

Polestar 2  
Why wait  
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



**7** Cambodian PM Hun Sen to step down after four decades



**8** Hopes of IMF bailout fade as West fears Tunisia collapse



**13** Glitzy Dubai hungry for culinary fame



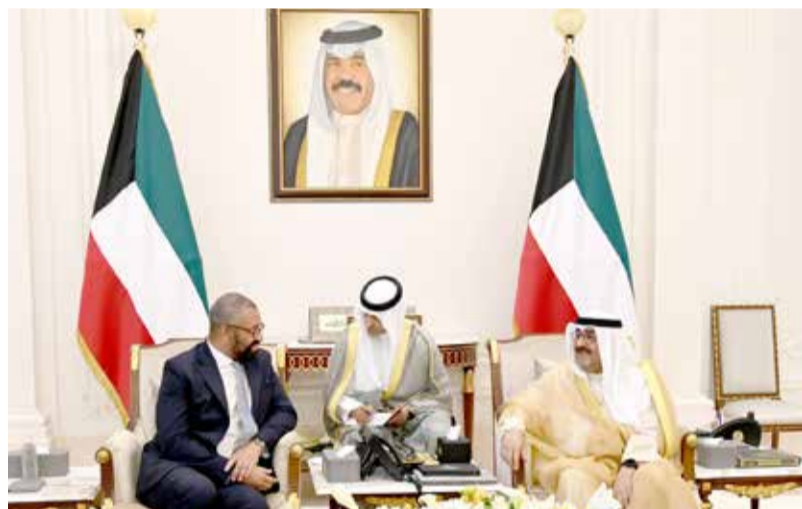
**16** Tunisia's Hafnaoui wins men's 800m freestyle gold



## Kuwait records first fiscal surplus in nearly a decade

\$21bn surplus achieved • 92% revenues from oil • Wages, subsidies make up 78% of spending

### Crown Prince meets British FM



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets British Foreign Minister James Cleverly on July 26, 2023. — KUNA (See Page 2)

KUWAIT: Kuwait recorded its first surplus in nine years for the 2022-2023 fiscal year which ended in March, the finance ministry said on Wednesday, crediting last year's surge in oil prices. The state, whose revenues rely heavily on hydrocarbons, closed its fiscal balance with a surplus of KD 6.4 billion (\$21 billion), the ministry said, against an actual deficit of KD 4.3 billion (\$14 billion) in the previous fiscal year. "The final account of the state's financial administration records an actual surplus for the first time in nine years," the ministry said in a statement on its website.

More than 92 percent of revenues came from oil after prices surged following last year's Russian invasion of Ukraine. Oil revenues for the fiscal year which started in April 2022 stood at KD 26.7 billion (\$87 billion), a 64 percent increase from the previous year, the ministry said. The average price of a barrel of oil over the fiscal year stood at \$97.1, an increase of 21.4 percent compared to the previous year.

Output was 2.7 million barrels per day.

Revenues for the current fiscal year are expected to fall due to a decline in oil prices. The draft budget for the 2023-2024 fiscal year — published in January — was calculated based on a price of \$70 per barrel. The 2023-2024 draft budget projects a growing deficit, with total revenues expected to drop to around \$63.8 billion.

The finance ministry said actual revenues reached KD 28.8 billion (\$93.8 billion), rising by 54.7 percent, in the fiscal year 2022-2023, noting that oil proceeds stood at 92.7 percent of the achieved income. Actual oil revenues amounted to KD 26.7 billion (\$87 billion), rising by 64.7 percent, while actual non-oil proceeds reached KD 2.1 billion (\$6.8 billion), falling by 12.8 percent. Total actual expenditures reached KD 22.4 billion (\$73 billion), a fall of 2.6 percent, the statement said.

Wages and subsidies constituted 78 percent of total expenditures and actual capital spending reached nine percent of total expenditures. The press release

quoted Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments and the Acting Minister of Finance Dr Saad Al-Barrak as saying Kuwait enjoys a solid financial status, huge reserves and monetary and financial stability. These factors solidify the state vis a vis oil market jitters in the short term "and enable us to rise above the interim challenges and seize opportunities emanating from these challenges".

Kuwait is home to seven percent of the world's crude reserves. It has little debt and one of the strongest sovereign wealth funds in the world. However, it suffers from constant standoffs between elected lawmakers and governments.

The political instability, which has seen seven general elections held in little more than a decade, has spooked investors and stymied economic reforms. Kuwait's fifth government in less than a year took the oath of office last month after the latest election returned an opposition-controlled parliament. — Agencies

### 'Attempted coup' in troubled Niger as president held

NIAMEY: An attempted coup was underway Wednesday in the Sahel state of Niger as President Mohamed Bazoum was being held by members of his guard, who in turn were given an ultimatum by the army, sources said. The West African bloc ECOWAS, the African Union and the European Union condemned what they called an "attempted coup d'etat," a description echoed by a source close to Bazoum who also predicted the bid would fail.



Mohamed Bazoum

A close ally of France, Bazoum was elected in 2021, taking the helm of a country mired in poverty and burdened by a history of chronic instability. Members of the elite Presidential Guard on Wednesday morning sealed off access to the president's residence and offices, and after talks broke down "refused to release the president," another presidential source said. "The army has given them an ultimatum," said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

In a message on Twitter, which is being re-branded as X, the president's office said "elements of the Presidential Guard (PG) had a fit of temper... (and) tried unsuccessfully to gain the support of the national armed forces and the national guard."

Continued on Page 6

### Constitutional court reforms approved as it endorses elections

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved crucial amendments to the law governing the constitutional court, eliminating its powers to nullify parliamentary elections as it did on three occasions since 2012. The vote coincided with a scheduled ruling by the constitutional court, which rejected all petitions against the June 6 parliamentary polls, which means that the current Assembly and general elections have been confirmed by the country's top court and will not be dissolved by the court. The amendments were approved in two rounds of voting by 58 members, including all present

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: Members of parliament attend a session of the National Assembly on July 26, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

### Erdogan meets Palestinian prez, Hamas leader

ISTANBUL: Turkey's leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday spoke in Ankara with the Palestinian president and the head of Hamas in the run-up to a crucial meeting of Palestinian factions set for the weekend. Erdogan, who has good ties with Mahmoud Abbas of the

Fatah party and Hamas' political bureau chief Ismail Haniya, has said his government will do its best to push for intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

He told Wednesday's meeting, which was held behind closed doors, that a lack of unity among the Palestinians benefited those "who wanted to undermine peace" according to the Turkish leader's office. An official in the Palestinian presidency told AFP that Abbas "invited all Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to attend the meeting of the heads of the factions in Cairo" on Sunday.

Continued on Page 6



ANKARA: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the leader of the Palestinian Hamas movement Ismail Haniya meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the Presidential Complex on July 26, 2023. — AFP

### UN warns against 'excessive' tech use in classrooms

PARIS: Heavy reliance on technology in education may be unproductive, or even detrimental, if it interferes with the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, the UN warned on Wednesday. The body's education, culture and science agency UNESCO said

in a report that while students should learn about technology in the world, teachers should beware of overusing "fancy technological" means in the classroom. "There is little robust evidence on digital technology's added value in education," the report said.

Technology in the classroom "can have detrimental impact if inappropriate or excessive", it said. "It should focus on learning outcomes, not on digital inputs." Manos Antoninis, who directed the UNESCO report, said 20 years after laptops began to be rolled out in schools, it was clear that such policies only worked if they were combined

with a solid pedagogical framework. But only a "few countries have had the patience and energy to move into that direction", he said. "It's not enough to just distribute devices," he said.

UNESCO had observed a rising trend of banning smartphones in classrooms, with "one in four countries" passing laws and regulations to that effect. "The presence of a phone in a classroom can be very distracting," Antoninis said. He said smartphone bans in schools, including by liberal countries like The Netherlands, were "an interesting and

Continued on Page 6



9 780202 223841

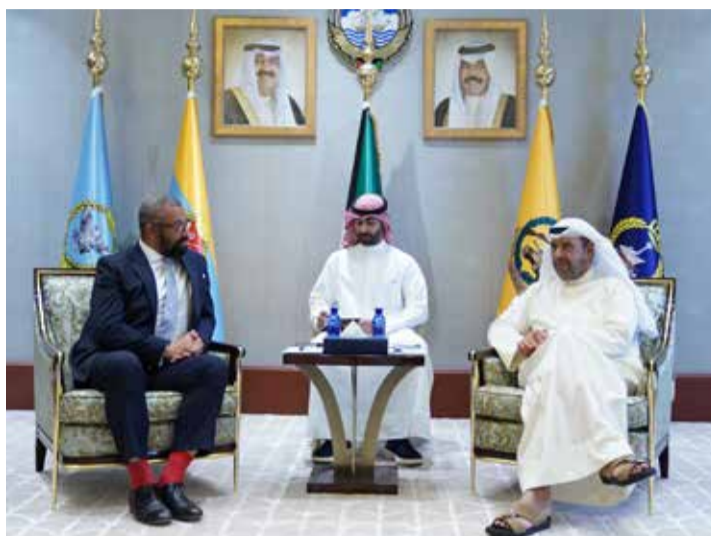
## Local

# Sheikh Talal affirms strong and historic Kuwait-British relations

## Defense Minister, Foreign Minister hold talks with visiting UK official



KUWAIT: First Deputy PM and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (right) receives UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly on Wednesday.



Deputy PM Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (right) receives James Cleverly. — KUNA photo



Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) receives James Cleverly.

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly, discussed topics of mutual concern on Wednesday. During the meeting, attended by UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled affirmed the strong and historic Kuwaiti-British ties, said the Ministry of Interior's department of media and relations in a statement. On his part, Cleverly thanked Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled for the reception, adding that the topics discussed are of importance to develop cooperation between the two countries. The meeting was also attended by senior officials of the Ministry of Information.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also held discussions relations with the visiting UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly. A ministry statement said military and defensive issues, in addition to latest regional and international developments were discussed.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad praised depth of historic relations between the two countries, said the statement, adding that the meeting was attended by Britain's Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis and Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Sadeq Marafi.

Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also met with the visiting UK

official. The meeting touched upon the bilateral and historic ties between the two friendly countries and ways to boost cooperation in various fields. The two sides also discussed the latest political regional and global developments.

Moreover, the meeting stressed the importance of continuing the joint dialogue in the technical and legal aspects of demarcating the maritime borders beyond mark (162) between the State of Kuwait and the Republic of Iraq, emphasizing the need to resolve this issue in a manner that is consistent with the rules of international law.

They also discussed enhancing cooperation within the framework of resolving crises by peaceful means, with all neutrality, in order to maintain the international order and respect for the sovereignty of states over their lands and maritime borders. The talks also tackled the current developments of the Palestinian cause, the repeated Zionist attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque and Muslim sanctities, and the ongoing systematic and serious Zionist violations and crimes against the Palestinian people.

The repeated crimes and reprehensible practices of burning copies of the Holy Quran in Sweden and Denmark were also discussed, and those totally rejected practices were condemned.

Cleverly, who is on a 3-day visit to Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan, emphasized the UK's growing partnership with the region. A foreign office statement said, "I am delighted to be back in the Mid-



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti delegation hold talks with UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly and his accompanying delegation. — KUNA

dle East. The UK's mutually beneficial relationships with the Gulf and Jordan continue to thrive. We have a bright future together," Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said. "From working together on shared goals like developing stronger trade ties and security, I am proud of how we are collaborating for the benefit of us all." The UK also remains

committed to supporting refugees and host communities, collaborating with partners to help the most vulnerable in the region.

In Qatar, the Foreign Secretary met with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani before travelling to Kuwait to meet His Highness the

Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and explore opportunities to strengthen cooperation. In Jordan on Thursday, he will meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi. He will also announce funding to support women and girls and to help the most vulnerable refugees in Jordan. — KUNA

## NBK holds lecture in partnership with IE Business School

KUWAIT: Underscoring its belief in the importance of investing in the human capital, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues the series of Masterclasses on innovation and leadership organized for its employees, in partnership with IE Business School- Madrid.

This series is part of the bank's consistent endeavors to develop its human capital and talent and qualifying them through top-of-the-line training programs that develop their skills, in partnership with the most reputable international educational institutions. The series includes lectures focusing on several key topics, mainly Innovation and Leadership, as well as Communication and Digital Trends, Design Thinking Strategy and Customer Experience.

The second Masterclass, which was held during July, was given by Pablo Esteves, Professor of Leadership, IE School of Human Sciences and Technology. Esteves has extensive experience in entrepreneurial endeavors, and is a partner at Emzingo, a leading institution in leadership development, entrepreneurship and social innovation, and helped manage 100+ social projects since 2011.

The Masterclass aimed to explore future working trends and strategic planning for a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, identify the challenges and opportunities that may emerge and understand the waves and signals that help imagine plausible future scenarios, and apply them in different fields and industries. This Masterclass comes within an intensive Development initiative, which includes eight masterclasses which extend until the beginning of next year, and focus on many key topics that are instrumental in the future of the banking industry.

Speaking on this, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK regards its employees as its most valuable resource, therefore, we give top priority to developing the skills of its employees, harnessing all capabilities to contribute to their professional development. To this end, the bank provides training and development programs in partnership with the most reputable international educational institutions, engaging a number of well-renowned experts to benefit from their experience in relevant fields." "NBK's consistent efforts to increase the efficiency of its employees reflect its commitment to achieving sustainable growth and creating a banking generation that can assume leadership in the future, and sustain the bank's successful journey," she noted.

"Human capital investment is one of NBK's key strategies to achieve more success, especially considering that developing human resources is a key driver of the bank's leadership, locally and regionally," she added. Founded in 1973, IE Business School is one of the largest business schools in the world, consistently ranked among the top international educational institutions by international magazines and newspapers, Forbes, The Economist, Financial Times and Bloomberg.



Najla Al-Sager



A technician checks a device for measuring heat and humidity.



A technician examines the recorded readings made by a mobile weather monitoring station.



A meteorological device that measures the intensity of the sun.

## How temperatures are accurately measured in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Although Kuwait is one of the countries that witnesses the most noticeable rise in temperatures, even exceeding the 50-degree mark in the Jahra station, the forecasts for these days as well as the upcoming days remain open for other regions. As the summer gets hotter, questions are being raised about the distinction between their officially approved degrees or those seen in vehicles and other measuring instruments.

In an interview with KUNA Wednesday, climate observer at the Meteorology Department of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Dr Hassan Dashti said that the department is keen to provide all accurate and reliable information on weather conditions and temperatures with internationally accredited scientific measuring devices through 27 land and sea surface monitoring stations in various regions of the country.

These stations measure temperatures transparently and in a scientific way, according to the standards approved by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and through monitoring stations that are followed up 24 hours a day, monitoring their readings and analyzing them using advanced computers in a scientific way, Dashti added.

He pointed out the administration's keenness to provide all accurate and reliable information and data on weather phenomena and its elements such as temperatures, atmospheric pressure, wind speeds and direction, and rainfall amounts through internationally accredited scientific measurement devices through these stations, noting that all these centers and stations are subject to international standards that must be met so that the desired degree can be calculated and based on it.

Accurate temperature measurements are the main

concern of meteorological centers and departments through those stations, with each station having special sensors that depend on the nature of its use, he stated. He stressed the need to differentiate between measuring the temperature in the shade and measuring it under direct sunlight and in the open air, indicating that temperatures are affected by the surrounding environment, in addition to the accuracy and sensitivity of the thermometer used.

Regarding the confusion about what the temperature indicator reads in some cars and what is circulated on social media, for example, the rise in temperatures above 60 degrees Celsius in the past days, he explained that the thermometer in the car is affected by several factors, including the temperature of the engine, the intensity of traffic congestion, as well as the factor of dark colors and other influences.

Dashti said: "the method and conditions that must be met to measure temperatures is through a special device, which is a wooden box of a special type with openings that allow air to enter to ensure that the temperature measured inside the box is not affected by direct sunlight or reflected from the surface of the earth." "The device is isolated from direct sunlight and heat radiating from the ground, so the observed and declared temperature is the actual temperature," he added.

Dashti pointed out that the administration also measures the temperature of the soil and at different depths, as well as the temperature of the grass, indicating that measuring the duration and intensity of sunshine during the day are two important elements for understanding and predicting the weather for the purposes of agriculture.

Regarding the measurement of wind speed and direction at the main meteorological station, Dashti said that this is done by an anemometer, as the stations contain an electronic device to measure wind speed and direction automatically and send data to the database on an up-to-date basis.

He explained that the department supervises the operation and maintenance of meteorological stations, whether fixed or on platforms distributed on lands and offshore islands and follows up on

then in a timely basis through its trained professional national cadres.

"All these stations are linked to an integrated network to collect data around the clock before sending it via cellular communication lines to the (main server) at the Meteorological Department building. The data is then extracted, audited, and sorted to use in the weather forecasting process or for climate studies. They are also provided to the authorities according to the stipulated systems and regulations," he added.

Dashti said there is international cooperation between all meteorological departments and centers across the world under the umbrella of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) regarding the conditions for collecting information on the weather at specific and globally agreed on times. The information is distributed through the organization's network to enable the issuing of weather forecast bulletins around the clock.

He added that the department obtained approval to start the project of renewing the entire network of meteorological stations in Kuwait according to the latest systems and technology. It's also got approval for a project to manage data after auditing them according to the latest internationally approved quality control and assurance programs.

"Upgrading the meteorological stations is a qualitative leap in the field of land and sea weather observations and the upper atmosphere," he said, noting that the first meteorological station in Kuwait was established in 1953 in the Shuwaik area, specifically to record daily observations.

He pointed out that at the end of 1957, the first meteorological station was established at Kuwait International Airport to serve the take-off and landing operations of aircraft, while the first radio bulletin for the weather was issued on the State of Kuwait Radio in 1958.

He stated that the air monitoring station at Kuwait International Airport operates around the clock to ensure the safety of air traffic from weather fluctuations, especially during the take-off and landing operations. — KUNA

Local

# How husseiniyas commemorate the 10th of Muharram in Kuwait

Volunteers, MoI officials collaborate to serve, safeguard public



A flag of Al-Abbas, brother of Imam Hussain, is raised at Al-Karbalaeia husseiniya in Kuwait in this file photo.



A man weeps while listening to the incidents of the battle in Karbala at Al-Karbalaeia.



Officers search attendees of a husseiniya in this file photo.

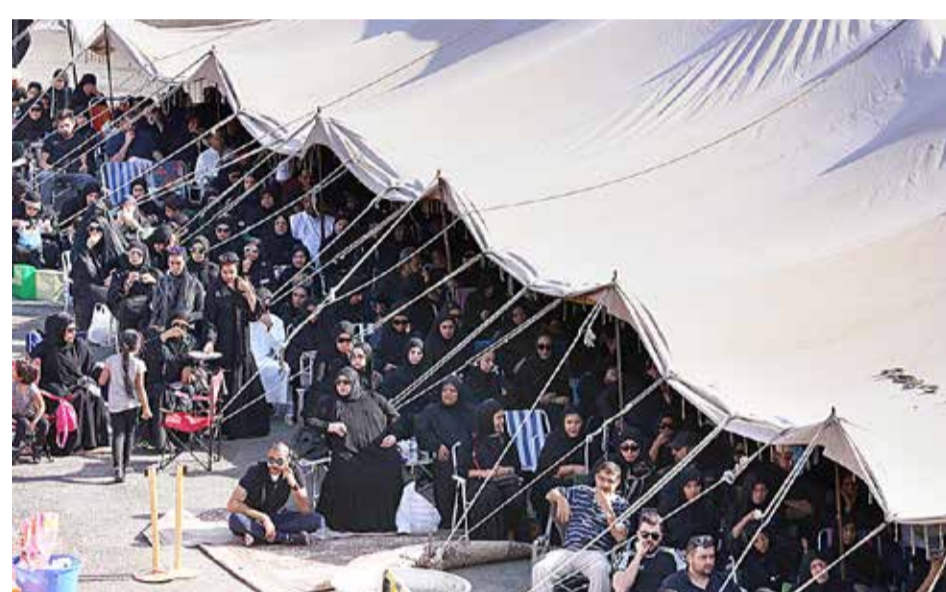
By Ghadeer Ghloum

**KUWAIT:** The Islamic month of Muharram holds great significance for Muslims worldwide. Among the various events during this month, the commemoration of the 10th day of Muharram, known as Ashoura, stands out as an important event. For Shiite Muslims, the significance of Ashoura, which falls on Friday, July 28 this year, stems from the tragic events in which Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), along with his family and followers, faced betrayal and martyrdom in Karbala.

