



Defense top brass discuss steps to face crisis Page 2



## Kuwait Amir, Crown Prince mark Eid with messages of unity and solidarity

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The Amiri Diwan conveyed on Thursday the warmest congratulations of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to citizens and residents of Kuwait on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, praying that the country may continue to enjoy unity, love, and harmony.

On this festive occasion, the Amiri Diwan also extended congratulations to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, as well as to the Kuwaiti people and all residents.

It expressed hopes that the occasion would return as the nation enjoys greater peace and security under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, particularly amid the exceptional circumstances facing the region, while praying for the safety of Kuwait's defenders and mercy upon its martyrs.

His Highness the Amir received greetings from senior Sheikhs marking the advent of Eid Al-Fitr. Cables were sent by His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem

Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. They conveyed sincere congratulations and good wishes, hoping the occasion returns for many years to come.

In his reply, His Highness the Amir thanked them for their greetings and wished the Kuwaiti people continued welfare, progress, and prosperity.

His Highness the Amir also received a phone call from King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain, during which they exchanged Eid Al-Fitr greetings. The two leaders strongly condemned the recent Iranian acts of aggression against Kuwait and Bahrain, describing them as blatant violations of sovereignty, international law, and the UN Charter.

They emphasized the importance of halting escalation and pursuing dialogue and diplomatic solutions to preserve regional security and stability. His Highness the Amir expressed appreciation for King Hamad's gesture, reflecting the deep-rooted ties between the two brotherly nations, and wished the Kingdom of Bahrain continued prosperity under its wise leadership.

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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah



### Opinion

## Persians' enmity toward the Arabs is millennial-old and counting

### Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

THE animosity of Persian leaders towards the Arabs, which led to the attacks on neighboring Arab states, particularly those in the Gulf, is a complex issue. Understanding this hostility is crucial in revealing the true sentiments – regardless of sect or doctrine – that Persian leaders harbor towards Arabs.

This enmity is neither a new development nor a

result of the current American-Israeli conflict with the Iranian regime. It is a deep-rooted, centuries-old legacy. Its origins can be traced back to the Battle of Dhi Qar, and most importantly, to a pivotal moment in Persian history – the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. The event marked a devastating defeat for the expansionist ambitions of the Persians at the time.

Before the advent of Islam, the Persian Empire had enormous control over the behavior of Arab tribes, many of whom were Christians, thereby, reflecting an immense sense of Persian superiority.

The catalyst for conflict was a dispute between Persian King Khosrow II (Khosrow Parviz) and Al-Nu'man Ibn Al-Mundhir. The discord began when Khosrow II wanted to marry Al-Nu'man's daughter,

a proposal that the father rejected. Although the details are not discussed here, the refusal led to a war between the Arab tribes and the Persians.

A force of just 20,000 Arab fighters defeated the Persian Army, which was larger -- around 120,000 soldiers. Despite this defeat, the Persian Empire was undeterred and continued its expansion into the Arab world, motivated by a desire for revenge. However, the ongoing expansion proved to be disadvantageous for the empire.

The decisive battle involving the Persian Empire took place in 12 AH. At the time, Khalid Ibn Al-Walid gave Hormizd, the Persian governor of Iraq, a choice – convert to Islam, pay the jizya (tribute) or face war.

Khosrow II then commanded his governor in Mes-

opotamia to reinforce his army. The Muslims were ready and the ensuing Battle of Kazima resulted in the fall of the Sasanian Empire.

These initial defeats only intensified the Persians' hostility towards the Arabs, whom they dismissively viewed as inconsequential tribes. Nevertheless, the following events proved the superior power and strategic acumen of the Arabs in organization and warfare.

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## CUSTOMS SHIFTS INTO EMERGENCY GEAR TO KEEP GOODS FLOWING

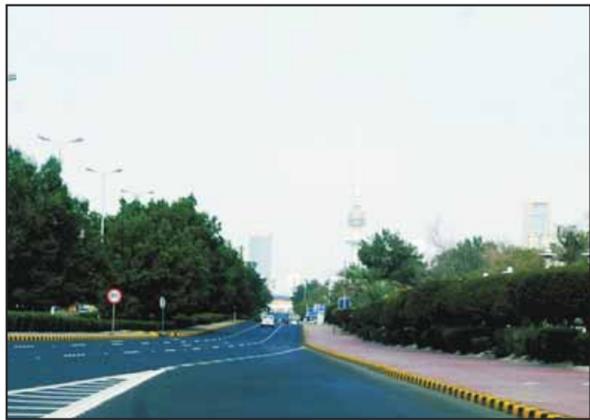


Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

With temperatures hovering in the low 20s and humidity in the air, Kuwait City glows softly as the Liberation Tower pierces the overcast skyline.

## Unsettled skies ahead as Kuwait faces multi-day rain

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The Kuwait Meteorological Department forecast on Sunday that the country will see chances of scattered rain from Sunday evening, with some thundery showers in certain areas, continuing until late Monday night, before returning from Tuesday morning through Thursday evening.

Acting Director of the department

Dhirar Al-Ali told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather charts show an increase in low and medium clouds, with cumulus formations bringing scattered rain from Sunday evening, occasionally turning thundery in some regions and persisting until late Monday night.

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# Kuwait drags Iran to ICAO over air strikes

Washington and Tehran trade threats of expanding war

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) submitted an official protest letter to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) over what it described as serious violations and Iranian attacks targeting the country's airspace and facilities at Kuwait International Airport.

In a statement to KUNA, the authority said the letter stressed that these attacks constitute a blatant violation of international conventions governing civil aviation, exposing passengers, airlines, and airport personnel to significant risks.

The incidents disrupted air traffic, forcing the suspension of all flights and re-

sulting in substantial financial losses to the civil aviation sector, as well as human injuries and threats to the safety of passengers and infrastructure.

The authority noted that the protest letter detailed the nature of the violations and their repercussions on aviation safety and security.

It also called on ICAO to take necessary measures to ensure the protection of airspace and civilian facilities and to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in line with international standards.

The statement affirmed that Kuwait reserves its full legal rights to take all necessary actions to safeguard its security, sovereignty, and aviation infrastructure.

Kuwait's General Administration of Customs said Sunday that it has activated an emergency plan since the first day of the Iranian attacks on Kuwait to ensure the continuity of supply chains and the smooth flow of goods across all customs ports.

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## Kuwait, GCC deepen strategic coordination with Washington

WASHINGTON, March 22, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to the US, Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, joined ambassadors of the GCC states in a meeting with US Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby to discuss the latest regional security developments.

In a statement to KUNA, Sheikha Al-Zain said the meeting, held at the Pentagon, also included Deputy As-

istant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Mike DiMino and senior advisor at the US State Department's Near Eastern Affairs Bureau Robert Palladino.

She noted that the meeting comes within the ongoing coordination between GCC countries and the US, based on their long-standing strategic partnership.

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KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi conducted inspection tours on Friday to some hospitals and health centers across the country to ensure the smooth workflow during Eid Al-Fitr holiday, assess readiness levels and the provision of pharmaceutical supplies.

## Kuwait health authorities lock in preparedness across all facilities

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi conducted inspection tours on Friday to some hospitals and health centers across the country to ensure the smooth workflow during Eid Al-Fitr holiday, assess readiness levels and the provision of pharmaceutical supplies.

The visits were part of the ministry's ongoing field-monitoring approach aimed at strengthening preparedness across all health facilities and reaffirming its firm commitment to providing integrated, safe services, the ministry said in a press statement.

The ministry also emphasized the readiness of the healthcare system to handle various circumstances and ensure the continuity of care with efficiency and competence.

Accompanied by Assistant Undersecretary for Drug Control Dr. Ahmad Al-Saeed,

the minister visited also Farwaniya Hospital and Jahra Hospital, where they verified the availability of pharmaceutical stock and monitored the supply system to ensure uninterrupted service delivery.

According to the statement, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, accompanied by Assistant Undersecretary for Dental Affairs Dr. Ahmad Asad, conducted a field tour that included Amiri Hospital, Jaber Hospital, and Mubarak Al-Kabeer hospital.

Furthermore, the Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Foreign Healthcare services Dr. Hesham Klander visited Al-Sabah Hospital, where he reviewed the readiness of departments and the continuity of specialized services.

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KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi during a visit to one of the hospitals.

### Other Voices

## In times of crisis, let the law lead, not the noise

By Dr. Fawaz Khaled Alkhateeb

In times like these, people react quickly. News spreads fast, and opinions spread even faster. But in the middle of all that, something important often gets overlooked: the law.

Following the recent developments and reports linked to individuals allegedly connected to Hezbollah, names and photos have been circulating widely on social media. Many have rushed to comment, share, and even judge, without waiting for the legal process to take its course.

This is exactly where we need to slow down.

There is a basic principle that should never be forgotten: every person is pre-

sumed innocent until proven guilty by a final and binding judgment. This is not just a legal concept, it is what keeps justice fair.

Investigations are confidential for a reason. Sharing details, publishing names, or speculating publicly about ongoing cases does not help. It can interfere with the process itself. The Public Prosecution is responsible for handling these cases and operates within a legal framework designed to protect both society and individual rights.

At the end of the day, only the courts decide. That decision only becomes final after all legal stages are complete.

What we are seeing today is something different. People are forming conclusions before the system has had a chance to work. Publishing names, sharing photos, or attacking individuals publicly may feel like participation, but in reality it can cross into legal responsibility.

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Dr. Alkhateeb

## Prayer Timings

Fajr .....	04:51	Asr .....	15:20
Sunrise ..	06:10	Maghrib ..	17:50
Zohr .....	12:00	Isha .....	19:06

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Warm with light to northwesterly wind to light wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

## Weather

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait Airport	22	05
Abdaly	22	07
Jahra	23	08

## Defense top brass discuss steps to face crisis

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah chaired a meeting on Thursday attended by Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as well as senior military and security leaders to discuss the latest developments in the country and region.

Sheikh Fahad reviewed during the meeting the joint security and defence plans, as well as the level of combat and readiness of the various military sectors, said the Interior Ministry in a statement.

He stressed the need of raising levels of alertness and caution to confront all potential challenges, ensuring the protection of the nation's security and safety.

He praised the level of coordination between the military institutions (the army, police, and National Guard), affirming the need to collaborate efforts, exchange information, and work with a team spirit to deter any attempts at undermining security or breaking the law.

At the meeting's conclusion, he emphasized the importance of continuing these meetings to monitor field developments, expressing confidence in the armed forces and security to perform their duties.

Kuwait Mol Undersec. inspects vital security sectors  
Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior Maj. Gen. Abdulwahab Al-Waheeb inspected several field, security, and vital sectors on Saturday as part of ongoing field visits to assess readiness levels during Eid al-Fitr holiday.

In a press statement, the ministry said that during the tour, he reviewed the sectors' full preparedness and readiness levels and was given a com-



KUNA photo  
First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah chairs the meeting of senior officials dealing with security and stability of Kuwait.

prehensive briefing on security plans and field deployment to protect security sites and facilities.

It added that the tour is meant to ensure the highest levels of protection and security control amidst the current situation and developments in the country and the region.

The senior security official conveyed to the field sector personnel the greetings and congratulations of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah, on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, commending their dedication to performing their duty.

## China and Kuwait mark 55th 'versary of friendship, trust

By HE Yang Xin

Ambassador of China to Kuwait



HE Yang Xin

March 22, 2026 marks the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait. Over the past half century and more, China and Kuwait have forged a profound friendship across vast distance.

We have constantly deepened cooperation no matter how the times change, setting a fine example of mutual understanding, mutual affinity and mutual benefit.

China and Kuwait are good friends trusting each other.

The Chinese people will never forget Kuwait's firm support for the restoration of the lawful seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations, and highly appreciate Kuwait's steadfast commitment to the one-China principle. China staunchly supported Kuwait's sovereignty and independence during the invasion, and actively supported Kuwait in playing a constructive role at the United Nations and in other multilateral diplomatic activities. In 2018, the two nations forged a strategic partnership. In recent years, H.E. President Xi Jinping and H.H. Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Amir of Kuwait had two successful meetings and reached important consensus on the deepening of China-Kuwait strategic partnership, charting a new blueprint for the future of bilateral relations.

Since the escalation of the situation in the Middle East on February 28, 2026, China has actively carried out diplomatic mediation, calling for an immediate stop to the military operations and a return to dialogue and negotiation as soon as possible. China supports Kuwait and other countries involved in safeguarding their respective sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

China and Kuwait are good partners pursuing shared development. Kuwait provided strong support to China for its initial economic and social development, offering the largest amount of government concessional loans to China among the Arab countries. And China has been Kuwait's largest trading partner for 11 consecutive years, with bilateral trade reaching 18.58 billion U.S. dollars in 2025. Under the framework of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, Chinese enterprises have been actively engaged in the construction of major projects in Kuwait. At present, about 70 Chinese enterprises are operating in the country.

Major cooperative projects such as the Mubarak Al Kabeer Port, will strongly underpin Kuwait's national development strategy and make positive contributions to its economic and

social development. As Kuwait steadily advances the Kuwait Vision 2035, the potential of China-Kuwait cooperation in such sectors as industrial upgrade, green development and the digital and smart economy has been progressively unleashed. Products featuring intelligent manufacturing from China including automobiles, communications

devices, and robotics are increasingly popular with Kuwaiti families.

China and Kuwait are good brothers sharing deep mutual affection. When China suffered natural disasters and serious epidemics, Kuwait has always given generous support to the Chinese people. Likewise, China once dispatched professional teams to help Kuwait extinguish oil field fires. In recent years, with the increase in direct flights between the two countries and China's unilateral visa-free policy for Kuwaiti citizens, people-to-people exchanges between the two sides have become increasingly frequent. The first China Cultural Center in the Gulf region was officially inaugurated in Kuwait in 2025.

The Chinese medical team to Kuwait, the sole Chinese medical assistance team stationed in the Gulf region, has been serving in Kuwait for five decades, providing high-quality medical services to over one million local residents. More and more Kuwaiti friends have come to know about China and be familiar with China through "China Travel", while increasing numbers of Chinese people have visited Kuwait. Together, they have been an envoy for friendly exchanges between our two countries.

This year is the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait. It is also the 70th anniversary of the beginning of diplomatic ties between China and Arab states. At this crucial juncture linking past achievements with future prospects, China will host the second China-Arab States Summit and the China-GCC Summit which will set longer-term goals, formulate more holistic plans and roll out more concrete measures for the future of China-Arab and China-GCC relations, and surely inject strong impetus into the growth of China-Kuwait relations.

Arab friends often say, "True friendship never fades with time." In the past 55 years, China and Kuwait have worked together to promote cooperation and friendship, becoming good friends, good partners and good brothers that share weal and woe. I'm confident that under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state and with joint efforts of the two peoples, China-Kuwait relations will enjoy an even brighter future.

# Kuwait Airways to begin ops via Dammam from Thursday

Travelers safety, security top priority

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The Kuwait Airways (KA)

announced Saturday the resumption of its scheduled flights to and from Cairo via Dammam Airport in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with four flights per week on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, as of this Thursday, March 26.



Al-Shatti

Acting CEO of KA Abdulwahab Al-Shatti told KUNA that passengers would be received at the Khairan Mall terminal on Wednesday, March 25, this week, 24 hours

before the flight time.

The latest time for receiving passengers and for the buses to depart to the Nuwaiseeb border crossing is 8 hours before the departure time, he elaborated.

The company would continue to employ its operational capabilities with high efficiency to ensure smooth travel flow, he noted.

He affirmed that the company relies on flexible and proactive operating plans that keep pace with various developments.

He stressed that the KA is keen on continuous coordination with the relevant authorities inside and outside Kuwait, in a way that contributes to providing the best operational alternatives and solutions.

Al-Shatti pointed out that the safety and security of passengers and flight crews remain at the top of the national carrier's priorities.

He went to say that a designated area has been prepared for passengers at Khairan Mall to ensure their safety and comfort, while also ensuring that they receive their land transportation ticket.

He urged travelers to adhere to the instructions

regulating land transport trips, beginning with proceeding to the baggage weighing area and completing check in procedures.

Travel procedures will be completed at King Fahd International Airport in Dammam in preparation for departure to the final destination, Cairo.

Al-Shatti noted that passengers are transported via buses belonging to the company from the Kuwait to King Fahd International Airport in Dammam. He stressed that residents must obtain a transit visa for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Al-Shatti stated that Kuwait Airways provides limousine service to transport Royal and Business Class passengers from their houses to Khairan Mall only and based on service requests. He explained that passengers wishing to travel using their private vehicles must proceed to Khairan Mall to obtain their boarding pass, then head to Dammam Airport to check in and hand over their baggage.

The Kuwait Airways allows booking for passengers through the Customer Service Call Center (171) or via WhatsApp at: 009651802050, along Kuwait Airways' sales offices.

## Mol warns citizens and expats against spreading false info

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Director of the Security Media Department at the Ministry of Interior Colonel Othman Al-Mansouri stressed the importance of accuracy in sharing information on social media.

Al-Mansouri warned against spreading rumors or implicating individuals without evidence, as this is a violation that harms innocent people. He emphasized that only competent authorities are authorized to announce case details, and underscored the need to obtain information from official sources and avoid speculation or inaccurate information.

He added that the widespread praise from citizens and expatriates for the efforts of security authorities reflects a high level of public awareness and strong support for security personnel. He commended this action, which boosts the morale of security personnel in performing their national duty.

He pointed out that publishing details of security seizures and the uncovered plots and tools has contributed to raising public awareness.

Moreover, the ministry reaffirmed its commitment to perform its duties with utmost firmness and vigilance, and that it will not hesitate to take legal action against anyone found to be involved in spreading rumors or undermining public safety.

It urged everyone to cooperate with official authorities and comply with the instructions to maintain national security and to protect the public.

It has been reported that the security authorities apprehended an individual who appeared in a video circulating on social media.

In the video, he disseminated misleading information and figures, claiming the arrest of more than 1,000 people—a baseless allegation intended to misinform the public and incite unrest. He also called for amnesty for those sympathetic to Iranian aggression. Legal measures were taken against him and he was referred to the Public Prosecution.

The ministry emphasized the importance of verifying information, obtaining it from official sources, and refraining from circulating rumors or false news. It asserted that it will not tolerate anyone who spreads false information or harms the society.

## UAE dismantling of terror gangs wins Kuwait praise

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The Kuwait Foreign Ministry hailed Friday the efficiency and vigilance of UAE security organs in monitoring and dismantling a terror network linked to Iran and the terrorist Hezbollah organization and arresting its members, who sought to disrupt its security and stability.

In a press release, the ministry restated Kuwait's categorical rejection of all forms of terrorism, and condemned the perpetrators and their supporters, while underlining absolute solidarity with the UAE and its support for all measures it takes to safeguard its security, stability and sovereignty.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Friday Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the Israeli occupation's targeting of military facilities in Syria.

This act is a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity as well as international law, the UN Charter, and relevant international legitimacy resolutions, the ministry said in a statement.

The State of Kuwait has renewed its call for the Security Council and international community to necessarily assume their responsibilities and cease these repeated violations, it added.

The statement stressed the country's support for the Syrian government to face aggressions and take all required measures to maintain its security and stability, and ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

## Kuwait launches probe into spying, state security cases

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The Public Prosecution said it has launched investigations into two separate cases related to espionage and acts undermining state security.

In a statement Sunday, the Public Prosecution said the investigative team began its work in cooperation with relevant authorities, obtaining the necessary legal authorizations to apprehend the suspects and search their premises.

The measures resulted in the seizure of tools and devices linked to the criminal activity.

The Public Prosecution, under the directive of Attorney General Saad Al-Safran, emphasized that the investigations are classified and prohibited the publication, broadcast, or circulation of any news, statements, or information related to these cases through any means.

This is in accordance with Article 75, Paragraph 2 of the Code of Criminal Procedures and Trials, as amended by Law No. 3 of 2012.

The statement added that the Public Prosecution will inform the public and media of the investigation outcomes once they are finalized, as required by law.

As part of direct oversight of the investigations, both Attorney General Saad Al-Safran and Public Prosecutor Meshal Al-Ghanem reviewed the progress of the cases, receiving a detailed briefing from the head of the investigative team, Chief Prosecutor Talal Al-Abdulrazzaq, along with 11 members of the Public Prosecution team, regarding the investigation's procedures, work plan, and measures taken.

The statement confirmed that the Attorney General was kept updated on the investigations by the specialized team, which has begun taking the necessary legal measures to complete the process.

The Public Prosecution stressed that these acts constitute serious crimes threatening state security, subject to the severest penalties prescribed by law, and that it will continue to take all legal measures against anyone found involved, in preparation for referring the suspects to the judiciary.



KUNA photo  
Mosques throughout Kuwait were jam-packed for Eid prayers after the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan.

## Muslim worshippers flock to mosques for Eid prayer

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Amid highly peaceful, spiritual and cheerful atmospheres, large numbers of Muslim worshippers performed Eid Al-Fitr prayers on Friday morning with glorification of Allah, the Almighty, and praise to Him echoing from loudspeakers across Kuwait.

The prayers signalled the conclusion of the holy lunar month of Ramadan.

In colourful clothes, scores of men, women and children went to mosques designated by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs from the early hours of the day.

### Other Voices

## The receipt we have waited for 45 years

By Ahmad alsarraf

AT the beginning of 1980, Kuwait had approximately 550,000 landline telephone connections. These lines were used for all communications, both local and international, as well as for operating telex machines and other services.

Due to the poor systems and services provided by the Ministry of Communications at the time, and as a step towards modernization, it was decided to privatize the printing and distribution of telephone bills to subscribers on a monthly basis.

The task was not easy, given the chaotic address system and the absence of a GPS system.

Several companies submitted bids, most offering around one million dinars annually. One bid stood out, with the bidder offering to undertake the task for only KD 75,000.

This fact was well known to those working at the Ministry of Communications at the time, as well as to the companies that submitted bids, including a company managed by my friend Hisham Al-Sultan.

The then-Minister of Communications, as well as the relevant committee, decided to enforce the law and award the bid to the lowest offer, even though everyone believed there was something wrong.

The error was later discovered, and the tender was canceled. From that day forward, no landline user received a monthly bill as before. Those who wanted to know the cost of their international calls had to visit the ministry in person to request a printout of their calls. This ordeal continued for over thirty years, until the advent of the WhatsApp application, which allowed free international calls and alleviated these difficulties in



alsarraf

recent years.

I recalled this story after reading the decision of the Partnership Projects Committee to announce Beyon Connect as the winning investor in the telecommunications network development project.

The acting Director General of Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects, Asma Al-Mousa, stated that awarding the contract represents a new strategic milestone in the digital transformation process and the provision of a state-of-the-art fixed telecommunications network across all areas of Kuwait, enabling internet speeds of up to 10 gigabytes per second.

According to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Al-Mousa stated that at least 65 percent of the total jobs in the project will be allocated to Kuwaiti citizens, and 50 percent of the company's shares will be offered for public subscription.

We hope that extremist fatwas prohibiting subscription to this company will not arise, as happened with other companies that are now among the most profitable. The greatest harm from avoiding subscription was suffered by lower-income citizens, who followed such fatwas, while wealthier individuals benefited, increasing their shareholdings due to the large number of people abstaining. Ironically, these same individuals later took to the streets demanding the cancellation of the loans.

It is worth noting that Beyon Connect is a Bahraini company specializing in the development and provision of innovative products and services aimed at creating and strengthening inclusive digital communities for both the public and private sectors.

The company was founded in 1981, the same year the Ministry of Communications stopped sending landline telephone bills to customers. It took 45 years to witness any significant development in the ministry's systems.



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# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## Mideast heading for total chaos unless sense prevails

"We have repeatedly advised Iran, yet it refuses to heed counsel and has squandered numerous opportunities," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Iran could have encouraged American, European, and Arab investments on its soil. Today, true power lies not in military might but in economic strength."

"We have offered examples, and history provides a clear lesson from Denmark and Sweden. Denmark fought numerous wars with Sweden, only to realize the immense human and material losses it had suffered, that its approach was mistaken, and that reconciliation with Sweden was the wiser path. Indeed, both nations ultimately changed for the better. In contrast, Iran has neglected the well-being of its citizens in its relentless pursuit of armament. Instead of becoming the 'Singapore of the Gulf,' it is trapped in the Middle Ages, ignoring advice and rejecting the voice of reason."

"Iran has pursued aggressive policies toward Arab nations, interfering in the internal affairs of four Arab states and claiming the ability to overthrow regimes in the Gulf."

"At the outset of the US-Israeli war on Iran, which began on February 28, Israel and the US stated that they were paving the way for an Iranian uprising to topple the government. Many Iranians initially cheered the foreign attack, seeing it as a last resort to overthrow the regime. But today, the people find themselves facing a devastated country and a harsh government that vows to take an even tougher stance against any protester who supports the enemy."

"The Iranian people are fearful and expect the authorities to use force against them through mass arrests, imprisonment, and violence once the current fighting ends. In the 1980s, during the eight-year war with Iraq, Iran consolidated its power by executing thousands of political prisoners. There is concern that the government will become even more repressive and brutal."

"Iran is weaker than at any point in its history. American and Israeli strikes have killed many of its leaders, destroyed much of its navy, severely weakened its missile program, and damaged government ministries, police stations, and military facilities. Yet, Iranian officials may still rush to develop a nuclear weapon. In other words, even a weakened Iran remains extremely dangerous."

"For decades, military spending and sanctions targeting its nuclear program have impoverished the Iranian people. After the regime's nearly eight-year war with Iraq, it turned to revenge, targeting both domestic and foreign entities. If it survives its current war, it may follow a similar path, driven by a desire for retaliation, by launching a series of attacks against Americans, Israelis, Europeans, and others."

"Given its current extreme military weakness, Iran may decide that nuclear weapons are necessary to restore deterrence. The peaceful Gulf states have already suffered from Iranian drone attacks, despite not being party to the war, incurring both human and material losses that continue to this day. Iran would have been better served by addressing its internal challenges. Minority groups, such as the Kurds, Baloch, and Azeris, could rise up to demand autonomy or even overthrow the regime."

"Iran has also inflicted harm on Lebanon. Its proxy, Hezbollah, disregarded the country's security by launching rockets at Israel, prompting retaliatory strikes that destroyed parts of southern Beirut and displaced Lebanese residents to target Hezbollah positions. The Lebanese government demanded that Hezbollah disarm, but the group refused and openly mocked these demands. As a result, Lebanese civilians were killed, and many were displaced from their homes."

"Our greatest fear is that the war could escalate, plunging peaceful and vibrant Lebanon into civil war, or that the Houthis might join the fighting, or that major powers could intervene."

"A homeland is not merely a meaningless word, nor a slogan raised on occasions. Rather, it is a spirit residing in the heart and an entity living in the human conscience," Kuwaiti lawyer **Dr. Abdullah Al-Turajji** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The Arab poet Ahmed Shawqi expressed this profound meaning when he said, 'O my homeland, even if I were preoccupied with paradise, my soul would still yearn for you there.'"

"The homeland is the source of a person's pride and dignity; indeed, it is life itself. It is the place where individuals are born, grow, live, dream, work, and build their future."

"Therefore, love for one's homeland is not a fleeting emotion, but a commitment based on loyalty, responsibility, and duty. It is the homeland that gives a person everything from the very beginning including security, education, identity, and a sense of belonging."

"It is the right of the nation that its

citizens stand with it in difficult times, just as it stood with them in times of prosperity."

"Whatever citizens offer to their nation is not a favor, but a debt that must be repaid and a duty that must be fulfilled."

"Betraying one's homeland is not merely a betrayal of the land, but a betrayal of oneself, one's dignity, and one's history."

"A person without a homeland loses their value and meaning and becomes like a branch cut off from a tree."

