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**6** Gazans fret amid rubble of homes flattened by fighting



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# Baghli: Kuwait first in Gulf in achieving gender equality

## Women's empowerment hailed as Kuwaiti Women's Day marked

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Childhood's Affairs Mai Al-Baghli highlighted the state's empowerment of Kuwaiti women on Tuesday, noting Kuwait is first among Gulf states in achieving gender equality. She added Kuwait looks forward to reaching the goal of increasing women's active participation in the state's development plans. Baghli also affirmed the political leadership's interest in the role of women in society and supporting their empowerment in decision-making positions in the country. This came in a speech delivered by Baghli during the launch of an event organized by the ministry on the occasion of Kuwaiti Women's Day, which is marked on May 16 every year.

The event was held under the slogan 'Empowering Kuwaiti Women' in the presence of a number of officials. Baghli said the participation of the ministry aims to highlight the achievements of Kuwaiti women in various fields alongside men, in addition to activating their role in civil society organizations. "This year's celebration is characterized by the participation of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, which is concerned with enhancing the role of women, highlighting their capabilities and encouraging them to engage in development programs and activities in an integrated system with the sectors of the ministry of social affairs," she added. Baghli expressed pride in the status enjoyed by

Kuwaiti women in recent years, which made the country the first in the Gulf in achieving gender equality. Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Mutairi said during the event that the ministry, through its projects, seeks to empower women, noting that it is a cornerstone of society. He said the issue of women empowerment receives great attention from several sides, indicating the country's development plan includes a government program to empower women, in addition to the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the Department of Family Care and other sectors interested and working in this regard.



Mai Al-Baghli

## Hawrah Al-Yakoob appointed Marketing, Advertising Manager



Hawrah Al-Yakoob

KUWAIT: Hawrah Samir Al-Yakoob has been appointed as Executive Director for Marketing and Advertising at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News. Yakoob has long experience in the field, as she has worked in high-profile companies including Zain and Alghanim Industries. Yakoob has a Bachelor's degree in Communications and Professional Writing with specialty in Advertising from York University in Toronto, Canada.

## Abbas calls to suspend Zionist entity as Nakba commemorated at UN

NEW YORK: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called for the Zionist entity to end its "aggression" against Palestinians or be suspended from the United Nations during a speech marking the 75th anniversary of the Nakba on Monday. More than 760,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948 when the Zionist entity was created, an event Palestinians call Nakba, or catastrophe, and mark on May 15.

The United Nations is commemorating Nakba at its headquarters in New York this year for the first time, after a resolution was passed in November. "We demand today officially, in accordance with international law and international resolutions, to make sure that (the Zionist entity) respects these resolutions or suspend (the Zionist entity's) membership of the UN," Abbas said during an hour-long speech.

Abbas, whose "State of Palestine" has observer status at the UN, spoke in Arabic at a special

Continued on Page 6



NEW YORK: People attend an observation of the 75th anniversary of the Nakba in the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations on May 15, 2023. (Inset) Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas attends the observation. — AFP

## Residence of head of Kuwait military office in Sudan attacked

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry announced on Monday that the residence of the head of the military office at the Kuwaiti embassy in Khartoum was stormed and ransacked. In a statement, the ministry expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the attack and all forms of violence and sabotage, especially those targeting diplomatic missions and their buildings.

## Court to look into petition to stop elections

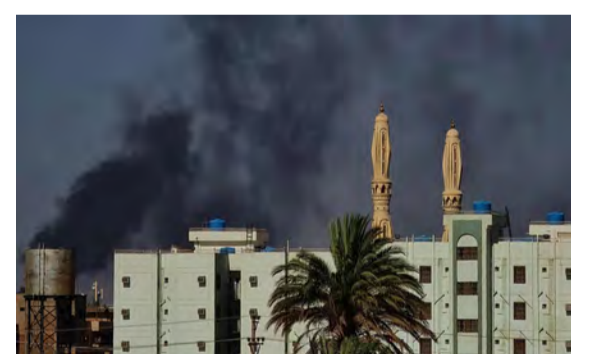
By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The court of first instance is due to look on Wednesday into a petition calling for halting the general polls scheduled for June 6 until the constitutional court had heard another petition demanding the revival of the scrapped 2022 National Assembly. Six members of the 2022 Assembly, elected last year but scrapped by the constitutional court on March 19, submitted a petition last week urging the court to review its decision, saying it had violated the law.

It dismissed such assaults as a flagrant violation of all international norms, rules of international law and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961. The ministry renewed its call to official authorities and all concerned parties in the sisterly Republic of Sudan to quickly take necessary measures to provide full protection to diplomatic missions' staff, buildings and properties. It stressed the need to bring to account perpetrators of these attacks.

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi and President of the Arab Parliament (AP) Adel Al-Asoumi expressed Monday their strong condemnation and denunciation of the attack and sabotage. In a statement, Budaiwi stressed the necessity of respecting

Continued on Page 6



KHARTOUM: Smoke billows above buildings in southern Khartoum amid ongoing fighting between the forces of two rival generals on May 16, 2023. — AFP

orandum to the minister of justice ahead of forming a committee that will supervise the election process, the society said the committee should allow representatives of candidates to perform their duties.

It also called to guarantee the right of all candidates to see ballot papers during the manual counting of votes and provide screens to show the ballot papers in a very clear way. It called for opening offices of area police stations to allow candidates and their representatives to file complaints against any violations. It also called for installing video cameras to show the results of the counting.

Meanwhile, the Shammar tribe celebrated late Monday night the release from jail of around 27 tribesmen who were serving a two-year jail term for taking part in outlawed tribal primary elections. They included former MP and current candidate Marzouq Al-Khalifa. The men were released by an Amiri pardon issued by the government on Monday.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Philippine delegation in Kuwait

KUWAIT: An official Philippine delegation arrived in Kuwait to discuss solutions after Kuwait suspended visas for Filipino workers. The meetings will tackle outstanding issues, foremost of which is the problem of overcrowding at the embassy shelter of female workers, whose numbers have reached hundreds. The meetings will also discuss resolving labor disputes, financial rights, nonpayment of salaries or end-of-service benefits and confiscation of workers' civil IDs or passports.

#### Qatar awards \$10bn contract

DOHA: State-owned QatarEnergy on Tuesday said it awarded a contract worth around \$10 billion to a joint venture of France's Technip Energies and Consolidated Contractors Company for a landmark natural gas field. — AFP (See Page 8)



# Cabinet hails partnership with UN, blasts Zionists

## Kuwait reiterates firm stance against violence, terrorism

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet has lauded the effective strategic partnership between Kuwait and the United Nations and pledged continued support to the international organization and its efforts and brilliant endeavors in various regions of the world. The Cabinet, in its weekly meeting, also expressed immense pride and appreciation for the United Nations on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Kuwait's accession to the international organization in 1963, according to a statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel following the meeting which was chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

It hailed the joint cooperation in a variety of domains, especially in the humanitarian and development fields as well as the efforts to maintain international peace and security. The Cabinet renewed Kuwait's commitment to principles of the UN Charter which forms a solid basis for international multilateral action that governs and regulates relations between the countries of the world.

The Kuwaiti government also congratulated Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, on the occasion of the first anniversary of his assumption of power. It admired the great development and civilizational achievements witnessed by the UAE in various domains, expressing great pride in the deep-rooted historical and fraternal relations that unite the two peoples and the two countries.

The Cabinet took note of the recommendation of the Economic Affairs Committee regarding the report submitted by the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing on the efforts of the concerned authorities to prepare



**KUWAIT:** Cabinet meeting was chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

for the upcoming evaluation process for the State of Kuwait. It assigned the committee to intensify efforts and cooperate with other relevant bodies to achieve the international requirements in this regard.

It tasked the Kuwaiti Financial Investigation Unit — in coordination with the Civil Service Commission, the Central Agency for Public Tenders and Department of Fatwa and Legislation — to take necessary measures to facilitate the unit's contracting with relevant bodies to prepare for the next evaluation process. The Cabinet approved the proposal of the Public Authority for Sports to launch an annual National Sports Day in which institutions from all sectors participate in organizing sports, recreational and sports awareness activities.

The minister of foreign affairs briefed the Cabinet about the air bridge launched by Kuwait on May

4 for sending humanitarian and relief aid to Sudanese people. The Cabinet discussed political affairs in the light of reports related to the overall current developments in the political arena at the Arab and international levels. In this regard, the Cabinet expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the brutal aggression of the occupation forces on the Gaza Strip and the storming of the West Bank city of Nablus. It stressed Kuwait's absolute rejection of this dangerous escalation and attacks. It dismissed the repeated crimes of the occupation forces against the Palestinian people as a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

The Cabinet renewed calls on the international community and the UN Security Council to assume their responsibilities and take immediate action to stop these attacks and work to provide full civil and

legal protection for the Palestinian people in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of law international.

It expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist attack that took place on the Tunisian island of Djerba, which resulted in a number of deaths and injuries. It reiterated Kuwait's firm stance against violence and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It underlined the need to redouble international efforts to eradicate this dangerous phenomenon. The Cabinet affirmed Kuwait's solidarity with the sisterly Republic of Tunisia and support to the measures it takes to maintain its security and stability. It also voiced sincere condolences and sympathy of Kuwait to the Tunisian government and to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — KUNA

### In my view

## The cycle of time and ancient Europe



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Time has cycles, and the cycles of time lift states and bring down others, and here we recall Ibn Khaldun's description of the movement of states: he says: States rise up then collapse, and are replaced by others. The cycle then repeats itself. Historical cycles, all of them, are similar in their start and fate; the replacement is always a new state that repeats the same role, and meets the same fate. This is the end of Ibn Khaldun's statement.

But there are those who do not want to recognize the cycles of time, one of them was a deputy in the British House of Commons in 1985, I heard him requesting Prime Minister of the British government to hold Japan accountable because the balance of payments was in favor of Japan. He demanded in a condescending language that the government should bridge the gap in that balance in favor of Great Britain. Indeed, a delegation from the British government went to Japan then when they returned to their country results of the visit appeared in practice — British television showed Japanese wrestling every week and the balance of payments increased in favor of Tokyo. Japan's message was clear that Japan was greater than Britain in 1985 and that Britain has come to resemble Libya with its fondness for labels.

Today, about forty years after that lesson, we in the Gulf have still not learned its meaning. Today, we are emerging nations with the strength of youth and a strong economy. We just need leadership that forgets the recent past and remembers the distant past — the past when we were at the top of the pyramid of the world's civilization. Those of us who believe the European media, especially the English media, still believe their claims of medical discoveries, artificial intelligence and modern technologies, despite the knowledge of real scientists that the English are late in this field.

We wish to increase confidence in our scientists and doctors, search for modern developed countries, strengthen cooperation with them, and leave the old countries that still live on the memory of the past and wear the stolen crowns as an attempt to turn back the wheel of time.

## MoE to bring teachers from Jordan, Palestine

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Education plans on signing contracts with 600 teachers from Palestine and Jordan, in order to fill the shortage in schools for the next academic year 2023-2024. The number of specializations where there is need in the next year for both girls and boys schools are eight: English, French, mathematics, science, chemistry, physics, biology and geology. Only two countries, Jordan and Palestine, have been chosen as a source for the new teachers through external contracting committees, and no other nationality residing in the contracting country will be accepted.

The date of the official announcement of these contracts, the submission of applications electronically and the timing of the committees' travel has not been determined due to the circumstances that the ministry is going through and the administrative vacuum it suffers. It is expected that it will be determined after the end of the end-of-year exams and the appointment of an undersecretary.



**KUWAIT:** Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem governor Adnan Ghaith speaks at the event through video conference. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Kuwait Committee for Jerusalem marks Nakba tragedy

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Nakba, the Kuwait Committee for Jerusalem held an event titled "The Nakba, the continuing crime", in cooperation with the Women's Cultural and Social Society at Kuwait Graduates Society. During a video call, Adnan Ghaith, the Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem Governor, said: "We stand today to remember the memory of the Nakba. The occupation is still striving to obliterate the Palestinian identity."

After 75 years, the Palestinian people are still being killed. This Nakba and this tragedy have not ended, but are continued by these Zionist extremists. The occupation is changing Palestine's features, besieging it, displacing its people and assassinating its youth. There are more than six neighborhoods whose people are threatened with displacement."

Ghaith praised Kuwait's role in supporting Palestine, saying Palestinians are proud of Kuwait's efforts and support for freedom in Palestine in international forums, affirming the responsibility is on all

countries, which are the backbone of the Palestinian people, to support them with their voices and pens, standing up and telling the truth.

"The Zionists are preparing to celebrate Flag Day, while we remember the pain of the massacres. The series of crimes continue with settlements, forced displacement and ethnic cleansing, but our people will not kneel and will not surrender. Either they will live as great on their land or as great under it. We will not leave our land. Our people adhere to their just rights and will not give them up, and soon celebrate our freedom with the Arab and Islamic world in Jerusalem," he added.

"The settlements are expanding, in addition to the siege of the city and prevention of people's access to places of worship, whether Islamic or Christian. We can only remember the massacres that are committed against our Palestinian people on a daily basis. The hypocritical international community committed to stopping crimes in other countries did not lift a finger for Palestine, while the Zionists are continuing their aggression, displacement, killing and falsification of facts and history. We pledge to you that we will keep our oath, fight for the cause and protect our history and our land and its sanctity with our lives, children, ourselves, money, and all that we have," Ghaith concluded.

Talal Al-Rashoud, Professor of History at Kuwait University, shed light on the link between Kuwaiti people and the Palestinian cause throughout history. "Many are unaware that Kuwaitis have been closely



People wearing scarves representing Palestine watch a documentary screened at the event.



Palestinian women browse the art gallery on the sidelines of the event.

linked to the Palestinian national movement since the 1920s, when the Mufti of Jerusalem visited Kuwait to collect donations for the restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque," he said.

"When we remember the Nakba, we must remember all the sacrifices of the Arab nation in solidarity with Palestine, especially in Kuwait and the Gulf region, since the beginning of the Palestinian cause. It is not surprising to find, from the late twenties, poems about Palestine written by Kuwaiti writers. Kuwait was also the center of the pro-Palestinian movement in the thirties, when Kuwaitis sent letters, collected donations, held marches and smuggled weapons for the Great Palestinian Revolt," Rashoud said, noting Kuwait also included Palestine in its curricula.

## FM receives letter from Palestinian counterpart



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Al-Otaibi (right) speaks with Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub. — KUNA

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Al-Otaibi on Tuesday received Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub who presented him with a written letter from Palestine's Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki. The letter, directed to Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, focused on the bilateral relations and means to develop them on all possible domains. — KUNA



Kuwait University honors Dentistry Faculty professor Dr Fawaz Al-Zaabi. — KUNA photos



Dr Fawaz Al-Zaabi

## KU registers patent for breakthrough dental procedure

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait University (KU) on Monday completed a registration with US Patent and Trademark Office administrators dealing with an innovative procedure related to periodontal tissue responses during insertions of artificial teeth, using cutting-edge 3D technology. The breakthrough enables local physicians to easily interact with dentistry centers across the world, in addition to providing higher quality services on a local level, said Kuwait University Dentistry Faculty professor Dr Fawaz Al-Zaabi. Hailing the achievement as a source of pride, Kuwait University acting chief Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi congratulated the inventor on the creation, saying such work is appreciated and supported on a national level. — KUNA

Local

# Kuwaiti women play equal role in accelerating state development

## Success in achieving gender equality sparks hope for Gulf countries

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti women have come a long way in terms of political representation in the National Assembly. Historically, women have faced significant barriers to their participation in public life, but recent efforts have led to increased female representation in Kuwait's political field. Women in Kuwait were only granted the right to vote and hold public office in 2005. Since then, Kuwaiti women have gradually been increasing their representation in the Kuwaiti political field and proving their worth and capabilities.

For instance, Kuwait's women MPs have been active advocates for the rights and welfare of Kuwaiti women. They played a major part in introducing legislation aimed at improving gender equality in the country, such as the anti-domestic violence law passed in 2015, as well as efforts to increase maternity leave and provide additional support to working mothers. Kuwaiti women have shown resilience and determination in advocating for their rights and working towards a more inclusive and equitable society. The increasing representation of women in Kuwait is a positive trend, and offers hope for continued progress in the future.

Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Childhood Affairs Mai Al-Baghlil highlighted the state's empowerment of



Kuwaiti women hold signs demanding their rights in this file photo.



Masouma Al-Mubarak, Kuwait's first female minister.

Kuwaiti women, noting Kuwait is first among Gulf states in achieving gender equality. Baghlil also confirmed that Kuwait looks forward to reaching the goal of increasing women's active participation in the state's development plans.

In addition to providing women with the right to vote and run for office, Kuwait has implemented several measures to encourage and support women's participation in politics. In comparison to other Gulf states, Kuwait has taken great strides in empowering women and pro-

moting gender equality. This has been made possible by a series of important reforms and initiatives. Allowing women to earn their own money helped in eliminating traditional societal norms that restricted women's participation in economic activities. This law has further provided opportunities for women to hold key positions in the political field as well as public and private sectors, which were previously reserved for men.

Abdullah, a Kuwaiti citizen, looks forward to empowering Kuwaiti wom-

en and giving them their full civil rights. "Kuwait has made positive progress in empowering women through their participation in politics and the economy. With more women occupying political and leadership positions, Kuwait is well-positioned to progress even more in promoting gender equality and creating a more inclusive society. While there are still areas that require improvement, Kuwait should be commended for its efforts to support women's empowerment at different levels,

such as politics," he said. Kuwait's success in achieving gender equality sparks hope for other Gulf countries. The country has become a role model, and other countries in the region can learn from Kuwait's progressive approach. It is essential that Kuwait continues to work towards promoting gender equality and women's rights. With the state's direction towards equally supporting its female half of the society, achieving full gender equality may soon become a reality in the region.

### Kuwait Times female staff celebrated on Kuwaiti Women's Day

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Times and Kuwait News female staff have been celebrated by social media accounts of prominent entities in the country on the occasion of Kuwaiti Women's Day. Jana Al-Naqeeb, Public Relations and CSR Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, was included in a list of inspirational women posted by Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) on their Instagram account. Dhoha Al-Issa, content creator with Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, was included in a video hailing Kuwaiti women published on Instagram by Mudhawi's List, an online platform supporting women running for elected office position in Kuwait.

”جنى النقيب  
مديرة تنفيذية في الكويت  
ليز وكويت تيمز  
تدير العلاقات العامة  
والمسؤولية الاجتماعية  
“  
Jana Al Naqeb  
Executive Director in  
Kuwait News and Kuwait  
Times, she manages  
public relations and  
social responsibility.

Jana Al-Naqeeb

### Women's Day: EU envoy congratulates Kuwaiti women

By Gediminas Varanavicius, EU Delegation to Kuwait Charge d'Affaires

**KUWAIT:** Tuesday marked Kuwaiti Women's Day, a momentous occasion that celebrates the day Kuwaiti women secured their right to vote and run for office on 16 May, 2005. I would like to extend my congratulations to all Kuwaiti women on this important and historic anniversary. Kuwait has made great strides in the years since to promote women's empowerment, including a decision in 2021 allowing women to join support services in the armed forces for the first time in the country's history and another landmark decree in 2020 that saw women enter the judiciary.



Gender equality is one of the founding values of the European Union. We intend to strengthen our engagement with our Gulf partners, including Kuwait, to promote women's empowerment even further through close cooperation with the government, civil society, and the private sector. Such cooperation is in line with both the EU Gender Action Plan III and the "Strategic Partnership with the Gulf", which was released in May 2022 as a roadmap for broadening EU-GCC ties. Since opening in 2019, our delegation has organized a variety of projects as part of wider efforts to promote women's empowerment locally. Later this year, we plan on organizing a trip for a group of Kuwaiti women leaders from a variety of professional backgrounds to Brussels. The visit will offer them an opportunity to engage with EU officials and experts, visit EU institutions, gain insight into the EU's policies, as well as enhance dialogue between the EU and Kuwait. Women are key agents of development and change. Achieving gender equality and empowering women is vital to building fair, inclusive, prosperous and peaceful societies everywhere.

### Kuwaiti women need equal housing rights

**KUWAIT:** The head of the Kuwaiti National Diwan for Human Rights, Jassim Al-Mubarak on Tuesday said Kuwaiti Women's Day, which is marked on May 16, is one of the most important cultural features in Kuwait and a pioneering step forward in its institutional and legal development.

This came in a speech by Mubarak in a celebration organized by the Diwan on the occasion of Kuwaiti Women's Day, with the participation of the oil sector and faculty members from the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University.

