex-girlfriend. Majors avoided jail time but was given a year of probation.

The disappointment-filled weekend added to a rough 2025 so far for Hollywood. The box office is down 6.9% from last year, according to data firm Comscore, and 38.6% from 2019.

With final domestic figures releasing Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at US and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore.

People

Charges denied

Depardieu faces trial for assaults

PARIS, March 24, (AP) — French actor Gérard Depardieu strode calmly into a Paris courthouse on Monday to stand trial over accusations that he sexually assaulted two women during the filming of a movie in 2021.

The case is seen as a potential watershed for the #MeToo movement in France. Depardieu, 76, is facing charges that he groped a 54-year-old set dresser and a 34-year-old assistant director during production of the film "Les Volets Verts" ("The Green Shutters"). The actor denies any wrongdoing.



Depardieu

He will be able to show in an impartial, objective and incontestable manner that all of the accusations are lies," his attorney, Jérémie Assous, told journalists massed outside the courtroom.

"The truth will be obvious and the truth is on our side," he said.

Prosecutors allege the assaults included obscene remarks and inappropriate touching, including an incident in which Depardieu allegedly used his legs to trap one of the women before groping her in front of other crew members.

The Associated Press doesn't name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to being identified. Neither has in this case.

Verdict

The two-day trial was initially scheduled for October but was postponed because of Depardieu's health. A verdict is expected at a later date.

Assous previously said the actor had undergone a quadruple heart bypass and has diabetes. A court-appointed medical expert determined that he's fit to stand trial. He is expected to attend the hearing, reportedly with scheduled breaks.

Carine Durrieu Diebolt, the lawyer for one of the two plaintiffs, said on France Info radio that her client "is calmly awaiting the outcome of the case ... because the case is solid."

Durrieu Diebolt said four additional women who say they have been sexually assaulted by Depardieu will speak at the trial.

This is the first time that Depardieu, one of France's most prominent film actors, has been tried over sexual assault allegations. He has previously been accused publicly or in formal complaints of misconduct by more than 20 women, but no other case has proceeded to court. Some were dropped because of a lack of evidence or the statute of limitations.

In a separate case, French actor Charlotte Arnould accused Depardieu of two rapes allegedly committed in August 2018. Depardieu was charged in 2020 with rape and sexual assault in that case, and in August prosecutors requested it go to trial. A magistrate has yet to make the decision.

In an open letter published in Le Figaro in October 2023, Depardieu wrote: "Never, but never, have I abused a woman."

Variety

LOS ANGELES: "Coco" is getting a sequel. Walt Disney Company CEO Bob Iger said Thursday that "Coco 2" is currently in development at Pixar Animation Studios.

"While the film is just in the initial stages, we know it will be full of humor, heart and adventure," Iger said at the company's shareholders meeting.

The sequel will reunite the creative team behind the first, including directors Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina. "Coco" followed Miguel, a 12-year-old boy with musical dreams who goes to the Land of the Dead to find out more about his family's history.

The original grossed over \$814 million at the worldwide box office and won two Oscars, for best animated feature and best song



Bob Iger

for the catchy hit "Remember Me." It also won a Golden Globe and the BAFTA for best animated film. "Coco 2" is reportedly eyeing a 2029 theatrical release. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese will have two of their games broadcast in primetime nationally for the first time in league history.

The June 7 and Aug. 9 games between the Indiana Fever and Chicago Sky will be shown on CBS. Both games are on Saturday night.

The WNBA will have more than 175 games broadcast across multiple platforms in the regular season, including 13 on ABC. The network will have an opening weekend doubleheader of Las Vegas against New York and Chicago vs. Indiana on May 17.

"The WNBA is coming off a 2024 season in which incredible basketball and countless memorable performances paved the way for the WNBA to deliver a record-breaking season," said WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert. "Now, with so much excitement around the player movement that took place this winter through free agency and trades, the WNBA's

broadcast and streaming partners in 2025 will spotlight the league's superstars, rising stars and must-see matchups like never before." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: The largely private relationship between Quinta Brunson and her husband of three years is over. Brunson, the star and creator of the hit ABC series "Abbott Elementary," filed to divorce Kevin Anik on Wednesday.

Her filing in Los Angeles Superior Court states the pair have an agreement they signed after marriage on how their assets should be divided in a divorce. They have no children together, so the divorce should be relatively straightforward and keep details about the breakup private.

Anik and Brunson dated for several years before marrying in October 2021, though both have been extremely private about their relationship. Brunson thanked Anik when she won an Emmy Award in 2022, which People magazine described as the first public confirmation they were married, and again when she won the best comedy actress Emmy in September. (AP)

Sakura: Symbol of life, death, rebirth

Japan declares cherry blossom season open in Tokyo

TOKYO, Japan, March 24, (AP): Japan's official cherry blossom spotters on Monday confirmed the first blooming of the country's favorite flower, declaring the official start of the festive season in the Japanese capital.

An official from the Japan Meteorological Agency carefully examined the specimen tree of Somei Yoshino variety at Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine and announced that more than five blossoms - the minimum required for the announcement - were flowering on it.

The opening matched the average year and was five days earlier than last year, according to the JMA.

Cherry blossoms, or "sakura," are Japan's favorite flower and usually reach their peak in late March to early April, just as the country celebrates the start of a new school and business year. Many Japanese enjoy walking or picnicking under the trees.

Sakura have deeply influenced Japanese culture for centuries and have regularly been used in poetry and literature, with their fragility seen as a symbol of life, death and rebirth.

The announcement in Tokyo, which is enjoying warmer-than-usual temperatures of around 19 Celsius (66 Fahrenheit), comes just one day after the blooming of the nation's first cherry

blossom was confirmed Sunday in the southwestern city of Kochi on the island of Shikoku.

The JMA tracks more than 50 "benchmark" cherry trees across the country. The trees normally bloom for about two weeks each year from first bud to all the blossoms falling off. They are expected to reach their peak in about 10 days.

Cherry trees are sensitive to temperature changes and the timing of their blooming can provide valuable data for climate change studies.

In recent years, Japan's cherry blossom season has tended to come earlier than the average, prompting concerns of a possible impact of climate change.



The blooming Somei Yoshino cherry tree at the specimen tree at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, Monday March 24. (AP)

Music



Michelle Zauner of Japanese Breakfast performs during Jack Antonoff's 1984 Superjam at the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival on June 18, 2022, in Manchester, Tenn. (AP)

Japanese Breakfast's singer embraces solitude

Zauner explores melancholy in new album

LOS ANGELES, March 24, (AP): "All of my ghosts are real, all of my ghosts are my home," Michelle Zauner of Japanese Breakfast sings in her singular way - sweetness laced with sorrow.

Four years ago, the release of her Grammy-nominated album "Jubilee" dovetailed with her bestselling memoir "Crying in H Mart" - chronicling her love of Korean food and loss of her mother - to produce a season of success. Then came a film adaptation of her memoir, for which she wrote the screenplay. With the Hollywood strikes, though, it came to a grinding halt (and later a full stop, when actor and director Will Sharpe left the project).

In the aftermath, Zauner recorded new tracks. She sidestepped the spotlight by moving to Seoul - where she immersed herself in Korean language and culture - the subject of her upcoming second book.

Zauner talked to The Associated Press about her fourth studio album, "For Melancholy Brunettes (and Sad Women)." Out recently, it's that rare thing: a cerebral yet deeply felt album from an artist with just enough commercial success to secure resources for her still-quiet indie vision.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. AP: The album cover looks like a very sumptuous painting. It's very memento mori with the skull and flowers - and then there's oysters and a tray of bloody guts. Where did the idea come from?

Zauner: I really loved the idea of being on the album cover, but not showing my face. I was feeling pretty introverted after the years that followed "Jubilee." It was a really natural desire to just focus more on the work and less on me as a figure.

