



Amir condoles with Qatar over deadly 'copter crash' Page 2



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KUWAIT STAYS RESILIENT AS GULF CONFLICT ENTERS FOURTH WEEK

US halts strikes; Iran denies talks



PM Diwan photo His Highness the Prime Minister chairs a meeting to discuss the latest economic developments and their implications amid the current crisis.



Ministry of Interior photo First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior during an inspection tour of border posts and vital security sectors aiming to assess preparedness, monitor operations on the ground.



General Administration of Customs photo Director General of the General Administration of Customs during an inspection visit to the Nuwaiseeb Customs port, accompanied by Deputy Director for Ports Affairs and Customs Investigation.

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

Deport drug traffickers to their countries

THE new drug law, enacted a few months ago, is a significant and necessary step in dealing with the pervasive issue of drug abuse and trafficking, reflecting the need for stricter penalties.

However, we wish to present certain observations to First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef. We believe these points are vital in strengthening national social security and it will result in substantial financial savings for the State.

The main concern is the composition of the smuggling population, which predominantly consists of foreigners, notably from Iran, other Arab countries and Asian countries. Imposing long-term prison sentence on these individuals puts a considerable financial strain on public funds. More importantly, their presence in the correctional system undermines efforts to combat drug abuse. They do not only pose the high risk of encouraging non-users to consume narcotics, but also engage in a form of 'brainwashing'. This allows them to exploit other inmates for drug use or trafficking.

Furthermore, these foreign inmates serve as conduits, exchanging and relaying information about smuggling techniques to their networks outside the prison. Along with local dealers, these individuals establish and operate an internal drug distribution network within the prison facilities.

Despite the prison administration's efforts to uncover and disrupt such operations, the tactics of these criminals keep on evolving. The constant innovation is designed to attract more users, tragically prompting non-users to be involved due to curiosity or inability to resist the false and dangerous promise of euphoria.

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KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (Agencies): Kuwait's Ministry of Defense said that one hostile ballistic missile was intercepted and destroyed within Kuwaiti airspace over the past 24 hours, with no human casualties or material damage reported.

The announcement was made by the Ministry's official spokesperson, Colonel Staff Saud Al-Atwan, during a media briefing on current developments and the latest operational updates in light of Iranian aggression against Kuwait.

Colonel Al-Atwan affirmed that the Kuwaiti Armed Forces, in full coordination and cooperation with various military and security authorities in the country, continue to carry out their duties with the highest levels of readiness and efficiency, ensuring the protection of national security and stability under the wise leadership.

Kuwait's Ministry of Interior announced that explosives disposal teams handled 14 reports related to falling debris resulting from defensive interception operations over the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 498.

The statement was made by Brigadier Nasser Bousalaib, Director General of the General Department of Security Relations and Media and official spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior, during a media briefing on current developments and the latest field updates considering the Iranian aggression against Kuwait.

Brigadier Bousalaib noted that air raid sirens were activated twice in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of activations since the onset of the aggression to 118.

He also presented a video clip showing several reports related to falling debris or objects outside the scope of direct threat.

- PM chairs meeting on economic stability
1st Deputy PM reviews border operations
Customs allocates dedicated lane for Kuwait Airways

The Ministry of Interior emphasized that national unity remains the solid foundation of Kuwait's strength and cohesion, stressing that the solidarity and unity of the people form an impenetrable barrier against various challenges.

Kuwait has released new figures on Monday outlining its national response since the onset of the regional crisis, detailing extensive military, security, and civil defense operations across the country.

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'\$53 billion global flight losses likely inflated'

Airfare spike reports overblown: Kuwaiti expert

By Najeh Bilal Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The initial estimated losses of global airlines due to the American-Israeli-Iranian conflict were \$53 billion.

Head of the Kuwaiti Federation of Travel and Tourism Offices Mohammad Al-Mutairi expressed skepticism to the newspaper, stating that the abovementioned data on global aviation losses is unconfirmed, inaccurate and unacceptable.

He acknowledged the price increase on some routes due

to reduced flights and higher demand, but he described the general reports of 200 to 300 percent increase as "exaggerated and just a few isolated cases."

In contrast, international reports suggest that rising oil prices and subsequent fuel surcharges prompted airlines to raise airfares. Specifically, increases on domestic flights in the United States and Europe reportedly ranged between 200 and 300 percent.

In the Middle East, where thousands of flights were canceled due to the repercussions of the war, price hikes ranged between 11 to 135 percent, although they reached nearly 400 percent in some exceptional instances.

According to global statistics, the top 20 carriers already incurred losses reaching \$53 billion. The Financial Times reported that Gulf state airlines have been affected due to numerous flight cancellations, route disruptions and the fuel price surge. Industry leaders described this situation as "the worst aviation crisis since the pandemic."

As an example from the United States, The Washington Post reported that the price of a flight from San Francisco to Kansas City, Missouri—which previously cost between \$400 and \$500—rose to \$1,500 for the cheapest seat after about two weeks of disruption.

Gov't agencies resume work amid shorter hours and remote options

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari and Fares Ghaleb Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Government agencies resume operations Tuesday, after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, implementing temporary regulatory measures aimed at ensuring the continuity of efficient work and a balance between the functions of public facilities and the exceptional circumstances.

Chairman of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Dr. Essam Al-Rubaiaan confirmed that the post-holiday working hours are flexible and reduced in order to guarantee the continuity of services and the safety of employees.

In an interview with Kuwait Radio, Al-Rubaiaan said these measures are based on official directives that take into account the current situation. He clarified that the working hours are flexible, with the starting time period set at 7:00 am to 9:00 am, while the departure time is determined based on the arrival time, provided the total

number of working hours is six.

He also confirmed a temporary adjustment to the mechanism for calculating employee tardiness, coinciding with the reduction of daily working hours to six. He said the permissible tardiness period without penalty has been set at 90 minutes, down from the previously applied 105 minutes.

He emphasized that these measures are part of exceptional organizational arrangements, adding that the previous system, including the approved tardiness limit, will be reinstated once official working hours return to normal.

He stated that the departure times differ for female employees, who are allowed to leave 15 minutes before their male counterparts. He pointed out that the total working hours for female employees are five and quarter hours, compared to five and a half hours for males, and the previously specified grace periods remain in effect.

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Other Voices

Not everything should be published: Why confidentiality protects justice

By Dr. Fawaz Khaled Alkhateeb Attorney at Law

The Public Prosecution's recent decision to classify ongoing investigations into serious state security cases as confidential has sparked public discussion. Yet, from a legal perspective, this step is not a limitation on transparency, it is a safeguard for justice.



Dr. Alkhateeb

The statement confirmed that investigations are underway in two separate cases involving allegations of collaboration and harm to the security of the State. Legal measures have already been taken, including arrests, warrants, and the seizure of relevant tools and devices.

Pursuant to Article (75), Paragraph (2) of the Criminal Procedures and Trials Law, the Public Prosecutor ordered that the investigations remain confidential, with a prohibition on publishing or disseminating any related information.

This is not an exceptional measure. It is a recognized legal tool designed to protect the integrity of investigations particularly in sensitive cases.

At this stage, evidence is still being examined, and witness accounts are still developing. Any premature disclosure risks influencing testimony, compromising evidence, or creating public narratives that may interfere with the course of justice.

The real danger is not in temporary confidentiality, but in the circulation of incomplete or unverified information.

It is equally important to note that this confidentiality does not apply to the accused or their lawyer. The right to defense remains intact, ensuring that the legal process continues to operate within the framework of fairness and due process.

The Public Prosecution has also confirmed that the public will be informed once investigations are concluded. Transparency, therefore, is not denied, it is deferred until the appropriate stage.

These cases, by their nature, involve national security. They demand precision, discretion, and a high degree of procedural integrity.

Justice cannot be rushed, and it should not be shaped by speculation. Confidentiality, in this context, is not silence, it is protection. Not everything should be published immediately, because some truths must be preserved until they are complete.

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Online transfers cushion Kuwait exchange market

By Najeh Bilal Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: As the ongoing war between the United States of America and Israel against Iran enters its fourth week and despite its negative impact on the global economy and stock and financial markets, the local exchange market has remained resilient in facing challenges.

Several branch managers of exchange companies confirmed to the newspaper that the current war has not affected the money transfer transactions and they have not experienced delays. They attributed this to the strong oversight and management of the exchange sector by the Central Bank of Kuwait, especially since many of the measures that the Central Bank took in 2025 cleansed the exchange market of 'exchange brokers'.

Chairman of the Kuwait Federation of Exchange Companies Abdullah Najib Al-Mulla stressed that money transfers at local exchange companies have been proceeding at normal rates since the outbreak of the war. He clarified that the demand for money transfers may have decreased during this crisis, but the increase in online payment rates reduced the congestion that exchange markets witnessed previously. He disclosed that the Central Bank implemented certain regulations and conditions. He added majority of the customers of local exchange centers opted to send their remittances through the online applications provided by licensed exchange companies.

Meanwhile, Hamed Al-Husseini, an official at an exchange company, stated that money transfers in the Kuwaiti exchange market have been proceeding smoothly since the outbreak of the war.

He explained that the congestion in exchange companies at the beginning of this month coincided with the start of the war, especially since exchange companies typically experience a relative increase in activity at the beginning of each month due to the deposit of expatriate workers' salaries, so the congestion at the beginning of March was not related to the war.

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Al-Mulla

NewsWatch

MUSCAT: Omani authorities said Monday the death toll from heavy rains has risen to five, amid forecasts the weather will persist this week.

The National Committee for Emergency Management's search and rescue sector said one person was found dead after a vehicle carrying ten people was swept away in valley in Barka, bringing total fatalities to five. (KUNA)

GAZA: Palestinian health authorities announced that nine Palestinians were killed and 30 others injured during the Eid al-Fitr holiday as a result of a series of Israeli occupation attacks across various areas of the Gaza Strip.

In their daily statistical report, the authorities stated that a total of nine fatalities were received at Gaza hospitals during the Eid period, including one individual who succumbed to wounds sustained earlier. (KUNA)



8 National Investments Company Successfully Leads Milestone IPO of Trolley General Trading Company on Boursa Kuwait

16 Man City outguns Arsenal to seal League Cup

Kuwait economy stable, urged to diversify amid threats of war

By Najeh Bilal Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Experts are grappling with major questions about the ongoing war and its economic impact on Kuwait and the entire Gulf region.

They are contemplating on the economic repercussions for Kuwait should the conflict last until April. If the war continues for several months, the focus shifts to the available options for Kuwait and the sur-

rounding nations. The main point of inquiry is on which Gulf countries will most likely be affected by the crisis.

Economist Mohammad Ramadan told the newspaper that the Kuwaiti economy will not witness a sharp decline if the current war between America and Israel against Iran continues until April, especially since high oil prices will persist for a long period, thus, the need to compensate the country for its losses from the halt in oil exports.

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## 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 southerly 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



HH Amir Sheikh Meshal



Sheikh Tamim

## Amir condoles with Qatar over deadly 'copter crash

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, sent a cable to Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, expressing his deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences over the martyrdom of crew members of the helicopter that crashed in Qatari territorial waters due to a technical malfunction.

In his cable, His Highness the Amir prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy on the deceased and the victims' families with patience and consolation.

## Crown Prince condoles

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## Prime Minister condoles

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See Also Page 4

## Temporary committee set up to manage MoSA staff union

## By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef issued Ministerial Decree No. 6/2026 regarding the formation of a temporary committee to manage the Social Affairs Ministry Employees Union.

Article One of the decree stipulates the formation of a temporary committee with one-year term, renewable only once, consisting of the following individuals, to manage the affairs of the Social Affairs Ministry Employees Union until new elections are held in accordance with the law and relevant regulations:

1. Nasser Marzouq Mishan Al-Mutairi - Chairman
2. Mohammad Abdulrahman Al-Solh - Vice Chairman
3. Hanan Mohammad Abdulhadi Al-Saqran - Secretary
4. Bader Thaher Hamdan Al-Fadhli - Treasurer

5. Maher Farhan Awad Al-Enezi - Member

The committee may seek assistance from individuals with expertise and specialization as it deems appropriate in carrying out its duties, without granting them voting rights.

Article Two states that the committee shall carry out the tasks stipulated in Article Three of Ministerial Resolution No. 3/2025 as follows:

- Manage urgent administrative and financial matters.
- Collect membership fees.
- Prepare and update the list of general assembly members who meet the membership requirements and have the right to vote.
- Call for a general assembly meeting.
- Supervise nomination and election procedures in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations.

Article Three stipulates that the committee shall convene at the invitation of its chairperson or deputy chairperson. A meeting is valid only if at least half of the members are present, in addition to the chairperson or deputy chairperson.

## Other Voices

## What does Dana Smith say?

## By Ahmad alsarraf

IN an article published in The New York Times, columnist Dana Smith said, "We should take a moment to reflect on the last decade of our lives, on the level of physical fitness we aspire to, and on the activities we want to continue doing. There's no magic ball to predict our future health. However, there are some tests we can take to assess our strength, fitness, and balance."

These are all factors that will influence our physical abilities in the future, extending our lifespan and ensuring we remain independent. People naturally lose strength and muscle mass with age, so it is important to start early. However, sometimes it is better to start later, because it is better to start late than never. Even those over 90 can improve their strength and motor functions simply by engaging in some light physical activity.

There are four tests to determine your current strength and fitness level, and not meeting these criteria is not a cause for concern. Regularly performing strength, fitness, and balance exercises can help improve performance.

1. The Sit-Up Test - Stand up from the floor using minimal support. This test is scored out of 5 points. The sitting and standing test is performed without using hands or holding onto a chair, with one point deducted for each hand, knee, or other body part used for support. For those over 60, scoring 8 points indicates excellent physical fitness.

Tests on 4,000 people aged 46 to 75 showed that the mortality rate among those scoring 4 or less on the sitting and standing test was almost four times higher than among those scoring 10. Lower scores indicate a greater risk of falls.

2. Walking Speed - Walking speed is a crucial indicator of functional ability and vitality. A low walking speed can

predict future decline, mortality, nursing home placement, disability, and other health issues. To assess walking speed, measure a distance of four meters on a flat surface and time how long it takes to walk it. The ideal time is less than four seconds at a normal pace. The test should be repeated every few months. A decrease in speed may indicate a health problem requiring investigation and treatment.

3. Grip Strength - Grip strength is also linked to mortality. Although this relationship may seem counterintuitive, experts confirm that it is a useful indicator of a person's daily activity level. The more you use your hands, the stronger your grip will be.

To assess grip strength, try holding a heavy weight in each hand while walking for 60 seconds, a simple form of weightlifting. Start with lighter weights and gradually increase over time.

A 45-year-old man can aim to hold two 14-kilogram dumbbells. A 65-year-old can hold two 9-kilogram dumbbells in each hand, and an 85-year-old can hold two 5-kilogram dumbbells in each hand. For women in these age groups, the target weights are 9 kilograms, 5 kilograms, and 3.5 kilograms per hand, respectively.

4. Standing on One Leg - This is the most challenging and important exercise. As strength naturally declines with age, so does balance, increasing the risk of falls, which is a leading cause of serious injuries and deaths among older adults.

The balance test is simple. Just stand on one leg. Adults should aim to maintain this position for at least ten seconds on one side. The results are more accurate when the eyes are closed. According to a 2022 study, 20 percent of adults aged 51 to 75 could not maintain this balance for ten seconds. These individuals were 84 percent more likely to die within the following seven years.

Overall, all of these measures - strength, fitness, and balance - can be improved. Enhancing them significantly reduces the risk of premature death.

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## KFMB committed to ensure food security 'Khubus' will now be available at Q8 fuel stations

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: As part of its expansion plans to increase commercially generated operating revenues, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company (KFMB) has received approval from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to add a centralized retail outlet to its business model, enabling the company to open retail outlets in the local market, reports Al-Rai daily.

As per the plan, the company's new commercial activity will begin with the opening of retail outlets at Kuwait Petroleum International's (Q8) fuel stations.

Q8 is preparing to launch six of these stations in the near future as a first phase, as part of a plan to operate approximately 200 new stations. The goal is to transfer Q8's European expertise, gained from operating over 4,500 stations, to the local market.

This comes at a time when Al-Mutahina Mills has successfully met consumer demand for food products with high efficiency in cooperative societies and central markets, despite the repercussions of the regional war that erupted on February 28 and its logistical impact on Kuwait and the Middle East supply chain.

According to informed sources, the company is committed to ensuring food security in the country, preventing any shortages during or outside of crises, and achieving clear successes with all the products it manufactures.

To maximize the benefits of its new "central market" operations, Al-Mutahina Mills is expected to expand its offerings beyond its own products at its outlets in gas stations, with the first outlet scheduled to open next March. The company plans to include products from other food and non-food companies, focusing on practical and fast-moving items such as grocery products that are readily available to consumers at gas stations, as well as other non-food items.

## Operations

From an accounting perspective, adding a central market to Al-Mutahina's operations is expected to increase its commercial revenue stream. This is because its presence at gas stations will be through fully integrated and independent retail outlets, rather than simply offering its products to consumers in cooperative societies and supermarkets under the current operational model.

Analytically, Al-Mutahina's anticipated opening of new retail outlets at gas stations is part of the company's broader commercial strategy of geographical expansion in the local market. This initiative introduces a sophisticated retail experience in the food sector, benefiting from the company's expertise and the competitiveness of its products in terms of price and quality.

Al-Mutahina's approach in this regard is

supported by an integrated production process that emphasizes adherence to standards and certifications, the use of high-quality raw materials, and the maintenance of consistent quality for all products.

Moreover, the opening of Al-Mutahina outlets at gas stations is in line with the broader government initiative, through the oil sector, to develop Q8 gas stations. This development aims to provide consumers with a comprehensive and convenient experience, offering food, convenience, and fast food products at these outlets while adhering to international standards.

Adding a central market to Al-Mutahina's business operations complements the company's ongoing commercial and operational expansion plans. These plans began earlier with the "boutiques" initiative, which included a unique project in government school canteens. The initiative provided students with a different model, offering healthy and balanced meals through a buffet system, including baked goods and juices.

Strong demand for Al-Mutahina's products at its various outlets, supported by its established brand and competitive pricing, lower than imported products while maintaining high quality, fuels optimistic expectations for the success of its commercial expansion into gas stations.

# Constant supply bolsters 'strategic food' reserves

Steady availability of goods in co-ops, malls

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait continues to enjoy a stable and well-supplied food market, supported by abundant availability of essential goods across cooperative societies and shopping malls. This steady supply reflects the strength of the country's food distribution system and its ability to meet consumer demand despite ongoing regional tensions linked

to the American-Israeli-Iranian conflict.

A key factor behind this stability is Kuwait's reliance on a diverse network of exporting countries, which helps minimize the risk of supply disruptions. By sourcing goods from multiple international partners, the country maintains flexibility and resilience in the face of global trade challenges.

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry reassured the public by announcing the arrival of the first Kuwait Airways flights carrying fresh food shipments into the country. These

deliveries included meat, fruits, vegetables, and other essential items that form a vital part of everyday consumption.

On the ground, this strategy is clearly visible. Cooperative stores and central markets across Kuwait remain fully stocked with staple products such as rice, sugar, cooking oils, meat, and dairy items, all available in quantities sufficient to meet local demand.

Retailers told Al-Anba that the uninterrupted flow of goods, combined with the arrival of new shipments, continues to strengthen Kuwait's strategic food reserves. This ensures that the country is well-prepared to sustain supply

levels for extended periods, even in the event of disruptions to international trade or supply chains.

They also emphasized that diversifying import sources not only reduces dependence on any single country but also enhances the market's ability to respond effectively to global developments.

Meanwhile, regulatory authorities are actively monitoring local markets to ensure price stability and prevent unjustified increases. Through regular inspection campaigns across cooperative societies and retail outlets, these efforts help maintain consumer confidence and reinforce market stability during the current regional situation.

## Charitable platform 'boon' to Kuwait priorities: MoSA

## By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Social Affairs has launched a national charitable platform aimed at coordinating and directing the efforts of the charitable sector to support the state's priorities.

This initiative seeks to unify charitable work channels and enhance the efficiency of responding to community needs, representing an advanced model of institutional cooperation based on transparency and integrated roles.

The platform also contributes to harnessing capabilities to serve the nation and strengthen community preparedness to face challenges. Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, affirmed that the launch of the national charitable platform supports the government's role and aligns with the state's vision to enhance integration between government agencies and charitable organizations, unifying national efforts and directing energy to serve Kuwaiti society in all circumstances.

Dr. Al-Huwaila explained that this platform represents a qualitative leap in employing technology and data management in charitable work, providing a comprehensive database that serves as a center for monitoring and follow-up, and displaying performance indicators and real-time data related to the contributions of the charitable sector. It showcases the charitable sector's initiatives in supporting government agencies and helps organize and coordinate efforts in various fields, including equipping shelters, organizing Iftar meals for those fasting during Ramadan, providing logistical support, and documenting humanitarian initiatives such as paying off the debts of individuals in financial distress.

Dr. Al-Huwaila noted that the platform has achieved tangible results through the broad participation of charitable societies and foundations, as well as thousands of volunteers.

She emphasized that this initiative reflects the strategic partnership between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations, aiming to maximize humanitarian and social impact and strengthen the system of organized charitable work.

Meanwhile, Saad Al-Otaibi, Chairman of the Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations, affirmed that the launch of the platform reflects the strength of the national partnership between state institutions and the charitable sector.

He highlighted that the union has played a pivotal role in coordinating the efforts of charitable societies and foundations and directing their initiatives toward national priorities, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

## Strategic

Al-Otaibi stressed that the platform serves as a strategic tool for organizing charitable work, providing accurate data and an interactive database that enables monitoring the level of achievement and coverage.

He indicated that the broad participation of associations and foundations reflects the spirit of social responsibility and national solidarity that defines Kuwaiti society, emphasizing that the charitable sector has been and continues to be an active partner in supporting the state's efforts and strengthening the social security system.

Al-Otaibi affirmed that the union will continue developing coordination mechanisms through the platform and expanding areas of cooperation with government entities, thereby contributing to maximizing the impact of national charitable work.

## SAB nods purchase of power from Gulf grid

## By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy obtained conditional approval from the State Audit Bureau (SAB) to proceed with the contract to purchase electricity from the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) for the month of April at a total cost of \$ 15.301 million. The ministry submitted the contract

to SAB on Jan 10 to complete the review and audit procedures, in preparation for approving the contract.

The GCCIA aims to secure energy supplies for member states, develop energy exchange, and diversify energy sources to achieve shared economic benefits.

It is worth noting that SAB previously approved the contract to import electricity from GCCIA for the period from the beginning of January until the end of March, at a total value of

KD43.5 million.

In another development, the newspaper obtained information that two companies are competing for the tender to upgrade eight steam boilers at the Subiya power and water desalination plant.

The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has opened the bids and referred them to the ministry for review within one month of the referral date, in preparation for issuing a technical recommendation. Based on this recommendation, the contract

will be awarded to the company that meets the technical requirements. It will then be referred to SAB for review, audit and approval before finalizing the contract with the winning company.

This tender is considered one of the most important and largest maintenance projects implemented by the ministry in its power plants, as the aim is to upgrade the eight boilers, improve their operational efficiency and extend their lifespan.

# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## What's in store for Gulf as war moving to crescendo!

"IN a press conference, US President Donald Trump announced that the war in the Arabian Gulf region and the Middle East is almost over," Kuwaiti writer **Emad Khamis Eqab** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"These statements raise questions about their credibility and their implications for the Gulf states. The timing of President Trump's remarks comes at a sensitive moment, as the region continues to face escalating security and political tensions. Therefore, these statements should be approached with caution.

"It is important first to verify the information through official and multiple sources to ensure its accuracy. Second, the political and diplomatic context in which these statements were made should be examined, as they may be part of a wider strategy aimed at achieving specific goals, whether electoral or diplomatic.

"To verify the credibility of President Trump's statement, several factors should be considered.

1. Official statements - Monitor statements from the US Department of Defense (Pentagon), the US State Department, and leaders of the concerned Gulf countries.

2. Media coverage - Follow reports from reputable news agencies such as Reuters, Associated Press, and the BBC.

3. Developments on the ground - Monitor the situation through reports from international organizations and independent observers.

4. Implications of the declaration for the Gulf states - The declaration of the end of the war carries political, economic, and social implications for the Gulf States and may lead to a reshaping of political alliances in the region.

"The Gulf States may seek to strengthen their relations with major powers, such as the United States and Russia, to enhance regional stability. The end of the war will reduce security tensions, potentially allowing the Gulf States to strengthen their defense and security capabilities through new cooperation agreements.

"The end of the war is likely to lead to improved economic conditions by attracting foreign investment and easing economic sanctions. Financial markets in the Gulf States may benefit from increased political and security stability.

"On the social level, the end of the war could lead to improved humanitarian conditions through the reconstruction of infrastructure and the return of displaced persons to their homes.

"In conclusion, President Trump's statements should be approached with caution and analyzed using multiple sources to verify their credibility.

"The end of the war in the Arabian Gulf region may present many opportunities and challenges for the countries of the region. It is essential for governments and peoples to be prepared to address the potential political, security, economic, and social repercussions of these statements.

"May God protect the Arab and Muslim peoples from all harm."

**Also:**

"Social media is no longer merely a platform for socializing and exchanging opinions. It has become a daily reality that shapes public opinion due to its powerful influence," Kuwaiti lawyer **Sarah Al-Jassem** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The positive role of these platforms cannot be denied. They promote freedom of expression, facilitate the sharing of opinions, spread culture and social awareness, highlight public issues, enable professional and media communication, and support small and medium-sized enterprises and digital marketing.

"These platforms have created a broad space for public debate, in line with constitutional principles that guarantee freedom of opinion and expression within the framework of the law and without violating public decency. However, despite these advantages, social media can sometimes be a double-edged sword, as users may face unexpected legal repercussions.

"The problem does not lie in the platform itself, but in its misuse. A casual post, an emotional comment, or a repost without verifying its accuracy can expose the user to legal accountability.

"Crimes punishable by law include defamation and slander via social media, as well as any infringement on the dignity and reputation of individuals. Incitement to hatred, sedition, or actions that harm the public interest are also considered crimes that threaten societal security and carry severe penalties.

"Furthermore, the circulation of private photographs or recordings without prior consent, or the threat of their publication, may constitute privacy violations and cyber extortion.

"Creating and using fake accounts for defamation, fraud, or scams is among the most serious cybercrimes and may be punishable by imprisonment or fines. These actions constitute digital identity theft and infringement on the rights of others.

"The legislature does not tolerate these offenses, as they attack the sanctity of private life and individual rights and hold the perpetrator legally accountable.

"Legislation has been enacted to regulate social media, including the Cybercrime Law, the Kuwaiti Penal Code, and the Press and Publications Law. Penalties have been increased in some

cases, including imprisonment and fines that can reach thousands of dinars, particularly for online defamation, given its rapid spread and wide impact.