"History does not remember favorably those who betray or abandon their homelands in times of hardship; rather, they end up in the dark pages of history's dustbin."

"As for those who were true to their homelands and sacrificed themselves, their wealth, and their children for them, their names remain etched in the memory of nations, remembered with pride and honor."

"A homeland is not just land, but dignity, identity, and future."

"Whoever knows the value of their homeland understands that defending it and being loyal to it is the noblest thing a person can offer in their life."

"O God, protect Kuwait, the Arabian Gulf, the Arabs, and the Muslims from the plots of the schemers, the cunningness of the deceitful, and the hatred of the spiteful. O God, make our homelands safe and secure, strong and proud in their faith and unity."

"Amid these rapid transformations, the Arab role in preventing the region from sliding into widespread chaos has become more paramount than ever," Saudi writer **Saleh bin Abdullah Al-Musallam** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The Middle East cannot withstand another prolonged war, especially given the economic and security pressures facing many of its countries. This underscores the urgent need to intensify diplomatic efforts and prevent further escalation. This current war can be seen not merely as a military confrontation between two states, but as a struggle over the future shape of the regional order in the Middle East."

"Whatever its outcome, the war will carry far-reaching consequences for the balance of power, as well as for the region's security and stability for years to come. The Middle East is experiencing one of its most perilous geopolitical moments in decades, following the outbreak of direct military confrontation between the United States and Iran. This escalation comes after a series of extensive airstrikes that began on February 28, targeting military installations and strategic infrastructure inside Iran."

"These strikes were part of a joint military operation between Washington and Tel Aviv aimed at Iran's missile program and military command centers. The attacks reportedly resulted in the deaths of senior Iranian officials in the early days of the campaign. These developments mark a significant shift in the nature of the conflict, moving from a years-long 'shadow war' to an overt confrontation with far-reaching regional and international implications. With the expansion of military operations and the exchange of strikes, the region is entering a new strategic equation that could reshape the balance of power in the Middle East."

"U.S.-Iran relations have been marked by persistent tension for decades, intensifying in recent years over three primary issues - Iran's nuclear program, its ballistic missile development, and the network of regional influence Tehran has built through allied groups in the region. Negotiations in recent months have failed to bridge the gap between the two sides, particularly over uranium enrichment levels and restrictions on Iran's missile capabilities. As a result, military escalation has outpaced diplomatic efforts."

"With the launch of intensive strikes numbering in the hundreds within the initial hours, the war entered a new phase aimed at degrading Iran's military capabilities. In response, Tehran has sought to retaliate by targeting U.S. interests and those of its allies in the region. On the economic front, global markets began to feel the impact of the war early on, with oil prices surging above \$100 per barrel amid fears of supply disruptions in the Gulf region—a vital artery for global energy flows. Concerns have grown over disruptions to maritime traffic, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a substantial share of the world's oil trade passes."

"The current situation opens the door to several possible scenarios. The first is a prolonged war characterized by continued airstrikes and indirect operations, arguably the most likely scenario in the short term. The second scenario involves an expansion of the war into a wider regional confrontation, should additional powers become directly involved. The third, and currently least likely, scenario is a return to the political track following mutual military attrition, prompting international actors to push for a diplomatic settlement."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Ahmad Al-Dawas



Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah visited several military bases and sites during the Eid. KUNA photo

## Minister hails high morale of armed forces

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah visited several military bases and sites on Friday on Eid Al-Fitr, reviewing operations and monitoring the armed forces' readiness and preparedness.

According to a press statement, Sheikh Abdullah conveyed the greetings and Eid

wishes of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, to the personnel of the armed forces.

He praised their dedicated efforts, vigilance, discipline, and high morale across all

sites. Sheikh Abdullah expressed his pride in the sacrifices and continuous efforts of the armed forces to defend Kuwait's land and skies.

He prayed to Allah to bless Kuwait and its people with prosperity, stability, and continued security.

## Kuwait army chief tours military sites during Eid

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Al-Shurainan on Friday visited several military sites on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.



Al-Shurainan

According to a press statement from the General Staff, Al-Shurainan expressed his pride in the high morale of military personnel and underlined the significance of continuing to work with full efficiency and competence in order to protect the country's security and stability.

He also spoke highly of the sincere efforts made by the personnel of the armed forces in performing their national duty.

The army chief wished the nation a blessed Eid Al-Fitr and eternal security, stability and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

## You made us proud, KNG personnel efforts praised

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: In a message reflecting national pride and a sense of belongingness, Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hamad Al-Barjas conveyed Eid Al-Fitr greetings to all the KNG personnel over the radio.

Al-Barjas said "Eid Mubarak, heroes! May you be well every year. I convey to you the greetings of the political leadership and the Kuwaiti people, who trust in your capabilities and honorable stance. You made us proud and honored us, heroes. May Allah protect you, bless you, guide your aim, strengthen you, and protect our country from all harm. May Allah grant you strength."

The KNG personnel responded to the message over radio as well, with the same patriotic spirit, affirming their unwavering commitment to perform their duties. They stated "Eid Mubarak, sir. We are performing our duties and reaffirm our readiness and commitment. Kuwait is entrusted to us."

These wireless exchanges manifest the sense of belongingness and pride in the KNG heroes and their commitment to protect the homeland, while emphasizing that preparedness and vigilance are considered the first line of defense in terms of maintaining the security and stability of Kuwait.

## Over 100 kg of stale fish, shrimps seized at stalls

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) seized 111 kilograms of fish unfit for human consumption from fish stalls, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

Necessary legal measures were taken, and violation and destruction reports for the spoiled food were issued.

Inspection tours also led to the seizure of 83 kilograms of frozen shrimp that had been thawed and was being sold as fresh Kuwaiti shrimp.

PAFN affirmed its continued intensive monitoring efforts to ensure the safety of food sold in markets and to protect consumer health from any illegal practices.

## Public response to sirens exceptionally calm – KFF

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: The official spokesperson for the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Gharib, affirmed that the awareness and self-restraint shown by citizens and residents over the past few days, especially in response to the repeated sounding of sirens, greatly contributed to a calm and organized reaction to the current situation. He praised their good conduct and adherence to official guidelines, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

In a statement to Al-Akhbar TV, Brigadier General Al-Gharib explained that worshippers followed the instructions issued by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, particularly regarding limiting the number of children brought to mosques under these circumstances. This compliance reflected a high level of community awareness, despite the special nature of the occasion and its connection to social customs.

He indicated that the response to the sirens has become more mature compared to the initial period, with fewer signs of panic and a better understanding of how to react when they sound.

Brigadier General Al-Gharib emphasized that society is gradually adapting to the current situation while maintaining calm and avoiding panic.

He stressed that social media has shown improvement in how events are handled, with greater reliance on official sources, which has helped to reduce rumors and provide reassurance to the community.

Brigadier General Al-Gharib affirmed that the relevant authorities, particularly the Ministry of Interior and KFF, continued to implement their field plans for the Eid period despite the challenges, adding that efforts are ongoing around the clock to ensure the safety and security of everyone.

## Fire-fighters 1st 'line of defense'

76 'unusual' fires dealt with

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Chief of Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Al-Roumi conducted a field tour of several fire stations, as well as preventive force units assigned to secure hospitals. The visit is part of the senior leadership's commitment to monitoring field readiness and boosting morale, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

In an official statement, KFF explained that Major General Al-Roumi, during his visit, conveyed the greetings and congratulations of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, to all KFF personnel on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, praising their sincere efforts and dedication to performing their national duty.

During the tour, Major General Al-Roumi emphasized the importance of maintaining high readiness and complete preparedness to deal with various hazards.

He explained that firefighters represent the first line of defense in protecting lives and property. Their sacrifices are valued and appreciated by the political leader-

ship and the people. Firefighters will always remain committed to their duty, and vigilant in safeguarding the nation's security and the safety of its people

Major General Al-Roumi concluded his visit by highlighting that fieldwork on such occasions reflects the highest meaning of dedication.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) reported on Thursday that its teams responded to

76 unusual fire calls since the beginning of the Iranian aggression, mostly involving fires due to shrapnel from drones or missiles.

Six firefighting teams dealt with two fires at Mina Al-Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries earlier today and managed to put them out in "record" times, said Brig. Gen. Mohammad Al-Gharib, Director of Public Relations and Media and official KFF spokesperson during a media briefing on current events and the latest developments.

The fires broke out in operational units at both sites following drone attacks, resulting in limited damage in the affected units, he noted.



Al-Roumi



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# Ministry of Education launches nationwide Thank-You initiative

Kuwaiti students unite in tribute to frontline workers

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22:** On Saturday, March 21, the Ministry of Education launched the "From Our Children's Hearts...To the Nation's Heroes" campaign, aimed at instilling a sense of social responsibility among students and enhancing their appreciation for the dedicated efforts of those serving the country, reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that this two-week campaign comes under the directives of the Minister of Education, Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabai, and in cooperation with the Volunteer Work Center, headed by Sheikha Amthal



Ministry of Education photo  
A student adds finishing touches to a patriotic artwork as part of the Ministry of Education's 'From Our Children's Hearts...To the Nation's Heroes' campaign, expressing gratitude to frontline workers across Kuwait.

Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The campaign aims to engage students from public and private schools, as well as special education and religious education schools, from kinder-

garten through high school, to express their gratitude and appreciation to frontline heroes in various fields. This will be achieved by collecting 100,000 thank-you messages that will form a

patriotic artwork reflecting their recognition and appreciation of the efforts made by these heroes.

This initiative is an extension of the ministry's educational role in instilling national values in students and strengthening their connection to their homeland. It reflects the honorable image of Kuwaiti youth and highlights their awareness and sense of responsibility towards state institutions and their employees.

School administrations and educational bodies were urged to promote the campaign and encourage students to actively participate by writing short thank-you messages or creating expressive drawings appropriate to their age and grade level.

Messages will be received via WhatsApp at 22304160.

At the end of the campaign, the contributions will be compiled and transformed into a large national mural embodying the sentiments of Kuwaiti students, to be presented symbolically to frontline heroes in various fields.



Namaa Charity photo  
Namaa Charity carried out an Eid clothing project.

## Namaa Charity brings Eid joy to 700 orphans across 6 countries

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA):** Namaa Charity, affiliated with the Social Reform Society, has carried out an Eid clothing project for more than 700 orphans across six countries. In a statement to KUNA on Friday, director of financial, administrative affairs and governance at Namaa Charity Waleed Al-Bassam said that the initiative covered orphans from Yemen, Cambodia, Kenya, Niger, Palestine and Somalia.

He explained that the step reflects a humanitarian message that brings happiness to orphans living under difficult

humanitarian conditions, particularly in Gaza and Yemen.

Al-Bassam added that the smiles on the children's faces highlighted the profound humanitarian impact of the initiative, which helped restore aspects of their childhood joy and gave them a sense of care and attention amid ongoing challenges.

He affirmed that Namaa Charity would continue implementing its projects, in line with a vision to achieve sustainable impact, through the support of donors and charitable contributors.

## Al-Omar reviews Ministry of Information readiness



Ministry of Information photo  
Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar inspects the Ministry of Information premises, accompanied by senior officials, to review workflow and ensure operational readiness during Eid.

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA):** Minister of State for Communication Affairs and Information Technology and Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar paid Friday an inspection visit to the Ministry of Information to follow up workflow and readiness at different sectors amid the current conditions in the country and the region.

The visit came as part of keenness to follow up on workflow and observe efforts exerted to ensure the continuity of media operations, lauding the ministry's staff for their outstanding performance, which reflects a spirit of responsibility and national commitment.

He highly appreciated all efforts exerted by the ministry's workers to do their duties, mainly this blessed occasion, to serve their country. "These efforts are a source of pride," he confirmed.

The minister was accompanied by the Undersecretary of the Information Ministry Dr. Nasser Muhaisen and Assistant Undersecretary for the Television and Radio Sector Turki Al-Mutairi to review action mechanism at different departments. They listened to an explanation by officials about workflow and approved plans during Eid al-Fitr holidays.

Envoy details outreach, travel solutions

## India's Ambassador Tripathi outlines crisis response, support with Kuwait

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22:** During a comprehensive press briefing addressing current regional developments, the Indian Ambassador-Designate to Kuwait, HE Paramita Tripathi, presented the embassy's strategic response since February 28. She reaffirmed India's dedication to ensuring the safety and welfare of Indian citizens residing in Kuwait. Emphasizing close coordination with



Paramita Tripathi, India's Ambassador to Kuwait

Kuwaiti authorities and strong bilateral engagement, the envoy highlighted measures taken to support the Indian community, maintain essential services, and contribute to stability during a challenging period for the region. Speaking at a press briefing, the envoy noted that she has been in Kuwait for the past four months and expressed satisfaction in serving the Indian community, emphasizing that the embassy remains fully committed to their safety and well-being while standing in solidarity with the Government of Kuwait.

**High-Level Diplomatic Engagement**  
The ambassador highlighted ongoing high-level contacts between the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who held two telephonic conversations within a span of two weeks.

The first call took place on March 3, shortly after the onset of tensions, while the second included exchanges of Eid greetings and discussions on the evolving security landscape in West Asia. India strongly condemned attacks targeting Kuwait's sovereignty and stressed the importance of ensuring safe maritime navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

Both leaders reaffirmed the need for sustained diplomatic efforts to maintain regional peace and stability.

**Embassy Support and Community Outreach**

The embassy has been working closely with Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other local authorities to ensure uninterrupted support for the Indian community, the largest expatriate group in the country.

A 24/7 emergency helpline was activated on February 28, providing real-time assistance and information not only to Indian nationals but also to other communities and transit travelers passing through Kuwait.

**Travel Disruptions and Alternative Arrangements**

Airspace closures since February 28 had led to the suspension of commercial flights, forcing many travelers to seek alternative routes via neighboring Saudi Arabia.

To address this, Jazeera Airways has begun operating special flights from Al Qaisumah Airport in Saudi Arabia to six major Indian cities - Kochi, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru - starting March 20. The initiative has

been coordinated with India's aviation and foreign affairs authorities to ease travel challenges.

**Visa Facilitation and Regional Coordination**

The embassy has facilitated over 1,100 Saudi visas for Indian nationals in coordination with the Indian mission in Riyadh and Saudi authorities, enabling smoother transit and onward travel.

Efforts are ongoing to expand access to multiple airports in Saudi Arabia to further assist travelers.

**Repatriation Services Continue**  
Despite logistical challenges, the embassy has successfully repatriated the mortal remains of more than 17 Indian nationals since February 28. Officials described this as one of the most complex but essential services being carried out with the support of Kuwaiti authorities.

**Supporting Kuwait's Food Security**

The Indian community has also contributed to maintaining food supply chains in Kuwait by facilitating shipments of fresh produce, including fruits, vegetables, and meat, from India.

These supplies, transported via Kuwait Airways and the Lulu Group International, have ensured stable availability of essential goods, helping to prevent shortages and public concern.

**Safety Situation and Casualties**

The ambassador confirmed that while Kuwait has witnessed casualties due to recent attacks including the deaths of four military personnel and a child, along with several injuries the Indian community remains safe so far.

Condolences were extended to the victims' families, and appreciation was expressed for Indian healthcare workers contributing to Kuwait's medical response.

**Visa Extensions and Residency Measures**

To ease concerns among expatriates, Kuwaiti authorities have extended visitor visas by one month and residency permits holders by three months starting February 28. The embassy continues to work with local officials to resolve additional visa-related issues.

**Situation in India and Maritime Sector**  
In India, energy supplies remain stable, with no disruption to fuel availability despite regional tensions. Authorities are also closely monitoring the situation of Indian seafarers in the region.

Currently, 611 Indian seafarers are deployed on 22 vessels, including a group at Mina Al-Ahmadi port in Kuwait who are reported safe and awaiting transfer to Sharjah.

Concluding the briefing, the ambassador extended greetings on multiple Indian festivals, as well as Eid wishes to the people of Kuwait. She expressed hope that the festive season would usher in peace and stability across the region.



Ambassador Paramita Tripathi during a comprehensive press briefing addressing current regional developments.



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## MEW restores overhead power line

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA):** Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy announced on Friday the restoration of an additional overhead power transmission line to service after completing repair of the damage caused by falling debris resulting from the interception of the Iranian attacks.

The ministry's spokesperson Engineer Fatima Hayat said in a press statement that the repair works, carried out at dawn on the first day of Eid al-Fitr, reflected a high level

of readiness and dedication to duty.

Hayat affirmed that technical teams continue to work around the clock to complete repairs on the remaining line, in accordance with the highest technical standards and safety procedures, to ensure the stability of the electrical grid and continuity of service.

She also praised the efforts of national personnel, including engineers, technicians, and field workers, noting that serving the country is an honor of the ministry's staff.

## NATO affirms full solidarity with Kuwait and GCC countries

# G7 FMs express support for Gulf countries following attacks by Iran

PARIS, March 22, (KUNA): The G7 foreign ministers, including the EU, expressed support Saturday for their partners in the Gulf region, following "unjustifiable attacks" by Iran, and its proxies. The French foreign ministry published a joint press release by the group as saying, "we, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, express support to our partners in the region in the face of the unjustifiable attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies".

"We condemn in the strongest terms the regime's reckless attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Iraq, in line with UNSC Resolution 2817," the statement said.

"The Iranian regime's unjustifiable attacks against these states also threaten regional and global security, we call for the immediate and unconditional cessation of all attacks by the Iranian regime," the statement added.

"We reaffirm the importance of safeguarding maritime routes, and safety of navigation, including in the Strait of Hormuz and all associated critical waterways, as well as the safety and security of supply chains and the stability of energy markets.

We stand ready to take necessary measures to support global supply of energy such as the stockpile release decided by International Energy Agency members on March 11," the statement noted.

"The G7 has repeatedly stated that Iran must never obtain a nuclear weapon and that it must halt its ballistic missile program, end its destabilizing activities in the region and around the globe, and cease the appalling violence and repression against its own people. "We support the right of the countries unjustifiably attacked by Iran or by Iranian proxies to defend their territories and protect their citizens.

"We reaffirm our unwavering support for their security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. "We condemn the brazen attacks in Iraq by Iran and its militias against diplomatic facilities and energy infrastructure, particularly in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region,

and against US and Counter ISIS Coalition forces, and the Iraqi people," the statement added.

### Also:

**BRUSSELS:** Kuwait's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and Head of its Mission to the European Union and NATO, Nawaf Al-Enezi, said on Thursday that NATO allies expressed their full solidarity with Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries regarding Iran's repeated violations.

They affirmed their condemnation of these actions, which pose a threat to regional and international security and stability, and demanded that Iran immediately cease these violations. This came during a meeting held by NATO with the ambassadors of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) countries; Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar, to discuss the Iranian aggression against the GCC states. The meeting was attended by NATO Deputy Secretary General Radmila Sekerinska.

## Nasser Al-Mutairi appointed chairman

### Temporary committee formed to manage MoSA Labor Union

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: A temporary five-member committee has been formed to manage the Ministry of Social Affairs Labor Union, headed by Nasser Al-Mutairi, tasked with handling urgent matters, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The Ministry of Social Affairs announced that the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM), Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, issued Ministerial Decree No. 6/2026 to establish the temporary committee.

Article 1 of the decree stipulates that the temporary committee will serve a one-year term, renewable only once, and will manage the affairs of the Ministry of Social Affairs Labor Union until new elections are held in accordance with relevant laws and regulations.

The committee members are:  
1. Nasser Marzouq Mishaan Al-Mutairi - Chairman  
2. Mohammad Abdulrahman Al-Solh - Vice Chairman  
3. Hanan Mohamad Abdulhadi Al-Sagran - Secretary  
4. Bader Thaher Hamdan Al-Fadhli - Treasurer  
5. Maher Farhan Awad Al-Anzi - Member

The committee may seek assistance from individuals with relevant expertise and experience as needed to perform its duties, without granting them voting rights.

Article Two states that the committee shall undertake the tasks outlined in Article 3 of Ministerial Resolution No. 3/2025, in particular the following:

■ Managing urgent administrative and financial matters of the union.

■ Collecting membership dues from members.

■ Preparing and updating the lists of general assembly members who meet the membership requirements and have the right to vote.

■ Calling for a general assembly meeting.

■ Supervising nomination and election procedures in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Article Three stipulates that the committee shall convene at the invitation of its chairperson or deputy chairperson. A meeting shall be valid only if at least half of the members are present, in addition to the chairperson or deputy chairperson. The committee shall issue its decisions by an absolute majority of the members present, and in the event of a tie, the chairperson shall have the casting vote.

Article Four states that the committee shall prepare a detailed report on all its activities, present it to the first general assembly of the union for approval, and submit a copy to the relevant minister.

Article Five stipulates that this resolution shall take effect from the date of its issuance and shall be published in the official gazette.

# Power, water systems remain resilient amid regional unrest

Frontline workforce key to stable services, says Al-Mukhaizeem

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem confirmed the continuous monitoring of the readiness of all its sectors, according to well-studied operational plans, to ensure the stability of services.**

Al-Mukhaizeem made the statement when he visited the East and West Doha power and water desalination plants on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr in order to assess the progress of work and operational readiness of the systems during the holiday.

He was accompanied by Undersecretary of the ministry Dr. Adel Al-Zamel and acting Assistant Undersecretary for Power and Water Desalination Plants Eng. Haitham Al-Ali

He indicated that the ministry is operating at the highest level of preparedness in light of the current regional situation through the implementation



MEWRE photo

Kuwaiti Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem (center) poses with ministry and plant staff during his inspection tour of the Doha East and West power and water desalination plants.

of emergency plans and raising the level of coordination and round the clock technical follow up in a bid to guarantee the stability of the electricity and water systems.

He commended the national em-

ployees who continue to work tirelessly to maintain the stability of the systems and provide services in an efficient manner under all circumstances.

He also expressed his deep appreciation for the efforts of the frontline heroes

among the national workforce, who continue to work with dedication to protect the nation and ensure the stability of vital services. He asserted that their efforts are a source of pride for everyone.

During the visit, the minister inspected the operations, monitoring and control units and reviewed the control and operation systems.

He was also briefed on the technical procedures followed to ensure the continuity of production with high efficiency and to immediately respond to issues or emergencies, thus, contributing to the stability of the electrical grid during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday.

Meanwhile, official spokesperson of the ministry Eng. Fatima Hayat affirmed that the technical teams restored an additional overhead power transmission line that was damaged by falling debris from the drone interception operations.

In a press statement, Hayat disclosed that the repair work was completed in a very efficient manner, thanks to the efforts of national personnel. She said the line was restored at dawn on the first day of Eid Al-Fitr, reflecting a high level of preparedness and dedication despite the holiday.

Continued from Page 1

## Persians' enmity

After the successful conquests in the Levant, the Persians retaliated by betraying the Muslims in Iraq. Under the command of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, the Muslim forces countered the enemy, securing a decisive victory for the Muslim Arabs at the Battle of Qadisiyah.

Nonetheless, the animosity persisted even after the Persians converted to Islam, as nationalist sentiment proved to be a stronger force than religious belief.

The historical analysis highlights persistent differences between the two sides, which escalated into ethnic conflicts lasting until the 15th century CE. The major turning point was when Ismail Safavi altered the religious doctrine for all Iranians. This religious transformation was violent, resulting in the death of about one million people.

For centuries, the Persians have allegedly attempted to corrupt all Islamic schools of thought, even incorporating ingrained elements of Zoroastrian culture into the Persian mindset. This context is crucial in understanding recent events. Prior to the Israeli-American war on Iran, which commenced on Feb 28, Gulf states explicitly refused to allow the United States of America to use their territories for an attack. They actively pursued mediation to avert the conflict. However, the Gulf governments were not consulted before the United States and Israel launched their war.

In spite of the Gulf states' attempts to remain neutral, they unexpectedly became the primary battleground for Iran's response, rather than Israel or the United States. The region was subjected to a volume of Iranian missiles and drones, more than those launched against Israel. Moreover, Iran activated sleeper cells the Gulf nations.

Why the attack? Iran targeted its neighbors due to the deep-seated, inherited hostility toward Arabs in the Gulf region. This approach proved the disregard for good neighborly relations, as Iran continues to perceive the Gulf region as the main cause of the collapse of the Sasanian Empire.

## In times

Even a retweet or a comment can carry consequences.

There is also another risk that deserves attention. When discussions shift into generalization, labeling, or targeting groups based on identity, the situation moves beyond opinion into something more serious. The law is clear. Anything that fuels division or undermines national unity can lead to legal consequences.

Kuwait has always stood strong because of its balance between security and justice, and between freedom and responsibility. That balance is what protects everyone.

This is not a moment for assumptions. It is a moment to trust the process.

Let the investigations move forward. Let the courts do their job. Let us respect the principles that protect all of us, especially when emotions are high.

Because once we stop respecting the presumption of innocence, we risk losing something far more important than any single case.

We risk the integrity of justice itself. May God protect Kuwait and preserve

its unity, security, and justice.

Fawaz@tahergrp.org

## Kuwait drags

In a media briefing, official spokesperson Raed Al-Mathkooor said the plan included restructuring customs pathways and rerouting air cargo shipments through land routes via Gulf Cooperation Council countries and neighboring Arab states, following the suspension of air traffic.

He noted that shipments originally destined for Kuwait by air are now transported by trucks through land crossings, with customs clearance procedures being completed at air cargo customs facilities to maximize the use of available personnel across sectors and government entities.

Al-Mathkooor noted that goods continue to arrive through land ports and are being cleared in accordance with established procedures, while maritime shipments that arrived prior to the escalation are also being processed to ensure the steady supply of local markets and the preservation of strategic reserves.

He stressed that customs authorities are closely monitoring daily developments in global and regional trade flows to ensure uninterrupted movement of goods and travelers through the country's ports.

Despite risks facing maritime ports, particularly southern ports, and challenges affecting airports, as well as ongoing efforts at land crossings, customs operations continue around the clock, except in cases requiring evacuation for safety reasons, he said.

The statement also revealed that between February 28 and March 21, customs clearance included approximately 417 tons of medical imports, 103,775 tons of food supplies, and 24,400 tons of fresh produce.

Al-Mathkooor affirmed that Kuwait Customs will continue its efforts to safeguard the nation's borders and ensure the steady provision of essential goods, in line with directives from the country's leadership.

On Sunday, Kuwait's Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of six individuals for operating aerial drones without permits in violation of previously issued warnings and regulations over the past 24 hours.

In a media briefing, ministry spokesperson Brigadier Nasser Bouslaib said the suspects have been referred to the competent authorities for legal action, reiterating a strict ban on the use of drones without authorization during the current period.

Explosive ordnance disposal teams handled 12 reports in the past 24 hours related to debris resulting from interception operations, bringing the total number of such incidents addressed since the start of the escalation to 484, he added.

He stressed the importance of adhering to security instructions, urging citizens and residents to refrain from filming or sharing images and videos related to ongoing events in support of national efforts and to maintain security and stability.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ministry of Defense said Sunday that the armed forces detected seven hostile drones within Kuwaiti airspace over the past 24 hours,

successfully intercepting and destroying four, while three fell outside the threat zone without posing any danger.

In a media briefing, official spokesperson Colonel Saud Al-Atwan said that explosions heard in various parts of the country were the result of interception operations against hostile drones, as well as activities carried out by explosive ordnance disposal teams.

He affirmed that the Kuwaiti Armed Forces continue to carry out their duties with the highest levels of readiness and efficiency, in full coordination with military and security authorities, to safeguard the nation's security and stability amid ongoing developments.

Colonel Saud Al-Atwan announced on Saturday the detection of nine hostile ballistic missiles within Kuwaiti airspace over the past 24 hours.

In a media briefing, Al-Atwan said the air defense systems intercepted these missiles without causing material damage. He added that four hostile drones were also detected and destroyed.

