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## Law applied equally to all

Deputy Premier meets senior commanders, defense and interior ministry officials

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Zionists out to destroy UNRWA

GENEVA: The Zionist entity is waging a concerted campaign aimed at destroying UNRWA, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said in an interview published Saturday. Philippe Lazzarini said calls for his resignation were part of the Zionist government's push. — AFP (See Page 7)



Officers attend the unveiling of the Arman defense systems.

#### Iran unveils air defense systems

TEHRAN: Iran unveiled two new air defense systems on Saturday, state media reported. "The Arman anti-ballistic missile system and the Azaraksh low-altitude air defense system, built by the ministry of defense, were unveiled this morning," the official IRNA news agency said. — AFP

#### Houthis claim latest vessel strike

SANAA: Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Saturday claimed an attack a day earlier on an oil tanker in the Red Sea. Houthi naval forces "carried out an operation targeting the British oil tanker Pollux in the Red Sea" with missiles, rebel spokesman Yahya Saree said in a statement. — AFP (See Page 6)

#### 10 killed in India factory fire

NEW DELHI: Ten people were killed and 15 more injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in India on Saturday, police said. The explosion was caused by a fire inside the factory in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, police officer Feroze Khan Abdullah said. — AFP



Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah delivers televised speech.

#### Hezb: Zionists to pay with blood

BEIRUT: Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed Friday that the Zionist will pay "with blood" for civilians it killed in Lebanon this week, warning the group has missiles that can reach anywhere in the Zionist entity. The funeral of the seven family members killed in Nabatiyeh was held on Saturday. — AFP (See Page 5)



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah holds a meeting at the defense ministry on Feb 17, 2024. — KUNA

### Fears grow for Gaza patients as killings rise

GAZA: The Zionist entity said it had taken 100 people into custody at one of Gaza's main hospitals Saturday after troops raided the facility, with fears mounting for patients and staff trapped inside. The deadly bombardment of Gaza continued overnight with another 100 people killed in Zionist strikes, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

At least 120 patients and five medical teams are stuck without water, food and electricity in the Nasser Hospital

in Gaza's main southern city of Khan Yunis, according to the health ministry. The Zionist entity has for weeks concentrated its military operations in Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas's Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar.

Intense fighting has raged around the Nasser Hospital — one of the Palestinian territory's last major medical facilities that remains even partly operational. The power was cut and the generators stopped after the raid, leading to the deaths of six patients due to a lack of oxygen, according to Gaza's health ministry. "Newborn children are at a risk of dying in the next few hours," the ministry warned Saturday.

The Zionist army said troops entered the hospital on Thursday, acting on what it said was "credible

Continued on Page 6

### UN warns Gazans shouldn't flee amid Sinai camp reports

GENEVA: An exodus of Gazans into Egypt must be "avoided at all costs", and could be the "nail in the coffin" of a future peace process, the UN refugees chief said Friday. Nearly 1.5 million displaced Palestinians — more than half of Gaza's population — are trapped in Rafah, seeking shelter in a sprawling makeshift encampment near the Egyptian border.

"The position of Egypt has been very clear. People should not go across the border. I think Egypt has very valid reasons," Filippo Grandi told BBC television from the Munich Security Conference. "It would be catastrophic for Palestinians... to be displaced again. It would be catastrophic for Egypt from

Continued on Page 6

### Dozens detained in Russia as Navalny family seek body

MOSCOW: Alexei Navalny's supporters on Saturday accused Russian authorities of being "killers" who were "covering their tracks" by refusing to hand over his body, as the Kremlin stayed silent despite Western accusations and a flood of tributes to the late opposition leader. The 47-year-old Kremlin critic died in an Arctic prison on Friday after spending more than three years behind bars, prompting outrage and condemnation from Western leaders and his supporters.

His death, which the West has blamed on the



RAFAH, Egypt: This handout satellite picture taken and released by Maxar Technologies on Feb 15, 2024 shows machinery building a wall along the Egypt-Gaza Strip border. — AFP



LONDON: A pro-Palestinian supporter poses with a placard during the National March for Palestine on Feb 17, 2024 — AFP

Kremlin, deprives Russia's opposition of its figurehead just a month before elections poised to extend President Vladimir Putin's grip on power. On Saturday, Navalny's mother, Lyudmila and his lawyer were refused access to his body, after arriving in the region of the remote prison colony where he had been held, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said. "It's obvious that the killers want to cover their tracks and are therefore not handing over Alexei's body, hiding it even from his mother," Navalny's team said in a post on Telegram.

Russian police on Saturday moved swiftly to break up small protests and memorials in honor of the deceased Kremlin critic. They arrested more than 340 people in 30 cities, the OVD-Info rights group said. In the capital Moscow, AFP reporters saw two people being detained at a makeshift tribute in

Continued on Page 6



AMSTERDAM: People set up a portrait of Alexei Navalny on Dam Square on Feb 17, 2024, one day after Russian officials announced the death of the Kremlin's most prominent critic. — AFP



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# 15-year-old Kuwaiti aims to renovate Al Abraj Park

Ambitious student project named 'Rethinking Aladailiya' seeks to revamp one of the oldest parks



The current restroom design (left) — Dousari aims to redesign the restroom to this (right).



The current water fountain area (left) — the vision that Dousari aims to implement (right).



By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** If someone wishes to change the world, they should always start with themselves. With that purpose in mind, a 15-year-old student with a passion for architecture decided to take the initiative and develop one of the most iconic parks in Kuwait, located in the heart of the Capital governorate — Al Abraj Park in Adailiya. Disappointed with the park's outdated designs, abandoned services and neglected irrigation system, Ahmed Al-Dousari created a comprehensive renovation plan for it.

"I remember how I used to visit this park every weekend when I was a child. Just observing how its quality kept declining over the years made me feel so sad," Dousari said on the key motive behind his idea. The idea initially originated as a school project that Dousari undertook in the 10th grade, but evolved into a vision that he aspires to bring to life. Inspired by world-class parks, Dousari displayed an initial 2D design that he created with the guidance of his teachers and the support of his family, showing a clear development in many aspects of the park.

#### Greenery

Dousari sadly described the overall state of the park's greenery. "The grass is half-brown, and the trees are almost dead." In response, he advocates for the implementation of a proper irrigation system, recognizing the vital role greenery plays as one of the most crucial components of any urban park. Simultaneously, he expressed his de-



Ahmed Al-Dousari

sire to increase the number of trees in the park to use them as natural shade against the harsh sun and create a more visually appealing landscape, thereby attracting more visitors. Dousari specifically highlighted the importance of adding more palm trees, as he believes they are a great reflection of Arab heritage and can perfectly grow in the warm and sunny conditions of Kuwait.

#### Children's play area

"All the play equipment is very old and of very low quality. Even when they're broken, they don't get fixed," Dousari remarked. The play area seemed very outdated as an option for entertainment for the current generation, so he focused on modernizing the rides and make them accessible for all kids, even disabled ones, as well as introducing synthetic rubber flooring to protect children.

In order to incorporate more shade into

the designs, he introduced a retractable roof for the play area, serving as a shield against the scorching heat of Kuwait. Dousari also plans to shift the play area far from the entrance to keep the visitors who initially entered the park away from the children's noise and chaos.

#### Water fountain

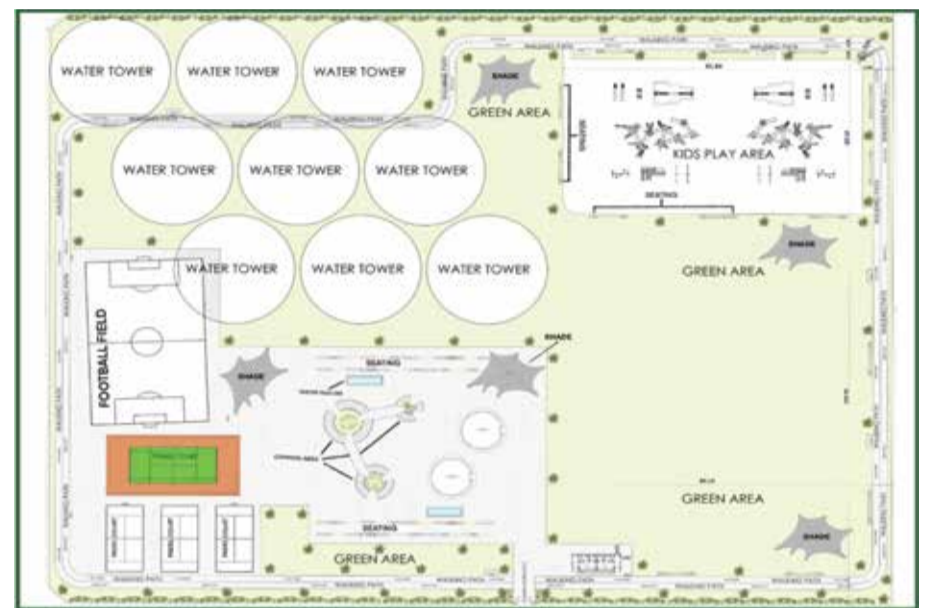
The water fountain, once serving as the main common area for people, became an abandoned fountain that rarely works, Dousari noted. Therefore, he plans to transform this area into a coffee place, including comfortable seating and shade from the sun as well, with all materials made from glass and reclaimed wood for a more ecofriendly approach.