I had noticed this kind of trope in many paintings of women collapsed over tables, overcome with melancholy. It looks like I'm this collapsed, spoiled prince just with a table full of excess, and still miserable.

I dressed the table with little Easter eggs from the album - almost like a still life where every object has some kind of meaning. There is a bowl of guts that is a line from "Here is Someone," and there's milky broth and oysters, which are lines on "Orlando in Love." There's flowers in a vase, which I mention in "Winter in LA."

AP: Melancholy is a motif throughout the tracks. It feels like a different flavor or color of grief than your earlier work. How would you describe the kind of sadness you wanted to capture?

Zauner: At this time in my life and the way that I think about melancholy, it's very intertwined with time and the passage of it. And this desire to get ahead of it and to keep it at bay - and the sort of melancholic reality that it's forever passing. I think of it not so much as like a violent sadness or longing or heartbreak, but kind of this pensive, anticipatory grief about the passage of time.

It evokes a specific kind of feeling of being sort of on



Michelle Zauner of Japanese Breakfast poses for a portrait on Tuesday, March 18, 2025, in New York. (AP)

edge. Or, like, a taut feeling. Most of that dissonance, I think, comes from the chord changes or the progressions. I originally wanted to make a creepy album, and those sort of changes felt really essential to achieving that kind of eerie sound.

AP: You recorded this album, shelved it, went to Korea for a year, came back to New York and are now releasing it. Why did you shelve it for a period of time and what's it like now listening back to the recordings?

Zauner: My last record was also shelved for a year because of COVID, so I'm honestly used to that process now. I've actually found that I really love my records even more with time away from them.

There's so much that goes into preparing for an album to come out, from the visuals to mixing and mastering to prepping for the tour that, honestly, that kind of separation is really nice.

I'm not someone that's super precious. I have a very clear idea of what I want, and I am someone that is good at knowing when to finish.

AP: You've talked about the toll that touring takes on the body, and pressures that come with reaching a certain level of recognition. What are ways you've learned to take care of yourself?

Zauner: It's so hard to just eat well on tour because you're so confined to what's around a venue. I eat a lot of Asian food and sometimes when you're in the middle of America, there's not a lot of options that are, you know, not Panda Express.

It's so hard to just not eat a home-cooked meal for months at a time. I'm actually going to be bringing a rice cooker on this tour, which is something that I did at the beginning of my tour days that I'm returning to.

I bring a yoga mat and stretch. Your body just gets like, so f---d from, like, sleeping in a moving bus in a tiny little coffin hole.

I probably am going to be sober for all of my tour time. I always really loved having a couple of drinks to get loose. But if you're doing that every day, it takes a toll on you eventually. A lot of the women I know that tour regularly have all sworn off alcohol, and I was very obstinate about it, like "It's fine, I can do both, I can have it all." But this is the tour that I finally accept that there's probably no drinking.

I'm also an only child and I need a lot of privacy and alone time. I think that my self-care is just like, "You are allowed to disappear."

AP: You're touring with the same musicians as the "Jubilee" tour, right? What are you excited about playing, venue-wise?

Zauner: I've somehow assembled 15 people that I happen to get along with really well, which is extremely rare for me. I feel like that's the best thing that I could have ever done for myself is just find 12 to 15 people that you can spend an ungodly amount of time together with and still like each other at the end.

We've never played the Ryman in Nashville, and that's something that we're all just super excited about.

I've had such an allegiance to Union Transfer in Philadelphia because the coat check is named after me.

AP: The coat check is named after you?

Zauner: Before I became a professional musician, I used to work the coat check there. Once, someone gave me a fake hundred-dollar bill. I gave them like \$98 of real change. And the manager was upset about that and told me that I was going to have to pay it out of my paycheck, which was like more than I made in the five hours that I had worked that shift. I had no money at this time.

Anyway, my boss was really cool about it and he stepped in and paid the \$100 for me. I never forgot that. Years later, when we sold out five nights at Union Transfer as a band, I paid him back the \$100 onstage. After the last night, they surprised me by naming that coat check "the Michelle Zauner's coat check." There's like a big hand-painted sign, which is very sweet.

AP: I think a lot of listeners will be surprised to hear actor Jeff Bridges' voice on "Men in Bars." Who would be a dream collaborator next?

Zauner: I really want to make, like, a sexy album and I really want to work with the band Air. I really love "Moon Safari."

I think because I sort of disavowed synths for this album, I suddenly am like, "Oh, I want to make like a sexy, synth record."

They write just such amazing bass lines and like, such cinematic music. Let's just put that out into the world.

Media

Press under attack

Media outlets battle Trump's new tactics

NEW YORK, March 24, (AP): During the first Trump administration, the biggest concern for many journalists was labels. Would they, or their news outlet, be called "fake news" or an "enemy of the people" by a president and his supporters?

They now face a more assertive President Donald Trump. In two months, a blitz of action by the nation's new administration - Trump, chapter two - has journalists on their heels.

Lawsuits. A newly aggressive Federal Communications Commission. An effort to control the press corps that covers the president, prompting legal action by The Associated Press. A gutted Voice of America. Public data stripped from websites. And attacks, amplified anew.

"It's very clear what's happening. The Trump administration is on a campaign to do everything it can to diminish and obstruct journalism in the United States," said Bill Grueskin, a journalism professor at Columbia University.

"It's really nothing like we saw in 2017," he said. "Not that there weren't efforts to discredit the press, and not that there weren't things that the press did to discredit themselves."

Supporters of the president suggest that an overdue correction is in order to reflect new ways that Americans get information and to counter overreach by reporters. Polls have revealed continued public dissatisfaction with journalists - something that has been bedeviling the industry for years.

Tension between presidents and the Fourth Estate is nothing new - an unsurprising clash between desires to control a message and to ask probing, sometimes impertinent questions. Despite the atmosphere, the Republican president talks to reporters much more often than many predecessors, including Democrat Joe Biden, who rarely gave interviews.

Concerns

An early signal that times had changed came when the White House invited newcomers to press briefings, including podcasters and friendly media outlets. The AP was blocked from covering pool events in a dispute over Trump's renaming of the Gulf of Mexico, setting off a flurry of First Amendment concerns among press advocates and leading the administration to assert that the White House, not the press, should determine who questions him.

Two months before the administration took office, former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer, who served under Republican President George W. Bush, had urged that changes be made.

"It's time to bring that (briefing) room in line with how readers and viewers consume the news in 2025," Fleischer said in an interview. "They don't get their news from The Washington Post, The New York Times and the three networks anymore. They get their news from a myriad of sources."

In practice, some newcomers have refreshingly tried to shed light on issues important to conservatives, instead of hostile attempts to play "gotcha" by the mainstream media, Fleischer said. There were also softballs, like when the Ruthless Podcast asked press secretary Karoline Leavitt if reporters who questioned border policy were "out of touch." The conservative Real America's Voice network tried to knock Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy off stride by asking why he wasn't wearing a suit in the Oval Office.

While the White House Correspondents' Association has protested the AP's treatment and efforts to upend tradition, it has been largely toothless.

For more extensive discussions, the president and his team generally favor interviews with outlets that speak to his supporters, like Fox News.

The White House has also established a "Rapid Response 47" account on X to disseminate its views and attack journalists or stories it objects to. The feed's stated goals are supporting the president and "holding the Fake Media accountable."

Leavitt, 27, hasn't hesitated to go toe to toe with reporters, often with a smile, and Tik-Tok collects some of those moments.

"We know for a fact there have been lies that have been pushed by many legacy media outlets in this country about this president, and we will not accept that," she said at her first press briefing. It stood in contrast to Trump's 2017 press secretary, Sean Spicer, who got into an angry confrontation with the press about the size of the president's inauguration crowd on his first day in the White House, and never truly recovered from it.

