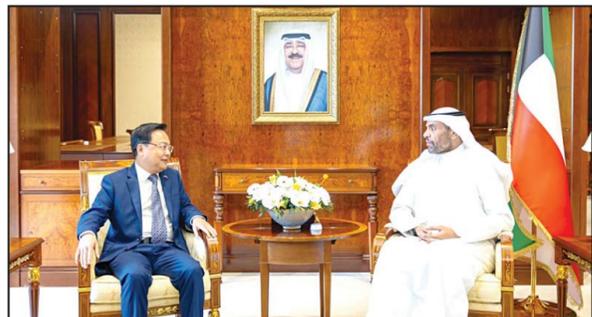




Kuwait FM, Chinese envoy discuss bilateral ties



Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya receives Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei.

'Boost' eyed

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Monday Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei.

During the meeting, the two officials discussed ways to enhance bilateral ties and strategic cooperation in various fields between the two countries.

Kuwait legal committee meets ministries for election coordination

Court delays disqualified candidates' appeal verdict

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Administrative Court postponed until Wednesday the announcement of its verdict on the appeal filed by former MP and 2024 parliamentary election candidate Marzouq Al-Khalifa against the decision to disqualify him from standing for election and until Thursday for similar appeals filed by former MPs and candidates Marzouq Al-Hebeini, Ahmed Mutei Al-Azmi and Jaber Al-Mehailbi.

Al-Mehailbi said he appeared in court on Monday, during which the court lis-

tened to his statement and then it decided to postpone the ruling.

Meanwhile, the government's defense team demanded the rejection of such appeals and that the disqualification decision should be supported in accordance with the law.

The Election Affairs General Department at the Interior Ministry had excluded the disqualified candidates from the candidate lists based on previous rulings issued by the court.

It is worth noting that the appellants demanded for the cancellation of the Interior Ministry's decision to disqualify them and re-register their candidacies in the electoral districts in which they are registered.

The ministry had earlier disqualified some candidates for missing one of the election conditions and being convicted of the crime of participating in by-elections. These candidates include Ahmed Mutee, Jaber Al-Mehailni, Marzouq Al-Habini, Marzouq Al-Khalifa, Sheikh Mishal Al-Malik Al-Sabah, Mohammad Al-Juwahil, Walid Al-Nasser, Mohammad Al-Azmi, Hani Hussein, Adel Al-Saeedi and Mubarak Tarad; while three others were excluded for not completing the registration procedures. Sheikh Mishal Al-Malik Al-Sabah was disqualified as per the law banning members of

Continued on Page 5

Hail expected

Kuwait set for rainy weather

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): The Kuwait Meteorological Department predicts the onset of rainy weather across the country, starting Monday afternoon, particularly in the western regions. Director of the Department, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, explained to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that this weather pattern is due to the increase in low and medium clouds, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms. These conditions are expected to continue until reaching their peak on Tuesday afternoon.

Al-Qarawi noted that the rainfall, varying from light to moderate with occasional heavy showers in some areas, may also include hailstorms. Additionally, strong winds exceeding 60 kilometers per hour are forecasted, leading to high waves in the sea and reduced visibility in certain areas.

However, Al-Qarawi assured that weather conditions are expected to gradually improve after midnight on Tuesday, with clouds dissipating and the likelihood of rain decreasing. He also mentioned the potential for fog formation in some areas on Wednesday.

Moreover, the forecast indicates a return of light to moderate rainfall on Friday morning after a brief break, with overall weather conditions remaining relatively calm.

258 ILLEGAL EXPATS CLEARED, EXIT KUWAIT DEBT-FREE

Kuwait to 'deport' visit visa violators, sponsors included

Residency law offenders rush to adjust status

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Security sources within the Ministry of Interior have disclosed that Lieutenant General Salem Al-Nawaf, the Undersecretary of the Ministry, is stressing strict enforcement of laws regarding violations of recently permitted visit visas.

Any visitor exceeding the allowed visit duration, typically one month, will receive an additional week to rectify the violation. Failure to comply, along with payment of fines, will result in deportation for both the visitor and their sponsor, as reported by Al-Jarida daily.

Regarding the Ministry's decision to regularize the status of residency violators, 652 individuals submitted requests on the first day of the grace period to Residency Affairs Departments to adjust

their status within the announced deadline, starting Sunday, March 17, and extending until June 17. Among them, 258 expatriates left the country via the airport after authorities confirmed they were not wanted and had no outstanding financial fines to settle with the state.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Interior, along with relevant departments, has commenced receiving residency law violators seeking to rectify their status or depart the country during the grace period. This collaborative effort involves multiple administrations, aiming to facilitate the regularization of residency status for violators by June 17, 2024.

The Ministry has outlined terms for the grace period, allowing violators to amend their status after paying fines and following specified procedures. Departing individuals during this period may return under new procedures. However, failure to rectify status or leave within the grace period will result in legal penalties, deportation, and a ban on re-entry.



During the holy month of Ramadan in Kuwait, traffic congestion builds up along the Airport Road in the afternoon as work timings are shortened.

Photo by Samer Shikher

NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to Russian President Vladimir Putin on winning the presidential elections.

His Highness the Amir wished the President good health and success, and further progress in the relations between the two countries. His Highness the Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah also sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to President of Russia Vladimir Putin on winning the presidential elections. (KUNA)

- See Also Page 6

KUWAIT CITY: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KWD (240) million for (6) months with Rate of Return (4.500%).

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KWD (240) million for (3) months with Rate of Return (4.375%).

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani airstrikes targeted multiple suspected hideouts of the Pakistani Taliban inside neighboring Afghanistan early on Monday, killing at least eight people and drawing return fire from the Afghan Taliban, officials said.

The latest escalation is likely to further increase tensions between Islamabad and Kabul. The Pakistani strikes came two days after insurgents killed seven soldiers in a suicide bombing and coordinated attack in northwestern Pakistan. (AP)

DOHA: Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani met on Sunday with UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and discussed the latest developments in Gaza.

Qatari Foreign Ministry said in a statement, the two also discussed cooperation relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them, in addition to accelerate the pace of entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip without obstacles. (KUNA)

AMMAN: Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi discussed with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday efforts to reach a ceasefire and facilitate passage of humanitarian aid in Gaza. The two officials engaged in their discussion through a phone call, said Jordan's Foreign Ministry in a statement.

The statement also mentioned that they also discussed the situation in Jerusalem agreeing on the importance of maintaining respect of the history it is built on, as well as the urgent need to reach a ceasefire in Gaza. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) affirmed on Saturday shooting down a number of Houthi controlled drones and ships in the Red Sea. "On March 16, between 7:50 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. (Sanaa time), Iranian-backed Houthi launched two unmanned Aerial vehicles (UAV) from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward the Red Sea." CENTCOM stated on X platform. (KUNA)

Other Voices

Christians and Muslims: Extinguish the fire of war and light the candle of peace

By Miguel Angel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ Prefect and Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakarathne Kankanamalage Secretary

DICASTERY FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF RAMADAN AND 'ID AL-FITR 1445 A.H. /2024 A.D.

Vatican City

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, Once again we greet you on the occasion of the month of Ramadan with a message of closeness and friendship, aware of the importance of this month for your spiritual journey and for your family and social life, which also embraces your Christian friends and neighbours.

We are pleased to know that our yearly message to you for Ramadan is an important means of strengthening and building good relations between Christians and Muslims, thanks to its diffusion through traditional and modern media, particularly social media. For this reason, it would be beneficial to make this Message better known among both communities.

We would have liked to share with you some considerations on a different theme from the one we have chosen to address. Yet the growing number of conflicts in these days, ranging from military combat to armed clashes of varying

intensity involving states, criminal organizations, armed gangs and civilians, has become truly alarming. Pope Francis recently observed that this increase in hostilities is in fact transforming "a third world war fought piecemeal" into "a genuine global conflict".

The causes of these conflicts are many, some long-standing, others more recent. Together with the perennial human desire for domination, geo-political ambitions and economic interests, a major cause is surely the continuing production and commerce in arms. Even as part of our human family suffers grievously from the devastating effects of the use of these arms in warfare, others cynically rejoice in the great economic profit deriving from this immoral commerce. Pope Francis has described this as dipping a morsel of bread in the blood of our brother.

At the same time, we can be thankful that we also possess immense human and religious resources for advancing peace. The desire for peace and security is profoundly rooted in the soul of every person of good will, since no one can fail to see the tragic effects of war in the loss of human lives, the toll of serious injury and the throngs of orphans and widows.

Continued on Page 5

Main hospital hit

Famine is 'imminent' in northern Gaza: UN

RAFAH, Gaza Strip, March 18, (AP) The U.N. food agency said Monday that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where 70% of the remaining population is experiencing catastrophic hunger, and that a further escalation of the war could push around half of Gaza's total population to the brink of starvation.

The alarming report came as Israel faces mounting pressure from even its closest allies to streamline the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip and open more crossings. The European Union's top diplomat said the impending famine was "entirely man-made" as "starvation is used as a weapon of war."

Continued on Page 5



This photo provided by World Central Kitchen shows food packages being loaded on a truck at a makeshift port on the Gaza Strip, Saturday, March 16, 2024. Spanish NGO Open Arms has sent essential aid to Gaza by a barge towed by a ship from Cyprus. (AP)

## Prayer Timings

Fajr .....	04:36	Asr .....	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:55	Maghrib ..	17:58
Zohr .....	11:56	Isha .....	19:15

# Local

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

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Unstable, a significant decrease in temperature and cloudy with moderate to fresh southwesterly wind to southeasterly wind, with speeds of 22-55 km/h with a chance for thunder rain that might be heavy with a chance for rising dust.

## Weather

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

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	30	20
Kuwait Airport	30	18
Abdaly	32	15
Jahra	31	19
Salmiyah	28	21
Nuwaisib	27	17
Wafra	30	16

## EU keen on strengthening ties with Kuwait in all fields: spokesman

# 'Kuwait plays pivotal role in promoting peace, stability in region'

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Official spokesman for the European Union (EU) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Luis Bueno has affirmed that Kuwait plays a pivotal role in promoting peace and stability in the region, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In an interview with the daily, Bueno asserted: "We appreciate this role. Kuwait's calm policy is a huge asset to the Gulf and the international community, especially in these times when we are witnessing an increase in crises. The EU considers Kuwait a reliable partner at the regional and international levels, so we are keen on strengthening cooperation with Kuwait in all fields."

He pointed out that the EU values Kuwait's role in the humanitarian field, "as we share the same priorities regarding the current crises, particularly the catastrophic situation in Gaza. The United Nations Security Council, in its Resolution 2712, called for an urgent and extended humanitarian truce and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days. This must happen now, so that the hostages can be released and humanitarian workers can resume their operations. There should be life-saving efforts on a scale necessary to match the enormous humanitarian needs across Gaza."

He said "the lives of millions of people are at risk and we cannot let them down. It is necessary to support and respect the vital role of the United Nations (UN) in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance."

He then congratulated Kuwait for obtaining membership in the Human Rights Council from 2024 to 2026. "It was a unanimous decision. We look forward to strengthening bilateral cooperation in this regard," he revealed.

## Success

Regarding the possible success of the European military mission, 'Aspides', launched by the EU in the Red Sea to deter the Houthis and its importance in protecting and stabilizing the region, Bueno stressed: "This is a purely defensive naval mission that was established in order to protect commercial ships and ensure freedom of international navigation in accordance with UN Resolution 2712 and the international law, with the aim of securing the movement of essential goods, including food, fuel and humanitarian aid, to all parts of the region and beyond through this vital waterway," he elaborated.

He explained that this mission has no relationship with other missions in the region, pointing out the UN and a number of countries and international organizations have warned about the devastating effects of the Houthi attacks, which could lead to the disruption of commercial shipping.

While he pointed out that the Aspides mission was launched less than a month ago, he stressed that the EU has no desire to militarize the Red Sea.

Regarding the impact of the Houthi attacks and tension in the Red Sea on Europe's economy, Bueno said the EU is closely monitoring the situation. "According to our data, ship traffic in the Red Sea decreased by 22 percent within one month due to these attacks. So far, there has been no impact on energy and commodity prices in general, but there is an impact on transportation prices, and unfortunately the largest impact we will probably see in the region," he disclosed.

In response to accusations regarding the decline in the European position on the Ukraine and Gaza crises and its dependence on the American position, he stated: "We are fully aware that there are accusations against the EU countries in this regard, but the nature of the EU must be explained in order for us to understand the steps that we are taking. Ukraine is neighboring four countries

in the EU, and the impact of the war in Ukraine is so enormous that the Europeans see it as an existential threat to them and that the future of the European project is at stake. This helped build consensus among the member states, which reached a unified policy and this allowed a strong and united EU reaction. With regard to the war on Gaza, the EU countries are not united on this, as some countries called for a ceasefire while others opposed it. The result is a weaker position for the EU as a bloc. High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell plays an essential role as he works for a unified position to stop the conflict and suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza."

## Pressure

On why the EU did not use its 'commercial' influence to pressure Biden and stop the war on Gaza, Bueno revealed the EU's foreign policy official, Josep Borrell, was in the United States this week and he discussed the war in Gaza with his counterpart Anthony Blinken. "The EU is studying a request from Spain and Ireland to find out whether Israel is violating the terms of the Association Agreement with EU," he added.

According to Bueno, the EU repeatedly called on Israel to respect international law and international humanitarian law, avoid civilian casualties and protect them. "In the last meeting with the government of Israel, we appealed to the Israeli Foreign Minister to make more efforts to ensure the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and infrastructure, including those of the United Nations Relief Agency for Palestinian Refugees, opening new crossing points for humanitarian aid and accelerating truck inspection procedures," he narrated.

He emphasized that peace alone will achieve security and safety in the Middle East, and that the EU supports the Arab Peace Initiative as a basic reference for ending the conflict.

He continued saying: "We cannot deal with Gaza in isolation from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as it is an integral part of the Palestinian State. The solution is known to everyone, which is the two-State solution, and there is a clear consensus among member states on this matter."

Asked if there are European-Iranian discussions to lift sanctions within the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Bueno disclosed: "Borrell continues his efforts to facilitate dialogue between the United States and all participants in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The EU continues to support the full implementation of this agreement as well as Security Council Resolution 2231."

On January 16, 2016, as soon as the International Atomic Energy Agency verified Iran's implementation of measures related to the nuclear program, most EU and UN sanctions were lifted. The EU lifted all economic and financial sanctions related to the nuclear program. However, some remained. Restrictions are in place, such as bans on weapons and ballistic missiles, and restrictive measures against certain listed persons and entities. Given Iran's failure to fulfill its obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the European Union Council decided on Oct 18, 2023 to maintain its restrictive measures against Iran. This step is reversible and does not mean that the EU is imposing additional restrictive measures on Iran."

He highlighted the importance of the 'Development Road' project, which links the Arabian Gulf to Europe via Iraq, in enhancing international trade and economic communication with countries in the region and developing investments in these countries. "Therefore, some member states of the EU began to search for investment opportunities. Our ambassador in Baghdad visited the Grand Al-Faw Port last December and we are following with interest the development of this project," he concluded.



Kuwaiti citizens through the Dates Market in Shuwaikh at the time before breaking the fast. Dates are a staple in the holy month of Ramadan as most people break the fast with a few pieces of dates and water. Other food items and cold drinks, including laban, Vimto, orange juice, sweets follow later. Traditionally, in Kuwait, one heavy meal is taken around 10 pm or later which suffices for the next whole day. From the religious point of view, it is mandated to take 'suhour', the meal just before the call (Azan) for Fajr (morning) prayer.

Photo by Samer Shaqir

# Strategic alternative to payscale discussed; no new amendments

MEW seeks budget to install energy system

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has discussed various aspects of the strategic alternative to the salary scale and there were no new amendments; so it will be submitted to the Economic Committee at the Council of Ministers soon, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting a government source.

The source explained the Economic Committee will deliberate on the axes of the alternative to the salary scale like the cost and mechanism for its implementation, in preparation for submission to the National Assembly after the April 4 election.

The source stated that the strategic alternative to the salary scale needs an economic vision and scrutiny of all aspects, because it will cost the State budget approximately KD1 billion annually. He said the most important matters that the Council of Ministers will discuss include ways to avoid burdening the State budget and finding non-oil sources of income to support the approval of the strategic alternative to the salary scale. He added the Council of Ministers will review the categories eligible for the strategic alternative to the salary scale.

## Leadership

On filling up vacant leadership positions, the source revealed the list of nominees to these positions will be reviewed and then submitted to the CSC within this week, in preparation for submission to the Council of Ministers in its upcoming session.

He confirmed that many ministers held meetings with acting officials and nominees for the vacant leadership positions to determine the work development vision of the nominees before submitting the list of nominees to the CSC.

He added some ministers informed the Council of Ministers that work in their respective ministries almost stopped due to the vacant leadership posts; and they were then asked to expedite the nomination process in order to continue the work toward achievements, especially in vital sectors that cannot tolerate delay.

He affirmed this will continue throughout the holy month of Ramadan as part of the government's plan to speed up the process of filling up vacant leadership positions.

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**Energy project:** The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has requested its Finance counterpart to approve the budget for the supply and installation of a photovoltaic system for its facilities in 10 sites to produce 34.6 megawatts of electricity, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources said this is one of the small renewable energy projects that the ministry intends to implement in order to supply its sites with renewable energy; instead of traditional energy produced from fossil fuels, which contributes to saving the budget allocated for this kind of energy and protecting the environment.

Sources disclosed that the ministry supplies electricity to secondary transfer stations and fresh water to the housing cities, indicating that electrical and water networks in the cities were established by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare.

□ □ □

**Distance learning:** The Ministry of Education intends to implement the distance learning system for students in the last two days of the holy month of Ramadan; during which the students will have online classes, while the teachers will conduct lessons in their respective schools, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Sources indicated that the ministry chose the last two days of the holy month, because there are no short tests scheduled during those days. Sources said the ministry will issue a circular in the next few days, announcing in detail the implementation of the distance learning system. Sources added the ministry has instructed the principals to activate 'Teams' account.



Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Secretary-General and CEO of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Jagan Chapagain.

KUNA photo

## Deputy FM receives IFRC CEO

Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Sunday Secretary-General and CEO of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Jagan Chapagain, accompanied by KRCS

Chief Dr. Hjal Al-Sayer. Vice Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the Asia and Pacific region, Maha Al-Barjas also attended the meeting. (KUNA)

## Safeguarded data in Iraq invasion

# PACI data base expert Ihab Younis expires at age of 61

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Ihab Younis, a database expert at the Public Authority for Civil Information, passed away at the age of 61, leaving behind a legacy of courage and dedication. He played a crucial role in safeguarding Kuwait's civil registry database during the brutal Iraqi invasion, ensuring its protection before the occupying forces could tamper with it, reports Al-Rai daily.

Born in Egypt, Younis moved to Kuwait with his family when he was just one month old in 1962. He received his education in Kuwait's schools and graduated from Kuwait University's Faculty of Science, specializing in Mathematics, Computers, and Statistics.

Joining the Public Authority for Civil Information in 1985, he became instrumental in maintaining the database that would later serve as a crucial demographic map of Kuwait, recognized by the United Nations.

During the invasion, Younis collaborated with authority officials to extract a copy of the database, smuggling it out of Kuwait to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. His efforts resulted in two complete copies of the database on magnetic tapes, crucial for preserving Kuwait's vital information.

Moreover, Younis played a pivotal role in disrupting the invading Iraqi forces' operations. He suggested a plan to sabotage the central control disk, effectively halting the main computer's function and preventing the Iraqis from accessing civilian information systems.



Ihab Younis

Following his departure from Kuwait, Younis continued his mission in Bahrain, where he worked tirelessly to ensure the continuity of the database system. He compiled detailed lists of Kuwaitis with their data, which were later submitted to the Kuwaiti government and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as an official demographic map of Kuwait.

Younis's dedication allowed for the provision of essential services, including ration card services and rewards allocation, to Kuwaiti citizens both inside and outside the country. His bravery and commitment to protecting Kuwait's vital information will be remembered as a testament to his unwavering patriotism and loyalty.

# Education Ministry to disburse long overdue bonus to workers

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, has directed the swift disbursement of overdue financial rewards to Ministry of Education workers, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Educational sources told the daily that the financial sector is on the verge of completing the disbursement process, with funds expected to reach beneficiaries' accounts early next week.

The disbursement will encompass all outstanding bonuses, including those for training, teaching, supervision, examinations, work team bonuses, night shift allowances, and entitlements for grading tests, control

workers, marking committees, and workers in adult education centers. The sources noted that efforts are underway to finalize disbursement operations and transfer funds to beneficiaries' accounts.

Furthermore, Minister Al-Adwani has tirelessly pursued approvals from regulatory authorities and the Ministry of Finance to facilitate the necessary transfers and distribute bonuses to employees, including administrators and teachers, for their recent assignments.

On another front, Acting Undersecretary for Public Education, Hessa Al-Mutawa, emphasized the urgent response to letters and comments received from employment affairs monitors by educational district directors. Al-Mutawa highlighted the importance and urgency of addressing communications received from the Administrative Affairs Sector regarding requests from the Civil Service Commission and observations on Ministry decisions.



Dr. Al-Adwani

# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## 'Kuwait needs to diversify ties with US for security in future'

"IT IS noteworthy that both Kuwait and the United States are currently amidst distinct electoral waves: Kuwait navigating its national elections, while the United States sees escalating discourse between the Democratic and Republican parties as they gear up for the presidential elections in the first week of November, seven months from now," columnist **Abdullah Bishara** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Of particular concern to Kuwait is the reaffirmation of the enduring strategic partnership with the United States. This partnership encompasses crucial dimensions of life, including security, defense, trade, education, investment, tourism, and various dialogues, overseen by a joint committee comprising senior specialists and officials from both nations. Regular meetings of this committee underscore the commitment to invigorating all avenues and honoring their outcomes.

"Among all nations, Kuwait is especially attuned to the unfolding nomination dynamics in the United States. There is a keen interest in discerning the voices dissenting against American foreign policy, sharply critiquing its engagements and collaborations with less developed regions and most countries worldwide across security, commerce, and technological cooperation.

"While there is a sense of assurance regarding the trajectory of the Democratic Party and familiarity with the incumbent candidate, President Joe Biden, memories of the previous Republican Party contender, former President Donald Trump, who lost to Biden in the last election, resurface.

"Former President Trump's discomf with America's foreign obligations was evident in his criticism of alliances with Europe, NATO, and East Asian countries like Japan and Korea. This led him to engage in meetings with North Korean leaders, exploring the potential for reducing nuclear arsenals.

"Trump viewed the Gulf-American relationship with a certain unease, perceiving it as burdensome due to its extensive commitments, particularly in defense and security matters. He advocated for withdrawal, leaving Gulf nations to fend for themselves.

"Such sentiments are disconcerting for Kuwait, underscoring security vulnerabilities. Kuwait's painful past experience, notably the invasion it endured, emphasized the necessity for a robust deterrent capability to thwart aggression and mitigate harm. The liberation of Kuwait marked a turning point in Kuwaiti-American relations, with Washington leading a global coalition to secure Kuwait's freedom, demonstrating unwavering resolve.

"Post-liberation, Kuwait's diplomatic landscape transformed forging strategic partnerships integral to Kuwaiti life across various domains beyond security, encompassing investment, trade, culture, diplomacy, and technology.

"Cooperation with Britain has expanded into investments and dialogue involving relevant ministries, serving as a model for relations with the United States. However, dialogue with the US requires further enhancement, extending beyond security and economics to encompass technology, tourism, culture, and educational exchange. Strengthening ties with the American people, acknowledging their role in Kuwait's liberation, and fostering mutual understanding are paramount objectives for Kuwait's diplomacy.

"In bygone eras, the American electoral landscape held little relevance for us. America's regional approach, intertwined with Israel and maintaining strategic ties with Jordan, Egypt, and Gulf states, remained consistent.

"Election outcomes rarely deviated significantly between candidates until the emergence of President Trump. His candidacy ushered in a period of questioning American commitments worldwide, including in the Gulf, which seemed incongruent with the longstanding relationship between Washington and the Gulf. President Trump failed to acknowledge the vast and varied historical American interests in the region, viewing them as insufficient justification for the substantial costs borne by the United States to uphold Gulf security.

"Moreover, the presence of energy resources in the Gulf did not serve as a compelling reason for America to remain, as energy was readily available in global markets, and access could be regulated. As we monitor the electoral landscape, it's crucial to recognize that we're not alone in observing the fluctuations in the proposed electoral programs of the two major parties and their impacts worldwide -- be it among friendly, allied, adversarial, or neutral nations.