#### Restrooms

The restrooms, which look outdated in design and are malfunctioning, are one of the most irritating elements in the park, according to Dousari. So, he plans to revamp them into a more eye-pleasing design and a stronger structure, also created from reclaimed wood.

#### Encouraging a more active lifestyle

To create a more fitness-friendly environment, Dousari desires to add some extra touches reflected in the padel and tennis court that he created in the design, serving as an attractive source of entertainment for teenagers, in addition to the pre-existing football court. He also plans to add a running track made from synthetic rubber to make it



2D plan of the general aerial view of the park Dousari created.

more convenient for runners, instead of the existing concrete track.

#### Call to action

To implement this project successfully, Dousari needs some guidance in modifying the current 2D plan and an expert in Auto-CAD to help in creating the 3D plan. He's reaching out for support from the ministry of social affairs, ministry of public works, Public Authority of Agricultural Affairs and Fish

Resources and Adailiya Cooperative Society to provide him with a team of engineering experts. Once his idea gets approved by the government, he is planning to work on setting an accurate budget and timeline for the project. He's also calling for more awareness and support from the Kuwaiti community. Dousari believes the park has great potential that can be maximized, due to its large capacity and attractive location, but there's just a need to spotlight it.

## Flag-raising ceremony to mark national holidays



**KUWAIT:** The Social Affairs Ministry held a flag-raising ceremony to mark the launch of the Ministry's celebrations of national holidays under the slogan 'Glory and Pride', under the patronage and presence of Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah. The event was organized by the media department with the participation of many government agencies and volunteer teams. "We must instill a sense of belonging and loyalty to our beloved Kuwait in future generations, as well as spread the spirit of joy and optimism on this great occasion," the minister said. He highlighted the role of science in strengthening national unity and the importance of hard and sincere work to build a better future for Kuwait.

## GCC seeks to expand bilateral relations

**BERLIN:** Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Al-Budaiwi held a series of meetings with Western officials on the sidelines of the 60th Munich Security Conference in Berlin on Friday to discuss expanding bilateral relations and exchange views over a variety of issues. In a press statement, the GCC Secretariat said Al-Budaiwi discussed ways to enhance cooperation between Germany and the GCC countries in a meeting with the German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Niels Annen.

They touched upon a number of regional and international issues of common interest. Al-Budaiwi was quoted as saying after the meeting that the two sides stressed the importance of moving forward in strengthening GCC-German relations and opening new horizons for joint cooperation. In a meeting with the Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, Tobias Lindner, Al-Budaiwi urged the international community to do all in its power to end the war on the Gaza Strip.

He voiced the GCC States support for all international efforts to maintain regional and international security and stability. Partners and allies of the occupying entity must press it to stop its military operations against innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip, respect all international laws, treaties, and agreements, and allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip, stressed Al-Budaiwi. The GCC chief met with the Grand Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta, Riccardo Paterno.

During the meeting, the GCC chief briefed the Maltese official on the GCC's role and efforts at all levels, as well as its regional and international partnerships. The two sides hoped the several Gulf-European meetings to be held in 2024 would contribute to developing and strengthening bilateral relations at all levels. Al-Budaiwi also met with NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy Ambassador Boris Ruge and discussed regional and international issues of common interest, including continuing the dialogue between the GCC General Secretariat and the NATO Secretariat, which reflects the commitment of both parties to boost cooperation.

In a meeting with US Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technologies Anne Neuberger, Al-Budaiwi said the GCC states prioritize cooperation with countries and organizations in the field of cybersecurity. They exchanged views about the different aspects of cybersecurity and ways to support and develop joint work in this domain. They reviewed the progress achieved during the meetings of the joint Gulf-US working groups specializing in cybersecurity. The 60th session of the Munich Security Conference, the largest security gathering in the world, kicked off in the city of Munich on Friday. Over 100 heads of state and government, ministers of defense and foreign affairs, and civil society organizations participate in this important event. — KUNA

## Failaka Island: A home to ancient civilizations

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Failaka Island witnessed civilizations dated back to the end of the 3rd millennium BC and extended until the 19th century AD. Dilmun Town, also known as Tell Sa'ad, contains the remains of houses and rooms from 1950 BC and late Dilmun in 1450 BC. The site also includes the Rest House of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who ruled Kuwait from 1921 to 1950. Al-Hakem Palace and Dilmunian Tower Temple, northeast of Tel Sa'ad, 2000 BC, and a small housing unit belonged to the Third Ur Dynasty (2100 BC). The Hellenistic Fortress, also known as Tell Sa'eed, is one of the largest archeological sites in Failaka, dating back to 280-150 BC. — KUNA



Local

# Zain, ktech ink strategic partnership

## Affirming its ongoing support to education and youth empowerment

KUWAIT: Zain signed a strategic partnership with the Kuwait Technical College (ktech) to support student, academic, cultural, and sports activities held throughout the current academic year. The step affirms the company's ongoing support to education and youth empowerment in the local community. The partnership was signed at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by ktech Chairman of the Board of Trustees Meshari Ayman Bodai, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, ktech Vice President Abdulrahman Al Ajeel, and team members from both partners.

Through this partnership, Zain supports a wide variety of programs, activities, and initiatives organized by ktech during the current academic year, including the annual student carnivals, where exciting entertainment and interactive segments are held for students. Zain also supports thrilling sports competitions that promote the spirit of teamwork and encourage being active, including the Ramadan Futsal Tournament for male students, the Ramadan Volleyball Tournament for female students, and more.

Zain is always eager to take an active part in supporting education and engaging with students and young people by partnering with schools, universities, and colleges from both the public and private sectors. The company will spare no efforts to offer its support and encouragement to any entity that embraces the youth and contributes to the further progress of the community.

The Kuwait Technical College was founded under Amiri Decree 303 in 2005 to provide op-



Meshari Bodai and Waleed Al Khashti with Zain and ktech officials.

portunities for students who are more oriented toward practical education. Ktech is licensed by Kuwait's Ministry of Higher Education and

the General Secretariat of Private Universities Council and offers recognized two-year Diploma programs. Its vocational education is de-

signed to prepare students to enter the market upon graduation by providing practical training to develop specific industry skills.

## Women's conference discusses violence and security challenges

KUWAIT: The regional conference, "The Arab woman, peace, and security: challenges facing women in the Arab region... halting the war on Gaza now, not tomorrow," proceeded in Kuwait for the second day in a row on Friday. Dr. Haila Al-Mukaimi, a political sciences professor at Kuwait University, said during the session that the Kuwait Union of Women's Associations called for promoting United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which essentially renounces violence against women.

The UNSC needs to be activated further to enable the Arab woman to be a peacemaker, Dr. Al-Mukaimi said. The resolution, adopted on October 31, 2000, reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Maha Ali, secretary general of the Jordanian national committee for women affairs, indicated that the UNSG resolution needs to be literally heeded, citing hardships suffered by Palestinian women, in particular due to complacency, in this respect. Jordan has worked out a national plan to ensure women's participation in the security, military, and non-conventional sectors, she said. The number of Jordanian women occupying jobs, particularly in general security and peacekeeping missions, has increased, she added.

