



**3** Some workers ignore outdoor work ban to make ends meet



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## Decree issued to dissolve 2020 National Assembly

Move aims to safeguard Kuwait's stability • Ghanem to contest elections



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah chairs a Cabinet meeting on May 1, 2023. — KUNA

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** An Amiri decree was issued on Monday dissolving the 2020 National Assembly that was reinstated by the constitutional court in a ruling issued on March 19. The decree was issued by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of HH the Amir, after the draft decree was approved by the Cabinet, which met earlier in the day.

The decree said the Assembly was dissolved based on the articles of the constitution and in respect to the will of the people and to safeguard the higher interests of the country and its stability amid international and regional economic changes. It said that as a result of those reasons, it became necessary to go back to the people to choose their representatives.

The Cabinet said in a statement that it approved the draft decree after a briefing by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, adding the Cabinet invoked article 107 of the constitution, which talks about disputes between the Cabinet and

the National Assembly. The same article states that fresh elections must be held within two months of dissolving the Assembly, which means the new parliamentary polls must be held before July 1, under the scorching summer heat when temperatures soar to around 50 degrees Celsius. Local reports had expected the elections to be held in September or October, when the weather is relatively better.

After the decree was issued, outgoing Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem announced he will run for a seat from the second constituency. Ghanem had not contested the Sept 2022 elections. Ghanem said that he had repeatedly called for going back to the people to elect a new Assembly. Ghanem has led the National Assembly since 2013, but was a member of the Assembly years before that.

This will be Kuwait's third parliamentary polls in less than 30 months and the 10th elections since 2006 amid continued political crises between the governments and MPs.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Arab Parliament honors Amir

**KUWAIT:** The Arab Parliament has granted HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the leader's medal in appreciation for his services to his country and the Arab nation. Cabinet members were briefed on a letter from the Chairperson of the Arab Parliament Adel Asoumi regarding the award, the Cabinet said following its weekly meeting on Monday. — KUNA

#### Zionists kill Palestinian teen

**RAMALLAH:** Zionist forces killed a Palestinian teenager Monday during a raid in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry announced. The ministry said 17-year-old Jibril Mohammed Kamal Al-Ladaa died after being "shot in the head" in the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp near the city of Jericho. — AFP

#### ADNOC signs \$1bn Total deal

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates' ADNOC Gas announced Monday a \$1 billion deal to provide liquefied natural gas to France's TotalEnergies as Europe scrambles to find alternatives to Russian energy sources. The liquefied natural gas provided under the three-year supply deal "will be delivered to various export markets around the world". — AFP (See Page 8)

#### India religious freedom in focus

**WASHINGTON:** A US government panel renewed calls Monday to blacklist India over religious freedom, saying that treatment of minorities has continued to worsen under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's annual report pointed in India to violence and destruction of property targeting Muslims and Christians and drew links to comments and social media posts by members of Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP. — AFP (See Page 5)

### Turkish forces kill IS chief in Syria raid

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey released new details Monday about its successful operation against the Islamic State's global chief, saying he died by setting off a suicide vest to avoid being detained. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Sunday the death of the "suspected leader of Daesh, codename Abu Hussein Al-Qurashi".

Turkey's Anadolu state news agency gave his full name as Abu al-Hussein Al-Hussein Al-Qurashi, saying he joined IS in 2013 and quickly rose through the jihadist group's ranks.

Turkish media also released images of a fenced-off building in the middle of a field where it said Qurashi was hiding in Syria's Afrin province. A section of the two-storey house was sheared off, apparently from blasts.

The Islamic State announced the death of its previous leader, Abu Hasan Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi, on Nov 30. Anadolu said Turkey's MIT intelligence agency conducted a four-hour operation during which it located and surrounded al-Hussein al-Hussein on Saturday. MIT agents blasted apart a stone wall that surrounded the house, before entering it through a rear entrance and side windows.

Al-Hussein al-Hussein set off his suicide vest when he realized he was about to be captured, Anadolu said, adding that no Turkish operatives

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MASKA, Syria: An aerial view shows a house reportedly used by the leader of the Islamic State group Abu Hussein Al-Qurashi in this village north of Jindires on May 1, 2023. — AFP

### Sudan battles flare, UN warns of mass exodus

**KHARTOUM:** The UN on Monday warned that more than 800,000 people could flee fighting in Sudan, where gun battles and explosions again shook the capital in violation of the latest truce agreed between warring generals. The chaos and bloodshed, now in their third week, have already sparked an exodus of tens of thousands of Sudanese to neighboring countries including Egypt, Chad and Central African Republic.

But the United Nations refugee agency said it was bracing for "the possibility

that over 800,000 people may flee the fighting in Sudan for neighboring countries". "We hope it doesn't come to that, but if violence doesn't stop we will see more people forced to flee Sudan seeking safety," UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said in a tweet, adding to UN alarm over what the world body calls a catastrophic humanitarian situation sparked by the three-week-old war.

Hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded since fighting erupted on April 15 between Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Millions of Sudanese unable to afford the inflated prices required to escape the battles have sheltered in their homes with dwindling food and water and frequent power

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KHARTOUM: Smoke billows over buildings in the Sudanese capital on May 1, 2023 as deadly clashes entered their third week. — AFP

### Scientists use brain scans and AI to 'decode' thoughts

**PARIS:** Scientists said Monday they have found a way to use brain scans and artificial intelligence modelling to transcribe "the gist" of what people are thinking, in what was described as a step towards mind reading. While the main goal of the lan-

guage decoder is to help people who have lost the ability to communicate, the US scientists acknowledged that the technology raised questions about "mental privacy".

Aiming to assuage such fears, they ran tests showing that their decoder could not be used on anyone who had not allowed it to be trained on their brain activity over long hours inside a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanner. Previous research has shown that a brain implant can enable people who can no longer speak or type to spell out words or even sentences. These "brain-computer interfaces" focus on the part of the brain that controls

the mouth when it tries to form words.

Alexander Huth, a neuroscientist at the University of Texas at Austin and co-author of a new study, said that his team's language decoder "works at a very different level". "Our system really works at the level of ideas, of semantics, of meaning," Huth told an online press conference. It is the first system to be able to reconstruct continuous language without an invasive brain implant, according to the study in the journal Nature Neuroscience.

For the study, three people spent a total of 16 hours inside an fMRI machine listening to spoken

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# Kuwait calls for collaborative efforts to halt fighting in Sudan

## Foreign Minister lauds Red Cross, Crescent's role in alleviating humanitarian crisis

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah praised the efforts of the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) teams in Sudan during a meeting held with Secretary General and Executive Chairman of IFRC Jagan Chapagain.

The two held talks around the humanitarian conditions in Sudan, means of alleviating the Sudanese people's hardships, boosting international action in response to humanitarian catastrophes regionally and internationally. The foreign minister during the meeting lauded the role of the IFRC at the global humanitarian level and its response to the regional humanitarian catastrophes. He also applauded the IFRC teams' efforts, delivering relief and medical aid to the needy.

Chapagain expressed deep gratitude to the State of Kuwait for its leading role in relieving stricken peoples, noting its leading role at the humanitarian level earned it a distinguished status at

the regional and international levels. The discussions also touched on regional and international issues, namely the humanitarian hardships suffered by the Yemeni and Syrian peoples, repercussions of the crises in the Ukraine, Afghanistan, as well as famine in Africa.

In related news, the State of Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt and the Permanent Representative at the Arab League Ghanem Al-Ghanem on Monday affirmed necessity of exerting collaborative efforts for ceasing the fighting immediately in Sudan.

The State of Kuwait has followed up with deep concern the recent developments in Sudan that led to spread of violence and strife among various parties thus threatening Sudan's stability and security," said Ambassador Al-Ghanem during an extraordinary session of the Arab League Council, held at the level of permanent delegates, addressing the issue of Sudan.

Ghanem underscored necessity of

holding national dialogue among the Sudanese parties with regional and international support to pave the way for holding credible elections. Military action will not achieve any progress for restoring Sudan's stability, he stressed. He lauded the Arab states for rapid response to the developments in Sudan and keeping session of the delegates' meeting open.

Warplanes on bombing raids drew heavy fire over Khartoum this week as fighting between Sudan's army and paramilitaries entered a third week with the UN chief warning the country was falling apart.

More than 500 people have been killed since battles erupted on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former number two Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

They have agreed to multiple truces but none has taken hold as the number of dead civilians continues to rise and



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) received on Monday Jagan Chapagain during his visit to Kuwait. —KUNA

chaos and lawlessness grip Khartoum, a city of five million people where many have been cloistered in their homes lacking food, water, and electricity.

Tens of thousands have been uprooted within Sudan or embarked on arduous trips to neighboring Chad, Egypt, South Sudan or Ethiopia to flee the battles. — Agencies



People browse the Islamic book fair held at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref from 9 am till 1 pm and from 4:30 pm to 10 pm until May 6. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Social Reform Society Dr Khaled Al-Mathkour (center) and a number of official bodies and public benefit associations cut the ribbon during the opening of the exhibition.

## Islamic book fair promotes moderate values

KUWAIT: The Islamic book fair is essential to the development of thought and the consolidation of diverse values among youth, said Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Social Reform Society Dr Khaled Al-Mathkour.

The Social Reform Society kicked off the 45th edition of the book fair Sunday, which will see participation from 49 publishing houses, including 19 from Kuwait and 30 from outside the country. The book fair is returning after a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19.

Mathkour was at the opening ceremony of the book fair Sunday, where he cut the ribbon alongside other officials. He said the society has continuously sought since its establishment to develop and diversify the sources of reading materials available to the public through the exhibit by inviting entities from across to participate. While the main purpose of the book fair is to spread

moderate Islamic culture, it also provides reading materials on women, children, law and other important topics.

Saad Al-Otaibi, CEO of Namaa Charity, said in a similar statement to KUNA that participation in the exhibit stems from the belief in the importance the role such exhibits play in building and developing societies, especially as it helps develop human thought and behavior. Namaa, he said, is participating in the exhibit through a number of books.

Participants from Saudi Arabia and Morocco were also present at the opening ceremony. Muhammad Al-Baghaish, with Kids Skills from Saudi Arabia, said participation in the exhibition opens the door for the exchange of experiences and cultures. Kids Skills publications, he added, focus on developing children's mental and motor abilities through innovative interactive games.

Firas Najeeb was there to represent Najeeb-bawahi, a publishing house from Morocco. He praised Kuwait for being a platform for culture



Dr Khaled Al-Mathkour



A customer chats with one of the book vendors at the fair, where 49 publishing houses, including 19 from Kuwait and 30 from outside the country, are participating.

and knowledge. The book fair, he added, reflects Kuwait's endeavors in the dissemination of knowledge. Najeeb said he hoped his country will continue to participate in such cultural exhibitions which provide great services to the society.

The exhibit is held at Kuwait International

Fairground in Mishref. It's open daily from 9 am till 1 pm and from 4:30 pm to 10 pm until May 6. It will include activities for children, in addition to competitions, lectures and seminars, organized with the participation of a number of volunteer teams. — KUNA

### News in Brief

#### Tens of residency violators caught

KUWAIT: Residency detectives arrested 6 residency and labor laws violators in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh during a security campaign in the area. The tripartite commission in cooperation with Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) arrested 16 residency and labor laws violators in Industrial Ardihiya area, while PAM issued 15 violation notices. Ten bogus domestic help offices harboring 43 violators were busted in Ishbiliya. The 43 are of various nationalities and worked on daily basis in Ishbiliya and Abdallah Mubarak area. All violators were sent to concerned authorities.

#### Electricity ministry busts 26 violators

KUWAIT: A joint committee to address the bachelor's phenomenon resumed its campaign to cut off power to violating properties. This is its first campaign after warnings were issued to violators during the month of Ramadan. The deputy head of the Judicial Enforcement Team of the Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy, Ahmed Al-Shammari, said that the campaign targeted the Dasma and Faiba areas in the Asimah Governorate, where the power was cut off from violating real estate. "Five properties have been completely or partially deprived of power, as a number of properties that combine singles and families have been discovered. The committee's field teams have the ability and vigilance to distinguish between real estate inhabited by singles and families, as well as deal with the situation as required according to the law," Shammari said. In a related context, Shammari pointed out that the total number of violations for the month of April amounted to 26 violation reports in the Ahmadi, Asimah, Jahra and Farwaneya governorates. Violations varied between violating home extensions and various violations on the network.



## Customs seizes smuggled rations

KUWAIT: The Customs Authorities of Kuwait have seized a large amount of subsidized food items (Tamween) hidden in personal shipments.

Officials at the department responsible for the control and inspection of warehouses at the Land Customs Administration and Shubra Al-Khudaar discovered the items, according to a media release.

The authority said it caught trucks full of various subsidized items, with the aim of smuggling them to other Arab countries through Kuwait's land borders.



Local

# Demographic challenges persist as more foreign laborers enter market

## Domestic helpers make biggest jump • Private sector still employs half of workforce

By Ahmad Jabr and Nebal Snan

**KUWAIT:** The proportion of citizens in Kuwait's labor force dropped to 15.9 percent by the end of 2022 compared to 17.4 percent a year earlier, according to recent government statistics. The change is accompanied by a surge in the number of domestic workers and expatriate workers in the public and private sectors.

The new figures released by the Central Statistical Bureau shed light on the challenges facing Kuwait, as the government seeks to rectify what it describes as a 'demographic imbalance' problem that's often blamed for a host of issues including deteriorating public services. But despite state efforts to reduce the heavy reliance on foreign manpower in favor of encouraging the recruitment of more Kuwaiti workers, the percentage of Kuwaitis has dropped not only in the private sector, but in the public sector as well, according to the statistics.

In the public sector, Kuwaiti employees made up 79.8 percent of the workforce in 2022, slightly down from 80 percent in 2021. Kuwaitis made up only 4.6 percent of private sector employees, also down from 5 percent in 2021. The drop in the percentage of Kuwaiti employees in the public sector is not due to a decrease in their numbers. In fact, the number of both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti workers increased in 2022 compared to 2021. However, Kuwaiti workers increased by 3.6 percent, whereas non-Kuwaiti workers increased by 4.5 percent, meaning more

non-Kuwaitis joined the public sector compared to Kuwaitis in 2022.

### More domestic helpers

Domestic helpers saw the largest jump in numbers compared to other worker groups, rising from 24 percent of the total workforce in 2021 to 27 percent in 2022. Meanwhile, private sector workers still made up more than half of the total workforce at 56.3 percent by the end of 2022, down from 57.9 percent in 2021. On the other hand, public sector employees made up only 16.7 percent of the total workforce by the end of 2022 compared to 18.1 in 2021.

Kuwait's total workforce recorded a slight growth in 2022, increasing by 12.7 percent. The country's overall labor force stood at 2,790,287 by the end of 2022, including 464,606 public sector employees, 1,572,384 private sector employees and 753,297 domestic helpers.

Both Kuwaiti and expatriate labor forces have grown, the statistics show. Kuwaiti employees increased by 2.9 percent, making up 21.7 percent of the total workforce by the end of 2022. Meanwhile, the expatriate workforce rose by 9.8 percent, as their participation level in Kuwait's labor market reached 78.3 percent. The Kuwaiti workforce stood at 442,647 employees, while expatriate labor reached 1,594,343 as of the end of 2022.

While expatriates remain the dominant workforce in Kuwait's private sector, the statistics show that

more domestic helpers entered the labor market last year compared to expatriate private sector employees. According to the latest figures, 63.9 percent of expatriates worked in the private sector, while 32.1 percent were employed as domestic workers as of the end of 2022, up from 29 percent in 2021, when 66.6 percent of expat laborers worked in the private sector.

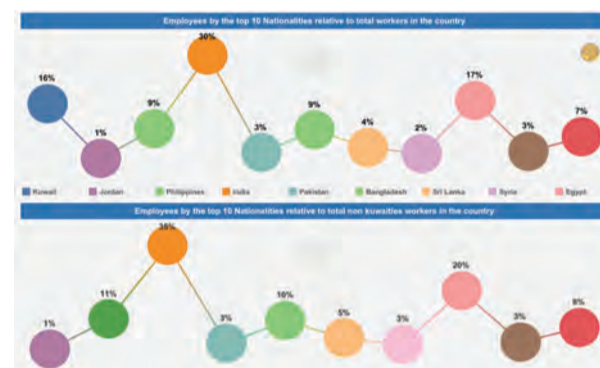
### Main recruiters

Accommodation and food service activities, con-

struction and manufacturing industries remain the top three business fields where Kuwait's labor force is concentrated in the private sector, according to the data. More than 72.2 percent of Kuwaitis in the private sector work there, including 52.8 percent in accommodation and food service activities. Meanwhile, companies working in these three fields employ over 70 percent of expatriates in the private sector, including 45.7 percent in accommodation and food service activities alone.

## Nationality breakdown

**I**ndia has the largest workforce in Kuwait at 30 percent of the country's total laborers, according to data from new population and labor market indicators released by the Public Authority for Civil Information on Monday. Egypt comes second at 17 percent followed by Kuwait at 16 percent and then the Philippines and Bangladesh, which are tied at nine percent each. Among the expatriate workforce, Indians dominate the top percentage with 35 percent, followed by Egypt at 20 percent, the Philippines at 11 percent and Bangladesh at eight percent.



## Workers power through summer ban to earn living

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait is considered one of the hottest countries in the Middle East, and every year workers in jobs that require them to work under the burning sun struggle to bear the temperatures that are rising due to climate change. The mercury exceeds 50 degrees Celsius between June and September, along with dust storms and severe humidity, or sometimes both together.

Although Kuwaiti authorities have set a law that prevents companies from forcing their workers to work under the sun from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm from June till August to prevent them from being exposed to serious health consequences that can lead to death, some people choose to work during that time to make ends meet. Kuwait Times spoke to some of them on the occasion of International Labor Day.

An Egyptian refreshment vendor told Kuwait Times he has been working in the searing heat for the past six years. He said despite his company not forcing him to work during the outdoor ban hours in summer, this is the only time he can sell his products due to rising demand from customers during the daytime as they drive home from work.

The worker, who looked sweaty and tired but was still smiling, said the first year was very hard on him, as he suffered from several health problems including becoming allergic to sunlight. The worker noted that standing daily in the heat for all these hours to sell a fixed number of products is not very profitable for him, but he is thankful to have a job that supports his family financially.

When Kuwait Times asked this work-



**KUWAIT:** A worker cools himself in the summer heat in this recent file photo. This photo is used for illustrative purposes only. — KUNA

er and other vendors about their hopes and suggestions to improve the circumstances of their job, they said there are few solutions that could alleviate their problems, because this job requires them to be on the street. But the workers hope authorities allow them to use motorcycles instead of bicycles in the burning heat, despite the motorbikes being bought from their own pockets as they are not imported by their companies.

When Kuwait Times asked one of the workers if he is facing legal violations for working during the outdoor ban hours, he said his company has forced him and his colleagues to sign a resignation letter, so it will not be responsible for them if they are charged. They added they have to bear the cost of the violation, not to mention that they are not receiving the salary that is mentioned in their job contract and are only depending on the profits made from selling their goods.

Meanwhile, gas station workers are not exposed to the direct sun and companies have set up awnings that cover the work areas, claiming

it reduces the heat. But workers at a petrol pump had a different point of view. A Bangladeshi worker told Kuwait Times he has been admitted to hospital many times due to dehydration. He said they have a break period during the day, but this is not a solution. "It is not only about the sunrays, but also the high temperature, humidity and dust. We understand that the country has a dry and hot weather, but the heat has worsened in the last couple of years," he said.