"America's reach spans from East Asia to the Middle East, Europe, and beyond, with virtually every member of the United Nations affected by developments in Washington to varying degrees. The influence of nations in Washington is measured by the depth of their diplomatic channels and the diversity of their roles, spanning political, commercial, and cultural spheres, as well as the frequency of high-level visits.

"In Kuwait, our response to coalition terms has been primarily focused on political and defense affairs, with limited engagement in cultural and educational exchanges -- an area ripe for improvement. Effective communication with American legislative bodies, such as the Senate and House of Representa-

tives, is imperative for fostering meaningful dialogue with Washington's ruling institutions.

"In the early years of the Gulf Cooperation Council's existence, annual visits to Washington were instrumental in nurturing these relationships, facilitated by organizations like the Council for Arab-American Relations. These efforts contributed to enhancing Washington's understanding of the Gulf Cooperation Council's constructive role in the Arab world and beyond.

"We will continue to follow the development of the American electoral process until the end of the first week of next November, and we hope for the best."

**Also:**

"I emphasize every word mentioned in the article by brother Ahmad Al-Sarraf, under the title 'Saleh, the Owner of the Three Names', about the honorable Mr Saleh Al-Fadala, and I join him in praising and supporting this person who took upon himself an extremely difficult task," columnist **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Despite the seriousness of the content of the mission of Mr. Saleh Al-Fadala in the illegal resident apparatus, to single out the corrupt and counterfeiters, and the difficult nature of his work, and the results of this work in revealing poisonous secrets that are dangerous to the nation, its security, stability, and identity, this mission is the strongest bright light at the end of the black tunnel that the nation was passing through; a stage in which truth mixed with injustice, and bad intentions with good intentions were identified.

"Mr. Saleh Al-Fadhala endured what the most powerful people could not bear, in terms of the cruelty of attacks and personal and family abuse, from parties that know well and realize that they are the first and last victims of the legal work of this apparatus. However, in the end, it is a purely national mission that, with all the circumstances surrounding it from its beginning to the present day, cannot be borne by an ordinary person because it is considered a kind of 'jihad'.

"We all stand with you with grace, and we all support your efforts and the efforts of everyone with you in revealing the truth without injustice or abuse, as we have promised you in your work, which is based on documents and information based on facts and not gossip.

"Many national efforts have been initiated by men and women of the people of Kuwait to protect their homeland from the darkness that stained the homeland's wall for a period of time, in light of corruption that found an environment that embraced it in which it expanded with the help of some of those with decision-making and authority at the time, may God forgive them, when they sold the homeland to inflate their accounts and increase their popularity."

"Relationship... Our great Islamic religion urges reunification, especially during Islamic occasions like Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adha and the holy month of Ramadan -- may it bring goodness and blessings to everyone," **Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"These are occasions that pave the way for reconciliation between people, to put aside differences between them. Our political leadership has been following this for a long time.

"When His Highness the Amir, may Allah protect him, welcomed his fellow citizens of all walks of life and ages, both men and women, during this holy month, it was observed that some people, specifically the former lawmakers, did not have the honor of greeting the father of everyone on this great annual religious occasion.

"I deliberately referred to the former lawmakers to remove the opposition status attached to them in the period prior to renewing the relationship with pure intentions and opening a new page free of the impurities of the past.

"Let us imagine... What would be the result if some former MPs or one of them took over the Prime Minister post to manage the country for one day? What if he took over for a week, after they rejected the law on withdrawing citizenship from counterfeiters and the legal measures taken by the Ministry of Interior whose mission is to protect the country and its people? What is expected? What is the fate of the Kuwaiti citizen?"

"Some of us need moral advancement and some education in order to respond well to topics that we do not like. The matter does not go beyond friendly disagreements over verbal opinions without nervousness and aggression.

"Do not go overboard... It is the Ramadan habit of some women with a deficient mind to waste money, so what prompts a woman to give her friends a quantity of incense or some women's jewelry at high prices on the occasion of the blessed month of Ramadan?"

"This holy month does not call for such spending except for zakat and alms, which bring good to the owner. What is called 'naqsa' in the past, when family and neighbors exchange some of their breaking of fast meals without formal appearances has become a competition for whose gift is more expensive. The exchange of clothes suggests to us that others lack clothes, while sending incense makes others feel unbearable.

"Therefore, we say to these women: Feed the poor and needy so that you may gain the Hereafter, instead of this crazy extravagance every year, and to preserve and develop your wealth. May Allah guide you.

"May Allah protect Kuwait and its people from all forms of evil and harm!"

— **Compiled by PFX Fernandes**



Firemen pulling out the body from the sea.

## One dead as car plunges into sea off Khaleej road

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Tragedy struck on Sunday afternoon as a collision led to a vehicle plunging into the sea off Al Khaleej Street, claiming the life of one individual. The General Fire Force reported that both firefighting and marine rescue teams swiftly responded to the incident. The Fire Department has since turned over the site to the appropriate authorities for further investigation, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

## Team tasked to combat cheating gives opinions

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Anwar Al-Hamdan, has given the nod for the final report of the team tasked with combating cheating in exams, comprising eight key recommendations, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

The recommendations advocate for implementing a system of diverse exam models for secondary schools across different semesters, aiming to curtail instances of cheating. Additionally, the report proposes granting school administrations the authority to utilize anti-cheating devices during examinations, enhancing the integrity of the assessment process.

Furthermore, the recommendations call for revisions to Resolution 2018/21 concerning the handling of cheating reports, advocating for broader authority beyond the committee head. It also suggests printing secondary school tests within schools, particularly for tenth and eleventh grades, as a means to deter cheating and streamline educational resources effectively.

Moreover, the committee advises against extensive application of Ministerial Resolution No. 2023/245 in forming examination committees for twelfth-grade students, emphasizing external rotation as the norm. Additionally, it advocates for linking national test results with the Ministry of Education to verify the authenticity of school grades, mandating physical examination settings for group observation and reevaluating the selection process for resident observers.

Concluding the report, the committee stresses that while these measures can contribute to reducing cheating in schools, the primary responsibility lies with families, state institutions, and civil society. They emphasize the crucial role of these entities in fostering values, behaviors, and principles conducive to integrity and hard work, underscoring that cheating undermines societal fabric and progress.

## Municipality proposes new fees, regulations

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Kuwait Municipality has proposed several amendments to the advertisement regulations, including the addition of a seasonal advertisements item with a fee of 5 dinars per month per square meter. Additionally, the municipality suggests raising fees for mobile electronic advertisements to 75 dinars annually per square meter and setting a fee of 5 dinars per month for advertisements on mobile vehicles licensed by the Ministry of Commerce, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

Engineer Saud Al-Dabbous, Director General of the Kuwait Municipality, detailed these amendments in a prepared document addressed to Chairman Abdullah Al-Mahri of the Municipal Council. The proposed changes include a financial fee of 75 dinars annually per square meter for animated electronic advertisements, and 50 dinars annually per square meter for fixed commercial advertisements and non-mobile electronic advertisements.

The amendments also introduce new clauses, such as specifying the height requirements for advertisements and introducing seasonal advertisement fees. Counselor Hussein Al-Ajmi, Director of the Legal Department in the municipality, confirmed the legality of these amendments and emphasized the completion of the review process.

Al-Ajmi urged the Advertising Committee to compile a comprehensive project outlining the necessary amendments and additions to the advertisement regulations, which will undergo further legal scrutiny before implementation.

## Inmate found dead

## Domestic worker commits suicide in sponsor's home

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: A 41-year-old domestic worker committed suicide by hanging in the house of her sponsor in Al-Qurain, reports **Al-Anba** daily. A woman reported to the Operations Unit at the Ministry of Interior that her domestic worker committed suicide in the kitchen pantry by tying a rope around her neck.

A security source confirmed that a forensics team rushed to the location immediately after receiving the report. They referred the domestic worker's body to Forensics.

A case of death under criminal suspicion was registered at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Police Station and investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances leading to the suicide.

Meanwhile, a citizen was found dead at the Central Prison and investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances leading to his death, reports **Al-Rai** daily. The citizen's cellmates reported that he was unconscious, so paramedics and security officers rushed to the cell, but he was already dead when they arrived at the scene. His remains were referred to the Forensics Department to determine the cause of death.

# GCC nations grapple with obesity: report

'Weight loss' market surges

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: A recent report highlights overweight and obesity as the foremost health concerns in Gulf countries, amidst a backdrop of robust economic growth and sedentary lifestyles, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

Over the past few decades, the Gulf region has witnessed a surge in obesity rates attributed to sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary patterns, and the proliferation of fast food culture. The World Health Organization ranks Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar, among the highest globally in terms of obesity prevalence and associated ailments.

According to a study conducted by iMark Research Company, the weight loss market in the Gulf soared to approximately \$5 billion in 2023, with projections indicating a value exceeding \$10 billion by 2032, representing an 8% annual growth rate.

The report underscores the significance of weight loss interventions in improving health outcomes, such as reducing the risk of obesity-related diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers. It emphasizes that weight loss regimens, including dietary modifications, exercise, and lifestyle changes, are pivotal for enhancing overall health and athletic performance.

The region's modernization, economic development, and reliance on car transportation have exacerbated lifestyle changes conducive to obesity. However, there is a growing awareness of the health risks posed by obesity, prompting an increasing focus on healthy living and preventive healthcare initiatives.

With rising healthcare costs and heightened awareness of preventive measures, residents in the Gulf region are increasingly seeking solutions to manage their weight. This has spurred a surge in demand for weight loss products, services, and programs aimed at achieving and sustaining healthy weight goals.

compression.

The court's decision reflects the acceptance of this defense, absolving the accused of the charges brought against them.

**Saudi couple in mishap:** Two Saudi nationals visiting Kuwait found themselves in a traffic accident during their stay, reports **Al-Nahar** daily. The Saudi Embassy in Kuwait issued a statement, affirming its commitment to the well-being of Saudi citizens abroad. Following the directives of the Saudi leadership, the embassy closely monitored the situation of the two citizens, identified as a couple, involved in the accident. Subsequently, arrangements were made for their transfer via a medical evacuation plane to continue their treatment in Saudi Arabia. The embassy extended its wishes for their swift recovery.

During the proceedings, the defendants maintained their innocence, asserting that they encountered the items in question at the Salmi scrapyard. They claimed to have purchased them under the assumption that they were ordinary iron materials, intending to trade them without knowledge of their military origins. Their explanation clarified that their intention was to process the iron for export after



Colonel Waleed Al Azmi and Waleed Al Khashti with Zain and MoI officials.



A photo from the visit.

## MEW requests budget approval for 34.6 MW solar installation project

Municipality rejects Council member's 'parking' proposal

By Mohammed Ghanem and Inass Awadh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18:** According to informed sources in the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, the ministry requested the Ministry of Finance to approve the budget for a project for the supply and installation of a photovoltaic system in its facilities in ten locations for producing 34.6 megawatts within the small renewable energy projects that the ministry seeks to implement. This includes supplying its sites across many regions with renewable energy instead of traditional energy produced from fossil fuels, which

contributes to saving the budgets allocated for this energy, and also preserves the environment.

The sources stressed that, if the budget is approved for the aforementioned project, it will be put forward through the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to the specialized companies classified by CAPT to submit their bids and study them, after which CAPT will take the award decision and begin implementation.

Meanwhile, the sources reported spending a total amount of KD 14.289 million, the value of two water projects in the residential city of Wafra. The project to implement a main water line with a diameter of 800 mm from the reservoirs of Wafra to the residential city of Wafra costs KD 3.714 million and the project to implement a 1,200 mm diameter water line from the Zour Water Complex to the Wafra reservoirs costs KD 10.575 million.

In the same context, they said the ministry delivered electricity to all secondary transformer stations,

and also delivered fresh water to the city, revealing that the works on the electrical and water network in the city were carried out by PAHW.

**Municipality rejects proposal:** Kuwait Municipality rejected the request related to the proposal submitted by Municipal Council member Fahad Al-Abduljader to allocate temporary parking spaces in Al-Adami Rest House, due to the urgent need to provide sufficient number of parking spaces for the Qadran, Al-Hafeirah and Fawwar projects.

In its letter of response approved by its general director Saud Al-Dabbous, the municipality stressed that the request does not comply with the regulations and laws.

It explained that upon studying the matter it became clear that the proposed parking lots are located on the "right-of-way".

After the site was presented to the Municipality's Public Facilities and Services Subcommittee at its meeting on January 9, the response of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) in the subcommittee was to not agree to the existence of services.

### Recognizing their efforts during Ramadan

Zain hosts Iftar banquet at Abdali Border Port for Interior and Customs personnel

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18:** Zain hosted a special Ramadan Iftar banquet at Abdali Border Port for Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Customs personnel. The step, held under Zain's annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, came in recognition of the unwavering commitment demonstrated by the port's staff year-round, particularly during the Holy Month, to protect Kuwait and its people.

The initiative was joined by Abdali Border Port Director, Colonel Waleed Faleh Al Azmi, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer, Waleed Al Khashti, along with Zain officials and port personnel from the Ministry of Interior and the General Administration of Customs.

Zain's team visited the headquarters of Abdali Border Port, located at northern Kuwait, to share the blessings of Ramadan with staff members from MoI and Customs who operate at the border

to keep the nation and community safe. Zain hosted the Iftar banquet as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation to those who dedicate their time and effort to Kuwait's safety, especially during the Holy Month.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

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

Kuwaiti students in US surpass 14K

## Proposal under review to enroll non-Kuwaiti students in PAAET

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18:** Informed sources within the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training disclosed to Al-Jarida that the authority is considering a proposal to admit non-Kuwaiti students to its various colleges and institutes on a fee-paying basis, following similar practices adopted by the Kuwait University, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The sources revealed that this proposal arose due to a surge in applications for scholarships, surpassing the allocated capacity, estimated at 3 percent of the total Kuwaiti admissions in the original plan.

The sources emphasized that this initiative aims to offer opportunities for non-Kuwaiti students to enroll in the authority's programs, focusing on specialized fields not widely sought after by Kuwaiti students but deemed essential for the labor market.

Once the proposal is thoroughly examined, it will be presented to the au-

thority's board of directors for final approval and implementation. This strategic move seeks to address the growing demand for educational opportunities while aligning with the needs of the workforce.

Meanwhile, the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Educational Quality Assurance announced that the total number of accredited universities in the United States of America has reached 709, reports Al-Jarida daily.

According to statistics, the accreditation covers a wide range of programs, with 12,187 bachelor's programs, 8,865 master's programs, and 5,738 doctoral programs accredited across various universities in the country.

Furthermore, the report highlighted that the number of Kuwaiti students enrolled in bachelor's and postgraduate programs at these accredited American universities has exceeded 14,000. This includes both male and female students whether they are studying on scholarships or funding their education independently.

### 'Teach Me' drive supports needy families

'Balad Al-Khair' provides humanitarian assistance to nearly half million people

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18:** The Balad Al-Khair Association has disclosed that it extended humanitarian assistance to nearly half a million people within the State of Kuwait last year, through a diverse range of charitable initiatives spanning various fields, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The association reported that it offered support to approximately 3,662 needy families and 425,960 workers across Kuwait.

Othman Al-Thuwaimi, the association's director, highlighted the significant increase in the organization's activity throughout 2023, evident in the approval and execution of approximately 50 charitable projects. These initiatives encompassed a wide array of charitable endeavors aimed at assisting families, individuals, and workers in need across Kuwait.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Heritage Revival Society has initiated a humanitarian, charitable, and educational effort under the title "Teach Me," aimed at assisting needy families in Kuwait who struggle to afford their children's tuition fees due to limited income, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Under this initiative, the society aims to extend a helping hand to these families and alleviate their financial burdens by covering tuition fees, providing stationery supplies, and school clothes, with the support of charitable individuals.

According to the society's statement, the target amount for the initiative is subject to increase, and zakat contributions are permissible. The campaign will be conducted in stages, with each stage featuring lists of cases to be assisted. Aid will be provided directly to the students by issuing checks in the name of their respective schools, taking into account any late fees incurred.

□ □ □

**Food baskets distribution:** The governorates of Lahj and Taiz in southern Yemen

witnessed the distribution of aid, which included 500 integrated food baskets to displaced and poor families, with Kuwaiti support. Deputy Director of the Kuwaiti Relief Society office in Yemen, Adel Baeshen, said in a press statement on Sunday that the society distributed food baskets to needy families, with funding from the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Association, within the "Kuwait is by your side" campaign, as part of efforts to support the poor and alleviate their suffering during the holy month.

He added that this aid will contribute to alleviating the burden on needy families and providing them with a decent life, which comes as part of a series of humanitarian initiatives implemented by the association before and during the month of Ramadan to provide food and livelihood support to the poor and needy and alleviate their suffering.

He expressed his thanks and gratitude for the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the Al-Nouri Association and its provision of these baskets that contain all the food and canned food needs of the affected families for the month of Ramadan. For his part, Advisor to the Governor of Lahj, Omar Al-Samati, praised in a press statement the role of the Kuwait Relief Society and the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Association in the State of Kuwait in supporting vulnerable and needy groups, pointing out the importance of solidarity and cooperation in facing humanitarian challenges and meeting the food needs of the poor and displaced. In turn, the Director of the Social Affairs Office in Taiz, Abdo Ali, confirmed in a press statement that this initiative is part of a series of humanitarian activities implemented by the Kuwait Relief Society in Yemen, appreciating its focus on meeting the basic needs of the needy and providing them with the necessary support in light of the difficult circumstances in which they live. The two officials expressed their thanks and appreciation to the State of Kuwait for its continued support to the Yemeni people in various circumstances and stages and in various development and relief sectors. (KUNA)



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Minister of Health Dr Ahmed Al-Awadhi in a group photo during the Ramadan Ghabqa organized by the Kuwait Medical Association.

Photos by Leah Qurtal

## Ramadan atmosphere spurs 'surge' in women's demand for gold jewelry

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The ambience and customs of Ramadan seem to be fueling women's inclination towards purchasing gold jewelry to complement traditional attire, particularly during gatherings like "ghabqas" and other customary Ramadan occasions, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in Kuwaiti women's interest in acquiring gold jewelry, transcending generational boundaries. Gold has emerged as a desirable accessory across all age groups, epitomizing the adage of "adornment and treasury."

The allure of gold jewelry during Ramadan is further augmented by its integration into Ramadan fashion, with women and girls in Kuwait embracing gold as an essential element of their attire for events like "Quraysh" and "Ghabqat," as well as various Ramadan gatherings.

Many women are turning to traditional gold jewelry designs, reminiscent of Kuwait's heritage, which featured distinctive ancient patterns for bracelets, rings, and other ornaments like "al-mammash" and "marami." This resurgence has prompted gold factories and shops to reintroduce these traditional models, catering to individuals seeking to embellish their tradition-

al attire with authentic gold accents.

Despite the recent rise in gold prices, the onset of Ramadan has spurred women to invest in gold jewelry, evident from the bustling crowds of women and girls flocking to stores across Kuwaiti markets to acquire their desired pieces and complete their Ramadan ensembles.

Additionally, gold has become a favored choice for those looking to gift a special Ramadan "naqsa," particularly to mothers or wives, further fueling the demand for gold during the holy month.

Meanwhile, the Al-Jarida daily said gold prices experienced a decline, reaching \$2,156 per ounce by the end of last week's trading session, marking the first decrease in four weeks.

However, in the local market, the price of 24-karat gold stood at 21.3 dinars (approximately \$65) per gram, while 22-karat gold was priced at 19.5 dinars (approximately \$60) per gram. Silver closed at 294 dinars (approximately \$896) per kilogram.

According to a report from Kuwaiti Dar Al-Sabaek Company, gold prices dropped from \$2,180 to \$2,156, representing a 0.3% decline in futures prices for April delivery, which settled at \$2,161 per ounce, registering a 1.1% loss for the week.

## Christians and

Continued from Page 1

The destruction of infrastructure and property makes life hopelessly difficult, if not impossible. Sometimes hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in their own country or forced to flee to other countries as refugees. Consequently, the condemnation and rejection of war should be unambiguous: every war is fratricide, useless, senseless, and dark. In war, everyone loses. Once again, in the words of Pope Francis: "No war is holy, only peace is holy."

All religions, each in their own way, consider human life sacred and thus worthy of respect and protection. The states that permit and practise capital punishment are, fortunately, becoming fewer each year. A reawakened sense of the respect for this fundamental dignity of the gifts of life will contribute to the conviction that war must be rejected and peace cherished.

Albeit with their differences, religions acknowledge the existence and the important role of conscience. Forming consciences to respect the absolute value of the life of each person and his or her right to physical integrity, security and a dignified life will likewise contribute to the condemnation and rejection of war, any war and all wars.

We look to the Almighty as God of peace, the source of peace, who in a special way loves all those who devote their lives to the service of peace. Like so many things, peace is a divine gift but at the same time the fruit of human efforts, especially in preparing the conditions necessary for its establishment and preservation.

As believers, we are also witnesses to hope, as we recalled in our 2021 Message for Ramadan: "Christians and Muslims: Witnesses of Hope". Hope can be symbolized by a candle, whose light radiates security and joy, whereas fire, uncontrolled, can lead to the destruction of fauna and flora, infrastructure and the loss of human lives.

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, let us join in extinguishing the fires of hatred, violence and war, and instead light the gentle candle of peace, drawing upon resources for peace that are present in our rich human and religious traditions.

May your fasting and other pious practices during Ramadan and the celebration of 'Id al-Fitr that concludes it, bring your abundant fruits of peace, hope and joy.

## Court delays

Continued from Page 1

the Al-Sabah Family from running for elections.

On the other hand, the Consultative Committee at Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies recently met with the ministries of Interior and Information to coordinate their efforts for the upcoming election.

Chairman of the committee and Court of Appeals Undersecretary Judge Saleh Al-Hamadi presided over the meeting with committee members judges Husain Al-Ramadan, Adel Al-Doussari and Abdulsalam Al-Beajian and acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Hashem Al-Qattaf in attendance.

Also present at the meeting were Director of the Legal Affairs General Department at the Ministry of Interior Brigadier Salah Al-Shatti, Director of Elections Af-

fairs General Department Brigadier Ahmed Al-Hajri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Nasser Mehaisen, Assistant Undersecretary for News Affairs at the Ministry of Information Badr Al-Anzi, Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Information Salem Al-Wetyan and Administrative Auditor Saad Al-Adwani.

## Famine is

Continued from Page 1

Israeli forces meanwhile launched another raid on the Gaza Strip's largest hospital early Monday, saying Hamas militants had regrouped there and had fired on them from inside the compound, where Palestinian officials say tens of thousands of people have been sheltering.

The army last raided Shifa Hospital in November after claiming that Hamas maintained an elaborate command center within and beneath the facility. The military revealed a tunnel leading to some underground rooms, as well as weapons it said were found inside the hospital. But the evidence fell short of the earlier claims, and critics accused the army of recklessly endangering the lives of civilians.

The World Food Program on Monday released the latest findings of its Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, an international process for estimating the scale of hunger crises.

It says virtually everyone in Gaza is struggling to get enough food, and that around 677,000 people - nearly a third of the population - are experiencing the highest level of catastrophic hunger. That includes around 210,000 people in the north.

It warned that if Israel broadens its offensive to the packed southern city of Rafah, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly promised, the fighting could drive around half of Gaza's total population of 2.3 million into catastrophic hunger.

"This is the largest number of people facing imminent famine in the world today, and it has only taken five months to occur," said Matthew Hollingworth, the acting World Food Program country director for the Palestinian territories.

"It's still possible to turn this around but there has to be a cease-fire and there has to be massive amounts of food aid to flow consistently, and people need to have access to clean water and health care," he said.

Northern Gaza, including Gaza City, was the first target of the invasion and suffered widespread destruction. It is now the epicenter of Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe, with many residents reduced to eating animal feed. At least 20 people, mostly children, have died from malnutrition and dehydration in the north, the Health Ministry said earlier this month.

Airdrops by the U.S. and other nations continue, while deliveries on a new sea route have begun, but aid groups say it's essential that Israel open up more ground routes and ease restrictions to meet the mounting humanitarian needs. The WFP report said airdrops account for a "negligible share" of aid compared with what is brought in on trucks.

Israeli authorities say they place no limits on the entry of aid and accuse U.N. bodies of failing to distribute it in a timely manner. Aid groups say distribution is impossible in much of Gaza because of ongoing hostilities, the difficulty of coordinating with the military and the breakdown of law and order.

Ahead of the report's release, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said it was up to Israel to facilitate more aid by streamlining procedures.

"Israel has to do it. It is not a question of logistics. It is not because the United Nations has not provided enough support," he said. "Trucks are stopped. People are dying, while the land crossings are artificially closed."