Mubarak said: "Kuwait celebrates this occasion in order to highlight the role of women and highlight their active role in the development process. Kuwaiti women have been moving forward steadily and diligently in harmony with men."

"Kuwaiti women have come a long way in various fields of public affairs and occupied the highest leadership positions, and all these were truly the culmination of a long march of struggle for their full rights," he said, indicating that the Diwan has been working since its inception to promote human rights issues as well as to spread culture and respect for freedoms within constitutional and legal regulations.

#### Equal rights to housing

Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University, Dr. Bashaer Al-Ghanim, said during a seminar held as part of the event: "We need Kuwaiti women who are married to non-Kuwaitis to have equal access to housing care that will have a positive impact on women and their families."

She added that the right to housing is a basic right around the world as provided by the state in accordance with legal frameworks.

"This right has a gender-based differentiation that the CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has tried, indicating that the State of Kuwait is a member of this Convention, which is an indication of Kuwait's interest in women," Ghanim explained.

Kuwaiti law gives Kuwaiti women the right to housing only if they are married to a Kuwaiti, Assistant Professor at the Department of Private Law at Kuwait University Dr Latifa Al-Zamil said. That's because the Kuwaiti head of the family has the right by law, whether married to a Kuwaiti or a non-Kuwaiti, to request the Public Authority for Housing Welfare."

But that application can only be submitted by men while women are not entitled to submit a housing care application.

Zamil added that after submitting the housing care application, the family is entitled to benefit



KUWAIT: The panelists speak about Kuwaiti women's housing rights at an event organized by the Kuwaiti National Diwan for Human Rights. — KUNA photos

from the rent allowance, but under the conditions that the head of the family does not receive rent from any party, and if his employer provides him with this allowance, this allowance is not paid to him by residential care.

"If the wife receives a rent allowance of KD 150 from her employer, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare is not entitled to pay this allowance, but if it is less than that amount, the institution is informed to pay this difference between the two allowances," she added.

She said that there are obstacles that deprive spouses of the right to residential care, as registration for the application for care requires that the head of the family does not own a property with an area of more than 250 square meters or participate in the ownership of a property whose share is within this area.

#### Women are leaders

Chairman of the Standing Committee for Family Rights and member of the Board of Directors of the Diwan, Huda Al-Shayji, said: "Kuwaiti women, in light of the empowerment of the political leadership, which believes in the involvement of women, were able to anticipate and shape the future, as well as proceed in the process of sustainable development."

"Kuwaiti women have been able to achieve successes that the country is proud of and now reap their rewards internally and externally, which is evident of their unlimited success through their assumption of leadership positions in ministries and state institutions, the private sector, public benefit associations, as well as civil society institutions," she explained.



Bashaer Al-Ghanim



Latifa Al-Zamil

Shayji added that Kuwait has worked to devote efforts towards empowering women to exercise their rights and perform their duties in line with the provisions of the constitution, which guarantees women's political, social, and economic rights, as well as in line with international conventions ratified by Kuwait.

"The law establishing the Diwan included the establishment of permanent committees, including the committee on Family Rights on Women's Affairs - the most important of which are the promotion and development of the family in humanitarian, social, and economic aspects, education, health, housing, and work," she added.

She concluded by expressing her thanks to the oil sector for its cooperation with the Diwan - demonstrating the role of Kuwaiti women and their achievements in the sector throughout all its fields. She also expressed her thanks to the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University for their contributions in explaining and clarifying legislation on various topics. — KUNA

### Dr Ameenah Farhan new KFAS Director General

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) announced appointing Dr Ameenah Farhan as the new director general as of June 1, 2023. Farhan worked as an Associate Professor at Kuwait University's Physics Department Chair (1999 - 2004) and is currently working in the same position since 2018. She has also served as Vice Dean for Research and Laboratories Affairs, Faculty of Science (2004 - 2008).



She had previously assumed various positions at KFAS including as Senior Scientific Advisor (2011 - 2018), Acting Director for Research Directorate (2016 - 2018), Program Manager for Research Program (2011-2018) as well as a board member. Other positions she's assumed include the Project Leader for Kuwait Nuclear Data Center (1986-2016), Technical Advisor at Kuwait Environmental Remediation Program (KERP), Kuwait National Focal Point (KNFP) (2009 - 2011), Member and Convener of the Jaber Al-Ahmad Center for Molecular Imaging and Nuclear Medicine board (2013 - 2020), Member of the Board of Trustees for American University of Kuwait (2004 - 2014) and Jury Member for L'OREAL UNES- CO For Women in Science (FWIS) Middle East Fellowship Program. (2015 - Present).

## News in Brief

## Cardboard waste exports banned

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammed Al-Aiban issued a decision banning the export and re-export of cardboard paper waste Tuesday. The decision will be enforced for six months. Aiban's decision comes after a previous decision to stop the export and re-export of scrap iron in order to maintain stable supply of raw materials in the local market and recycle them for other uses.

## Judge in bribery case steps down

KUWAIT: Consultant Fahad Abu Sulaib stepped down from hearing a case where a member of the Municipal Council is being persecuted for bribery. Abu Sulaib referred the case file to the President of the Court of Appeal. Security authorities arrested the Municipal Council member for getting a bribe through an intermediary in exchange for completing transactions in the municipality. The Criminal Court, headed by Judge Nayef Al-Dahoum, ruled previously to imprison the Municipal Council member, in addition to a businessman for 10 years with work, fining each of them KD 360,000. He also sentenced the mediator to five years in prison and fined him KD 240,000. The defendants denied the charges.

## Violating vehicles removed, warned

KUWAIT: Public Cleanliness and Roads Occupancy Department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality Branch removed 21 abandoned vehicles, boats and mobile grocery trucks in addition to scrap containers. Fifty-six loads of trash and 16 garbage containers were replaced with new ones during a field campaign within the governorate. Municipality branch director Fahad Al-Qraifah said the aim of the campaign is to check violators and take legal action against them. He said that 134 warning stickers were placed on abandoned cars and boats to be removed within the designated period.

## Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A cat sleeps inside a plastic bag on the sidewalk at Souq Mubarakiya in Kuwait City. Hundreds of stray cats can be found roaming the streets of Kuwait in the absence of a government-funded animal shelter. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Kuwait first worldwide in obesity, second in diabetes

## Population to be at high risk if no measures are taken: Doctor

KUWAIT: Kuwait ranks first worldwide in obesity and second in diabetes rates, according to World Health Organization data aggregated by US website wisevoter.com. The figures highlight the health challenges Kuwait faces as it seeks to spread awareness among the population about healthier lifestyles.

Kuwait has a staggering 39.7 percent rate of prevalence of obesity among the population over the age of 18, ahead of the United States which has a 38.5 percent rate. The data uses Body mass index (BMI) to measure obesity. BMI can be measured in several ways. The WHO defines as a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of the person's height in meters (kg/m<sup>2</sup>).

According to the World Health Organization,

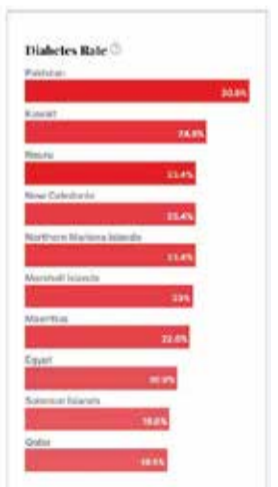
obesity is a major risk factor for a number of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease and stroke, which are the leading causes of death worldwide. Being overweight can also lead to diabetes and its associated conditions, including blindness, limb amputations, and the need for dialysis.

When it comes to diabetes, Kuwait has a 24.9 percent prevalence rate, second only to Pakistan where 30.7 percent of the population has the disease. "There seems to be a trend where countries with high diabetes rates are typically located in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands," wisevoter.com wrote. "This could be attributed to factors such as sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy diets, genetic predisposition and high rates of obesity."

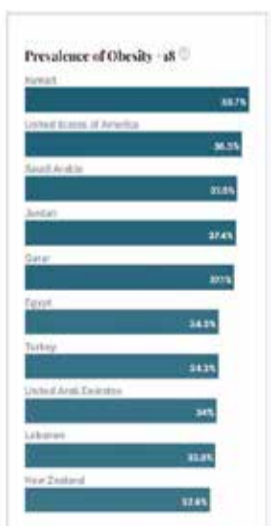
A report released by the International Diabetes Federation in November 2022 had indicated that Type 2 diabetes rates in Kuwait have reached 25.5 percent among adults. Dr Ebaa Al-Ozairi, Chief Medical Officer at Dasman Diabetes Institute had warned in March 2023 that "by 2035, if no measures are taken in Kuwait, 52 percent of adults will suffer from obesity which puts Kuwait in a very high-risk category." The country has organized several campaigns to raise awareness and curb the spread of the both conditions.

While the data aggregated by wisevoter.com matches that published by the World Health Organization in 2016, there is not much information available on wisevoter.com beyond being founded by a marketer and columnist named Ben Kaplan.

Country	Diabetes Rate
1 Pakistan	30.8%
2 Kuwait	24.9%
3 Nauru	23.4%
4 New Caledonia	23.4%
5 Northern Mariana Islands	23.4%
6 Marshall Islands	23%
7 Mauritius	22.6%
8 Egypt	20.9%
9 Solomon Islands	19.8%
10 Qatar	19.5%
11 Guam	19.1%
12 Malaysia	19%



Country	Prevalence of Obesity >18
1 Kuwait	39.7%
2 United States of America	38.5%
3 Saudi Arabia	37.6%
4 Jordan	37.4%
5 Qatar	37.1%
6 Egypt	34.2%
7 Turkey	34.2%
8 United Arab Emirates	34%
9 Lebanon	33.8%
10 New Zealand	32.8%
11 Iraq	32.3%
12 Canada	31.3%



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## Postal service customers warned of suspicious emails

KUWAIT: There have been recent reports of emails sent anonymously requesting fees for the delivery of parcels and postal shipments from customers. Official Speaker for the Ministry of Transportation, Dr Ahmed Al-Husseini, said on Tuesday.

Husseini said the messages that reach customers via e-mail are not from Kuwait Post, but are messages sent from unknown persons with the aim of stealing their money and data.

Husseini stressed that Kuwait Post notifies customers of delivery of postal freight through text messages only. A customer receiving an official

text from Kuwait Post is prompted to go to Kuwait Post's website and is allowed to choose the mechanism for receiving the postal shipment, either by attending directly to the sorting center, or choosing the delivery service.

If the customer chooses to get the parcel by delivery, they must follow instructions on the following website: (<https://KuwaitPost.moc.gov.kw>) The website will ask them to create a personal account through which payment is made in a secure manner.

"Messages that reach our valued customers via e-mail, which include links to pay directly, are a scam. The postal sector is not responsible for them and does not send e-mails," said Husseini.

Customers, he said, must verify the source of the text message by going to Kuwait Post's website <https://KuwaitPost.moc.gov.kw> or by calling the number 1880545 before interacting with the message so that they are not vulnerable to theft and data breaches.



**New Zealand hostel fire kills six**

## Women still struggling with boys' club of Greek politics

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**RAMALLAH:** A protester carries luggage symbolizing Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes 75 years ago during a rally marking 'Nakba' day in the Ramallah city center in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

# Palestinians mark 75 years since 'Catastrophe' in occupied West Bank

## More than 760,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948

**RAMALLAH:** Thousands from across the occupied West Bank demonstrated Monday, waving Palestinian flags to mark the 75th anniversary of the "Nakba" or "catastrophe" which they associate with Zionist entity's creation. According to the UN, more than 760,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948.

In Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority, protesters carried black banners that read "Return" and also raised images of old keys, a symbol of the Palestinians' plight and demand for recognition of their right to return.

Commemoration of the Nakba this year comes during heightened tensions in the Zionist entity-Palestinian conflict, which has claimed more than 170 lives on both sides since the start of the year. Thirty-five people, almost all of them Palestinian, were killed during five days of fighting between Zionist and armed groups in the blockaded Gaza Strip last week.

Zionist entity was established on May 14, 1948 following a United Nations vote in November 1947 that divided the British Mandate for Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab

state. A day after the Zionist entity declared statehood, five Arab armies attacked the young nation. In the war that ensued, the Zionist entity defeated the Arab forces.

During the conflict, more than 600 communities were destroyed or depopulated by Jewish forces, according to the Zionist organization Zochrot. Palestinians have since demanded a right to return, which Zionist entity has steadfastly denied, claiming it would be tantamount to a demographic surrender of the state's Jewish nature.

According to the United Nations, there are now 5.9 million Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Zionist entity celebrated its 75th Independence Day on April 26, according to the Jewish calendar.

### 'Respect international resolutions'

For the first time, the United Nations commemorated Nakba at its headquarters in New York on Monday, after a resolution was passed in November. Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas, whose "State of Palestine" has

UN observer status, spoke in Arabic at a special session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. "We demand today officially, in accordance with international law and international resolutions, to make sure that Zionist entity respects these resolutions or suspend Zionist entity's membership of the UN," Abbas said, referring to hundreds of UN resolutions over the years that Palestinians view as guaranteeing their rights.

During the hour-long speech he said that Nakba "did not start in 1948 and it did not stop after that date." "Zionist entity's occupying power continues its occupation and its aggression against the Palestinian people and continues to deny this Nakba and rejects international resolutions regarding the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland."

### 'Not a number'

Back in Ramallah, 64-year-old Khairy Hanun, dressed in a traditional Palestinian costume, was carrying an old suitcase and an old key, symbolizing the displacement of 1948.

"We are here to tell the occupation (Zionist entity) that it was like this that they have chased away our parents and grandparents, only with the clothes on their backs", said Hanun, resident of Tulkarm in the northern West Bank.

Within Zionist entity, about two million people — more than 20 percent of the population — are Palestinians and their descendants who remained there after the state was founded. The community of Arab-Zionist, as Zionist entity calls them, was also represented at the gathering in Ramallah.

"One of the greatest mistakes committed by the Zionist movement was that between 150,000 and 160,000 Palestinians remained (in Zionist entity) after the Nakba", said Mohammed Baraka.

"Today, we are almost two million, and we are not a number, but a testament to the national identity Zionist entity had tried to erase," Baraka said. Nohad Wahdane, whose family lived through the Nakba, said that "these commemorations are organized every year, so that young people can learn their history and not forget it." — AFP

## Mocha death toll rises to 60 in Myanmar

**BU MA:** The death toll in cyclone-hit Myanmar rose to 60 on Tuesday, according to local leaders and junta-backed media, as villagers tried to piece together ruined homes and waited for aid and support. Packing winds of up to 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour, Mocha made landfall on Sunday, downing power pylons and smashing wooden fishing boats to splinters.

In Rakhine state, at least 41 people died in the villages of Bu Ma and nearby Khaung Doka Kar, inhabited by the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority, local leaders told AFP reporters at the scene. Thirteen people were killed when a monastery collapsed in a village in Rathedaung township north of Rakhine's capital Sittwe, and a woman died when a building collapsed in a neighboring village, according to Myanmar state broadcaster MRTV.

"There will be more deaths, as more than a hundred people are missing," said Karlo, the head of Bu Ma village near Sittwe. Nearby, Aa Bul Hu Son, 66, said prayers at the grave of his daughter, whose body was recovered on Tuesday morning. "I wasn't in good health before the cyclone, so we were delayed in moving to another place," he told AFP.

"While we were thinking about moving, the waves came immediately and took us." "I just found her body in the lake in the village and buried her right away. I can't find any words to express my loss." Other residents walked the seashore searching for family members swept away by a storm surge that accompanied the cyclone, AFP correspondents said.

State media had reported five deaths on Monday, without offering details. Mocha was the most powerful cyclone to hit the area in over a decade, churning up villages, uprooting trees and knocking out communications across much of Rakhine state. China said it was "willing to provide emergency disaster relief assistance", according to a statement on the Facebook page of its embassy in Myanmar.

### 'No one has come to ask'

The United Nations refugee office said it was investigating reports that Rohingya living in displacement camps had been killed in the storm. It was "working to start rapid needs assessments in hard-hit areas" of Rakhine state, it added.

Widely viewed as interlopers in Myanmar, the Rohingya are denied citizenship and healthcare,



**SITTWE:** Local residents stand on a broken bridge at the Khaung Dote Khar Rohingya refugee camp in Sittwe, on May 15, 2023, after cyclone Mocha made a landfall. — AFP

and require permission to travel outside of their villages in western Rakhine state. Many others live in camps after being displaced by decades of ethnic conflict in the state.

In neighboring Bangladesh, officials told AFP that no one had died in the cyclone, which passed close to sprawling refugee camps that house almost one million Rohingya who fled a Myanmar military crackdown in 2017. "Although the impact of the cyclone could have been much worse, the refugee camps have been severely affected, leaving thousands desperately needing help," the UN said as it made an urgent appeal for aid late Monday.

Cyclones — the equivalent of hurricanes in the North Atlantic or typhoons in the Northwest Pacific — are a regular and deadly menace on the coast of the northern Indian Ocean where tens of millions of people live.

Non-profit ClimateAnalytics said rising temperatures may have contributed to Cyclone Mocha's intensity. "We can see sea surface temperatures in the Bay of Bengal in the last month have been significantly higher than they were even 20 years ago," said the group's Peter Pfeleiderer.

"Warmer oceans allow storms to gather power, quickly, and this has devastating consequences for people." On Tuesday, contact was slowly being restored with Sittwe, which is home to around 150,000 people, AFP reporters said, with roads being cleared and internet connections re-established.

Photos released by state media showed Rakhine-bound aid being loaded onto a ship in commercial hub Yangon. Rohingya villagers told AFP that they were yet to receive any assistance. "No government, no organization has come to our village," said Kyaw Swar Win, 38, from Basara village. "We haven't eaten for two days... We haven't got anything and all I can say is that

## Ukraine downs Russian barrage, China envoy due

**KYIV:** Ukraine said on Tuesday it had downed an entire barrage of Russian drones and missiles overnight — including six hypersonic Kinzhal missiles — hours ahead of a visit from China's special envoy. The wave of strikes came just over a week after Kyiv announced it had shot down a Kinzhal nuclear-capable hypersonic missile for the first time, using US-supplied Patriot systems.

Ukraine's mounting success in taking out dozens of Russian drones and missiles illustrates its bolstered air defences, after a winter of Moscow's strikes on key infrastructure. "Another unbelievable success for the Ukrainian air forces!" Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said in a Twitter post.

The defence ministry said Ukrainian air defence systems had knocked out a total of 18 missiles, including types the Kremlin had touted as "ideal", as well as nine drones. Three people were injured in Kyiv and some rocket fragments fell on the capital's zoo, but neither staff nor animals were hurt, Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko said. Russia said all the targets assigned by its military had been hit.

### China envoy

China's special envoy, Li Hui, was expected to arrive in Kyiv for a two-day visit as part of a European tour to promote Beijing-led peace negotiations on the war in Ukraine. A senior Ukrainian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Ukrainian authorities planned to further discuss Kyiv's stance on the conflict and China's peace mission.

"The president already said at the Vatican that we don't need mediation for the sake of mediation," the official said, referring to Zelensky's recent talks with Pope Francis. He said the same message would be relayed to Beijing's envoy. "Ending the war with a compromise at the expense of Ukraine will not work."

Li will become the highest-ranking Chinese diplomat to visit the war-torn country since Moscow's invasion last year. His trip comes three weeks after Zelensky spoke by telephone to Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Beijing has said the aim of the tour is to "communicate with all parties on the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis". Xi, who has aimed to position China as a neutral mediator and visited Moscow in March, has been criticized for refusing to condemn the Kremlin's attack on its neighbor. Li's visit follows hot on the heels of Zelensky's whirlwind tour of major European capitals to urge Ukraine's allies to increase military support.

### 'Like rats in a mousetrap'

His tour to shore up military assistance to help make his troops more battle-ready began in Italy, with weekend visits to France and Germany, followed by a stop in the



**DRAMMEN:** Ukraine's Parliament speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk (center left) poses with Norwegian Parliament speaker Masud Gharahkhani (centre right) and well-wishers as he visits Drammen, Norway on May 16, 2023. — AFP

UK. But Zelensky has yet to succeed in his goal of enlisting Western fighter jets to seize command of the skies, although UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced on Monday preparations to open a flight school to train Ukrainian pilots.

France, too, has offered to train Ukrainian fighter pilots, although President Emmanuel Macron ruled out sending warplanes to Kyiv. Nevertheless, Zelensky said late on Monday he was "returning home with new defence packages".

