

Polestar 2  
Why wait  
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



**6** Syrian refugee becomes mayor of German village



**8** Philippine lawmakers approve \$8.9 bn sovereign wealth fund



**8** India records strong 7.2% annual growth



**11** Royal fever in Jordan ahead of crown prince's wedding



## 'Smart system' for expats eyed

50K deportations seen in 2023 • Biometric scanning to help set up databank



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas visits a biometric scanning center to check the performance and facilities on May 31, 2023. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi said on Wednesday that Kuwait is continuously seeking to overhaul legislations concerning expatriate workers with the aim to set up a "smart system" to regulate bringing in foreign workers. Mahdi, in a statement marking the launch of the 2023 World Development Report, indicated that mechanisms would be set up to test professional skills of the workers that would be allowed into the country.

Notions incorporated in the aspired strategy include specifying areas where the workers are highly needed, with priority for building a lucrative work environment for citizens, namely young Kuwaitis who should be employed in the private sector. A planned online platform will screen potential workers from abroad to ensure the

newcomers are qualified to perform the job chosen for them.

"It does not make sense that a truck driver in his home country turns into an engineer in the host state," Mahdi remarked sarcastically, alluding to some such cases. He called for establishing an agency for hiring the foreign expatriates in the private sector.

Member of the National Human Rights Diwan Dr Abduredha Asiri said in a separate statement that the diwan advocates protecting rights of citizens and expatriates. Resident Representative of the World Bank in Kuwait Ghassan Al-Khojeh indicated that authorities of expatriates' home countries should have well-studied systems to regulate the dispatch of laborers to work abroad.

The head of International Migration Organization in Kuwait Mazen Abulhessen said recommendations incorporated in the

report are in harmony with the international convention for migration and the IMO strategy for the Gulf. Nisrin Rebaiaan, the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said the World Bank "has invited us to be part of the consultative commission tasked with the recently issued report on migrants and refugees". The recommendations in the report show how migrants can contribute to constructive and sustainable development in the host country, rather than turning into a burden for the community where they have chosen to work.

Meanwhile, informed sources said the interior ministry expects the number of expats to be deported this year to nearly double the number last year, which was 30,000, to reach more than 50,000. Sources said security efforts and continued inspection

Continued on Page 6

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Saudi population up by third

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's population has grown by more than one third since 2010, and 63 percent of the kingdom's nationals are aged under 30, according to a 2022 census published Wednesday. The General Authority of Statistics set the total population of the country at 32.2 million. Of these, 58.4 percent are Saudis and most others are from South Asia or elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa region. The total resident population is up 34.2 percent since 2010 — an increase of 8.2 million people, of whom 4.8 million are Saudis. Non-Saudi nationals account for 13.4 million, the majority of whom are Bangladeshis, followed by Indians, Pakistanis, Yemenis and Egyptians. — AFP

#### UAE withdraws from coalition

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates has withdrawn from a US-led maritime coalition tasked with securing tense Gulf waterways that are vital to the global oil trade, it said Wednesday. The UAE "withdrew its participation" in the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces two months ago, a foreign ministry statement said, without giving reasons for the move. A spokesperson for the Bahrain-headquartered CMF said the UAE remains a partner nation, despite putting its participation on hold. "The UAE remains committed to responsibly ensuring the safety of navigation in its seas," the UAE statement said, adding it is "committed to peaceful dialogue and diplomatic engagement". — AFP

#### Blast at Palestinian base kills 5

BEIRUT: Five fighters from a pro-Syrian Palestinian militant group were killed in an accidental explosion at a base in eastern Lebanon, a Lebanese security source said Wednesday. A spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) instead accused the Zionist entity of carrying out "overnight raids" at the base in Qusaya, near the Syrian border. "An old rocket exploded in an arms depot on the base and five fighters were killed," the security source said. The PFLP-GC is the only Palestinian faction to maintain bases outside Lebanon's official Palestinian refugee camps, the security source said. — AFP

### Candidates call for reforms to regain stability

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Candidates contesting the National Assembly elections scheduled for June 6 have said Kuwait needs ur-

gent fundamental reforms to regain political stability. Jenan Bushehri, a former minister and member of the 2022 Assembly which was scrapped by the constitutional court, said reforms must include amending the election law and establishing a higher commission for election. She added that if she is elected, she will submit a draft law calling to grant civil rights to children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners.

Candidate Khaled Al-Tammar bemoaned political instability that has

rocked the country in the past several years. Tammar, a member of the 2022 Assembly, said the government is incapable of facing the Assembly and avoids confrontation. Candidate Ali Nasir said the main political reforms urgently needed include amending the constitutional court law and fundamental changes to the elections law to get closer to having political parties. Parties are currently banned under Kuwaiti law and candidates run as individuals, but polit-

ical groupings operate freely. Nasir said he expects political disputes between some political leaders to restart after the June 6 elections and appealed to voters to elect the best so as to avoid such disputes.

Candidate Osama Al-Zaid, a member of the 2022 house, said submitting a draft law to purchase bank loans owed by Kuwaiti citizens was not a crisis. He added the country is capable of undertaking political

Continued on Page 6

### Capsule carrying Saudi astronauts splashes down

WASHINGTON: A SpaceX capsule carrying two Saudi astronauts has splashed down off the coast of Florida, completing the second private mission to the International Space Station. Rayyanah Barnawi, the first Saudi woman to go to space, compatriot Ali Al-Qarni, and Americans Peggy Whitson and John Shoffner waved happily to cameras after the hatch was opened on their Crew Dragon late Tuesday night.

They were then helped out of the spacecraft, slightly unsteady on their feet after spending eight days on the orbital outpost, as seen on a video stream provided by Axiom Space, which chartered the mission with NASA. "Welcome back to Earth!" tweeted NASA chief Bill Nelson. The four-member crew conducted more than 20 research experiments and served as research subjects to better understand

Continued on Page 6



This still image taken from video shows a SpaceX capsule being retrieved after splashdown off the coast of Florida on May 31, 2023. — AFP

### 'Manhattanhenge' wows New Yorkers

NEW YORK: Snapping pictures with cell phones, hundreds of New Yorkers and tourists gathered in the streets to watch the sun set in perfect alignment between rows of the skyscrapers for which the city is famous. Right on schedule at 8:12 pm on Tuesday evening, the flaming orange ball could be seen perfectly framed by Manhattan's canyons of tall buildings on streets running east-west, such as 42nd Street, which runs through Times Square.

This spectacle happens four times a year for two days, about three to four weeks before and after the summer and winter solstices. It has come to be known as "Manhattanhenge" after Stonehenge, the ancient monument in southern England where the sun also lines up perfectly during the solstices — the moments when the sun appears to reach either its highest or lowest point in the sky. — The event lures photographers with fancy lenses and regular New Yorkers and tourists who do not hesitate to stand in the streets for a few minutes, blocking traffic. The next time it happens will be on July 12. — AFP (See Page 12)



NEW YORK: The Sun sets in alignment with Manhattan streets running east-west, also known as Manhattanhenge, on May 30, 2023. — AFP



9 780202 223841

## Local

# Peru eyes agricultural cooperation with Kuwait

## Visa-free travel for Kuwaiti citizens under negotiations: Envoy



Ambassador of Peru Carlos Velasco speaks with local media during the event.



Ambassador Velasco (center) is seen with local media.

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Ambassador of Peru Carlos Velasco revealed the embassy presented a proposal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait to negotiate an agreement on visa-free travel for Kuwaiti citizens to Peru. "We believe we can start the procedures and hopefully approve this in the short term," he said.

During a lunch event with local media, the ambassador said his country is also trying to arrange a meeting with the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources to develop agriculture in Kuwait. "Peru is known for its fruits and vegetables, and we would like to improve the process in Kuwait to help in food security. I spoke to the authority to have a meeting to develop sustainable assistance to develop crop production. We will have a meeting soon, as they were very interested. We want to share our experience, especially since Peru also has such a similar climate and we grow crops in the desert," Velasco said.

"Trade between the two countries should improve, although many products from Peru are already in the Kuwaiti market," he added. The ambassador revealed that last year, 200 visas were issued for tourism to Kuwaiti citizens. "The visa will be issued in 24 hours or a maximum of 72 hours. We also proposed an airport services



Ambassador of Peru Carlos Velasco

association (ASA) agreement for direct flights between Kuwait and Peru."

The wealth of its land and cultural diversity give Peru an exquisite and tremendously varied gastronomy. According to Velasco, Peru is considered as one of the world's top gastronomic countries. "Peru's best restaurants are among the top 10 in



Chef Martin Velasco prepared traditional Peruvian ceviche at the event held by the embassy.



Traditional Peruvian ceviche

annual rankings of the 50 best restaurants in the world. We have 13 Peruvian restaurants in Dubai in the UAE, three in Doha, Qatar and one is going to open in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Hopefully, we will introduce Peruvian food in Kuwait," he said.

As for tourism, Peru is one of the world's most varied countries. It is a multicultural nation, filled

with traditions, a unique cuisine and vast natural reserves. It is home to 12 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and 84 of the planet's 117 life zones. The latest trend reveals that biodiversity in Peru is increasing, with the numbers of species of wild flora and fauna having risen and currently totaling 20,585 and 5,585, respectively.



**KUWAIT:** Speakers are seen at the conference organized by the World Bank Group and the Supreme Council for Planning and Development. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Migrant workers vital for global job markets: Report

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** World Bank Group in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development organized a press conference to announce launching the World Bank Development Report 2023, titled "Migrants, Refugees, and Societies" at the General Secretariat headquarter.

Speakers included Chief Economist and Co-Director of the World Development Report Caglar Ozden, speakers from the World Bank-Kuwait office, National Diwan for Human Rights, UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labor Organization (ILO) and officials from the government, in addition to representatives of the private sector, civil society and diplomatic and academic bodies in Kuwait.

This year, the report discusses the issue of migrants, as it is considered one of the most important and time-sensitive issue that is facing the world. Statistically, the report showed people who don't have the nationality of the country they are living in amount to about 184 million people around the world, including 37 million immigrants, while 43 percent of them live in countries with low and medium wages.

Globally, migrants are being defined as people who were born outside their countries, while this report opposes this definition, showing that people who were born outside their countries and got naturalized shouldn't be considered as migrants as they enjoy the same rights original citizens have.

On the other hand, it showed that rapid demographic change is making migrants increasingly necessary for countries at all income levels. High-income countries are ageing rapidly. So are middle-income countries, which get old before they get rich. The population of low-income countries is booming, but young people are entering the workforce without the

skills needed in the global labor market. These trends will spark global competition for workers.

Regarding international competition over attracting migrants, the report indicated these workers are increasingly important for countries. Countries with high and medium wages are rapidly ageing, unlike countries that have weak wages, where the number of young people is increasing but without having good skills required for the international labor market. Therefore, this will boost global demand for skilled migrants.

The report also showed the importance of creating laws and legislations that meet the proficiency of migrants and the needs of destination countries, and the motivation behind migrants moving to other countries. It added that if migrants and moving to other countries due to justified fear, or as immigrants, they should have the right to have international protection.

Meanwhile, the report reached several conclusions, saying when migrants' skills are identical to the host country, it will benefit all parties, whether these migrants are highly or mediumly skilled, regular or irregular. The report showed that when the skills are weak, the costs should be divided on everyone or at least reduced, as the situation of migrants will continue for years.

It pointed out that when the situation is weak and people are not refugees, difficult political challenges arise, especially when migration is in irregular and in frustrating conditions. Then the host countries have the right to regulate the entry of migrants, but deportation and denial of entry can lead to inhumane treatment.

It also added that countries of origin should actively manage migrants for development. They must make migration an explicit part of their development strategies. Destination countries can also manage migrants more strategically. It should use "robust" immigration to meet its labor needs and facilitate the integration of migrants, while addressing the social impacts that raise concerns among their citizens.

Finally, the report stressed international cooperation is essential to transform the migrant workforce into a powerful force for development. Bilateral cooperation can further align migrants with the needs of destination countries.

## NBK sponsors KIBS banking seminars

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is sponsoring a number of seminars organized by Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) during May and June, hosting lecturers from IE University- Madrid and London Business School.

The seminars tackle a number of key topics relevant to the banking sector including "How Will AI Impact Banking" and "Influence & Negotiations".

The workshop titled "Influence & Negotiations" was presented by Dr Niro Sivanathan, Prof of Organizational Behavior at the London Business School.

The workshop focused on making good decisions, influencing individuals, and negotiating good deals. Through a variety of simulations and cases dealing with negotiations, and influence, it explored the processes by which leaders can bring value to themselves and their organization.

The lecture augmented participants' knowledge of negotiations by bringing together extensive knowledge on decision-making and the psychology of influence to develop a set of tactics and strategies to influence others at the bargaining table and beyond.

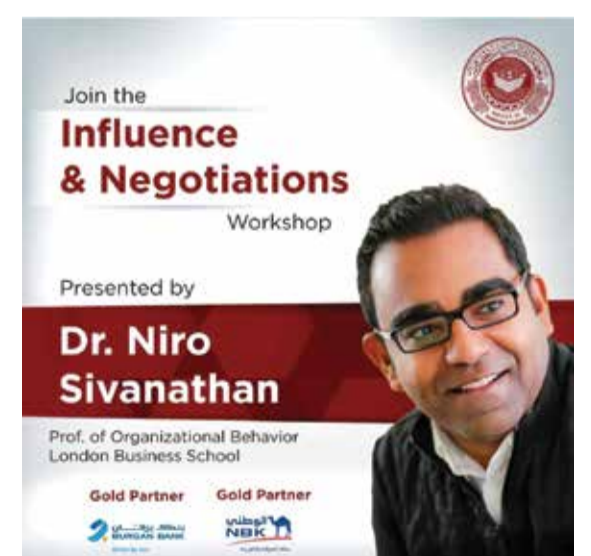
It also helped participants from professionals who have policymaking, managerial or supervisory roles in banks and non-banking organizations developing strategies all designed to help negotiators create and claim the greatest value.

Dr. Niro's work has been published in top journals in the fields of Science, Management and Psychology, such as the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Nature Human Behavior, Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Psychological Science, and Journal of Applied Psychology, among others.

In a related context, NBK also sponsors a seminar themed "How will AI Impact Banking" which hosts Prof. Ikhlaz Sidhu, the Dean of the School of Science and Technology, IE University in Madrid Spain. The program explores the impact of AI and ChatGPT on the banking industry as well as the various ways in which AI is being used in the sector. It also demystifies the technology trends of AI, ChatGPT and new Web technologies, through discussion of their relevance to the banking industry. In particular, the program also examines how AI technologies, such as machine learning and natural language processing, are being used to automate various banking processes, improve customer service, enhance fraud detection and reduce costs.

Participants will discuss how AI is transforming the traditional banking system and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for financial institutions and their customers, as well as case studies of AI applications in banking operations and fraud detection.

Prof Ikhlaz Sidhu is the Dean of the School of Science and Technology, IE University in Madrid



Spain and the founding faculty director emeritus of UC Berkeley's Sutardja Center for Entrepreneurship & Technology. He is the author of the book "Innovation Engineering" and the creator of the very popular Data-X Course at Berkeley. He has been granted 75 patents in internet communication technologies. Dr. Sidhu developed the Berkeley Method of Entrepreneurship, a teaching framework used at UC Berkeley as part of the Entrepreneurship and Technology area at the number one university in the world.

NBK's participation as a main sponsor of these seminars comes as part of its consistent endeavors to actively contribute to increasing awareness and knowledge among all segments of society, especially in view of the fast-paced technological advancement and its impact on digital banking services.

NBK always sponsors such seminars as part of its social initiatives, reflecting its approach to develop the different areas of society including social and educational sides, in an effort to better serve society and contribute to its development.

## Local

# Zain, Arab Media Forum partnership promotes media excellence

## Company hosted several interactive programs during two-day event



KUWAIT: Minister Al-Mutairi honors Eaman Al-Roudhan with Madhi Al-Khamees and Ambassador Ahmad Khetabi present.

KUWAIT: Zain, the Strategic Partner of the 18th Arab Media Forum, contributed to the event by hosting a number of unique programs throughout the two-day conference. The event came under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and was attended by some of the Arab World's top media personalities and executives.

The opening ceremony was attended by the representative of the event's patron, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Arab Media Forum Secretary General Madhi Al-Khamees and many ministers, ambassadors, and diplomats.

Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan joined a special panel discussion about the impact of technology on the progress and sustainability of communities. During the panel, Roudhan highlighted the vital role technology plays in empowering communities to grow and become more sustainable. The CEO also discussed Zain's leadership position in the local market as a pioneer in technology and digitization.

In addition, Roudhan discussed how technology facilitated access to information, paving the way to the digital revolution, and bringing simple and free access to resources like e-books and scientific journals. She further stressed on how technology helped create a digitally cultured community, presenting a new generation of entrepreneurs, developing key

infrastructures, advancing science, and improving quality of life.

Throughout the forum's two-day program, Zain hosted a number of activities to promote media excellence, including two workshops on the essentials of hosting TV, radio, and podcast shows and the essentials of creative writing, both hosted by media influencer Ali Najem. The company also hosted a special talk show, Zain Microphone, at the event, hosted by TV presenter Abdulrahman Al-Jaser, who interviewed some of the event's top guests and discussed the future of media and the impact of technologies like AI on the age of information.

Zain's strategic partnership with the forum extended throughout the past 10 years and came this year to further reflect the company's strong belief in the significant role media plays within the community. By sponsoring the event, Zain contributed to shouldering the local and regional media sectors and continued to support the Arab World's biggest media gathering.

This year, the Arab Media Forum celebrated its 20th year with support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The event welcomed high-profile executives from the Arab world, including foreign affairs ministers, media and information ministers, owners and executives of Arab media institutions, media personalities, journalists, authors, actors and more.

Zain's annual presence in this forum highlights its

from operational disruptions. Given its importance, it is dominating the regulatory agenda across the globe. The Monetary Authority of Singapore, Central Bank of Ireland, Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, European Commission, Financial Conduct Authority, Bank of England and the Saudi Arabia Monetary Authority, are just examples of a few regulators who have recently issued operational resiliency requirements in the aim of mitigating against the risks of disruptions in their respective jurisdictions. Their collective endeavor echoes an international push for a stronger and more resilient operational ecosystem within the global community.

### Enforcing operational resilience

While Kuwait has several laws and regulations designed to improve certain risk management and business continuity/disaster recovery aspects, there are no laws or regulations that mandate organizations to be operationally resilient. The consequence of this regulatory void could leave the vital services rendered by Kuwait's businesses and government entities vulnerable to debilitating disruptions, with potential ramifications that could send shockwaves throughout the nation's economy and society. The constant interruptions in service have become so routine that we've started to view them as a norm rather than an issue that needs urgent attention. However, we must not overlook the fact that these disruptions have widespread implications. Therefore, the necessity of crafting comprehensive laws and regulations is undeniable. Such provisions will offer clear guidance for organizations and businesses to manage their IT infrastructure effectively. They will also enhance Kuwait's capability to tackle the disruptions that could potentially derail the regular course of life and work in the country.