# Minister emphasizes support for development of Kuwaiti doctors

Dr Al-Awadhi attends Ghabqa organized by KMA

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

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi says developing human resources and providing all support to qualify Kuwaiti doctors are among the main pillars of the ministry's action plan to achieve greater excellence, especially in scientific research, in order to serve the interests of patients and alleviate their pain and suffering.**

In a speech he gave recently at the Ramadan Ghabqa organized by the Kuwait Medical Association (KMA), Dr. Al-Awadhi explained that Kuwaiti medical professionals have significantly contributed to global scientific research across various specialties, yielding positive outcomes that have made a notable impact on international platforms. Their work has been prominently featured in renowned scientific and specialized research journals worldwide.

The unlimited dedication and distinguished efforts of the nation's medical professionals have bolstered the quality of healthcare services and elevated standards across diverse specialties. This aligns with the government's agenda, the ministry's strategic initiatives, and the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

### Energies

The Kuwaiti doctors' energies represent the true wealth of the nation and are indispensable for enhancing competencies and expertise in the health sector.

He highlighted his keenness to support and encourage them and provide them with a suitable work environment, as well as his full support for all doctors because of their responsibility in treating patients in all health facilities affiliated with the ministry.

Dr. Al-Awadhi also affirmed the keenness to develop a comprehensive vision to deal with some of the challenges in order to provide an appropriate work environment for Kuwaiti doctors, and to continue coordination in this regard, indicating the need to move forward in achieving the goals and projects contained in the government's work program within the 100-day plan.

Meanwhile, the President of the Kuwait Medical Association Dr. Ibrahim Al-Tawala revealed that the smart electronic membership for members of the association will be launched next month.

He expressed appreciation for the ministry's keenness to support and qualify medical personnel in various specialties, and provide them with the opportunity to exchange experiences locally, regionally, and globally in a way that serves the goals of the health system in the country.

### Completion

Dr. Al-Tawala explained that the last period witnessed the completion of a number of files, the most important of which was the file for implementing article 80 of law No. 70/2020, which is the new law for practicing the medical profession and was frozen for two years. As a result of implementing this article, many benefits were generated for doctors, starting with the fixing of the guard's allowance and the positive steps taken by the Minister of Health.

He stressed the minister of health's keenness and interest in addressing the problems of the medical sector, most notably the



Top and above: Some more photos from the Ghabqa held by the Kuwait Medical Association.

## Effects of fasting on skin diseases in focus

### Expert highlights stomach cancer risk factors

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Dr. Wafaa Al-Hashash, a consultant specializing in gastroenterology, liver, and liver transplants, emphasized that individuals aged 55 to 85 years are the most susceptible group to stomach cancer, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Dr. Al-Hashash noted that men are more commonly affected by this disease than females. She identified several high-risk groups, including smokers, individuals with a family history of stomach cancer, those who are obese or overweight, and individuals leading sedentary lifestyles.

Highlighting the significance of lifestyle choices, Al-Hashash underscored that lack of physical activity increases vulnerability to stomach cancer. Symptoms of the disease, she explained, encompass fatigue, bloating after eating, early satiety, heartburn, stomach pain, weight loss, and decreased appetite.

Dr. Al-Hashash acknowledged the challenges in diagnosing stomach cancer in its early stages and emphasized factors that heighten the likelihood of contraction, such as infection with stomach bacteria, affecting about 55 percent of Kuwait's population and the global populace. She underscored the Ministry of Health's commitment to offering innovative treatments for patients.

Furthermore, Dr. Al-Hashash emphasized the importance of promptly addressing any mouth ulcers, whether painful or not, as they could signify underlying issues, potentially includ-

ing stomach cancer.

President of the Kuwait Dermatologists Association and Head of the Dermatology Departments Council at the Ministry of Health Dr. Atfal Al-Lafi revealed that the number of visitors to dermatology clinics is about 50,000 cases annually.



Dr Hashash

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the Dermatologists Association's annual Ramadan Ghabqa yesterday, Dr. Al-Lafi explained that the most common skin diseases in Kuwait are dry skin, allergies, and eczema.

Fasting is a treatment for many skin diseases, allergies and urticaria. Temporarily reducing the rate of water in the blood and skin has many benefits in increasing the skin's immunity and resistance to microbes, and infectious and bacterial diseases. This reduces the severity of some skin diseases that spread across various areas of the body, such as psoriasis and allergies.

Despite the great benefit of fasting on the body, some special cases of people with skin diseases are prohibited from fasting, the most prominent of whom are patients suffering from severe lupus erythematosus, severe widespread psoriasis, skin cancer,

and others.

There are many skin diseases that are affected by fasting because they are related to food. Some of them require nutritional elements that decrease in the body when fasting. It is therefore necessary to compensate for this deficiency on the breakfast table, such as hair loss and dry skin.

Fasting and the subsequent change in eating habits can have impact on the skin and hair on the head, which is affected by the change in the level of certain nutritional elements such as vitamins A and D. Therefore, these nutrients must be provided, especially at the breakfast and suhoor tables through green salad and lean protein. Salts and pickles must be avoided at the Ramadan table.

There are many skin diseases for which fasting is a treatment to increase their severity with some foods, specifically pickles. These include allergies, especially urticaria, which appear in the form of red spots throughout the body and are accompanied by severe itching, in addition to the harmful effect of excess salts on the kidneys and urinary system, which can be relieved through fasting.

There are other skin diseases that become more severe by eating too much fat and sweets, such as acne, which requires abstaining from too much fatty foods and sweets.

A fasting person must consume sufficient quantities of water without allowing himself to feel thirsty in order to compensate for the fluids the body loses during fasting. He must reduce eating a lot of pickles and spices, and increase the quantity of fresh vegetables.

interest in creating a qualitative shift in the training programs at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties, where admission seats in medical boards were doubled, and the monthly increase of trainers in the Kuwaiti board program was approved.

Dr. Al-Tawala praised the services provided to doctors who are

members of the association, most notably the electronic transformation of all the association's services, and the completion of the electronic link with the "My Identity" application, as the first public benefit association, in addition to providing a self-service device.

He affirmed the minister of health's

support for Kuwaiti medical cadres, and for providing them with the opportunity to exchange experiences locally and globally, and to receive scholarships locally and abroad, or at the level of internal programs in the Kuwaiti board, and their short-term and long-term impact on the development of medical cadres.

## World News Roundup

## Europe

## Gething beats Miles

## Putin wins Russia's presidential election

MOSCOW, March 18, (AP): President **Vladimir Putin** basked in an election victory that was never in doubt, as officials said Monday that he had won his fifth term with a record number of votes, underlining the Russian leader's total control of the country's political system.

After facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing opposition voices, Putin was set to extend his nearly quarter-century rule for six more years. Even with little margin for protest, Russians crowded outside polling stations at noon on Sunday, the last day of the election, apparently heeding an opposition call to express their displeasure with the president.

Putin has led Russia as president or prime minister since December 1999, a tenure marked by international military aggression and an increasing intolerance for dissent.

Early Monday, Putin hailed overwhelming preliminary results as an indication of "trust" and "hope" in him - while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election.

"Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has

ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future," Putin said at a meeting with his campaign staff after polls closed.

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.



Putin

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: "This is not what free and fair elections look like."

## Limited

Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, independent monitoring of the election was extremely limited.

Russia's Central Election Commission said Monday that with nearly 100% of all precincts counted, Putin got 87.29% of the vote. Central Election Commission chief Ella Pamfilova said that nearly 76 million voters cast their ballots for Putin, his highest vote tally ever.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the presidents of Bolivia, Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela quickly congratulated Putin on his victory, as did the leaders of ex-Soviet nations Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, the West dismissed the vote as a sham.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: "This is not what free and fair elections look like."

In the tightly controlled environment, Navalny's associates urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to go to the polls at noon on Sunday - and lines outside a number of polling stations both inside Russia and at its embassies around the world appeared to swell at that time.

## Call

Among those heeding call was Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, who spent more than five hours in the line at the Russian Embassy in Berlin. She told reporters that she wrote her late husband's name on her ballot.

Asked whether she had a message for Putin, Navalnaya replied: "Please stop asking for messages from me or from somebody for Mr. Putin. There could be no negotiations and nothing with Mr. Putin, because he's a killer, he's a gangster."

But Putin brushed off the effectiveness of the apparent protest.

Putin referenced Navalny by name for the first time ever at the news conference, declaring that he was ready to release him in a swap for unidentified inmates in Western custody just days before the opposition leader's death.

Meanwhile, supporters of Navalny streamed to his grave in Moscow, some bringing ballots with his name written on them.

## Also:

**BERLIN:** A prominent European far-right figure was prevented from giving a speech at an event in **Switzerland** and thrown out of the region where it was taking place.

**Martin Sellner** of the Identitarian Movement said in a video posted on social media network X that he had been invited by a local group, **Junge Tat** (Young Deed), to "talk about remigration and the ethnic vote" and what happened at a recent meeting in Germany that prompted a string of large protests there. Remigration refers to the return, sometimes forced, of non-ethnically European immigrants back to their place of racial origin.

Sellner, who comes from neighboring **Austria**, said that a few minutes after he started speaking at the event Saturday, the electricity was turned off and he was taken to a police station, then told he was thrown out of Aargau canton (state) and escorted to **Zurich**.

Regional police said in a statement that they tracked down the **Junge Tat** event in the small town of **Tegerfelden** on Saturday after receiving a number of tips. They found some 100 people at the venue and said that, after the landlady found out about the contents of the planned meeting, she canceled the contract for it.

Police said they told organizers to end the event, but they didn't obey. Without identifying Sellner by name, they said the speaker was held and ordered out of the canton "to safeguard public security" and prevent confrontations with opponents.

**LONDON:** **Vaughan Gething** won the Welsh Labour Party leadership contest on Saturday, and is set to become the first Black leader of Wales' semi-autonomous government.

Gething, the son of a Welsh father and a Zambian mother, will be the first Black leader of a government in the **UK** - and, according to him, of any European country.

"Today, we turn a page in the book of our nation's history. A history we write together," Gething said in his victory speech. "Not just because I have the honor of becoming the first Black leader in any European country - but because the generational dial has jumped too."

"I want us to use this moment as a starting point, for a more confident march into the future," he added.

Gething, who is currently Welsh economy minister, narrowly beat Education Minister **Jeremy Miles** in a race to replace First Minister **Mark Drakeford**. Drakeford, 69, announced late last year he would step down once a replacement was chosen.



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., joined by fellow Republicans, speaks during a news conference ahead of the State of the Union at the Capitol in Washington on March 6. (AP)

## Politics

## N.Carolina legislator files election protests

## House GOP seeks unity at W.Virginia retreat

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, W.Va., March 18, (AP): US House Republicans huddled in West Virginia for a strategy-planning retreat designed to unify the often-fractious conference as they head into the final months before the November election.

One problem: Many didn't bother to show up.

It was the first annual retreat for House Speaker Mike Johnson since he took the speaker's gavel late last year after former Speaker Kevin McCarthy was ousted from office in a historic move that left Republicans deeply divided and mired in dysfunction.

Johnson does not currently appear at risk of suffering the same fate. But he is trying to figure out how to guide his razor-thin majority through a series of legislative hurdles that divide Republicans, including how to provide military aid for Ukraine, finish government funding and reauthorize a federal surveillance program - all while trying to make a case that voters should reelect a House GOP majority.

Johnson said his message to the Republicans was simple: "We have to stand together, stick together, get the job done, deliver for the American people."

Democrats have expressed growing confidence they can retake the House in November, but Johnson promised that lawmakers would be in a "better mood next January" if Republicans could sweep the House, Senate and White House.

## Declined

But many Republican members did not hear that message. A broad swathe of the conference declined the trip to the Allegheny Mountains, where The Greenbrier, a 700-room resort, had been rented out for a few days of team-building exercises.

Several Republicans this week said they excused themselves to spend time with family or attend events in their home districts.

"We spent far too many days in Washington because of the speaker debacle and appropriation negotiation - all important, but I just really need to spend time in the district," said Rep. Marc Molinaro, a New York Republi-

can. Others were more blunt. "I just don't see it as valuable," said Rep. Eli Crane, an Arizona Republican who frequently defies leadership.

The annual retreat is designed to be a strategy-planning session, but also a chance to build comradery and personal relationships outside the busy halls of the Capitol, said Rep. Lisa McClain, a Michigan Republican who holds a junior position in GOP leadership.

"I think it's really disappointing," McClain said of the absences. "I know for me I wouldn't miss it. It's fun. It's a good time."

The turnout underscored how Republicans have been hobbled by conflict since taking the majority last year, though Johnson in a series of news conferences put a positive spin on their time in the majority, casting the House as a bulwark against the agenda of President Joe Biden and Democrats.

"Major conservative wins are not easy to come by, obviously, but we are delivering for the American people nevertheless," he said.

## Majority

GOP leaders repeatedly pointed out they are working with a historically thin majority that is only getting smaller. Rep. Ken Buck, a Colorado Republican, plans to resign, leaving Republicans unable to move bills along party lines if more than two Republicans defect. The GOP majority will be down to 218-213.

The dynamic has forced the speaker to reach across the aisle to pass practically any legislation. The House approved 352-65 a bill that would lead to a nationwide ban of the popular video app TikTok if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake.

Johnson is also in the midst of negotiations on spending bills, including for defense and the Department of Homeland Security, that could settle a government budget debate that has stretched since the fall of last year. Johnson is also mulling how to advance aid for Ukraine through the House.

He is facing heavy political pressure on all sides. Democrats have launched an effort to force the aid package to the

House floor. Hardline conservatives have vowed to forcefully oppose any aid for Kyiv. And centrist Republicans are becoming restive as they await action.

Bucking Johnson, eight Republicans have already signed onto a "discharge petition" - a procedural tool that can circumvent the speaker's control over which bills come up for a vote. But the effort would need far more support - from at least 218 members - to be successful.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian soldiers are suffering from shortfalls of ammunition. The Pentagon announced this week it will send about \$300 million in weapons to Kyiv after finding some cost savings in its contracts, but the military remains deeply overdrawn and needs at least \$10 billion to replenish all the weapons it has pulled from its stocks to the desperate fight against Russia's invasion.

## Also:

**RALEIGH, NC:** A veteran North Carolina legislator filed protests Friday in his primary election in which he slightly trails, alleging that ballot distribution and counting mistakes along with unlawful voting-site campaigning cast doubt on the results.

Democratic Rep. **Michael Wray**, who joined the state House in 2005, filed the protests with elections boards in **Halifax, Northampton and Warren** counties, which are northeast of Raleigh and compose the 27th House District.

As of Friday afternoon, **Rodney Pierce**, a Halifax County teacher, led Wray by 35 votes from close to 12,000 ballots cast in last week's primary. The winner faces no Republican opposition in the fall.

Wray has been criticized by outside groups and other Democrats for aligning himself at times with leaders in the Republican-controlled House, where he's been made one of the senior chairmen of the powerful finance committee.

Pierce called on Wray to concede, saying he "seems to want to change the rules more than a week after the contest ended, just because he lost." And several groups favoring Pierce's election put out news releases calling the accusations "bogus" and "dirty tricks."



Vaughan Gething arrives with his son Isaac, at Cardiff University, after being elected as the next Welsh Labour leader and First Minister of Wales, in Cardiff, on March 16. Gething has won the Welsh Labour Party leadership contest and is set to become the first Black leader of Wales' semi-autonomous government. (AP)



Allen



DeWine

## America

**Three killed in car crash:** Three people were killed and an infant was hospitalized in critical condition after an SUV crashed into a bus shelter in San Francisco, authorities said Sunday.

Two victims, including a child, died at the scene of the crash Saturday afternoon in the city's West Portal neighborhood, police said. Three others were taken to hospitals.

The third victim, a woman, later died at a hospital, police said.

The infant was being treated for life-threatening injuries, police said. The driver of the white Mercedes SUV was among those hospitalized, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency said Saturday it was investigating the cause of the crash in collaboration with the San Francisco Police Department. (AP)

**Man faces murder charges:** A man faces murder charges in Pennsylvania and carjacking and weapons charges in New Jersey after allegedly killing three family members, carjacking vehicles in both states and evading law enforcement for hours as police mobilized in two states, authorities said Sunday.

Andre Gordon Jr., 26, is charged in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with three counts of first- and second-degree murder, aggravated assault, robbery and other charges, according to court documents. In New Jersey, Gordon is charged with first-degree carjacking and weapons offenses, New Jersey Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin said in a statement Sunday.

"The string of violent acts ... is the latest in a horrific litany of illustrations of how illegal guns and assault rifles can empower one aggrieved and disturbed actor," Platkin said. "We will pursue justice for the victims and hold the defendant accountable for his reprehensible actions." (AP)

**New Mexico detains man:** A suspect in the shooting death of a New Mexico state police officer was captured Sunday by law enforcement officers in the Albuquerque area based on a tip from a gas sta-

tion clerk, authorities said.

The Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office detained 33-year-old Jeremy Smith of Marion, South Carolina, in the south-

western reaches of Albuquerque after the clerk notified authorities of a man who fit Smith's description, Sheriff **John Allen** said at a brief news conference.



The area around a bus stop near Muni's West Portal Station is fenced off after a sport utility vehicle crashed into the stop, killing 3 people and injuring others, on March 16. Two victims, including a child, died at the scene of the crash Saturday afternoon in the city's West Portal neighborhood, police said. Three others were taken to hospitals. The third victim, a woman, later died at a hospital, police said. (AP)

South Carolina authorities have identified Smith as a person of interest in the killing of a local paramedic whose stolen car was involved in Friday's fatal shooting of New Mexico State Police Officer Justin Hare along Interstate 40 west of Tucumcari. (AP)

**Ohio gov declares emergency:** Ohio's governor has declared a state of emergency in 11 counties across central Ohio struck by severe weather last week. Gov **Mike DeWine** also activated the Ohio National Guard to help officials in one county, Logan County, where three deaths were confirmed, with the cleanup of storm debris on public property. DeWine announced the emergency declaration Sunday.

The declaration also covers Auglaize, Crawford, Darke, Delaware, Hancock, Licking, Mercer, Miami, Richland and Union counties. It orders all relevant state departments and agencies to lend their services, equipment, supplies, and personnel to aid in response and recovery efforts, the governor's office said.

Thursday night's storms claimed three lives in the Indian Lake area of Logan County, one of the hardest-hit regions.

The storms also left trails of destruction across parts of Kentucky, Indiana and Arkansas. About 40 people were injured and dozens of homes were damaged in one Indiana community. Tornadoes were also reported in Illinois and Missouri. (AP)

## Lat/Am

## Cubans protest blackouts

## Colombia 'suspends' ceasefire with groups

BOGOTA, Colombia, March 18, (AP): Colombian President **Gustavo Petro** on Sunday suspended a ceasefire with one of a handful of armed groups with which he hoped to negotiate peace accords, saying its fighters violated the truce by attacking an Indigenous community.

The government said that starting Wednesday it would resume military operations against Estado Mayor Central, a group of fighters who broke away from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia when it signed a peace pact in 2016.

Indigenous leaders in the war-torn western region of Cauca said an attack by the dissident group Saturday wounded at least three people and a young student was taken away by force.

In a post on the X platform, Petro said group was "violating the ceasefire agreement," adding that he believed it used peace negotiations as a cover to "strengthen itself militarily."

The suspension of the ceasefire was a political blow to Petro, a former rebel who became Colombia's first leftist leader promising to consolidate "total peace" in a country long ravaged by armed conflict.

He has sought to rewire the way the country grapples with its decades of conflict, by addressing the poverty that underlies the unrest while simultaneously negotiating peace with armed groups to minimize bloodshed. Yet conflict continues to rage in many rural swaths of the South American nation.

With implementation of the FARC accord's provisions lagging, a growing number of former rebels have rearmaged against the government, joining a toxic slate of drug gangs and guerrilla groups to war for power.

A report by a United Nations agency warned Friday that more than 8 million people in Colombia need humanitarian help, mainly because of the expansion of the country's armed conflict.

**Cubans protest blackouts:** Small groups of protesters took to the streets in the eastern city of Santiago on Sunday, decrying power outages lasting up to eight hours and food shortages across Cuba.

Videos on social media showed demonstrators on the outskirts of the city, which is about 800 kilometers (500 miles) from Havana.

State media confirmed the protests in Santiago, while the U.S. Embassy in Havana said there were also reports of protests in a number of other provinces across the island. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel also referred to protests in a social media post, though he did not specify where they occurred.

In reporting on events in Santiago, the government-linked news organization El Nocio said, "Due to the long hours of power outages from lack of fuel and other situations arising from the current economic crisis, several people took to the streets" to protest.

Cuba is facing one of the worst economic and energy crises in its history. Waves of blackouts have grown worse in recent weeks, adding to frustrations over food shortages and inflation that have made it increasingly difficult to make ends meet on the communist-governed island. Hundreds of thousands of people have migrated, with many headed to the United States.

Videos showing people chanting "Electricity and food" were quickly shared by Cubans on and off the island on platforms like X and Facebook.

One person, who spoke to The Associated Press in a phone call from Santiago on condition their name not be used, said internet service in the area was shut off after the demonstrations.

**US citizens fleeing Haiti now in Miami:** A charter flight carrying dozens of US citizens fleeing spiraling gang violence in Haiti landed Sunday in Miami, U.S. State Department officials said.

More than 30 US citizens were on the government-chartered flight, officials said in a statement. It arrived in the Miami International Airport after the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince earlier this month urged U.S. citizens to leave "as soon as possible" as chaos grips Haiti.

Passenger Avlot Quessa, who lives in Boston, traveled from the center of the country to board the charter flight after going to Haiti last month for what was supposed to be a weeklong trip to visit his mother.

"It's just terrible... The suffering, you can only imagine," Quessa told the Miami Herald of the nearby Caribbean nation. "Haiti is my homeland and it's very stressful to see the homeland going through this act of violence, destruction... and they are our neighbors."

Officials said they could not provide ground transportation to Cap-Haitien and that U.S. citizens should consider the charter flights "only if you think you can reach Cap-Haitien airport safely."

**Looting on the rise in Haiti:** As Haiti once again spirals into chaos with another wave of gang violence, a number of government and aid agencies reported Saturday that their facilities and aid supplies have been looted.

Gangs have raged through Haiti in recent weeks, attacking key institutions and shutting down the main international airport. The chaos has pushed many Haitians to the brink of famine and left many more in increasingly desperate conditions. On Saturday, UNICEF said one of its containers containing "essential items for maternal, neonatal, and child survival, including resuscitators and related equipment" were looted in the capital of Port-au-Prince's main port, which was breached by gangs last week.

"Looting of supplies that are essential for life saving support for children must end immediately and humanitarian access must remain safe," Bruno Maes, UNICEF representative in Haiti, said in a statement.

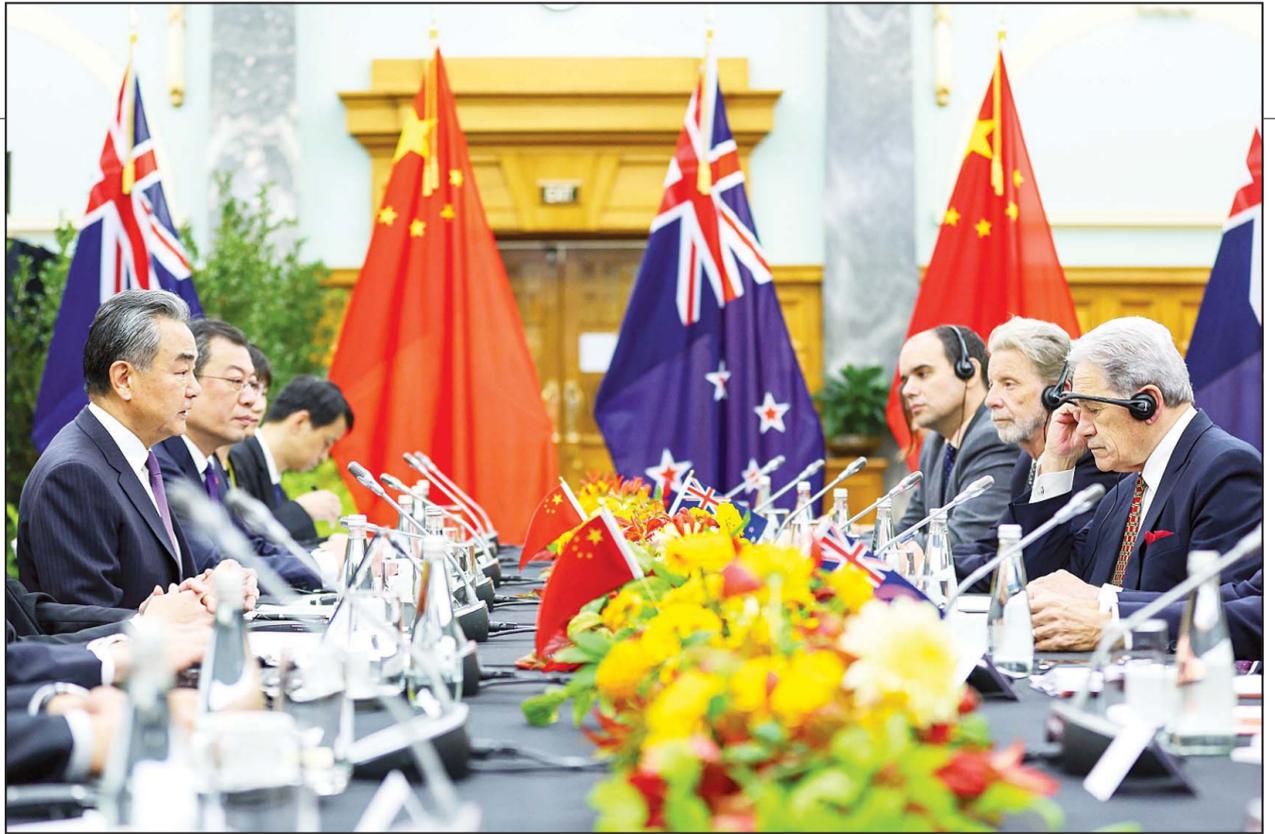
The aid agency said the looting and overall violence has further cut some of the country's most vulnerable from basic supplies, coming "at a critical moment when children need them the most."