Dr. Yosra Mohsen, the director general of the circuit for empowering Iraqi women, spoke about her



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the regional conference. — KUNA photos



Dr Haila Al-Mukaimi

government's measures to boost women's participation at various levels. Iraq has sought to bolster the role of civil society through an executive plan focusing on protecting women, she said, alluding, as a tangible result, to the mounting participation of female citizens in elections. Wafaa Al-Daiqa, a member of the executive council of the Arab Women Organization, called in

her speech for a cease-fire in Gaza and protecting the Palestinian people from the genocides carried out by the Zionist occupation.

Al-Daiqa indicated that the UNSG resolution

could not be literally heeded in Lebanon due to recurrent events and jitters. Dr. Chefika Abdeh, the head of the Yemeni women's committee, echoed an identical picture due to the internal violence. Leila Jeddin, a female justice from Mauritania, acknowledged in her statement that the number of female leaders has remained small in her country.

Her peer, Fatma Al-Muaqqet, the head of the Palestinian Fund, said that a number of laws for improving women's status had been drawn up in Palestine and argued that the UNSG resolution has proven ineffective in the shadow of aggression in Palestine. Kuwait Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah inaugurated the conference on behalf of Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya. The two-day event is organized by the Kuwaiti Union for Women's Associations in coordination with the Arab League Affiliated Organization of the Arab Woman. — KUNA

## Ministry prepares for National Days

KUWAIT: All personnel and cadres of the Ministry of Information are preoccupied with executing the ministry's programs marking Kuwait's 63rd Anniversary of the National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day, "Kuwait Glory and Pride." The plan encompasses integrated programs aimed at engaging all Kuwaiti nationals and residents of the country in celebrating these national days in the dear homeland, said Saad Al-Azmi, the assistant undersecretary for media services and new media at the Ministry of Information, in a statement on Saturday.

The agenda of the celebrations and activities will be distinguished and will involve various public and private sectors, bodies, and public welfare societies, with the aim of promoting the significance of the occasion and boosting patriotism, said Al-Azmi, also the head of public relations, media, and marketing at the permanent committee of the national celebrations.

The ministry, during the celebrations, will launch an awareness campaign titled "Celebrate with Responsibility," designed to bolster values of national unity and belonging to the homeland, he said, adding that it will also hold an "open day" for the diplomats' families at the heritage village, "Yom Al-bahar," where they will closely get acquainted with "our history, our sea, and our land heritages," examining tools and items of the Kuwaiti handicrafts and old professions. Moreover, there will be a digital exhibition named "The Path of Memories," displaying historic television and radio programs shedding light on Kuwait's history since the 1970s of the past century, at the Avenues Mall. — KUNA

## Ophthalmology Conference reviews medical protocols

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi emphasized the importance of enhancing the efficiency of doctors and specialists by enabling them to review the latest medical protocols, modern diagnostic and treatment methods and advanced surgeries. This, he stated, is one of the key pillars for improving health services.

During the opening of the 23rd Ophthalmology Conference organized by the Ophthalmology Departments Council under the theme "Updates in Ophthalmology and Surgeries", Dr Awadhi highlighted the ministry's special interest in the ophthalmology specialty. He noted the expansion of ophthalmology departments in health ministry hospitals as part of the ministry's efforts to decentralize health services. The goal is to establish six departments and increase specialized ophthalmology clinics at primary care centers, currently numbering 30 clinics in 20 centers.

Dr Awadhi underscored the ministry's commitment to supporting medical conferences in various specialties, and he expressed the ministry's dedi-



KUWAIT: Kuwait Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi attends the 23rd Ophthalmology Conference organized by the Ophthalmology Departments Council.

cation to the advancement of ophthalmology. Dr Ahmad Al-Foudary, Head of the Ophthalmology Departments Council and Conference Chairman, addresses during the conference the latest developments in ophthalmology medicine and surgery with the participation of experts from around the world. The scientific program includes lectures, visual displays, scientific papers, workshops and training courses covering various aspects of ophthalmic diseases and surgeries.

The conference features workshops on emergency eye injuries, cataracts, valve implantation related to high intraocular pressure, botox injections and their uses in treating certain eye diseases. Additionally, surgical courses in ophthalmic simulated surgeries are included, along with the presentation of scientific research on glaucoma and keratoconus.



KUWAIT: Participants attend a seminar as part of the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival. — KUNA photos



## Qurain Cultural Festival sessions focus on editing

KUWAIT: The seminar sessions (literary editing and publishing in the Arab world) were launched on Saturday as part of the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival with the participation of a number of specialists and academics from inside and outside Kuwait. The secretary general of the National

Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Dr. Mohammed Al-Jassar, underlined the importance of the symposium, stressing that "attention should be given to editing at this time to maintain the level of the Arabic language in literary writing."

Al-Jassar expressed his pleasure in hosting such seminars, hoping for the continuation of these activities to preserve the Arabic language. For her part, the Assistant Secretary General of the Culture Sector of the Council, Aisha Al-Mahmoud, said that there will be more seminars on cultural issues in the Arab world, whether literary, economic, or political. — KUNA

## Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Cats participate in a show organized by the Kuwait Cat Club in Salmiya on February 17, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait has 7  
ECMO centers

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi said that Kuwait has seven Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO), also known as Extracorporeal Life Support (ECLS), centers run by capable, experienced physicians. Investment in human capital is the mainstay of sustainable socio-economic development, he said in his opening remarks at the 10th Conference of the South West Asia and Africa Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (SWAAC-ELSO), being hosted by Kuwait for the first time on February 15-17.

Dr. Al-Awadhi said his ministry has a strategy for building the capacity of national cadres in collaboration with SWAAC-ELSO and world-renowned centers to share ECMO knowledge. "The Ministry of Health launched the seven centers and organized several training courses accredited by the organization over the past years. "The centers and courses helped qualify more than 300 members of the national ECMO team for working in various specializations," the minister noted.

On the agenda of the SWAAC-ELSO Conference, he said it has 120 topics to be addressed by 70 lecturers from across the world. The conference will see the presentation of 60 scientific papers and seven workshops meant to build the capacity of nearly 140 ECMO members from various countries, he said. Meanwhile, President of the Conference, Dr. Huda Al-Foudri, said Kuwait's hosting of the conference signals the confidence placed by the organization in the health sector of Kuwait.

"The ECMO center at Al-Adan Hospital has been the first Kuwaiti center to win the golden award of excellence of SWAAC-ELSO in 2020," she said, noting the ECMO centers of the Amiri and Jaber hospitals won the same awards recently. Al-Adan Hospital's ECMO center was accredited by the ELSO in 2022, which is indicative of the quality of medical training at the center. The Center has qualified 300 ECMO medical staff over the past four years, she added. The three-day conference gathered celebrated physicians in various medical specializations from over 20 countries. — KUNA

Arab League values African  
solidarity with Palestine

## Arab Parliament warns of expanding conflict in the region

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit commended African humanitarianism and a sense of justice regarding solidarity with Palestinians during the Zionist occupation's onslaught in the Gaza Strip. This came in a statement made on Saturday during the Arab League's participation in the 37th African Union Summit in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa.

He particularly praised South Africa's exemplary efforts in holding the Zionist occupation accountable for genocidal crimes against Palestinians and exposing them by filing a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, he said the Arab League is continuing efforts to call for peace in Sudan amidst the bloodshed and armed clashes taking place, provide Sudanese people with integrity and security, and affirm the African Arab country's territorial sovereignty.

He also affirmed the League's support for a long-term ceasefire through the Jeddah Platform, consisting of the US, AU, Saudi Arabia, and others. Concerning the Somali issue, Abu Al-Gheit, while praising efforts in this regard this past year, also voiced the League's full support of Somalia's sovereignty in cooperation with the Federal Government of Somalia, the UN, and AU, as well as other regional groups. He concluded by calling for Libya to find political solutions to the obstacles taking place in the country, saying that political stability is needed to preserve the unity and sovereignty of the country.

## Expanding conflict

Meanwhile, Arab Parliament Speaker Adel Al-Asoumi warned of expanding the scope of

conflict in the Middle East region. Calling for activating Arab parliamentary diplomacy to limit consequences for the region's security and stability, Al-Asoumi's remarks came during a meeting with Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) President and Iraqi Acting Parliament Speaker Mohsen Al-Mandalawi on the sidelines of the Parliamentary Conference for South-South Cooperation hosted by Morocco.