### Operational resilience versus business continuity

It appears that a key impediment to effective regulatory action in Kuwait might be a fundamental misunderstanding of the distinction between operational resilience and business continuity planning/disaster recovery. It is critical to note that while these two concepts are interrelated, they are not identical. The main difference between the two is that operational resilience is a broader concept that encompasses all aspects of an organization's ability to continue operating, while business continuity planning/disaster recovery focuses on how an organization will respond to a disruption during a crisis/temporary disaster. Emphasizing operational resilience empowers organizations to be less susceptible to disruptions, highlighting their ability to withstand any setbacks while maintaining routine operations. Conversely, business continuity planning/disaster recovery is the revival and maintenance of critical functions at reduced capacity until normal operations are resumed. Understanding these subtle yet significant differences is pivotal for a robust, effective organizational resilience strategy. It can help organizations avoid the need to execute business continuity / disaster recovery plans altogether.

### Improving operational resilience

Practical steps that should be done to improve the resiliency of the entire digital ecosystem in



Eaman Al-Roudhan is seen during the panel discussion.



Zain's Corporate Affairs and Relations team.

commitment to become a socially responsible organization that actively contributes to developing the communities in which it operates. The company will continue supporting this unique event that is considered the top in the region.

The Arab Media Forum has proven itself to be one

of the region's most prominent events that attend to Arab media. Since 2003, the event brought together many ministers, editors-in-chief of local and regional newspapers, media executives, journalists, academics, authors, actors, businessmen, and social figures from all around the Arab world.

## Kuwait's operational resilience: A national security concern

By Mohammed Al-Roumi

In today's interconnected and rapidly evolving digital world, operational disruptions have become a pressing concern for businesses and government entities alike. The threats associated with disruptions have the potential to wreak havoc, resulting in severe financial losses, irreparable damage to reputation, disgruntled customers, and even legal ramifications. From multinational corporations to local government agencies, the consequences of failing to address these matters loom covertly on the horizon. This article will provide an overview of how disruptions occur, the importance of operational resilience, why it isn't being regulated in Kuwait and factors that should be considered to help mitigate against any associated risks.



Mohammed Al-Roumi

### How disruptions occur?

Disruptions are events that interrupt or prevent the normal operation of an organization's IT systems and services. It can arise from human error, technical failures, cyberattacks, supply chain issues and natural disasters. The need for comprehensive resilience and proactive strategies are paramount to protect critical infrastructure and ensure the continued functioning of society. To put it in perspective, imagine a bank experiencing a system outage, it could hinder customers from accessing their accounts, making payments, or transferring funds.

### Relevance to Kuwait

Recently, Kuwait has been grappling with a flurry of unforeseen challenges, including technical failures and cyberattacks, which have brought disruptions to many key businesses and government services. These disruptions are causing widespread uncertainty and concern, raising questions about the country's ability to withstand future challenges as it progresses with its digital transformation journey. The government's alliance with Google Cloud is a particular focus area that will have a big impact on the way the government will operate. While the headlines about the alliance may be attention-grabbing, does Kuwait have the right regulatory setup, governance structure, vision, target architecture landscape and talent/skills to ensure it is implemented in a way that is both effective and resilient?

### Operational resilience and its importance

Operational resilience is the ability of an organization to prevent, adapt, respond to, recover and learn

Kuwait include: modernizing the existing IT infrastructure, setting up suitable governance, embracing disruption, stress testing essential business services and implementing effective management information and oversight.

The IT infrastructure in Kuwait needs modernization: Much of Kuwait's IT infrastructure is rooted in legacy systems, which are notably less resilient, susceptible to cyberattacks and often costlier to maintain. These weaknesses place businesses and government entities at risk, as legacy systems can be slow, unresponsive, difficult to change and prone to errors. This makes it hard to keep up with the demands of users and their changing needs. Modernizing this infrastructure is not just beneficial but essential to Kuwait's national security; But are leaders within these organizations adequately prepared to embark on such a transformational journey? And do they possess the necessary skills, expertise and/or familiarity with the latest technologies and practices that are needed? These may include proficiency using infrastructure as code (IaC), embracing microservices architecture, using a hybrid of SQL/NoSQL database and in-memory storage, de-coupling services and communicating asynchronously through publish/subscribe messaging-based systems, automation, visualization and leveraging the power of artificial intelligence in operations.

The right governance is essential for operational resilience: While Kuwait's supervisory and regulatory boards are comprised with executives possessing valuable experience in operations, finance, sales and their respective industries, only a handful boast up-to-date cybersecurity and technical IT expertise. The infusion of individuals with specialized cyber and technical knowledge significantly boosts the board's capacity to identify and mitigate operational risks. Such knowledge equips supervisory boards with nuanced understanding of the organization's systems, processes, potential threats, vulnerabilities and the necessary risk management strategies. As a case in point, following a significant data breach, Equifax, a major credit reporting agency, welcomed a board member with extensive cybersecurity experience. This strategic move enabled the company to improve its cybersecurity posture which in turn improved its resilience to cyberattack and disruptions.

Focus on avoidance when they need to focus on resilience: Instead of businesses and government entities concentrating their spending and efforts entirely on avoiding disruptions to critical business services, they should also focus on being resilient to them. This means planning and preparing for the possibility of a disruption and embedding resiliency as part of the organization's culture and operations. Although spending resources to minimize the possibility of a successful disruption is important (i.e., implementing security measures or keeping systems up to date), focusing on resiliency (i.e., implementing distributed and/or fault-tolerant systems that incorporate redundancy, load balancing, auto scaling, burst capacity, self-healing) is equally as important, given that avoiding operational disruption in its entirety is an unachievable target. A balanced strategy that involves both prevention and resilience offer a more robust defense against operational disruptions.

Identifying essential business services, setting

impact tolerances and stress testing: Performing a risk assessment by identifying the business services that are essential can improve an organization's ability to withstand and recover from disruptions. Impact tolerances, i.e., the levels of disruption that an organization can withstand without impacting its ability to deliver critical services, should be set based on the criticality of the service and the impact of a disruption. A critical service, such as online banking, should have zero tolerance for disruption, whereas a less critical service, such as marketing and advertising, should be able to tolerate a short period of disruption without significantly impacting the organization's ability to operate. Once organizations have established tolerances, they should implement mitigation measures that are appropriate to those tolerances. Periodic resilience/stress testing should also be performed to assess the organization's operational durability during disruptions. Organizations should promptly act on the insights gathered from these tests to mitigate identified risks and ensure readiness and resilience in the face of unplanned events.

Effective management information and oversight can help organizations identify and mitigate risks to their operations. By having access to accurate and up-to-the-minute information, organizations can make timely and better decisions. AI Ops and tools (such as BigPanda, Dynatrace, Splunk) can help automate and improve IT operations by logging/storing vast amounts of data from a variety of sources, including networks, applications, databases, tools, then use this data to identify patterns, anomalies and predict potential problems. Traditional IT management solutions cannot keep up with the volume of data captured. They are not able to provide real time visibility and are often based on manual processes, which can be slow and error prone. AI Ops can provide rapid response and remediation: or, in some cases, automatically resolve issues without human intervention. The adoption of cutting-edge technology like AI Ops is not yet embraced in Kuwait.

Operational resilience is a top priority for regulators around the world. Regulators worldwide are increasingly focused on ensuring that organizations are prepared and resilient to operational disruptions. Laws/Regulations such as the Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA), NIS 2 Directive and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA)'s Operational Resilience Policy Statement (PS21/3) are a few examples of the steps Regulators across the globe have taken to mitigate against the risks of disruptions. Kuwait is facing a growing threat that can have a devastating impact on the economy, society and national security. Kuwaiti Regulators must take action to improve operational resilience within government entities and businesses.

*NOTE: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ernst & Young Global or its member companies. Mohammed Al-Roumi is a senior manager in Ernst & Young's Information technology advisory practice with over 12 years of experience managing information technology (IT) matters for international companies. These organizations include high profile Big Tech corporations, Globally Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs) and Media conglomerates.*

## News in Brief

Interior Minister suspends  
officials over jail 'incidents'

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah suspended the ministry's assistant undersecretary for special security and correctional facilities' affairs and the director of the correctional facilities' department over incidents that happened at the Central Jail on Tuesday, the Interior Ministry announced on Wednesday. The minister ordered a probe into the incidents, the statement said.

Deal signed to bring  
Ethiopian domestic workers

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait Union of Domestic Labor Offices Khalid Al-Dakhnan signed an agreement with his Ethiopian counterpart to bring in domestic laborers from Ethiopia. According to the agreement laborers will be able to come to Kuwait after receiving suitable training. There are 600 employment agencies under the supervision of the Ethiopian Domestic help union that will contribute to providing Kuwait with labor. The agreement emphasized the importance of providing full labor protection and coordinating with the Kuwaiti side in this regard, with the purpose of avoiding illegal practices common in some employment agencies.

Pakistan, Kuwait discuss  
enhancing health cooperation

KUWAIT: Ministry of Health Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha received on Wednesday Pakistani Ambassador Malik Farooq and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Technical Affairs Dr Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and Director of the Department of International Relations Dr Rehab Al-Watyan. The two sides discussed ways of enhancing cooperation that serves common health interests and activating medical cooperation memorandums that contribute to the development of the health system in both countries.

## Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City skyscrapers stand tall behind an urban residential area. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Tobacco taxes should be mandated in Kuwait: Health official

## Kuwait has the lowest cigarette prices among Gulf countries

## How affordable is tobacco in Kuwait?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Kuwait levies an import duty on tobacco products, which amounts to 100 percent of the cost, insurance and freight value.

There is also a minimum specific import duty of KD 8 per 1,000 cigarettes, which has not increased in the last 10 years – despite other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increasing minimum import duties. The minimum import duty on waterpipe tobacco is KD 3 per kilogram.

## What does WHO say about Kuwait's tobacco policies?

WHO recommends Kuwait decrease the affordability of tobacco, particularly the waterpipe variety. "A uniform specific excise tax should be implemented on all tobacco products and gradually increased," said WHO in its recommendations. "When implemented, the excise tax should be extended to include all tobacco products in order to maximize the reduction in consumption."

WHO also recommends banning duty-free allowances for tobacco products and earmarking part of tobacco revenue for health or tobacco control.



KUWAIT: Officials tour booths at the event held by the health ministry on the occasion of "World No Tobacco Day". — KUNA photos



Israa Mandani



Ahmad Al-Shatti



Abeer Al-Bahwa

KUWAIT: The new parliament should impose taxes on tobacco and take measures to combat smoking, Director of Mubarak Al-Kabeer health area Waleed Al-Busairi said Wednesday at an event held by the Ministry of Health to raise awareness against growing tobacco.

The campaign was held on the occasion of "World No Tobacco Day" observed by all United Nations member states on May 31. The campaign, said Busairi, aims to alert people to the dangerous effects of smoking on both individuals and society as a whole.

"Kuwait has the lowest prices for cigarettes among all Gulf countries," said Vice President of the Health Ministry's National Anti-Smoking Program Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti. He said he hoped Kuwait would mandate higher prices for cigarettes in order to reduce consumption rates in the country, pointing out that smoking is a major contributor to the development of many ailments.

Dr Abeer Al-Bahwa, the Director of the Health Promotion Department and the Campaign Officer, said the campaign aims to urge governments to discontinue subsidies for tobacco cultivation and redirect the savings to support farmers in transitioning to more sustainable crops that enhance food security.

The campaign seeks to raise awareness among tobacco-growing communities regarding the benefits of abstaining from tobacco and cultivating sustainable crops. It supports endeavors to combat desertification and environmental degradation by reducing tobacco cultivation while exposing the industry's obstruction of sustainable livelihoods.

## 8 million deaths

Bahwa said tobacco usage accounts for 25 percent of all global cancer-related deaths, with tobacco smokers being 22 times more likely to develop lung cancer com-



Officials tour booths at the event held by the health ministry.

pared to non-smokers. "Tobacco is the only preventable cause of illness and death worldwide," said Bahwa. "(However), it causes more than 8 million deaths every year." Teaching children and youth about the effects of smoking through health promotion programs at schools, said Busairi, is essential in protecting against future risks. He urged parents to set a good example for their children by refraining from smoking.

Dr Israa Mandani, the head of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Division in the School Health Department, reaffirmed the commitment of school health awareness programs to combat smoking through informative lectures. A total of 190 lectures were conducted across various middle and secondary schools, she said. — KUNA

## Fishing sector historically sidelined: Fishermen union

KUWAIT: Kuwait Union of Fishermen lauded the decision of Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi and his keenness to inject new blood in the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) and Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, and appreciated his reformist efforts. "Fishermen have their confidence in the minister. Workers in the sector have high hopes for a better future under his leadership,"

said Head of the union Thamer Al-Suwayan. "The reforms will lead to sustainable development and growth". Minister Al-Awadhi issued decisions Tuesday to retire 161 employees in three departments, including the Health Ministry, Public Authority for Food and Nutrition and Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources because they have reached retirement age. The decisions including retiring 40 employees in the food authority, 25 in the agriculture authority and 96 in the health ministry.

Suwayan said the fishing sector has been sidelined for years and does not get the simplest of support approved by PAAAFR. Support for the fishing industry has been negligible, he added, and has not been increased since the 80s, while other sectors had their allowances doubled several times.



## 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



'We want to be free': Filipinos demand right to divorce

## Syrian refugee who became mayor of a German village

Page 6

Page 7

# N Korea spy satellite crashes into sea

## UN chief calls for N Korea to cease 'such acts' and return to the negotiating table

**SEOUL:** North Korea attempted to launch a spy satellite Wednesday but it crashed into the sea after a rocket failure, with the South Korean military retrieving part of the likely wreckage in a potential intelligence bonanza. North Korea does not have a functioning satellite in space and leader Kim Jong Un has made developing a military spy satellite a top priority for his regime, despite UN resolutions banning its use of such technology. Pyongyang had said in the build-up to the launch attempt that the satellite would be vital to monitoring the military movements of the United States and its allies.

But the rocket lost thrust and plunged into the sea with its satellite payload, the official Korean Central News Agency reported. It added that authorities would investigate the "serious defects" revealed by the launch and conduct another test as soon as possible.

South Korea's military said it had managed to locate and salvage a portion of the suspected debris. It released images showing a large barrel-like metal structure with thin pipes and wires at the bottom, which experts said might be a liquid fuel tank.

"Technical experts will be able to gain tremendous insight into North Korea's proficiency with large, multi-stage boosters from the recovered debris," US-based analyst Ankit Panda told AFP.

### Panic, confusion

The launch prompted confusion and panic in Seoul, as city authorities sent an early morning emergency evacuation alert to residents and blasted an air raid siren across the downtown area.

This sparked widespread consternation online, before the interior ministry clarified minutes later the alert

had been "incorrectly issued".

"I was taking my two young children to a basement parking lot as advised, in shock," a 37-year-old father who asked to be identified by his surname Yoon, told AFP. The correction left him "speechless and outraged", he said. Japan briefly activated its missile alert warning system for the Okinawa region early Wednesday, lifting it after about 30 minutes.

### Condemnation

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington all slammed the launch, which they said violated a raft of UN resolutions barring Pyongyang from any tests using ballistic missile technology.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for North Korea to cease "such acts" and return to the negotiating table. "Any launch using ballistic missile technology is contrary to the relevant Security Council resolutions," he said in a statement.

Because long-range missiles and rockets used for space launches share the same technology, analysts say developing the ability to put a satellite in orbit would provide Pyongyang with cover for testing its banned intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

In 2012 and 2016, Pyongyang tested ballistic missiles that it called satellite launches. Both flew over Japan's southern Okinawa region.

### 'Determination'

Prior to Wednesday's launch, Pyongyang had launched five satellites since 1998, three of which failed immediately and two of which appeared to have been put into orbit.

Signals from those launches have never been independently detected, indicating they may have malfunctioned.



SEOUL: A man watches a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul on May 31, 2023. North Korea launched its purported spy satellite, the South's military said, prompting confusion in Seoul as the city briefly issued an evacuation warning in error. — AFP

North Korea said Tuesday its new spy satellite would be "indispensable to tracking, monitoring... and coping with in advance in real time the dangerous military acts of the US and its vassal forces".

South Korea this month launched its own homegrown Nuri satellite and put a working satellite into orbit for the first time, with this success likely prompting the North to conduct a rapid launch of their own satellite, Seoul's spy agency told lawmakers.

"They shortened the launch period

from the normal 20 days to just a few days," MP Yoo Sang-bum told reporters after a National Intelligence Service parliamentary briefing on Wednesday.

Since diplomatic efforts collapsed in 2019, North Korea has doubled down on military development, conducting a string of banned weapons tests, including test-firing multiple ICBMs.

Kim last year declared his country an "irreversible" nuclear power and called for an "exponential" increase in weapons production, including tactical nukes.

Wednesday's failure should be only regarded as a temporary setback for Kim, who will continue to develop his nuclear and satellite programmes, according to experts.

"We know that Kim's determination does not end with this recent activity," Soo Kim, policy practice area lead at LMI Consulting and a former CIA analyst, told AFP. She said that the launch could be a "foreshadowing of greater provocations, including the nuclear test". — AFP

## NATO-led peacekeepers step up security after Kosovo clashes

**ZVECAN:** NATO-led peacekeepers stepped up security around a town hall in northern Kosovo on Wednesday, where hundreds of ethnic Serbs gathered again at the scene of clashes earlier this week that left more than 80 people injured.

NATO has decided to deploy hundreds of reinforcements to strengthen Kosovo's international peacekeeping mission (KFOR) after Monday's violence in the town of Zvecan. Hundreds of ethnic Serbs rallied outside Zvecan's town hall on Wednesday for a third consecutive day and held aloft a huge Serbian flag that stretched over 200 meters (660 feet) from the municipal building to the town centre.

KFOR soldiers encircled the town hall, additionally securing the building with a metal fence and barbed wire, an AFP journalist said. Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority boycotted local elections in the north last month, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of local councils despite a turnout of less than 3.5 percent.

Many Serbs are demanding the withdrawal of Kosovo special police forces, as well as the ethnic Albanian mayors they do not consider their true representatives. The demonstrators decorated the fence — erected by KFOR soldiers — with Serbian flags.

They also carried a flag dedicated to Belgrade-born tennis star Novak Djokovic, who wrote a message on a TV camera at the French Open on Monday calling Kosovo the "heart of Serbia". Three vehicles of ethnic Albanian Kosovo special police — whose presence sparks controversy in Serb-majority northern areas — remained parked outside the town hall. On Monday,



ZVECAN: Hundreds of ethnic Serbs gather outside Zvecan town hall, in northern Kosovo, on May 31, 2023. Tensions remained high after violent clashes earlier this week between ethnic Serbs and NATO-led peacekeepers over the recent appointment of elected Albanian Mayors in the town. — AFP

NATO-led peacekeepers used shields and batons in a bid to disperse the crowd but were met by a hail of rocks, bottles and Molotov cocktails.

A total of 30 peacekeepers — 11 Italians and 19 Hungarians — were wounded in Monday's clashes, according to KFOR. Fifty-two protesters were also injured, three of them "seriously", while five Serbs were arrested for taking part in the clashes.

On Tuesday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned attacks on the alliance's forces in Kosovo, saying they were "unacceptable and must stop". "We have decided to deploy 700 more troops from the operational reserve force for Western Balkans and to put an additional battalion of reserve forces on high alertness so that they can also be deployed if needed," Stoltenberg said. — AFP

fighter pilot had performed an "unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" near an American surveillance aircraft operating over the South China Sea last week. Video footage released by the US military shows a Chinese fighter plane crossing in front of the American aircraft, which can be seen shaking from the resulting turbulence.