Showing the spread of the administration's disciplined approach, the Defense Department also has a rapid response account that says it "fights fake news." The Pentagon has evicted several news organizations from long-held office space, leading some reporters to worry about access to fast, reliable information during a military crisis.

"Strategically, he likes to use the press as a pawn - it is one of the institutions that he can demonize to make himself look good," said Ron Fournier, a former Washington bureau chief for the AP.

Trump has active lawsuits going against news outlets that displease him, such as CBS News for the way "60 Minutes" edited an interview with 2024 election opponent, Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris, or The Des Moines Register, for what turned out to be an inaccurate pre-election poll of Iowa voters.

Variety

NEW YORK: Mikey Madison, Jack Black and Jon Hamm are next up to host "Saturday Night Live" as the show hits the final stretch of its 50th season.

Less than a month after winning the best actress Oscar for "Anora," Madison is set to make her "SNL" hosting debut on March 29, with musical guest Morgan Wallen.

Black has signed on to host for the fourth time on April 5, a day after the release of his newest film, "A Minecraft Movie."

Elton John and Brandi Carlile are set to duet as musical guests the day after the drop of their album collaboration "Who Believes in Angels?"

Hamm has also agreed to become a four-time host on April 12, the day after the debut of his Apple TV+ show



Madison

"Your Friends and Neighbors." And Lizzo will be a four-time musical guest as she promotes her forthcoming album, "Love in Real Life." (AP)

BUDAPEST: A special exhibition featuring ancient Chinese zithers, or Guqins, kicked off Friday evening at the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest.

Titled "The Voice of Nature and the Human Soul from China - An Exhibition of Guqins from the China Three Gorges Museum" in China's southwest city of Chongqing, the display offers a rare glimpse into the artistry, spirituality, and philosophy embedded in this traditional Chinese string instrument, often referred to as the "instrument of the sages."

In his welcome address, Lajos Kemecsi, director-general of the Museum of Ethnography, said "The exhibition opening today marks a significant milestone in the complex cooperation between the Museum of Ethnography and its Chinese partner institutions. China's musical culture has a long and distinguished history, characterized by remarkable richness."

Kemecsi added that visitors can experience the unique

charm and depth of Chinese instrumental culture through the carefully selected items on display. Sun Jie, cultural counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, emphasized the symbolic value of holding such an event in Hungary, a country with deep musical traditions. (Xinhua)

ROME: The Trevi Fountain, arguably the world's most famous, has graced screens for decades, from Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" to Netflix's "Emily in Paris." Each year, millions of visitors push through Rome's narrow streets to gaze at the towering Titan legend flanked by falls cascading into a turquoise pool.

Yet, they never get to venture behind Oceanus' back to see what produces the sublime play of water in the baroque masterpiece. Wooden doors on an adjacent street lead to the maneuvering chambers that control the fountain's water supply, coming from the Aqua Virgo - an ancient Roman aqueduct 16 kilometers (10 miles) away. Two electric pumps recycle 126 liters (33 gallons) of water per second while Rome's water management company, ACEA, carefully monitors the flow around the clock. (AP)

TB cases in the US reach 12-year high

WHO in W. Pacific urges action to end tuberculosis by 2030

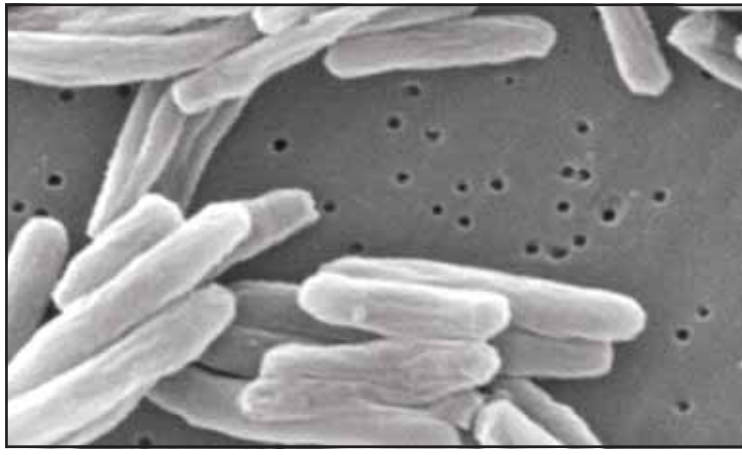
MANILA, March 24. (Agencies): The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday called on countries to take "urgent and decisive action" to end Tuberculosis (TB) by 2030.

"This is especially urgent in the WHO Western Pacific region, where nearly one in every five TB cases occur," the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific said in its press release on World TB Day, falling on March 24 every year.

With an estimated 1.9 million new cases and 95,000 deaths due to TB in 2023, the Manila-based office said the impact of this disease on families and communities is profound.

"Every missed TB case is a lost opportunity to save a life," said Saia Ma'u Piukala, WHO regional director for the western Pacific. "We must turn our commitments into decisive action, ensuring that every person at risk gets the timely, high-quality diagnosis and care that they deserve."

According to the WHO, TB is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that most often affect the lungs. It spreads through the air when people with TB cough, sneeze, or spit. TB is prevent-



This 2006 electron microscope image provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows Mycobacterium tuberculosis bacteria, which causes the disease tuberculosis. (AP)

able and curable with specific antibiotics, but it still kills more people than any other infection.

TB continued to rise again in the US last year, reaching its highest levels in more than a dozen years.

More than 10,300 cases were reported

last year, an 8% increase from 2023 and the highest since 2011, according to preliminary data posted this month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Both the number of cases and the rate of infections rose. Rates were up

among all age groups, and 34 states reported an increase.

CDC officials say the rise is the mainly due to international travel and migration. The vast majority of US TB cases are diagnosed in people born in other countries. Other illnesses that weaken the immune system and allow latent TB infections to emerge may also be at play.

Outbreaks in several states have contributed to recent TB trends, including a recent one in the Kansas City, Kansas area. The Kansas TB rate jumped 148% last year, according to the new CDC data. Alaska and Hawaii continue to have the highest case rates.

Meanwhile, China's self-developed novel tuberculosis mRNA vaccine started a clinical trial at Beijing Chest Hospital on Monday, according to the local newspaper Beijing Evening News.

Previous animal experiments have shown that the protective efficacy of the new vaccine is more than 20 times higher than that of both Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) and foreign tuberculosis vaccines.

This tuberculosis vaccine with independent intellectual property rights can offer a new vaccination option for people of all age groups and effectively reduce the incidence and infection rates of tuberculosis.

Next, the research and development team will study the vaccine's immunization strategies, immune methods, administration routes, and symptoms of vaccine adaptation, head of the hospital's bacteriological immunology Pang Yu was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

Meanwhile, the hospital launched an AI diagnosis model and a rapid detection method of tubercle bacillus bacteria based on tongue swabs.

The incidence rate of TB in China has declined by 3 percent annually since 2021, but challenges with the disease prevention and control persist.

Liu Qing, a senior official of infectious disease with the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration, revealed that the mortality rate of TB has maintained a low level. However, China still struggles to contain one of the world's most fatal infectious diseases, with the number of TB pa-

tients still high globally.

There is still an imbalance of TB incidence and prevention among different regions, and efforts need to be intensified for the timely identification of patients, Liu said at an event marking World Tuberculosis Day 2025, which fell on Monday.

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) teams worldwide join government and civil society partners in calling for more substantial political commitments, increased funding, and expanded access to TB services. AHF teams' World TB Day events will call for action and help raise awareness about TB - the world's deadliest infectious disease, the leading cause of death for people living with HIV, and a major cause of death related to antimicrobial resistance.

"Ending TB is not a question of whether or not it is possible-it is a matter of commitment. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the ability to stop this disease, but progress will only happen if governments prioritize TB as a global health emergency," said AHF Chief of Global Advocacy and Policy Terri Ford.