He said his colleagues hope for an improvement in their working conditions by at least providing water misters, adding the heat is not only affecting their health, but they also cannot bear the cost of treatment due to their low wages. Another gas station worker said people in Kuwait are kindhearted, as many bring them cold water or food or give them money as a kind of support. But during summer, the heat affects them badly, as they lose muscle strength. Moreover, some of workers' mental health is also affected due to the stress of working in the high summer temperatures.

## IFRC praises cooperation with KRCS

**KUWAIT:** Chief Executive Officer and Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Jagan Chapagain praised on Monday, the role of the State of Kuwait in the field of humanitarian and relief work, dealing with crises and disasters, and community participation.

Jagan Chapagain said after his meeting with Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, head of the administrative council at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society: "The Society has a long history of honorable work by supporting the state's efforts in relief work and facing crises and disasters, in addition to its participation in supporting the efforts of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent."

"The Society is one of the most active members of the Federation, whether in the countries of the region or in areas where crises are widespread and in which the International Federation is active. It is considered a good example to follow and it reflects the excellence and leadership of Kuwaiti humanitarian work," he said.

He also mentioned that the KRCS is one of the most active and supportive national societies of the directives of the International Movement of the Red Crescent and the Red Cross as it

always strives to achieve its goals and principles, including providing support and assistance to the needy and those affected by humanitarian crises and natural disasters.

He indicated that he follows up with the KRCS' field activities in the Yemeni, Sudanese and Syrian arenas, keeping pace with the humanitarian situation and dealing with it with responsibility and high efficiency.

"The meeting discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation, many humanitarian issues and crises, particularly the issues of refugees and displaced persons, and the efforts exerted by both parties to alleviate their suffering and improve their lives," pointing that he also presented the role of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in confronting crises, disasters and wars, in addition to exchanging the experiences and capabilities of national societies affiliated with the Federation in various countries of the world.

Sayer said the Society pays great attention to the areas of cooperation with international humanitarian organizations, especially the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, for the benefit of humanity. He praised the federation's role in terms of international humanitarian aid and its development projects in countries that are subject to crises.

He added that the KRCS is looking forward to strengthening its partnership with the IFRC as well as working together to improve the conditions of those affected by humanitarian crises. — KUNA



Officials responsible for organizing the awareness campaign are seen in this group photo taken at The Avenues Mall. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



This photo shows the booth set up by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Public Authority of Manpower, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Kuwait Trade Union Federation as part of an awareness campaign on the occasion of the International Labor Day.

## Labor Day event stresses workers' rights

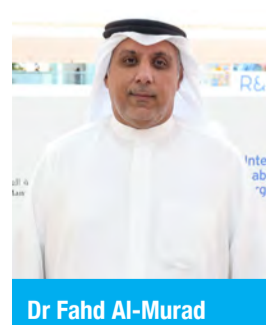
By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of International Labor Day, the International Labor Organization (ILO) held an awareness campaign on Monday at The Avenues mall in collaboration with the Public Authority of Manpower, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Kuwait Trade Union Federation. Jaber Al-Ali, Kuwait Country Coordinator of ILO, said the event aims to celebrate International Labor Day and reach out to the public about the concept of decent work.

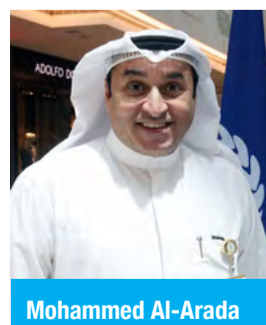
"The event also aims to affirm that everybody is a worker. It is not limited to handymen, but also to any

male or female doing work and getting a wage. For us, it is an important concept to understand, especially here in Kuwait," he said. "ILO and participating entities are providing brochures and copies of Kuwait's labor laws at our booth. We will give the public information about our role, and I think this one-day event is a good start for many activities to come," Ali added.

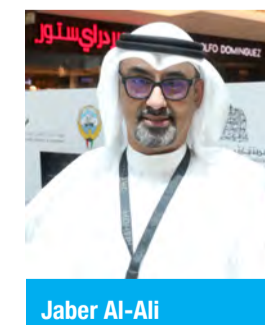
Acting Deputy Director General for Manpower Protection at PAM Dr Fahad Al-Murad stated the authority's belief in the importance of work. "We participated in the International Labor Day event to highlight the role of the authority in explaining its role in protecting employment and providing a decent work environment. We focus on punishing violators and work to expedite procedures to refer



Dr Fahad Al-Murad



Mohammed Al-Arada



Jaber Al-Ali

violators to the judiciary," he said.

Concerning labor complaints, Murad indicated the authority has formed a committee to consider the complaints of workers and employers. "This committee is responsible for following up the procedures and developing solutions. The number of workers in Kuwait is large and the percentage of complaints is considered normal. Many amendments and laws will be worked on," he pointed out.

General Secretary of KTUF Mohammed Al-Ara-

da noted the event is keen to educate citizens and residents about the role of unions by distributing 10,000 brochures about labor rights that protect workers, in addition to providing information about the domestic workers' law.

Arada called on the legislative and executive authorities to extend cooperation and focus on and prioritize popular issues, such as developing the health and education system, reducing unemployment, confronting corruption and safeguarding public funds. "We demand the abolition of the sponsorship system and the creation of a new system that guarantees the rights of workers in Kuwait," he said.

"We have a big challenge ahead, including new work patterns, artificial intelligence and digital transformation. We need to amend some legislation and issue new ones to guarantee workers' rights," Arada stressed, affirming the union plays a prominent national role in all national issues and builds bridges of cooperation between the country's partners to contribute and encourage social dialogue to resolve problems.

## News in Brief

Environment authority  
warns of medicinal plant

KUWAIT: A plant called angel's trumpet, which is widely used by people as a pain killer, is poisonous, confirmed the Environment Public Authority in a statement Monday. The plant, with the scientific name *Datura innoxia*, is a genus of wild plants that are widespread in the environment of Kuwait. It is considered a flowering plant and is abundant, especially after the rainy season. It is somewhat similar to the fruits of the okra and is considered one of the annual herbaceous plants belonging to the Solanaceae family. It grows naturally on street sidewalks and gardens after it rains. "The plant is used in folk medicine as a general analgesic and pain reliever. It has a height of 30 to 150 centimeters and has large white flowers," the authority explained. "The authority previously issued a press release in 2019 warning citizens and residents not to approach or eat this plant due to the toxicity of the seeds."

MoE announces  
flexible working hours

KUWAIT: Education Minister Dr Hamad Al-Adwani announced the flexible working hours determined by the Civil Service Commission. The new timings don't apply to teachers and those who work at school, meaning that the flexible timings don't apply to about 80 percent of workers affiliated with the ministry. The new timings are as follows: The general education sector and its affiliated departments in all educational regions, the private and qualitative education sector and its affiliated departments, the administrative affairs and administrative development sector and its affiliated departments and the financial affairs sector and its affiliated departments will be working from 7:00 am to 2:00 pm. The legal affairs sector and its affiliated departments, the educational facilities and planning sector and its affiliated departments, educational development sector and its affiliated activities and departments, educational research sector, curricula and its affiliated departments will work from 7:30 am until 2:30 pm. The office of the Minister of Education, Department of Public Relations and Educational Media, UNESCO Committee, in addition to the Supreme Education Council will work from 8:00 am until 3:00 pm.

## Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People walk inside the Avenues Mall, Kuwait's largest shopping center, on May 1, 2023, in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Modern Kuwaiti dramas prioritize profit, controversy over substance

## Youth have potential to produce outstanding work, grow industry: Experts



KUWAIT: Writer Taleb Al-Refai (center back) poses with guests at the 11th cultural forum to discuss television drama in Kuwait held at his home on Sunday.



(From left) Fahad Al-Handal, Layla Ahmad, Taleb Al-Refai and Hadeel Al-Hasawi pictured at the cultural forum. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The status of Kuwaiti drama, once hailed as one of the best across the Arab world and GCC countries, is deteriorating, said a number of experts in the TV drama industry at a forum held by Writer Taleb Al-Refai.

Refai welcomed guests to the 11th cultural forum to discuss television drama in Kuwait at his home on Sunday. The meeting discussed several issues the TV drama industry is currently facing in Kuwait.

The meeting included critic Layla Ahmad, critic and writer Fahad Al-Handal, narrator and writer Hadeel Al-Hasawi, prominent actor Jassem Al-Nabhan and writer Layla Al-Othman, in addition to other young writers, actors and family members of Refai. Ahmad and Handal shared their views on the reasons behind the deterioration of Kuwaiti dramas in response to questions raised by Hasawi.

Handal said drama in Kuwait no longer has the qualities it used to have during its golden age, when it thrived and stood out. Kuwaiti drama used to be closer to people's issues — people used to feel that the TV series is communicating with them because drama in the past used to be faithful to its duty of raising awareness in society and bringing up a new generation. Many people in the industry today mainly focus on the materialistic income that comes from the drama, rather than the quality

of the message behind it, he lamented.

A series might bring up unrealistic and irrelevant issues, yet the drama may go viral and become a trending topic. Ahmad said it's because platforms normally seek people's attention. Many dramas create an intriguing plot that manifests a taboo or a prohibited issue, for instance. In agreement with Ahmad's opinion, Handal said trends feed on scenes and plots that create controversy, so when producers doubt the quality of their work, they usually tend to focus on issues that would attract people's curiosity and attention.

Moreover, Handal suggested reproducing societal issues in dramas and digging deeper into people's pain, pointing out the necessity for actors to understand their social responsibility rather than seeking popularity and fame. Nabhan further elaborated on this matter, saying actors and actresses must pay more attention and consideration to their responsibility at work, as they affect society and reflect it too.

Ahmad, Handal and Nabhan expressed their hope and trust in youngsters, as they represent the future of drama in Kuwait. They said youngsters must be given a chance to showcase their work in order to grow in this field, believing youth in Kuwait have the passion and potential that is needed to produce to outstanding work in the drama industry.



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## Summer in Kuwait: How to beat the heat

By Dr Mohammad Al-Azemi  
Dermatology department, Jaber Al Ahmed Hospital

Kuwait has long been known for its hot and sunny weather, which makes it essential for people to take necessary precautions when they step out in the sun. The use of sunscreen is one such precaution that has become increasingly popular in recent years.

According to a recent study conducted by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health, the use of sunscreen has increased by over 40 percent in the past five years. The study surveyed over 1,000 people from different parts of Kuwait, and the results showed that people are becoming more aware of the harmful effects of UV radiation on their skin.

Sun protection in Kuwait is more important than ever and there are several things that people can do to protect themselves. One of the most important things to consider is clothing. Wearing long-sleeved shirts, hats, and sunglasses can help protect the skin and eyes from harmful UV

radiation. It's also a good idea to seek shade during peak sun hours, which is between 10 am and 4 pm. This can help to reduce the amount of direct sun exposure the skin receives.

Another key component of sun protection in Kuwait is the use of sunscreen. Sunscreen is a vital tool for protecting the skin from UV radiation, which can cause sunburn, premature aging, and skin cancer.

It's recommended to use a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, and to apply it at least 20-30 minutes before going outside. Sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours or immediately after swimming or sweating. In addition to these measures, it's important to stay hydrated when spending time outdoors in Kuwait. Drinking plenty of water can help to prevent dehydration, which can exacerbate the effects of sun exposure.

The Kuwaiti government and healthcare organizations are taking steps to promote sun safety and raise awareness about the risks of prolonged sun exposure. They are distributing educational materials and holding public awareness campaigns to encourage people to take sun protection seriously. By promoting sun protection measures such as wearing protective clothing, seeking shade, using sunscreen, and staying hydrated, individuals can protect themselves from the harmful effects of UV radiation.



Costa Rican sloth antibiotics offer hope for human medicine

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KOUFROUN, Chad: Sudanese refugees from the Tandelti area who crossed into Chad gather on April 30, 2023. —AFP

# Sudanese making perilous trek to Chad

## Over 20,000 people found refuge at a makeshift camp in Koufroun

**KOUFROUN, Chad:** On donkeys or horses, by cart or by foot, hundreds of Sudanese, most of them women and children, each day cross a small, dry stream to find safety in neighboring Chad. As of Monday, at least 20,000 people had found refuge at a makeshift camp in the Chadian border village of Koufroun, according to the United Nations refugee agency UNCHR, which manages their influx along with other UN agencies.

The village lies a few hundred meters (yards) from the border with West Darfur, which with the capital Khartoum is among the worst-hit provinces in the Sudan conflict. Most of those arriving have come from the Sudanese town of Tandelti, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) away—the theatre of intense fighting between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by his ex-deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Many show up empty-handed—a sign of a desperate getaway. The UN says at least 100 people were killed in West Darfur in the past week. The toll may be far higher, but information from the area is lacking. Some carry belongings and provisions on

the arduous trek in the overwhelming Sahelian heat. They search for shelter under huge but rare acacia trees, under which their predecessors and humanitarian workers have set up makeshift camps. Scattered in small groups over two square kilometers (about half a square mile), some use garments and veils to provide shade from the merciless sun.

### 'I have nothing'

Under one of the trees, Mahamat Hassan Hamad had built a room with walls of straw and a roof of plastic sheeting, held up by branches, to provide shelter for himself, his wife and their 11 children.

The 52-year-old tailor arrived in Koufroun two weeks after having fled Tandelti. "Trying to hold back tears, he said, "The RSF attacked early in the morning, they set fire to our homes and destroyed everything in their path. I took my children to cross the border." "Today, I have no food for my children and no means of work—my sewing machines were taken by the attackers," he said.

"We have had nothing from the UNCHR, we sur-

vive thanks to solidarity from the local people," he said. Nearby, Hinit Issack Abakar, 17, wearing a black hijab, said, "I had just enough time to pack my diploma, which will help me get into university, and escape with my little brother and sister," she said.

"I don't know where to find my mother and my father, when the fighting began, they weren't at home, I've had no news," she said before crying. "It's very hard to live in a refugee camp without parents."

Achai Idriss, a woman in her 30s, said "I was at the market selling coffee when the fighting started. I had just enough time to collect my belongings and head for the border, like the others." "Thank heaven, I've been able to get my business going again. I make and sell coffee and the money helps me to make ends meet here."

### Emergency kits

This desolate spot lies some 800 km east of N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, one of the poorest countries in the world. Humanitarian workers are overwhelmed by the demand.

The UN children's agency UNICEF is drawing on an emergency stockpile to provide kits with cooking utensils, blankets and mats, said Donaig Le Du, a spokesperson for the agency. A French-based NGO called Premiere Urgence Internationale has built a makeshift medical post in Koufroun. Three health workers work there daily and offer consultations, prioritizing women, children and the elderly.

They see around 100 to 200 people each day, said Ndoumbaye Thertus, the agency's local chief.

"The main pathologies are respiratory illnesses, gastroenteritis and malnutrition," he said. The humanitarian situation could quickly become catastrophic at Koufroun, aid workers fear. "The big challenge is supplies—we need to mobilize donors to provide support," said Jean Paul Habamungu, head of UNHCR operations in eastern Chad. "And let's not forget that there were already half a million Sudanese refugees in Chad" before the latest conflict, he said.

Thousands more could still arrive in Koufroun or elsewhere in Chad, struggling into the country along the porous 1,300-km border, aid workers say. —AFP

## Dutch police arrest 'Boris Johnson' after DUI incident

**THE HAGUE, Netherlands:** Dutch police said Monday officers were surprised upon arresting a man in connection with a drunk driving incident over the weekend, when his driver's license named him as "Boris Johnson". The fake Ukrainian driver's license, complete with the former British prime minister's picture and correct birth date, was "issued" in 2019 and valid until the end of the year 3000.

Police spokesman Thijs Damstra said officers investigated an incident shortly after midnight Sunday when a car crashed into a pole near the Emma Bridge in the northern city of Groningen.

The car was abandoned but police were later told that the driver was standing on the bridge. "The person could not identify himself and refused to undertake a breathalyzer test," Damstra told AFP. The 35-year-old man, from the small town of Zuidhorn west of Groningen, was arrested and police searched his car.

"Inside, police found a fake driver's license belonging to Boris Johnson," Damstra said. "Unfortunately for this person, we did not fall for his forgery," Groningen police said on its Instagram account. Police could not say where the forged document was made but public broadcaster NOS journalist and former Russia correspondent Kysia Hekster, in a tweet published by the NOS, said that fake driver's licenses could easily be bought in tourist shops in Ukraine. Damstra added, "As far as I'm aware, the real Mr Boris Johnson was not in the Netherlands at the time." —AFP



GRONINGEN, Netherlands: This image taken from the Instagram account of Netherlands's Police Groningen Centrum on May 1, 2023, shows an official holding a Ukrainian driving license featuring an image of former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. —AFP

## Macron minister raises eyebrows with racy novel

**PARIS:** A new novel by French President Emmanuel Macron's heavyweight finance minister, containing one breathlessly erotic passage that has gone viral, has forced the government to explain how he finds the time for such penmanship in a period of economic trouble. "Fugue americaine" ("American Fugue") by Finance and Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire, 54, is no less than the 13th book by the politician who has held his post since Macron came to power in 2017. Le Maire has been on the front line of defending Macron's controversial pension reform which has sparked months of sometimes violent protests but the government says is necessary to balance the books. He also faces pressure to help the French deal with the rising cost of living due to surges in fuel prices and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But "American Fugue" inhabits a wholly different world. It is devoted to the legendary pianist Vladimir Horowitz, through the story of two brothers, Franz and Oskar Wertheimer, who travel to Cuba to attend one of his concerts and whose lives are then turned upside down.

### Not have 'a minute'

But it is one single page of the novel, widely shared and the target of mockery on social media, that has taken all the attention. It describes Oskar having sex with a woman named as Julia in excitedly erotic and also deeply explicit terms.

MIP for the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) party Fran-



French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire, 54, has written 13 books. — AFP

cois Ruffin said the minister should not have "a minute, an hour, a week of his time to devote to writing a book" when the French are experiencing "big worries about inflation". In an unfortunate coincidence for the minister, the novel was published on Thursday, just hours before credit ratings agency Fitch downgraded the country's debt worthiness.

It also comes as controversy mounts over the communications of Macron's government after social economy minister Marlene Schiappa posed for Playboy, albeit mostly clothed. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne took umbrage over the April front cover shoot, calling Schiappa to tell her that it "was not at all appropriate, especially in the current period". Le Maire's colleague Olivier Dussopt admitted he had not read the new novel but defended the minister's right to write it. "This shows that there are feelings... behind the suits of the ministers," he told BFMTV, adding he had seen the erotic passage and it "made him smile". —AFP

## US panel takes aim at India on religious freedom

**WASHINGTON:** A US government panel renewed calls Monday to blacklist India over religious freedom, saying that treatment of minorities has continued to worsen under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom offers recommendations but does not set policy and there is little expectation that the State Department will accept its stance on India, a growing US partner.

The State Department each year lists countries where it

sees particular concern on religious freedom, with the prospect of sanctions without improvement. The independent commission, whose members are appointed by the president and congressional party leaders, supported all of the State Department's latest designations which included China, Iran, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

It however recommended that the State Department add several countries including India, Nigeria and Vietnam. The annual report pointed in India to violence and destruction of property targeting Muslims and Christians and drew links to comments and social media posts by members of Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "The continued enforcement of discriminatory laws facilitated a culture of im-

punity for widespread campaigns of threats and violence by mobs and vigilante groups," it said. It was the fourth straight year that the panel has made the recommendation on India, angering New Delhi which has called the commission biased. The State Department briefly blacklisted Nigeria at the end of Donald Trump's presidency following calls from evangelical Christians, but President Joe Biden's administration removed it, rejecting suggestions of violence in Africa's most populous country being religious-based or abetted by the government. The commission also recommended that the State Department add a number of US partners to a watch list of countries that risked being blacklisted without improvements including Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey. — AFP

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## International

# French mass in May 1 show of anger against Macron reform

## Unions vow not to stop fighting even after law amendments

PARIS: Hundreds of thousands of people on Monday massed in France on labor day to vent their anger against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform, with unions vowing not to stop fighting even after the changes were signed into law.