The Chinese plane "flew directly in front of and within 400 feet of the nose of the RC-135, forcing the US aircraft to fly through its wake turbulence" on Friday, the Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement. "The RC-135 was conducting safe and routine operations over the South China Sea in international airspace, in accordance with international law," it said.

The Pentagon said the incident was part of a pattern of behavior by China. A senior US defence official said there has been an "alarming increase in the number of risky aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea" by Chinese aircraft and ships — actions that "have the potential to create an unsafe incident or miscalculation".

The announcement of the latest incident came a day after the Pentagon said Beijing had refused a US invitation for Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to meet his Chinese counterpart in Singapore this week. The senior US defence official said the timing of the announcement of the South China Sea incident was unrelated to China's refusal of the invitation, explaining that information "was subject to the US military declassification process and US diplomatic communication process". — AFP

## Beijing blames US 'provocation' for fighter jet incident

**BEIJING:** Beijing blamed US "provocation" Wednesday for an incident last week in which a Chinese plane crossed in front of an American surveillance aircraft over the South China Sea. The incident comes at a time of frayed ties between Washington and Beijing over issues including Taiwan, which China regards as its territory, and the shooting down of an alleged Chinese spy balloon that flew over the United States this year.

"The United States' long-term and frequent sending of ships and planes to conduct close surveillance on China seriously harms China's national sovereignty and security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said when asked about the latest incident.

"This kind of provocative, dangerous activity is the cause of the security issues on the seas," Mao said, calling on Washington to "immediately stop this form of dangerous provocation". "China will continue to take all necessary steps to resolutely protect its own sovereignty and security," she said.

The US military said on Tuesday a Chinese

**KEMS ZAJIL Telecom**  
A Kalaam Group Company

### Your Digital Solutions Partner

KEMS Zajil Telecom leverages innovative technologies to enable Enterprises to become future-ready, agile, and resilient.

- Connectivity
- Cybersecurity
- Cloud
- Managed Networks
- Voice & Communication
- Datacenter
- ICT
- IoT

Visit our website

Kalaam Group's Global Offices  
Bahrain | KSA | UAE | Kuwait | Jordan | UK

## International

# Republican governor DeSantis begins presidential bid in Trump's shadow

## 'Leadership is not about entertainment, It's about results': DeSantis

**CLIVE:** Republican governor Ron DeSantis kicked off his 2024 presidential campaign tour in Iowa on Tuesday by pitching himself as the best alternative to Donald Trump.

Though he did not name the septuagenarian ex-president directly during his speech, DeSantis, 44, nevertheless evoked Trump, attempting to draw a study of parallels and contrasts. America needs an "energetic" president capable of serving two terms, he said, a reference to the fact that Trump is constitutionally limited to one more four-year stint in office.

"Leadership is not about entertainment," DeSantis told Iowans. "It's about results." But he also tried to ingratiate himself with Trump's voter base, most obviously with a campaign slogan — "Our great American comeback" — that strongly echoed Trump's "Make America great again" mantra.

### Wooing evangelicals

In an appeal to religious voters previously won over by Trump, the Florida governor started his White House bid at the evangelical Eternity Church in Clive, Iowa under a giant portrait of Jesus Christ. The practicing Catholic has in recent interviews sought to emphasize his conservative policy achievements, including a ban on discussing gender identity and sexual orientation in schools, a block on funding efforts for promoting diversity at public universities, and one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the country.

While he lacks the Republican frontrunner's national profile, DeSantis has tried to position himself as an effective policymaker, implicitly contrasting

himself with Trump's reputation for legislative inertia. In Iowa, DeSantis spoke at length on themes dear to the president's fans, including denouncing immigration as out of control, accusing the media of spreading lies, and painting a dystopian picture of life under Democratic President Joe Biden, who he claimed has allowed criminals "to roam in the streets."

Each talking point received a hearty standing ovation. "American decline is not inevitable. It is a choice. And we must choose a new direction for our country. We must choose a path that will lead to a revival of American greatness," he said.

His return to Iowa on Tuesday was his second stop this month in the small Midwestern state, which plays an outsized role in presidential elections as the first to cast ballots in the GOP primary, guaranteeing invaluable momentum for the winning candidate. The kickoff event begins a four-day tour through 12 cities in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

### 'Too much baggage'

Polls show DeSantis trailing Trump, who is set to make his own pitch to Iowans this week. In his speech, DeSantis refrained from explicitly criticizing Trump and possibly offending a large voter base that could swing away from the recently indicted ex-president.

His approach struck a chord with some in the crowd, who expressed exhaustion with the chaos, scandals and lawsuits that have shadowed Trump. "I think he has too much baggage and so I'd rather see someone else," Kathy Leinenkugel, a 67-year-old epidemiologist, told AFP.

Retiree Martha Burch agreed. "I just want op-



**CLIVE:** Florida Governor and 2024 Presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis (left) listens as his wife Casey DeSantis speaks during his campaign kickoff event at Eternity Church in Clive, Iowa. — AFP

portunities," she said. "A lot is going on with Trump. We don't know what's gonna happen with the legal thing." Burch said she saw something "presidential" in the conservative Florida governor and that it was clear "he loves America."

Speaking to the media after his speech, DeSantis more directly took swings at his chief Republican rival Trump, who has recently skewered the governor on social media. "I'm going to hit back," DeSantis said. — AFP

## Turks in Germany predict exodus after Erdogan re-election

**BERLIN:** Turkish artist Bugra Erol, 36, has worked between Berlin and Istanbul over the last few years but his country's decision to re-elect Recep Tayyip Erdogan has spurred him to move his studio to Germany for good. "Life has been difficult for artists like me in the last decade and the result of the last election was the cherry on the cake," he told AFP.

"I feel like I spent all my life with the struggle," said Erol, who first came to Berlin in 2017 in search of more artistic freedom. Turkish artists and intellectuals living in Germany fear that a whole generation of creative young people will leave Turkey after Erdogan's historic election win.

Erdogan, who enters his third decade of rule with Sunday's historic victory, has overseen the country's worst economic crisis since the 1990s with inflation running at more than 40 percent. He has also caused growing consternation with his crackdowns on dissent, with thousands of opposition figures and campaigners jailed since an attempted coup in 2016.

Isil Egrikavuk, a performance artist and academic based in Berlin, believes many of her peers will choose to leave Turkey. "People have been leaving increasingly" since the Gezi Park protests of 2013 and "in the last years these numbers increased also", she said. — AFP

## Syrian refugee who became mayor of a German village

**BERLIN:** Ryyan Alshebl fled war-torn Syria in 2015, arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos after a harrowing four-hour journey on a rubber boat. Eight years on, he is the mayor of a German village. "It was dark and cold and there was not a single light to be seen on Lesbos," he recalls.

"A few hours ago we had been in a normal Mediterranean town in Turkey. The environment had transformed with the cold and dark, and of course the feelings of fear that go with such a journey," Alshebl, then barely 21, was among a huge wave of refugees who arrived in Europe that year.

After landing in Greece, he made his way through Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia by public transport and on foot, taking 12 days in total to reach Germany. He eventually ended up at a refugee centre at Althengstett, a rural region near the Black Forest.

"In the shared accommodation, where you cannot expect more than a bed, a roof and some food, for which you are still thankful, you can only do one thing: get back on your feet quickly and invest rapidly in your own future," he said.

Alshebl soon learned to speak German fluently — "if you are in the countryside you have no other choice" — and landed a traineeship as an administrative assistant at Althengstett town hall. He earned German citizenship in 2022, a

prerequisite for anyone who wants to stand in local elections in Germany.

### 'Taking responsibility'

Now 29, he will take up his post as mayor of Ostelsheim, a village near Althengstett, in June.

He is believed to be the first Syrian from the wave of refugees who arrived in Germany in 2015-16 to be elected to a political post. Alshebl was joined by four friends on his journey to Europe. But he left behind his parents and one brother, though a second brother had already moved to Germany on a student visa.

He said his experience of fleeing Syria and having "to take responsibility not only for (myself) but also for the environment" had given him the drive to go into politics. "To take on this responsibility at such an age, you learn a lot. Of course, it creates a new person, a new personality," he said.

Alshebl ran as an independent candidate in the election, winning 55.41 percent of the vote. But he is also a member of the Greens, "because climate protection is very important" to him. His victory is all the more striking given that Ostelsheim, a village of 2,700 people, is a traditionally conservative community.

Situated among a cluster of hills, the village is surrounded by rolling fields lined with dry stone walls and hedges. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party harnessed anger over the influx of asylum seekers in 2015-16 to win votes and ultimately enter parliament for the first time.

### Openness

But Alshebl said he has not seen right-wing extremism personally. Alshebl believes he was elected because he listened to the people's concerns—



**Ryyan Alshebl**

from childcare to digitalization issues. He admits to not really "feeling anything" on hearing he had won the election in March as he was "overwhelmed".

But as congratulations poured in from around the world, it became clear that his story was "bigger than a mayoral election in a small community". Alshebl believes the fact he triumphed against two other local candidates who grew up in the area says a lot about the mentality of the voters.

"It is a sign that people did not count the origin, but the qualifications. It is a sign of openness to the world," he said. Alshebl's parents, a schoolteacher and an agricultural engineer, belong to Syria's Druze minority, but he describes himself as not religious.

He has "mixed feelings" about Syria, which he has not been able to visit since living in Germany. "It is the country where you were born and raised... You long for the people you grew up with," he said. "But I am happy that I got this chance to live here at all" when others have not, he said. — AFP

## Candidates call for reforms to...

Continued from Page 1

reforms under the current political leadership. Zaid called on authorities to create regional partnerships with neighboring giants Saudi Arabia and Iran.

## 'Smart system' for expats eyed...

Continued from Page 1

campaigns in expat-dominated areas will lead to an increase in arrests of those with expired residency permits, wanted people and absconders. All these are violations that warrant deportation, with deportees banned from entering the country again.

The sources said decisions issued by the interior ministry's higher committee to remedy the population structure, the manpower authority and follow up by the Cabinet to implement the Kuwaitization policy will lead to the possibility of the number of residency violators rising. They said expats will not be given work permits in the

Former MP Saifi Al-Saifi warned that touching the income of citizens is a red line, adding that forces of corruption have stolen public funds. Former MP Saadoun Hammad said he will decide on his choice for Assembly speaker only after the elections. He also criticized the opposition's "double standards". Meanwhile, the national campaign against smoking called on the next Assembly to impose additional taxes on cigarettes, saying tobacco is cheapest in Kuwait among Gulf states.

private sector if their specialties are not technical and required in the market, in addition to limits on age. They said the government is again reviewing leaving the country as a condition to receiving indemnity payment, but this move requires studying legal aspects to avoid violating constitutional articles and court rulings.

Separately, an interior ministry official said on Wednesday biometrics scanning in Kuwait will help set up a databank of all individuals living in the country aged 18 and above. A press statement by the ministry's public relations and security media department said Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas said after his tour of biometric centers that the ministry would do its best to facilitate the process of registering biometric data of citizens and residents alike. There is no need to undergo the process prior to departure from Kuwait; however, biometric scanning is required upon arrival, he reiterated. — Agencies

to have paid tens of millions of dollars for their tickets.

The company has not disclosed how much the government of Saudi Arabia spent on sending its two nationals on Ax-2, nor the amount paid by Shoffner, an entrepreneur. Whitson is a former NASA astronaut now contracted by Axiom. The mission has been something of a publicity coup for Saudi Arabia.

Axiom is one of several companies working on a commercial space station to replace the ISS once it retires after 2030. NASA has made it a goal to stimulate a commercial economy in the region of space called low Earth orbit, leaving it to focus on missions deeper into space, such as returning to the Moon with humans and then going on to Mars. — AFP

## Khan in court as rights watchdog issues warning

**ISLAMABAD:** Embattled Pakistan opposition leader Imran Khan returned to court on Wednesday, as the nation's human rights watchdog warned all sides are to blame in a rapidly deteriorating democratic crisis. Khan's brief arrest earlier this month sparked days of deadly unrest before Islamabad orchestrated a crackdown on his party, including mass arrests and a pledge to try some protesters in army courts.

The Islamabad High Court and a specialist corruption court granted Khan bail on Wednesday in the same graft case which prompted his arrest on May 9, his lawyers said. Thousands, including grassroots supporters and key Khan aides, have been rounded up since the Supreme Court declared that detention illegal and allowed him to walk free.

Islamabad says the arrests are justified because it was targeted by anti-state terrorism, while Khan claims his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party is being quashed ahead of elections due by October. But Hina Jilani, the head of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), issued a stark warning to "all political stakeholders". "Unless they desist from any further measures that could imperil the country's fragile democracy, they may find themselves unable to steer the country safely through the multiple crises it is facing."

Since he was ousted from office in a no-confidence vote last spring, Khan has waged an unprecedented campaign of defiance against Pakistan's powerful military establishment, which analysts say was behind his rise and fall from power. His arrest was widely seen as payback ordered by top brass after he repeated incendiary allegations that they plotted an assassination attempt against him.

The HRCP said "civilian supremacy has emerged as the greatest casualty" from the deepening political crisis, which comes as Pakistan suffers from a flatlining economy and worsening security situation. "The government's inability — or unwillingness — to safeguard civilian supremacy" and PTI's "inces-



**LAHORE:** Security personnel with ballistic shields escort former Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan to the High Court on May 30, 2023. — AFP

sant humiliation of law... has led to making military interference in politics inevitable", Jilani said.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, Human Rights Watch criticized Islamabad for agreeing to try 33 civilians in military courts for allegedly attacking army installations during the unrest. "Pakistan's military courts, which use secret procedures that deny due process rights, should not be used to prosecute civilians," said associate Asia director Patricia Gossman.

As the clampdown on PTI continues, several senior figures have defected, leaving former cricket star Khan increasingly isolated. He says arrests are being used to force resignations. Nonetheless he remains far and away Pakistan's most popular politician.

Meanwhile, a Pakistani soldier was killed on Wednesday when militants opened fire on a polio vaccination team, the country's military said, in the latest attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban. Attempts to eradicate polio in Pakistan have been hit by attacks targeting inoculation teams that have claimed hundreds of lives in over a decade. "Terrorists attempted to disrupt the ongoing polio campaign by firing on the members of the polio team," the military said in a statement about the assault in the former tribal areas that border Afghanistan. A soldier deployed to protect the vaccination team was killed during an exchange of fire, it added. — AFP

## Capsule carrying Saudi astronauts...

Continued from Page 1

the impacts of microgravity on the human body and to develop technologies that can assist future human spaceflight, Axiom Space said in a statement.

The Axiom Mission 2 (Ax-2) crew took off aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral on May 21. The company carried out its first private mission to the ISS in April last year, with each of its three paying crew members reported

## International

# 'We want to be free': Filipinos demand right to divorce

## Process is slow and expensive, cases can cost as much as \$10,000

**MANILA:** Philippine mother-of-three Stella Sibonga is desperate to end a marriage she never wanted. But divorce in the Catholic-majority country is illegal, and a court annulment takes years.

The Philippines is the only place outside the Vatican where divorce is outlawed. Pro-divorce advocates argue the ban makes it harder for couples to cut ties and remarry, and escape violent spouses. People wanting to end their marriage can ask a court for an annulment or a declaration that the nuptials were invalid from the start, but the government can appeal against those decisions. The legal process is slow and expensive — cases can cost as much as \$10,000 or more in a country plagued by poverty — with no guarantee of success, and some people seeking a faster result fall for online scams.

"I don't understand why it has to be this difficult," said Sibonga, who has spent 11 years trying to get out of a marriage that her parents forced her into after she became pregnant. Sibonga's legal battle began in 2012, when she applied to a court to cancel her marriage on the basis of her husband's alleged "psychological incapacity", one of the grounds for terminating a matrimony.

After five years and \$3,500 in legal fees, a judge finally agreed. The former domestic worker's relief was, however, short-lived. The Office of the Solicitor General, which as the government's legal representative is tasked with protecting the institution of marriage, successfully appealed the decision in 2019.

Sibonga said she requested the Court of Appeals to reverse its ruling, but is still waiting for an answer. "Why are we, the ones who experienced suffering, abandonment and abuse, being punished by the law?" said Sibonga, 45, who lives near Manila. "All we want is to be free."

### 'Dysfunctional marriages'

The most powerful opponent to divorce in the Philippines is the Catholic Church, which is also against abortion and contraceptives. Around 78 percent of the country's 110 million people are Catholic, according to official census data, and many politicians are wary of contradicting the Church on sensitive social issues. But Congress has scored significant wins in recent years.

A controversial birth control law was passed in 2012, despite strong opposition from the Church.

And in 2018, majority and opposition parties in the House of Representatives approved a divorce bill that later stalled in the Senate. It was the first time such a proposal had got that far. Surveys conducted by polling company Social Weather Stations show a shift in Philippine attitudes towards divorce.

In 2005, 43 percent of Filipinos supported legalizing divorce "for irreconcilably separated couples", while 45 percent disagreed. The same survey in 2017 showed 53 percent in favor, while only 32 percent disagreed. A group of lawmakers is now leading a fresh push to legalise divorce, with several bills filed in the House and the Senate.

"We are not destroying any marriage," said Edcel Lagman, a congressman and author of one of the bills. Lagman said divorce was for "dysfunctional marriages beyond repair" and legalizing it would enable women and their children to escape "intolerant and abusive husbands". The legislation would not allow for a "quickie divorce", he added. Before he was elected, President Ferdinand Marcos said the country should consider allowing divorce, but insisted it should not be easy.

### Annulment scams

The burdensome process for getting a court order to end a marriage has spawned online scams offering to secure a quick ruling without time-consuming court appearances. AFP fact checkers found numerous Facebook posts spreading false information about the legal process for annulment in order to attract clients, underscoring a growing global trend of fraudsters profiting off disinformation.

AFP has a global team of journalists, including in the Philippines, who debunk misinformation as part of Facebook and WhatsApp owner Meta's third-party fact-checking programme. One victim told AFP she was charged the equivalent of \$2,400 for an annulment service that turned out to be fake.

She is now considering converting to Islam in the hope of securing a divorce under Muslim law.

"I'm really trying every possible option just to be single again," she said on condition of anonymity. "An-



**PASAY:** Photo shows pro-divorce protesters taking part in a demonstration on Valentine's Day in front of the Senate Building in Pasay, Metro Manila. — AFP

nulment takes so long, it's so expensive and it's not guaranteed, so I'm seeking a more convenient way." Family law specialist Katrina Legarda said the number of people falling for bogus services showed there was a "dire need" for new legislation.

But Father Jerome Secillano, of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, said the nation should be "proud" to be the only country outside the Vatican "holding on to the traditional concept of marriage". "There will always be imperfections in a relationship," he said. Secillano said divorcing an abusive partner would "perpetuate the violence" because the perpetrator would go on to abuse their next partner. "You are not actually curing the disease itself," he said.

### 'I'm a sinner'

Sibonga was raised a Catholic, but stopped attending church to avoid accusations of adultery. She

has a long-term boyfriend, but cannot tie the knot with him until her first marriage is legally terminated.

That her case has dragged on for so long is not unusual in the Philippines, where a creaky justice system can take years to resolve even minor issues. "People think that because I am still technically married, I'm a sinner," she said. "They really believe that what God has united cannot be separated. Really? Even if your husband is trying to kill you, even after everything he's done, divorce is still not allowed?"