In a photo provided by Isar Aerospace, Photo Wingmen Media, Isar Aerospace Launch Vehicle 'Spectrum' rolls out at Andoya Spaceport in Nordmela, on Andoya island, Norway, on March 1. (AP)

Planarian regeneration study

European startup set for its first orbital rocket test

OSLO, Norway, March 24. (AP): A private European aerospace company is set to make the first test flight of its orbital launch vehicle from Norway on Monday.

The launch window for its Spectrum rocket from the island of Andoya in northern Norway is 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. local time, said Isar Aerospace, which is headquartered in Munich.

The launch is subject to weather, safety and range infrastructure. The company said it also could conduct the test flight later in the week.

The 28-meter- (91-foot-) Spectrum is a two-stage launch vehicle designed for small and medium-sized satellites.

The company largely rules out the possibility of the rocket reaching orbit on its first complete flight, saying it would consider a 30-second flight a success. Isar Aerospace aims to collect as much data and experience as possible on the first integrated test of all the systems on its in-house-developed launch vehicle.

The startup, which says it has raised more than 400 million euros (\$435 million) in capital, hopes to build up to 40 launch vehicles per year in the future in a plant outside of Munich. The launch vehicles are all to be used for putting satellites into orbit. Isar Aerospace is separate from the Euro-

pean Space Agency, or ESA, which is funded by its 23 member states.

ESA has been launching rockets and satellites into orbit for years, but mainly from French Guiana - an overseas department of France in South America - and from Cape Canaveral in Florida.

Space: China's space station is set to introduce a novel participant in its space science experiments -- the planarian, a creature renowned for its extraordinary regenerative capabilities. China Media Group reported on Saturday.

Planarians, flatworms with an evolutionary history spanning over 520 million years, are one of the widely used experimental animal models in biological research. These organisms demonstrate an exceptional capacity for tissue repair: when bisected, planarians can regenerate lost muscles, skin, intestines, and even an entire brain from each segment -- a process that can be repeated indefinitely.

The study of planarians holds profound implications for understanding human cellular mechanisms to combat aging and promote longevity, according to the Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Cholera cases

Gut health key to overall wellness

WEST HILLS, Calif., March 24. (Agencies): Nature Made, the leading national vitamin and supplement brandline with over 50 years of delivering high-quality products with ingredients backed by science, has announced the launch of clinically studied innovations and new formulations within its Digestive portfolio to deliver a range of probiotic, prebiotic, and fiber supplements for daily gut health support and benefits based on specific wellness needs.

Awareness of the role gut health plays in overall wellness continues to rise and, as consumers remain committed to proactive health and wellness through vitamin and supplement routines, the cultural conversation around probiotics and consumer exploration of the category are growing. However, while more than 70% of US adults consider digestive support to be a key component of health and wellness, nearly 75% experience digestive discomfort at least once a month and approximately 40% aren't comfortable doing day-to-day activities because of the gut health issues they experience.

Cholera: More than 178,000 cases of cholera have been confirmed in 16 countries in eastern and southern Africa from January 2024 to March 2025, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Monday.

The startling number, worsened by limited access to water, sanitation, hygiene and health services, has resulted in about 2,900 deaths, many of which are children, UNICEF said.

"We need the continued commitment of governments, the private sector, and individuals who believe that every child deserves a future," UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa Edeva Kadilli said in a statement issued in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

According to UNICEF, South Sudan and Angola have faced the most severe cholera outbreaks, with children under 15 years of age comprising 50 percent of cases in South Sudan and 40 percent in Angola.

Chief culprit of chronic disease epidemic

What are ultraprocessed foods, how do they affect your health?

NEW YORK, March 24. (AP): In the Trump administration's quest to "Make America Healthy Again," there may be no bigger target than ultraprocessed foods.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's new health secretary, has cited "highly chemically processed foods" as a chief culprit behind an epidemic of chronic disease in the US, including ailments such as obesity, diabetes and autoimmune disorders.

Such foods are "poisoning" people, particularly children, Kennedy said during Senate confirmation hearings. He has vowed to work to remove such foods from federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"I will do everything in my power to put the health of Americans back on track," he told lawmakers.

Key to that goal, however, could be making sure that consumers understand basic facts about ultraprocessed foods and the role they play in daily meals.

From sugary cereals at breakfast to frozen pizzas at dinner, plus in-between snacks of potato chips, sodas and ice cream, ultraprocessed foods make up about 60% of the US diet. For kids and teens, it's even higher -- about two-thirds of what they eat.

That's concerning because ultraprocessed foods have been linked to a host of negative health effects, from obesity and diabetes to heart disease, depression, dementia and more. One recent study suggested that eating these foods may raise the risk of early death.

Nutrition science is tricky, though, and most research so far has found connections, not proof, regarding the health consequences of these foods.

Food manufacturers argue that processing boosts food safety and supplies and offers a cheap, convenient way to provide a diverse and nutritious diet.

Even if the science were clear, it's hard to know what practical advice to give when ultraprocessed foods account for what one study estimates is more than 70% of the US food supply.

The Associated Press asked several nutrition experts and here's what they said:



A woman looks at products in the aisle of a store as her daughter naps in the shopping cart in Waco, Texas, on Dec. 14, 2010. (AP)

What are ultraprocessed foods?

Most foods are processed, whether it's by freezing, grinding, fermentation, pasteurization or other means. In 2009, Brazilian epidemiologist Carlos Monteiro and colleagues first proposed a system that classifies foods according to the amount of processing they undergo, not by nutrient content.

At the top of the four-tier scale are foods created through industrial processes and with ingredients such as additives, colors and preservatives that you couldn't duplicate in a home kitchen, said Kevin Hall, a researcher who focuses on metabolism and diet at the National Institutes of Health.

"These are most, but not all, of the packaged foods you see," Hall said.

Such foods are often made to be both cheap and irresistibly delicious, said Dr. Neena Prasad, director of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Food Policy Program.

"They have just the right combination of sugar, salt and fat and you just can't stop eating them," Prasad said.

However, the level of processing alone doesn't determine whether a food is unhealthy or not, Hall noted. Whole-grain bread, yogurt, tofu and infant formula are all highly processed, for instance, but they're also nutritious. Are ultraprocessed foods harm-

ful? Here's the tricky part. Many studies suggest that diets high in such foods are linked to negative health outcomes. But these kinds of studies can't say whether the foods themselves are the cause of the negative effects -- or whether there's something else about the people who eat these foods that might be responsible.

Ultraprocessed foods, as a group, tend to have higher amounts of sodium, saturated fat and sugar, and tend to be lower in fiber and protein. It's not clear whether it's just these nutrients that are driving the effects. Hall and his colleagues were the first to conduct a small but influential experiment that directly compared the results of eating similar diets made of ultraprocessed versus unprocessed foods.

Published in 2019, the research included 20 adults who went to live at an NIH center for a month. They received diets of ultraprocessed and unprocessed foods matched for calories, sugar, fat, fiber and macronutrients for two weeks each and were told to eat as much as they liked. When participants ate the diet of ultraprocessed foods, they consumed about 500 calories per day more than when they ate unprocessed foods, researchers found -- and they gained an average of about 2 pounds (1 kilogram) during the study period.

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Ortiz wins on Asian Tour

Hovland rallies to capture Valspar Championship



Los Angeles Clippers guard Ben Simmons and Oklahoma City Thunder guard Aaron Wiggins battle for a loose ball during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

Six players score in double figures, Cavs snap four-game losing streak

Oklahoma City holds on to beat Clippers

SALT LAKE CITY, March 24, (AP): Jarrett Allen scored 18 points and Donovan Mitchell added 16, helping Cleveland snap a four-game losing streak with a 120-91 victory over the Utah Jazz on Sunday.