Unions had been hoping for a vast turnout across France for the May 1 protests to further rattle Macron, who has been greeted by pot-bashing and jeers as he toured the country seeking to defend the reforms and relaunch his second mandate.

Macron last month signed a law to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64, despite months of strikes against the bill. "The law has been passed but has not been accepted, there is a desire to show discontent peacefully to have a reaction in response that shows a certain level of decency," said Celine Bertoni, 37, an academic in the central city of Clermont-Ferrand.

"I still hope that we are going to be told it will be withdrawn," she added.

"Macron has the impression that as he was elected he has all the power! But I want him to cede his place to the people," added Karine Catteau, 45, in the western city of Rennes. The main march in Paris kicked off at 1200 GMT along the traditional protest route of Place de la Republique to Place de la Nation, with a heavy downpour suddenly beginning at the very moment it started.

Police had been given a last-minute go-ahead to use drones as a security measure after a Paris court rejected a petition from rights groups for them not to be used. Police used tear gas in Toulouse in southern France as tensions erupted during the demonstrations, while a car was set on fire in the southeastern city of Lyon. In the western city of Nantes, police also fired tear gas after protesters hurled projectiles,

AFP correspondents said. The windows of Uniqlo clothing store were smashed.

### 'Page not going to be turned'

Macron and his government have tried to turn the page on the episode of popular discontent, one of the biggest challenges to his second term. "The page is not going to be turned as long as there is no withdrawal of this pension reform. The determination to win is intact," said the head of the CGT union Sophie Binet at the Paris protest. "The mobilization is still very, very strong," added Laurent Berger, head of the CFDT union. "It is a sign that resentment and anger are not diminishing."

Monday marked the first time since 2009 that all eight of France's main unions have joined in calling for protests. "This workers' holiday will take place amid union unity and that alone is historic," said Frederic Souillot, the secretary general of the Force Ouvriere (Worker's Force) union.

Radical ecological activists from Extinction Rebellion earlier sprayed orange paint on the facade of the glitzy Fondation Louis Vuitton museum in Paris, which is backed by the LVMH luxury goods giant. In a separate action by a different environmental protest group, activists sprayed orange paint around the Place Vendome in central Paris, known for its jewellery shops, targeting the facade of the ministry of justice.

### 'Red card' to Macron

France has been rocked by a dozen days of nationwide strikes and protests against Macron and his pension changes since mid-January, some of which have turned violent. But momentum has waned at



**BORDEAUX, France:** A protester kicks a tear gas pellet back to police lines during a demonstration on May Day (Labor Day), to mark the international day of the workers, more than a month after the government pushed an unpopular pensions reform act through parliament, in Bordeaux, southwestern France, on May 1, 2023. — AFP

recent strikes and demonstrations held during the working week, as people appear unwilling to continue to sacrifice pay. When Macron attended the final of the French football cup on Saturday, he was met with activists waving red cards.

Almost three in four French people were unhappy with Macron, a survey by the IFOP polling group found last month. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, with Macron's support, invoked in March the controversial article 49.3 of the constitution to ram the

pension reform through parliament without a vote in the hung lower house. Macron won a second five-year term last year but lost his parliamentary majority in June elections. Borne last week pledged to cut unemployment and make industry greener as she sought to move on to other affairs of state.

She also postponed any discussion on a controversial immigration bill until the autumn for lack of a parliamentary majority, saying she believed it was not the time for another divisive debate. — AFP

## Santiago Pena wins Paraguay presidential vote

ASUNCION, Paraguay: Paraguayans on Sunday elected a president from the rightwing party in power for nearly eight decades, rejecting a center-left challenger who had railed against endemic institutional corruption.

Economist and former finance minister Santiago Pena, 44, took the election with more than 42 percent of the vote to continue the hegemony of the conservative Colorado Party, results showed.

Sixty-year-old challenger Efraim Alegre of the Concertacion center-left coalition garnered nearly 27.5 percent despite having gone into the vote with a narrow lead in opinion polls. The outcome bucked a recent anti-incumbency trend in Latin American elections with voters repeatedly punishing establishment parties, often in favor of leftist rivals. The Colorado Party has governed almost continually since 1947 - through a long and brutal dictatorship and since the return of democracy in 1989, but has been tainted by corruption claims.

Pena's political mentor, ex-president and Colorado Party leader Horacio Cartes, was recently sanctioned by the United States over graft. Pena thanked Cartes in his first public address as president-elect for his "stubborn dedication to the party," to loud cheers from supporters at party headquarters. Conceding defeat, Alegre stated: "The effort was not enough."

Around 4.8 million of Paraguay's 7.5 million inhabitants were eligible to vote Sunday for a re-



**ASUNCION, Paraguay:** Paraguayan presidential candidate for the Colorado Party, Santiago Pena, celebrates with his party members after winning the presidential election in Asuncion on April 30, 2023. — AFP

placement for President Mario Abdo Benitez, who is leaving office after a constitutionally limited single five-year term. They also voted for new lawmakers, with the Colorado Party winning the highest share of the upper house Senate votes at 43 percent.

Voting is mandatory in Paraguay, though only 63 percent turned out. Key issues for voters were endemic corruption, a spiraling crime problem and poverty. On the international stage, Pena's win defuses fears that Paraguay would end diplomatic relations with Taiwan in favor of China. Unlike his challenger, Pena had vowed to continue recognizing the self-ruled democracy, which counts a dwindling number of allies as Beijing pushes to isolate it. — AFP

## Costa Rican sloth antibiotics offer hope for human medicine

CAHUITA, Costa Rica: The fur of Costa Rican sloths appears to harbor antibiotic-producing bacteria that scientists hope may hold a solution to the growing problem of "superbugs" resistant to humanity's dwindling arsenal of drugs. Sloth fur, research has found, hosts bustling communities of insects, algae, fungi and bacteria, among other microbes, some of which could pose disease risk.

Yet, experts say, the famously slow-moving mammals appear to be surprisingly infection-proof.

"If you look at the sloth's fur, you see movement: you see moths, you see different types of insects... a very extensive habitat," Max Chavarria, a researcher at the University of Costa Rica, told AFP.

"Obviously when there is co-existence of many types of organisms, there must also be systems that control them," he said. Chavarria and a team took fur samples from Costa Rican two- and three-toed sloths to examine what that control system could be.

They found the possible existence of antibiotic-producing bacteria that "makes it possible to control the proliferation of potentially pathogenic bacteria... or inhibit other competitors" such as fungi, according to a study published in the journal Environmental Microbiology.

### 'No infection'

The sloth is a national symbol in laid back Costa Rica, and a major tourist attraction for the Central



**CAHUITA, Costa Rica:** Judy Avey-Arroyo, owner of the Sloth Sanctuary and Rescue Shelter, supervises sloths at the sanctuary in Cahuita, Limon Province, Costa Rica, in this March 10, 2023 file photo. — AFP

American country. Both the two-toed (*Choloepus hoffmanni*) and three-toed (*Bradypus variegatus*) sloth species have seen their populations decline, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

They live in the canopies of trees in the jungle on the Caribbean coast, where the climate is hot and humid. American Judy Avey runs a sanctuary in the balmy jungle to care for sloths injured after coming into contact with humans or other animals.

She treats and rehabilitates the creatures with a view to releasing them back into the wild.

"We've never received a sloth that has been sick, that has a disease or has an illness," she told AFP. "We've received sloths that had been burned by power lines and their entire arm is just destroyed... and there's no infection. — AFP

## Decree issued to dissolve...

### Continued from Page 1

This is also the second time that the National Assembly elected in December 2020 has been dissolved by III the Amir. It was dissolved for the first time in August last year because of political disputes

between the government and the Assembly. As a result, snap polls were held in September, with the opposition scored a massive victory.

But the 2020 Assembly was reinstated eight months later by the constitutional court, which annulled the September elections and scrapped the 2022 Assembly. The judge who chaired the constitutional court which issued the ruling, Mohammad Bin Naji, has since resigned after asking for retirement.

## Turkish forces kill IS chief...

### Continued from Page 1

were killed or injured. An AFP correspondent in northern Syria said the operation had targeted an abandoned farm that was being used as an Islamic school. Turkey has deployed troops in northern

Syria since 2020, and controls entire zones with the help of Syrian proxies.

At its height, when it controlled swathes of Iraq and Syria, the IS group claimed responsibility for a series of attacks in Europe. In Oct 2019, Washington announced it had killed IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in northwestern Syria, and several of the group's top commanders have since been killed in raids. Despite having been driven out of much of the territory it once controlled, the group still launches attacks in Syria. — AFP

## Scientists use brain scans and AI to...

### Continued from Page 1

narrative stories, mostly podcasts such as the New York Times' Modern Love. This allowed the researchers to map out how words, phrases and meanings prompted responses in the regions of the brain known to process language. They fed this data into a neural network language model that uses GPT-1, the predecessor of the AI technology later deployed in the hugely popular ChatGPT.

The model was trained to predict how each person's brain would respond to perceived speech, then narrow down the options until it found the closest response. To test the model's accuracy, each participant then listened to a new story in the fMRI machine. The study's first author Jerry Tang said the decoder could "recover the gist of what the user was hearing".

For example, when the participant heard the phrase "I don't have my driver's license yet", the model came back with "she has not even started to learn to drive yet". The decoder struggled with personal pronouns such as "I" or "she", the researchers admitted. But even when the participants thought up their own stories — or viewed silent movies — the decoder was still able to grasp the "gist", they said.

This showed that "we are decoding something

that is deeper than language, then converting it into language," Huth said. Because fMRI scanning is too slow to capture individual words, it collects a "mish-mash, an agglomeration of information over a few seconds," Huth said. "So we can see how the idea evolves, even though the exact words get lost."

David Rodriguez-Arias Vailhen, a bioethics professor at Spain's Granada University not involved in the research, said it went beyond what had been achieved by previous brain-computer interfaces. This brings us closer to a future in which machines are "able to read minds and transcribe thought," he said, warning this could possibly take place against people's will, such as when they are sleeping.

The researchers anticipated such concerns. They ran tests showing that the decoder did not work on a person if it had not already been trained on their own particular brain activity. The three participants were also able to easily foil the decoder. While listening to one of the podcasts, the users were told to count by sevens, name and imagine animals or tell a different story in their mind. All these tactics "sabotaged" the decoder, the researchers said.

Next, the team hopes to speed up the process so that they can decode the brain scans in real time. They also called for regulations to protect mental privacy. "Our mind has so far been the guardian of our privacy," said bioethicist Rodriguez-Arias Vailhen. "This discovery could be a first step towards compromising that freedom in the future." — AFP

## Sudan battles flare, UN warns...

### Continued from Page 1

cuts, as fighter jets thunder through overhead on raids that have drawn heavy anti-aircraft fire.

Warplanes struck northern areas of the capital, a witness told AFP, while another reported "armed clashes in central Khartoum". Burhan and Daglo have flouted multiple ceasefires and extended the latest by 72 hours late on Sunday. While foreign nations have evacuated thousands of their citizens by air, road and sea, around 50,000 Sudanese have already escaped overland to neighbors, said the UN.

In a makeshift camp near Adre on the Chadian border, UN refugee agency staff were handing out emergency food rations to families who fled the violence with few belongings, sitting in the sand in the shade of trees. "Today I have no food for my children and no means of work," one refugee, Mahamat Hassan Hamad, a tailor, told AFP, trying to hold back tears. "My sewing machines were taken by the attackers." He blamed the RSF who "destroyed everything in their path."

Sudan's turmoil has seen aid workers killed, hospitals shelled, humanitarian facilities looted, and foreign aid groups forced to suspend most of their operations. "The scale and speed of what is unfolding is unprecedented in Sudan," said Stephane Dujaric, spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres. Top UN humanitarian official Martin Griffiths arrived in

Nairobi on an urgent mission to look for ways to bring relief to millions. "The humanitarian situation is reaching breaking point," he said on Twitter, later calling it "catastrophic".

The UN World Food Program said it expected to soon resume food distribution in some parts of the country after a suspension following the deaths of three of its aid workers. "Over 15 million people faced severe food insecurity in Sudan before this conflict. We expect these numbers to grow significantly as the fighting continues," WFP said. At least 528 people have been killed and almost 4,600 wounded in the violence, according to Sudan's health ministry, but the real death toll is feared to be far higher.

Fighting has spread across Sudan, including to the long-troubled Darfur region. The UN said at least 96 people were reported killed in El Geneina, West Darfur, where supplies were seen strewn across the floors of badly damaged hospitals. Daglo's RSF emerged from the Janjaweed unleashed in a scorched-earth campaign in Darfur from 2003 by former strongman Omar al-Bashir, who faces charges of war crimes and genocide.

The fighting was pushing Sudan's already ailing health sector toward "disaster", warned the WHO's regional director for the eastern Mediterranean, Ahmed Al-Mandhari. He sounded an alarm over the growing threat of cholera, malaria and other diseases as the rainy season nears and safe water supplies are becoming scarce. A first Red Cross plane on Sunday took eight tonnes of medical supplies from Jordan to Port Sudan, which has served as an evacuation hub. — AFP

## International

## UN holds Afghanistan crisis talks

## Afghan women groups 'outraged' by move to 'recognize' Taliban

DOHA: Afghanistan's Taliban authorities were absent from UN-led talks that opened on Monday on how to handle the crisis-stricken country's rulers and press them to ease a ban on women working and girls going to school. Envoys from the United States, China and Russia as well as major European aid donors and key neighbors such as Pakistan were among representatives from about 25 countries and groups called to the two days of talks by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The Taliban government has not been invited, however, to the Doha talks and the controversial question of recognition of the administration has been raised ahead of the meeting. A small group of Afghan women staged a weekend protest march in Kabul to oppose any moves to recognize the rulers who returned to power in August 2021.

In an open letter to the Doha meeting released Sunday, a coalition of Afghan women's groups said they were "outraged" that any country would consider formal ties with the government that the United Nations calls the "de facto authorities". The United Nations and United States have insisted that recognition is not on the agenda. Rights' groups fears have been fuelled by UN deputy secretary-general Amina Mohammed, who said last month that the Doha meeting could find "baby steps" that lead to a "principled recognition" of the Taliban government.

The UN said the comments were misinterpreted. No country has established formal ties with the Afghan administration and UN membership can only be decided by the UN General Assembly. Ahead of his arrival in Doha, Guterres' office said the meet-

ing "is intended to achieve a common understanding within the international community on how to engage with the Taliban" on women's and girls' rights, inclusive governance, countering terrorism and drug trafficking.

## UN dilemma

"Any kind of recognition of the Taliban is completely off the table," US State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said last week. Despite not being invited to the meeting, the head of the Taliban representative office in Doha, Sohail Shaheen said he has met with members of the British and Chinese delegations. He said the UN talks and "the importance of engagement" was among topics raised.

Since ousting a foreign-backed government in 2021, the Taliban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia law that the United Nations has labeled "gender-based apartheid". Women have been barred from most secondary education and universities, and prevented from working in most government jobs as well as UN agencies and NGOs. Though divided on many disputes, the UN Security Council powers united on Thursday to condemn the curbs on Afghan women and girls and urge all countries to seek "an urgent reversal" of the policies. Diplomats and observers say, however, that the Doha meeting highlights the quandary faced by the international community in handling Afghanistan, which the UN considers its biggest humanitarian crisis with millions depending on food aid.

Amina Mohammed said it was "clear" that the Taliban authorities want recognition. Formal UN



WASHINGTON: Activists hold banners during a demonstration in front of the White House in Washington, DC, on April 30, 2023. — AFP

ties would help the government reclaim billions of dollars of desperately needed funds seized abroad after it took power. But diplomats from several countries involved in the Doha talks said this would not be possible until there is a change on women's rights. The Afghan foreign ministry said after last week's UN vote that "diversity should be respected and not politicized".

The UN chief is to give the Doha meeting an update on a review of the world body's critical relief operation in Afghanistan, ordered in April after authorities had stopped Afghan women from working with UN agencies, diplomats said. The UN has said it faces an "appalling choice" over whether to maintain its huge operation in the country of 38 million. The review is scheduled to be completed on Friday. — AFP

## Leading Thai oppn PM candidate gives birth ahead of polls

BANGKOK: An opposition frontrunner in Thailand's upcoming general elections has given birth two weeks before the polling day, her party confirmed on Monday.

The kingdom is entering the final stretch before the May 14 election with reformist groups, including Pheu Thai and Move Forward, surging ahead of establishment parties. Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of billionaire former leader Thaksin Shinawatra, is one of Pheu Thai's prime ministerial candidates and has been polling strongly.

A near-constant presence on the campaign trail, for the past week she has rallied virtually, appearing by video link at an event on Saturday in Thailand's eastern Si Sa Ket province. "She gave birth this morning," Rinthipond Varinvatchararoj, Pheu Thai acting spokeswoman, told AFP.

It is unclear how long Paetongtarn will rest, she said, but Rinthipond was confident that she would be present at Pheu Thai's final rally in Bangkok on May 12. On her official Instagram page, Paetongtarn said the baby boy would be named Pruthasin Sooksawas and nicknamed "Thasin".



BANGKOK: In this file photo taken on April 3, 2023, Pheu Thai Party candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra arrives for the first day of the constituencies candidates registration ahead of Thailand's general election, in Bangkok. — AFP

The news was also shared by her father, who said on Twitter that he would return to the kingdom to care for his seventh grandchild. Ousted in a 2006 coup, Thaksin lives in Dubai to avoid corruption charges he says are politically motivated. "All of my

seven grandchildren were born while I lived abroad. I will go back to raise my grandchildren," he wrote, without specifying when he might return.

It is not the first time Thaksin has promised to return to Thailand. — AFP

## Uzbekistan okays reforms to boost president's power

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan has overwhelmingly approved constitutional changes that will allow President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to remain in power until 2040 in a tightly-controlled referendum, election results showed Monday.

Mirziyoyev, 65, became president in 2016 after the death of dictator Islam Karimov. Uzbeks voted Sunday on reforms that extend presidential terms from five to seven years, allowing Mirziyoyev to serve two more terms and prolong his time in power. According to the preliminary results released Monday, the changes were approved by 90.21 percent of votes with a 84.54 percent turnout.

Despite undertaking recent reforms, government critics and rights groups say Uzbekistan remains authoritarian. Mirziyoyev has insisted that the overhaul of the constitution will improve governance and quality of life in Uzbekistan.

But he is set to benefit from the changes the most. Neighbouring Kazakhstan was the first to congratulate the Uzbek leader, with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev saying the result was evidence of "trust" in his rule and "firm support from the Uzbek nation." Mirziyoyev has presented himself as Karimov's modern successor. He had served 13 years as a loyal prime minister under Karimov's brutal rule. He then won two elections, in which international ob-



TASHKENT, Uzbekistan: A handout photograph released by the Press Service of the President of Uzbekistan on April 30, 2023, shows Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev (center) with his family during a visit to a polling station in Tashkent. — AFP

servers say he did not face real competition.

Following Karimov's death, Mirziyoyev spearheaded a series of reforms in Uzbekistan, including a clampdown on forced labour in the country's cotton fields. After years of being cut off from the world under Karimov's regime, Uzbekistan now wants to join the World Trade Organization. But activists say rights abuses persist, and authorities have shown no sign of allowing a political opposition to emerge.