Sibonga said her relationship with her husband had been traumatic and had pushed her to attempt suicide twice. She does not want her children to marry until divorce is allowed. "I told them they can cohabitate and have as many children as they want, but I won't ever consent to them getting married," she said. "I just don't want them to end up like me." — AFP

## Radio broadcaster killed in Manila

**MANILA:** A radio broadcaster was shot dead outside his home in the central Philippines on Wednesday, police said, the latest in a long list of journalists killed in the country. Cresenciano Bunduquin, 50, was killed by motorcycle-riding gunmen in Calapan City in Oriental Mindoro province, police Colonel Samuel Delorino told AFP.

One of the assailants died after Bunduquin's son hit the gunmen with his vehicle as they fled the scene of the pre-dawn attack. "The remaining suspect was able to run off. The hot pursuit operation is still ongoing," said Delorino.

The archipelago nation is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, and most of the killers often go unpunished. Radio broadcasters outside the capital were often the target. Bunduquin hosted a programme on radio station 101.7 DWXR as well as on Facebook, said station manager Jester Joaquin, who described the broadcaster as "hard-hitting" on local issues.

He had been outspoken about a recent oil spill affecting the province, illegal gambling and politics. "He told me before that he's receiving threats but he didn't elaborate," Joaquin told AFP. "He mentioned to me that he wanted a change in his line of work, that's why he put up a chicken farm, because he wants to go quiet."

Delorino said police were investigating whether Bunduquin had an enemy or a personnel quarrel. Bunduquin is the third journalist to be killed since President Ferdinand Marcos took office last June. The latest killing comes less than a year after radio personality Percival Mabasa was shot dead in Manila as he drove to his studio.

"Bunduquin's killing further shows that journalists in the Philippines still operate under threat despite our improvement in the press freedom index and the relatively friendlier relations that media has with the current administration," said Jonathan de Santos, chairman of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines. — AFP



**CALAPAN:** Handout photo taken on May 31, 2023 and received from Oriental Mindoro Provincial Police Public Information Office shows police investigators searching for evidence after radio broadcaster Cresenciano Bunduquin was shot dead outside his home by motorcycle-riding gunmen in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro province, south of Manila. — AFP



**NAYPYIDAW:** Handout photograph shows Myanmar's Vice-Senior General Soe Win (centre) receiving a delegation (left) led by Major-General Yang Yang, Acting Director-General of the Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission of China, during a meeting in Naypyidaw. — AFP

## Top Chinese intelligence official visits Myanmar for 'cooperation' talks

**YANGON:** A top Chinese intelligence official has visited Myanmar to discuss military "cooperation" with the junta. Myanmar state media reported Wednesday, the latest high-profile delegation sent by Beijing to its internationally isolated ally.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and the formation of dozens of "People's Defence Forces" now battling the junta. It is the first publicly reported visit by a military official from China, a major ally and arms supplier of the junta, since the coup.

Major-General Yang Yang, acting director-general of the Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department of China's Central Military Commission, met the junta's number two official, Soe Win, for talks on "cooperation between the two armies", state media said. The two also discussed "cooperation in peace, tranquillity and development programmes for border areas" at the Tuesday meeting, according to state-run newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar.

China's defence attaché was also present at the meeting, the report said. The junta has been shunned by many in the international community over its bloody

crackdown on dissent, but China has maintained ties with the regime.

Myanmar's military has imported \$267 million in arms and equipment from China since it seized power, including from state-owned entities, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews said earlier this month.

Several projects in Beijing's sprawling Belt and Road infrastructure initiative are slated to run through northern Myanmar, linking China's landlocked Yunnan province with the Indian Ocean. Beijing also backs and arms several ethnic rebel groups along its border with Myanmar, analysts say.

Some of these groups have clashed repeatedly with the Myanmar military in the aftermath of the coup, and an alliance of China-backed rebels in March called for Beijing's help to defuse the crisis.

Earlier this month, China's foreign minister travelled to Myanmar to meet junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, becoming the highest-ranking Chinese official to meet the top general since the coup. At the meeting, Qin Gang called on the international community to "respect Myanmar's sovereignty", according to a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry.

Beijing's diplomats are also mediating between Myanmar and Bangladesh on a pilot programme to repatriate Rohingya refugees who fled a 2017 military crackdown that is currently the subject of a UN genocide investigation. More than 3,500 people have been killed in the Myanmar military's crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. — AFP

## At Lula's S American unity summit, Venezuela turns divisive

**BRASILIA:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called for South American unity Tuesday as he hosted fellow leaders for a regional "retreat," but drew barbs for his warm welcome of Venezuelan socialist Nicolas Maduro. Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January after leading Brazil from 2003 to 2010, is looking to strengthen diplomatic ties in a region where left-wing governments are newly back in style. But he faced criticism for hosting Maduro, a pariah in some quarters for his government's alleged human-rights violations and crackdown on political dissent — a depiction Lula questioned Monday as a hostile "narrative." The issue exposed fissures at what was meant to be a display of South American diplomatic goodwill and cooperation. "I was surprised to hear what's happening in Venezuela described as a 'narrative,'" said Uruguay's center-right

President Luis Lacalle Pou, who has labeled Maduro a "dictator." "The worst thing we can do is try to sweep that under the rug," he told the summit. "Human rights must be respected everywhere, always, no matter the political colors of the leader in power," said Chile's left-wing President Gabriel Boric.

However, Boric backed the Venezuelan government's call for Washington and the European Union to lift sanctions on Maduro and his inner circle. Maduro responded by saying Chile and Uruguay "have one vision" and Venezuela, "another." "The most important thing is that there has been a debate," he said, announcing "a new stage" of South American integration. Lula defended Maduro, whose country he said was experiencing a period of "tranquility." "The same demands that the democratic world makes for Venezuela it does not make for Saudi Arabia," Lula said later at a press conference. He had warmly welcomed Maduro to Brasilia Monday, reversing the policy of his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who had cut ties with Venezuela's socialist government and joined a US-led group of more than 50 countries in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaido instead. — AFP

## NATO upbeat on Sweden bid as US urges Turkey to say yes

**OSLO:** NATO's chief voiced guarded optimism Tuesday on welcoming Sweden to the alliance as the United States pressed holdout Turkey to drop its objections, two days after President Tayyip Recep Erdogan won re-election.

Sweden and Finland last year reversed decades of hesitation and formally applied to join NATO after Russia invaded Ukraine, which had unsuccessfully sought to enter the alliance whose members promise to defend one another.

But decisions must be unanimous and Turkey has used its leverage to push the two countries over the presence of Kurdish militants, letting Finland join NATO in April but still blocking Sweden. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said it was "within reach" for Sweden to join in time for the July 11-12 NATO summit in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. "There are no guarantees but it's absolutely possible to reach a solution and enable the decision on full membership for Sweden by then," Stoltenberg told reporters in Oslo on the eve of a NATO foreign ministers' meeting to prepare for the summit.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, visiting Sweden on his way to Oslo, said the Swedish government had already addressed Turkish concerns. "There is no reason for any further time. Sweden is ready now," Blinken told a news conference with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in the northern Swedish city of Lulea.

"We urge both Turkey and Hungary — which also has not yet ratified — to ratify the accession as quickly as possible," he said. The State Department said Blinken pushed Sweden's case directly Tuesday in a telephone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, who is not expected in Oslo. Blinken said the United States wants the process to be "completed in the weeks ahead" but stopped short of saying if he was certain it would be finished by the summit. Erdogan, Turkey's leader for two decades, won another five-year term on Sunday after a campaign in which he vowed to stand up to the West. — AFP



**BRASILIA:** Handout picture released by the Argentine Presidency showing Argentine President Alberto Fernandez (left) and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva talking during a bilateral meeting at Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, in the framework of a summit of South American leaders. — AFP

THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2023

# India's GDP grows by 7.2%

## Robust growth expected to bolster Modi's economic credentials



MUMBAI: The city skyline is seen beside a construction site of a coastal road project near Haji Ali mosque in Mumbai on May 31, 2023. — AFP

MUMBAI: India's GDP grew by 7.2 percent in the year to March, official figures showed Wednesday, boosted by services and consumption, putting it among the world's fastest-expanding major economies. The South Asian nation is the world's fifth-largest economy, and recently surpassed China to become the most populous country. Its growth has rebounded since the pandemic - the economy rocketed 9.1 percent in the 2021-22 financial year.

But like other countries, it has been buffeted by global headwinds including tightening global financial conditions, the war in Ukraine and geopolitical tensions. India imports more than 80 percent of its crude, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine driving up oil costs. But its economy grew by 6.1 percent in the fourth fiscal quarter from January to March compared with the same period last year, according to National Statistical Office data.

In the same period, China's economy expanded 4.5 percent year-on-year according to its National Bureau of Statistics, while Washington's Commerce Department said the United

States grew by an anemic 1.1 percent. China is rebounding after the end of zero-COVID measures that battered business and supply chains, but is bedeviled by a host of other headaches. Meanwhile the United States is battling persistently elevated inflation, Germany is in a technical recession amid an energy crisis triggered by the Ukraine war, and Japan expanded by just 0.4 percent in the first quarter.

In India, growth in financial, real estate and other services strengthened from the previous year, while the manufacturing sector expanded at a much slower pace. The quarterly and annual figures were slightly above market expectations of around 5.5 percent for the quarter and 7.0 percent for the 2022-23 financial year. The robust growth is expected to bolster Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic credentials ahead of 2024 general elections, where he is expected to lead his party to a third term in office.

### 'Bright spot'

Analysts said government spending and domestic consumption have also

helped India's economy remain robust. The World Bank's India country director, Auguste Tano Kouame, said in April that the economy "continues to show strong resilience to external shocks". "Notwithstanding external pressures, India's service exports have continued to increase, and the current-account deficit is narrowing." Economists said softening crude oil prices at the start of this year, coupled with a flourishing services sector, had driven growth for the quarter.

India's services sector jumped to its highest level in nearly 13 years in April on the back of strong finance and insurance output, according to the S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index, a private survey. Inflationary pressures, which had led the Reserve Bank of India to lift interest rates from 4.0 percent to 6.50 percent between May last year and February before pausing in April, have eased in recent months. Retail inflation fell to 4.70 percent in April, within the central bank's target band of 2.0 to 6.0 percent, from 5.66 percent in March and down from a peak

of 7.79 percent in April last year.

Looking forward, the Reserve Bank projected GDP growth of 6.5 percent in the 2023-24 financial year in its annual report published Tuesday, citing easing inflation risks. The International Monetary Fund forecasts India's economy to grow by 5.9 percent in the 2023-24 financial year. Daniel Leigh, who heads the World Economic Studies division in the IMF's Research Department, in April called the country "one of the bright spots in the global economy".

State Bank of India Chief Economic Adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh added in a note on Friday that the manufacturing sector was expected to rebound, while the boost in government spending would "strengthen job creation and demand". But analysts have warned that the unemployment rate, which has been rising this year and reached 8.11 percent in April according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, could weigh on the economy. India's benchmark Sensex index closed down 0.55 percent in trading in Mumbai on Wednesday ahead of the GDP data release. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Nvidia exceeded \$1 trillion

NEW YORK: Chip company Nvidia exceeded \$1 trillion in market value Tuesday as Wall Street stocks mostly rose, following an agreement between President Joe Biden and Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to avoid a US debt default. All three major indices were in positive territory, while Nvidia jumped more than seven percent on bullish sentiment over its role in artificial intelligence breakthrough technology. About 20 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.2 percent at 33,021.07. The broad-based S&P 500 climbed 0.4 percent to 4,223.64, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index gained 1.1 percent to 13,116.93. The week-end deal, reached after weeks of frantic negotiations, faces opposition from the progressive and hard-right wings of Biden and McCarthy's respective parties. — AFP

#### Credit Suisse shares battered

ZURICH: Battered shares in crisis-hit Credit Suisse no longer meet criteria for listing on the New York Stock Exchange, the bank said Wednesday, adding that its upcoming sale to UBS would resolve the issue. "The New York Stock Exchange notified Credit Suisse on May 1... that it is no longer in compliance with the NYSE's continued listing minimum price criteria," Credit Suisse said in a statement. Credit Suisse is listed in New York under a "Depositary Shares" scheme that allows foreign firms to sell stock in the United States. Under NYSE rules, shares must trade for at least \$1.00 for 30 consecutive days to qualify for listing. But the financial firm, whose share price crumbled under the pressure of fears of contagion from the collapse of three US regional banks, is slated to be taken over by historic rival UBS in a rescue organized by Bern. — AFP

#### US consumer confidence slips

WASHINGTON: US consumer confidence slipped again in May, dragged down by a decline in how people perceive the job market, says a survey. The slight fall in consumer confidence will provide the Federal Reserve with a useful data point on how consumers view the economy as it mulls raising interest rates again in order to control rising prices. "Consumer confidence declined in May as consumers' view of current conditions became somewhat less upbeat while their expectations remained gloomy," the Conference Board's senior economics director Ataman Ozyildirim said in a statement. The consumer confidence index fell in May to 102.3, down from a revised 103.7 in April, according to the Conference Board. This was slightly above the median forecast in a MarketWatch survey of economists. — AFP

#### Over-fishing 'devastating'

BANJUL: Chronic over-fishing, especially by foreign-owned industrial trawlers, is having a "devastating" impact on the tiny West African state of The Gambia, Amnesty International said on Wednesday. In a report, it estimated that illegal and excessive fishing off The Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone amounted to a total loss of \$2.3 billion per year. The Gambia - a state along the Gambia River that is almost entirely surrounded by Senegal - is being especially badly hit, it said. Large industrial trawlers, many of them foreign owned, are scooping up small fish such as sardines and bonga to be turned into meal for fish farming. The practice deprives subsistence fishermen of a fair catch and forces up prices for Gambians, who rank among the poorest people in the world, it said. — AFP

#### Sweden economy grows

STOCKHOLM: The Swedish economy grew more than expected in the first quarter despite high inflation and rising interest rates, official statistics showed. The top Nordic economy expanded by 0.6 percent in the first three months of the year, avoiding a technical recession following a 0.2 percent contraction in the fourth quarter of 2022. "The upturn is mainly explained by an increase in inventories and by a strong growth in the export of goods," Statistics Sweden said in a statement. Analysts were on average expecting 0.1 percent growth, according to Bloomberg. A preliminary estimate published by Statistics Sweden at the end of April had put growth at 0.2 percent. — AFP

## Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan jumps 16 percent

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in April jumped 16.0 percent from a year earlier to 7.67 million barrels, or 256,000 barrels per day (bpd), up for the fifth straight month, government data showed Wednesday. Kuwait was Japan's No.3 oil provider last month, supplying 8.9 percent of the Asian nation's total crude imports, compared with 7.6 percent in the same month of 2022, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil fell 1.5 percent year-on-year to 2.87 million bpd, down for the third month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 95.2 percent of the total, up 1.5 percentage points from the year before. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) returned to be Japan's No.1 oil supplier, with imports from the country surging 29.4 percent from a year earlier to 1.21 million bpd, followed by Saudi Arabia with 1.01 million bpd, down 20.9 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 178,000 bpd and the US fifth with 61,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced its liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices, namely propane and butane, for next June. In a press release sent to KUNA, the KPC added that a propane metric ton would be sold for \$450 during June, and a butane metric ton for \$440. Both liquefied natural gases, propane and butane, are used in petrochemical industry, cooking and heating purposes, it added. LNG prices are mainly affected by the increase and decrease of global oil prices, market supply and demand and other factors. — KUNA

## Philippine lawmakers approve \$8.9 billion sovereign wealth fund

MANILA: Philippine lawmakers approved the creation of an \$8.9 billion sovereign wealth fund on Wednesday to boost growth and cut poverty, but critics insisted it was a "scam" and should be scrapped. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr had called for a swift passage of the bill, filed by his son and cousin late last year, to enable the debt-laden government to earn extra funds to finance infrastructure projects. The national government will be the biggest contributor to the 500-billion-peso "Maharlika Investment Fund", drawing seed funds from the central bank, gaming revenue, and two government-owned banks.

Private financial institutions and corporations will also be allowed to invest. House of Representatives deputy speaker Aurelio Gonzales declared the Senate's version of the bill approved during a session. It will be sent to Marcos to be signed into law. The original proposal was for a \$4.9 billion fund that would be partly bankrolled by state-run pensions for government and private sector workers, sparking public fears that retirement savings could be put at risk.

The final version of the bill said pension funds would not have to contribute. "I assure our countrymen they need not worry. All the safeguards that could be put in were put in place," Senate President Miguel Zubiri told reporters. Senator Mark Villar, the main author of the Senate bill, said the fund would create infrastructure projects, resulting in stronger growth, more jobs and reduced poverty. "This would help the government manage its budget and mitigate fiscal pressures during economic downturns," Villar said in a statement Tuesday.

### 'Bill shouldn't exist'

The fund will be allowed to make a wide range of



QUEZON CITY: A protester holds a placard during a rally in front of the House of Representatives in Quezon City. Philippine lawmakers approved the creation of \$8.9 billion sovereign wealth fund on May 31. — AFP

investments, including in corporate bonds, equities, joint ventures and infrastructure projects. Activists and opposition figures have questioned the need for a sovereign wealth fund in the poverty-plagued country and raised concerns about the potential for corruption. Business groups have said the government was already running huge budget deficits and the proposed law risked downgrading its credit rating. Conventional sovereign wealth funds are seeded by windfall government profits from natural resources, such as oil or minerals.

The left-wing Akbayan Party said Wednesday the measure was "the country's largest investment scam" and warned the public to "remain vigilant". "This bill shouldn't even exist," the party said in a statement. "Safeguards may be in place now, but a law is only as good as its execution." The word "maharlika" is widely associated with Marcos Jr's late dictator father and namesake, who presided over widespread human rights abuses and corruption during his two decades in power. He was ousted in 1986. — AFP



## Business

# New AI tools threaten to upend ad industry

## Some brands are dipping their toes in AI waters

**PARIS:** Data-driven algorithms supercharged the advertising industry by enabling precisely targeted campaigns, but new AI tools may be about to shake the sector once again. Some brands are dipping their toes in the AI waters, like Coca-Cola, which has invited people to create AI works using "iconic creative assets from the Coca-Cola digital archives". Others are using it to create a social media buzz — fashion firm Stradivarius recently pushed out AI images based on one of its collections.

But the full force of the AI revolution may be felt most keenly in the engine room of the ad industry — the agencies who conceive and design the campaigns. "We're only at the beginning," said Fernando Pascual, vice-president of design at Spanish company Seedtag. His firm specializes in "contextual" advertising, which they claim will enable digital ads to blend in with the website where they appear.

So a car ad might show the vehicle driving through a glass and steel cityscape on a business-orientated website, but the same car might be seen cruising past peaceful suburban gardens on a family-friendly website. "The main element of advertising is still anchored in reality," he told AFP. "We're just helping our clients to be more relevant." Seedtag is far from the only ad agency promoting its AI chops. But photographers and models are among those left wondering about their future livelihoods.

### 'Uproar'

French lingerie firm Undiz recently found itself at the centre of the debate. Billboards in brilliant blue

with eerily beautiful models gliding underwater in the firm's swimwear have appeared across France in recent weeks. Only, there were no real people in these posters. The models were created by an ad agency using image generator Midjourney, with real images of the swimming costumes added later. "We wanted to achieve a slightly dreamlike, intriguing result," Undiz director Isolde Andouard told AFP.