"Some may mistakenly believe that responsibility rests solely with the original author of a post. However, legally, reposting, sharing, or even endorsing content can result in joint liability if the content constitutes a crime punishable by law. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse, and good faith does not negate the material element of the offense.

"Legal advice - Do not publish information without verifying its source, avoid intruding into the private lives of others, and refrain from reposting offensive content. Social media is a powerful tool, but it carries legal responsibility and can be a double-edged sword if misused. Freedom of expression is not absolute. It is limited by respect for the law and the rights of others. Words are no longer merely letters to be written but they can become evidence against a person in court."

"Nationalist and liberal affiliations, along with various disparate groups, converged with Islamist movements, most notably the politicized religious groups and the Muslim Brotherhood, as the voices of Hamas emerged alongside the launch of the Kuwaiti popular boycott campaign against American and Kuwaiti companies and interests following the events of October 7, 2023," columnist **Khaled Ahmed Al-Tarrah** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Emotion played a significant role, and political considerations became intertwined with populism and a superficial understanding of political events and their potential repercussions for Kuwait. The public reacted emotionally and irrationally, amplifying a Palestinian and Arab narrative at a highly sensitive time.

"At this critical juncture, these boycotters, whether intentionally or through deliberate silence, ignored the blatant threat and aggression facing Kuwait, its people, and the Gulf states from the Iranian regime under the Supreme Leader. Ideological differences between leftist, liberal, nationalist, and Islamist movements suddenly vanished, even coalescing against Kuwaiti and Western interests, fracturing Arab and Gulf societies under a politicized Islamic banner.

"Kuwait, known for its social, political, and media neutrality, has at times become an arena where dangerous sectarian tendencies have emerged, reaching the point of forming terrorist cells, such as the Abdali cell.

"There has been interference from the Iranian embassy in a Kuwaiti judicial matter, and a media outlet at the time provided a platform for the Iranian ambassador to glorify the Khomeini revolution.

"Today, a silent scene and a stance of indifference toward Iranian aggression against Kuwait and the Gulf states are evident.

"The appearance of a former interior minister from the Al-Sabah family at Erada Square, responding to an emotional rather than political confrontation, cannot be overlooked. This occurred as the laws of war with Israel were invoked, without awareness of the extent of the media chaos being fueled by an agitated public.

"Selective boycotts have rapidly emerged in Kuwait, as well as among Palestinian and Arab residents. A state of manipulation of public opinion has spread through media outlets and online platforms. Those advocating for boycotts have completely refrained from leading a genuine, organized, and rational boycott initiative against Iranian interests in Kuwait.

"These facts and indicators suggest that street emotions and uncontrolled public opinion have come to dictate public consciousness, rather than being guided by it. They also reveal a degree of political and intellectual immaturity within the Kuwaiti arena.

"Here, it is essential to study Hamas's relationship with the Iranian regime and Iraqi militias carefully and frankly, without ambiguity or favoritism.

"Ultimately, Kuwait cannot be the target of selective boycotts driven by emotion and directed by political Islamist groups, while the real threats to its security and sovereignty remain outside the sphere of public concern.

"National stances are measured not by raising one's voice against commercial companies, but by the clarity of one's position regarding those who threaten the state and seek to infiltrate it politically and militarily.

"Staying silent regarding Iranian interests in Kuwait, while boycott campaigns target other interests, is neither a moral nor a political stance, but rather an expression of dangerous intellectual and political hypocrisy.

"Nationalism is indivisible, and sovereignty cannot be compromised. Driven by emotion or sentiment, some have used the boycott as a platform for ideological posturing and populism, yet the truth remains clear - Kuwait's security and sovereignty are paramount, above all considerations and empty slogans.

"A boycott that ignores the Iranian threat and focuses solely on other issues does not reflect patriotism; rather, it is an escape from confronting reality."

— **Compiled by Simi K. Kutty**



Khamis Eqab

## Condolences pour in over deadly 'copter crash

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Defense (MoD) Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah sent on Sunday a cable of condolences to Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

In the cable, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali voiced his deepest and heartfelt sympathy over the martyrdom of crew members of the helicopter crashed in Qatari territorial waters due to a technical malfunction, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations said in a press statement.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant mercy and paradise to the martyrs, and bring solace to their families, and protect the sisterly State of Qatar and its people from all harm, it added.

The Sultanate of Oman expressed Sun-



Sheikh Abdullah



Jasem Al-Budaiwi

day its condolences to Qatar and Turkiye over the helicopter crash into Qatari territorial waters that led to the death of some personnel of the joint Turkish and Qatari forces.

In a statement, Oman's Foreign Ministry stressed the Sultanate's solidarity with brothers in this painful incident, praying to Allah

the Almighty to bestow mercy on those personnel and bring solace to their families.

Earlier today, Qatar's Ministry of Defense announced the death of seven security persons in the crash incident of the helicopter belonging to Qatar's Defense Ministry, due to a technical malfunction while doing a routine duty.

The GCC Secretary-General, Jasem Al-Budaiwi, expressed his heartfelt condolences and sincere sympathy to Qatar and Turkiye following the martyrdom of seven individuals in the crash of a helicopter due to a technical malfunction during a routine mission.

In a statement, Al-Budaiwi prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow the deceased with mercy and inspire their families with patience and solace.

He also extended his deepest condolences to the families of the martyrs.

## Ban on camping, tent weddings

Municipality ensures waste collection on time

**KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Kuwait Municipality confirmed that it has implemented several precautionary measures since the start of the current situation in the region more than three weeks ago, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

In a press statement issued on Monday, Director of Public Relations and Media and the official spokesperson of Kuwait Municipal-

ity Mohammad Al-Sundan explained that the municipality adopted an emergency plan to ensure the smooth and normal operation of cleaning and road maintenance. The plan includes deploying equipment, machinery, and cleaning personnel in residential areas while preventing them from being stored overnight at designated storage sites.

The precautionary measures also include the cancellation of temporary permits for spring camps to ensure the safety of campers,

as well as suspending the issuance of temporary permits for event tents (wedding halls) until further notice. They also include reducing the time required to empty and transport waste containers to the sanitary landfill for processing, as well as adjusting the daily manual sweeping schedule for cleaning workers to ensure their safety.

Al-Sundan affirmed that coordination is ongoing regarding any procedures issued by Kuwait Municipality in response to developments related to the emergency situation.

## AG oversees probe into espionage, terror cases

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: As part of his direct oversight of the investigations, Attorney General Saad Abdulkarim Al-Safaran, accompanied by Public Prosecutor Meshal Ibrahim Al-Ghannam, reviewed the investigations into several cases related to state security, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

Al-Safaran and Al-Ghannam heard a detailed presentation submitted by the head of the investigation team, Chief Prosecutor Talal Adel Al-Abdulrazzaq, with the participation of 11 members of the Public Prosecution. The presentation covered the investigation process, the work plan, the procedures taken, and the progress achieved to date.

The Attorney General was briefed on the latest developments in the investigations.

The Public Prosecution revealed that it had initiated investigations into two separate cases related to espionage and harming state security, based on serious inquiries that uncovered information indicating that several individuals were involved in communicating and coordinating with terrorist organizations that threaten Kuwait's sovereignty and security.

It explained that the investigation team commenced its work in cooperation with the relevant authorities, obtaining the necessary legal warrants to arrest and apprehend the suspected individuals and to search their residences. Tools and devices related to the criminal activity were seized.

The Public Prosecution continues to complete its legal procedures in preparation for taking the necessary measures against those involved.

It affirmed that these acts constitute serious crimes related to state security and are punishable by the most severe penalties.

Based on Article 75/2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and Trials, as amended by Law No. 3/2012, the Attorney General ordered that the investigation be kept confidential and prohibited the publication, broadcasting, or dissemination of any information related to the two cases by any means whatsoever.

The Public Prosecution stated that it will inform the public and the media of the investigation's findings once they are completed, in accordance with the relevant law.

## Citations issued in Jahra for breaching sale rates

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) revealed that an extensive inspection tour of several commercial establishments in Jahra Governorate resulted in the issuance of 24 violation reports for various infractions, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

In a press statement, the ministry explained that the inspection tour, conducted by emergency teams, identified several violations, most notably non-compliance with food price stabilization decisions and the sale of some goods at prices higher than the set price. Other violations included failure to display price lists, organizing promotional offers without a license, and not specifying the country of origin.

The ministry highlighted its ongoing efforts to enhance market stability, ensure the availability of goods and services, and protect consumer rights.

## Young Kuwaiti woman perishes in road crash

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: A collision on the First Ring Road led to the death of a 26-year-old Kuwaiti woman, while another woman sustained minor injuries.

Emergency, police and ambulance teams were dispatched to the scene immediately after the Operations Unit at the Interior Ministry received information on the accident. Upon arrival, the paramedics confirmed the death of the Kuwaiti woman, while the injured woman was taken to the hospital.

Security authorities launched an investigation to determine the circumstances that led to the accident. The body of the deceased was referred to the Forensic Medicine Department.

**Don't put eggs in one basket!** Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) urged the public to avoid overloading electrical circuits and connecting multiple electrical devices to a single outlet or distribution box.

In an awareness video released in conjunction with the shift to distance learning, Major Ahmad Boushehri from the Public Relations and Media Department at KFF emphasized the importance of using electrical connections safely and in accordance with the guidelines, as well as preventing children from tampering with electrical outlets. He also stressed the need for continuous monitoring of electrical devices to prevent overheating.

## Media briefed 120 times: Lt Col Al-Murshad

### Don't spread rumors, says KFF

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Lieutenant Colonel Hamed Al-Murshad of the Public Relations and Media Department of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) revealed that the department's media center has conducted 120 media appearances since the start of the current events affecting the country and the region, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

In a statement to Kuwait TV, these appearances aimed to reassure citizens and residents, and provide accurate and reliable information from official sources.

Lieutenant Colonel Al-Murshad urged the public to avoid rumors and refrain from spreading them, as they can cause panic and anxiety. He emphasized the importance of immediately calling the emer-

gency hotline in the event of any incident.

Lieutenant Colonel Al-Murshad noted that the department received eight routine reports in the past 24 hours, ranging from minor house fires to elevator malfunctions, all of which were handled quickly and efficiently.

He advised citizens and residents to avoid excessive electrical loads, especially with the continuation of distance learning after the Eid al-Fitr holidays.

Lieutenant Colonel Al-Murshad stressed that fire crews respond to various types of reports around the clock to protect lives and property, and urged the public not to hesitate to request help when needed.

## Old guard condemn terror cells

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Association of Retired Officers strongly condemned the actions of the two terrorist cells affiliated with the banned group Hezbollah, which sought to destabilize security, spread chaos in the country, and recruit individuals to join the organization, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

In an official statement, the association emphasized the serious threats these actions pose to the nation's security, sovereignty, and stability.

It said, "Kuwait's security is a red line that cannot be crossed. We commend the security services of the Ministry of Interior for their tireless efforts in uncovering and arresting the first and second terrorist cells that sought

to undermine Kuwait's security."

The association reiterated its support for Ministry of Interior personnel, particularly the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, and all security leaders and members of the ministry, for their national efforts, vigilance, and meticulous follow-up to ensure the safety, security, and stability of Kuwait and to protect its citizens and residents.

It stated that it places all its resources and expertise at the government's disposal and calls for the preservation of national unity, emphasizing that the group represents only itself and its members, not any particular sect.

### Seven killed in joint forces mission after technical failure

## Kuwait expresses solidarity with Qatar, Turkiye over helicopter crash

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed sympathy and solidarity with Qatar and Turkiye following the helicopter crash in Qatari territorial waters that resulted in the martyrdom of seven from the joint Qatari-Turkish forces.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the ministry extended Kuwait's sincere condolences to the governments and peoples of Qatar and Turkiye, as well as to the families of the victims.

Qatar Ministry of Interior announced that the seventh missing, Captain (Pilot) Saeed Nasser Smeikh, had been found following the helicopter crash in the country's territorial waters, as part of ongoing search and rescue operations.

In a statement on X, the ministry confirmed that all

seven people on board the aircraft had been located and that all were confirmed dead.

Earlier, Qatar's Ministry of Defense announced that a Qatari helicopter experienced a technical malfunction while on a routine mission, leading to its crash in the country's regional waters.

The United Arab Emirates expressed condolences and solidarity with Qatar and Turkiye over the deaths of six people in a helicopter crash in Qatar's territorial waters, caused by technical malfunction during a routine mission.

In a statement Sunday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs extended sincere condolences to the families of the victims from the Qatari armed forces and the joint Qatari-Turkish forces, affirming solidarity with both countries.

Qatar's Ministry of Interior announced on Sunday the deaths of six out of the seven people recovered following the helicopter crash in the country's regional waters.

In a statement, the Ministry said that as part of the ongoing search and rescue operations for those missing after the helicopter crash, search efforts resulted in the recovery of six of the seven people on board, confirming that those recovered were deceased.

The Ministry of Interior extended its deepest condolences to the families of the deceased, praying for their peace, and explained that specialized teams are continuing their intensive search for the remaining missing person.

Earlier on Sunday, Qatar's Ministry of Defense an-

nounced that a Qatari helicopter experienced a technical malfunction while on a routine mission, leading to its crash in the country's regional waters.

A Qatari helicopter had a technical malfunction during a routine mission which led to its crash in the country's territorial waters, the Qatari Ministry of Defense announced.

Searching operation for its crew members and passengers is in progress, the Ministry said in a statement on its X account on Sunday early morning.

Rescuers from the General Directorate of Coasts and Borders Security, and Qatar International Search and Rescue Group - and affiliate of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), rushed to the scene, the Ministry of Interior said in a similar statement.

## Kuwait boosts meteorological systems ahead of climate risks

DGCA invests in tech, early warnings and int'l co-op

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): Acting Director of the Meteorology Department at Kuwait's DGCA, Dhirar Al-Ali, stressed that international cooperation and the exchange of meteorological data are fundamental to the accuracy and effectiveness of weather forecasts.

Marking World Meteorological Day, Al-Ali told KUNA that Kuwait is keen to actively participate and cooperate in regional and international programs and conferences at both governmental and organizational levels.

He noted that Kuwait takes pride in its pioneering efforts in this field, adding that the DGCA has made extensive investments under a well-planned timeline to comprehensively upgrade meteorological and climate monitoring systems using the latest technologies, with further updates planned soon.

Al-Ali pointed out that these efforts include training national personnel to keep pace with global developments and increasing the number of automated observation stations to 38, covering marine, land, and agricultural areas, in addition to implementing an automated system for measuring upper-atmosphere weather elements.

He noted that achievements also include upgrading airport runway

equipment, adding an advanced mobile weather radar, introducing early warning systems for sand and dust storms, and enhancing meteorological data processing systems to improve aviation safety and protect lives and property.

Al-Ali said this year's celebration is held under the theme "Observing Today to Protect Tomorrow," emphasizing that safeguarding the future begins with monitoring the present, and that every forecast and early warning represents an investment in human, economic, and environmental security.

He pointed out that 193 countries worldwide, members of the World Meteorological Organization, mark this occasion annually, underscoring the vital role of meteorology and climate science in protecting communities and strengthening resilience against escalating climate challenges.

Al-Ali added that since 1970, extreme weather events have caused economic losses exceeding USD 4.3 trillion and claimed nearly two million lives, noting that early warnings issued just 24 hours in advance can reduce damage by up to 30 percent.

He highlighted that global initiatives such as "Early Warning for All" demonstrate that investment in monitoring and early warning systems yields economic savings while reducing human and material losses.

He stressed the urgent need to enhance monitoring systems, adopt modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, and invest in human resources to ensure sustainable innovation amid climate change and unprecedented rising temperatures.

### Calls for unity amid regional tensions

## Prominent figures extend Eid Al-Fitr greetings to HH Amir, Crown Prince

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Secretary General of Kuwaiti Diwanias Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Muajil extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, praying to Allah Almighty to grant them continuous good health and well-being and to bestow upon Kuwait more progress and prosperity, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Al-Muajil emphasized that the efforts of His Highness the Amir embody the commitment of the political leadership to strengthen unity that characterizes the Kuwaiti society, particularly in light of the turbulent regional circumstances.

He commended the efforts exerted by State agencies in various sectors, including the Kuwait Armed Forces, police, Kuwait Fire Force and all other relevant authorities, praising their role in maintaining national security

and stability.

Moreover, Kuwaiti historian Issa Al-Ghanim congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, praying that Allah grant them good health and well-being and that Kuwait enjoys lasting security and progress.

Al-Ghanim praised the efforts of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince in leading the country with wisdom and competence, asserting that this wise leadership has contributed to protecting Kuwait and preserving its stability amidst the challenges and turmoil in the region.

He called for unity behind the leadership, imploring Allah to protect Kuwait, perpetuate its security and safety blessings, and that Eid becomes a blessed occasion for the country and the entire Muslim world.



Photo by Rezk Tawfiq  
Clear skies over Kuwait City as traffic moves steadily toward the city center, with the iconic Grand Mosque visible in the distance.

### Eid without applause

## Kuwait's iconic theater goes quiet

By Mufreh Hijab

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Artistic events during Eid Al-Fitr in Kuwait, other Gulf countries and many other Arab nations are almost nonexistent due to the current situation in the region.

Despite the value of theatrical performances and concerts, which used to be the main attractions for the public during this occasion, they have completely disappeared.

Other activities that used to bring joy to the public have vanished, replaced by a sense of community, solidarity, social cohesion and family visits – a phenomenon many of us have been missing.

Theater in Kuwait has a unique charm, a powerful presence and a popularity unmatched by any other Arab country. Dozens of plays are shown during Eid and all of them were sold out. This enduring appeal surprised theater professionals throughout the Arab world, who marveled at the strength and widespread appeal of Kuwaiti theater and the audience's attachment to it.

There was a remarkable categorization of theater: adult theater, presented by Abdulaziz Al-Musallam who is distinguished by his unique school of horror theater, social comedy by Tariq Al-Ali, comedy by Hassan Al-Balam, alongside Ahmed Al-Awnan, Abdul Nasser Darwish and other stars, youth theater or the new generation presented by Bader Al-Shaabi, Mubarak Al-Mana, Mohammad Al-Hamli, Abdullah Abdul-Redha, Shujoun and others, and children's theater, presented by numerous artists.

This diverse range of theatrical productions during holidays and special occasions sometimes extended to other Gulf countries. Many Kuwaiti stars performed in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Oman.

All of this came to a halt during Eid Al-Fitr in Kuwait and other Gulf states this year. Similarly, concerts, which were held in numerous theaters and drew large audiences, also ceased.

Many Arab stars stopped performing

in the region, but the most positive aspect is that current circumstances have led to a significant increase in social interaction. People have become more concerned for one another, strengthening communication and social bonds.

Families and friends are checking on each other, a phenomenon we greatly missed in recent years due to social media and a new culture that has alienated us from one another. We hope that theater will return and that social cohesion and communication will continue.

During Ramadan, actor Mustafa Shaaban presented the series 'Darsh' alongside actor Riad El-Khouly and a group of other actors. The series revolves around the character of Darsh, who suffers from a mental illness. He has multiple personalities, and in each episode, a new character appears in his life, each with their own social connections, including a wife and a full life. The way these characters are interwoven in the storylines confuses the viewer, who forgets Darsh's connection to so many other personalities. Should the viewer believe Dr. Sameh, the hospital owner? Or Eng. Mohammad, the construction company owner and real estate developer? Or Darsh, the perfumer? Or George, the Christian? Or Sheikh Wafa, the healer? Or Abu Sana, the drug dealer? This multitude of characters contributes to the fragility of the narrative and creates a significant gap for the viewer, who is distracted by the overly dense script. While it may be tempting for an actor to portray so many characters in a single drama, it also requires a discerning audience to interpret the events. Therefore, many viewers stopped watching it after the first few episodes, and it became one of the less popular shows during Ramadan.

The month of Ramadan has ended, along with the drama productions. It has become clear that the ongoing war affected many drama productions, as viewers have not seen any outstanding drama productions, whether in the Gulf or the Arab world. It seems that the general mood in the Arab world did not accept all the shows.



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## LOCAL

## Kuwait FM discusses regional tensions with UK counterpart

KUWAIT CITY, March 23, (KUNA): Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah held a phone call on Monday, discussing escalating military tensions in the region, with UK's Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Yvette Cooper.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the call addressed the latest developments regarding the escalating military tensions in the region resulting from Iran's aggression against regional countries, and the consequences for regional and international security and stability.

## Kuwait University's Life Sciences unveils summer course schedule

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Faculty of Life Sciences at Kuwait University announced its course schedules for the summer semester of the 2025-2026 academic year.

The schedules include general education courses, as well as courses expected to be offered by the College of Architecture to students of the Faculty of Life Sciences.

This initiative aims to help students prioritize their majors and prepare early for the registration process, allowing them to select courses that best suit their academic plans.

The faculty stated that the general education course schedule for the summer semester includes the following courses:

- Personal Nutrition and Fitness (Course No. 1800110-01A) from 9:15 am to 10:15 am.
- Introduction to Entrepreneurship (Course No. 1800161-01A) from 9:15 am to 10:15 am.
- Life Sciences Statistics (Course No. 1800203-001A) from 8:00 am to 9:00 am.
- Statistics (Course No. 1800109-01A)

is offered in multiple sections, with theoretical lectures from 9:15 am to 10:15 am, and practical lectures from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm on specific days.

■ Technical Writing (Course No. 1800253-01A) is offered from 10:30 am to 11:30 am, with an additional evening section from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm.

Meanwhile, the college announced the courses expected to be offered by the College of Architecture for Life Sciences students, which include:

- Applications Lab 1 (1600106) from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm
- Photography Lab 1 (1600108) from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm
- Introduction to Critical Theories and Design (1600101) from 11:45 am to 12:45 pm

The faculty confirmed that publishing these schedules is part of its commitment to providing students with information well in advance, helping them plan their studies effectively, avoid course overlaps, and maximize their learning during the summer semester.

It urged students to carefully review the schedules and select courses that align with their study plans.

The faculty wished the students a successful academic year.

## Finance Ministry issues executive rules for land anti-monopoly law

10 KD annual fee on large plots starts March 1

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Minister of Finance Dr. Yaqoub Al-Rifai issued Ministerial Decree No. 11/2026 regarding the executive regulations of Law No. 126/2023 on combating the monopolization of undeveloped land, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The regulations stipulate the following:

Article 1 - The procedures outlined in the following articles shall be adopted when collecting the fee stipulated in Law No. 126/2023.

Article 2 - A 10 KD annual fee shall be due starting from March 1, 2026, for each square meter exceeding 1,500 square meters of owned land, or from the first day of the month following the expiration of two years from the date of approval of the decision to regulate, subdivide, or divide private residential plots, or any project that includes plots designated for private housing by Kuwait Municipality, whichever is later.

This fee is payable whether the plot owner is a natural or legal person, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 126/2023. The fees stipulated in Law No. 50/1994, as amended by Law No. 8/2008, remain

in effect.

A 10 KD fee is imposed for each square meter exceeding 5,000 square meters of owned land.

Article 3 - The aforementioned fee is collected annually, beginning at the start of the fiscal year and ending at its conclusion, in accordance with Law No. 126/2023.

Article 4 - The plot owner or owners are jointly and severally obligated to pay the fee.

Article 5 - An owner who is unable to pay the fees due on their property may submit a request to the Ministry of Finance for permission to sell the property, or part of it, either through a sale contract with a third party or via a public auction organized and supervised by the Ministry of Justice, in accordance with the relevant provisions and procedures.

The Real Estate Registration Department shall inform the Ministry of Finance upon completion of the sale procedures and will not issue the original title deed to the new owner until the required fees have been paid to the state.



Dr. Al-Rifai

Article 6 - The Real Estate Registration and Documentation Department at the Ministry of Justice shall provide Kuwait Municipality with lists of natural and legal persons who own vacant land designated for private housing if the area exceeds 1,500 square meters. The lists shall include the location of the land in terms of district, plot, and area, as well as the area codes necessary for property identification, whether the plots are in one location or multiple locations, or within one project or multiple projects.

Kuwait Municipality shall verify that these lands are subject to Law No. 126/2023 and the provisions of this decision, and shall return the lists, clarifying the current status of each plot, to the Real Estate Registration Department at the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Finance shall forward these lists to the Public Authority for Civil Information to obtain the personal information and data of those subject to the fees payable under Law No. 126/2023.

Article 7 - The Ministry of Finance shall calculate the fees payable by landowners subject to Law No. 126/2023 and shall notify each landowner, within the fiscal year, of the amount of fees due on their vacant land by registered mail with return receipt requested.

Landowners subject to the provisions of this law are obligated to pay

these fees within three months from the beginning of the fiscal year.

Article 8 - Within 60 days of being notified of the fees due, the landowner has the right to appeal the fees determined by the Ministry of Finance on their undeveloped land to the relevant committee, which shall be formed by a decision of the Minister of Finance.

Article 9 - The committee shall decide on the appeal within 60 days of its submission. If the appeal is rejected, the decision must include the justifications.

Article 10 - The owner or their representative shall remit the outstanding fees to the Ministry of Finance. The fees shall be paid in a single installment, either in cash, by certified check, or by any other method approved by the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance shall take all necessary measures to lift any blocks once payment is made.

Article 11 - All government entities are obligated to impose a block on the transactions of those who fail to pay the outstanding fees in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 126/2023.

Article 12 - The relevant authorities, each within its respective jurisdiction, shall implement this decision, which shall come into effect from the date of its publication in the official gazette "Kuwait al-Youm".

Continued from Page 1

## Deport drug

Here, we must acknowledge that prisons function as self-contained societies, often characterized by widespread illicit activities. Crimes such as theft, forgery, drug use, rape and others are common in correctional facilities.

In spite of the efforts of the police and the General Directorate of Correctional Facilities, it is a known reality that criminals are often a step ahead, even when they are incarcerated. This raises a crucial question regarding non-Kuwaiti prisoners: Why immediate deportation is not the standard policy?

When a non-Kuwaiti individual is sentenced, regardless of the nationality, the most logical and cost-effective procedure is immediate deportation to the country of origin. The embassy should be notified about the case. This will transfer the responsibility for his care to his own government, eliminating the enormous cost incurred by the State of Kuwait for long-term imprisonment, followed by deportation.

Similarly, if the sentence is death, why delay the execution? Once all three levels of appeal are completed, the execution should be carried out immediately. The presence of long-term death row inmates in Kuwait, some incarcerated for several years, is an ongoing danger to others and it costs the State so much. This cost could be mitigated and swift action will prevent diplomatic interference.

It is acknowledged that the new law addresses drug use by focusing on treatment, recognizing that addicts require psychological support first, before medication. Nevertheless, this approach led to relapses, as some individuals committed more crimes and even turned into drug dealers.

Financial desperation prompts some to sell drugs in schools, turning this innocent segment of society into a target for major traffickers. Numerous reports highlight the severity of this issue. The worsening drug epidemic is an alarming societal vulnerability.

For solutions to be effective, eliminating smugglers and dealers through all means must be the priority.

## US halts

According to official data released by the Center for Government Communication-Kuwait (CGC-Kuwait), authorities have monitored and dealt with 549 drones and 255 ballistic missiles since the beginning of the escalation.