He said the Kuwaiti Armed Forces, in coordination with various military and security agencies, continue to perform their duties with the highest level of readiness and efficiency, ensuring the security and stability of the country under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad -- the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

On the other hand, Ministry of Interior spokesman Brigadier General Nasser Bouslaib said the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams responded to 11 reports about falling shrapnel from defensive interception operations during the same period, bringing the total number of such reports since the beginning of the attacks to 472.

He added that the country witnessed the activation of sirens nine times and the total number of such activations has reached 116, affirming the rapid field response and efficient handling of the reports by the concerned teams.

He commended the efforts of the military, security forces and medical personnel, praising their role in enhancing security and reassuring the public under the current circumstances.

On Friday, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), announced Friday the pilot launch of the National Emergency Alert System using cellular broadcasting technology.

The launch was announced by Lieut. Col. Yusuf Al-Otaibi, Head of the Alarm Systems Department at the Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Civil Defense, during a news briefing on the current regional situation amid the Iranian aggression on Kuwait.

The fresh system reflects the ministry's commitment to promoting the early warning and emergency alert system in a way that ensures that reliable alerts are delivered to mobile users in case of emergency, he elaborated.

The system consists of four alert levels: national warning alerts with a high emergency tone, emergency alerts with a text tone, general alerts with silent texts and periodic text messages, he noted.

In latest development, Iran and its ally, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, stepped up their attacks on Israel on Sunday, launching strikes across the country

after the United States and Iran threatened to widen their targets in the war in the Middle East, now in its fourth week.

As Israel came under renewed fire, top Israeli leaders traveled to the southern town of Arad, one of two communities near a secretive nuclear research site struck by Iranian missiles late Saturday, wounding scores of people.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu toured the destruction in Arad and said it was a "miracle" no one was killed there. He claimed Israel and the U.S. were well on their way to achieving the war's goals and implored the international community for more support.

Earlier, President Donald Trump warned the United States will destroy Iran's power plants if Tehran fails to fully open the Strait of Hormuz, setting a 48-hour deadline on Saturday. Iran's parliament speaker said if the U.S. follows through on its threat, Tehran will retaliate against American and Israeli energy and wider infrastructure in the region.

The developments signaled the Iran war, which the U.S. and Israel launched Feb. 28, was moving in a dangerous new direction, despite Trump's mention last week he was considering "winding down" operations. It has killed hundreds of people, rattled the global economy and sent oil prices surging.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for an airstrike Sunday that killed a man in northern Israel while Gulf Arab states - including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - said they were intercepting fresh barrages of new Iranian strikes.

Iran has practically closed the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world through which roughly one-fifth of global supply passes. Attacks on ships and threats of further strikes have stopped nearly all tankers from navigating the strait, compelling some of the largest oil producers to make cuts because their crude has nowhere to go.

The blockade is a liability for both the U.S. and its allies in Europe and Asia, who rely heavily on the Persian Gulf supply to meet energy demand and power factories, vehicles and homes. The U.S. lifted some sanctions on Iranian oil at sea to relieve pressure on energy prices.

Trump said if Iran didn't open the strait, the U.S. would destroy its "various POWER PLANTS, STARTING WITH THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST!"

Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf responded Sunday on X that if Iran's power plants and infrastructure are targeted, then vital infrastructure across the region - including energy and desalination facilities - would be considered legitimate targets and "irreversibly destroyed."

Separately, Iranian officials said they would keep providing safe passage through the strait to vessels from countries other than its enemies.

Iran said its strikes in the Negev Desert were in retaliation to an earlier attack on Iran's main nuclear enrichment site in Natanz, according to state-run media.

Tehran praised the attack as show of strength, even as Israel's military asserts that Iranian missile launches have gradually decreased in frequency since the war began.

"If the Israeli regime is unable to intercept missiles in the heavily protected Dimona area, it is, operationally, a sign of entering a new phase of the battle," said Qalibaf, the Iranian parliament speaker.

## Unsettled skies

Al-Ali added that weather conditions will see a relative improvement after Monday night, before rain chances pick up again on Tuesday morning, with rain expected to be thundery and at times heavy, lasting until Thursday evening.

He noted that a gradual improvement in weather will begin from Thursday evening, as rain chances diminish, accompanied by intermittent active winds that may cause sea waves to rise at times, along with a chance of fog formation in some areas.

## Kuwait, GCC

The ambassadors stressed the importance of enhancing joint coordination to address escalating security challenges and ensure regional stability, including safeguarding air and maritime navigation.

They also underscored the need to protect the region from continued Iranian attacks targeting Gulf states and Jordan, which they said have deliberately struck civilians, infrastructure, and vital facilities in violation of international norms and sovereignty.

The discussions reaffirmed that the security of GCC countries is indivisible and constitutes a fundamental principle of the Gulf Cooperation Council Charter.

For his part, Colby emphasized the importance of the US partnership with GCC countries, highlighting their key role in operating missile defense systems to counter attacks targeting civilian areas.

He also reaffirmed the US Department of Defense's commitment to continued coordination with GCC partners within the framework of their strategic alliance.

## Kuwait health

Meanwhile, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Dr. Al-Munther Al-Hasawi, accompanied by Assistant Undersecretary for Services Eng. Abdulaziz Al-Tasha, visited Al-Adan Hospital.

Moreover, Assistant Undersecretary for Supporting Medical Services Dr. Abdullah Al-Fares also conducted a tour that included the Emergency Medical Services Department, the Operations Center, and ambulance centers, where he reviewed the level of technical and operational readiness, and ensured the preparedness of ambulance teams during the holiday period.

Assistant Undersecretary for Private Medical Services and Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative Affairs Dr. Fatima Al-Najjar visited Mubarak Al-Hasawi Health Center and Al-Saqr Health Center, statement added.

Assistant Undersecretary for Healthcare Services Dr. Nadia Al-Juma also visited Jaber Al-Ali Health Center and Manahi Al-Osaimi Specialized Health Center to assess readiness in providing primary and specialized healthcare services and to ensure the integration of services delivered to citizens and residents.

## Kuwait Amir,

Additionally, His Highness exchanged Eid Al-Fitr greetings with Arab and Muslim leaders, praying that Allah

Almighty may bless Arab and Islamic nations with continued peace, unity, and stability.

His Highness also received a phone call from Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who conveyed warm Eid greetings and best wishes. Both leaders discussed recent regional developments following hostile Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti territory and Israeli strikes on Lebanon, expressing firm condemnation of these aggressions as violations of sovereignty and international law. They underscored the importance of restraint, dialogue, and collective efforts to safeguard regional peace. His Highness thanked President Aoun for his kind sentiments, reaffirming the strong relations between the two nations.

His Highness the Amir also received a congratulatory message from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who extended heartfelt greetings on Eid Al-Fitr, praying for the Amir's continued health and success in leading the nation toward further prosperity. The Amir, in reply, thanked the Crown Prince for his kind words and prayers, wishing him good health and the homeland lasting security and progress.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Eid greetings from senior Sheikhs, including His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. He thanked them for their warm wishes and extended prayers for Kuwait's continued progress and well-being.

His Highness the Crown Prince also exchanged Eid Al-Fitr greetings with Arab and Muslim leaders and GCC crown princes, expressing hopes that the blessed occasion brings greater peace, harmony, and prosperity to all nations.

In a separate phone call, His Highness the Crown Prince spoke with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who strongly condemned the recent Iranian attacks on Kuwait, describing them as a flagrant breach of sovereignty and international law. Prime Minister Starmer reaffirmed the United Kingdom's solidarity with Kuwait and readiness to support all efforts preserving its security. His Highness conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir to His Majesty King Charles III and expressed appreciation for Britain's firm and supportive position, reflecting the historic friendship between both nations.

His Highness the Crown Prince also received a call from Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who denounced the attacks on Kuwait's territory as blatant violations of international law. The King reiterated Bhutan's full support for Kuwait's right to defend its sovereignty and expressed hopes for the triumph of dialogue and wisdom in preserving regional stability. His Highness conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir and appreciated Bhutan's principled stance of solidarity.

'Get ready.' No more waiting, No more games!'

## ICE officers soon will help with airport security unless Dems end shutdown: Trump

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., March 22, (AP) — US President Donald Trump said Saturday he will order federal immigration officers to take a role in airport security starting Monday unless Democrats agree on a bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security.

In a series of social media posts, Trump said he was making plans to put officers from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in airports if the congressional standoff continues. After the Senate failed to find a resolution at a rare weekend session, Trump appeared resolute in his plan: "ICE is ready to go on Monday," he said.

He made the announcement as a partial shutdown contributes to long lines to pass through screening at some of the nation's largest airports.

The Republican president said ICE agents would bring the administration's immigration crackdown into the nation's airports, promising to arrest "all illegal immigrants."

"I look forward to moving ICE in on Monday, and have already told them to, 'GET READY. NO MORE WAITING, NO MORE GAMES!'" Trump wrote while spending the weekend in Florida.

The move appears to be a pointed effort to expand the type of immigration enforcement that has become a sticking point in Congress. Democrats pledged to oppose funding for DHS unless changes were made in the wake of a crackdown in Minnesota that led to the fatal shootings of two protesters. Democrats are asking for better identification for federal law enforcement officers, a new code of conduct for those agencies and more use of judicial warrants, among other measures.

The Minnesota operation was tied in part to allegations of fraud involving Somali residents. On Saturday, Trump said ICE officers sent to airports would focus on arresting immigrants from Somalia who are in the United States il-



US President Donald Trump speaks with reporters before departing on Marine One from the South Lawn of the White House on March 20, in Washington. (AP)

legally. Repeating his criticism on Somalis, he said they "totally destroyed" Minnesota.

"If the Democrats do not allow for Just and Proper Security at our Airports, and elsewhere throughout our Country, ICE will do the job far better than ever done before," Trump said.

Trump's posts did not offer detail on how ICE would take a role in airport security and what it meant for the Transportation Security Administration, which screens passengers and luggage for hazardous items.

The vast majority of TSA employees are considered essential and continue to work during the funding lapse, but they are doing so without pay. Call-out rates have started to increase at some airports, and DHS said at least 376 have quit since the partial shutdown began Feb. 14.

On Saturday, the Senate rejected a motion by Democrats to take up legislation to reopen TSA and pay workers who are now going without paychecks. Republicans argue that they need to fund all parts of the DHS, not just certain ones. A bill to fund the Cabinet department failed to advance in the Senate on Friday.

There were signs of progress, though, with the restarting in recent days of stalled talks between Democrats and the White House. On Saturday, Republican and Democratic senators were set to meet for a third consecutive day with White House officials behind closed doors as Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York spoke of "productive conversations."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., urged the bipartisan group to act quickly. He has said repeatedly that Democrats and the White House need to find compromise as lines at airports have grown.

"If that group that's meeting can't come up with a solution really quickly, things are going to get worse and worse," Thune said Saturday.

## Hawaii's worst flooding in 20 years threatens dam, prompts evacuations

HONOLULU, March 22, (AP) — Hawaii officials urged people in hard-hit areas to evacuate Saturday due to the state's worst flooding in more than 20 years, after heavy rains fell on soil already saturated by downpours from a winter storm a week ago with still more expected over the weekend.

Muddy floodwaters smothered vast stretches of Oahu's North Shore, a community world-renowned for its big-wave surfing. Raging waters lifted homes and cars and prompted evacuation orders for 5,500 people north of Honolulu, though they were later lifted. Authorities cautioned that a 120-year-old dam could fail.

On the island of Maui, authorities upgraded an evacuation advisory to a warning for some parts of Lahaina, which is still reeling from a deadly 2023 wildfire, because of retention basins nearing capacity.

North Shore Oahu residents who did not evacuate were heartened in the morning by receding waters and moments of blue skies, but more rain was on the way.

"Don't let your guard down just yet," said Tina Stall, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Honolulu, "there's still potential for more flooding impacts."

Racquel Achiu, a Waialua farmer who stayed to care for her livestock,

found her goats in knee-high water Thursday night, and an hour later, her family's seven dogs were in danger of drowning in an elevated kennel. Her nephew and son-in-law rushed out into chest-high water to save them.

"My dogs' heads were literally just sticking out of the water," Achiu recalled. "There was so much water, I cannot even express."

Gov. Josh Green said the cost of the storm could top \$1 billion, including damage to airports, schools, roads, homes and a Maui hospital in Kula.

"This is going to have a very serious consequence for us as a state," Green said at a news conference. He also said his chief of staff spoke to the White House and received assurances of federal support.

Green said the flooding was the state's most serious since 2004, when homes and a University of Hawaii library were swamped. Dozens and perhaps hundreds of homes have been damaged, but officials have yet to fully assess the destruction.

Officials blamed some of the devastation on the sheer amount of rain that fell in a short amount of time on saturated land. Parts of Oahu received 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 cm), the National Weather Service said.

More than 200 people were rescued from the rising waters, authorities said,

but no deaths were reported and no one was unaccounted for. Crews searched by air and by water for stranded people.

The National Guard and Honolulu Fire Department airlifted 72 children and adults from a spring break youth camp at a retreat on Oahu's west coast called Our Lady of Kea'au, city officials said. The camp is on high ground, but authorities did not want to leave them there, the mayor said.

Winter storm systems known as "Kona lows," which feature southerly or southwesterly winds that bring in moisture-laden air, have been responsible for the deluges in the past two weeks. The intensity and frequency of heavy rains in Hawaii have increased amid human-caused global warming, experts say.

Officials have been closely watching the Wahiawa dam, which has been vulnerable for decades, saying it was "at risk of imminent failure."

Water levels in the dam about 17 miles (28 kilometers) northwest of Honolulu, on the island of Oahu, receded by late Friday and then went up again with overnight rain.

However the dam appeared to be less of a concern the following morning than the "breadth of hazardous conditions" across the island, said Molly Pierce, a spokesperson for Oahu's Department of Emergency Management.



Flooding covers a residential neighborhood in Waialua, Hawaii on March 20. (AP)



People gather to take part in a large anti-government protest in Prague, Czech Republic on March 21. (AP)

### Protesters rally in Prague against new govt of Czech PM

Tens of thousands of people protested in Prague on Saturday against the policies and plans of the new Czech government led by populist Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.

The protesters from across the Czech Republic attended the peaceful demonstration at Letná park, the scene of huge gatherings in 1989 that greatly contributed to

the fall of communism.

They came to express their concerns that Babiš, a billionaire, and his coalition Cabinet, are a threat to democracy, steering the country away from supporting Ukraine and toward an autocratic path.

People in the crowd, who organizers estimated at 200,000, were waving Czech national flags, while

one of the banners on display read: "Let's defend democracy."

"We're here to clearly stand against dragging our country onto the path of Slovakia and Hungary," said Mikuláš Minář, the head organizer from the Million Moments for Democracy group, referring to the pro-Russia and autocratic leanings of those two countries. (AP)

## Italy's justice referendum becomes high stakes test for Premier Meloni

ROME, March 22, (AP) — Italy's conservative Premier Giorgia Meloni faces a pivotal political test in a two-day referendum on judicial reform that starts Sunday, a vote that has transformed into a broader judgment on her leadership at home and abroad.

Originally presented as a technical overhaul of the justice system, the reform has sharpened political divisions and unified the center-left opposition, turning the referendum into a symbolic showdown on Meloni's strength one year ahead of national elections.

Recent polls show the race remains too close to call, with the "No" camp gaining late momentum in a polarized climate where turnout may prove decisive.

Lorenzo Pregliasco, political analyst and polling expert at YouTrend, said a rejection of the reform would carry significant political weight.

"A possible 'No' victory would send a political signal, weakening Meloni's



Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni speaks about the upcoming referendum on a judicial reform during the RAI state television program Cinque minuti (Five Minutes), in Rome, on March 20. (AP)

aura of invincibility, while pushing the center-left opposition to say that there is already an alternative in the country," he told The Associated Press.

Meloni initially avoided tying her image too closely to the referendum, wary of the danger that a defeat could weaken her domestically and abroad.

## 4 killed as Russia and Ukraine trade attacks ahead of US talks – officials

KYIV, Ukraine, March 22, (AP) — Russia and Ukraine traded attacks that killed at least four people Saturday, officials said, ahead of US-Ukraine talks on ways to end Russia's invasion of its neighbor.

A man and a woman were killed and six people wounded, including two children, when a Russian drone hit a house in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, regional head Ivan Fedorov said. Russian strikes also knocked out power across much of the northern Ukrainian region of Chernihiv, according to local officials.

In Russia, two women were killed and another wounded by Ukrainian shelling of the Belgorod border region, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

The attacks came ahead of US-Ukraine talks in Miami that US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff said on X were "constructive." He said the meetings, which included US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, were "part of ongoing mediation efforts, with discussions focused on narrowing and resolving remaining items to move closer to a comprehensive peace agreement."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Thursday he had sent a delegation to the U.S. in a bid to move forward suspended US-brokered



In this photo provided by Ukraine's 65th Mechanized Brigade press service, recruits rest after drills at a training ground in the Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine on March 21. (AP)

talks on ending Russia's invasion. Trilateral talks involving Russia, which have yet to produce any breakthrough on key issues, have been on ice while the Iran war has dominated international attention.

Zelenskyy said the main goal of the meeting was to ensure that the trilateral talks resume and that Washington continues to allow other NATO countries to purchase American weapons to send to Ukraine.

### Europe

**Deadly avalanche kills 2 skiers:** An avalanche in high alpine terrain in Italy's South Tyrol on Saturday killed two skiers, according to the country's mountain rescue service.

The avalanche happened at an altitude of around 2,400 meters (7,874 feet) on the slopes of the 2,669-meter (8,757-foot) Hohe Fers (also known as Monte Tallone Grande) near the town of Ratschings, close to the border with Austria.

The CNSAS rescue service's Bolzano emergency center reported that 25 skiers were caught in the avalanche. Besides the two dead, three were seriously injured and two lightly injured, it said.

The avalanche took place at 11:40 a.m. local time (1040 GMT). A rescue operation involved six helicopters and around 80 rescuers from CNSAS, the Alpine Association, police and firefighters, Italian news agency ANSA reported. (AP)

**French voters head to polls:** French voters are returning to the polls Sunday for the second and final round of municipal elections in over 1,500 communes.

The vote is a test of the balance of power on France's local political map before the 2027 presidential race begins to take shape. It is also a measure of whether the far right can convert national momentum into control of major cities, where it has often struggled to break through.

The most closely watched contests are concentrated in major cities after a first round that left France's traditional left and right competitive, the far right strongly placed in several urban races, and President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance movement keeping a low profile in many of the most closely watched races.

After days of mergers, withdrawals and tactical deals between lists, three-way races remain common in the runoff. (AP)



Rescuers search on the site where an avalanche broke loose in Val Ridanna, in Alto Adige, northern Italy, engulfing a group of 10 skiers on March 21. (AP)

**Slovenia votes in tight polls:** Voters in Slovenia headed to the polls on Sunday in a highly contested parliamentary election that pits the governing liberals against right-wing populists in a vote that will decide whether the small European Union nation stays on its liberal course or sways toward the right.

The race is expected to be tight and follows a campaign rocked by allegations of foreign interference that stunned the traditionally moderate EU country.

The vote comes down to two main players: Prime Minister Robert Golob's Freedom Movement and the right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party, or SDS, led by three-time premier Janez Jansa, a populist-style politician and an admirer of US President Donald Trump. (AP)

## INTERNATIONAL



Black smoke rises from an auto parts plant in Daejeon, South Korea on March 20. (AP)

**10 killed in South Korean factory fire: officials**

South Korean rescue workers on Saturday recovered the remains of 10 people from the charred wreckage of an auto parts factory in the central city of Daejeon, where a blaze likely triggered by an explosion injured at least 59 others and left four missing.

The Ministry of the Interior and Safety said 25 people were seriously injured but officials didn't immediately confirm whether any were in life-threatening condition. More than 500 firefighters, police and emergency personnel were deployed to contain the fire and

conduct rescue operations after the fire broke out Friday afternoon.

Videos and photos from the scene showed thick gray smoke billowing from the complex and some workers jumping from a building. (AP)

**Kim's teenage daughter drives tank while observing drill with father**

SEOUL, South Korea, March 22, (AP): The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has driven a tank during army training supervised by her father, the pair's latest joint public appearance fueling outside speculation that the girl is groomed as Kim's heir.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported Friday that Kim oversaw an offensive tactical drill involving tank units and infantry troops a day earlier and called for completing war preparations.

Video and images released by state media showed Kim's daughter sticking her head out of the driver's hatch of a moving, olive green tank while her smiling father sat on top with three soldiers.

Observers say the girl's position clearly showed she was driving the armored vehicle, her first such activity. But they note modern tanks are not technically complicated to pilot, especially while moving slowly for a brief time.

"She only drove straight at a low speed. It's also easy to drive modern tanks, and I think it was easier for her to drive as she was on a flat ground," said Lee Illwoo, an expert with the Korea Defense Network in South Korea.



This photo provided by the North Korean government shows its leader Kim Jong Un, (front right), his daughter, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae, and other soldiers on a tank at a military training base in North Korea on March 19. (AP)

The girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and aged about 13, has accompanied her father to a number of high-profile military and other events since late 2022. North Korean state media has called her Kim Jong Un's "most beloved" or "respected" child and published footage and photos indicating

the two's closeness.

They recently fired pistols during a visit to a light munitions factory and watched a live-fire test of multiple rocket launch systems. In September, the girl went to Beijing with her father. During New Year's Day celebrations she kissed him on the cheek.

**Surprise, embarrassment, unease in Japan after Trump uses Pearl Harbor to defend Iran war**

TOKYO, March 22, (AP): Senior US and Japanese officials tend to shy away from anything but very careful public comments about Japan's 1941 sneak attack on US forces at Pearl Harbor. So there was embarrassment, confusion and unease on Saturday in Japan after President Donald Trump casually used the World War II attack to justify his secrecy before launching the war against Iran.

The Japanese discomfort was compounded by the fact that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi was sitting awkwardly at Trump's side as he spoke.

Partly, the reaction is linked to the crucial security and economic role that the US plays for Japan, its top ally in the region. Put simply, Japan needs to make sure the US relationship thrives. That's why Takaichi was in Washington.

But it's also a reflection of just how fresh the political debate about Japan's role in World War II remains here, even 80 years after its end.

Senior leaders, including Takaichi, have argued that Japan has apologized enough for what happened in the war. Takaichi herself has recently hinted at



US President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in the Oval Office of the White House on March 19, in Washington. (AP)

visiting Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine, where Japanese war criminals are honored among the 2.5 million war dead.

It is, however, somewhat startling for Japan to see these history questions spill over into a White House summit.

On Thursday, when asked by a Japanese reporter why he didn't tell allies in Europe and Asia ahead of the US attack on Iran, Trump cited Pearl Harbor to defend his decision, saying, "Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about

Pearl Harbor, OK?"

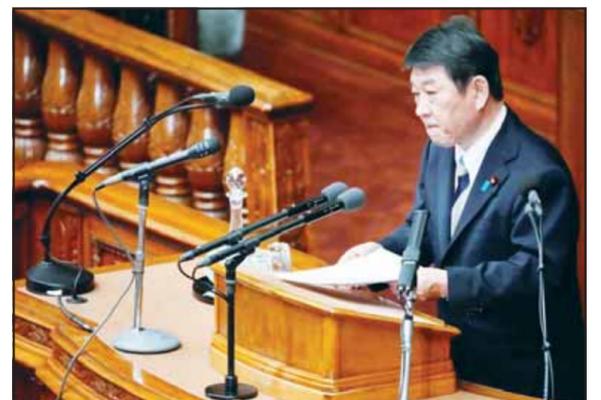
The liberal leaning Asahi newspaper said in an editorial Saturday that Trump's comments "should not be overlooked."

"Making such a remark to justify a sneak attack and boast about its outcome is a piece of nonsense that ignores lessons from history," Asahi said.

Social media reaction has ranged from accusations of ignorance and rudeness by the US president to claims that he didn't see Japan as an equal partner. There were calls for Japan to protest what Trump said.

Tsunee Watanabe, a senior fellow at the Sasaki Peace Foundation, said in an online opinion piece published in the Nikkei newspaper Saturday that the comment signaled that Trump was "not bound by existing American common sense."

"I get the impression that the comment was intended to bring the Japanese reporter (who asked the question) or Ms Takaichi into complicity in order to justify his 'sneak attack' on Iran during diplomatic negotiations and without telling allied countries," Watanabe said.



Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi delivers a speech during the special Diet session on Feb 20 in Tokyo. (AP)

**Japanese national detained in Iran last year has been released: Motegi**

TOKYO, March 22, (AP): Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Sunday that one of two Japanese nationals detained in Iran has been released and is headed home.

Motegi, speaking on a Fuji Television talk show, said the person had been detained since last year and was released on Wednesday. He said the

person took a flight from Azerbaijan which was scheduled to arrive in Japan on Sunday.

Kyodo News agency and other Japanese media said the former detainee later returned to Japan.

Motegi said another Japanese national who was arrested earlier this year is still in custody.

**Brazil slams 'interference' in previously colonized nations, without naming Trump**

BOGOTA, Colombia, March 22, (AP): Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva criticized what he called the return of a colonial approach toward developing nations during a summit in Colombia on Saturday, pointing to the disposal of ex-Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and the fuel blockade of Cuba.

"It's not possible for someone to think that they own other countries," Lula said, in an apparent reference to US policy in the region, at a high-level forum with delegates from Africa and a summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. "What are they doing with Cuba now? What did they do with Venezuela? Is that democratic?"

The left-wing president also criticized the war launched by the US and Israel against Iran on Feb. 28 and drew a parallel with the Iraq War. "Iran has been invaded under the pretext that Iran was building a nuclear bomb. Where are Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons? Where are they? Who found them?"

Lula said that all countries present had already experienced being plundered for gold, silver, diamonds and minerals. He accused an unspecified "they" of seeking to own developing countries' critical minerals and rare earth deposits.



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, right, arrives to attend the Community of Latin American and Caribbean, CELAC-AFRICA, Summit in Bogota, Colombia on March 21. (AP)

"After taking everything we had, now they want to own the critical minerals and rare earths that we have," Lula said. "They want to colonize us again."

Washington's history of intervention in Latin America goes back a long way - to when President James Monroe claimed the hemisphere as part of the U.S. sphere of influence more than 200 years ago.

While large-scale, overt US involvement in the region mostly petered out after the Cold War, Trump has rekindled the legacy.

Since assuming office last year, Trump launched boat strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Caribbean, ordered a naval blockade on Venezuelan oil exports and got involved in electoral politics in Honduras and Argentina.

**US strike on suspected drug boat off Costa Rica leaves 2 dead, 1 hurt**

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, March 22, (AP): A US strike on a boat suspected of transporting illegal drugs along Costa Rica's Pacific coast left at least two people dead and one seriously injured, Costa Rican authorities said Friday.

The attack on the alleged drug boat was reported by the US Southern Command on its X account. It was the latest in a series of strikes by the US on boats in the Pacific and Caribbean oceans suspected of transporting drugs.

Steven Umaña, regional operations coordinator for the Costa Rican Red Cross, said that at 8:15 a.m. Friday he received the alert from the Coast Guard about a shipwreck.

"Upon arrival, one person was found with severe burns and significant chest trauma and was transported in critical condition to the Golfito Hospital. In addition, two people were found with no vital signs," Umaña said.

Such strikes have been sharply criticized by governments in the region as the Trump administration has taken a more aggressive approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean, including staging a military operation to capture Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro.

According to the SOUTHCOM report, on Thursday the US carried out a "lethal kinetic strike" on a boat



A US strike on a boat suspected of transporting illegal drugs along Costa Rica's Pacific coast left at least two people dead and one seriously injured, Costa Rican authorities said on March 20. It was the latest in a series of strikes by the U.S. on boats in the Pacific and Caribbean oceans suspected of transporting drugs. (AP)

it said was operated by a criminal group the U.S. has designated as a foreign terrorist organization. A video posted by the administration shows an explosion of the boat.