Andouard admitted that the campaign had caused "uproar" among models and photographers. Thomas Serer, a popular French content creator and photographer, wrote on Twitter that he was a fan of AI but in this case "using AI adds zero value" apart from allowing the firm to save money. Andouard was quick to deny the approach was simply about cutting costs, saying the AI campaign was rolled out alongside traditional photos.

### 'Non-event'

The reaction to the Undiz campaign suggests the path to AI domination will be far from smooth. And they are not the only company to have received criticism. Jeans brand Levi's trumpeted a partnership with Dutch studio Lalalandia in March with the promise of using AI models to boost diversity on its online shop.

After an outcry, the firm put out another statement saying its announcement "did not properly represent certain aspects of the program" and promised to continue working with models and photographers. There are plenty who doubt that such upfront uses will ever really go industry-wide. Olivier Bomsel, an economist specializing in intellectual property and advertising,

new public transport card allowing unlimited travel for 49 euros a month.

"The significant drop in the German inflation rate" brings "some relief", said KfW chief economist Fritz Koehler-Geib. "But there is still a long way to go," she said, before inflation reaches the European Central Bank's two-percent target. The ECB has hiked interest rates by an unprecedented 3.75 percentage points since last July in an attempt to bring down rapidly rising consumer prices. ECB vice-president Luis de Guindos earlier on Wednesday welcomed "positive" inflation data out of key euro-zone economies recently, but he too warned that the battle against high prices was not over.

"The data that we have received yesterday and today is positive, it's a decline in headline inflation," de Guindos told reporters. "But I would not say that the victory is there," he said. "We are on a correct trajectory and we have to look very carefully at the evolution of core inflation" which excludes volatile food and energy prices, he added. Consumer price growth slowed to 5.1 percent year-on-year in France in May, down from 5.9 percent a month earlier, preliminary figures showed Wednesday. Spanish inflation meanwhile declined to 3.2 percent in May mainly thanks to lower fuel costs, after hitting 4.1 percent in April, according to figures released on Tuesday. — AFP

## German inflation slows sharply on lower energy costs

**FRANKFURT:** German inflation fell sharply in May on lower energy costs, official data showed Wednesday, mirroring slowing price growth in France and Spain. The annual inflation rate in Europe's biggest economy eased to 6.1 percent, down from 7.2 percent in April, federal statistics office Destatis said in preliminary figures. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had expected a May reading of 6.4 percent. The drop was partly down to the comparison with May 2022, when energy prices soared in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Energy prices have come down from their peaks in recent months, helped by government relief measures to cushion the impact on consumers and businesses. Food prices, however, continued to show "above average growth" in May compared with a year earlier, Destatis said. Prices in the service sector also cooled this month, "probably due in part to the introduction of the Germany ticket", Destatis said, referring to a



**OGUN:** Motorists queue to buy fuel at a petrol station at Magboro, Ogun State in southwest Nigeria. Queues have resurfaced at filling stations across the country as consumers rush in panic buying to restock fuel as President Bola Tinubu announced subsidy removal during his inauguration. — AFP

## Nigerians rush to buy fuel ahead of subsidy removal

**LAGOS:** Long queues were seen on Tuesday outside petrol stations in Nigeria, a day after newly inaugurated President Bola Tinubu announced the end of fuel subsidies in his first speech. Oil-rich Nigeria swaps crude worth billions of dollars for gasoline that it then subsidizes for its domestic market, causing a huge drain on revenue, foreign exchange and contributing to ballooning debt. On Monday, 71-year-old Tinubu triggered a wave of panic when he declared that the "fuel subsidy is gone" after taking the helm of Africa's most populous nation.

The previous government of Muhammadu Buhari budgeted the subsidies until the end of June, but it was unclear if that was when nationwide prices at the pump would rise, or if it would happen before. "The reality is that from today the government can no longer afford to pay for fuel subsidies," the CEO of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Mele Kyari told reporters on Tuesday. He

said the government needed to "settle up to 2.8 trillion naira (about \$6 bn)... on subsidies." But he said that "some engagements are ongoing to bring relief to the people."

Some petrol stations had already started increasing the price of petrol on Tuesday, and so far the new government has not announced palliative measures for customers. "I think we are going to be in for a terrible situation, worse than before. It is more suffering for Nigerians," said Emeka Emef, a 43-year-old civil servant queuing outside a petrol station in the megacity of Lagos. While fuel subsidies largely benefit the middle class and those who own a vehicle, it does help keep the cost of transport low and is generally a popular measure in the country.

Previous efforts by political leaders to remove it have been met with anger, including in 2012 when the army clashed with protesters demonstrating over fuel costs. Tinubu — who said during his campaign that he would remove the costly subsidies — said his government intends to "re-channel the funds into better investment in public infrastructure, education, health care and jobs". More than 80 million of the country's estimated 210 million people live below the poverty line, according to the World Bank, and the United Nations has warned that over a quarter of those are facing acute hunger this year. — AFP



**TOKYO:** Visitors look at a booth showing 'FirstContact', a problem-solving AI-equipped chatbot service by Japanese company Vitalify using ChatGPT, during the three-day 7th AI Expo, part of NextTech Week Tokyo 2023. — AFP

said the arrival of AI-manipulated images was a "non-event" and amounted to just a new kind of digital editing.

And as AI tools get more widespread, he said, the people whose images provide the training data will be able to claim fees that will eventually "cost as much as using a model". And the arrival of AI behemoths Meta

and Google into the space is sending heads spinning. Both firms announced in May a series of simplified AI tools that promise to allow anyone to design ad campaigns just using simple phrases as prompts. It remains to be seen whether this will give ad agencies a shiny new plaything — or torpedo their business models entirely. — AFP

## Gulf Bank: 13 tips to use cards safely

**KUWAIT:** As part of its keenness to promote financial literacy in society, Gulf Bank continues to support the Diraya "Let's Be Aware" campaign for the third consecutive year — by broadcasting and spreading awareness and educational materials through social media, the Bank's website, and other channels. With the advent of the travel and tourism season this summer, the Corporate Communications Officer at Gulf Bank, Abdul Mohsen Al-Nassar, provides a number of tips for those wishing to travel during the summer, in order to ensure that they use their bank cards safely, and enjoy the many services that Gulf Bank offers. The tips are as follows:

(1) Ensure that your cards are valid to cover the entire travel period. (2) Ensure that all personal details are up to date with the bank such as your phone number, email, etc. (3) Ensure to have sufficient credit limits and check your account balance. (4) Never give your card or your PIN number to any person, and should you lose your card or face any issues, immediately contact the Bank's Call Center. You can also stop the card via mobile app or website. (5) Download the mobile app of the bank to track your card usage and spending while traveling. (6) Ensure your online banking access is working. (7) Ensure to book flights through well-known and credible websites only. (8) Avoid false offers and advertisements to avoid the risk of fraud.

(9) Ensure that the PC or mobile you are using for booking has the latest update. (10) Never share your 3D Secure one-time password used to protect your online shopping with anyone. (11) Ensure to read the contents of the OTP message, the name of the store and the payment amount before using the OTP in the payment process. (12) Be aware that the bank will never ask you to enter your personal information through email or calls; never click on a Web link received by non-trusted emails. (13) Some cards have some travel privileges — we recommend checking the offers available for your card via Gulf Bank's website, or Visa and MasterCard websites.

The Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association, has launched the Diraya "Let's Be Aware" campaign in 2021, to acquaint bank customers with the most important banking services provided to them. This is to ensure the safety of transactions and to enhance financial inclusion, as well as monetary and economic stability — through comprehensive awareness of customers' rights and obligations. The Diraya campaign also aims to introduce the advantages of electronic financial transactions and ways to avoid the risks arising from them to achieve cybersecurity.

losses in Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Mumbai, Bangkok, Singapore, Taipei, Wellington, Manila and Jakarta. London, Paris and Frankfurt fell in the morning and US futures were also in negative territory.

Sentiment was given an extra jolt after data showed China's manufacturing activity contracted even further last month as leaders struggled to kick-start the world's number-two economy. The country's growth has stalled this year, despite expectations for a surge after strict COVID rules were lifted at the end of last year. "China's uneven economic recovery is one of investors' concerns, along with geopolitics," said Vey-Sern Ling, at Union Bancaire Privee. "More stimulus from the government may help, but evidence of sustainable longer-term growth will be required to clear investors' doubts."

Data showing inflation remained sticky in the United States ramped up expectations the Fed will hike rates again next month, denting hopes it will pause after more than a year of tightening. "More likely than not the Fed will continue to tighten and that is going to lead to a recession," said Shana Sissel at Banrion Capital Management. "It's going to take time before we start to see the real impact of the Fed policy on the system."

Recession worries were increased by news that US consumer confidence hit a six-month low in May, with the jobs market and future business conditions among the key issues. The uncertain demand outlook caused by the stuttering US and Chinese economies, as well as long-running tensions between the two powers, also weighed on oil prices. Both main contracts extended Tuesday's loss of more than four percent, with traders keeping tabs on an upcoming meeting between OPEC and other major producers. — AFP

## Markets tumble as hardline Republicans threaten US debt deal

**HONG KONG:** Asian markets sank Wednesday on worries that hardline Republicans could vote down a crucial bill to hike the US borrowing limit and risk a catastrophic default that could hammer an already fragile global economy. Further signs that China's post-pandemic recovery was fading added to the downbeat mood on trading floors, as did worries that the US Federal Reserve is likely to increase interest rates again next month.

The buoyant mood that started the week, after US President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy finalized a debt deal, was giving way to a fear that the far-right Freedom Caucus could torpedo it. Members on both sides of the political spectrum have raised concerns about the agreement, with Republicans saying it does not have enough spending cuts and the left wing of the Democratic Party unhappy that Biden agreed to any limits at all.

The Treasury has warned that if the borrowing ceiling is not lifted by June 5, the government will run out of cash to service its debt obligations. While McCarthy has described the deal as "transformational" and expressed confidence the bill will pass, leading Freedom Caucus member Chip Roy called it a "turd sandwich". "Not one Republican should vote for this deal. It is a bad deal. No one sent us here to borrow an additional \$4 trillion to get absolutely nothing in return," Roy said at a Freedom Caucus news conference.

He later warned McCarthy would face a "reckoning". That came as another GOP Representative, Dan Bishop, called party members to vote McCarthy out as speaker. And CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson said ratings agencies were "already sharpening their pencils on downgrades for the US credit rating". Still, House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries remained confident, telling Bloomberg Television: "We will be able to get this bill over the finish line tomorrow."

### Fed meeting in view

But with the House vote due later Wednesday, nervous investors were shifting out of risk assets, sending Asian markets well into the red. Hong Kong led losses, dropping nearly two percent, while Shanghai was also well down. There were also big



**PHNOM PENH:** A vendor rides his motor-cart loaded with clothes for sale along a street in Phnom Penh on May 31, 2023. — AFP

## Business

# Elon Musk, China discuss ways to develop new energy vehicles

## Tesla CEO seeks to expand business

BEIJING: Elon Musk and China's industry minister discussed ways to develop new energy vehicles Wednesday, a day after the Tesla CEO flew into Beijing and declared he wanted to expand his business in the world's second largest economy. The mercurial billionaire, one of the world's richest men, is on his first trip to China in more than three years. On Wednesday he met Jin Zhuanglong in Beijing to discuss "the development of new energy vehicles and intelligent connected vehicles", the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said in a readout.

It did not share further details. Tesla representatives did not respond to AFP requests for further information on Musk's itinerary. Musk has extensive business interests in China and on Tuesday told foreign minister Qin Gang that his firm was "willing to continue to expand its business in China", according to a foreign ministry readout.

Chinese media reported Tesla welcomed its CEO to Beijing on Tuesday with a 16-course dinner that included seafood, New Zealand lamb and traditional Beijing-style soybean paste noodles. China is the world's biggest electric vehicle market and Tesla announced in April it would build a second mas-

sive factory in Shanghai, which would be its second plant in the city after Gigafactory, which broke ground in 2019.

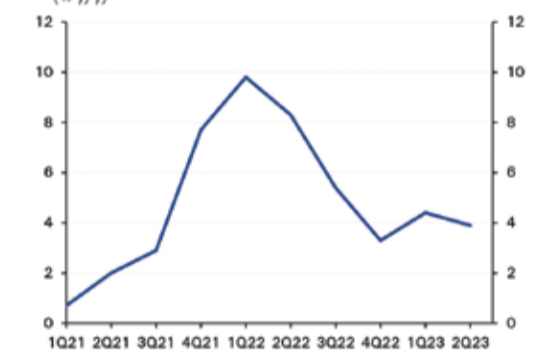
In his meeting with Qin on Tuesday, Musk also expressed his opposition to an economic "decoupling" between China and the United States. Beijing said. "The interests of the United States and China are intertwined, like conjoined twins, who are inseparable from each other," Musk added. Musk's extensive business ties to China have raised eyebrows in Washington, with President Joe Biden saying in November that the executive's links to foreign countries were "worthy" of scrutiny.

And he has caused controversy by suggesting the self-ruled island of Taiwan should become part of China - a stance welcomed by Chinese officials but which deeply angered Taiwan. Critics point to the industrial ties linking Musk to China, which has increasingly fraught ties with Washington. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Tuesday that the country welcomed visits by international executives "to better understand China and promote mutually beneficial cooperation". — AFP



BEIJING: Tesla Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk (in white) boards his private jet before departing from Beijing Capital International Airport on May 31, 2023. —AFP

Chart 1: GDP (% y/y)



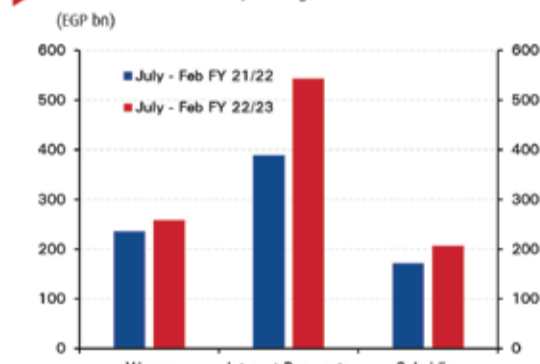
Source: Central Bank of Egypt, NBK estimates. Note: dates refer to quarters of the financial year ending in the year shown.

Chart 2: Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) (index)



Source: IHS Markit

Chart 3: Government spending (EGP bn)



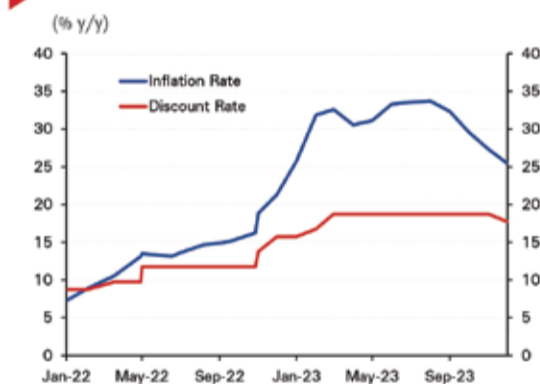
Source: Haver

Chart 4: Egyptian pound exchange rate (EGP/\$)



Source: Haver

Chart 5: Inflation\* (% y/y)



Source: CAPMAS and Central Bank of Egypt \* For urban areas

### NBK Economic Report

## Egypt's economic growth under renewed pressure

KUWAIT: Egypt's economic situation has come under renewed pressure so far in 2023. Economic reforms have paused just months after the IMF approved the \$3 billion loan deal in December 2022. The pound is back to being tightly managed and fixed at EGP30.9/\$1 versus 38-40 on the unofficial market, while the authorities have so far been unable to execute any substantial privatization deals due to difficulties including asset valuation.

The postponement has led to the IMF putting its first program review (originally scheduled for March) on hold and postponing it until June. The government faces a thin timeframe to meet a key IMF requirement of executing deals worth of \$2bn before the end of June 2023. Currency stability has prevented a further spike in inflation but the associated import controls (non-oil imports fell 12% y/y in 1H22/23) have revived the backlog of goods at ports and disrupted growth.

Recent developments suggest that a fresh devaluation will happen only in tandem with strong promises of US dollar proceeds or progress on asset stake sales, which will strengthen reserves. Amid these pressures, economic growth over coming quarters will slow, albeit at face value remain somewhat resilient at 3-4% and still well clear of recession. A pickup is expected in FY2024/25 helped by a more competitive currency and as interest rates and inflation come down.

### Slower economic growth

Economic growth slowed in 2Q FY22/23 (Oct-Dec) to 3.9% y/y (from 4.4% the previous quarter and 8.3% 2Q FY21/22) with activity severely pressured by shortages in major goods and services, an acceleration in inflation and higher borrowing costs. These factors have led to a squeeze in consumers' purchasing power and therefore private consumption, as well as a pullback in business investment. So far this year (January to April), the purchasing managers' index of activity has averaged 46.6, down slightly from 46.8 in Oct-Dec 2022.

It included figures of around 44 for both the current output and new orders subcomponents, although employment held up better. Consequently, we expect growth to come in slightly softer for 2HFY22/23 at 3-3.5% as this period would encompass January's 19% depreciation of the pound, a rise of the parallel market exchange rate to EGP40/\$1, high inflation rates averaging at 31% (Jan-Apr), and tighter monetary policy, with policy interest rates hiked by 5% from December to March.

Looking ahead into FY23/24, we expect that growth will remain pressured absent reforms and with the authorities potentially opting to continue to compress imports and utilize reserves to defend the currency and buy time. However, a major window for key policy changes could emerge after the elections expected for early 2024, as political certainty improves. Actions required (as reflected in the IMF agreement) include a shift to a durable flexible exchange rate regime, execution on the government/quasi-government stake sales, and fiscal reforms needed to keep the ballooning deficit under control.

### Import and debt servicing costs

A mixture of currency devaluation, interest rate hikes, and global inflation has put the fiscal position under pressure. The cumulative fiscal deficit widened 36% y/y in 8M FY22/23 to EGP501bn, with expenditure growth (+24%) outpacing revenue growth (+18%). This is mainly due to an acceleration in government goods and services purchases and higher subsidy and social benefits outlays, triggered by a combination of EGP devaluation, increased global food and energy prices and the rolling out of social programs to mitigate the impact of rising inflation on lower income groups.

Higher interest rates in FY22/23 were also a contributing factor with debt servicing up by 40% y/y and now worth 42% of all spending. The fiscal deficit as a share of GDP stood at 5.1%, compared to 4.6% for the same period a year earlier. The deficit is forecast to widen further for the full year of 22/23 as it encompasses another 2% policy rate hike that took place in March 2023 and further rises in costs. We expect the deficit to reach 8.5% of GDP during FY22/23 from 6.1% of GDP in FY21/22. As for FY23/24, the economic policy direction will play a key role in the public finances.

In the scenario we imagine materializing (slower reforms up until 2024) then we see limited pressures on the fiscal front as we would expect interest rates to remain on hold or not move too far, and similarly for the EGP. Recent balance of payments results indicate significant improvement as the current account deficit contracted to only \$1.7bn in 1HFY22/23, versus \$7.8bn in 1HFY21/22. This came on the back of non-oil imports compression by 12% to \$37bn and a strong recovery in tourism revenues by 26% to \$7.3bn. It is worth noting that worker remittances witnessed a 20% drop y/y to \$11.9bn from \$15.5bn. We now expect the FY22/23 deficit to narrow to \$6-7bn (around 2.1% of GDP) from our earlier expectations of \$11bn.