The event serves as a symbol of sacrifice, bravery and standing up against oppression. Shiite Muslims hold the commemoration of Ashoura as an expression of mourning and solidarity with Imam Hussain and his companions. Believing that through expressing their sorrow and despair, they can connect with Imam Hussain's grief, honor his sacrifice and mourn the injustice inflicted upon him and his followers. Thus, they reaffirm their allegiance to the principles of justice, righteousness, and resistance against tyranny.

Like many other countries, Shiites in Kuwait come together to commemorate the sorrowful days of Muharram through visiting the husseiniya, which is a building or a place of gathering for people to commemorate and engage in religious rituals that are related to Imam Hussain. Different activities take place at the husseiniya, including prayers, lectures that focus on the life and teachings of Imam Hussain, charity that aims to distribute food, clothing, healthcare, or educational assistance to disadvantaged individuals or communities under the name of Imam Hussain, and commemorations.

Husseiniyas are particularly significant during Muharram, when visitors mourn the mar-



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Shiite Muslims take part in a traditional mourning event during Ashura commemorations in this file photo.



A man pours Arabic coffee for husseiniya attendees in this file photo.



Men prepare food for husseiniya attendees in these file photos.



Policeman ensure people's safety during Ashura in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Over 800 youth attend Zain, SACGC camp

**KUWAIT:** Zain announces the successful conclusion of the Innovation Nation summer camp, a unique educational experience that came in partnership with Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) and in collaboration with the Avenues. The camp presented a unique set of rich content, courses, and workshops for children and youth to upskill a wide range of digital and technical skills with the aim of nurturing their creativity and fostering their talents.

This initiative was the first fruitful result of Zain and SACGC's recently signed strategic partnership to invest in the talents and skills of Kuwait's youth to contribute to the national economy by empowering tech and digital com-



petencies, which are core requirements of today's career market.

The initiative achieved outstanding results in a short period of time. In just 10 days, the summer camp welcomed over 800 children and youth aged 7-14 years to join over 130 courses and workshops, covering the fundamentals of electronics, robotics, 3D printers, programming, artificial intelligence, and more.

The Innovation Nation summer camp offered a great opportunity for parents to positively fill their children's free time while they shop at the Avenues. Each course or workshop ran for two hours and was supervised and facilitated by experts, volunteers, and certified trainers from SACGC. The content was presented in an out-of-the-box way with fun, informative, and innovative educational methods that appealed to younger age groups, resulting in hundreds of registrations.

Zain recently signed a memorandum of understanding with SACGC, a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), to build a new strategic partnership that focuses on elevating the digital

literacy of the youth, empower creativity and innovation, and enhance the local startup ecosystem in the community.

The MoU aims to foster a joint collaboration between the two partners to achieve a number of targets, including elevating digital literacy, developing digital competencies, supporting the local startups ecosystem, empowering Kuwaiti inventors and innovators to excel, and more to serve the nation's developmental, economic, and social goals. The partnership targets young people of 7-35 years, and includes insightful programs, workshops, and more to share expertise and achieve these shared goals.

The summer camp is the first of many projects under Zain's all-new initiative, Innovation Nation, under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs will fall, especially within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth, and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation, and more.

## Japan's policy on discharge of treated water

**KUWAIT:** The Embassy of Japan issued a statement on July 26, 2023 on Japan's policy on the discharge of treated water into the sea: "More than 12 years have elapsed since the occurrence of the Great East-Japan Earthquake, and with the generous support of the international community, particularly the State of Kuwait and its people, the disaster-stricken area has significantly recovered. Japan and its people sincerely appreciate the support and will never forget it.

"One specific issue of concern is the water that contains radioactive materials associated with the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Japan has kept storing the water that is treated by the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), and in April 2021 the Government of Japan announced its policy to discharge 'ALPS treated water' into the sea in about two years. The water to be discharged is such water that has been sufficiently purified until the concentration of radioactive materials is below the regulatory standards.

"On July 4, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published a comprehensive report. It has concluded that Japan's approach to the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea is consistent with relevant international safety standards. It has also concluded, based on its comprehensive assessment, that the discharge of the ALPS treated water will have a negligible radioactive impact on people and the environment.

"Prime Minister Kishida has expressed his intention to decide on the concrete timing of discharging after considering entire safety measures and efforts to combat reputational damages. He also said the Government of Japan would continue to explain the efforts of the Government of Japan regarding ALPS treated water to the Japanese community, including the people in the vicinity areas, as well as to the international community with higher transparency. The Government of Japan provides information to the international community in a transparent manner based on scientific evidence in Tokyo and other places, as well as on the government website." — Embassy of Japan

Kuwait Times  
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher

YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432

ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 301

CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 220

ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com

Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

## News in Brief

Advance censorship of books  
backwards: Graduate Society

KUWAIT: Kuwait Graduates Society said in a statement Tuesday that it was against a parliamentary proposal to censor books imported from abroad before they enter the country. Chairman of the society Ibrahim Al-Mulaifi said the status-quo for censorship should be maintained. Currently, books are not reviewed before entering the country. Instead, the system relies on subsequent control and referral to the judiciary in case of any harm. "The subsequent supervision system has only been in effect for a short period, so what is the justification for returning to the old system?!" Mulaifi said. Mulaifi said he wonders why such proposals are coming from within the legislative authority "whose members are supposed to be keen on broadening freedoms and not suppressing them." He also found the Parliamentary silence towards the moves that call for the advanced censorship of books "strange", especially at a time when censorship "can't keep up with information and technology revolution." He said that it is necessary to maintain Kuwait's cultural status in the Arab arena, and its leadership at book exhibitions through increasing support and extending all facilities for all components of the cultural scene and avoid harming it through some negative proposals.

Explosion leaves 2 workers  
injured in Jahra Industrial

KUWAIT: A water heater explosion has led to the collapse of the roof of a shop in Jahra Industrial area, Kuwait Fire Force reported Wednesday. The Central Operations Department directed the Jahra and Jahra Herafiya fire brigades to the site. The building was evacuated as fire crews handled the incident. The collapse resulted in two workers being injured and they were taken to the medical emergency team for treatment. In a separate incident, a fire broke out in the Salmi landfill, according to Kuwait Fire Force. Jahra, Al-Soor and Al-Isnad fire brigades were dispatched to the site after a report was received by the Central Operations Department on Wednesday afternoon alerting them to the fire. The fire was extinguished without injuries.

## Photo of the day



A delivery driver rests in the shade of a tree during a heatwave in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Government, civil society should team up to motivate entrepreneurs: Official SME development fund, federation ink deal to support 'vital' sector

KUWAIT: Director General of the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development, Adel Al-Hasawi, stressed on Wednesday the need for government agencies to cooperate with civil society to motivate entrepreneurs and encourage national cadres to start their own businesses.

Hasawi said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Tuesday on the sidelines of the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the fund and the Federation of Kuwaiti Professionals and Business Associates for Small and Medium Enterprises at the fund's headquarters that the government provides support to the initiative and their projects in all sectors through financing, incubation and consulting, indicating that the role of civil society is complementary and essential to the government.

President of the the Federation of Kuwaiti Professionals and Business Associates for Small and Medium Enterprises Sheikh Dr Hessa Saad Abdullah Al-Sabah said the agreement aims to develop and support small enterprises and help entrepreneurs to enhance the role of this important and vital sector in the Kuwaiti economy.

She stressed that the union has been striving since its inception to encourage entrepreneurs to find creative solutions and motivate Kuwaiti youth towards starting their own businesses and working in the private sector by providing various job opportunities and supporting their initiatives and ideas and turning them into projects on the ground in line with Kuwait's development goals.

Hasawi noted the fund's current efforts to con-

tinue supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in Kuwait, to get out of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had catastrophic effects on the sector in various countries of the world. He explained that the fund is keen to revive this important and vital sector to help Kuwaiti youth establish their businesses and economic activities to benefit the national economy and contribute to diversifying sources of income.

Sheikha Hessa added that the federation and the fund have the desire to strengthen bilateral ties and cooperation in several areas that concern small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. She pointed out that signing the agreement aims at exchanging experiences, ideas and information in the field of small businesses. — KUNA



## Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times  
Established 1961  
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



First Place Winners are seen in this photo.

## Ahli bank holds annual bowling tournament

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently organized its annual staff bowling tournament, demonstrating its commitment to fostering strong relationships among employees and promoting the importance of sports for maintaining good health.

The annual bowling tournament, which witnessed healthy competition amongst staff members, included the participation of 19 teams, each consisting of three players, where first and second-place winners received valuable prizes.

Commenting on the event, Afrah Al-Arbash, General Manager of Human Resources at ABK, highlighted the Bank's dedication to cultivating a friendly atmosphere outside of the workplace, away from the pressures of daily life. She said: "This initiative aims to create an ideal workplace environment by continuing to strengthen the bond between ABK employees, thus positively impacting productivity."

These initiatives also endeavor to enhance employees' sense of loyalty and affiliation, ensuring their comfort which, in turn, helps improve performance. Arbash clarified: "Ultimately, this has a positive impact on the Bank's ability to provide customers with the highest quality of service." She emphasized that ABK highly prioritizes the mental wellbeing of its employees. "Participating in sports activities helps reduce stress levels and release endorphins. This can contribute to an overall improvement in mood and wellbeing thus helping reduce any possible negative emotions," she said.

Arbash affirmed that sports events provide a platform for social interaction and team building among employees. This is especially true of team sports events which encourage collaboration, communication, and teamwork skills. She added, "The competitive nature of sports can help develop qualities, such as resilience, determination, and self-confidence. It also encourages

staff to overcome challenges as a team."

As such, ABK remains committed to encouraging employees to engage in various sports activities. Arbash assured that a series of future events will be organized, aimed at fostering a sense of camaraderie among employees.

She concluded: "In addition to upcoming sports events, ABK will continue to conduct regular employee surveys to gain insights into satisfaction ratings thus allowing us to assess their needs and provide the essential tools that help improve morale, operations and overall performance."

Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that is today known for offering a simpler banking experience. The Bank offers personal, corporate, and private banking of which includes a wide array of products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital. Enjoying equal stability and strength, the Bank also offers the convenience of banking across the region, servicing other markets in Egypt and the UAE.



Afrah Al-Arbash

ABK's team spirit at the bowling tournament.



Deadly fire raging aboard car carrier ship sparks fears

United by Beirut blast grief, couple vow to fight for justice

Page 7

Page 6

## Mediterranean nations fight heat, deadly fires

Thousands evacuated as death toll mounts



KARYSTOS: Military officers and firemen search for the debris of a Canadair CL-215 firefighting aircraft, which crashed near while being flown to fight a wildfire in Karystos, on the Greek Aegean island of Evia. Two pilots died when their water-bombing plane crashed while battling a blaze on the Greek island of Evia on July 25, as wildfires flared across the Mediterranean. — AFP

**RHODES:** Greece sweltered in intense heat Wednesday while crews scrambled to douse deadly wildfires that have also struck nations around the Mediterranean and killed dozens. Thousands of people have evacuated in the region this week as fires also flared in Croatia and Italy, and flames killed 34 in Algeria in extreme heat that has left landscapes tinder dry. "Back home, there is nothing left and not even a sheep survived," Taous Timizar, a survivor of the blaze in northeast Algeria, told AFP.

Witnesses described fleeing walls of flames that raged "like a blowtorch", and TV footage showed charred cars, burnt-out shops and smoldering scrubland. Scientists from the World Weather Attribution group said this week the heatwaves that have hit parts of Europe and North America this month would have been almost impossible without human-caused climate change. The European Union's

climate observatory Copernicus on Wednesday said smoke emissions from wildfires in Greece have been the highest for this period of time in the last 21 years. Greece has battled over 600 fires in the past 12 days, the government said Wednesday.

Temperatures were expected to hit between 43-46 degrees Celsius in central and southern Greece, according to the national meteorological service. "Today is the most difficult day in terms of the heat, complicating the fight against existing fires and making new fire outbreaks more likely," fire department spokesman Ioannis Artopios told Skai radio. Storms are forecast for Thursday. Greece is used to summer heatwaves, but is experiencing one of the longest ones in recent years, according to experts. The civil protection ministry has warned of an extreme danger of fire in six of the country's 13 regions on Wednesday. Wildfires, which have been burning in several

parts of the country for more than 10 days, were ravaging the tourist islands of Rhodes, Corfu and Evia. The EU crisis management commissioner's office on Wednesday said over 490 firefighters and seven planes had been deployed to different areas in Greece under the bloc's civil protection mechanism. At least 100 firefighters were working to contain the flames on Evia, where on Tuesday two pilots were killed when their water bomber aircraft crashed. The body of a third victim was also found on Evia.

### Fires around Mediterranean

Authorities have evacuated tens of thousands of people from fire areas in Greece, including many tourists. The severe heatwave in Greece has also been reflected across much of southern Europe and northern Africa. In Italy, firefighters spent the night battling wildfires in Sicily, one of which approached

so close to Palermo airport that it shut down for several hours Tuesday morning. Italy's civil protection department on Tuesday reported "extensive fires" across the south. In the north, a 16-year-old girl on a camping trip was among two people killed by falling trees during violent storms.

Dozens of firefighters were battling a wildfire near Croatia's picturesque southern city of Dubrovnik, authorities said Wednesday, with water-bombing planes dispatched to help contain the blaze. Around 130 firefighters were working to contain the flames that had been spread by strong winds on Tuesday. Local media reported the fire also triggered landmines to explode in the area. During the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Dubrovnik was besieged and shelled by Serb forces, leading several areas in the city to be damaged while swaths of its outskirts are still contaminated by landmines. — AFP

## 2 killed as typhoon batters Philippines

**MANILA:** A powerful storm pounded the northern Philippines on Wednesday, killing at least two people, toppling trees and knocking out power as thousands sheltered with neighbors or in emergency evacuation centers. Typhoon Doksuri was "slowly moving away from Dalupiri Island", off the northern tip of the main island of Luzon, and into open waters, the state weather agency said in its 0900 GMT update.

The agency earlier warned of "violent, life-threatening conditions" as severe maximum sustained winds of 175 kilometers an hour and heavy rain pounded the lightly populated region. A woman selling bread rolls died when she was hit by a falling coconut tree in the northern province of Isabela on Wednesday, provincial disaster official Constante Foronda told AFP.

A 16-year-old boy was crushed to death Wednesday when a landslide struck a house in the northern mountain city of Baguio, city disaster official Julius Santos told AFP. Rey Aguinardo, a retired government official in the coastal Ilocos Norte province, said: "The wind and rain were so strong overnight I could not sleep well." "When I got up today, I saw fallen trees and broken branches outside. We have no electricity," he told AFP.

Doksuri had been a super typhoon as it swept across the Pacific Ocean on Tuesday but weakened as it neared the Philippines. The storm is expected to weaken as it moves across the South China Sea, grazing Taiwan before making landfall in southeast



GAOQI: Fishing boats are moored at a port in the Gaoqi locality of Xiamen city at Fujian province in preparation for the approaching Typhoon Doksuri on July 26, 2023. — AFP

China on Friday. High waves lashed southeastern Taiwan coast on Wednesday, with the Central Weather Bureau issuing warnings and heavy rain advisories. China also issued its highest alert for Doksuri, stopping trains and calling fishing boats to shore as the storm approaches.

### Thousands flee homes

In the Philippines, around 12,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Cagayan province, including 431 in the Babuyan islands, following warnings of three-meter storm surges, Cagayan disaster official Ruelie Rapsing told AFP. Dalupiri is one of the five islands that make up the tiny Babuyan ar-

chipelago. Widespread flooding and power cuts were reported in the north of Luzon, while landslides blocked key arteries in its mountainous interior.

About 1,500 people were also evacuated from coastal communities in neighboring Isabela, Foronda said. "We won't allow them to go home until we get the all clear from the experts," he said. Some evacuees have sheltered with neighbors who had concrete houses, while others were taken to municipal halls. "The roof of the Sanchez Mira municipal hall was blown off," Rapsing added. "The windows of an evacuation centre there also broke so we had to move them to multi-purpose halls back in their villages." — AFP

## Storms and Sicily wildfires kill five

**MILAN:** At least five people were found dead in Italy Tuesday following violent storms in the north and wildfires in Sicily, which could lead the government to declare a state of emergency in the hardest-hit regions. A 16-year-old girl on a camping trip was among two people who died in storms that hit northern Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said. The teenager was killed when a tree fell on her tent during a scout camp near Brescia, after high winds and torrential rain overnight.

On Monday, a middle-aged woman died after also being hit by a falling tree in Lissone, north of Milan. Meloni confirmed the two "tragic" deaths due to bad weather, and offered her thoughts to their loved ones on social media. Milan residents reported torrential

rain and hail in the early hours of Tuesday morning, which flooded streets and uprooted trees, many of which fell onto parked cars.

Transport authorities reported serious damage to the city's electricity network, while an AFP journalist said water in the historic centre was temporarily shut off. Firefighters said the situation was "very serious", reporting more than 200 calls for help across Milan since 4 am (0200 GMT). But even as the north was drenched, the heatwave across the south persisted, with temperatures of 47.6 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit) recorded in the eastern Sicilian city of Catania on Monday.

The bodies of two people in the 70s were found in a house destroyed by the flames while another 88-year-old woman was found near the Sicilian city of Palermo, according to media reports Tuesday evening. Sicily's regional president Renato Schifani said he planned to ask the government ahead of a Wednesday ministers' meeting to declare a state of emergency for the Mediterranean



SICILY: Photo shows a house burning in the Tono district of Messina, Sicily, as a fire rages. — AFP

island. Firefighters on the island spent a night battling wildfires, one of which got so close to Palermo airport that the facility was shut down for several hours Tuesday morning. — AFP

## Iran 'intensifying' hijab crackdown

**PARIS:** Iranian authorities have in the last months launched an intensified crackdown against women deemed to have violated the Islamic republic's strict dress rules, Amnesty International said on Wednesday. Iran was convulsed for months by unprecedented protests sparked by the September 2022 custody death of Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested by the morality police for purportedly breaking the rules. Some politicians inside Iran had argued in the wake of the protests that the rules should be loosened and there were even indications - never confirmed - that the morality police could be abolished.

But with the intensity of protests diminishing over the last months, Amnesty said Iranian authorities had launched a new crackdown on women's dress since April. "The Iranian authorities are doubling down their oppressive methods of policing and punishing women and girls to quell widespread defiance of degrading and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws," Amnesty said. It has been obligatory for women to cover their heads and necks since shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 that ousted the secular shah.

### Police patrols

Viral images posted online during the protest movement showed women removing their headscarves as well as carrying out daily tasks such as shopping bareheaded. Some images showing women without headscarves at cafe tables in relatively secular northern Tehran had suggested a more permissive attitude in some areas. But Amnesty said there is in fact "an intensified nationwide crackdown", and noted that police this month announced the return of car and foot patrols enforcing compulsory veiling across the country.

According to Amnesty, more than a million women have received SMS warnings threatening that their vehicles will be confiscated if they are found traveling in a car while unveiled. "Morality policing in Iran is back," said Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International secretary general. She added the stepped-up enforcement was "intensified by mass surveillance technologies capable of identifying unveiled women in their cars and pedestrian spaces".