Al-Asoumi reaffirmed the Arab Parliament's full support for Iraq, a pivotal Arab country when it comes to the region's security and stability. He pointed out the parliament's keenness to enhance cooperation and coordination with the Iraqi parliament in all fields, especially with Iraq's current presidency of AIPU, adding that this would support Arab issues, including the situation in Gaza. — KUNA

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Hemanshu Gupta presented the Climate AI initiative at the Davos Forum. — KUNA

AI Green Horizon:  
Crafting the future  
climate resilience

KUWAIT: In a groundbreaking move during COP 28 in the UAE, the United Nations unveiled an unprecedented initiative to deploy artificial intelligence (AI) in the battle against climate change. The initiative is particularly focused on aiding developing nations grappling with the harsh impacts of climate shocks. At the recent World Economic Forum (Davos 2024), technology experts reached a consensus on the invaluable potential of AI in addressing global challenges.

They emphasized its capability to "accelerate everything," from adapting to climate changes to mitigating pollution and refining weather models. Hemanshu Gupta, a leading expert, shared insights with KUNA about pioneering efforts in Silicon Valley to fast-track the use of artificial superintelligence (ASI) in supporting agriculture's resilience against climate change under the "Climate AI" initiative. Gupta explained that his team was developing highly intelligent platforms to assess crop vulnerability to high temperatures over the next decade.

This groundbreaking technology integrates vast amounts of precise data, including weather forecasts, oceanic conditions, seed properties, and economic factors, to determine urgent actions for climate adaptation. The unique blend of accurate machine learning, traditional climate science, and agricultural data holds immense promise for countries like Australia, a key player in global wheat production. Gupta highlighted the crucial role AI plays in predicting and adapting to extreme climate events, providing valuable insights for both farmers and global supply chains.

This initiative marks a global shift towards harnessing AI not only for climate adaptation but also for understanding and effectively addressing climate events. Experts anticipate that AI algorithms will play a pivotal role in reducing environmental impact, heralding an era of global smart sustainability. Smart

"Vulnerability Mapping" aids governments in making informed decisions for public health, urban planning, and waste management, contributing to more sustainable and livable cities.

Industries with high carbon footprints, such as fashion, can benefit from AI innovation to improve supply chains and reduce environmental impact. Similarly, AI in agriculture, responsible for a significant portion of global greenhouse gas emissions, can help in adapting to climate change, reducing waste, and mitigating environmental impact. Recent weeks have witnessed fierce competition among tech giants like Google, IBM, and Microsoft to leverage AI to accelerate climate action. Google, for instance, pledged to lead globally in reducing emissions using innovative AI systems.

The "Green Light" project and other initiatives demonstrate the potential of AI to significantly reduce pollution and improve environmental sustainability. IBM's partnership with NASA and Microsoft's collaboration with the United Nations underscore the industry's commitment to revolutionizing climate solutions using AI. These efforts aim to compress centuries of scientific progress into the next few decades, offering hope for a green future.

While the push for AI-driven climate solutions is gaining momentum, challenges remain. The energy-intensive nature of AI, requiring massive amounts of data for training, poses a hurdle. Projections indicate that AI data centers will rival the energy consumption of medium-sized countries by 2027. Professor Jassem Haji, head of the Global AI Group in London, expressed optimism about ongoing research to enhance "green artificial intelligence."

Collaborative efforts between governments, companies, and civil society are crucial to overcoming these obstacles and achieving a balance between progress and environmental preservation. Despite historical industrial revolutions contributing to both progress and climate change, the Fourth Industrial Revolution appears distinct. It holds the promise of innovative solutions to save the Earth and propel it towards a green future. The fusion of artificial intelligence and climate action is steering the world towards a sustainable and resilient future, marking a pivotal moment in the fight against climate change. — KUNA



Ukraine withdraws from key city

## NY judge fines Trump \$355m

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NABATIYEH: Mourners, Hezbollah militants and clerics gather around the flag-draped coffins of civilians killed in a Zionist strike on February 14, during their funeral, on February 17, 2024. — AFP

# Zionists to pay 'with blood' for civilian deaths: Nasrallah

## Hezbollah chief vows to intensify cross-border fire, pursue targets beyond military positions

**BEIRUT:** Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed Friday that the Zionist entity will pay "with blood" for civilians it killed in Lebanon this week, warning the group has missiles that can reach anywhere in the entity. "The enemy will pay with blood" for every woman and child killed in Lebanon by cross-border fire, Nasrallah said in a televised address.

He warned that his Iran-backed movement has "precision-guided missiles that can reach ... Eilat", on the Zionist entity's Red Sea coast, well beyond the northern towns it usually targets in retaliatory strikes.

Hamas ally Hezbollah and the Zionist entity have been exchanging near-daily fire across the border since the Zionist entity launched its military operation in Gaza in October 2023.

In the bloodiest day for Lebanon since then, the Zionist military said it had killed Hezbollah commander

Ali al-Debs, his deputy and another fighter in Nabatiyeh on Wednesday. The strikes also killed 10 civilians — seven from the same family — and two other Hezbollah fighters, according to an AFP tally based on figures released by the emergency services.

Nasrallah said the killing of civilians was aimed at "putting pressure" on Hezbollah to stop attacks on the Zionist entity, but stressed that the group will intensify its cross-border fire. "The response to the massacre must be to pursue the resistance (against the Zionist entity)" and Hezbollah will not just strike "(military) positions ... and spying equipment" as it has done before, he said.

The Zionist army said it carried out Wednesday's strikes after a soldier was killed by rocket fire from Lebanon. Hezbollah retaliated with a barrage of rocket fire at the northern Zionist town of Kiryat

Shmona, saying it was a "first response" to the deadly Zionist strikes.

### 'Rules of war: protect civilians'

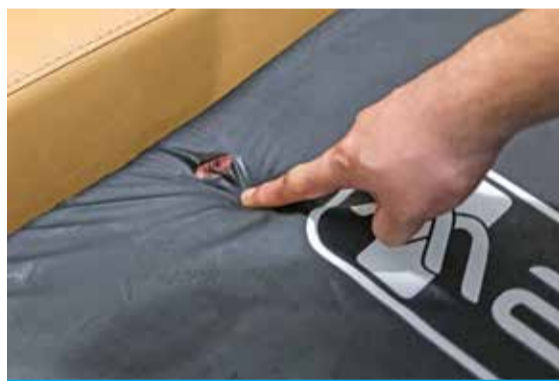
The Zionist entity hit back with new strikes on south Lebanon on Friday that killed five fighters from Hezbollah and the allied Amal movement, the groups said. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said Zionist warplanes hit five southern villages overnight. Hezbollah said it carried out five attacks against Zionist military positions along the border.

The latest uptick in violence has caused international alarm, with fears growing of another full-blown war between the Zionist entity and Hezbollah like that of 2006. The UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) urged "intensified" diplomatic efforts "to restore stability and safeguard the safety of civilians"

following Wednesday's bloodshed. "The devastation, loss of life and injuries witnessed are deeply concerning," said UNIFIL spokesman Andrea Tenenti, urging "all parties involved to halt hostilities immediately to prevent further escalation".

UN humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon Imran Riza said "the rules of war are clear: parties must protect civilians". Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who condemned the latest deadly Zionist strikes, has said Beirut will lodge a complaint with the UN Security Council.

Since October, cross-border exchanges have killed at least 269 people on the Lebanese side, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 40 civilians, according to an AFP tally. On the Zionist side, 10 soldiers and six civilians have been killed, according to the Zionist army. — AFP



JENIN: A nurse shows the hole made by a bullet in a mattress at Ibn Sina hospital in Jenin in the occupied West Bank, on February 8, 2024. — AFP photos



A view of the room where three Palestinians were killed.

## Fear pervades West Bank hospital after deadly Zionist raid

**JENIN, Palestine:** A climate of fear pervades a hospital in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, where patients and doctors are reeling from last month's deadly raid by Zionist agents disguised as medics. At the rehabilitation ward at Jenin's Ibn Sina hospital, two patients recalled hearing the screams of a nurse as Zionist forces reached the third floor.

"I opened the door and saw a man. I didn't know they were special forces," said a patient, a grey hoodie pulled up over his head to conceal his face. "The man was choking the nurse with his hand and hit her with the butt of his gun."