Evan Mobley had 11 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks to help the Cavaliers get back in the win column. Six players scored in double figures for Cleveland.

Kyle Filipowski led Utah with 18 points and 13 rebounds. Walker Kessler added 13 rebounds and three blocks.

The Jazz rallied from an early 12-point deficit and took a 36-34 lead on Collin Sexton's layup midway through the second quarter. Cleveland went ahead for good after taking a 44-43 lead on Mitchell's pull-up jumper with 2:04 left before halftime.

The Cavaliers held Utah without a point for 6½ minutes and pulled away behind a 15-0 run to open the third quarter. Allen bookended the run with a pair of baskets, his second one giving Cleveland a 66-45 lead five minutes into the second half.

Thunder 103, Clippers 101

In Inglewood, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 26 points and eight assists, Aaron Wiggins scored 19 points and NBA-leading Oklahoma City extended their winning streak to six games by holding on to beat Los Angeles.

Alex Caruso scored 14 points; including the go-ahead 3-pointer with 1:54 remaining after Oklahoma City squandered a nine-point lead in the fourth quarter. Isaiah Hartenstein added 14 points and 10 rebounds, and Jaylin Williams scored 12 points.

The Thunder won despite missing Jalen Williams (hip) and Chet Holmgren (hip), their second- and third-leading scorers, respectively.

Kawhi Leonard had 25 points and 10 rebounds, and James Harden scored 17 points for the Clippers, who had their five-game win streak halted in head coach Tyronn Lue's return to the bench. Lue missed the previous two games due to back pain.

Nuggets 116, Rockets 111

In Houston, Jamal Murray had 39 points, Michael Porter Jr. added 17 points and nine rebounds and Denver beat Houston to snap the Rockets' nine-game win streak.

Murray, who scored 17 in the first half, had 17 in the third quarter as Denver outscored the Rockets

39-22 in the quarter to take a 96-79 lead.

Russell Westbrook had 14 points off the bench, Aaron Gordon scored 13 points with eight assists and DeAndre Jordan had 11 points and 15 rebounds for the Nuggets, which shot 51% and were 10 of 21 on 3-pointers.

Jalen Green scored 30 points, and Dillon Brooks added 21 points for Houston. Alperen Sengun had 17 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists, and Steven Adams finished with 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Rockets, which shot 44% and were 11 of 34 from behind the arc.

Trailing 109-100 with 1½ minutes left, Houston used a 7-1 run to cut the lead to three on a Sengun layup with 21 seconds left, but Christian Braun made two free throws with 19 seconds remaining to push the lead back to five.

Celtics 129, Trail Blazers 116

In Portland, Jayson Tatum had 30 points, nine assists and nine rebounds and Boston extended their winning streak to five games with a win over Portland.

Sam Hauser shot 8 for 10 from long distance and scored 24 points, and Derrick White added 17 points and eight assists for Boston, which was without Jaylen Brown, Jrue Holiday and Kristaps Porzingis. The Celtics (52-19) are five games behind the Cleveland Cavaliers for the top seed in the Eastern Conference with 11 games remaining.

Shaedon Sharpe scored 23 points for the Trail Blazers (32-40), who are 2½ games behind Phoenix and Dallas in the race for 10th place in the Western Conference.

Tatum's four-point play early in the third quarter gave Boston a 75-57 lead before Portland rallied. The Trail Blazers closed within seven points, but couldn't get any closer.

Spurs 123, Raptors 89

In Toronto, Devin Vassell scored 25 points, Julian Champagnie had 20 and San Antonio won their third straight game by routing Toronto.

Stephon Castle scored 15 points and Sandro Mamukelashvili added 13 for the Spurs. San Antonio led by as many as 38 points and won for the fifth time in seven.

Scottie Barnes scored 22 points, RJ Barrett had 18 and Jamal Sheard added 17 as the Raptors lost their fourth straight.

Barrett, Toronto's leading scorer, returned after missing the previous three games, but regulars Immanuel Quickley and Jakob Poeltl both sat for rest. The Raptors also played without reserve forward Chris Boucher (illness).

Barnes had six rebounds and six assists. According to the Raptors, he's the 10th player in NBA history to record at least 2,000 rebounds, 1,000 assists and 200 blocks before his 24th birthday.

Hawks 132, 76ers 119

In Atlanta, Trae Young scored 28 points with 12 assists, Zacharie Risacher scored 22 points and Atlanta beat Philadelphia.

Georges Niang added 20 points, including five 3-pointers, and Dominick Barlow finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds. Onyeka Okongwu scored 14 points and grabbed nine rebounds.

Quentin Grimes led the 76ers with 26 points and six assists. Rookie Justin Edwards scored 22 points, Ricky Council IV 14 and Guerschon Yabusele 11.

The Hawks shot 55% from the field, hit 17 3-pointers and made 19 of 22 from the free-throw line.

Pistons 136, Pelicans 130

In Detroit, Holland II scored 14 of his season-high 26 points in the fourth quarter as Detroit beats New Orleans.

McCullum had 40 points and seven assists, but Holland helped the Pistons outscore the Pelicans 43-39 in the fourth quarter to win for the third time in four games.

Jalen Duren added 22 points and 12 rebounds for the Pistons, who played without All-Star point guard Cade Cunningham because of a calf injury. Marcus Sasser, who like Holland came off the bench, scored 20 points.

Jordan Hawkins made six 3-pointers and scored 25 points for the Pelicans, who put up a much better fight in Detroit than on Monday in New Orleans, when the Pistons routed them 127-81.

Heat 122, Hornets 105

In Miami, Andrew Wiggins scored 42 points for the second-highest scoring game of his career, Tyler Herro added 29 and Miami beat Charlotte to snap a 10-game losing streak.

Wiggins had the most points by a Heat player this season - Herro had 40 three times - and finished five shy of his career high of 47, done Nov. 13, 2016, for Minnesota against the Los Angeles Lakers.

He'll face his former team, Golden State, on Tuesday for the first time since getting traded to Miami last month.

Nick Smith Jr. scored 19 and LaMelo Ball had 18 points and 11 assists for Charlotte, which led by 12 early but were eliminated from postseason contention. The Hornets haven't made the playoffs since 2016 - a seven-game Round 1 loss to Miami.

PALMHARBOR, Fla., March 24, (AP): Viktor Hovland found a swing that worked down the tough closing stretch at Innisbrook on Sunday, making three late birdies to rally past Justin Thomas with a 4-under 67 for a one-shot victory in the Valspar Championship.

Hovland has changed coaches five times since he last won at East Lake to capture the FedEx Cup in 2023. He won for the seventh time on the PGA Tour when he least expected it.

Hovland and Thomas finally separated from the pack during a final round so tight that nine players had at least a share of the lead at some point.

Hovland was three shots behind Thomas when he holed a 12-foot birdie putt on the par-5 14th to start his amazing run. He hit 7-iron to a tucked pin on the 16th to 5 feet for birdie, and then made a 12-foot birdie putt on the par-3 17th for the lead.

Thomas, who made four birdies in a five-hole stretch to take the lead, made bogey on two of the last three holes and shot 66.

Carlos Ortiz of Mexico made two early birdies and pulled away Sunday for a 6-under 64 and a three-shot victory over Patrick Reed in the International Series Macau, his second Asian Tour title since joining LIV Golf.

Ortiz, Reed and Jason Kokrak - all with LIV Golf - were the top three players and earned spots in the British Open this summer. It will be the first major for Ortiz in two years.

Sergio Garcia finished fourth, one shot away from getting one of the International Finals Qualifying exemptions to the British Open.

Ortiz, who has one victory on LIV Golf, also won the International Series Oman a year ago. He finished at 22-under 258 at Macau Golf and Country Club and earned \$360,000.