Hundreds of businesses such as hotels, restaurants, pharmacies and shopping centres have been forcibly closed for refusing to enforce compulsory veiling laws while women have been denied access to education, banking services and public transport, Amnesty said. Earlier this month a "disturbing video" went viral on social media showing a female police officer "harassing and assaulting" an unveiled woman in Tehran, pushing her against a wall and attempting to violently arrest her and take her into a van, the watchdog said. — AFP

## International

# NASA laboratory hopes to find life's building blocks in asteroid sample

## Sample could be key to understanding formation of solar system

**HOUSTON:** Eager scientists and a gleaming lab awaits. A sample from the asteroid Benu, which could be key to understanding the formation of the solar system and our own planet, is set to be analyzed at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston after it reaches Earth in late September. The precious cargo is currently aboard OSIRIS-REx, a US space probe launched in 2016 to Benu, which orbits the Sun at an average distance of about 105 million miles.

Long white sleeves hang from the huge metal and glass box in which the sample will be handled. Scientists will separate pieces of the rock and dust for study now, while carefully storing away the rest for future generations equipped with better technology—a practice first started during the Apollo missions to the Moon.

"We don't expect there to be anything living but (rather) the building blocks of life," Nicole Lunning, lead OSIRIS-REx sample curator, told AFP. "That's really what motivated going to this type of asteroid, to understand what the precursors were that may have fostered life in our solar system and on Earth." Once the return vessel arrives at the Texas "cleanroom," Lunning's job will be to carefully disassemble it and separate the contents, all while keeping the material pure and uncontaminated.

The spacecraft is scheduled to land in the Utah desert on September 24, carrying an estimated 8.8 ounces, or 250 grams of material—just over a cupful. Obtaining it involved a high-risk operation in October 2020: the probe came into contact with the asteroid for a few sec-

onds, and a blast of compressed nitrogen was emitted to raise the dust sample which was then captured. The whole mission was imperiled when NASA realized a few days later that the valve of the collection compartment was failing to close, letting fragments escape into space. But the precious cargo was finally secured after being transferred to a capsule fixed in the spacecraft's center.

The first samples brought to Earth by asteroids were carried out by Japanese probes in 2010 and 2020, with the latter found to contain uracil, one of the building blocks of RNA. The finding lent weight to a longstanding theory that life on Earth may have been seeded from outer space when asteroids crashed into our planet carrying fundamental elements. Cosmochemist Eve Berger can't wait to get to work on the Benu material. "These samples haven't hit the Earth. They haven't been exposed to our atmosphere. They haven't been exposed to really anything except harsh space for billions of years," she said.

Ultimately they "will help us to determine whether what we really think is true, is true," said Berger. Not only might the Benu sample add to our knowledge of the ingredients that brought life to our world, but "if we can figure out what happened here on the Earth, that helps us to extrapolate to other bodies where we might look or how we might interpret what we're seeing," she added. Could Benu bring back something that's never been seen before? "You never know," said Berger. "Benu is a trickster, so we'll know more in a few months when the sample comes back—that would be exciting!" — AFP



**HOUSTON:** The OSIRIS-REx Curation Lab, where samples will be processed, is seen during a media day hosted by NASA to preview the OSIRIS-REx Sample Lab at Johnson Space Center in Houston. — AFP

## US urged to confront racism; Biden honors lynching victim

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden designated a new national monument Tuesday to memorialize the racist 1950s lynching of Emmett Till, and challenged Americans to confront their dark history or risk repeating the past. "We should know about our country. We should know everything," Biden said at a White House ceremony attended by lawmakers and Till family members, including the last surviving witness to his abduction, prior to torture and murder.

The monument honors Till, a 14-year-old Black boy snatched by white men in 1955 after he allegedly whistled at a white shopkeeper's wife in Mississippi. It also honors his mother Mamie Till-Mobley, who turned the tragedy into a focal point for the nascent civil rights movement. Signed on the 82nd anniversary of Till's birth, Biden's proclamation preserves three historic sites in Illinois and Mississippi.

One is the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ in Chicago, where a huge crowd viewed Till's mutilated body at the funeral after Mamie Till-Mobley insisted on leaving the casket open, saying Americans should see what had been done. Another will be the Tallahatchie, Mississippi, courthouse where an all-white jury acquitted the men accused of murdering Till, although they would later admit to the crime. The spot on the Tallahatchie River where Till's battered body was eventually discovered is also part of the memorial. Signs commemorating the brutal event there and in other locations around Tallahatchie County have repeatedly been defaced and vandalized over the years.

'Quite a journey' Joining the audience in the ornate Indian Treaty Room was Wheeler Parker, a pastor now in his 80s, who was Till's best friend and cousin when, at age 16, he witnessed Till taken to his death. Parker spoke of that "night of terror" but reflected that changes in the United States had brought him all the way to standing alongside the president in the White House. It's "been quite a journey for me from the darkness to the light," he said, recalling his "fear of certain death in the darkness of a thousand midnights."

"Back then in the darkness, I could never imagine a moment like this: standing in the light of wisdom, grace, and deliverance," he said. An emotional Biden spoke quietly about the Till story, something he has long taken an interest in, including hosting a screening of the 2022 biopic movie "Till" early this year. He then connected the nearly seven-decades-old case to recent controversies over race, slavery and more contemporary issues.

Without naming names, Biden—who at 80 was born in to the same generation as the slain Mississippi teenager—took shots at a chorus of Republicans who complain that leftist ideology is teaching Americans to be ashamed of their past. One of the most prominent right-wing voices, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, is seeking to challenge Biden in the 2024 presidential election on a campaign of fighting the "virus" of leftist "woke" attitudes.

Mirroring a broader right-wing push nationwide, Florida's government has sought to weed out school textbooks seen as overly emphasizing LGBTQ issues, race and the oppression of Black people. DeSantis himself suggested last Friday that slaves benefited from job training while they were the property of white owners. "They're probably going to show that some of the folks that eventually parlayed, you know, being (an enslaved) blacksmith into doing things later in life," DeSantis said. — AFP

## Deadly fire raging aboard car carrier ship sparks fears

**THE HAGUE:** Authorities were battling Wednesday a deadly blaze raging aboard a car carrier ship off the Netherlands, sparking fears of ecological damage to a fragile nearby island chain. The cargo aboard the vessel includes electric vehicles and a coastguard official told Dutch media that authorities were looking into whether the fire had started with one of them. Rescue personnel received a call shortly after midnight saying a fire had started on the Fremantle Highway, a Panamanian-registered ship with 3,000 vehicles on board, about 14.5 nautical miles off the northern Dutch island of Ameland.

"All 23 crew members have... been evacuated off the ship" with the use of helicopters and a boat, the Dutch coastguard said on its website. "The crew tried to put out the fire themselves, but failed. Unfortunately one person died and several others were injured," it added. At least seven crew members jumped overboard and were rescued from the water, while the rest were airlifted by helicopter.

The Fremantle Highway is an 18,500-tonne car carrier ship and was sailing between Bremerhaven in Germany and Port Said in Egypt when the blaze broke out, according to the marinetraffic.com website. "The blaze is still raging on board," the coastguard said in a later update, adding that the ship was listing. The Fremantle Highway is currently close to Ameland, one of four ecologically sensitive Frisian islands, situated in the Waddensee area just north of the Dutch mainland.

Also called the Frisian Islands, the area has been



**AT SEA:** This aerial photograph shows emergency boats extinguishing a fire aboard the Panamanian-registered car carrier cargo ship Fremantle Highway, off the coast of the northern Dutch island of Ameland. — AFP

declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has a rich diversity of more than 10,000 aquatic and terrestrial species. This included more than 140 species of fish of which some 20 spent their entire life in the tidal areas along the islands' famous mud flats. The area also has a large seal and porpoise population. Should the Fremantle Highway sink, "it would be a disaster of the highest order," the daily tabloid De Telegraaf said.

Salvage vessels were on the scene trying to put out the blaze and prevent the ship from sinking, the NOS national broadcaster said. Specialized firefighters were called from Rotterdam, who would be taken to the ship by helicopter. But the fire developed so quickly that it was no longer safe to bring those firefighters on board. A tug vessel has however managed to attach a cable to the stricken ship to prevent it from drifting and blocking an important sailing route into Germany, the NOS said. "We are taking into account all scenarios," a coastguard official told the NOS. — AFP

## Constitutional court reforms approved...

Continued from Page 1

ministers, and opposed by MP Bader Al-Mulla. This means that the government is unlikely to reject the legislation. Under the new legislation, the constitutional court has the right to review Amiri decrees on dissolving the Assembly or inviting voters to vote in elections, but only before the elections and not after, which has been the case.

The court can accept petitions against such decrees within seven days of their publication and must issue its verdict within 10 days and before the election date. This means the constitutional court will have no powers to nullify parliamentary elections as it did on two occasions in 2012 and a third time in March this year, when it nullified the Sept 2022 elec-

tions and dissolved the National Assembly, which resulted in holding fresh polls in June.

MPs hailed the amendments as the first real step toward political reforms. MP Mohammad Al-Huwailah said amending the constitutional court law is a true political reform move and a step in the right direction for political stability. MP Abdulwahab Al-Essa said approving the legislation is a popular and parliamentary victory and will safeguard the judiciary from being a party to political disputes. MP Dawood Marafie said the amendments will protect the Assembly against dissolution by court.

Assembly speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said he will invite lawmakers for a special session on Thursday to debate a second key political reform law — the establishment of the higher election commission. Before passing the constitutional court legislation, MPs continued to debate the Amiri address which was delivered at the opening session of the new Assembly.

Jenin refugee camp razing swathes of the area, and killing 12 Palestinians, including militants and children. The raid on Jenin was one of the biggest operations carried out by the Zionist army in the West Bank in years.

Turkey is home to prominent Hamas officials even though the Palestinian group, which controls the Gaza strip, is considered a terror organization by much of the West. Haniya and the group's former chief Khaled Meshal visits Turkey often. Erdogan is a fervent supporter of the Palestinian cause and a fierce critic of the Zionist entity — but he altered regional strategy by initiating an outreach to the Zionist entity after several years of tensions.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was due to visit Turkey this week, but his visit was later postponed, after he had surgery last weekend and as the Zionist entity is roiled by protests over contentious judicial reform. Erdogan on Tuesday promised to continue supporting the Palestinian cause and voiced concerns over the flare up of violence in the West Bank, after meeting with Abbas separately. — AFP

The report warned strongly against substituting technology for the acquisition of traditional key skills which could actually help children avoid some of the pitfalls of the digital world. Students with strong reading skills, for example, were much less likely to be deceived by phishing mail, Antoninis said. "If you are taught to read well, read for meaning, that makes you also better prepared to navigate the digital world and that's a reality that we often forget," Antoninis said. — AFP

## Crown jewel carries weight of UK's colonial past

**LONDON:** The star of Britain's crown jewels, the Koh-i-Noor diamond, is back on view after a notable absence from Charles III's coronation that highlighted the nation's awkward ties with its colonial past. The massive stone has appeared at formal occasions for over 150 years, but Charles' wife Camilla opted not to wear it for May's coronation amid debate in the UK over imperial artefacts and calls in India for the diamond's return.

Months after the coronation, with the crown jewels returned to public display in the Tower of London, the question remains: Where does the priceless gem rightfully belong? Legend has it that the 186-carat diamond, which was cut down to 106 carats by Queen Victoria, has denoted supreme authority since at least the time of the Delhi Sultanate's invasion of the kingdoms of southern India in the 14th century.

## 'Attempted coup' in troubled Niger...

Continued from Page 1

"The army and national guard are ready to attack the elements of the PG who are involved in this fit of temper if they do not return to a better disposition," the presidency said. "The president and his family are well," it added.

The reason for the guards' anger was not disclosed. Access was blocked off to the presidential complex in Niamey, although there was no abnormal military deployment or sounds of gunfire in the area, and traffic was normal, an AFP journalist saw. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and AU issued separate statements condemning an "attempted coup d'Etat".

ECOWAS called for Bazoum's immediate and unconditional release, and warned that all those involved would be held responsible for his safety. The source close to Bazoum, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the attempt to seize power was "doomed to fail". The EU said it "associates itself" with the ECOWAS statement, with foreign policy chief Josep Borrell posting online: "The EU condemns any attempt to destabilize democracy and threaten the stability of Niger".

The British state-chartered East India Company formally annexed the Kingdom of Punjab in 1849 after winning the Second Anglo-Sikh War, gaining the diamond as part of the resulting peace treaty and giving it to Queen Victoria. Yet, New Delhi has repeatedly sought its return and foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said last year: "We have been raising this matter from time to time with the UK government and we will continue to explore ways and means for obtaining a satisfactory resolution of the matter."

One man with a long connection to the diamond is Eddie LeVian, CEO of the US-based Le Vian fine jewelers — which counts Rihanna and Jennifer Lopez as clients — whose family looked after the diamond while it was in the hands of the Persian shah in the 18th century. "I don't know what the legal argument would be to say that it should be returned to India, considering that it was gifted to Queen Victoria by the East India Company and was not taken from India by the British," LeVian told AFP at the Tower of London, which his company had taken over for an event.

"This diamond wasn't discovered by the Indian government," he added, saying that India didn't exist as a sovereign entity at the time of its discovery. "I don't know if the claim went to an international court that the evidence would mean that the government of India has a right to the Koh-i-Noor diamond. — AFP

The landlocked Sahel state has experienced four coups since independence from France in 1960 as well as numerous other attempts on power, including against Bazoum himself. The country's last coup occurred in February 2010, overthrowing then president Mamadou Tandja. There was an attempted coup just days before Bazoum's inauguration in April 2021, according to a security source at the time.

Several people were arrested, including the suspected ringleader, an air force captain named Sani Gourouza. He was arrested in neighboring Benin and handed over to the Niger authorities. Ousmane Cisse, a former interior minister under a military government of transition that ran from 2010-2011, was detained in April 2022 for his suspected role. He was acquitted in February this year, but five others, including Gourouza, were jailed for 20 years.

A second bid to oust Bazoum occurred in March this year "while the president... was in Turkey", according to a Niger official, who said an arrest was made. The authorities have never commented publicly on the incident. In January 2018, nine soldiers and a civilian were sentenced by a military court to jail terms ranging from five to 15 years for having attempted to topple Bazoum's predecessor, Mahamadou Issoufou, in 2015. Those convicted included General Souleymane Salou, a former army chief of staff and a member of the junta that had forced out Tandja in 2010. — AFP

## Erdogan meets Palestinian prez...

Continued from Page 1

The meeting will "discuss how to confront aggression against the Palestinian people, especially from the extremist (Zionist) government, and to strengthen Palestinian unity," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Sources close to the Fatah party and Hamas said that the Ankara meeting organized by Erdogan focused on Palestinian unity and how to end divisions.

The meeting is "very important especially in light of the continuation of the (Zionist) aggression in Jerusalem and the West Bank and the continuation of settlement activity," the sources said. The Zionist has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Earlier this month, Zionist forces conducted a two-day raid on the

## UN warns against 'excessive' tech...

Continued from Page 1

surprising finding" for the UNESCO researchers. "People are thinking a little bit more through what the consequences and the distractions in schools are," he said.

## International

# Hardline Cambodian PM to step down after 4 decades

## Hun Sen to hand power to his eldest son

**PHNOM PENH:** Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-serving leaders, said Wednesday he will resign and hand power to his eldest son after almost four decades of hardline rule. The former Khmer Rouge cadre has run the kingdom since 1985, eliminating all opposition to his power, with rival parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled. His Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won a landslide victory in an election on Sunday with no meaningful opposition, taking 82 percent of the vote, paving the way for a dynastic succession to his eldest son that some critics have compared to North Korea.

"I would like to ask for understanding from the people as I announce that I will not continue as prime minister," the 70-year-old said in a special broadcast on state television. Election authorities disqualified the only serious challenger, the Candlelight Party, on a technicality in advance of the election, and the CPP is expected to win all but five lower house seats. The government hailed the 84.6 percent voter turnout as evidence of the country's "democratic maturity" but Western powers, including the United States and the European Union, condemned the poll as neither free nor fair.

The UN's human rights chief Volker Turk added his own criticism on Wednesday, saying opposition parties and media had faced "restrictions and reprisals" aimed at hindering free elections. Hun Sen said Hun Manet, a 45-year-old four-star general, would take over as prime minister at the head of a new government on the evening of August 22. "I ask people to support Hun Manet who will be the new prime minister," he said, adding that he was stepping down now to ensure a smooth handover of power.



**PHNOM PENH:** Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen (left) poses with his son Hun Manet during a ceremony at a military base in this file photo. — AFP

### 'Control security'

Hun Sen has trailed the handover to his son for a year and a half, and the 45-year-old played a leading role in campaigning for Sunday's vote. But the outgoing leader has made it clear that he still intends to wield influence, even after he steps down, scotching the notion the country could change direction. While insisting he would not interfere with his son's rule, Hun Sen said he would help him to "control security, order and take part in the further development of the country".

After stepping down as PM, he will become president of the senate and act as head of state when the king is overseas, he said. Sebastian Strangio, author of "Hun Sen's Cambodia", told AFP the father "will undoubtedly exercise a huge influence over the direction of his son's administration". "Lacking his father's power and authority, Manet will have limited freedom of manoeuvre, and his actions as leader will most likely be

dictated by the requirements of the political system, rather than the other way around," he said. The need to placate wealthy and powerful CPP members will also tie his hands, the analyst added.

### Chinese influence

Under Hun Sen, Cambodia has tacked close to Beijing, benefiting from huge Chinese investment and infrastructure projects, including the redevelopment of a naval base that has alarmed Washington. China welcomed Sunday's election, with President Xi Jinping sending Hun Sen a personal message of congratulations.

But the flood of Chinese money has brought problems, including a rash of casinos and online scam operations staffed by foreign workers, many trafficked and toiling in appalling conditions. Critics say his rule has also been marked by environmental destruction and entrenched graft. Cambodia ranks 150th out of 180 in Transparency International's corruption perception index. In Asia, only Myanmar and North Korea rank lower. Rights groups accuse Hun Sen of using the legal system to crush any opposition to his rule - including critical activists and troublesome union leaders as well as politicians.

Scores of opposition politicians have been convicted and jailed during his time in power and the law was changed ahead of Sunday's election to make it illegal to call for voters to spoil ballots. Five days before polling day, authorities banned exiled opposition figurehead Sam Rainsy from running for office for 25 years for urging people to void their ballot papers. Opposition leader Kem Sokha was convicted of treason in March and sentenced to 27 years in prison over an alleged plot to topple Hun Sen's government. He is currently serving his sentence under house arrest. — AFP

## Japan sees record drop in population

**TOKYO:** Japan's population fell by a record in 2022, government data showed Wednesday, as the country struggles to reverse its perennial low birthrates. While many developed countries face low birthrates, the problem is particularly acute in Japan where the population has now fallen for 14 straight years. The country has the world's second oldest population, after tiny Monaco, and in January, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned Japan was "on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society".

Last year, the number of Japanese fell by 800,523, or 0.65 percent, to 122,423,038 from a year earlier, a survey by the internal affairs ministry shows. For the first time, the population fell in all 47 prefectures. The overall drop was the steepest decline recorded since 1968, when the government survey began, the ministry said. In contrast, Japan's foreign population increased by a record 289,498, or 10.7 percent, to 2,993,839 - the highest since 2013, when comparative figures were available.

Japan has relatively strict immigration rules but the government has been gradually loosening them to address labor shortage issues. The sharp increase also coincided with the government's relaxation of its Covid-19 pandemic border controls. "Decline in the number of children and population is an import-



**TOKYO:** Elderly people rest on a bench in Tokyo. — AFP

ant issue that involves Japan's social, economic, and social welfare issues," top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters on Wednesday.

The government will work towards "prompting women and elderly people to enter the work-force" through reforms of work styles and labor markets, he said. The country of 125 million recorded fewer than 800,000 births last year, the lowest since records began, while the cost of elderly care soared. Last month, Kishida unveiled a \$25 billion plan to expand support for young people and families in a bid to help raise the country's plummeting birthrate. — AFP



**TAOYUAN:** Four US made Black Hawk helicopters fly during the military Han Guang drill at the Taoyuan International Airport on July 26, 2023. — AFP

## Taiwan stage first-ever military drill at airport

**TAOYUAN:** Taiwan staged its first-ever military drill at Taoyuan International Airport on Wednesday, briefly halting commercial traffic as soldiers practiced defending the facility against a simulated attack by Beijing. The exercise is part of Taiwan's week-long massive wargames — the annual "Han Kuang" (Han Glory) drills — which this year has included protecting civilian airports as Beijing ramps up military and political pressures on the island.