That same day, the Guatemala's Foreign Ministry said that the offices of its honorary consul in Haiti was ransacked, but didn't give any details of damage or thefts, nor did it say who was responsible.

The ministry said only "paperwork and documentation of the last four or five years had been previously transferred" to the Guatemala Embassy for Haiti, which is located in the neighboring Dominican Republic. The violence has left Haiti's government in a state of turmoil and prompted Prime Minister Ariel Henry to pledge that he will resign, a key demand of the gangs.



Petro



China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, (left), speaks during a bilateral meeting with his New Zealand counterpart Winston Peters, (right), in Wellington, New Zealand, on March 18. (AP)

## Asia

## China's foreign minister meets NZ counterpart

## North Korea resumes ballistic missile tests

SEOUL, South Korea, March 18, (Agencies): North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters Monday morning, its neighbors said, days after the end of the South Korean-U.S. military drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

The launches - North Korea's first known missile testing activities in about a month - came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Seoul for a conference. Outside experts earlier predicted North Korea would extend its run of missile tests and intensify its warlike rhetoric ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November to boost its leverage in future diplomacy.

## Damage

Japan's Defense Ministry said North Korea fired three missiles, two together at 7:44 a.m. and the other about 37 minutes later. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a parliamentary session that the North Korean missiles landed in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, all outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone, and that no damage or injuries have been reported.

Kishida denounced North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests as acts "that threaten the peace and safety of Japan, the region and the international society." He said Japan strongly protested against North Korea over its testing activities, saying they violated UN Security Council resolutions that ban the North from engaging in any ballistic activities.

South Korea's military said it also detected "several" suspected short-range ballistic launches by North Korea on Monday morning. The Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launches "clear provocation" that threaten peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea will maintain readiness to repel any provocation by North Korea, based on its solid military alliance with the United States.

According to Japanese and South Korean assessments, the North Korean missiles fired from its capital region traveled a distance of 300-350 kilometers (about 185-220 miles) and reached a maximum altitude of 50 kilometers (about 30 miles). Observers say the missiles' flight distances indicate they are weapons targeting major facilities in South Korea, such as its military headquarters in the central region.

The US State Department condemned the launches, saying they pose a threat to the North's neighbors and

undermine regional security. A State Department statement said the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and Japan remain "ironclad."

The US stations a total of 80,000 troops in South Korea and Japan, the backbone of its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

During the South Korea-US military drills that ended Thursday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un guided a series of military training exercises involving tanks, artillery guns and paratroopers and called for greater war fighting capabilities. The 11-day South Korean-US drills involved a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year.

The North didn't perform any missile tests during its rivals' training, however. Its missile tests are considered much bigger provocations as North Korea has been pushing hard to mount nuclear warheads on its missiles targeting the US mainland and its allies. Many experts say North Korea already has nuclear-armed missiles capable of reaching all of South Korea and Japan, but it has yet to have functioning long-range missiles that can strike the US mainland.

## Also:

**TOKYO:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that the US would always work with South Korea to firmly respond to North Korea's provocations, according to Seoul's presidential office, after Pyongyang fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles earlier in the day, Yonhap News Agency reported.

Blinken made the remark during a meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on the sidelines of the third summit for Democracy hosted by South Korea this week.

"Secretary Blinken said the US will always be with South Korea to respond firmly to North Korea's provocations and for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," the presidential office said in a press release.

The top US diplomat called for continuing close coordination and communication between the allies, while further strengthening their "extended deterrence," the US commitment to using the full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear, to defend its ally.

Blinken's comment came hours after North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea (Sea of Japan).

Yoon welcomed Blinken to Seoul, saying the recent flurry of senior-level exchanges shows the strength of the alliance, which has evolved into a "global comprehensive strategic alliance."

He also called for working closely together to leave behind a "better democracy" for future generations in line with this week's summit's theme, "Democracy for Future Generations," noting the alliance is stronger because the two countries share a belief in liberal democracy.

Meanwhile, at the ministerial conference of the Summit for Democracy forum, Blinken highlighted the importance of making technological advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation in a way that will "safeguard" the democratic principles against attempts by authoritarian states to erode democracy.

**WELLINGTON, New Zealand:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his New Zealand counterpart Monday, as China's most senior diplomat began a tour of the country and Australia.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters greeted Wang in Wellington, New Zealand's capital. "There have been some significant developments since we last met, not least a global pandemic that impacted both our countries," Peters said in his opening comments of their formal meeting at New Zealand's parliament house.

"Today is a valuable opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that are now before us."

Wang is the highest-ranking Chinese politician to visit the country since his own previous visit in 2017. New Zealand has had strong economic ties with China in recent years, and was the first developed country to sign a bilateral free trade deal with Beijing in 2008.

While in Wellington, Wang will also have brief meetings with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and Trade Minister Todd McClay.

"China looks forward to working with the two countries to deliver on the common understandings between the leaders, enhance strategic communication, deepen mutual trust, advance exchanges and co-operation, promote the steady and sustained growth of the China-New Zealand and China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnerships and contribute to world peace, stability and prosperity," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea on March 18. (AP)



Kiir



Creazzo

## Africa

**S.Sudan shuts all schools:** South Sudan is closing all schools starting Monday in preparation for an extreme heat wave expected to last two weeks.

The health and education ministries advised parents to keep all children indoors as temperatures are expected to soar to 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit).

They warned that any school found open during the warning period would have its registration withdrawn, but the statement issued late Saturday didn't specify how long schools would remain shuttered.

The ministries said they "will continue to monitor the situation and inform the public accordingly."

Resident Peter Garang, who lives in the capital, Juba, welcomed the decision. He said "schools should be connected to the electricity grid" to enable the installation of air conditioners.

South Sudan, one of the world's youngest nations, is particularly vulnerable to climate change with heat waves common but rarely exceeding 40 C (104 F). Civil conflict has plagued the east African country which also suffered from drought and flooding, making living conditions difficult for residents. South Sudan President is **Salva Kiir**.

The World Food Program in its latest country brief said South Sudan "continues to face a dire humanitarian crisis" due to violence, economic instability, climate change and an influx of people fleeing the conflict in neighboring Sudan. It also stated that 818,000 vulnerable people were given food and cash-based transfers in January. (AP)

**'60 died on trip from Libya':** Survivors rescued from a deflating rubber dinghy in the central Mediterranean Sea have reported that some 60 people who departed Libya with them more than a week ago perished during the journey, the humanitarian rescue group SOS Mediterranean said.

The European charity's ship Ocean Viking spotted the dinghy with 25 people on board Wednesday. Two were unconscious, and were evacuated to the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, some 60 miles to the north, by an Italian Coast Guard helicopter for treatment. The other 23 were in serious condition, exhausted, dehydrated and with burns from fuel on board the boat.

SOS Mediterranean spokesman **Francesco Creazzo** said that the survivors were all male, 12 of them minors with two of those not yet teenagers. They were from Senegal, Mali and The Gambia.

Creazzo said the survivors were traumatized and unable to give full accounts of what had transpired during the voyage, adding that the number of missing and pre-

sumed dead was unlikely to ever be verified. Humanitarian organizations often rely on accounts of survivors when pulling together the numbers of dead and missing at sea, presumed to have died.

The UN International Organization for

Migration says 227 people have died along the perilous central Mediterranean route this year through March 11, not counting the new reported missing and presumed dead. That's out of a total 279 deaths in the Mediterranean since Jan. 1. A total of 19,562

people arrived in Italy using that route in the period. The survivors said the boat departed Zawiya, Libya with about 85 people on board, including some women and at least one small child. The motor broke sometime after departure, and they had been adrift for more than a week.

"These people saw many of the dear ones die," one of the rescuers, identified only as Massimo, said in a video distributed by SOS Mediterranean. "We have taken care of them. They were suffering from hypothermia, and burns from gasoline and sea water."

The Ocean Viking later Wednesday night rescued another 113 people adrift in international waters off Libya in a wooden boat, including six women and two children, after being alerted by authorities. Before the Ocean Viking's arrival, a civilian sailing vessel that was the first to arrive distributed live vests to the people.

Ocean Viking has been directed by Italian authorities to the port of Ancona, in the central Marche region, Creazzo said.

Humanitarian groups have warned that the far-right-led Italian government's policy of assigning ports further north keeps their rescue ships out of waters where they can be saving lives. The government has typically ordered the ships to port after each rescue, punishing groups that conduct other rescues by blocking ships in port for 20 days at a time. The Ocean Viking has been subject to three such blocks over three months, the most recently from Feb. 8 until a judge lifted the block 10 days later. (AP)



A police officer walks past a trailer with a hot-air balloon basket on it after the discovery of a man's body at Yarra Bend Park in Melbourne on March 18. A man has fallen to his death from a hot-air balloon as it passed over suburban Melbourne, Australia's second largest city. Police said it will prepare a report for the coroner and the death is not being treated as suspicious. Police are also speaking with the balloon's pilot, other occupants and witnesses. (AP)

		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+10.03	12,772.46
UAE	- DFM	+12.90	4,275.38
JAPAN	- Nikkei	+1,032.80	39,740.44
PHILIPPINES	- PSEi	+30.97	6,853.29
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+59.17	65,913.66

Change Closing pts

# Business

## Assembly approves Board of Directors' recommendation of cash dividends of 15 fils per share & 5% bonus shares

### Salhia holds successful 52nd Ordinary & 26th Extraordinary General Assembly meeting

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly meeting of Salhia Real Estate Company was held on Monday, March 18, 2024, where it approved the recommendations of the Board of Directors to distribute cash dividends of 15% (15 Fils per share) and distribute free bonus stock dividends of 5%.

Mr. Ghazi Fahad Alnafisi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Salhia Real Estate Company, said in his speech to the Company's shareholders during the meeting, that Salhia Real Estate Company has achieved development in the extent of its operational performance and succeeded in increasing its total revenues, especially those resulting from its main activities in real estate investment.

He added, "Our view is positive for the next stage, and we seek to enhance the Company's investments locally, in light of the country's entry into a greater path of economic development, and the increasing recovery in the state's general budget, which enhances spending opportunities and stimulates investment."

#### Assima Project

Regarding the Assima Project, Ghazi Alnafisi said that the project has completed last November its second year since its opening, and the Assima Mall continues to offer a lot of new things to its visitors, whose interests in shopping have diversified, and their desires to obtain distinct activities and experience different services have increased. The mall has also succeeded in attracting new categories of visitors, including youth, families, and children, through its distinguished mix of tenants from the finest and best international and local brands in all fields, including restaurants, entertainment, cinema, and retail stores for clothing, accessories, electronics, food, and other activities that occupy the Assima Mall. It is characterized by renewal and development to keep pace with the increasing number of visitors of the mall and their needs.

Alnafisi explained that the early marketing plan for the project had a positive impact on drawing the project's map and directions on the rental space, which is estimated at 71,500 square meters, as the rental rate in the mall reached approximately 99% of the total available units.

Alnafisi also said that the Marriott Hotel Apartments, which occupy eleven floors in the Assima project, were launched, and the hotel provides distinguished and unique accommodation for guests during vacation periods through luxurious units that include the latest equipment and means of comfort and relaxation.

The Assima office tower, which consists of 54 floors, has also begun leasing with a rental area estimated at 59,700 square meters allocated for commercial offices. Thus, all components of the Assima project have entered into actual operation so that the company begins to reap the fruits of years of building and construction.



The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly meeting of Salhia Real Estate Company held on Monday.

#### Anwar Al-Sabah Complex

Regarding the Anwar Al-Sabah towers property land deal, Alnafisi stated that Salhia Real Estate Company had completed the deal, as a "lease purchase agreement" was signed with a local Islamic bank for an amount of KD 70 million, for the purpose of financing a lease purchase agreement for the aforementioned lands.

Anwar Al-Sabah towers are located in Qibla area - Kuwait City, on a total area of 9,284 square meters. The Company is currently studying the best proposed development plans to achieve the maximum benefit from the lands of Anwar Al-Sabah towers, whether through direct exploitation by the company or through building strategic partnerships or cooperation with related parties. Alnafisi added that this deal will increase the Company's total investment properties in exchange for an increase in financial obligations. The value of Anwar Al-Sabah's real estate lands will also be included in the Company's financial statements in the first quarter of 2024.

#### Developing Salhia Complex and JW Marriott Hotel

During the year 2023, development work started on the ground floor of the Salhia Commercial Complex, extending from the Complex to the new main entrance from the side of Abdulaziz Al-Saqer Street. The installation of the new facades of the Complex was completed, and work is still underway to develop the JW Marriott Hotel adjacent to the Complex.

The work is carried out according to a framework agreement to ensure implementation with high professionalism and in a logical manner that ensures completion on time. The development is carried out in cooperation with the

best local and international engineering consulting houses to achieve a development that befits the name of Salhia and reflects the luxury and sophistication enjoyed by the Company's facilities.

Salhia Company shares were upgraded to the Premier market on the Kuwait Stock Exchange - Boursa Kuwait

The shares of Salhia Real Estate Company Public on the Kuwait Stock Exchange at the end of the year with good levels of trading and liquidity, and succeeded in joining the list of Premier market companies on the Kuwait Stock Exchange after applying all the required standards, according to the stock exchange's disclosure regarding the summary of results of the annual review of listed companies for the year 2024, and the Premier market is the elite market of listed companies.

#### Summary of financial performance

Regarding a summary of the financial performance for the year 2023, the Company achieved a profit of KD 16 million, with earnings of 29.3 Fils per share, compared to the previous year, where profitability amounted to KD 14.6 million, with earnings of 26.8 Fils per share.

The Company's total assets increased by 9% to KD 458 million for the year 2023, compared to KD 419 million, and property rights amounted to KD 179.7 million, compared to KD 168 million, with a growth rate of 7% over the previous year. On the other hand, total liabilities increased to KD 278 million in the year 2023, compared to KD 250 million for the previous year, to cover the costs of financing the Assima project.

The Company's operating revenues during the year 2023 witnessed remarkable growth of 13% to the amount of KD 41 million compared to KD 36 million, and the net operating profit increased by 15% to the amount of KD 31 million compared to KD 27 million for the previous year.

Taking into account that all previous financial statements were recorded at historical cost and based on the financial statements for the year 2023.

With regard to the market value of total assets, which includes assets that were evaluated by neutral professional evaluators at the end of the year 2023, it amounted to KD 730 million, and thus the property rights, plus the asset revaluation surplus, became approximately KD 452 million, thus increasing the book value according to the fair value to 827 Fils per share.

#### Ordinary and extraordinary general assembly

The 52nd ordinary general assembly of Salhia Real Estate Company and the 26th extraordinary general assembly concluded by approving all the items contained in the two agendas, including the Board of Directors' report, the governance report, and the financial statements for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2023. The Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 15% (15 Fils per share) and free bonus shares of 5% of the issued and paid-up capital was approved to the Company's shareholders registered in the Company's records at the end of the entitlement day.

## Kuwaiti banks increase industrial sector financing by 123.5% in Jan

Industrial sector financing shows 38.3% annual growth

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The financing provided by local banks to the industrial sector saw a significant increase in January compared to December 2023, rising by 123.5% to 148.9 million dinars from 66.6 million dinars. This surge represents a noteworthy boost in funding for industrial activities within Kuwait. Moreover, on an annual basis, this increase amounted to 38.3% from 107.6 million dinars in January 2023. The rise in financing indicates a positive trend in supporting industrial development and growth in the country.**

Simultaneously, the accumulated balance of industry financing also witnessed growth, indicating sustained investment in the sector. The balance increased by 1.5% monthly, reaching 2.686 billion dinars in January 2024 from 2.646 billion dinars in December 2023. Despite this monthly increase, there was a 6.1% decrease in the accumulated balance compared to January 2023, where it stood at 2.861 billion dinars. While there was a slight decline from the previous year, the ongoing investment in industry financing underscores the importance of this sector in Kuwait's economic landscape.

Monthly statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait for the year 2023 provide further insights into the dynam-

ics of financing within the industrial sector. Total monthly financing to the industrial sector witnessed a notable decline of 31% during the fiscal year, amounting to 1.033 billion dinars in December 2023 compared to 1.499 billion dinars in December 2022. This significant reduction reflects various challenges faced by the industry sector, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions in global supply chains.

Moreover, December 2023 saw a staggering 90.7% decrease in financing compared to the same period in 2022, dropping from 73.8 million dinars to 7.2 million dinars. This drastic decline underscores the volatility and uncertainties that characterized the industrial sector during the past year. However, despite these challenges, the resilience of the industry sector remains evident, with ongoing efforts to navigate through turbulent times and adapt to changing market conditions.

The industry sector has faced numerous challenges over the past three years, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on corporate activities, disruptions in supply chains, and decreased demand have all contributed to the sector's struggles. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles in completing transactions, reliance on imported goods, and high rental prices for industrial facilities have further compounded the challenges faced by industrial enterprises.

Despite these obstacles, the Kuwaiti government continues to prioritize the development of the industrial sector and has implemented various initiatives to support its growth. These efforts include addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies, promoting domestic manufacturing, and enhancing infrastructure to facilitate industrial activities. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on emerging opportunities, the industrial sector in Kuwait can overcome current obstacles and realize its full potential in driving economic growth and prosperity.

## Economic rebound in Lebanon hindered by regional conflict

Interview by Fawaz Al-Otaibi

BEIRUT, March 18, (KUNA): Jitters emanating from the fighting across southern Lebanon have cast shadows on the internal social and economic conditions that started to rebound favorably recently triggering short-lived hopes for recovery.

The hopes emerged last summer when the tourist sector witnessed some prosperity but they have been dashed since October 7, when Hamas launched "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation prompting Israel to launch an all-out war on Gaza while engaging in tit-for-tat hostilities with the Lebanese resistance in southern Lebanon.

Mohammad Shuqair, the head of the economic associations, said in an interview with KUNA that the private sector started in 2023 "to gradually exit the economic crisis that began in

2019," and last summer's tourist season was better than the previous annual seasons.

However, the security ramifications of "Al-Aqsa flood" operation have negatively affected the economic and tourist activities in the country, Shuqair said.

Shuqair indicated that the economic conditions could have gotten worse without remittances from the Lebanese immigrants abroad and some contributions by the domestic private sector. He indicated that the local industrial sector had witnessed some recovery with establishment of 780 factories between 2022 and 2023. Most of the new projects are in the food sector and there are currently 11 macaroni factories.

Mentioning other positive signs, Shuqair revealed that locally made products had accounted to 30 percent of the domestically traded commodities.



Bird's eyeview of the project

### First new free zone in two decades

## Nuwiseeb Free Zone to serve as Kuwait's new hub for investment

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority has finalized plans for the Nuwiseeb Free Zone, situated in the southern region of the country. Designed with advanced economic specifications, the free zone aims to emulate regional counterparts in terms of organization and investor services.

According to a document obtained by Al-Qabas daily, the project aims to attract and accommodate 500 local and foreign companies across various sectors. It will feature 50 logistics warehouses, storage facilities, and land plots, along with 50 factories specializing in light and manufacturing industries.

Additionally, the zone will house three hotels, two sub-lease investment complexes, four restaurant complexes catering to workers and visitors, and two medical centers. More than five locations have been designated as headquarters for multiple commercial banks.

The Nuwiseeb Free Zone marks the first establishment of a new free zone in two decades, distinguished by its management approach, potential privatization, and the variety of economic activities it will host.

The primary beneficiaries of the project are Kuwaiti private sector investment and industrial companies, as well as foreign investors. Its core objective is to bolster direct investment by streamlining entry into the national economy, enhancing trade relations with global partners, and stimulating non-oil industrial exports, particularly in manufacturing.

The government's initiative to establish the Nuwiseeb Free Zone aims to bolster Kuwait's national output by fostering commercial and industrial activities.

Insiders revealed to Al-Qabas that the executive leadership overseeing the Nuwiseeb Free Zone is keen on learning from past mistakes, particularly those encountered by the Shuwaikh Free Zone, to avoid repetition. Given Nuwiseeb's wilderness location, distinct from Shuwaikh's legal complexities, meticulous planning and execution are emphasized to ensure its success.

Specific project objectives include developing free zones in Kuwait, expanding free zones and economic competition, attracting foreign investors and giving the Kuwaiti private sector an opportunity to invest in the region, providing job opportunities for citizens, especially in private sector companies operating in the region, increasing the national product with non-oil revenues, developing commercial activity through import and export of goods, introducing modern technology to manage the free zone.

The most important objectives and components of "Nuwiseeb Free Zone include 3 upscale hotels, localization of 500 local and foreign companies, establishing 50 logistical warehouses and storage lands, establishing 50 factories for light and manufacturing industries, two investment complexes with the right to sublease to investors, building 4 restaurant complexes to serve investors, workers and visitors, two medical centers and more than 5 commercial banks.

## No acquisitions in Boursa Kuwait's special deals system amidst stability

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Despite the Boursa Kuwait's special deals system being in effect since the beginning of the year, there have been no acquisitions made through this system during the current period.

The assessment by Al-Jarida daily indicates that investment entities have not utilized the private deals mechanism to execute any acquisitions within the market.

In contrast to the 19 agreed-upon deals totaling 283.7 million dinars conducted in the past year, the absence of special deals in the first few months of this year suggests a period of stability and position rebuilding, particularly in dividend stocks.

The performance of listed companies and their ability to sustain positive profits are influencing investor sentiment, with a potential impact on appetite for completing such deals via the market system.

Private deals, also known as negotiated deals, involve negotiations between buyers and sellers outside the regular trading mechanism. They cater to various investor needs and can provide early indications of forth-

coming company announcements regarding share acquisitions.

The private deals system accommodates investment movements while maintaining confidentiality and preventing strategic ownership exposure to speculative activities. Investors can acquire 5 percent or more of a listed company's total issued capital from existing shareholders through private deals, with any acquisition exceeding 30 percent subject to mandatory acquisition provisions.

The Boursa Kuwait's implementation of the special deals system has facilitated trading operations for investors with significant quantities, without straining the trading system.

Transactions exceeding 5 percent are fully disclosed, with acquisitions surpassing 30 percent subject to compulsory acquisition conditions.

While the private transactions require a minimum transaction size of 150 thousand dinars and adherence to price limitations, the system's flexibility and transparency have encouraged acquisitions and yielded favorable returns in recent periods.

Demand set to double by 2030

## Mideast data centers surge amid AI Revolution, \$5 bln investments

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Data centers, serving as the backbone of the digital economy, are witnessing a surge in investments driven by the increasing demand for computing power amid the AI revolution, reports Al-Qabas daily.

A recent report highlighted the significant momentum gained by the cloud and data center industry in the Middle East, exemplified by Amazon's \$5.3 billion commitment to invest in Saudi Arabia and DataVolt's \$5 billion pledge to establish local data centers in Riyadh. These investments underscore a broader trend aimed at bolstering digital infrastructure to drive economic modernization and diversification.

The Middle East has emerged as a burgeoning hotspot for data center construction, fueled by skyrocketing demand propelled by the digital economy's growth and the proliferation of AI applications. Saudi Arabia and the UAE currently lead the market, with projections indicating a doubling of data center demand by 2030.

Despite the region's immense potential, challenges such as poor-quality international connectivity, regulatory uncertainty, and limited cloud supply hinder rapid cloud adoption. Data center construction costs, coupled with mounting energy consumption driven by AI, raise concerns about strain on power grids, exacerbated by significant water usage for cooling purposes in the arid Middle East.

Moreover, delivery challenges persist, including design and planning issues and a shortage of skilled professionals, alongside price escalations due to rising building material costs and supply-demand imbalances.