The Ministry of Interior reported activating the country's warning sirens 116 times, while emergency teams handled 484 reports filed since the outbreak of hostilities.

On the public health front, the Ministry of Health said it established 75 primary mental health clinics across various regions, alongside launching a psychological support hotline that has received 151 calls.

Civil defense teams recorded 36 direct fires caused by drone incidents, in addition to 78 scattered fires reported nationwide. Firefighting units responded to a total of 940 emergency callouts. Authorities also confirmed that 42 sites were secured and brought under control by relevant teams.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's National Guard stated that its monitoring systems are operating around-the-clock with high efficiency at Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Center for Chemical Defense and Radiological Monitoring. The force also reported handling 35 drones and securing 27 locations through rapid-response task units.

Separately on Monday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired a meeting to discuss the latest economic developments and their implications amid the current crisis.

The meeting touched on financial measures required for the next phase to ensure financial stability and effectively address economic challenges.

The meeting was attended by Minister of Finance Dr. Yaqoub Al-Rifai, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Abdulaziz Al-Marzuq, Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr. Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah.

On Sunday, First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah stressed the importance of maintaining vigilance, raising readiness levels, and firmly confronting any attempts that may threaten the country's security or disrupt public order.

The Ministry of Interior said in a press statement that the remarks came during an inspection tour of the northern border posts conducted by Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef.

The visit, accompanied by senior security officials, aimed to assess preparedness, monitor operations on the ground, and check on personnel stationed at their posts, affirming that safeguarding national security and border integrity requires the highest levels of vigilance and readiness.

During the tour, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef conveyed the greetings and Eid al-Fitr wishes of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to members of the border security, ports, and Coast Guard forces.

The Minister also directed enhanced coordination among various security and military sectors to ensure comprehensive protection of the country.

According to the statement, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef began his tour by visiting the northern border centers, where he reviewed field conditions, security deployment, and operational procedures, closely examining the level of readiness and reassuring personnel carrying out their national duties in protecting the country's borders and stability.

He praised the high morale and discipline demonstrated by security personnel, reflecting their dedication and loyalty in performing their duties.

In a gesture of appreciation, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef shared a meal with stationed forces at their sites, underscoring his commitment to being present with them and recognizing their sacrifices, particularly during the Eid holiday while away from their families.

Customs allocates lane for Kuwait Airways

Also on Monday, Director General of the General Administration of Customs, Saad Al-Nuwaif announced the allocation of a dedicated lane for Kuwait Airways flights at the Nuwaiseeb border crossing to accelerate procedures and enhance passenger experience.

Al-Nuwaif made the remarks during an inspection visit to the Nuwaiseeb customs port, accompanied by Deputy Director for Ports Affairs and Customs Investigation, Saleh Al-Omar, as part of efforts to monitor operations and ensure readiness to improve efficiency and facilitate entry and exit procedures.

He said the step, coordinated with Kuwait Airways would also streamline the movement of goods and vehicles through a fast-track system in line with best operational standards, stressing the importance of easing travel procedures.

Al-Nuwaif underlined prioritizing medical supplies and medicines, ensuring their swift clearance to meet urgent needs, particularly under conditions requiring rapid response.

He added that economic lane systems have been activated to facilitate truck and cargo entry, reduce waiting times, and enhance the flow of commercial transport.

During the visit, Al-Nuwaif met customs inspectors and extended Eid al-Fitr greetings, commending their dedication and vital role in safeguarding border security.

He noted the visit aligns with

tom's strategy to develop the working environment, enhance port efficiency, and balance speed with accuracy in line with international best practices.

Nuwaiseeb port has been equipped with advanced technologies, including X-ray scanners for trucks, to improve inspection efficiency and accelerate procedures without compromising security.

In latest developments, US President Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, saying the U.S. will hold off on striking power plant for five more days.

Trump made the announcement on his Truth Social site hours ahead of his previous deadline. Trump said the U.S. and Iran have had "very good and productive conversations" that could yield "a complete and total resolution" in the war. Talks will continue "throughout the week," Trump said. Iran's foreign ministry denied that any negotiations with the U.S. have taken place, and called on Washington to de-escalate tensions.

Shortly after Trump's announcement - hours before the deadline was set to expire - Iranian state television declared that the American leader had backed down "following Iran's firm warning."

The war, now in its fourth week, has already seen several dramatic turning points - the killing of Iran's supreme leader, the bombing of a key Iranian gas field, and strikes targeting oil and gas facilities and other civilian infrastructure in Gulf Arab nations. The conflict has killed more than 2,000 people, shaken the global economy, sent oil prices surging, and endangered some of the world's busiest air corridors.

The latest threatened attacks could have cut electricity to wide swaths of people in Iran and around the Gulf and knocked out desalination plants that provide many desert nations with drinking water. There are also increasing concerns about the consequences of any strikes on nuclear facilities.

Trump said over the weekend that the U.S. would "obliterate" Iran's power plants unless the country releases its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours - a deadline that would have expired late Monday Washington time.

But on Monday morning, Trump wrote on his Truth Social site that the U.S. and Iran have had "very good and productive conversations" that could yield "a complete and total resolution" in the war.

Trump added that the suspension of his threat to attack power plants was "subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions."

Trump did not elaborate on the negotiations that had taken place, and the state-owned IRAN newspaper reported that Iran's Foreign Ministry denied that there have been any.

"Remarks by the U.S. president are part of efforts to reduce energy prices and buy time to implement his military plans" the newspaper said.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he spoke by phone with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan. Turkey has been an intermediary before in negotiations between Tehran and Washington.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi also said Monday that Egypt has delivered "clear messages" to Iran focusing on de-escalating the conflict, according to his office.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard promised retaliation if Trump made good on his threat, saying Iran would hit power plants in all areas that supply electricity to American bases, "as well as the economic, industrial and energy infrastructures in which Americans have shares."

Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said Iran would consider vital infrastructure across the region to be legitimate targets, including energy and desalination facilities critical for drinking water in Gulf nations.

Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency, which is close to the Revolutionary Guard, published a list of such facili-

ties, including the United Arab Emirates' nuclear power plant. Over the weekend, Iran launched missiles targeting Dimona in Israel, near a facility key to its long-suspected atomic weapons program. The Israeli facility wasn't damaged.

In the wake of Trump's turnaround, Fars and the Tasnim news agencies portrayed the American president as backing down.

"Since the start of the war, messages have been sent to Tehran by some mediators, but Iran's clear response has been that it will continue its defense until the required level of deterrence is achieved," Tasnim's report said. "With this kind of psychological warfare, neither the Strait of Hormuz will return to pre-war conditions nor will calm return to energy markets."

With the U.S. deploying more amphibious assault ships and additional Marines to the Middle East, Iran also warned against any ground attack.

Israel launched new attacks Monday on the Iranian capital, saying it had "begun a wide-scale wave of strikes" on infrastructure targets in Tehran without immediately elaborating. Explosions were heard in multiple locations in the afternoon. It wasn't immediately clear what had been hit.

The United Arab Emirates reported its air defense were attempting to intercept new incoming Iranian fire Monday afternoon.

Israel has also targeted the Iran-linked Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, while the group has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel.

In recent days, Israel has hit many apartment buildings in Beirut and bombed bridges over the Litani River in the Lebanon's south.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the targeting of bridges "a prelude to a ground invasion," while Egypt denounced the strikes as the "collective punishment" of civilians for the actions of Hezbollah.

Authorities say Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon and displaced more than 1 million.

Iran's death toll has surpassed 1,500, its Health Ministry has said. In Israel, 15 people have been killed by Iranian strikes. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, along with more than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states.

## Kuwait economy

He was quick to point out that if Iranian threat to the Strait of Hormuz continues once the war ends, this could delay the economic recovery of Kuwait and other countries in the region.

About the possible scenarios if the war continues for two months, he stressed the need to address the issue by transporting Kuwaiti oil via tankers that are not subject to Iranian threats while passing through the Strait of Hormuz, such as Chinese, Russian and Pakistani tankers.

He cited another possible scenario -- that Iran might impose a commission on oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz. "In this case, we might accept such option," he asserted.

He added that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly Kuwait and Qatar -- the most affected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz -- should partner with Saudi Arabia on a pipeline to transport Kuwaiti oil or Qatari gas to the Red Sea. He said Saudi Arabia could also partner with Oman on another pipeline to the Arabian Sea, thus, reducing the need for the Strait of Hormuz. He warned that the longer the project to link Gulf oil with a shared pipeline is delayed, the more vulnerable the regional economy will be to instability arising from political tensions in the region.

He said these steps require urgent decisions by the GCC countries, especially since the implementation could take several years. He empha-

sized that expediting implementation is beneficial for the economies of the Gulf states, which are most severely affected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

About the impact of the war on the global economy, he stated that the extent of the impact varies from country to country. He revealed that countries with diversified economies differ from those whose economies rely on primary sources, such as the Gulf states, including Kuwait. He underscored the need for Kuwait to continue the diversification of its sources of income in order to reduce dependence on oil revenues, hence, preventing the State budget from being affected by geopolitical or financial crises or decline in oil prices.

He said the countries with diversified economies will not be entirely affected by global crises, citing the diversified economy of the United States of America, which was minimally impacted during the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

He urged Kuwait and other countries in the region to capitalize on the current crisis to further diversify their economies. He added that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are among the least affected Gulf countries, as they have export routes for oil quantities that bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

He stated that the coming period may witness the postponement of some non-urgent projects included in the government's plan, especially since the focus will be on major priority projects that cannot be delayed. He thinks the Kuwaiti government might resort to borrowing to meet all needs if the war continues for a long period.

## Gov't agencies

He indicated that attendance at workplaces should not exceed 30 percent, with the implementation of the mandatory rotation system as per the needs of each department, while remote work is possible for the remaining employees. He said those with disabilities are exempted from the attendance system.

He affirmed that shift work is unchanged in vital sectors, taking into consideration the nature of their tasks. He said the evening shift is suspended in order to reduce on-site presence, improve safety measures and alleviate traffic congestion.

He went on to say that social considerations are factored in, particularly in aligning working hours with the schedule of schools, stressing that entities with special needs can implement work arrangements in accordance with their functions.

He added that the CSC monitors compliance through the automated attendance and departure systems, urging employees to adhere to the specified percentages, while emphasizing the importance of flexibility in dealing with humanitarian and exceptional cases.

He concluded that the current phase necessitates concerted efforts to ensure the continuity of the operations of State institutions and their ability to perform their duties efficiently regardless of the circumstances.

## Online transfers

He attributed the stability and continuity of the exchange market in Kuwait to the stability and strength of the Kuwaiti financial system and the Central Bank's robust oversight of the exchange sector. He also cited the important measures taken by the Central Bank last year to eliminate unlicensed exchange centers proven to have engaged in illegal activities.

Ali Al-Azbi, another official at an exchange company, stressed that all Kuwaiti exchange companies are oper-

ating normally. He ascribed this to the strength of the Kuwaiti economy and availability of a smart network that allows certain customers to make transfers online, indicating that expatriate workers who had no access to education were the ones transacting in person as they cannot complete transfers through their phones.

He said that the initial days of the war witnessed some increased activity and near-congestion, but after the first week, the money transfer activity began to subside due to customers' confidence in the continuity and strength of the Kuwaiti economy and its financial system, which is wisely managed by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in addition to the stability of the security situation in the country.

An official at Wahba Sabri Exchange Company said that before Eid al-Fitr and during the Eid holidays up to the present, money transfers through exchange companies have been proceeding smoothly and easily.

He pointed out that although the war has been going on for almost a month, exchange companies in Kuwait are operating normally, so they have not witnessed any rush or unusual congestion due to the confidence of all customers in the continuity of transfers even in the most difficult circumstances.

He emphasized that most money transfers are processed through the exchange company applications, which provided customers with online transfer services, thus, eliminating overcrowding before and during the crisis. He praised the role of the Central Bank, which regulated money transfer transactions.

He added that the real crisis that local exchange companies faced was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of exchange companies for several months, resulting in accumulated rent arrears, and these companies were obligated to pay their employees' salaries.

He asserted that the measures taken by the Ministry of Interior and the Central Bank of Kuwait led to higher customer confidence in Kuwaiti exchange offices.

In addition, banking expert Fahad Al-Gharib revealed that expatriate remittances reached around KD3.8 billion in the first nine months of 2025, compared to about KD3.15 billion in the first nine months of 2024 and KD2.97 billion in the first nine months of 2023.

He pointed out that the significant growth in the value of expatriate worker remittances in recent years is due to the strength and resilience of the Kuwaiti economy and the stability of the labor market, as well as the strength of the Kuwaiti Dinar.

He said the banking and exchange sectors are operating at normal rates during the current crisis, particularly since the Central Bank of Kuwait intensified its oversight mechanisms for exchange centers in such circumstances.

He added the local banking institutions, including banks and major exchange companies, have implemented numerous contingency plans to ensure the continuity of transfer operations and the uninterrupted provision of all services.

He affirmed that the local banking sector has systems and technologies that enable it to confidently provide services under normal and challenging conditions.

He asserted that the banking and exchange sectors rely on Kuwait's robust digital infrastructure, which facilitates banking and transfer services under various circumstances. "This is further enhanced by the robust and user-friendly 'Wamd' automated payment system, which allows 24-hour transfers between bank accounts, as well as the availability of ATMs in most areas, cooperative societies and parallel markets," he concluded.

## INTERNATIONAL

## America

**Trump places statue of Columbus near WH:** A statue of Christopher Columbus has been placed on the grounds of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House, the latest effort by President Donald Trump's administration to recognize the controversial explorer.

The statue is a replica of one that was tossed into Baltimore's harbor in 2020 during Trump's first term at a time of nationwide protests against institutional racism.

Trump endorses a traditional view of Columbus as a leader of the 1492 mission seen as the unofficial beginning of European colonization in the Americas and the development of the modern economic and political order. But in recent years, Columbus also has been recognized as a primary example of Western Europe's conquest of the New World, its resources and its native people.

"In this White House, Christopher Columbus is a hero, and President Trump will ensure he's honored as such for generations to come," the White House posted on X.

"We are delighted the statue has found a place where it can peacefully shine and be protected," said John Pica, a Maryland lobbyist and president of the Italian American Organizations United, which owns the statue and agreed to loan it to the federal government for placement at or near the White House. (AP)



Trump

**Hawaii floods leave 2,000 without power:** More than 2,000 people remained without power Sunday afternoon after Hawaii suffered its worst flooding in more than 20 years when heavy rains fell across the islands.

Heavy rains fell on soil already saturated by downpours from a winter storm a week ago. Raging waters lifted homes and cars, causing an expected \$1 billion in damages. The storm prompted evacuation orders for 5,500 people north of Honolulu - though they were later lifted - and more than 200 people were rescued from the

rising waters. No deaths have been reported as of yet. Molly Pierce, spokesperson for Oahu's Department of Emergency Management, said Sunday afternoon.

By Sunday afternoon, Hawaiian Electric restored power to about 1,200 people in Waiialua on the North Shore of Oahu, according to the company. Customers' power was proactively turned off Friday because of the flooding.

Crews continue to assess the damage and make repairs, and Hawaiian Electric expects to return power to 2,000 more people later Sunday. In Maui County, about 100 people were without power Sunday afternoon, and all major outages were addressed on Hawaii Island, according to the company.

The worst of the storms appear to be over, Hawaii meteorologist Matthew Foster told The Associated Press.

By Sunday afternoon, the weather shifted from widespread showers to scattered rain from Oahu, Maui County to Hawaii Island, Foster said. Less than 5 inches (13 cm) of rain is expected for Hawaii Island, with between 1 to 2 inches (3-5 cm) in other areas. (AP)

**Former FBI Director Mueller dies:** Robert S. Mueller III, the FBI director who transformed the nation's premier law enforcement agency into a terrorism-fighting force after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and who later became special counsel in charge of investigating ties between Russia and Donald Trump's presidential campaign, has died. He was 81.

"With deep sadness, we are sharing the news that Bob passed away" on Friday night, his family said in a statement Saturday. "His family asks that their privacy be respected."

At the FBI, Mueller set about almost immediately overhauling the bureau's mission to meet the law enforcement needs of the 21st century, beginning his 12-year tenure just one week before the Sept. 11 attacks and serving across presidents of both political parties.

The cataclysmic event instantaneously switched the bureau's top priority from solving domestic crime to preventing terrorism, a shift that imposed an almost impossibly difficult standard on Mueller and the rest of the federal government: preventing 99 out of 100 terrorist plots wasn't good enough.

Later, he was special counsel in the Justice Department's investigation into whether the Trump campaign illegally coordinated with Russia to sway the outcome of the 2016 presidential race. (AP)



An Air Canada jet sits on the runway at LaGuardia Airport on March 23, after colliding with a Port Authority aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicle in New York. (AP)

## 2 killed in collision between jet, fire truck at NY's LaGuardia Airport

Two people were killed and several others badly hurt when an Air Canada regional jet struck a fire truck on a runway while landing at New York's LaGuardia Airport late Sunday night, officials said.

The pilot and copilot were killed in the collision, which crushed the nose of the aircraft, while 41 passengers and crew members were taken to area hospitals, some with serious injuries. Most have since been released from treatment, au-

thorities said.

Two Port Authority employees who were traveling in the fire truck suffered injuries that were not believed to be life-threatening, said Kathryn Garcia, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the airport. The pilot and copilot were both based out of Canada, Garcia said during a news conference early Monday.

The airport will remain closed

until at least 2 p.m. Monday to facilitate the investigation, which is being led by the National Transportation Safety Board.

The fire truck was traveling across the runway to respond to a separate incident aboard a United Airlines flight, whose pilot had reported "an issue with odor," said Garcia, who deferred additional questions about the sequence of events leading up to the crash to the NTSB. (AP)

## US vice presidents can be vulnerable: Simmons

# Dems sharpen criticism of Vance as they look past Trump to 2028 presidential campaign

FAIRFIELD, Ohio, March 23, (AP) - Although US President Donald Trump is the top Democratic nemesis, some of the party's most ambitious leaders are increasingly looking past him and at Vice President JD Vance.

In the latest example, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear traveled to Vance's home county in Ohio, where on Saturday night he said the vice president had abandoned the communities that he wrote about in the memoir that made him famous.

Beshear said "Hillbilly Elegy," which detailed Vance's hardscrabble upbringing, had "trafficked in tired stereotypes."

"His book 'Hillbilly Elegy' was really hillbilly hate," the governor said at a Democratic fundraiser in Butler County. "It is poverty tourism, because he ain't from Appalachia."

The broadside was not only a sign of Beshear's own potential presidential aspirations, but a reflection of Vance's status as the Republican heir apparent to the coalition that twice elected Trump to the White House.

"With every day that passes, we get closer to a day when Donald Trump is no longer president. And we need to prepare for that day," said Lis Smith, a Democratic strategist. "Right now, JD Vance is a clear front-runner for the 2028 nomination. And so we should begin defining him - not in 2027, not in

2028 - but today."

Vance spokesperson Taylor Van Kirk brushed off Beshear's criticism.

"Every time Andy Beshear attacks the vice president to try to get himself publicity, he ends up humiliating himself in the process, but maybe that's something he's into?" she said.

US Rep. Ro Khanna of California was among the first Democrats to begin focusing on Vance last year. Khanna stopped at the City Club of Cleveland and Yale University, where he and Vance studied law, and gave speeches that attempted to cast Vance as more extreme than Trump.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, another potential presidential contender in 2028, singled out Vance in November while making the argument that the Trump administration did not care about working people.

"At least with Donald Trump, he's transparent about that," Shapiro said. "JD Vance is a total phony."

Some Democrats have coalesced around California Gov. Gavin Newsom as a strong candidate because of his aggressive strategy in going after Republicans.

He coined the nickname "JD 'Just Dance' Vance" on social media, and he has mocked the vice president's appearance, saying Vance "grew a beard and lost his spine."

Smith, the strategist who led Pete



US Vice President JD Vance salutes as he walks off Air Force Two on March 18, at Joint Base Andrews, Md., returning from a day trip to Waterford Township, Mich. (AP)

Buttigieg's 2020 presidential campaign and still works with the former Biden administration transportation secretary, said every line of criticism of Vance is an audition.

"There's definitely value in taking on Vance to show Democrats, hey, this could be me on the debate stage against him," said Smith.

The vice president was born and

raised in Butler County's Middletown, and he rose to prominence with the publication of "Hillbilly Elegy" in 2016. The book earned Vance a reputation as someone who could help explain Trump's appeal in middle America, especially among the working class, rural white voters who helped Trump win the presidency.

Vance carried that reputation to the US Senate, winning election in 2022, and later to the vice presidency. That same background is likely to be central to any future presidential run - and it is precisely what Democrats are now working to undercut.

At Saturday's Democratic fundraiser, the mere mention of Vance's name drew a chorus of boos from the audience.

"I don't think he's got the magic that everybody looks at with Trump," said Theresa Vacheresse, a retired physician and business owner who attended the event. "I think when Trump is gone, the Democrats might have a chance. My god, I hope so."

The focus on Vance is not unusual for a vice president widely seen as a potential future nominee, particularly one as young as 41. Republicans went after Kamala Harris early in her tenure under President Joe Biden to undermine her political future.

Jamal Simmons, Harris' communications director in 2022 and 2023, said vice presidents can be vulnerable.

"The party is built to defend the president more than it is the vice president," he said. "The vice president's kind of out there on their own, to defend themselves, and find friends where they can."

Republicans, including Vance, frequently tied Harris to some of the Democratic administration's most po-

litically difficult issues, such as immigration and border security.

"Being vice president is a very mixed blessing," said David Axelrod, who was a top adviser to Democratic President Barack Obama. "You often don't have the assets of the president, but you inherit all of the president's record. The good, the bad, and the ugly."

Beshear is the rare Democrat to lead a red state, and he is positioning himself as someone who can reach voters who have tuned out his party.

He said Democrats can "actually go and win back those voters that JD Vance is so condescending to" if they stay focused on Americans' basic needs such as affordable health care and public safety.

"We've gotta start talking to people and not at them," he said. "That's how I won counties in eastern Kentucky that normally vote for Republicans by large margins - including Breathitt County. That's the county JD Vance pretends to be from. Donald Trump won it by 59 points. I won it by 22 points the year earlier."

The audience appeared delighted with Beshear's message.

"I think he's first-rate," said Mark Kaplan, who lives in Butler County. "What he's got is compassion, empathy, charisma and intellect, but he's also down-to-earth."

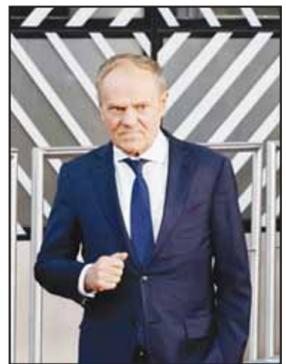
# Poland long suspected Hungary shared EU Council details with Russia: PM Tusk

WARSAW, March 23, (Agencies) - Poland's prime minister Sunday said Poland "had our suspicions" in response to a Washington Post report that Hungary's government has for years provided Russia with detailed information from EU Council meetings.

The Post, citing several current and former European security officials, found that the Hungarian government under Viktor Orbán has long offered Moscow access to sensitive discussions within the European Union.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó regularly calls during breaks in EU council meetings to provide his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, with "direct reports on what was discussed" and possible solutions, according to the Post report.

"The news that Orbán's people inform Moscow about EU Council meetings in every detail shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone," Poland Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on X. "We've had our suspicions about that for a long time. That's one reason why I take the floor only when strictly necessary and say just as much as necessary."



Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk prepares to take his place prior to a group photo at an EU summit in Brussels on March 19. (AP)

Szjijártó on X called Tusk's comments "fake news."

"Fake news as always. You are telling lies in order to support Tisza Party to have a pro-war puppet government

in Hungary. You will not have it!"

Tisza is Hungary's main opposition party that is currently ahead in the polls three weeks before parliamentary elections. Relations between Poland and Hungary have been tense over Budapest's blocking of EU aid to Ukraine and its close ties to Russia.

### Also:

**MOSCOW:** Russian forces have launched strikes on energy infrastructure and military-related targets in Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry said Sunday.

According to the ministry, the strikes targeted key facilities within Ukraine's fuel and energy sector, as well as sites used for the preparation and launch of long-range unmanned aerial vehicles.

The raid also struck temporary deployment sites of Ukrainian armed formations and foreign mercenaries across 144 locations, the ministry added.

In addition, Russian air defense systems reportedly downed eight guided aerial bombs and 244 fixed-wing drones over the past 24 hours, the ministry said.



Former French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin arrives at the Elysee Palace on May 14, 2017 in Paris. (AP)

## Grégoire becomes Paris' new mayor

# French ex-prime minister Jospin dies

PARIS, March 23, (AP) - French former prime minister Lionel Jospin, who gave France its 35-hour work week and then withdrew from politics after leading France's Socialist Party to an earth-shaking presidential election defeat against far-right firebrand Jean-Marie Le Pen, has died. He was 88.

His death was confirmed by the current prime minister, Sébastien Lecornu, after the national news agency, Agence France-Presse, reported that Jospin died on Sunday, citing his family.

Lecornu said in a post on X that Jospin "served France with constancy, rigor and a sense of responsibility" and that "his actions, guided by a certain vision of social progress and republican values, leave a lasting mark and a model of commitment."

A touse of white curls and thick-rimmed glasses gave Jospin the trappings of the economics professor he was before being unexpectedly named as head of the Socialist Party in 1981 by newly elected President Francois Mitterrand.

Untarnished by allegations of corruption, Jospin re-established cred-



French socialist candidate for Paris mayoral election, Emmanuel Grégoire celebrates after he won the second round of France's municipal elections in Paris, France, on March 22, 2026. (AP)

ibility for the Socialists after bribery and fraud scandals led to their downfall in the 1993 parliamentary elections.

He became prime minister in 1997,

holding the post until 2002, leading a broad left-wing government under French conservative President Jacques Chirac in a power-sharing arrangement dubbed "cohabitation."

As prime minister, Jospin resisted shifting the French left toward free-market reforms embraced at the same time in Britain.

### Also:

**PARIS:** Emmanuel Grégoire, a Socialist little known to the French public, was elected mayor of Paris in a runoff vote Sunday, succeeding fellow party member Anne Hidalgo.

Soon after claiming victory, Grégoire, 48, took a city bike through the streets of Paris toward City Hall, echoing his promise to make the French capital greener.

Grégoire beat out prominent conservative contender Rachida Dati, who acknowledged her defeat after partial results were made public.

The race for Paris mayor was part of France's second round of municipal elections. Sunday's vote showed clear gains for the traditional left and right, and one major win for the far right in the French Riviera city of Nice.

## Europe

**Ambulances set on fire in London:** Four ambulances belonging to a charity in London were set on fire early Monday morning in London, in what British police are investigating as an antisemitic hate crime.

No one was injured in the overnight attack, which shattered windows in nearby homes.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the "deeply shocking antisemitic arson attack."