"Intelligence confirmed that the low-profile vessel was transiting known drug trafficking routes in the eastern Pacific and was involved in drug trafficking operations," the post said.

Costa Rica's National Coast Guard Operations Center reported it

received an alert about a shipwreck and dispatched a vessel 126 nautical miles from Golfito on the country's southern Pacific coast to respond.

It wasn't immediately clear how many people were aboard the boat that was struck.

The Judicial Investigation Agency confirmed it received the bodies, which were handed over by a US Navy force at sea to Costa Rica's Coast Guard Service and, once at port, were delivered to judicial authorities.

**Strike on hospital in Sudan killed at least 64, says WHO**

CAIRO, March 22, (AP): At least 64 people were killed, including at least 13 children, in a strike on a hospital in Sudan's western Darfur region last week, the World Health Organization said Saturday.

The strike on the Al Daein Teaching Hospital in East Darfur on Friday also injured at least 89 people and rendered the hospital non-functional, **Tedros Ghebreyesus**, the head of the WHO, said on X.

Sudan slid into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces exploded into war throughout the country.

The RSF has blamed the military for the strike on the hospital.

The army has denied the attack, but two military officials said the strike was targeting a nearby police station. They spoke on the condition of anonymity as they were not allowed to discuss the matter openly.

The devastating war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to UN figures, but aid groups say that is an undercount and the true number could be many times higher.

The WHO has said that over 2,000 people have been killed in attacks on medical facilities since the start of the war.

"Enough blood has been spilled. Enough suffering has been inflicted. The time has come to de-escalate the conflict in Sudan," said Ghebreyesus.



Ghebreyesus

**Subcontinent**

**Bangladesh train-bus collision kills 12:** At least 12 people were killed and about 20 others injured when a train collided with a passenger bus at a level crossing in Bangladesh's Cumilla district early Sunday, local police said.

The accident occurred at around 3:00 a.m. local time in the Padua Bazar area of Sadar South Upazila, when a Chattogram-bound mail train rammed into the bus as it was crossing the railway tracks, police officials said.

Rescue teams rushed to the scene and transported the injured to Cumilla Medical College Hospital. (Xinhua)

**4 dead in Afghanistan vehicle accident:** At least four commuters were killed and three others sustained injuries after their vehicle overturned in northern Afghanistan's Faryab province, the official media outlet Bakhtar News Agency reported on Saturday.

The mishap took place in the Jungal area, Dawlat Abad district, when the driver lost control due to carelessness, causing the vehicle to veer off the road and overturn, killing four on the spot and injuring three others, according to the report.

The injured were transferred to a nearby health center for treatment, it said.

Road accidents remain a leading cause of death in Afghanistan, often resulting from reckless driving on congested roads, poor road conditions, and a lack of traffic signs on dilapidated highways. (Xinhua)

**Cuba power grid collapses leaving it without electricity for 3rd time in March**

HAVANA, March 22, (AP): Cuba's power grid collapsed Saturday leaving the country without electricity for a third time in March as the communist government battles with a decaying infrastructure and a U.S.-imposed oil blockade.

The Cuban Electric Union, which reports to the Ministry of Energy and Mines, announced a total blackout across the island without initially giving a cause for the outage.

The union later said the blackout was caused by an unexpected failure of a generating unit at the Nuevitas thermoelectric plant in Camagüey province.

"From that moment, a cascading effect occurred in the machines that were online," said a report from the Ministry of Energy and Mines, which activated "micro-islands" of generating units to provide power to vital centers, hospitals and water systems.

Authorities said they were working to restore power.



People are seen waiting in a car in the dark during a blackout in Havana, Cuba on March 21. (AP)

Power outages, whether nationwide or regional, have become relatively common in the last two years due to breakdowns in the aging infrastruc-

ture. The breakdowns are compounded by daily blackouts of up to 12 hours caused by fuel shortages, which also destabilize the system.

## Kuwaiti oil barrel price drops to \$156.50 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 22, (KUNA): The price of the Kuwaiti oil barrel went down USD 8.48 to reach USD 156.50 per barrel on Friday, compared with USD 164.98 pb Wednesday, according to the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday.

In international markets, Brent crude oil price went up USD 3.54 to USD 112.19 pb, while West Texas crude increased USD 2.18 to USD 98.32 pb.

# Business

## Jazeera Airways reunites families and loved ones with more flights and more destinations

Exports to drop 14%

## Qatar halts helium output after strikes



Jazeera Airways increases capacity.



KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Jazeera Airways has announced additional capacity across its network with more flights and more destinations to reconnect people with their families and loved ones. Open for booking until 15 April from Kuwait via Qaisumah Airport, this includes over 18 destinations.

This year, Eid is being observed under exceptional circumstances across the region. As the only airline currently operating from Kuwait, Jazeera Airways continues to play an important role in maintaining connectivity – reuniting families, enabling residents to return to their lives, and supporting essential travel when it matters most.

In response to increased demand, the airline has expanded its services to offer greater flexibility and more opportunities for travel during the Eid period and beyond.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said:

“Eid is a time of togetherness, and this year, staying connected carries even greater meaning. By expanding the number of destinations and increasing the number of flights, we are focused on ensuring people can reach where they need to be – with their families, their work, and their com-

munities. We continue to operate with the support of the Government of Kuwait and the many people working to keep the country safe. Our teams have shown incredible dedication in making this possible, and we remain committed to keeping Kuwait connected during this time.”

To facilitate the journey from Kuwait passengers are transported overland between Kuwait and Qaisumah before boarding onward flights, ensuring continuity of travel despite the temporary suspension of operations at Kuwait International Airport.

Bookings are available on [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App.

LONDON, March 22, (AP): Iran's attack this week on Qatar's natural gas export facility threatens to disrupt not just world energy markets but also global technology supply chains because the helium it produces is crucial for a range of advanced industries.

Best known as the gas that makes party balloons float, helium is also a key input in chip-making, space rockets and medical imaging.

Qatar supplies a third of the world's helium, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, but the nation had to halt production shortly after the war erupted three weeks ago. The latest Iranian strikes against the region's energy producing infrastructure have added to supply worries, with Qatar's state-owned gas company saying it would crimp helium exports by 14%.

Here's a deeper look at helium's industrial role:

Helium is a byproduct of natural gas production, when it's separated out by cryogenic distillation. Qatar, which sits on the world's biggest single natural gas field, produces about 30% of global helium supply, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Qatar's helium is produced at its Ras Laffan facility, the world's largest liquefied natural gas plant. But state-owned energy company QatarGas halted production of LNG and “associated products” on March 2 because of Iran's drone attacks and two days later declared force majeure, meaning it's unable to supply contracted customers due to circumstances beyond its control.

After Ras Laffan was hit again by more Iranian strikes on Wednesday and Thursday, QatarGas reported “extensive” damage that will take years to repair and cut annual helium exports by 14%.

“It makes the story worse,” said Phil Kornbluth, president of Kornbluth Helium Consulting. “Your best case scenario would be you're back producing some helium in six weeks or something like that. As it looks right now, that's highly unlikely.”

Spot prices for helium have doubled since the crisis erupted and will probably rise further, Kornbluth said.

But spot trading only accounts for about 2% of the total market in normal times, he said. Helium is a thinly traded commodity and is mostly sold through long-term contracts.

Still, contract prices “could go up a lot,” Kornbluth said. “There's lots of room for price increase if this is an extended outage.”

Kornbluth said the shortage hasn't hit yet, because helium containers that would have been filled when the conflict erupted at the start of March would have still taken several weeks to arrive in Asia.

“Nobody's run out of helium yet. But it's a few weeks out when the shortage really hits.”

Helium is essential for manufacturing semiconductors, including the cutting-edge chips used for artificial intelligence models produced in Asian fabrication plants.

It's great at conducting or transferring heat, making it ideal for rapid cooling.

Chipmakers use it to cool wafers - the discs of silicon printed with tiny electronic circuits. Helium is used during the etching process, when material that's been deposited on a wafer is scraped away to form transistor structures, said Jacob Feldgoise, an analyst at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

During the etching process, “you really want to maintain a constant temperature over the wafer. And in order to do that, you need to be able to draw heat away from the wafer that's being processed,” said Feldgoise.

“Helium is an excellent thermal conductor. And so chip fabs will blow helium over the back of the wafer in order to speed heat removal and keep heat removal consistent.”

Under current semiconductor manufacturing processes, there's no viable replacement for helium to cool wafers, said Jong-hwan Lee, a professor of semiconductor

devices at South Korea's Sangmyung University.

The medical industry uses helium to cool superconducting magnets powering magnetic resonance imaging machines.

And the space industry uses helium to purge rocket fuel tanks, a demand that is expected to grow because of more frequent launches by companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin.

Helium's atomic properties make it tricky to store and transport.

In gas form, helium's tiny molecules can easily escape containers by leaking through even the smallest of gaps.

Helium is typically chilled by Qatar's gas company into liquid form and stored in insulated containers for transport through the Strait of Hormuz. The specialized containers can store helium for 35 to 48 days. Any longer and they start warming up, letting the helium transform into gas that escapes through pressure release valves.

About 200 of these containers are stuck in the Middle East, Kornbluth said. They cost about \$1 million each, so there aren't a lot of extra ones sitting around elsewhere.

“It's going to take a fair amount of time to get these containers out of Qatar and to get them somewhere else where they might be able to be filled with helium,” he said.

“So this initial period when you lose Qatar supply and have to re-jig the supply chain and reposition containers, that's going to be the worst part of the shortage most likely.”

There only are a handful of countries that produce helium.

The United States is the biggest producer, accounting for 81 million cubic meters last year. Qatar, Algeria and Russia are the other major producers, but Russian supplies are banned under Under States and European Union sanctions.

USGS estimates the United States has 8.5 billion cubic meters of recoverable helium in geologic reservoirs, while the rest of the world has 31.3 billion cubic meters.

The war highlights the sprawling global supply chains that underpin South Korea's semiconductor industry, which has seen a surge in global demand for its chips amid the AI boom.

Fitch Ratings said in a report this week that the country - home to Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, the world's largest memory chip makers - is particularly vulnerable to supply shortages because it imports about 65% of its helium from Qatar.

Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix likely have several months of inventory, but it's crucial that they accelerate efforts to secure alternative sources, Lee said, as the war could drag on and potentially disrupt supplies of more materials beyond helium.

Helium is among 14 semiconductor supply chain materials the Seoul government has flagged for monitoring due to their heavy vulnerability to the war.

“Even disruptions affecting just a handful of materials could destabilize the entire semiconductor manufacturing process as each stage of production depends on the previous one,” Lee said.

Still, a full-blown helium crisis is unlikely, experts said. In the event of a shortage, Kornbluth said the helium industry allocates supplies based on importance so critical industries such as chip-making and medical would be at the front of the line.

And because helium is a small part of the overall production cost of a semiconductor, it's likely that chip fabs “would be willing to pay a higher price” to secure supplies, Feldgoise said.

Samsung and SK Hynix declined to respond to questions about inventory or plans to diversify supplies. The Korea Semiconductor Industry Association said short-term supplies are sufficient and companies have been diversifying their supply routes.

Chipmaking giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company also said it does not “anticipate any significant impact at this time” but will continue monitoring the situation.

### New route strengthens Kuwait-Egypt connectivity via Qaisumah

## Jazeera Airways launches new flights to Sohag

KUWAIT CITY, March 22: Jazeera Airways today announced the expansion of its network in Egypt with new flights to Sohag. Sohag marks the sixth destination that Jazeera Airways will operate in Egypt via Qaisumah Airport in KSA and further strengthens connectivity between Kuwait and one of its most important travel corridors.

With Egyptians comprising the largest Arab expatriate community in Kuwait, the new route is based on a strong demand to reunite families and loved ones, while supporting essential travel for work, business, and personal commitments.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said:

“Egypt remains one of our strongest and most important markets. The launch of Sohag further expands our ability to connect people at a time when travel carries deeper meaning. Whether it is reuniting with family, returning to work, or continuing essential journeys, we remain focused on maintaining reliable connectivity under challenging circumstances.”

With the addition of Sohag, Jazeera Airways now connects Kuwait to six destinations in Egypt – Alexandria, Cairo, Sphinx, Assiut and Luxor, offering increased choice and flexibility for passengers. Since the resumption of operations via Qaisumah Airport, Jazeera Airways has facilitated the travel of over 8,500 passengers, ensuring continuity of movement during this critical period.

Flights to Sohag will operate via Qaisumah Airport (AQL) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of Jazeera Airways' ongoing efforts to maintain operations while the Kuwait International Airport remains temporarily closed. Departure formalities are



Jazeera Airways – Mishref Hall

conducted at Jazeera Airways' dedicated check-in facility at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref (Hall 8). Once check-in is complete, passengers are transported overland by bus to Qaisumah Airport for their onward journeys.

The expanded Egypt network forms part of Jazeera Airways' broader commitment to keeping Kuwait connected, with operations currently spanning close to 20 destinations. Bookings are now open on [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App, with additional frequencies and destinations to be introduced progressively.

zeera Airways' broader commitment to keeping Kuwait connected, with operations currently spanning close to 20 destinations. Bookings are now open on [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App, with additional frequencies and destinations to be introduced progressively.

### Iran war sends gas to \$3.94

## Economists warn rising fuel costs to offset Trump's tax refund gains

WASHINGTON, March 22, (AP): The U.S. economy was supposed to start the year with a bang, fueled by an unusually large jump in tax refunds from President Donald Trump's tax cut legislation. Yet spiking gas prices are on track to eat up those refunds, leaving most Americans with little extra to spend.

“Next spring is projected to be the largest tax refund season of all time,” Trump said in a prime-time speech in December that was intended to address voters' concerns about the economy and stubbornly high prices.

But that was before the Iran war, which began Feb. 28. Oil and gas prices have soared since then, with the nationwide average price of gas reaching \$3.94 Sunday, up more than a dollar from just a month earlier.

Gas prices are likely to remain elevated for some time, even if the war ends soon, because shipping and production have been disrupted and will take time to recover. Economists now expect slower growth this spring and for the year as a whole, as dollars that are spent on gas are less likely to be used for restaurant meals, new clothes, or entertainment.

Lower and middle-income households are likely to be hit particularly hard, because they receive lower refunds, while spending a greater proportion of their earnings on gas.

“The energy shock is going to hit those who have the least cushion,” said Alex Jacquez, chief of policy at the left-leaning Groundwork Collaborative and a former economist in the Biden White House. “And it doesn't look like those tax refunds are going to be here to save them.”

Neale Mahoney, director of the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, calculates that gas prices could peak in May at \$4.36 a gallon, based on oil price forecasts by Goldman Sachs, followed by slow declines for the rest of the year. The notion that gas prices decline much more

slowly than they rise is so ingrained among economists that they refer to it as the “rocket and feathers” phenomenon.

In that scenario, the average household would pay \$740 more in gas this year, nearly equal to the \$748 increase in refunds that the Tax Foundation has estimated the average household will receive.

Through March 6, refunds have risen by much less than that, according to IRS data: They have averaged \$3,676, up \$352 from \$3,324 in 2025. Still, average refunds could rise as more complex returns are filed.

Other estimates show similar impacts. Economists at Oxford Economics, a consulting firm, estimate that if gas prices average \$3.70 a gallon all year, it will cost consumers about \$70 billion more than the \$60 billion in increased tax refunds.

The gas price spike comes with many consumers already in a precarious position, particularly compared to 2022, when gas prices also soared because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At that time, many households still had fattened bank accounts from pandemic-era stimulus payments and companies were hiring rapidly and sharply lifting pay to attract workers.

Now, hiring is nearly at a standstill and Americans' saving rate has steadily fallen in the past few years as many households borrow more to sustain their spending.

“When you start looking across the perspective from a consumer side, you're seeing people who have maxed out their credit cards, are using ‘buy now, pay later’ to purchase their groceries,” said Julie Margetta Morgan, president of The Century Foundation, a think tank. “They're making it work for now, but that can fall apart quite quickly.”

The impact will likely worsen the “K-shaped” narrative around the U.S. economy, analysts said, in which higher income households have fared better than lower-income households. The bottom 10% of earners spend nearly 4% of their incomes

on gasoline, Pantheon Macroeconomics estimates, while the top 10% spend just 1.5%.

For now, most analysts still expect the U.S. economy to expand this year, even if more slowly, given the gas price shock. Higher gas prices will likely worsen inflation in the short run, but over time weaker spending will also slow growth.

American consumers and businesses have repeatedly shaken off shocks since the pandemic - soaring inflation, rising interest rates, tariffs - and continued to spend, defying concerns that the economy would tip into recession. Many economists note that the proportion of their incomes that Americans spend on gas and other energy has fallen significantly compared with a decade ago.

Data from the Bank of America Institute, released Friday, showed that spending on gas on the bank's credit and debit cards shot 14.4% higher in the week ended March 14 compared with a year ago. Before the war, such spending was running 5% below the previous year, a benefit to consumers.

Spending on discretionary items - restaurant meals, electronics, and travel - is still growing, the institute said, evidence of consumer resilience. But there is little sign it is accelerating, as many economists had hoped.

“The longer these gasoline prices persist, the more that will gradually sap consumer discretionary spending,” said David Tinsley, senior economist at the institute.

Other analysts expect growth will slow because of the war. Bernard Yaros and Michael Pearce, economists at Oxford Economics, forecast that the U.S. economy will grow just 1.9% this year, down from an earlier estimate of 2.5%.

“We had anticipated a lift in spending from a bumper tax refund season,” they wrote, “but the rise in gasoline prices, if sustained, would more than offset that boost.”

## The Conversation

## Ras Laffan severely damaged

## Iran conflict hits critical Gulf oil and gas facilities

By Kristian Coates Ulrichsen  
Rice University

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

The U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran took a dangerous turn on March 18, 2026, with tit-for-tat strikes on critical energy infrastructure that amount to the most serious regional escalation since the conflict began.

First, an Israeli drone strike targeted facilities at Iran's Asaluyeh complex, damaging four plants that treat gas from the offshore South Pars field, which straddles the maritime boundary between Iran and Qatar.

Tehran vowed to retaliate by hitting five key energy targets in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Hours later, Iranian missiles caused "extensive damage" to Ras Laffan, the heart of Qatar's energy sector. Qatar's state-owned petroleum company said additional attacks on March 19 had targeted liquefied natural gas facilities.

Separate suspected Iranian aerial attacks also caused damage to oil refineries in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and led to the closure of gas facilities in the United Arab Emirates.

Much attention has been focused on the seemingly unanticipated consequences of the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran and the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping. But as a scholar of the Gulf, I believe that the targeting of energy facilities is close to a worst-case outcome for regional states. Export revenues from oil and, in Qatar's case, natural gas have transformed the Gulf states into regional powers with global reach over the past three decades, and that is now at risk.

The offshore gas field that lies on both sides of the maritime boundary between Qatar and Iran is the world's largest reserve of so-called nonassociated gas. This means that the gas is not connected to the production of crude oil and is unaffected by decisions to raise or lower output according to, for example, OPEC quotas.

The field, known as the North Field on the Qatari side and South Pars on the Iranian side, was discovered in 1971. Development of its massive resources began in earnest in the 1980s. Largely because of the field, Iran and Qatar have the second- and third-largest proven gas reserves in the world, respectively.

While Israel attacked gas facilities in southern Iran on the second day of the 12-day war in June 2025, oil and gas infrastructure was largely spared during that earlier conflict. The opening two weeks of the current fighting, however, have seen a significant loosening of the restraints on targeting critical infrastructure.

On March 8, Israel struck oil storage facilities in Tehran, starting large fires and blanketing the capital in plumes of smoke and toxic, so-called black rain. For their part, Iranian officials signaled that energy facilities were on the table as swarms of its drones targeted the Shaybah oil field in Saudi Arabia, the Shah gas field southwest of Abu Dhabi and oil facilities in Fujairah.

One of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates along with Abu Dhabi, Fujairah is strategically located on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz, with direct access to the Indian Ocean. For this reason, it has grown into an important oil-loading and ship fuel-supplying hub and is the terminus for the Abu Dhabi crude oil pipeline.

Opened in 2012, that pipeline has a capacity of 1.5 million barrels per day, covering more than half of the UAE's oil exports. Its repeated targeting during the war signifies Iranian intent to disrupt one of the two pipelines that bypass Hormuz. Thus far, the other pipeline, the East-West pipeline from the eastern Saudi oil fields to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, has not been targeted.

But that could quickly change, as early on March 19 Saudi authorities reported that a drone had struck a refinery at Yanbu, while a ballistic missile that targeted the port had been

intercepted.

On at least four occasions over the past decade, most recently in 2022, Houthi forces in Yemen - who are allied with Iran - struck targets around the East-West pipeline.

And in 2024 and 2025, in defiance of U.S. and Israeli policy in the region, the Houthis led a campaign against shipping in the Red Sea.

So far, the Houthis have refrained from joining the latest war, but they have threatened to do so. Any such actions would cause enormous additional disruption to oil markets.

However, the attack on Ras Laffan in Qatar and the wider threats to other energy infrastructure in the Gulf have the potential on their own to be catastrophic for a number of reasons.

Developed in the 1990s, the industrial city of Ras Laffan is the most critical cog in Qatar's economic and energy landscape and the epicenter of the largest facility for the production and export of LNG in the world. Fourteen giant LNG "trains" process the gas from the North Field, which is then transported by vessels from the accompanying port to destinations worldwide.

Ras Laffan also houses gas-to-liquids facilities - these convert natural gas into liquid petroleum products - along with a refinery and water and power plants that produce desalinated water and generate electricity.

Ras Laffan is quite simply the engine that has powered Qatar's meteoric growth and rise as a global power broker.

Early reports suggest that the world's largest gas-to-liquids plant, Pearl GTL, which is operated by Shell, was damaged during the first attack on Ras Laffan, and that the second attack damaged 17% of Qatar's LNG capacity, with repairs projected to take three to five years. A three-phased expansion to the LNG facilities, which would add a further six LNG trains by 2027, is also likely to be delayed.

What is clear is that Iranian officials view the Israeli - or American - targeting of facilities in their territorial waters in the South Pars field as sufficient to justify hitting facilities on the Qatari side. That's even though Qatar forcefully condemned the Israeli strike on Asaluyeh as a dangerous escalation, for reasons that have become all too real.

There lies the nub of the dilemma for Qatar and the five other Gulf states facing the brunt of the backlash from a war they tried to avert through diplomacy.

On my visits to the region in fall 2025, it became clear that many officials in the Gulf viewed the ceasefire that ended the 12-day war as, at best, a temporary cessation of hostilities and feared that the next round of fighting would be far more damaging, for Iran and for the region.

This has now come to pass. An embattled government in Tehran that sees itself in an existential fight for survival has spread the cost of war as far and as wide as it can.

Officials statements from Gulf capitals that have consistently - and correctly - emphasized their direct noninvolvement in the U.S.-Israeli military campaign have fallen on deaf ears in Tehran.

An incident on March 2 that saw Qatar down two Iranian Soviet-era fighters was a defensive measure. The jets had entered Qatari airspace with the apparent intent to strike Al Udeid, the air base that houses the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command.

However, the scope of Iran's attacks has gone far beyond military facilities used by U.S. forces and have hit the sectors - travel, tourism and sporting events - that put the region so firmly on the global map.

Nowhere is this more the case than the energy sector that has underwritten and made possible the transformation of the Gulf states over the past half-century, and whose health remains vital to the global economy and supply chains in oil, gas and many derivative products.

If that sector remains firmly in the crosshairs, there's no telling how intense the regional and global consequences of the ongoing war in Iran may prove to be. (AP)

## Geopolitical tensions dominate as Central Banks hold firm

By National Bank of Kuwait

Financial markets remained on edge this week as geopolitical tensions in the Middle East pushed Brent crude back toward \$110 a barrel, fuelling inflation concerns and reshaping central bank policy expectations across the globe. The Federal Reserve held rates steady in the 3.50%-3.75% range, slightly raising its growth and inflation projections while signalling that two rate cuts are still likely over the next two years, though markets have now pushed back expectations to at most one cut in 2026 following hotter than expected wholesale inflation data and an unexpected drop in jobless claims that pointed to persistent price pressures and a resilient labour market. The Bank of Canada also held at 2.25%, with Governor Tiff Macklem describing the environment as one of "acute" uncertainty as rising oil prices and U.S. trade policy widen the range of possible outcomes. While the Bank of England unanimously kept rates at 3.75% but warned that the Middle East crisis could push energy costs even higher, with markets now pricing in three hikes for 2026. Meanwhile, the European Central Bank left its deposit rate at 2% as inflation has dropped to 1.9%, though it cautioned that the Iran war could drive short-term price pressures. The Swiss National Bank held at 0% while signalling greater willingness to intervene in currency markets to prevent franc strength. In Asia-Pacific, the Bank of Japan kept rates at 0.75% but maintained a hawkish tilt, with markets seeing a 60% chance of a hike in April. Moreover, the Reserve Bank of Australia delivered its second consecutive hike, raising the cash rate to 4.1% amid renewed inflation pressures tied to geopolitical tensions. The dollar index hovered near 99, on track for a weekly loss as hawkish signals from other major central banks strengthened their currencies at the greenback's expense. In addition, the euro retreated to \$1.157 and the pound falling below \$1.34 as investors nevertheless sought safety in the dollar amid deepening inflation fears. Gold remained below \$4,487 an ounce and silver fell toward \$67.7, both heading for sharp weekly losses as surging energy prices prompted investors to rotate into the dollar and Treasuries instead of safe-haven metals, while Brent crude climbed to its highest level since mid-2022 as the Strait of Hormuz remained largely closed and supply disruptions deepened across the region.

## United States

## U.S. Federal Reserve Holds Rates Steady in the 3.50%-3.75% Range

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve voted to keep its key interest rate steady in the 3.5%-3.75% range, as policymakers navigate higher inflation, mixed labour market signals, and the uncertainty of the recent war with Iran. While the central bank slightly raised its growth and inflation projections for 2026, it still signalled that two rate cuts are likely over the next two years, though the timing remains unclear. Officials acknowledged that the war and its impact on oil prices through the Strait of Hormuz pose an uncertain threat to the economy and could keep inflation above the 2% target. Fed Chair Jerome Powell noted it is "too soon to know" the war's full effect, but that oil-driven inflation expectations have recently risen. The decision was not unanimous: Governor Stephen Miran dissented in favor of a quarter-point cut due to jobs concerns, while Governor Christopher Waller joined the majority in holding rates. Following the announcement, stocks fell as markets grew more concerned about persistent inflation, with expectations now shifting to at most one rate cut in 2026.

## U.S. Wholesale Inflation Hits One-Year High as Service Costs Surge

US wholesale inflation jumped to its highest level in a year, signalling that price pressures were already strong even before the recent war in the Middle East began. The Producer Price Index (PPI) rose 0.7% for the month, beating expectations, and climbed to 3.4% on an annual basis. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, also came in higher than forecast at 0.5% for the month and 3.9% for the year. The increase was largely driven by a rise in services costs, including portfolio management and securities brokerage fees, which is a trend likely to worry Federal Reserve officials, as they had previously linked inflation mainly to tariffs. Goods prices also moved higher, rising 1.1% for the month. The stronger than expected data raises new concerns about persistent inflation, especially as the ongoing war continues to push up

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.1412	1.1410	1.1616	1.1570	1.1445	1.1697	1.1619
GBP	1.3228	1.3217	1.3466	1.3339	1.3215	1.3470	1.3334
JPY	159.57	157.49	159.90	159.22	157.45	160.49	157.95
CHF	0.7881	0.7842	0.7957	0.7879	0.7779	0.7981	0.7800

energy costs and disrupt global shipping.