On the front line, fighting has picked up in the eastern Donetsk region, in particular for the battle-scarred city of Bakhmut. In recent days, Ukraine has been posting its first gains around the city in weeks and the head of Russia's Wagner paramilitary group has blasted the performance of Moscow's regular troops around the key city.

The commander of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, said on Tuesday he had visited Bakhmut to hand out awards to troops fighting in the longest battle of the invasion. "Wagner's men went into Bakhmut like rats into a mousetrap," he said.

"Using the principle of active defence, we are using counter-offensive actions in some areas near Bakhmut," he added. The British defence ministry said that "over the last four days, Ukrainian forces have made tactical progress, stabilizing the flanks of Bakhmut to their advantage".

The head of the Donetsk region, where Bakhmut is located, announced on Tuesday that five civilians had been killed and four more injured in fighting in the previous 24 hours. The conflict triggered fears of a global food crisis last year when major Ukrainian ports were blocked by Moscow's warships.

On Tuesday, Russia said it was still undecided as to whether it would renew its participation in a landmark grain export deal with Ukraine, brokered by the United Nations and Turkey and due to expire on Thursday. — AFP

## International

# Gazans amid the rubble of homes flattened by fighting

## What's my fault, that you make me pay the price?

**GAZA CITY:** After her house was levelled by an Zionist strike, Najah Nabhan wonders what will become of her and dozens of relatives left homeless by the latest fighting to hit Gaza. "I'd barely reached the street, then the house was bombed," said Nabhan, standing next to a mangled heap of concrete slabs and breeze blocks that had been the family home.

Dozens of homes were destroyed during five days of fighting, which erupted when the Zionist military launched deadly strikes on top militants from the Islamic Jihad militant group. Nabhan, 56, has been trying to care for her children and grandchildren, many of whom have disabilities, since they were left homeless on Saturday.

"I borrow clothes from the neighbors for them. I didn't take anything with me," she said, in the Bir al-Najeh neighborhood of northern Gaza. The family said they were warned in a phone call from the Zionist military that a strike was imminent, but the army did not detail why it targeted the house when asked by AFP.

In total, 103 homes were completely destroyed and 140 severely damaged in the fighting, the United Nations said Tuesday, citing officials in Gaza. Belal Nabhan, 35, earns just 10 shekels (\$2.70) a day selling parsley in the market, and said he remains in a state of shock.

"People were screaming and we ran away... now 45 people are staying here, where will they go? They need shelter," he said, indicating relatives resting

beside the rubble. Zionist entity and Palestinian militants in Gaza, which is ruled by Islamist group Hamas, have fought multiple wars in recent years.

The ruins of past conflicts — such as a three-day escalation in August which killed 49 Gazans — are dotted across the densely populated Palestinian territory. With Gaza's poverty rate at 53 percent, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, few people can afford to rebuild their homes.

### 'My dreams are gone'

In Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, children clambered atop a huge mound of concrete and rebar flattened by Zionist bombardment. In the tightly-packed neighborhood, Mohammed Zidan's home escaped a direct hit but the blast was so powerful it blew out the walls. "Because you want to strike one person, you don't need to destroy a whole apartment complex," said the 29-year-old. "I'm a young man, living in my house, with my children in my home. I'm focusing on my work. What's my fault, that you make me pay the price?" As Zidan stepped over the remains of his bedroom on Monday, Palestinians elsewhere were commemorating the Nakba, or catastrophe. It marks the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes, in the war which erupted when Zionist entity was created in 1948.

"We will stay living the life of the Nakba, continuously," said Zidan, who has taken to sleeping on the street behind his home. The Zionist mili-

### Kurds: A double-edged sword?

Kurds, a minority ethnic group representing around 10 percent of the electorate, may also come out stronger in favor of Kılıçdaroğlu. The opposition leader, himself an Alevi Kurd who represents one of Turkey's most repressed communities, was endorsed by the pro-Kurdish HDP party in late April.

But Sunday's turnout in Kurdish-majority provinces was believed to hover around 80 percent — well below the national average of almost 89 percent. Greater Kurdish support may also be a double-edged sword that makes Kılıçdaroğlu's bid for power near impossible.

One of Erdogan's attack lines was linking the opposition to outlawed Kurdish militants that have waged a deadly insurgency against the Turkish state for decades — an appeal to nationalist and conservative Turks that appeared to work.

"On balance, Kılıçdaroğlu's electoral alliance with pro-Kurdish HDP hurt him," said Washington Institute analyst Soner Cagaptay. "Some HDP voters in Kurdish-majority provinces stayed home on election day, while some Turkish nationalist voters abandoned Kılıçdaroğlu, admonishing him for allying with the HDP."

Sinan Ogan, a nationalist third candidate, picked up five percent of the vote and his support could be crucial in the second round. He is a secular nationalist, which separates him from religious conservatives who have rallied around Erdogan. But he has also campaigned strongly against "terrorism", a word that many Turkish politicians use to condemn Kurds.

"Anti-Kurdish nationalism of this line represented by Ogan... makes it very difficult for Kılıçdaroğlu to strike a deal," Kursad Ertugrul of Ankara's Middle East Technical University told AFP. Even if Kılıçdaroğlu somehow earned Ogan's backing, that would probably alienate the Kurdish vote, said Berk Esen, a political science professor at Sabanci University in Istanbul. — AFP

Jewish and Arab states.

Abbas accused the Zionist entity of having "never fulfilled its obligations and the prerequisites for its membership" of the United Nations. The Palestinian president counted "around 1,000 resolutions" adopted by the UN General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council related to the Zionist entity. "To date, not one single resolution was implemented," he said. Abbas added that Nakba "did not start in 1948 and it did not stop after that date".

"(The Zionist entity), the occupying power, continues its occupation and its aggression against the Palestinian people and continues to deny the Nakba and rejects international resolutions regarding the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland," he said. There are 5.9 million Palestinian refugees living in the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, according to the UN. The memory of the Nakba has become a rallying point for the Palestinian quest for statehood. — AFP



**BEIT LAHYA:** Photo shows Palestinian Hanin (left) and Bilal Nabhan sitting in wheelchairs atop the rubble of their family home in Beit Lahya in the northern Gaza Strip, which was destroyed in a Zionist airstrike on May 13. — AFP

tary did not immediately respond to an enquiry from AFP on why it targeted the neighborhood. A fragile ceasefire has largely held since late Saturday, ending the repeated rounds of Zionist strikes and volleys of rocket fire launched by Palestinian militants. The fighting killed 33 people in Gaza,

including children as well as militants, and two civilians. Sitting in a donated wheelchair in Bir al-Najeh, Haneen Nabhan said she fainted when she heard her home was destroyed. "I used to take medicine, but the medicine's in the rubble," she said. — AFP

## Erdogan rival faces uphill struggle in Turkey runoff

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey's secular opposition leader may have succeeded in forcing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan into his first ever runoff, but his chances of winning on May 28 are remote. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was predicted to perform well in Sunday's first round but ended up with just under 45 percent while Erdogan fell fractionally short of the 50-percent threshold required for an outright victory.

His six-party alliance now needs to accomplish seemingly impossible electoral gymnastics to unseat Erdogan, who needs just a sliver of extra support to extend his two decades in power to 2028. "The second round will be easier for us," Erdogan spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Tuesday. "There is a difference of five points, close to 2.5 million votes. It seems there is no possibility of this closing."

Mobilizing more young voters could boost Kılıçdaroğlu's prospects, with polls suggesting he will win that group by a two-to-one margin. More than five million first-time voters — who grew up knowing no leader other than Erdogan — were eligible to vote on Sunday and are deemed more likely to want change.

Kılıçdaroğlu, a 74-year-old former civil servant, tried to revive his campaign on Tuesday with a message targeted at young people. "You can't afford anything. You even have to think about a cup of coffee. Your joy of life has stolen, whereas youth is carefree," he said on Twitter. "They didn't give you that even for a day."

## Women still struggling with boys' club of Greek politics

**ATHENS:** As the credits rolled on Greek television's long-awaited election debate between the party leaders, one thing united them — they were all men. While the three battled for three hours over defence spending, unemployment and a wiretapping scandal, there is no reference to the elephant in the room, that Greek politics largely remains a man's game.

Women only acquired the vote in Greece in 1952, two decades after their British and Spanish sisters, and only one in five MPs are women, one of the lowest rates in the EU. Outgoing conservative prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has only 10 women in his cabinet of 58, and only two of them are full ministers.

In 2015, Vasiliki Thanou became the country's first female prime minister — but her tenure was purely technical and temporary before leftist Alexis Tsipras' re-election. The former head of the supreme court was in charge for nearly a month with the country on the verge of bankruptcy and facing a refugee crisis.

"The number of women involved in politics is not satisfactory", Thanou told AFP. "Perhaps Greek society is not mature enough to recognize that women have the same potential as men to assume political responsibilities," said the 72-year-old.

Things seem to change under New Democracy's Mitsotakis, whose big sister Dora Bakoyannis was first woman mayor of Athens and Greek foreign min-

ister. In 2019, his government introduced a mandatory quota of at least 40 percent of female candidates on electoral lists. A year later, his party made veteran judge Katerina Sakellariopoulou president, a largely honorific post.

But progress at the polls has been another matter. "There are (indeed) a lot of women on the ballots, but they are not elected," said New Democracy candidate Dora Palli-Petralia, whose mother was one of the party's few women ministers in the 2000s.

Even so the place of women is changing in the country of 10 million people. The belated arrival of the #MeToo movement, spearheaded by the revelations of an Olympic sailing champion who was a victim of rape, raised awareness regarding violence against women. But sexist remarks are still rife.

When the former Greek vice-president of the European Parliament Eva Kaili was held during the Qatargate corruption scandal, Greek media focused on her "beauty" and "beautiful blue eyes". Speaking to young female YouTuber Nefeli Meg last month, Mitsotakis vowed to appoint "many more" women in government if re-elected.

His main rival, leftist leader Tsipras has promised to bring parity — but his own cabinet in 2015 had just two women in its ranks. "We live in a patriarchal society, we are a Mediterranean society and many gender stereotypes persist," Stella Kasdagli, co-founder of the non-profit organization "Women on top", told AFP.

In Greece "the life of women is almost entirely defined by family tasks", in particular the education of children and frequently the care of elderly parents, she added. Despite the five million women who are eligible to vote on Sunday outnumbering men, their place in Greek politics leaves a lot to be desired. — AFP

## Abbas calls to suspend Zionist entity as ...

Continued from Page 1

session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to which dozens of UN ambassadors had been invited. According to the Zionist foreign ministry, 32 countries, including the United States, Canada, Ukraine and 10 from the European Union, did not participate.

The UN's under-secretary general for political affairs and peace building, Rosemary DiCarlo, reaffirmed the UN's "clear position" that the Zionist entity's occupation of Palestinian territories must end because it is "illegal under international law". The Zionist entity was established on May 14, 1948, following a UN vote in Nov 1947 that divided the British Mandate for Palestine into two

## WHO warns against artificial sweeteners

**GENEVA:** Artificial sweeteners, used to replace sugar in a vast range of products, do not help in losing weight and can have serious health effects, according to the World Health Organization. The United Nations' health agency released new guidelines on Monday advising against using so-called non-sugar sweeteners or NSS. A systematic review of available evidence "suggests that use of NSS does not confer any long-term benefit in reducing body fat in adults or children", the WHO said.

In addition, results from the review "suggest that there may be potential undesirable effects from long-term use of NSS, such as an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and mortality in adults". Sweeteners are consumed by millions of people every day in products like diet soda or to sweeten coffee, partly as a way to avoid weight gain from sugar. But how healthy these substitutes are has long been a matter of controversy.

The WHO's director for nutrition and food safety, Francesco Branca, stressed that replacing ordinary sugar with artificial sweeteners "does not help with weight control in the long term". "People need to consider other ways to reduce free sugars intake, such as consuming food with naturally occurring sugars, like fruit or unsweetened food and beverages," he said. "NSS are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve their health."

The WHO said its new recommendation applied to everyone except individuals with pre-existing di-

abetes. It includes all synthetic and naturally occurring or modified sweeteners not classified as sugars found in manufactured foods and beverages or sold on their own to be added to products by consumers. Among the most widely used sweeteners are acesulfame K, aspartame, advantame, cyclamates, neotame, saccharin, sucralose, stevia and stevia derivatives, it said.

Meanwhile, the UN health agency emphasized that its guidelines were considered conditional since it remained difficult to draw firm conclusions due to the diversity of participants and complexity of NSS-use seen in the studies it had examined. Some nutrition experts pointed out limitations in the WHO report, which was largely based on observational studies that cannot directly establish a causal link between sweeteners and weight or disease.

Nita Forouhi, a nutrition and epidemiology specialist at Cambridge University in the UK, emphasized that "using sweeteners can be part of interventions to manage weight in the short term". "The key takeaway is that for longer-term weight management and for chronic health conditions such as the development of future type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, the use of NSS is not advisable," she told the Science Media Centre.

Tom Sanders, professor emeritus of nutrition and dietetics at King's College London, said the review did not consider the impact of replacing sugary drinks with artificially sweetened drinks. Sanders said he thought the advice would "likely cause a lot of confusion in the public health arena", particularly in the UK, where a tax on sugar has led to drink manufacturers replacing sugar with artificial sweeteners. He added that the quality of evidence for any link between sweeteners and disease was rated as "low". — AFP

## Residence of head of Kuwait military...

Continued from Page 1

international accords and diplomatic norms that guarantee the safety of the diplomatic missions. He called on all the Sudanese parties to take immediate and urgent measures to protect diplomats and diplomatic missions.

Meanwhile, Asoumi said that the act runs counter to all international laws and norms that regulate diplomatic missions and stipulate full protection to those missions. Repeated storming of, and sabotage acts against, diplomatic and consular missions of Arab countries in the last period require action from the Sudanese authorities and all concerned parties to provide full protection to all consular and diplomatic missions and facilitate their work amid these "critical" conditions. Asoumi stressed. — KUNA



**NEW YORK:** A tribute to slain Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh is shown during an observation of the 75th anniversary of the Nakba in the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations on May 15, 2023. — AFP

## International

# New Zealand hostel fire kills six

## 80 firefighters and 20 trucks battled the blaze

WELLINGTON: A fire ripped through a four-storey hostel in New Zealand's capital in the early hours of Tuesday, killing at least six people as others fled for their lives, with some plucked from the roof. Towering flames and thick smoke could be seen pouring from the top-floor windows of the Loafers Lodge hostel in central Wellington during the night, as 80 firefighters and 20 trucks battled the blaze.

Firefighters found six bodies inside the charred building, but a roof collapse on the top floor prevented them from searching all of the 92-room hostel, emergency services said. Police said the final toll could not be confirmed until they had entered the building for a "methodical" examination once it was made safe, probably on Wednesday.

Six people were taken to hospital, one in serious condition, the city's ambulance service said. An additional 15 people were treated at the scene. More than 50 people were rescued. Firefighters used a ladder truck to save people trapped on the roof, said Fire and Emergency deputy national commander Brendan Nally.

"They plucked quite a few people off the top of the roof from an area directly above the fire," Nally told local media. "There was no other way. Those people were going to perish, except for the intervention of our team. Multiple people are walking around because of it." There were no sprinklers in the hostel, Nally said. The fire was being treated as "suspicious", Fire and Emergency New Zealand region manager Bruce Stubbs told reporters. But police stressed it would remain "unexplained" until their investigators could examine the scene.

## Leaders of wider Europe unite against Russia

REYKJAVIK: A year after kicking Russia out of the Council of Europe (CoE), the leaders of the 46-nation pan-continental rights body gather Tuesday in Iceland to show a united face against Moscow. Firming up ways to hold Russia legally responsible for the death and destruction it has wrought in Ukraine will dominate the summit in Reykjavik, only the fourth to be held in the CoE's seven-decade history. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was to address the opening of the summit by videolink, according to British officials who hosted him on the last leg of a whirlwind tour he made of major European capitals.

During Zelensky's trip, Berlin, Paris and London all pledged to step up arms deliveries to Kyiv, deepening a military arrangement between the West and Ukraine that has helped put Russia on the back foot.

Ukraine is expected to mount an offensive against Russian forces in the east of its territory in coming weeks. Zelensky tweeted on Monday that he was "returning home with new defence packages". The Council of Europe's mission is to promote human rights, democracy and rule of law in its member states, which include all 27 European Union nations plus Britain, Turkey, Western Balkan countries, Georgia and Armenia.

Russia was kicked out of the CoE in March 2022, because of its invasion of Ukraine, just ahead of its plan to withdraw from the Strasbourg-based body. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, who is attending the summit, said on Monday the EU will "keep supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes".

She said that, "in Reykjavik we will discuss how to hold Russia accountable" and "I will support the creation of a dedicated tribunal to bring Russia's crime

## Japan, China make first call on defence hotline

TOKYO: Japan and China used a new military hotline for the first time on Tuesday, their defence ministries said, following years of negotiations to set up the communication channel. Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada held a 20-minute call with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu, Tokyo's ministry said in a statement. "Hamada mentioned the existence of security concerns between Japan and China, such as the situation in the East China Sea," it said. He "stated that it is necessary to have candid communication especially when there are concerns about Japan-China relations".

Beijing confirmed the call, saying the air and maritime hotline would "contribute to further maintaining regional peace and stability". The hotline, launched on March 31, had been mooted by both sides for over a decade as a way to avert unexpected clashes in

## 16 killed in Pakistan clash over mountains

PESHAWAR: Sixteen people were killed over a decades-long land dispute between two tribes in Pakistan's coal-rich northwest, police said Tuesday. The Akhoral tribe opened fire on the Suni Khel tribe from an elevated position on Monday, police said, as the latter marked the boundaries of their territory in the mountainous area of Darra Adam Khel, less than 100 kilometres (60 miles) from the Afghan border.

"The tribes were equipped with powerful firearms, and within a matter of minutes, the violent clash had resulted in a significant number of casualties," Farhan Khan, a senior police official, told AFP. Khan said the clash followed several previous jirgas — tribal councils of elders responsible for settling disputes — that had failed to yield any resolution.

### 'I had to jump'

One of the hostel residents, Tala Sili, said smoke had rushed in under his door before he decided to jump to a roof two floors below. "I was on the top floor and I couldn't go through the hallway because there was just too much smoke, so I jumped out the window," he told Radio New Zealand.

"It was just scary, it was really scary, but I knew I had to jump out the window or just burn inside the building," Hemi Lewis, 56, still smelled of smoke as he recounted his escape from the third floor of the hostel, which had been his home for four months. "I opened my door and there was just smoke everywhere. There were flames coming from the roof. I couldn't breathe. So I hit the floor and crawled the three flights down to the bottom," he told reporters at an evacuation centre. "I have no idea what to do now, I've lost everything. It's all gone. I'm in the same clothes."

Some residents said the building's smoke alarm went off so often that they doubted it was an emergency when it rang during the night. Others said they heard nothing. About 90 people were thought to have been in the building when the blaze began, fire services said.

### 'A dark day'

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins described the fire as "an absolute tragedy". Hipkins praised the "incredible effort" of firefighters to extinguish the blaze and evacuate people. "I acknowledge the victims and their families — an absolutely tragic set of circumstances," he said, promising a "thorough review" of the disaster. "There will be an opportunity to test

of aggression to trial". Von der Leyen, Britain and the United States — which holds observer status in the CoE — all voiced backing for a new register of damage in The Hague that would record harm and destruction wrought by Russia for the mooted future court.

### Russia isolated

The commission and EU countries are in favour of setting up a special tribunal, likely in The Hague in the Netherlands where the International Criminal Court already sits, to judge Russian leaders and commanders.

That prospect, though, is pushed off to after what looks like it will be a long war, with Russia digging in and perhaps preparing its own spring attack on Ukrainian positions. The two-day Council of Europe summit will be an opportunity for almost the entire European community to portray Russia as isolated on its own continent. Emmanuel Macron of France, Rishi Sunak of Britain and Olaf Scholz of Germany are among the heads of state and government set to attend. But for



REYKJAVIK: Photo shows a ship of the Icelandic Coast Guard patrolling off the coast next to the Harpa Concert hall in Reykjavik, Iceland, the venue of the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, on the eve of the two-day summit. — AFP

the East China Sea. A territorial dispute over islets in the area known as the Senkaku by Tokyo and the Diaoyu by Beijing has long fuelled tensions between the countries. Japan, wary of its neighbor's growing military power, has publicly protested the presence of Chinese vessels around the disputed islets, and in other regions including near Okinawa.