His account matched that of an elderly patient, speaking to AFP while exercising along the corridor clutching a walking frame, who recalled hearing shouting while he stayed put in his room. Neither knew that through a sky-blue door just meters away, the Zionist unit shot dead three Palestinians, all militants, including a paraplegic patient hospitalized for months.

"It's toughest at night," said the patient, who had been shouted at by the undercover agents to shut his door during the assault. All but one person in the hospital spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity, as they were worried about their safety.

Across the ward, room 376 had been scrubbed clean and lay empty. Only on closer inspection were bullet holes visible in the abandoned hospital bed and an adjacent chair where the young men had been shot. One of the staffers showed AFP photos on his phone of a bullet, another of flesh left on the bed in the January 30 raid.

### WHO 'appalled'

A medic said he was approached by a man dressed as a doctor, who spoke perfect Arabic and showed the ID pinned to his chest before asking him to unlock room 376. Inside were Basel Ghazawi — unable to walk after being shot in October — his brother Muhammad Ghazawi and friend Muhammad Jalannah.

The Zionist military justified the killing inside a medical facility, which are granted special protection under international law, by saying the trio were "terrorists" who were "hiding" in the hospital. The World Health Organization said it was "appalled".

Such an attack "creates fear and is dangerous for health workers and patients", said Rik Peeperkorn, the agency's envoy for the Palestinian territories. "It reduces the trust in health workers and hospitals, putting them in danger, and also diminishing confidence in the health system, therefore decreasing people's access to care," he said in a February 2 statement.



A nurse shows his cellphone with a picture of a bullet found at the hospital.

While Ibn Sina has continued to function, serving the Jenin area of the northern West Bank, there was palpable unease compared with earlier AFP visits. Tawfiq al-Shubaki, head of the surgery department, admitted the staff "feel scared" and a sense of "insecurity". "It's a tough feeling for the medical personnel, especially as it reflects negatively on the clinical staff themselves and on the patients," he said.

### 'I'm terrified'

Medics in Jenin have become accustomed to dealing with emergencies, as people wounded during Zionist military raids in the nearby refugee camp are frequently rushed to Ibn Sina. They must balance such crises alongside care for other patients, such as those in the cardiology department, intensive care or neonatal ward, all of which have been affected by the raid, according to Shubaki. "You should feel safe in your workplace. What happened impacts the effectiveness and the performance of the medical team," he said.

The Jenin raid came against the backdrop of the war in Gaza, during which Zionist soldiers have repeatedly raided hospitals. Speaking in the West Bank city of Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, Health Minister Mai Kayla said the same pattern was being repeated.

"Our message is to stop (the Zionist entity) abusing the health system in Palestine. Stop the aggression on the hospitals in Gaza as well as in the West Bank — they started to do it also in the West Bank," she said during a February 7 rally.

As well as being afraid of a repeat of the special forces raid — the first such operation in eight years — the killings have also created suspicion among patients and medics. Not knowing how Zionist agents plotted their assault, some have been speculating that a hospital insider could have collaborated with special forces. "For more than a week this informant has been in the imagination, and on my mind," said the patient, still in his hospital room. "I'm terrified." — AFP

## India's opposition says funds frozen ahead of election

**NEW DELHI:** India's main opposition party said Friday that its bank accounts had been frozen by the tax department just weeks before the expected announcement of national elections. Critics and rights groups have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of using law enforcement agencies to selectively target its political foes.

Congress spokesman Ajay Maken said the action against the party was aimed at sidelining it ahead of the polls. "When the principal opposition party's accounts have been frozen just two weeks before the announcement of the national elections, do you think democracy is alive in our country?" he asked reporters. "Don't you think it is going towards a one-party system?"

Four of Congress's accounts had been frozen after an investigation of the party's 2018-19 income tax returns, Maken said. He added the tax department had issued a payment demand for 2.1 billion rupees (\$25.3 million) in relation to its probe. Maken conceded that the party had filed its returns late by up to 45 days but insisted it had done nothing to warrant such a penalty. "Today is a sad day for Indian democracy," he said, adding that the party was appealing the decision in court and would stage public protests.

Friday's announcement follows numerous legal sanctions and active investigations against leading opponents of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, scion of the dynasty that dominated Indian politics for decades, was convicted of criminal libel last year after a complaint by a member of Modi's party. His two-year prison sentence saw him disqualified from parliament for a time until the verdict was suspended by a higher court but raised concerns over democratic norms in the world's most populous country.

Congress is a member of an opposition alliance hoping to challenge Modi at this year's polls, and other leading figures in the bloc have also found themselves under investigation. Arvind Kejriwal, leader of the Aam Aadmi Party and chief minister of the capital region Delhi, has repeatedly been summoned by investigators probing alleged corruption in the allocation of liquor licenses. Earlier this month police arrested Hemant Soren, until then the chief minister of eastern Jharkhand state and another leading figure in the opposition alliance, for allegedly facilitating an illegal land sale. India's main financial investigation agency, the Enforcement Directorate, has ongoing probes against at least four other chief ministers or their families, all of whom belong to the BJP's political opponents.—AFP

## International

# NY judge fines Trump \$355m

## Republican presidential candidate banned from running businesses for 3 years in fraud trial

**NEW YORK:** Donald Trump was ordered to pay \$355 million over fraud allegations and banned from running companies in the state for three years Friday in a major blow to his business empire and financial standing.

A New York judge has found Trump — almost certain to be the Republican presidential nominee this November — liable for unlawfully inflating his wealth and manipulating the value of properties to obtain favorable bank loans or insurance terms.

Trump accused President Joe Biden of driving the case, calling it “weaponization against a political opponent who’s up a lot in the polls”, and vowed to appeal. As the case was civil, not criminal, there was no threat of imprisonment. But Trump said ahead of the ruling that a ban on conducting business in New York state would be akin to a “corporate death penalty.”

Trump, facing 91 criminal counts in other cases, has seized on his legal woes to fire up supporters and denounce his likely opponent Biden, claiming that court cases are “just a way of hurting me in the election.” However, Judge Arthur Engoron said the financially shattering penalties are justified by Trump’s behavior. “Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological,” Engoron said of Trump and his two sons, who were also defendants, in his scathing ruling.



**NEW YORK:** Donald Trump attends a pre-trial hearing at Manhattan Criminal Court on February 15, 2024. — AFP

“They are accused only of inflating asset values to make more money ... Donald Trump is not Bernard Madoff. Yet, defendants are incapable of admitting the error of their ways,” he added, referring to the perpetrator of a massive Ponzi scheme. Trump’s sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr were also found liable in the case and

ordered to pay more than \$4 million each, prompting Don Jr to claim on social media that “political beliefs” had determined the outcome. The Trump Organization, an avowedly family business, will also be forced by the ruling to allow an independent compliance director answerable to the court.

### ‘Tremendous victory’

It was as a property developer and businessman in New York that Trump built his public profile which he used as a springboard into the entertainment industry and ultimately the presidency. The judge’s order was a victory for New York state Attorney General Letitia James. She had sought \$370 million from Trump to remedy the advantage he is alleged to have wrongfully obtained, as well as having him barred from conducting business in the state.

“This is a tremendous victory for this state, this nation, and for everyone who believes that we all must play by the same rules — even former presidents,” James said. Trump has repeatedly attacked James, calling her a “lunatic,” as well as smearing Engoron, who decided the case without a jury, calling him “out of control.”

During highly technical testimony, the court heard that in one case Trump valued Mar-a-Lago, his exclusive Florida club, by using “asking prices,” rather

than actual sales prices, for a comparison. “From 2011-2015 defendants added a 30 percent premium because the property was a ‘completed (commercial) facility,’” the prosecution said, arguing it unlawfully distorted its true value.

Trump’s lawyer Chris Kise said “there is no clear and present evidence establishing intent by Donald Trump.” Kise acknowledged there could be errors in Trump’s corporate financial statements but none “lead to the conclusion there was fraud.”

### Legal whirlwind

The ruling caps a whirlwind legal week for Trump. Trump appeared in a New York court Thursday ahead of a criminal trial, where he faces charges of illegally covering up hush money payments. It will be the first criminal trial of a former US president.

Trump’s lawyers were also representing him in Atlanta, Georgia, where he is accused of conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden. A separate trial on Trump’s attempts to overturn the 2020 election is on hold in Washington, DC, while Trump attempts to assert presidential immunity.