This is the first such drill held at Taiwan's biggest airport near the capital since it opened in 1979. Analysts said Taiwan is drawing experiences from Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which last year fended off a seizure by Russian paratroopers at an airport just outside Kyiv. "Seeing the experience of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Battle of Antonov Airport is a successful counter-offensive of the Ukrainian forces in the defence of Kyiv," said Su Tzu-yun, a military expert at Taiwan's Institute for National Defence and Security Research.

He added that Taoyuan airport's proximity to a "red beach" — using a term for a potential land-

ing point for amphibious assaults — makes it especially important to protect it. "If it were to be seized by China, Chinese paratroopers would join the attack against our troops guarding the beach," Su told AFP. Alexander Huang, a military expert at Taipei's Tamkang University, said the seizure of "an adversary's airport is key to sending in large numbers of assault forces via air transport in an invasion operation".

He added there was an extra incentive for the Taoyuan drill, besides familiarizing Taiwan's troops with emergency scenarios. "This drill can also signal to potential enemies that we are getting ourselves prepared for such contingency," Huang told AFP. As air traffic was halted for about 30 minutes, dozens of soldiers fought off "enemies" landing on the airport's tarmac from attack helicopters.

Airport police and firefighters also joined the operation, which the government said is aimed at combining civilian and military forces to protect critical infrastructure. At the end of it, a soldier climbed a ramp and waved Taiwan's national flag, signaling victory, as "bodies" were littered nearby. China, which regards Taiwan as its territory, has upped the pressure in recent years, with near-daily warplane incursions and Chinese vessels deployed around the island's waters. The Chinese military has also held two massive drills in waters around Taiwan in the past year, simulating targeted strikes and a blockade of the island. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Moldova expels Russia diplomats

**CHISINAU:** Moldova has ordered 45 Russian diplomats and embassy staff to leave the country "over numerous unfriendly actions," officials said Wednesday, as tensions between the two countries are running high. Moldova's pro-EU government has firmly condemned Russia's invasion of neighboring Ukraine and alleged a Russian plot to overthrow the current government. An investigation by Moldovan media outlets Jurnal TV and The Insider published this week alleged that there are 28 antennas on Russia's embassy in Chisinau and an adjacent building that could be used for spying. "Forty-five diplomats and technical staff will have to leave before August 15th," Foreign Ministry spokesman Igor Zaharov told AFP. — AFP

#### Body parts in floating fridge

**BRUSSELS:** The discovery of body parts in a fridge found floating in a canal has triggered a murder investigation in Belgium, prosecutors said Wednesday. "The most important thing now is to identify the victim to make possible links to missing persons cases," a spokeswoman for the prosecutors' office in the city of Liege, Catherine Collignon, told AFP. A local of the eastern city raised the alarm after spotting the refrigerator bobbing in the canal in a northern suburb, Hermalle-sous-Argenteau, according to local media. Police dragged it ashore and opened it to find its grisly contents — "two arms and two legs", according to Collignon. — AFP

#### Bus crash kills 22 in Senegal

**DAKAR:** Twenty-two people died and 52 were injured Wednesday when a bus crashed in northern Senegal, the fire brigade told AFP. The accident happened in the village of Ngeune Sarre in Louga region, a national fire brigade official said, while a rescue worker at the site said the final death toll could rise. They did not specify the cause or time of the accident. In January, 19 people were killed and 24 injured in a collision in the same area, near Louga. The previous week, around 40 people died in a bus crash in the centre of Senegal. That tragedy, on January 8, prompted a wave of criticism against authorities over the frequency of accidents on Senegal's roads, and the lack of action taken to prevent them. — AFP

#### Ghana to outlaw death penalty

**ACCRA:** Ghana's parliament has voted to outlaw the death penalty for almost all crimes, becoming the latest African country to repeal capital punishment, lawmakers said on Wednesday. The West African country last carried out an execution in 1993, with death sentences handed out for murder and treason. Lawmakers voted late Tuesday to remove the death penalty from the country's statute books. "The death sentence is too final and as a country that respects human rights, we can't continue to have it as part of our laws," Francis-Xavier Sosu, an opposition MP who proposed the reform, told AFP. "It's a proud moment and I am looking forward to the presidential assent." The prison service said 172 prisoners are currently on death row and will have their terms converted to life imprisonment. — AFP

#### Singapore hangs drug convict

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore on Wednesday hanged a local man convicted of drug trafficking, officials said, two days before the scheduled execution of the first woman prisoner in the city-state in nearly 20 years. Mohd Aziz bin Hussain, convicted and sentenced to death in 2017 for trafficking "not less than 49.98 grams" (1.76 ounces) of heroin, was executed at Changi Prison, the Central Narcotics Bureau said in a statement. The 57-year-old was the 14th convict sent to the gallows since the government resumed executions in March 2022 after a two-year pause during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hussain's previous appeals against his conviction and sentence had been dismissed, and a petition for presidential clemency was also denied. A woman drug convict, 45-year-old Saridewi Djamani, is scheduled to be hanged on Friday, according to the local rights group Transformative Justice Collective (TJC). — AFP

#### Former Thai PM to return

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's billionaire former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra will return to the kingdom on August 10 after 15 years in self-exile, his daughter said Wednesday. The 74-year-old tycoon, twice elected premier but ousted by a military coup in 2006, has long spoken of his wish to come home, but faces multiple criminal charges, which he says are politically motivated. Thaksin is a bogeyman for Thailand's pro-military and royalist establishment and his return could inflame an already tense political situation. The kingdom is in political deadlock after the military-dominated Senate blocked the head of the Move Forward Party (MFP) from becoming prime minister after the reformist party won May's elections. "I can't believe what I am about to write. Dad is coming back on Aug 10 at Don Meung airport," his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra wrote on her official Facebook page on Wednesday — Thaksin's birthday. — AFP



**MECHMECH:** William Noun and his fiancée Maria Fares stand outside a church built in memory of his late firefighter brother Joe in the village of Mechmech. — AFP

## United by Beirut blast grief, couple vow to fight for justice

**MECHMECH:** William Noun and Maria Fares were united by loss after a devastating blast ripped through Lebanon's capital three years ago. Now engaged, the couple pledge to keep fighting for justice. As they prepare to take their wedding vows, Noun and Fares, both 28, sit at his family's house in the hills northeast of Beirut, surrounded by photographs of Noun's brother who perished in the tragedy. "Ours won't be a normal wedding," said Noun, who is set to marry Fares in September.

"Many people lose their siblings... but the difference is that we don't even know why we lost them, and that they died together," he said. Joe Noun and Fares' sister Sahar were among 10 firefighters sent to their deaths when a blaze broke out at a warehouse at Beirut's port on August 4, 2020.

What followed was one of the world's biggest non-nuclear explosions, which killed more than 220 people, injured at least 6,500 and wreaked destruction on swathes of the capital. Families of those killed have been fighting for justice ever since, with Noun one of the key figures in the campaign. But three years on, political pressure and legal hurdles have stalled and buried the investigation into the cause of the explosion. Fighting back tears, Fares said she was "unable to think about how the wedding day will go". "It's very hard, knowing that your sister won't be next to you."

### 'Our promise'

Authorities said a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertilizer kept haphazardly in a port warehouse for years caught fire and detonated. Despite the scale of the destruction, no one has yet been held accountable, and the cause of the fire has not been officially determined. Noun and Fares first met in 2020 during a therapy session for the siblings of firefighters killed in the blast. Overwhelmed with grief at the time, they only got to know each other later.

Noun said he wished they had met under different circumstances, but had found in Fares someone who shared "the same pain". Their engagement "shows our faith: despite everything that happened, we still have the will to live, and we can still go on", said Noun, who runs a family restaurant in their town. Fares described her sister - a paramedic with the firefighters - as someone who loved life. "We've been thinking of ways to make their presence felt with us on the wedding day, maybe with a flower or a picture," she said.

The couple are committed not only to each other, but also to fighting for justice following the explosion. "We insist on reaching the truth," said Noun, who has an image of his brother in a firefighter's helmet tattooed on his forearm. "This is our promise and it will grow after we marry." But he also acknowledged the pair would have to "try to separate our private lives from the investigation". Otherwise "we will spend our whole lives crying". — AFP

## Business

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2023

# As West fears economic collapse in Tunisia, hopes of IMF bailout fade

## Bailout hinges on painful economic reforms

**TUNIS:** Western nations fear an economic collapse in Tunisia could trigger even greater migrant flows to Europe and have offered financial assistance. Yet prospects of Tunisia's sealing the biggest deal of all—a \$1.9-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund—seem increasingly remote.

The inflation-ravaged and heavily indebted country reached a tentative deal for the loan from the Washington-based IMF in October. It would require Tunisia to undertake what the IMF calls a "comprehensive economic reform program" that would phase out subsidies on fuel and electricity. But President Kais Saied has repeatedly rejected "foreign diktats that will lead to more poverty".

In March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Tunisia urgently needs to reach an IMF deal because its economy "risks falling off the deep end". That followed European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's concern that a collapse "economically or socially" in Tunisia would trigger a new flow of migrants to Europe—an assessment rejected by Tunisia. Italy says migrant arrivals by sea have surged this year, most of them from Tunisia and Libya. "Tunisia is a nation that is in extreme distress and clearly leaving it to its fate can have consequences that are very serious," Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni told reporters in Rome on Sunday at a conference with Saied and other Mediterranean leaders.

Beyond the economic situation, the European Union and Washington have been troubled by Saied's increasing authoritarianism. He has seized far-reaching powers since sacking the government in July 2021. He later dissolved parliament and pushed through a constitution to replace one approved in 2014 following the country's Arab Spring revolution.

### Almost 'buried'

Struggling with joblessness and inflation exacerbated by the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many Tunisians have joined sub-Saharan Africans in

an exodus from Tunisia, which lies just 130 kilometers (80 miles) from the Italian island of Lampedusa. The European Union in June said it could offer a long-term loan of around 900 million euros (\$1 billion) to the country "following (the) IMF-supported reform program". But Aram Belhadj, a lecturer and researcher at Tunisia's University of Carthage, said the IMF agreement "is blocked" because Saied "rejects the reforms proposed", particularly on fuel subsidies as that would lead to higher costs for public transport and deliveries.

Tunisian consumer prices are already projected to rise 10.9 percent this year, according to the IMF. "If by the end of August there is no clarification on the position of Tunisia, the IMF agreement will be buried once and for all," Belhadj said. According to economist Ezzedine Saidane, the president saw "things which would penalise him politically" in the required reforms. Under the IMF deal Tunisia would also have to restructure 100 state-owned firms that hold monopolies over many parts of the economy and are often heavily indebted. "It's Tunisia which blocked" the agreement, Saidane said, and now, "negotiations are completely stalled."

### 'Increasingly difficult'

IMF regional director Jihad Azour indicated in mid-April that he had not received "any request from Tunisia for the revision of its program". Since then, Saied has reiterated his defense of subsidies and continued his attacks on the international financial system. At the Rome conference, Saied again called for "a new global financial institution", to establish "a new human order where hope replaces despair".

He has floated the idea of "taking surplus money from the rich to give to the poor", but it would not be easy. The budget deficit of eight percent in 2022 came entirely as a result of state subsidies, mostly for energy, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed up global prices. The state's fuel subsidies bill soared 370 percent on-year in the first half of



**TUNIS:** A shopper walks past empty shelves in a supermarket alley amidst a shortage of coffee, milk, pasta, and sugar in Tunisia's capital Tunis. — AFP

2022, official figures show.

"There is nothing much that can replace the gradual increase in pump prices foreseen by the IMF program," a source close to the negotiations said. Saidane advised against a tax hike since the country is already under "the most elevated fiscal pressure in Africa". Debt is around 80 percent of gross domestic product.

Belhadj said that without an IMF deal "the situation is going to become increasingly difficult" with a "very large" risk of debt default in 2024 and 2025. In Saidane's view, the Tunisian state "seems to have made the choice to favor debt repayment. But at the

expense of providing basic goods".

In the past few months sporadic shortages of flour, rice, sugar and fuel have led to empty shelves or long queues. Russia's exit last week from a deal allowing Black Sea grain exports has renewed fears of shortages or price hikes that could hit vulnerable countries. In Tunisia, where flour is among basic food ingredients subsidized by the state, this could only add to budgetary pressure. The government has turned increasingly to local banks for financing, contributing to a downgrade in the ratings on four of the country's financial institutions earlier this year by global agency Moody's. — AFP

## Tech giants form AI group focused on ensuring safety

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Four US leaders in artificial intelligence (AI) announced Wednesday the formation of an industry group devoted to addressing risks that cutting edge versions of the technology may pose.

Anthropic, Google, Microsoft, and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI said the newly created Frontier Model Forum will draw on the expertise of its members to minimize AI risks and support industry standards.

The companies pledged to share best practices with each other, lawmakers and researchers. "Frontier" models refer to nascent, large-scale machine-learning platforms that take AI to new levels of sophistication—and also have capabilities that could be dangerous. "Companies creating AI technology have a responsibility to ensure that it is safe, secure, and remains under human control," Microsoft president Brad Smith said in a statement.

"This initiative is a vital step to bring the tech sector together in advancing AI responsibly and tackling the challenges so that it benefits all of humanity," US President Joe Biden evoked AI's "enormous" risks and promises at a White House meeting last week with tech leaders who committed to guarding against everything from cyberattacks to fraud as the sector grows.

Standing alongside top representatives from Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Inflection, Meta, Microsoft and OpenAI, Biden said the companies had made commitments to "guide responsible innovation" as AI spreads ever deeper into personal and business life. Ahead of the meeting, the seven AI giants committed to a series of self-regulated safeguards that the White House said would "underscore three principles that must be fundamental



to the future of AI: safety, security and trust."

In their pledge, the companies agreed to develop "robust technical mechanisms," such as watermarking systems, to ensure users know when content is from AI and not humans.

Core objectives of the Frontier Model Forum include minimizing risks and enabling independent safety evaluations of AI platforms, the companies involved said in a release. The Forum will also support the development of applications intended to take on challenges such as climate change, cancer

prevention and cyber threats, according to its creators. Others pursuing AI breakthroughs were invited to join the group. "Advanced AI technologies have the potential to profoundly benefit society, and the ability to achieve this potential requires oversight and governance," said OpenAI vice president of global affairs Anna Makanju.

"It is vital that AI companies—especially those working on the most powerful models—align on common ground and advance thoughtful and adaptable safety practices." —AFP

## US new home sales cooled slightly in June

**WASHINGTON:** Sales of new homes in the United States cooled in June, according to government data released Wednesday, but the market remains squeezed by a lack of existing properties. Sales of new single-family houses ticked down to an annual rate of 697,000, seasonally adjusted, the Commerce Department said in a statement. This was in line with analyst expectations, but the figure was still elevated compared to earlier months. The latest number was slightly below May's revised rate of 715,000.

From the same period a year ago, new home sales were 23.8 percent higher, and the median price edged down to \$415,400. The market for new homes is much smaller than that of existing homes, which makes up the vast majority in the country.

But a lack of inventory for existing homes has created additional demand for new properties in recent months, despite elevated mortgage rates.

While new home sales fell in June, the sales rate in the second quarter was significantly higher than the average in the first three months of the year, said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. Analysts have cautioned, however, that the margins of error in new home sales data can be large. "New home sales have risen 40 percent from their low last summer and prices are falling sharply, as homebuilders are offering steep discounts and temporary mortgage buydowns to keep sales ticking over," said economists at Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent report.

"This is in stark contrast to the existing home market, where sales are still bouncing around the cycle low and prices are trending sideways," the analysts said. —AFP

## Automakers form North America EV charging network

**BERLIN:** Seven major global automakers said on Wednesday they were creating a joint venture for an extensive North American charging network in a bid to boost demand for electric vehicles. BMW, General Motors, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mercedes-Benz and Stellantis said in a statement their alliance would make "EV charging more convenient, accessible and reliable".

The network is set to install at least 30,000 high-powered chargers, the companies said, using federal and state subsidies along with private funds. "The new charging stations will be accessi-

ble to all battery-powered electric vehicles from any automaker," they said.

The stations will offer connectors for both the so-called Tesla system, known as the North American Charging Standard (NACS), as well as the rival standard, known as the combined charging system (CCS).

The joint venture, due to be established this year, "aims to become the leading network of reliable high-powered charging stations in North America". The first stations, powered solely by renewable energy, are scheduled to open in the United States next summer and in Canada "at a later stage".

They will be built in cities and along major highways, as well as on key commuter and vacation routes. With US electric vehicle sales expected to exceed 50 percent of total US sales by 2030, "the expansion of reliable charging infrastructure will become even more critical to widespread electric vehicle adoption," the companies said. Elon Musk's Tesla

has already been forming charging partnerships with major car companies including Ford, General Motors and EV truck company Rivian.

Under the partnerships, Musk has agreed to let consumers with autos from rival brands utilize its popular national network. The ascendance of Tesla's network has reflected the system's reputation for reliability, as well as the sluggish expansion of rival EV charging options amid supply chain problems and a slow rollout of a giant federal program. A January 2023 forecast by S&P Global concluded that the US charging system was "not nearly robust enough to support a maturing electric vehicle market," saying that the number of EV chargers in the country would need to quadruple between 2022 and 2025. The US National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program, established in the 2021 infrastructure bill signed into law by President Joe Biden, provides \$5 billion in funds for states to build EV charging networks. — AFP



**BMW, General Motors, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mercedes-Benz and Stellantis said their alliance would make "EV charging more convenient, accessible and reliable".**



Business

# Ooredoo Kuwait Group net profit soars 209% to reach KD 64 million for H1 2023

## Earnings per share reached 128 fils

KUWAIT: National Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C.P "Ooredoo" (Ticker: OOREDOO) announced on Wednesday its financial results for the half year ended 30 June 2023:

- Consolidated revenue increased by 4 percent to KD 318 million in H1 2023, compared to KD 306 million in H1 2022. Revenues benefited from efficient operations in Kuwait and a year-on-year improvement in Maldives and Algeria.

- Consolidated customer base increased by 2 percent to 24.6 million in H1 2023 compared to 24.1 million in H1 2022.

- EBITDA increased by 3 percent in H1 2023 to reach KD 116 million compared to KD 112 million in H1 2022.

- Net profit attributable to NMTC increased to KD 64 million in H1 2023 from KD 21 million in H1 2022. Net profit growth came mainly from Ooredoo Kuwait after winning a final court ruling related to recovery of excess regulatory tariff paid amounted to KD 43.8 million in a case against Kuwait's Ministry of Communication "MOC" and Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority "CITRA".

- The consolidated Earnings per share was 128 fils for H1 2023, compared to 42 fils earned in H1 2022.

Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al-Thani, Chairman of the board of directors commented: "I am pleased to report that NMTC continued on its growth trajectory achieving consolidated revenues of KD 318 million compared to KD 306 million in H1 2022, a solid 4 percent growth. This performance was driven by steady expansion in our operations in Kuwait as well as a year-on-year improvement in Maldives and Algeria. Our consolidated customer base grew by 2 percent to 25 million in H1 2023, which reflects our ongoing commitment to delivering high-quality services to our valued customers.

Net profit attributable to NMTC grew from KD 21 million in H1 2022 to KD 64 million in H1 2023. This improvement was mainly due to a final court ruling in favor of Ooredoo Kuwait against the Kuwaiti Regulator. This resulted in the recovery of excess regulatory tariffs previously paid.