Such positive external developments will help narrow Egypt's external financing needs, if sustained until FY23/24. However, aside from the current account deficit, large external debt maturities (\$16bn) remain a key challenge for the coming year. With the pause in privatization deals delaying fresh FX proceeds, we expect to see a drawdown in reserves over the course of the year, absent fresh overseas support. Additionally, although a weaker currency is still widely anticipated and possible, it now looks plausible that there will be no major currency adjustment until there are clearer guarantees on implementation of the privatization program and thus the availability of US dollar proceeds.

### Interest rates on hold

Inflation has jumped so far this year as the impact of the goods shortage and January's devaluation filtered through. Inflation averaged 30.8% y/y during January to March versus 18.8% in October to December, and reached a six-year high of 32.7% in March 2023. However, it eased slightly in April to 30.5%, helped by the absence of further currency moves or subsidy cuts. On that basis, we expect inflation figures over coming months to be highly driven by government actions. For example, we see inflation within the 29-31% range in the coming months on the condition that no major policy moves take place. But if the authorities decide to recommit to a flexible exchange rate then inflation could move higher later this year.

### Pound exchange rate

In response to rising inflation over the past quarter, the Central Bank of Egypt hiked policy interest rates by 200 bps on 30 March, taking the discount rate to 18.75% from 8.75% a year earlier. Yields on

## Foxconn predicts huge growth in AI server business

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech giant and key Apple supplier Foxconn predicts three-digit growth for its artificial intelligence server business due to robust demand for AI products such as ChatGPT, its chairman said Wednesday. Foxconn - known officially as Hon Hai Precision Industry - is the world's biggest contract electronics manufacturer and assembles devices for many international brands, most notably Apple's iPhone products. It has also moved to diversify beyond electronics assembly, expanding into areas ranging from electric vehicles to semiconductors and servers.

"In 2022 alone, Hon Hai's revenue for servers reached 1.1 trillion Taiwan dollars (\$36 billion) to obtain a 40 percent global market share," Chairman Young Liu told an annual shareholders' meeting in Taipei. Liu said Foxconn ranks first in global market share for mobile phones, personal computers and servers, with the AI server market now "rising faster than everyone has expected". He attributed the jump in demand to ChatGPT, the AI program that burst into the spotlight late last year with the ability to generate essays, poems and conversations from the briefest of prompts.

Its runaway success has sparked a gold rush with billions of dollars of investment in the field. "For the second half of this year, we may have a three-digit growth, not two digits... We will continue to boost our market share for servers," Liu said. He said the company's latest AI servers also use Nvidia chips. Nvidia is known for creating graphics chips long coveted by gamers but which have become engines for the kind of complex processes involved in artificial intelligence, known as accelerated computing.

Nvidia, co-founded by Taiwanese-American Jensen Huang, surged to a market value of more than \$1 trillion on Tuesday after its quarterly earnings report last week blew past expectations. Despite the rosy future for AI, Foxconn maintains a "flat" outlook for the 2023 full year, Liu said, after its first quarter profits plunged 56 percent on weakened demand due to a global downturn. "The global tightening monetary (policies), coupled with tense geopolitics and the significant uncertainty of inflation have a relatively large impact on the economic outlook," he said. — AFP

## China's factory activity shrinks

BEIJING: China's manufacturing activity shrank in May for the second successive month, official figures showed Wednesday, the latest sign that the country's economic recovery is losing steam. The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) - a key measure of factory output - fell to 48.8 this month, below the 50-point mark that separates expansion and contraction, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The figure followed an unexpected fall to 49.2 in April, which reversed three consecutive months of growth. It was lower than the median estimate of 49.5 in a Bloomberg survey of economists. The drop "indicates the economic recovery faces challenges", said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. They include a cooling property market and a burgeoning second wave of COVID-19 that has weakened domestic demand, Zhang said. But there is "no sign of imminent policy response", he said, adding the government "may continue to take a 'wait-and-see' stance for now". China's economy expanded 4.5 percent in the first quarter of the year as the country rapidly reopened after ditching years of strict health controls that hammered businesses and international supply chains.

But a host of other headaches are bedeviling the world's second-largest economy, including its debt-laden property sector, limp consumer confidence and the risk of recession elsewhere. The country is also grappling with a new COVID-19 outbreak, but official data on the scale of it is scarce and there is little sign that containment policies will be reimposed. Senior health adviser Zhong Nanshan said the current wave may peak at around 65 million infections per week by the end of June, state-backed Shanghai media outlet The Paper reported last week. — AFP

# Royal fever sweeps Jordan ahead of crown prince's wedding



A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows Saudi fiancée Rajwa Al-Saif during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman.

A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows her (second left) posing for a picture with her future daughter-in-law Rajwa Al-Saif (center) alongside Azza Al-Sudairi (second right), Princess Iman, and Princess Salma during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman. — AFP photos



A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows her (center) dancing during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman.



A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows Saudi fiancée Rajwa Al-Saif dancing during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman.



A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows her (center) sitting alongside her future daughter-in-law Rajwa Al-Saif during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman.

Jordan is gearing up for Crown Prince Hussein's wedding on Thursday, an event already greeted with fireworks, concerts and social media frenzy in the usually quiet desert kingdom.

The eldest son of King Abdullah II will marry Saudi fiancée Rajwa Al Saif at the grand royal wedding with regional monarchs, US First Lady Jill Biden and the king of the Netherlands among the guests.

On the big day for the Hashemite kingdom, a key Western ally, the royal red motorcade, reserved for special occasions, will cross the capital Amman to celebrate the bride and groom who are both 28 years old.

In the lead-up to the wedding of the next in line to Jordan's throne, the country has been gripped by royal fever.

Photos of Saif's henna bridal party took the internet by storm last week as she donned a white gown with an Arabic poetry verse embroidered in gold: "When I see you, life becomes sweet".

The Royal Hashemite Court published a YouTube video of Prince Hussein's mother Queen Rania and his sisters, Princesses Salma and Iman, singing and dancing with guests at the party. "Like any mother, I have long dreamt of his wedding day," the queen said in a speech, telling her subjects that "Hussein is your son, and you are his family, and this is your wedding".

After the party, drones hovering over Amman formed the shape of a crown in the sky.

### 'Like a family party'

Such highly public displays may be common for Western royals, but they are a rarity in the Arab world where conservative monarchies seldom share any details

of their private lives. "Everyone took pictures and posted them on social media - this perhaps wouldn't be possible with other royal families," said one bridal party attendee, Lara al-Laty, a 35-year-old travel agency employee.

She shared pictures of the party on her Facebook page, with guests seen wearing traditional abayas embroidered with Arabic inscriptions.

"The atmosphere, the decor, the ululations all had a humble Jordanian character that made you feel like you were at a family party," she said.

The Western-educated crown prince, officially became heir apparent at the age of 15, has long grown accustomed to the spotlight. Hussein has amassed four million followers on his Instagram account where he shares eclectic photographs of hiking trips, military training and royal functions.

On Monday, famous musicians from across the Arab world flocked to the Jordanian capital to perform at a free concert to honor the couple, among them Lebanese star Ragheb Alama and Egyptian singer and actor Tamer Hosny.

### Groomed for succession

Among the concertgoers, Suhad al-Idrisi, her sister and her niece all wore T-shirts that read: "We are happy for Hussein".

"We have not witnessed such moments of joy in a long time in Jordan," a country plagued by economic woes, said Idrisi, 45, who has prepared candy



A handout picture released by the Press Service of Jordanian Queen Rania, shows her (center) during a dinner party in Amman.

and roses for the day of celebrations.

The Hashemite family is "not like other Arab ruling families", she said, because they use social media and live broadcasts to share details of the wedding with "nothing to hide". King Abdullah II, aged 61 and on the throne since 1999, has long groomed his eldest son to succeed him, bringing him along to important visits and meetings, former information minister Samih Maaytah told AFP.

The Jordanian king has wide-ranging political powers in the country of 11 million people, a parliamentary monarchy, and also acts as supreme leader of the armed forces. Hussein followed in his father's footsteps by attending Britain's Sandhurst Military College and then studied history at Washington's Georgetown University.

His bride-to-be was born and raised in conservative Saudi Arabia but is also Western educated, having studied architecture at Syracuse University in New York. "The royal wedding crowns an advanced step" in Hussein's succession to the throne, said analyst Oraib Al-Rantawi, head of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies.

The high-level celebration would bring him closer to his people and allow him to mingle with international royals, he said, adding that "this consolidates the prince's network of relations". — AFP



A handout picture shows Saudi fiancée Rajwa Al-Saif (right) kissing her mother Azza Al-Sudairi during a pre-wedding dinner party in Amman.



Jordanian singer Diana Karazon performs during a free musical concert celebration ahead of the wedding of Jordan's Crown Prince at Amman International Stadium.



Lebanese singer Ragheb Alama performs during a free musical concert celebration ahead of the wedding of Jordan's Crown Prince.



Egyptian singer Tamer Hosni performs during a free musical concert celebration ahead of the wedding of Jordan's Crown Prince.

Lifestyle



Artist and museum curator Saliwa Shamoun Abba cleans a Syriac-inscribed plaque detailing information about the history of the Syriac Museum, in Iraq's predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh (Baghdada), in Nineveh province. —AFP photos



The Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Mosul Michael Najeeb presents an old Syriac-language Christian codex at the Eastern Manuscript Digitization Centre (CNMO) in Arbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdish region.



Syriac language teacher Salah Sarkis writes on a whiteboard as he gives a class at the Ashurbanipal Syriac School.

# Iraq's Christians fight to save threatened ancient language

Iraq's shrunken and conflict-scarred Christian community is launching a new television channel as part of efforts to save their dying language, spoken for more than 2,000 years. Syriac, an ancient dialect of Aramaic, has traditionally been the language spoken by Christians in Iraq and neighboring Syria, mostly in homes but also in some schools and during church services.

However, Syriac-speaking communities in the two countries have de-

clined over the years, owing to decades of conflict driving many to seek homes in safer countries. In Iraq, the Christian population is thought to have fallen by more than two-thirds in just over two decades. "It's true that we speak Syriac at home, but unfortunately I feel that our language is disappearing slowly but surely," said Mariam Albert, a news presenter on the Syriac-language Al-Syriania television channel.

channel in April to help keep the language alive. It has around 40 staff and offers a variety of programming, from cinema to art and history. "It is important to have a television station that represents us," said Albert, a 35-year-old mother. Many programs are presented in a dialect form of Syriac but Albert said the channel's news bulletins are broadcast only in classical Syriac, a form not widely understood by every-

one. zations, including the ancient Sumerians and Babylonians, who produced the earliest known written legal code. The country was also home to the city of Ur, which the Bible cites as Abraham's birthplace. Today, the country is overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim but also home to Sunni Muslims, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis and other minorities, while Arabic and Kurdish are the official languages. Before the 2003 United States-led invasion of the oil-rich country, Iraq was home to around 1.5 million Christians.

In the 20 years since, which included the brutal onslaught of the Islamic State group (IS) that swept the country in 2014, their population has declined to roughly 400,000, mostly living in the north. The Syriac language has been "sidelined", according to Kawthar Askar, head of the Syriac language department at Salahaddin University in Arbil, in the autonomous Kurdistan region. "We can't say it's a dead language... (but) it is under threat" of disappearing, he said. The cause is migration, Askar said, adding that families who emigrate often continue speaking Syriac among themselves but later generations abandon it.

Askar's department teaches the language to around 40 students, with more studying it in Baghdad. Syriac is also taught at around 265 schools across Iraq, according to Imad Salem Jajjo, responsible for Syriac education within the education ministry.

**'Our mother tongue'**

The earliest written record of Syriac dates to the first or second century BC

**'Sidelined' but not dead**

Iraq is known as a cradle of civili-



The Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Mosul Michael Najeeb holds an old damaged Syriac-language Christian codex at the Eastern Manuscript Digitization Centre (CNMO) in Arbil.



A view of a Syriac language Bible on display at the Syriac Museum.



Syriac language teacher Salah Sarkis gives a class at the Ashurbanipal Syriac School.

and the language reached its peak between the fifth and seventh centuries AD, Askar said. At its height, Syriac was spoken in everyday conversation, used in literature, the sciences and within public administration. With the seventh-century Islamic conquests, more people in the region began speaking Arabic. By the 11th century, Syriac was clearly in decline.

Despite the decades of conflict that have ravaged Iraq, hundreds of Syriac books and manuscripts have survived. In 2014, days before IS fighters seized swathes of northern Iraq, the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Mosul left the city, salvaging a trove of centuries-old Syriac manuscripts from the invading jihadists. Around 1,700 manuscripts and 1,400 books — some dating to the

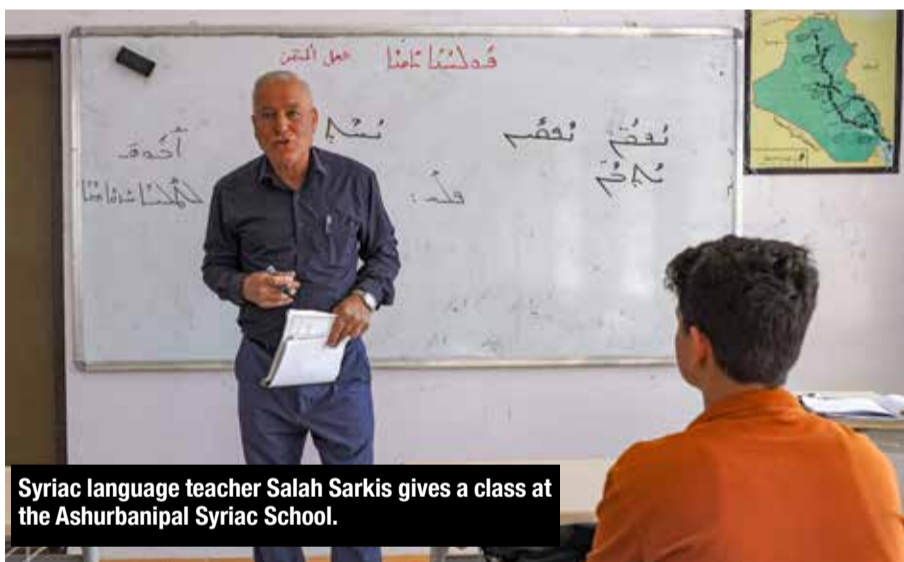
11th century — are now conserved at Arbil's Digital Centre for Eastern Manuscripts, which is supported by the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Dominican order.

The conservation will "preserve the heritage and guarantee its sustainability", archbishop Michael Najeeb told AFP. Syriac "is our history, it is our mother tongue", said Salah Bakos, a teacher from Qaraqosh, a town near Mosul, which adopted the language into its curriculum 18 years ago. "Teaching Syriac is important, not only to children but all segments of our society... even if parents say it is a dead language that serves no purpose". — AFP

Iraq's government launched the



Mariam Ashur (right) and Mariam Albert (left), presenters of a television program airing on 'al-Syriania' television channel, stand with channel director Jack Anwia in a studio in Baghdad.



Syriac language teacher Salah Sarkis gives a class at the Ashurbanipal Syriac School.



The Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Mosul Michael Najeeb presents an old Syriac-language Christian codex at the Eastern Manuscript Digitization Centre (CNMO) in Arbil.

## New Yorkers gather to watch 'Manhattanhenge'

Snapping pictures with cell phones, hundreds of New Yorkers and tourists gathered in the streets to watch the sun set in perfect alignment between rows of the skyscrapers for which the city is famous. Right on schedule at 8:12 pm on Tuesday evening, the flaming orange ball could be seen perfectly framed by Manhattan's canyons of tall buildings on streets running east-west, such as 42nd Street, which runs through Times Square.

This spectacle happens four times a year for two days, about three to four weeks before and after the summer and winter solstices. It has come to be known as "Manhattanhenge" after Stonehenge, the ancient monument in southern England where the sun also lines up perfectly during the solstices — the moments when the sun appears to reach either its highest or lowest point in the sky.

"It's a beautiful event. And it's some totally New York moment to do," said Jeanette Wolfson, a 47-year-old science teacher from Long Island who came into the city to take pictures for her students. She said she would remind them that "it's not the sun actually setting. It is the Earth rotating out of the light into the darkness."

The event lures photographers with fancy lenses and regular New Yorkers and tourists who do not hesitate to stand in the streets for a few minutes, blocking traffic. Patrick Batchelder, a 59-year-old photographer, said that what matters is sharing the special moment with others.

"The picture itself is not so important, just being around the crowd and seeing something unique in New York City," he said. The city's American Museum of Natural History recommends viewing the phenomenon from 14th, 23rd, 34th, 42nd or 57th streets to take in how "the city is framing the sunset", as astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson puts it. The next time it happens will be on July 12. — AFP



The Sun sets in alignment with Manhattan streets running east-west, also known as Manhattanhenge, in New York City.



People take photographs of the sunset at 42nd Street in Times Square on one of the four evenings of the year referred to as "Manhattanhenge".



People take photographs of the sunset at 42nd Street in Times Square on one of the four evenings of the year referred to as "Manhattanhenge".



A man crosses the street as the Sun sets in alignment with Manhattan streets running east-west, also known as Manhattanhenge, in New York City.

Lifestyle



(From left) Portuguese-US filmmaker Joaquim Dos Santos, US filmmakers Kemp Powers and Justin K. Thompson arrive for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse" at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP photos



US actress Issa Rae arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse" at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles.



US actress Hailee Steinfeld arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".



US actor Shameik Moore arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".

# Animated Spider-Man back with 'arthouse' sequel to Oscar winner

Nearly five years after the animated "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" won an Oscar with its innovative, biracial take on the beloved webslinger, a wildly ambitious sequel aims to further blur the boundaries between superhero films and arthouse cinema. "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," out Friday in the United States, picks up the story of half-Black, half-Latino Miles Morales, again using an eye-popping blend of decades-old 2D comic book drawing techniques with the latest computer-generated visual effects.

This time, the action takes place across several parallel universes, each one visualized in its own unique animated style, from a paint-streaked, grungy 1990s New York to a kaleidoscopic futuristic hybrid of Mumbai and Manhattan. The movie employed three directors, more than 1,000 artists, and runs at two hours and 20 minutes - unusually long for an animated film.

Its creators told AFP that the success of the first movie - which holds the highest-ever rating for a superhero movie on Rotten Tomatoes (97 percent) - "gave us permission to just be even more daring on this film." "I feel like we got the amazing opportunity as directors to make the world's biggest independent film, basically," said co-director Justin K. Thompson. "It's an arthouse film, disguised as a superhero movie."

### 'The Spider-Verse'

The film's hero Morales was first introduced to comic books in 2011, but came to mainstream attention with



US rapper Offset (second right) and his family arrive for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".

"Into the Spider-Verse," which won the Academy Award for best animated feature in 2019. Morales shares a familiar backstory with Peter Parker - bitten by a radioactive spider, he quickly deploys his new powers to swing between Manhattan skyscrapers and fight crime.

But his diverse ancestry and fondness for trendy sneakers and rap music set him apart from the "traditional" Spider-Man. It is all made possible thanks to the concept of a "multiverse," in which different versions of the same characters exist in parallel

dimensions - and occasionally interact - that has been used in comic books for decades. In recent years, the multiverse has become popular in Hollywood too, as movie studios feed audiences' boundless appetite for more and more superhero films, and writers scramble to explain how they can possibly all fit together.