## U.S. Jobless Claims Hit Lowest Level Since January In Unexpected Drop

The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits dropped more than expected, falling by 8,000 to 205,000 the lowest level since January. This decline surprised economists, who had predicted a slight increase. The data reinforces the view that the US job market is characterized by very few layoffs, even though hiring has slowed significantly. The number of people already receiving benefits also rose only slightly, remaining near recent lows. This strong reading on jobless claims contrasts with the weak payroll figures seen earlier in the year, painting a picture of a labor market with limited firing but also sluggish job creation. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly volatility, also fell to its lowest point since January. The report follows the Federal Reserve's recent decision to hold interest rates steady, with Chair Jerome Powell noting that while the unemployment rate has remained stable, the slow pace of hiring is a concern. He added that the Fed needs to see more progress on inflation before considering further rate cuts.

The Greenback was last seen trading at 99.65.

## Canada

## Overnight Rate

In its latest decision, the Bank of Canada chose to hold its benchmark overnight rate steady at 2.25%, a move that was widely anticipated by financial markets. This decision comes as the central bank navigates a complex set of inflation risks, primarily driven by rising oil prices. During his press conference, Governor Tiff Macklem acknowledged that while domestic inflation has remained close to the 2% target for over a year, the escalating conflict in the Middle East specifically the war in Iran is causing oil prices to climb sharply, which is expected to put temporary upward pressure on consumer prices. In addition to this geopolitical shock, Macklem reiterated that the Canadian economy continues to face persistent uncertainty stemming from U.S. trade policy. He noted that the war in Iran introduces an entirely new layer of unpredictability, explaining that its overall effect on both the global and Canadian economies will ultimately depend on the duration of the conflict and whether it spreads further across the region. When discussing the Bank's approach, Macklem emphasized that its Governing Council is carefully weighing both the most probable path for the economy and inflation alongside the growing risks to that outlook. He characterized the current environment as one of "acute" uncertainty, where ongoing trade tensions combined with the broader Middle East War have significantly widened the range of potential economic outcomes.

The USD/CAD was last seen trading at 1.3273.

## United Kingdom

## Bank of England Holds Rates at 3.75%

The Bank of England has decided to keep interest rates at 3.75% following a unanimous vote by its nine-member Monetary Policy Committee. This decision comes as the Bank assesses the potential inflationary impact of the war in the Middle East, which has already pushed up petrol prices and could lead to higher household energy bills. While some policymakers suggested that rate increases might still be necessary, the Bank is also mindful of a weakening economy. Governor Andrew Bailey stated that the Bank's primary focus remains on returning inflation to its 2% target, regardless of how global events unfold.

The GBP/USD was last seen trading at 1.3339.

## Eurozone

## European Central Bank Holds Rates Steady Amid Geopolitical Uncertainty and Energy Price Fears

The European Central Bank kept its key interest rates unchanged on Thursday, pointing to growing uncertainty around inflation and economic growth following the outbreak of the Iran war. The

conflict is expected to push energy costs higher, which could drive up inflation in the short term while also posing longer-term risks to economic growth. The ECB's deposit rate remained at 2 percent, where it has stood since June 2025, as the bank emphasized the heightened unpredictability stemming from the conflict and its potential impact on both inflation and the broader economy. This decision mirrors similar moves by the Bank of England and the U.S. Federal Reserve, both of which also held rates steady amid rising economic uncertainty. Meanwhile, European inflation has dropped sharply to 1.9 percent, bringing it in line with the ECB's 2 percent target.

The EUR/USD was last seen trading at 1.1570.

## Switzerland

## SNB Holds Rates Steady at 0% Despite a Slight Uptick in Inflation

In March 2026, the Swiss National Bank kept its key interest rate at 0% and maintained its policy of charging a small fee on very large bank deposits. With the Middle East conflict raising uncertainty, the SNB signalled it is more willing to intervene in currency markets to prevent the Swiss franc from becoming too strong and threatening price stability. Inflation ticked up slightly to 0.1% in February, and while higher energy costs may cause a short-term bump, medium-term pressures remain stable, with the bank forecasting average inflation of 0.5% for both 2026 and 2027. Although the global economy was solid late last year, rising energy costs and geopolitical tensions are increasing uncertainty and could slow activity. Switzerland's economy posted modest growth in the fourth quarter and is expected to expand by about 1% in 2026, though this forecast depends heavily on global conditions.

The USD/CHF was last seen trading at 0.7879.

## Asia-Pacific

## Bank of Japan Holds at 0.75%

On Thursday, the Bank of Japan kept its key interest rate steady at 0.75% but maintained its push for tighter policy, warning that surging oil prices from the Middle East war could intensify inflation. Governor Kazuo Ueda stated that the board is now more focused on inflation risks than on risks to economic growth, keeping expectations alive for a near-term rate hike. While the decision was not unanimous with one board member again proposing a hike to 1.0% and another arguing inflation could hit the target sooner than expected. The BOJ noted that global markets remain volatile and that rising energy costs will likely push consumer prices higher. Ueda offered few clues on exact timing but signalled that the April economic review will be key, and that a rate hike is possible if inflationary risks overshoot expectations. Following his remarks, which markets viewed as somewhat hawkish, the yen strengthened slightly. Markets see roughly 60% of another rate hike in April.

The USD/JPY currency pair was last seen trading at 159.22

## RBA Hikes Rates to 4.1% as Inflation Pressures Persist

The Reserve Bank of Australia raised rates by 25bps to 4.1% in March 2026, following a similar hike in February and in line with expectations. The decision, which was split, reflects renewed inflation pressures, supported by tighter labour market conditions and stronger capacity constraints. While some inflation drivers are seen as temporary, the RBA highlighted upside risks to inflation, including from geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. As a result, inflation is expected to remain above target for some time. The central bank reiterated a data-dependent and flexible approach, closely monitoring global developments, domestic demand, and labour market trends, while maintaining focus on price stability and full employment.

The AUD/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 0.7023

## Kuwait

**Kuwaiti Dinar**  
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30660

## Super micro shares plunge 33% amid US smuggling probe

## High oil prices knock down stocks and erase Wall Street's hopes for a cut to interest rates

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP) - Another climb for oil prices shook stock markets on Friday, as hopes collapsed for a possible cut to interest rates this year by the Federal Reserve.

The S&P 500 fell 1.5% to close its fourth straight losing week, its longest such streak in a year. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 443 points, or 1%, and the Nasdaq composite tumbled 2%.

The market's losses deepened after oil prices erased an early dip and accelerated in the afternoon. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 3.3% to settle at \$112.19 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude gained 2.3% to \$98.32 per barrel.

Stocks also bent under the weight of leaping yields in the bond market. Higher yields make mortgage rates and other borrowing more expensive for U.S. households and companies, slowing the economy, and they grind down on prices for all kinds of investments. Treasury yields have been jumping on worries the war with Iran will cause a long-term spike in oil and natural gas prices that drives up inflation.

Worries have gotten so high that traders have canceled nearly all their bets that the Federal Reserve could cut interest rates this year, according to data from CME Group. Some even think the Fed could raise rates in 2026, a nearly unthinkable scenario before the war began.

"I think it would be market shaking," Ann Milette, head of equity investments at Allspring Global Investments, said about a rate hike. But she also said that if oil prices stay high for a long time, they would likely drag so much on the economy that the Fed would not raise rates.

Lower interest rates would give the economy and investment prices a boost, and they're something President Donald Trump has angrily been calling for. Before the war, traders were betting heavily that the Fed would cut rates at least twice this year.

But lower rates risk worsening inflation. And investors now see little room for central banks worldwide to cut interest rates to help their economies. Besides the Federal Reserve, central banks in Europe, Japan and the United Kingdom also held their interest rates steady this past week.

The price of Brent crude has zigzagged sharply on its way from roughly \$70 per barrel before the war began to as high as \$119.50 this week. Big swings have struck hour to hour as financial markets try to handicap how long the war will last and how much damage it will do to oil and gas production in the Persian Gulf.

The U.S. stock market has a history of bouncing back relatively quickly from past conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, as long as oil prices

don't stay too high for too long. Oil prices aren't at a red-flag point yet, Milette said, but "we're getting close if the duration is long enough."

"If three months from now, we're in a similar situation, not only myself but a lot of other investors will be much more cautious," she said. While companies can adjust to gradual rises in oil prices, Milette said they're less able to quickly change their business models after a sudden spike becomes a new normal.

On Wall Street, Super Micro Computer lost a third of its value and tumbled 33.3% to help drag the U.S. stock market lower. The U.S. government accused a senior vice president of the company and two others affiliated with it of conspiring to smuggle billions of dollars of computer servers containing advanced Nvidia chips to China.

The company said it has been cooperating with the investigation and is not a defendant in the indictment. It placed its two accused employees on administrative leave and terminated its relationship with an accused contractor.

Roughly three out of every four stocks in the S&P 500 fell. Stocks of smaller companies, which can feel the pinch of higher interest rates more than their bigger rivals, led the way lower. The Russell 2000 index of smaller stocks fell a market-leading 2.3%.

Among the few winners was FedEx, which rose 0.8% after delivering a much stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 100.01 points to 6,506.48. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 443.96 to 45,577.47, and the Nasdaq composite sank 443.08 to 21,647.61.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury jumped to 4.38% from 4.25% late Thursday and from just 3.97% before the war started. That's a significant move for the bond market.

The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for what the Fed will do, leaped to 3.88% from 3.79% late Thursday and is near its highest level since the summer.

When bonds are paying more in interest, they make other investments less attractive in comparison. That's particularly the case for things like gold, which pay their investors nothing at all. Gold's price finished the week at \$4,574.90 per ounce, hurting its reputation as a safe place for money during uncertain times. Earlier this year, gold was setting records and briefly topped \$5,400 per ounce.

Outside of Wall Street, stock indexes fell sharply in Europe following their wipeouts on Thursday. Indexes also sank in China, though South Korea's Kospi added 0.3%.

Plan seeks to protect children, power grid, and innovation

# White House urges Congress to override state AI laws

WASHINGTON, March 22, (AP): The White House said Friday that Congress should “preempt state AI laws” that it views as too burdensome, laying out a broad framework for how it wants Congress to address concerns about artificial intelligence without curbing growth or innovation in the sector.

The legislative blueprint outlines a half-dozen guiding principles for lawmakers, focusing on protecting children, preventing electricity costs from surging, respecting intellectual property rights, preventing censorship and educating Americans on using the technology.

House Republican leaders swiftly endorsed the framework and said they’re ready to work “across the aisle” to pass legislation, but doing so would be a heavy lift, requiring agreement with Democrats in the Senate as public divisions over AI run deep.

The announcement comes as state governments have forged ahead on their own regulations for AI while civil liberties and consumer rights groups lobby for more regulations on the powerful technology. The industry and the White House have pushed back, arguing that a patchwork of rules would hurt growth. Trump signed an executive order in December to block states from crafting their own regulations.

“This was in response to a growing patchwork of 50 different state regulatory regimes that threaten to stifle innovation and jeopardize America’s lead in the AI race,” said White House AI czar David Sacks in a social media post Friday.

Sacks said the next step is to work with Congress to turn the administration’s principles into federal legislation.

While passing sweeping AI legislation will be difficult, especially in a mid-term election year, the framework appeared designed to appeal to some AI-wary Republicans and Democrats with a focus on widespread and bipartisan concerns, such as the harms that AI chatbot companionship can pose to children and the electricity costs of AI infrastructure.

“It covers basically all the key sticking points I think that might stop an AI bill from moving through Congress,” said Neil Chilson, a Republican former chief technologist for the Federal Trade Commission who now leads AI policy at the Abundance Institute. “It reads to me as an attempt to build a larger tent, even if it doesn’t give everybody everything that they want.”

But it has already been panned by some Democrats, including U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey, who said in a statement it “fails to address key issues, including strong accountability for AI companies, under the guise of protecting children, communities, and creators. Americans need protection - but

this means nothing if we allow the AI industry to be the Wild West.”

Whether AI legislation can pass both chambers of Congress could also rely heavily on the support of Republicans like U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, who has introduced her own AI bill, and last year was instrumental in thwarting Trump’s earlier attempt to deter state governments from regulating AI. Blackburn on Friday called Trump’s framework a roadmap and welcomed the administration to the “important discussion” of getting a bill passed.

Several states - including California, Colorado, Texas and Utah - have already passed laws that set some rules for AI across the private sector.

With bipartisan support in the Texas legislature, a new AI law that took effect this year in the Republican-led state requires government agencies and health care providers to disclose when they are using AI to interact with consumers or answer questions. The law also prohibits the development of AI that encourages a person to commit suicide, harm themselves, harm another person or engage in criminal activity.

A federal law following Trump’s framework “could knock out parts of Texas’s AI code while leaving some parts standing,” said Saurabh Vishnubhakat, a professor at Yeshiva University’s Cardozo School of Law. “The fact that it’s a Republican governor I don’t think is going to save Texas’ law from preemption.”

Also vulnerable is Colorado’s law, which is aimed at preventing AI from discriminating against people when making consequential decisions about things like hiring and medical care. It was passed in 2024 but isn’t set to take effect until later this year. Lawmakers hope to rework the regulations before then.

Colorado State Rep. Jennifer Bacon, a Democrat, said voters don’t want to stifle innovation or fall behind China “but our constituents are interested in not becoming China.”

California’s Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom has vetoed some AI bills while signing into law others. His office criticized Trump’s framework Friday.

“Yet again, Donald Trump is trying to gut laws in California that keep our residents safe and protect consumers - a core state responsibility,” Newsom’s spokesperson Marissa Saldivar said in a statement.

The Trump administration says it doesn’t think Congress should preempt all state regulatory powers over AI, including enforcement of general laws against AI developers, “to protect children, prevent fraud, and protect consumers.” It also says Congress shouldn’t interfere with local authorities in deciding where to place data centers and other AI infrastructure, or how states procure their own AI tools for law enforcement or education.

Trump moves to reinstate tariffs despite legal setbacks

## Democrats aim to turn Trump’s tariffs against GOP in campaigns for governor

WASHINGTON, March 22, (AP): Less than a week after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump’s global tariffs, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul listened as one of the plaintiffs in the case recounted the financial toll of the levies on his wine importing business.

“This is a heavy tax and you have to pay it up front,” Victor Schwartz, the owner of VOS Selections, told Hochul as they walked alongside bottles of wine he imports from 16 countries.

As Hochul seeks reelection this year, she says the impact of Trump’s tariffs is a “centerpiece” of her message. She has pressed the administration to issue a \$13.5 billion tariff refund to New Yorkers following the Supreme Court decision. And she released an ad this week criticizing her Republican challenger, Bruce Blakeman, for supporting the levies and attending the White House event where Trump unveiled them with a massive board listing the rate for each country.

“This is a lethal issue for Republicans this November,” Hochul said in an interview. “You can be sure we’re going to make sure people know who did this to them.”

She’s not alone. Democrats running for governor across the country are making tariffs central to their pitch to voters. They’re betting that in an election year dominated by issues ranging from immigration to the war in Iran, rising costs connected to the tariffs will be a motivating issue for many voters.

“That picture of (Trump) with the tariff board is going to be front and center in every single one of our campaigns,” Gov. Andy Beshear of Kentucky, who is leading the Democratic Governors Association this year, said in an interview.

White House spokesman Kush Desai countered that “what Democrats are really running against are President Trump’s Most-Favored-Nations deals to slash prescription drug prices by up to 90 percent, trillions in investments to bring manufacturing back to America, and new trade deals that level the playing field for American workers.”

“All of these historic victories were possible because of tariffs.”

Republicans are entering a challenging election year as they contend with voter anxiety around spiking prices - an issue Trump pledged to fix during his

2024 campaign - and the record of a president’s party losing ground during the midterms.

Much of the focus has been on Congress, where Democrats are just a few seats shy of taking the House majority. But the party is also aiming to regain ground outside Washington as they hope to hold onto governorships in Arizona, Michigan and Wisconsin and eye GOP-held seats in Nevada, Georgia and Iowa.

In interviews this week, Democrats running in some of those states said tariffs and the broader issue of affordability will be at the forefront of their agenda.

In Nevada, state Attorney General Aaron Ford sued the administration over its initial round of tariffs and is suing again as Trump seeks to revive them. As he seeks the Democratic nomination to take on Republican incumbent Gov. Joe Lombardo, Ford called the tariffs “illegal” and blamed them for restaurant closures and fewer visitors to his tourism-dependent state.

“Tariffs are at the very top of the conversation because Nevadans every single day are feeling the impacts,” Ford said.

In Arizona, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs is seeking reelection in a state Trump won by more than 5 percentage points in 2024 with a focus on costs. She criticized GOP Reps. Andy Biggs and David Schweikert, who are vying for the nomination to challenge her, for “cheering on these reckless tariffs.” Both lawmakers voted against a measure last month to end the national emergency Trump declared to impose tariffs on Canada.

Hobbs said the cost concern was about more than tariffs, noting Medicaid cuts, rising health costs and a spike in gas prices in the wake of the war in Iran.

“They’re being hit everywhere,” she said.

Republicans largely reject the tariff criticism and are trying to turn the anxiety about affordability back on Democrats, especially in high-cost states where they already govern. Blakeman, for instance, said in a statement that Hochul is “solely responsible for the affordability crisis in New York, with crushing electric bills, soaring insurance rates and the highest taxes in America.”

In an interview, Schweikert argued that “it was only a few years ago in a previous administration that

the Democrats actually liked tariffs. So this seems to be if Trump’s for it, they’re against it.”

Trump, for his part, hasn’t given up on the tariffs. After calling the Supreme Court’s decision “unfortunate,” his administration is scrambling to find ways to revive the levies. The president has already announced a 10% tariff using a different mechanism, a move that’s facing legal challenges, and wants to further raise tariffs to 15%.

But Trump’s prediction of a manufacturing renaissance that would result from companies making more products in the U.S. to avoid tariffs has not materialized. During the first year of his second term, 98,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. Revenue from tariffs is doing little to reduce the federal deficit, which is projected to climb over the next decade.

Polling suggests unease about the dramatic way Trump has imposed the levies. In January, before the Supreme Court’s ruling, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults said Trump went too far in imposing new tariffs and using presidential power, an AP-NORC poll found.

Now Republicans are trying to balance acknowledging the public’s concern without antagonizing Trump, who remains popular among the GOP base.

Lombardo’s response to a question about tariffs last year in a local television interview has given Democrats persistent fodder. The governor said, “We need to maybe feel a little pain in the short term and hopefully in the long term it’s a huge benefit for us.”

“We’re feeling it,” Ford said of the pain, “and Nevadans are ready for new leadership.”

In a statement, Drew Galang, Lombardo’s communications director, said that “while the governor cannot control federal trade policy, he has prioritized policies to drive growth in Nevada - diversifying the state’s economy, cutting red tape, and attracting billions of dollars of business investments.”

The competing pressure on Lombardo was on display in a letter he sent to Trump last year, urging the president to lift tariffs on lithium. He argued that since “domestic processing is not yet a viable option, the current environment poses a serious risk to jobs in Nevada and across the country.”

But he didn’t reject Trump’s overall tariff push, expressing “sincere appreciation for your efforts to return manufacturing jobs back to United States soil.”

However, it says states “should not be permitted to regulate AI development,” shouldn’t penalize AI developers for a third party’s unlawful conduct using their product, and “should not unduly burden Americans’ use of AI for activity that would be lawful if performed without AI.”

As backlash against data centers has increased along with rising power prices, the White House had previously stepped up pressure on AI companies and the power sector to do more to address the issue -- including having AI companies sign voluntary pledges earlier this month to build their own power generation plants.

Some AI safety advocates are pushing for Blackburn and other influential Republicans to insist on more protections against AI’s most catastrophic risks to national security or the economy, such as out-of-control AI agents or the widespread replacement of human workers.

“We have companies that explicitly are hoping to replace human labor,” said Brendan Steinhauser, a former Republican strategist who now leads The Alliance for Secure AI and believes Trump’s framework doesn’t do enough to address risks. “Tinkering at the edges with upskilling and job training is just not going to make an impact on that. I just don’t think we as a country are taking this seriously enough.”

The framework aims for a more balanced approach to another controversial topic: AI and copyright.

It recommends against wading into the legal fights between artists and creators and the technology companies that have ingested huge amounts of copyrighted works to build AI systems that can generate new text, images and sound.

The Trump administration “believes that training of AI models on copyrighted material does not violate copyright laws,” according to the document, but acknowledges “arguments to the contrary exist and therefore supports allowing the Courts to resolve this issue.”

That language was welcomed by trade group AI Progress - a coalition that includes Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Midjourney and OpenAI.

Tech companies have been fighting dozens of copyright infringement lawsuits from writers and publishers, visual artists, music record labels and others. Judges have largely sided with AI developers in allowing for the “fair use” of copyrighted works to create something new, but some have questioned how the materials were obtained. A federal judge in September approved a \$1.5 billion settlement between Anthropic and authors who allege nearly half a million books had been illegally pirated to train its chatbot.

Musk’s legal team plans to appeal

## Elon Musk found liable in Twitter investor case

SAN FRANCISCO, March 22, (AP): A jury has found Elon Musk liable for defrauding investors by deliberately driving down Twitter’s stock price in the tumultuous months leading up to his 2022 acquisition of the social media company for \$44 billion. But it absolved him of some fraud allegations, finding that he did not “scheme” to mislead investors.

The civil trial in San Francisco centered on a class-action lawsuit filed just before Musk took control of Twitter, which he later renamed X. Jurors were asked to decide if two tweets and comments Musk made on a podcast in May 2022 amounted to him intentionally defrauding Twitter shareholders, who sold their shares based on Musk’s statements.

The nine-person jury returned the verdict after nearly four days of deliberation, nearly three weeks after the trial began on March 2. They said that while Musk was liable for misleading investors with two tweets - including one said the Twitter deal was “temporarily on hold,” he did not do so with a statement he made on a podcast and that he did not intentionally “scheme” to defraud investors.

The jury awarded shareholders between about \$3 and \$8 per stock per day as damages, which the plaintiffs’ lawyers said amounts to about \$2.1 billion in stock and another \$500 million in options. Musk’s fortune is currently estimated at about \$814 billion, much of it tied up in Tesla shares.

“It’s an important victory, not just for investors of Twitter, but for the public markets,” said Mark Molumphy, an attorney for the plaintiffs. “I think the jury’s verdict sends a strong message that just because you’re a rich and powerful person, you still have to obey the law, and no man is above the law.”

Musk’s legal team referenced other cases Musk won and said they will appeal.

“Last month, Elon won the largest appellate victory in this country’s history after getting an unfair shake at the trial level. Earlier today, in a Texas court he won another appellate victory in which the trial judge was reversed,” the legal team at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan said in a statement. “We view today’s verdict, where the jury found both for and against the plaintiffs and found no fraud scheme, as a bump in the road. And we look forward to vindication on appeal.”

Much of the trial focused on Musk’s claims about the number of bots on Twitter. Musk testified that Twitter had a much higher number of fake and spam accounts than the 5% it disclosed in regulatory filings. He used what he called Twitter’s misrepresentation of the number of fake accounts on its service as a reason to retreat from the purchase.

After Musk tried to back out, Twitter went to court in Delaware to force him to honor his original deal. Just before that case was scheduled to go to trial, Musk reversed course again and agreed to pay what he had originally promised.

The central question of the case was whether Musk sent out tweets - including one on May 13, 2022, that said the Twitter deal was “temporarily on hold” while he sought information on the number of fake accounts on the service - as a deliberate scheme to tank Twitter’s shares. The jury found that while Musk did mislead investors with two tweets, he did not do so with a statement he made on a podcast because it was an opinion. The jurors also absolved

him of scheming to drive down the stock.

The nearly three-week trial in San Francisco federal court for the Northern District of California saw testimony from former Twitter executives including CEO Parag Agrawal and CFO Ned Segal, as well as Musk, who was on the stand for more than a day.

In his testimony, Musk maintained that Twitter’s leadership lied about the amount of bots on the platform and withheld information from him about how the number of fake accounts was calculated. He repeatedly described the information that Twitter’s board provided with an abbreviation for a bull’s scatology. “I did make it clear that I thought it was BS,” Musk said of Twitter’s calculations asserting that only about 5% of its accounts were bots.

Musk also asserted that his decision to follow through on the deal at the original sales price provided a huge windfall for most Twitter shareholders.

But Twitter’s shares fell below \$33, or about 40% below Musk’s original purchase price, while the deal was hanging in limbo. That downturn cost shareholders who sold their stock during the uncertainty caused by what the lawsuit alleges was Musk’s deceitful behavior.

“I can’t control whether people sell their stock, but everyone who held the stock fared extremely well,” Musk said.

The plaintiffs argued that, as Tesla’s stock price declined and buying Twitter became too expensive for Musk, he tweeted statements that drove down the stock price in the hopes he could renegotiate the deal for a lower price or get out of it altogether.

Musk’s tweets, the plaintiffs’ lawyer argued, were not some “innocent mistake” or a “stupid tweet” off the top of his head, but carefully calculated to drive down Twitter’s stock price.

In closing arguments, Mark Molumphy, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, asked jurors to hold Musk accountable and compensate thousands of investors who lost money because of tweets Musk sent, including one from May 13, 2022, that said the deal was “on hold.”

“He knew what he was doing,” Molumphy said. Musk’s lawyers motioned for a mistrial several times during the contentious trial, contending that the billionaire Tesla CEO can’t get a fair trial in San Francisco because of animosity toward him from the public.

This isn’t the first time that Musk has been dragged into court to defend himself against allegations of duping investors with his social media posts.

Three years ago, Musk spent about eight hours testifying in a San Francisco federal trial about his plans to buy Tesla - the electric automaker that he still runs as a publicly traded company - for \$420 per share in a proposed 2018 deal that never materialized. A nine-member jury absolved Musk of wrongdoing in that case.

Monte Mann, a business litigation lawyer who was not a part of the case, said the “verdict sends a clear message-if you move the market with your words, you own the consequences.”

“The law has always prohibited misleading statements. What’s new is the scale and speed,” Mann said. “When one person can move billions with a tweet, the consequences of those statements are amplified - and juries are starting to take that seriously.”

Jury to decide if Meta violated consumer protection laws

## Meta faces billions in New Mexico child safety trial

SANTA FE, March 22, (AP): A daunting stream of testimony and evidence has been presented in a New Mexico case that explores what the social media conglomerate Meta knew about the effects of its platforms on children.

State prosecutors allege Meta failed to disclose the risks that its platforms pose for children, including mental health problems and sexual exploitation. Meta’s attorneys have said the company has built-in protections for teenagers and weeds out harmful content but the company acknowledges some dangerous content gets past its safety nets.

Attorneys prepared for closing arguments to jurors next week after Meta on Friday closed out its showing of testimony and evidence and the trial completed its sixth week.

If jurors later find that Meta - which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp - violated New Mexico’s consumer protection laws, prosecutors say sanctions could add up to billions of dollars. Meta, however, says it would seek a different calculation.

The trial that started Feb. 9, is one of the first in a torrent of lawsuits against Meta and comes as school districts and legislators want more restrictions on the use of smartphones in classrooms.

As a second phase of the trial, possibly in May before a judge with no jury, would determine whether Meta created a public nuisance with its social media platforms and should pay for public programs to fix matters.

Here’s what to know about the possible outcomes of the trial:

Meta is confronting two counts of violating the New Mexico Unfair Trade Practices Act that protects consumers from deceptive or predatory business practices. An additional count was dropped Friday by the judge from a draft of jury instructions.