"My thoughts are with the community who are waking up this morning to this horrific news," he said.

Officers were called to Golders Green, after receiving reports of a fire, the Metropolitan Police force said.

Four ambulances belonging to Hatzola Northwest, a volunteer organization that provides emergency medical response, were damaged, according to the London Fire Brigade.

Multiple gas cylinders on the vehicles exploded, causing windows to break in an adjacent apartment block. Nearby homes were evacuated as a precautionary measure. (AP)

**Slovenia's liberals, populists neck and neck:** Slovenia's governing liberals and opposition right-wing populists were neck and neck after a highly contested parliamentary election on Sunday, near-complete preliminary results showed, heralding a period of political



Burnt ambulances in a car park at Golders Green in London on March 23. (AP)

uncertainty in the small European Union country.

Prime Minister Robert Golob's center-left Freedom Movement won 28.5% of the votes while the right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party, or SDS, led by ex-premier Janez Jansa - an admirer of U.S. President Donald Trump - had 28.1%, the State Election Commission said after counting some 99% of the ballots.

The practically equal result means that none of the main parties will have a majority in the 90-member parliament and that whoever will form a future government will depend on smaller parties that will act as kingmakers. It was not immediately clear what shape possible future alliances might take. (AP)

Petro consistently denied allegations

## DEA names Colombia prez 'priority target' as US prosecutors probe ties to drug traffickers

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP): Colombian President Gustavo Petro has been designated a "priority target" by the US Drug Enforcement Administration as federal prosecutors in New York probe his alleged ties to drug traffickers, according to people familiar with the matter and records seen by The Associated Press.

DEA records show Petro has surfaced in multiple investigations dating to 2022, many based on interviews with confidential informants. The alleged crimes the DEA has investigated include his possible dealings with Mexico's Sinaloa cartel and a scheme to leverage his "total peace" plan to benefit prominent traffickers who contributed to his presidential campaign. The records also suggest the use of law enforcement to smuggle cocaine and fentanyl through Colombian ports.

The "priority target" label is reserved for suspects DEA deems to have a "significant impact" on the drug trade. It's unclear when the DEA gave Petro that designation.

Petro denied all ties to drug traffick-

ers and maintained he never accepted their funds during his campaign. Writing on X, he argued that US legal proceedings would ultimately dismantle accusations from the Colombian far right, a group he claims is actually the one involved with traffickers.

Colombia's Embassy in Washington downplayed what it called "unverified" and anonymous reports of preliminary law enforcement investigations against Petro.

"The reported insinuations have no legal or factual basis," the embassy said in a statement.

In recent months, prosecutors in Brooklyn and Manhattan have been questioning drug traffickers about their ties to Petro and specifically about allegations the Colombian president's representatives solicited bribes to block their extradition to the United States, according to one of the people who weren't authorized to discuss the ongoing inquiry and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The person said it wasn't clear



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro speaks after voting during legislative elections in Bogotá, Colombia on March 8. (AP)

whether federal prosecutors have implicated Petro in any crime.

The investigation is focusing at least in part on allegations that representa-

tives of Petro solicited bribes from drug traffickers at the Colombian jail La Picota in exchange for a promise that they not be extradited to the US,

one of the people said.

Petro has consistently denied allegations of drug trafficking, particularly after Trump labeled him an "illegal drug leader" and the Treasury Department sanctioned him in late 2025 for alleged ties to the trade without offering evidence.

US federal prosecutors declined to comment. The DEA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The federal inquiry was reported earlier Friday by The New York Times.

The inquiries into Petro are in the early stages, and it is not clear whether they will result in charges, according to another person familiar with the matter, adding the White House has had no role in the investigations.

The DEA records reviewed by the AP are based in part on tips from confidential sources that point to Petro's possible involvement with a range of criminal groups that have dominated the South American drug trade for years. Those include Mexico's Sinaloa cartel as well as the Cartel de los soles,

or Cartel of the Suns, a term used to describe a loose network of corrupt, high-ranking military officers in neighboring Venezuela.

The records also cite a 2024 interview with an unnamed source who claimed Petro is utilizing former campaign aides and officials from state-run oil company Ecopetrol to launder presidential funds into foreign countries for Petro's use upon completion of his presidency.

Ecopetrol President Ricardo Roa vehemently denied the allegations in a statement to AP, saying they "lacked all reality or logic."

Petro, a former rebel leader, soared into office promising to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels and reallocate state resources to addressing entrenched poverty.

A leftist politician known for winding sometimes incoherent speeches, he has regularly criticized the Trump administration over its support for Israel, bombing of drug boats in the Caribbean and likened the White House migration crackdown to "Nazi" tactics.

### Asia

**First session of new parliament opens in Laos:** The Lao National Assembly's 10th legislature opened its inaugural session on Monday, convening top leaders and representatives from across the country to set the agenda for key national priorities.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, President of the Lao National Assembly (NA) Xaysomphone Phomvihane highlighted the session's focus on electing key state leaders and addressing major national priorities.

Xaysomphone outlined the 10th legislature's priorities during its inaugural session, highlighting five years of progress and an ambitious agenda for 2026-2030.

During the session, **Thongloun Sisoulith**, general secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Central Committee, was elected President of Laos. Sonexay Siphandone, a politburo member of the LPRP's Central Committee, was elected Prime Minister. The session also elected the Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister, and Vice Presidents of the National Assembly. (Xinhua)



Sisoulith

**'Kim re-elected as president of State Affairs':** The Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Sunday re-elected Kim Jong Un as president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported Monday.

At the first session of the 15th SPA, Jo Yong Won was elected as chairman of the Standing Committee of the SPA, and Pak Thae Song was elected as premier of the Cabinet, according to the KCNA. (Xinhua)

**S.Korea's wind turbine fire kills 3:** Three maintenance workers died in a fire at a wind turbine in Yeongdeok county, North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, Yonhap News Agency reported Monday.

The North Gyeongsang Provincial Police Agency announced on Monday that three maintenance workers affiliated with a service company were confirmed dead in the fire. Authorities are currently recovering the bodies. (Xinhua)

**2 dead in southwest China road accident:** A road accident in southwest China's Guizhou Province left two students dead and 14 others injured early Monday morning, local authorities said.

The accident took place around 7 am in Hezhang County, Bijie City. All the injured are now in stable condition after being taken to the hospital for treatment. (Xinhua)

## 50 years after Argentina's bloody coup, families still search for and bury the disappeared

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, March 23, (AP): Beneath a leaden sky in a municipal cemetery, relatives of Eduardo Ramos and Alicia Cerrotta carry the two urns containing their remains. They lean down to kiss the wooden caskets before resting them in a mausoleum in Argentina's northern province of Tucuman.

"We finally know where they are," one of them whispers.

The burial marked the closing of a 50-year wound. Eduardo, a 21-year-old journalist and poet, and his wife Alicia, a 27-year-old psychologist, were kidnapped by Argentine military forces in the months following the 1976 coup that ushered in a bloody dictatorship. Human rights organizations estimate 30,000 people were disappeared by the regime, while official figures place the number at around 8,000.

Following Argentina's return to democracy in 1983, the state prosecuted those responsible for the crimes. Yet, the search for victims' remains has largely fallen to relatives, activists and forensic experts.

The effort has been further hindered by the military's refusal to provide information about the victims' whereabouts and, more recently, by budget cuts to human rights programs ordered by libertarian President Javier Milei.

"Fifty years after the coup, 'where are they?' remains a very relevant question," said Sol Hourcade, a lawyer for the Center for Legal and Social Studies representing plaintiffs in



Patricia Ramos, center, cries during the burial of her brother Jose Eduardo Ramos and his wife Alicia Dora Cerrotta, who were kidnapped and disappeared by the dictatorship in 1976, at the cemetery in Tafi Viejo on March 5, 2026. (AP)

crimes against humanity trials.

Eduardo and Alicia bore the label of the "disappeared" until 2011, when an independent team of archaeologists discovered their remains together with those of another hundred people in the so-called Pozo de Vargas, a nearly 40-meter-deep (130-foot-deep) pit once used to supply water to steam locomotives.

The military had turned the well into a mass grave, dumping the bodies of

students, political activists and rural workers deemed subversive, and covering them with layers of earth, stones and debris.

The exhumation and identification process took years. In early March, authorities in Tucuman handed over the incomplete remains of Eduardo and Alicia to their families.

"When I saw the urns, I realized that for us this means a final farewell," said Ana Ramos, Eduardo's sister. She was

13 when she last saw him and buried him at 63. "People have no idea what it means when the remains are returned. At first, it's very overwhelming, but it's the most liberating thing that has happened to us."

Runaway inflation and escalating political violence by leftist and far-right armed groups paved the way for the coup against President María Estela Martínez on March 24, 1976. Martínez, the third wife of former populist President Juan Domingo Perón, ascended to power following his death, leading a country shaped by the populist movement he founded, Peronism.

A military junta led by Jorge Rafael Videla, Emilio Eduardo Massera and Orlando Ramón Agosti seized power. A defining feature of their rule was the forced disappearance of people deemed subversive.

"There was no other solution: we agreed it was the price to pay to win the war, and we needed it to be evident so that society wouldn't realize," Videla told journalist Ceferino Reato in his final interview before dying in prison in 2013 while serving a life sentence for crimes against humanity.

Dissidents were abducted and taken to clandestine detention centers, where they were tortured and held in inhumane conditions. Many were later "transferred" - a euphemism for execution by firing squad or so-called death flights, in which prisoners were sedated, loaded onto aircraft and thrown alive into the Río de la Plata.

### Subcontinent

**'1 killed in Pakistan cross-border attacks':** One individual has been confirmed dead and another injured due to Pakistan's cross-border attacks in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar province on Sunday, deputy spokesman for the Afghan government Hamdullah Fitrat said Sunday night.

According to the official, the Pakistani artillery's mortar mine struck Shanib area in Nari district on Sunday morning, killing one person and injuring another.

Pakistani artillery also targeted a vehicle in the eastern Paktika's Shakin district but left no casualties, the official asserted.

Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to have a ceasefire during the three-day Eid al-Fitr holiday. (Xinhua)

**Over 3M Afghan refugees return home in 1 year:** More than 3 million Afghan refugees have returned to their homeland Afghanistan over the past one year, spokesman for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation Abdul Mutalib Haqqani said.

"A total of 3,114,107 refugees had returned to their country Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye in the year 1404 (in Persian calendar, which started from March 20, 2025 and ended on March 20, 2026). The year 1405 started on March 21, 2026," the official Radio and Television of Afghanistan (RTA) quoted Haqqani on Saturday night as saying.

The Afghan government, in addition to providing some 4 billion Afghani (62,992,126 US dollars) in cash to the returnees at the crossing points and providing temporary shelters, has transported them to their home provinces, RTA reported. (Xinhua)

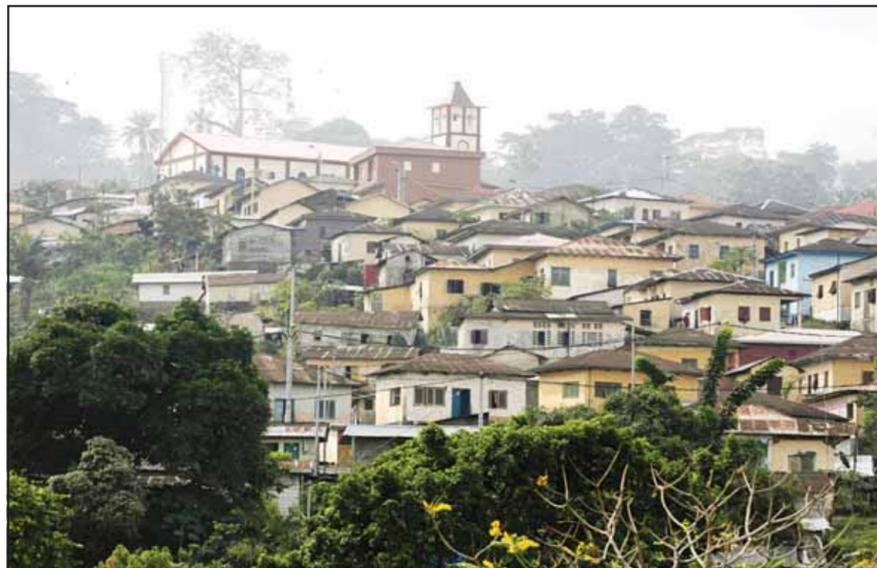


Taliban security personnel guard people carrying the remains of victims of a Monday airstrike on a drug rehabilitation hospital, ahead of burial in Kabul, Afghanistan, on March 18. (AP)

**Sri Lanka seeks unified system:** Sri Lanka has initiated efforts to develop a centralized national database on missing persons, partnering with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to address persistent gaps in documentation and coordination.

The initiative comes amid concerns over the lack of a single, reliable source of information, with records currently dispersed across multiple institutions. This fragmentation has limited the state's ability to maintain a consistent and verifiable account of cases.

Minister of Justice and National Integration Harshana Nanayakkara informed parliament that resolving these inconsistencies remains a priority, as the absence of a consolidated system has posed a long-standing challenge for authorities and affected families. (Xinhua)



An aerial view of Rebola Neighborhood, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on Jan 30, 2015. (AP)

## Secretive deal leaves deportees from US stuck in Equatorial Guinea with 'no more hope'

DAKAR, Senegal, March 23, (AP): When a US immigration judge told a 28-year old refugee from East Africa that he was free to leave detention in California after 13 months, he was overjoyed. Though an asylum request was denied, the judge ruled he could not be deported home because it would put him in danger.

"He told me: 'Welcome to the US,'" the refugee told The Associated Press, which saw his legal documents. "You are now protected by the US law, so you can leave the center, work and stay in this country."

But he was never freed, and instead was later handcuffed and put on a flight to Equatorial Guinea, an authoritarian petrostate in West Africa that signed a secretive deal with the Trump administration and has become a transit hub for deported migrants. It holds him and others in detention, and has no asylum policy.

He requested anonymity for fear of repercussions, saying he fled his country after being beaten, persecuted and imprisoned because of his ethnicity.

He is among 29 people deported to Equatorial Guinea, which the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jeanne Shaheen, has called "one of the most corrupt governments in the world."

The first American pope, Leo XIV, who has criticized the Trump administration's treatment of migrants as "extremely disrespectful," is visiting Equatorial Guinea in April.



Local security agents walk through a plaza in Sippopo, a luxury complex constructed to host the upcoming 17th African Union Summit, outside Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, June 28, 2011. (AP)

At least seven African nations have signed deals with the US to facilitate deportations of third-country nationals, which legal experts said are effectively a legal loophole for the US. Most deportees received legal protection from US judges shielding them against being returned to their home countries, their lawyers said.

AP previously interviewed a gay asylum-seeker from Morocco who was deported to Cameroon and, believing she had no choice, agreed to be

returned to her home country, where homosexuality is illegal.

In a phone interview, the 28-year-old refugee said authorities in Equatorial Guinea pressure him to return home even though he lodged an asylum application there, which AP has seen.

"They told us there is no any asylum or any protection in this country for us," he said. "So the best option is to leave the country as soon as possible."

But he said returning to a country ravaged by ethnic conflict was "not an option."

The US is deporting people to third countries "to circumvent laws that forbid sending a person to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened," said Meredith Yoon, litigation director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, who has helped deportees to Equatorial Guinea.

She verified significant parts of the 28-year-old asylum-seeker's account.

"Once deported, these individuals face impossible alternatives: indefinite detention without access to counsel, or forced deportation to the very countries they fled from," she said.

The 29 people deported to Equatorial Guinea were from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mauritania, Angola, Congo, Chad, Georgia, Ghana and Nigeria, according to their visiting lawyer, who requested anonymity given the country's human rights record. He said authorities did not allow him to see most of them.

## Madagascar orders lie detector tests for candidates applying to be ministers

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar, March 23, (Agencies): Anyone applying to become a minister in Madagascar's new government will be subjected to lie detector tests to root out those who are corrupt, the country's military leader said.

President Michael Randrianirina, who took power in a coup in the Indian Ocean island in October, said Madagascar had acquired a polygraph machine and a specialist to operate it to vet new government ministers.

"We will know who is corrupt and who can help us," Randrianirina said. "We are not looking for someone who is 100% clean, but someone who is more than 60% clean."

Randrianirina, a colonel in an elite army unit, ousted President Andry Rajoelina after a weeklong uprising last year by mainly young Madagascans frustrated with the lack of government services and opportunities in a nation of around 32 million that is beset by poverty.

Randrianirina fired his entire Cabinet and dissolved the government last week. He appointed a new prime minister last week.

"After taking the polygraph test, candidates who fail will not proceed to an interview," Randrianirina told reporters. "Those who pass the polygraph



CAPSAT military unit commander Col. Michael Randrianirina is seen in Antananarivo, Madagascar on Oct 14, 2025. (AP)

test will have an interview with me and the prime minister."

Randrianirina has promised to hold new elections within two years of him taking power.

### Also:

**CONAKRY:** Legislative and municipal elections in Guinea will be held on May 24 across the country, said a presi-

dential decree published on Friday.

The decree calls on voters in all relevant constituencies to cast their ballots in both elections.

Polling stations will be open nationwide from 0700 GMT to 1830 GMT. In accordance with Article 79 of Guinea's Electoral Code, voting will be conducted using a single ballot, the decree said.



شركة الاستثمارات الوطنية  
National Investments Company

## National Investments Company Successfully Leads Milestone IPO of Trolley General Trading Company on Boursa Kuwait



**Mr. Bashar Khan**  
Managing Director - Alternatives &  
Investment Banking Division

"We are proud to have spearheaded one of the most significant IPOs in the local market. This transaction is a testament to the trust our clients place in NIC's ability to navigate complex regulatory landscapes and engage global capital. Our dedicated team successfully managed every facet of this deal – from structuring and marketing to final allocation – ensuring a seamless transition to the Premier Market."

### A Legacy of Market Leadership

This transaction adds to NIC's storied track record of high-profile listings, following the successful market debuts of Boursa Kuwait Securities Company, Ali Al Ghanim Sons Automotive Company, Beyout Holding Company and Action Energy Company. This latest achievement reaffirms NIC's position as the premier investment house for companies seeking sophisticated capital market solutions in the region.

National Investments Company ("NIC") announced the successful completion of the private placement and subsequent listing of Trolley General Trading Company ("Trolley") on the Premier Market of Boursa Kuwait.

The offering was met with overwhelming demand from both local and international institutional investors, with subscription coverage reaching 15.2x of the initially offered shares and total demand hitting KWD 777 million. Trading of Trolley shares is

scheduled to commence on 25 March 2026.

### Strategic Execution & Unprecedented Demand

The offering included a secondary sale of a 35% stake in the issuing company, with the offered stake increased from 30% to address unprecedented demand. Acting as the Exclusive Listing and Investment Advisor, Joint Global Coordinator, Joint Bookrunner and Sole Subscription

Agent, NIC managed the transaction from inception to execution.

The offering price was determined through a structured book building process, during which participating qualified investors were invited to submit their demand across three price levels proposed by the selling shareholders, indicating both the number of shares sought and the corresponding price. Following the close of the demand collection period, the Joint Global Coordi-

nators and Bookrunners, in coordination with the Selling Shareholders, assessed aggregate demand and pricing sensitivity to determine the final offering price.

The entire subscription process, including investor registration, submission of demand forms, issuance of provisional allocation notices, submission of subscription forms and issuance of final allocation notices was conducted exclusively through NIC's digital subscription platform, ensuring

efficiency, transparency and a streamlined investor experience.

Despite the offering taking place during the holy month of Ramadan, and amid the prevailing global geopolitical conditions and challenges associated with ongoing tensions, the transaction attracted strong participation from a broad base of investors, spanning both institutional and retail segments, reflecting sustained confidence in the company and the offering structure.

The final offering price was set at 618 fils per share, resulting in a total allocation of KWD 777 million to qualified investors. This success highlights Trolley's robust business model as a leading convenience retailer across Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Khan further extended his gratitude to the Capital Markets Authority ("CMA"), Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Company ("KCC") for their professional cooperation, which ensured the efficient execution of the listing.

### Unlocking global connectivity from Kuwait

## Jazeera Airways reopens Dubai gateway

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Jazeera Airways today announced the resumption of flights to Dubai, marking a significant step in reconnecting Kuwait to one of the world's most important aviation hubs and unlocking seamless access to onward destinations across the globe.

As a key gateway for international travel, Dubai plays a vital role in linking passengers to major markets across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The reinstatement of this route strengthens Jazeera Airways' network and provides travelers with renewed flexibility and expanded travel opportunities during a time when connectivity is more important than ever.

With Dubai serving as a global crossroads, passengers can now benefit from smoother connections to a wide range of destinations, whether for business, family reunions, or essential travel.

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



"The resumption of flights to Dubai represents more than just the return of a route – it is the reopening of a critical gateway for our customers. Dubai is one of the world's most connected cities, and restoring access to it enables our passengers to seamlessly reach destinations far beyond the region. As we con-

tinue to operate under unique circumstances, our focus remains on ensuring that people stay connected safely, reliably, and with greater choice."

Operating via Qaisumah Airport (AQI) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jazeera Airways continues to maintain essential air links for Kuwait, ensuring continuity of travel despite ongoing regional challenges. Passengers will be transported overland from Kuwait to Qaisumah before boarding onward flights to Dubai.

The addition of Dubai further enhances Jazeera Airways' growing network, which includes destinations across Egypt, India, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, and the UAE. The airline remains committed to progressively expanding its network and restoring key routes that enable passengers to reconnect with the world.

Bookings are now open through [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App.

### Mamoun Hmidan: Travel demand shifting, not slowing in Middle East

**Q**uestion: How is Wego monitoring the immediate impact of the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East on travel demand, search behaviour, and booking patterns on your platform?

**A**nswer: At Wego, the #1 travel app and largest online travel marketplace in the MENA region, we track real-time shifts across millions of daily searches to understand how traveller behaviour evolves during periods of uncertainty.

What we're seeing is not a slowdown in intent, but a recalibration of travel decisions. Historically, this translates into three key patterns: shorter booking windows, a temporary dip in demand to impacted destinations, and a noticeable shift toward alternative regional and international routes perceived as stable.

From an aviation perspective, we're also closely observing how airlines respond through capacity adjustments, route optimization, and fare recalibration which are often the earliest indicators of broader market sentiment.

Our role is to translate this data into clarity for travellers, ensuring they have access to accurate, real-time information, transparent pricing, and flexible options so they can continue to travel with confidence.

**Q**: What are you hearing directly from travellers and travel partners about their perceptions of safety and travel intentions during this period?

**A**: What we're seeing across Wego's platform is that travellers are becoming more deliberate, not hesitant. Travel isn't stopping, it's shifting.

Most users are not cancelling outright; instead, they are adjusting destinations, delaying departures, or opting for routes that offer greater predictability. This reflects a broader trend where flexibility has become the primary currency of travel.

On the supply side, airline partners are responding quickly, refining schedules, introducing more flexible policies, and maintaining competitive pricing to sustain demand. Hotels are also adapting with more lenient cancellation terms to reassure travellers.

Importantly, the Middle East continues to demonstrate strong operational resilience. Its robust infrastructure and connectivity help maintain traveller confidence, even during periods of volatility.

**Q**: Do you expect travel demand to rebound quickly once stability returns, and what indicators are you watching for signs of recovery?

**A**: The Middle East has consistently shown that travel demand is highly resilient and quick to rebound once stability returns.

The first signal we typically see is a sharp recovery in search volumes across key origin markets, followed closely by improvements in booking conversion rates. From there, we look at more structural indicators such as airline capacity returning to market, fare stabilization, and the gradual extension of booking windows.

It's also important to note that a significant portion of travel demand in the region is anchored by visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business travel, and religious journeys. These segments provide a strong baseline of demand, which helps accelerate recovery once conditions normalize.

In short, recovery in this region



Mamoun Hmidan, Chief Business Officer of Wego

tends to be fast, data-led, and supported by strong underlying travel fundamentals.

**Q**: How do you see long-term travel trends evolving in the Middle East post-conflict for example, will technology, loyalty programmes, or sustainability considerations shape recovery differently than before?

**A**: Periods of uncertainty often accelerate trends that are already underway, and technology, particularly AI, will play an even more central role in shaping how travel recovers.

At Wego, we're seeing increasing reliance on AI-powered tools for real-time fare tracking, personalized recommendations, and dynamic pricing insights, enabling travellers to make smarter, faster decisions. This level of personalization is becoming an expectation rather than a differentiator.

Loyalty ecosystems are also evolving, with travellers gravitating toward brands that offer both reliability and tangible value. We expect deeper integration between rewards, pricing intelligence, and personalized travel experiences.

While sustainability remains an important long-term consideration especially among younger travellers, safety, value, and flexibility will lead decision-making in the near term. Over time, these priorities will converge, with technology enabling more responsible and informed travel choices.

**Q**: Looking ahead to the next 6-12 months, what is your base-case scenario for travel demand in the region?

**A**: Our base case is short-term volatility followed by a relatively swift normalization. The Middle East remains one of the most dynamic aviation markets globally, supported by strong government investment, world-class connectivity, and diversified tourism strategies.

We expect intra-regional travel to stabilize first, driven by proximity and flexibility, followed by a steady return of long-haul leisure demand. As confidence rebuilds, segments such as business travel, mega-events, and diaspora flows will further accelerate recovery.

Ultimately, the region's strength lies in its adaptability. Demand may shift in the short term, but the underlying appetite for travel remains strong and platforms like Wego play a key role in helping travellers navigate these shifts with confidence and clarity.

### Strengthening connectivity under Project Vande Bharat

## Jazeera Airways restores Indian network with Ahmedabad and Thiruvananthapuram routes

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Jazeera Airways has fully restored its Indian network of eight cities in India with the addition of Ahmedabad and Thiruvananthapuram, under Project Vande Bharat, reinforcing connectivity between Kuwait and India during the ongoing regional situation.

With these additions, Jazeera Airways continues to play a vital role in restoring essential travel links, offering a much-needed reprieve for the large Indian expatriate community in Kuwait seeking to reunite with families, return to their livelihoods, or undertake urgent travel.

The introduction of Ahmedabad and Thiruvananthapuram builds on the airline's existing list of operational Indian cities including Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Kochi, further enhancing access across key regions of the country and catering to strong passenger demand.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said: "By restoring our entire Indian network, Jazeera Airways marks a significant milestone - eight destinations, bringing us closer than ever to the heart of one of our most important markets. With one of the largest expatriate communities in Kuwait, this is more than connectivity; it's about bringing people closer to home and to their families, especially as the only airline operating to India from Kuwait. In close coordination with the Embassy of India, we are proud to strengthen this vital air bridge and support the journeys of thousands who rely on it every day."

Since the relaunch of operations on 20 March, Jazeera Airways has already enabled more than 1,300 passengers to travel between Kuwait and India, supporting critical movement at a time when travel options remain limited. The expansion of the network



Jazeera Airways restores full operations to India.

provides greater flexibility and increased capacity, particularly during the high-demand Eid travel period.