Miguel Angel Jimenez became the first multiple winner on the PGA Tour Champions this year when he chipped to within a foot for birdie on the par-5 18th for a 4-under 67 and a one-shot

victory in the Hoag Classic.

The 61-year-old Jimenez also won the Trophy Hassan II in Morocco in February.

This one came down to the wire. Jimenez and Freddie Jacobsen were tied at 14-under par, with Stewart Cink having just birdied the 18th hole ahead of them for a 65 to join them.

Jacobsen missed well to the right and was unable to get up-and-down for birdie. Jimenez came up just short of the green, leaving him a simple chip that he executed perfectly. Jacobsen missed his 25-foot birdie putt and shot 67 to share second place with Cink.

Fred Couples, who started the final round tied for the lead with Jimenez, only managed one birdie and shot 71 to tie for eighth, four shots behind.

Richard Mansell of England claimed his first European title Sunday when he two-putted from about 100 feet for birdie on the 18th hole for a 6-under 66 and a one-shot victory in the Porsche Singapore Classic.

Mansell, who started the final round one shot behind, ran off five straight birdies on the front nine to take the lead. His final birdie gave him the title over Keita Nakajima of Japan, who closed with a 65.

The tournament was reduced to 54 holes because of rain that washed out play on Thursday.

Tom McKibbin of Northern Ireland, who gave up a PGA Tour card this year to join LIV Golf, had a 68 and tied for third with Adrien Saddier of France, who also shot 68.

Quim Vidal of Spain closed with a 1-under 71 and defeated Joshua Berry with a birdie on the third playoff hole to win the Delhi Challenge for his fifth title on Europe's Challenge tour. ... Mimi Rhodes of England won her first Ladies European Tour title with a 2-under 69 for a two-shot victory over Kirsten Rudgeley of Australia in the Ford Women's NSW Open.



Viktor Hovland of Norway reacts as he holds the trophy after winning the Valspar Championship golf tournament at Innisbrook in Palm Harbor, Fla. (AP)

Season-opening wins for Hyderabad and Chennai

HYDERABAD, India, March 24, (AP): Ishan Kishan scored 106 net out off 47 balls as Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Rajasthan Royals by 44 runs in their season-opening encounter in the 2025 Indian Premier League.

Kishan smacked 11 fours and six sixes in his first IPL hundred on debut for his new franchise, which notched up its second-highest total in tournament history.

Travis Head scored 67 off 31 balls as the Sunrisers picked up where they left off in 2024 to reach a mammoth 286-6 in 20 overs.

Hyderabad's previous highest score was 287-3 - the highest IPL total - against Royal Challengers Bengaluru last season.

In the evening game, Chennai Super Kings beat Mumbai Indians by four wickets with five balls remaining in a high-profile clash.

Afghanistan's left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmad took 4-18 in four overs for Chennai as Mumbai was restricted to 155-9 after losing the toss. Tilak Varma top-scored with 31 off 25 balls.

Rachin Ravindra's unbeaten 65 off 45 balls, along with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's quick-fire 53 off 26, helped Chennai score 158-6 in 19.1 overs.



Chennai Super Kings' captain Ruturaj Gaikwad bats during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians in Chennai, India. (AP)

Rajasthan Royals fought well to post 242-6 (20 overs) in reply to Hyderabad's huge target. Dhruv Jurel led with 70 off 35 balls, while Sanju Samson scored 66 off 37 balls.

Feurstein wins 1st WC race

Vonn takes 2nd in final World Cup race of comeback season

SUN VALLEY, Idaho, March 24, (AP): Lindsey Vonn's return to the podium - six years since stepping away from ski racing, 11 months since her partial knee replacement, four months since announcing her return - hit her hard in the finish area.

Struggling to catch her breath, but still managing the energy to raise her ski poles in celebration, the tears fell. They were for joy and relief that she could even make it back to the World Cup circuit. They were for the satisfaction of proving all her doubters wrong.

Vonn found her vintage form while flying down the twisting and steep Challenger course at World Cup finals. The 82-time World Cup winner - along with three-time Olympic medalist - glanced at the scoreboard and soaked in the roar of the large crowd.

It's a moment she will cherish.

This was Vonn's first World Cup podium spot since March 15, 2018, when she finished third in a super-G in Are, Sweden. A year later in Are, she earned downhill bronze at the world championships before calling



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt, first place men's super-G overall season winner, celebrates during a ceremony at the World Cup Finals in Sun Valley, Idaho. (AP)

it a career due to her knee.

Vonn received a titanium knee last April and was feeling so good that she announced in November her plans for a return.

Gut-Behrami finished in a time of 1 minute, 12.35 seconds - edging Vonn by 1.29 seconds - to earn the season-long super-G crystal globe by overtaking Brignone. Gut-Behrami trailed by five points heading into Sunday's race. Gut-Behrami found plenty of speed and took some calculated risks to glide through the course. Brignone finished third, 1.33 seconds behind Gut-Behrami.

Lukas Feurstein led a 1-2 Austrian finish in the final super-G race of the season at the World Cup finals.

Feurstein's first World Cup victory came on the new and steep Sun Valley course. The 23-year-old finished in 1 minute, 10.96 seconds to hold off teammate Raphael Haaser by 0.19 seconds. Franjo von Allmen of Switzerland finished third.

Swiss racer Marco Odermatt made sure there was no drama by locking up the season-long discipline title ahead of the World Cup finals. He finished 215 points in front of fellow Swiss racer Stefan Rogentin. Vincent Kriechmayr of Austria wound up third - 219 points back - in the super-G standings.

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'Sponsorship highlights deep commitment to sports'

ABK sponsors Al-Arabi Club Futsal Championship and Heroes Penalty Kick tournament



A group photo featuring the victorious team.

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has announced its sponsorship of the Al-Arabi Club Futsal Championship and the Heroes Penalty Kick Championship, held during the holy month of Ramadan. The event featured participation from numerous teams and children in a lively entertainment setting, along with various prize draws.

The sponsorship of the two championships is part of ABK's social responsibility program during the holy month. The initiative emphasizes participation in sports activities and encourages community members to partake in them regularly.

On this occasion, Sager Albenali, Chief Communications Officer at ABK, stated, "This sponsorship highlights our deep commitment to sports.

We are dedicated to encouraging youth and new generations to engage in sports activities, given their crucial role and importance in maintaining health. Additionally, we aim to provide essential guidance for adopting a healthy lifestyle that suits them."

He added that sponsoring the championship demonstrates the Bank's ongoing dedication to ensuring the success of events in various sectors. It also reflects ABK's commitment to strengthening its presence among all segments of Kuwaiti society, as part of its continuous efforts to enhance its standing in the local market.

Albenali concluded by affirming the Bank's commitment to social responsibility, which forms a core component of its role as a leading banking institution in the Kuwaiti market.



Mr. Sager Albenali, Chief Communications Officer



The bank honored on the sidelines of the tournament's closing ceremony.

Mexico wins historic NL title

Jiménez continues comeback story

INGLEWOOD, Calif., March 24, (AP) — Raúl Jiménez scored his second goal on a penalty kick in the second minute of second-half stoppage time, and Mexico beat Panama 2-1 to win the CONCACAF Nations League tournament for the first time.

Jiménez, the 33-year-old Fulham striker, dominated the week at SoFi Stadium with all four of Mexico's goals in El Tri's two matches.

After he scored on a header in the eighth minute against Panama, he used a stutter-step approach before perfectly striking a penalty awarded when defender José Córdoba touched the ball with his inexplicably outstretched arm while chasing after it in the 90th minute.

"It's fantastic to come back after what I've been through," Jiménez said. "I'm really happy. This is just a great example that you never have to lose faith, and continue. You know what you're capable of doing."