After closing arguments, jurors will weigh whether Meta knowingly misrepresented the risks on its platforms - by omission or active concealment at the least.

The case could sidestep immunity provisions that protect tech companies from liability for material posted on their social media platforms under Section 230, a 30-year-old provision of the U.S. Communications Decency Act, as well as a First Amendment shield.

In California, a jury already is sequestered in deliberations on whether social media companies should be liable for harms caused to children using their platforms, in one of three bellwether court cases that could set the course for thousands of similar lawsuits.

New Mexico’s case is built on a different foundation - including a state undercover investigation where agents created social media accounts posing as children to document sexual solicitations and the response from Meta.

The lawsuit, filed in 2023 by New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, also says the dangers of addiction to social media haven’t been fully disclosed or addressed by Meta. Meta hasn’t agreed that social media addiction exists, but executives acknowledge “problematic use” and say they want people to feel good about the time they spend on Meta’s platforms.

Among thousands of pages of documents, the New Mexico trial examines a raft of internal Meta correspondence and reports related to child safety. Jurors also heard testimony from Meta executives, platform engineers, whistleblowers who left the company, psychiatric experts and tech-safety consultants.

The jury also may be influenced by testimony from local public school educators who have struggled with disruptions linked to social media, including the exchange of violent and sexually explicit images, along with sextortion schemes targeting children in New Mexico.

One count of consumer protection violations alleges that Meta engaged in “unconscionable” trade practices that were grossly unfair.

In opening statements, prosecution attorney Donald Migliori emphasized accusations that Meta targeted social media engagement with children in an unconscionable way as a source of long-term profit while knowing children were at risk of sexual exploitation on social media. Meta disputes that argument by highlighting platform safety features and content filters for teenagers, who are seen by Meta as trendsetters with limited initial purchasing power to satisfy advertisers.

The jury would decide whether the conduct was “willful” and merits civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation, and may help calculate the number of

violations.

Torrez says those penalties could add up, given the number of people in New Mexico using Meta’s platforms. Meta, however, has asked to cap those sanctions at one penalty per misleading statement or fair-trade violation - and not the number of social media views or users.

State District Judge Bryan Biedscheid is overseeing both phases of the trial. He would decide nuisance allegations as the case advances - and whether the company is on the hook financially to repair damage.

Prosecutors have accused Meta of carelessly creating a marketplace and “breeding ground” for predators who target children for sexual exploitation. They allege Meta’s platforms also undermine the mental health of teenagers in a variety of ways - from sleep deprivation and depression to self-harm.

Attorneys for Meta accuse prosecutors of cherry-picking evidence as well as shoddy investigative work that may have made matters worse.

At trial, Meta executives described robust systems for detecting child sexual abuse material on its platforms and notifying law enforcement - but said the company also cautions users that its enforcement isn’t flawless.

“We believe it’s important to disclose the risks, but to do so in a consistent and rigorous way,” Instagram head Adam Mosseri said, describing a philosophy that extends to blog posts, service agreements and more.

In a video deposition played at trial, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that “safety is extremely important for the service and having it be something that people trust and want to use over time.” He said Meta in 2017 stopped linking business performance goals directly to the extended amount of time users spend on its platforms.

Torrez says he will request court-ordered relief to make Meta change the way it does business and remedy the harm to children from social media.

“We’re going to have meaningful investments in targeted strategic programming around how you use the internet and how you use social media in ways that are responsible and healthy,” he said on the opening day of the trial.

## 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' actor Nicholas Brendon dies at 54

# Chuck Norris, martial arts master and actor, dies at 86

LOS ANGELES, March 22, (AP) — Chuck Norris, the martial arts grandmaster and action star whose roles in "Walker, Texas Ranger" and other television shows and movies made him an iconic tough guy - sparking internet parodies and adoration from presidents - has died at 86.

Norris died Thursday, in what his family described as a "sudden passing."

"While we would like to keep the circumstances private, please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace," the family said in a statement posted to social media.

Before he would become a star in movies and on TV, Norris was wildly successful in competitive martial arts. He was a six-time undefeated World Professional Middleweight Karate champion. He also founded his own Korean-based American hard style of karate, known sometimes as Chun Kuk Do, and the United Fighting Arts Federation, which has awarded more than 3,300 Chuck Norris System black belts worldwide. Black Belt magazine ultimately credited Norris in its hall of fame with holding a 10th degree black belt, the highest possible honor.

Born Carlos Ray Norris in Ryan, Oklahoma, on March 10, 1940, he grew up poor. At age 12, he moved with his family to Torrance, California, and joined the U.S. Air Force after high school, in 1958. It was during a deployment to Korea that he started training in martial arts, including judo and Tang Soo Do.

"I went out for gymnastics and football at North Torrance high," he told The Associated Press in 1982. "I played some football, but I also spent a lot of time on the bench. I was never really athletic until I was in the service in Korea."

After he was honorably discharged in 1962, he worked as a file clerk for Northrop Aircraft and applied to be a police officer, but was put on a waitlist. Meanwhile, he opened a martial arts studio, which expanded to a chain, with students including such stars as Bob Barker, Priscilla Presley, Donny and Marie Osmond, and Steve McQueen, whom he later credited with encouraging him to get into



Chuck Norris appears at a ceremony in Garland, Texas on Dec. 2, 2010. (AP)

acting. Norris made his film debut as an uncredited bodyguard in the 1968 movie "The Wrecking Crew," which included a fight with Dean Martin. He had also crossed paths with Bruce Lee in martial arts circles. Their friendship - sometimes, as sparring partners - led to an iconic faceoff in the 1972 movie "Return of the Dragon," in which Lee fights and kills Norris' character in Rome's Colosseum.

He went on to act in more than 20 movies, such as "Missing in Action," "The Delta Force" and "Sidekicks." "I wanted to project a certain image on the screen of a hero. I had seen a lot of anti-hero movies in which the lead was neither good nor bad. There was no one to root for," Norris said in 1982.

In 1993, he took on his most famed role, as a crime-fighting lawman in TV's "Walker, Texas Ranger." The show ran for nine seasons, and in 2010, then-Gov. Rick Perry awarded him the title of honorary Texas Ranger. The Texas Senate later named him an honorary Texan.

"It's not violence for violence's sake, with no moral

structure," Norris told the AP in 1996, speaking about the show. "You try to portray the proper meaning of what it's about - fighting injustice with justice, good vs. bad. ... It's entertaining for the whole family."

Norris also made a surprise comedic appearance as a decisive judge in the final match of the 2004 movie "Dodgeball." He only on occasion had taken acting roles in recent years, including 2012's "The Expendables 2" and the 2024 sci-fi action movie "Agent Recon." He's due to appear in "Zombie Plane," an upcoming film starring Vanilla Ice.

It was around the time of "Dodgeball" that his tough-man image became the stuff of legend, literally: "Chuck Norris Facts" went viral online with such wildly hyperbolic statements as, "Chuck Norris had a staring contest with the sun - and won," and, "They wanted to put Chuck Norris on Mt. Rushmore, but the granite wasn't tough enough for his beard."

Norris ultimately embraced the absurdity of the meme craze, putting together "The Official Chuck Norris Fact Book," which combined his favorites with supposedly true stories and the codes he aimed to live by. He would also write books on martial arts instruction, a memoir, political takes, Civil War-era historical fiction and more.

"To some who know little of my martial arts or film careers but perhaps grew up with 'Walker, Texas Ranger,' it seems that I have become a somewhat mythical superhero icon," Norris wrote in the forward to the "Fact Book." "I am flattered and humbled."

That book raised money for a nonprofit he founded with President George H.W. Bush that promoted martial arts instruction for kids.

The intentionally outlandish statements featured in the 2008 Republican presidential primary, when Norris endorsed Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and shot an ad playing on the "Chuck Norris facts."

"Chuck Norris doesn't endorse. He tells America how it's going to be," Huckabee said in the campaign ad.

President Donald Trump's supporters later promoted "Trump Facts" in the same vein, and political pundits tried it as well, describing the commander-in-chief's decision to seize Venezuela's sitting president, Nicolas Maduro, as a "Chuck Norris Moment," and its initial effect on oil prices a "Chuck Norris Premium."

Norris was outspoken about his Christian beliefs and his support for gun rights, and backed political candidates for years - he even went skydiving with Bush for the former president's 80th birthday. As for Trump, Norris endorsed him in the 2016 general election and wrote guest columns praising him without explicitly endorsing him in the days before the 2020 and 2024 elections.

Norris is survived by five children: stunt performers Mike and Eric with his late ex-wife Dianne Holechek, twins Dakota and Danilee with his wife Gena Norris, and Dina, the result of an early 1960s "one-night stand" revealed in his autobiography.

Norris celebrated his birthday just over a week before his death, posting a sparring video on Instagram.

"I don't age. I level up," he wrote.

### Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** Nicholas Brendon, an actor best known for his role as a loveable underdog sidekick on the hit television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," has died. He was 54.

Brendon's family announced the death in a statement posted on his social media accounts Friday. They said he died in his sleep of natural causes, but did not say where or when it happened.

Brendon played Xander Harris, a close friend of lead character Buffy, on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" that ran from 1997 to 2003. The supernatural series, which started on the WB network and then moved to UPN, was about vampire slayers, led by the teenager Buffy, who battled a wide range of demons, werewolves and other dark forces while also navigating life in high school.

### Variety

**FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla.:** Former reality TV star **Joseph Duggar** on Friday waived his right to an extradition hearing in Arkansas, which set in motion his transfer to Florida to face a child molestation charge.

Duggar, 31, was arrested Thursday in Tontitown, Arkansas, where he lives with his family. Authorities in Bay County, Florida, now have 30 days to transfer him from the jail in Washington County, Arkansas, authorities said.

Joseph Duggar is charged with lewd and lascivious behavior on a child under 12 years old, according to an arrest affidavit from the Bay County Sheriff's Office in Panama City, Florida.

Authorities have also filed charges against him and his wife, Kendra Duggar, 27, in Arkansas, the Tontitown Police Department said in a statement Friday. The charges include four counts of endangering the welfare of a minor and four counts of false imprisonment. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** Calvin Tomkins, an author and longtime staff writer for The New Yorker known for his witty and expansive profiles of Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp and dozens of other visual artists, died Friday at 100.

Tomkins was just a few months younger than the magazine where he spent decades, as editor David Remnick noted in a tribute. Tomkins' wife, Dodie Kazanjian, told The New York Times the cause was complications of a stroke. The newspaper reported that he died at home in Middletown, Rhode Island.

For more than 50 years, Tomkins completed dispatches from the transformative art scene of the 1960s and beyond, whether individuals such as Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg or such movements as pop art, conceptual art and minimalism. Tomkins was witness to the art world losing its old insularity and museum shows becoming celebrity gatherings and status symbols.

"It was more advantageous (and a lot more fun) to be on board of the Museum of Modern Art or the New Whitney Museum ... than it was to be on the boards of a dozen hospital or private schools," he wrote in "Off the Wall," a Rauschenberg biography that drew upon Tomkins' New Yorker correspondence. (AP)

**LONDON:** Three men who alleged that actor Kevin Spacey sexually assaulted them have settled their civil claims before going to trial at the High Court in London, courts document show.

The three men alleged that the Academy Award-winning star abused them at times between 2000 and 2013. Spacey has denied the allegations.

Civil trials were due to start later this year, but case judge Christina Lambert last week ordered the proceedings paused, saying the parties had "agreed to the terms of the settlement."

"By consent, it is ordered that all further proceedings against the defendant in these actions be stayed upon the terms set out in this order and in the confidential schedule," the judge said.

The terms were not disclosed and the judge did not make any order about costs. (AP)

### Film

## 'Project Hail Mary' turns sci-fi into a buddy comedy

# Lord and Miller finally get their space odyssey

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP) — Ryan Gosling wanted a friend.

Directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller were in the midst of their largest production ever, the \$200 million science-fiction adventure "Project Hail Mary." They were shooting some of the movie's early scenes, when middle school biology teacher Ryland Grace (Gosling) wakes up in deep space. After realizing he's the sole survivor on board the spaceship, he turns depressed and, eventually, drunk.

"Ryan was like, 'I just feel like I need a friend. I need a scene partner for this. I don't know what to do in here,'" Miller recalls. "We were like: OK, let's make a friend. So we scoured the set and found a mop and got a dress from the costume department. And we made a little mop friend for him to dance around with."

"We called it 'Moppy Ringwald.'"

In their two decades making movies together, Lord and Miller have shown a particular talent in making inanimate objects come alive. They did this especially in 2014's "The Lego Movie," but little in their idiosyncratic filmography, from "21 Jump Street" to "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," hasn't involved some degree of playful reinvention.

"Project Hail Mary" may be their biggest challenge yet in breathing life into an improbable concept - and not just Moppy Ringwald. The film, adapted from Andy Weir's bestseller, stars Gosling as an astronaut sent far into space on a mission to save Earth that brings him into contact with a faceless, rock-based alien whom Ryland nicknames "Rocky."

"It did seem like a crazy idea to make a movie with the hunkiest actor of his generation and a rock puppet," Lord said, chuckling, in an interview alongside Miller. "I guess we're interested in difficult things."

Budgets of \$200 million are usually reserved for the biggest franchises, but "Project Hail Mary," which opened in theaters Thursday, is hoping to become a blockbuster built on originality. The film, comic and heartwarming, arrives with an enviable pedigree.

Weir's 2011 book "The Martian" became the Oscar-nominated 2015 film, which adopted the book's sense of joy and wonder for science. That movie's screenwriter, Drew Goddard ("The Cabin in the Woods," "Bad Times at the El Royale"), also penned the ad-



This image released by Amazon MGM Studios shows Ryan Gosling in a scene from 'Project Hail Mary.' (AP)

aptation to "Project Hail Mary." Gosling was attached before the 2021 book was even published. Sandra Hüller, the celebrated German actor of "Anatomy of a Fall," co-stars as the leader of a United Nations task force trying to save the planet from a star-eating virus called "astrophage."

Lord and Miller have made a career out of turning seemingly bad ideas into good movies, but "Project Hail Mary," greenlit by MGM before it was acquired by Amazon, started off with clear crowd-pleasing possibilities, albeit with an unconventional extraterrestrial.

"We no longer get the benefit of low expectations," Miller says, laughing. "So we sort of try to do things that maybe seem like a good idea from the beginning. It's the evolution of our career."

The result is something a little like a combination of "Interstellar" and "Deep Space Homer." Though the directors' first sojourn into space (the "Star Wars" spinoff "Solo") was famously aborted, "Project Hail Mary" gives Lord and Miller a space odyssey entirely of their irreverent sensibility. While the movie shares Weir's physics-and-jokes approach from "The Martian," Lord and Miller are approximately the polar opposite of Ridley Scott.

"In both cases, the directors were perfect for the task ahead of them. Ridley Scott is really good at conveying grandeur, really letting the setting hit and capturing the scale of things," says Weir. "But 'Project Hail Mary' is a bromance. It's like a buddy comedy."

"It's much more fast-paced, there's a lot of rapid dialogue, and that's Phil and Chris' bread and butter," he adds. "You can give them any random thing off the shelves and they can make a movie such that you care about its emotions."

Much of what distinguishes "Project Hail Mary" is that, despite the size of its production, the directors were still able to make a loose-limbed comedy, with zero-gravity improvisation and interstellar pratfalls. Big budgets and copious special effects are usually kryptonite to comedy, but "Project Hail Mary" gives Gosling, a not charmless performer, room to riff.

"What we've learned throughout our career is that spontaneous moments are magical," says Miller. "Our job was to prepare and prepare and prepare, but make sure there was room to play and room to chase

an idea that might be inconvenient." "No one ever walked out of a movie going, 'Wow, that seemed so well planned,'" says Lord.

That included suspending Gosling in a spinning ring that allowed him to move where he wanted within the spaceship, designed by Charles Wood. And it involved following instincts. In one scene set at a karaoke bar, Gosling, after hearing Hüller sing, felt her character needed a song. Hüller picked Harry Styles' "Sign of the Times" and the filmmakers rushed to secure the rights within 48 hours.

But their most important innovations had to do with Rocky. Weir had written him, he says, intent on going further than a humanoid creature with funny prosthetics. "I wanted my alien to be truly alien," he says.

"The part of the book that made me go, 'Oh, god, I don't know how we're going to realize this,' was Rocky," says Goddard. "He doesn't have the usual crutches that you have for loveable aliens. He doesn't have a face. He can't even exist in our atmosphere. He speaks in whale songs. He looks like the kind of alien that would normally be eating everyone."

Goddard, a filmmaker, too, was happy to leave the problem-solving to Lord and Miller.

"I knew Chris and Phil could figure it out," Goddard says. "I knew from their background with animation and creating delightful characters out of thin air, they could do it."

To give Gosling a scene partner that went beyond a mop in a dress, Lord and Miller opted to hire a puppeteer to manipulate and voice

Rocky. To find the right match, they even did chemistry reads between puppeteers and Gosling. James Ortiz got the role, and "Project Hail Mary" lives off his and Gosling's interplay.

"You never would have gotten that if you were like, 'OK, there's a tennis ball and a stick that's an alien here. Now be delighted by it,'" Miller says.

Hollywood loves to make merchandise of cute little aliens. Faces are usually a part of that. But the unique challenges of "Project Hail Mary" were what most intrigued Lord and Miller. The common denominator to their movies, Lord says, is that they all begin with a thought process of "It's impossible," followed by "unless ..."

"Even 'Spider-Verse' was like: Oh, this is going to be the seventh 'Spider-Man' movie. Nobody wants this - unless ..." says Lord. "Audiences want to watch a movie put itself in a box, and wiggle out of it like Houdini."

The alien sequences worked well enough that Steven Spielberg urged the filmmakers to insert a nod to his own sci-fi classic of first contact: "He was like: 'You should have the alien do the 'Close Encounters' theme,'" Miller says. "If you say so, Steven."

It's one of several references peppered throughout (another is to "Rocky") by Lord and Miller, who have maintained the "Lego Movie" ethos of taking neatly constructed sets apart and rebuilding them in their own fashion.

"It's having it both ways," Lord says, smiling. "Making an original thing out of unoriginal parts."



Phil Lord, (left), and Chris Miller pose for a portrait to promote 'Project Hail Mary' on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, in New York. (AP)

## Album reintroduces band, reaffirms pop status

## BTS' comeback album 'ARIRANG' is exciting experiment

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP) - The game-changing K-pop boy band BTS has returned after a nearly four-year musical hiatus. "ARIRANG," the 14-track, fifth studio album from the septet - RM, Jin, Jimin, V, Suga, Jung Kook and j-hope - is here. And it is appropriately massive.

"ARIRANG" - titled after a popular, traditional Korean folk song that touches on themes of longing, separation and love - is a stadium-sized album that serves as both a reintroduction to the band and as a keen reminder of their place atop popular culture conversation. That's evident from the jump: The first half pulls largely from trap and hip-hop, an energetic reminder of their early rap records. It's an ode to where they came from and where they're going - as immediately demonstrated in the opener "Body to Body," which works in a melody from the traditional "Arirang."

After the fiery block comes the short interlude "No. 29," a reverberating bell toll captured from the Divine Bell of King Seondeok - South Korea's largest extant bell, designated

National Treasure No. 29 in 1962 - before a pop detour of various genre experiments.

The tagline for BTS' comeback album is "born in Korea, playing for the world." It couldn't be more fitting: Here, the septet utilize their familiar strengths and further their inventive spirit, bringing their country to a global audience eager to hear from them again.

To call it highly anticipated would be a gross understatement. "ARIRANG" is the band's first original full-length release since all seven members completed South Korea's mandatory military service. Not that it has been all quiet at team BTS: The band tiered their enlistments, giving ample time for its members to focus on solo projects while the group was on a break.

The time apart must've bolstered their hunger for composition and experimentation: According to a press release, leader RM is credited on every track save for the interlude. The others contributed, too: Suga and j-hope on a number

of songs, including "Body to Body," "Merry Go Round" and "Normal"; Jimin with "They Don't Know 'Bout Us" and "Into the Sun." V was also involved in the latter as well as "2.0." Jung Kook was involved in four tracks, including "Hooligan."

There are a number of familiar names on the credits: Mike Will Made-It, Ryan Tedder, Tame Impala's Kevin Parker and Diplo are among the listed producers, and their presence is known.

The latter brings Jersey club to the energetic "FYA"; there's a real joy in its boisterous lyrics: "Club go crazy like Britney, baby / Hit me with it one more time." Parker's dreamy, psych-pop production is heard on "Merry Go Round"; BTS' performance amplifies the producer's signatures.

"Normal" has echoes of Taylor Swift with a low-key hook; it leads to the distorted trip-hop and Pixies' wistfulness of "Like Animals."



This image released by Big Hit Music shows "Arirang" by BTS. (AP)

## Music



K-pop boy band BTS perform onstage during comeback concert at Gwanghwamun Square on March 21, in Seoul, South Korea. (AP)



BTS perform during 'BTS The Comeback Live Arirang' concert in central Seoul. (AP)



Fans react during a comeback concert of K-pop band BTS near Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday, March 21. (AP)

## Netflix spectacle sparks huge fan turnout

## K-pop sensation BTS returns with comeback concert in Seoul

SEOUL, South Korea, March 22, (AP) - After a four-year break, K-pop supergroup BTS returned Saturday with a massive, free comeback concert in Seoul, where thousands of police locked down a central boulevard for the Netflix-exclusive spectacle that drew tens of thousands of fans.

"Annyeonghaseyo! We're back," RM, the band's leader, told the crowd, using the Korean word for "hello," as they opened with "Body to Body," setting off delirious screams from fans waving purple-and-red light sticks and thrusting smartphones into the air.

All seven members of the band - RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V and Jung Kook - recently completed South Korea's mandatory military service, and hope to reclaim their status as one of the world's biggest pop acts. The performance at Gwanghwamun Square launches a global tour spanning dozens of shows across the United States, Europe and Asia, which analysts say could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue per quarter.

The hourlong concert came after the group on Friday released its fifth album, "ARIRANG," which sold nearly 4 million copies in its first day, said the band's management company, HYBE. The company also said RM had injured his ankle during a rehearsal, but he still performed with modified choreography. The BTS concert, which began at 8 p.m., drew several tens of thousands to the Gwanghwamun area, including 22,000 fans who secured free seats in the designated viewing zone and others

who watched on screens nearby. The show was streamed live on Netflix.

"It will be amazing because it's been so long that BTS (was) not with us," Dallila Di Tullio, a 32-year-old fan from Italy, said before the concert, calling it a once-in-a-century event.

BTS debuted in 2013 and has a legion of global supporters who call themselves the "Army." It became the first K-pop act to top Billboard's Hot 100 chart in 2020 with their first all-English song "Dynamite."

Jung Dukhyun, a pop culture commentator, said that the impact of BTS' return as a full-group would be tremendous at a time when global fandom for K-pop has grown much stronger, as shown by the success of Netflix's animated sensation "KPop Demon Hunters."

The dark streets blazed with light as waves of fans sang and cheered from cordoned sections, a jubilant scene that unfolded under an unusually heavy police presence managing the crowds.

"I still vividly remember how, at our last Busan concert a few years ago, we asked you to wait for us. Thank you so much for coming here like this," Jin said.

The group performed songs from their new album, including "SWIM," alongside hits like "Dynamite" and "Butter." Some members appeared to tear up while thanking fans who braved the chilly night, before holding hands and bowing to the crowd to close the show.

Police and city officials closed

nearby streets and roads, halted the area's subway and bus services, and sealed off dozens of surrounding buildings, in what amounted to a full-day shutdown of the district.

Thousands of police officers maintained a tight perimeter around the performance venue, channeling the crowds with a maze of fences and buses. Concertgoers began queuing by midday to secure spots along nearby roads, passing through security checks and metal detectors at designated entry points. The restrictions forced nearby shops to close and police to use their buses to shuttle wedding guests to a nearby venue.

"I was hoping to (see) if we can go through some holes or be around. Apparently we cannot because they will be asking people to move," said Bernice Sanchez, a 52-year-old fan from Switzerland, as she looked for a place to wait.

While South Korean officials have taken crowd safety more seriously since a 2022 Halloween surge that killed nearly 160 people, critics say the controls went too far and undermined the symbolism of performing in Gwanghwamun, seen as Seoul's spiritual heart and most prominent gathering space.

Hundreds of thousands have gathered in Gwanghwamun in recent years to mourn, protest and celebrate as the country weathered tragedy and political upheaval. The BTS concert came about a year after waves of demonstrators filled the area, calling for the ouster of then-President Yoon Suk Yeol over his brief imposition of martial law in December 2024.

## Production hope

## 'The Pitt' model can work: Wyle

BURBANK, Calif., March 22, (AP) - "The Pitt" has won praise - and a gurney full of Emmys - for bringing a dose of classic episodic TV to the prestige streaming era.

Its star, executive producer and sometimes director Noah Wyle

said Friday that the HBO Max hospital series is also a throwback of a different sort - it actually shoots in Hollywood at a time when film and television production

has shifted to other places with more favorable economic conditions. Wyle said "The Pitt," which won the Emmy for best drama for last year's first season, is "proof of concept" that the model can work.

Wyle spoke at a hearing organized by California Sen. Adam Schiff held at City Hall in Burbank, the Los Angeles-adjacent city that is home to most major studios, including the Warner Bros. lot where "The Pitt" shoots.

"I was asked to participate in today's hearing to tell a success story," Wyle said. "I'm happy to report we'll commence shooting season three this summer, and that a rising tide has indeed lifted all boats."

Wyle said California's recent tax breaks for production made making the series in Burbank possible. He said the show's first season brought nearly 600 production jobs, and its ripple effects brought \$125 million to the state economy.

"That is proof of concept," he said. "That is replicable. And it is vital to the strength of our industry and to our city to support these incentives."

Wyle, 54, played a central character on NBC's "ER" from 1994 to 2009. His return to a Hollywood hospital - fictionally in Pittsburgh - with "The Pitt" won him an Emmy for best actor in a drama.

Lean years came in between, when he had to go the increasingly far-off places smaller roles took him. "I'll speak from personal experience and say that I haven't slept in my own bed in 15 years while I've been working as an actor. Since the end of 'ER,'" Wyle said. "It's hard on families, and I can speak to that. It is hard to fracture your industry that way."

Schiff and other members of Congress who spoke said they are working on nationalizing production tax breaks that states have instituted. US Rep. Laura Friedman, whose district includes Burbank and its studios, addressed objections to cozy treatment for a business snuggled in wealth.

"We give tax credits to many industries. Hollywood is not asking for special treatment," she said. "This is something that is standard across the United States for industries that we have determined that we care about."

Matthew Loeb, president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, which represents most behind-the-scenes crew members, lamented Marvel recently moving its production hub from Georgia to England.

But he said the same project-by-project production model that can be difficult for his members can make change more possible. It's not as hard for film to come back as it might be for other industries.

Paramount's pending acquisition of Warner Bros. was a running theme, with all expressing worry that its consolidation will mean loss of production and jobs



Wyle

## Timberlake's 2024 drunken driving arrest video released

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP) - Justin Timberlake struggled to perform field sobriety tests requiring him to walk a straight line and stand on one leg after he was pulled over in New York's Hamptons in 2024 by police officers who suspected him of driving drunk, according to video footage released Friday.

The pop star tells officers at one point, "these are like really hard tests."

The footage, which runs roughly eight hours, includes Timberlake's initial stop after Sag Harbor police said he ran a stop sign in the village center, veered out of his lane and got out of his BMW smelling of alcohol that June.

The NSYNC singer-turned-solo artist and actor tells officers he had consumed one martini and had been following friends home in the former whaling village, which is among the affluent beach towns of the Hamptons, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east

of New York City.

When an officer asks why he is in town, Timberlake says, "I'm on a world tour."