The constitutional changes also include a ban on capital punishment and the protection of human rights for what Mirziyoyev has called a "New Uzbekistan." But despite some economic progress and

social improvements—such as the criminalization of domestic violence—the government allows no dissent. The adoption of the text was beyond doubt after a one-sided campaign, in a state where the press is still largely controlled. Two journalists from state media interviewed by AFP claimed on condition of anonymity to have "received instructions to cover Uzbekistan, the referendum and the president in a positive way". They said censorship strengthened as the election approached. The government went to lengths to give the vote a veneer of legitimacy, enrolling local celebrities at large rallies and concerts to praise the proposals and the president. — AFP

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## Armed attackers kill 10, wound 3 in Ecuador port

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador: At least 10 people were killed overnight when heavily armed assailants opened fire outside a shop in Guayaquil, Ecuador's main port city and economic hub that is under a state of emergency due to rising drug violence, police said Sunday.

The gruesome attack occurred at a mechanic shop in the city's southwest as people were inside drinking and watching a soccer match on TV, witnesses said. Several people drove up in a black truck, stepped out without saying a word, and opened fire using "long weapons," said General William Villarroel, the police commander for Guayaquil and neighboring Duran and Samborondon.

Hours later, bodies could be seen lying on the

sidewalk in pools of blood, as people cried and hugged one another while police cordoned off the area, AFP saw.

"I don't feel comfortable living like this," one neighbor told AFP, asking not to be named. "We can't go out with our families, with our children." In addition to those killed, three people were wounded, "unfortunately including a five-year-old girl who is stable and is going to be operated for shrapnel," Villarroel said. He said police believed the massacre was the result of "a fight between organized criminal groups—a fight for power and territory."

## Surge of violence

Ecuador's attorney general's office said on Twitter that it had opened a preliminary investigation. Guayaquil has become one of the country's increasingly bloody centers of a turf war between rival drug-trafficking gangs.

The port city's position on the Pacific coast makes it a strategic launch point for shipments of drugs to the United States and Europe. The killing is the latest in a recent surge of violence, including gang- and

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## News in Brief

## 1 dead, 25 hurt in Spain accident

MADRID: One person died and 25 others were hurt, seven seriously, when a bus carrying Moroccan seasonal workers overturned early on Monday in southern Spain, the emergency services said. The accident, which took place just before sunrise on a road around 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the southwestern Andalusian city of Huelva, involved a bus carrying 34 Moroccan agricultural workers, the 112 emergency services said. "One woman died and 25 others have been injured, including seven in very serious condition, when a bus carrying seasonal workers overturned," the 112 said on the regional government's website. — AFP

## Nigeria arrests eight separatists

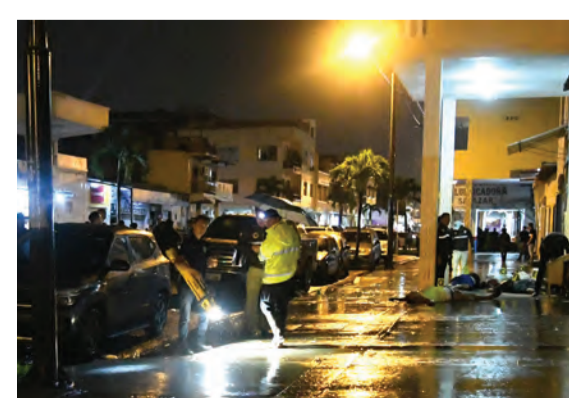
LAGOS: Nigerian police said they had arrested eight separatists suspected of killing six people last month in the country's troubled southeast. The suspects have "all confessed to be members of the dreadful IPOB ESN syndicate terrorizing the good people of Imo state and had a hand in the recent killing of four police officers and two civilians," state police said in press release late Sunday. IPOB is the Indigenous People of Biafra movement, which wants a separate state for the Igbo people in southeast Nigeria, while the ESN is its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network. — AFP

## Fiji's ex-attorney general charged

SUVA: Fiji's former attorney-general Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum has been charged with abuse of office, police said Monday, in a fresh blow to ex-Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama who is due in court next week to face similar allegations. Sayed-Khaiyum faces a single charge relating to a report lodged by the acting supervisor of elections in February, police said in a statement. The former attorney general will remain in custody overnight before appearing at the Suva magistrate's court on Tuesday. Sakeo Raikaci, chief of investigations and prosecutions, called for patience in the high-profile case of Sayed-Khaiyum, a key ally of Bainimarama who was voted out of office last year. — AFP

## 18 dead in Mexico bus crash

MEXICO CITY: At least 18 Mexican tourists died and two dozen were injured when their tourist bus plunged into a ravine in the western state of Nayarit, a local official told AFP on Sunday. The bus, from a private company, was transporting tourists on a 220-kilometer (136-mile) journey from Guadalajara in the neighboring state of Jalisco to the beach destination of Guayabitos in Nayarit when it went off the road, according to civil protection official Pedro Nunez. — AFP



GUAYAQUIL: Ecuadorian police officers inspect a workshop after a multiple murder that left 10 dead in Guayaquil, Ecuador on April 30, 2023. — AFP

fishing port, killing nine people. Local media reported that in that province—also under a state of emergency—four other people were shot dead on Saturday. — AFP

## Business

TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2023

# JPMorgan buys First Republic after regulators seize control

## Move could bring to an end to two-month banking crisis

**NEW YORK:** US financial authorities seized California's troubled First Republic Bank on Monday and sold it to JPMorgan Chase, hoping to bring to close a two-month banking crisis that has spooked the financial system. First Republic became the second-largest bank by assets to collapse in US history after it disclosed last week a loss of more than \$100 billion in deposits in the first quarter.

After the bank failed to produce a satisfactory rescue plan and with its stock continuing to nose-dive, the authorities stepped in, soliciting bids last week from potential buyers, and then taking possession of it. As part of the deal struck early Monday, the California regulator appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), an agency in charge of guaranteeing bank deposits, as the receiver of First Republic, to be immediately sold to JPMorgan Chase.

The agreement means JPMorgan, the largest bank in the United States, will recover all of the First Republic's deposits, as well as "almost" all of its assets, according to an FDIC statement. The federal agency estimates it will have to pay about \$13 billion to cover First Republic's losses, but the bank's 84 branches will be able to reopen Monday as usual. "Our government invited us and others to step up, and we did," Jamie Dimon, JPMorgan's CEO, said in a statement after the deal was announced.

The transaction "modestly benefits our company overall," JPMorgan said in a news release.

Shares of JPMorgan jumped 4.3 percent in pre-market trading, while US stock futures were little changed. "Hopefully this will help stabilize everything," Dimon said on a conference call with reporters before the US stock market opened.

## UAE led Gulf markets with IPO proceeds of \$3.2 billion in Q1

**KUWAIT:** Issuers in the UAE led the Gulf markets with proceeds of \$3.2 billion from three initial public offerings in the first quarter of 2023, more than doubling in value year-on-year. However, the six-member GCC bloc raised a combined total of \$3.5 billion in proceeds through 12 IPOs during the first three months of 2023, a 25 percent decline from \$4.6 billion raised in 13 IPO deals during the same year earlier, the Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) said in a report on Sunday.

The report stated that the UAE led the region in terms of IPO proceeds in Q1-2023, raising a total of \$3.2 billion from three offerings and recording an increase of 192 percent in value compared to Q1-2022. UAE offerings constituted 91 percent of total GCC IPO proceeds in Q1-2023. Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) witnessed the highest proceeds with \$3.0 billion through the offerings of ADNOC Gas and Presight AI.

UAE offerings that were listed on the Dubai Financial Market (DFM) raised a total of \$0.2 billion from one IPO, which is Al-Ansari Financial Services.

Muscat Securities Market (MSM) witnessed one IPO with total proceeds of 244 million, constituting

## Tunisia's main union lambasts IMF loan talks

**TUNIS:** Tunisia's largest union on Monday attacked the government's handling of negotiations with the IMF on a loan to bail out the North African country as it slides deeper into debt. Tunisia is seeking a bailout package worth nearly \$2 billion from the International Monetary Fund, which conditions any aid on a series of reforms.

As Nouredine Taboubi of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) was giving his May Day speech in the capital Tunis, protesters in the country's second city Sfax denounced "an IMF government", saying "No to colonization". "We back the position of the president", Kais Saied, who last month rejected what he called IMF "diktats" for Tunisia to be granted the loan, Taboubi said.

Despite an agreement in principle on the loan, agreed in October, talks with the IMF have been stalled for months over Saied not committing to restructure public bodies and lift subsidies on basic goods. The IMF has called for legislation to restructure more than 100 state-owned firms, which hold monopolies over many parts of the economy and in many cases are heavily indebted.

Taboubi on Monday said the president had "aligned himself" with the UGTT which opposes the sale of public companies and the lifting of subsidies. "This makes us wonder whether there is any value in the government negotiating with the

### Snowball effect

The government's takeover and sale of First Republic comes two months after the liquidation of Silvergate Bank—a favorite among the cryptocurrency crowd—and the swift demise of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), after it took on excessive interest-rate risk.

New York-based Signature Bank also closed a few days after SVB. The collapses led to a snowball effect as concerned investors looked for signs of weakness in the broader banking sector in the United States and Europe.

Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse became the highest-profile casualty when it was pushed by regulators to merge with its rival, UBS. To avert yet another banking collapse, authorities reached a deal with 11 major banks in March to extend a \$30 billion lifeline to First Republic.

But this was not enough to reassure investors. By Friday's close, First Republic was worth only \$654 million, down from more than \$20 billion at the start of the year, and \$40 billion at its peak in November 2021. At first glance, First Republic appeared to be well-positioned: it was known to have a wealthy clientele who deposited large sums.

But the string of banking defaults rattled customers, and a majority of First Republic's loans were fixed-rate mortgages, which have lost value due to soaring interest rates. Observers are closely watching for any broader implications of the latest financial institution's collapse.

With its assets standing at \$233 billion at the end of March, First Republic is the second-largest bank to fall in US history—excluding investment banks, such as Lehman Brothers—after Washington Mutual's bankruptcy during the financial crisis of 2008. That lender too was acquired by JPMorgan, the



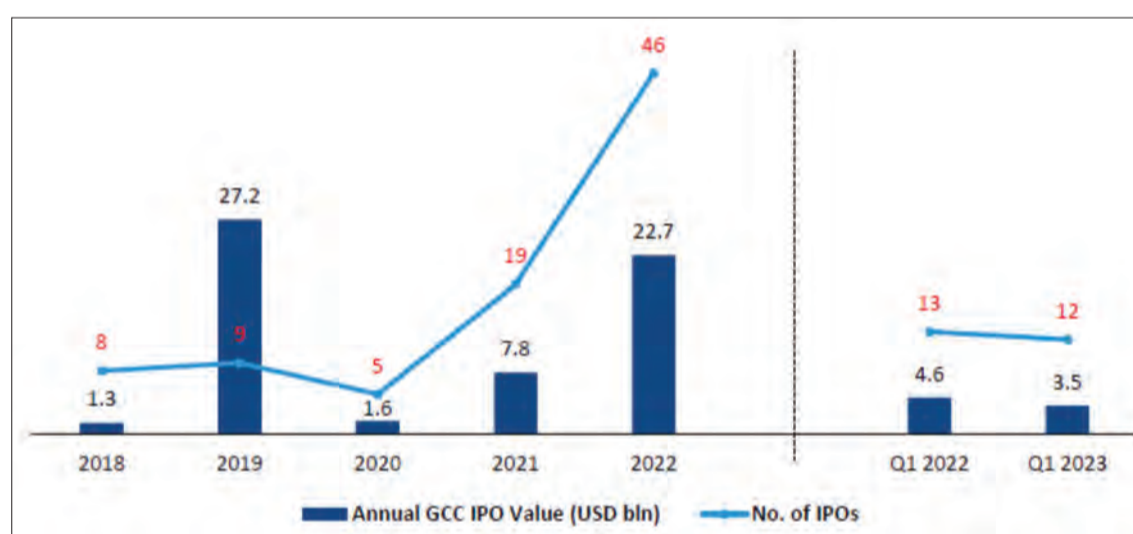
BEVERLY HILLS, United States: First Republic Bank signage is displayed outside of a bank branch in Beverly Hills, California, on May 1, 2023. —AFP

largest bank in the United States. "First Republic was identified as a problem bank as early as mid-March and the announcement of its closure is not a new reason to worry," Nicolas Veron, an economist at the Peterson Institute for International Economics said ahead of the takeover announcement.

"If another bank proved to be fragile, that would be another problem," he added.

Soon after First Republic's seizure was announced, the US Treasury moved to try to allay concerns. "The

banking system remains sound and resilient, and Americans should feel confident in the safety of their deposits and the ability of the banking system to fulfill its essential function of providing credit to businesses and families," a Treasury spokesperson said. The upheaval in the banking sector comes on the heels of a shift by the Federal Reserve to counter inflation with aggressive interest rate hikes, a pivot that has significantly revalued assets. The Fed is expected to again lift interest rates later this week. —AFP



7 percent of total GCC IPO proceeds raised during the first three months of 2023. The Saudi Exchange (Tadawul) witnessed eight initial public offerings in Q1-2023 that generated total proceeds of \$72 million, constituting 2 percent of total GCC IPO proceeds. This represents a drop of 98 percent year-on-year in value when compared to proceeds raised by Saudi IPOs in Q1-2022. The Saudi Exchange (Tadawul) registered 8 IPOs during the period, which generated total proceeds of \$72 million, about 2 percent of total GCC IPOs' value.

Prospects of the IPO market remains bright for

the remainder of the year. The Tadawul received 100 listing applications until mid-February and 23 companies obtained final approval for their IPO, according to Markaz data. Saudi Arabia's First Mills Company is planning to float 16.65 million shares, or 30 percent of its share capital, in a deal that could value the company at as much as \$1 billion, the report said. Al-Mawarid Manpower Company intends to offer 4.5 million shares, or 30 percent of its capital, on Tadawul in May. The UAE is also expecting 11 IPOs this year, with Adnoc planning to float its marine and logistics subsidiary in the coming months, Markaz said.

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

**KUWAIT:** The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 200 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.25 percent.

## UAE's ADNOC signs \$1bn LNG deal with TotalEnergies

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates' ADNOC Gas announced Monday a \$1 billion deal to provide liquefied natural gas to France's TotalEnergies as Europe scrambles to find alternatives to Russian energy sources. The liquefied natural gas provided under the three-year supply deal "will be delivered to various export markets around the world", a company statement said.

The agreement is valued at between \$1 billion and \$1.2 billion, the statement said, without elaborating on the quantities involved. The deal was signed with TotalEnergies Gas and Power Limited, a subsidiary of the French multinational. ADNOC Gas, which only became operational at the start of this year, is a subsidiary of state-owned energy giant Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).

The UAE has emerged as a key partner for Western countries as they scramble to secure energy deals worldwide to replace imports from sanctions-hit Russia. In July, a deal between TotalEnergies and ADNOC was signed "for cooperation in the area of energy supplies" during a visit by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to Paris.

In September, the UAE agreed to supply natural gas and diesel to Germany as part of an "energy security" deal to replace Russian supplies. In 2021, the UAE produced 57 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas, or about 1.4 percent of global output, according to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy. That same year, the Emirates exported 8.8 bcm of LNG, 1.7 percent of world LNG exports, the Statistical Review said.

The UAE is looking to boost its LNG production capacity to 15 million tons annually in the next few years, according to Bloomberg. —AFP



TUNIS: General Secretary of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) Nouredine Taboubi (third left) and union members greet the audience during celebrations of Labour Day in Tunis on May 1, 2023. —AFP

IMF," he said. Taboubi said the IMF's conditions for granting the bailout would "impoverish the Tunisian people even more" in a country where inflation is already more than 10 percent and unemployment is higher than 15 percent.

Late last month the UGTT said there were major differences between Saied and the government led by Prime Minister Najla Gouden which, the union claimed, was engaged in "secret nego-

tiation" with the world lending body. In a statement, it attacked "the global lending funds that seize such opportunities to dictate the conditions and dominate the economies of countries experiencing crises such as ours".

On Monday, Taboubi also demanded the release of trade unionists arrested in recent weeks, including one detained on Friday for posts on social media deemed to be anti-Saied. —AFP





Business

# Al-Homaizi opens IKEA Al-Khiran

## IKEA Al-Khiran to offer Kuwait's first hybrid shopping experience



IKEA Al-Khiran inaugural ceremony.



IKEA Al-Khiran staff members.

**KUWAIT:** IKEA, the leading brand for Life at Home, announced the opening of IKEA Al-Khiran, its fourth customer meeting point in Kuwait.

The inaugural ceremony was chaired by AbdulMohsen Al-Homaizi, owner and board member of Al-Homaizi Limited, Adel Al-Shamali, board member of Al-Homaizi Limited, and Marino Maganto, the Chief Executive Officer of IKEA Al-Homaizi Ltd, and attended by many distinguished guests, including Mohammed Jassim Al-Marzouq, the chairman of Tamdeen and Avijit Yadav, the chief executive officer of Tamdeen.

"I want to express my deepest gratitude to our board and partners in Tamdeen for their support to make this day possible. You have been fundamental in making IKEA Al-Khiran a reality. We are proud to be able to be part of the exciting development of Al-Khiran area", said Maganto.

IKEA Al-Khiran is Kuwait's first hybrid shopping experience bringing together value shopping, entertainment, unique F&B offering, and a full waterfront experience with the country's biggest marina.

"In this exciting environment, IKEA Al-Khiran is also special, I must say, it is unique! IKEA Al-Khiran offers unique and exciting home furnishing solutions, with amazing prices 365 days a year. Unique products that you will not find anywhere else at super reduced prices! You will enjoy surprising and unrepeatable deals every time you visit. We will make your day on every visit and make the experience so exciting that you will always be curious to come back", explained Maganto.



Marino Maganto

"You will enjoy the taste of the IKEA food and the exclusive food offer only available in IKEA Al-Khiran, like our bakery baskets to take away to your chalet or your boat, or just enjoy them by the sea, including our famous cheese croissants, Sweet mini pastries, and baguettes", added Maganto.

Back in 1984, when we announced the opening of our first store in Kuwait, we made a commitment to always stay by the side of the people of Kuwait. Since then, we have come a long way; we moved our first IKEA store from Shuwaikh to a much bigger store in the Avenues in early 2007. In 2020, we opened our first Plan and Order in 360. Soon after, in 2021, we opened IKEA at the Assima Mall.

"Today, we are here to celebrate with you the opening of the unique IKEA Al-Khiran, our fourth physical customer meeting point in Kuwait. It is our first IKEA in the south, but not the last. As

you all know, we will open soon an IKEA store in The Warehouse Mall in Subahiya. Both are key milestones in our strategic expansion plan in Kuwait, following all the amazing new developments of Kuwait and our vision to create a better everyday life for the many people", continued Maganto.

Affordability is one of the key pillars of IKEA globally, which is working to make its operations more efficient to continue lowering prices, beyond the constraints of the current global economic situation.

"This is one of the main long-term commitments we made with the people of Kuwait. With IKEA Al-Khiran we continue to reach more people to be able to continue lowering our prices", added Maganto.

"Our values play a significant role in our people's strategy. We continuously develop our people to be the next generation of IKEA leaders and specialists with individualized plans that will allow them to grow with IKEA in Kuwait and abroad. We want our teams to grow with us for the long term. Our coworkers have the opportunity to work for a company with a strong culture and values, like honesty, humbleness, leadership by example, or togetherness and enthusiasm", explained Maganto.

"All these values, in combination with a passion for retail and customer service, contribute towards building the IKEA brand. A brand that sides with the many; a brand that is humble and willing to learn and reinvent itself constantly, while at the same time remaining close, human, and down to earth," said Maganto.