As the world's second- and third-largest economies, China and Japan are key trading partners, and last year marked 50 years of diplomatic relations. But ties between them are often fraught, and soured in December when Japan announced a security overhaul including more defence spending, calling China its "greatest strategic challenge ever". Nonetheless, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently said he wants "constructive and stable" ties with China. Kishida met President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of a summit last year, and Japan's foreign minister visited Beijing last month — the first such trip since December 2019. This week, Kishida is hosting G7 leaders in Hiroshima, where the bloc's relationship with China will be high on the agenda. At a G7 foreign ministers' meeting in April, seen as setting the stage for the summit, the group warned Beijing over "militarization activities" in the South China Sea. — AFP

"The clash left 12 individuals from the Suni Khel tribe and four individuals from the Akhoral tribe dead, while an additional four people sustained injuries," local police spokesman Fazal Naeem told AFP.

Inter-family feuds are common in Pakistan, but in the mountainous northwestern region — where communities abide by traditional tribal honor codes — they can be particularly protracted and violent. Darra Adam Khel is a part of the Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, home to the largest coal reserves in the region, with disputes over deposits common between tribes.

Despite safety concerns and a lack of regulatory oversight, mining is a vital source of employment and income for the local community. The police said that since the shooting, the situation in the area had been brought under control with the involvement of a local jirga.

Darra Adam Khel is part of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a semi-autonomous region in northwestern Pakistan that was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018, bringing it into the legal and administrative mainstream. — AFP



WELLINGTON: Damage is seen on the Loafers Lodge hostel building following a fatal fire in Wellington on May 16, 2023. At least six people have been killed in a fire that erupted in the early hours of Tuesday. — AFP

whether this building was fully compliant with all of the rules that it needed to be compliant with but obviously the focus at the moment is supporting our firefighters," Hipkins said.

The New Zealand leader said many shift workers were staying in the hostel, making it difficult to know how many people were in the building. Wellington Mayor Tory Whanau said the hostel was home to

all the projected unity there are fissures in the European community.

Britain, for instance, is antagonistic towards the CoE's European Convention of Human Rights, which is a barrier to its plans to stem the irregular arrival of asylum-seekers by deporting them to Rwanda or returning them to transit European countries.

The convention is backed by a European Court of Human Rights which has made rulings that have already stymied Britain's efforts in that direction. "It is clear that our current international system is not working, and our communities and the world's most vulnerable people are paying the price," Sunak said late Monday.

Britain's ruling Tories, who took their country out of the European Union after a Brexit referendum, are determined to fight what they describe as "the scourge of illegal migration". The leaders' gathering is also a key moment for the heads of European heavyweights Germany, France, Italy and Britain to meet before a G7 summit starting Friday in Japan. — AFP

## Iraq lays to rest 78 killed by IS found in mass grave

NAJAF: Funerals were held Tuesday in Iraq for 78 people killed by the Islamic State group in 2014 and uncovered in a mass grave, in one of the jihadist group's worst atrocities. DNA testing was used to identify the remains of hundreds of people slain by IS after their discovery in 2017 at the grave site on the outskirts of Mosul, in the country's north.

The Sunni Muslim extremists seized a large chunk of Iraq's territory and proclaimed a "caliphate" in 2014, carrying out abductions, beheadings, ethnic cleansing, mass killings and rapes. In June that year, IS members attacked Badush prison and freed Sunni inmates before forcing around 600 mostly Shiite prisoners into a truck, driving them to a ravine and shooting them dead.

Seventy-eight of them were laid to rest on Tuesday in Baghdad and in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, in central Iraq, AFP journalists reported. "We feel pain and sorrow, but at least we got his remains," Khaled Jabbar said during the funeral procession in Najaf for his cousin, who was among those killed.

In front of Baghdad's Martyr Monument, coffins draped in Iraqi flags were carried on army vehicles and accompanied by a military band. "About 1,000 prisoners, mostly Shiites, were executed by IS members inside the prison and at other sites," according to UN investigators. The killings were described as "crimes against humanity" by UNITAD, the UN body set up to investigate IS crimes in Iraq. The 78 victims buried on Tuesday were from a group of 605 missing people, said the Iraqi health ministry's forensic director Zaid Ali Abbas.

The first mass grave containing victims from Badush prison was discovered in 2017, with dozens of remains exhumed from it in 2021. The slow and laborious process of taking DNA samples from victims and families of the missing continues.

IS' seizure of Mosul in 2014 helped it to briefly hold roughly one-third of Iraqi territory, and for a time there were real fears of a major attack on the capital Baghdad. Baghdad declared victory over the jihadists in December 2017, and work to uncover their crimes is still ongoing. — AFP

## Three dead in Senegal clashes over oppn leader

DAKAR: Three people died during clashes between Senegalese police and supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, the authorities said on Tuesday, amid flaring tensions triggered by a legal showdown.

Two young people were found dead overnight in the capital Dakar and southern city of Ziguinchor, where a policeman died on Monday after being accidentally crushed by an armoured anti-riot vehicle, the interior ministry said.

Crowds in Ziguinchor, where Sonko is mayor, on Monday hurled stones at police who responded with tear gas, according to an AFP correspondent there. In Dakar, around 20 vehicles at a depot belonging to the national bus company were torched, and the local press said two stores belonging to the French supermarket chain Auchan, which has been frequently targeted in disturbances, were also attacked.

The violence erupted on the eve of a scheduled court appearance by Sonko, who is facing trial for the alleged rape of an employee at a beauty salon where he went for a massage. Young demonstrators in Ziguinchor on Tuesday blocked off the streets leading to his home, some of them holding rocks or wielding steel bars, to prevent the authorities from taking him.

Sonko's trial opened meanwhile in Dakar, more than 400 kilometres (250 miles) to the north, and was immediately adjourned until May 23 after he failed to show. His accuser Adji Sarr, a woman in her twenties, and Sonko's co-accused, Ndeye Khady Ndiaye, who owns the massage parlour where the alleged rape took place, were both present. "I feel fine. I have confidence. We are going to win. It's a pity that after waiting two years for a trial, he (Sonko) has fled," Sarr said, speaking before proceedings opened. Sonko, 48, who was also recently sentenced to a six-month suspended prison sentence for defamation and insults against the tourism minister, has denied the charge.



ZIGUINCHOR: Ousmane Sonko, President of the opposition party Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Brotherhood (PASTEF), waves good bye to his supporters at the HLM basic school in Ziguinchor. — AFP

Sonko, president of the PASTEF-Patriots party, came in third in the 2019 presidential elections. He says the legal cases against him are a plot aimed at barring him from contesting the 2024 vote. Senegal is traditionally a beacon of stability in troubled West Africa, but in recent years has been buffeted by turbulence that has at times turned deadly.

When Sonko was arrested in 2021, several days of protests left at least 12 people dead. The interior ministry on Tuesday did not directly attribute the latest death of the two young people to the protests, but said it "strongly urges parents to prevent their children from taking part in violent demonstrations." These events are liable to "attacks, theft, looting and other acts of vandalism," it said. — AFP

# Business

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2023

## G7 leaders meet to pressure Russia and find China unity

### Three-day summit to cover everything from energy to AI

**TOKYO:** G7 leaders meet in Hiroshima this week looking to tighten the screws further on Russia over the Ukraine war and agree a united line on China's growing military and economic power. The three-day summit of leading developed democracies will cover everything from energy to AI, but a key focus will be targeting those who have helped Moscow blunt the impact of Western-led sanctions.

The leaders will also chart a careful course on Beijing, projecting unity on Taiwan and emphasizing the need to "de-risk" crucial supply chains by diversifying away from China, while also attempting to avoid further inflaming tensions. Last month's G7 foreign ministers' meeting, seen as setting the stage for the Hiroshima talks, put Beijing on notice over "militarization activities" in the South China Sea.

It also insisted there was "no change" on Taiwan policy after French President Emmanuel Macron, following a trip to Beijing last month, said Europe should avoid "crises that aren't ours".

Ministers warned Beijing on everything from its nuclear arsenal to its business practices, and this week's summit is expected to endorse extracting crucial supply chains from Chinese influence. Washington has taken an aggressive approach, blocking China's access to the most advanced semiconductors and the equipment to make them, and has convinced Japan and the Netherlands to follow suit.

But "this G7 is not an anti-Chinese G7," an adviser

er to Macron told journalists before the summit. "We have a positive message for China which is that we are ready to cooperate on condition that we negotiate together," the adviser added. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also this week said the bloc seeks a "multifaceted approach to our economic relationships with China," characterized by "de-risking, and not decoupling."

#### 'Vulnerable to coercion'

"We are most vulnerable to coercion... where dependencies build up. That's why we are taking action," she added, calling critical raw materials one area for work. Europe has already enraged Beijing by proposing to restrict exports of sensitive tech to eight Chinese firms suspected of shipping it on to Russia. And the Hiroshima summit is expected to push for similar actions to help close gaps in the sanctions regime G7 countries have imposed on Russia. Countries are keen to ensure that "sanctions that we have imposed, which have a cost for our economies, are not simply circumvented to the benefit of others," the French official said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has been touring European capitals before an expected new offensive, will address the bloc by video. The G7 groups Japan, Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and the European Union. —AFP

## QatarEnergy awards \$10bn gas contract to Technip, CCC

**DOHA:** State-owned QatarEnergy on Tuesday said it awarded a contract worth around \$10 billion to a joint venture of France's Technip Energies and Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) for a landmark natural gas field.

The value of the engineering, procurement, and construction contract for the North Field South (NFS) project "is around \$10 billion, and its scope covers the construction of two mega liquefied natural gas trains with a combined capacity of 16 million tons per year, QatarEnergy said. "Tech-

nip holds a comfortable majority of the capital," a source close to the French company told AFP.

CCC is a global engineering and construction firm. The LNG trains, together with further expansion of North Field East, will boost Qatar's total production from 77 to 126 million tons per year, QatarEnergy said.

NFS and North Field East form the wider North Field Expansion project to increase LNG production. The North Field contains the world's biggest natural gas reserves and extends under the Gulf into Iranian territory. Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, who is also QatarEnergy's chief, called the latest deal "another significant milestone in the world's largest LNG project".

The project includes "a large CO2 carbon capture and sequestration facility... leading to 25 percent-plus reduction of greenhouse gas emissions when compared to similar LNG facilities", Technip said in a statement. Asian countries led by China,

this year of tens of thousands of jobs across the global tech sector, including by Facebook parent Meta, as soaring inflation weakened the economy.

Della Valle's predecessor Nick Read stepped down in early December after a four-year tenure marked by a steep fall in the company's share price. He left with Vodafone in talks over merging its UK operations with rival Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison.

Media reports say a deal worth £15 billion (\$18.7 billion) is close to completion.

Vodafone on Tuesday added that group revenue stood at 45.7 billion euros (\$50 billion) in its financial year to the end of March, almost flat compared with 2021/22. It added that net profit surged to 11.8 billion euros from 2.2 billion, reflecting its part-disposal of European mast division, Vantage Towers.

"We will be a leaner and simpler organization, to increase our commercial agility and free up resources," the company said Tuesday. It announced "11,000 role reductions planned over three years, with both HQ and local markets simplification".

Vodafone, which has more than 300 million mobile customers in Europe and Africa, is heavily

instead of throwing out a pageful of links for the search user to wade and click through.

With a prompt, Bing will compare two products, brainstorm vacation plans or reassuringly help prepare a job interview, for example.

#### 'Heavy lifting'

"Now, search does the heavy lifting for you," said Cathy Edwards, VP Engineering at Google, during the company's annual I/O developers conference in California. The user no longer has to "sift through the information and then piece things together," she said. At the conference, matching Bing, Google presented the latest iteration of its web search juggernaut, but instead of the constellation of links that confronts you today, a chatbot offered a few paragraphs to answer what you were looking for.

Google's AI amped search engine will slowly be released in the United States as a start, the company said. "What we're trying to do is make it more natural and intuitive, as easy as asking a friend and getting information from someone who's really knowledgeable for any question you have in the world," Elizabeth Reid, Vice President of Search, told AFP.

Beyond search, Google and Microsoft have deployed generative AI tools to other products, from

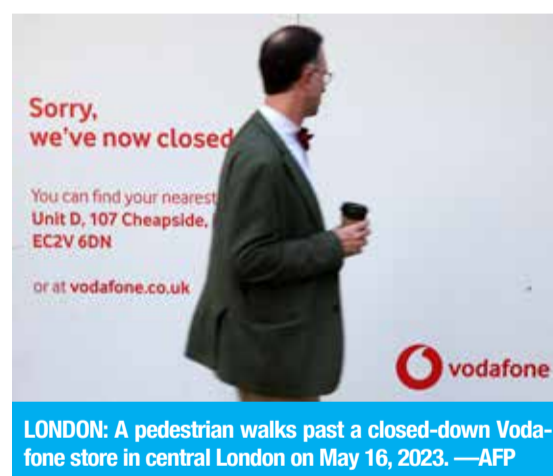


**HIROSHIMA:** A large banner hangs from the roof of a popular shopping precinct advertising the G7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima on May 14, 2023 just days ahead of the arrival of leaders for the event. — AFP



**QatarEnergy signs major LNG deal for NFS project.**

Japan and South Korea have been the main market for Qatar's gas, but it has been increasingly targeted by European countries since Russia's war on Ukraine threw supplies into doubt. —AFP



**LONDON:** A pedestrian walks past a closed-down Vodafone store in central London on May 16, 2023. —AFP

ily focused on accelerating rollout of 5G in the UK. Vodafone is banking on the merger of its UK operations with three to expand broadband connectivity to rural communities and small businesses. The rollout of faster 5G connectivity has been hampered by Britain's ban on the Chinese giant Huawei from involvement in the technology. —AFP

cloud to word processing, presenting bots as helpful "co-pilots," to use the term hammered home by the Windows-maker.

#### Personal 'genie'

"I think search is going to be fractured into a million pieces, and integrated into all sorts of interfaces, and not just one monolithic centralized place, which is what Google has become," said John Battelle, author and media entrepreneur. But if every website acts like a faithful friend, it will become ever more difficult to distinguish good information from bad, he warned.

"Would you trust an AI travel agent to give you the right deal? No," Battelle said. "I want my own 'genie,' my 'agent' to negotiate with the website. If it's just me against an AI, I'm gonna lose. I want one on my side."

Battelle's "genie" would digest a user's information from the smartphone, computer, TV or car to help answer and act for the user in life online. The bot, powered by personal data, would buy the best vacuum cleaner according to your tastes, habits and current promotions, sparing a long and tedious search. The AI personal assistant would have to come for a fee, ensuring that personal data wasn't harvested and sold to the highest bidder for ad-

## CBK issues new instructions on e-payment of funds

**KUWAIT:** In line with the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) strategy to maintain a strong advanced financial system and encourage emerging technologies in the field of electronic payment; and with the mandate granted by the Law No 20 of 2014 on electronic transactions, which gave CBK the authority of oversight and regulation of the electronic payments of funds, and to issue binding instructions in this regard.

The Central Bank of Kuwait has issued an updated version of the Instructions for Regulating the Electronic Payment of Funds - May 2023. The instructions were first issued in 2018. A draft of the updated instructions was made public in early 2022 and a round of public consultations with stakeholders on the draft instructions followed.

In a statement, the Central Bank of Kuwait indicated that these instructions outlined the mandatory requirements that must be met by existing and new financial firms to practice the activity of electronic payment or electronic money, or to operate electronic payment systems according to five types of licenses differing as per the size and nature of the activity. With the goal of enhancing the safety and stability of payment systems in the State of Kuwait, the instructions spell out the regulatory requirements and controls that must be adhered to by those institutions. These include governance, a risk management framework, combating money laundering and terrorist financing, cyber security, business continuity and customer protection.

The instructions will also include a new activity of "Buy Now Pay Later" (BNPL) services within the supervisory and regulatory framework to ensure that necessary measures are in place to protect customers.

vertising or online tracking, as it is on social media. Startups such as Replika, Anima and others are already moving into the companion AI space.

#### 'Vital role'

For the time being, Google isn't going to disappear, said Jim Lecinski, professor of marketing at the Kellogg School of Management. "We could have had this same conversation about four years ago with the advent of voice assistants like Alexa or Siri."

"Oh wow, search is going away because people are just going to speak their query to their car and device on their kitchen counter. Well, here we are," he said. The disruption of generative AI could, however, challenge the internet's business model, as it can allow users to find the product they want "without having to click on an ad," Lecinski said. But he has no doubt that the giants, ad-based Google and Meta first among them, will find solutions.

In the new version of Google search presented on Wednesday, the ads still appear, either up at the top of the page or lower in the results, depending on the question asked.

"I don't think we can predict what the future will have, but we do think ads will continue to play a vital role," said Google's Reid. —AFP

## Online search to make up lost time with AI

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Online search, dominated by Google for 25 years, has become as banal as making a phone call, but it could finally be getting a profound reset thanks to artificial intelligence.

The classic search and click made ubiquitous by the Google behemoth is getting a major AI makeover as bots ChatGPT, Bard or Bing see hundreds of millions of web surfers seek answers to life's questions in a new way. "People are realizing how many times they use Google search, not to find a webpage, but to answer a question," said Stefan Sigg, Chief Product Officer at Germany-based Software AG.

Microsoft, long considered big tech's boring uncle, has jumped fearlessly and some say blindly into generative AI search with an update to Bing, the long struggling also-ran to Google.

Bing's bot, which was released worldwide after three months of testing, responds directly to a que-



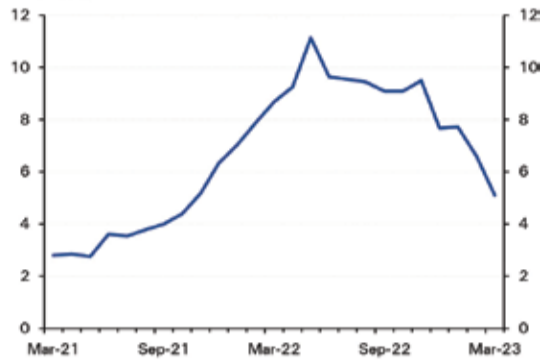
Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

# Kuwait's credit growth slows in Q1

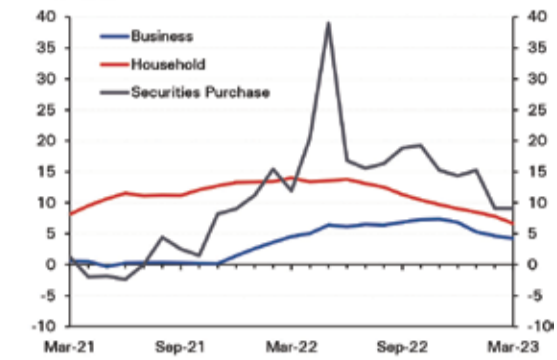
## Business credit dynamics to continue amid lower oil prices

Chart 1: Growth in Credit to Residents (% y/y)



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait; slight change in data series starting August 2021 but with no major impact on historical y/y growth rates

Chart 2: Growth in Credit to Residents by Sector (% y/y)



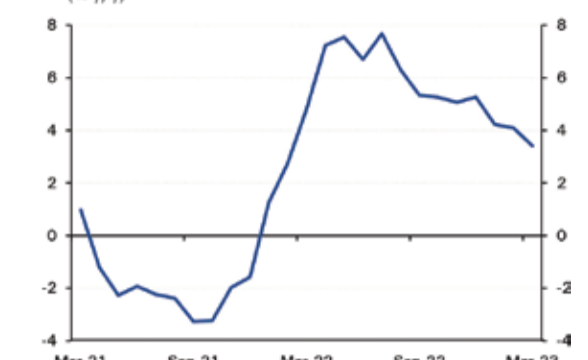
Source: Central Bank of Kuwait; slight change in data series starting August 2021 but with no major impact on historical y/y growth rates

Chart 3: Change in Credit to Residents (m/m) (KD millions)



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Chart 4: Growth in Deposits from Residents (% y/y)



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Domestic credit started the year on a relatively weak note, increasing by 0.6 percent q/q in Q1 2023, cutting the y/y increase to 5.1 percent through March. Higher interest rates, banks' lower price competition in terms of retail lending, and normalizing growth following a very strong 2022 are some of the factors behind the softening growth so far this year.

Business credit increased by 1.2 percent q/q, cutting the y/y increase to 4.2 percent through March. This follows a strong 6.8 percent growth in 2022, the fastest annual expansion since 2013. Growth of the various sectors differed markedly with the particularly interest rate-sensitive real estate, in addition to oil/gas, being broadly flat in Q1 2023.