Furthermore, our earnings per share for H1 2023 increased significantly to 128 fils, up from 42 fils in H1 2022. The increase is attributable to the aforementioned final court ruling. As we continue our efforts to solidify our position as the leading telecommunications provider, we are witnessing notable growth in our customer base. In Kuwait, our customer base increased 7 percent to 2.8 million in H1 2023, while revenue increased 5 percent to KD 123 million in the same period.

Meanwhile, Ooredoo Algeria reported robust expansion, with revenue experiencing a solid 9 percent growth and an accompanying increase in its customer base. Palestine and Maldives also recorded increases in their customer bases. Ooredoo Maldives reported a 6 percent increase to its customer base and a solid 7 percent growth in revenue in H1 2023. In H1 2023, Ooredoo Palestine saw a 2 percent increase in its customer base.

"We remain committed to maximizing stakeholder value as we work towards enhancing operational efficiencies to foster growth across the company while providing exceptional services to our customers."

### Review of operations

The Group's operational performance can be summarized as follows:

## OBG report to map out Kuwait banking sector's pivotal role

KUWAIT: The global research and advisory company Oxford Business Group (OBG), in a forthcoming report, will explore the key role earmarked for Kuwait's banks in driving forward the country's economic development plan. The Report: Kuwait 2023 will shine a spotlight on efforts underway to transform the country into a knowledge-led, digitalized economy, in line with the targets laid out in Vision 2035, the national roadmap for diversification.

Kuwait's plans to carve a niche as an international financial center will be a focal point, with in-depth analysis provided of topical sectoral-related issues, including the need to make cyber security a priority and growth opportunities in the Islamic banking and fintech segments. OBG has signed a first-time memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) to support its research. Under the

## Microsoft, Google beat earnings expectations

SAN FRANCISCO: Tech titans Google and Microsoft announced better-than-expected earnings on Tuesday as the frenzy over artificial intelligence stokes investor excitement and breathes a new life into the sector.

The release of ChatGPT last year landed as technology giants were embarking on major layoffs and cost-cutting plans, with share prices hammered after flying high during the coronavirus pandemic.

For the second consecutive quarter, Microsoft has more than reversed the trend, seeing profits and sales soaring to the highest levels ever for the 48-year-old company co-founded by Bill Gates. An earnings statement reported that net profit for Microsoft was \$20.1 billion in the April to June period, up 20 percent year-on-year and above expectations.

The company posted \$56.2 billion in sales, which also beat expectations, though the growth slowed from the previous quarter. And even though its share price slipped in after-hours trading, the Win-



Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al-Thani

Abdulaziz Al-Babtain

### Ooredoo - Kuwait

Ooredoo's customer base in Kuwait increased to 2.8 million in H1 2023, up by 7 percent compared to H1 2022. Ooredoo Kuwait reported a 5 percent increase in revenue to KD 122.9 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 117.0 million in H1 2022. EBITDA increased by 8 percent to KD 38.0 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 35.1 million in H1 2022, driven by operational efficiencies across the business.

Commenting on these major milestones during H1 2023, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Ooredoo Kuwait CEO, stated that the robust results achieved in Ooredoo Kuwait have contributed to enhancing the group's financial and operational performance. We are pleased to announce our solid financial performance for the first half of 2023, the company has achieved remarkable growth and demonstrated unwavering resilience in an ever-changing market.

### Financial Highlights:

	Quarterly Analysis			Half Year Analysis		
	Q2 2023	Q2 2022	% change	H1 2023	H2 2022	% change
Consolidated Revenue (KWD m)	162.9	153.2	6%	318.2	306.1	4%
EBITDA (KWD m)	60.5	56.4	7%	115.9	112.2	3%
EBITDA margin (%)	37%	37%	-	36%	37%	-
Net Profit attributable to NMTC (KWD m)	11.3	12.4	-8%	64.4	20.8	209%
Consolidated Customers (m)	24.6	24.1	2%	24.6	24.1	2%

During the first two quarters of 2023, we have witnessed robust revenue growth, exceeding previous benchmarks. This achievement is a testament to the dedication of Ooredoo toward its customer base, we gladly continue to drive innovation and excellence in every aspect of our operations.

Furthermore, our commitment to innovation remains at the forefront of our company's vision. We have continued to invest in research and development, resulting in the introduction of several ground-breaking products and services that have resonated positively with our customers that catered for the consumer and Enterprises Sector.

Throughout the first half of 2023, Ooredoo Kuwait remained dedicated to its digital transformation strategy, which led to the successful implementation of user-friendly digital platforms, streamlining the customer journey. Our efforts were duly recognized, as we received two prestigious awards for the best Mobile App and Website. Specifically, Ooredoo Kuwait was honored with the Stevie Bronze Award for

agreement, the KBA will contribute to the Banking Chapter of The Report: Kuwait 2023 and other content for the Group's suite of research tools, looking in detail at key industry developments, such as digitization, cyber security, sustainability in funding and the sector's broader performance over the last year.

The MoU was signed by Dr Hamad Al-Hasawi, General Secretary, Kuwait Banking Association, and Dana Carmen Agarbicean, OBG's Country Director in Kuwait. The national drive taking shape to increase the private sector's contribution to growth will also be examined, together with the part that lenders are expected to play in providing sustainable financing. Other subjects set for coverage include the steps being taken to enhance Kuwait's business environment with the aim of attracting new investment.

Commenting after the signing, Al-Hasawi said the digitization of Kuwait's banking sector, which includes the launch of several online-only banks, and the challenges and opportunities that technological advancements present, would be a key area of research, together with other developments in the banking systems and the positive outlook for the broader regional industry, whose banks are marked by solid balance sheets.

dows-maker remains the world's second most valuable company after Apple, with a market capitalization of \$2.6 trillion. Once again, business in the latest quarter was driven by the cloud, which relies heavily on artificial intelligence and accounts for more than half of the company's sales.

Cloud sales grew by 21 percent year-on-year. Microsoft shares lifted off last week when the company said it would charge \$30 extra per user to turbocharge its Microsoft 365 product — which includes Word, Excel and Teams — with AI powers. "Every customer I speak with is asking not only how, but how fast they can apply next generation AI to address the biggest opportunities and challenges they face and to do so safely and responsibly," said Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella.

Google parent Alphabet on Tuesday also reported profits that beat market forecasts as digital advertising revenue revived and its cloud business grew. The search engine giant reported net income of \$18.7 billion on revenue of \$74.6 billion in the recently ended quarter.

"There's exciting momentum across our products and the company, which drove strong results this quarter," Alphabet chief executive Sundar Pichai said in an earnings release. Alphabet shares jumped more than six percent to \$129.57 in after-market trades following the results. — AFP

the Ooredoo App and the Asian Telecom Award for our exceptional Mobile App & Website. The Ooredoo App showcased cutting-edge FINTECH capabilities and advanced security measures, making us the first to introduce smart and Google Pay technologies, thus embracing the latest advancements in the industry.

Our continuous innovation was not only on a customer level but it covers also the Enterprises & Business Sector to digitize and automate all the business needs of the enterprises in Kuwait today through the latest ICT Solutions.

As for our commitment to social responsibility, our program focused on activating sustainable development partnerships with the public and private sectors and strengthening relations with communities in Kuwait, in addition to raising awareness of the concept of social responsibility through partnership with non-profit associations to support humanitarian and community issues with the Al-Rahma International Association. We are proud of the increasing growth and diversity within the framework of Ooredoo's social responsibility, which addresses fundamental issues across our main pillars: education, health, sports, environment, entrepreneurship and youth empowerment, especially our partnership with the Students' Union in Kuwait - UK branch and the internship programs for graduates.

### Ooredoo - Tunisia

Ooredoo's customer base in Tunisia stood at 6.9 million customers in H1 2023. Revenues decreased to KD 59.5 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 62.0 million in H1 2022. EBITDA decreased to KD 20.8 million

to reach KD 39.0 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 33.2 million in H1 2022.

### Ooredoo - Algeria

Ooredoo Algeria's customer base stood at 13.0 million in H1 2023. Revenue increased by 9 percent to KD 98.5 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 90.7 million in H1 2022. EBITDA increased by 18 percent



to reach KD 39.0 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 33.2 million in H1 2022.

### Ooredoo - Palestine

Customer base in Palestine increased by 2 percent to 1.4 million customers in H1 2023. Revenue decreased to KD 17.1 million in H1 2023, compared to KD 17.5 million in H1 2022. EBITDA increased by 6 percent to KD 6.9 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 6.5 million in H1 2022.

### Ooredoo - Maldives

Customer base in Maldives increased by 6 percent to reach 398,000 customers in H1 2023. Ooredoo Maldives reported a 7 percent increase in revenues to KD 20.2 million in H1 2023, compared to KD 18.8 million in H1 2022. EBITDA expanded by 8 percent to reach KD 11.2 million in H1 2023 compared to KD 10.3 million in H1 2022.

NATIONAL MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY K.S.C.P

# FINANCIAL RESULTS

H1 2023

NET PROFIT TO NMTC

+209%

KWD 64 Million

REVENUE

+4%  
KWD 318 Million

EBITDA

+3%  
KWD 116 Million

SUBSCRIBERS

+2%  
25 Million customers



## Business

## NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

# Kuwait's economic activity showed signs of further moderation in 2Q23

## Oil prices pressured lower on global recession fears

- Domestic activity showed signs of moderation in 2Q23 amid global uncertainties, higher interest rates and oil output cuts.
- Real estate sales reached their lowest since 3Q20, while credit growth slowed to 2.7% in May amid weak household borrowing.

- Project activity also eased in 2Q23, albeit after a strong Q1 and likely affected by seasonal factors.
- But encouragingly, employment held up well in 1Q23, a continuation of the post-pandemic recovery.
- Following the June elections, the new government outlined its four-year work agenda aimed at boosting economic development.

Chart 1: Brent crude oil price (\$/bbl)



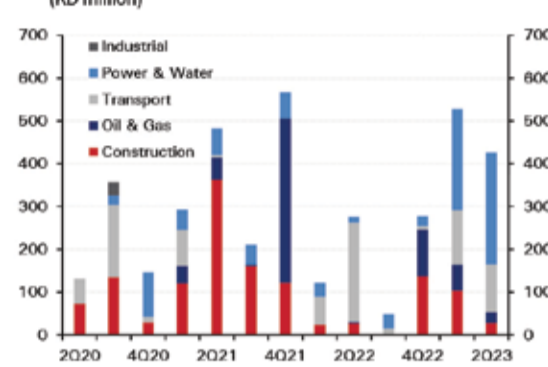
Source: Refinitiv, KPC

Chart 2: Real estate sales (KD million)



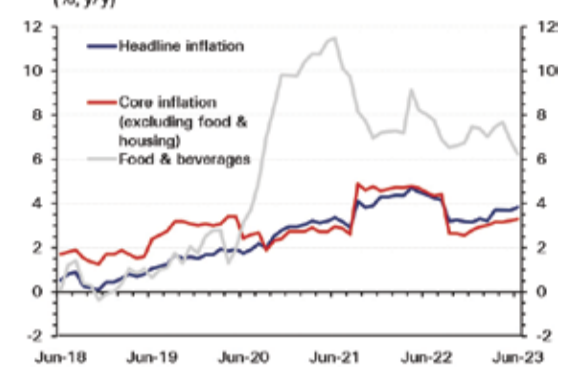
Source: Ministry of Justice

Chart 3: Project awards (KD million)



Source: MEED Projects (update as of 25 July 2023)

Chart 4: Consumer price inflation (%/y)



Source: CSB

**KUWAIT:** Economic activity showed signs of further moderation in 2Q23 amid the higher interest rate environment, global uncertainties, and oil production cuts. Household and business credit growth remained weak, while real estate sales stayed on a downward trajectory. Oil production also declined during the quarter with the introduction of voluntary output cuts in May to halt sliding oil prices (which showed signs of working as prices rose in July). On a brighter note, although project awards eased in 2Q23, affected by seasonal factors, they remained above 2022 levels, while employment in 1Q23 was still rising at a fairly solid pace.

On the policy front, following the election of a new parliament in June, the new government sent its 2023-27 work plan to the legislature for review. It includes five main pillars covering the economy, jobs, welfare and governance through measures to develop key sectors, boost productivity including in the public sector, address the housing shortage and put the public finances on a sustainable path. Meanwhile, as of mid-July, the government's expansionary draft budget for FY23/24 was yet to be signed off by parliament.

### Oil prices pressured

Oil prices retreated during 2Q23 amid intensifying global recession concerns. Tighter global monetary policy to combat inflation, uninspiring Chinese economic metrics and ample crude stock cover amid resilient Russian supply all combined to push market sentiment in a more bearish direction during the quarter. Having traded sideways through June, Brent crude closed the quarter down 6.1 percent q/q to \$74.9/bbl (-12.8 percent ytd).

Kuwait Export Crude fared better, maintaining a premium over Brent during the quarter, dropping by 1.9 percent q/q to end 2Q23 at \$77.8/bbl (-5.1 percent ytd). With prices heading south through 2Q23 and OECD crude stocks not drawing down at the rate expected, oil producers in the OPEC+ group, led by Saudi Arabia, moved to extend the previously announced voluntary production cuts to end-2024. Saudi went further, with a unilateral, additional cut of 1 mb/d for July, later rolled over into August.

For Kuwait, its participation in OPEC+'s additional voluntary production cuts saw its official output reduced by 128 kb/d in May to its quota target of 2.548 mb/d, slightly above the assessment by OPEC secondary sources. Kuwait will need to keep output steady at this level—the lowest since December 2022—through to the end of the year, which poses a challenge for the country's plan to steadily ramp up crude throughputs in the newly commissioned 1.4 mb/d Al-Zour refinery in pursuit of higher low-Sulphur fuel oil and diesel exports. Kuwait could pare back crude exports in favor of domestic refining and higher refined exports.

### Four-year plan to drive growth

Following its appointment in June, the government published its proposed work agenda for the coming four years (2023-27) in July, with the aim of kick-starting a more aggressive period of reforms which have lagged versus Kuwait's GCC peers in recent years. The plan contains five overall pillars: public finance stability, the economic agenda (including diversification away from oil and promoting the role of the private sector), creating job opportunities, sustainable welfare & strong human capital, and productive government. Each pillar contains a number of goals, with a broad timeline relating to each year of the plan.

Key year-one highlights in our view are the targeted passing of the public debt law, the real estate financing law, laws to facilitate the build of large residential cities and distribute 15,000 more plots of residential land, a mass program of road maintenance works, the launch of a plan for economy-wide carbon neutrality by 2060 and measures to boost healthcare capacity.

Also eye-catching was the proposal to create a sovereign fund ('Ciyada') to invest in the local economy, which could help spearhead key megaprojects and initiatives. A feasibility study on the fund is expected to be completed next year. The government's program has been sent to the National Assembly for debate and review, and parliament's response will be monitored for signs of a more cooperative and productive relationship with the government in the upcoming period than previously.

### Real estate activity eases

Real estate sales dropped to KD 672 million (-38 percent y/y) in 2Q23, their lowest since 3Q20. Residential sales fell by 28 percent on lower transactions (-37 percent), which could be related to the ongoing high valuations within this segment as well as the higher interest rate environment. Investment and commercial segment sales fell by 35 percent and 60 percent, respectively, on rising borrowing costs and perhaps uncertainty about the restructuring of utility pricing. The average transaction value only saw a mild decline, supported by the residential segment, where transactions rose by 14.7 percent y/y.

Real estate activity could remain soft throughout this year mainly due to ongoing high residential valuations, tighter financial conditions, elevated construction costs and global macroeconomic uncertainties. The government's four-year plan, which includes the distribution of around 43,000 building permits and 15,000 land plots, could help in easing the housing shortage by absorbing incremental demand over the medium term. Though by itself it would not eliminate the large backlog of existing applications estimated at above 90,000 in mid-2023.

Projects overseen by the Ministry of Electricity and Water and the Ministry of Public Works accounted for the bulk of awards signed off on in the quarter. Despite

the slower 2Q23, compared to the previous quarter, the market appears to be improving, albeit from a low base. MEED Projects expects KD 5.2 billion worth of contracts will be awarded this year, though half this figure relates to KIPIC's Al-Zour Petrochemicals project packages (1&2) (KD 2.4 billion). The outlook remains heavily influenced by events in the political sphere, and in particular cooperation between government and parliament in executing the development plan.

### Employment grows

According to the latest data from the Labor Market Information System (LMIS) and Central Bureau of Statistics (CSB), total employment continued to recover in 1Q23 from its trough seen at the end of 2021, increasing by 10 percent y/y due to the influx of foreign workers following the resumption of economic activities post-pandemic.

The number of expatriate workers (excluding domestic workers) rose by 12.3 percent y/y in 1Q23, while growth among Kuwaiti nationals eased to 2.3 percent. Jobs gains among Kuwaitis were driven by the public sector, which saw a net addition of 11K jobs, while private sector jobs fell by 1,000 over the last four quarters. Expatriate employment was boosted by gains in the private sector (+173K y/y), mainly low paid workers in labor-intensive sectors such as construction (+121K) and manufacturing (+26K). Meanwhile, domestic workers also recorded a sharp rise of 27 percent y/y (+167K).

### Inflation edges up

Consumer price inflation rose to 3.8 percent y/y in June, up slightly from 3.7 percent in March and 3.3 percent at the beginning of the year. Prices in the "housing services" category (+3.2 percent y/y in June) have risen, largely reflecting a pickup in rents, while inflation in clothing and miscellaneous sub-segments continued to trend upwards.

Nevertheless, price growth in food and beverages, the second largest component by weight, eased to its lowest rate this year in June (6.3 percent y/y) amid softening global food prices. Meanwhile, the core inflation rate, which excludes food and housing, has also moved up versus the start of the year, but remained lower than the headline rate at 3.3 percent y/y in June. With consumer and credit activity softening against a backdrop of tighter monetary policy (relative to last year), inflationary pressures will likely ease as we progress through the year. Nevertheless, since it has come in slightly higher than expected so far this year, we now see year-average inflation at 3.4 percent versus the previous 3.1 percent.

Domestic credit growth continues to soften as the mid-point of the year approaches. Growth was essentially flat over the first five months of 2023, with May's reading of 2.7 percent y/y significantly down on the

double-digit growth recorded a year earlier. Higher interest rates, banks' lower price competition in terms of retail lending and normalizing growth following a very strong 2022 are some of the factors behind this year's weaker readings.

Business credit increased by just 1.1 percent in the year to May, cutting the annual growth rate to 2.1 percent. This relatively muted business credit growth is partly due to weakness in the particularly interest rate-sensitive real estate sector and in the oil/gas sector, which are both down year-to-date. Excluding these two sectors, business credit would have expanded by a relatively decent 2.9 percent ytd and 7.0 percent y/y. In fact, several sectors, such as 'construction' and 'other services' have been resilient so far this year, posting ytd growth of 4.5 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively. The slowdown is even sharper in household credit, which is broadly flat year-to-date, cutting the y/y increase to 5.3 percent in May. Overall, such subdued growth does not bode well for the remainder of the year, knowing that the second half of the year has historically been weaker than the first.

Resident deposit growth has been stronger than credit growth, increasing by 3.2 percent in the year to May (+3.0 percent y/y). Growth over the past year has been driven by both private sector (+6 percent) and government deposits (+10 percent), in contrast to deposits from public institutions, which fell by 15 percent y/y in May. Within private-sector KD deposits, current and saving accounts (CASA) continued to decrease (-11.8 percent y/y) while time deposits remained on an upward trend (+26 percent), which is unsurprising given the higher interest rate environment.

The Central Bank of Kuwait has hiked the discount rate by a cumulative 2.5 percent since March 2022, half of the 5 percent implemented by the US Fed. However, the Fed is close to ending its rate hiking cycle, with the futures market currently expecting a final 25 bps hike on 26 July.