Passengers travelling on these routes will continue to benefit from structured check-in processes at the designated facility in Kuwait, followed by seamless transfers to Qaisumah Airport for onward departures.

Bookings are available through [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App, with additional frequencies and destinations expected to be introduced in phases.

## Jazeera Airways restores Pakistan network connectivity with 2 weekly flights to Lahore

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: Jazeera Airways today announced the relaunch of two weekly flights to Lahore from 29 March, marking its first route back to Pakistan and restoring a vital air link between Kuwait and one of its very important travel markets.

The start of flights to Lahore signals a significant step in rebuilding connectivity between Kuwait and Pakistan, home to a large expatriate community with deep-rooted personal, cultural, and economic ties to the region. The route is expected to serve strong demand from passengers travelling to reunite with families, return to work, and maintain essential cross-border connections.

H.E. Dr. Zafar Iqbal, Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait, said: "I commend Jazeera Airways for their agility and determination in restoring connectivity under challenging conditions. Their swift and innovative response reinforces Jazeera Airways' position as a dependable regional carrier. The resumption of flights to Pakistan is timely and will directly benefit our community by restoring a vital travel lifeline." This milestone comes as Jazeera Airways continues to lead efforts in maintaining connectivity from Kuwait during an exceptional period for regional aviation, with operations currently being facilitated via Qaisumah Airport (AQI) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said: "The relaunch of Lahore marks an important milestone as we reconnect Kuwait to Pakistan, one of our key markets with longstanding ties to the country. At a time when connectivity carries greater meaning, restoring this route enables thousands of passengers to reunite with their families or return back to Kuwait. As the first airline



Jazeera check-in counters

to operate from Kuwait, we remain focused on ensuring safe, reliable, and continuous connectivity. Lahore is the first step in rebuilding our Pakistan network, and we look forward to expanding further in the near future." Passengers travelling on this route will be transported by bus from Kuwait to Qaisumah before boarding onward flights to Lahore, ensuring continuity of travel. With an expanding network that now spans over 20 destinations, Jazeera Airways remains committed to reconnecting people and enabling essential travel in challenging times. Flights are now open for booking on the Jazeera Airways website: [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com) and the Jazeera App.

Energy shock risk puts Fed's rate-cut plans in doubt

# Geopolitical tensions cloud US dollar's safe-haven status

ISTANBUL, March 23, (Xinhua): Escalating tensions involving Israel, Iran, and the United States are raising doubts about the traditional safe-haven appeal of U.S. dollar-denominated assets, as geopolitical risks increasingly shape global asset pricing and influence global capital flows.

Market analysts warn that a prolonged conflict could erode confidence in dollar assets through several channels, including significant U.S. corporate exposure to the region, potential energy-driven inflationary pressures that could disrupt U.S. Federal Reserve policy, and mounting structural vulnerabilities in U.S. financial markets.

Since the latest escalation, the dollar index has strengthened only modestly, gains have been limited, and not all dollar-denominated assets have benefited equally.

According to data from U.S.-based Emerging Portfolio Fund Research cited by Reuters, global emerging market bond funds saw net outflows of around 1.1 billion dollars in the week ending June 11. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which tracks the greenback against six major currencies, edged down 0.13 percent on June 17 to close at 99.574.

Notably, yields on both 10-year and 2-year U.S. Treasury bonds have risen recently, a departure from the typical crisis pattern where yields fall, prompting some analysts to describe the trend as a "safe-haven failure."

U.S. companies hold tens of billions of dollars in direct investments across the Middle East, spanning sectors such as energy and digital infrastructure,

leaving them significantly exposed to regional risks. According to media reports, recent drone strikes by Iran damaged two data centers operated by a cloud computing platform under Amazon in the United Arab Emirates, causing power outages and disruptions to some services. The incident underscores the risks facing U.S. corporate assets in the region, particularly digital infrastructure.

Pan Xiangdong, chief economist of Qilai Research Institute, told Xinhua that continued targeting of such infrastructure could raise risk premiums on U.S. corporate assets in the Middle East and weigh on valuations, particularly in the tech sector.

Another major concern is whether the conflict will alter the Federal Reserve's policy trajectory. Before the escalation, the Fed had signaled potential rate cuts under pressure from the U.S. administration to support economic growth. Yet if the conflict drives global energy prices into a prolonged surge, the Fed may be forced to pause its easing plans.

Adding to the uncertainty, Patrick Minford, professor of applied economics at Cardiff Business School in Britain, noted that confidence in dollar assets is also being weighed down by domestic policy uncertainties. Persistent U.S. fiscal deficits may undermine trust in long-term U.S. Treasuries, while rising bond yields reflect growing investor concerns over inflation and policy direction.

Meanwhile, structural vulnerabilities in U.S. financial markets are

drawing increasing scrutiny. The Financial Times recently reported that redemption requests for the flagship fund of U.S.-based Cliffwater surged to 14 percent of its size in the first quarter, far exceeding the 5 percent quarterly cap set by regulators. Major Wall Street firms, including BlackRock, Blackstone, Morgan Stanley, and private credit firm Blue Owl, have also faced waves of investor redemptions, triggering withdrawal restrictions.

Australian economist Guo Shengxiang warned that redemption pressures could trigger systemic risks, with investors potentially accelerating withdrawals from higher-risk assets if the conflict persists.

The dollar's dominance is also facing longer-term headwinds. Hisham Farag, professor of finance at the University of Birmingham in Britain, noted that countries are increasingly attentive to political risks tied to the dollar system and are exploring alternatives such as expanding local currency settlements and diversifying reserve assets.

Pan added that a protracted conflict could undermine the petrodollar framework, accelerating de-dollarization and prompting a structural reassessment of dollar-denominated assets.

Chang Shishan, CEO of Cedar FinTech Group in the Middle East, noted that while geopolitical events tend to trigger short-term market volatility, capital ultimately flows toward stable and efficient financial systems, a dynamic that could shape the dollar's role in the years ahead.

Oil and gas losses already exceed previous global energy crises

Asia markets tumble

## International Energy Agency warns Iran war is a 'major, major threat' to global economy

WELLINGTON, March 23, (AP): The head of the International Energy Agency said Monday that the global economy faces a "major, major threat" because of the Iran war. "No country will be immune to the effects of this crisis if it continues to go in this direction," Fatih Birol said at Australia's National Press Club in Canberra on Monday.

The crisis in the Middle East, he said, has had a worse impact on oil than the two oil shocks of the 1970s combined, and a worse effect on gas than the Russia-Ukraine war.

Israel launched a new wave of attacks early Monday against Tehran. U.S. President Donald Trump also warned the United States will "obliterate" Iran's power plants if Tehran doesn't fully open the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours. That prompted Iran to say it would respond to any such strike with attacks on U.S. and Israeli energy and infrastructure assets.

Trump is facing increasing pressure at home to secure the strait as oil prices soar.

One major fear is that the war could knock out oil and gas production in the Middle East for a long time, which would mean high prices could last a while and cause infla-



International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol speaks at the National Press Club in Canberra, Australia, Monday, March 23, 2026. (AP)

tion to rip higher around the world. 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.

Iran on Monday renewed strikes on its Gulf neighbors and threatened to start hitting their power plants.

"The situation is very severe," Birol said in Australia.

The oil crises of 1973 and 1979, he said, lost together 10 million barrels per day, causing "major economic problems around the world, the recessions. And today, only as of today, we lost 11 million barrels per day - so more than two major oil shocks put together."

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he said, the gas markets, especially in Europe, "lost about 75 billion cubic meters, 75BCM. And

as of now, as a result of this crisis, we lost about 140BCM, almost twice (as much)."

Birol said 40 energy assets in nine countries across the region were "severely or very severely damaged."

"Some of the vital arteries of the global economy, such as petrochemical, such as fertilizers, such as sulfur, such as helium - their trade is all interrupted, which would have serious consequences for the global economy," he said.

He said the International Energy Agency, "in order to comfort the markets," earlier released 400 million barrels of oil, "which is historic. We have never released so much oil to the markets. ... The single most important solution to this problem is opening up the Hormuz Strait as things stand now."

The official added that he was consulting with governments in Europe, Asia, North America and the Middle East about the prospect of releasing further stockpiled oil.

"We will see, we will look at the markets," he said. "If it is necessary, of course, we will do it, but we will look at the conditions, we will analyze, assess the market and discuss with our member countries."

Global shares dip as oil soars amid Trump's Iran ultimatum



People stand in front of an electronic stock board showing Japan's Nikkei index at a securities firm Monday, March 23, 2026, in Tokyo. (AP)

TOKYO, March 23, (AP): Global shares dipped Monday across the board, as oil prices continued to climb after U.S. President Donald Trump's latest comments dashed hopes for an early end to the war in Iran.

France's CAC 40 lost 1.5% in early trading to 7,548.83, while Germany's DAX dove 2.0% to 21,944.26. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 1.7% to 9,754.80. U.S. shares were set to drift lower with Dow futures down 0.5% at 45,659.00. S&P 500 futures fell 0.7% to 6,515.25.

In Asia, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 dropped 3.5% to finish at 51,515.49. In Taiwan, the Taieix shed 2.5% to 32,722.50. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.7% to 8,365.90. South Korea's Kospi dove 6.5% to 5,405.75. Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 3.5% to 24,382.47, while the Shanghai Composite declined 3.6% to 3,813.28.

Trump over the weekend warned the U.S. will "obliterate" Iran's power plants if it doesn't fully open the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours, prompting Tehran to say it would respond to any such strike with attacks on U.S. and Israeli energy and infrastructure assets in the region.

Trump's ultimatum and Iran's retaliatory warnings point to a widening conflict that keeps energy disruption and market volatility

elevated with no clear off-ramp in sight," said Ng Jing Wen, analyst at Mizuho Bank in Singapore.

Higher oil prices, which also shook stock markets on Friday, dashed hopes for a possible upcoming cut to interest rates by the Federal Reserve, analysts said. Before the war, traders were betting that the Fed would cut rates at least twice this year. Central banks in Europe, Japan and the United Kingdom also recently held their interest rates steady.

But analysts observed that the markets were starting to react less to each of Trump's remarks, perhaps deciding the narrative for markets was being set elsewhere, not Washington, such as what Iran might do but how global economic growth could be affected by soaring energy prices. Some Asian nations, like Japan, are vulnerable to higher energy prices.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added \$1.62 to \$99.85 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gained \$1.42 to \$113.61 a barrel. The price of Brent crude has zigzagged lately from about \$70 per barrel before the war began to as high as \$119.50.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar rose to 159.53 Japanese yen from 159.22 yen. The euro cost \$1.1526, down from \$1.1571.

## Landmark trial in New Mexico to decide whether Meta misled users about children's safety risks

SANTA FE, March 23, (AP): Closing arguments were scheduled Monday in a landmark trial in New Mexico where social media conglomerate Meta is accused of misleading its users about how safe its platforms are for children.

Jurors will take up the case after the arguments and six weeks of testimony from scores of witnesses that included teachers, psychiatric experts, state investigators, top Meta officials and whistleblowers that left the company.

The case in New Mexico state court is among the first to reach trial in a wave of litigation involving social media platforms and their impacts on children.

New Mexico prosecutors have accused Meta - which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp - of prioritizing profits over safety in violation of state consumer protection laws. They have raised concerns about the safety of complex algorithms, and a variety of messaging features and settings.

Attorneys for Meta dispute the claims and say the company incorporates protections for teenagers and weeds out harmful content, while also acknowledging that some potentially harmful posts get past its safety nets.

A second phase of the trial will follow with a judge deciding whether Meta created a public nuisance and should be on the hook financially to fund programs to address alleged harms to children.

Attorney General Raúl Torrez filed suit in 2023, accusing Meta of creating a marketplace and "breeding ground" for predators who target children for sexual exploitation and failing to disclose what it knew about those harmful effects. State investigators created social media accounts posing as children to document online sexual solicitations and the response from Meta.

Meta attorneys have said the company is honest with platform users about rigorous but imperfect efforts to enforce bans on child sexual abuse material. They also accuse prosecutors of cherry-picking evidence and conducting a shoddy investigation.

Meta executives emphasized at trial that the company continuously improves safety and addresses compulsive social media use without infringing on free speech or censoring users.

A jury assembled from residents of Santa Fe County, including the politically progressive state capital city, will decide whether Meta

violated the state's Unfair Practices Act on three counts, including "unconscionable" trade practices.

A finding of willful violations would open the way for possible fines of up to \$5,000 per violation. Prosecutors say that could add up to billions of dollars given the number of people using Meta platforms in New Mexico, though Meta said it would seek a different calculation.

Tech companies have been protected 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.

Prosecutors say New Mexico is not seeking to hold Meta accountable for content on its platforms, but rather its role in pushing out that content through complex algorithms that proliferate material that can be addictive and harmful to children.

In California, a jury already is sequestered in deliberations on whether Meta and YouTube should be liable for harms caused to children using their platforms. The bellwether case could impact how thousands of similar lawsuits against social media companies are likely to play out.

Intra-regional trade lags at just 20% of total volume

## SADC urged to accelerate practical economic integration

JOHANNESBURG, March 23, (Xinhua): Member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) must accelerate practical measures to deepen economic integration and unlock the region's full potential, according to a Johannesburg-based senior economist.

While the 16-member bloc has made strides in promoting regional trade and investment, intra-SADC trade still accounts for only about 20 percent of the region's total trade volume, highlighting a significant opportunity for expansion.

Joseph Upile Matola, from the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), told Xinhua that while gains have been recorded, further efforts are required to improve regional connectivity and market access.

A key priority remains improving the efficiency of One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), according to Matola, facilities like the Chirundu Border Post between Zambia and Zimbabwe have successfully slashed crossing times from days to hours.

However, he noted many OSBPs across the region remain only partially integrated. "Enhancing OSBP operations is critical to lowering both the cost and time associated with cross-border trade."

Digitalization is also expected to play a pivotal role. With internet penetration exceeding 50 percent and mobile subscriptions rising steadily, SADC is well-positioned to expand e-commerce

and digital trade platforms to bolster intra-African commerce.

As a regional inter-governmental organization, SADC is committed to promoting sustainable economic growth, deeper integration, good governance, and security among member states in Southern Africa.

The organization includes 16 members: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Matola urged governments to pivot from "rhetorical integration" toward practical, results-driven cooperation to achieve sustainable growth over the next decade. Central to this shift is political leadership, particularly in translating policy into action. This includes fast-tracking the ratification of regional protocols, many of which have been signed but remain unenforced.

Stronger governance and political stability are also vital for attracting investment, as investors prioritize predictable and secure operating environments.

Furthermore, the economist called for more robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with regional agreements, noting that weak implementation continues to undermine integration efforts.

Regional stability remains a priority, requiring

continued diplomatic engagement in conflict-affected areas such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar.

To reduce dependence on external markets, Matola highlighted the need for structural transformation. Currently, SADC economies rely heavily on exporting raw materials, including minerals and agricultural commodities. Promoting value addition and beneficiation, especially in mining and agriculture, will be essential for driving industrialization and shielding the region from global price shocks.

Matola also identified the operationalization of the Regional Development Fund as a crucial step toward mobilizing domestic financing for regional projects, thereby reducing reliance on external funding.

Energy development, particularly in renewables, was cited as another critical frontier. Despite abundant natural resources, many countries in the region still face chronic power shortages.

"Energy is the backbone of manufacturing," he said, stressing that increased investment in power infrastructure is vital to support industrial growth and enhance economic resilience.

As SADC countries pursue deeper integration, the economist concluded that stronger implementation, strategic infrastructure investment, and regional stability will be the cornerstones of long-term economic transformation.

BRUSSELS, March 23, (AP): A landmark free trade deal between the European Union and four South American countries will begin on May 1 after more than a quarter-century of negotiations and new global economic uncertainty unleashed by tariffs, critical mineral controls and the war in Iran.

The European Commission said Monday that the start date for the EU-Mercosur free trade deal was triggered by Brussels receiving a "note verbale" from Paraguay that it had approved the deal, which is a key part of the 27-nation EU's strategy to slash economic dependencies on China and the United States.

Parliaments in Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina have ratified the deal that links more than 700 million people and accounts for 25% of global gross domestic product. Bolivia, the newest Mercosur member, didn't participate in negotiations but will be able to join the deal in the coming years.

"The priority now is turning this EU-Mercosur agreement into concrete outcomes, giving EU exporters the platform they need to seize new opportunities for trade, growth and jobs," said European trade commissioner Maroš Šefčovic.

Fierce opposition by farmers and environmentalists delayed the deal in December. It then hit another snag after EU lawmakers voted to send the deal to the bloc's judiciary. The EU executive responded by saying it would provisionally enact the deal - effectively sidestepping the European Parliament.

That means trade will begin in May and halt only if the European Court of Justice rules against it.

French President Emmanuel Macron called that move "a bad surprise." France and Poland had led a campaign to halt or temper the deal with clauses protecting consumers and agricultural producers.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has shrugged off such criticism of a deal she describes as vital for the EU's survival in a newly disordered world.

"This is about resilience, this is about growth, and Europe shaping its own future," she told a news conference in February. Recently, she has not taken questions about the issue.

Von der Leyen is in Australia this week for talks aimed at a potential free trade deal, defense cooperation and critical mineral supplies.

# Business Plus



## Trump is reviving large sales of coal from public lands. Will anyone want it?



The Dave Johnson coal-fired power plant is silhouetted against the morning sun in Glenrock, Wyo. (AP)

BILLINGS, March 23, (AP): U.S. officials in the coming days are set to hold the government's biggest coal sales in more than a decade, offering 600 million tons from publicly owned reserves next to strip mines in Montana and Wyoming.

The sales are a signature piece of President Donald Trump's ambitions for companies to dig more coal from federal lands and burn it for electricity. Yet most power plants served by those mines plan to quit burning coal altogether within 10 years, an Associated Press data analysis shows.

Three other mines poised for expansions or new leases under Trump also face declining demand as power plants use less of their coal and in some cases shut down, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration and the nonprofit Global Energy Monitor.

Those market realities raise a fundamental question about the Republican administration's push to revive a heavily polluting industry that long has been in decline: Who's going to buy all that coal?

The question looms over the administration's enthusiastic embrace of coal, a leading contributor to climate change. It also shows the uncertainty

inherent in inserting those policies into markets where energy-producing customers make long-term decisions with massive implications, not just for their own viability but for the future of the planet, in an ever-shifting political landscape.

The upcoming lease sales in Montana and Wyoming are in the Powder River Basin, home to the most productive U.S. coal fields.

Officials say they will go forward beginning Monday despite the government shutdown. The administration exempted from furlough those workers who process fossil fuel permits and leases.

Democratic President Joe Biden last year acted to block future coal leases in the region, citing their potential to make climate change worse. Burning the coal from the two leases being sold in coming days would generate more than 1 billion tons of planet-warming carbon dioxide, according to a Department of Energy formula.

Trump rejected climate change as a "con job" during a Sept. 23 speech to the U.N. General Assembly, an assessment that puts him at odds with scientists. He praised coal as "beautiful" and boasted about the abundance

of U.S. supplies while deriding solar and wind power. Administration officials said Wednesday that they were canceling \$8 billion in grants for clean energy projects in 16 states won by Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election.

In response to an order from Trump on his first day in office in January, coal lease sales that had been shelved or stalled were revived and rushed to approval, with considerations of greenhouse gas emissions dismissed. Administration officials have advanced coal mine expansions and lease sales in Utah, North Dakota, Tennessee and Alabama, in addition to Montana and Wyoming.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said Monday that the administration is opening more than 20,000 square miles (52,000 square kilometers) of federal lands to mining. That is an area bigger than New Hampshire and Vermont combined.

The administration also sharply reduced royalty rates for coal from federal lands, ordered a coal-fired power plant in Michigan to stay open past planned retirement dates and pledged \$625 million to recommission or modernize coal plants amid growing electricity demand from

artificial intelligence and data centers.

"We're putting American miners back to work," Burgum said, flanked by coal miners and Republican politicians. "We've got a demand curve coming at us in terms of the demand for electricity that is literally going through the roof."

The AP's finding that power plants served by mines on public lands are burning less coal reflects an industry-wide decline that began in 2007.

Energy experts and economists were not surprised. They expressed doubt that coal would ever reclaim dominance in the power sector. Interior Department officials did not respond to questions about future demand for coal from public lands.

But it will take time for more electricity from planned natural gas and solar projects to come online. That means Trump's actions could give a short-term bump to coal, said Umed Paliwal, an expert in electricity markets at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

"Eventually coal will get pushed out of the market," Paliwal said. "The economics will just eat the coal generation over time."

The coal sales in Montana and Wyoming were requested by Navajo

Nation-owned company. The Navajo Transitional Energy Co. (NTEC) has been one of the largest industry players since buying several major mines in the Powder River Basin during a 2019 bankruptcy auction. Those mines supply 34 power plants in 19 states.

Twenty-one of the plants are scheduled to stop burning coal in the next decade. They include all five plants using coal from NTEC's Spring Creek mine in Montana.

In filings with federal officials, the company said the fair market value of 167 million tons of federal coal next to the Spring Creek mine was just over \$126,000.

That is less than one-tenth of a penny per ton, a fraction of what coal brought in its heyday. By comparison, the last large-scale lease sale in the Powder River Basin, also for 167 million tons of coal, drew a bid of \$35 million in 2013. Federal officials rejected that as too low.

NTEC said the low value was supported by prior government reviews predicting fewer buyers for coal. The company said taxpayers would benefit in future years from royalties on any coal mined.

"The market for coal will decline significantly over the next two decades. There are fewer coal mines expanding their reserves, there are fewer buyers of thermal coal and there are more regulatory constraints," the company said.

In central Wyoming on Wednesday, the government will sell 440 million tons of coal next to NTEC's Antelope Mine. Just over half of the 29 power plants served by the mine are scheduled to stop burning coal by 2035.

Among them is the Rawhide plant in northern Colorado. It is due to quit coal in 2029 but will keep making electricity with natural gas and 30 megawatts of solar panels.

The largest U.S. coal company has offered a more optimistic take on coal's future. Because new nuclear and gas plants are years away, Peabody Energy suggested in September that demand for coal in the U.S. could increase 250 million tons annually - up almost 50% from current volumes.

Peabody's projection was based on the premise that existing power plants can burn more coal. That amount, known as plant capacity, dropped by about half in recent years.

"U.S. coal is clearly in comeback mode," Peabody's president, James Grech, said in a recent conference call with analysts. "The U.S. has more energy in its coal reserves than any nation has in any one energy source."

No large coal power plants have come online in the U.S. since 2013. Most existing plants are 40 years old or older. Money pledged by the administration to refurbish older plants will not go very far given that a single boiler component at a plant can cost \$25 million to replace, said Nikhil Kumar with GridLab, an energy consulting group.

That leads back to the question of who will buy the coal.

"I don't see where you get all this coal consumed at remaining facilities," Kumar said.

### Science warns of unknown impacts from seafloor extraction

## Deep-sea mining emerges as new frontier for critical minerals

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

By **Leonardo Macelloni**  
University of Mississippi

You may be hearing a lot lately about critical minerals and rare earth elements. These natural materials are essential to industry and modern technology - everything from cell phones to fighter jets.

They include lithium and cobalt used in batteries, neodymium for magnets in motors and hard drives, and rare earths that are essential in defense systems, lasers and medical imaging. Critical minerals are also indispensable for renewable energy systems, energy storage and digital infrastructure. Without them, modern society - and any realistic path to a world with net-zero emissions - would not be possible.

Critical minerals get their name because they're also highly vulnerable to supply chain disruptions from global events, trade tensions or economic instability. And, today, one country dominates many critical mineral supply chains: China.

With that in mind, many governments are looking for alternative sources of critical minerals, and several companies are eyeing the ocean floor as a potential new frontier for mining them.

As a marine geologist, I know the potential for seafloor minerals is vast.

But that doesn't mean those minerals are easy to harvest. They come in several forms, from potato-size rocks scattered on the seafloor to seafloor crusts at hydrothermal vents and underwater brine pools. And they are often found in sensitive locations that are home to fragile marine life, raising questions about damage to some of the least explored and least understood parts of our planet.

When you picture seafloor mining, polymetallic or manganese nodules are probably what come to mind.

Rock-like nodules are about the size of potatoes and are found scattered on vast deep-water plains, typically 3,000 to 6,000 meters deep, in several regions, including a large area of the Pacific Ocean southeast of Hawaii.

They primarily consist of manganese and iron, though they can contain significant amounts of other metals, including valuable nickel, cobalt, copper and small amounts of rare earth elements and platinum.

Nodules form from metals that get into the ocean through erosion or from seafloor hydrothermal vents in volcanically active areas. The metal ions attach to a nucleus, such as a rock or shell fragment. Over time, layers form around that core. The growth is very slow - only a few millimeters in a million years - so larger nodules can be several million years old.

More than 17 exploration licenses exist, primarily in the Pacific's Clarion-Clipperton Zone. Tests there have involved suctioning nodules from the seafloor to ships above. But, as of early

2026, full-scale, commercial mining has not yet begun.

Another source of critical minerals is seafloor massive sulfides, which form near hydrothermal vents along oceanic ridges. Volcanic activity reacts with seawater, fueling bursts of marine life at these vents, and also forming rocks rich in copper, gold, zinc, lead, barium and silver.

These hot springs form where water rises through the oceanic crust at high temperatures, up to about 750 degrees Fahrenheit (400 degrees Celsius). The metals contained in these solutions precipitate on contact with the cold, oxygen-rich seawater, forming the ventlike structures known as "black smokers" because they look like factory chimneys.

The technology for mining these deposits is currently being built. The first deep-sea tests were performed by Japanese miners in their coastal waters.

Ferromanganese crusts are another source. They form on the slopes and summits of underwater mountains known as seamounts and contain manganese, iron and a wide array of trace metals such as cobalt, copper, nickel and platinum.

Over millions of years, metals in the surrounding seawater form coatings of iron and manganese oxides, with thicknesses ranging from a few millimeters to a few decimeters, depending on the age of the seamounts.

Crust mining is technically much more difficult than nodule mining. Nodules sit on soft sediment. Crusts, in contrast, are attached to substrate

rock. For successful crust mining, it would be essential to recover the crusts without collecting too much substrate, which would dilute the ore quality.

However, little is known about the marine life found on seamounts, particularly those in the most likely regions for crust exploration and mining.

Another possible ocean source of lithium and potentially rare earth elements may lie in unusual underwater lakes called hypersaline brine pools. These salty pools are found on the seafloor in several parts of the world, but they are especially common in the Gulf of Mexico.

Brine is already the source of much of the lithium used today. Companies extract it from salty water produced during oil and geothermal operations.

Lithium becomes concentrated in brines over millions of years. As water moves through deep rocks, minerals dissolve along the way and elements like lithium can accumulate.

Extracting lithium from deep-sea brines, if it is confirmed to be there, could be more straightforward than traditional seabed mining. Technologies already exist to separate lithium from salty water.

In the Gulf, this approach could potentially use existing offshore oil and gas infrastructure, reducing the need for new construction. The brine could be pumped up, processed to remove lithium, and then returned to the subsurface.