"Doing what?" the officer asks.

"Hard to explain," Timberlake says.

After stammering a bit, he says "World tour. I'm Justin Timberlake."

The officer eventually responds: "You are Justin Timberlake? Do you have a license with you?"

Timberlake, who ultimately pleaded guilty to a lesser charge, is asked by officers to walk heel-toe in a straight line on the road and lift one leg. At times he seems flustered listening to the instructions. He apologizes to officers and tells them his heart is racing. "I'm a little nervous," Timberlake says at one point.

In the back seat of the police car, he asks: "Why are you arresting me?"

Back at the police station, Timberlake is informed he will be held overnight, to which he says, "I'm going to be here all night? You guys are wild, man."

He asks the officer to keep the light on in the cell as they lock the door.

The release by Sag Harbor Police comes after the village and Timberlake's lawyers agreed to disclose a redacted version of the footage. The Associated Press was among several media outlets that filed a records request seeking the release of the video.

Timberlake's lawyers had sued to block the release of the video, arguing it would "devastate" Timberlake's privacy by revealing "intimate, highly personal, and sensitive details." They also said it would cause "severe and irreparable harm" to his reputation by subjecting him to "public ridicule and harassment."



This police body cam still image provided by the Sag Harbor Police Department shows Justin Timberlake during his arrest by police in Sag Harbor, N.Y. on June 18, 2024. (AP)

## New shot could help those with suboptimal weight loss

## FDA approves higher-dose Wegovy for greater weight loss

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP): Federal regulators on Thursday approved a new higher-dose version of the blockbuster obesity drug Wegovy that may help users lose more weight and keep it off.

The US Food and Drug Administration approved a 7.2-milligram dose of Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk's semaglutide. Previously, the highest approved dose of the drug, taken as a weekly shot, was 2.4 milligrams.

The new dose received accelerated review through the FDA's ultra-fast drug review program. The approval was granted 54 days after the request for review was approved, the agency said in a statement.

The new dosage will be available in April at pharmacies in the US, with a price to be announced then, according to the company.

European drug regulators approved the higher-dose version of Wegovy in February.

Called Wegovy HD, the higher-dose drug helped participants in a study lose about 19% of their body weight, or almost 47 pounds, versus about 16% of body weight, or 39 pounds with the lower dose over almost 17 months.

The higher dose was developed because while the 2.4-milligram shot is effective, "some individuals do not reach their therapeutic goals" at that dose, according to results published last year in the medical journal *Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*.

The FDA in December approved an oral Wegovy pill. It contains 25 milligrams of semaglutide, the amount needed to ensure the drug is absorbed via the digestive

system.

Dr. Jody Dushay, an endocrinologist and obesity expert at Harvard Medical School, welcomed the approval of the higher-dose shot.

"It may be especially helpful for people" who are tolerating the lower-dose version, but "have had sub-optimal weight loss," she said in an email. It also could be helpful for people who don't have a robust response to the highest dose of Eli Lilly's obesity drug Zepbound, she added.

Still, side effects such as nausea, vomiting and constipation were reported in more than 70% of those who took the higher dose of Wegovy, compared to more than 60% taking the lower dose and about 43% taking a dummy medication, the study showed.

And a condition in which people experience unpleasant skin sensations such as burning, stabbing or a feeling like an electrical shock occurred in about 23% of those taking the higher dose of Wegovy versus 6% of those taking the lower dose and less than 1% in people who received a placebo.

Serious adverse events were reported in nearly 7% of those taking the 7.2-milligram dose of the drug in the study, versus about 11% of those taking the 2.4-milligram dose and about 5% of those who received a placebo.

Increasing the highest dose of Wegovy from 2.4 milligrams to 7.4 milligrams is "quite a big jump," especially without an intermediate dose, Dushay noted.

"It will be important to see if in the real world, versus in a clinical study, side effects are any worse," she said.



This 1966 image taken by Ron McQueeney shows astronauts Neil Armstrong (second from right) and David Scott (third from right) standing on the deck of the USS Leonard F. Mason at Naha Air Base in Okinawa, Japan. (AP)

## Power of ordinary photos

## New photos show Armstrong after the Gemini 8 emergency

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP): Sixty years after Neil Armstrong barely survived an emergency in orbit around Earth on Gemini 8, never-before-seen photos of his heroic return have been donated to the Ohio museum that bears his name.

Quick thinking saved Armstrong and fellow astronaut David Scott, who ended the mission early with a splashdown off Okinawa, Japan.

Previously unreleased photos taken by Ron McQueeney, an Army veteran and professional photographer who escorted Armstrong and Scott, show new angles of the pair.

Since the splashdown was unplanned, few members of the media were on site, though NASA and military photographers were there. People who were unexpectedly called to help with recovery operations, like McQueeney, played a key role in capturing the aftermath.

"Sometimes, an incredible event can actually be documented by some of the most ordinary means," said Dante Centuori, executive director of the Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Armstrong's western Ohio hometown.

McQueeney's widow donated the photos, which show Armstrong and Scott on the deck of a US Navy vessel and waving to service members on land. One shows the Gemini 8 capsule being lifted into the air for transport.

One of the mission's goals was to complete the first docking in space. Minutes after accomplishing this, both spacecraft started tumbling uncontrollably. The astronauts separated from the other spacecraft but the spinning got worse.

Armstrong made a calculated decision, deploying the craft's thrusters to stop the spinning. In doing so, he ate into some of the vital fuel needed to get home. For safety's sake, they had to end the mission early.

The duo splashed down about 10 hours after the March 16, 1966 launch. They were picked up by a recovery ship and brought to the Naha Air Base in Japan.

Centuori said one element of the photos that sticks out is the smiles on the astronauts' faces, which he suggested shows their professionalism and ability to remain at ease even after a life-threatening mission.

Science historian Robert Poole said the grins point to something else. "The obvious thing that sticks out to me is that they are very happy to be alive," said Poole, of the University of Lancashire.

Armstrong's ability to stay cool in a crisis was key to his getting picked as commander of Apollo 11, Poole said.

More than a half-century after the last Apollo mission, NASA is preparing to return to the moon with a lunar fly-around by Artemis astronauts in April.

Past missions are a reminder of the effort and preparation it takes to get to space and adapt when plans change.

"Seeing people launch to space frequently can suggest that it's easy, but it's very hard. And it requires a lot of resources and attention," said Emily Margolis, a curator at the National Air and Space Museum.

The new images will help the Armstrong Museum fill in gaps when telling the story of the mission to visitors. The Gemini 8 capsule is already on display at the museum.

## NASA moves moon rocket from hangar to pad for April mission

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., March 22, (AP): For the second time this year, NASA moved its moon rocket from the hangar out toward the pad Friday in hopes of launching four astronauts on a lunar fly-around next month.

If the latest repairs work and everything else goes NASA's way, the Space Launch System could blast off as early as April 1 from Florida's Kennedy Space Center. The Artemis II crew went into quarantine this week in Houston.

The 322-foot (98-meter) rocket began the slow 4-mile (6.4-kilometer) trek in the middle of the night, transported atop a massive crawler used since the 1960s Apollo era. The trip was held up for several hours by high wind but completed by midday, 11 hours after it began.

The three Americans and one Canadian will zip around the moon in their capsule and then come straight home without stopping. Their mission should have been completed by now, but hydrogen fuel leaks and clogged helium lines forced two months of delay.

While technicians plugged the leaks at the pad, the helium issue could only be fixed in the Vehicle Assembly Building, forcing NASA to roll the rocket back at the end of



The NASA Artemis II rocket with the Orion spacecraft aboard leaves the Vehicle Assembly Building moving slowly to pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Friday, March 20. (AP)

February.

The last time NASA sent astronauts to the moon was during Apollo 17 in 1972. The new Artemis program aims for a two-person landing in 2028.

## Vitamin K refusals nearly double, study finds

## It's not just vaccines, parents refuse other preventive care for newborns

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP): One day at an Idaho hospital, half the newborns Dr. Tom Patterson saw didn't get the vitamin K shots that have been given to babies for decades to prevent potentially deadly bleeding. On another recent day, more than a quarter didn't get the shot. Their parents wouldn't allow it.

"When you look at a child who's innocent and vulnerable - and a simple intervention that's been done since 1961 is refused - knowing that baby's going out into the world is super worrisome to me," said Patterson, who's been a pediatrician for nearly three decades.

Doctors across the nation are alarmed that skepticism fueled by rising anti-science sentiment and medical mistrust is increasingly reaching beyond vaccines to other proven, routine, preventive care for babies.

A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which analyzed more than 5 million births nationwide, found that refusals of vitamin K shots nearly doubled between 2017 and 2024, from 2.9% to 5.2%. Other research suggests that parents who decline vitamin K shots are much more likely to refuse getting their newborns the hepatitis B vaccine and an eye ointment to prevent potentially blinding infections. Rates for that vaccination at birth dropped in recent years, and doctors confirm that more parents are refusing the eye medication.

"I do think these families care deeply about their infants," said Dr. Kelly Wade, a Philadelphia neonatologist. "But I hear from families that it's hard to make decisions right now because they're hearing conflicting information."

Innumerable social media posts question doctors' advice on safe and effective measures like vitamin K and eye ointment. And the Trump administration has repeatedly undermined established science. A federal advisory committee whose members were appointed by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. - a leading anti-vaccine activist before joining the administration - voted to end the longstanding recommendation to immunize all babies against hepatitis B right after birth. On Monday a federal judge temporarily blocked all decisions made by the reconfigured committee.

One common thread that ties together anti-vaccine views and growing sentiments against other protective measures for newborns is the fallacy that natural is always better than ar-



In this photo provided by Norton Healthcare, nurse Robin Waldrige administers a Vitamin K shot to a newborn baby at Norton Women's and Children's Hospital on Friday, March 6, at the hospital in Louisville, Ky. (AP)

tificial, said Dr. David Hill, a Seattle pediatrician and researcher.

"Nature will allow 1 in 5 human infants to die in the first year of life," Hill said, "which is why generations of scientists and doctors have worked to bring that number way, way down."

Babies are born with low levels of vitamin K, leaving them vulnerable because their intestines can't produce enough until they start eating solid foods at around 6 months old.

"Vitamin K is important for helping the blood clot and preventing dangerous bleeding in babies, like bleeding into the brain," said Dr. Kristan Scott of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, lead author of the JAMA study.

Before injections became routine, up to about 1 in 60 babies suffered vitamin K deficiency bleeding, which can also affect the gastrointestinal tract. Today the condition is rare, but research shows that newborns who don't get a vitamin K shot are 81 times more likely to develop severe bleeding than those who do.

Hill has seen what can happen.

"I cared for a toddler whose parents had chosen that risk," the Seattle doctor said. The child essentially had a stroke as a newborn and wound up with severe developmental delays and ongoing seizures.

At a February meeting of the Idaho chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, doctors said they knew of eight deaths from vitamin K deficiency bleeding in the state over the preceding 13 months, said Patterson, who is

president of the chapter.

Infections prevented by other newborn measures can also have grave consequences. Erythromycin eye ointment protects against gonorrhea that can be contracted during birth and potentially cause blindness if untreated. The hepatitis B vaccine prevents a disease that can lead to liver failure, liver cancer or cirrhosis.

Even if a pregnant woman is tested for gonorrhea and hepatitis B, no test is perfect, and she may get infected after testing, said Dr. Susan Sirota, a pediatrician in Highland Park, Illinois. Either way, she risks passing the infection to her child.

Parents give many reasons for turning down preventive measures, like fearing they might cause problems and not wanting newborns to feel pain.

"Some will just say they want more of a natural birth philosophy," said Dr. Steven Abelowitz, founder of Ocean Pediatrics in Orange County, California. "Then there's a ton of misinformation. ... There are outside influences, friends, celebrities, nonprofessionals and political agendas."

Abelowitz practices in an area with about an equal mix of Republicans and Democrats.

"There's more mistrust from the conservative side, but there's plenty on the more liberal side as well," he said. "It's across-the-board mistrust."

Social media provides ample fuel, spreading myths and pushing unregulated vitamin K drops that doctors warn babies can't absorb well.

## FMD control

## India orders bird culling amid flu

NEW DELHI, March 22. (Xinhua): Authorities in the southern Indian state of Kerala have ordered the culling of over 20,000 birds amid an outbreak of avian influenza (commonly called bird flu), local media reports said Friday.

The move is part of containment measures undertaken by the officials in Kozhikode and Alappuzha districts that have been hit by the bird flu. Reports said around 14,228 birds in Kozhikode and 5,961 birds in Alappuzha are to be culled.

The decision was taken after the samples sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

The culling operations, beginning on Saturday, will be carried out within a one-km radius of the affected areas by the rapid response teams deployed by the Animal Husbandry Department.

According to officials, the disease has been reported so far only in birds. However, authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant and report any unusual mass bird deaths to the nearest veterinary hospital.

**FMD:** Namibia has declared a foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) control area in the southern Kharas Region to safeguard its FMD-free status and protect access to international export markets, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform said Saturday. The declaration, which took effect immediately, followed a Government Gazette notice published on March 17 defining the control area in key border zones and communal lands in southern Namibia.

According to the ministry, the area includes a 10-km strip south of the Mata Mata border post to the Orange River, a 10-km strip north of the Orange River extending westward to the Atlantic Ocean, as well as communal settlements and adjacent farms within the designated zones.

"It is important to note that this declaration should not create an assumption that there is an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Namibia," ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda said in a statement.

He said Namibia continues to maintain its FMD-free status without vaccination, which allows the country access to premium international markets.

The precautionary move is intended to prevent the introduction of FMD, particularly amid increased activity in neighboring countries, Muyunda said.

Farmers and livestock owners within the declared control area are required to comply with strict disease control measures to safeguard livestock health, he added.

## Health chief often overstates the science: experts

## RFK Jr. makes food sound like a miracle drug

NEW YORK, March 22, (AP): In the Trump administration's campaign to promote healthy eating, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has not stopped at his slogan urging people to "eat real food" to prevent disease.

In recent speeches and podcast appearances, the nation's health secretary also has claimed that diet can "cure" schizophrenia and diabetes and allow people to rid themselves of bipolar disorder diagnoses. Researchers say the comments overstate current evidence about the real and promising role that food can play in managing illness.

"Food is medicine, and you can heal yourself with a good diet," Kennedy said on comedian Theo Von's "This Past Weekend" podcast in February.

The talking point aligns with an idea from Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" allies that has gotten some bipartisan support: The role of food in health deserves more attention.

Scientists agree that diet can contribute to some diseases and also can be valuable in treating them. But public health advocates say Kennedy's exaggerations are part of a pattern in which he cherry-picks and misrepresents scientific research, a tendency that he has regularly applied to vaccine science, enraging doctors.

It is the latest example of Kennedy being "incredibly careless and irresponsible" in talking about health issues, said Kayla Hancock, director of a public health project at the advocacy group Protect Our Care.

Dr. Theresa Miskimen Rivera, president of the American Psychiatric Association, fears the language could drive patients to self-medicate with food alone.

"The concern always is that people can have hope and they might interpret that as, 'Well, I don't need medication. I do not need treatment. I just need to follow the diet,'" Rivera said.

In an early February speech at the Tennessee Capitol, Kennedy cited the work of Dr. Christopher Palmer, a Harvard Medical School researcher who in 2019 wrote about two patients with schizophrenia who experienced remission of their symptoms following a high-fat, low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet.

Kennedy said that Palmer had "cured schizophrenia using keto diets."

Palmer has called that inaccurate. He told The Associated Press that "as much as I wish we had cures for mental illness or other chronic diseases, it is important that we use more precise language." Palmer



Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., speaks during the Take Back Your Health Tour event at the state Capitol, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026, in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)

prefers the word "remission."

During the same speech, and later on Joe Rogan's podcast, Kennedy referred to studies "where people lose their bipolar diagnosis by changing their diet." He said "there's a big paper about to come out" showing results.

Kennedy spokesman Andrew Nixon said those comments referred to a "growing body of research" on the issue, including a University of California, Los Angeles, study investigating the effect of a keto diet on teenagers with bipolar disorder.

That study is still recruiting patients and will not be completed until March 2027, according to a posting on a federal website. Any publication would come months after that.

Rivera, of the American Psychiatric Association, said Kennedy's claims exaggerate the evidence. Studies testing the role of the ketogenic diet on mental health conditions have been small, anecdotal or pilot studies, she said. Many did not include a control group of patients following a regular diet.

"At this point, it's premature. We cannot draw definitive conclusions," Rivera said. "There is not enough evidence to recommend a specific diet or as a standalone, without medication such as antipsychotics or mood stabilizers."

It is true that research into the effects of ketogenic

and other diets on psychiatric disorders is accelerating, Palmer said. He said 20 controlled clinical trials using the keto diet for severe mental illness are underway, with results of two trials set for publication within the next year.

Palmer said he is "very enthusiastic" about diet as a promising therapy for serious psychiatric disorders, but that patients with mental illness should still talk with their doctors.

"I want to implore patients: Please do not stop your medications on your own," he said. "Please do not even try a ketogenic diet on your own as a treatment for schizophrenia or bipolar disorder."

Kennedy's comments on Von's podcast that "most diabetes can be cured through diet" also have been scrutinized. Some experts say the health secretary overstated the role of diet.

Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disorder, cannot be cured by diet alone, said Dr. Willa Hsueh, an Ohio State University endocrinologist and researcher. A healthy diet and exercise are keys to managing Type 2 diabetes, but it can be difficult to use those tools alone to reverse the disorder, she said.

**Also:**

**WASHINGTON:** Nearly 90,000 bottles of a children's pain reliever have been recalled due to reports of black specks and other contaminants, according to federal regulators.

The Food and Drug Administration posted an online notice about the recall of Taro Pharmaceuticals' Children's Ibuprofen Oral Suspension. The company's website states that the product comes in a berry-flavored solution and is recommended for children ages 2 to 11.

The FDA notice states that the recall was launched earlier this month after customers reported "a gel-like mass and black particles in the product." Agency regulators categorized the action as one in which the risk of serious injury or health consequences to consumers is "remote."

The medication was manufactured in India by Strides Pharma Inc., which produces generic and over-the-counter medicines for firms in the US and many other countries. Strides initiated the recall, according to the FDA notice.

Neither Strides nor Taro Pharmaceuticals immediately responded to requests for comment Friday morning.

## SPORTS

## KD overtakes Jordan in scoring list, James sets games record



Houston Rockets forward Kevin Durant (7) shoots against Miami Heat forward Simone Fontecchio (0), center Bam Adebayo (13), and guard Pelle Larsson (9) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Houston. (AP)



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, second from front right, and forward Jarred Vanderbilt, right, react after a dunk by guard Austin Reaves, left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Orlando Magic in Orlando, Fla. (AP)

## SGA scores 40 as OKC pulls away for win over Wizards after early scuffle

**HOUSTON, March 22, (AP): Kevin Durant scored 27 points to move past Michael Jordan for fifth place on the NBA's career scoring list and Amen Thompson had a tip-in at the buzzer to lift the Houston Rockets to a 123-122 win over the Miami Heat.**

Durant's shot for the win bounced off the rim and Thompson tipped it in to give Houston the thrilling victory. Durant has 32,294 points in his career, two more than Jordan.

Miami trailed by eight before using a 9-2 run, with a 3 from Simon Fontecchio, to get within 119-118 with 46.3 seconds to go. Reed Sheppard made a shot in the lane to push the lead to 121-118 with 12.7 seconds left.

Bam Adebayo made two free throws after that before Jabari Smith Jr. was called for goaltending on a layup by Fontecchio to put the Heat on top 122-121 with 5.4 seconds remaining and set up the wild ending.

**Lakers 105, Magic 104**

In Orlando, LeBron James set the NBA record by playing in his 1,612th regular-season game and Luke Kennard made a 3-pointer with 0.6 seconds left to send the Los Angeles Lakers to a comeback victory over the Orlando Magic.

Luka Dončić scored 33 points in the Lakers' ninth straight win, but was called for his 16th technical foul - an automatic one-game suspension by the league if it's not rescinded.

James had 12 points, six rebounds, four assists and three steals on his record-breaking night, passing the mark Robert Parish held for nearly 30 years.

Paolo Banchero, who led seven Magic players in double figures with 16 points, blocked a shot by James out of bounds with 4.7 seconds left. After a replay review, it was determined that the ball had not caromed off James' foot out of bounds - and Los Angeles maintained possession. That set up Marcus Smart's pass to Kennard for the winning shot.

**Thunder 132, Wizards 111**

In Washington, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and the Oklahoma Thunder pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat the Washington Wizards for their 11th straight win, a game during which four players were ejected following a scuffle in the first half.

Gilgeous-Alexander extended his NBA record of 63 consecutive road

games with at least 20 points.

Oklahoma's Jaylin Williams and Washington's Justin Champagnie began showing each other after a basket by the Wizards with 27 seconds left in the second quarter. Several players joined in and the scrum spilled into the stands behind the basket.

**76ers 126, Jazz 116**

In Salt Lake City, VJ Edgecombe had 22 points and 13 rebounds and Quentin Grimes scored 26 points to lead the Philadelphia 76ers to a 126-116 victory over the Utah Jazz.

Trendon Watford had 20 points and nine rebounds, and Adem Bona and Cameron Payne each had 16 points - with Payne adding seven assists - for the 76ers, who won for the fourth time in five games.

Philadelphia overcame 17 turnovers and outscored the Jazz 74-52 in the paint.

**Spurs 134, Pacers 119**

In San Antonio, Keldon Johnson and Dylan Harper each scored 24 points and the San Antonio Spurs never trailed in a victory over the Indiana Pacers.

San Antonio All-Star Victor Wembanyama had 20 points, eight rebounds, six assists and five blocks. Harper was 9 for 13 from the field in his first NBA start.

Andrew Nembhard scored 25 points and Jarace Walker added 21 for the Pacers, whose franchise-record losing streak reached 16 games. Indiana fell to 15-56 overall and is in last place in the Eastern Conference after losing to Oklahoma City in seven games in last season's NBA Finals.

San Antonio has won 21 of its last 23 games and improved to 53-18, securing its most victories since finishing 61-21 in 2017.

**Cavaliers 111, Pelicans 106**

In New Orleans, Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points and James Harden, held scoreless in the first half, added 20 second-half points to power the Cleveland Cavaliers to comeback victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Cleveland trailed 88-76 entering the final period, but outscored the Pelicans 35-18 in the fourth - with Harden scoring 13 and Mitchell 12 in the quarter. It was the Cavaliers' eighth victory in their last nine games against New Orleans, which had its seven-game home winning streak snapped.

**Hornets 124, Grizzlies 101**

In Charlotte, LaMelo Ball scored 29 points and finished 7 of 14 from 3-point range to help lift the Charlotte Hornets to their third straight victory, 124-101 over the struggling Memphis Grizzlies.

Brandon Miller had 22 points and Moussa Diabate had 14 rebounds and 11 points for the Hornets, who have won five of their last six and are 21-6 since Jan. 22 to make a push for a play-in spot.

**Bucks 108, Suns 105**

In Phoenix, Ryan Rollins had 26 points and 10 rebounds, Kyle Kuzma scored 20 before leaving with an injury and the short-handed Milwaukee Bucks beat the Phoenix Suns.

The Suns have lost five straight. The Bucks won for just the third time in 12 games. Rollins made a tough floater in the lane with 23.8 seconds to push the Bucks up 107-104 and added a free throw with 9.7 seconds left to seal the win. He shot 10 of 19 from the field and also added seven assists.

Kuzma left in the third quarter because of tightness in his right Achilles tendon. Garland scores 41 and Leonard adds 34 as Clippers extend Mavs' home losing streak to 11 games.

**Clippers 138, Dallas 131**

In Dallas, Darius Garland scored a season-high 41 points, Kawhi Leonard added 34 with a tying bucket late in regulation and the Los Angeles Clippers beat Dallas 138-131 in overtime on Saturday night, extending the Mavericks' longest home losing streak in 32 years to 11 games.

Derrick Jones Jr. scored 15 points with a pair of 3-pointers in the extra period, and Garland had 11 assists as the Clippers ended a four-game skid that followed a four-game winning streak.

**Hawks 126, Warriors 110**

In Atlanta, Dyson Daniels scored a season-high 28 points and CJ McCollum had 23 points as the Atlanta Hawks bounced back after having their 11-game win streak snapped with a 126-110 win over the Golden State Warriors. Zacharie Risacher had 17 points for the Hawks, who were without Jalen Johnson (left shoulder inflammation).

Mouhamed Gueye had 16 points and 10 rebounds and Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 17 as the Hawks shot 54% from the floor to win their 10th straight home game.

## Esterhuizen makes maiden half-century

## South Africa beats New Zealand by 19 runs to level the T20 series at 2-2

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, March 22, (AP): New Zealand foundered against South Africa's spinners as the Proteas won the fourth Twenty20 by 19 runs Sunday to level the five-match series at 2-2.

Connor Esterhuizen made a maiden half-century from 33 balls as South Africa scored 164-5 after choosing to bat. Esterhuizen eventually was out for 57 and his innings made the difference between the teams.

New Zealand was ahead at 63-2 after the powerplay with Tim Robinson making 32 from 22 balls at the top of the order. But left-armers Prenelan Subrayen took 2-13 on debut and Keshav Maharaj took 2-22 to cut through the New Zealand middle order and turn the match in South Africa's favor.

Dane Cleaver made 26 from 16 balls, returning to the New Zealand lineup after almost three years. He was looking dangerous when he was beaten and bowled by a Subrayen delivery. Bevon Jacobs was also bowled by Subrayen when the ball dipped under his bat.

Jimmy Neesham (10) was dropped twice then caught in the same over from Ottneil Baartman, who took 2-30

from four overs.

Maharaj removed Nick Kelly (16) and Cole McConchie (10) as the spinners pinned down the New Zealand batters by varying their pace and flight. "I thought a total of 164 was about par, maybe a bit below par," New Zealand captain Jimmy Neesham said. "We certainly had a chance going into the second half of the game.

"A few average options and poor execution and we came out on the wrong side of it." New Zealand's already depleted lineup was further reduced by the loss of Tom Latham to injury and Devon Conway, Mitchell Santner and Lockie Ferguson for the last two matches of the series.

Esterhuizen rallied South Africa after it had lost Wiaan Mulder to the second ball of its innings, a maiden bowled by Kyle Jamieson.

The right-hander hit a six and a four from the third over, a six and four in the fourth over, a six and two fours among 17 runs in the fifth over, keeping the South Africa run-rate up. South Africa was 50-1 after the powerplay, its best start of the series so far.

Esterhuizen reached his half-century in the 10th over with a boundary from Ben Sears, the sixth four of his innings that also included three sixes.

"I just tried to keep it as simple as possible to be honest," Esterhuizen said. "I didn't have much time to think about it because I was out there straight away.

"So I just tried to stick to a game plan and it came off tonight."



Esterhuizen

## Lloris posts record 5th straight shutout to begin season

## Leroux stars as Earthquakes hand Whitecaps first loss of the season

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, March 22, (AP): Beau Leroux scored in first-half stoppage time and Daniel De Sousa Britto made it stand as the San Jose Earthquakes cooled off Vancouver with a 1-0 victory, ruining the start of a five-match homestand for the Whitecaps.

Leroux scored unassisted in the second minute of stoppage time to give the Earthquakes (4-1-0) the lead for good. Leroux's first goal this season comes after scoring five times in 33 matches as a rookie last year.

Daniel finished with six saves in posting his fourth clean sheet in five starts this season and his 15th in 68 career starts - all with the Earthquakes. He's never had more than five in one season.

Yohei Takaoka saved one shot on goal for the Whitecaps (4-1-0), who outscored their opponents 14-1 in winning their first four matches.