### Equities pare losses

Kuwaiti equities ended a lackluster 2Q23 little changed (-0.3 percent q/q), with May's steep banking sector losses (-6.0 percent m/m) partially recouped in June after the Fed's rate hike pause eased investor concerns. Sentiment was also helped by less political uncertainty given the conclusion of the parliamentary elections and signs of improvement in global and regional economic data. Market capitalization subsequently recovered to KD 45.7 billion as of end-June from an 8-month low of KD 43.7 billion in May, while turnover by value eased to a monthly average of KD 798 million reflecting lower trading activity and prices. Despite the recent pickup, the market is still far from a full recovery given that the market capitalization and index level are well below their November 2022 peaks.

## Danone takes seized Russian unit off its books

**PARIS:** French food giant Danone said Wednesday it was taking its Russian dairy unit off its books even though it believes it remains its legal owner after Moscow seized its local operations. Danone also said it was writing down an extra 200 million euros (\$221 million) after Russia took over its local assets last week and named the nephew of Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov as its chief.

Danone had already taken a financial hit of nearly 500 million euros last year. Russia also seized the assets of Danish brewer Carlsberg earlier this month even as both companies have been seeking to sell their Russian businesses following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"These changes took place without the knowledge of, or approval by, Danone," the French group said. "While Danone no longer retains control of the management of its EDP operations in Russia, it remains their legal owner," it said. Danone had announced in October that it would transfer control of its essential dairy and plant-based (EDP) business in Russia, retaining only its infant nutrition branch.

Danone chief executive Antoine de Saint-Affrique told reporters that "the situation is sensitive and we can't tell you much more at the moment". Despite the financial hit, Saint-Affrique said the company would still meet its 2023 sales growth target of between four and six percent. Danone reported on Wednesday that its sales reached 14.2 billion euros in the first half of the year, a 6.3 percent increase from the same period last year. Its net profit rose 48.3 percent to 1.1 billion euros. — AFP

## KNPC announces record profits of \$3.32bn in 2022-23

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced on Tuesday record-breaking profits of KD 1.016 billion (\$3.32 billion) for the fiscal year 2022-2023. CEO Wadha Al-Khateeb expressed to KUNA her pride in this exemplary achievement, indicating that the company had logged in a KD 675 million increase (\$2.2 billion) against the previous year's KD 341.380 million (\$1.1 billion), marking a 198 percent jump.

Khateeb attributed this significant jump in profits to various factors including the global increase in prices of oil products, and the company's improved operational performance especially following the complete and successful operation of eco fuel project in Mina Ahmadi and Mina Abdallah refineries. The project, Khateeb clarified, took quality of products to better levels, up to par with latest global standards, allowing the company to market products in new global markets and creating profitable opportunities.

These new large and innovative projects were accompanied with a rise in refining capacity aiming to meet demands of local markets and keep up with augmenting global demands, explained the CEO. Khateeb presented several marketing indices that contributed to the achievement of such profit, including putting out improved diesel and low sulfur gasoline. Moreover, she took the opportunity to ap-



KNPC CEO Wadha Al-Khateeb



Kuwait, which holds about 8 percent of the world's oil reserves, produced 2.7 million barrels per day in 2022, up from 2.42 million bpd a year earlier. — AFP

plaud the company's cadres in all its various sectors, saying that what has been achieved is nothing but the fruit of their labor.

Kuwait, which holds about 8 percent of the world's oil reserves, produced 2.7 million barrels per day in 2022, up from 2.42 million bpd a year earlier, according to OPEC data. The country, OPEC's fourth-largest producer, aims to raise its oil production capacity to 3.15 million bpd in the next four years. It also plans to increase its natural gas output by about 79 percent to 930 million cubic feet per day in the same period.

The country has set a refining capacity target of 1.45 million bpd, up from 755,000 bpd currently. In November, Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries said the first phase of Al-Zour refinery had begun commercial operations. The move will be followed by the second and third phases of the refinery's opera-

tions, moving towards full maximum refining capacity. KIPIC Chief Executive Waleed Al-Bader said at the time. The refinery is designed to process heavy crudes and will have a capacity of 615,000 bpd.

Kuwait will invest more than \$300 billion in the energy sector by 2040, the country's Oil Minister Saad Al-Barrak said at the OPEC seminar earlier this month. Al-Barrak also said that the country hoped to have a higher production quota within OPEC after expanding its output capacity. Similar to other Gulf countries, Kuwait has benefitted from a surge in crude prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. Brent, the benchmark for two thirds of the world's oil, surged to about \$140 a barrel last year after Moscow started its military offensive against Ukraine. It is currently trading at about \$83 a barrel. — KUNA and agencies

## Business

In an interview with CNBC Arabia TV

# Al-Rushood: KFH's historic profits boost competitiveness of national economy

## KFH topped all listed companies on Boursa Kuwait with a market cap exceeding KD 11bn

**KUWAIT:** In an interview with CNBC Arabia TV, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood stressed KFH's continuous improvement in the Group's performance significantly during the first half of 2023, in which the net profit increased by over 141 percent reaching KD 333.4 million compared to the same period last year, the highest-ever quarterly profits recorded in its history and the biggest in Kuwait banking sector.



Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood

Al-Rushood added that the record profits enhance its local and global standing, supports its financial strength and creditworthiness while enabling the Bank to assist companies and lead mega financing deals, as well as positively contribute to raising the performance of Kuwait banking sector in general and promote competitiveness of national economy.

He indicated that Earnings per share for the first half of 2023 reached over 22 fils; an increase of 73 percent compared to the same period last year, while Net financing income for H1 23 reached KD 458.5 million; an increase of 43.2 percent compared to the same period last year. Net operating income for H1 23 reached KD 489.1 million; an increase of 58.6 percent compared to the same period last year.

He explained that the capital adequacy ratio

### Highlights

- **KFH Group's first half net profit increased by over 141% reaching KD 333.4 million compared to the same period last year.**
- **Earnings per share for the first half of 2023 reached over 22 fils; an increase of 73% compared to the same period last year**
- **Net financing income for H1 23 reached KD 458.5 million; an increase of 43.2 percent compared to the same period last year.**
- **Net operating income for H1 2023 reached KD 489.1 million; an increase of 58.6 percent compared to the same period last year.**
- **KFH has made great strides in its digital transformation strategy where customers carried out more than 135 million e-banking transactions through KFHonline on mobile and website in H1 23.**

reached about 16.45 percent which is above the minimum limit required by the regulatory authorities, noting that this ratio confirms the solid financial position of KFH. He pointed out that KFH is continuing with the exits policy as part of the Bank's strategy of focusing on core banking business and achieving sustainability in profits.

Al-Rushood revealed that Group non-performing financing (NPF) ratio reached 1.52 percent (as per CBK calculation) and Provisions Coverage ratio for KFH-Kuwait is approximately 505 percent and about 312.6 percent for the Group. He mentioned that the provisions carried on consolidated financial statements decreased during the first half of 2023 by nearly 42.8 percent compared to

the same period last year, amounting to about KD 25.9 million, including financing and investment provisions in addition to additional precautionary provisions.

On the acquisition front, Al-Rushood said "By the grace of Allah, the acquisition led to various positive benefits in general such as boosting profits, enhancing the financial position and key financial indicators in addition to achieving regional and international expansion. Following the AUB-Bahrain acquisition, KFH has become the largest bank in Kuwait in terms of assets and market capitalization which exceeded KD 11 billion. This means KFH is the largest company listed on Boursa Kuwait, not to mention is reporting the highest quarterly profits in Kuwait banking sector." Speaking about the digital transformation strategy, Al-Rushood confirmed KFH's sustained efforts in offering innovative financial and investment solutions to customers by relying on financial technology and AI to support operations and enhance customers' banking experience.

"KFH has made great strides in its digital transformation strategy where customers carried out more than 135 million e-banking transactions through KFHonline on mobile and website in H1 23, with a growth rate of about 40 percent compared to the same period last year. This noticeable growth confirms KFH's leadership in digital transformation and facilitating financial solutions for customers on the mobile and the website," Al-Rushood said.

On another front, he pointed out that KFH is at the forefront of many sustainability initiatives, indicating that KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to issue the "Carbon Footprint" report, and the first to issue banking cards made with 85 percent recycled materials. KFH is also the first bank to receive Global Sustainability Assessment System GSAS certificate - Gold level for its environment-friendly auto showroom (KFH Auto). He went on to say that KFH has different sustainability initiatives with the UNDP and continues its environmental projects in sustainability under (Keep it Green) initiative.



Al-Rushood indicated that KFH's distinguished efforts in sustainability has been commended and recognized worldwide, leading KFH to win various awards such as "Best Bank in Sustainability in Kuwait and the Middle East", as well as the Best Islamic Bank in sustainability" worldwide from prestigious international magazines.

## No successor named for Lebanon central bank chief: Deputy PM

**BEIRUT:** Crisis-hit Lebanon — which has no president and is ruled by a caretaker government — will also have to go without a central bank chief from next week, says the country's deputy premier.

No successor has been named for the embattled bank governor, Riad Salameh, 73, who steps down after three decades at the helm at the end of July, Saade Chami told AFP. "We need to appoint a central bank governor, in consultation with all political parties," Chami said, noting however that "conditions are not ready for a new governor to be appointed within a week".

"There is no other option but for the vice-governors to assume their responsibilities under these circumstances," he said, adding that Salameh's mandate will not be extended. Lebanon has been mired in a painful economic crisis since 2019 that has seen its currency lose around 98 percent of its value against the dollar and pushed most of the population into poverty. Salameh has been a central figure of the political elite that is widely blamed for the crisis. He has been the subject of judicial investigations at home

and abroad into allegations including embezzlement, money laundering, fraud and illicit enrichment, charges he denies. Once hailed as the guardian of Lebanon's financial stability, Salameh is now wanted by France and Germany in connection with alleged financial irregularities.

Lebanon, however, does not extradite its citizens. Now his departure is set to create the latest high-level power vacuum that could plunge the country into further disarray. Earlier this month, the central bank's four vice-governors said they planned to resign unless politicians swiftly name an incoming governor.

### 'Experts in wasting time'

Lebanon's central bank governor is named by cabinet decree for a six-year mandate that can be renewed multiple times, based on the finance minister's recommendation. If the position is vacant, the law stipulates that the first vice-governor take over. Prime Minister Najib Mikati is set to meet the vice-governors in the next couple of days to find a solution, Chami said.

"They have some demands, they are asking for the government and parliament's support to continue their work," he said. A senior central bank official told AFP this month that the vice-governors did not want to take the blame for Lebanon's economic collapse "while the political class continues to buy time". Despite the severe meltdown, Lebanese leaders have failed to enact all the reforms required by



Lebanon's Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami gives an interview at his office in Beirut on July 25, 2023. - AFP

international lenders to unlock billions of dollars needed to save the economy.

Chami, who also heads Lebanon's International Monetary Fund negotiation team, said the vice-governors have also called for Beirut to enact much-needed reforms. Last month, the IMF warned that Lebanon's failure to implement reforms could have "irreversible" consequences and further jeopardize economic and social stability. Chami said about the reform demands that, "the more we delay, the harder finding a solution will be," adding that "we have become experts in wasting time". "We are facing a crisis that has been worsening for the past 30 years," he said. "We really need bold decisions and courage from the decision-makers." — AFP

## UK bank NatWest CEO resigns after Farage 'error'

**LONDON:** The chief executive of Britain's NatWest bank, Alison Rose, stepped down Wednesday after admitting a "serious error of judgment" in speaking to a reporter about the banking affairs of arch-Brexititeer Nigel Farage. Farage, former leader of the Brexit Party and the anti-immigration party UKIP, had complained about the closure of his account with the upmarket Coutts, the bank used by the late Queen Elizabeth II and subsidiary of NatWest. He said he was removed as a client for his political views. But, in a report which it has since apologized for, public broadcaster the BBC suggested Farage's accounts were closed because he did not have sufficient funds to remain a client of the prestigious establishment.

Reacting to the departure of Rose after nearly four years at the helm, Farage called on the entire board of NatWest to resign. "The first rule of banking is you have to obey client confidentiality. So they have made a complete and utter mess of this," he told Sky News. Farage, a Eurosceptic politician and now a television presenter, campaigned for decades for Britain's withdrawal from the European Union and was a key figure in the 2016 Brexit referendum.

UK media said pressure for Rose to step down came from within the British government, which owns 39 percent of NatWest. Minister Andrew Griffith, who is responsible for financial services, said that Rose had made the "right" decision. "This would never have happened if NatWest had not taken it upon itself to withdraw a bank account due to someone's lawful political views," he added. "I hope the whole financial sector learns from this incident."

### 'Sad moment'

NatWest was formerly known as Royal Bank of Scotland — the lender rescued following the 2008 global financial crisis with £45.5 billion of UK taxpayers' cash in what was the world's biggest banking bail-



LONDON: NatWest chief executive officer Alison Rose poses for a photograph at NatWest's headquarters in the City of London on March 21, 2023. Rose, stepped down on July 26, 2023. - AFP

out. Rose, the first woman CEO of a major UK bank, decided to rebrand the lender after her appointment in 2019, while the government has gradually cut its stake as the bank recovered. But it is in fresh crisis after Rose admitted she was the source for the BBC story, and acknowledged "a serious error in judgment" in discussing Farage's relationship with the bank.

NatWest's board on Tuesday gave its backing to Rose, a 30-year veteran of the company. But by early Wednesday it announced she was stepping down. "The Board and Alison Rose have agreed, by mutual consent, that she will step down as CEO of the NatWest Group," board chairman Howard Davies said in a statement. "It is a sad moment. She has dedicated all her working life so far to NatWest and will leave many colleagues who respect and admire her." The board has appointed Paul Thwait, current CEO of the commercial and institutional business, to take her place for an initial period of a year. "A further process will take place in due course to appoint a permanent successor," it added.

Addressing her dealings with the BBC journalist earlier, Rose admitted that she had given the reporter "the impression that the decision to close Mr Farage's account was purely commercial", calling it a "serious error of judgment". Farage obtained a 40-page report regarding the closure of his account with Coutts, a 331-year-old institution. — AFP

## Nigerian doctors begin strike over pay, welfare

**LAGOS:** Nigerian resident doctors working in government hospitals began a total and "indefinite" strike on Wednesday over pay and welfare in their latest industrial action. The strike began as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's government comes under pressure over his economic reforms that have won praise from investors, but have also sharply hiked fuel prices and the cost of living for Nigerians. The strike by the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) came after a two-week notice on the failure of government to meet the demands of the association. In a statement at the end of an emergency meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the association on Tuesday, the NARD decided to go on an immediate strike.

"Having considered all the numerous ultimatums, appeals, and engagements with government, NEC unanimously resolved to proceed on a total and indefinite strike commencing from 12:00 am on Wednesday," it said. The association said that the strike would affect all government-owned hospitals throughout Africa's most populous nation.

It said the work stoppage would be called off only when its demands were met, including payment of salary arrears, hazard allowance, employment and replacement of doctors who have left the country to work overseas. NARD is also asking for an improvement of facilities in state-run hospitals across the country. Wednesday's strike is the latest by the association in recent months. Previous strikes on similar issues were suspended after the intervention by prominent Nigerians, including leaders from parliament. The NARD represents resident doctors at government-owned hospitals in Nigeria, who account for about one-third of doctors operating in the country.

The doctors strike comes as Nigerians are already struggling with more than 22 percent inflation, a tripling of petrol prices and the impact of a sharp devaluation of the national currency, the naira. — AFP

## Will climate change hit Mediterranean tourism?

**PARIS:** Destructive fires, temperatures topping 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) and tourists dodging possible catastrophe by staying home. Will climate change end up transforming tourism - not least in the Mediterranean?

### State of play

Regions which welcome a sizeable share of holidaymakers are also those hardest hit by climate change. In Greece, thousands of tourists have been evacuated in recent days from the islands of Rhodes and Corfu which have been ravaged by fires touched off by suffocatingly hot weather. Rhodes' international airport has morphed into an improvised campsite flooded by disorientated tourists.

Other countries around the Mediterranean have also been hit. In Spain, the thermometer has shot 15 degrees above normal summer season levels. Italy has also labored under heatwaves with the island of Sardinia melting under 48 Celsius while, on Monday, Tunis endured 49C. Tourism plays a key role in the region's economies - the sector accounts for nearly a quarter of GDP in Greece and 12 percent in Spain.

### Economic consequences

The soaring temperatures could turn off visitors. For Jean-François Rial, who heads French travel firm Voyageurs du Monde, "global warming is going to render some destinations less and less visitable. The whole of the Mediterranean is concerned and yet it is the main destination of European travelers." In Spain, "we're starting to hear tourists ask themselves" if they should be looking to spend their summer break on the Mediterranean coast, said Joantxo Llantada, professor at Madrid's IE Business School. According to a recent note from Moody's, "heatwaves may reduce Southern Europe's attractiveness as a tourist destination in the longer term or at the very least reduce demand in summer, which will have negative economic consequences given the importance of the sector."

### No more sunworshipping?

Not so fast, suggests Hamit Kuk, who heads the association of Turkish travel operators. "This issue is very important for the tourism industry - but it is not a problem if temperatures are very hot in Antalya because European tourists mostly prefer to see the sun," Kuk told AFP. "We can look at the examples of Egypt and Dubai. In July-August there are temperatures of 45C and tourists still prefer to go there. The president of Tunisia's hotel federation, Dora Miled, told AFP that to date "the heat has had no impact on tourism. If we have yet to return to 2019 activity levels ... that's above all mainly due to the high cost of air travel," said Miled.

Didier Arino, who heads the Protourisme travel consultancy in France, said: "When it comes to their holidays, people don't dream of a cool destination, they want good weather." Even in Greece it is not certain that the fires will dissuade tourists from coming. Kostas Chrysohoides, vice prefect of Dodecanese, an island group in the southeastern Aegean Sea that includes Rhodes, observed that "24,000 tourists arrived on Rhodes" between Sunday and Monday, fires notwithstanding. — AFP

Lifestyle



F. Murray Abraham speaks as SAG-AFTRA members hold "Rock The City For A Fair Contract" rally in Times Square.



Actor Bryan Cranston speaks during a SAG-AFTRA "Rock The City For A Fair Contract" strike rally at Times Square.



SAG-AFTRA members pose during the "Rock The City For A Fair Contract" strike rally at Times Square. — AFP photos



Jessica Chastain attends a SAG-AFTRA "Rock The City For A Fair Contract" rally in Times Square.

# Hollywood heavyweights lead strike rally in Times Square

Hollywood A-listers including Emmy winner Bryan Cranston and a group of Oscar winners on Tuesday led a large rally of striking actors and writers in New York's Times Square, as the stalemate with studios and streamers dragged on.

Academy Award winners Brendan Fraser, Jessica Chastain and F. Murray Abraham were among the stars joining the mass of demonstrators.

Movie and television production has effectively shut down in the United States since thousands of members of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AF-

TRA) guild walked off the job on July 14, joining writers who have been on strike for weeks.

Both guilds are demanding better pay and job security, as well as safeguards against the threat posed by artificial intelligence as they pursue the first industry-wide walkout in 63 years.

"We will not be having our jobs taken away and given to robots," "Breaking Bad" star Cranston told attendees, referring to fears about AI being used to recreate an actor's likeness.

Surrounded by Times Square's giant screens, which often advertise the latest

movies and streaming series, Cranston delivered a message to Disney boss Bob Iger, the target of the actors' ire.

"We will not have you take away our right to work and earn a decent living and, lastly and most importantly, we will not allow you to take our dignity," he bellowed, wearing a SAG-AFTRA t-shirt and raising his fists.

Abraham, best known for winning an Academy Award for his starring role in the 1984 movie "Amadeus," said unionism was "good for America."

"We're fighting for integrity, respect, and honor," said the 83-year-old, who

recently featured in television hit series "The White Lotus."

Steve Buscemi and Christian Slater were also among the protesters.

SAG-AFTRA represents actors from mega-stars to day-players who take small roles on television series. It represents about 160,000 people, including stuntmen and dancers.