This remarkable tournament is only the latest chapter in the comeback story of Jiménez, who incurred a serious head injury while playing for Wolves in November 2020. After fracturing his skull in a collision with Arsenal's David Luiz, he sur-



Mexico's Raul Jimenez lifts the trophy after the team won against Panama in a CONCACAF Nations League final soccer match in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

vived a life-threatening brain bleed and returned to competition nine months later.

The U.S. had won the first three editions of this tournament, which brings together the nations of North and Central America and the Caribbean. But with Jiménez in dominant form and veteran coach Javier Aguirre tweaking his formation to emphasize aggression, Mexico stepped

up to claim another trophy in the stadium where it won the 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup, both times in front of vociferously pro-Mexico crowds.

"We are enjoying our game," Jiménez said. "We are really happy. We knew since we arrived, since the (quarterfinals) against Honduras when we won our pass to the final four, we knew this game was going

to be difficult, but we knew we had the quality. We know each other. We know how we can play better than the other teams, and that's the key."

Adalberto Carrasquilla scored on a penalty in first-half injury time for underdog Panama, which staged a dramatic 1-0 upset of the host U.S. on Thursday night to reach the final.

Gabon's Aubameyang double sinks Kenya to dent WC hopes

NAIROBI, March 24, (Xinhua) — Kenya's 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification dreams suffered a blow after a 2-1 defeat at home to Gabon in Nairobi.

Former Arsenal and Borussia Dortmund striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored either side of the break to put the visitors 2-0 up.

Captain Michael Olunga pulled one back just past the hour, but it was not enough to save the Harambee Stars from defeat.

It was the first home game in four years for Kenya, who played in front of a sellout crowd led by the country's president William Ruto.

The defeat leaves Kenya fourth in qualifying Group F, as Gabon kept up the pressure on African champions Cote d'Ivoire at the summit.

Following a dramatic last gasp 3-3 draw to Gambia on Thursday, optimism was riding high among Kenyans that their team could outclass the Panthers.

But in front of a fervent support that filled the Nyayo National Stadium

three hours before kickoff, it took Aubameyang only 16 minutes to show his class.

The Al Qadsiah forward beat Kenya keeper Ian Otieno with a half volley from Guelor Kanga's delivery.

And the defensive frailties that had overshadowed Kenya's draw with the Gambia came to the fore again, when the Harambee Stars conceded a penalty for the second game running at the start of the second half.

Defender Erick Ouma handled the ball in the box to give away the penalty, and Aubameyang made no mistake from the spot.

Ouma redeemed himself somewhat when his low cross was tucked away by Al Duhail striker Olunga for his second goal in as many games. However, Kenya could not force an equalizer as Gabon saw out the win.

It was the first defeat for former South Africa international and UEFA Champions League winner Benni McCarthy in his second game in charge of Gabon.

Blaney's engine failure ends strong race

Larson overcomes pit road mishaps and restarts for Homestead victory

HOMESTEAD, Fla., March 24, (AP) — Kyle Larson passed Alex Bowman with six laps remaining in NASCAR's Cup Series race at Homestead-Miami Speedway on Sunday, giving the Hendrick Motorsports

driver the 30th win of his career at one of his best tracks.

Larson sped by as Bowman scraped the wall on Turn 4 with the lead. Larson extended his edge to more than a second over his Hendrick

Motorsports teammate, then held on to beat Bowman by 1.205 seconds for his second career Cup Series win at Homestead and his second victory of the weekend.

Larson fell one race short of sweeping the triple-header weekend. He won the Craftsman Truck race on Friday and finished fourth in the Xfinity Series on Saturday. He was hoping to join Kyle Busch as the only driver to sweep a triple-header weekend - Busch did it at Bristol Motor Speedway in 2010 and 2017.

He was far from dominant on Sunday. Larson, driving the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, led just 19 of 267 laps and had to overcome poor starting position, pit road mishaps, and bad restarts to pull off the win - his first victory of the season and first in the Cup Series at Homestead since 2022.

Bowman, who was Saturday's pole winner, finished second in the No. 48 Chevrolet. Bubba Wallace was third

for 23XI Racing after leading 43 laps - the most laps he's led in a race since September 2023. Joe Gibbs Racing teammates Chase Briscoe and Denny Hamlin rounded out the top five.

Ryan Blaney was running third when his engine blew up on Lap 207, causing a thick cloud of smoke to cover the track and a lengthy cleanup.

It had been a strong race for Blaney before then. He led 124 laps and won Stage 1 after starting sixth. It was the second time in three races that Blaney did not finish a race because of an engine failure with his No. 12 Team Penske Ford.

"It just stinks," Blaney said. "Led a lot of laps. Lost a little bit of track position there with some stuff on pit road but got back to third. And it was a great race between me, Bubba, and Larson. ... It was going to be a heck of a battle the last 60 laps or so, but just didn't really work out for us. We'll keep our heads up."



Kyle Larson crosses the finish line to win a NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Homestead-Miami Speedway in Homestead, Fla. (AP)

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Spain's Mikel Oyarzabal celebrates after scoring his side second goal during the UEFA Nations League quarterfinal second leg match between the Netherlands and Spain at Mestalla stadium in Valencia, Spain. (AP)

Sports

Morale high in the Kuwaiti camp

Kuwait banks on home support in pivotal World Cup qualifier against Oman

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait's World Cup qualification hopes hang in the balance as they prepare to host Oman in a decisive encounter at 9:15 PM this Tuesday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. The match marks the eighth round of Group B in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, set to be hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Elsewhere in Group B, Jordan will take on South Korea at 2:00 pm, while Palestine faces Iraq at 9:15 pm at Amman International Stadium.

South Korea leads the group with 15 points, followed by Iraq and Jordan, who are tied for second with 12 points each. Oman sits in fourth place with 7 points, while Kuwait is fifth with 5 points—just two points ahead of Palestine, which remains at the bottom of the standings.

The top two teams from each of the three groups will secure direct qualification to the World Cup, while the third- and fourth-place teams will enter the playoffs, divided into two groups, competing for two and a half spots.

For Kuwait, victory is the only viable option to keep their qualification hopes alive and boost their chances of finishing in third or fourth place. A draw would extend their chances into the final two

rounds, but a loss could significantly diminish their hopes of advancing.

The Blues will be without star striker Yousef Nasser, who scored both goals against Iraq in the previous round but, is suspended due to yellow card accumulation. This force Argentine coach Juan Pizzi to seek an alternative in attack, with Salman Al-Awadhi and Fawaz Mbilish emerging as potential replacements. Another tactical option could see Kuwait deploying a "false nine," with Eid Al-Rashidi or Mubarak Al-Fenini filling the role.

Beyond tactics, the coaching staff is banking on the team's rising morale following its strong performance against Iraq in Basra. Additionally, a strong home crowd is expected to provide a crucial boost, especially given the Blues' noticeable improvement in recent months.

Oman, under coach Rashid Jaber, recognizes the significance of this fixture. A win would dramatically improve its chances of progressing to the next round and put pressure on Iraq and Jordan. It will draw confidence from its resilient 1-1 draw against South Korea in the previous round.

Qatari referee Salman Falahi will officiate the match, assisted by Ramzan Al-Nuaimi and Majed Al-Shammari. Video Assistant Referees (VAR) Abdullah Al-Marri and Mohammed Ahmed will also be in charge.



Players pose for camera after their final training session.

Amir Shooting Championship to kick off on April 11



Officials of the tournament address the media.

KUNA photo

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): The President of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club, Du'aib Al-Otaibi, announced that the His Highness the Amir's International Shooting Championship will be held from April 11 to 20.

The prestigious event will bring together top shooters from across the Arab region and beyond.

Al-Otaibi, who also serves as the head of the organizing committee, shared the news with reporters on Sunday evening.