"I am convinced that IKEA Al-Khiran



will be a source of inspiration and joy for all our visitors. With the help of our knowledgeable and passionate coworkers and a fun and inspiring atmosphere,

we hope to deliver an exciting and unforgettable IKEA experience that will make the day for all our visitors," concluded Maganto.

## Nurses in England walk out as dispute intensifies

**LONDON:** Nurses in England walked out again Monday, with some critical services due to be hit for the first time. The industrial action is the latest stoppage in an increasingly bitter dispute with the government over pay and conditions.

The 28-hour strike, which started at 8:00 pm (1900 GMT) on Sunday, comes after members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) earlier this month voted to reject a five-percent government pay increase offer. The walkout is one of many across the private and public sector over the past year as workers have grappled with double-digit inflation.

All hospitals have been guaranteed a minimum level of cover for intensive care and trauma. But the latest strike is the first time areas such as intensive care, chemotherapy and dialysis have been hit, although some exemptions had been agreed. In previous walkouts, such services had been completely excluded from strike action. RCN General Secretary Pat Cullen called on the health minister Steve Barclay to "come back around the table and put a better offer on the table".

"We need to pay nurses decently and what we need to see now is the NHS standing up and being very clear with the government that they need to address the nursing crisis that they've got right throughout the NHS," she told Sky news. "And until they do so our nurses unfortunately, will be left with



LONDON: Healthcare workers hold placards as they demonstrate on Westminster Bridge, near to St Thomas' Hospital in London on May 1, 2023, as members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) continue their industrial action. — AFP

no option but to continue with the action that they are taking," she said.

Unions representing other health care workers including Unison and the GMB have voted in favor of the government's pay offer. Unite and the RCN have voted against. Barclay described the RCN's decision to go ahead with the walkout as "hugely disappointing" despite "the government's fair and reasonable

offer on pay". Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said big pay hikes are unaffordable and risk fuelling inflation. Doctors have also staged strike action and are demanding a 35 percent pay increase. Their last stoppage earlier this month lasted four days with doctors leaders arguing that pandemic backlogs coupled with staff shortages are massively increasing workloads, endangering patients. — AFP

## Germany hopes to help climate with discount travel card

**BERLIN, Germany:** Germany launched on Monday a new flat-rate public transport ticket valid across the country, but the 49-euro (\$54) price point has raised doubts about the pass' potential impact.

Touting the monthly pass as a "revolution", policymakers hope it will bring some relief for consumers amid soaring inflation, and encourage people to favor mass transit in the name of the environment.

The "Deutschlandticket" offers unlimited access to Germany's bus and metro systems, as well as local and regional trains — with only long-distance high-speed services not included. Transport Minister Volker Wissing was quick to call the new initiative "the biggest public transport reform in German history", but the pass' success is far from assured.

The association of German transport companies (VDV) expects 16 million of the country's 84 million inhabitants to take up the offer. Roughly 750,000

tickets have been sold already, without counting people who will switch over from their current transport subscriptions. How to finance the new policy was the subject of months of debate, delaying the roll-out of the ticket.

An agreement was reached between the federal government and Germany's states, which will both contribute 1.5 billion euros towards the ticket's financing to avoid adding to the national rail operator's debt pile. The expenditure has come in for heavy criticism from the opposition, who argue the money could have been used to "improve and renovate rail infrastructure", in the words of conservative (CDU) parliamentarian Michael Donth.

Germany's rail network is indeed creaking, with investment needs totaling around 8.6 billion euros a year for the next 10 years, according to official estimates. With services packed and facing regular technical problems, only 65.2 percent of long-distance trains arrived on time in 2022. The issues on Germany's rail system were put on full display last summer when the government first experimented with a heavily discounted flat-rate ticket. Between June and August, locals were able to travel the length and breadth of the country for just nine euros a month.

Interest in the pass was understandably great, with 52 million people signing up for the offer. But operators struggled to manage the stampede.

"The solution is certainly not reducing the cost of subscriptions," Christian Boettger, a rail expert from the Technical University Berlin, told AFP. Transport Minister Wissing has not ruled out an increase to the price of the new-model ticket in future to ensure it remains financially viable.

Similarly, getting people to abandon their cars to use public transport is often easier said than done. Many commuters who live far from the city centre do not have "rail infrastructure that could replace the car", said Boettger.

According to the federal statistics agency Destatis, the introduction of the nine-euro offer saw road traffic "stagnate" compared with 2019, instead of rising. Overall, road vehicles emitted 0.8 million additional tons of greenhouse gases in 2022, compared with the year before, according to the federal environment agency. The 49-euro ticket will particularly benefit "urban residents who already have a more expensive subscription", transport expert Oliver Wittig told AFP. Germany is not alone in its efforts to boost rail use in order to reduce emissions from transport. — AFP

## Chinese firm to build major Sri Lanka port complex

**COLOMBO:** A Chinese state-owned firm said on Monday it plans to take its investment in Sri Lanka to \$2 billion by building a major logistics hub. Sri Lanka is looking to kickstart its economic recovery after defaulting on its foreign debt last year, when shortages of essentials such as food, fuel and medicines sparked widespread anti-government protests.

The investment by the China Merchants Group in a large logistics complex at Colombo Port, with an estimated construction cost of \$392 million, is the first major foreign investment in Sri Lanka since the default. The logistics centre project will take CMG's "accumulated investment in Sri Lanka to... over \$2 billion, making it the largest foreign investment enterprise in the island", the company said in a statement on Monday.

CMG will have a 70 percent stake in the company set up to build the logistics complex at Colombo, the only deep-sea port between Dubai and Singapore.

Describing the project as South Asia's largest logistics hub, CMG said it expects to complete it by the end of 2025. CMG also manages the port complex at Hambantota on the southern tip of Sri Lanka.

That port was considered among the white-elf elephant projects launched by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who ruled the country for a decade until 2015. Rajapaksa borrowed heavily from China for projects that many criticized as a debt trap that led to the worst economic crisis in Sri Lanka's history.

Unable to repay a huge loan taken from China in 2017 to build Hambantota port, Sri Lanka handed it over to CMG for \$1.12 billion on a 99-year lease. China has loaned billions for projects in Asia, Africa and Europe under its gargantuan Belt and Road Initiative, which critics say is saddling nations with debt. Neighboring India as well as the United States have also expressed concern about China gaining a naval advantage in the Indian Ocean with its access to Sri Lanka's ports. Sri Lanka has insisted that its ports will not be used for any military purposes. — AFP



Colombo port

# KFH's 'Increase Good Deeds in Ramadan' program concludes

## Al-Ruwaieh: KFH volunteer team carried out several initiatives

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has concluded the 2023 "Increase Good Deeds in Ramadan" program amid great public attention and social engagement in a new affirmation of KFH's leadership in social responsibility and its role in active participation in social events.

Group Deputy General Manager Public Relations and Media Yusef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh pointed out that KFH has succeeded in carrying out several social initiatives within an integrated Ramadan program that considers the requirements of the community and the nature of the holy month, to cover all aspects of the fasting Iftar campaign, providing hospitality service in Taraweeh and Qiyam prayers, Girgian events, the Holy Quran competition, sports competitions, cooking courses, health and traffic awareness initiatives, awareness of security and safety. It was extended to include events and activities during Eid, stressing that the program included all segments of society in a way that enhances KFH's leadership in volunteer work, social responsibility and sustainable development.



Yusef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh

witness traffic congestion, with the aim of reducing traffic accidents resulting from speeding before Iftar time. KFH also participated in distributing "Ramadan basket" and Eid clothing to needy families in cooperation with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, indicating that the month of Ramadan represents an opportunity to enhance social responsibility, and the participation of the community in various occasions, stressing that such initiatives encourage the spirit of volunteerism, and contribute to instilling the concept of giving.

### Quran application as a gift from KFH

Al-Ruwaieh pointed out that KFH offers the public the Holy Quran application as a gift from KFH, noting that the application launched by KFH on iOS and Android devices has achieved a record number exceeding 10 million users.

### Iftar meals

Al-Ruwaieh added that during the month of Ramadan, KFH volunteer team prepared and distributed thousands of Iftar meals to fasting people daily in various governorates of Kuwait, and through the largest Ramadan tent in the Grand Mosque and different locations.

### Sharing Iftar with those on duty during iftar time

Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH participated with employees of the Public Security Operations Department at the Ministry of Interior and employees of the Fire Force in Iftar Ramadan in appreciation of their efforts during Iftar, and their great role around the clock.

### Ramadan Aman

Al-Ruwaieh pointed out that KFH participated in the "Ramadan Aman" campaign to distribute light fasting Iftar meals to motorists at the main intersections that

### Hospitality service in mosques

He said that KFH, as part of the Ramadan program, provided hospitality service in several mosques in different regions in Kuwait during Taraweeh prayers, as well as Qiyam prayers in the last ten days of Ramadan.

### 'KFH Reciters' competition

Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH organized the tenth edition of the "Quran Reciters" competition to recite the Holy Quran with the participation of about 1000 contestants. 42 winners from male and female categories were announced, pointing out that the "KFH Reciters" competition is the largest in terms of the value of prizes.

### Sadu House

Al-Ruwaieh explained that KFH, as part of its strategic partnership with the Sadu House, organized many events within the Ramadan program, such as the Girgian event for children. Al-Ruwaieh stated that the children at Sadu House completed the "Fun with Weaving" program sponsored by KFH which reviewed their handicrafts, indicating that part of the proceeds of these works will be for community and charitable activities. Sadu House aims to preserve Kuwait's culture and textile traditions and is an advisory organizer at UNESCO.

### Biggest virtual walking challenge (V-FiT)

Al-Ruwaieh mentioned that KFH concluded the biggest virtual walking challenge, which was launched during the Holy Month of Ramadan, in collaboration with its strategic partner, V-Thru application, and with the participation of over 10,000 participants. The initiative encourages the community to exercise and adopt a healthy lifestyle under KFH's (Better Health...Better Life) campaign.

### Sustainability and Keep it Green campaign

He added that KFH look into consideration sustainability standards in all its initiatives and activities, indicating that the walking challenge allowed participants to earn a balance in the V-FIT application in exchange for their steps. Participants were able to use the balance in purchasing transactions or contributing to the greening of Kuwait through (Keep It Green) campaign to achieve a sustainable environment.

### Girgian events

He went on to say that KFH also organized many (Girgian) events for kids in different locations particularly in Winter Wonderland, the Avenues, Naif Palace, and the Kuwaiti Society for the Guardians of the Disabled, adding that this initiative contributes to the joy of children and helps maintain the Kuwaiti tradition.

### Daily engagement with the society

Further, Al-Ruwaieh mentioned that KFH continues exerting all efforts in employing its social media channels to interact with the public and followers on various occasions. He pointed out that the Bank launched a series of awareness messages on different subjects that contained sharia advice and instructions for the audience in collaboration with a cohort of distinguished religious scholars such as sheikh/Ahmad Al-Nafees and Sheikh/Fahad Al-Kandari. KFH has also collaborated with nutritionists and doctors to share healthy tips, as well as awareness messages in cooperation the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior, in addition to Ramadan daily fasting calendar. The Bank also collaborated with the young Quran reciter Othman Al-Haddad through its social media channels.

### Ayadi ATMs

Al-Ruwaieh also stated that KFH pro-



Muhammad Al-Faris and the team with the officials of the interior ministry.



Honoring the winners of the Baitak Quran recital competition.

vided customers with Ayadi cash gifts, adding that the Ayadi were offered through ATMs in the Avenues, as well as in KFH Go branches across Kuwait, Mubi Baitak, in addition to KFH branches.

### Eid surprises

He said that during Eid, KFH's voluntary team organized (Your Lunch is on Us) initiative for KFH customers in the Avenues, in addition to (Your Coffee is on Us) for all the Bank's customers. These initiatives affirm KFH's keenness to stay in touch with its customers anywhere, any time and on different occasions.

### Visiting children during Eid

He said that KFH voluntary team visited children admitted to Jaber Hospital and shared the joy of Eid with them, wishing them speedy recovery.

He pointed out that the Bank's voluntary team also visited KFH family members who were on duty serving customers during the Eid holiday. The voluntary team presented their colleagues with Eid gifts and extended their appreciation for

their vital role in serving KFH customers.

### KFH voluntary team

Al-Ruwaieh indicated that KFH voluntary team undertook a major societal role by carrying out and supervising all Ramadan initiatives appropriately, which contributes to enhancing the culture of volunteering among youth, and thus contributes to strengthening friendliness and generosity among members of society.

### The leader of social responsibility

He affirmed that KFH is moving forward in community contributions and support of all volunteering initiatives, which confirms KFH's leadership in social responsibility, and being the pillar in sustainable development in numerous environmental, health, social, educational, sports and other aspects. He concluded by saying that naming KFH as the "CSR Market Leader" at Kuwait level by Eurromoney, is a recognition of KFH's extended community contributions and its significant role in carrying out community initiatives with added value and positive impact, and its leadership at the private sector level.

## Four Seasons Kuwait relaunches afternoon tea at Al-Soor Lounge

KUWAIT: Afternoon tea is an iconic British tradition, so it makes perfect sense that Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya should relaunch its own elegant version at Al-Soor Lounge on May 6—the Coronation Day for Britain's King Charles III. On launch day delectable, light bites will be served for a quintessentially British experience. Available every day thereafter from 2pm to 6pm in the sumptuous surrounds of Kuwait's "place to see and be seen", the Al-Soor Afternoon Tea is a perfect excuse for a girls' tete-a-tete in refined style.

The new Afternoon Tea menu - crafted by executive chef Thierry Papillier and his culinary team - features both savory and sweet delicacies: classics updated with thoughtful modern twists. Smoked salmon tartar is served with fresh waffle and sour cream, dill, onion and capers; creamy chicken with fresh truffle comes in a soft-as-a-cloud brioche bun, while an egg mimosa sandwich is flecked with chopped chives. Sweet treats include strawberry tartlet, double chocolate choux, and date and saffron mousse cake. Traditional British favorite, scones, are straight-from-the-oven and served with clotted cream, strawberry jam and lemon curd.

Enjoy with fragrant tea or coffee, served just so—King Charles is said to enjoy Darjeeling with organic honey and milk, with the honey placed in the cup before the tea is poured over. Queen Elizabeth II, on the other hand, was a fan of Earl Grey, served boiling hot with a splash of milk and no sugar.



Al-Soor Lounge

The mouth-watering treats are presented in an artful etagere for Instagram-worthy moments shared with friends. The whole experience is elevated by the striking design of Al-Soor with its dramatic soaring ceilings, bold gold-leaf glass screens, and contemporary style. Also known as the La Chocolaterie of Kuwait, Al-Soor's dazzling French chocolaterie counter offers 15 different hand-made truffles and pralines for an extra je ne sais quoi—making it the perfect place to pick up a prettily packaged treat for someone special.

The British institution of taking tea in the afternoon is said to have been invented by the Duchess of Bedford around 1840 when industrialization and gas lighting meant a later dinner, leaving as to mach-growing gap after lunch. The Duchess, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria, asked for tea, bread and butter, and cake to be sent to her room in the late

to every customer that needs to send money quickly and reliably. I have used their branches to perform my transfers and have recently tried the app and found it to be convenient and efficient. Thank you, Al-Muzaini, for this wonderful prize."

Al-Muzaini is eager to provide the highest levels of quality financial services such as money transfers and foreign currency exchange, comfortably and safely at the best prices throughout.

Al-Muzaini General Manager Hugh Fernandes congratulated the winner of the \$10,000 Eidayah prize and stated, "We are pleased to conduct our Mega Promotion Campaign 2023 and offer our customers the chance to win incredible prizes. We are also always looking forward to presenting the best offers and conducting more promotional campaigns in the future to thank our valued customers for their loyalty and the trust that they place in us."

Transfer money through Al-Muzaini for a chance to win a BMW X3 2023 and incredible prizes worth over \$130,000. Send money through our branches, self-service kiosks, online or our mobile app and use any of our services for a chance to win every day. Transferring through our app multiplies your chance



Afternoon Tea at Al-Soor Lounge.

afternoon. The rest, as they say, is history—with Afternoon Tea becoming a fashion that spread across Britain, and eventually much of the globe.



of winning. The campaign continued from March 23 and will last until June 11.

Al-Muzaini, always near you! Transfer now!

## Italy cuts anti-poverty subsidies as critics slam 'provocation'

ROME: Italy's right-wing government on Monday rolled back anti-poverty subsidies introduced four years ago that helped some four million people last year, as critics denounced a "provocation" on the international May Day labor holiday.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who leads the country's most far-right coalition since World War II, said the "citizens' income" benefits would be replaced by a more limited "inclusion cheque" for qualifying households. The government says it costs too much, at around eight billion euros (\$8.8 billion) last year, and discourages able-bodied people, especially youths, from looking for jobs.

The new inclusion cheques, set to begin in January 2024, will cost around 5.4 billion euros annually, and be available only to households with minors, seniors 60 or older, or handicapped people.

Since taking office last September, Meloni has pushed corporate tax cuts while also promising to restore Italy's economic credibility by cutting debt incurred most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. "We are reforming the citizens' income to make a distinction between those who are able to work and those who aren't," Meloni said in a statement.

Her government also made it easier for companies to hire on short-term contracts—which unions blast as keeping employees in precarious economic situations—while promising tax breaks to firms hiring people benefiting from the new inclusion cheques. The goal is to stimulate hiring and encourage more youths to find work in the euro zone's third-largest economy, where the employment rate for 15-to-24-year olds, at 22.4 percent in February, is nearly three times above the national average (eight percent). The citizens' income program was introduced by the populist Five Star Movement (M5S) in 2019, and its supporters say it has provided precious help to millions of low-income households, in particular in impoverished southern regions.

Italy's INPS social security agency says the citizens' revenue benefited four million people last year, with an average monthly subsidy of 550 euros. The new inclusion cheques will be capped at 500 euros a month, though further aid will be offered for households with elderly or handicapped members, or those that do not own their homes.

"A serious government does not meet on May 1 to condemn young people to a life of precariousness, destroying their dream of having a home or children," said former Five Star premier Giuseppe Conte.

Roberto Fico, a popular former speaker of the lower house of parliament, called Meloni's move a "provocation". In a statement, Meloni defended "a strong signal and a privilege to honor workers on this day of celebration, bringing them the answers they are expecting". — AFP

## Al-Muzaini's \$10,000 Eidayah winner announced

KUWAIT: Al-Muzaini Exchange Company, the number one exchange company in Kuwait announced the winner of their \$10,000 Eidayah Prize at an event held at Al-Muzaini branch, Jahra on April 20, 2023.

The winner, Meshal Awwad Alfadhli was extremely happy upon receiving the prize and expressed his joy towards Al-Muzaini for rewarding their customers by conducting campaigns all throughout the year. Meshal has been using Al-Muzaini for several years for the purpose of performing fast, safe and secure money transfers and obtaining foreign currency for his travels at extremely competitive rates. The winner said, "I trust Al-Muzaini for my money transfers and foreign exchange, they are really great and the staff is extremely helpful. I recommend Al-Muzaini

Lifestyle



A man dressed up in a costume attends ComicCon Cape Town.

# Smash? Pow?

## No, South Africa's comic hero is non-violent

A South African superhero who prefers fighting inequality rather than villains is going down a storm as Cape Town hosts the continent's largest pop culture, fantasy and gaming festival.

Captain South Africa, a star of Comic-Con Cape Town, is a far cry from her US counterpart.

Unlike Captain America, the superheroine would rather tackle the country's housing crisis than beat up baddies.

The black injustice warrior, who sports a bandana in the colours of the South African flag, is the brainchild of Bill Masuku, a comic book artist who divides his time between his native Zimbabwe and South Africa.