On the other hand, industry, construction and other services recorded decent growth of around 3 percent q/q. Excluding real estate and oil/gas, business credit would have increased by 2.3 percent q/q (+8 percent y/y). Looking ahead, business credit dynamics may remain as seen so far this year, especially given the weaker oil price. In contrast, a more optimistic scenario could unfold driven by the major improvement in project awards so far this year, the end (or close to) of the rate-hiking cycle giving corporates more visibility on their borrowing costs, and

a stronger appetite by banks to grow business credit given weak household credit demand.

Household credit was flat in Q1 2023 (weakest quarter since the start of the pandemic in Q1 2020), dropping the y/y increase to 6.7 percent. Higher interest rates, easing price competition among the banks given the higher cost of funds, softening consumer spending growth, and lower real estate sales are all factors that have contributed to this major slowdown in household lending. Another factor is the normalizing growth after two very strong years, which saw household credit expand by 23 percent through December 2020 and December 2022.

Finally, relatively weak lending for securities purchase and lending to banks/financial institutions also contributed to the lackluster credit growth in Q1 2023. The former increased by 1.6 percent in Q1 2023, less than half the average quarterly increase recorded in 2022 while the latter fell by 1.9 percent q/q.

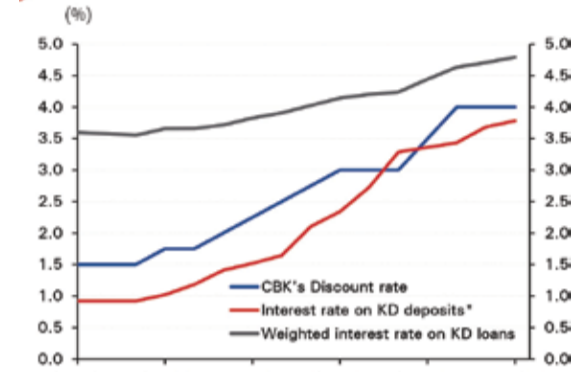
Meanwhile, resident deposit trends were stronger than the credit ones with deposits up 1.4 percent q/q (+3.4 percent y/y). Private-sector deposits were particularly resilient, growing by 2.2 percent q/q (+6.5 percent y/y), government deposits continued to inch up (+3 percent q/q), while public-institution deposits remained on a downtrend (-3.9 percent

q/q, -12.2 percent y/y). By the end of March 2023, out of total resident deposits (KD 47.6 billion) private-sector deposits accounted for 79 percent, public-institution deposits 14 percent, and government deposits 7 percent.

In line with expectations, among KD private-sector deposits, time deposits continued to increase at a much faster rate than current and saving accounts (CASA). In fact, CASA dropped for the third straight quarter, falling by 9.1 percent (KD 1.7 billion) between June 2022 and March 2023, while time deposits soared by 4.9 percent q/q, the fifth straight quarter of solid growth. By the end of March 2023, among private-sector deposits, CASA accounted for 44 percent of the total, time deposits 51 percent, and foreign-currency deposits 5 percent. This compares to 51 percent, 44 percent, and 5 percent, respectively, in March 2022, when policy interest rates, globally and domestically, started increasing. Looking ahead, given that the rate-hiking cycle is close to its end, if not ended already, it is reasonable to expect that the discrepancy between the growth in time deposits and CASA will start to narrow.

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has hiked the discount rate by a cumulative 2.5 percent since March 2022, half the cumulative 5 percent increase by the US

Chart 5: Interest Rates in Kuwait (%)



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait \* typical one-month maturity deposit

Federal Reserve (Fed). However, the rate-hiking cycle in the US has either ended or is very close to ending. And while the Fed has repeatedly indicated that there will be no rate cuts in 2023, the futures market continues to reflect cuts commencing in the second half of the year. Whether rate cuts in the US will materialize or not, the big picture for Kuwait is that the rate-hiking cycle is also very close to its end.



Judging panel.



Organizers and participants.

## Gulf Bank concludes second edition of Datathon competition

**KUWAIT:** With the participation of more than 400 young and talented Kuwaiti contestants, Gulf Bank announced the winning teams of the second edition of the Datathon competition – the first platform of its kind in Kuwait, to empower data professionals, high school, and university students, as well as new employees interested in working in the fields of data and analytics.

The Datathon competition lasted for two days at Al-Shaheed Park, in cooperation with Coded Academy and INJAZ Kuwait, witnessing the participation of young individuals aged 14 to 18 years, for the first time. Participants over 18 years old also took part in the competition, which aimed to teach students how to use data analysis and visualization skills.

Gulf Bank offered three valuable prizes to the winning projects – where the Data Modeling category winners received a prize of KD 1,000, the best Data Visualization category winners received a prize of KD 500, and the best Digital Analytics category winners received a prize of KD 500 – which was specifically designated for individuals aged 14 to 18 years.

The competition's tracks included Data Analysis with ChatGPT, Data Visualization, and Digital Analytics using an array of tools including: ChatGPT, Python, Tableau, R and other coding languages. The bank also awarded participants with trophies in the categories of Next Googler, Fancy Dataviz, and Neat Coder.

The Chief Data and Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank Mai Bader Al-Owaish expressed her happiness with the doubling number of participants, in comparison to first edition of the Datathon competition. She pointed out that not only did this year's Datathon witness great diversity with age groups but has also witnessed the participation of several youths from across the GCC.

Al-Owaish indicated that the student members of the winning teams will have the opportunity to receive internships in the Data and Innovation Unit at Gulf Bank, which will allow them to apply what they have learned in the competition into a real-work environment. This is part of the bank's efforts to prepare young individuals for the labor market.

She said: "The next decade will depend heavily on data analysis, which is why it's our duty, at Gulf Bank, to work hard to build and spread the culture of data in society – especially with regards to qualifying and equipping young people for the future. This enables them to keep pace with the

future requirements of universities and helps prepare them to join the labor market."

Al-Owaish added: "The competition reflects Gulf Bank's distinguished role in social responsibility and sustainability, as well as its continuous efforts to support the digital transformation process. This helps to achieve Kuwait Vision 2035 goals and consolidates the bank's leading position in the field of data and digitization: by working to spread the data culture in society, with a major focus on youth. Hence, we were keen to add a new age group for young people aged 14 to 18 years old."

For her part, the CEO of INJAZ Kuwait, Laila Al-Mutairi, said: "Empowering youth is one of the main objectives of the association, and for this reason, we are keen to equip them with the necessary skills to keep pace with the future. And based on this goal, we were eager to cooperate with Gulf Bank and Coded in this competition." She added: "The winning projects showcase high level talents and capabilities in Kuwait, as seen through the ideas and projects that were presented to the judges from the various age groups."

On this occasion, Ahmed Marafie, CEO of Coded Academy, said: "We are pleased to cooperate with Gulf Bank in this successful event, and we expect more success and an increase in the number of participants in the upcoming competitions."

Throughout the Datathon competition, the judges assessed the submission of the participants, and evaluated them on whether they have completed the required tasks. The judges included several local experts from the industry, namely:

- Mai Bader Al-Owaish – Chief Data and Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank
- Dr Zainab Al-Meraj – Acting Chair of the In-

- formation Science Department at Kuwait University
- Hashem Behbehani – Head of the Health Informatics Unit at Dasmann Diabetes Institute
- Laila H Al-Mutairi – CEO at INJAZ Kuwait
- Dr Ahmad Al-Baqsmi – Assistant Professor of Computer Engineering at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET)

### Free workshops

The Datathon featured free educational workshops as a chance to learn hands-on skills with data science, visualizations and digital analytics tools and techniques. The workshops were held at Coded, with the participation of experts from Gulf Bank and the industry. They included Assistant Professor of Computer Engineering at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Dr Ahmad Al-Baqsmi, Chief Data and Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank, Mai Bader Al-Owaish, and Data Scientist at Gulf Bank, Mariam Bazzi. The workshops included: Tableau, Modeling with Python, and Google Analytics.

## Musk considering 'significant investments in France'

**PARIS:** Billionaire businessman Elon Musk on Monday said he was considering "significant investments in France" as he visited the country for a summit aimed at attracting foreign business leaders. The world's second richest man, who is the chief executive of electric car firm Tesla, social media company Twitter and cosmic exploration outfit SpaceX, made the comments after meeting President Emmanuel Macron and Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire.

"I'm very impressed with President Macron and the French government and how welcoming they are to industry," the 51-year-old South African said.

"I'm confident that in the future Tesla will be making significant investments in France," Le Maire said France would "continue discussions" with the businessman, but refused to share any further details. Macron and Musk earlier met at the Elysee Palace before heading to Versailles for the latest edition of the president's Choose France conference where Macron seeks to drum up investment in the country. "We talked about the attractiveness of France and the significant progress in the electric vehicle and energy sectors," Macron wrote on Twitter afterwards.

"We have so much to do together," he added. Musk smiled and waved at reporters as the meeting got under way but made no comment. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the BFM TV broadcaster that "negotiations are ongoing" with the magnate. Le Maire gave no details of Monday's talks with Musk, saying simply that "all of today's investments are the fruit of months or even years of negotiations".

### 'Choose France'

Macron said in another tweet that some 13 billion euros of investment would be announced at the summit, equating to the creation of some 8,000 jobs. "When a foreign investor chooses France, it's good for jobs and for our regions," he said. Some 200 foreign business bosses are expected at the summit, including Sunil Bharti Mittal of Indian conglomerate Bharti Enterprises, ArcelorMittal chief Lakshmi Mittal and Nokia chief executive Pekka Lundmark.

The meeting is being hosted at the Palace of Versailles, the former residence of France's monarchs, around which a tight security perimeter has been erected. Macron remains the target of angry protests after signing into law his controversial pension reform last month, leading to new accusations from the opposition he was only a president for the rich. Already confirmed last week was the investment of over five billion euros by Taiwanese battery maker ProLogium in building a new factory in northern France for its first European plant. Among other projects, the Swedish furniture giant Ikea is announcing over 900 million euros of investment in France by 2026, including the creation of a logistics centre near Toulouse. In pharmaceuticals, Pfizer is injecting an additional 500 million euros and Britain's GSK nearly 400 million in France. During a US trip in December, Macron held an unannounced face-to-face meeting with Musk, saying later the two had had a "clear and honest" discussion during an hour-long meeting, including on electric cars and batteries. —AFP



PARIS: SpaceX, Twitter and electric car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk meets with France's President Emmanuel Macron (L) at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris on May 15, 2023. —AFP

## Business

# EBRD bank lowers Turkey GDP forecast and upgrades Russia

## European development bank opens annual meeting in Uzbekistan

**LONDON, UK:** Turkey's quake-hit economy will grow this year by less than previously forecast, while Russian output will shrink far less than expected despite Ukraine war sanctions, Europe's development bank said Tuesday. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which later opens its annual meeting in Uzbekistan, published its latest outlook for a region hit also by rampant inflation and slowing global economic activity.

The EBRD predicted Turkish GDP will expand 2.5 percent this year, cutting prior guidance of 3.0 percent and citing the impact of "unorthodox" loose monetary policy alongside one of the world's highest inflation rates, as well as February's deadly earthquake.

The death toll of Turkey's worst disaster of modern times stands at more than 50,000. Official estimates put the damage inflicted by the February earthquake at more than \$100 billion, the EBRD said. Turkey, meanwhile, faces a presidential runoff later this month after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday came within a fraction of a percentage point of defeating secular challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu in the first round, despite the country's most dire economic crisis since the 1990s.

"Over the last several years, Turkey has been prioritizing growth over macroeconomic stability," EBRD chief economist Beata Javorcik told AFP.

"There is a limit to how long one can engage in unconventional policies and defy the basic laws of economics. So, no matter who wins there are some difficult choices awaiting the new Turkish government."

Turning to Russia, the EBRD forecast Tuesday that its economy will shrink 1.5 percent, compared with a previous estimate of a 3.0-percent contraction. The upgrade for the key energy producer was driven by higher oil price expectations and as Western sanctions force it to sell elsewhere.

The institution added that the economies of its operating zone would grow by a 2.2 percent overall this year. However, that marked a downgrade from a February forecast that was recalculated at 2.3 percent using latest data.

The EBRD also noted that its region's inflation remained stubbornly high at 14.3 percent in March, after spiking last year on soaring energy prices after the start of the Ukraine conflict.

2023 is "a very difficult year for Central Europe and Baltics, as inflation is eroding the purchasing power of consumers", Javorcik added. "Now this contrasts very much with Central Asia and the Caucasus. These countries... have benefited from influx of Russian who were escaping the war."

Nations in this region also played a key role in "intermediating trade, particularly between Western Europe and Russia", she noted. This trade was "par-



**ISTANBUL:** The EBRD predicted Turkish GDP will expand 2.5 percent this year, cutting prior guidance of 3.0 percent and citing the impact of "unorthodox" loose monetary policy.

ticularly pronounced in goods that are fully or partially subject to sanctions". The EBRD was founded in 1991 to help former Soviet bloc nations embrace

free-market economies, but has since extended its reach to the Middle East and North Africa to cover a total of 29 nations. — AFP

## KIPCO announces KD 5.1 million net profit for Q1 2023

**KUWAIT:** KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – announced a net profit of KD 5.1 million (\$16.6 million) for the first three months of 2023, an increase of 59 percent from the KD 3.2 million (\$10.4 million) reported in the corresponding period of 2022. Earnings per share for the first quarter (the three months ended March 31, 2023) came to 1.1 fils (\$0.36 cents), compared to 1.3 fils (\$0.42 cents) for the same period last year.

In the first quarter, KIPCO's consolidated revenue came to KD 313.7 million (\$1.02 billion), an increase of 93 percent from KD 162.2 million (\$529.1 million) reported for the same period in 2022.

KIPCO's consolidated assets increased 4 percent and came to KD 11.8 billion (\$38.5 billion) at the end of the first three months of 2023, up from KD 11.4 billion (\$37.2 billion) reported at year-end 2022.

Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "The positive results of the first three months of 2023 reflect the performance of our portfolio companies. Our commercial banking sector, namely our operation in Jordan, has reported positive growth, together with the energy and the industrial & logistics sectors that were added to our portfolio as a result of the recent merger with Qurain Petrochemical Industries. As we said in our recent Annual General Assembly Meeting, we strive to build a holding company that is strong and able to withstand market volatilities. These results demonstrate our efforts to ensure that KIPCO's core businesses continue to deliver enhanced positive performance, stemming from streamlined operations that are both efficient and effective."



Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

## EU backs tougher tax rules on crypto transactions

**BRUSSELS:** EU ministers agreed stronger rules Tuesday to crack down on the use of cryptocurrencies in tax fraud, as Brussels bolsters its efforts to regulate the volatile sector. Regulators worldwide are increasingly worried about the lack of oversight of the digital currency sector but the European Union has already taken steps to protect investors.

The 27-member bloc's parliament last month approved the world's first comprehensive rules covering crypto assets, which include cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and ethereum and tradable tokens whose value is secured using blockchain technology, such as NFTs.

During a meeting of EU economy and finance ministers on Tuesday, they agreed on rules to go after individuals who stash their cash where tax authorities have no oversight. The rules will close loopholes that allow people to avoid taxation on their income using crypto assets, Swedish Finance Minister Elisabeth Svantesson said.

"This reduces the risk of crypto assets being used as a safe haven for tax avoidance and tax fraud," she added in a statement. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm charged with implementing EU laws and regulations, welcomed the ministers' approval, adding that it would also help curb tax evasion. Tax authorities in the EU currently lack the information they need to monitor proceeds from crypto assets, which are easily traded across borders, it said.

As a result, member states are deprived of important tax revenues, the commission added. The rules will force all crypto asset providers (CASPs) based in the EU, regardless of their size, to report the transactions of clients who reside in the bloc. There will also be an automatic exchange of tax rulings within the EU relating to the wealthiest individuals to target attempts to hide money from the taxman. — AFP

## China economic data miss expectations as demand cools

**BEIJING:** China's economic data for April missed expectations last month, official figures showed Tuesday, as low demand and high youth unemployment led to a patchy recovery after lifting strict COVID rules. Retail sales — a key indicator of domestic consumer activity — grew 18.4 percent on-year, data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed.

The reading was short of the 21.9 percent forecast in a survey of economists by Bloomberg, even as shoppers and diners returned to malls and restaurants. Low domestic demand despite low inflation has slowed China's economic recovery.

Beijing has set a growth target of around five percent this year, the lowest goal in decades, with Premier Li Qiang warning it "will be no easy task". Zhang Zhiwei, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said: "The growth target for this year is set at a low level, which leaves room for the government to wait and see."

Unemployment among China's urban 16-24-year-olds reached a record high of 20 percent in April, as the services sector was slow to absorb millions of rural migrants flocking to cities.

Overall urban unemployment slipped to 5.2 percent in April, from 5.3 percent in March. Industrial production for April rose 5.6 percent, a little more than half the 10.9 percent growth ex-

## Ex-Audi boss pleads guilty in 'dieselgate' trial

**MUNICH:** Ex-Audi CEO Rupert Stadler pleaded guilty to his "dieselgate" fraud trial in Germany on Tuesday, becoming the highest-ranking former executive to make a confession in the emissions cheating scandal that rocked the car industry.

Stadler, 60, admitted at a district court in Munich that he allowed vehicles equipped with manipulating software to remain on sale even after learning of the scam.

The confession comes as part of a plea deal that will allow Stadler, who has been on trial since 2020, to avoid jail time. German car giant Volkswagen — whose subsidiaries include Porsche, Audi, Skoda and Seat — plunged into crisis after admitting in September 2015 that it had installed software to rig emission levels in 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide.

The so-called defeat devices made the vehicles appear less polluting in lab tests than they were on the road. "In the course of addressing the diesel issue" after the revelations became public, Stadler "neglected" to inform business partners that cars with so-called defeat devices were still going on the market, his lawyer Ulrike Thole-Groll told the court in a statement.

In doing so, her client was "accepting that vehicles equipped with the illegal software would go on sale," she said. Asked by the judge whether the statement was correct, Stadler replied: "Yes."

Stadler had until now always denied wrongdoing. But his defense team announced earlier this month that he had accepted a plea deal that included a confession in exchange for a suspended sentence of up to two years. Stadler also agreed to make a payment of 1.1 million euros (\$1.2 million). A verdict is expected in June.



**QINGDAO, China:** This photo taken on May 15, 2023 shows an employee working at a textile factory in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province. — AFP

pected as factories gradually returned to full capacity after scrapping disruptive lockdown rules.

Fixed asset investments from January through April increased 4.7 percent, below the 5.7 percent forecast, as debt-laden local governments were forced to cut back on big infrastructure projects. China's central bank yesterday said the world's second-largest economy was not on course to suffer from deflation, after data showed consumer

prices edged up just 0.1 percent year-on-year in April, the slowest rate recorded since 2021.

"Consumer prices are still rising moderately... and economic operations continue to improve, which does not conform to the characteristics of deflation," the report reviewing monetary policy implementation in the first quarter said. "In the medium and long term, there is also no basis for... deflation." — AFP



**MUNICH:** Rupert Stadler (right), former CEO of German car manufacturer Audi, arrives in a room of the regional court in Munich, southern Germany, on May 16, 2023. — AFP

### Dieselgate aftermath

Volkswagen had always insisted that the diesel trickery was the work of a handful of lower-level employees acting without the knowledge of their superiors.

Stadler himself was not accused of instigating the trickery. But German prosecutors say Stadler knew about the scam by the end of September 2015 "at the latest" and nevertheless allowed thousands more vehicles with defeat devices to be sold until early 2018.

By admitting that he failed to intervene, Stadler faces a conviction for fraud by negligence.

Stadler's lawyer said her client "regretted" that he not been able to "resolve the crisis" that erupted at Volkswagen in the wake of "dieselgate". Stadler had been Audi's chief executive for 11 years when he was arrested in 2018. He was also a member of the management board at Volkswagen group.

Stadler spent four months in pretrial detention owing to prosecution concerns that he would try

to influence witnesses. His trial began in September 2020. With him in the dock was Wolfgang Hatz, a former Audi and Porsche manager. He pleaded guilty last month. Hatz, who at one point was head of engine development at Audi, admitted that he helped arrange the installation of emissions-cheating software.

Two other co-defendants, both Audi engineers, have also made confessions. Volkswagen's former CEO Martin Winterkorn was also supposed to stand trial for fraud over the scandal, but his case has been indefinitely postponed due to his poor health. The "dieselgate" saga shocked Germany and is seen as the country's biggest post-war industrial scandal.