"The thing that shocked us on the first movie was, there was no resistance to the idea of a multiverse - that the audience were completely on board and, like, not confused!" Christopher Miller, who co-produced

both movies, told AFP. "It allowed this movie to go to even more spectacular places - to introduce more unusual characters." The first Spider-Verse movie had a 1930s film noir-style private eye Spider-Man, and even a Spider-Ham pig character. This time, we meet a British punk rocker Spidey, and a dashing Indian version.

### Two-hour barrier

Aside from the complexity of its dimension-hopping plot, the new film has raised eyebrows due to its length. While upcoming adult dramas such as Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" and Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" are set to top three hours, anything longer than two hours for a US animated feature is highly unusual. And "Across the Spider-Verse" is the first of two sequels, with "Beyond the Spider-Verse" to conclude events next year.

But the creators shrugged off the notion that "a film that happens to be animated" must be brief, noting that "quiet" moments from the first film involving Miles bonding with his father and uncle were fan favorites. "The peaks don't play as high if those lows don't play as beautifully low as they do," said co-director Joaquim Dos Santos. "Those are the moments you're losing - the moments that actually make the film special in the first place," added fellow director Kemp Powers, who also co-wrote Pixar's "Soul." "Of course, if it were six hours, that's too long," he joked. — AFP



US actress Rachel Dratch arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".



US writers Phil Lord (left) and Chris Miller arrive for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".



US actor Jason Schwartzman arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".



Garcelle Beauvais attends the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse" at Regency Village Theatre.



US actor Evan Ross arrives for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse".



Brian Tyree Henry attends the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse" at Regency Village Theatre.

## Hummus, the healthy super food

Hummus, that creamy dip that hails from the Middle East, has a reputation as a clean, healthy food. It deserves it. All the main ingredients are super foods in their own right. It's got chickpeas, sesame paste (tahini), garlic, and olive oil in most traditional versions.

### Homemade Is a Home Run

It's convenient to buy a plastic container of hummus at the store,

but you'd be surprised at how easy it is to whip up at home. You'll save a few bucks and know exactly what's in your hummus. Just combine 1 can of chickpeas, ¼ cup tahini, garlic to taste (try 1-2 cloves), 2 tablespoons olive oil, and the juice of half a lemon in a food processor or blender, and whirl until smooth. Tip: You can adjust the proportions of the ingredients to taste, depending on how strong you want the flavor to be and how thick you like your hummus. Start with less liquid than you think you might need. You can always add more as you blend it, but if you add too much, you've got a sauce, not a dip.

### Healthy Ingredients

Chickpeas, hummus' main ingredient, give you protein, good-for-you carbs, and fiber. Like other members of the legume family, they routine-

ly top lists of the world's healthiest foods. Eating more plant foods is good for you. People who make that a habit are less likely to get certain diseases. Of course, lots of things affect your health — there's no miracle food — but a little hummus wouldn't hurt. Garlic and olive oil are two of the best-known and most studied ingredients. They're both part of the famously good-for-you Mediterranean Diet. These zesty seasonings give hummus its great flavor.

### Portion Control

There's plenty of nutrition-packed goodness in every scoop of hummus. There are also lots of calories: 408 per cup. You're not going to eat a whole cup of hummus, are you? Like anything else, you need to watch your serving size. You can get too much of a good thing.

### Be a Better Dipper

The classic partner for hummus is pita bread, usually in wedges made of white flour. Instead, pair your dip with a 100% whole-grain pita. You'll add fiber and vitamins to your lunch. Even better: Serve your hummus with veggies like cucumber slices, carrot spears, and red pepper wedges. You'll get even more nutrition without



adding as many calories as a bread, chip, or cracker.

### Avoid an Oil Spill

If you order hummus in a restaurant, it's likely to be garnished with olive oil, which adds another 124 calories per tablespoon. A well-made hummus is rich and delicious enough to stand on its own. Ask your server to hold the slick stuff.

### Move Over, Mayo

Hummus isn't just for dipping. It makes a great sandwich spread, too. Try it instead of mayo. You'll get more protein and fiber for half the calories you would from mayonnaise. Hummus adds 1 gram of fat to your lunch box, compared to 5 grams for regular mayo. — webmd.com

## Sports

# French sports minister slams Djokovic message on Kosovo

## 'Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence'

PARIS: France's sports minister condemned Novak Djokovic on Wednesday after he wrote a message saying Kosovo was at the "heart of Serbia" following his victory in the opening round of Roland Garros. The Belgrade-born tennis superstar scrawled "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence" on a camera on Monday in Paris amid clashes between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in the territory. Kosovo, mostly populated by Muslim ethnic Albanians, broke away from the then-Yugoslavia in the late 1990s and declared independence in 2008, in a move that has never been accepted by neighboring Christian-majority Serbia or its ally Russia.

French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera told broadcaster France 2 that Djokovic's message was "not appropriate, clearly". "There's a principle of neutrality for the field of play. When you carry messages about defending human rights, messages that bring people together around universal values, a sports person is free to express them." "But in this case it was a message that is very activist, that is very political. You shouldn't get involved, especially in the current circumstances, and it shouldn't happen again," added Oudea-Castera, who is

the former head of the French tennis federation.

She added that the director of Roland Garros, Amelie Mauresmo, had spoken to Djokovic and his entourage. Thirty peacekeepers from a NATO-led force in Kosovo were injured in clashes with ethnic Serb demonstrators on Monday during protests about the installation of ethnic Albanian mayors in northern Kosovo. With tensions running high, the European Union and other Western countries have called for calm.

Djokovic, ranked number three in the world, has defended his message. "Kosovo is our cradle, our stronghold, centre of the most important things for our country... There are many reasons why I wrote that on the camera," the 36-year-old told Serb media at the tournament. "Of course it hurts me very much as a Serb to see what is happening in Kosovo and the way our people have been practically expelled from the municipal offices, so the least I could do was this," added Djokovic, whose father was born in Kosovo.

### Ukraine distinction

Oudea-Castera made a distinction for messages in support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion. She

said she did not put Kosovo and Ukraine "on the same level." "What's happening for Ukrainians on the circuit is so painful, so difficult," she said. She supported Ukrainian player Marta Kostyuk who refused to shake hands with Aryna Sabalenka from Belarus which led to boos from the crowd on Sunday. Belarus has served as a launchpad for Russian attacks on Ukraine and its authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko is one of Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin's closest allies. Kostyuk said she had refused to shake hands over Sabalenka's stance on the conflict, even though the Australian Open champion said in a news conference afterwards that "nobody in this world, Russian athletes or Belarusian athletes, support the war."

"You can understand," Oudea-Castera said of the incident. "Even if you'd like there to always be fair-play up to and including the handshake, but there's pain and I respect it." Djokovic is seeking a record-setting 23rd Grand Slam in Paris and is set to play Marton Fucsovics of Hungary in the second round on Wednesday evening. The ethics charter of Roland Garros forbids any expression of political or religious views, but nei-



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a backhand return to US Aleksandar Kovacevic during their men's singles match on day two of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris. — AFP

ther organizers nor the French Tennis Federation have announced any intention to take disciplinary action against Djokovic. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Queensland overpower NSW

ADELAIDE: Selwyn Cobbo and Hamiso Tabuai-Fidow both bagged doubles as Queensland stunned New South Wales 26-18 to draw first blood in a riveting opener to the best-of-three State of Origin rugby league series Wednesday. Playing on neutral territory at South Australia's Adelaide Oval in front of a capacity 48,000 fans, Queensland scored twice early on to seize control. But in a see-sawing contest, NSW hauled themselves back into contention with a try before the break and then another early in the second half to set up an exciting finale. Despite being a man down with enforcer Tom Flegler sin-binned, the never-say-die Queenslanders dug deep to produce two tries in a frantic final six minutes for the win. "We all had trust and we all believed in each other, we never gave up," said Tabuai-Fidow. "It was an unbelievable job." Victory was a huge boost for the Maroons, who unexpectedly won the shield 2-1 last year when clear underdogs. — AFP

#### US Soccer elevates Callaghan

WASHINGTON: BJ Callaghan, an assistant coach for the United States national team the past four years, was elevated to interim head coach on Tuesday by US Soccer after Anthony Hudson departed. Matt Crocker, US Soccer's sporting director, appointed Callaghan to take charge of the American squad through title defenses in the upcoming CONCACAF Gold Cup and Nations League tournaments. Hudson, who had been serving on an interim basis, is leaving for an unspecified new opportunity. The search continues for a permanent head coach to replace Gregg Berhalter, whose contract expired at the end of last year. "BJ has been an integral part of the USMNT staff during the last four years as this young team has grown and developed," Crocker said. "Working alongside Anthony Hudson these last five months, we are confident he is prepared and ready to lead this group in the summer tournaments." — AFP

#### Schmadtke joins Liverpool

LONDON: Liverpool have appointed Jorg Schmadtke as their new sporting director, the Premier League club announced. The 59-year-old German spent over four years in the same role with Bundesliga side Wolfsburg before leaving at the start of 2023. He will begin his new role on June 1, subject to work permit formalities as Liverpool look to bounce back from a trophy-less season. Schmadtke will take over from Julian Ward, who is leaving after more than a decade at Anfield that featured Premier League and Champions League titles. Mike Gordon, the president of Fenway Sports Group, the club's US-based owners, told Liverpool's website that Schmadtke "will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience into a role in which such qualities can only be beneficial both to him and us. "Jorg will work with our football operations department as it continues to provide support for Jurgen Klopp, in keeping with our ongoing endeavor to keep growing and developing the club in all areas." — AFP

#### Newgarden takes record prize

WASHINGTON: Josef Newgarden took a record top prize of \$3.666 million from a record purse of \$17,021,500 for winning the Indianapolis 500, IndyCar announced. The 32-year-old American captured his first Indy 500 crown on Sunday before more than 330,000 spectators at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Newgarden, the IndyCar season champion in 2017 and 2019, made his breakthrough in his 12th Indy 500 appearance after starting 17th. This year's average payout for all 33 drivers in the oval classic was \$500,600 - \$15,600 more per racer than last year, which boasted the old money marks of \$3.1 million for the winner and \$14.4 million overall. Swedish runner-up Marcus Ericsson, last year's Indy 500 champion, took \$1.043 million. Danish driver Benjamin Pedersen was named the Indianapolis 500 Rookie of the Year after finishing 21st. He took home \$215,300 plus a \$50,000 bonus for being honored as the top newcomer. — AFP

## Seyboth Wild stuns Medvedev amid Djokovic fallout

PARIS: World number two Daniil Medvedev was knocked out of the French Open in the first round on Tuesday, losing in five sets to 172nd-ranked Thiago Seyboth Wild of Brazil as Roland Garros attempted to move on from Novak Djokovic's Kosovo controversy. Seyboth Wild, who came through the qualifiers and had never previously won a Grand Slam match, triumphed 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

It was Medvedev's fifth loss in the opening round at Roland Garros in seven appearances. "It's a dream come true to beat these kinds of players on this court," said the 23-year-old Brazilian who unleashed 69 winners on Court Philippe Chatrier. "I was cramping in the second set and couldn't really serve the way I wanted but I tried to play my best tennis."

Seyboth Wild, without a win on the main tour since February 2022, held his nerve in the conclusion of the four-hour 15-minute match, one of a Grand Slam record 21 first round ties to require five sets. He twice saw breaks retrieved by Medvedev in the deciding set before finally backing up a third break with a hold for 5-3. Two giant forehands secured victory. Medvedev arrived in Paris buoyed by winning his first ever clay court title at the Italian Open last week for his fifth trophy of 2023. "Every time the clay court season finishes, I'm happy," said Medvedev.

### 'Vandals' destroy image

Djokovic will return to Court Philippe Chatrier on Wednesday night for his second round match with controversy over his "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" message still raging. The Belgrade-born superstar, chasing a record 23rd Grand Slam title in Paris, wrote the message in Serbian after his opening round victory over Aleksandar Kovacevic on Monday. "Kosovo is our cradle, our stronghold, centre of the most important things for our country," 36-year-old Djokovic told Serb media.

His comments came amid heightened ethnic tensions in northern Kosovo where demonstrators and NATO soldiers have been injured. Serb TV reported that "vandals" had destroyed a mural bearing the image of Djokovic on a building in Orahovac, a town in south-western Kosovo where a small number of Serbs live amongst the majority Albanians. French veter-

## Rugby World Cup 'timely' with sport's off-field problems

PARIS: World Rugby chief executive Alan Gilpin said this year's Rugby World Cup is "timely" as Wednesday marks 100 days to go until the start of the tournament. The competition begins on September 8 as hosts France play three-time winners New Zealand. Problems over recent months have included clubs in England continuing to experience financial woes and Welsh players threatening to strike over contract problems. In December, former World Rugby vice-chairman Bernard Laporte stood down from his role as the French Rugby Federation's presi-

dent following his conviction for corruption.

"I think it is certainly timely for the sport as a whole that we are going to have this incredible opportunity to celebrate all the best things around rugby," Gilpin told reporters last week. "We know it has been challenging times for a number of professional leagues, certainly for a number of clubs." "Rugby World Cup comes at a great time," he added. More than 600,000 international travelers are expected to head to nine host cities across France for the eight-week showpiece with tickets for all games sold out far in advance.

A growing number of high-level global sporting events such as Premier League football games and the Tour de France have been impacted by protests from environmental groups. "We are planning all the time for such a wide range of different scenarios, and pro-

tests of any nature are certainly part of that," Gilpin said before activists halted last weekend's English Premiership final in London. "While I am sure, as there is in every major event and every Rugby World Cup, there will be incidents we need to deal with, I think we will be well prepared for that," he added.

### 'Humble' France

The Webb Ellis trophy arrived in France on Tuesday as ex-South Africa prop Tendai Mtawarira, who won the competition in Japan 2019, handed over the silverware to organizers in France. On Wednesday, monuments across the country including Paris' Arc de Triomphe will be lit up to mark the date as the excitement for the tournament goes up a gear.

French supporters' enthusiasm has grown with the impressive on-field performances by Les Bleus since ex-cap-



PARIS: Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild bites his racket after his match against Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their men's singles match on day three of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier on May 30, 2023. — AFP

an Gael Monfils, a semi-finalist 15 years ago but now ranked at 394, came back from 0-4 in the final set to defeat Sebastian Baez of Argentina 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 in a match which ended after midnight.

Monfils, 36, overcame cramping to secure a first win since August last year before a serious foot injury sidelined him until March. Defending champion Iga Swiatek survived an early wobble to reach the second round with a straight sets win over Cristina Bucsa of Spain. The world number one, bidding to become the first woman to successfully defend the title since Justine Henin in 2007, came through 6-4, 6-0. Swiatek could lose her top ranking to Aryna Sabalenka or Elena Rybakina at Roland Garros.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina kept up the pressure by downing Czech teenager Brenda Fruhvirtova 6-4, 6-2. Russian qualifier Mirra Andreeva, 16, marked her Grand Slam debut with a 56-minute 6-2, 6-1 victory over Alison Riske-Amritraj of the United States. Andreeva, the youngest player in the tournament and ranked 143, hit the headlines at the Madrid Open earlier this month where she reached the last 16. Wimbledon and

US Open runner-up Ons Jabeur eased past Italy's Lucia Bronzetti, who won her maiden WTA title in Rabat on Saturday, 6-4, 6-1.

### Five-hour marathon

Coco Gauff, the 2022 finalist, battled to a 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 success over Rebecca Masarova but Barbora Krejickova, the 2021 champion, was knocked out in the first round for a second successive year, losing 6-2, 6-4 to Lesia Tsurenko of Ukraine. Fourth seed Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal last year, eased past Swedish qualifier Elias Ymer 6-4, 6-3, 6-2. Alexander Zverev, who suffered a season-ending ankle ligament injury in his 2022 semi-final loss to Nadal, eased past Lloyd Harris of South Africa 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/0), 6-1.

Holger Rune, seeded six, passed a tough test against American Christopher Eubanks, winning 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2. Italian qualifier Andrea Pavonari saved five match points to knock out Serb 31st seed Miomir Kecmanovic in a five-hour 10-minute epic. Pavonari hit a colossal 106 winners in his 5-7, 2-6, 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (11/9) victory. — AFP

tain Fabien Galthie took over as head coach after the last World Cup. Skipper Antoine Dupont is the poster boy for this generation of France players, who have tasted success at club level in the Top 14 and the Champions Cup as well as with a Six Nations Grand Slam.

Last week, the Toulouse scrum-half was presented with his waxwork replica at a Paris museum, alongside Frederic Michalak, who was his country's standout player when they lost in the semi-finals of the 2007 World Cup, also on home soil. "We're not far, honestly we're getting closer and closer even if we do have objectives with our clubs," 26-year-old Dupont told reporters. "It's obvious that it's in our heads, and we want to win the cup. "We know where we're at, we're confident and we're also humble because of our position and that France have never succeeded in winning it up until now." — AFP

## Don't make 2024 Paris Olympics a 'scapegoat'

PARIS: France's sports minister argued Wednesday that the 2024 Paris Olympics should not be a "scapegoat for all of our frustrations" while denying that plans to move homeless people out of the capital were linked to the games. Reports emerged last week that the government had asked officials in regions around the country to prepare temporary facilities for the homeless from Paris in anticipation of an accommodation crunch in the capital. The games have also become embroiled in a row over ticket pricing, with the high cost of attending many events leading to criticism of organizers amid a cost-of-living crisis in France.

"I don't want us to mix everything up," Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera told the France 2

channel. "We do have major challenges over emergency shelter but it's not the Olympics' fault." She denied that the plans to move homeless people out of Paris were linked to the games. "No. It's something that was started in April. We shouldn't make the Olympics the scapegoat of all of our frustrations. It's important not to distort the facts and blame the Olympic Games for all the problems and difficulties of our society."

Her government colleague, Housing Minister Olivier Klein, made a link between the games and an expected shelter problem for the homeless in the capital during a speech to parliament on May 5. Klein said that many budget hotels that usually provide space for the homeless were intending to rent their rooms at market rates to sports fans and holiday makers during the Rugby World Cup in September and the Olympics starting next July.

The government estimates that hotel capacity available to accommodate the homeless "will fall by 3,000-4,000 places due to these events," Klein told MPs. The idea of creating new facilities around France to accommodate homeless people from Paris, many of whom are migrants, is already



French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera speaks during the official presentation of gold medals designed for the upcoming Rugby World Cup, at the Monnaie de Paris museum on May 31, 2023. — AFP

sparkling concern in some areas. The mayor of Bruz in northwest Brittany, Philippe Salmon, has voiced his opposition to plans for a new centre in his town of 18,000 people. — AFP

Sports

# Juve escape an additional Serie A points deduction

## Juventus fined in false accounting trial

ROME: Juventus escaped an additional Serie A points deduction but agreed to pay a fine of more than 700,000 euros (\$751,000) for lying about players foregoing wages during the COVID-19 pandemic after a plea bargain approved Tuesday by the Italian Football Federation tribunal. The plea deal, which Juventus had requested, brings to an end a series of cases in Italy's sporting courts involving the Turin club. Last week they were given a 10-point deduction in Serie A after a revision of their initial 15-point penalty inflicted on the club over illicit transfer activity.

Juventus have agreed not to appeal that penalty as part of Tuesday's deal. The disciplinary tribunal of the Italian federation (FIGC) said in a published decision that it had fined the troubled club 718,240 euros, while seven of its management figures were ordered to pay fines ranging from 47,000 euros to 10,000 euros. Excluded from the plea agreement, however, is former chairman Andrea Agnelli, who jointly requested along with prosecutors that his hearing be postponed to June 15, given what the tribunal called "advanced talks" on potential sanctions.