The industrial action not only prohibits actors from filming but also from promoting their productions in person or on social media. — AFP

# RAPPER'S DELIGHT AS NEW YORK CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF HIP-HOP

From a display of Jay-Z lyrics on the facade of the Brooklyn Library to a concert of rap pioneers at Yankee Stadium, New York is celebrating 50 years of hip-hop, a genre born in its ghettos and now dominant around the world. Inside the library, a vast exhibition retraces the career of one of Brooklyn's most famous sons, charting his rise from "a street-smart hustler to a global revered music mogul." The

is pretty mind-blowing. For a lot of African American kids coming up here, he can set an example for them that they can be bigger," Thomas added. The free exhibition, which opened Friday and was conceived by Jay-Z's entertainment empire Roc Nation, is entitled "The Book of HOV," a reference to one of the 53-year-old's nicknames.

Jay-Z's string of hits include 1998's "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)"

tribute precedes the opening of another immersive retrospective about the history of hip-hop at the Hall des Lumieres on August 2 as the Big Apple marks half a century of the genre with a slew of events.

**'Amazing'**

Although early forms of hip-hop expression were bubbling years earlier, musicologists cite August 11, 1973 as

Stadium in the Bronx alongside other hip-hop veterans including Grandmaster Caz, Kurtis Blow and Roxanne Shante. Lil Kim, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, Run DMC and The Sugarhill Gang, whose song "Rapper's Delight" is known as the first commercially successful hip-hop single, are also due to take the stage.

"When we first started, nobody was interested in hiring a hip-hop DJ, or getting an emcee or getting some breakdancers," said Ralph McDaniels, hip-hop coordinator for the Queens Public Library. "To be celebrating 50 years is amazing because there was no value on this," he told AFP. Other concerts, block parties and graffiti and breakdance sessions are scheduled to take place across the Big Apple.

**'Recognition'**

The hip-hop movement was born as a way for African Americans and Hispanics to escape poverty and discrimination. Then, few people would have predicted it would become a billion-dollar phenomenon that inspires not only music, but also sports and fashion.

Another sign of how far it has come: this week, Sotheby's offered a ruby and diamond ring worn by rapper Tupac Shakur, the Harlem-born icon of California's West Coast who was murdered in 1996. It is estimated to sell for up to \$300,000. Back at the Jay-Z exhibit, Brooklyn-born Amanda Brown said she was happy the rapper was being honored with the retrospective while he is still alive. "Singers that did a lot don't get the recognition until they are gone so this is nice," the 28-year-old told AFP. — AFP



A gold, ruby, and diamond crown ring, designed and worn by the late US rapper Tupac Shakur during his last public appearance in 1996, is displayed during a press preview at Sotheby's in New York City. — AFP photos

## Tupac Shakur ring sells for record \$1 million

A gold, ruby and diamond crown ring worn by rap legend Tupac Shakur during his last public appearance sold for \$1 million at auction in New York Tuesday. The winning bid was well above Sotheby's pre-sale estimate of between \$200,000 and \$300,000 and becomes the most valuable hip-hop artifact ever sold, the auction house said.



Tupac Shakur

The New York-born rapper wore the ring during his final public appearance at the MTV Video Music Awards on September 4, 1996. He was shot dead by an unidentified assailant in a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas just days later on September 13. He was 25.

Shakur, whose hits included "California Love," designed the ring over the course of a few months, Sotheby's said. He did so through his godmother Yaasmyn Fula, who put the ring up for sale. Shakur was influenced by 16th century Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli's political manifesto "The Prince" which he read while in prison on sex abuse charges.

He modeled the design on the crowns of the medieval kings of Europe, Sotheby's added. The ring is engraved "Pac & Dada 1996," a reference to his girlfriend Kidada Jones. A gold circulet studded with a central cabochon ruby flanked by two pave-cut diamonds sits atop a diamond-encrusted gold band.

The sale was part of a dedicated hip-hop auction to mark 50 years of the genre which falls in August this year. Shakur is considered one of the greatest rappers of all time, selling 75 million records. He was a central figure in the Los Angeles-based West Coast hip-hop scene, which feuded with rival East Coast rappers in New York. — AFP



Members of the Shirt Kings speak during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of hip-hop, at the Queens Public Library. — AFP photos

artist born Shawn Carter has written about dealing drugs in the Marcy Houses housing project where he grew up, before becoming a billionaire rapper whose marriage to Beyonce created one of the most glamorous couples in pop culture.

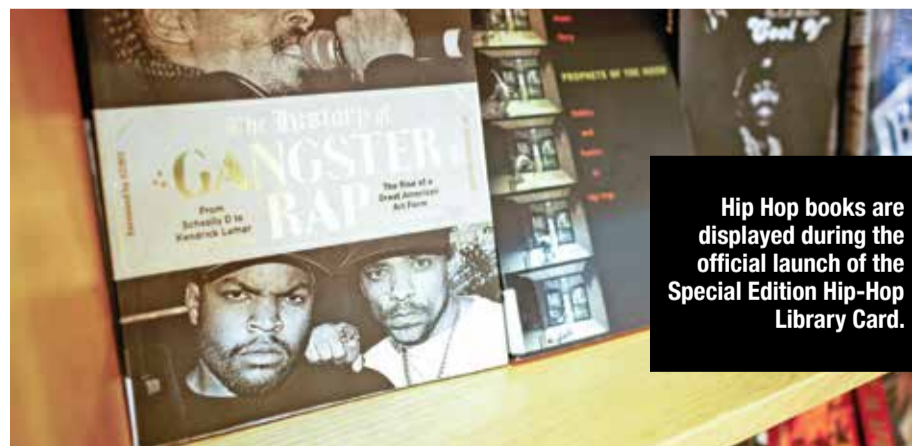
"I've never really been to a lot of exhibitions," said 31-year-old warehouse worker Jamarly Thomas, joking that he goes by "Jay-T." "So to witness something like this from my favorite rapper

and "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)" from 2001. He also crossed rap's boundaries, including with his megahit "Empire State of Mind," and holds the record for the most number-one albums of any solo artist on the Billboard 200 with 14. Only the Beatles have more, with 19.

Long queues formed over the weekend as fans rushed to visit the exhibition or register for one of thirteen Brooklyn Library cards stamped with the artist's album covers. The

the date of its birth. On that day, on the ground floor of a low-income building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, Jamaican-born DJ Clive Campbell, aka DJ Kool Herc, broke new ground. He spun the same record on two turntables, isolating the sequences of rhythms and percussion to extend the beat, an essential component of hip-hop music.

Fifty years later, on August 11, 2023, DJ Kool Herc will perform at Yankee



Hip Hop books are displayed during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



Banners are displayed during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



A member of the Shirt Kings signs autographs during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



DJ Chuck Chillout plays music after the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



Muslim hip-hop artist Mc Glamorous speaks during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



A member of the Shirt Kings speaks during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card.



# GLITZY DUBAI

## hungry for culinary fame

Solemann Haddad, head chef and co-owner at Moonrise Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion restaurant works at the rooftop spot with a backdrop of the Dubai skyline.

French chef Renaud Dutel never thought his career would take him to the United Arab Emirates' glam hub of Dubai, but has found there a culinary capital in the making. Five years since he was offered a spot at a fancy restaurant in the Gulf financial and tourism hub - better known for its skyscrapers than its food

nick Alleno clinched two stars, but none made it to three - Michelin's highest honor. "Dubai's gastronomy scene has transformed the city into one of the most diverse and dynamic food hubs in the world," said Issam Kazim of the local government's tourism and economy department.

The meat-heavy Emirati cuisine is strongly influenced by historic trade ties with present-day Iran and India. But it did not see the "gastronomization" that culinary traditions in much of the West did, according to Loic Bienassis of the European Institute for the History and Culture of Food.

Still, it "can be done", he told AFP. "And political will can play a role." Instead, with expats largely outnumbering the local Emirati population, the city's rich cultural mix has yielded a unique culinary identity.

Moonrise, a rooftop restaurant which offers a Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion and only seats 12 people at a time, is a prime example. Solemann Haddad, Moonrise's head chef and co-owner, described the food as one-third European, one-third Japanese and one-third Arabic, "but it's 100 percent Dubai".

Haddad, born in the city to French and Syrian parents, won a coveted Michelin star last year at the ripe age of 27.

His dishes reflect the cosmopolitan spirit of Dubai, he told AFP, combining elements such as date syrup with a chutney of saffron and pineapple.

Having established itself as a business and luxury hot spot, Dubai is now also attracting some of the world's leading culinary names including Alleno and fellow Frenchman Pierre Gagnaire.

### Desert-sourced

Britain's Gordon Ramsay, Japan's Nobu Matsuhisa and Italy's Massimo Bottura have also joined the roster of celebrity chefs with a presence in the city.

But beyond importing top talent, Dubai is also fostering local stars, said Habib Al Mulla, an Emirati lawyer and culinary blog-



A chef prepares a dish in the kitchens of STAY by Yannick Alleno restaurant in Dubai.



Solemann Haddad, head chef and co-owner at Moonrise Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion restaurant in Dubai prepares a dish.



A chef prepares a dish in the kitchens of STAY by Yannick Alleno restaurant in Dubai.



A chef prepares a dish at Moonrise Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion restaurant in Dubai.

ger who has reviewed more than 700 establishments worldwide. "A new, young generation of home-grown chefs are coming up," he told AFP. "Many of them are winning... worldwide recognition."

Dubai's rising culinary stars include not only chefs but also restaurateurs such as Omar Shihab, born and raised in the UAE to a Jordanian family. The restaurant he founded, BOCA, was awarded the Michelin Green Star for sustainability this year.

Shihab sources a bulk of his produce from the UAE - a feat in a country that imports more than 80 percent of its food needs. "Let's face it, we live in the desert," he told AFP. "But through our sourcing policy, we prioritize local ingredients."

Some 30-40 percent of fruit and vegetables served at BOCA come from hydroponic Emirati

farms, and up to 80 percent of the fish sourced from the UAE or nearby shores, said Shihab. "We do not have any local or regional suppliers" for meat and chicken, he said.

"But we make sure that the farms we rely on, we know their names, we know a little bit about their practises, no matter where they are in the world." — AFP



French chef Renaud Dutel prepares a dish in the kitchens of STAY by Yannick Alleno restaurant in Dubai.

scene - Dutel is delighted to have "taken the risk".

"I believe Dubai is at the beginning," he told AFP as lobster cuts were sizzling on a skillet beside him at STAY, a Michelin-starred restaurant specialized in French cuisine on the city's signature Palm Jumeirah man-made island.

"But (Dubai) is on the way to becoming one of the best destinations in the world to come to dine." Boasting about 13,000 restaurants and cafes, some of the city's eateries are already making global waves.

Last year, 11 Dubai restaurants were awarded the Middle East's first Michelin stars, with more joining the prestigious club this year. Some like STAY by Yan-

### '100 percent Dubai'

The UAE, a five-decade federation of seven emirates along the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, lacks the rich culinary heritage of other Arab states.



French chef Renaud Dutel (right) prepares a dish in the kitchens of STAY by Yannick Alleno restaurant in Dubai. — AFP photos

Chefs prepare dish ingredients at Moonrise Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion restaurant in Dubai.



French chef Renaud Dutel serves a dish at STAY by Yannick Alleno restaurant in Dubai.



Chefs prepare dish ingredients at Moonrise Middle Eastern-Japanese fusion restaurant in Dubai.

## Sports

# LeBron's son stable after suffering cardiac arrest

## Bronny James, 18, collapses on court while training

LOS ANGELES: Bronny James, the eldest son of NBA superstar LeBron James, is in a stable condition after suffering a cardiac arrest during a practice with his college basketball team, the James family said on Tuesday. Bronny James, 18, collapsed on court while training with his University of Southern California team-mates on Monday in Los Angeles.

"Yesterday while practicing Bronny James suffered a cardiac arrest," a spokesperson for the James family said in a statement to AFP. "Medical staff was able to treat Bronny and take him to the hospital. He is now in stable condition and no longer in ICU (intensive care). "We ask for respect and privacy for the James family and we will update media when there is more information. "LeBron and Savannah wish to publicly send their deepest thanks and appreciation to the USC medical and athletic staff for their incredible work and dedication to the safety of their athletes."

The TMZ.com celebrity news website reported that James was unconscious before being rushed to hospital following the cardiac incident. According to the American Heart Association, only about 1 in 10 people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, which occurs when the heart stops abruptly with little or no warning. James' cardiac arrest came just over a year after another USC basketball player, Vince Iwuchukwu, suffered heart failure and collapsed during an informal practice. Iwuchukwu subsequently made a full recovery.

### Words of support

The James family meanwhile were given words of support from NFL player Damar Hamlin, who suffered a cardiac arrest while playing for the Buffalo Bills in January in an incident that shocked the sports world. "Prayers to Bronny & the James family as well," Hamlin wrote on Twitter. "Here for you guys just like you have been for me my entire process," added the 25-year-old, who subsequently made a full recovery and has since been cleared to resume his NFL career. Los Angeles Lakers legend Earvin "Magic" Johnson also offered support. "We are praying and hoping he makes a full and speedy recovery," Johnson wrote on Twitter.

Bronny James committed to playing for the USC Trojans in May after becoming one of the top prospects in US high school basketball. He capped a stellar senior year campaign at the exclusive Sierra Canyon school in Los Angeles with 15 points in an all-star game of top college candidates, sinking five 3-pointers. His famous father - the NBA's all-time leading scorer as well as a four-time NBA champion and four-time NBA Most Valuable Player - has long spoken of his desire to extend his career in order to play in the league with his son.

"I need to be on the floor with my boy, I got to be on the floor with Bronny...that would be ideal for sure," James told ESPN in an interview in January. Teen star James could be eligible for the NBA Draft after one season for the Trojans, who are expected to have a strong squad next sea-



HOUSTON: Bronny James, #6 of the West team, talks to LeBron James, of the Los Angeles Lakers in this file photo. Bronny James, the eldest son of NBA superstar LeBron James, is in a stable condition after suffering a cardiac arrest during a practice with his college basketball team. — AFP

son. Some analysts have already marked James as a likely top-10 selection in the 2024 NBA Draft. Bronny James would turn 20 in October of 2024,

the same month that the 2024-25 NBA campaign will start. His father would turn 40 in December of 2024. — AFP

## Buildup to Paris Olympics enters its final year

PARIS: The buildup to the Paris Olympics entered its final year on Wednesday as International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach hailed the "very, very good" preparations. Having sailed down the River Seine on Tuesday to get a taste of the spectacular opening ceremony on July 26, 2024, Bach formally invited 203 countries to take part in the Summer Games. Russia and Belarus, its ally in the invasion of Ukraine, are not among the countries invited. The IOC has however left the door open for Russian and Belarusian athletes to take part as neutrals in Paris without their teams competing.

The participation of Russians and Belarusians could trigger a boycott by Ukraine. Bach refused to be drawn on when the IOC would make a decision on the issue, but noted that many sports federations had heeded his body's call to allow Russians and Belarusians to take part as neutrals in qualifying events. "It will depend on the further developments," the German told reporters. "We see now international federations applying our conditions for the participation of neutral and individual athletes. "We will supervise this... based on the result of this we will at the appropriate time take a decision."

### Potential Ukrainian boycott

He said, however, a decision would not be taken at the IOC Session in the Indian city of Mumbai in October. The potential difficulties were underlined at the world fencing championships on Wednesday when Ukraine's Igor Reizlin withdrew from his epee bout with Vadim Anokhin in line with his government's policy of barring athletes from competing against Russians. Ukraine's sports minister Vadym Gutzeit was ambivalent about a boycott of the Olympics themselves when he spoke to French newspaper Le Monde on Tuesday. "We have yet to take a decision concerning the Olympic Games," he said. "We are awaiting a final decision and to know if (the Russians and Belarusians) will be authorized to compete or not."

### Sponsorship boost

The French organizers were boosted this week when luxury brand LVMH announced it will be a "premium partner" of the Paris Olympics, bringing sponsorship close to the target of 1.24 billion euros (\$1.37 billion). "We still need a few tens of millions of euros to reach the budget we set, but it's clearly a very good thing, even if we were confident," a senior member of the organizing committee said.

Organizers will pray there is no repeat next summer of the riots that erupted in the Parisian suburbs and around France earlier this month after a policeman shot dead a 17-year-old youth at a traffic stop. Tony Estanguet, the head of the Paris 2024 organizing committee, told AFP this week he did not have any "big concerns" with 12 months to go. "I am very satisfied by the way the project is advancing. Yes there are issues every day that need resolving, but that's why the Games are in 2024 and not 2023."

The tone will be set by the opening ceremony on the Seine, the first time in the history of the Summer Olympics that it will take place outside a stadium. But the prospect of securing a six-kilometer stretch of the river with up to half a million spectators is giving the security forces a headache. "Clearly, it is not something we have ever done," a top official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Securing nearly six kilometers of route with so many people present is a real challenge." — AFP

## Ukraine fencer hands Russian walkover at world championships

MILAN: Ukrainian Igor Reizlin's hopes of an epee world fencing title were dashed on Wednesday as he withdrew from his bout with Vadim Anokhin in line with his government's policy of barring athletes from facing Russians. A source within the International Fencing Federation (FIE) told AFP the Tokyo Games bronze medalist had presented a medical certificate to justify his withdrawal.

A minor consolation for Reizlin is that the certificate safeguards the small number of qualifying points he has obtained for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Anokhin, like his compatriots and Belarusian fencers, are obliged to compete as neutral athletes due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year — their countries are not permitted to fence in the team competitions.

Reizlin's fellow star Olha Kharlan faces the same problem on Thursday because the four-time individual sabre world champion has been drawn against Russia's Anna Smirnova. Kharlan, though, will be able to take part from Saturday in the team event — in which she won Olympic gold in 2008 and silver in 2016. Ukraine's govern-

ment has taken a tough stance since Russian and Belarusian athletes were permitted to return to competition earlier this year. They withdrew their judokas from the world championships in May. Their tennis players, though, have had to play each other since the invasion.

Recently, though, there have been rumblings from athletes including Kharlan they are not happy with this policy. As for a boycott of the Olympics themselves, Ukraine's sports minister Vadym Gutzeit was ambivalent when he spoke to French newspaper Le Monde on Tuesday. "We have yet to take a decision concerning the Olympic Games," he said. "We are awaiting a final decision and to know if (the Russians and Belarusians) will be authorized to compete or not."

### Russia, Belarus omitted

In another development, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach on Wednesday formally invited 203 countries, but not Russia and Belarus, to participate in the Paris Olympics which begin in a year's time. Bach had said in mid-July that neither Russia



Ukraine's Igor Reizlin

nor its ally in the invasion of Ukraine, Belarus, would be invited as a team.

The IOC has however left the door open for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals in the 2024 Summer Games without their teams competing. Bach is on a three-day visit to the French capital to mark the one-year-to-go milestone on Wednesday. "In accordance with the Olympic Charter it is my great honor and pleasure to mark this important milestone today by inviting the athletes of the world to come together in

Paris, France, to celebrate the Games of the 33rd Olympiad," Bach said.

Bach said he had "just received excellent information about the preparations for Paris 2024" after touring the construction site of the Athletes' Village on Tuesday. He said then that the competitors would be "very happy" in the Village. Guatemala were not invited either because it is currently suspended from the Olympic movement due to alleged government interference with the independence of the National Olympic Committee there. — AFP

## Brown, Celtics agree record \$304 m deal

NEW YORK: Jaylen Brown will remain with the Boston Celtics after agreeing a record-breaking \$304 million five-year contract extension, US media reports said on Tuesday. If confirmed, the mammoth deal will be the richest contract in NBA history, eclipsing the \$264 million extension inked by two-time MVP Nikola Jokic last

year. The 26-year-old Brown has been one of the mainstays of the Celtics' success in recent years, helping the team reach the playoffs for seven consecutive seasons.