"She is a political superhero, non-violent and a diplomat," Masuku, 30, explained to AFP.

"She doesn't punch criminals. She's fighting a lot of systems. Like, how do you fight poverty? Because you can't punch poverty."

The evil facing Captain South Africa is not a fictional villain but real life problems rooted in poverty and inequality, which remains entrenched nearly 30 years after the end of apartheid.

"It's a modern-day exploration of what South Africa could be," said Masuku.

The story of his heroine is rooted in Masuku's experience as a student at Rhodes University, in the south-eastern town of Grahamstown, now called Makhanda and which was shaken by protests over an increase in study fees.

"I was inspired by the people I went to university with, these protest movements that asked for political change that didn't incite violence," he said. "And by the women I was inspired by, I had to write their stories in the way I knew how, which was comics."

Three years later, Captain South Africa was born -- with an untamed shock of black hair and initially garbed, like Captain America, in red and blue.

She then migrated to a sec-



A gamer dressed up in a costume attends ComicCon Cape Town.

ond outfit, "white with stripes, which represent her Xhosa heritage. People stop and are like, 'Oh, this is a Xhosa woman. I'm a Xhosa woman. I'm going to buy this. I want to see what this is about'."

Captain South Africa has so far starred in 10 books, selling nearly 5,000 copies -- a small but passionate following.

### African makeover

Abigail Backman-Daniels, a 23-year-old student dressed as a Valkyrie from the Thor movie franchise, said she was delighted that American-style superheroes were now getting a local makeover. "I honestly think it is just long overdue," she said.

"It's definitely so amazing to see it come to African countries and seeing how they adapt the tropes for the different climates, and the different like societal contexts of Africa."

The first South African superhero, Kwezi, emerged in 2014 at the hands of Loyiso Mkize.

"I think we're approaching a golden age where things will really start to show... to define what South African comic books are," said Mkize, 35.



Bill Masuku, creator of Captain South Africa comic, shows some of his work at ComicCon Cape Town, a festival of popular culture, Cape Town. —AFP photos

"This is now the dawn of our storytelling, and there will be a style that's attributed or associated with South African comics." —AFP



A gamer dressed up in a costume attends ComicCon Cape Town.

## 'Soviet Dior' Slava Zaitsev dies at 85

Russian fashion designer Viacheslav "Slava" Zaitsev, dubbed the "Soviet Christian Dior", has died at the age of 85, his fashion house told AFP Sunday.

Confirming Russian media reports, a spokeswoman added that when Zaitsev had celebrated



In this file photo taken on March 12, 2017 Russian designer Slava Zaitsev arrives before presenting his creations at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Russia in Moscow.

his birthday in March with friends, "we could already see he was very, very, weak".

"The couturier Viacheslav Zaitsev has died," Russian state channel Perviy Kanal reported, paying tribute to a man who "dictated Soviet and Russian fashion for decades, an innovator who



In this file photo taken on June 15, 2001 famous Russian fashion designer Slava Zaitsev shows his dresses in the Bolshoi theatre's museum in Moscow. — AFP photos

wasn't afraid of bold experiments".

"It's a great loss for the world of international fashion," Ria Novosti news agency quoted Russian stylist Sergei Zverev as saying.

Russia's most famous fashion designer, Zaitsev achieved global success with bright dresses adorned with the flower patterns found on traditional Russian shawls.

From a modest childhood in Ivanovo, a town of 400,000 people to the northeast of the capital, his career took him to the catwalks of Paris, New York and Tokyo. The French press in the 1960s dubbed him the "Soviet Christian Dior".

Watched closely by the KGB because of his contacts with Western designers and his flamboyant character, Zaitsev was initially refused permission to leave the Soviet Union and his first collections were shown abroad without him.

In 1962, Zaitsev's first collection of clothes -- a uniform for female workers that featured skirts with

the flower patterns of traditional Russian shawls and multicoloured boots -- was rejected by Soviet authorities. "The colours were too bright and contrasted with the greyness of Soviet everyday life, where an individual should not differ from the rest of society," Zaitsev said in an interview with AFP in 2018.

But the collection, nonetheless, attracted international attention. In 1963, French magazine Paris Match became the first Western media outlet to describe Zaitsev as a pioneer of Soviet fashion.

### Celebrity clients

Born into a poor family with a mother who worked as a cleaner, he initially was barred from attending a top-flight university because his father, taken captive by the Nazis during World War II, had, like other former prisoners-of-war, been labelled an "enemy of the people" and sentenced to 10 years in a labour camp.

"When I was a child, my mother taught me em-



In this file photo taken on March 29, 2013 Russian fashion designer Slava Zaitsev (Center) walks on stage surrounded by models during the Fashion Week in Moscow.

broidery so I wouldn't roam the streets without purpose," he told AFP. "In the evenings I would pick flowers with girls on Lenin Avenue to draw them and recreate them in embroidery. That's how I began my adventure in art."

He studied at a vocational college until the age of 18 and then went on to the unglamorous Moscow Textile Institute.

"During my studies, I lived with a family whose children I looked after. The apartment was tiny and I slept on the floor under the table," he recalled.

Later in life, between 2007 and 2009, he presented a popular television show called "The Verdict of Fashion," in which stylists dressed participants in the latest street looks.

He counted several Russian movie stars, singers and the ex-wife of President Vladimir Putin, Lyudmila, among his clients. —AFP

## Hollywood writers strike looms as deadline nears

Hollywood faced a cliffhanger moment Monday as talks to avert a potentially catastrophic strike by thousands of TV and movie writers remained unresolved just hours before a crunch deadline.

Major studios and networks including Disney and Netflix are locked in talks with the powerful Writers Guild of America (WGA), which has threatened to order a walkout just after midnight Tuesday unless a new deal is agreed.

If a strike takes place, late-night shows could immediately grind to a halt, and television series and movies scheduled for release later this year and beyond could face major delays.

The last time talks failed, in 2007, Hollywood writers laid down their pens and keyboards for 100

days, costing the Los Angeles entertainment industry around \$2 billion.

This time, the two sides are clashing as writers demand higher pay and a greater share of profits from the boom in streaming, while studios say they must cut costs due to economic pressures.

"I think everybody feels like there's going to be a strike," said one Los Angeles-based TV writer, who asked not to be identified.

"This is a deal that's going to determine how we are financially compensated by streamers," not just now but well into the future, they said.

### Streaming 'residuals'

Many of the issues are familiar to contract talks in industries around the world.

Writers say it is becoming impossible to earn a living, as salaries have flatlined or declined after inflation, even as employers reap profits and fatten executives' paychecks.

More writers than ever are working at the union-mandated minimum wage, while shows hire fewer people to script ever-shorter series.

A key issue is reworking the formula that cal-

culates how writers are paid for streaming shows, which often remain on platforms like Netflix years after they were written.

For decades, writers have been paid "residuals" from reuse of their material, such as television reruns or DVD sales.

These are either a percentage of studios' receipts for the film or show, or a set fee each time an episode is replayed.

With streaming, writers simply get a fixed annual payout -- even if their work generates a smash hit like "Bridgerton" or "Stranger Things," streamed by hundreds of millions of viewers around the world.

"These amounts remain far too low for the global reuse of WGA-covered programming on these massive services," says the guild.

The WGA has vowed to "improve these residuals so that writers share in the global success of the programming they create."

It also wants to address the future impact of artificial intelligence on writing.

### 'Challenged'

Unsurprisingly, the studios -- represented by the

Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) -- have a different take.

They note overall residuals paid to writers hit an all-time high of \$494 million in 2021, largely thanks to the boom in writing jobs driven by the explosion of streaming content.

That was up by almost half, from \$333 million, a decade earlier.

They also dispute suggestions that studios are falsely claiming economic hardship to bolster their negotiation position.

"Do you think that Disney would be laying 7,000 people off for fun?" said a source familiar with the AMPTP's position.

"There's only one [streaming] platform that's profitable right now, and that's Netflix. The movie industry... that's a pretty challenged segment as well."

After the spendthrift past few years, when rival streamers chased subscriber growth at any cost, bosses are now under intense pressure from investors to curb spending and deliver profits. — AFP

# Heed the reed: Thatcher scientist on mission to revive craft



Jacobus van Hoorne and his workers harvest reed near Lake Neusiedl in Breitenbrunn, Austria.

Once upon a time many homes in the picturesque Burgenland wine-growing region of eastern Austria were thatched. But now Jacobus van Hoorne's house is the only one in the entire neighborhood with a reed roof. And to get it approved he had to do battle for two years with the local authorities, culminating in having to set fire to a model thatched house to prove that his home wouldn't be a fire hazard.

"You are practically not allowed to have reed roofs

## Carbon captors

Like straw and earth they have an almost negligible carbon footprint, said Azra Korjenic, head of the Department of Ecological Building Technologies at the Vienna University of Technology. In fact, marshlands and moors where reeds grow are some of the planet's main carbon sinks, surpassing even forests and grasslands, according to the 2015 Soil Atlas. Yet one of the biggest stumbling blocks to sustainability is



Jacobus van Hoorne poses in front of his house for which he built the reed roof at Weiden am See, Austria.



Jacobus van Hoorne, poses in front of stacks of reed at his storage at Weiden am See, Austria.

in Austria," said Van Hoorne. "You have to find a way around it, which took a long time." Buoyed up by his legal victory, the CERN particle physicist turned thatcher hopes to revive the ancient art as a part of more sustainable house building — particularly as his reeds come from the region's UNESCO-listed salt-water lake.

"It's not just a natural raw material, but it also has great insulating properties," he told AFP. "A roof like that... is only made of reed and (steel) wire. It's completely untreated. You can just compost it and recycle the wire. "The nature, the material, the craft. It's just beautiful," he added. A reed roof lasts about 40 years, said the Dutch-born scientist, and unlike conventional materials whose manufacture requires lots of carbon to be burned, reeds actually help store it.

the construction industry, which favors prefab building modules over ecological materials, Korjenic added.

Current regulations and norms are also hampering the inclusion of natural building materials. As Austria's only master thatchers, Van Hoorne and his father are in high demand, and they also farm their own reeds locally. But even that is not easy because of low prices and droughts which stunt the reeds' growth as the climate warms, he said.

He and four other remaining reed farmers in Austria also face crushing competition from China, which has an 80 percent share of the European market. With his customers for now mostly in England and the Netherlands, "shipping a container from Shanghai to Rotterdam costs around \$2,000 - just as much as a truck from Austria," he said. — AFP



Jacobus van Hoorne, a 37-year-old former physicist at Cern and now reed farmer, checks stacks of reed at his storage at Weiden am See, Austria. - AFP photos



Jacobus van Hoorne, checks stacks of reed at his storage at Weiden am See, Austria.



Jacobus van Hoorne, checks plants of reed as he harvests near Lake Neusiedl at Breitenbrunn, Austria.

## Paris museum gives troubled NFT art scene a big showcase

NFTs, the tokens of the crypto world linked to digital artworks, have been granted a show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, despite an almost total collapse in their price and cultural cachet.

The Pompidou, a popular attraction in the Marais district of the French capital, has opened the exhibition in its minimalist halls dedicated to NFTs which could give the digital art form a much-needed lift.

Blockbuster multimillion-dollar sales helped fuel publicity in 2021, and prices soared amid a lack of regulation and general confusion over what the digital tokens were.

But the value of NFT transactions fell 94 percent between 2021 and 2022, from \$233 million to \$14 million, according to French analytics firm Artpix.

The organizers of the event at the Pompidou, the first European gallery to start a collection of NFT art, are more keen to talk about the art than the economics.

"These artists get a place in the history of art and their works are guaranteed longevity," said Marcella Lista, the gallery's chief curator.

However, the collapse in interest in NFTs along with a wider plunge in the value of cryptocurrencies allowed the Pompidou to bag many of the works for just a handful of dollars, according to records on the OpenSea platform. About half of the works were donated by their creators.

### Crypto icons

Among those who happily handed over their work was Californian artist Robness, who came to see the show and said it was a "humbling experience" to be included.

He too was keen to shift the focus from the



Crypto artist Robness shows his piece "Brute Trash Can", which sold for over \$250,000, in Torrance Beach, Torrance, California. — AFP

stump in prices. "If you start worrying about the market dynamics, you're taking your energy out, putting it into other places," he told AFP.

"That's not conducive to actually creating." Robness compared NFTs to email, an elemental technology that he reckons will continue to find uses.

Born at the crossroads of technology and artistic provocation, NFT art quickly created its own emblems and myths - and the Pompidou exhibition is steeped in its iconography.

Robness donated a 3D "portrait" of Satoshi Nakamoto, the possibly fictional creator of bitcoin.

Another of the works on display is "Bitchcoin", a representation of a bitcoin created by Sarah Meyohas in 2015, making it one of the first NFT artworks.

While one of the most famous emblems of the scene, a "cryptopunk", also gets an airing.

Visitors get the experience of a traditional art gallery - whitewashed walls, hanging images accompanied with small explanation cards - but instead of canvas and paper, the digital works are rendered on screens. — AFP

## Apple and Amazon 'committed' to big screen, says theater owners

Movie theater owners are confident that previously streaming-focused tech giants Apple and Amazon are now "committed" to putting their films on the big screen — even if Netflix still declines to — their trade body's new president told AFP. This week's CinemaCon event in Las Vegas, where owners of multiplex chains and arthouse screens gather annually, took place in an optimistic mood, after three nervous years blighted by the pandemic and the rapid rise of streaming. Back in those dark days, some 2,000 US theaters were forced to close forever, while even traditional Hollywood studios like Warner and Disney were skipping theaters and putting major films on HBO Max and Disney+ streaming first.

But since big screens reopened, even Apple and Amazon have pivoted to giving movies like "Air," "Napoleon" and "Killers of the Flower Moon" extended runs in theaters. The two tech giants reportedly each plan to spend \$1 billion per year on movies headed first for the big screen. "I think their commitment to the theatrical experience is amazing," said Michael O'Leary, who takes over the National Association of Theater Owners (NATO) this week.

"We're excited to see where it goes. We're confident that they're committed to this enterprise." According to O'Leary, there has been a recognition that movies that are released in theaters first will eventually be more successful on streaming. "People are aware of what's playing in the theaters, and they're more likely to watch something on a streaming service that played in the theater," he said.

It is an argument theater owners have been pushing for years, but the pandemic offered a "crash course in whether or not a purely streaming model would work," he said. The industry's drive to boost subscriber numbers at any cost — a hallmark of the so-called "streaming wars" — has recently dissipated, with investors and markets demanding more focus now on making money. "There's been a recognition not just in the marketplace, but also on Wall Street, that you have to have elements that allow you to make profit," said O'Leary. "And theatrical space is one of those places you can do that."

This week, Sony showed footage from Ridley



Michael O'Leary, new president and CEO of NATO (National Association of Theatre Owners) poses for AFP during CinemaCon. — AFP

Scott's upcoming historical epic "Napoleon," and Paramount gave CinemaCon audiences a sneak look at Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," starring Leonardo DiCaprio. Both films were made by Apple, but will be released in theaters by Sony and Paramount respectively. Amazon recently gave "Air," a sports drama from Ben Affleck, a wide theatrical release, having originally planned to put it straight onto Prime Video streaming. Still, the industry faces urgent challenges ahead. One noticeable holdout from theaters is Netflix.

Although Netflix last year gave "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery" its biggest ever theatrical launch, the movie still only played on around 600 screens. Netflix spends around \$17 billion on original content per year — far more than Amazon or Apple, and most of its films never reach theaters at all. "If a company decides that they don't want to do that, that's their decision. I don't agree with it, but we wish them well," said O'Leary.

"I don't believe it's a problem. I think that the wind is in the sails of theatrical exhibition." Meanwhile, some of the world's biggest movie theater chains remain in dire financial straits. Cineworld last year filed for bankruptcy, and heavily indebted AMC has had to sell shares to raise cash. O'Leary blamed global economic conditions and the effects of the pandemic. "The difficulties that have arisen did not occur overnight, and they won't necessarily be solved overnight," he said. "It's certainly not a time to be gloating," he added. — AFP

Lifestyle

# Quack 'aphrodisiac' from lizard a hit in Pakistan

In a clamorous bazaar, hot-blooded Pakistani men seek a cold-blooded cure for their sexual ills—freshly rendered lizard fat, marinated in scorpion oil and garnished with filaments of a fiery red spice. Unsurprisingly, the black market balm known as "sanda tael"—cola-colored, with the whiff of burnt frying pan—has absolutely no scientific backing. It also relies on poaching the reclusive Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizard, which is cruelly butchered on the pavement before its innards are cooked on a crude gas hob.

"You just apply five drops over the affected area and massage," said Yasir Ali, one of four vendors in Rawalpindi's Raja Bazaar. "It does magic in terms of promoting sexual stamina," the 40-year-old told AFP. As he speaks, a lounge of paralyzed lizards is spread out on his tarpaulin sheet cluttered with glass vials. Ali entices a gaggle of customers perusing his potions by telling them it is "a solution to bring joy and happiness" which will make them "strong like steel".

"It will make your wife happy," he promises with a glint in his eye. "Buy it and try it." Sultan Mehmood, 62, a user for three decades says it "works like a miracle", as he launches into a vivid description of his sexual performance.



In this picture "sanda tael" balm vendor Yasir Ali holds a paralyzed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizard while speaking with customers at his stall in Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi. — AFP photos



Clinician Ahmad Shahab speaks during an interview with AFP at his clinic in Islamabad.



"Sanda tael" balm vendor Yasir Ali holds paralyzed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards at his stall in Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi.



Paralyzed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards are seen at a stall in Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi.



"Sanda tael" balm vendor Yasir Ali waits for customers while sitting next to paralyzed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards in Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi.



"Sanda tael" balm vendor Yasir Ali (right) talks to customers while sitting next to Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards at his stall in Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi.



"Sanda tael" balm vendor Yasir Ali shows scorpion oil to customers while sitting next to paralysed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards at Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi.



Paralyzed Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards sit on a vendor stall at Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi

Chasing tail

The meek lizards—measuring up to 60 centimeters (24 inches) as adults—are plucked from the plains of Punjab and Sindh provinces as they peep out of their burrows to sunbathe. As night fades, Muhammad Nasir, 25, lays a web of fishing wire snares on the arid plateaus surrounding the village of Adiala, 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Islamabad. Within hours he has caught more than a dozen.

"We break the lizards' back after capturing them," the fourth-generation poacher said. "This is done to make sure they don't run away, because the animal moves with the speed of a bullet." "Sometimes it's quite painful to hunt these lizards and deprive them of their right to live in a natural habitat, but this is how we make a living."

In a nation where social pressure dictates couples produce sprawling families, infertility is deeply stigmatized and Viagra is outlawed, the quack remedy for sexual impotence remains popular. But Islamabad clinician Ahmad Shahab says the trade is capitalizing on naivety stemming from the taboo of sexuality in deeply conservative Pakistan. "It is absolutely rubbish and there is no truth in claims that the oil helps," Shahab said. "Sex is a subject people are quite curious about and these quacks are making fools out of them," he added. "We have to change the mindset of our people and to educate them."



Muhammad Nasir holds Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizards captured on the outskirts of Rawalpindi.

**'Great human desire'**  
WWF senior research and conservation manager Jamshed Iqbal Chaudhry agreed claims of healing properties are "totally false and devoid of any truth". The International Union for Conservation of Nature classes the spiny-tailed lizards as "vulnerable". "The over-exploitation of lizards will lead them to the verge of extinction," Chaudhry warned.