The federation had been tasked with considering the deferred payment of certain players' wages by the club and its key figures, as part of a wide-ranging scandal involving false accounting and transfer trickery that has rocked Italian football. Newspaper La Stampa, which, like Juventus, is owned by the Agnelli family, wrote on Tuesday that the club had accepted the deal to avoid another points deduction, which could have pushed it further away from the European places in Serie A.

Juventus are seventh in Serie A with one game

of the season remaining, after the imposition of the 10-point deduction. If they hold that position on the final day, they will qualify for next season's Europa Conference League, but they still have a chance of finishing as high as fifth and going into the Europa League. Juve faces separate criminal proceedings in the affair, with 12 current and former key club figures including former chairman Agnelli potentially facing trial.

### Losses artificially reduced

The plea bargain agreed Tuesday relates to the Turin club having communicated that players were giving up salary payments during the pandemic in 2020, while privately assuring those players they would only miss out on a portion of what was publicly announced. In doing so, Juve was able to artificially reduce losses in the club's annual balance sheets during the pandemic, when matches were cancelled and revenue plummeted. Agnelli, his ex-deputy chairman Pavel Nedved, and the rest of the club's board resigned in November following the probe by Italian authorities into the accounting irregularities.

In its decision, the tribunal said that the individual "FP" would be fined 47,000 euros, and "PN" 35,250 euros - referring to Juve's former sporting director Fabio Paratici, and Nedved, respectively. A 15-point penalty inflicted by the FIGC's appeals court in January against Juve for overstating capital gains on player sales was revoked in April by Italy's highest sporting court, the Sports Guarantee Board. It was then revised to 10 points by the federation's appeals court on May 22.

In January, the federation hit both Agnelli and



ROME: Juventus fans cheer prior to the Italian Serie A football match at the Olympic stadium in Rome. — AFP

ex-CEO Maurizio Arrivabene with two-year bans, handing sporting director Federico Cherubini a ban of 16 months. Former sporting director Paratici, who had left Juve for Tottenham Hotspur, was banned for two-and-a-half years, a decision that was extended worldwide by FIFA in March. Juve icon Nedved,

originally banned for eight months, was acquitted by the appeals court in May. On the criminal front, Italian news agencies have reported that a court hearing on October 26 will determine whether any possible trial will be held in Turin, where the investigation has been based, or Milan or Rome. — AFP

## Pochettino handed a tough task to rebuild troubled Chelsea

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino is back in the Premier League with the tough task of putting the pieces back together after Chelsea's disastrous first season under their new ownership. The Argentine will take charge of a club that finished 12th in the Premier League despite an eye-watering outlay of more than £550 million (\$678 million) on new players under Todd Boehly's consortium. Pochettino made his name in management by making the most of meagre resources at Espanyol, Southampton and particularly during a five-year stint at Tottenham.

Eighteen months at Paris Saint-Germain delivered the first silverware of the 51-year-old's career - the Ligue 1 title and French Cup - but he never appeared comfortable managing the egos of a star-studded squad before leaving in July 2022.

Pochettino's man-management skills will face a severe examination at Stamford Bridge as he tries to succeed where three managers have already failed under the new regime.

Thomas Tuchel, who led Chelsea to Champions League glory in 2021, was unceremoniously sacked by co-owners Boehly and Behdad Eghbali, of private equity firm Clearlake Capital, just seven games into this season. At the time Chelsea sat sixth in the Premier League and few could have foreseen the calamity that would follow the German's departure.

Graham Potter lasted less than seven months at

Stamford Bridge, even though Chelsea paid more than £20 million to snatch the Englishman from Brighton. Even worse was to follow as club great Frank Lampard returned as interim boss only to oversee six successive defeats in his first six matches.

### Bloated squad

All three bosses have faced the challenge of hands-on owners and a bloated squad. Experienced defender Thiago Silva confirmed last month that the club had to extend the dressing room to accommodate a group of more than 30 players.

A major clearout is needed at the end of the season to give Pochettino a more manageable squad to work with and instill a team spirit that has been sorely lacking. Chelsea's huge spending over the past 12 months may mean he has limited room for manoeuvre in the transfer market. The Argentine faced a similar challenge at Tottenham, when the club punched above its weight to finish in the top four of the Premier League four times under his leadership. The Blues' spending is under scrutiny due to financial fair play controls but much of their outlay was with one eye on the future.

Wesley Fofana, Benoit Badiashile, Enzo Fernandez, Mykhailo Mudryk, Carney Chukwuemeka, Noni Madueke, David Datro Fofana, Malo Gusto and Andrey Santos are all 22 or younger. Chelsea have been ridiculed for putting some of those players on eight-year contracts, but the club's ownership are betting on Pochettino's record with young talent to prove them right.

He produced impressive results at Tottenham, helping turn young home-grown talents such as Harry Kane and Dele Alli into household names on a budget. "I can't speak highly enough of him. He's



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE: Mauricio Pochettino walks on the pitch during a training session. — AFP

a fantastic manager, a fantastic man," said England captain Kane, during their time together at Spurs. "You just want to perform for him, work hard for him, win for him. He's very passionate. You can tell sometimes he wants to be out there himself, putting in tackles, running about.

"You respond to that. On nights like that, big occasions, you just want to do him justice." Before appointing Pochettino, Spurs had only finished in the top four of English top-flight twice in 24 years. He also inspired a run to the club's first-ever Champions League final in 2019 and Tottenham's struggles since his departure have led to a clamor from fans for his return. Pochettino's reputation appears to be untarnished by his indifferent spell at PSG, given the French giants' struggles on and off the field this season. Should he turn Chelsea's motley crew back into Premier League contenders, his status as one of the world's leading managers will be restored. — AFP

## Illegal football streaming gang jailed

LONDON: Five men in the UK who illegally streamed English Premier League football matches to tens of thousands of people were jailed on Tuesday, the league announced. Members of the gang received prison terms ranging from three to 11 years each after the Premier League brought what it said was "the world's largest-ever prosecution of an illegal streaming network". The defendants, aged between 30 and 46, raked in more than £7 million (\$8.7 million) selling subscriptions to three illegal platforms streaming to over 50,000 customers and resellers.

"The organizations offered illegal access to watch Premier League matches, hundreds of channels from around the world and tens of thousands of on-demand films and TV shows," the Premier League said in a statement. The gang's "mastermind", Mark Gould, 36, was sentenced to 11 years in jail at Chesterfield Justice Centre, in central England. The remaining four received sentences ranging from three to more than five years.

The private prosecution was supported by the trading standards team at Hammersmith and Fulham Council in London and the intellectual property protection organization FACT (the Federation Against Copyright Theft). "Today's sentencing is the result of a long and complex prosecution of a highly sophisticated operation," Premier League general counsel Kevin Plumb said. "The sentences handed down, which are the longest sentences ever issued for piracy-related crimes, vindicate the efforts made to bring these individuals to justice and reflect the severity and extent of the crimes."

The gang, which relied on dozens of employees, profited by offering live access to Premier League games otherwise unavailable in the UK due to so-called "blackout" broadcasting rules. It accessed feeds from broadcasters in the UK, Qatar, the United States, Australia and Canada and streamed them a few seconds later. The operation developed mobile phone and online apps screening Premier League matches and other content. England's Premier League is the most lucrative football league in the world, with the UK broadcast rights alone worth about £5 billion for the 2022 to 2025 seasons. — AFP

## Ugandan baseballer pitching for the big league

GAYAZA: The baseball pitch is shared with grazing cows, but the rustic conditions are no distraction for Ugandan major league hopeful Dennis Kasumba. The 18-year-old is off to play in a top-flight amateur baseball league in America this summer, the chance of a lifetime for an orphan raised in a slum who dreams of going pro. "I am very, very happy. I can't explain my feelings. I feel blessed," said Kasumba, who comes from Gayaza, a town about 12 kilometers from the capital Kampala, where he was raised in grinding poverty.

Spotted online after videos his exploits went viral, Kasumba received an invitation to the Major League Baseball (MLB) Draft League, which starts on June 1 in the United States. "Today I'm starting my Journey," Kasumba wrote on Twitter on May 28 alongside a video of family, friends and supporters waving him off at the airport. Determined to impress the scouts and do his coach and teammates

proud, Kasumba has been fine-tuning his pitch and swing ahead of the MLB fixture where prospective stars are put through their paces.

Ahead of his departure, Kasumba trained day and night at Gayaza, running drills with a worn catcher's mitt and bat held together with tape at the local diamond. Off the field, he keeps fit any way he can, using everything and anything at his disposal. Puffing away in the equatorial sun, Kasumba runs through squats using barbells made of concrete and discarded car tyres, with water-filled plastic bottles taped to his legs for resistance. Friends and relatives have filmed his sessions and posted them on social media, and Kasumba has attracted thousands of followers inspired by his grit and cheer.

### Hard beginnings

Raised in Gayaza by his grandmother, Kasumba never knew his parents. His mother abandoned him as an infant along with two siblings after their father, a soldier, died fighting anti-government rebels. By the age of eight, he had dropped out of school to work for his meals, slaughtering animals in an abattoir until meeting volunteer coach John Bosco Sempa, who invited him to the local baseball pitch. As his natural talent and determination became clear,



GAYAZA: A Ugandan baseball player trains with Dennis Kasumba, 18 (center) who dreams of becoming Uganda's first US Major League Baseball (MLB) player at Gayaza Baseball and Softball Sports Club Ground in Gayaza, Uganda. — AFP

Sempa encouraged his protege to promote his skills on social media, where the rising star found another source of motivation and support. "It started like a joke, but now I am going to US for MLB," Kasumba told AFP. — AFP

# 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 | Qadsiya        | 22515088 |
| Adaliya             | 22517144 | Dasmah         | 22532265 |
| Khaldiya            | 24848075 | Bneid Al-Gar   | 22531908 |
| Kaifan              | 24849807 | Shaab          | 22518752 |
| Shamiya             | 24848913 | Qibla          | 22459381 |
| Shuwaikh            | 24814507 | Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Abdullah Salem      | 22549134 | Mirqab         | 22456536 |
| Nuzha               | 22526804 | Sharq          | 22465401 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 | Salmiya        | 25746401 |

### Change of Name

I, **Fakhruddin** holder of Indian Passport No. V1972831 having permanent address V/P Najampura Sagwara Dist. Durgapur (RAJ) 314025 residing in Kuwait present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Given name Fakhruddin and surname Bhaishab (#3547) 31/05/2023

## Title-hungry Nuggets face odds-defying Heat in Finals

Best-of-seven championship series kicks off



BOSTON: A general view during pregame introductions prior to game seven of the Eastern Conference Finals between the Miami Heat and the Boston Celtics at TD Garden. — AFP

DENVER: A Denver Nuggets squad looking to prove its championship quality and an upstart Miami Heat lineup that made defying the odds a trademark are on an NBA Finals collision course. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic of Serbia leads the Western Conference top seed Nuggets against sharpshooter Jimmy Butler and the Heat, who needed a play-in victory just to grab an eighth seed in the Eastern Conference.

The best-of-seven championship series begins Thursday at Denver. It's the Nuggets' first trip to the NBA Finals since making their league debut in 1976. Denver has won hard-earned respect after 46 seasons of futility, this year as a playoff top seed for the first time. "Our goal is to win a championship, so we have much more work to do," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said.

"Seems like for years now, some dusty old cowtown in the Rocky Mountains, the little respect that we get. You can sit there and complain about it or

you can just embrace who we are and what we have. "Until we win a championship, people are going to keep saying that about us. So that's what drives us. Getting to the finals doesn't do it. It's winning a championship." Jokic, a 6-foot-11 (2.11m) center, averaged 24.5 points, 11.8 rebounds and a career-high 9.8 assists a game this season and shot a career-best 63.2% from the floor.

Miami center Bam Adebayo says the key to slowing Jokic is "making him take tough shots" but added, "The biggest thing for us is try to limit his assists. Sounds easier said than done. Biggest thing for us is watching film and figuring that out." The Nuggets have talent and depth around Jokic, led by guard Jamal Murray, who missed the entire 2021-22 season due to a torn left knee ligament. He's averaging 27.7 points in the playoffs. "I'm so happy for Jamal. He's a special player," Jokic said. "He has been our best player since round one, really stepping up. Even if he doesn't make shots, his energy is always good. He's still fighting."

Denver forwards Michael Porter Jr., Aaron Gordon and Bruce Brown and guard Kentavious Caldwell-Pope each average 10-15 points in the playoffs in supporting roles that have made the Nuggets formidable. "When we're just playing the right way, everything opens up," Murray said. "Everybody eats when we're all playing for each other and we've been doing that for a while. We're just in a great rhythm of playing unselfish basketball." And there's more to come. "We've got four more wins to go," Murray said. "First Nuggets team to go all the way. We just want to make the most of the opportunity."

To do that, the Nuggets must defeat a giant-killer Heat team that became only the second eighth seed to reach the NBA Finals after the 1999 New York Knicks. Miami, which lost two regular-season games against Denver, lost a play-in game to Atlanta then beat Chicago to grab the last East playoff spot.

The Heat stunned NBA wins-leader Milwaukee, beat New York and edged Boston in seven games in

the East final after letting the Celtics pull level from an 0-3 hole. "We have some incredible competitors in that locker room. They love the challenge," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "Things don't always go your way. The inevitable setbacks happen and it's how you deal with that collectively. It can sap your spirit. It can take a team down for whatever reason. With this group, it has steeled us and made us closer and made us tougher."

Butler has averaged 28.5 points, 7.0 rebounds and 5.7 assists a game in the playoffs but "Jimmy Buckets" says he isn't finished. "Nobody is satisfied," he said. "We haven't done anything. We don't play just to win the Eastern Conference. We play to win the whole thing." And being a huge underdog in the finals is just how Adebayo wants it. "When you go through what we went through this whole season, people writing us off, to be four games from a championship just speaks volume to, one, we never quit, and two, everybody rallied together," he said. — AFP

### Butler: Miami's man for moments of truth

MIAMI: Desperate. Urgent. Maniacal. Psychotic. Incredible. Unique. World class. Miami Heat head coach Erik Spoelstra has used an array of adjectives to describe Jimmy Butler over the course of his team's remarkable postseason campaign. On Monday, Spoelstra was once again plundering his vocabulary after Butler led Miami's scoring in a do-or-die game seven blowout of the Boston Celtics to seal a place in the NBA Finals.

It was the latest in a lengthening list of towering performances from Butler, the 33-year-old forward who has invariably been the cornerstone of Miami's odyssey through the playoffs. In the first round, Butler scored 56 points and 42 points in games four and five as Miami romped to a 4-1 series victory against the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks. In the conference semi-finals, Butler averaged 24.6 points per game in a 4-2 series win over the Knicks, and then followed that up with an average 24.7 points per game in the 4-3 series win over Boston.

But as Spoelstra emphasizes, Butler's influence on Miami's fortunes goes far deeper than raw on-court statistics. "You have to have a guy that you can hold on to, particularly in those moments of truth," Spoelstra said of Butler. "There's no way to quantify the confidence that (Jimmy) can instill in everybody. "The confidence level that he can create for everybody on the roster is incredible. I've almost never seen anything like it."

"He's special because he does it on both ends of the court. He can play 48 if you need him to, and then he just has a way, also, that he has a hard edge. "He's gnarly, but he knows how to have a soft touch to give somebody some confidence at the right time. That's the special gift that he has." In a sense Monday's game-seven victory in Boston was tailor-made for Butler. Boston had clawed their way back from a 3-0 series deficit to level at 3-3, leaving them with the chance to close out a historic series win in front of their home fans.

But Butler is rarely more comfortable when the odds



Jimmy Butler of Miami Heat

and prevailing logic are against him and his teammates. Butler and Miami have repeatedly demonstrated a fearlessness in adversity that ought to give the Denver Nuggets plenty of food for thought heading into Thursday's game one. "We're a resilient group. We stick together through everything," Butler said earlier in the playoffs. "We just play hard. We know what we're capable of. We don't listen to the outside noise. We're going to do what we do, learn from our mistakes and get better."

Speaking in the wake of Miami's first round upset of Milwaukee, Spoelstra said Butler was the embodiment of the Heat's dogged approach. "He is us and we are him," Spoelstra said. "A lot of guys play the game of basketball in this league. He competes to win. And that's a different language. "He's desperate, and urgent, and maniacal, and sometimes psychotic, about the will to win. He'll make everybody in the building feel it."

Butler's indomitable spirit has been a recurring theme of his NBA career and, indeed, his life. A difficult childhood in Texas saw him endure homelessness as a teenager before he was eventually drafted by the Chicago Bulls in 2011. He remained in Chicago until 2017 and then had stints in Minnesota and Philadelphia before landing in Miami in 2019, leading the Heat to the NBA Finals in his pandemic-disrupted first season, where they lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in the Orlando bubble. — AFP

### Quiet man Jokic set for crowning glory

DENVER: Nikola Jokic can cap an improbable journey to the pinnacle of his sport by leading the Denver Nuggets to a first ever championship when the NBA Finals get under way on Thursday. Nine years ago, the softly spoken Serbian center barely caused a murmur of attention when the Nuggets chose him with the 41st overall pick in the draft. That selection was so low-key that it was not even broadcast live; instead, viewers watching the NBA draft were shown a commercial for a popular fast-food chain. The consensus was that while Jokic had size coupled with respectable passing and shooting ability, the doughy youngster lacked the athleticism and speed to thrive in the world's toughest basketball league.

But over the course of the 28-year-old's rise to the very highest echelon of the NBA, those early scouting assessments have been steadily shredded. He won back-to-back NBA Most Valuable Player awards in 2021 and 2022, and this year only narrowly missed out on averaging a triple double over the course of the regular season, finishing with 11.8 rebounds, 9.8 assists and 24.5 assists per game. "He's going to go down as one of the all-time great centers to ever touch a basketball," was Kevin Durant's verdict on Jokic after the Nuggets eliminated the Phoenix Suns in the second round of the playoffs.

LeBron James was similarly complimentary after the Nuggets swept the Los Angeles Lakers in the Western Conference finals. "There are certain guys in this league that play the game a certain way, a certain way that I like to play the game as well — and he's one of them," James said. "You are always off-balance when you are guarding a player like that because of his ability to score, rebound, shoot. He sees plays before they happen. "There's not many guys in our league like that."

Yet while the likes of James and Durant embrace Jo-

kic as a member of the league's elite, the 6ft 11in (2.11m), 284-pound (129-kilo) Serb continues to be the subject of sniping. Some critics say his triple-double prowess is the result of "stat-padding," while others accuse him of lacking true star power. "Jokic can win this championship and no one's going to care," former Washington Wizards player Gilbert Arenas said recently. "Let's just be honest. I'm sorry. He's not going to go from where he is right now to this super megastar because he's not doing anything kids want to see," Arenas said. "It's the players, their personality. You know Jokic is great, but he doesn't have IT."

Those kinds of criticisms leave Nuggets coach Michael Malone bemused. Malone notes that Jokic's remarkable postseason — he has averaged 29.9 points, 13.3 rebounds and 10.3 assists in 15 games — ought to quash any debate about his skills. "Have you seen any stat-padding out there?" Malone said. "I'm serious, enough of the silliness. — AFP



Nikola Jokic of Denver Nuggets