Nevertheless, Gulf governments' ambitious economic transformation agendas and accelerated digital adoption during the COVID-19 crisis are driving the development of digital infrastructure. Global tech giants like Microsoft, Google, and Huawei are intensifying their presence in the region, complemented by investments from local players like DataVolt.

Real estate developers are also capitalizing on the data center boom, as evidenced by Dubai tycoon Hussain Sajwani's \$1 billion investment in global data center projects through Edgnex. Additionally, partnerships like Edgnex's collaboration with Vodafone to invest \$100 million in Turkey further illustrate the industry's global expansion.

Looking ahead, the Middle East's investments in digital infrastructure align with a broader interest in artificial intelligence. Initiatives such as the establishment of MGX in the UAE and Saudi Arabia's ambition to become an AI hub underscore the region's commitment to harnessing AI's transformative potential, with partnerships like OpenAI and Microsoft's data centers facilitating AI expansion locally and regionally.

# Khalaf Al Habtoor announces a joint endowment agreement with the Humaid Bin Rashid Al Nuaimi Charitable Foundation

DUBAI, UAE, March 18: Khalaf Ahmed Al Habtoor, founder and Chairman of the Al Habtoor Group, announced the signing of a joint endowment agreement to establish a residential building project donated for charity in honor of Khalaf Al Habtoor's parents, on a plot of land among the lands belonging to the Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi Endowment in the Emirate of Ajman.

The agreement includes the construction of a residential endowment building on one of the plots of land belonging to the Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi Endowment. The project's entire area is 3,720 square metres, with a cost of approximately 9 million UAE dirhams.

This endowment residential building seeks to provide residential units for rent and investment, this step is considered a tribute to the memory of the late, God willing, Ahmed Mohammed Al Habtoor and Noura Ahmed Al Otaiba, Khalaf Al Habtoor's parents and the driving force behind his success.

In this context, Khalaf Al Habtoor, said: "I am pleased with this cooperation with the Humaid Bin Rashid Al Nuaimi Charitable Foundation, which expresses our common objective of creating a society based on solidarity and interdependence. It also represents our commitment to working together and in solidarity to promote humanitarian activities and achieve social sustainability. Our interest in the charitable endowment stems from a sense of responsibility to our community and a desire to help achieve solidarity among all members of society while also spreading goodness and giving. I hope this collaborative endeavour and this project to serve as an ongoing charity for my parents' souls, as well as a sustainable good that benefits them."

This project builds on the Al Habtoor Group's previous endowment projects in Dubai, including the Al Habtoor Charitable Endowment in the Al Quoz area, and the charitable Endowment

in the name of Hamda bint Rashid Al Suwaidi in the Al Bidaa area, which were carried out in collaboration with the Endowments Foundation and the Management of Minors' Funds. The revenues from both are used for charity and charitable efforts, as well as for the care of Al-Farouq Omar Bin Al-Khattab Mosque and Centre, may God be pleased with him in Dubai.

The Humaid Bin Rashid Al Nuaimi Charitable Foundation, for its part, applauded Khalaf Al Habtoor's effort to establish a new endowment within Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi's Endowment Complex, may God rest his soul, which will be added to the present endowments, which total five.

Tariq Abdullah Mohammed Al Awadi, General Manager of the Humaid Bin Rashid Al Nuaimi Charitable Foundation, thanked Khalaf Al Habtoor for his ongoing support and initiative in ensuring the success of the Sheikh Rashid Bin Humaid Al Nuaimi Endowment Complex Project, which will allow the Humaid Bin Rashid Foundation to double its investment in the endowment. With other buildings that help to make the Emirate of Ajman one of the most visible cities, characterised by a sense of solidarity and generosity.

He added: "The Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi Charitable Foundation's endowment complex project is running successfully, as decreed, after His Excellency Khalaf Al Habtoor joined as a partner in its success, along with many other contributing charitable entities and institutions, such as the Beit Al Khair Society and the philanthropists Ghanem and Faraj bin Hamouda. This endowment complex by Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi provides an opportunity for philanthropists and compassionate individuals to create endowments and distribute the revenues to the needy in collaboration with our charity foundation."

In the same context, Al-Awadi confirmed that several endowments have been completed on the land area of this endowment project, including a



Top and above: photos taken from the event

mosque and buildings, and that work is still underway to ensure the project's success through the endowments that will be built, as the endowment project

consists of 15 plots of land designated for the construction of endowment structures. It has a total area of 25,243 square metres and is located in the Li-

wara 2 area in Ajman.

This project exemplifies Al Habtoor's ongoing commitment to social responsibility by helping to build soci-

ety, supporting charitable efforts, and encouraging social investments that benefit the local community and encourage long-term growth.

## The Conversation

### An obscure rule helps explain why

## Why do airlines charge so much for checked bags?

By Jay L. Zagorsky  
Boston University

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

Five out of the six biggest U.S. airlines have raised their checked bag fees since January 2024.

Take American Airlines. In 2023, it cost US\$30 to check a standard bag in with the airline; today, as of March 2024, it costs \$40 at a U.S. airport - a whopping 33% increase.

As a business school professor who studies travel, I'm often asked why airlines alienate their customers with baggage fees instead of bundling all charges together. There are many reasons, but an important, often overlooked cause is buried in the U.S. tax code.

Airlines pay the federal government 7.5% of the ticket price when flying people domestically, alongside other fees. The airlines dislike these charges, with their trade association arguing that they boost the cost to the consumer of a typical air ticket by around one-fifth.

However, the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations specifically excludes baggage from the 7.5% transportation tax as long as "the charge is separable from the payment for the transportation of a person and is shown in the exact amount."

This means if an airline charges a combined \$300 to fly you and a bag round-trip within the U.S., it owes \$22.50 in tax. If the airline charges \$220 to fly you plus separately charges \$40 each way for the bag, then your total cost is the same - but the airline only owes the government \$16.50 in taxes. Splitting out baggage charges saves the airline \$6.

Now \$6 might not seem like much, but it can add up. Last year, passengers took more than 800 million trips on major airlines. Even if only a fraction of them check their bags, that means large savings for the industry.

How large? The government has tracked revenue from bag fees for decades. In 2002, airlines charged passengers a total of \$180 million to check bags, which worked out to around 33 cents per passenger.

Today, as any flyer can attest, bag fees are a lot higher. Airlines collected over 40 times more money in bag fees last year than they did in 2002.

When the full data is in for 2023, total bag fees will likely top \$7 billion, which is about

\$9 for the average domestic passenger. By splitting out the cost of bags, airlines avoided paying about half a billion dollars in taxes just last year.

In the two decades since 2002, flyers paid a total of about \$70 billion in bag fees. This means separately charging for bags saved airlines about \$5 billion in taxes.

It seems clear to me that tax savings are one driver of the unbundling of baggage fees because of a quirk in the law.

The U.S. government doesn't apply the 7.5% tax to international flights that go more than 225 miles beyond the nation's borders. Instead, there are fixed international departure and arrival taxes. This is why major airlines charge \$35 to \$40 for bags if you're flying domestically, but don't charge a bag fee when you're flying to Europe or Asia.

This system raises an interesting question: Do baggage fees force airlines to be more careful with bags, since customers who pay more expect better service? To find out, I checked with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, which has been tracking lost luggage for decades.

For many years, it calculated the number of mishandled-baggage reports per thousand airline passengers. The government's data showed mishandled bags peaked in 2007 with about seven reports of lost or damaged luggage for every thousand passengers. That means you could expect your luggage to go on a different trip than the one you are taking about once every 140 or so flights. By 2018, that estimate had fallen to once every 350 flights.

In 2019, the government changed how it tracks mishandled bags, calculating figures based on the total number of bags checked, rather than the total number of passengers. The new data show about six bags per thousand checked get lost or damaged, which is less than 1% of checked bags. Unfortunately, the data doesn't show improvement since 2019.

Is there anything that you can do about higher bag fees? Complaining to politicians probably won't help. In 2010, two senators tried to ban bag fees, and their bill went nowhere.

Given that congressional action failed, there's a simple way to avoid higher bag fees: travel light and don't check any luggage. It may sound tough not to have all your belongings when traveling, but it might be the best option as bag fees take off. (AP)

# So many voters frustrated by the American economy

Home prices to blame

## Concerns mount over migration

## European Union announces an \$8 billion aid package for Egypt

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): Lori Shelton can't fathom ever having the money to buy a home - and that's a major reason why so many voters feel down on the economy ahead of this year's presidential election.

Shelton, 67, drives an Uber to help pay rent in Aurora, Colorado. An advance on her pay covered her apartment's security deposit. But it also cut into her next paycheck, leaving her bank account dangerously low when the rent was due - a cycle that never seems to end.

"I'm always one step behind," said Shelton, her voice choking up. "It's a nightmare, it's a freaking nightmare right now."

The United States is slogging through a housing affordability crisis that was decades in the making. At the root of this problem: America failed to build enough homes for its growing population. The shortage strikes at the heart of the American dream of homeownership - dampening President Joe Biden's assurances that the U.S. economy is strong and underscoring the degree to which Republican Donald Trump, the former president and presumptive GOP nominee for 2024, has largely overlooked the shortage.

The lack of housing has caused a record number of renters to devote an excessive amount of income to housing, according to a Harvard University analysis. Not enough homes are for sale or being built, keeping prices elevated. Average mortgage rates have more than doubled and further worsened affordability.

In fact, the Census Bureau reported that homeownership fell slightly at the end of last year in an otherwise solid economy. If it wasn't for shelter costs, inflation - Biden's most pronounced economic problem - would be running at a healthy and stable 1.8%. Instead, it's hovering around 3.2%.

Administration officials are confident that shelter inflation will soon cool, but the damage across several years is apparent to advocates and economists.

"I've been doing housing work for 30 years - the housing affordability challenge is the worst I've ever seen in my career," said Shaun Donovan, a former secretary of Housing and Ur-

ban Development in the Obama years who now leads the nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners.

Donovan noted that this is an increasingly bipartisan challenge that could bring the political parties together. Expensive housing was once the domain of Democratic areas such as New York City and San Francisco. It's now moved into Republican states as places such as Boise, Idaho, grapple with higher prices.

El-Sissi's office said in a statement that the deal aims to achieve "a significant leap in cooperation and coordination between the two sides and to

achieve common interests."

The EU will provide assistance to Egypt's government to fortify its borders, especially with Libya, a major transit point for migrants fleeing poverty and conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. The 27-nation bloc will also support the government in hosting Sudanese who have fled nearly a year of fighting between rival generals in their country. Egypt received more than 460,000 Sudanese since April last year.

The deal comes amid growing concerns that Israel's looming ground offensive on Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah could force hundreds of thousands of people to break into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The Israel-Hamas war, now in its sixth month, have pushed more than 1 million people to Rafah.

Egypt says there are 9 million migrants, including about 480,000 who are registered refugees and asylum-seekers with the U.N. refugee agency. Many of those migrants have established their own businesses, while others work in the huge informal economy as street vendors and house cleaners.

For decades, Egypt has been a refuge for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa trying to escape war or poverty. Egypt is a destination and a haven for some, because it's the closest and easiest country for them to reach. For others, it's a point of transit before attempting the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Europe. While the Egyptian coast has not been a major launching

pad for people smugglers and human traffickers sending overcrowded boats across the Mediterranean to Europe, Egypt faces migratory pressures from the region, with the added looming threat that the Israel-Hamas war will spill across its borders.

The deal would inject much-needed funds into the Egyptian economy which has been hit hard by years of government austerity, the coronavirus pandemic, the fallout from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and most recently, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Egypt reached a deal with the International Monetary Fund earlier this month to increase a bailout loan to \$8 billion, up from \$3 billion, after marathon negotiations. The deal with the IMF was combined with economic reforms that included the flotation of the Egyptian pound and a sharp raising of the main interest rate.

The EU deal follows the template of those recently signed with Tunisia and Mauritania that pledged funds in return for fortifying their borders. Both Tunisia and Mauritania were key points of departure for migrants crossing the Mediterranean and a stretch of the Atlantic to Italy and Spain, respectively, and they too were criticized for alleged abuses against migrants.

The package drew criticism from international rights groups over Egypt's human rights record. Amnesty International urged European leaders not to be complicit with human rights violations taking place in Egypt.

"It is a first-tier issue almost everywhere," he said. "And that is changing the national politics around it in a way that I think is quite different than I've ever seen." Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, said that the outcome of the November election could ultimately depend on the path of 30-year mortgage rates.

Rates currently average about 6.74%. If they dropped closer to 6%, the odds of a Biden victory would

increase. But rates moving near 8% might enable Trump to prevail, Zandi said.

"Given the current housing affordability crisis, higher rates will make owning a home completely out of reach for nearly all potential first-time homebuyers," he said. "Since homeownership is a key part of the American dream, if it appears unattainable, this will deeply impact voters' sense of the economy."

## Cryptocurrency mkt dips its lowest level in ten days

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The largest cryptocurrency by market cap fell to its lowest level in 10 days, after falling below \$66,000, a 5% decline in the last 24 hours, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Data from Cointelegraph Markets Pro and TradingView showed new lows for Bitcoin prices at \$64,522 on

the last 24 hours.

A popular account called "Watcher Guru" attributed the recent decline in cryptocurrency prices to concerns about potential regulatory crackdowns in certain countries, as well as profit-taking by investors following recent price surges.

The market volatility underscores the ongoing uncertainty surrounding digital currencies, despite their growing popularity and adoption. Investors are closely monitoring regulatory developments and market sentiment to gauge the future direction of cryptocurrency prices.



Shadi Zahran



Abdulwahab Al-Rashoud



Hamad Al Marzouq



Prof. Dr. Sayed Muhammad Al-Sayyid Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Tabtabai



Bader Al-Wazzan

Cash dividend distribution of 20% (including 10% in H1 2023) and bonus share of 9%

# Kuwait Finance House holds Annual General Assembly

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) held its Annual General Assembly meeting (AGM) with a nearly 80% quorum and approved the Board of Directors' recommendation of cash dividend distribution of 20% (including 10% distributed in H1 2023) and bonus share of 9% to shareholders.

**Chairman's Message**  
**Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq**  
**In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,**  
**Praise be to Allah the Almighty, and Peace and Blessings be upon our Prophet, his family, and companions.**

**Dear Esteemed Shareholders,**  
**Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatu Allah Wabarakatuh**  
On behalf of myself and my fellow members of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Finance House (KFH), I would like to present to you the 2023 KFH Group Annual Report including major achievements, consolidated financial statements, and other reports.

During the past year, KFH continued its strategy of previous years, resulting in achieving remarkable financial performance and launching numerous products, services and initiatives that contributed to maintaining KFH's leadership and meeting customers' needs and satisfaction as one of our ultimate objectives. I can honestly say that, during 2023, we succeeded in attaining the key objectives of our strategy, overcoming the various difficulties of the operational environment, and various challenges.

In 2023, our strategic plans proved successful, bolstering our leading position. This success notably facilitated KFH Group's transition to a new pivotal phase. A significant milestone was the regional expansion through the acquisition of Ahli United Bank - Bahrain achieved within its first year of launch. This accomplishment stands as a source of pride, aligning with our sustainable goals and yielding positive outcomes, such as an increased market capitalization of the Group. KFH ascended to become Kuwait's largest bank and the world's second-largest Islamic bank, attaining the highest local market capitalization. Our services expanded into new strategic markets such as the UK, UAE, and Egypt, among others.

We successfully completed the conversion of all conventional banking services at Ahli United Bank (AUB) - Bahrain to be compliant with Shari'a principles. On December 10, 2023, the bank officially received the approval from the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) as a licensed Islamic Bank. We take great pride in completing the conversion of AUB - Bahrain from a conventional to an Islamic bank in a timely manner. AUB will offer an integrated range of products and services that are compliant with the provisions and principles of Shari'a, including retail and corporate services, saving and investment products, in addition to trade finance and wealth management solutions.

Despite rapid environmental changes, we remain optimistic about directing our financial resources to promising investment opportunities. This approach aims to sustainably enhance the wealth of our customers and shareholders and contribute to economic and social development.

Amidst the worldwide economic deceleration, KFH recognizes the importance of maintaining the robustness of its balance sheet to enhance its flexibility and capacity for the long run. KFH also maintains a solid capital reserve, capitalizing on the abundant liquidity ratios and an ongoing diversification in financing. Consequently, the primary emphasis persists on bolstering and strengthening the Group's financial position.

KFH achieved top-tier levels and profit rates within the banking sector. Furthermore, it has secured the highest returns across all key indicators. Our commitment to enhance the capital base and the capital adequacy ratio, asset quality, rationalize expenses, develop operating profits, as well as boost and diversify revenues, resulted in robust financial strength, efficiency, and a well-balanced sustainable growth across all balance sheet items.

Following the successful completion of the acquisition project of AUB - Bahrain, KFH proceeded with a proposal of merger by amalgamation with Ahli United Bank - Kuwait. The Extraordinary General Assembly of both parties approved the merger decision, thus finalizing the steps as per the approved plans and procedures.

On the other hand, KFH excelled in introducing various innovative banking services, products, and solutions, marking an unprecedented success in its digital transformation strategy. This success was capped off by the launch of Tam Digital Bank; first Shari'a-compliant digital bank in Kuwait. The innovation journey continued around creating financial solutions that are geared towards customers' aspirations and needs. The Information Technology department (IT) executed over 100 projects for banking and financing services, products, and practices encompassing various business aspects. The projects also involved developing the technological infrastructure, cybersecurity measures, in addition to boosting the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the collaboration with Fintech providers.

KFH was also at the forefront in launching several digital services in Kuwait. These services included the detecting biometric facial features in branches, instant printing for all types of cards, Zaheb digital platform and KFHonline for corporates, in addition to the transfer service from a prepaid card to the account, five digital portfolios to facilitate e-payment, and D-POS device for instant opening of bank accounts.

KFH has also collaborated with Western Union to offer co-branded international money transfer services. It also enabled their customers to view their account balances in KFH - Türkiye. Additionally, the formation of "high-performance teams" had a positive impact on expediting the completion of KFH's projects in technology and digital transformation.

In recognition of its digital transformation excellence, Euromoney Magazine ranked KFH as a Market Leader in digital solutions.

In addition to KFH's solid pillars, we continued our precautionary approach in managing risks, prioritizing this approach in 2023 as a response to the geopolitical developments in the region and the world which would impact the operational environment in the markets where we operate. As a result of this approach, KFH maintained a consistent growth in its financing and deposits portfolio accompanied by good progress in various performance indicators. This aligns with our medium and long-term expectations, reflecting a stable policy and signifying customers' trust in KFH's product and brand quality, which we work on solidifying to maintain its growth momentum comprehensively and across all aspects.

KFH succeeded in launching a new generation of digital banking services as part of the Bank's approach towards digitizing all its businesses, services, and products and facilitating the ways in which these services and products

are accessed. This was achieved through KFHonline (mobile application and website), XTM and ATM devices as well as KFH Go branches, shifting customers' experience from the traditional channels for transactions and basic services into KFH's digital channels.

Regarding the financial results, KFH, by the grace of Allah, reported a net profit for its shareholders of KD 584.5 million up to the end of 2023, an increase of 63.4% compared to last year. Earnings per share reached 38.49 Fils; an increase of 29.6% compared to last year.

Net financing income increased to 965.9 million; an increase of 20.7% compared to last year.

Net operating income increased to 945.4 million; an increase rate of 30.7% compared to last year.

Total assets reached 38.01 billion; an increase of 1.04 billion and by 2.8% compared to last year.

Depositors' accounts reached 21.8 billion, while the capital adequacy ratio recorded a rate of 18.18%.

BoD has recommended to the General Assembly the distribution of 20% in cash dividends (including 10% in H1 2023) and 9% bonus shares to shareholders, considering the distributed returns on investment deposits and saving accounts as shown in the following table:

Depositors Profit		
Account Type	2023	2022
"Al Khomasiyah" Investment Deposit	5.000%	4.000%
"Continuous" Investment Deposit	4.500%	3.500%
"Al Sidra" Investment Deposit	3.850%	2.325%
"Al Dima" Investment Deposit (12 months)	4.250%	2.725%
"Al Dima" Investment Deposit (6 months)	4.125%	2.225%
Long term investment plans	3.950%	2.550%
Investment Saving Accounts	0.250%	0.230%

KFH maintained its standing as the leading Islamic financial institution in Kuwait's banking sector. Since its inception, KFH has played a significant role in supporting and financing companies, SMEs, and micro-enterprises.

KFH is recognized as a strategic partner for society. It has achieved growth in its corporates and SMEs financing portfolio, establishing itself as the leader in this market segment.

KFH expanded its financing contributions at the regional level by participating in financing deals for electricity, petrochemical and aviation projects, amounting to approximately USD 10.5 billion across three GCC countries. Additionally, KFH participated in a syndicated financing deal for Egypt in cooperation with the International Islamic Trade Finance Cooperation (ITFC).

KFH Group continued its pioneering presence in the international Sukuk issuance arena. Through the Group's investment arm, KFH Capital, had successfully led and arranged Sukuk issuances exceeding USD 7.5 billion for diversified issuers, covering sovereign and corporate issuances across various sectors and geographies. KFH Capital demonstrated its key role by acting as Joint Lead Manager & Bookrunner for many other Sukuk deals.

KFH Group Treasury investment transactions exceeded USD 13 billion in the Primary and Secondary markets. It maintained its leadership as a Primary Dealer for the IILM Sukuk for the 7th time, and a Secondary Dealer for the 3rd consecutive year, thus affirming KFH position as a Main Market Leader in the short-term IILM Sukuk market.

The KFH capital market retail client activity amounted to USD 45 million in 2023 compared to USD 20 million in 2022; an increase of 125%. As a part of the Bank's sustainability initiative, the Group Treasury expanded further its ESG Sukuk exposure by further increasing the ESG compliant Sukuk investments. The total ESG Sukuk investments increased reaching USD 294 million in 2023, an increase of 362% from the previous year, exhibiting the Group Treasury commitment to responsible and sustainable investment. The Group Treasury also achieved USD 38 billion in volume of FX transactions during the year.

The Group Operations sector has once again showcased the robust operational capabilities of KFH. It has been a cornerstone for the Group, in the light of the numerous milestones achieved, all of which underscore our commitment to excellence, efficiency, and customer-centricity. Operations leveraged also Robotic Process Automation (RPA), where our bank has revolutionized major back-office operations, driving unparalleled efficiency, reducing costs, and enabling our talented workforce to focus on strategic initiatives that would enhance our overall competitiveness and value proposition.

To name but few, Card Operations Department took several remarkable steps towards enhancing the customer experience, with the launch of Google Pay for KFH debit cards, the introduction of the Turkish Lira Foreign Currency Prepaid card, and significant enhancement in ATM deposit related claims processing time. Central Operations continued its trend of innovation with the successful transition to ISO 20022 for inward fund transfers. The Financing Operations Department excelled in CRM Workflow Automation for Corporate CAD and direct product centralization at Retail CAD, thereby improving customers services.

In the first year of its creation, Procurement and Contracts Department has established a bank-wide policy that paved the way for a seamless process for Procure-to-Pay (P2P) generating savings, enduring payment accuracy, and enhancing Inventory & Supply Chain while having prime focus for on-time deliveries and vendor onboarding.

To expand its market share and face competition, KFH continued to provide a comprehensive range of products and services in Retail and Private Banking. KFH launched and participated in several customer-focused campaigns in collaboration with major companies. To achieve its vision as the leading bank in the market and the most preferred by customers, KFH launched many distinctive services and products to attract specific segments of customers. These included the Emergency Cash service, KFH-Kuwait Staff rotation with its subsidiary in Türkiye to serve customers in both countries, the launch of new payment channels and benefits as well as cash gifts to attract customers and enhance their loyalty.

Group Human Resources continued to focus on its Kuwaitization agenda where we exceeded 81% Kuwaitization ratio, development of national talents, and demonstration of our role and contribution to the Kuwaiti economy, highlighting KFH as the employer of choice in Kuwait. We are keen on im-

plementing succession planning and working on having Kuwaiti nationals in Middle and Executive Management, which would achieve labor nationalization goals at KFH. This has been demonstrated this year in the assumption of leadership positions by Kuwaiti nationals as an embodiment of this principle. Moreover, it fills us with pride that KFH has the largest number of Kuwaiti employees among Kuwaiti banks and the private sector.

We believe that the sustainability of our business and success are consolidated when the bank strengthens its social ties, through many contributions to the development of society and environmental sustainability. In this regard, KFH offered various environmental initiatives in partnership with government and private entities to preserve the environment. KFH also launched the "Green Finance" initiative, embracing the global shift towards sustainability. It also introduced a landmark Green Products Financing campaign, highlighting KFH's commitment to advancing eco-conscious housing solutions by providing tailored financing for environmentally sustainable and smart infrastructures.