Ali, the vendor, says he has been arrested "many times" by wildlife protection officers, but after fines no larger than 10,000 rupees (\$35) he was freed to continue his trade. Ali cuts the sand-colored lizards' necks while they are immobilized but alive—ending their 15-year lifespan—and melts down the fat inside their plump bellies.

He says the uncton is infused with saffron—an exorbitantly expensive spice—but given the oil sells for between 600 and 1,200 rupees (\$2 to \$4) that seems unlikely. He also claims its miracle properties include healing joint aches, back pain, sciatica and hair loss. "I have regular customers from Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Sharjah, Malaysia and several African countries," he boasts.

Muhammad Azam, 65, remains unconvinced. "It's nothing but a fraudulent activity," he said. "I used this medicine but found it useless. It's full of germs and bacteria." Still, Ali's fellow vendor Muhammad Rafiq, 40, says others turn to the oil "to satisfy their wives and to have children". "This is a great human desire which is undeniable," he said.—AFP



A man pulls out a Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizard after getting stuck in a trap on the outskirts of Rawalpindi.



Muhammad Nadeem holds a Hardwicke's spiny-tailed lizard caught on a trap on the outskirts of Rawalpindi.

## Sports

# 'Special' Jaiswal: From homeless to IPL hero

## 'I want to follow my dream and work hard for it'

**NEW DELHI:** He once lived in tents and sold street food to pursue his cricketing dream. Now, sizzling talent Yashasvi Jaiswal is the toast of the Indian Premier League. On Sunday the Indian 21-year-old smashed 124 off 62 balls for Rajasthan Royals in front of a huge crowd in Mumbai, the city he moved to as a child from a poor family in Uttar Pradesh.

"What a story, what a special talent. Yashasvi Jaiswal is a superstar in the making," former Australia batsman and ex-IPL coach Tom Moody tweeted. "He has got real talent. The kind of domestic season he has had, he has taken that form into IPL. Good for him, good for Indian cricket and good for RR as well," India's all-format captain Rohit Sharma said.

The left-hander's maiden IPL century was not only the highest score of the current season—it also put him on top in the league's 2023 batting rankings. With a strike rate of 159.70, he has now racked up 428 runs, ahead of South Africa's on-fire Faf du Plessis (422 - Royal Challengers Bangalore) and New Zealand opener Devon Conway (414 - Chennai Super Kings).

### Pani puri to premier league

Jaiswal moved to Mumbai—without his parents—when he was just 11. "I used to sleep in a dairy and then stayed at my uncle's place but it wasn't big enough and he asked me to find a different place," Jaiswal told AFP in an interview in 2020. "I then started to stay in a tent near Azad Maidan (a Mumbai sports ground) and would play cricket there during the day."

"I sold pani puri at night, to help earn some money for food," he said, referring to a popular street snack. Jaiswal also did some cricket scoring and fetched

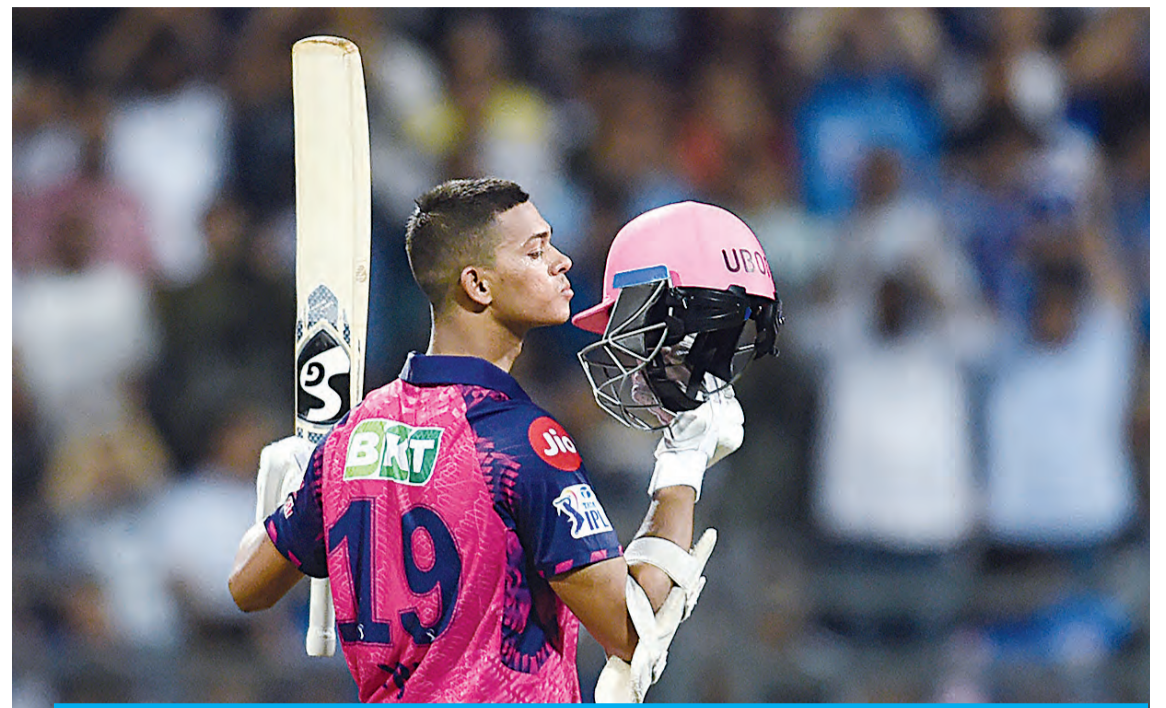
balls in club games to help finance his career before being noticed by coach Jwala Singh, who became the boy's legal guardian. "I saw in Yashasvi a younger me and thought God is giving me another chance to play well in my second innings of life," Singh, who played state-level cricket, told AFP in 2020.

Jaiswal won a place in the Mumbai state team in 2019 and became the youngest batsman, at 17 years and 292 days, to score a domestic one-day double century. His big break came when the youngster was snapped up by Rajasthan for \$338,000 in the 2019 auctions of the world's richest T20 tournament. In 2020, Jaiswal was the leading scorer for India's under-19 team, and player of the tournament at the 2020 under-19 World Cup.

### Losing cause

His first three IPL seasons were ordinary, but this year he has formed a fearsome opening pair with England white-ball captain Jos Buttler. His sparkling innings on Sunday was in a losing cause, with Mumbai Indians winning with three balls after Australian axe-man Tim David blasted three sixes in a row in the final over. But Jaiswal was still named player of the match and was typically humble afterwards, even after his innings with 16 fours and eight sixes. "I want to follow my dream and work hard for it. (I will) work on my process and the result will follow," he said.

Veteran cricket journalist Ayaz Memon tweeted that Jaiswal "seems destined for bigger things", while former India cricketer Virender Sehwag called the innings "one of the finest hundreds you will see". His name was also trending on social media, with users



**MUMBAI:** Rajasthan Royals' Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. —AFP

comparing his knock to former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum's unbeaten 158 for Kolkata Knight Riders in the first match of the league in 2008. "This year he has taken his game to a new level,"

Rohit said. "I asked him where all that power is coming from because last year I didn't see so many sixes and he was timing it so nicely. He says 'I have been spending a lot of time in the gym.'" —AFP

## Finau holds off Rahm to win Mexico Open

**MEXICO CITY:** American Tony Finau held off the threat from Masters champion and world number Jon Rahm to win the Mexico Open on Sunday, shooting a final round 66 to win by three strokes from the Spaniard and claim his sixth PGA Tour title.

Rahm, the defending champion at Vidanta, put himself in contention after a 10-under course-record 61 in his third round on Saturday put him within two strokes. But his four-under round of 67 on Sunday was not enough to close the gap on Finau, who produced a calm and solid bogey free round, completing a consistent week where he had shot 65, 64 and 65 before the final round.

The Vidanta course in Puerto Vallarta is a happy hunting ground for Finau, who ended tied for second behind Rahm last year. That result sparked an upturn in form for Finau, who went on to win three events in seven starts with victories in Minnesota, Detroit and the Houston Open.

Since that last win, Finau has had eight top-ten finishes in 11 events but not been able to add another title until Sunday. The 33-year-old finished 24-under for the week and was delighted to have got the upper hand on Rahm this time round.

"Rahmbo is the best, top of the world right now, so I knew I was going to have my hands full with him all the way to the end," he said. "I didn't know this tournament was mine until I hit this (last) green. It is crazy how this game is, you never think you have it won until its over. So it feels great," he added.

Finau birdied the par-3 fifth, the par-4 seventh, the par-3 11th and then the par-5 14th but missed a short putt for birdie on the final hole, where Rahm made birdie. Rahm, gave himself a glimmer of hope with a birdie on 15, but said he wasn't surprised at Finau's calm defence of his lead.

"Yeah, I knew I needed a low one again today... It was a day where I didn't do much wrong, but I didn't do much right, either," said the Spaniard. Rahm, who played the RBC Heritage at Hilton Head in the week after his Masters triumph before attempting his title defence in Mexico, will take a break before the PGA Championship, starting May 18, in Rochester.

"I probably need a bit of time off, just a little bit of rest. Not too much, just mind, body and soul, I just need it. It's been a lot of golf. I haven't had time to really sit back and rest after the Masters. I'm looking forward to do that," he said.

American Brandon Wu finished third, five strokes behind Finau after making 68 in his final round, but had made a real push early in his round. Wu birdied the first and third holes before an eagle on the par-5 sixth and a birdie on the seventh.

But he bogeyed the eighth and fell out contention with a double bogey on the par-4 10th, where he drove into the water. American Akshay Bhatia, the 21-year-old who shot 63 on Saturday, finished fourth after shooting a one-under 70. —AFP

## Australia's Green grabs emotional playoff win in LPGA

**LOS ANGELES:** Hannah Green ended her LPGA title drought Sunday, winning the LA Championship with a par at the second playoff hole to capture the victory ahead of Lin Xiyu and Aditi Ashok. Green claimed her third LPGA title, she won the Portland Classic and a major crown at the Women's PGA Championship in 2019.

When her short par putt dropped for the win at the par-three 18th at Wilshire Country Club, Green couldn't hold back her emotions. "It's been a long few years," the teary 26-year-old from Perth said. "I played really well last year but getting across the line has been really difficult," added Green, who had nine top-10 finishes last year, including a runner-up finish in the LA Open—which was played on the same Wilshire Country Club course but moved to Palos Verdes Golf Club this year—leaving Wilshire to host this week's inaugural LA Championship.

Green had just two birdies and 16 pars in her two-under 69, rattling in a long birdie putt in regulation at 18 to join the playoff with Lin and Ashok on

nine-under par 275. China's Lin grabbed her share of the 72-hole lead with impressive back-to-back birdies at 17 and 18 to cap a four-under 67 while India's Ashok bounced back from a bogey at 17 to birdie the final hole in her 67.

They returned to the par-three 18th for the playoff. Ashok's 12-foot birdie attempt lipping out as Lin made a 10-footer and Green sank a four-foot birdie to extend the playoff. Playing 18 one more time, Green was safely on the green as Lin was in the right greenside bunker and was unable to get up and down for par.

Ashok, a four-time winner on the Ladies European Tour, remains in search of a first LPGA title, as does Lin. Green admitted that she'd had little expectation of lifting the trophy as she tried to keep her patience through 14 pars to start her round.

"I'm really proud of myself for hanging in there because I really didn't think that I'd be in it with how I was playing and making so many pars," she said. "I knew you didn't need a low score today to win. My caddy just said stay patient. You always try to do that."

Green's cause was helped by some miscues from others, as players struggled to break free atop a crowded leaderboard. China's Yin Ruoning, who won the LA Open a month ago, was alone atop the leaderboard on 10-under after back-to-back birdies at



**LOS ANGELES:** Hannah Green of Australia poses with the trophy after victory during the final round of the JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro at Wilshire Country Club. —AFP

14 and 15, but she bogeyed 17 and 18 to finish tied for fourth on 276 with Japan's Ayaka Furue, who carded a six-under 65 to climb the leaderboard.

Overnight leader Cheyenne Knight shook off two early bogeys and was nine-under after her third birdie of the day at 14, but her hopes evaporated with a double-bogey at 15 and her two-over 73 left her tied on 277 with world number one Nelly Korda, who shot a 67, and South Korean Ryu Hae-ran, who carded a 71. —AFP

## Ding Liren becomes China's first world chess champion

**PARIS:** Ding Liren became China's first world chess champion on Sunday after a rapid-play tie-break victory over Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi in Kazakhstan. Ding, 30, takes over as winner of the World Chess Championship from Norway's Magnus Carlsen, who chose not to defend his title after a 10-year reign.

He and Nepomniachtchi had finished on seven points each after the 14 first-stage games played in the Kazakh capital, Astana. Each had won three, with the other eight ending in draws. For the tie-break stage of the match, also in Astana, the contenders had only 25 minutes to make their moves, plus an additional 10 seconds for each move played.

Ding clinched victory after winning the fourth of Sunday's quick-fire games following three draws. Both players reacted emotionally, with Nepomniachtchi getting up from the table quickly after shaking hands to concede defeat, and shaking hands again before leaving the hall.

Ding sat in front of the board, his face resting on one hand as he tried to compose himself. "I'm quite relieved," said Ding, in comments posted after the match by FIDE, the International Chess Federation. "The moment Ian resigned the game was a very emotional moment. I couldn't control my feelings. I know myself, I will cry and burst into tears. It was a tough tournament for me."

He had held his nerve to come back from behind three times during the 14-match classical play series: each time Nepomniachtchi won a game to take the lead, Ding eventually levelled the score with a win of his own.

team are athletes who are active servicemen of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, part of the army that attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022".

A Russian army, the federation said, that "is still waging a brutal full-scale war on our territory, shelling Ukrainian cities, civilian homes every day, killing civilians and children". "Instead, more than 250 Ukrainian athletes have given their lives defending the country. Among them are representatives of judo."

The federation added: "We do not see here neutrality, equal conditions and a 'bridge to peace' as stated in the IJF Resolution on the participation of Russian and Belarusian teams in the World Championships in Doha."

"Moreover, we see here a decision that contradicts the latest recommendations of the International Olympic Committee of

### Breaking the deadlock

No Chinese player had ever previously won the competition, in which men and women can compete. But China has dominated women's tournaments since the 1990s and Ding's triumph signalled the country's rise as a major player on the global chess scene.

Ju Wenjun is the reigning world champion in women's chess and will face compatriot Lei Tingjie in July to defend her title. China also won the Chess Olympiad, the game's most important international competition, in 2014 and 2018, with Ding playing a major role in his nation's success on both occasions.

The 14th and final game Saturday in the classical format had demonstrated once again that, at this level, chess is as much a question of nerves as a battle of minds, as both players made uncharacteristic mistakes. Although Nepomniachtchi pushed hard to convert a slight advantage into a win, he finally had to settle for a draw in what was the longest game of the tournament: 90 moves played over more than six and a half hours.

Sunday's action followed a similar trend, with the games likely to be most remembered for their dramatic circumstances rather than the quality of play. Nepomniachtchi appeared to acknowledge this in his comments after the match.

"I guess I had a chance and many promising positions," he said, in comments posted by FIDE. "Probably I should have tried to finish everything in the classical portion, because it was a matter of one or two precise moves."

### Rise to stardom

Born in Wenzhou, which has become known as China's "chess city", Ding burst onto the scene in 2009 when he became the country's youngest chess champion at national level. He then became the highest-ranked Chinese player in the world rankings, reaching a high of second place in 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic held back Ding's progress and he initially failed to obtain a visa for competitions leading to qualification for the Candidates

March 28, 2023, where the IOC says that the status of neutral athletes can only be granted to those athletes who are not military personnel."

IOC president Thomas Bach said last month that Russians and Belarusians banned from international competition would include "athletes who actively support the war" as well as "athletes who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies".

Athletes from Russia and Moscow ally Belarus have faced sanctions from a multitude of sports since Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year. As Moscow's assault on Ukraine stretches into a second year, the IOC recommended allowing athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete as individual neutrals in upcoming international competitions.



**ASTANA:** Grandmaster Ding Liren from China competes during the first game of a 14-game match at the new 17th World Chess Champion in Astana. —AFP

Tournament, which players must win to challenge the world champion.

The disqualification of Russia's Sergey Karjakin from all tournaments organised by the International Chess Federation, which took a pro-Ukraine position following Moscow's invasion, freed up a space at the 2022 Candidates Tournament which Ding took as the highest-ranked non-qualifier. He finished second at the tournament, but Carlsen's decision to step aside from the World Chess Championship allowed him to compete against Nepomniachtchi in Astana.

At Sunday's closing news conference, Ding said he wanted to dedicate the victory to his friends, mother and grandfather. "I started to learn chess from four years old... I spent 26 years playing, analysing, trying to improve my chess ability with many different ways, with different changing methods, with many new ways of training," he said.

"I think I did everything. Sometimes I thought I was addicted to chess, because sometimes without tournaments, I was not so happy. Sometimes I struggled to find other hobbies to make me happy. This match reflects the deepness of my soul." The two-million-euro (\$2.2-million) prize money will be split 55-45 between the two players. —AFP

## Ukraine withdraws from Judo worlds

**KYIV:** Ukraine on Monday pulled its team from the World Judo Championships in Qatar over the presence of Russian athletes it argued were active soldiers. The International Judo Federation (IJF) gave judokas from Russia and Belarus the green light to compete at the May 7-14 championships in Doha on the proviso they compete as individual neutral athletes.

But the Ukrainian judo federation said in a statement that "the majority of the (Russian)

The IOC says however it is yet to make a decision on whether Russians can take part at the Paris Olympics next year. The announcement, made late last month, angered Ukrainian authorities, who have accused the global body in charge of Olympics of promoting war.

But Moscow has condemned what it says is "discrimination on the basis of nationality" and says all athletes must be allowed to compete. The standoff between Kyiv and the IOC points to the widening fallout of the conflict and how sports bodies are facing pressure to appease both Moscow and Kyiv or find a fine line of neutrality.

Russian missile attacks across Ukraine early Monday wounded 34 people in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, including children, regional authorities said. —AFP

Sports

# Record-breaking Bruins suffer shock playoff exit at hands of Panthers

‘What an unbelievable effort, it is one of those legacy games for our team and our franchise’

WASHINGTON: After a record-breaking regular season, the Boston Bruins crashed out of the Stanley Cup playoffs at the first hurdle, suffering a stunning defeat to the unfancied Florida Panthers with a game seven overtime 4-3 loss on Sunday.

Boston had the most successful regular season in NHL history, with a record 65 triumphs and an unprecedented 135 points. But that counted for nothing as they were dumped out of the post-season on home ice by a Panthers team that was the eighth seed in the East.

“It really is the biggest upset in NHL history, to every single person other than those in that (locker) room,” said Panthers winger Matthew Tkachuk, whose game five overtime winner started their remarkable comeback in the series.

“What an unbelievable effort, it is one of those legacy games for our team and our franchise, we just did what nobody in the world thought we could do.” Boston had been 3-1 up in the best-of-seven series but needing just another win, they lost the last three games.

Adding to the agony, the Bruins had come back from 2-0 down on Sunday to lead 3-2 with one minute remaining, only for Brandon Montour’s one-timer to force overtime. Carter Verhaeghe then scored at 8:35 in overtime to silence the raucous crowd in the TD Garden and prompt wild on-ice celebrations from the visiting Panthers.

It was also the start of what will be a painful

post-mortem for the Bruins. “The way it ended, it didn’t matter how it ended, the season is over,” said Bruins coach Jim Montgomery. “I guess the words that come to mind right now are disappointment, confusion.”

Despite the stunning exit, Montgomery said he was proud of what the team had been able to achieve. “The other part is if you start looking at the season, it was an honor to coach that group. I know we didn’t get to where we wanted, I get that, but their professionalism, work ethic and commitment was a joy to be around,” he said.