The twice-impeached former president is due to go on trial in Florida in May on charges of taking troves of highly secret documents when he left the presidency and thwarting officials trying to recover them. — AFP

## Japan successfully launches H3 rocket after multiple failures

**TOKYO:** Japan’s space agency toasted a successful blast-off for its new flagship rocket on Saturday, making it third time lucky after years of delays and two previous failed attempts. The next-generation H3 has been mooted as a rival to SpaceX’s Falcon 9, and could one day deliver cargo to bases on the Moon.

“I’ve been in the space industry for a long time, but I’ve never felt so happy before, and I’ve never felt so relieved,” said Hiroshi Yamakawa, president of space agency JAXA. The latest launch follows Japan’s successful landing last month of an unmanned probe on the Moon — albeit at a wonky angle — making it just the fifth country to land a craft on the lunar surface.

The H3 launched from the Tanegashima Space Center in southwestern Japan at 9:22 am (0022 GMT). Cheers and applause could be heard from the JAXA control center after the agency’s live stream announced the H3’s engines had successfully burned, meaning the rocket had made it into orbit.

Developed jointly by JAXA and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the H3 is the successor to the H-IIA launch system, which debuted in 2001. Designed for “high flexibility, high reliability, and high cost performance”, the craft will “maintain Japan’s autonomous access to space”, JAXA says.

Unlike the reusable Falcon 9, the H3 is expendable, but scientists say the trial of its world-first technology is significant. “The H3 rocket has a unique and novel first-stage engine that delivers greater thrust compared to state-of-the-art rockets,” said Michele Trenti, director of the Melbourne Space Laboratory at the University of Melbourne.

The H3 “has the potential to be the most cost-effective rocket”, making the exploration of the solar system more affordable. Its maiden launch has been beset by mishaps. A February 2023 launch was abandoned after ignition issues left the rocket standing motionless on the ground. On the second try in March last year, technical problems meant a



**TANEGASHIMA SPACE CENTER:** Japan’s H3 rocket leaves the launch pad at the Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima, southwestern Japan on February 17, 2024. — AFP

destruct command was issued shortly after blast-off. Even this latest launch was postponed by four days due to bad weather.

The rocket which took off successfully on Saturday was carrying two small satellites. One of the microsatellites is expected to contribute to disaster prevention by taking photos and videos. The other, equipped with a sensor to detect infrared rays, is intended to track the operation conditions of factories on the ground. Separation of the microsatellites was also confirmed, according to JAXA’s live stream. “We will keep analyzing the sequences after successfully putting the rocket into orbit,” a JAXA official said.

### Greater thrust

H3 will be “an all-rounder — able to launch satellites into Earth orbit, serve as a supply vehicle for space stations, and go to the Moon”, said as-

sociate professor Alice Gorman, a space exploration expert at Flinders University. The successful launch bolsters JAXA’s reputation after a string of failures, including of a different rocket, a solid-fuel model called the Epsilon-6.

Japan succeeded in landing its SLIM spacecraft nicknamed “Moon Sniper” on the lunar surface last month, although the craft’s solar panels were facing the wrong way. Despite recent failures, overall, Japan’s space program punches above its weight, said Adrian Michael Cruise, an honorary professor of astrophysics at the University of Birmingham.

The country “has future ambitions for space exploration challenging some of the major players”, he said. “However, space payloads are getting heavier and heavier, and to remain competitive in the missions it can mount, Japan needs access to more powerful launch vehicles, like H3.” — AFP

## Yemen rebels claim latest Red Sea vessel strike

**SANAA:** Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Saturday claimed an attack a day earlier on an oil tanker in the Red Sea, the latest in a series of strikes which have led to retaliation by Britain and the United States.

The Houthis said the vessel was British, although the US military later said it was Danish. Houthi naval forces “carried out an operation targeting the British oil tanker Pollux in the Red Sea” with missiles, rebel spokesman Yahya Saree said in a statement. He did not say how the rebels had determined a “British” connection to the ship. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that four anti-ship ballistic missiles were launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, between Friday afternoon and 1:00 am (2200 GMT) on Saturday. “At least three of the missiles were launched towards ... MT Pollux, a Panamanian-flagged, Denmark-owned, Panamanian-registered vessel,” CENTCOM said in a statement on social media. It added that it had “successfully conducted two self-defense strikes against one mobile anti-ship cruise missile and one mobile unmanned surface vessel” in Yemen, which it said “presented an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region”.

The strike came on the same day that Washington’s redesignation of the Houthis as a terrorist group and accompanying sanctions came into force. A US State Department spokesperson said on Friday the vessel was able to continue on its voyage. The tanker “sustained minor damage” in the missile strike northwest of Yemen’s port of Mokha, security firm Ambrey said.

The latest attack came after the US military said earlier on Friday it conducted strikes “against three mobile anti-ship cruise missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea”. In December the United States announced a maritime security initiative, Operation Prosperity Guardian, to protect shipping in the area. Repeated strikes on Houthi targets by the United States and Britain have failed to halt the rebel attacks.—AFP

## Fears grow for Gaza patients...

**Continued from Page 1**

intelligence” that captives seized in the Oct 7 attack had been held there and that the bodies of some may still be inside. The raid has been criticized by medics and the United Nations. The army has insisted it made every effort to keep the hospital supplied with power, including bringing in an alternative generator. A witness, who declined to be named for safety reasons, told AFP Zionist forces had shot “at anyone who moved inside the hospital”.

World Health Organization spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic slammed the operation Friday, saying “more degradation to the hospital means more lives being lost”. “Patients, health workers and civilians who are seeking refuge in hospitals deserve safety and not a burial in those places of healing,” he said. Doctors Without Borders said its medics had been forced to flee and leave patients behind, with one employee unaccounted for and another detained by Zionist forces.

The Zionist entity’s assault on Gaza has killed at least 28,858 people, mostly women and children. The UN Human Rights Office said the Nasser Hospital raid appeared to be “part of a pattern of attacks by (Zionist) forces striking essential life-sav-

ing civilian infrastructure”. High-level negotiations to pause the war were held this week in Cairo, but their outcome is still unclear.

A day after US President Joe Biden called for a “temporary truce” to secure the release of hostages, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh reiterated the group’s demands, including a complete pause in fighting, the release of Hamas prisoners and the withdrawal of Zionist troops. Qatar-based Haniyeh said Hamas would “not agree to anything less”.

Biden has also urged Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to launch an offensive in Rafah without a plan to keep civilians safe — but Netanyahu insisted he would push ahead with a “powerful” operation there to defeat Hamas. Around 1.4 million displaced civilians are trapped in Rafah after taking refuge in a makeshift encampment by the Egyptian border, with dwindling supplies. In northern Gaza, many are so desperate for food they are grinding up animal feed. “We need food now,” said Mohammed Nassar, 50, from Jabalia in northern Gaza. “We’re going to die from hunger, not by bombs or missiles.”

As a much-needed delivery of supplies arrived in southern Gaza Saturday, the UN warned that Gazans are close to famine while the head of its agency for Palestinian refugees accused the Zionist entity of waging a campaign to “destroy” it. The Zionist entity has called for UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini to resign following claims a Hamas tunnel was discovered under its Gaza City headquarters. — Agencies

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference hours after news of her husband’s death, Yulia Navalnaya said Putin and his entourage would be “punished for everything they have done to our country, to my family and to my husband”. She called on the international community to “unite and defeat this evil, terrifying regime”.

Russian Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov said Navalnaya’s death was “murder” and that he was “tortured and tormented” for all of the three years he spent in prison. Tributes continued to pour in on Saturday, as supporters staged anti-Putin protests and set up memorials to Navalnaya at Russian diplomatic missions around the world.

In Russia, police detained hundreds of people who had laid flowers at monuments to the victims of political repression, rights groups said. In a video posted by the independent Sota outlet from the capital Moscow, a woman could be heard screaming as a crowd of police officers forcefully detained her, to chants of “shame” from onlookers. — AFP

## UN warns Gazans shouldn’t flee...

**Continued from Page 1**

all points of view, and more important than anything else, a further refugee crisis would be almost the nail in the coffin of a future peace process already.”