The competition will feature skeet, trap, and cartridge events for men, women, and mixed teams, hosted at the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Olympic Shooting Complex.

On behalf of the committee and all Kuwaiti shooters, Al-Otaibi expressed heartfelt gratitude to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for his continued patronage and unwavering support for the annual event and Kuwaiti athletes.

Kuwaiti referee crew set for Saudi vs Japan WC qualifier

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has appointed a Kuwaiti refereeing team to officiate the upcoming 2026 World Cup qualifier between Saudi Arabia and Japan, set for Tuesday at Saitama Stadium 2002. Ahmed Al-Ali will lead the match as the referee, with Abdullah Al-Enezi and Ahmed Sadiq serving as assistants. Ammar Ashkanani will act as the fourth official.

Abdullah Jamali will oversee the video assistant referee (VAR) duties, with Saud Al-Samhan assisting him. Japan has already secured its World Cup qualification, topping Group C with 19 points, while Saudi Arabia is in third place with 9 points.

In other group fixtures, China (6 points) will host Australia (10 points), while Bahrain (6 points) will face Indonesia (6 points).



Ahmed Al-Ali

Pedri delivers decisive blow, Spain survives Dutch thriller

France, Germany & Portugal reach Nations League semis

PARIS, March 24, (AP): Defending champion Spain and France needed penalty shootouts to reach the Nations League semifinals, where they were joined by Germany and Portugal.

Spain was pegged back three times by the Netherlands in a 3-3 draw after extra time in the second leg for a 5-5 aggregate score. Barcelona midfielder Pedri scored the decisive penalty kick after Spain goalkeeper Unai Simón had saved Donyell Malen's effort as the shootout finished 5-4.

France won the shootout by the same score against Croatia after leading 2-0 after 90 minutes to level the tie overall and force extra time, which saw no more goals scored. Dayot Upamecano scored the decisive spot kick after goalkeeper Mike Maignan brilliantly saved from Josip Stanisic.

Germany scored three first-half goals against Italy but then held on grimly for a 3-3 draw to win 5-4 on aggregate. Giacomo Raspadori's penalty deep into second-half stoppage time of the second leg had put Italy within one goal of forcing extra time in Dortmund.

Portugal beat Denmark 5-2 after extra time in Lisbon after losing the first leg 1-0. Francisco Trincão scored twice for Portugal late on, with Cristiano Ronaldo missing an early penalty.

The semifinals begin on June 4 with Germany playing Portugal in Munich, followed on June 5 with France vs. Spain in Stuttgart.

The final is on June 8. Kylian Mbappé's seventh game without a goal for France is his longest drought for the national team, and he remains tied for 48 goals.

Michael Olise got France back into the tie when he curled in a 52nd-minute free kick for his first international goal, then set up Ousmane Dembélé 10 minutes from time to make it 2-2 on aggregate.

Mbappé missed a good chance in extra time but held his nerve to score France's first penalty in the shootout at the Stade de France.

Mikel Oyarzabal's early penalty put Spain ahead in Valencia but Memphis



France's Kylian Mbappe, left, attempts a shot on goal past Croatia's Nikola Moro during the UEFA Nations League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between France and Croatia, at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. (AP)

Depay equalized from the spot in the 54th minute.

Oyarzabal grabbed his second goal midway through the second half following a counterattack but defender Ian Maatsen's left-footed strike sent the game into extra time.

Barcelona star Lamine Yamal put the Spanish ahead again in the 103rd minute with a neat finish, but midfielder Xavi Simons equalized as the Dutch took Spain to penalties.

Joshua Kimmich netted from the penalty spot after 30 minutes for Germany and Bayern Munich teammate Jamal Musiala added the second goal six minutes later in unusual circumstances.

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma had just made a fine save from a header. As he was remonstrating with his defense, Kimmich played a short corner to Musiala and he clipped the ball into the net with Donnarumma stranded.

Striker Tim Kleindienst put the Germans ahead 3-0, and Moise Kean

pulled two second-half goals back for Italy before late drama.

Ronaldo is the all-time top scorer



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo takes a header during the UEFA Nations League soccer match between Portugal and Denmark, at the Jose Alvalade Stadium in Lisbon. (AP)

in men's soccer, but he saw his tame sixth-minute spot-kick saved by Kasper Schmeichel, who guessed the right way and gathered easily.

Portugal took the lead close to half-time when defender Joachim Andersen clumsily headed into his own net from a corner.

Rasmus Kristensen headed in the right way for the equalizer in the 56th, getting his first Denmark goal in the process.

Ronaldo made it international goal No. 136 when he squeezed the ball in from close range but Christian Eriksen equalized for 2-2 moments later when he turned in a cross, only for Trincão to put the game into extra time and then score again.

Goncalo Ramos added the fifth goal. Denmark won the first leg 1-0.

Daniel Maldini started his first match for Italy, 23 years after his father Paolo Maldini's last game for the national team. Cesare Maldini, Daniel's grandfather, also played for Italy.

Kazma continues strong performance in league

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, Kazma continued its stellar performance in handball after claiming the Super Cup last week, defeating Al-Qadsia 27-21 in the final round of the 12th round of the "Merged" League at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Hall, where Al-Arabi also triumphed over Al-Sahel with a commanding 46-28 victory.

With these results, Kuwait Clubremains at the top of the standings with 22 points, just one point ahead of second-place Kazma. Burgan follows with 19 points, while Al-Arabi sits at 16 points. Al-Salmiya and Al-Sulaibikhat each have 14 points, with Al-Qurain, Al-Qadsia, and Al-Nasr all tied at 12 points. Khaitan and Fahheel have 8 points, Al-Tadamon has 3 points, Yarmouk has 2 points, and Al-Sahel remains at 0.

The preliminary round will conclude on the 28th of this month, after which the Premier League will commence. The top six teams from the preliminary round will qualify based on accumulated points. The Premier League will be played in three divisions, with the



Players in a fight for the ball.

team with the highest points at the end being crowned champions.

The teams ranked seventh through 14th will compete in the First Division League, which will be held in a two-round, home-and-away format, with points from the preliminary round carried over.

The 13th round begins today with two exciting matches. The first will see Al-Tadamon face Al-Nasr at 9:00 pm.

New Zealand qualifies for World Cup

AUCKLAND, New Zealand, March 24, (AP): New Zealand will play at the 2026 World Cup after beating New Caledonia 3-0 on Monday in the final of the Oceania confederation qualifying series.

The New Zealand "All Whites" reached the World Cup for the third time after qualifying in Spain in 1982 and South Africa in 2010. They join hosts Canada, the United States and Mexico and Japan, which last week became the first team to qualify for the 48-team tournament.

New Caledonia still has a chance to qualify through a six-team intercontinental playoff involving teams from the Asian, African, North and Central American and South American confederations.

New Zealand had a setback when its captain, Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood, was forced from the field with a hip injury in the 53rd minute with the score still 0-0.

Wood is the focus of the New Zealand attack, scoring three headed goals

in New Zealand's 7-0 semifinal win over Fiji in a semifinal on Friday.

Up stepped an unlikely star in Wood's absence. In the 62nd Michael Boxall, the 36-year-old center back from Minnesota United, scored his first goal in 55 international appearances to finally break the deadlock. Boxall met Francis de Vries' corner at the far post and headed it home.

Four minutes later the 17-year international veteran Kosta Barbarouses, who replaced Wood, ran onto Tim Payne's pass and chipped the ball over Nyikeine to make it 2-0.

Finally, Denmark-based Elijah Just scored from Barbarouses' assist in the 80th to clinch New Zealand's place at the World Cup.

"When the goal went in I think I was a bit more relieved than anything," Boxall said. "Fair play to New Caledonia, they made it pretty hard work for us."

"Everyone's reaction when the ball finally went into the back of the net was incredible."