The future of the Bruins’s pair of 37-year-olds—captain Patrice Bergeron, who skated to center ice to acknowledge the team’s fans after the game and Czech David Krejci—remains uncertain after the loss. Asked whether this was the end of their time with the club, Montgomery said: “I’ve no idea, that’s up to them”. The Panthers will now face the Toronto Maple Leafs in the Eastern Conference second round.

Panthers head coach Paul Maurice had no doubt about the magnitude of his team’s achievement. “I don’t think you can find a harder team to play against than the Boston Bruins, they are just that good. There isn’t a weakness in their game,” he said.

“The players now have a shared experience of what heart is. We will cut that video, keep that video and use it at training camp and it will make us better for five years, that’s how hard it was.” —AFP



BOSTON: Aaron Ekblad #5 of the Florida Panthers defends Dmitry Orlov #81 of the Boston Bruins during the first period in Game Seven of the First Round of the 2023 Stanley Cup Playoffs at TD Garden on April 30, 2023. —AFP

## Alcaraz sets up Zverev French Open revenge

MADRID: World number two and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz on Sunday set up a Madrid Open last 16 duel with Alexander Zverev, the German rival who handed him a heartbreaking, reality-check defeat at Roland Garros last year. Alcaraz defeated Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria 6-2, 7-5 in the Madrid third round as he continues his bid to win a 10th tour title before his 20th birthday.

The Spanish crowd-pleaser was briefly troubled when 31-year-old Dimitrov broke for a 4-2 lead in the second set. However, that merely delayed the inevitable as Alcaraz wrapped up victory in 90 minutes, making just four unforced errors. It was his 25th win of 2023 against just two losses and a 15th victory on clay.

The 19-year-old swept past Zverev in the Madrid final in 2022 for the loss of just four games. However, just weeks later, the German claimed a four-set victory in the French Open quarter-finals. That was Zverev’s third win in the pair’s four meetings. “I really want to play that match. We played a few times,

head-to-head he is up,” said Alcaraz.

“I really want to show my great level here in front of my home crowd. I have great memories from last year in the final but obviously I have to be really focussed in that match. He added: “I know that Sascha is a really good player, a really aggressive one with good serves. I have to show all my skills.”

Two-time Madrid champion Zverev needed just 56 minutes earlier Sunday to dispose of France’s Hugo Grenier 6-1, 6-0 on the back of six breaks of serve and 26 winners. “With Carlos it will be a match-up people will look forward to,” said 16th-ranked Zverev.

“We played in the final here last year, played a massive match at Roland Garros before I got injured (in the semi-final against Rafael Nadal).” Spain’s Alejandro Davidovich Fokina topped world number seven Holger Rune 7-6 (7/1), 5-7, 7-6 (7/5).

Rune, who turned 20 on Saturday, had saved a match point in the previous round against Alexander Bublik. But it was Davidovich Fokina who came through the tight encounter to line up a clash with Borna Coric for a place in the last eight.

World number one Iga Swiatek claimed she had endured a “tricky” afternoon despite easing to a straight-sets win over American left-hander Bernarda Pera to reach the



MADRID: Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball to Bulgaria’s Grigor Dimitrov during their 2023 ATP Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament singles match at the Caja Magica in Madrid. —AFP

last 16 of the women’s tournament in the Spanish capital.

Swiatek, warming up for the defence of her French Open title, claimed a 6-3, 6-2 win for a sixth consecutive victory on clay this season.

### ‘Tricky’

“I wouldn’t say it was easy. Every match is tricky here,” Swiatek said after her 75-minute outing. “I’m happy that I’m getting my rhythm. Playing against a lefty is never easy... but I’m pretty happy that I

was disciplined and focused.”

Swiatek next faces 16th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova who came from a set down to see off Zheng Qinwen of China. Also progressing to the fourth round was world number three Jessica Pegula, who clinched a gruelling 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) victory over Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic.

Pegula, 29, made the final in Madrid in 2022 where she lost to Ons Jabeur. She will now tackle Italy’s Martina Trevisan on Monday for a quarter-final spot. —AFP

## Japanese figure skater Takahashi retires with partner

TOKYO: Japanese figure skater Daisuke Takahashi, who became the first Asian man to win a world title in 2010, announced his competitive retirement with ice dance partner Kana Muramoto on Monday. The 37-year-old Takahashi claimed the men’s singles world title in Turin ahead of Canada’s Patrick Chan and France’s Brian Joubert, one month after winning bronze at the Vancouver Olympics.

He retired from competition in 2014 but returned four years later, then switched to ice dance in 2020 with Muramoto as his partner. The pair, nicknamed “Kanadai”, competed at this year’s world figure skating championships in Saitama, north of Tokyo, before representing Japan at the World Team Trophy in Tokyo last month.

They said in a video posted on their Instagram account that they were “looking for a good time to announce” their retirement from competition. “Now is the time to announce it,” Takahashi said. Takahashi competed at three Winter Games, and his bronze in 2010 was Japan’s first-ever figure skating Olympic medal in men’s singles.

He also won two silver medals at the world championships. The 30-year-old Muramoto competed in ice dance at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics with former partner Chris Reed, finishing 15th. —AFP

## Rugby Australia chief quits ahead of WCup

SYDNEY: Rugby Australia boss Andy Marinos resigned Monday four months out from the World Cup in France, saying it was time to move on after returning the organisation to profit. The Zimbabwe-born 50-year-old was appointed chief executive in late 2020 after five years running the southern hemisphere governing body SANZAAR.

His departure comes a week after the gov-

erning body announced it had returned the business to profit for the first time in four years. Marinos was widely seen as instrumental in helping revive the once cash-strapped organisation.

“The foundations have been established and the business is now well-prepared to test the market for private equity investment, making it the right time for me to move on,” said Marinos in a statement. “Importantly, I will leave with the knowledge that RA is in a stronger position than when I joined, and proud of what has been achieved in my tenure as CEO.”

Australia has been mulling following New Zealand Rugby’s lead and seeking private equity investment to shore up the game’s financ-

es further. US private equity firm Silver Lake secured a NZ\$200 million (US\$134 million) stake in the famed All Blacks last year.

Local media said Wallaby great and RA board member Phil Waugh was a frontrunner to take over, with Marinos to remain until mid-June to assist with the transition. RA chairman Hamish McLennan said Marinos had helped re-establish rugby union as a sport to be reckoned with in a crowded landscape of rugby league, Australian Rules, cricket and football.

“We asked Andy to draw upon his impressive career experience and extensive global relationships to re-establish rugby as a leading code in Australia,” he said. “He has delivered on this and been fundamental in the turnaround of the business.” —AFP



Andy Marinos

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Announcement

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons for General Trading & Contracting Co. would like to attract the attention of its customers who have given their devices for repair at the Al-Yousifi Service Center located in Ardiya Industrial Area until **31-03-2023** and did not yet come and collect their devices till this date, to urgently contact Al-Yousifi Service Center on **1809809** in order to collect their devices within a period of only 2 weeks from the date of this Ad. The company will not be responsible under any matter in the future for these devices after the mentioned grace period is over.

Al-Yousifi Service Center  
**1809809**

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:  
Call MSAL hotline 128

### Change of Name

**I, SARRAH**, holder of Indian Passport No. T1942619 issued at Embassy of Indian, Kuwait. I am a permanent resident of Dungepur Rajasthan, India and presently residing in Kuwait hereby declare my given name is SARRAH and surname is SHAKIR. **(#3517) 1/5/2023**

**I, HAJA MYDEEN MOHAMED HUSSAIN**, holder of Passport No. L4533271, do hereby change my name to JAHIR HUSSAIN (as given name) HAJAMAIDEEN (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known as in the name JAHIR HUSSAIN HAJAMAIDEEN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3516) 1/5/2023**

**I am Rajendra Suthar**, father of Gopalji Suthar, resident of Bankoda Tehsil Aspur district, Dungarpur and I am known and recognized

by both name Rajendra Suthar and Rajendra Gopalji Sharma. Both names are my own and there is no other person with this name. **(#3515) 1/5/2023**

**I, YAQOOB**, holder of Indian Passport No. T8206521, having permanent address Ward No. 30 Mohalla Hussaini Chowk P.O. Fatehpur Sikar Pin: 332301, Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as YAQOOB and Surname SAYYED. **(#3514) 1/5/2023**

**I Fakhruddin**, holder of Passport No. Z5712375, do hereby change my name to Fakhruddin (as given name) Shamash Ali (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Fakhruddin Shamash Ali and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

Automated enquiry about the CivilID card is 1889988

## Curry hits 50 as Warriors advance

### Butler ankle injury raised tensions for the triumphant Miami Heat

NEW YORK: Stephen Curry scored 50 points in a record-shattering performance Sunday to send the defending champion Golden State Warriors into the second round of the NBA playoffs while a Jimmy Butler ankle injury raised tensions for the triumphant Miami Heat.

Curry, a four-time NBA champion and two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, was nearly unstoppable as the Warriors won 120-100 at Sacramento to capture their best-of-seven Western Conference series 4-3.

"I just wanted to come out and look for shots early, get my teammates going throughout the game," Curry said. "But when I'm looking for shots, it usually works in our favor." The 35-year-old guard delivered an incredible performance, hitting 20 of a career-high 38 shot attempts and going 7-of-18 from 3-point range and 3-of-5 from the free throw line.

"It was about being aggressive," Curry said. "I got 38 shots for a reason. We started to see where the holes were and I could be ultra aggressive and it worked." Curry also added eight rebounds and six assists.

"Steph was elite. He put these guys on his back and said, 'We're not losing,'" Kings coach Mike Brown said. "Give Steph a ton of credit for doing exactly what he's supposed to do. Heck of a performance." Curry's 50 points were a career playoff high and the most points in any NBA game seven — breaking the old mark of 48 set by Kevin Durant for Brooklyn in a 2021 loss to Milwaukee.

"What an incredible all-time performance," Curry's backcourt teammate Klay Thompson said. "This is a game seven I'll forever remember as the Steph Curry game." The Warriors next face LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers in a Western Conference semi-final matchup starting on Tuesday. Golden State faced a James-led Cleveland in four straight NBA Finals, winning three of them.

"It's special from the first series we played him in Cleveland," Curry said. "We're blessed to be playing at this level still and excited about a new chapter." In Sunday's other playoff contest, Butler scored 25 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to lead Miami over the host New York Knicks 108-101 in their Eastern Conference second-round opener but suffered a right ankle injury.

The series continues Tuesday at New York but Butler's status will steal the spotlight until then. "No idea," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "You just don't know



SACRAMENTO: Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors dribbles against Keegan Murray #13 of the Sacramento Kings during the fourth quarter in game seven of the Western Conference First Round Playoffs at Golden 1 Center on April 30. — AFP

with ankle sprains. I don't even know if we will know more by tomorrow. We'll just have to wait and see. It will be a waiting game."

Asked how the ankle felt, Butler said, "Like a rolled ankle." At Sacramento, the Kings had no answer for Curry in the winner-take-all battle. After 20 first-half points, he pressed the attack in the third quarter as the Warriors pulled away along with Kevon Looney, who grabbed 21 rebounds.

"It's huge for us," Curry said. "In each series he makes an impact. It's not loud. It's all the dirty work and we love him for it." Thompson completed a four-point play with 1.4 seconds remaining in the third quarter to give Gold-

en State a 91-81 edge entering the fourth. The Warriors stretched the lead to 104-83 with 6:30 remaining and cruised from there. Domantas Sabonis led the Kings with 22 points but had only six in the second half.

#### Heat sizzle late

There was an intense atmosphere at Madison Square Garden, which had not seen a second-round playoff contest since 2013. The game and Butler's ankle turned when Butler fell to the court with the Heat up 95-92 and 5:05 to play.

As Butler planted his right foot to drive to the basket, falling Knicks defender Josh Hart's foot struck Butler's

foot. Butler limped to the bench but returned to make two free throws and remained in the game.

"He did not want to come out of the game so we left him in," Spoelstra said. Often standing in a corner far from the run of play, Butler was largely stationary. "Find a way to win," Butler said of his reason for staying on the court. "Be out there. Be a presence. I didn't do too much except airball a three. But I'll take the dub (W)."

Butler's teammates stepped up. Gabe Vincent made a 3-pointer and Bam Adebayo and reserve Kyle Lowry, who scored 12 of his 18 in the second half, added hoops in a pivotal 7-0 run for a 104-94 Miami edge. — AFP

## PSG lead in Ligue 1 cut after defeat

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's lead at the top of Ligue 1 was cut to five points on Sunday after Achraf Hakimi was sent off in their 3-1 home defeat by Lorient and nearest rivals Marseille beat Auxerre 2-1. Mid-table Lorient were already ahead through Enzo Le Fee's early goal at the Parc des Princes before Hakimi was dismissed for a second yellow card inside the opening 20 minutes. Kylian Mbappe equalized for the home side in opportunistic fashion, pouncing to score after Lorient goalkeeper Yvon Mvogo had thrown the ball to the ground wrongly thinking the referee had blown for a free-kick.

Yet Lorient deservedly retook the lead before half-time when Darlin Yongwa converted from close range, and they made sure of the win late on when Bamba Dieng ran through unchallenged to score at the second attempt after Gianluigi Donnarumma had stopped his shot. The final whistle was met with loud jeers from the home support in a stadium where one end was closed as a punishment after fans let off flares during a recent defeat by Lyon. It was PSG's sixth Ligue 1 loss of 2023 and it allowed Marseille to close in, casting new doubt on the capital club's quest to win a French record 11th league title.

#### Marseille win

Marseille came from behind to win at home to Auxerre, with Cengiz Under's 75th-minute strike cancelling out Birama Toure's opener for their relegation-threatened opponents. Alexis Sanchez then clinched all three points for Marseille on 77 minutes with his 13th league goal this season. Third-placed Lens will move to within six points of PSG if they beat Toulouse away in midweek. "Our second half of the season has been very, very average. Too many players seem distracted," said PSG coach Christophe Galtier, who called Hakimi's second yellow card "really stupid".

## Atletico put five past Valladolid to close on Real Madrid

MADRID: Atletico Madrid moved back within two points of second-placed Real Madrid in La Liga after surviving a Real Valladolid comeback in a 5-2 victory on Sunday. Goals from Nahuel Molina, Jose Maria Gimenez and Alvaro Morata had visitors Atletico 3-0 ahead inside 38 minutes.

Valladolid hit back through a Cyle Larin penalty and Sergio Escudero's goal, but Atletico sealed victory thanks to Joaquin Fernandez's late own goal and an injury-time strike from Memphis Depay. Atletico have little to play for in La Liga, sitting 13 points behind leaders Barcelona and 13 clear of fifth-placed Villarreal. But Diego Simeone's men are finishing the season strongly and aiming to take second from Real.

They have won eight of their last nine league games, with the only blip a 1-0 loss at Barca. Earlier on Sunday, Valencia's bid to avoid slipping out of La Liga for the first time since 1987 suffered another

"Everyone in the dressing room is disappointed, and what I expect now is a reaction from everyone, from the players, the staff and everyone who works for the club," Luis Campos, who is effectively PSG's sporting director in his role of football advisor, told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"There must be a reaction and we have to win the title. I am sure we will do it but we need to make sure we don't lose our heads. We need to be conscious of the fact we can do better and must do better."

PSG, who had Neymar watching in the stands as he continues his recovery from an ankle injury, had not lost a home league game while conceding three goals since October 2010. That was the final season before the Qatari takeover that transformed the club.

PSG's next four games are against Troyes, Ajaccio, Auxerre and Strasbourg, four clubs who are either in the relegation zone or fighting to avoid the drop. Marseille and Lens also play each other next weekend, and it remains highly unlikely that the Parisians might fail to retain their league crown.

#### Monaco lose heavily

Monaco's hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League were dealt a new blow in a comprehensive 4-0 home defeat against Montpellier. Arnaud Nordin scored twice for Montpellier, with Foutou Maouassa and English former Arsenal winger Stephy Mavididi also on target.

It was a second successive heavy defeat for Monaco, after they went down 3-0 at Lens last weekend. They remain fourth in the table, five points behind third-placed Lens. Only the top three in Ligue 1 qualify for the Champions League with the team in fourth going into the Europa League alongside the winners of the French Cup.

Toulouse won the French Cup on Saturday with a crushing 5-1 win over holders Nantes in the final watched by over 78,000 at the Stade de France. Rennes, who are sixth, boosted their hopes of qualifying for Europe by beating bottom side Angers 4-2 on Sunday with Belgium's Jeremy Doku scoring twice. — AFP

blow with a 2-1 loss at fellow strugglers Cadiz.

Valencia are now only two points and one place above the drop zone, although Espanyol's 1-0 win over Getafe prevented the six-time Spanish champions from falling into the bottom three. Ruben Baraja's side are two points clear of both 18th-placed Espanyol and second-bottom Getafe in the relegation dog-fight.

Cadiz moved above Valencia with their win and sit four points clear of danger. The visitors were sunk by two goals either side of half-time from Gonzalo Escalante and Sergio Guardiola for Cadiz. Samuel Lino pulled one back but Valencia failed to mount a comeback and now need a response against Villarreal in midweek.

Villarreal gave their slim hopes of qualifying for the Champions League a boost with a 3-1 victory over Celta Vigo to move within five points of fourth-placed Real Sociedad. Senegalese youngster Nicolas Jackson scored twice as the Yellow Submarine also edged four points clear of Real Betis to strengthen their grip on the Europa League spot.

Betis were beaten 4-0 by Barcelona at the Camp Nou on Saturday as the Catalan giants maintained their 11-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of the table with six games to play. Espanyol ended a dreadful run of seven defeats and one draw in eight games thanks to Joselu's first-half penalty against Getafe. — AFP

## China's EV Market: Capitalizing on Western Divisions and Emerging as a Global Player



By Abdulaziz Al-Anjari  
Founder & CEO  
Reconnaissance Research



I recently encountered an Auto Express article by Andy Palmer, a renowned figure in the automotive world, discussing how BYD, a Chinese automaker, has surpassed Volkswagen to become China's top-selling car brand for the first time in history. He also emphasizes the role of government subsidies in the success of China's EV manufacturers.

It's crucial to acknowledge that governments globally often support their industries, with countries such as the United States, South Korea and the United Kingdom actively engaging in these practices. While this assistance has benefited numerous industries, some have faced obstacles, and a few have even encountered significant failures.

For example, the US government granted Solyndra, a clean energy company, a \$535 million loan guarantee in 2009 as part of the Obama administration's clean energy initiative, only for the company to declare bankruptcy in 2011. South Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding faced financial turmoil in 2015, prompting government intervention and financial aid.

Fisker Automotive, another recipient of a US government loan guarantee, filed for bankruptcy in 2013. Cases like these, as well as British Leyland and

Rover Group in the UK, demonstrate that government subsidies don't ensure success. Thus, BYD's accomplishments, driven by innovative thinking, should not be diminished by state subsidies.

China's significant progress in the EV market poses a challenge to the traditional Western dominance. However, it's worth noting that the UK, Europe and the West in general have somewhat hindered their progress through internal disputes and partisan conflicts over the past decade. These distractions have shifted focus and resources away from sustainable growth, inadvertently providing China an opportunity to strengthen its economy.

Additionally, concerns about China's control over vital raw materials like lithium and cobalt should motivate countries to diversify their supply chains and explore alternative technologies. This strategy could reduce reliance on a single source and foster innovation in the sector. In conclusion, I believe China's emergence can bring promising growth prospects and access to new possibilities and partnerships, particularly in regions that have historically enjoyed limited privileges, such as Asia and the Middle East.