It has already cost VW tens of billions of euros in fines, legal costs and compensation to car owners, mainly in the United States. The fallout has also accelerated development of environmentally-friendly electric vehicles, requiring huge investments in a tough economic climate. — AFP

Lifestyle

# 'Guardians' enjoys galactic box office earnings for 2nd week in row

Marvel's "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" trounced the competition for the second straight weekend in North American theaters, earning \$60.5 million for a global haul topping half a billion dollars, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The latest tale of oddball intergalactic mercenaries, human and otherwise, again stars Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Bradley Cooper and Vin Diesel—this time on a mission to save comrade Rocket Raccoon from a scientist intent on removing his brain.

"Guardians" had unseated Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" from the top spot the week before. But the video game-based "Mario," which

has now earned more than \$1.2 billion worldwide, remained firmly in second spot in its sixth week out, taking in \$13 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period. "Book Club: The Next Chapter," a Focus Features sequel to a well-received romantic comedy for the older set, came third in its debut weekend with \$6.5 million—described as a "slow start" by analyst David A. Gross, who also acknowledged that "older audiences take their time getting to these movies."

The film, which follows four friends on a grown-up girls trip to Italy, features an all-star quartet of Diane Keaton, Jane Fonda, Candice Bergen and Mary Steenburgen—all of whom are in their 70s or 80s. Warner Bros.' blood-soaked

horror film "Evil Dead Rise" dropped one spot to fourth, taking in \$3.7 million. It features two sisters (Lily Sullivan and Alyssa Sutherland) battling the demonic Deadites crew.

In fifth place, also down one spot, was the Lionsgate comedy-drama "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," at \$2.5 million. Abby Ryder Fortson plays sixth-grader Margaret Simon as she navigates the challenges of that awkward age. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Hypnotic" (2.4 million)
- "John Wick: Chapter 4" (\$1.9 million)
- "Love Again" (\$1.6 million)
- "Air" (\$750,000)
- "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" (\$740,000)—AFP



US artist, writer, activist, and ambassador for Represent Justice Halim A. Flowers, poses during a photo session in Paris.

## The US artist who went from prison cell to Paris show

Aged 16, Halim Flowers was arrested in the United States, tried as an adult then jailed for murder. Now aged 42, he is a prolific artist, poet and writer exhibiting in Paris.

The turnaround has been spectacular. Flowers was only released in 2019 after a change in US law allowed for under-18s who had been tried as adults to be "re-sentenced".

Then a year later, when COVID-19 pushed much of the world into lockdown, his wife -- also an artist -- suggested he should give painting a go. "I just took the brush. I had no idea about colour, how mixing red and white made pink. She told me how to do that, how to take care of my brushes," he told AFP.

Visiting AFP's photo studio in Paris, Flowers sketched a graffiti-style drawing on a white background and explained that art was his "only drug". "I don't smoke drugs, I don't drink alcohol, I don't party. All I do is art," he said. Colourful and rich in symbolism, his work highlights the experiences of people on the margins -- prisoners, the homeless, those with mental health issues.

The Washington native, who is displaying his paintings until Sunday at the Champop gallery in the French capital, told the United States' National Public Radio in 2021 he had already sold art worth more than \$1 million.

His life now is a far cry from that of the skinny teenager who featured in a 1998 documentary for HBO titled "Thug Life in DC". A disconsolate Flowers told the documentary he had no hope, and that his mother would probably be dead by the time he was freed.

### Kardashian collaboration

Flowers was raised in a poor neighbourhood of the US capital and grew up during the crack "epidemic". He fell into drug dealing and eventually got caught up in a robbery that resulted in someone being shot dead. Despite not being the shooter, he was tried and convicted of murder under the principle of "aiding and abetting". He said his generation of jailed children were regarded as "super predators" but he knew he was innocent and had enough faith in himself to struggle to show his humanity.

"Those who are considered as beasts and super predators today can become those who visit the museums tomorrow," he said. After years of campaigning, he was finally freed in early 2019 -- his mother greeting him with open arms. Already with a track record as an author and poet, he worked with reality TV star Kim Kardashian on a documentary called "The Justice Project", which helped to secure the release of one of his childhood friends. He met both Kardashian and her then husband, musician Kanye West, although he credits West's fellow rapper Jay-Z with sparking his interest in visual art. —AFP

# German court sentences five over spectacular museum heist

A German court on Tuesday sentenced five members of a criminal gang to up to six years in prison for snatching priceless 18th-century jewels from a Dresden museum in what local media have dubbed the biggest art heist in modern history.

The thieves made away with a haul worth more than 113 million euros (\$123 million) from the Green Vault museum in November 2019. Some, but not all, of the loot was recovered after four of the defendants made confessions in court.

The thieves are members of the so-called "Remmo clan", an extended family known for a web of ties to organised crime in Germany. The regional court in the eastern city handed down three sentences ranging from just under to just over six years for armed robbery, aggravated arson and grievous bodily harm.

Two of the men, who were minors at the time of the crime, received juvenile sentences of five years, and four years and four months respectively.



A defendant hides his face behind a newspaper reporting on his trial at the Higher Regional Court in Dresden, eastern Germany, prior to a hearing in the trial over a jewellery heist on the Green Vault (Gruenes Gewoelbe) museum in Dresden's Royal Palace in November 2019.

A sixth defendant was acquitted because he produced a credible alibi -- an emergency surgery at a Berlin hospital.

The trial, which began in January 2022, shed some light on the spectacular case but left key questions unanswered. Although many of the historic pieces were recovered as part of a plea deal, some are feared lost forever in



A defendant (right) is brought to the courtroom on May 16, 2023 at the Higher Regional Court.

what prosecutors called an act of "remarkable criminal drive and recklessness" by the thieves.

The loot included a sword with a diamond-encrusted hilt and a shoulder piece which contained the famous 49-carat Dresden white diamond.

Prosecutor Christian Weber said on the opening day of the trial that the defendants had stolen "unique and irreplaceable treasures... of outstanding cultural and historical significance". Two of the defendants, Wissam and Mohamed Remmo, were already serving time for the daring 2017 theft of a massive gold coin from a Berlin museum.

In a statement read in court in January by their lawyer, they said the idea for the Dresden job was hatched after a younger acquaintance "came back from a field trip to the Green Vault... raving about the green diamonds on display there".

### 40 suspects still wanted

The court found that the defendants, aged between 24 and 29, slipped into the museum through previously damaged bars on a window, broke a display case with an axe and grabbed 21 pieces encrusted with 4,300 jewels in less than five minutes. The thieves were able to escape in a getaway car that they later set ablaze in an underground car park.

For months after the crime, authorities thought the haul was lost for good, with detectives scouring Europe's shadowy stolen goods markets for signs of the Saxon royal artefacts.



Defendants sit at the Higher Regional Court in Dresden, eastern Germany, prior to a hearing in the trial over a jewellery heist.



This undated Handout photo shows one of the pieces stolen from the Royal Palace that houses the historic Green Vault (Gruenes Gewoelbe) in Dresden, eastern Germany.



This undated Handout photo shows one of the pieces stolen from the Royal Palace that houses the historic Green Vault (Gruenes Gewoelbe) in Dresden, eastern Germany.



This undated Handout photo made available by the Dresden Police shows one of the pieces stolen from the Royal Palace that houses the historic Green Vault (Gruenes Gewoelbe) in Dresden, eastern Germany. — AFP photos



The Weeknd play at the end of the H&M STUDIO SS17 Spring-Summer 2017 ready-to-wear collection fashion show on March 1, 2017 in Paris.--AFP

# The Weeknd starts scrapping stage name on social media

The Weeknd appears to be making good on his recently expressed desire to transition back to his given name, Abel Tesfaye, after soaring to stardom under his globally known stage moniker. On Monday the Canadian artist behind the smash "Blinding Lights" had updated his screen name on Twitter and Instagram, although the handle on both remained @theweeknd.

The shakeup follows comments in W Magazine in which Tesfaye said he wants "to kill The Weeknd."

"I'm going through a cathartic path right now," he said. "It's getting to a place and a time where I'm getting ready to close the Weeknd chapter," he added. "I'll still make music, maybe as Abel, maybe as The Weeknd. But I still want to kill The Weeknd. And I will. Eventually, I'm definitely trying to shed that skin and be reborn."

He also told the publication the album he's working on now "is probably my last hurrah as The Weeknd."

"This is something that I have to do.

As The Weeknd, I've said everything I can say." Tesfaye, 33, is set to star alongside Lily-Rose Depp in the forthcoming HBO series "The Idol," set to premiere next month. The Canadian artist born to Ethiopian parents rose to fame on a brand of dark R&B after gaining a strong following on YouTube more than a decade ago. He went on to become the first artist to gain more than 100 million monthly listeners on Spotify. — AFP



US actor Tyrese Gibson (left) and US actor Vin Diesel arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X", the tenth film in the Fast & Furious Saga at the Colosseum monument in Rome. — AFP photos



South African and American actress Charlize Theron arrives for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".

### Son of Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti arrested for 'police assault'

Nigerian musician Seun Kuti, son of Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti, was arrested for allegedly assaulting a police officer, Lagos state police said on Monday. An order was made for the arrest of Kuti, a Grammy-nominated saxophonist and singer, on Saturday after a viral video showed him on a road, shouting and apparently pushing and smacking a policeman, police said. He turned himself in early Monday to the headquarters of the Lagos State Police Command, accompanied by a lawyer and a family representative, police spokesman Benjamin Hundeyin said on Twitter.



"He has been placed under arrest in line with the law," he said. "The ongoing investigation will be detailed, transparent, professionally pursued; and justice will be manifestly served for all parties involved." Kuti, 40, is the youngest son of Fela Kuti, who drove Afrobeat—a powerful mix of funk and jazz—to global fame in the 1980s. A charismatic figure and activist who was bitterly critical of Nigeria's military regimes and corrupt elite, Fela Kuti died in 1997 but retains a fervent following today.

His son started playing in his band Egypt 80, at the age of nine and took the helm when he was just 14, after his father died. In 2019, Kuti and the group were nominated for a Grammy, the paramount US music awards, for their album Black Times in the Global Music category. —AFP

## French fan takes over final FAST AND FURIOUS films

French director Louis Leterrier was a regular fan of "The Fast and the Furious" when the multi-billion-dollar franchise started more than two decades ago. Now he is finishing it. "I was a fan, buying my ticket on the Champs Elysee in 2001, who became a director and now I'm ending the fran-

chise," Leterrier told AFP. "That never happens!" The 49-year-old has taken over directing duties for the final two instalments—including "Fast X" which hits theatres around the world next week.

His goal, he told AFP, was to reconnect with "the integrity" of that first

installment way back in 2001. "Well, there's still some pretty crazy things in there but we are at least on Earth," Leterrier said, referring to the last installment, "Fast 9", which upped the ante by driving a car into outer space.

The sprawling series has followed the adventures of Dom Toretto (Vin Diesel), an ex-criminal who becomes a street racing star in Los Angeles, and the gang which he considers his family. From a relatively modest thriller focusing on pimped-out cars, the franchise has grown to challenge the superhero behemoths of Hollywood, raking in more than \$6.6 billion at the global box office. As the budgets have ballooned, so have the outlandish stunts and storylines. But Leterrier said he wanted to bring things back down to Earth.

Nothing is impossible anymore when it comes to stunts, he said, "but I don't want to lose the viewer in the impossible. I want to push reality, to push cinema into another dimension, but above all I have to tell human stories."

This time around, Dom and his friends battle the son of an enemy they defeated back in the fifth installment, played by Jason Momoa ("Aquaman"). They are joined by regulars such as Michelle Rodriguez and Jason Statham, as well as Oscar winners Charlize Theron and Brie Larson. As with the other films in the series, viewers are taken to the four corners of the world, from Rio de Janeiro to London, and Antarctica to Portugal.

"I'm going back to the essentials. And that means getting out of the computer and back into the physical world," Leterrier said. "The cars are really being driven. The fires are actually real."

The final chapter is due next year and Leterrier knows where it is going. "The sequel was not shot at the same time but it was conceived at the same time, so we know where the film will end," he said. "It will be a human climax. The end will not be just a big explosion." His lips are sealed on the details, but he promised that it would go to "a place where Hollywood does not usually go... and back to where it all began". —AFP



US actor and singer Alan Ritchson and his wife Catherine Ritchson arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



US actor Tyrese Gibson and his partner Zolie Timothy arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



British actor Jason Statham and his partner Rosie Huntington-Whiteley arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



French director Louis Leterrier and US actress Cameron Richardson arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



US actress Michelle Rodriguez arrives for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



British US actress Helen Mirren arrives for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".



US wrestler and actor John Cena and his Iranian-born Canadian wife Shay Shariatzadeh arrive for the Premiere of the film "Fast X".

### Singapore to host Prince William's Earthshot Prize

Singapore will host the next awards ceremony for Prince William's Earthshot Prize that aims to reward innovative efforts to combat climate change, a statement said Monday. A winner is selected in each of the prize's five categories such as "Clean our Air" or "Revive our Oceans". The winners are awarded £1 million (\$1.2 million) each. "The Earthshot Prize is all about showing the world that solutions to some of the biggest environmental challenges we face are out there," said William, who is heir to his father King Charles III.



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales speaks on stage inside Windsor Castle grounds at the Coronation Concert, in Windsor, west of London. —AFP

The ceremony in Singapore will take place on November 7 and will feature performances by "world-renowned musicians and artists", according to the statement. This year's finalists will be revealed toward the end of this year, it added. Founded by the prince in 2020, the Earthshot Prize's name was inspired US president John F. Kennedy's "Moonshot" project in the 1960s to put a man on the moon. The inaugural awards ceremony took place in London in 2021.

Last year's prize was awarded at a star-studded ceremony in Boston with television presenter David Attenborough and actress Cate Blanchett among the judges. Winners included a female-founded start-up providing cleaner-burning stoves to women in Kenya and a British company that crafts biodegradable packaging from seaweed. —AFP

Lifestyle

# Johnny Depp: Once-loveable loner hit by lurid claims

Johnny Depp became a global megastar playing off-beat characters from Willy Wonka to Captain Jack Sparrow, until his destructive off-screen lifestyle threatened to permanently derail his career. Pouring his own eccentricities into his roles, Depp earned a reputation as both heartthrob and indie darling through sensitive performances in films such as "Edward Scissorhands" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape". He stepped into another level of fame fronting Disney's billion-dollar "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise as the rum-swilling sea dog Captain Jack Sparrow—partly inspired by one of his many heroes, Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards.

But his bitter legal battles with ex-wife Amber Heard laid bare a turbulent private life involving rows, drink and drugs that turned him into a toxic figure in Hollywood, from which his career is still recovering.



File photo shows US actor Johnny Depp poses as he leaves after a tribute ceremony during the 45th Deauville US Film Festival, in Deauville, northern France. — AFP

### From music to stardom

Born June 9, 1963 in Owensboro, Kentucky, Depp set out trying to be a musician, and sold ballpark pens before dabbling in acting. He made his big-screen debut in the cult Wes Craven thriller "A Nightmare on Elm Street" in 1984. From there, he launched a successful television career as a baby-faced undercover police officer in the popular series "21 Jump Street". In 1990, he played "Edward Scissorhands", a shear-fingered creature with a heart of gold who brings a bit of magic and joy to a small town with fanciful topiaries

and cutting-edge hairdos. It was one of several collaborations with director Tim Burton that also included "Ed Wood", "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and "Alice in Wonderland".

Depp portrayed another renegade hero, journalist and drug aficionado Hunter S. Thompson, in "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas". It was on set of one of Thompson's lesser-known works, "The Rum Diary" that he met and starred opposite Heard in 2011. He has also taken on heavier roles, such as an undercover detective who infiltrates the mob in 1997's much-loved "Donnie Brasco". Depp has been nominated three times for an Oscar, including for his role as "Peter Pan" creator J.M. Barrie in 2004's "Finding Neverland" and 2007's "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street". He has also frequently returned to his first love of music, collaborating with Oasis, Alice Cooper and Aerosmith's Joe Perry.

### Messy private life

Depp dated a string of celebrities including actress Winona Ryder and supermodel Kate Moss, and was with the mother of his two children, French singer and actress Vanessa Paradis, for 14 years. But his lifestyle and finances were a mess. He once claimed he spent more than \$30,000 a month on wine alone, and spent lavishly on art and property.

He told a London court in 2020 that business managers stole the \$650 million he made from "Pirates of the Caribbean". His marriage to Heard in 2015 was short-lived. They split the following year and divorced in 2017. In 2020, he tried to sue The Sun newspaper for libel after they called him a "wife beater", admitting he took drugs but denying any violence—but he lost the case.

Their marriage was raked over in even more lurid detail during a defamation trial in the United States two years later, and this time Depp was successful. "The jury gave me my life back," said a jubilant Depp. But the trial was a lightning rod for opposing sides of the #MeToo debate and Depp remains a toxic figure for many, particularly in the United States. The tumult cost him his prime role in Harry Potter spin-off franchise "Fantastic Beasts".

But his trial victory appears to have allowed a return. He plays King Louis XV in "Jeanne du Barry", which opens the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, and sees him speak French throughout. Just a few days earlier, it was reported he had been given a record \$20 million to remain the face of Dior fragrance. He is also set to direct Al Pacino in a biopic of artist Amedeo Modigliani later this year. —AFP



Swedish film director and President of the Jury of the 76th Cannes Film Festival Ruben Ostlund (center) poses with members of the jury (from left) US actor Paul Dano, French-Afghan writer and film director Atiq Rahimi, Argentinian film director Damian Szifron, US actress Brie Larson, French film director Julia Ducournau, Moroccan film director Maryam Touzani, French actor Denis Menochet and Zambian film director Rungano Nyoni during a photocall for the 2023 Cannes film festival jury at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos

# Cannes festival jury: Who's who

The jury at this year's Cannes Film Festival, which opens Tuesday, is headed by last year's Palme d'Or winner, "Triangle of Sadness" director Ruben Ostlund. His team of eight members, most aged under 50, includes US stars Paul Dano and Brie Larson and will decide on the prizes for the 21



Swedish film director and President of the Jury of the 76th Cannes Film Festival Ruben Ostlund poses during a photocall for the 2023 Cannes film festival jury at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.

films in competition to be announced on May 27. The celebrated actor Dano, who appeared most recently in Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans", made his directorial debut in acclaimed drama "Wildlife" in 2018.

Best-known as Captain Marvel and outspoken in the #MeToo movement, 33-year-old Larson, this year's youngest jury member, won an Oscar for her role as a mother locked up with her young son in "Room" in 2016. Two French stars join Ostlund's jury: actor Denis Menochet, whose breakout role came in 2009 with Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds", and violent gore director Julia Ducournau, who won the Palme d'Or in 2021 for "Titane".

Argentinean director Damian Szifron's second feature "To Catch a Killer" about a deranged gunman on the loose in Baltimore came out this year. Zambian-born Rungano Nyoni, who grew up in Wales, caused a sensation with her first feature about a little girl accused of witchcraft, "I'm Not a Witch" in 2018.

Morocco's Maryam Touzani was celebrated last year at Cannes for "The Blue Caftan" about homosexuality, which followed her critically acclaimed "Adam" in 2019 centred around an unwed and pregnant country girl. At 61 years old, Afghan writer and director Atiq Rahimi is this year's oldest member of the jury. A previous winner of France's prestigious Goncourt literary award, his films include two adaptations of his own novels. —AFP

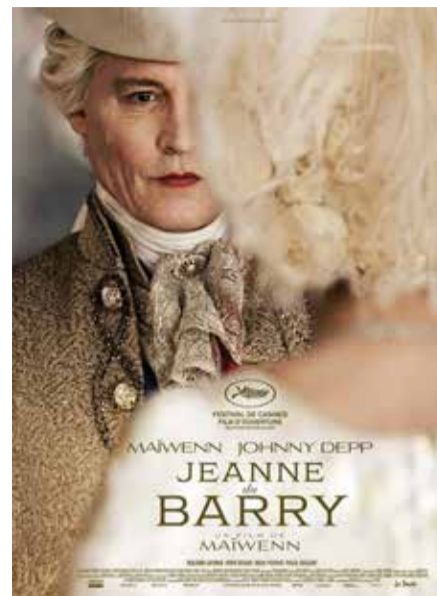
# Cannes opens with Johnny Depp's French comeback drama

The red carpet has been rolled out at Cannes as the French Riviera city saw the opening of the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. This year's festival kicked off on May 16 and will continue till May 27, promising splashy blockbusters, films from up-and-coming talent and also possible encounters with the global film industry's creme-de-la-creme strutting the grounds around the Palais des Festivals' entrance.