Like many observers, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees believes that once Palestinians leave Gaza they will no longer be able to return — as happened in 1948 — something which would ruin the possibility of a two-state solution between the Zionist entity and the Palestinians. The war accompanying the creation of the Zionist entity in 1948 saw 760,000 Palestinians flee or forced from their homes. Millions of their descendants continue to live as refugees in neighboring countries.

“The old 1948 refugee crisis is an unresolved problem; if you add a dimension to that, you can say goodbye to a meaningful peace process,” said Grandi. “It has to be avoided at all costs.” Pressure has grown on Egypt to open its border to Palestinian civilians, as the Zionist entity plans to push ahead with a military operation in Rafah, seeking complete victory over Hamas. Grandi said his Geneva-based UNHCR agency was not involved in any preparations that Egypt might be making for if people cross the border.

But in any case, a Gazan refugee surge into Egypt “needs to be avoided and it can only be avoided if humanitarian aid can enter Gaza in significant quantities — but more important, if hostilities cease”, he said. Grandi said the plight of displaced people in Rafah was “absolutely dramatic”. “So I hope that the appeals by the entire international community for a ceasefire and access of humanitarian aid and the liberation of hostages are heeded by the parties; by (the Zionist entity), by Hamas.”

A US media report and an Egyptian human rights monitor said on Friday Egypt is constructing a walled camp in the Sinai Peninsula to receive displaced Palestinian civilians from the Gaza Strip. But the Zionist entity claimed it had no plans to move civilians there, as it prepares an offensive in Rafah.

The Wall Street Journal said an eight-square-mile (21-sq-km) “walled enclosure” was under construction on the Egyptian side of the border. The compound was part of “contingency plans” if ceasefire talks in Cairo failed and could accommodate more than 100,000 people, it added. The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, an

Egyptian NGO, released a report this week that it said showed construction of the compound to receive Palestinian refugees “in the case of a mass exodus”.

AFP reviewed satellite pictures taken on Thursday of the area in northern Sinai, showing machinery building a wall along the Egypt-Gaza border. The area is highly secure and closed to journalists. A comparison of satellite photos taken on Feb 10 and Feb 15 shows land having been graded. North Sinai governor Mohamed Shousha has denied Egypt is preparing “an isolated area in Sinai” to receive refugees. The construction work was to assess houses destroyed during upheaval in recent years to “properly compensate” owners, he said Thursday.

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights said two contractors told it construction firms had been tasked with building the gated area, “surrounded by seven-metre-high walls”. The site lies on the “rubble” of Egyptian homes “demolished” during the state’s war against Islamist insurgents in northern Sinai over the past decade, it said.

Sources in Sinai told AFP the area was being prepared in case of a breach of the Gaza border, which Egypt has fortified with additional walls and buffer zones since the Zionist entity’s war with Hamas began. “The area will be readied with tents” and humanitarian assistance would be delivered inside, said one source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Egypt, which controls the Rafah border crossing from Gaza, has repeatedly warned against any “forced displacement” of Palestinians from Gaza into the Sinai desert. President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has said if that happened it could jeopardize the peace treaty Egypt signed with the Zionist entity in 1979.

The Zionist military is facing growing calls not to go into Rafah, because of fears it could lead to heavy civilian casualties and worsen an acute humanitarian crisis. In Tel Aviv on Friday, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the Zionist entity had “no intention of evacuating Palestinian civilians to Egypt”. “We respect and value our peace agreement with Egypt, which is a cornerstone of stability in the region as well as an important partner,” he added.

Of military action in Rafah, Gallant said: “We are thoroughly planning future operations in Rafah, which is a significant Hamas stronghold.” He claimed operations would not target civilians, who are facing “unprecedented” levels of “near famine-like conditions”, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. — AFP

## Dozens detained in Russia as Navalny...

**Continued from Page 1**

central Moscow, while hundreds of tearful mourners laid flowers in the snow. “Alexei Navalny’s death is the worst thing that could happen to Russia,” said one note left among the flowers.

After initially pushing back at accusations they were to blame, the Kremlin made no mention of his death on Saturday, despite an angry chorus of condemnation from Western leaders. G7 foreign ministers meeting in Munich held a minute’s silence for the leader on Saturday, while US President Joe Biden pointed the blame at Putin. “Make no mistake, Putin is responsible for Navalny’s death,” he said on Friday.

## International

## Ukraine withdraws from key city

'You can't hold the city because it no longer exists,' Ukrainian sergeant says of Avdiivka

KYIV: Ukraine withdrew troops from the besieged eastern stronghold of Avdiivka to save the lives of its soldiers, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday, handing Russia its biggest symbolic victory since May. The pullback comes after Russian forces stepped up efforts to capture the eastern industrial hub in October, leading to mass casualties and destruction. Facing ammunition shortages and outnumbered on the battlefield, Ukrainian forces announced they had withdrawn in the early hours of Saturday. "The ability to save our people is the most important task for us," Zelensky told a security conference in Munich, explaining the move.

"In order to avoid being surrounded, it was decided to withdraw to other lines. This does not mean that people retreated some kilometers and Russia captured something, it did not capture anything," he also said. This echoed earlier statements from the newly-appointed commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky, who said he "decided to withdraw our units from the city and switch to defense on more favorable lines." "The life of military personnel is the highest value," Syrsky said.

It was Syrsky's first major decision since his appointment, at a time when Ukraine faces mounting pressures in the east because of ammunition shortages, with a \$60 billion US military aid package held up in Washington.

#### Captured soldiers

Soldiers are now holding a second line of defense, commander Oleksandr Tarnavsky said. A number of Ukrainian servicemen were captured "at the final stage of the operation, under the pressure of superior enemy forces," he added, calling

on the international community to help "return our soldiers to their homeland."

A Ukrainian serviceman deployed on the eastern frontline told AFP that withdrawing was "the right decision given the lack of weapons and artillery shells, because if we don't save the lives of the soldiers, we will soon have no one left to fight". "But if we keep losing ground, we will lose this war," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Avdiivka lies in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, which the Kremlin has claimed to be part of Russia since a 2022 annexation that remains unrecognized by nearly all United Nations members.

It briefly fell in July 2014 into the hands of pro-Russian separatists, before returning to Ukrainian control and remaining so despite the invasion and its proximity to the separatist capital Donetsk.

After the failure of Kyiv's counter-offensive in the summer, Russian forces went on the attack, facing a Ukrainian army struggling to replenish its ranks and running low on ammunition. "I am surprised that Avdiivka has held out for two years," Oleksii, a 50-year-old sergeant in the Donetsk region, told AFP on the phone.

#### 'Staggering losses'

The battle for Avdiivka, less than 10 kilometers (six miles) north of the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk, has been one of the bloodiest of the two-year war. Many compare it to the battle for Bakhmut, in which tens of thousands of soldiers were killed.

Avdiivka had around 30,000 inhabitants before the Russian invasion. Most of the city has been since destroyed but less than 1,000 residents re-

had been discovered under its evacuated Gaza City headquarters.

Lazzarini said the tunnel was 20 meters below ground and UNRWA as a humanitarian organization did not have the capabilities to be examining what was underground in Gaza. He also said there was "no reason" to comply with the Zionist entity's lone call for him to quit, "especially since my resignation would not improve the situation at UNRWA". "The criticisms are not concerned with me personally, but with the organization as a whole. The calls for resignation are part of the campaign to destroy UNRWA," he said.

#### Money running out

Several countries—including the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan—have suspended funding to UNRWA in response to Zionist allegations that some of its staff participated in the attack on the Zionist entity, which Hamas carried out on October 7.

Lazzarini said \$438 million has been frozen — the equivalent of more than half of expected income for 2024. "If all countries continue to withhold their payments, UNRWA's funding will very quickly be at risk," he said. "From March onwards, expenses exceed income. And without new donors, UNRWA will have to cease operations in April."

He said this applied not only to the Gaza Strip but also to work in the West Bank, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Lazzarini said he was holding meetings with donors and some were "willing to reconsider their decision". He said the European Commission would pay its contribution of around 82 million euros (\$88 million) again from March. — AFP



AVDIIVKA: This handout photo by Ukrainian Presidential Press Service shows President Volodymyr Zelensky recording a video address in front of a sign reading "Avdiivka is Ukraine" on December 29, 2023. — AFP

main, according to local authorities. Russian forces "destroy everything, level it to the ground," Oleksii said. "You can't hold the city because it no longer exists," he said.