In the Central Pacific Ocean and off Japan, deep-sea mud enriched with rare earth elements and yttrium has been

recognized as another new resource.

These deposits form from the very slow accumulation of fish debris, composed of biogenic calcium phosphate, in the deepest parts of the ocean. In 2026, a Japanese research vessel successfully drilled and retrieved deep-sea sediment containing rare earth minerals from the seabed near the island of Minamitorishima, and the Japanese government announced a deep-sea mud extraction trial would begin in 2027.

While these regions likely hold vast resources, scientists know very little about the ecological conditions at the boundary between deep-sea water and seafloor sediments, especially about the microbial communities that live there.

Microorganisms are the most widespread and fundamental forms of life on Earth. They play central roles in ecosystems, nutrient cycles, and the long-term stability of the planet. The potential impacts of mechanically removing nodules from the seafloor - through cutting, scraping or lifting - on these microscopic ecosystems remain largely unknown.

In the Pacific Ocean, an experimental mining test carried out in 1978 was revisited more than two decades later. Even after 26 years, tracks left by mining vehicles were still visible on the seafloor. The disturbed areas had fewer bottom-dwelling organisms and less diversity compared to nearby undisturbed regions. Notably, no detailed assessment of microbial communities was conducted, leaving a significant gap in understanding. (AP)

“Demand for electricity is going through the roof”

“The ecological impact of mining is still unclear.”

editor's choice



## Show defies doomsayers with solid debut

### 'SNL UK' aims to take comedy hit across the pond

LONDON, March 23, (AP): "Saturday Night Live" has crossed the pond with a mild splash.

A British offshoot of the 51-year-old US comedy institution has debuted to generally positive reviews, defying doomsayers who doubted the show would survive the trans-Atlantic journey.

The format of the first episode of "Saturday Night Live UK" stuck closely to the US original. The 75-minute show opened with a skit showing Prime Minister Keir Starmer seeking help from a Gen Z adviser about how to talk to President Donald Trump, before the proclamation: "Live from London, it's Saturday night!"

"SNL" veteran Tina Fey was the host, taking questions during her opening monologue from celebrity audience members Michael Cera, Graham Norton and "Bridgerton" star Nicola Coughlan, who jokingly warned Fey that "British people tend to root for the failure of others."

Certainly, many in Britain had predicted the show would fail, and reviews expressed surprise that it was - largely - pretty funny. The Telegraph newspaper called it "shockingly competent" and "occasionally

hilarious."

There was widespread praise for the cast of largely little-known comics: George Fouracres, Hamed Animashaun, Ayoade Bamgboye, Larry Dean, Celeste Dring, Ania Magliano, Annabel Marlow, Al Nash, Jack Shep, Emma Sidi and Paddy Young.

As in the original, the show featured topical comedy, offbeat sketches, fake commercials and the "Weekend Update" spoof of the news, as well as a guest musical act, the English band Wet Leg. Some of the humor was mildly edgy, including jokes about pedophiles, the Epstein files and disgraced royal Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

Apart from the accents, one difference from the American original was the expletives. British broadcasting rules allowed for a liberal sprinkling of F-words.

Since its debut in 1975 "SNL" has become a pop-culture institution and helped launch the careers of generations of comedians, from Bill Murray to Eddie Murphy and Gilda Radner to Kristen Wiig.

Efforts to replicate its success in other countries,

such as France, Japan and Italy, have typically been short-lived, though a version of the show remains on the air in South Korea.

The UK offshoot, which has "SNL" creator Lorne Michaels as executive producer, airs on the relatively little-watched channel Sky One and the NOW streaming service. But social media may bring a much bigger audience for clips. Fey's monologue had more than half a million views on YouTube by noon on Sunday.

The initial run is only eight episodes, and it remains to be seen how the cast fares without Fey's assured guidance. Future guest hosts include Jamie Dornan and Riz Ahmed.

Nick Hilton in The Independent said the first episode's sketches included "a handful of hits," but also moments when it seemed like "tepid cosplay" of the US original.

Charlotte Ivers in The Times of London felt that "the spark is not there yet," but The Guardian's Lucy Mangan praised the program's ambition.

"It did not fail. And in the coming weeks, let's hope, it can build toward real success," she wrote.



Tina Fey attends the American Museum of Natural History's Museum Gala on Nov. 30, 2023, in New York. (AP)

## Film

'Dhurandhar 2' debuts top 3

### 'Project' blasts off with \$80.5m to top box office

LOS ANGELES, March 23, (AP): "Project Hail Mary" is bringing audiences to movie theaters in numbers the industry hasn't seen for a non-franchise film since "Oppenheimer." The science fiction epic starring Ryan Gosling earned around \$80.5 million in ticket sales in its first weekend playing in North America, according to studio estimates Sunday. Box office tracker EntTelligence estimates that translates into about 5 million ticket buyers.

The PG-13 rated film opened on 4,007 screens and easily topped the domestic box office charts, surpassing expectations and delivering a record opening for studio Amazon MGM, whose previous best was "Creed III" (\$58 million in 2023). Not accounting for inflation, "Project Hail Mary" also scored the second biggest opening for a non-franchise movie behind only "Oppenheimer," which opened to \$82.4 million in 2023.

It's now one of only three non-franchise movies in the past decade to open over \$70 million (the third is Jordan Peele's "Us"). In the realm of modern space operas, it exceeded the debuts of "The Martian," also an Andy Weir adaptation that opened around \$54.3 million in 2015, "Gravity" (\$55.6 million in 2013) and "Interstellar" (\$47.5 million in 2014).

Internationally, "Project Hail Mary" earned \$60.4 million from 82 markets, bringing its global total to \$140.9 million.

"We all know theatrical is not an easy business. It's tougher today I think than it's ever been," Kevin Wilson, Amazon MGM Studios' head of domestic distribution, told The Associated Press on Sunday. "And sci-fi movies, to break out to a broad audience, is not the easiest thing to do."

And yet the results of the weekend put them in "rarefied air" alongside "Oppenheimer," which Wilson said is "certainly something special." The film is playing broadly across the country with markets like Salt Lake City, Denver and Portland over-indexing which, Wilson said, suggests that they're getting some family audiences too.

Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, "Project Hail Mary" cost about double the "Oppenheimer" production budget, with a price tag in the \$200 million range. But it also carries strong reviews and audience scores and could be destined for a long run. According to PostTrak exit polls, where it scored five out of five stars, 83% of audiences said they would "definitely recommend" the film to friends. The gender breakdown skewed slightly more male (57%), and 55% of the audience were under 35.

The film is centered around Gosling's character who wakes up alone and with little memory on a spaceship, where his apparent mission is to try to save the sun from dying. As has become the norm for "event" movies like "Project Hail Mary," premium large format screens were in demand, making up 56% of the weekend's gross. IMAX screens alone accounted for \$27.6 million of the global total.

"The next interesting piece will be how long can this movie play, which I think could be something special," Wilson said.

"Project Hail Mary" will have a second weekend essentially free of big competition until it loses its IMAX screens to "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie" on April 1.

Hollywood's other big new opener, "Ready or Not 2: Here I Come," a Searchlight release, came in a distant fourth with \$9.1 million, behind Disney and Pixar's "Hoppers" (\$18 million) and the Bollywood sequel "Dhurandhar: The Revenge," which made \$9.6 million from Friday through Sunday according to the US distributor; Comscore is projecting a slightly higher \$10 million figure. Universal's Colleen Hoover adaptation "Reminders of Him" rounded out the top five in its second weekend with \$8 million.

Viva Pictures also released an animated adaptation of the popular children's book "The Pout-Pout Fish" in 1,854 theaters, which landed in ninth place with \$1.5 million.

The year-to-date box office is now up around 21%, according to Comscore.

"The performance of 'Project Hail Mary' is a momentum builder like no other and it's reinvigorating the movie marketplace," said Paul Dergarabedian, Comscore's head of marketplace trends. "This is a momentum business, and this is exactly what the industry needed right now."

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

1. "Project Hail Mary," \$80.5 million; 2. "Hoppers," \$18 million; 3. "Dhurandhar: The Revenge," \$10 million; 4. "Ready or Not 2: Here I Come," \$9.1 million; 5. "Reminders of Him," \$8 million; 6. "Scream 7," \$4.3 million; 7. "Goat," \$3.7 million; 8. "Undertone," \$3 million; 9. "The Pout-Pout Fish," \$1.5 million and 10. "MET Opera: Tristan und Isolde," \$722,499.



Ryan Gosling attends the premiere of 'Project Hail Mary' at Lincoln Center Plaza on Wednesday, March 18, in New York. (AP)

## Fashion



Bollywood actress Aneeth Padda displays creations under the label Pero by Aneeth Arora at the grand finale of the Lakme Fashion Week X FDCI in Mumbai, India, Sunday, March 22. (AP)

### 'It's another piece of America that is gone'

## CBS News shuts its storied radio service after nearly 100 years

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP): CBS News said Friday it will shut down its storied radio news service after nearly 100 years of operation, ending an era and blaming challenging economic times as the world moves on to digital sources and podcasts. Sidelongtime CBS News anchor Dan Rather: "It's another piece of America that is gone."

When it went on the air in September 1927, the service was the precursor to the entire network, giving a youthful William S. Paley a start in the business. Famed broadcaster Edward R. Murrow's rooftop reports during the Nazi bombing of London during World War II kept Americans listening anxiously.

Today, CBS News Radio provides material to an estimated 700 stations across the country and is known best for its top-of-the-hour news roundups. The service will end on May 22, the network said Friday.

"Radio is woven into the fabric of CBS News and that's always going to be part of our history," CBS News editor-in-chief Bari Weiss said in delivering the news to the staff. "I want you to

know that we did everything we could, including before I joined the company, to try and find a viable solution to sustain the radio operation."

But with the radical changes in the media industry, she said, "we just could not find a way to make that possible." CBS News cut some of its radio programming late last year, including its "Weekend Roundup" and "World News Roundup Late Edition," in an attempt to keep the service going.

It was unclear how many people will lose their jobs because of the radio shutdown. CBS News was cutting about 6% of its workforce, or more than 60 people, on Friday. It's not the end of turmoil at the network, as parent company Paramount Global is likely to absorb CNN as part of its announced purchase of Warner Bros. Discovery.

"Given the way things are going, I was saddened but I wasn't surprised by it," said Rather, who succeeded network legend Walter Cronkite in 1981 and anchored for 25 years.

When Rather covered the civil rights era for CBS News during

the 1960s, he said he would file reports as frequently as a dozen times a day. Cronkite told America on television that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated; Rather relayed the news for radio.

"Radio was considered an equal responsibility to television," Rather, now 94, said in an interview.

Along with newspapers, radio was the dominant medium in how Americans got their news from shortly after the dawn of commercial radio in 1920 through the 1940s, with people in their living rooms listening to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats" during the Depression. CBS News Radio's broadcast about Germany's invasion of Austria in 1938, the first time Murrow was heard on the air, was an historic marker for the service.

Broadcasters like Douglas Edwards, Dallas Townsend and Christopher Glenn were familiar voices on CBS News Radio. The beginning of the television era in the 1950s began a long slide for radio, often an afterthought today with the world online and on phones. Those seeking audio often turn to podcasts before radio.

## Variety

LOS ANGELES: ABC has scrubbed the upcoming season of "The Bachelorette," starring Taylor Frankie Paul, three days before its planned premiere, citing a newly released video from 2023 in which she appears to punch, kick and throw chairs at her former partner as her young daughter watched and cried.

Thursday's cancellation of the already filmed 22nd season of the reality show is unprecedented. While ABC parent company Disney cited the older video, the move comes amid a current domestic violence investigation involving Paul and Dakota Mortensen, father to a son who is the youngest of her three children.

"In light of the newly released video just surfaced today, we have made the decision to not move forward with the new season of 'The Bachelorette' at this time, and our focus is on supporting the family," a statement from Disney Entertainment Television said. (AP)



Paul

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina: Stevie Young, guitarist for the legendary Australian rock band AC/DC, was hospitalized in Buenos Aires just days before he is scheduled to perform in the city as part of the band's "Power Up" world tour.

Young, the nephew of the band's late founder Malcolm Young, "was not feeling well. As a precaution, he was admitted to a local hospital, where he is undergoing a full series of tests," according to a statement released Thursday by the event's promoter.

The causes of the 69-year-old Young's condition were not specified. (AP)

HELSINKI: Finland has once again been ranked the world's happiest country, marking its ninth consecutive year at the top, according to the World Happiness Report released on Thursday.

A total of 147 countries and regions were included in the 2026 ranking. According to the report's editorial board, the ranking is based on factors including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, perceptions of corruption and social tolerance.

The report said Finland and the other Nordic countries have remained at the top due to a combination of wealth, relatively equal income distribution, welfare systems that protect people from the impact of economic downturns, and healthy life expectancy. (Xinhua)

AUCKLAND, New Zealand: The Shanghai Symphony Orchestra performed in Auckland on Thursday evening after a hiatus of over half a century, resonating with audiences in the largest city in New Zealand.

As part of the 2026 Auckland Arts Festival and its Asia-Pacific tour, the orchestra performed works from "Chinese Kitchen: A Feast of Flavors" to Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme" and "Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor," showcasing a perfect blend of Eastern and Western music.

"Chinese Kitchen: A Feast of Flavors" was specially commissioned by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra for its 145th anniversary. (Xinhua)

HONG KONG: The opening ceremony of the exhibition titled "The Majestic Han: A Golden Age of Vigor and Cultural Integration" was held on Thursday in Hong Kong, featuring 252 pieces of invaluable exhibits.

The exhibition is jointly organized by the Development Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government and the National Cultural Heritage Administration. It presents significant archaeological finds unearthed in the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong, showcasing the dynamic and innovative Han dynasty, a golden era that made profound contributions to promoting exchanges between Chinese and Western civilizations. (Xinhua)

## K-pop sensation asks what makes them BTS

## 'BTS: The Return' offers intimate look at band's comeback

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP) — All seven members log onto a livestream, broadcast from a beach. A few years ago, it was a common image. But after the K-pop boy band BTS pressed pause on their full-band duties for nearly four years, it was revelatory.

That's the scene that begins "BTS: The Return," a new Netflix documentary from director Bao Nguyen ("The Stringer," "The Greatest Night in Pop"), produced by This Machine ("Martha," "Karol G") and HYBE, the South Korean entertainment company behind BTS and countless other international acts.

The mostly-Korean language film offers an intimate look at BTS' journey to their latest album, "ARIRANG," released Friday. It also follows the seven member group — RM, Jin, Jimin, V, Suga, Jung Kook and j-hope — as they learned to reacclimate to their life in the fast lane, together again.

Here are key takeaways from the documentary film, which premieres on Netflix on Friday, March 27.

As BTS fans are well aware, "ARIRANG" is the band's first full-length release since all seven members completed South Korea's mandatory military service. In South Korea, all able-bodied men aged 18-28 are required by law to perform 18-21 months of military service under a conscription

system meant to deter aggression from North Korea.

In their documentary, mention of BTS' service emerges right away. In the first minute, while the band films their live video on the beach, RM mentions that he "learned to hustle" in the military. Then it cuts to footage of the guys getting their heads shaved and wearing their uniforms — and quickly thereafter, rejoining the band. In reality, they were separated for a number of years. Before announcing their comeback in June, all seven members hadn't been seen broadcasting live together since September 2022.

Shortly after returning from their mandatory service, the band camped to Los Angeles during the summer of 2025 to begin work on "ARIRANG," their 14-track, fifth studio album and first in nearly four years.

They lived in the same house together. It was tight quarters, and a tight turnaround: In the film, Jin says he joined the band in Los Angeles the day after completing his 2025 solo tour. For that reason, he missed some of the early writing and recording.

The journey was also bumpy. As RM mentions in the movie, a long lifespan for a K-pop group is not guaranteed.

Fans of the genre might be familiar with what is referred to as the "seven-



Korean group BTS appears at the 64th Annual Grammy Awards in Las Vegas on April 3, 2022. (AP)

year curse," where a group disbands, or loses members, or contracts expires, and they fall apart. That has not been the case for BTS, still widely regarded one of the most popular bands on the planet. The question then, for them, became: Where does their sound go from here?

"We're doing a lot of experiments, trying to find out, like, what makes us

The documentary shows clips of the guys in the studio working with some recognizable producers like Diplo and the South Korean songwriter Pdogg.

It also shows the band struggling to land a lead single and their in-studio dynamics: Suga playing guitar, serious and studious, V comforting an anxious Jin, so on and so forth.

Then they returned to South Korea to finish and mix the album.

Boyoung Lee, executive creative director at Big Hit Music, told the band that in 1896, a group of Koreans arrived in the US for an education, where they met music producer and ethnologist Alice C. Fletcher. Together, they recorded the first-ever Korean-language song in the US: "Arirang," the traditional Korean folk song that dates back to the 1400s and that inspired BTS' album title.

It also meant that the album was a true celebration of South Korea and BTS' efforts to bring their country and culture to the world. In one scene, Suga mentions changes needed to the song "Normal," which he felt originally featured too much English and not enough Korean. "For this album, authenticity matters," RM agreed.

Some members expressed reservations about how they might be received — what did their fans want from

them, after so much time apart? And in an industry that demands reinvention? So, they worked as hard as they could, and in surprising ways: In one scene, V throws a baseball in a parking lot — seemingly to blow off steam. Days later he's throwing a pitch at Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium. It's clear he was practicing as to not disappoint their fans.

Even when the band is relaxing at night together at their shared home in Los Angeles — enjoying festive meal — they are still shown talking about their music, what could've been done differently in the studio, what they might want to try in the future. It's a 24/7 process.

"I wonder if we've done a good job here," Jung Kook asks aloud.

Some members of the band thought the song "Swim" might be too low in energy to serve as their lead single. But they also weren't sure about "Dynamite" back in 2020, which became a huge international smash. It was their first all-English-language single and it debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 — a first for an all-South Korean musical act.

Suga appeared to be an early believer in "Swim." "Oh, they can come back with a song like this? I think it'll be cool," he told his band mates, fantasizing about fan reaction.

## Variety

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Grammy-winning singer Chappell Roan responded on Sunday to accusations made by Brazilian soccer star Jorginho that a security guard mistreated his 11-year-old stepdaughter after she recognized the singer.

Jorginho Frello, a player for Flamengo widely known as Jorginho, said that his wife and the child were staying at the same hotel in Sao Paulo as the singer, who is in the country for the Lollapalooza Brazil music festival, when the controversy occurred.

"During breakfast, the artist walked past their table. My daughter, like any child, recognized her, got excited and just wanted to make sure it was really her," Jorginho said, in a lengthy text posted on Instagram in Portuguese and English on Saturday. The girl is the daughter of Catherine Harding, Jorginho's wife, and British actor Jude Law. (AP)

BEIJING: China on Sunday issued the security guidance for the use of the open-source AI agent OpenClaw, advising users, cloud service providers and developers to reduce risks during deployment and operation.

The guidance, jointly issued by the National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team/Coordination Center of China and the Cyber Security Association of China, recommends that ordinary users install OpenClaw on dedicated devices, virtual machines, or containers, maintain strict environment isolation, and avoid installing it on everyday work computers.

Ordinary users are also advised not to run OpenClaw with administrator or superuser privileges, avoid storing or processing private or sensitive data within OpenClaw environments, and keep OpenClaw updated to the latest releases. (Xinhua)

SIEM REAP, Cambodia: Huge crowds of tourists rallied in front of the famed Angkor Wat temple here in northwest Cambodia early Sunday morning to watch the stunning sunrise during the spring equinox.

"A large number of national and international tourists gathered to capture memorable photos of the sunrise aligning with the central tower of Angkor Wat," Tourism Minister Huot Hak said in a post on social media.

"Equinox sunrise is an extraordinary and rare phenomenon that occurs only twice a year," he added.

The APSARA National Authority (ANA), the government agency responsible for managing, safeguarding and preserving the Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap province, said the Angkor equinoxes happen twice a year. (Xinhua)

## Art



A woman takes a picture of artwork that might have been made by British street artist Banksy on a building destroyed by fighting in Borodyanka, Kyiv region, Ukraine, Sunday, Nov. 13, 2022. (AP)

## Murals still spark reflection and debate

## Banksy 'unmasking' stirs fans, not dealers

LONDON, March 23, (AP) — Years before the rise of Instagram, Banksy figured out that the key to real influence lay in not being famous, exactly, but in being anonymous.

The mystery of his identity has long been part of the value of his art, which for decades and across continents defied authority from public walls and self-shredded on the auction block. Now, Banksy's apparent unmasking by the Reuters news agency has generated talk about whether the works themselves retain their cultural and financial value.

It also raises the question: Why pop the red balloon of his mystique in the first place? Many Banksy fans mourned the loss of the mystery and lashed out at the news outlet. One said it was like being told without warning that Santa Claus doesn't exist.

"I feel like they are telling me how a magic trick is done," said Thomas Evans, a Denver-based artist on Instagram. "Sometimes I just want to enjoy the magic trick."

But some art experts say the murals and the message will survive Banksy's naming because his appeal wasn't driven solely by his anonymity. He and his works — mischievous and also dark — stand as witnesses to injustice, oppression and inequality around the world, from the artist's native England to walled-off Bethlehem and war-ravaged Ukraine. Subtract his anonymity, they say, and the work still inspires reflection and discussion.

"People buy his works because they absolutely love it," said Acoris Andipa, director of the Andipa gallery in London. "The main feedback that I get is that they really, frankly, don't care if they know who he is."

Banksy, long thought to have been born Robin Gunningham around 1972, grew out of a tradition of street artists who viewed the undercover act of posting their art in public as a subversive form of expression. The postindustrial landscape of his native Bristol was his canvas and gallery. The walls of London, New York and elsewhere gave him a global stage just before the rise of social media.

Banksy's apparent identity has been an open secret among protective fellow artists, and long been easy to find online for those who wanted to know. The Daily Mail reported in 2008 "compelling evidence suggesting" that was the artist's birth name. It has been published by other news outlets, including by The Associated Press in 2016, as part of their coverage of the detective work.

Reuters reported last week that after The Daily Mail's story, Banksy changed his legal name to David Jones — the second most-popular name in Britain. It's also the given name of another rock star, the late David Bowie, whose Ziggy Stardust avatar inspired a 2012 Banksy painting of Queen Elizabeth II.

Banksy's lawyer didn't respond to a request for comment, and the artist's spokeswoman declined to

participate in this story.

Reuters pieced together that a David Jones traveled to Ukraine with a well-known associate of Banksy's in late 2022 — just before the artist's work began appearing on buildings that had been bombed by Russia. Banksy later confirmed that he'd created seven murals in the war zone, including one of a child flipping over a grown man who is wearing a black belt. Russian President Vladimir Putin practices judo.

There's evidence that even some in the establishment he was protesting have accepted Banksy. They didn't arrest him, for example, after the Royal Courts of Justice removed a Banksy stencil depicting a judge in a traditional wig and gown beating an unarmed protester with a gavel. Some street artists grumbled that they might be arrested for creating such graffiti — but when it's a Banksy, it's art.

On Sept. 17, 2000, a Robin Gunningham was arrested for defacing a Marc Jacobs billboard atop a building on Hudson Street in New York.

In a handwritten signed confession, he described the work on the night in question: "I had been out drinking at a nightclub with friends when I decided to make a humorous adjustment to a billboard on top of the property," he wrote in court records unearthed by Reuters and confirmed by the AP. "I painted eye-shadow a new mouth and a speech(sic) bubble" on the photo of a male model. He was charged with a misdemeanor.

## UNESCO recognizes first martial art with Int'l Day

## Tai Chi goes global as China marks first Taijiquan Day

BEIJING, March 23, (Xinhua) — More than 1,200 Tai Chi practitioners from nine countries and 10 Chinese provincial-level regions gathered on Saturday at Wuyi Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage site, for the main event marking UNESCO's inaugural International Taijiquan Day.

The mass demonstration was the centerpiece of events held across China, with special celebrations also taking place at the historic homes of the martial art, including Wudang Mountain in central China's Hubei Province, Wenxian in Henan Province, and Handan in north China's Hebei Province.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated March 21 as the annual International Taijiquan Day at the 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference in Uzbekistan on Nov. 5, 2025.

Lidia Brito, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, said at the meeting that Taijiquan illustrates how traditional sports and games can foster peace and serve as a bridge between people and across generations.

This marks the first time a martial art has been recognized with an official international day within the United Nations

system, underscoring Taijiquan's status as both an intangible cultural heritage and a global fitness practice embraced by millions worldwide.

"The date choice around the Chinese solar term Chunfen conveys Tai Chi's core value: the pursuit of dynamic balance between life and nature," said Ekarat Janrathitakarn, dean of the Maritime Silk Road Confucius Institute in Thailand, who has practiced Taijiquan for nearly 10 years.

Chunfen, or the vernal equinox, occurs when the Sun is positioned directly above the Earth's equator, bringing day and night into equal length and falling between March 19 and 22 on the Gregorian calendar. This year, it fell on March 20. The perfect balance of light and dark reflects the core philosophy of Tai Chi.

Janrathitakarn calls himself a devoted fan of Tai Chi. "The school introduced Taijiquan into its curriculum a year after its founding in 2015. Through the course, students not only learn the exercise but also better understand the Chinese ways of thinking, which many alumni said has led to their career success," he said.

As a core concept in Chinese philosophy that first ap-

peared in documents of the Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC), Tai Chi pursues harmony between humanity and nature and between body and mind.

Taijiquan refers to a martial art that puts the Tai Chi philosophical ideas into physical practice, which is generally believed to have been formed in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

According to the UNESCO website, Taijiquan is a traditional physical practice characterized by relaxed, circular movements that work in concert with breath regulation and the cultivation of a righteous and neutral mind. Safeguarding it would increase its visibility and dialogue about the diverse ways Taijiquan is practised by different communities.

"Today, Taijiquan serves as a new bridge for cultural exchange and mutual learning," said Lin Qiu, deputy mayor of Nanping City, which administers the Wuyi Mountain area.

By hosting 28 cultural and tourist activities for the First International Taijiquan Day, the city aims to promote Tai Chi-themed training while boosting health and wellness tourism, leveraging its scenic landscapes and rich tea culture.

## Tech

## 'AI poisoning'

## Are AI answers truly objective?

BEIJING, March 23, (Xinhua) — A growing number of Chinese are turning to generative artificial intelligence (AI) as their "assistant" for consumption decisions. They may ask chatbots for coffee machine recommendations, and when choosing a blood pressure monitor, they let a large language model make comparisons. However, a new question has surfaced: Are the answers AI gives truly objective?

This year, the annual "3·15" World Consumer Rights Day TV show broadcast by the national broadcaster China Media Group pulled back the curtain on what lies behind some of those answers. Some organizations were found to have mass-published sponsored articles, fabricated product reviews, and invented expert credentials — all designed to be "fed" into the data that large language models draw upon. The goal: turn commercial promotions into the seemingly neutral answers chatbots deliver.