This year's highlight for film buffs at the festival is the French-language film Jeanne du Barry, which casts Johnny Depp as King Louis XV, his first major role since a highly publicized trial against his ex-wife, Amber Heard.

Saturday will see Martin Scorsese present his latest epic, "Killers of the Flower Moon", alongside stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro. That day also sees Natalie Portman and Julianne Moore in indie favourite Todd Haynes's "May December". It is among 21 films competing for the top prize Palme d'Or, by a record seven women directors.

Fremaux said increasing women's representation at the festival was a "fundamental question" but "I refuse congratulations, it is an evolution. We don't look at the gender, we select movies." Several Palme laureates are back in competition, including Britain's



two-time winner Ken Loach, Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda and Germany's Wim Wenders. The jury is led by last year's winner, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund ("Triangle of Sadness"), and also includes Hollywood stars Brie Larson and Paul Dano. Around a thousand police and security guards are in place for the festival, amid fears of protests linked to President Emmanuel Macron's unpopular pension reforms, with the CGT union even threatening to cut power.

### 'A lot of worries'

Depp's "Jeanne du Barry" has reportedly yet to secure US distribution. His dialogue in the film is kept to short phrases that help disguise his American accent. Maïwenn, the French star who directs and plays the lead role, admitted she was worried about the impact of his legal woes. "The film was shot last summer and he was coming out of his second trial," Maïwenn, who goes by a single name, told AFP last week. "I had a lot of worries. I was wondering: 'what will his image become?'" she said. But she faces her own controversies. In March, a well-known French journalist, Edwy Plenel of Mediapart, lodged a criminal complaint against Maïwenn, accusing her of approaching him in a restaurant, grabbing him by the hair and spitting in his face.

She refused to discuss the "ongoing case" with AFP, but admitted the assault in an interview on French TV, without going into details. Depp was axed from Harry Potter spin-off "Fantastic Beasts" following Heard's abuse allegations, but he is a long way from being "cancelled". He has secured a record \$20 million deal to remain the face of Dior fragrance, according to Variety last week. He is also set to direct Al Pacino in a biopic of artist Amedeo Modigliani later this year. —AFP

# The films competing at the Cannes Film Festival

The Cannes Film Festival returns from May 16 to 27, bringing a huge number of stars and celebrated filmmakers to France's Cote d'Azur. Here is a list of the 21 films competing for the top prize Palme d'Or, as well as a selection of other movies premiering out of competition.

### IN COMPETITION

#### "Asteroid City" by Wes Anderson

The king of quirky, Anderson divides audiences and almost never wins awards, but is loved by actors. His latest—about American space cadets—stars Tom Hanks, Scarlett Johansson and Edward Norton, to name but a few.

#### "The Zone of Interest" by Jonathan Glazer

Based on a book by Martin Amis about a romance in the Auschwitz concentration camp, the long-awaited return of this British director ("Under the Skin", "Sexy Beast") has arthouse fans salivating.

#### "May December" by Todd Haynes

Haynes wowed Cannes with lesbian drama "Carol" in 2015 starring Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara. His latest pairs two more big-hitters, Julianne Moore and Natalie Portman, for the story of an actress meeting the couple at the heart of a tabloid scandal.

#### "Monster" by Hirokazu Kore-eda

Japan's Kore-eda won the Palme for his touching family drama "Shoplifters" in 2018. "Monster" unfolds multiple viewpoints, "Rashomon"-style, to explain a child's disturbing behaviour.

#### "The Old Oak" by Ken Loach

The 86-year-old Brit is one of cinema's most politically engaged directors, and has won the Palme twice, for Irish civil war drama "The Wind That Shakes the Barley" in 2006 and "I, Daniel Blake" 10 years later. Possibly his final film, this focuses on Syrian refugees in Britain.

#### "Firebrand" by Karim Ainouz

Jude Law and Alicia Vikander star as English king Henry VIII and his sixth wife Catherine Parr in a period drama from Brazilian director Karim Ainouz.

#### "Black Flies" by Jean-Stephane Sauvaire

A young paramedic (Tye Sheridan) learns the ropes from a grizzled New York veteran (Sean Penn). There is much interest in the supporting role for Mike Tyson.

#### "Homecoming" by Catherine Corsini

Dogged by controversy over an underage sex scene, this got a delayed competition slot. It follows an African family returning to Corsica years after a tragedy on the French island.

#### "Perfect Days" by Wim Wenders

Wenders made two of the most iconic 1980s films in "Paris, Texas" and "Wings of Desire", winning the Palme and best director at Cannes. Since then, his features have gained less attention than his documentaries such as "Buena Vista Social Club". His new, Japan-set film charts a toilet cleaner's unexpected past.

#### "About Dry Grasses" by Nuri Bilge Ceylan

The Turkish filmmaker's meditative tales require patience but have scooped up many prizes in Cannes, including the 2014 Palme for "Winter Sleep". His new film follows a frustrated teacher in a remote village.

#### "Fallen Leaves" by Aki Kaurismaki

The Finnish director, now on his 19th film, is a fixture of the arthouse circuit, known for darkly funny looks at marginalized groups. This is billed as a gentle tragicomedy about two lonely hearts at a Helsinki nightclub.

#### "A Brighter Tomorrow" by Nanni Moretti

Moretti is another past winner (for "The Son's Room" in 2001). Here, the Italian stars as a 1950s director.

#### "Shanghai Youth" by Wang Bing

A rare documentary in the competition, it follows the lives of China's migrant workers.

#### "Banel et Adama" by Ramata-Toulaye Sy

The debut feature from the French-Senegalese director looks at the difficulties of young love in a Senegalese village.

#### "Rapito" by Marco Bellocchio

The 83-year-old Italian cineaste returns with the true story of a Jewish boy taken from his family to be raised as a Catholic by Pope Pius IX.

#### "The Pot-au-Feu" by Tran Anh Hung

The Vietnamese-French director adapts a classic 1920s French novel about fictional foodie Dodin Bouffant.



Workers prepare the red carpet ahead of the opening of the 76th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southeastern France. —AFP

#### "Club Zero" by Jessica Hausner

The Austrian directs Mia Wasikowska as a teacher in an elite school who forms a dangerous bond with students engaged in protesting the climate crisis.

#### "Four Daughters" by Kaouther Ben Hania

The Tunisian director received an Oscar nomination for "The Man Who Sold His Skin". Her follow-up mixes documentary and fiction in the story of a woman whose daughters suddenly disappear.

#### "Anatomy of a Fall" by Justine Triet

A thriller about a woman with a blind son suspected of her husband's murder.

#### "La Chimera" by Alice Rohrwacher

Isabella Rossellini stars in the story of a group of archaeologists working in the black market for historical artefacts.

#### "Last Summer" by Catherine Breillat

Known for her sexually transgressive films, Breillat has remade critically-acclaimed 2019 Danish film "Queen of Hearts" about a woman's affair with her stepson.

### OUT OF COMPETITION

These films are also being premiered, but are not competing for the Palme d'Or:

- "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" by James Mangold
- "Killers of the Flower Moon" by Martin Scorsese
- "Occupied City" by Steve McQueen
- "The Idol" by Sam Levinson
- "Cobweb" by Kim Jee-woon
- "Kennedy" by Anurag Kashyap
- "Kubi" by Takeshi Kitano
- "Anselm" by Wim Wenders —AFP

## Sports

# Gill's ton fires Gujarat to play-offs, Hyderabad out

## Shubman Gill hit maiden IPL century to lift holders

**AHMEDABAD:** India opener Shubman Gill hit his maiden IPL century to help holders Gujarat Titans secure their play-off berth with a thumping 34-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday. Gill, who smashed 101 off 58 balls, put on a 147-run stand with Sai Sudarshan, who made 47, to guide table-toppers Gujarat to 188-9 in Ahmedabad. Mohammed Shami and Mohit Sharma both took four wickets to limit Hyderabad to 154-9 as Gujarat became the first team to secure one of the four play-off spots. Gujarat, who had a fairytale debut season when they won the title last year, are also assured of a top-two finish in the group phase.

"Very proud of the boys. Two in two. Last year was different, we knew there'd be a lot of challenges this year," skipper Hardik Pandya said. "Boys have put their hands up in different situations. I think we've rightly earned the chance of making the play-offs." Hyderabad, the 2016 champions, fell out of the play-off race, making it seven teams fighting for three remaining play-off places. "Lots of pride still left in the upcoming games," said captain Aiden Markram. "Maybe we'll give out

a few opportunities and guys can finish well but sadly we haven't been good."

Gujarat lost Wriddhiman Saha, for a duck, on the third ball of the match but Gill hit Fazalhaq Farooqi for four straight boundaries to set the pace. Gill, who jumped to second in the batting charts with 576 runs behind Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis (631), smashed 13 fours and a six and Sudarshan was also punishing in his 36-ball stay. The 23-year-old Gill, who has scored a ton each in all three international formats, was named man of the match.

Hyderabad hit back with wickets and despite Gill's century in 56 balls, Gujarat managed just 34 runs in the last five overs and lost seven wickets. The Sunrisers bowlers did well to check Gujarat's total, which looked like going over 200, as seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar returned figures of 5-30 but the efforts were vain. Hyderabad were never in the chase after they fell to 12-3 with Shami taking two and further slipped to 59-7. South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen then smashed 64 and put on 68 runs with Kumar, who made 27, but the stand only reduced their margin of defeat. — AFP



**AHMEDABAD:** Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Sunrisers Hyderabad on May 15, 2023. — AFP

## Nobody is perfect but Rahm close as showdown looms

**ROCHESTER:** Top-ranked Jon Rahm is borrowing the philosophy of Arnold Palmer as he embarks on what he believes is a never-ending quest for golfing perfection. The Spanish world number one heads to the PGA Championship chasing a third major title after his Masters triumph last month, happily accepting that his golf may never be perfect. "That's almost a blessing in life, to know the work is not really done. It's never done. The search is ever ongoing," Rahm said. "The path, I believe Arnie said, to success is always under construction and that couldn't be any more true."

That said, however, Rahm has built a record pile of prize money this year of \$14.5 million, with his four victories including his Masters triumph. He has already broken 2022 Masters winner Scottie Scheffler's old mark of \$14 million with nearly four months of the campaign to come, including next week's PGA Championship at Oak Hill. "Feeling good with the game where it's at right now," Rahm said. "I'm glad to be in good form this year." Rahm won his first PGA Tour event of the year at the Tournament of Champions and followed up with another victory two weeks later in the California desert.

A month later, Rahm captured his third title of the year at Riviera, his sixth top-10 showing of the season, and followed up with his emotional win at Augusta National. Rahm shared 15th the following week at the Heritage in a designated event but bounced back two weeks later to finish second in defending his Mexican Open title, losing to Tony Finau. Rahm, who has won 11 career PGA titles and eight DP World Tour events, was forced to re-evaluate his season goals after his sizzling start to the year.

"I had to reassess them even before winning the Masters. One of my goals earlier in the year was to win multiple times again on the PGA Tour and I won my first two events," Rahm said. "You need to reset



**ROCHESTER:** Jon Rahm of Spain signs his autograph for a fan during a practice round prior to the 2023 PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club on May 15, 2023. — AFP

because I was getting close to accomplishing everything I had set my mind to. If you have to reset or refresh your goals, it's an amazing thing because that means you're exceeding your expectations." "So I did have a day with my mental coach where we talked about things and reassessed and refocused on what we wanted to accomplish in the year. Yeah, I had to do it, which again, it's a wonderful thing to do."

### Rest mind, body, soul

Rahm said he pushed himself by playing two of the next three weeks after taking the green jacket, so he has taken a two-week break before the year's second major showdown. "Need a bit of time off, just a little bit of rest," Rahm said. "Not too much, just mind, body and soul need it. It has been a lot of golf."

But he shared 14th two weeks ago at Quail Hollow, site of his 2017 major triumph, after a third-round 70 that he said revived his confidence in his shotmaking.

"I showed a lot of really good signs in Charlotte," Thomas said. "I was hitting a lot of very poor wedges and irons. I birdied two of the last four holes and salvaged an under par round on a tough golf course." Thomas caddie Jim Mackay, nicknamed "Bones", was thrilled at the effort. "Bones and I said on 18 green, this is the stuff that we haven't been doing this year," Thomas said. "That 70 then gave me an opportunity to play myself into contention with nine holes left, whereas I wouldn't have been that way beforehand."

"It wasn't making that putt to get some momentum or hitting wedges in there close, (it was) making those two, three, four birdies in a row. "I really turned a little bit of a corner of seeing more, of scoring better." World number 13 Thomas must now apply those lessons after months of frustration. "It was very frustrating," Thomas said. After a few months where you're not performing as well as you feel like you should... it's pretty easy to get pissed off and understand what's going wrong." "I'm starting to see a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel."

Thomas said he doesn't feel he's in a slump now but did a month ago and had events where he doubt-

tee (IOC). We understand but we hope the situation will change," Russian federation press chief Maria Tikhonravova told AFP.

### 'Big friendly family'

Russians and Belarusians at the tournament say they have been well received by competitor nations. "Judo is a big friendly family," said Adamian. "When I arrived, I met people from the IJF EJU (the European federation), and also from international teams and everybody was ready to say thank you for coming, we really missed you and they hope that we will stay here for other competitions until the Olympic Games," said Tikhonravova.

The return of the Russians sparked the withdrawal of Ukraine from the worlds but there was no repeat of what happened at the boxing worlds when several other nations pulled out in protest. The Polish judo federation did say initially it was "shocked" but then sent its athletes to Doha with the Olympic qualification process under way. Germany said it would have hoped for a different decision to send out a "signal" against Russia's "war of aggression." At the same time, the German federation said it did not want to disadvantage athletes. During their enforced absence from the circuit

And I haven't had time to really sit back and rest after the Masters." Rahm skipped a designated event last week in Charlotte, the only miss allowed if he hopes to collect a full payout from last season's bonus pool.

"I wish I could have rested a little more, but it is the life we signed up for," Rahm said. "I probably didn't help, I celebrated the Masters win on Tuesday (after). That delayed the recovery a little bit." But nothing has dimmed Rahm's resolve to deliver the best he can at events that matter most, and a victory at Oak Hill would leave him only the British Open to complete a career Grand Slam. "We put in a lot of effort to try to beat the best guys in the world so maybe that level of intensity and that determination is why I'm characterized as a fighter," Rahm said. "I'm also never going to give up." — AFP



**Justin Thomas**

ed he could win or thinking he couldn't win. "It sucks. It's terrible," Thomas said. "I've never felt so far and so close at the same time. That's a very hard thing to explain and it's also a very hard way to compete and win a golf tournament. "That's how you get out of it, just playing your way out of it and hitting the shots when you want to, making those putts when you need to, and then your confidence builds back up and next thing you know, you don't even remember what you were thinking in those times." — AFP

the Russian judokas have continued training and taken part in domestic competition or else attended training camps with their Belarus neighbors and allies. "I never stopped training, I was continuing my job and I think what I have I deserved it," says Adamian.

### 'We are patriots'

There is an advantage in seeing the Russians and Belarusians return in that, a year out from the Paris Olympics, rival nations can see what stage their preparations and level are currently at. "Better to see them a year out from the Games. It gives us an idea of their level as we had not seen them since March 2022," explained French deputy head coach Bastien Puget, despite a colleague regretting Ukraine's resulting absence.

"Of course, we want to go (to the Olympics) with our flag and anthem. I am a citizen of Russia, you are a patriot of your country, we are patriots of our country," said Tikhonravova. In March, the IOC recommended the return of Russian and Belarusian athletes to international competitions, without commenting on their presence at the Paris Games. In March, fencing became the first sport to authorize athletes from the two countries with triathlon following suit. — AFP

## Curran under fire as IPL record price tag weighs heavy

**NEW DELHI:** Sam Curran is the most expensive player in Indian Premier League history but England's World Cup hero is drawing flak after failing to justify his price tag with bat or ball. Punjab Kings shelled out \$2.23 million on the all-rounder but they are eighth in the 10-team table and barring a miracle will not qualify for the knock-out phase. With a week of the group phase left, Curran was languishing at 39th on the runs table as of early Monday, with 216 from 11 innings and only one half-century. South African six-machine Faf du Plessis at Bangalore has almost three times as many runs and seven 50s to top the batting stats.

Left-arm quick Curran, who with his run-choking bowling at the death was player of the tournament at the T20 World Cup last winter, has been even less effective with the ball. He has seven wickets (51st position) at an economy of over 10. Former India opener Virender Sehwag was the latest commentator to lay into the 24-year-old's sub-par performance, comparing him unfavorably with bargain-buy teammate Prabhsimran Singh after the Indian player's century on Saturday. "You bought Sam Curran for (\$2.23 million), what has he done?" Sehwag told the website Cricbuzz.

Sehwag, known for his straight talk, also criticized Curran last month, saying "he doesn't have that experience yet" despite the record-setting price tag. Curran, who had a previous stint in the IPL with Chennai, started this edition of the competition well. He captained Punjab in three matches in the absence of the injured Shikhar Dhawan and played match-winning roles in two of them. Bowling figures of 3-31 — his best this season — helped Punjab down Lucknow and then his 29-ball 55 won him the player of the match award against the Mumbai Indians.

Curran tried to make light of the fee Punjab paid, telling Sky Sports last month: "They've put a lot of faith in me and I guess I'm the type of person try not to put too much pressure on myself. "Hopefully I can show some good performances for the team. The price tag is what it is." But Curran has since struggled with the pitches and conditions, and on Saturday pundit Simon Doull picked him as his biggest disappointment of the current IPL season. "Sorry Sam Curran. It's you this season so far," the former New Zealand paceman said. "Hasn't bowled well enough at the death, going at over 10 an over. You buy a big-priced all-rounder, you have to deliver."

### 'A little disappointed'

Curran is not the only big buy to disappoint. Australian all-rounder Cameron Green has been decent if not spectacular, hitting 274 runs to help Mumbai to third in the table, but taking only six wickets. Green was the second most expensive buy in the December auction after Mumbai Indians paid out 175 million rupees (\$2.11 million) on him. Several Englishmen have failed to live up to the hype — a worry for the country ahead of the Ashes and one-day World Cup. England Test skipper Ben Stokes was bought by Chennai Super Kings for 162 million rupees but managed only two underwhelming performances before being benched with injury. — AFP



**Sam Curran**

## Thomas fights through slump for PGA boost

**ROCHESTER:** Defending champion Justin Thomas says he can't take much from last year's victory into this year's PGA Championship, but he got a major boost from a round two weeks ago. The 30-year-old American chases his third major title this week at Oak Hill, where a third PGA title would put him behind only five-time winner Jack Nicklaus and four-time winner Tiger Woods in the stroke play era (since 1958).

Thomas won the 2017 PGA and last year made the greatest last-day fightback in tournament history, rallying from seven strokes down to beat Will Zalatoris in a playoff at Southern Hills. "It's so long ago in terms of your golf game," Thomas said Monday. "The feelings can translate and the memories can translate, but a lot of things — swings and putts and chips — have happened since then. That part is hard to relate." Since that victory, Thomas has managed only three top-five finishes in 19 PGA starts.

## Back in from the cold, Russia judokas eye Paris Olympics

**DOHA:** After returning to international competition at the world championships in Doha following a ban in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, Russian and Belarusian judokas are now eyeing next year's Paris Olympics. Competing under neutral flags, the Russians have struggled to land titles but Arman Adamian broke their duck Friday in Doha winning -100 kg gold.

After his win the Russian flag was replaced for the ceremony with a banner of the competition and the anthem played was that of the International Judo Federation rather than Russia's. Adamian's tunic also bore the letters AIN for Independent Neutral Athletes rather than Russia. Asked about how he felt about that, Adamian said simply: "No comment". "They understand that they come here as an individual because it is the rule from the International Olympic Commit-

## Sports

# Barca fans celebrate league titles with players in parade

## Barcelona win club's 27th league title and first since 2019

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona players from the men's and women's teams lapped up affection from thousands of supporters in the city's streets on Monday afternoon to celebrate their dual league titles. Xavi Hernandez's side beat Espanyol on Sunday to win the club's 27th league title and first since 2019, while Barca's women's team earned their fourth consecutive Liga F win at the end of April. The players rode in two open-top buses, heading from Camp Nou to the city's Arc de Triomf monument five miles away, the streets lined with jubilant supporters despite the threat of rain.