Along with its high creditworthiness that has been confirmed by international credit rating agencies, KFH Group received during the year 25 prestigious awards from global organizations specialized in monitoring and evaluation of top banks performance.

Meanwhile, we will continue to focus our efforts on enhancing our business model, focusing on customers, supporting innovation initiatives, digital banking, governance, and social responsibility. KFH proved its leadership in social responsibility through contributions of millions of Kuwaiti Dinars to many strategic community initiatives.

Finally, I'd like to convey our sincere thanks, gratitude, and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard him, and His Highness, the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Our thanks and appreciation are also extended to the Central Bank of Kuwait and regulatory authorities for their continuous support to the banking sector in the State of Kuwait.

BoD would also like to extend its sincere thanks to the esteemed shareholders, customers, KFH Executive Management and all employees for their efforts and cooperation during the year.

**Acting Group Chief Executive Officer's Message**  
**Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood**

**In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,**  
**Praise be to Allah the Almighty, and Peace and Blessings be upon our Prophet, his family, and companions.**

**Dear Esteemed Shareholders,**  
**Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatu Allah Wabarakatuh.**

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group demonstrated exceptional performance and attained unprecedented results across all business indicators. This has further enhanced the value, quality, and reputation of both KFH and its services, while providing significant benefits to its customers. Additionally, the Group's growth across various sectors was synergistically achieved through a network of banking services and groundbreaking digital financial products, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience. As a result, KFH Group has emerged as a leading financial and banking brand in the global markets where it operates.

One of the highlights from last year might have been the positive harmonious performance and cooperation across all departments and units within the Group. This was achieved through a unified and comprehensive vision, aiming to strengthen KFH's leadership and continue its success in various fields and markets. This success is substantiated by tangible indicators and promising growth prospects in the present and future.

## Strategy

During 2023, the Strategic Planning adopted flexible strategies dealing with the principal pillars of KFH strategy to achieve the set objectives. In addition, it monitored with high efficiency the implementation of these strategies against clear, measurable, and realistic standard which enabled it to accomplish the previously determined strategic projects and proactively formed different targets which the KFH Group aims to fulfil in the next years.

The Strategy function developed the 2023 strategy by collaborating with the Group's subsidiaries located in key markets around the world. This was accomplished through conducting local, regional, and global market research, identifying the latest banking trends in addition to conducting a SWOT analysis on KFH's various departments to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. This analysis also aimed to overcome obstacles and achieve the plan's strategic objectives. As a result, several strategic initiatives were launched with the main pillars of the KFH Group. These included customer centricity, digital transformation, innovation, security, and regulatory compliance. These initiatives are under three elements of KFH's strategic map: customers, internal environment, and employees.

In addition to considering customers' perceptions and expectations of their banking experience with KFH, the Strategy function also strives to enrich their experience and strengthen their loyalty by staying updated and responsive to developments and changes through planning and analysis tools. During the first year of the strategic acquisition of Ahli United Bank - Bahrain, KFH Group successfully maximized its indicators, reflecting positively on the Group's market value as the highest in the Kuwaiti market.

## Human Resources

As part of the continued efforts to care for employees, Group Human Resources and Transformation has demonstrated unprecedented achievements on the local and global stage, securing two gold and one bronze awards from The Brandon Hall Group in 2023. This exceptional recognition establishes KFH as the sole bank in the Middle East to attain such prestigious accolades in one year. While we are proud to have succeeded in building a culture of management that fosters empowerment, talent development and creative thinking at work, Group Human Resources and Transformation demonstrated the Bank's dedication to promoting nationalization through its massive recruitment efforts. KFH hired around 400 employees with a noteworthy 22% representation of women and an impressive nationalization rate of 100% among these new hires. In an effort to promote diversity and inclusion within its workforce, KFH championed opportunities for individuals with special needs to be hired and successfully integrated into KFH's workforce.

Moreover, the bank has actively embraced social responsibility, exemplified by its commitment to the Women's Empowerment Principles through agreements with UN Women and UN Global Compact.

KFH's commitment to employee well-being and development has fortified its standing in the banking sector. A remuneration survey conducted in 2022 by a global company positions KFH among the top 3 paying banks in the overall banking sector market.

The Bank's proactive approach extends to the enhancement of medical insurance benefits for the employees and their dependents in the 2023-2024 plan, ensuring comprehensive coverage. Additionally, KFH has invested significantly in the professional growth of its workforce, organizing an impressive array of training courses, workshops, and e-learning courses.

This direction has resulted in the collective logging of over 83,000 hours of training by 3,116 employees. Furthermore, KFH launched the "Excellence in Leadership" program, which entails "Building Leadership Excellence" and "Enterprise Leadership" programs in collaboration with prestigious universities and esteemed training institutions, with the aim of fostering the leadership capabilities of 50 executives and managers within KFH group, further solidifying the Bank's commitment to excellence and innovation. This is in accordance with the continuous drive to develop the staff by acquiring the best expertise and competencies at various administrative levels, especially from the national talent. Strengthening the position and developing the performance of these talents are at the forefront of our priorities. Therefore, we attracted a large number of employees and provided them with intensive training courses to acquire experience and skills to prepare them as future leaders.



Khaled Al-Shamlan, Salah Al-Muraikhi, Ahmed Al-Fares, Muhammad Nasser Al-Fawzan, Ahmed Al-Omar, Abdulaziz Al-Nafisi, Khaled Al-Nisf, Moaz Al-Usaimi and Fahd Al-Ghanem.

Continued on Page 11

**KFH holds AGM**

Continued from Page 10

**Treasury and Financial Institutions**

Due to the significant growth in the Group's assets, the Group Treasury took significant steps by foreseeing a higher yield environment, thus arranged cost effective liquidity and stable funding for Group businesses.

With its expertise in the market, KFH positioned itself as the largest bank in Kuwait, benefitting customer service by optimizing financing costs, increasing returns, and diversifying financing options. This allowed KFH to continuously serve customers in Kuwait and across the Group.

Thanks to our approach of improving financing and securing the lowest cost in 2023, KFH established a strong presence in the money markets and had the capability to offer advanced products to its customers, making it a competitive and active market maker in Dinar, Dollar, international and GCC currencies trades.

The Group Treasury continued its investment and trading activities in primary and secondary capital markets. While being one of the most active market makers, Group Treasury executed Sukuk transactions worth more than USD 13 billion during the year and persistently expanded its short term Sukuk trading in International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation's (IILM) short term issuances. KFH Group Treasury maintained its leadership position in IILM market making and won the top rank Primary Dealer for the 7th time and 3rd consecutive year in a row for Secondary Dealer, affirming KFH position as a core player in the short-term IILM Sukuk market.

The Group Treasury increased its network of capital market counterparties to further improve access to competitive rates, enhanced trade opportunities and expanded connections to serve our Sukuk market trades. The KFH capital market Retail client activity amounted to USD 45 million in 2023 compared to USD 20 million in 2022; an increase of 125%. As a part of the Bank's ESG initiative, the Group Treasury expanded further its ESG Sukuk exposure by further increasing the ESG compliant Sukuk investments during the year. The total ESG Sukuk investments increased to reach USD 294 million in 2023 and increase of 362% from the previous year, exhibiting the Group Treasury commitment to responsible and sustainable investment growth practices.

The Group Treasury achieved USD 38 billion volume in FX transactions during the year and onboarded several new and current reputable corporate clients who has shown keen interest in FX Spot and Islamic derivatives hedging instruments and solutions. To further enhance the FX activities, the Group Treasury established a partnership with a leading global bank to become their exclusive Market Maker for GCC currencies. In addition, the Group Treasury went the extra mile by providing retail customers with live FX prices through its E-channels. This allowed customers to easily transact and obtain competitive and real-time FX market prices. Furthermore, the introduction of "KFH Global," an FX platform for Corporate FX, optimized transaction speed with real-time pricing. This expansion attracted even more customers seeking these services. Overall, the Group Treasury's achievements and added value initiatives in the FX arena were highly commendable and contributed to its continued success.

The Group Financial Institutions (FI) department under Group Treasury continued to grow its portfolio of inter-bank facilities with further participation in financing facilities with large regional banks in the GCC region. The FI department was also successful in raising competitive funding from several Asian banks with medium and long-term tenors which helped diversify KFH's funding base. This also demonstrates KFH's commitment to expand its cooperation framework with Regional and Global banking partners.

**Sukuk**

KFH Group continued its pioneering presence in the international Sukuk space. Through its sole investment arm, KFH Capital, the Group had successfully led and arranged Sukuk issuances exceeding USD 7.5 billion through diversified issuances covering sovereigns and institutions across various sectors and geographies. Additionally, KFH Capital demonstrated its key role by acting as Joint Lead Manager & Bookrunner for USD 2.5 billion sovereign Sukuk issuance for the Republic of Turkey, USD 1 billion AlRajhi's Sukuk, USD 1 billion Dubai Islamic Bank's Sukuk, USD 600 million debut Sukuk for Air Lease's Corporation, USD 500 million First Abu Dhabi Bank's Sukuk, USD 500 million Qatar Islamic Bank's Sukuk and an additional issuance of USD 250 million, USD 1 billion EDO's - Government of Oman owned entity debut Sukuk, and the first sukuk issuance in Kuwaiti Dinars for Kuwait Projects Company Holding - KIPCO with an amount of KD 103.1 million, KFH Capital also acting as the sole structuring agent for the issuance.

In recognition for its various deals, KFH Capital won about 10 prestigious awards from different institutions in 2023. It successfully increased the capital of the REIT fund with a coverage of 149% and an amount of KD 46.1 million out of the required capital of KD 31 million. It also successfully marketed a UK Fund with a capital of KD 26 million consisting of six equity assets located in major cities around the United Kingdom.

Through the advanced features and tools of "KFH Trade" service, we now offer greater flexibility and support, while the mobile app has made trading more convenient on-the-go, making it more accessible and efficient for KFH clients of all levels. As a result, the number of users exceeded 25,000.

Additionally, KFH Capital received the "Market Lead-

er - Kuwait" rating in the investment banking category from the international Euromoney magazine.

**Corporate Finance**

KFH continued its role in financing major companies and projects at the local and regional levels. On the regional level, KFH participated in a club financing deal amongst several banks in favor of Saudi Electricity Company, where the total financing transaction amounted to USD 3.0 billion. It also participated in a financing deal for Ras Laffan Petrochemicals Company, where the total financing transaction amounted to 4.4 billion for the purpose of financing the construction, development, and operations of Ras Laffan Petrochemicals Project in the State of Qatar. In addition to participating in a deal with Dubai Aerospace Enterprise Funding Ltd, where the total financing transaction amounted to USD 1.6 billion, and a deal with the Government of Sharjah, where the total financing transaction amounted to USD 600 million. KFH also participated in a syndicated transaction with a certain cover from the Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit, where the transaction was arranged by the International Trade Finance Corporation in favor of the Arab Republic of Egypt represented by the General Authority for Supply Commodities, which is part of a total financing transaction amounting to USD 882 million.

Since inception, KFH has played a vital role for the micro and SME community and further extended its support in relation to this segment as strategic partner while successfully growing its SME portfolio. Many SMEs have started their early journey with KFH, and they have grown to become market leaders in their industries.

KFH's achievements in the field of corporate service were recognized by being awarded the "Market Leader - Kuwait" rating in the Corporate Banking category by Euromoney magazine.

**Group Operations**

Throughout 2023, the Group Operations Sector showed the utmost resilience, dedication, and innovative spirit. As a leading bank, the commitment from Group Operations to enhancing customer experience, streamlining processes, and adopting cutting-edge technology has never been stronger.

The Financing Operations Department made significant strides, including the transformative achievements in CRM Workflow Automation for Corporate CAD and the centralization of direct products at Retail CAD, greatly enhancing the services we offer to our clients. The digital transformation by launching a state-of-the-art "Business Facility Origination System" tailored for corporate and individual financing clients has streamlined credit facility processing, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and customer experience. Our focus on data accuracy and reliability was manifested in the meticulous task of reviewing and cleansing our data repositories for having a centralized legal report.

Card Operations Department has been exceptionally active. The extension of credit card and prepaid card validity from 3 years to 5 years exemplifies our forward-thinking approach, aligning with the digital shift and wallet payments trend. The introduction of the Turkish Lira Foreign Currency Prepaid card reflects our dedication to meeting customer needs. The launch of Google Pay for KFH debit cards and the expedited processing time for ATM deposit claims further elevate the banking experience for our customers. Furthermore, Card Operations achieved an annual USD 42 million boost in Visa & MasterCard usage owing to enhanced approval rates by 11%, leading to over USD 1 million in revenue through strategic model adjustments, expanded card acceptance, and vigilant fraud risk oversight.

The Central Operations team showcased their adaptability with the successful transition to ISO 20022 for inward fund transfers and have orchestrated several efficient CRM based workflows for seamless processing of banking transactions. We have also witnessed an innovative approach in handling SWIFT message cases in Kuwaiti Dinar and optimizing processes for various charity standing orders, signaling our commitment to both technological adoption and community service.

As part of our strategy of expanding operational excellence and digitizing back-office processes, several Automation and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) initiatives were implemented during 2023 such as issuance of Clearance Certificate and Balance Certificate. As a result, a remarkable optimization has been realized by reducing the turnaround time of producing such certificates from several days to several minutes. In addition, such significant optimization has positively transformed the customer experience completely and reduced the operational costs/efforts substantially.

The CSC under Operations have rolled out the usage of E-forms across multiple hubs in branches and balance confirmation certificate for corporate customers is fully automated and can now be printed on the spot, a process that used to take three business days earlier.

The Central Procurement Department has generated value at multiple opportunities. For example, the successful negotiation for the ongoing Oracle Fusion Procurement System Implementation resulted in significant cost savings of over USD 1.6 million. The emphasis on upskilling our procurement function, and centralizing contracts database exemplifies our focus on operational excellence. It is worth mentioning that Central Procurement Department has achieved a major milestone by enhancing the budgeting capabilities by incorporating the fixed assets and General Services as part of the internal process. Another aspect of improvement was GL recon-



Hamad Al Marzouq delivering his speech to the shareholders.

ciliations, accuracy and on-time payment to our service provider and suppliers.

A special mention must be made of our Real Estate Operations Department, which took the bold step of launching the first-of-its-kind Certified Real Estate Appraiser Program in Kuwait, setting a benchmark in the industry.

Our journey this year has been nothing short of transformational. As we move forward, we will continue to prioritize customer experience, innovate relentlessly, and stay committed to operational excellence.

**Information Technology**

KFH continued its efforts towards digital transformation and the development of all services, products, activities, and businesses based on modern technology. The Information Technology department has completed many advanced projects. Most notably, introducing an innovative customer recognition experience at KFH branches using facial recognition technology, where visitors to KFH branches are recognized using biometric facial ID. During this experience, a new meeting, greeting, and welcome message is displayed with a dynamic menu of various banking services, from which the visitor chooses the desired service, and this unique experience ends with obtaining a waiting number ticket within few seconds.

Through implementing RPA solution, a number of manual processes and functions for Operation & Risk departments were selected for robotizing, thus minimizing human intervention. The plan has been successfully applied to a number of operations and is now being shifted to other different processes.

In addition to upgrading Puffin system and integrating it with TAM App to enable push notifications, the department also enabled KFH POS terminals to support Refund/Partial Refund for Debit Cards (Contact & Contactless) and launched the first portable device on the market "D-POS" to onboard customers instantly. This will allow KFH to approach customers in several areas like ministries, universities, and shopping malls. This device aligns with KFH initiative "Keep it Green" as it will be digitalizing the customer onboarding process without the need for paperwork.

Furthermore, the availability of the civil ID card reader and NFC has the capability of adding extra functionalities in future phases such as the settlement of invoices.

We also succeeded in replacing the MasterCard (Credit/Prepaid) in a 3-minutes time through KFH Kiosk machines without the need to visit the branch during working hours.

KFH successfully launched the first corporate mobile banking application to the public with the following services:

- Visibility, access, and process pending requests under Requests Pool.
- Overview of accounts, holds, fixed deposits and margin accounts.
- Check account statement.
- View and share account IBAN.
- Report/stop corporate debit and credit cards.

The IT department upgraded and developed KFH's various systems to support integration with the GCC Cross-Border Payment System (AFAQ), that connects the Real Time Gross Settlement Systems (RTGS) of GCC member states.

Additionally, KFH's customer can now open a saving account in FC from KFH Online as this used to be available in branches only. The department completed the Clearance SMS Disablement project, which originated from Digital Wallets payment services in the App payments as well as from international in-store POS transactions. A single SMS of both authorization and clearing is being sent to customers, resulting in saving of around a million SMS monthly.

The IT department successfully developed the call-back systems in the call center. The business teams are now able to input external agencies' (Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch) risk ratings of our customers into the Credit Lens platform, the central risks platform for the Risks team.

It also completed the Pre-Fact Automation Project, developed the Hunting Process for Commercial Collection, launched Merchant Management Automation System, and completed the VAT Accounting System project.

The department's achievements also included the going live of Kiosk Credit Cards re-issuance for VISA cards including renewal, damaged, lost, or stolen cards, in addition to automating a remarkable number of corporate reports, developing Cards Campaign Draw System, and enabling new enhancements on Gold product.

Furthermore, Baiti and Hesabi customers are now automatically classified based on their age. Once they have reached the maximum age limit, they will be automatically transferred to the next segment. KFH introduced three new Debit card products with wide features to be used by corporate customers. Most notably, K-Net cards that are issued with limited acceptance only on government KNET POS/PG terminals.

The IT department also upgraded KFH payment systems to support the new version of SWIFT ISO 20022. This would support benefiting from the new XML Payment format message and is expected to boost interoperability between banks.

In addition to launching new services related to Financing Origination System on Ezway, reporting systems inside and outside KFH, and integrated systems with Cinet.

**Banking Services**

With our extensive banking expertise and dedication to our customers, we strive to offer the best banking experience in the Kuwaiti market. Building on our reputation for exceptional banking services, KFH aimed to provide convenient and secure channels, products, and services that cater to the needs of our retail and corporate customers. Additionally, in the financial and private banking sectors, KFH initiated various customer-centric campaigns in collaboration with renowned companies and institutions for delivering exclusive offers. Recognizing the significance of investing in the younger generation, who embody the future, we introduced a significant milestone by launching Tam Digital Bank, Kuwait's first Shari'a Compliant digital bank focused on the youth segment.

**Innovative Products**

As a step in KFH's commitment to digital transformation and delivering top-notch services to the youth segment, KFH launched the first Islamic Digital Bank in Kuwait, Tam Digital Bank. The launch also included assigning a WhatsApp number exclusively for Tam customers, as well as the enhancement of Tam customer account services, to ensure the smooth activation of SMS services, e-cards, and prepaid services. Additionally, K-Net Claims System and ATMs are upgraded to cater to the needs of Tam customers.

We continued to provide innovative products and ser-

vices in the market including:

- Expanding the scope of digital signature by linking with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI)
- Emergency Cash offering salaried customers the ability to get part of their salary in advance.
- Cash Gift granting up to KD 400 once the customer transfers his salary to KFH.
- "Zaheb" New digital payment platform launched, enabling merchants to accept cards payments through links and QR code without the need for a POS machine.
- Google Pay offering cardholders with a new channel for making payments.
- Kuveyt Turk - KFH Kuwait Staff rotation with our subsidiary in Turkiye which improved customer relations, satisfaction levels and bridged language barriers.
- Kuveyt Turk Service Center launched through the successful initiative of the staff rotation where customers can perform selected services without having to travel to Turkiye.

In recognition of its remarkable success, Euromoney magazine awarded KFH with the "Market Leader - Kuwait" rating in the digital solutions category.

As a result of KFH's collaboration with companies operating in the market, we initiated various campaigns that encompassed benefits for all products categories. These include a competitive selection of personal finance options at favorable rates, the option to delay payment for a certain installment, and credit card benefits tailored to customer's lifestyle requirements.

In an effort to prioritize environmentally friendly housing solutions, KFH introduced the Green Finance service, the first of its kind at the market level. This initiative affirms our dedication to developing environmentally friendly housing solutions by financing sustainable infrastructure and offering customized eco-friendly financing options. By taking the lead in this initiative, we not only meet the rising demand for eco-friendly housing choices, but also enhance KFH's involvement in environmental consciousness.

**Shari'a Control**

During 2023, KFH's Shari'a Control diligently fulfilled its responsibilities covering all areas, initiatives, and strategies. This included the notable endeavor of merging with Ahli United Bank, for which KFH's Internal Shari'a Audit Department conducted meticulous audits of the Bank's sectors and departments, as per the 2023 approved plan. Additionally, the Shari'a Research and Advisory Department conducted shari'a revision on contracts, products, agreements, and policies submitted by KFH sectors and departments, addressed Shari'a-related queries and concerns, and submitted them, whenever required, to the Fatwa and Shari'a Supervisory Board to obtain Shari'a opinion. In terms of spreading awareness and Shari'a culture among customers and employees, the department answered Shari'a inquiries received from customers via phone. It also published economic jurisprudential bulletins through the e-channels available at KFH.

**Legal**

The Group's Legal Department played a significant role in offering legal assistance to every division and branch of KFH and its subsidiaries, defending the organization's right in courts and other relevant bodies. It also examined the responsibilities outlined in contracts and agreements pertaining to KFH's diverse range of activities.

**Social Responsibility**

KFH persistently maintained its leading position in sustainable community development by actively engaging in social responsibility and implementing value-added community initiatives that catered to various segments of society. These initiatives encompassed supporting community capabilities, caring for individuals with special needs, launching awareness campaigns, safeguarding the environment, and promoting sustainable practices.

Moreover, KFH demonstrated continuous commitment to community welfare by supporting strategic and relief social initiatives both within Kuwait and abroad. KFH contributed with an amount of USD 20 million to aid in relief efforts following the earthquake that affected regions in Turkiye and Syria. This collaboration was carried out in collaboration with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to provide immediate assistance to those affected and fulfill their urgent needs.

Euromoney's recognition of KFH as the "CSR Market Leader" in Kuwait for the second consecutive year is an affirmative gesture that underlines KFH's diverse and inclusive social role. It also highlights KFH's efforts in promoting sustainable development and establishing new foundations for the private sector's role in development, reinforcing KFH as an exemplary and a benchmark in the market.

**26 Prestigious Awards**

KFH's winning of 26 awards at the local, regional, and international levels is a testimony to its commitment to innovation and advanced banking services and products. These accolades also solidify KFH's leading position in digital transformation, enhancing the banking experience and meeting customer expectations. Furthermore, KFH's strong financial performance and leadership in the Islamic finance industry are further recognized through these awards. Notably, in 2023, KFH received prestigious awards such as the "World's Best Islamic Financial Institution" from Global Finance, the "Bank of the Year 2023 - Kuwait" from The Banker, and the "Best Islamic Bank for ESG- global category 2023" award from Euromoney International Magazine.

I would like to note that in light of the increasing role of technology, intense competition, and rapid regulatory developments, KFH remains fully committed to its customers, shareholders, employees, and the community, striving to achieve the highest levels of profitability while maintaining security, privacy, transparency, and governance standards.

We take pride in the qualitative achievements we made this year, marking a significant shift in our business. These achievements were accomplished as we confidently navigate a challenging business environment, placing strong emphasis on prioritizing the customer experience, fostering innovation, and maintaining operational excellence. I have full confidence that, with our dedicated team and strategic vision, the future holds even greater accomplishments.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard him, and His Highness, the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Our thanks and appreciation are also extended to the Central Bank of Kuwait and all the regulatory authorities for their constant support to the banking sector in the State of Kuwait.

**May Allah grant us success.**



Fahd Al-Ghanem, Moaz Al-Osaimi and Khaled Al-Nisf



Khaled Al-Shamlan, Salah Al-Muraikhi, Ahmed Al-Fares and Muhammad Nasser Al-Fawzan



Ahmed Al-Omar, Abdulaziz Al-Nafisi, Khaled Al-Nisf, Moaz Al-Osaimi and Fahd Al-Ghanim.

## Seeking to promote the 'Let's Be Aware' banking awareness campaign

# NBK warns customers against unexpected offers promising quick and high profits

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to promote financial awareness and inclusion among all segments of society. In this context, the bank continues to intensify efforts to promote the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

During this month, the bank intensified awareness material on all its social media platforms with the aim of increasing public awareness of various misleading fraud techniques to steal customers' banking information.

In this regard, NBK highlights the various evolving fraud techniques, especially unexpected offers promising high profits, which may seem attractive to some investors or retirees due to the high fixed income they provide compared to traditional investments that do not provide the same.

NBK warned of such unverified ads that may impersonate well-known companies and banks aiming to trick victims using various professional fraud schemes to steal their money, including offering fictitious or worthless investment opportunities, unlicensed financial investments like forex trading and investments promising exaggeratedly high returns.