Chinese media have dubbed this practice "poisoning" the AI. The technical term is generative engine optimization, or GEO — a set of techniques designed to influence what AI models retrieve, cite and recommend. While traditional optimization strategies focused on making content more visible in search results, GEO targets the answers that AI generates directly.

Reports indicate that this practice has formed an industrial chain. And it raises a question that extends beyond China: As AI becomes a primary gateway to information, who ensures that what it says can be trusted?

Today's chatbots don't just rely on their training data. Many continuously pull fresh information from across the internet using a technique called retrieval-augmented generation, or RAG.

GEO exploits this. Flood the web with enough branded content, and models start treating it as truth. "Think of it not as rewriting the AI's brain, but contaminating the materials it consults," said Yao Jinxin, a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and researcher at the Wuzhen Institute.



A Russian practitioner practices Taijiquan in Chenjiagou Village of Wenxian County, central China's Henan Province, March 19.

## Experts say welcoming gyms and education can help women

## Doctors want more women lifting weights, but obstacles remain

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP) — During her first year of college, Elisabeth Bradley was inspired to try weightlifting after she followed a woman tracking her fitness transformation on social media, one barbell at a time.

Then, Bradley found herself to be the only woman in the weight room at San Diego State University.

"I felt like I stuck out a lot, and I just thought, 'OK, I'm gonna look dumb,'" she says. Intimidated by a room full of grunting, muscular men, she moved over to the cardio area, mirroring countless women who, for various reasons, avoid the free weights and machines.

But with research mounting on the benefits of resistance training, experts say a few things need to change at the gym to make it more enticing to women.

Michelle Segar, a behavioral scientist at the University of Michigan who studies exercise habits, said that making the environment more palatable and familiarizing women better with weights will lead more to use them. More representation will in turn get more women to continue.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends that everyone -



Thamar Gisele Mengue of Cameroon prepares to lift the weights during the women's heavyweight para powerlifting final at the Commonwealth Games at The NEC in Birmingham, England, Thursday, Aug. 4, 2022. (AP)

men and women - do resistance training at least twice a week. That includes all kinds of activities that require physical force, such as weight machines, resistance bands, or body-weight exercises like pushups and squats.

Resistance training has been found

to help prevent heart disease, improve long-term mobility and lower blood pressure, said Brad Schoenfeld, professor of exercise science at Lehman College in New York City. Some research suggests that women may even benefit more than men from weight training

because it staves off osteoporosis and age-related muscle loss, which women are more susceptible to, he said.

"The bottom line is, resistance training is a cure for all sorts of issues," Schoenfeld said.

Daisy Arauza, a 30-year-old mother of two in Menifee, California, does some Pilates and cardio-based exercise at home using videos and online tutorials, and would like to invest in a gym membership to help with strength and weight management.

But she lacks confidence, she said, and doesn't know enough yet about weights and gym etiquette.

"I have a lot of self-consciousness because of how my body looks right now. When you think of the gym, you think about people that are already more fit. And so it feels like I have to make myself fit into this mold before I can feel comfortable being in a gym setting working out in front of other people," she said.

There's also still a stigma about women lifting weights, Bradley said. Told for years that being skinny is the ultimate goal, some falsely believe strength training will make them look bulky.

Schoenfeld said few women need to

worry about building too much muscle because it's hard for anyone to gain a significant amount - especially women, who have lower levels of the muscle-building hormone testosterone. And it's easy to reduce training intensity if you don't like the results, he said: "It's very, very easy to lose muscle."

Months after her initial bad impression, Bradley shared her strength-training goals with a male weightlifter in her dorm, who showed her the bodybuilding ropes. The boost inspired her to found Girl Gains, a female weightlifting club that now has dozens of chapters at colleges across the country.

"Other things get shoved down our throats, like Pilates and cardio and yoga, but they complement each other," Bradley said. "Being stronger in the gym is going to help you progress in Pilates. Having muscle is going to help make you a faster, better runner."

Women embarking on strength training should do so with an empowering and realistic message, advocates say.

Complementary introductory training sessions can help, but a cursory introduction from a trainer in a revealing outfit won't, said Segar.

"Most women have tried to achieve the perfect body for decades, and it only leads to a sense of failure," she said. Instead of focusing on how the exercise makes them feel, they're thinking about how they're being perceived.

Women who find community in the weight room work together on their own targets, getting stronger and pushing themselves, Bradley said. "One of the things we always say is, 'The gains look good on you.'"

Some women find they can focus better on their workout when men aren't around.

At the women-only Goddess Gym in Peterborough, England, Charlie Sturgeon said she's happier than she was in mixed-sex gyms where she had "some quite weird experiences where people would just stare, pull faces, make comments. And here, with being women only, it just feels like there's a sense of community."

Some gyms try to make women more comfortable by offering day care on site.

Michelle Kozak of Phoenix, who has two young children, canceled her membership when her gym stopped offering child care.



In this photo provided by Roscosmos space corporation, the Soyuz-2.1a, a rocket booster with Progress MS-33 cargo ship which will deliver cargo to the International Space Station lifts off from the launch pad at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Sunday, March 22, 2022. (AP)

## Russia's cargo spacecraft to dock with ISS in manual mode

Russia's Progress MS-33 cargo spacecraft is expected to dock with the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday in manual mode, Russia's state space corporation Roscosmos said Sunday.

According to flight control for the ISS Russian segment, one antenna of the Kurs system, which is used for automatic docking of the spacecraft, failed to fully deploy after the spacecraft's launch earlier in the day.

Specialists are monitoring the spacecraft's flight parameters and preparing for a manual docking by the crew aboard the Russian segment of the ISS, Roscos-

mos said.

Cosmonaut Sergey Kud-Sverchikov is expected to carry out the manual docking. Oleg Kononenko, head of the Cosmonaut Training Center, said manual docking is routinely practiced and considered a straightforward task.

Launched atop a Soyuz-2.1a rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Progress MS-33 is expected to dock with the Russian segment's Poisk module, delivering more than 2.5 tonnes of cargo. (Xinhua)

## 'This is what climate change looks like'

## Records shattered as summer heat wave hits the US Southwest in March

WASHINGTON, March 23, (AP) — The dangerous heat wave shattering March records all over the US Southwest is more than just another extreme weather blip. It's the latest next-level weather wildness that is occurring ever more frequently as Earth's warming builds.

Experts said unprecedented and deadly weather extremes that sometimes strike at abnormal times and in unusual places are putting more people in danger. For example, the Southwest is used to coping with deadly heat, but not months ahead of schedule, including a 112 degrees Fahrenheit (44.4 degrees Celsius) reading in two Arizona communities on Friday that smashed the highest March temperature recorded in the US. Two places in Southern California also hit that same temperature.

All four spots are clustered within about 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) of each other.

"This is what climate change looks like in real time: extremes pushing beyond the bounds we once thought possible," said University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver. "What used to be unprecedented events are now recurring features of a warming world."

March's heat would have been virtually impossible without human-caused climate change, according to a report Friday by World Weather Attribution, an international group of scientists who study the causes of extreme weather events.

More than a dozen scientists, meteorologists and disaster experts queried by The Associated Press put the March heat wave in a kind of ultra-extreme classification with such events as the 2021 Pacific Northwest heat wave, the 2022 Pakistan floods and killer hurricanes Helene, Harvey and Sandy.

The area of the U.S. being hit by extreme weather in the past five years has doubled from 20 years ago, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Extremes Index, which includes various types of wild weather, such as heat and cold waves, downpours and drought.

The United States is breaking 77% more hot weather records now than in the 1970s and 19% more than the 2010s, according to an AP analysis of NOAA records. In the United States, the number and average cost of inflation-adjusted billion-dollar weather disasters in the last couple

years is twice as high as just 10 years ago and nearly four times higher than 30 years ago, according to records kept by NOAA and Climate Central, a nonprofit group of scientists and communicators who research and report on climate change.

"It's really hard to even keep up with how extreme our extremes are becoming," said Climate Central Chief Meteorologist Bernadette Woods Plackly. "It's changing our risk, it's changing our relationship with weather, it's putting more people in risky situations and at times we're not used to. So yes, we are pushing extremes to new levels across all different types of weather."

For government officials who have to deal with disaster it's been a huge problem.

Craig Fugate, who directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency until 2017, said he saw extremes increasing.

"We were operating outside the historical playbook more and more. Flood maps, surge models, heat records - events kept showing up outside the envelope we built systems around. That's just what we saw," Fugate said via email.

## Child mortality falls by more than half since 2000

UNITED NATIONS, March 23, (Xinhua) — Across the globe, deaths of children under five years old have fallen by more than half since 2000, according to a report released Wednesday by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

However, the pace of reduction in child mortality has slowed by over 60 percent since 2015, the "Levels & Trends in Child Mortality" report said.

An estimated 4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2024, including 2.3 million newborns, and most of these deaths were preventable with proven, low-cost interventions and access to quality health care.

Newborn deaths accounted for nearly half of all under-five deaths, reflecting slower progress in preventing deaths around the time of birth, the report said.

Leading causes among newborns were complications from preterm birth and complications during labor and

delivery, it said, adding that infections, including neonatal sepsis and congenital anomalies, were also important causes.

For the first time, the report estimated deaths directly caused by severe acute malnutrition, finding that more than 100,000 children aged 1 to 59 months died from it in 2024.

Child deaths remain highly concentrated geographically. In 2024, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 58 percent of all under-five deaths, followed by Southern Asia with 25 percent, according to the report.

"To accelerate progress and save lives, UNICEF calls on governments, donors and partners to make child survival a political and financing priority, to focus on those at highest risk, strengthen accountability and invest in primary healthcare systems," Farhan Haq, deputy spokesperson for the UN secretary-general, said at a daily briefing.

Meanwhile, a total of 40 students from Ekwazini Secondary School in South Africa's Mpumalanga province were hospitalized on Tuesday following a suspected food poisoning incident, local authorities said Wednesday.

The Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education said that three students initially reported severe stomach cramps after consuming snacks.

As more learners presented similar symptoms, the number of those transported to a nearby hospital for assessment rose to 40, the department said, adding that all affected students are in a stable, non-critical condition and have since been discharged.

Health inspectors have been deployed to investigate the cause of the outbreak. Samples of the suspected snacks, other food items and local water sources have been sent for laboratory testing to determine the exact cause of the illness.

## Allergy treatments have become more effective

## Welcome to allergy season. Here's what you can do to protect yourself

ATLANTA, March 23, (AP) — Allergy season can be miserable for tens of millions of Americans when trees, grass, and other pollens cause runny noses, itchy eyes, coughing and sneezing.

Where you live, what you're allergic to and your lifestyle can make a big difference when it comes to the severity of your allergies. Experts say climate change is leading to longer and more intense allergy seasons, but also point out that treatments for seasonal allergies have become more effective over the last decade.

Here are some tips from experts to keep allergy symptoms at bay - maybe even enough to allow you to enjoy the outdoors.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America issues an annual ranking of the most challenging cities to live in if you have allergies, based on over-the-counter medicine use, pollen counts and the number of available allergy specialists.

This year, the top five cities are: Boise, Idaho; San Diego; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Provo, Utah; and Rochester, New York.

Pollen is the powdery substance made by seed-producing plants and trees that is part of their reproductive process. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall.

Some of the most common tree pollens that cause allergies include birch, cedar, cottonwood, maple, elm, oak and walnut, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Grasses that cause symptoms include Bermuda, Johnson, rye and Kentucky bluegrass.

Pollen trackers can help you decide when to go outside. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology tracks levels through a network of counting stations across the US. Counts are available at its website and via email.

The best and first step to controlling allergies is avoiding exposure. Keep the windows in your car and your home closed, even when it's nice outside.



Elena Ivanov, visiting from San Jose, Calif., walks across a field covered with blooming poppies near the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve in Lancaster, Calif., March 30, 2022. (AP)

If you go outside, wearing long sleeves can keep pollen off your skin to help ward off allergic reactions, said Dr. James Baker, an allergist at the University of Michigan. It also provides some sun protection, he added.

When you get home, change your clothes and shower daily to ensure all the pollen is off of you - including your hair. If you can't wash your hair every day, try covering it when you go outside with a hat or scarf. Don't get in the bed with your outside clothes on, because the pollen will follow.

It's also useful to rinse your eyes and nose with saline to remove any pollen, experts said. And the same masks that got us through the pandemic can protect you from allergies - though they won't help with eye symptoms.

Over-the-counter nasal sprays are among the most effective treatments for seasonal allergies, experts said.

But patients often use them incorrectly, irritating parts of the nose, said Dr. Kathleen May, an allergist at Augusta University in Georgia. She suggested angling the nozzle outward toward your ear rather than sticking it straight up your nose.

Over-the-counter allergy pills like Claritin, Allegra and Zyrtec are helpful, but may not be as effective as quickly since they're taken by mouth, experts said.

If your allergy symptoms are impacting your quality of life, like causing you to lose sleep or loose focus at work or school, it might be time to consider making an appointment with an allergist. There are medications that can train your immune system not to overreact to allergens.

Some remedies for allergy relief that have been circulating on social media or suggested by celebrities - like incorporating local honey into your diet to expose yourself to pollen - have been debunked.

Dr. Shyam Joshi, an allergist at Oregon Health and Science University, said that's because the flowers that bees pollinate typically don't contain the airborne pollen that causes allergy symptoms.

Winters are milder and growing seasons are longer as the climate is changing, meaning there's more opportunity for pollen to stay in the air, resulting in longer and more severe allergy seasons.

## China scales up sleep care nationwide

## Experts explain why pain spikes at night

HEFEI, March 23, (Xinhua) — Many people with chronic pain find their discomfort manageable during the day but unbearable at night, and a team from China has now uncovered the neural mechanism behind these daily fluctuations.

The study, led by Zhang Zhi of the University of Science and Technology of China in eastern Anhui province, was published on Friday in the journal Science.

While the circadian rhythm of pain is a known biological pattern -- typically weaker during activity and stronger at rest -- the underlying mechanism was unclear. The brain's master clock, the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) in the hypothalamus, was known to regulate sleep and hormones, but its direct link to pain was missing.

Using advanced viral tracing technology, the team mapped a specific neural pathway in mice that connects

the SCN to the spinal cord. The researchers found that neurons in this pathway are controlled by the SCN's daily rhythm.

Since mice are nocturnal, their activity cycle is opposite to that of humans. During the mice's rest period (daytime), the SCN was highly active, driving this circuit to amplify pain signals in the spinal cord. At night, when the mice were active, SCN activity dropped, naturally reducing the intensity of pain signals transmitted through the spinal cord.

"This discovery explains why pain sensitivity follows a daily rhythm," Zhang Zhi explained, adding that it also provides a new theoretical basis for improving clinical pain management by aligning treatment schedules with the body's natural biological clock.

Separately, just a few years ago, only a handful of patients would walk into

the sleep clinic at Huimin County People's Hospital in Binzhou, east China's Shandong Province. Today, that number has tripled, with annual visits rising from around 200 to 600.

"It's not that suddenly more people can't sleep," said Yin Jianfeng, the clinic director. "It's that more people are willing to come for help."

The rising foothold reflects both the widespread nature of sleep problems in China and the rising public awareness of sleep health -- a challenge brought into focus as the country marks World Sleep Day on Saturday.

According to a survey published in 2025, Chinese people aged 18 and above sleep an average of 7.06 to 7.18 hours, while 48.5 percent report experiencing sleep problems, a share that rises with age.

The survey, conducted by the Chinese Sleep Research Society and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, showed that on average, Chinese adults fall asleep at 11:15 p.m. and wake at 6:38 a.m.

Among younger people, late sleep has become the norm, with around half not falling asleep until after midnight.

High-pressure professionals, people with chronic illnesses, and those with mental health conditions are among the groups most at risk of insomnia.

Huang Zhibi, a professor at Fudan University and chairman of the Chinese Sleep Research Society, pointed out that the rise in insomnia is closely linked to China's rapid industrial and digital development, which has brought intensified competition, heavier workloads, and a growing reliance on electronic devices.

Excessive screen use can disrupt sleep through light and noise stimulation, while constant exposure to information may also heighten anxiety.



Nurses introduce the correct sleeping posture for children in Handan City, north China's Hebei Province, March 21, 2017. (Xinhua)

## SPORTS

# Fitzpatrick wins Valspar week after finishing second

## DeChambeau takes LIV playoff

**PALM HARBOR, Fla., March 23, (AP):** Matt Fitzpatrick put the disappointment of a close call at Sawgrass behind him Sunday when he birdied the 18th hole from just inside 15 feet to cap off a 3-under 68 and win the Valspar Championship by one shot over David Lipsky.



Fitzpatrick managed to play bogey-free on a sunbaked Copperhead course at Innisbrook that ruined the hopes of so many others, from Sungjae Im to Presidents Cup captain Brandt Snedeker.

Fitzpatrick holed a 30-foot birdie putt on the par-3 15th to take the lead, only for Lipsky - playing in the group behind him - to make a 7-foot birdie on the 14th to catch him.

Fitzpatrick, who won the DP World Tour Championship to close out the European tour season last November, had the final say. His birdie putt was pure and the 2022 U.S. Open champion was emphatic thrusting his fist down to celebrate.

The victory, his third on the PGA Tour to go along with nine European tour titles, came one week after Fitzpatrick felt he did everything right only to see Cameron Young beat him on the final hole of The Players Championship.

Fitzpatrick finished at 11-under 273 on a Copperhead course that was a stern test.

Bryson DeChambeau won for the second straight week by saving par on the final hole for a 6-under 65 and hitting 3-wood from a wet lie in the rough to set up birdie in a playoff to beat Jon Rahm in LIV Golf South Africa.

Captain Bryson DeChambeau, of Crushers GC, hits from a bunker on the 18th hole during the final round of LIV Golf South Africa at The Club at Steyn City in Midrand, South Africa. (AP)

DeChambeau's final start before the Masters brought out some of his best work in winning his fifth overall LIV title. He won last week in Singapore.

DeChambeau had to get up-and-down for par on the closing hole to finish on 26-under 258 and force a playoff with Rahm (63). The par also gave Crushers the team time over South African-based Southern Guard.

Returning to the par-5 18th, DeChambeau pulled his drive into the mud and muck left of the fairway on the rain-soaked course. He hit 3-wood to 12 feet. Rahm went into a bunker and failed to make birdie, leaving DeChambeau two putts for the win.

Hyo Joo Kim held off Nelly Korda at Sharon Heights to complete a wire-to-wire victory in the Fortinet Founders Cup.

Her opening five-stroke advantage gone after 10 holes, Kim regained the

lead on the next hole and ended up with a one-shot margin after a closing bogey.

Kim shot a 1-over 73 for a 16-under 272 total. The 30-year-old South Korean player also won the 2015 event in Phoenix. She has eight LPGA Tour titles to go along with 14 KLPGA Tour victories.

Korda shot 69. The American won the season opener in Florida, then skipped the Asia swing. Earlier Sunday, brother Sebastian Korda beat top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz in the third round of the Miami Open tennis tournament.

Kim won for the first time in a year since the Ford Championship in Phoenix, the event that begins Thursday at Whirlwind Golf Club.

Jordan Gumberg got up-and-down for par on the final hole for a 2-under 70 to hold off Jorge Campillo of Spain and win the Hainan Classic.

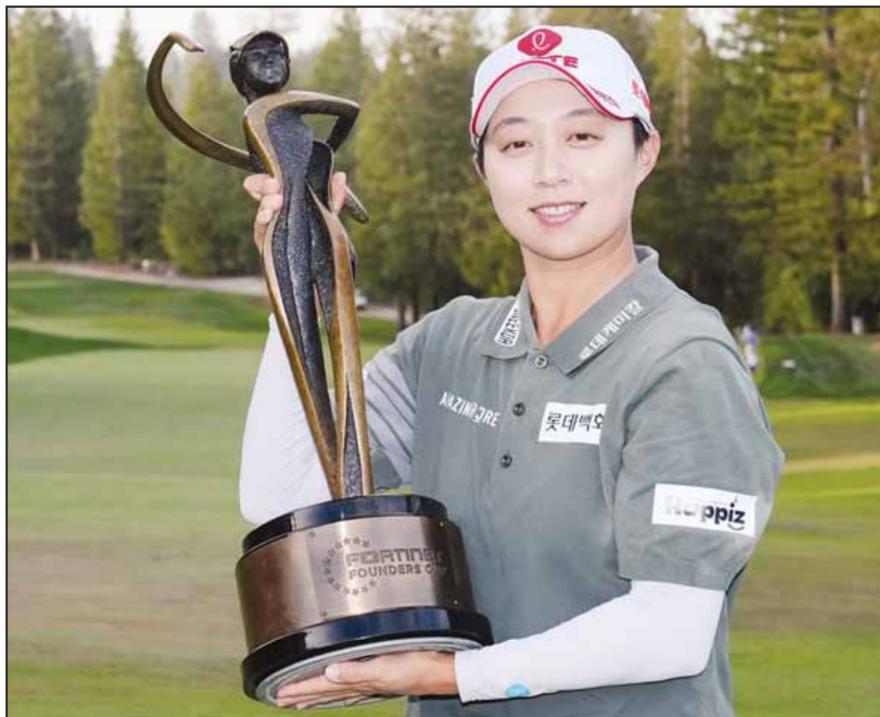
It was the second European tour title for the 30-year-old American. Gumberg was on the verge of losing his European tour card when he holed out for eagle on the final hole of the Genesis Championship, which enabled him to move into the top 115 and keep his card for 2026.

Campillo closed with a 71 and had birdie chances on the final three holes to catch Gumberg, all of them narrowly missing.

Zhou Yanhan, the 17-year-old from China who played the Puerto Rico Open on the PGA Tour two weeks ago, closed with a 69 to tie for third with Adrian Otaegui of Spain (64) and Marcus Armitage of England (69).

Steve Alker won the Cologuard Classic with a birdie on the first hole of a playoff for the second straight year, beating Pdraig Harrington with a 4-footer in mid-90 degree heat.

Last year at La Paloma, Alker beat Long Island club pro Jason Caron with a 12-foot putt on the first extra hole.



Hyo Joo Kim, of South Korea, poses with the tournament trophy after winning the LPGA Fortinet Founders Cup in Menlo Park, Calif. (AP)

Alker won for the 11th time in 100 career starts on the PGA Tour Championships. The 54-year-old New Zealander was nine strokes back after opening with an even-par 71, then shot a 62 on Saturday to pull within two.

Alker closed with a 65 to post at 15-under 198. Harrington, playing behind Alker in the final group, hit his approach long and bogeyed the par-4 18th - missing a 10-foot comebacker.

Zach Johnson closed with a 67 to tie for third at 13 under in his second

start on the 50-and-over tour. He won two weeks ago in Florida in his senior debut.

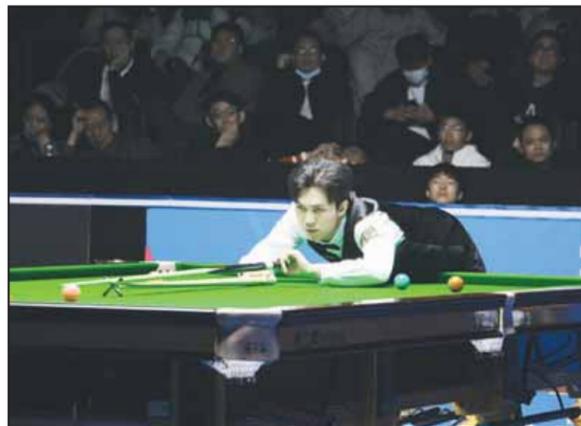
Hannah Green won her third consecutive tournament and made it a major double in her native Australia by closed with a 2-under 69 for a four-shot victory in the Australia WPGA Championship. This comes a week after Green won the Australian Women's Open. Her winning streak started by capturing the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore.

Maddie McCrory won the Orlando Health Championship at Grasslands in Lakeland, Florida, for her first Epson Tour title. She had a bogey-free week, closing with a 4-under 68 for a one-stroke victory over Mariel Galdiano.

M.J. Daffue of South Africa closed with a 3-under 69 for a one-shot victory over Jhaed Hack in the DP World PGTI Open on the Challenge Tour. ... Ritsuko Ryu closed with a 2-under 70 for a two-shot victory in the V Point SMBC Ladies on the Japan LPGA.

## Thai produces historic comeback

Un-Nooh 'stuns' O'Sullivan to win snooker's Yushan World Open title



Thepchaiya Un-Nooh competes during the semifinal match between Thepchaiya Un-nooh of Thailand and Judd Trump of England at World Snooker Open 2026 in Shangrao, east China's Jiangxi Province. (Xinhua)

NANCHANG, March 23, (Xinhua): Thailand's Thepchaiya Un-Nooh produced a historic comeback to claim the biggest title of his career, beating Ronnie O'Sullivan 10-7 in the final of snooker's 2026 Yushan World Open, headlined by a 147 maximum break in the penultimate frame of the best-of-19 showdown.

The 41-year-old Thai, famed for his fearless attacking style and rapid break-building, pulled off a remarkable turnaround, reeling off four consecutive frames to seal the title, having already stunned the sport by eliminating world number one Judd Trump in the semifinals 24 hours earlier.

O'Sullivan made a blistering start in Sunday's final, racing to a 4-0 lead in the afternoon session with a top break of 124 in the third frame. Un-Nooh refused to fold, turning the contest around to lead 6-4.

The seven-time world champion regained control in the second session, firing three consecutive century breaks -- 114, 102 and a clinical 136 total clearance -- to move 7-4 ahead and within touching distance of the trophy. Un-Nooh then unleashed an unstoppable run of scoring to turn the match on its head.

The Thai then wrote himself into the tournament's history books with the seventh official 147 maximum break of his career in frame 16, before closing out the match with a 131 total clearance in the 17th frame, leaving O'Sullivan without a chance to respond in the closing stages.

Speaking after the defeat, O'Sullivan admitted his technical limitations left him unable to match Un-Nooh's level, despite his improved form over the past two weeks.

"I knew there's only so many shots that I'm able to play at the moment. I'm playing better than I was for the last three years, but it's still not good enough to play against someone who plays like that," the 50-year-old said.

For Un-Nooh, the title marks a career-defining triumph, especially coming against his childhood hero O'Sullivan.

"Everyone knows Ronnie is the greatest of all time, not just in this world, in this galaxy. He was my snooker idol when I was young -- I learned his game, his style," he said in his post-match press conference.

The Thai star joked he was "so sad" there was no bonus prize for his 147 maximum, but added that making the perfect break against O'Sullivan in a ranking final was "a dream come true and a fantastic night". He also expressed hope that his title win would help revitalize snooker in Thailand, calling for more support to inspire a new generation of young players in his home country.

# Timberwolves snap 18-game skid in Boston

BOSTON, March 23, (AP): Bones Hyland scored 23 points, Jaden McDaniels had 19 and the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the Celtics 102-92 to snap an 18-game losing streak in Boston.

Ayo Dosunmu added 17 points, eight rebounds and six assists for Minnesota, and Rudy Gobert had 14 rebounds and nine points. The Timberwolves' last win in Boston came in 2005.