Vancouver falls into a second-place tie with San Jose, one point behind Los Angeles FC in a hotly-contested Western Conference that boasts seven teams with at least three victories through the first five weeks.

The Earthquakes also evened the series at 13-13-12.

Hugo Lloris finished with two saves for Los Angeles FC in a record fifth straight shutout to begin a season, and Brad Stuver stopped the only shot he faced for Austin FC in a scoreless draw.

Lloris and LAFC (4-0-1) began the season with four shutout victories, just one of four teams in league history to accomplish the feat. His scoreless stretch of 450 minutes is the longest in league history to begin a season.

Marcel Hartel had the lone goal of the second half, and St. Louis City spoiled New England's first trip to Energizer Park with a come-from-behind 3-1 victory over the Revolution.

St. Louis City (1-3-1) had just one goal - by Hartel - through its first four matches before coming to life after spotting New England (1-3-0) an early lead.

The Revolution jumped in front in the 14th minute when defender Ilay Feingold used assists from Luca Langoni and Carles Gil to score for the first time this season. Feingold had three goals in 29 appearances as a rookie last year. Langoni's four assists on the season have come in the last two matches.

Archie Goodwin subbed on in the



Vancouver Whitecaps' Ralph Priso (6) and San Jose Earthquakes' Preston Judd (19) vie for the ball during the first half of an MLS soccer match in Vancouver, British Columbia. (AP)

75th minute and scored two goals - the first two in his MLS career - and Charlotte FC beat the New York Red Bulls 6-1.

Pep Biel, Idan Toklomati, Kerwin Vargas and Wilfried Zaha each added a goal for Charlotte (2-1-2) and Ashley Westwood had three assists. Kristijan Kahlina finished with seven saves.

Toklomati opened the scoring in the 14th minute when he flicked a header, off a free kick played by Biel on the right side, inside the left post.

Gustav Berggren, who made his first start of the season, was shown a straight red card in the 53rd minute and the Red Bulls played a man down the rest of the way.

Walker Zimmerman scored a goal in the 83rd minute. José Cifuentes added a goal, and Toronto FC beat the Columbus Crew 2-1.

Luka Gavran stopped two shots for Toronto (2-2-1).

Djordje Mihailovic played a corner kick into the center of the area where Zimmerman went up high and slammed a header inside the back post to give Toronto the lead for good.

Logan Farrington scored two goals in the first 14 minutes and then picked

up an assist on Petar Musa's winner in the 86th as FC Dallas rallied last in a wild 4-3 victory over the Houston Dynamo.

Farrington staked Dallas (2-1-2) to an early lead, scoring for the first time

this season - in the 6th minute - with assists from Shaq Moore and goalkeeper Michael Collodi. He made it 2-0 eight minutes later with some help from rookies Herman Johanson and Joaquin Valiente, netting his 12th goal in 66 career appearances. It was the first assist for both rookies.

Sam Surridge scored three goals - his third multi-goal game this season - on Saturday to help Nashville SC beat Orlando City 5-0.

Surridge leads MLS with seven goals this season, two more than Vancouver's Brian White and Petar Musa of FC Dallas. The 27-year-old Surridge, who scored a career-high 24 goals last season, has three career hat tricks and scored a club-record four goals in a 7-2 win over Chicago last season.

Brian Schwake finished with a save and had his third shutout of the season for Nashville.

Hugo Cuypers scored a goal for the fourth consecutive game, Jonathan Bamba also scored a goal, and the Chicago Fire beat the Philadelphia Union 2-1.

Chris Brady had three saves for the Fire (2-2-1).

## Arias sends Palmeiras clear

SAO PAULO, March 22, (Xinhua): Jhon Arias struck an early winner as Palmeiras extended its lead in Brazil's Serie A with a 1-0 victory at Sao Paulo.

Arias put his side ahead in the sixth minute when he received the ball near the halfway line and dribbled 30 yards before cutting inside and lashing a low drive that beat goalkeeper Rafael at his near post.

The hosts dominated possession but could only manage two shots on target as they slipped to their second straight defeat.

Palmeiras now has a three-point lead over second-placed Sao Paulo with each team having played eight games.

Elsewhere, a first-half goal from Argentine striker Rodrigo Castillo gave Fluminense a 1-0 home win over Atletico Mineiro.

The result leaves Fluminense third in the 20-team standings, behind Sao Paulo on goal difference. Atletico Mineiro is 11th, eight points further back.

In Saturday's only other Brazilian top-flight fixture, Alexander Barboza struck late as Botafogo arrested a four-game losing run with a 2-1 victory at Bragantino.

Former Manchester United full-back Alex Telles opened the scoring from the penalty spot before Lucas Barbosa equalized with a close-range strike.

□ □ □

A late goal from Carlos Izquierdoz gave Lanus a 1-0 away win over leader Velez Sarsfield in Argentina's Apertura tournament.

The Buenos Aires side broke the deadlock in the 71st minute when Izquierdoz latched onto Eduardo Salvio's cross with a bullet header from the edge of the six-yard box.

## Aicher further closes gap on Shiffrin

## Goggia locks up World Cup super-G title with third win of season

KVITFJELL, Norway, March 22, (AP): Sofia Goggia put the crystal globe on the ground, lay down and kissed the snow.

Earlier, the Italian star was in tears when she finished her winning run. Goggia celebrated an emotional victory Sunday, winning her third super-G of the season at the World Cup finals to secure the discipline title.

"I had a really good, consistent season in super-G, so I think this globe is super well-deserved," said the Italian, adding that the super-G title made her a "more complete skier" after previously winning four season titles and the 2018 Olympic gold medal in downhill.

It was Goggia's 10th win in a super-G and 29th overall.

Sunday's race also saw Emma Aicher further close the gap to overall leader Mikaela Shiffrin.

Aicher, the only skier other than Goggia with multiple super-G wins this season, started the race 95 points behind the American following her fifth place in Saturday's downhill, which Shiffrin sat out.

Aicher had a solid run to place fourth and gain 50 points.

"It doesn't help me when I start thinking about those points. I have to ski well, sometimes I do, sometimes I don't," said the German, who still regards Shiffrin the strong favorite for the overall title.

"I have done so much right this year already that the rest will only be a bonus," said the 22-year-old Aicher, who was 15th in the overall standings last year.

Racing in only her third super-G this season, Shiffrin was among the late

starters and came in 2.78 off the pace in 22nd and didn't add to her tally because only the top 15 finishers get points in a race at the finals.

The American star now carries a 45-point lead into the last two races of the season - a slalom on Tuesday and a GS the following day - in her chase for a record-equaling sixth overall title. A race win is worth 100 points.

Shiffrin was joined for the pre-race course inspection by her fiancé, former overall champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde.

The Norwegian ended his season before the Olympics to further recover from a shoulder injury, but attended the finals as one of the forerunners, who test a course shortly before a race starts.

Shiffrin won five super-Gs in her career and the World Cup and world titles in that discipline in 2019, but has been hardly competing in speed events and mainly focusing on slalom and GS following two crashes in 2024.

On Sunday, Goggia confirmed her dominance in super-G this season.

A sixth place would have been enough for the Italian, who started the race with a commanding lead in the standings over her only remaining challenger, New Zealand's Alice Robinson.

But Goggia didn't hold back and used a trademark gutsy run down the Olympiabakken.

"When you have pressure, you have to handle it. I'm happy for the outcome," she said.

Robinson later had a wild run with costly mistakes and never threatened Goggia's lead, finishing 2.41 seconds off the pace.



Italy's Sofia Goggia holds the globe trophy for the super-G discipline title after winning an alpine ski, women's super-G race, at the Lillehammer World Cup Finals in Kvitfjell, Norway. (AP)

## Pidcock edged out on the line

## Bloodied &amp; battered, Pogacar rises to rule Milan-San Remo

SAN REMO, Italy, March 22, (AP): Bloodied, bruised and battered Tadej Pogacar finally won the Milan-San Remo race.

Pogacar recovered from a crash about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the finish to edge out Tom Pidcock on the line and win the race known as La Classissima for the first time.

"When I crashed, for a second I thought it's all over because to crash in Imperia just before the most important part of the race is not ideal," said Pogacar, who rides for UAE Team Emirates. "But luckily I was quickly back on the bike and not too much damage to me or to the bike."

"Then I saw my team ... they left out everything to come back to the front and they gave me back hope and the legs were still okay ... today if there is no team probably I would just go straight to the finish line."

Milan-San Remo is one of the longest one-day classics in Europe at almost 300 kilometers (186 miles), and the first of the season.

It was one of the few titles that still eluded Pogacar, the five-time Grand Tour winner, and the Slovenian admitted several times to being desperate to change that.

Pogacar's chances appeared to diminish when he was caught up in the crash that shredded the left side of his shorts and left him with scrapes and cuts on his leg.

Last year's winner Mathieu van der Poel also went down but the duo managed to get back onto the back of the peloton at the start of the penultimate Cipressa climb.

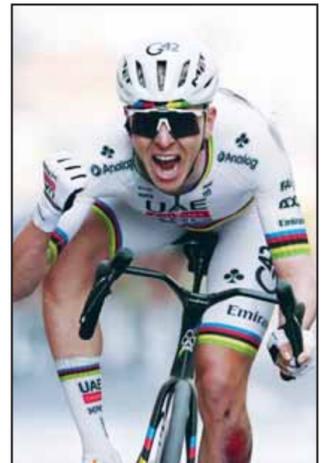
Pogacar worked his way to the front, stuck with an initial attack and then attacked himself towards the top, with only Pidcock and van der Poel able to follow.

The trio had a gap of 25 seconds at the top although that was down to 11 seconds as they began the Poggio climb shortly before the finish.

Pogacar attacked halfway up and managed to drop van der Poel. He tried several times to shake Pidcock but couldn't distance him and they were locked together as they crested the summit.

Little could separate the duo on the descent. Pogacar opened up the sprint 200 meters from the line and beat Pidcock by half a wheel.

"Honestly, I need time to reflect because right now I'm pretty disappointed because it hurts to be so close," Pidcock said. "I was told it's four centimeters."



Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar of UAE Team Emirates XRG celebrates after crossing the finish line ahead of Britain's Thomas Pidcock of Pinarello-Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team to win the men's elite race of the Milano-Sanremo one day cycling race (298 km) from Pavia to Sanremo, Italy. (AP)

"Tadej, he's the best cyclist ever, so I can't be disappointed but I can't help it ... It was so close to a monument win. But I need to look at it from a wider perspective. Because I think what I did was quite amazing, I'm quite proud."

Wout Van Aert, who was also caught up in the crash, won a bunch sprint for third.

"I have to say I saw him (Pogacar) next to me on the ground when we crashed and then the next moment I saw him again was after the finish, so I have no clue what he has been doing, but it must have been impressive because it was quite a hard crash and he still managed to get in the front like that," Van Aert said.

Lotte Kopecky edged Noemi Rüegg and Eleonora Gasparrini in a sprint of five to win the women's race.

The race was marked by a horrific-looking crash on the descent of the Cipressa.

Several riders were caught up in the incident; Italian Debora Silvestri flew over a guardrail as she tried to avoid the pileup.

Silvestri's team, Laboral Kutxa, said she was conscious as she was taken to hospital.

The women's race followed a 156-kilometer (97-mile) route from Genoa to Sanremo.

## Duplantis claims gold, Ehammer breaks heptathlon world record

Doroshchuk clinches first international title



Simon Ehammer, of Switzerland, reacts after a successful attempt in the heptathlon pole vault at the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Torun, Poland. (AP)

**TORUN, Poland, March 22, (Xinhua):** World record holder Armand Duplantis of Sweden claimed his fourth consecutive world indoor title in the men's pole vault at the World Athletics Indoor Championships, clearing 6.25 meters to set a season's best.

Duplantis opened with an easy clearance at 5.50m. Greece's Emmanouil Karalis, ranked second in the world after clearing 6.17m at the Greek indoor championships, opted to start at 5.70m and remained flawless until missing his first attempt at 6.00m. He regrouped to clear 6.00m and then 6.05m at the first attempt to become Duplantis' only serious challenger.

The Swede delivered a masterclass in consistency, clearing 6.10m, 6.15m and 6.25m all at the first attempt to break his own championship record and secure gold. Karalis failed at 6.20m and 6.25m and settled for silver, while Australia's Kurtis Marschall equaled his personal best at 6.00m to take bronze. It was the first time in an indoor global championship that three men cleared six meters in the same competition.

"I am proud of our jumps and of winning," Duplantis said. "Today it was more about the com-

petition itself. It was a tough competition, so I didn't go for the world record." Belgium claimed the mixed 4x400m relay title in dominant fashion, clocking three minutes 15.60 seconds to break the championship record. Spain took silver in 3:16.96, while Jamaica was disqualified for an illegal position switch before a takeover, promoting host Poland to bronze in 3:17.44.

In the men's high jump, 24-year-old Ukrainian Oleh Doroshchuk cleared 2.30 meters on his first attempt to claim his first international title. Mexico's Erick Portillo emerged as a dark horse, clearing 2.30m on his third and final attempt to secure silver with a personal best. South Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok and Jamaica's Raymond Richards shared bronze with 2.26m.

The 400m finals were contested in two timed sections. Canada's Christopher Morales Williams won the men's 400m in 44.76 seconds in the second section, breaking the championship record. The USA's Khaleb McRae took silver in 45.03, and Trinidad and Tobago's Jereem Richards claimed bronze in 45.39.

In the women's 400m, Czech runner Lurdes Gloria Manuel, also in the second section, ran a personal best of 50.76 to win gold. Poland's Natalia Bukowiecka set a national indoor record of 50.83 for silver, and the Netherlands' Lieke Klaver took bronze in 51.02.

After two days of competition, Switzerland's Simon Ehammer amassed 6,670 points in the men's heptathlon to break the world record and

clinch gold. Heath Baldwin and Kyle Garland of the United States took silver and bronze, respectively.

Italy's Nadia Battocletti won the women's 3,000m in eight minutes 57.64 seconds, followed by American Emily Mackay (8:58.12) and Australia's Jessica Hull (8:58.18).

Britain's Josh Kerr claimed the men's 3,000m gold in 7:35.56, edging Olympic champion Cole Hocker of the United States, who finished in 7:35.70. France's Yann Schrub took bronze by just 0.01 seconds.

In the women's triple jump, Cuba's Leyanis Perez Hernandez defended her title with a second-round leap of 14.95 meters. World record holder Yulimar Rojas of Venezuela took silver with a fourth-round effort of 14.86m, while Senegal's Saly Sarr set a personal best of 14.70m to claim bronze.

In the men's 60m hurdles final, Poland's Jakub Szymanski delighted the home crowd by clocking 7.40 seconds to edge Spain's Enrique Llopi (7.42) and claim the host nation's first gold medal of the championships. Trey Cunningham of the United States took bronze in 7.43 seconds.

The women's 60m final was equally tight. Italy's Zaynab Dosso claimed gold in 7.00 seconds, while American Jacious Sears and Saint Lucia's Julien Alfred both clocked 7.03. Sears took silver by three thousandths of a second on photo finish, leaving Alfred with bronze.

## Dortmund consolidates second

## Kane scores again, Bayern closes in on league title

BERLIN, March 22, (AP): Harry Kane scored again and Bayern Munich stepped closer toward its 13th Bundesliga title in 14 years after beating Union Berlin 4-0.

Kane scored after the break for his 31st league goal. He has seven more rounds to try and match Robert Lewandowski's season record of 41.

Serge Gnabry scored twice and Michael Olise also grabbed a goal for Bayern, taking the team's tally after 27 rounds to 97, on course to smash the season record of 101 goals set by Bayern in 1971-72.

"It'll fall," Bayern sports director Christoph Freund said of the record.

Midfielder Aleksandar Pavlović dropped out at short notice with hip problems and the Bavarian powerhouse was without three suspended players - Nicolas Jackson, Luis Diaz, Jonathan Tah - while Jamal Musiala, Alphonso Davies and regular goalkeeper Manuel Neuer were injured.

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany had several youngsters among the substitutes.

Bayern stayed nine points clear of Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga.

"We're right where we have to be and want to be," Kompany said of the team's form before its Champions League date with Real Madrid next month.

Ramy Bensebaini scored two penalties as Dortmund came from behind to beat Hamburger SV

3-2 at home to consolidate second.

Philip Otele and Albert Sambi Lokonga scored in the first half for Hamburg, while Felix Nmecha, whose mistake led to the second goal, also missed a penalty for Dortmund before the break.

Dortmund coach Niko Kovač sent on Serhou Guirassy and Bensebaini for the second half, with Fabio Silva and Carney Chukwuemeka going on shortly afterward, and the changes had the desired effect. Bensebaini took over penalty duties and Guirassy lifted his season tally to 13



Munich's Harry Kane, center, and Berlin's Livan Burcu, left, challenge for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between FC Bayern Munich and 1. FC Union Berlin in Munich, Germany. (AP)

goals.

Justin Njinmah scored in off the far post for Werder Bremen to beat Wolfsburg 1-0 away and boost its survival chances at the home team's expense.

Bremen's ultra supporters were reportedly late to the game because of a standoff with police outside the stadium.

Their team's third win in four games lifted it to 13th - four points above the relegation zone - while Wolfsburg remained second to last after failing to win any of its last 10 games, new coach Dieter Hecking's return notwithstanding.

Wolfsburg drew on Hecking's debut against Hoffenheim last weekend but his team was banking on a win against Bremen to start a turnaround. Its prospects took a further blow when defender Moritz Jenz was sent off in stoppage time.

Wolfsburg was five points from safety before relegation rival St. Pauli plays Freiburg on Sunday.

Eric Martel scored late for Cologne to draw with Borussia Mönchengladbach 3-3 in the Rhine derby, a result that did little for either team with Cologne just outside the relegation zone and Gladbach only a point above Bremen.

Before kickoff, Cologne's players lined up in front of their fans behind one of the goals for encouragement, facing a huge banner that said, "We're the No. 1 on the Rhein!"

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Australia's Alanna Kennedy controls the ball against Japan's Yui Hasegawa during the Women's Asian Cup soccer final between Japan and Australia in Sydney. (AP)

# Sports

## Hamano magic seals Women's Asian Cup for Japan

Heartbreak for Australia

SYDNEY, March 22, (AP): Maika Hamano took a pass from the left with her back to goal, turned and launched a powerful strike from outside the area in a moment of individual brilliance that secured Japan a third Women's Asian Cup final with a 1-0 win over Australia.

The 21-year-old Hamano, on loan at Tottenham from Chelsea, scored in the 17th minute to almost silence the crowd of 74,397 at Sydney's Stadium Australia.

The Australians applied all the pressure in the last 10 minutes, pressing for an equalizer but were continually denied by Japan's defense, including Alanna Kennedy's close-range header with two minutes left in regulation.

Japan had beaten Australia in the finals to win back-to-back Women's Asian Cups in 2014 and 2018 and has now won the title three times in the last four continental championships.

"I just want to enjoy it today because it's only the third time that Japan actually managed to win this tournament," Japan coach Nils Nielsen said. "(We) really deserve it, I mean, we won six games - it's OK, we take the trophy.

"The girls fought with everything they had, so did Matildas, and they made themselves proud as well."

The Australians, who reached the semifinals of the Women's World Cup on home soil in 2023, had 54% of possession, had 14 shots on goal compared to nine for Japan, and considerably more passes, crosses, and touches in the opposition box.

But as captain Sam Kerr said, "They beat us just off one moment. For most of the game, we had the better chances, and definitely in the



Japanese players celebrate after winning against Australia at Women's Asian Cup soccer final in Sydney. (AP)

second half, most of the possession. So it was just one moment. Unfortunately, that's what football is decided on.

"The last few games, we've had the moments and made the most of them. Tonight, they had an amazing goal."

Japan, the top-ranked team in Asia, tallied 29 goals and conceded just one in six games in a dominant performance in Australia.

The Matildas haven't won the continental championship since 2010, when Kerr - then 16 - scored in the decider.

The crowd of almost 75,000 for the final was a record for the Women's Asian Cup, along with the total crowd of 355,528 across the tournament that started on March 1.

Six teams from the Asian Cup - Japan, Australia, China, South Korea, the Philippines, and North Ko-

rea - have qualified for next year's Women's World Cup in Brazil.

The 12-team tournament gained global attention due to the involvement of an Iranian squad affected by the Middle East war.

The Iranian team arrived in Australia before the Feb. 28 attacks by

the United States and Israel triggered the Iran war, and their participation held the international focus.

Seven members of the Iranian delegation initially were granted asylum by the Australian government, though all but two have since returned home.

## García stands tall as Barcelona edges Rayo

BARCELONA, Spain, March 22, (AP): Barcelona edged Rayo Vallecano 1-0 in the Spanish league.

Ronald Araújo headed in the winner in the 24th minute at Camp Nou, and Barcelona goalkeeper Joan García's impressive performance showed why he is most likely heading to the World Cup with Spain.

Araújo jumped over his marker and scored after João Cancelo's corner to the far post.

Raphinha came close on three occasions to also scoring for the hosts in the first half. He shot wide on the break, forced goalkeeper Augusto Batalla to tip a shot over the bar, and hit the woodwork shortly after Araújo's goal.

García saved a shot by Carlos Martín in the game's opening minute, blocked Unai López's header early in the second half and got just enough on a low strike from Jorge de Frutos in the final moments to push it wide.

García was included in Spain's squad for the first time on Friday ahead of two friendly matches which will serve as warmups for this summer's World Cup.

Araújo stepped away from soccer from last November to early January because of what he said was a bout of depression caused by a longer struggle with anxiety. Since his return, the Uruguayan defender has had to fill in where



Rayo's Pathe Ciss tackles Barcelona's Fermin Lopez during a La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Rayo Vallecano in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

needed, mostly as a substitute, at center back or as a right back.

His start against Rayo was his first in La Liga since returning to action following his break to care for his mental health.

Elche left the relegation zone in La Liga by defeating Mallorca 2-1 for its first victory of the year, while Sevilla's

struggles continued in a 2-0 home loss to Valencia.

Elche scored twice in less than 10 minutes in the second half to earn the come-from-behind victory.

Mallorca went ahead with a goal by Pablo Torre in the 58th minute but Elche rallied with scores by Rafa Mir in the 62nd and Tete Morente in the 71st.

## Teen breakthrough powers PSG to Ligue 1 summit

PARIS, March 22, (AP): Drogba scored his first goal for Paris Saint-Germain as it won at struggling Nice 4-0 and reclaimed top spot in Ligue 1.

The 18-year-old midfielder joined from Barcelona in January and grabbed his side's third goal after being neatly set up by Ousmane Dembélé in the 81st minute.

PSG moved one point above Lens, which crushed Angers 5-1.

Defending champion PSG has played one game less and the sides meet on April 11 in Lens in what could be a title decider.

Nice competed evenly until a contentious handball decision gave PSG a penalty late in the first half. Désiré Doué's shot was off target and lightly brushed the arm of Nice midfielder Morgan Sanson, who was turning his back and un-sighted.

The referee awarded a penalty following a video review and left back Nuno Mendes scored.

Mendes then set up Doué in the 49th with a cross and, after Nice midfielder Youssouf Ndayishimiye was sent off on the hour, PSG added late goals from Fernández and right back Warren Zaire-Emery.

Substitute Emersonn scored a late solo goal to give Toulouse a 1-0 home win against Lorient.

The Brazilian forward cut inside the penalty area, beat two defenders and fired in off the underside of the crossbar. The win moved Toulouse up to ninth place.

Toulouse goalkeeper Guillaume Restes needed brief treatment in stoppage time after receiving a powerful shot from Arsène Kouassi full in the face. He was able to continue.

Emersonn almost scored a second goal with another solo



PSG's Pedro Fernandez, center, celebrates after scoring his side's third goal during the French League One soccer match between Nice and Paris Saint-Germain in Nice, France. (AP)

effort deep into added time.

Players from both sides had pictograms of different disabilities on their jerseys instead of their names as part of a disability awareness campaign aimed at providing better facilities in soccer stadiums for those with disabilities.

The game featured an accessible shuttle service; an audio description service; visual help devices, and spaces specifically designed for sensory and autistic disability. There were also introductory sessions about blind soccer and wheelchair rugby, which both featured at the Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024.

Sunderland seals late win against Newcastle

## Liverpool and Chelsea slump to bruising defeats, Champs League concerns mount

LIVERPOOL, England, March 22, (AP): A 10th Premier League loss of the campaign for Liverpool.

A fourth straight defeat in 10 days for Chelsea. These are bruising times for two of the biggest-spending powerhouse clubs in English soccer.

Forget about challenging for the Premier League title, at this rate they are struggling to even qualify for the Champions League.

Liverpool's feeble title defense unraveled further in a 2-1 loss at Brighton that extended the stuttering defending champion's winless run in the league to three matches.

Danny Welbeck scored both for Brighton at Amex Stadium, either side of Milos Kerkez's equalizer for Liverpool in its latest disjointed display under manager Arne Slot.

A few hours later, Chelsea was dispatched by Everton 3-0, completing a miserable week in which the team was also bundled out of the Champions League by Paris Saint-Germain in a chastening 8-2 aggregate loss.

Liverpool is hanging onto fifth spot in the league - a point and a place ahead of Chelsea. The Premier League is highly likely to again have five qualification spots for next season's Champions League but even that might not be enough for these two underperforming giants.

Liverpool has taken just one point from its last three league games and is a remarkable 21 points behind first-placed Arsenal with seven games left of the campaign.

Among those excuses might be Liverpool's injury problems, which worsened when striker Hugo Ekitike hobbled off in the eighth minute with a dead leg. Slot did say after the match, however, that it wasn't serious.

The Dutch coach was already without star winger Mohamed Salah and goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who both got hurt this week, while Alexander Isak - signed for \$170 million last summer - has been out since December and hasn't been fully fit all season.

Still, few could have expected Liverpool's title defense to be so underwhelming when the club spent a record \$570 million in last summer's transfer window to bolster a championship-winning squad.

Watch out Liverpool and Chelsea, Everton is coming for your place in the top five.

Beto scored twice and Iliman Ndiaye curled a shot into the top corner for the third as Everton outthought Chelsea, which delivered a performance lacking in energy after its recent Champions League exertions.

Chelsea manager Liam Rosenior said it was his team's most disappointing performance since he took charge in January. Everton was in eighth place - behind Brentford, which drew 0-0 at Leeds, on goal difference - and they were only three points behind Liverpool and two behind Chelsea.

Next-to-last Burnley slipped closer to relegation by squandering the lead and losing at Fulham 3-1.

Josh King, Harry Wilson and Raul Jimenez - with a stoppage-time penalty - scored for Fulham after Zian Flemming put Burnley ahead in the 60th.

Burnley was nine points from safety with seven games remaining and only three points above last-placed Wolverhampton.

It was Jimenez's first goal since the death of his father



Chelsea's goalkeeper Robert Sanchez punches the ball away during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Chelsea in Liverpool, England. (AP)

last week and the Mexico striker was reduced to tears after the match.

Brian Brobbey struck in the 90th minute to give Sunderland bragging rights in the Tyne-Wear derby against Newcastle on Sunday.

Brobbey's close-range effort sealed a 2-1 comeback win at St James' Park and saw Sunderland complete a Premier League double over its fiercest rival.

Sunderland also moved above Newcastle into 11th in the standings.

Anthony Gordon had given the home team the lead after capitalizing on sloppy passing at the back and firing low past Melker Ellborg after 10 minutes.

Chemsidine Talbi leveled shortly before the hour mark and Brobbey stunned the home fans when scoring at the second time of asking late on.

Earlier, the game had been halted due to a report of discriminatory abuse from the crowd towards Sunderland's Lutsharel Geertruida.

Before kickoff, there had been tense scenes between fans outside the stadium. Northumberland police said one arrest was made.