Defender Ronald Araujo was draped in a Uruguayan flag, while La Liga's top scorer Robert Lewandowski, wearing sunglasses and a Barcelona scarf, waved to fans. Coach Xavi, whose name was chanted frequently, threw down a can of beer to delighted thirsty fans below. Players from both sides wore t-shirts proclaiming "the league is ours, the future too". Crowds increased as the buses headed along their route, to the main square, Plaza Catalunya, and then on towards the Arc.

"You can see the fans are very excited about it and obviously we are too," goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen told club television. "It's a pride to share this with them and have them closer than ever." In front of the two players' buses, another bus pumping out pop songs to set the mood led the way, cutting through streets filled with blue and red smoke. Feeling among supporters was positive, as expected during a parade, although they expect more to come from both teams in Europe.

Barcelona's women have reached the Champions League final, where they will face Wolfsburg in

Eindhoven on June 3, while the men were knocked out of the Champions League in the group stage for the second season running. "We say to the fans that we are celebrating today, but that we have a lot of our minds focused on Eindhoven and that we will give everything and more to make them proud," two-time women's Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas told Barca TV.

Fans stood on balconies waving flags, while others clambered on top of bus stop shelters to get a better view. "I'm certain of my hope for the men's team (next season), for them to give a good account of themselves in Europe," supporter Laura Nieto, 37, from nearby Terrassa told AFP. "That they don't do a bad job against big opponents, which is what's been happening. And for the women, for them to continue like this - which is unstoppable."

### Messi chants

Some supporters chanted Paris Saint-Germain playmaker Lionel Messi's name, hopeful that Barcelona can bring him "home" this summer at the end of his contract in France. Others were more torn by the idea of Messi returning, despite president Joan Laporta pledging the club would "do everything" to sign him. "On one hand I would like it because it would bring back a lot of excitement," said Anabel Sanz, 16. "But on the other, I think not, because it would mean rebuilding the team again and in the long run, that would hurt us, it would not be good."

Messi, who turns 36 in June, is Barcelona's all-time top goalscorer, and said a tearful goodbye to the club in 2021 when they could not afford to renew his contract. "Barca have to reach the semi-

ing line-up, because a spate of badly-timed injuries induced their European collapse. However the economic "palancas" - levers - that Barcelona pulled last summer to make signings were a one-time-only parachute for the club to use.

This summer they need to make over 200 million euros (\$218 million) in savings or new revenue to be able to operate without their hands tied in the market. Until then, Barcelona are only permitted to spend up to 40 percent of any incomings or savings on new players or contract renewals, and there are some clear areas they need to improve. Barcelona need a striker to fill in for Lewandowski. They could also use a left winger and also a right-back - Koukou has been playing there out of position.

Midfielder Sergio Busquets confirmed he is leaving in June at the end of his contract, which while offering an economic boost, means they must sign a replacement. Coach Xavi Hernandez is thought to like Real Sociedad's Martin Zubimendi, but his prohibitive 60 million euro (\$66 million) release clause means he may have to settle for an alternative. Unlike rivals Real Madrid, linked with Borussia Dortmund star Jude Bellingham, Barcelona are unable to cherry-pick from the cream of the crop.

### The Messi maze

Perhaps one exception is Lionel Messi, whom the club have publicly courted for a fairytale return as his contract runs down at PSG. However the 35-year-old World Cup winner may choose a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia instead, which a source

home practicing and getting ready to go to Roland Garros." He admitted he was outplayed by his Hungarian opponent. "He surprised me a lot, his level was really, really high. I'm sure he's going to break the top 100 very, very soon."

Marozsan, who next plays Borna Coric for a place in the quarter-finals, had not won a match on the ATP Tour prior to the tournament—indeed this is the first time he has qualified for the main draw at a tournament on the Tour. "Everything was perfect today, I was doing my job," the winner said. "I cannot imagine this win, even if it was my dream last night. "I thought I might win a few games or a set." Marozsan produced 24 winners in a victory which took an hour and three quarters. "I had hoped I could do something special," he said. "Now I've just beaten the best in the sport so I'm very happy." Alcaraz now stands 30-3 for the season.

### Medvedev reaches last 16

Third seed Daniil Medvedev needed a fightback to defeat Spaniard Bernabe Zapata Miralles 3-6, 6-1, 6-3, with the winner producing his best career effort at the tournament by reaching the last 16. It will be the first time since 1994 that no Spaniard has made it to the fourth round at the Foro Italo. "This was my third win on clay from a set down," five-time Masters 1000 champion Medvedev said. "I managed to play better—I'm definitely happy with my level. "I'm playing my best tennis on clay—I've never played so well in Rome and I'm feeling great." Sixth seed Andrey Rublev defeated Spain's Alejandro Davidovich

ited fields to reward top stars.

That has left this week's showdown at Oak Hill and the other majors as the only place where LIV and PGA stars battle for bragging rights, with somewhat of a truce being called last month at Augusta National, where LIV had three of the top six finishers. "The good news is the Masters went first and set the stage for, frankly, civility," Waugh told the Times. "That's the tone we want - nobody died, right?" Waugh, however, ripped into LIV Golf, declaring such stars as Phil Mickelson and Dustin Johnson diminished after leaving the tour. "I don't think division is good for the game," Waugh added. "Hopefully it's good for those individuals that have made whatever decisions they have, but the game has moved on."

"It has amplified those who have stayed and the ones who have left have largely disappeared from the landscape - in terms of an exposure perspective." The comment came before Johnson won Sun-



**BARCELONA:** The players and staff of FC Barcelona men football team parade aboard a open-top bus followed by the women's team (out of frame), to celebrate their La Liga titles in Barcelona on May 15, 2023. —AFP

nals and finals of the Champions League at least, and win more," said Josep Martinez, 60. "It's difficult (to know if Messi should return), not because of his age.

It's about why he comes, what's the goal of him coming? "Is he coming here to fight for his place? ... For the team, I don't know if it's the best thing." — AFP

## Barca's La Liga title, first step on long road to recovery

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's La Liga triumph proves they are heading in the right direction, but the road back towards Europe's elite remains long and treacherous. President Joan Laporta mortgaged part of the club's future last summer to sign Robert Lewandowski, Jules Kounde and other star names, with Barcelona over 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) in debt. It paid off in the top flight as Barcelona won the league for the first time in four years, but a humiliating Champions League group elimination saw the Catalans drop into the Europa League.

Their stay in Europe's second tier didn't last long either, knocked out by Manchester United in a play-off tie, and were left to watch rivals Real Madrid cruise into the Champions League semi-finals. The full outcome of that gamble, which saw Barcelona sell 25 percent of future domestic television rights for the next 25 years, may not be clear for a long time, but in the short term, success is imperative.

Barcelona's league and Spanish Super Cup wins are the minimum that could be expected, and significant improvement on the continent is needed next season. Their Champions League exit showed the team still needs strengthening beyond the start-

## Alcaraz gets French Open wake-up call

**ROME:** Carlos Alcaraz slumped to a third round defeat at the Italian Open by unheralded Hungarian Fabian Marozsan on Monday, just two weeks before he heads into the French Open as top seed. The 20-year-old Spaniard, who is guaranteed to replace Novak Djokovic as world number one on May 22, had come into the tournament in Rome on the back of wins in Barcelona and Madrid. But the US Open champion was outplayed by 23-year-old Marozsan, losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

Marozsan, who is ranked 135th in the world, won the final six points of the second-set tie-break to give Alcaraz a wake-up call with the French Open starting in less than a fortnight. Alcaraz, who was second seed in Rome but in Paris will be top seed at a Grand Slam for the first time, said he required some sustained training to beef up his French Open preparations with the clay-court major beginning on May 28.

"I'm going to rest a little bit, some days off for me," he said. "I really need some days to reset my mind and be fresh for Roland Garros. "If I want to go to Paris in good shape, I have to practice, to be better. I've been playing so much that I couldn't practice more than three, four days in a row. "It's going to be really helpful for me to have days at

## Waugh rebukes LIV, seeks civility at PGA Championship

**ROCHESTER:** PGA of America chief executive officer Seth Waugh fanned the flames of the PGA Tour-LIV Golf civil war even as he called for civility at this week's PGA Championship. Waugh told British newspaper The Times that players who left the PGA Tour for Saudi-backed LIV have "disappeared" and the breakaway series has no viable survival plan. After LIV lured top PGA Tour talent with record \$25 million purses and money guarantees, the PGA banned LIV players and restructured its schedule to have "designated events" with larger purses and lim-



**Barcelona's President Joan Laporta**

told AFP was a "done deal". If Messi does return for a Barcelona farewell, Xavi would likely need a new formation to accommodate him. The Argentine could add the quality the team needs in the final third but may weaken them defensively and in pressing.

Lewandowski's form in the second half of the season has been a concern for Barcelona, with the bulk of his goals coming before the World Cup. The Polish international turns 35 in August and relying on him as their main source of goals carries a risk. Xavi's own ceiling as a coach is still unknown. While he has clearly improved Barcelona, in knockout competitions the team have struggled. To add further uncertainty, the "Caso Negreira" refereeing scandal still looms over Barcelona, with UEFA looking into the matter. — AFP



**ROME:** Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns to Hungary's Fabian Marozsan during their third round match of the Men's ATP Rome Open tennis tournament on May 15, 2023. — AFP

Fokina 7-6 (10/8), 6-3.

Three men's matches were left incomplete by evening rain, while two women's ties were delayed. Women's world number one Iga Swiatek, the reigning Italian and French Open champion, will now face Donna Vekic in their last-16 match on Tuesday. Fifth seed and 2022 finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas led Italian Lorenzo Sonego 6-3 when the rain came, Lorenzo Musetti led 12th seed Frances Tiafoe 5-7, 6-4, 2-1 and Alexander Zverev was 6-4, 3-3 in front of JJ Wolf. Wimbledon champion and women's seventh seed Elena Rybakina reached the quarter-finals by beating Marketa Vondrousova 6-3, 6-3. — AFP

day's LIV title in Tulsa in a dramatic playoff that went unseen in many US markets because television coverage was dropped after a storm delay pushed the finish beyond pre-set viewing windows. "I'm really playing well," Johnson said. "The game is in good form so we'll see what happens. I feel like I'm doing everything well right now."

Waugh called the idea that fans will support LIV's team format "flawed" and said: "I don't think people really care about it and I don't see how it's a survivable business model. "They can fund it for as long as they want to, but no matter how much money you have, at some point, burning it doesn't feel very good. I don't see they are accomplishing much." LIV Golf and the PGA Tour have taken their fight to court but a trial is at least a year away.

In the meantime, the majors have kept their qualifying criteria and remain open to LIV talent, but the fact the Saudi-backed events aren't awarded ranking

## 11 footballers arrested in match-fixing probe

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong authorities have arrested 11 footballers from the same team over allegations of match-fixing in a domestic league, the city's anti-graft body said Tuesday. After a yearlong investigation, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) on Monday detained 23 people in total, including a coach, over the alleged fixing of results in the First Division, Hong Kong football's second tier.

The alleged offences include bribery manipulating match results and illegal gambling. ICAC principal investigator Kate Cheuk said at a press conference on Tuesday. "This operation is the largest in recent years carried out by the ICAC against match-fixing," she added. ICAC said the match-fixing group was suspected of paying each player up to about HK\$10,000 (\$1,200) for each game, depending on their impact. "It's not about how well they played but how well they faked (their performance) or how much they could help manipulate the results," ICAC's Cheuk said.

The suspected footballers would either play passively so their team would lose to a weaker rival, or they sought to achieve a certain score that was unpopular and at high odds, she added. The group and some of the players then bet on these results in an illegally organized scheme for profits. The arrested players and the coach belonged to the same club, which ICAC did not name. Local media, however, cited sources as saying they were from Happy Valley, one of Hong Kong's oldest football clubs.

The anti-graft body said they belong to a First Division team that had played 26 matches and won eight in the 2022-23 season. There are currently three First Division teams with eight wins - Happy Valley is one of them. ICAC said it has yet to come up with the total amount of money involved as the probe is still ongoing.

In another development, South Korean international footballer Son Jun-ho is in police custody in northeast China in connection with a bribery case, Beijing's foreign ministry said Tuesday. World Cup midfielder Son was detained "on suspicion of accepting bribes by non-state employees", foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, without offering further details. Police "will provide necessary facilities for South Korean diplomats to perform their consular duties", he added.

Son has played for Chinese Super League side Shandong Taishan since 2021 and appeared in three of South Korea's four matches at last year's World Cup in Qatar. Chinese outlet Sina Sports reported he was detained on Friday, the same day his club posted a message on its official Weibo account wishing him a happy 31st birthday. South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported, citing a diplomatic source, that Son had been "questioned by public security authorities in Liaoning province while in detention". — AFP

points could slowly trim LIV players from the majors. Waugh, also a governing board member for the Official World Golf Rankings, said he has problems with awarding points for LIV events, citing relegation and promotion plus the impact of team events. "They have made a bad assumption that this will be a quick process," Waugh said. "It never has been."

German two-time major winner Martin Kaymer's withdrawal trimmed the number of LIV players in the field of 156 to 17, including six major winners with a combined 15 major titles. Six-time major champion Mickelson and four-time major winner Brooks Koepka shared second place behind Spain's Jon Rahm at the Masters, with LIV's Patrick Reed tied for fourth. World number one Rahm could be overtaken for the top spot at Oak Hill by world number two Scottie Scheffler, last year's Masters champion. Forecasts are for cold and rainy conditions during competition days. — AFP

## Al Shabab 'Champions' of Zain First Division League

Company congratulates Al Shabab, Khaitan on promotion to Zain Premier League



KUWAIT: Al Musaibeh joins in crowning Al Shabab SC as champions of the Zain First Division League.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, joined in honoring Al Shabab SC on achieving the Zain First Division League title after their exciting match against Khaitan SC in the league's final fixture during the 20th round. Zain took to the field in Mubarak Al Osaimi Stadium, home of Khaitan SC, to congratulate the champions, Al Shabab SC, on achieving the Zain First Division League, as well as Khaitan SC on securing the second-place title.

The ceremony was attended by Zain Kuwait's Corporate Affairs Department Manager Hamad Al Musaibeh, Kuwait Football Association Vice Chairman for Technical Affairs Hayef Al Dehani, KFA Board Member Jamal Al Otaibi, President of Al Shabab SC Dr Menahi Al Azmi, and President of Khaitan SC Abdullah Al Otaibi.

The company also congratulated both clubs on

securing their promotion to the Zain Premier League next season 2023-2024, after Al Shabab SC topped the league table with 38 points and Khaitan SC came in second with 28 points. Zain wishes both teams all the best of luck when they compete in the nation's top league. Zain's participation came as part of its official sponsorship of the KFA's competitions for the 2022-2026 seasons, including the Kuwaiti Premier League (Dawri Zain), the Zain First Division League, HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).

The company recently joined in co-hosting the special event held at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium to celebrate HH the Amir's Cup Final. The event, which came in partnership with the Kuwait Football Association, the Ministry of Information, and the Public Authority for Sports, celebrated the

final match of the most cherished local cup between title holders Kazima SC and Kuwait SC. The special celebration kicked-off with many fun activities and competitions in the Fans Zone, and the packed program included up to 200 valuable prizes like smartphones, smart watches, and headphones, along with special prizes for social media followers. The event also featured a unique performance prior to the match start whistle.

As the Official Sponsor, Zain offers KD 50,000 worth of prizes for athletes and fans per season, which is the biggest prize pool ever to be distributed in the Kuwaiti League's history. By dedicating cash prizes for athletes, the company seeks to encourage players to pursue excellence and elevate the league's performance. Zain's role centers around three main areas: supporting athletes with cash prizes, launch-

ing social events and interacting with fans at stadiums, and an all-new surprise: the first-ever Fantasy Football League in Kuwaiti football's history. These contributions and more go in line with the KFA's vision to further enrich the local football scene, given that it is the most beloved sports among Kuwaitis.

Zain firmly believe that the private sector has a vital and active role in developing the local sports and youth sectors, and it makes this belief a reality by sponsoring and supporting some of the biggest sports programs in the nation. This partnership with Kuwait's top football competition comes to strengthen the leadership role Zain plays in the local sports scene and is perfectly in line with the company's sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards the sports and youth sectors.

## Pele's turf-lined tomb opens to public in Brazil

SANTOS: It is a final resting place fit for "The King": six months after the death of the man widely considered the greatest footballer of all time, Brazil opened Pele's gilded, football-turfed tomb to the public Monday. Pele, who died on December 29 at age 82 after a battle with cancer, was laid to rest at the Ecumenical Memorial Cemetery in Santos, Brazil. It is a high-rise, 14-storey mausoleum that holds the Guinness world record for the tallest cemetery on Earth.

Fans were greeted by two life-size golden statues of the player nicknamed "O Rei"—The King—whose remains rest inside a large golden vault displayed in the middle of a 200-square-meter (more than 2,000-square-foot) room carpeted in artificial turf. "It surpassed my expectations. It's a really beautiful place," said Ronaldo Rodrigues, 44, a businessman who was first in line to visit the tomb, along with his wife. "I hope lots of tourists will come visit and get to know a little about Pele's story, what he represented for Santos, Brazil and the entire world." Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, Pele is the only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970).

He scored a world record 1,281 goals during his more than two-decade career with Santos (1956-74), the New York Cosmos (1975-77) and the Brazilian national team. In tears, Pele's son Edinho told reporters who flocked to the southeastern port city



SANTOS: View of the mausoleum where the coffin of late Brazilian football star rests, at the Ecumenical Necropolis Memorial cemetery in Santos, Brazil. — AFP

that the family was still struggling to cope with their loss. "But we're also very proud and happy at all the affection and reverence that's kept pouring in," he said. For now, entries to the tomb are limited to 60 people a day, via a sign-up form on the cemetery's website.

Topped with a cross, Pele's golden vault has black etchings on its sides depicting his 1,000th goal and his famous raised-fist goal celebration. The room is wallpapered with images of fans in a football stadium. The resort-like cemetery also features an auto museum that now includes the Mercedes Benz S-280 the company gave Pele in 1974 to commemorate his 1,000th goal. "It's a place that's rich in detail, all lovingly assembled in tribute, as the 'King' deserves," cemetery manager Paulo Campos told AFP. The mausoleum sits less than a kilometer (0.6 mile) from the Vila Belmiro, the stadium where Pele played most of his storied career. — AFP

## Liverpool maintain their top-4 pursuit

LEICESTER: Liverpool maintained their pursuit of Champions League football next season and pushed Leicester ever closer to the Championship as Curtis Jones scored twice in a 3-0 win at the King Power on Monday. Trent Alexander-Arnold rounded off another fine performance in his new hybrid role between right-back and midfield with a stunning strike as Liverpool closed to within one point of the top four.

Jürgen Klopp's men still need a late-season collapse from Newcastle or Manchester United, but a seven-game winning streak from the Reds has upped the pressure on their rivals, who both have three games remaining to Liverpool's two. "It's all we can do," said Klopp. "It would be a real shame if they slip and we're not there. So we have to do our job. "I think we have qualified for European football which six weeks ago wasn't in sight." Seven years on from shocking the world to win the title, Leicester's Premier League days look numbered as they remain two points from safety with two games remaining.

They face another daunting task when they travel to Newcastle next Monday in a match that could seal their fate should Everton or Leeds win over the weekend. "It's pretty simple, we need to win our next game," said Leicester interim boss Dean Smith. "It will be tough at St James' Park. It would be nice to take the lead for once." The Foxes' defensive frailties were again exposed as a bright start from the hosts was quickly forgotten when Jones struck twice in three minutes just after the half-hour mark.

Luis Diaz was allowed to race onto a long ball



LEICESTER: Liverpool's Brazilian striker Roberto Firmino (center) celebrates with teammates at the end of the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Liverpool on May 15, 2023. — AFP

forward from Alisson Becker before it broke for Mohamed Salah to cross for the unmarked Jones to tap in the opener at the far post. Salah was the provider again moments later as Jones produced a magnificent touch to control and finish past the helpless Daniel Iversen. "I thought the second goal looked like we had frazzled minds from the kick-off," added Smith. "We have to have clearer minds and think clear under pressure."

The home crowd quickly turned on their own side and there were boos when Cody Gakpo fired straight at Iversen with a glorious chance to make it 3-0. Scoring goals has not been Leicester's problem this season, but they even looked blunt in attack as belief drained from Smith's men. Liverpool's upturn in form after a difficult season has coincided with Alexander-Arnold's new role as a deep-lying playmaker in midfield when in possession. — AFP