Brown's new deal will ensure the two-time All Star remains in Boston until the end of the 2028-2029 season. Brown had one year remaining on his existing deal with the Celtics, which will pay him \$31.8 million for the 2023-2024 campaign. Brown posted career-best figures of 26.6 points, 6.9 rebounds and 3.5 assists per game in 2022-2023, forming a potent offensive partnership with Jayson Tatum. However, the Celtics' season ended in disappointment with the team losing at home to Miami in game seven of the Eastern Conference finals. — AFP



Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics

## Ashes 'not done' yet for Australia, Cummins insists

LONDON: Australia captain Pat Cummins insisted Wednesday that his side remains hugely motivated to complete a long-awaited Ashes series win in England, even though they have already retained the urn. The tourists head into a fifth and final Test at The Oval starting Thursday, 2-1 up after last week's Old Trafford washout denied a dominant England the chance to claim a series-leveling win. Australia, as the holders, are assured of retaining the Ashes.

But the goal of a first Ashes series win away to England since 2001, a run that spans five tours, remains in their sights. Australia were 2-1 up heading into The Oval four years ago only to pay the price for some over-exuberant celebrations before they arrived in London as England fought back to square that series 2-2. Fast bowler Cummins said the circumstances were different this time and that ending a 22-year wait for an Ashes series win in England would be the ideal way to finish a tour that started at The Oval with Australia's victory over India in the World Test Championship final.

"I think the good thing is that it's a really similar group to 2019," Cummins told a pre-match press conference at The Oval on Wednesday. "That Manchester (in 2019)

was a big win to retain the Ashes, which we hadn't done for a long time off the back of Headingley, even Lord's, where we probably missed a trick last series. "I felt like that was a big exclamation mark on the end of that series with still one Test match to play."

### 'Not at our best'

He added: "It feels really different here, this group has been really motivated to win the series. "We know that it wasn't our best week last week and at the end of the game it was a bit of a pat on the back, 'well done, we've retained the Ashes' but really it feels like the job's not done." The upcoming match could mark the end of an era for an Australia team. Several players are 30 or older, although under-pressure opening batsman David Warner, 37 in October, quashed rumors Tuesday he is set to retire, insisting he intends to stick to his plan of finishing on home soil early next year. "It's a hard one," said the 30-year-old Cummins when asked about managing a transition from one generation to the next. "I certainly don't want to rush anyone out of the door."

He added: "I think this is about the fourth Ashes series where (England veteran paceman) Jimmy Anderson has said it's going to be his last one, so you never quite



Australia's Pat Cummins

know." Cummins' captaincy was criticized after England's three-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley was followed by Australia's pummeling at Old Trafford before rain came to their aid. Mark Waugh, the former Australia batsman, suggested the cares of captaincy had made Cummins look "tired and frazzled".

"Is Pat Cummins the right man for the long-term captaincy?" Waugh asked on Fox Sports. "Because when it's tough I don't think he is. I think he's OK when

it's easy and he doesn't have to think too much, but it's a real question mark." Cummins, however, received support from Ben Stokes on Wednesday, with the England captain saying of his rival skipper: "I'm not sure why someone would say he should give it (the captaincy) up. "I don't know who has made those comments, but I think he's done a great job for Australian cricket. It's probably a little bit unwarranted from whoever said that -- and that's coming from an Englishman." — AFP

Sports

# Richarlison's hat-trick seals Tottenham win in Singapore

## Spurs trounce Lion City Sailors 5-1 in pre-season friendly

SINGAPORE: Brazilian striker Richarlison scored three second-half goals as Tottenham Hotspur came from behind to beat local side Lion City Sailors 5-1 in a pre-season friendly at Singapore's National Stadium on Wednesday. The Sailors took a surprise lead through Shawal Anuar after 14 minutes but the Premier League side got back on level terms through a Harry Kane penalty with the final kick of the first half.

Richarlison came on at half-time and scored twice in the first eight minutes of the second half before completing his hat-trick in stoppage time after Giovanni Lo Celso had netted Spurs' fourth goal. Tottenham were playing just the second pre-season game of their Asia-Pacific tour following the cancellation of a match against Leicester City in Bangkok on Sunday and manager Ange Postecoglou opted for a strong starting line-up which dominated the opening half.

But against the run of play, the Sailors took the lead when a cross from the right by Maxime Lesienne was bundled in by Shawal at the far post. Spurs turned up the pressure with James Maddison going close with a long-range effort which forced a fine diving save from Sailors goalkeeper Zharfan Rohazad. Son Heung-min headed home after 26 minutes but his effort was ruled out for offside while Pape Matar Sarr skimmed the crossbar with a volley.

However, Tottenham's pressure finally told in first-half stoppage time when Sarr was brought down in the Sailors box and Kane stepped up to send Zharfan the wrong way from the penalty spot to level things up. Postecoglou made 11 changes at half-time and his new line-up took the lead just three minutes after the restart. Lo Celso's effort deflected off a defender and the ball fell nicely for Richarlison to turn the ball into the net.



SINGAPORE: Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min (right) dribbles past Lion City Sailors' players during Singapore Festival of Football pre-season match in Singapore on July 26, 2023. — AFP

The Brazilian was again on target five minutes later when he pounced on a weak back-header to nod in his second of the game. While the Tottenham striker was twice denied a hat-trick goal by the off-side flag, his side managed to add a fourth goal in the

73rd minute when Lo Celso drove home a loose ball in the six-yard box. And Richarlison's persistence was finally rewarded in stoppage time when he burst through the centre of the Sailors defense and flicked in his third goal of the game to make it 5-1. — AFP

## Tottenham owner Lewis arrested

NEW YORK: The British billionaire owner of Premier League side Tottenham, Joe Lewis, was arrested on Wednesday ahead of a court appearance in New York on insider trading charges, US prosecutors said. The 86-year-old Bahamas-based Lewis surrendered voluntarily after traveling to the United States to answer the charges, his lawyer told AFP in a statement. Lewis is accused of furnishing employees and lovers with inside information for years in a "brazen" scheme that raked in millions of dollars.

The Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Damian Williams, announced on Tuesday that the Bahamas-based Lewis had been indicted along with two co-conspirators. "The defendants were arrested this morning and will be presented later today," Williams's office said in a statement.

David Zornow, attorney for Lewis, said the US government had made "an egregious error in judgment" in charging his client. "Mr Lewis has come to the US voluntarily to answer these ill-conceived charges, and we will defend him vigorously in court," he added. The prosecutors allege that for years Lewis "abused his access to corporate board rooms and repeatedly provided inside information to his romantic partners, his personal assistants, his private pilots and his friends." — AFP

## Aussie 'on a mission' at World Cup after concussion setbacks

BRISBANE: Australia coach Tony Gustavsson insisted Wednesday it was simply bad luck that two players were concussed in separate "high-intensity" training incidents on the eve of their Women's World Cup clash with Nigeria, and praised his team for how they responded. The Matildas were already without the injured Sam Kerr for the match in Brisbane on Thursday and now fellow forward Mary Fowler - who replaced the Chelsea star in their opening game - is also unavailable.

With Kyah Simon still recovering from a knee injury sustained in October, Arsenal's Caitlin Foord is their only recognized striker. Along with Fowler, defender Aivi Luik, who was a substitute in their 1-0 win against Ireland last week, also suffered a head knock in training and has been ruled out. "It was a completely normal training, two days out you always have high-intensity," said Gustavsson, who refused to say how the incidents unfolded.

"Everything was good, we were just unlucky unfortunately, two head knocks. We didn't do anything different than normal. "The players kept going ... they are on a mission, and just focused on what they can control so credit to them in yesterday's training on how they responded to it." Gustavsson had no update on Kerr's calf injury, saying only that she would be re-assessed after the Nigeria game.

"We want to wait until the last minute to see where she's at in terms of availability," he added, referring to their final Group B match, against Canada on July 31 in Melbourne. His options against Nigeria appear to now be starting Foord up front with Emily van Egmond or Tameka Yallop, who both usually play in midfield. Australia have three points and victory would ensure they progress to the last 16 from Group B. Nigeria and Canada have one point each, with Ireland yet to get off the mark.

### Quality

Nigeria coach Randy Waldrum warned a depleted Australia still have plenty of "weapons" and it would not change how they approached the game or give them an advantage. "I don't think it really changes our tactics and what we are trying to do. They obviously still have a lot of weapons that can hurt you," said the American. "We know the strength of their team, I know a lot of their players well from when I was coaching in the (American) NWSL. I know their quality.

"So we cannot go into the match thinking we are at some advantage for that reason. We have to stick to the game plan and how we have been preparing for them since after the Canada match." Nigeria opened their campaign by earning a valuable point in a battling 0-0 draw against Olympic champions Canada, with goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie the African side's hero after saving a penalty. The Nigerian defense was solid and gave little away against a team ranked seventh in the world. Waldrum said his side had taken note of how the Irish got players behind the ball to frustrate the co-hosts, but stressed they must also put away any chances that come their way. — AFP



MILAN: Cyprus' Alex Tofalides (left) competes against Kuwait's Ali Abbas during their Foil Men's Senior Individual qualifying bout as part of the FIE Fencing World Championships at the Fair Allianz MI.CO (Milano Convegno) in Milan. — AFP

## Vingegaard given hero's welcome in Copenhagen

COPENHAGEN: Jonas Vingegaard made a triumphant return to Denmark on Wednesday following his second successive Tour de France victory, as thousands lined the streets to welcome him home. "Vingegaard!, Vingegaard!, Vingegaard!" echoed from the crowd of tens of thousands gathered in the square outside Copenhagen's city hall, just as they had a year earlier, when Vingegaard won his first Tour de France title.

"It's still hard to understand, that I have won the Tour de France two years in a row," he said during a speech at city hall. "If someone had told me five years ago, I don't think I would have believed it, or I know I wouldn't have," he added. Many wore the Danish red and white, while others donned yellow shirts mirroring the jersey worn by the leader of the Tour de France. Crowds also lined the streets to wave at Vingegaard as he enjoyed his second open-top parade wearing the famous jersey into Copenhagen after landing in a private jet.

The 26-year-old was the first Dane to win the iconic race since Bjarne Riis - who later admitted to doping - in 1996. "I'm a big fan of yours, and I'm not the only one. More than anything you have won the hearts of all Danes, and we are so proud of you,"



COPENHAGEN: Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard (left), winner of the 2023 edition of the Tour de France, and Denmark's Mads Pedersen greet the crowd from the balcony of the Copenhagen City Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark, on July 26, 2023. — AFP

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said during a speech. Vingegaard, who hails from the small village of Hillerslev and worked in a fish market as a teenager, then stepped out on the balcony of the city hall to wave at the roaring crowd.

"He is amazing, he has won two times now and hopefully he takes number three next year," Kenneth Nielsen, a teacher who said he drove 300 kilometres to come welcome the cyclist home, told AFP. During his speech at Copenhagen's City Hall, Vingegaard conceded that he at times had doubted himself during the race this year, and his humble persona strikes a chord with many Danes. — AFP



Nigeria's goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Change of Name

I, **Qutbuddin**, holder of Indian Passport No. L4533621 having permanent address 25, Durga Colony, Neemuch Kheda, Udaipur, Pin - 313001, Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Shahid and (surname) Ansari. **Qutbuddin and (surname) Rajnagar. (C#892) 26/07/2023**

I, **Shahabuddin Ahmad Ansari**, holder of Indian Passport No. M9885941 having permanent address UP, Pin code 274409 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Shahid and (surname) Ansari. **(C#3837) 25/07/2023**

Automated enquiry about the CivilID card is 1889988

## Spain and Japan book last 16

Canada end Ireland's World Cup dreams; Spain demolish Zambia 5-0



AUCKLAND: Spain's defender #12 Oihane Hernandez (right) and Zambia's forward #17 Racheal Kundananji fight for the ball during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group C football match between Spain and Zambia on July 26, 2023. — AFP

AUCKLAND: Rampant title contenders Spain and former champions Japan became the first teams to reach the Women's World Cup last 16 on Wednesday as both won with ease. Two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas started for Spain following her serious knee injury and played her part in a 5-0 demolition of Zambia. Japan had been on the brink of reaching the knockout rounds following their 2-0 win over Costa Rica earlier in the day and the Spain result sent both of them sailing through.

In the final match of the day, Olympic champions Canada took a step towards the next round by fighting back from a goal down in soaking-wet Perth to win 2-1 against Ireland, whose hopes of progressing are over. Japan and Spain meet on Monday to decide who wins Group C, and with it a theoretically easier draw. Both have a perfect six points from two games and are yet to concede a goal. Costa Rica and Zambia play the same day in

the fight to avoid finishing bottom of the pile.

Barcelona's Putellas came off at half-time at Eden Park in Auckland but Zambia were already dead and buried by then with Spain two goals in front against the lowest-ranked team in the tournament. Jennifer Hermoso and Alba Redondo both scored twice in the victory in front of just over 20,000 spectators, but Spain coach Jorge Vilda warned their best was still to come. "We haven't seen the best version of Spain, that is absolutely clear," said Vilda. "After the second goal we took our foot off the pedal and that is something we need to correct. We can't settle for this," he added.

### Canada survive

The 2011 champions Japan beat an error-prone Costa Rica comfortably in front of 6,992 spectators in Dunedin, the smallest crowd at the finals yet. Japan, who began their campaign by thrash-

ing Zambia 5-0, were never in trouble against an outclassed Costa Rica at the nearly 30,000-capacity Dunedin Stadium.

The game was effectively killed off in the space of three first-half minutes with goals from Hikaru Naomoto and 19-year-old Aoba Fujino. In Group B, World Cup debutants Ireland took the lead against Canada after just four minutes when captain Katie McCabe scored direct from a corner. But an own goal in the tricky conditions brought Canada level just before half-time and then Adriana Leon scored what turned out to be the winner in the 53rd minute to end Ireland's World Cup hopes.

Canada top the group with four points from two games, but Australia will look to leapfrog them by beating Nigeria on Thursday. The co-hosts Australia must do with only one recognized striker after Manchester City's Mary Fowler was ruled out of the match with concussion. The Matildas were already

missing captain and talismanic striker Sam Kerr, who was ruled out of at least the first two matches of the tournament with a calf injury. Arsenal's Caitlin Foord is now Australia's only recognized fit striker.

### US-Netherlands clash

Thursday's action is headlined by a heavyweight clash between the United States and the Netherlands in Wellington. Both teams will expect to get out of Group E, so bragging rights and group supremacy are at stake in a re-run of the 2019 final. On that occasion the Americans won 2-0 and are pursuing an unprecedented third successive World Cup title. The Netherlands are not quite the force they were but coach Andries Jonker believes the rest of the world, the Dutch included, are closing in on the United States. "Are we getting closer? The feeling is yes," he said. "Tomorrow is the first time we can check if we are closer or not." — AFP

## Messi scores twice as Miami crush Atlanta

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi's instant impact in the United States continued on Tuesday as he scored twice in Inter Miami's 4-0 victory over Atlanta United, firing his team into the knockout rounds of the Leagues Cup. The Argentine World Cup-winner was handed his first start for his new club after coming off the bench and grabbing a 94th-minute winner in Friday's game against Mexican club Cruz Azul. In his first game against a Major League Soccer club, Messi was simply too much for Atlanta to cope with and he struck up a fruitful understanding with Finnish winger Robert Taylor, who helped himself to Miami's other two goals.

The Leagues Cup is a tournament which brings together all the top flight teams from MLS and Mexico's Liga MX and with two wins Miami top their group and with their new arrival looking settled so quickly, they will surely believe they can get their first ever trophy. Atlanta fatally began the game playing a high-line, hoping to compress the space for Messi, but the approach simply allowed Miami to pick their moments to go over the top and exploit the space behind.

It was via such a route that Messi put the home side ahead in the eighth minute when he was sent free by a ball over the top from his former Barcelona team-mate Sergio Busquets. Messi burst into the box and although his low shot struck the post, he made no mistake with the rebound, side-footing into the goal. The seven-times Ballon d'Or winner then doubled the advantage in the 22nd minute, the first of three goals that saw him combine with Finnish winger Robert Taylor.

Messi ran at the back-peddalling Atlanta defense before switching to Taylor who slid the ball back into the path of the 36-year-old who slotted home. Another Busquets ball over the top found Messi but the off-side flag was raised after he shot straight at Atlanta keeper Brad Guzan. Miami made it 3-0, a



FLORIDA: Lionel Messi #10 of Inter Miami CF battles for the ball in the second half during the Leagues Cup 2023 match between Inter Miami CF and Atlanta United on July 25, 2023. — AFP

minute before the interval, when Messi fed Benjamin Cremaschi, who cleverly flicked the ball to Taylor who defied the tight angle with a fierce blast.

Eight minutes after half-time, Atlanta were caught on the break when a corner was cleared to Messi, who ran from deep in his own half before feeding Taylor to his left who drilled in a low shot off the inside of the far post. The margin of victory allowed Miami's Argentine head coach Gerardo Martino to rest Busquets and Messi with the latter substituted in the 78th minute. Messi's Argentina team-mate Thiago Almada had a chance for a consolation for Atlanta but his penalty was well saved by Miami keeper Drew Callender.

Miami, bottom of the MLS standings, had not won for 11 league games prior to Messi's arrival, but look utterly transformed by his impact, together with Busquets. "Their arrival has given the players a lot of confidence," said Martino, who ten years ago coached the pair at Barcelona. "The players feel more supported, they feel that the responsibility is carried by the great players and so they feel more liberated to play," he added. Martino, who also coached Messi with the Argentine national team, said his World Cup triumph last season had given him a new lease of life. — AFP

## O'Callaghan breaks record as Marchand grabs more gold

FUKUOKA: Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan said she was "a wreck" after breaking the women's 200m freestyle world record at swimming's world championships on Wednesday, while French superstar Leon Marchand claimed more gold. O'Callaghan beat Olympic champion Ariarne Titmus and Canada's Summer McIntosh to touch the wall in 1min, 52.85sec in Fukuoka, breaking a world record that had stood since 2009.

The 19-year-old injured her knee five weeks before the championships in Fukuoka and she said she was "really shook" to break the record. "I couldn't really explain it in the moment," said O'Callaghan, who had fired a warning shot when she beat Titmus over 200m at the Australian trials last month. "There were tears, there was happiness. It was very mixed emotions." There was more glory for Marchand, who added the 200m butterfly title to the 400m individual medley gold he won in record-breaking time on the opening day.

Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui took revenge on Australia's Sam Short to win the men's 800m freestyle, while China's Qin Haiyang picked up his second gold in the men's 50m breaststroke. China then claimed another title when they won the mixed 4x100m medley relay. O'Callaghan came out on top after another epic women's freestyle battle. Titmus was looking to grab her second gold of the championships after winning the 400m in a world record time on the opening night.

She led for most of the race but O'Callaghan turned on the afterburners over the home straight to reel her in. Titmus finished second in a personal-best time of 1:53.01, ahead of McIntosh on 1:53.65. O'Callaghan's time beat the world record of 1:52.98 set by Italian Federica Pellegrini - wearing a supersuit - at the 2009 world championships. "Heading into this, I just really wanted to have fun and enjoy it and try my



FUKUOKA: Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan (top) competes in the final of the women's 200m freestyle swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka on July 26, 2023. — AFP

best and try some new race plans," said O'Callaghan. "To come out with a world record was really unexpected for me."

### Marchand wins again

Marchand made headlines on Sunday when he beat Michael Phelps's legendary 400m IM world record, a mark that had stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He picked up his second title in the 200m butterfly, coming home in 1min, 52.43sec, ahead of Poland's Krzysztof Chmielewski on 1:53.62 and Japan's Tomoru Honda on 1:53.66. Marchand was back in action just 40 minutes later, qualifying from the 200m individual medley with the fastest time. "I have one more race, then relays with the team," said Marchand, who has dropped the 200m breaststroke from his program. "I'm just trying to enjoy the moment and keep going. It's been very good the past few days."

Hafnaoui came off second best to Short in the 400m freestyle final on Sunday, an event in which the Tunisian is the reigning Olympic champion. He got the better of his Australian rival in the 800m, coming home in 7min, 37.00sec, ahead of Short on 7:37.76 and American Bobby Finke on 7:38.67. Hafnaoui, Short and Germany's Lukas Martens were neck-and-neck for almost the entire race until Hafnaoui pulled away at the last. — AFP