Therefore, NBK drew customers' attention to the necessity of choosing their investments very carefully, paying attention to all details such as the people with whom they invest their money, as well as consulting third parties like licensed brokers or financial advisors before taking the investment decision, to ensure avoiding falling victim to fraud.



Diraya new logo

The bank advised customers to adhere to banks' guidelines and the Central Bank's circulations on how to steer clear of the risks of fraudulent messages, fake ads, hacking of banking apps, advising customers to beware of suspicious transactions. It also called them to follow security tips and to refrain from sharing banking information with any person, as well as to take all other precautions to protect their

passwords/PINs.

NBK always employs innovative methods to promote financial literacy among large segments of the public, thus maximizing the exposure of this campaign's messages. It also harnesses its tremendous capabilities in communicating with customers including its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to serve the same end.

The bank makes consistent efforts to educate customers, regarding this as a crucial part of its strategy. To this end, it always uses all communication channels to advise them to keep their passwords/PINs and financial/personal account information strictly confidential, and not to share them with anyone impersonating a bank employee.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.

As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and across the region, NBK firmly observes its responsibilities towards the communities it serves. It is always taking the initiative to provide all necessary support to important and strategic campaigns, like the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which serve the interests of the national economy and society at large.

In collaboration with Kuwait Food Bank and with the participation of the Sawa'ed AlKhaleej volunteer team

# Gulf Bank distributes Iftar meals as part of Ramadan initiatives

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: As part of its Ramadan events and initiatives this year, Gulf Bank distributed Iftar meals to underprivileged people across Kuwait. This effort is part of its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank and marks the seventh consecutive year of collaboration, with active involvement from Gulf Bank's Sawa'ed AlKhaleej volunteer team.

Ms. Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, stated on this occasion, "At Gulf Bank, we are dedicated to actively participating in community events, spreading joy and happiness among those in need, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. This commitment reflects our distinctive role in advocating for societal sustainability, both internally and externally."

She added, "For more than 60 years, Gulf Bank has been an important part of Kuwait's history, always using its resources to help the underprivileged in society. We know these efforts make a positive difference for many families during this time of the year."

Al-Eisa mentioned that Gulf Bank remains steadfast in its dedication to launching sustainability programs, particularly focusing on social sustainability. These initiatives are thoughtfully chosen to benefit both the bank and the community, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

She added, "Gulf Bank, as a financial institution, is dedicated to supporting active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) like the Kuwait Food Bank, recognizing its prominent social and humanitarian contributions. We firmly believe that the private sector holds a significant responsibility in raising awareness about these vital issues."

Al-Eisa expressed her gratitude and appreciation to



Gulf Bank and Food Bank officials and employees in a group photo.

the officials of Kuwait Food Bank for their efforts in providing meals for distribution to the underprivileged. She also expressed the bank's anticipation of continued collaboration with them in various charitable initiatives aimed at promoting sustainability within the community.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive



Najla Al-Issa distributes meals to those who are fasting.

network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



ALSAYER Group's several events promoting road safety awareness.

## Event focuses on dangers of mobile phone usage while driving

# ALSAYER Group promotes road safety awareness and empowers students in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: ALSAYER Group has recently organized and participated in several events promoting road safety awareness & educating the community about safe driving habits and showcasing the advanced safety features of Toyota vehicles.

ALSAYER hosted a road safety event at the International University of Kuwait (IUK) as part of the GCC Road Safety Awareness Week. The event targeted university students and focused on raising awareness about the dangers of mobile phone usage while driving, the importance of wearing seatbelts, and the need to avoid rash driving. Kuwait road accident statistics were presented and engaged over 50 students and teachers through quiz sessions, emphasizing the criticality of following traffic safety rules. The event also featured the participation of our partner, the

Support & Rescue Team, who demonstrated road safety measures during emergencies and safe off-road practices utilizing fully equipped off-road rescue Toyota SUVs. Toyota Kuwait showcased Supra and Toyota 86 sports cars, allowing students to envision the superior driving and safety features in the Toyota mobility range.

In collaboration with the Kuwait Society of Engineers, we actively participated in the Traffic Safety Awareness Forum on 6th March 2024 to increase awareness about traffic safety and safe driving practices. We set up an engaging booth that showcased Toyota vehicles' advanced safety features, highlighting the company's commitment to enhancing the safety of drivers and passengers.

Car Rental Division played a vital role in promoting road safety



Road safety event at the IUK.

by participating in the Road Safety Campaign organized by the Kuwait National Petroleum Company

(KNPC) that was held on 3rd and 4th March, 2024 at the KNPC Ahmadi main building. The CarRental Division

presented our Group's vehicles' safety features and provided a comprehensive presentation on its safety techniques.

Furthermore, the Group's Toyota Technical Training Center conducted training sessions for the students of Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah High School. The sessions, held on March 5th and 6th, focused on educating the students about hybrid and electric vehicles (EVs), as well as emphasizing the importance of traffic safety and periodic maintenance. The team of experts delivered interactive discussions, presentations, and practical demonstrations to enhance the students' learning experience. They provided insights into the working principles of hybrid and electric vehicles, highlighting their environmental benefits and technological advancements. The sessions also stressed the significance of re-

sponsible driving, following traffic rules, wearing seat belts, and avoiding distractions on the road and the importance of regular maintenance and using genuine spare parts to ensure optimal vehicle performance and longevity.

Eng. Nehad Al-Haj Ali, Group Manager at ALSAYER Group emphasized the company's dedication to road safety and community empowerment and commented "we prioritize promoting road safety awareness and equipping students with responsible driving knowledge to make Kuwait's roads safer for everyone. We express gratitude to the partners: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), International University of Kuwait (IUK), Kuwait Society of Engineers and Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah High School for their contributions in GCC Road Safety Awareness Week".

## Novel approach to combat glioblastoma with CAR-T innovations

# New strategy to attack aggressive brain cancer shrank tumors in two early tests

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): A new strategy to fight an extremely aggressive type of brain tumor showed promise in a pair of experiments with a handful of patients.

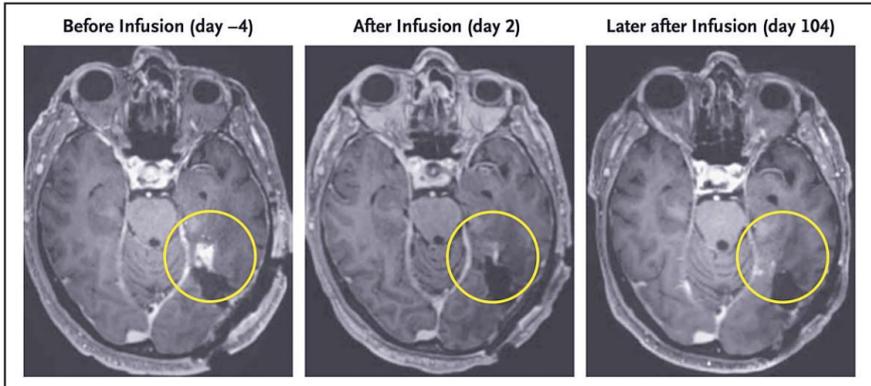
Scientists took patients' own immune cells and turned them into "living drugs" able to recognize and attack glioblastoma. In the first-step tests, those cells shrank tumors at least temporarily, researchers reported Wednesday.

So-called CAR-T therapy already is used to fight blood-related cancers like leukemia but researchers have struggled to make it work for solid tumors. Now separate teams at Massachusetts General Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania are developing next-generation CAR-T versions designed to get past some of glioblastoma's defenses.

"It's very early days," cautioned Penn's Dr. Stephen Bagley, who led one of the studies. But "we're optimistic that we've got something to build on here, a real foundation."

Glioblastoma, the brain cancer that killed President Joe Biden's son Beau Biden and longtime Arizona Sen. John McCain, is fast-growing and hard to treat. Patients usually live 12 to 18 months after diagnosis. Despite decades of research, there are few options when it returns after surgery and radiation.

The immune system's T cells fight disease but cancer has ways to hide. With CAR-T therapy, doctors genetically modify a patient's own T cells so they can better find specific cancer cells. Still, solid tumors like glioblastoma offer an additional hurdle - they contain mixtures of cancer cells with different mutations. Targeting just one type allows the rest to keep growing.



This combination of MRI scan images provided by the New England Journal of Medicine in March 2024 shows the progress of a glioblastoma patient who received CAR-T therapy which uses modified versions of T cells from a patient's own immune system. (AP)

Mass General and Penn each developed two-pronged

approaches and tried them in patients whose tumors returned after standard treatment.

At Mass General, Dr. Marcela Maus' lab combined CAR-T with what are called T-cell engaging antibody

molecules - molecules that can attract nearby, regular T cells to join in the cancer attack. The result, dubbed CAR-TEAM, targets versions of a protein called EGFR that's found in most glioblastomas but not normal brain tissue.

Penn's approach was to create "dual-target" CAR-T therapy that hunts for both that EGFR protein plus a second protein found in many glioblastomas.

Both teams infused the treatment through a catheter into the fluid that bathes the brain.

Mass General tested three patients with its CAR-TEAM and brain scans a day or two later showed their tumors rapidly began shrinking, the researchers reported in the New England Journal of Medicine.

"None of us could really believe it," Maus said. "That doesn't happen."

Two of the patients' tumors began to regrow soon and a repeat dose given to one of them didn't work. But one patient's response to the experimental treatment lasted more than six months.

Similarly, Penn researchers reported in Nature Medicine that the first six patients given its therapy experienced varying degrees of tumor shrinkage. While some rapidly relapsed, Bagley said one treated in August so far hasn't seen regrowth.

For both teams, the challenge is to make it longer-lasting.

"None of this is going to matter if it doesn't last," Bagley said.

## First punitive steps against physicians

### South Korea suspends licenses of two senior doctors over walkouts

SEOUL, South Korea, March 18, (AP): South Korean authorities have suspended the licenses of two senior doctors for allegedly inciting the weeklong walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents that have disrupted hospital operations, one of the doctors said Monday.

The suspensions are the government's first punitive steps against physicians after doctors-in-training walked off the job last month to protest the government's plan to sharply increase medical school admissions.

Officials say the recruitment plan is aimed at adding more doctors to prepare for South Korea's rapidly aging population in a country whose doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest in the developed world. But doctors say that schools can't handle an abrupt, steep increase in students, and that it would ultimately undermine the country's medical services.

In early March, the government began taking steps to suspend the licenses of striking junior doctors after they refused its orders to return to work by the end of February. Police are separately investigating five senior members of the Korean Medical Association, which represents doctors in South Korea, for allegedly inciting and abetting the strikes.

Park Myung-Ha, one of the five members, said he received a government-sent letter saying that his license will be suspended for three months from April 15. Park, who works for the KMA's emergency committee, said committee leader Kim Taek-woo was

also given a three-month suspension. The Health Ministry said it wouldn't confirm any reported administrative steps imposed on individual doctors.

"My fellow doctors and I are really angered and appalled by the government's measure," Park told The Associated Press.

Park accused the government of attempting to break up the KMA emergency committee and sending a warning message to striking junior doctors. He said he and others are discussing legal steps to respond to the license suspensions.

About 12,000 junior doctors have been off the job for a month, but none has received a license suspension. Observers have said it would take a few months to suspend all their licenses and that the government would likely end up suspending only strike leaders.

The striking junior doctors account for less than 10% of South Korea's 140,000 doctors. But in some major hospitals, they represent about 30%-40% of the doctors, assisting senior doctors during surgeries and dealing with inpatients while training.

Their strikes have caused hundreds of canceled or postponed surgeries and other treatments, but officials say the country's handling of emergency and critical patients largely remains stable.

Senior doctors at major university hospitals recently decided to submit resignations next week in support of the junior doctors. Still, most of them will likely continue to report to work. If they walk off the job, that would burden South Korea's medical services severely.



Members of the Gyeonggi Province Medical Association stage a rally against the government's medical policy near the presidential office in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 13, 2024. (AP)

## Easier and better funding opportunities for biomedical research

# Biden to sign 'executive order' aimed at advancing study of women's health

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): President Joe Biden is expected to sign an executive order Monday aimed at advancing the study of women's health in part by strengthening data collection and providing easier and better funding opportunities for biomedical research.

Women make up half the population, but their health is underfunded and understudied. It wasn't until the 1990s that the federal government mandated women be included in federally funded medical research; for most of medical history, though, scientific study was based almost entirely on men.

Today, research often fails to properly track differences between women and men, and does not represent women equally particularly for illnesses more common to them. Biden's executive order is aiming to change that, aides said.

### Health conditions

"We still know too little about how to effectively prevent, diagnose and treat a wide array of health conditions in women," said Dr. Carolyn Mazure, the head of the White House initiative on women's health.

Biden said he's long been a believer in the "power of research" to help save lives and get high-quality health care to the people who need it. But the executive order also checks off a political box, too, during an election year when women will be crucial to his reelection efforts. First lady Jill Biden is leading both the effort to organize and mobilize female voters and the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research.

And the announcement comes as the ripple effects spread from the Supreme Court's decision that overturned federal abortion rights,



President Joe Biden speaks during a St. Patrick's Day reception in the East Room of the White House, Sunday, March 17, 2024. (AP)

touching on medical issues for women who never intended to end their pregnancies. In Alabama, for example, the future of IVF was thrown into question statewide after a judge's ruling.

Women were a critical part of the coalition that elected Biden in 2020, giving him 55% of their vote, according to AP VoteCast. Black women and suburban women were pillars of Biden's coalition while Trump had a modest advantage among white women and a much wider share of white women without college degrees, according to the AP survey of more than 110,000 voters in that year's election.

The National Institutes of Health is also launching a new effort around menopause and the treatment of menopausal symptoms that will identify research gaps and work to close them, said White House adviser Jennifer Klein.

Biden and Jill Biden, the first lady, were expected to announce the measures at a Women's History Month reception on Monday at the White House.

NIH funds a huge amount of biomedical research, imperative for the understanding of how medications affect the human body and for deciding eventually how to dose medicine.

Some conditions have different symptoms for women and men, such as heart disease. Others are more common in women, like Alzheimer's disease, and some are unique to women - such as endometriosis, uterine cancers and fibroids found in the uterus. It's all ripe for study, Mazure said.

And uneven research can have profound effects; a 2020 study by researchers at the University of Chicago and University of California, Berkeley found that women were being overmedicated and suffering side effects from common medications, because most of the dosage trials were done only on men.

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Officials and divers of the Kuwait Diving Club pose for a group photo after the Ramadan ghabga at the Kuwait Olympic Committee headquarters.

### Kuwaiti Diving and Rescue Club celebrates sporting achievements

The Kuwaiti Diving and Rescue Club recently hosted its Ramadan ghabga at the Kuwait Olympic Committee headquarters, an event dedicated to

honoring champions of the sport and recognizing national record holders. Attendees included members of the club's board of directors, the techni-

cal committee, and players instrumental in setting new records. The ceremony also welcomed several distinguished figures from the sports

and diving communities. Club President, Mr. Talal Al-Sarhan, expressed immense pride in the club's accomplishments and

extended gratitude to its members for their tireless efforts in advancing the sport of diving and rescue. He emphasized the significance of

providing unwavering support to players and fostering an environment conducive to achieving even greater feats in the future.

### Truex Jr and Keselowski complete podium

Hamlin wins tire-management NASCAR race at Bristol, his 4th victory at famed bullring

BRISTOL, Tenn., March 18, (AP): Denny Hamlin won the NASCAR Cup Series race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sunday, passing Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Martin Truex Jr. in the final laps for his fourth victory at the famed short track.

Hamlin also won at

NASCAR's bullring last September.

This one was much different. Tire issues hampered most everyone all afternoon as only five cars finished on the lead lap - the first time that has happened in the Cup Series in 20 years. The Gibbs cars were the class of

the field.

"My favorite racetrack!" Hamlin exclaimed over his radio while taking the checkered flag. "We got another."

He was booed - no surprise considering Hamlin has become arguably the series' biggest villain - as he stood atop his No. 11 Toyota following a smoky burnout.

It was Hamlin's 52nd career win and locks him into the playoffs. Brad Keselowski finished third in a Ford, Alex Bowman was fourth in a Chevrolet and Bowman's Hendrick Motorsports teammate Kyle Larson rounded out the top five.

"It was weird," Larson said. "I accidentally finished fifth. I'll take it. I hope I never have to run another race like that again."

The other two Gibbs cars - driven by Ty Gibbs and Christopher Bell - finished ninth and 10th, respectively.

The race was chaotic from the start, with cars burning through tires at such an alarming rate that NASCAR issued each team



Denny Hamlin, left, hoists the trophy with Food City president Steve Smith after winning a NASCAR Cup Series auto race, Sunday, March 17, 2024, in Bristol, Tenn. (AP)



An official takes the weight of an athlete during the health program.

### Tomooh Sports Club, Special Oly Kuwait kick off health program

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Kuwaiti Tomooh Sports Club for Mental Disabilities, in collaboration with Special Olympics Kuwait, has launched the "Your Health in Your Step 4" Ramadan health sports program. This program involves the participation of 70 male and female players with mental disabilities across various age groups and will run until April 4th at the Capital Mall.

Before commencing the program, all participants underwent a weight measurement. Each participant is required to walk 3 km per day as part of the program's activities. At the program's conclusion, participants' weights will be reassessed, and prizes will be awarded to the top three individuals in both the boys' and girls' categories who achieve the

highest weight loss. Additionally, all participants will be honored for their participation.

Hana Al-Zawawi, Treasurer of the Tomooh Sports Club and President of Special Olympics Kuwait, expressed her delight at the strong turnout of players for the program, now in its fourth consecutive year.

She noted the positive impact the program has had in previous editions on participants' health, physical and mental fitness, as well as its fostering of a competitive yet supportive environment alongside health and awareness activities.

Al-Zawawi extended her gratitude to both the club and Special Olympics management for their dedication and efforts in ensuring the success of the program

### CAR RACING

an extra set. That gave them 11 sets total, including the one used in qualifying.

It made for four hours of tire management that put gave control to drivers and crew chiefs. It also led to the most lead changes (54) in NASCAR's short-track history, breaking the previous mark of 40 set in 1991 at Bristol.

JGR handled it better than the rest of the field.

"Our Toyotas are really working well right now," Truex said.

NASCAR returned Bristol to "normal" for the first time in four years for the spring race. The track added red clay each of the last three years. Reviews were mixed, and as the novelty wore off, sub-par racing inside the high-banked oval overshadowed any excitement that came with the series running on dirt for the first time since 1970.

In an effort to improve the racing and make sure the track had two equal lanes, workers put down a resin-based traction compound through the turns. It was far from perfect.

Goodyear felt the need to make a rare statement during the race. Greg Stucker, the tire manufacturer's director of racing, said a test at Bristol Motor Speedway last year was intended to find a setup that led to more tire wear.

But he called Sunday's outcome "too drastic."

The rubber that was supposed to leave tires and adhere to the racing grooves came off in chunks that looked like shredded cheese. Those loose pieces called "marbles" create a slippery situation around the 0.533-mile track.

Part of the culprit may have been the tracks' decision to put down a new and different traction compound.

"Now we're trying to understand what's different," Stucker said. "Why is the racetrack behaving differently this weekend than what it did a year ago? It's the same package. It's the same tire combination."

"Obviously, the difference is resin was placed on the lower groove instead of the (previous substance). Yet I still think the racetrack should be taking rubber as it did last fall; it took rubber immediately during that race."

# Bucks outpace Suns 140-129; Mavs squeeze past Nuggets

## Magic cast spell on Raptors

MILWAUKEE, March 18, (AP): Damian Lillard had 31 points and 16 assists and Bobby Portis had 31 points and 10 rebounds to lead Milwaukee past the Phoenix Suns 140-129 on Sunday, as the Bucks hit 24 3-pointers to win without star Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Antetokounmpo, averaging 30.8 points and 11.2 rebounds, was out with left hamstring soreness. He missed just his fourth game of the season and first since March 4, when he was out with Achilles tendinitis.

Phoenix trailed 109-94 after three quarters, but closed within 122-115 on a lay-in by Bradley Beal with 6:17 left. Lillard's 3-pointer from the top left put Milwaukee up 134-120 with 3:18 remaining.

Khris Middleton added 22 points for Milwaukee in his first game back after missing 16 games with a sprained left ankle. The Bucks finished 24 of 41 from 3-point range, with Portis and Malik Beasley hitting five apiece.

Beal had 28 points, Grayson Allen had 25 points and Devin Booker scored 23 for Phoenix.

**Mavericks 107, Nuggets 105**  
In Dallas, Kyrie Irving hit a running left-handed shot at the buzzer, capping a wild final 26 seconds and giving Dallas a victory over Denver.

### BASKETBALL

The Nuggets rallied from 13 points down midway through the fourth quarter and went ahead on Jamal Murray's tiebreaking 3-pointer with 26 seconds remaining.

Luka Doncic answered almost immediately on the inbounds pass after a timeout, hitting from several feet behind the arc for a 105-105 tie.

After Murray missed an elbow jumper in the final seconds, Dallas called timeout. The right-handed Irving took the inbounds pass, dribbled with his left hand as Nikola Jokic pursued and hit the shot from about 20 feet.

Denver had a five-game road winning streak stopped. The Nuggets had won all five by double digits, a first in franchise history.

**Magic 111, Raptors 96**

In Orlando, Fla., Paolo Banchero scored 29 points and Orlando Magic pulled away from Toronto handing the Raptors their seventh straight loss.

Franz Wagner had 22 points, nine rebounds and five assists for Orlando, and his brother, Moritz, scored 14 points. The Magic improved to 8-2 in their last 10 games.

Jordan Nwora led the injury-ravaged Raptors with 18 points, including 12 during an impressive third-quarter burst. Gary Trent Jr. scored 15 points, and Immanuel Quickley and Bruce Brown each had 12.

The Raptors, who lead the NBA in fast-break points after scoring 37 in a loss to the Magic on Friday night, were held to just 16. They went 8 for 31 from 3-point range and committed 18 turnovers.

**Celtics 130, Wizards 104**

In Washington, Sam Hauser had career highs of 30 points and 10 3-pointers in to help the short-handed Boston beat Washington.

Jayson Tatum also scored 30 points with six 3-pointers as the NBA-leading Celtics hit 24 shots



Boston Celtics forward Xavier Tillman shoots during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Washington Wizards in Washington. (AP)

## Mbappé scores hat trick as PSG rout Montpellier

PARIS, March 18, (AP): Kylian Mbappé scored a hat trick as Paris Saint-Germain routed Montpellier 6-2 to move 12 points clear of Brest at the top of the French league on Sunday.

Mbappe struck in the 22nd minute before adding two more goals in the second half. His third strike - a half-volley after a blistering run - was his 250th goal for PSG in all competitions since his arrival in August 2017. He is the leading scorer in the league this season with 24 goals.

Vitinha had opened the scoring and Lee Kang-in and Nuno Mendes also scored for PSG. It was the first league victory in four league games for PSG after draws with Reims, Monaco and Rennes.

Montpellier had fought back from 2-0 down to reach halftime at 2-2, thanks to a header from Arnaud Nordin and Teji Savanier's penalty kick, before being overwhelmed by speed and skill in the second half.

With eight rounds of matches left, PSG has 59 points, Brest has 47 and Monaco 46.

Montpellier is 14th.

Mbappé had returned to the starting lineup Wednesday when he scored an early goal as Paris Saint-Germain beat Nice 3-1 to reach the French Cup semifinals. He had started the previous two league games on the bench as part of coach Luis Enrique's rotation policy, which most observers accept

involves leaving out Mbappé to prepare for next season without him. He started Sunday.

A late goal by Martin Satriano salvaged a point for Brest in a 1-1 draw against Lille but Eric Roy's side will rue the dropped points. Lille, which took the lead through Jonathan David's strike in the 67th minute, leapfrogged Nice into fourth, four points behind Brest.

Monaco moved up to third after a 2-2 draw with Lorient that saw two own-goals and two red cards. Lorient went ahead after Wilfried Singo's own-

### SOCCER

goal in the opening minute before Monaco leveled through Formose Mendy's own-goal in the 27th. Youssouf Fofana put Monaco ahead on the hour mark but Tiemoue Bakayoko snatched an equalizer in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

Monaco's Denis Zakaria and Lorient's Tosin Aiyegun were sent off in the 81st and 89th minutes, respectively.

Martin Terrier scored his sixth league goal in eight games as Rennes beat Marseille 2-0. Benjamin Bourigeaud scored from the penalty spot.

Also Sunday, Clermont beat Le Havre 2-1 and Reims defeated Metz 2-1.

from beyond the arc in a game in which they never trailed despite missing three starters.