Jaylen Brown led Boston with 29 points, Jayson Tatum overcame a slow start to score 16 points and add 11 rebounds. Derrick White had 15 points. The loss snapped the Celtics' four-game winning streak and left them just a half-game ahead of the New York Knicks in second place in the Eastern Conference.

Timberwolves All-Star guard Anthony Edwards was sidelined for his fourth straight game because of right knee inflammation. Forward Naz Reid returned after a two-game absence with a sprained right ankle and was ineffective until scoring in eight of his 11 points during Minnesota's game-breaking 16-0 run midway into the final quarter.

The Timberwolves trailed 81-80 before Hyland's 3 from the right wing pushed them ahead for good with 9:05 to play. Reid had eight straight points in the run with a three-point play and 3 mixed in.

## Knicks 145, Wizards 113

In New York, Karl-Anthony Towns had 26 points and 16 rebounds, Jalen Brunson scored 23 points and the New York Knicks beat the Washington Wizards for their sixth straight victory.

Josh Hart made all three 3-point shots and added 16 points as New York handed Washington its 16th straight loss.

Mikal Bridges had 14 points and six assists, while Mitchell Robinson came off the bench to make all five shots and finish with 10 points and 10 rebounds in 17 minutes.

The Knicks rang up 77 points in the second half against one of the NBA's worst teams and shot 58.5% from the floor and 53% from 3-point range. They also made 18 of 19 free throws (94.7%).

Tyler Kolek played about 5 1/2 minutes in the blowout and went 4 for 4, including 3 for 3 behind the arc, and scored 11 points after pouring in 42 while playing for the Knicks' NBA G League team earlier in the day.

Jaden Hardy made seven 3-pointers and scored 25 points for the Wizards. Anthony Gill had 18.

## Nuggets 128, Trail Blazers 112

In Denver, Nikola Jokic recorded his 35th triple-double of the season and both he and Jamal Murray scored 22 points when the Denver Nuggets celebrated the return of Peyton Watson by cooling off the Portland Trail Blazers.

Jokic had 22 points, 14 rebounds and 14 assists. Cam Johnson added 19 points as the Nuggets stopped Portland's three-game win-



Phoenix Suns guard Jamaree Bouyea (17) drives past Toronto Raptors guard Ja'kobe Walter during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Phoenix. (AP)

ning streak, all on the road.

Deni Avdija led the Trail Blazers with 23 points and Donovan Clingan added 18 for Portland, which never led in the last of a five-game trip.

Watson, who hadn't played since Feb. 4 due to a hamstring injury, scored 14 points in just under 20 minutes. He was one of seven youngsters to score in double figures.

The 6-foot-8 guard was averaging almost 15 points when he got hurt six weeks ago, and coach David Adelman said before tip-off that the minutes of his "high-level wing defender" and precision passer will be restricted as he works his way back into the rotation.

## Suns 120, Raptors 98

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 25 points, Jalen Green added 20 and the Phoenix Suns snapped a five-game losing streak by beating the Toronto Raptors.

Phoenix won its 40th game of the season, which is already a four-win improvement over last year with 10 games to play.

The Suns never trailed and took an 18-point lead into halftime. They extended the advantage to 92-62 late in the third when Booker got fouled while making a driving layup, adding the free throw to convert the three-point play.

Booker shot 9 of 15 from the field, including 3 of 6 from 3-point range. Collin Gillespie

added 16 points. The Suns' second unit played well with Ryan Dunn scoring 12 and rookie Rasheer Fleming adding 11.

## Kings 126, Nets 122

In Sacramento, Malik Monk scored 10 of his 32 points in the final five minutes, Devin Carter made a pair of clutch free throws with 6.6 seconds remaining and the Sacramento Kings held off the Brooklyn Nets.

Monk made seven 3-pointers and went 9 for 9 from the line to help the Kings (19-53) end a two-game skid.

Carter had 16 points and five rebounds, but it was his two free throws in the final seconds that were crucial.

The Nets (17-54) had one final possession, but Nolan Traore stepped out of bounds and turned the ball over. The play was reviewed and upheld.

Kings rookie Maxime Raynaud had his 16th double-double with 22 points and 10 rebounds. Precious Achiuwa added 14 points and 15 rebounds and DeMar DeRozan finished with 10 points and eight assists.

Ben Saraf scored 22 points for the Nets, who have lost seven straight. Ziaire Williams had 18 points and Traore finished with 17.

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or WhatsApp: 97888146

## Two cities to host Pakistan Super League in empty stadiums due to spike in oil prices

ISLAMABAD, March 23, (AP): Pakistan's premier domestic T20 league will take place in empty stadiums due to the recent spike in oil prices, a top official of the Pakistan Cricket Board said.

The Pakistan Super League was set to be played in six cities, but now only Lahore and Karachi will be hosting the games with the opening encounter set to be played at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Thursday.

Pakistan has faced soaring oil prices prompted by the US and Israeli attack on

Iran and the subsequent spread of the conflict across the region. Pakistan's government has asked its citizens to restrict their movement due to rising fuel prices.

"We don't know how long this war will continue," PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi said.

"We can't ask people to restrict their movements and then have 30,000 people in stadiums every day. We decided that as long as this (oil) crisis is ongoing, we will not have crowds at matches. This was a difficult decision, but it needed to be made. The

opening ceremony will also be cancelled." Naqvi said the PCB will issue refunds for all sold tickets within 72 hours and will also compensate franchise owners for the loss of revenue from gate receipts.

Naqvi apologized to the four cities - Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan and Peshawar - that will no longer host PSL games this season. "We have to restrict our movements and we do not want to waste our resources," he said.

"I especially apologize to Peshawar, which was due to host PSL games for the first time,

(but) there will be no crowds anyway, so there was no reason to go to those cities."

Naqvi said he consulted Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who is also the PCB patron, and the eight franchises before finalizing the decision to cut down the venues and stage the games in empty stadiums.

Several foreign players have pulled out of PSL due to personal reasons, including Australians Jake Fraser-McGurk and Spencer Johnson, South African Otneil Baartman and Gudakesh Motie of the West Indies.

Lille wins at Marseille

# Akliouche shines as resurgent Monaco beats slumping Lyon

PARIS, March 23, (AP) — Maghnes Akliouche scored a brilliant individual goal and American forward Folarin Balogun netted a penalty as Monaco rallied to win 2-1 at Lyon for a sixth straight league victory.

Coach Paulo Fonseca's slumping Lyon side is seven games without a win overall having equaled a club record with 13 straight victories.

Sixth-place Monaco is only one point behind fourth-place Lyon and fifth-place Lille in the race for a Champions League spot next season and faces third-place Marseille after the international break.

The top three qualify directly for the Champions League and the team finishing fourth goes through qualifying.

Marseille lost 2-1 at home to Lille, which scored a late winner through Olivier Giroud. Monaco can move level on points with Marseille if it wins their match on April 5.

Marseille forward Mason Greenwood went off early on after being barged over at full speed by Calvin Verdonk. He was replaced by Ethan Nwaneri, who scored with a neat half-volley from Igor Paixão's left-wing cross. The 19-year-old Nwaneri is on loan from Premier League leader Arsenal.

Lille goalkeeper Berke Özer went off in first-half stoppage time after taking an accidental blow to the face from Marseille striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as they challenged for the ball. Özer was replaced by Arnaud Bodart.

Another high-profile error from Marseille defender Leonardo Balerdi gifted Lille a 49th-minute equalizer. Balerdi's misjudged clearance hit the foot of Thomas Meunier and went in.

Meunier then set up Giroud in the 86th with a pinpoint cross which the veteran striker met with a typical downward header.

Things looked good for Lyon when Brazil forward Endrick set up midfielder Pavel Šulc in the 42nd minute, skipping past two defenders down the right before cutting the ball back to the Czech midfielder near the penalty spot.

But Endrick went for goal himself in the 57th and saw his shot cleared near the line with teammate Corentin Tolisso unmarked.

Akliouche equalized five minutes later when he controlled a long pass with one touch to cut inside Clinton Mata and curled a shot into the top-right corner. Akliouche then won a penalty after drawing a foul from Tolisso and Balogun sent the goalkeeper the wrong way.

The penalty was awarded despite a video review showing Endrick had his jersey pulled by Monaco captain Denis Zakaria in the buildup to the penalty.

It was a second error from the officials, who failed to spot

a headbutt from Lyon left back Nicolas Tagliafico to the side of Akliouche's head. Tagliafico raised his right arm as he was running alongside Akliouche as if to disguise the intent.

Tagliafico was sent off in the 89th for a violent lunge on Lamine Camara, whose left foot buckled under him.

Veteran Italian striker Ciro Immobile finally got off the mark for new club Paris FC in a 3-2 home win over Le Havre.

It was a typical poacher's effort from the 36-year-old Immobile to put his side ahead. He latched onto a loose ball and drilled a low shot into the opposite corner. The win moved Paris FC up to 13th under new coach Antoine Kombouaré.

Rennes drew 0-0 at home to rock-bottom Metz and eighth-place Strasbourg won 3-2 at next-to-last Nantes with two late goals from Joaquín Panichelli.

The Argentina striker's brace moved him top of the Ligue 1 scoring charts with 16, one ahead of Greenwood.

# Charlton continues golden run



Team of the United States, poses on the podium after winning the gold medals in the men's 4 X 400 meters relay at the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Torun, Poland. (AP)

## Walsh secures shot put title with season-best throw

**TORUN, Poland, March 23, (Xinhua):** Devynne Charlton of the Bahamas equaled her own world record of 7.65 seconds and became the first woman to win three world indoor titles in the 60-meter hurdles.

Charlton, who also won in 2024 and 2025, celebrated by placing a crown on her head and draping herself in the Bahamian flag during her lap of honor.

"I didn't have the best start, I stumbled a bit but I tried to fix it as fast as I could," Charlton said. "I knew I had it when I crossed the finish line. I know I could have run a little bit faster too." In the women's pentathlon, Sofie Dokter of the Netherlands produced a career-best performance to upset world champion Anna Hall of the United States and world silver medalist Kate O'Connor of Ireland, winning gold with a world-leading 4,888 points. Dokter cried on the podium as the Dutch anthem played.

New Zealand's Tom Walsh secured the



Mariano Garcia, of Spain, leads Isaac Nader, of Portugal, during the men's 1500 meters final at the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Torun, Poland. (AP)

men's shot put title with a season-best throw of 21.82 meters in the sixth and final round. Americans Jordan Geist and Roger Steen took silver and bronze.

The men's long jump final also produced late drama as Portugal's Gerson Balde surged from behind with a world-leading leap of 8.46 meters in the sixth round to overtake Italy's Mattia Furlani for gold. Furlani claimed silver with a personal-best

8.39m, while Bulgaria's Bozhidar Saraboykov took bronze with 8.31m.

Portugal added another gold in the women's long jump through Agate De Sousa, who jumped 6.92 meters in the fifth round. Italy's Larissa Iapichino took silver with 6.87m in the final round, and Colombia's Natalia Linares won bronze with 6.80m.

Britain enjoyed a strong final day in the middle-distance events. Georgia Hunter Bell won the women's 1,500m in a world-leading 3:58.53, while Australia's Jessica Hull, bronze medalist in the 3,000m a day earlier, took silver in 3:59.45.

Keely Hodgkinson added another British gold in the women's 800m, setting a championship record of 1:55.30. Molly Caudery then won the women's pole vault with 4.85 meters.

The United States swept both 4x400m relay titles. The men won in a championship-record 3:01.52, with Belgium taking silver and Jamaica bronze. The U.S. women won in a season-best 3:25.81, ahead of the Netherlands and Spain.

The United States topped the medal table with 18 medals, including five gold. Host Poland finished with one gold, one silver and two bronze. Enditem

## Como takes control of final Champions League spot

# Inter A lead down to 6 points after draw

ROME, March 23, (AP) — Inter Milan is limping into the international break on a four-match winless streak across all competitions that has seen its Serie A lead reduced to six points.

Cher Ndour knocked in a rebound late in the second half for relegation-threatened Fiorentina in a 1-1 draw with visiting Inter.

Pio Esposito had put Inter ahead with a header less than a minute in.

Inter was left six points ahead of second-place AC Milan, which beat Inter in a derby two weeks ago and defeated Torino on Saturday; and seven points ahead of defending champion Napoli, which won at Cagliari on Friday for its fourth straight victory.

Eight rounds remain in the Italian league.

Fiorentina moved two points above the drop zone.

Como took control of the final Champions League spot by thrashing relegation-threatened Pisa 5-0 for its fifth straight victory.

The victory boosted Cesc Fabregas' club three points clear of fifth-place Juventus, which was held to a 1-1 draw by Sassuolo on Saturday.

Assane Diao, Anastasios Douvikas, Martin Baturina, Nico Paz and Maximo Perrone scored

for the hosts. Douvikas' 11th goal of the season made him the first Como player with that many in the top flight since Giuseppe Baldini scored 13 and Renato Cattaneo 11 in 1951-52.

Como's win came three days after one of Como's owners, Indonesian tobacco billionaire Michael Bambang Hartono, died at

86. Hartono and his brother, Roberto Budi Hartono, took over Como in 2019 when the team was playing in Italy's fourth division.

Como returned to Serie A in 2024 for the first time in more than two decades.

Sixth-place Roma beat visiting Lecce 1-0 to move level on

points with Juventus and snap a five-match winless streak that included an elimination defeat to Bologna in the Europa League on Thursday.

Robinio Vaz came off the bench to head in his first Serie A goal for Roma early in the second half after transferring from Marseille in January.

Lazio's January signing Kenneth Taylor scored two second-half goals in a 2-0 win at Bologna that enabled the Roman club to leapfrog the hosts into eighth place.

A Netherlands international, the 23-year-old Taylor was purchased by Maurizio Sarri's club from Ajax for 17 million euros (\$20 million).

Lazio goalkeeper Edoardo Motta - playing in just his third Serie A match - saved a penalty from Riccardo Orsolini in the 51st with the score 0-0.

It was Lazio's third straight win.

Also, seventh-place Atalanta bounced back from a Champions League loss to Bayern Munich with a 1-0 victory over Hellas Verona as Davide Zappacosta scored before the break.

Midfielder Marten de Roon was celebrated before kickoff as he made a club-record 436th appearance for Atalanta across all competitions.



Inter's Denzel Dumfries, left, and Fiorentina's Moise Kean, right, challenge for the ball during the Serie A soccer match between Fiorentina and Inter Milan in Florence, Italy. (AP)

# Oman appoints Sektioui as head coach following vet Queiroz exit

MUSCAT, March 23: Oman Football Association has named Moroccan coach Tarik Sektioui as the new head coach of the senior national team, replacing veteran Carlos Queiroz after a mutual termination of his contract.

Queiroz, 73, took charge in July 2025 on a one-year deal but left following disappointing results. In 11 matches, Oman recorded three wins, three losses, and five draws, exited the Arab Cup at the group stage, and failed to qualify for the 2026 World Cup after losing in the Asian playoff. Reports also cited regional issues in the Middle East as a factor in his departure.

Sektioui, 48, brings an impressive record, having led Morocco to the Arab Cup title in Qatar and guided Morocco's Olympic team to a bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Oman FA has not revealed contract details as the team gears up for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia.

## Cincinnati sinks Montreal

# Messi drives Inter Miami to dramatic win

NEW YORK, March 23, (AP) — Lionel Messi scored the equalizer off a free kick in the second half before helping to set up Micael dos Santos' winner and Inter Miami came from behind to beat New York City FC 3-2 at Yankee Stadium.

Inter Miami (3-1-1) pulls into a second-place tie in the Eastern Conference by handing NYCFC (3-1-1) its first loss. Gonzalo Luján scored his first career goal - unassisted off a rebound in the 4th minute to give Inter Miami an early lead. The 21-year-old defender has started in 23 of his 30 career appearances.

Nicolás Fernández continued his red-hot start with his fifth goal, scoring off a free kick in the 17th minute to pull NYCFC even. Fernández has eight goals in 16 career appearances since last season. Agustín Ojeda scored - with assists from Maxi Moralez and Kevin O'Toole - to give NYCFC a 2-1 lead in the 59th minute. It was Ojeda's second goal this season and his fifth in 61 career matches. Moralez already has four assists this season.

The advantage lasted for two minutes until Messi drilled a left-footed free kick that ricocheted its way past Matt Freese for his fourth goal this season. It was Messi's 54th goal in his 58th MLS appearance. The Argentine legend has scored 901 goals in his illustrious international and club career. Messi's corner kick in the 74th minute helped set up a header by Micael and Inter Miami took a 3-2 lead. Noah Allen and David Ayala assisted on Micael's first goal with his new team.

Tom Barlow scored short-handed for the equalizer in the 80th minute and Kevin Denkey followed with the winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time, rallying FC Cincinnati to a 4-3 victory over CF Montreal.

Barlow tied it 3-3 when he scored three minutes after subbing in to the match. It was his first MLS goal with his new team. Denkey scored for the second time this season - also unassisted - after notching 15 goals in 29 appearances last season - his first in the league. Cincinnati (2-3-0) was forced to play a man down after Miles Robinson's red card in the 60th minute.

Newcomer Wiki Carmona used as-



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi brings the ball up the field during the second half of an MLS soccer game against New York City FC at Yankee Stadium in New York. (AP)

sists from Prince Owusu and Bode Hidalgo in the 6th minute to score for the third time in three matches and give Montreal a 1-0 lead.

Ender Echenique tied it in the 40th minute for Cincinnati with his first goal this season. The 21-year-old scored once in eight appearances last season. Defender Alvas Powell and Matt Miazga had assists. Powell picked up his first assist of the campaign and became the fifth player to make 150 appearances for the club.

Seattle's Andrew Thomas finished with two saves and Drake Callender did likewise as the Sounders and Minnesota United played to a scoreless draw.

It was the third straight and fourth shutout in five starts this season for Thomas. The 27-year-old took the starting reins from mainstay Stefan Frei - now in a backup role. He hasn't allowed a goal since a 2-1 loss to Real Salt Lake in Seattle's road opener. He also blanked the Colorado Rapids 2-0 in the season opener at home. Thomas had the lone save of the first half.

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Arsenal's Martin Zubimendi, left, leaps to head the ball under pressure from Manchester City's Jeremy Doku, center, during the English League Cup final soccer match between Arsenal and Manchester City in London. (AP)

# Sports

## Man City outguns Arsenal to seal League Cup



Manchester City players and staff celebrate with the trophy after winning the English League Cup final soccer match between Arsenal and Manchester City in London. (AP)

### Tottenham's Premier League survival fight plunges deeper into crisis

**LONDON, March 23, (AP): The first major domestic trophy of the season is Manchester City's. And after a dominant 2-0 win against Arsenal in the English League Cup final, it may not be the last.**

Manchester-born Nico O'Reilly sealed victory with both goals in the second half at Wembley Stadium. The win could also have delivered a psychological blow in the race for the Premier League title as Pep Guardiola aims to chase down Arsenal's nine-point lead at the top of the standings.

"(It's an) unbelievable feeling to win a final and to beat this team. We know how good they are," O'Reilly told Sky Sports. "We need to build on it now, it'll give us momentum."

This was serial trophy-winner Guardiola flexing his muscles. It was his 16th major trophy as City manager and a record fifth League Cup. He has won 34 career titles as a manager including his time at Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

And, once again, he was stamping out Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta's own ambitions, having twice beaten his former assistant to the league title in recent years.

"I'm really pleased because I know the opponent we played. Mikel created a team that is almost unbeatable," Guardiola said. "Every time you win a title it looks more difficult than in the past. It is really difficult for many reasons."

Arsenal remains favorite to be crowned league champion this season for the first time since 2004, given its big lead. But with second-place City having a game in

hand and the teams still to play each other in Manchester at the Etihad Stadium, the picture could look very different in the coming weeks.

City's win also ended Arsenal's bid this season for an unprecedented quadruple of major trophies by an English team - including the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup.

"I'm very sad. It is a very hard one to take, especially for our players and our supporters because we know how much it means to them and how much we want that," Arteta said. "We will manage that energy in the right way and we have to go through that pain and disappointment. It's normal and it's part of football."

The 21-year-old O'Reilly, who came through City's academy, was the unlikely hero with both goals from left back.

He took advantage of Arsenal goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga's fumble to head City in front on the hour. And he headed in a second four minutes later to effectively kill off the match.

"My whole family came down today (to watch) ... I know they'll be buzzing and I can't wait to see them," O'Reilly said.

Arteta said he had no regrets about selecting Kepa - who had played in previous rounds - rather than first-choice David Raya.

Tottenham's Premier League survival fight was plunged deeper into crisis with a 3-0 loss to Nottingham Forest, one of three league games played.

The relegation six-pointer left Spurs one place and one point above the drop zone and raised further questions about the future of coach Igor Tudor.

"The season is tough, especially in this moment. Another very bad (result) for

us," said Tottenham captain Cristian Romero. "The situation is tough, but most important thing is play (every game) like a final now."

Fellow relegation-fighting Forest climbed above Spurs to 16th in the standings. The only positive on another miserable day for Tottenham was defeat for West Ham at Aston Villa to keep it in the bottom three.

Tottenham - one of English soccer's most iconic teams and a founding member of the Premier League - is still without a win in the top flight in 2026. Its last win was Dec. 28 and it has lost six of its last seven games.

Igor Jesus' header just before halftime gave Forest the lead at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Morgan Gibbs-White added a second just after the hour mark.

Taiwo Awoniyi completed Forest's first league win under coach Vitor Pereira in the 87th to leave home fans fearing the end of its ever-present stay in England's top division since the inception of the Premier League in 1992.

Tudor was hired last month to try to turn Spurs' season around, but has lost five of his seven games in charge in all competitions and seen his team eliminated from the Champions League.

Tottenham remains one point above 18th-place West Ham, which lost 2-0 to Villa.

Villa boosted its chances of Champions League qualification and took advantage of all of its immediate rivals dropping points.

Villa is fourth, one point behind Manchester United and five points above fifth-place Liverpool.

## Gulf Club Champions League fate to be decided; AFC Challenge League semifinals moved to April

By Hassan Mosa  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 23: The Competitions Committee of the Gulf Club Football Association will meet today to determine the fate of the Gulf Club Champions League, focusing on how to complete the semi-finals and final amid ongoing regional challenges.

Al-Qadsia, which qualified for the semi-finals, was originally scheduled to face Qatar's Al-Rayyan on March 4 and 11. The other semi-final between Iraq's Zakho and Saudi Arabia's Al-Shabab has also been postponed due to the current situation.

The meeting, chaired by Dr. Khalid Al-Muqrin, will discuss potential solutions, including completing the

tournament in a centralized location or holding single-leg matches, while ensuring fairness and equality for all teams.

Meanwhile, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has postponed the West Asia semi-finals of the AFC Challenge League to April 19 and 22. Kuwait will face Oman's Al-Shabab, and Lebanon's Al-Ansar will take on Kyrgyzstan's Muras United. The winners will clash on April 22 to determine who advances to face the East Asia zone winner in the final, scheduled for May 9.

The AFC has not yet confirmed the host city for these matches. However, the hosting application deadline closed on March 19 after reaching out to the federations of Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan.



A file photo of players battling for the ball.

### Real stays within four points of Barcelona

## Vinicius scores decisive double, Real survives Atlético fightback in thriller

BARCELONA, Spain, March 23, (AP): The cheers were back for Vinicius Junior at the Santiago Bernabeu after the Real Madrid forward scored twice in a 3-2 win over Atletico Madrid, keeping his team in the thick of the La Liga title race.

Vinicius had to endure jeers from Madrid's fans earlier this season following the firing of coach Xabi Alonso and some embarrassing losses.

But as the results have improved, so has Vinicius' reception from Madrid's supporters. Madrid has reached a high mark under new coach Alvaro Arbeloa with the win over Atletico - after a humiliating 5-2 loss in September - and the elimination of Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Champions League.

And Vinicius has rightfully gotten some credit for the team's recent improvement in form as he had helped to lead Madrid along with midfielder Federico Valverde, with stars Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham out injured.

Vinicius converted a penalty in the 52nd minute to cancel out Ademola Lookman's first-half opener for Atlet-



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappé, left, and Atletico Madrid's Marcos Llorente challenge for the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

ico before the speedy Madrid forward grabbed the winner with a curling strike in the 72nd.

"Another great game by Vini, it was an example of his character, his talent. It was a great goal that gave us a win in

a difficult moment. I am lucky to have him on my team," Arbeloa said. "We remain in the league fight. Mission accomplished."

Surprisingly, the goals were Vinicius' first against Atletico in La Liga after 12 scoreless derbies for the player. He had scored once before against Atletico in the Copa del Rey.

"I have worked hard all season for games like this," Vinicius said. "I don't know why, but when this time of the season arrives the goals and assists just flow."

Madrid had to hold on for the last 12 minutes when Valverde, who had scored to make it 2-1 before Nahuel Molina leveled for Atletico, got a direct red card for a tough-looking challenge on Alex Baena, who in 2023 accused Valverde of assaulting him after a game.

The sending off almost cost Madrid when Julian Alvarez got free and hit the post with 10 minutes to play.

But Arbeloa's team saw out the final minutes to ensure second-place Madrid stayed within four points of Barcelona with nine games remaining.

### Iowa eliminates No. 1 seed Florida

TAMPA, Fla., March 23, (AP): Alvaro Folgueiras told Bennett Stirtz he'd be ready for the ball, and he delivered in the clutch.

Folgueiras nailed a 3-pointer with 4.5 seconds remaining and Iowa eliminated defending national champion Florida, sending the top-seeded Gators home with a 73-72 victory on Sunday in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Under first-year coach Ben McColum, the Hawkeyes reached the Sweet

16 for the first time since 1999, while Florida (27-8) became the first No. 1 seed to be knocked out of this year's March Madness.

Iowa (23-12) wasted a 12-point lead in the second half but rallied in the final minutes, becoming the first No. 9 seed to beat a No. 1 since 2018, when Florida State shocked Xavier. The Hawkeyes will face No. 4 seed Nebraska in the South Region semifinals Thursday night in Houston.

Xaivian Lee's driving layup put Florida ahead 71-68 with under two minutes left. Stirtz answered with a floater to cut it to 71-70 with 57 seconds remaining.

After Thomas Haugh missed a 3-pointer, Stirtz missed a running layup and Isaiah Brown grabbed the rebound with 8.9 seconds left. Brown made his second free throw.

But Iowa easily broke Florida's full-court press and Folgueiras was wide open in the corner for his 3. The play was designed for Stirtz but when the defense converged on him, he tossed it to his teammate.

Coming off a 59-point victory over Prairie View A&M on Friday night, Florida played like a team that hadn't been tested. Iowa outfought the Gators on both ends.

Latrell Wrightsell, Jr. scored 24 points and fourth-seeded Alabama earned a fourth straight trip to the Sweet 16 with a 90-65 second-round rout of No. 5 seed Texas Tech.



Iowa forward Cooper Koch (8) celebrates a three-point shot during the second half in the second round of the NCAA college basketball tournament against Florida in Tampa, Fla. (AP)