In the first of back-to-back games - with a game against Detroit on Monday - Derrick White (left hand sprain) and Jaylen Brown (right ankle sprain) joined Kristaps Porzingis (right hamstring strain) among the ranks of injured Boston players.

Tatum also has been questionable with an ankle issue entering Wednesday. Instead, he played his 31st consecutive game and Hauser made his 16th career start to power Boston to 81 points before halftime and a lead that reached 36 points in the third quarter.

Hauser shot 10 for 13 from long distance and Boston went 17 for 28 from 3-point range in the first half. The Celtics shot 48% from beyond the arc despite removing their starters midway through the third quarter.

**Heat 104, Pistons 101**

In Detroit, Bam Adebayo made a 3-pointer at the buzzer to lift Miami to a win over Detroit.

Cade Cunningham missed a 3-pointer for Detroit with 9 seconds left and Terry Rozier sprinted up the court with the rebound. He couldn't

get to the basket, so he tossed the ball to Adebayo, who made his third 3-pointer in the last three games.

Duncan Robinson scored a season-high 30 points for Miami on 10-for-15 shooting. Adebayo had 20 points and 17 rebounds as the Heat beat the Pistons for the second time in three days.

Robinson hit his 1,000th career 3-pointer in the first quarter. He reached the mark in 343 games, breaking the NBA record of 350 by Buddy Hield.

**Hawks 110, Clippers 93**

In Los Angeles, Dejounte Murray scored 21 points, De'Andre Hunter added 20 and Atlanta Hawks beat the Los Angeles Clippers to snap a three-game losing streak.

Jalen Johnson had 18 points and 12 rebounds, and Clint Capela added 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Hawks.

Murray had five 3-pointers, marking a career-high fifth straight game he has knocked down at least four from beyond the arc. The Hawks were 17 for 34 on 3-pointers after tying a season high with 20 in Friday night's loss at Utah.

Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points

to lead the Clippers, and Paul George had 26. Los Angeles has lost four of its last five and is in fourth place in the Western Conference.

**Spurs 122, Nets 115, OT**

In San Antonio, V. Wembanyama had 33 points and 16 rebounds as San Antonio Spurs overcame 31 points by Cam Thomas and beat Brooklyn in overtime.

Wembanyama added seven assists and seven blocks while collecting his 36th double-double in 60 games. The 7-foot-4 rookie center has five games of at least 20 points, 10 rebounds, five blocks and five assists.

Wembanyama had an alley-oop dunk and followed that by blocking Dennis Schroder's layup attempt, preserving San Antonio's 116-115 lead with 38 seconds remaining.

Schroder finished with 19 points and Mikal Bridges added 14 points, including three in a low-scoring overtime.

Keldon Johnson's 3-pointer with 64 seconds remaining in regulation put the Spurs up 110-107. Johnson's 3 closed a 17-4 run, including four straight points from Wembanyama to tie the game.

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### Al-Azraq delegation departs for Doha

## Kuwait intensify preparation for crucial World Cup qualifiers against Qatar

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Kuwait is set to kick off its inaugural training session on Tuesday, at the Qatari Aspire Academy, gearing up to face Qatar next Thursday in the third round of the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup and 2027 Asian Cup finals. This follows the conclusion of the team's camp in Abu Dhabi.

Abdul Rahman Al-Mousa, the director of the national team, highlighted the meticulous preparation undertaken by the technical staff, under the guidance of Portuguese coach Rui Pinto, to ensure the team's readiness for the upcoming encounter with Qatar.

Al-Mousa emphasized the focus of the camp on bolstering the players' mental fortitude and streamlining administrative and technical efforts to optimize performance against the Qatari side, commending the players' dedication to their daily training regimen.

The national team director outlined the itinerary, revealing that the Al-Azraq delegation will depart for Doha today, Tuesday, partaking in their first training session later in the evening at the Aspire Academy Stadium.

On Wednesday, the team will engage in a full-fledged training session at the Jassim bin Hamad Sta-

dium at Al-Sadd Club, the venue for the showdown against Qatar. Al-Mousa expressed optimism that the Al-Azraq players would showcase their utmost capabilities against the reigning Asian champions, aiming for a favorable outcome in the qualifiers.

Following the match, the Al-Azraq delegation will return to Kuwait on Friday afternoon, initiating an internal camp on the same evening in preparation for their encounter with the Qatari national team on March 26 in the fourth round of the qualifiers.

### SOCCER

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Olympic team, under the guidance of Director Jarrah Al-Ateeqi, continued its training in Abu Dhabi, marking the final preparations before competing in the AFC U-23 Cup finals scheduled to take place in Qatar from April 15 to May 3.

Al-Ateeqi lauded the players' adherence to the directives of the administrative and technical staff, noting their discipline in daily training sessions and their commitment to delivering their best performance. He expressed optimism about the team's prospects in the upcoming finals, hoping for a standout display from the Olympic squad.



Kuwait team gears up for the World Cup qualifiers against Qatar.

# Scheffler goes back-to-back at The Players Championship

Catlin shoots 59, lowest score in Asian Tour history

**PONTEVEDRABEACH, March 18, (AP):** Already the best in the world, Scottie Scheffler added another layer to his legend Sunday. He became the first player to win back-to-back in 50 years of The Players Championship by matching the biggest comeback and the lowest closing round by a winner.

Scheffler holed out for eagle from the fourth fairway and had four birdies in a five-hole stretch around the turn, sending him to an 8-under 64 and a one-shot victory that wasn't decided until the final putt.

Xander Schauffele, Brian Harman and Wyndham Clark all had a chance to force a playoff with a birdie on the daunting 18th hole at the TPC Sawgrass.

### GOLF

Clark had the last shot, a putt just inside 18 feet that dipped into the cup on the left side and came out on the right side, leaving him stunned as he placed his hand over his mouth.

Scheffler, who started the final round five shots behind, finished at 20-under 268 and collected \$4.5 million from the \$25 million purse, the largest in golf.

This was no ordinary week. He struggled to take the club back early in his second round because of a neck issue and battled to a 69. He looked to be out of it Saturday afternoon until finishing with three straight birdies.

And then he delivered a masterpiece on the Players Stadium Course. His 64 matched the lowest final round by a Players champion, last done by Davis Love III in 2003, and he tied Justin Leonard (1998) with his five-shot comeback.

John Catlin closed with a 5-under 65 and beat David Puig of Spain with a birdie on the second playoff hole to capture the International Series Macau on the Asian Tour, the American's first victory in nearly three years.

One day after posting the first sub-60 round in Asian Tour history, Catlin had to hold off a closing 60 by Puig that led to extra holes.

Catlin, a 33-year-old Californian, won for the fifth time on the Asian Tour to go along with three European tour titles, most recently the Austrian Open in 2021.

Puig, now with LIV Golf, was going for his third Asian Tour in five months. His runner-up finish should bring him to just outside the top 100 in the world and improve his chances of getting an invitation to the PGA Championship in May.

Patrick Reed finished fourth and also helped his chance of getting a PGA Championship invitation. Reed is not eligible for any of the majors this year after the Masters.

Jessica Peng of Taiwan closed with 4-under 67 and won the IOA Golf Classic on the Epson Tour. Lindsey McCurdy was tied for the lead until she bogeyed the par-3 closing hole and finished with a 72. John Parry of England closed with



Al-Nasr Taekwondo heroes display their medals and trophy at the end of the event.

### Al-Nasr taekwondo team shines

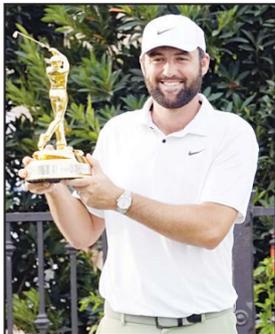
The Taekwondo team representing Al-Nasr Sports Club secured the top spot in the Men's Individual Club Championship during its second edition, clinching a remarkable

victory with three gold, five silver, and five bronze medals.

This remarkable accomplishment follows the stellar performance of Al-Nasr's athletes in the

tournament, including standout champions such as Abdulaziz Al-Adwani, Khaled Al-Mutairi, Ali Bourahma, Muhammad Al-Dhafari, Abdulaziz Al-Anazi, Yahya Al-

Anazi, Barak Al-Rashidi, Falah Al-Mutairi, Saud Al-Anazi, Bandar Al-Anazi, Mishaal Al-Mutairi, Badr Al-Mutairi, and Muhammad Al-Muzain.



Scottie Scheffler celebrates after winning The Players Championship golf tournament in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. (AP)

a 7-under 65 for a one-shot victory in the Delhi Challenge. Among those tying for second in the Challenge Tour event was Joshua Grenville-Wood from the United Arab Emirates. Cameron John shot 3-under 69 and won The National Tournament by three shots on the PGA Tour Australasia.

Ai Suzuki won for the second week in a row on the Japan LPGA, winning with a par on the second playoff hole over Sakura Koizumi in the V Point Eneos Golf. The final round was cut to nine holes because of weather. Both shot 33 and finished on 10-under par.

Yewon Lee closed with a 4-under 68 and won the Blue Canyon Ladies Championship by one shot over Minkyung Choi on the Korea LPGA.

## Fawaz Al-Subaie emerges as champion of prestigious Khaled Abdullah Al-Saeed Show Jumping Champ'ship

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Jockey Fawaz Al-Subaie emerged as the champion of the prestigious Khaled Abdullah Al-Saeed Show Jumping Championship, held at the Hawalli Equestrian Club with participation from riders representing various local clubs.

In the main event, the exhilarating "Grand Prix" race, set at a height of 140 cm, Al-Subaie clinched the top position with an impressive time of 55.07 seconds. Not only did he secure first place, but he also claimed third place.

### SHOWJUMPING

Following closely behind, rider Abdullah Al-Awadhi secured second place, while Italian rider Antonio Moroso secured fourth place. Belarusian rider Pavel Voronko, Ghazi Al-Jariwi, Khaled Al-Khubaizi, along with tournament sponsor Khaled Al-Saeed and Hammad Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Warba Bank, crowned the victorious riders during the grand prize ceremony.

Expressing his thoughts after the conclusion of the championship, sponsor Khaled Al-Saeed stated, "We organized this tournament to serve and support male and female riders, aiming to inspire them to

continue their journey in this noble sport." He highlighted the intense competition witnessed across all categories and stages, reaffirming the commitment to bolster equestrian sports in the forthcoming years.

In the earlier heats, Stephen Daniels showcased his prowess by securing first place at a height of 125 cm, while also claiming the top spot in the second heat at a height of 115 cm.



Al-Saeed and Al-Sayer pose with the champions after the awarding ceremony.

### Another step toward the title

## Leverkusen keep 10-point lead

FREIBURG, Germany, March 18, (AP): Patrik Schick scored his first Bundesliga goal in three months as Bayer Leverkusen beat Freiburg 3-2 to stay 10 points clear of Bayern Munich in the German title race.

With coach Xabi Alonso rotating his squad after a busy run of games, unbeaten Leverkusen

survived a late Freiburg comeback to take another step toward the title.

It was Leverkusen's 22nd Bundesliga win of the season, breaking the club record. Alonso's team now has 70 points, just one fewer than Bayern's title-winning tally from last season.

Leverkusen needed less than 90 seconds to take the lead as Florian Wirtz, the 20-year-old attacking midfielder who has been key to the team's success under Alonso, held off two defenders before curling the ball into the net.

Freiburg soon hit back with a goal from Ritsu Doan, before an error from Freiburg goalkeeper Noah Atubolu put Leverkusen back into the lead shortly before halftime. Trying to cut out a pass, Atubolu gave the ball away to Schick and blocked his shot before Adam Hlozek scored the rebound.

Schick extended Leverkusen's lead with a flick off the post in the 53rd minute off Jeremie Frimpong's cross. Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky let Freiburg back into the game when he spilled Yannik Keitel's shot, allowing Keitel to score at the second attempt.

That made for a nervy finish for Leverkusen as Freiburg defender Manuel Gulde headed narrowly over the bar at a corner with seconds remaining.

### SOCCER

It was a statement win in particular for Czech forwards Schick and Hlozek, who have had comparatively little impact on the German title race despite Leverkusen's stunning season.

Leverkusen has relied on goals from the midfield and wing back positions this season since an injury in January ruled out striker Victor Boniface. Schick hadn't scored in the league since a hat trick in December - though his goals in the Europa League have been vital. Hlozek's only other Bundesliga goal was in September.

Five wins from Leverkusen's last eight league games would be enough to give Alonso's team its first ever Bundesliga title, even if Bayern wins every game.

Bayern's own encounter with Freiburg saw the champion drop points in a 2-2 draw on March 1.

Bayern has concerns over an ankle injury to the league's top scorer Harry Kane after he collided with a goalpost in 5-2 win over Darmstadt. Bayern said Sunday that Kane would still join up with England for upcoming friendlies.

In the other Bundesliga game, Emre Can got a red-card reprieve before scoring a penalty as Borussia Dortmund beat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1 to reclaim fourth place from Leipzig.

Back in action after securing a spot in the Champions League quarterfinals, Dortmund went behind to a goal from Mario Goetze before Karim Adeyemi leveled for Dortmund off Donyell Malen's cross.

Mats Hummels' diving header gave Dortmund the lead for the first time in the 81st. Shortly after, Dortmund captain Can was red-carded for a sliding tackle before video review showed he had made contact with the ball before Ellyes Skhiri's ankle and the card was downgraded to yellow. Can converted a penalty in stoppage time after a foul on Jamie Bynoe-Gittens.



Denny Hamlin (11) leads Chase Elliott (9) and Ryan Blaney (12) during a NASCAR Cup Series auto race, Sunday, March 17, 2024, in Bristol, Tenn. Hamlin won the race. (AP) - See Page 14

# Sports

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## Man United outlast Liverpool in 7-goal thriller

Chelsea book semis place at Wembley

**MANCHESTER, England, March 18, (AP):** There's still some fight left in Manchester United.

With the season hanging in the balance, Erik ten Hag's team produced one of the most important wins of his tenure to beat Liverpool 4-3 after extra time in a thrilling FA Cup quarterfinal match.

With nearly the last kick of the match, substitute Amad Diallo sent Old Trafford into raptures, ended Liverpool's bid for a quadruple of trophies and fired United into the semifinals.

Ten Hag has faced mounting speculation about his position in the face of a troubled campaign and restructuring at the club. The FA Cup represents his last chance of silverware this season, while Champions League qualification is in doubt with United sixth in the Premier League.

Defeat against the club's fiercest rival would likely have seen pressure on the Dutchman grow. TV cameras focused on new director Dave Brailsford as the clock ticked down with Liverpool leading 2-1 as the game approached 90 minutes.

Brailsford is part of the team overseeing United's soccer operations following British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's recent investment in the club. He looked stone-faced with United seemingly headed out of the competition and Liverpool's away fans making the loudest noise.

Emotions changed drastically inside



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella celebrates after scoring the opening goal during the FA Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Chelsea and Leicester City at Stamford Bridge in London. (AP)

Old Trafford, however, when Antony equalized in the 87th to make the score 2-2. That set up a white-knuckle ride through to the first minute of stoppage time in extra time, with big chances missed and momentum swinging one way and then another until United's winner.

Ten Hag hopes it can be a turning point for his team.

Twelve-time FA Cup winner United was later drawn against second-tier Coventry in the semifinals and defending champion Manchester City will

play Chelsea, which beat Leicester 4-2.

The game had looked like going to a penalty shootout until Diallo fired low into the bottom corner to beat Caoimhin Kelleher following a late Liverpool corner.

The substitute was so caught up in the moment that he was shown a second yellow card and sent off for taking off his jersey during wild celebrations.

### SOCCER

United's pursuit of a top-four finish was also helped after fourth-place Aston Villa drew 1-1 at West Ham in the Premier League earlier in the day. Tottenham, in fifth, lost 3-0 at Fulham. Ten Hag's team is still nine points adrift of Villa, but has a game in hand, and perhaps momentum after such a morale-boosting win.

He described the opening 35 minutes of Sunday's match as the best his team had played all season.

Scott McTominay put United ahead in the 10th minute before goals from Alexis Mac Allister in the 44th and Mohamed Salah in the second minute of first-half stoppage time gave Liverpool the lead at the break.

After Antony leveled, Harvey Elliott hit the post for Liverpool and Rashford fired wide with only the 'keeper to beat with the final kick in regulation.

In extra time Elliott restored Liverpool's lead in the 105th and Rashford leveled for United seven minutes later. Diallo's winner killed off Jurgen Klopp's hopes of winning four trophies

before he steps down at the end of the season.

Liverpool has already won the League Cup, is second in the league and through to the quarterfinals of the Europa League.

Two goals in second-half stoppage time saw Chelsea book its place at Wembley and avenge its defeat to Leicester in the 2021 FA Cup final.

But Mauricio Pochettino's team was given a scare against Leicester at Stamford Bridge.

Marc Cucurella and Cole Palmer put Chelsea 2-0 up in the first half, with Raheem Sterling also having a penalty saved by Jakub Stolarczyk. Leicester fought back after the break through a spectacular own-goal by Axel Disasi, who sent a long-range back pass without checking where his 'keeper was, and an equalizer from Stephy Mavididi.

With the game looking set to go to extra time, Chelsea struck twice through two substitutes.

Carney Chukwuemeka restored the Premier League team's advantage after an assist from Palmer in the second minute of time added on. Noni Madueke scored a brilliant solo effort six minutes later to ensure the win and a semifinal spot.

Nicolo Zaniolo's goal in the only Premier League game could be crucial in the battle to qualify for the Champions League.

Even then, Unai Emery's team had to rely on VAR to rule out a a stoppage-time goal from Tomas Soucek for handball.



Daoud Marafi, the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Communications chairs the meeting of the Supreme Committee.

## Supreme Committee 'holds' a meeting to assess Kuwait readiness for Gulf Cup

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The 26th edition of the Supreme Committee for Hosting the Gulf Cup convened a meeting two days ago, on Sunday, chaired by Daoud Marafi, the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Communications. The meeting took place at the headquarters of the General Sports Authority, with Youssef Al-Baidan, the Director General of the Authority and Vice Chairman of the Organizing Committee, and Abdullah Al-Shaheen, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Football Association, in attendance. Representatives from the Kuwait Olympic Committee, the

Ministry of Interior, the General Fire Force, the Ministry of Electricity, the Ministry of Works, and the Gulf Football Association were also present.

During the meeting, thorough discussions were held regarding all arrangements for Kuwait's hosting of the

### SOCCER

upcoming tournament scheduled for December. The committee focused on addressing the observations made by the inspection committee during their visit to the stadiums and facilities designated to host the tournament, ensuring a seamless and successful event.

## Swiatek swamps Sakkari in women's final

## Alcaraz defeats Medvedev to defend Indian Wells title

INDIAN WELLS, March 18, (AP): Carlos Alcaraz arrived at Indian Wells full of doubt about his twisted right ankle. He's leaving as a two-time champion.

He defeated Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (5), 6-1 for the second straight year in the BNP Paribas Open final, earning his first title since winning Wimbledon last year.

Iga Swiatek beat Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-0 in just over an hour to win the women's title, with Swiatek losing just 21 games in six matches during the 12-day tournament - an average of 3.5 games per match.

Alcaraz sprained his ankle at the Rio Open in late February. His first practice at Indian Wells lasted 30 minutes without any movement. His first practice with his fellow pros "was really tough for me," he said in a Tennis Channel interview.

### TENNIS

Alcaraz outlasted Jannik Sinner in a three-set semifinal after needing three sets to get out of his second-round match.

"After every match I was feeling better," Alcaraz said. "I was getting more confident after every match. Winning a Master 1000 again, a really important tournament to win, gives you motivation to keep going."

Alcaraz became the first man to defend his Indian Wells title since Novak Djokovic won three in a row from 2014-16. He beat Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 last year in the Southern California desert.

"It's definitely your court, you like it here," Medvedev told Alcaraz during the victory ceremony. "Hopefully you can one day let me play a little bit better here."

Medvedev led 3-0 in the first set while Alcaraz had eight unforced errors over those games. The Spaniard won three games in a row to tie it, 3-3.

The players held serve the rest of the set, with Alcaraz serving a love game to get into the tiebreaker. He led 3-0 and 5-2 before Medvedev tied it 5-5. Alcaraz won the next two points to close it out.

Alcaraz got the only two breaks in the second set, when Medvedev had



Iga Swiatek, of Poland, holds the trophy after defeating Maria Sakkari, of Greece, in the final match at the BNP Paribas Open tennis tournament in Indian Wells, Calif. (AP)

one winner and nine errors. For the match, Alcaraz hit 25 winners and had 26 unforced errors, while Medvedev had 11 winners and 23 unforced errors.

Swiatek improved to 20-2 this year, with her wins leading the WTA Tour. It was a repeat of the 2022 final, in which Swiatek beat Sakkari 6-4, 6-1. Sakkari hasn't defeated the Polish star since 2021.

Swiatek raced to a 3-0 lead in the opening set. Sakkari recovered to win three straight games, including a break of Swiatek. She served a love game to tie it, 4-4. Swiatek lost just two points on her serve the rest of the set, wrapping it up with a forehand winner in the corner.

Swiatek was more dominant in the second set, breaking Sakkari three times all in love games. She lost just five points in the set.

Swiatek hit 15 winners and had 11 unforced errors in the 1 hour, 8-minute match. Sakkari had eight winners and 18 unforced errors.

Alcaraz and Swiatek earned \$1.1 million each for their wins. That's less than the \$1.26 million the women's and men's champions received in 2023. This year more prize money was allocated to the earlier rounds, reducing the champions' prize money by nearly 13%.



Carlos Alcaraz, of Spain, serves to Daniil Medvedev, of Russia, during the final match at the BNP Paribas Open tennis tournament in Indian Wells, Calif. (AP)



Liverpool's Harvey Elliott is tackled by Manchester United's Kobbie Mainoo during the FA Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Manchester United and Liverpool at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. (AP)

## Félix silences critics with goal

## Barcelona dominate Atletico to move to second

MADRID, March 18: (AP): Atletico Madrid fans burned a João Félix jersey before their team's match against Barcelona. They also vandalized a plaque with his name and insulted the player outside the Metropolitan Stadium.

But when the match started, the Portugal forward answered those fans on the field.

Félix struck against his former club again on Sunday, scoring the opening goal in Barcelona's 3-0 win over Atletico Madrid in the Spanish league.

Robert Lewandowski and Fermin López also scored for Barcelona, which moved to second place with its fifth straight league victory over Atletico.

### SOCCER

Félix had scored the winner in the Catalan club's 1-0 win in the league in December. The Portugal international is playing on loan from Atletico after falling out with the club last season.

Félix was loudly jeered by the Atletico fans at the Metropolitan Stadium when he was replaced in the 77th. The forward arrived at Atletico for 120 million euros (now \$130 million) in 2019 but never fully met the high expectations that came with his signing.

Félix opened the scoring from the middle of the area after a pass by Le-

wandowski in the 38th minute, becoming the first Barcelona player to score in both matches against Atletico in a single league season since Lionel Messi in 2019-20.

Lewandowski added to the lead in a breakaway after Atletico midfielder Rodrigo De Paul gave away possession with a bad pass early in the second half, and the Poland striker set up López's header for Barcelona's third goal in the 65th.



Atletico Madrid's Samuel Lino, (left), fights for the ball with Barcelona's Fermin Lopez during the La Liga soccer match between Atletico Madrid and Barcelona at the Metropolitan stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

Atletico defender Nahuel Molina was sent off in stoppage time for a foul on Vitor Roque to stop a breakaway. Xavi was sent off before halftime for protesting.

It was Atletico's first league loss at the Metropolitan Stadium since January 2023 - also 1-0 against Barcelona. It was also Atletico's worse loss at home in any competition.

The win added to Barcelona's momentum after it eliminated Napoli in

the Champions League on Tuesday to make it to the tournament's quarterfinals for the first time in four years.

Unbeaten in eight league matches, Barcelona moved two points ahead of third-place Girona, which lost 1-0 at Getafe on Saturday. Barcelona is eight points behind leader Real Madrid, which won 4-2 at Osasuna on Saturday.

Atletico eliminated Inter Milan in the round of 16 of the Champions League at the Metropolitan on Wednesday, but it has lost six of its last 10 matches across all competitions, with only three wins in that streak.

Simeone's team dropped out of the Champions League places with the loss on Sunday. It is one point behind fourth-place Athletic Bilbao, which won 2-0 against Alaves.

Almeria's winless streak in the Spanish league is finally over.

The last-place team from southern Spain beat Las Palmas 1-0 to pick up its first win after going 28 consecutive games without a victory in the league this season, the most ever by any team.

Almeria now has one win, 10 draws and 18 defeats.

Léo Baptista scored in the 14th minute to give Almeria the win in the debut of coach Pepe Mel.

Almeria is 14 points from safety with nine matches remaining. The Saudi-owned club had drawn four of its last five league matches.