The city has important symbolic value, and Moscow hopes its capture will make Ukraine's bombing of Donetsk more difficult. Russian forces "push us out a bit of the temporary occupied Donetsk" region, analyst Mykola Bieliesskov told AFP.

But he said holding Avdiivka would grant no ad-

vantage to Russia, whose positions in the city of Donetsk "even with the ruins of Avdiivka, wouldn't be fully secured."

"I doubt that Russia, after such staggering losses, has the capacity to turn limited local successes in a major breakthrough," said Bieliesskov, from the Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies. To fend off these attacks, Ukrainian officials are redoubling pleas for much-needed military aid, with Zelensky trying to rally allies in Munich. — AFP

## Zionist entity out to destroy UNRWA, says agency chief

GENEVA: The Zionist entity is waging a concerted campaign aimed at destroying UNRWA, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said in an interview published Saturday. Philippe Lazzarini said calls for his resignation were part of the Zionist government's push.

"Right now we are dealing with an expanded, concerted campaign by (the Zionist entity) aimed at destroying UNRWA," he told the Swiss newspaper group Tamedia. "It is a long-term political goal because it is believed that if the aid agency is abolished, the status of the Palestinian refugees will be resolved once and for all — and with it, the right of return. There is a much larger political goal behind this."

"Just look at the number of actions (the Zionist entity) is taking against UNRWA," the main aid body in the Gaza Strip, he said. He cited measures in the Zionist parliament, moves to remove the agency's VAT exemption and orders for contractors at the entity's port of Ashdod to "stop handling certain food deliveries for UNRWA". "And all these demands come from the government."

Furthermore, Lazzarini says more than 150 UNRWA installations have been hit since the Gaza war began. The Zionist entity has called for Lazzarini to step down following claims that a Hamas tunnel

## Philippines accuses Chinese boats of 'dangerous' actions

SOUTH CHINA SEA: The Philippines on Saturday accused Chinese coast guard ships of "dangerous" maneuvers after they repeatedly blocked a vessel delivering supplies to Filipino fishermen at a reef off the Southeast Asian nation's coast. The incidents happened near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal on Thursday and Friday, several days after the Philippine Coast Guard made similar accusations against Chinese boats in the same area. Scarborough Shoal — a triangular chain of reefs and rocks in the disputed South China Sea — has been a flashpoint between the countries since China seized it from the Philippines in 2012.

Since then, Beijing has deployed patrol boats that Manila says harass Philippine vessels and prevent Filipino fishermen from reaching a lagoon where fish are more plentiful. In the latest incidents, a Chinese navy ship, China Coast Guard vessels and other Chinese boats shadowed a Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel that was bringing food and fuel to Filipino fishermen, allowing them to spend more time at sea and pursue a larger catch.

AFP correspondents and journalists from several local outlets were on board the Philippines' BRP Datu Tamblot for the three-day round trip. The Datu Tamblot and the China Coast Guard vessels issued repeated radio challenges to each other, each side accusing the other of encroachment on their waters.

On four occasions, Chinese coast guard vessels briefly blocked the Datu Tamblot by crossing its bow and stopping in its path as it neared the shoal. "It's not permitted for any vessel to cross the bow of another vessel because it is very dangerous," Philippine Coast Guard Commodore Jay Tarriela told a news conference in Manila on Saturday. Tarriela, who is the coast guard's spokesman for the West Philippine Sea, said such actions could "cause a collision".

#### 'I'm really nervous'

Despite the Chinese actions, the Datu Tamblot was able to get within a few kilometers of the shoal and deliver 21,000 liters (5,550 gallons) of diesel and other provisions to 19 Philippine fishing boats, Tarriela said. Fishermen in small wooden outriggers bobbed around in the water as they waited to receive blue plastic jerry cans of diesel and food parcels from the Datu Tamblot crew. "Every time we come here, I'm really nervous," said Joe Saligan, 44, a third-generation fisherman who has been plying the waters around Scarborough Shoal for 20 years. "Maybe they will do what they did before, they might fire a water cannon or force us to leave," he said. "Next time they might bring a gun. I hope that will not happen because we are not trained to fight, we're just here for our livelihoods," Saligan added.

Salvador Achina, 49, said the food and fuel deliveries were a "big help", enabling the fishermen to go further out to sea. BFAR spokesman Nazario Briguera said more than 385,000 Filipino fishermen depended on the waters to the west of the country for their livelihoods. Scarborough Shoal is 240 kilometers (150 miles) west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometers from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan. — AFP



Filipino fishermen aboard their wooden boats sailing past a Chinese coast guard ship near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal, in disputed waters of the South China Sea, on February 16, 2024. — AFP



GAZA CITY: This picture taken on February 3, 2024, shows the UNRWA-run Sheikh Radwan Clinic, destroyed during Zionist bombardment on Gaza City. — AFP

## 'Bleak picture': AU leaders urged to tackle crises

ADDIS ABABA: African leaders were urged Saturday to step up and tackle the myriad conflicts and political crises blighting the continent of 1.4 billion people. Opening the African Union's two-day summit, AU Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat painted a "bleak picture" with a "litany of difficulties" confronting many countries. Faki blasted a failure to counter multiple "unconstitutional changes of government", following a string of coups in West Africa and warned the scourge of "terrorism" was diverting money away from vital social needs to military spending.

Sudan was "bruised, torn, sinking into chaos," Faki said, while Libya was divided and exposed to external interference, and the Sahel was facing a dangerous vacuum. The Great Lakes region of central Africa was, he said, witnessing a worsening of its "eternal crises" fueled by the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. "Africa cannot remain arms folded and not work to promote genuine peace in the region," Faki added. A mini-summit looking at ways to relaunch the peace process for the DRC — attended by Congolese leader and his Rwandan rival — opened Friday on the sidelines of the main AU meetings and was due to continue on Saturday.

Gabon and Niger were absent from the summit following their suspension over coups last year — joining Mali, Guinea, Sudan and Burkina Faso, which are also barred for similar reasons. But the 55-member bloc has long been criticised for being ineffectual and taking little decisive action in the face of numerous conflicts and power grabs.

Faki voiced worries about the crisis in Senegal, set off by President Macky Sall's last-minute move to push back this month's elections in a country usually considered a beacon of democracy in West Africa. But he said he hoped for a "spirit of consensus" to organize "inclusive, free and transparent elections as quickly as possible" after the Constitutional Council overruled Sall's move.

Faki also spoke of "worrying trends" in the Horn of Africa, where tensions are high after AU host nation Ethiopia infuriated Somalia with a deal with the breakaway region of Somaliland to give it long sought-after access to the sea. "Our main challenges have not diminished in importance," Faki said, pointing also to political instability, climate change, poverty, "deficits" in economic governance and marginalization of women and young people in development and leadership. Ahead of the summit, Nina Wilen, director of the Africa program at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations think tank in Brussels, said she did not expect any strong decisions by the AU. The body has so far had "very little influence on countries that have suffered recent coups", she said, adding that member states did not want to set precedents that could clash with their own interests. — AFP



QUETTA, Pakistan: Supporters of Balochistan National Party, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party and Hazara Democratic Party protest against the alleged skewing in Pakistan's national election results on February 17, 2024. — AFP

## Senior official admits to rigging Pakistan elections

ISLAMABAD: A senior bureaucrat said on Saturday he helped rig Pakistan's elections, a week after polls marred by allegations of manipulation returned no clear winner. Liaqat Ali Chattha, commissioner of the garrison city of Rawalpindi, where the country's powerful military has its headquarters, said he would hand himself over to police.

There have been widespread allegations of rigging after authorities switched off the country's mobile phone network on election day and the count took more than 24 hours. The army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), short of a majority, has announced a partnership with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and a handful of smaller parties to form the next government.

Chattha said he personally supervised rigging of votes in Rawalpindi, before stepping down from his post. "We converted the losers into winners, reversing margins of 70,000 votes in 13 national assembly seats," he told reporters. "For committing such a heinous crime, I will hand myself over to the police," he said, also implicating the head of the election commission and the country's top judge.

The election commission rejected Chattha's allegations, but said in a statement that it would "hold an enquiry". Leading advocacy group the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said after Chattha's announcement that the "involvement of the state bureaucracy in rigging in Pakistan is beginning to be exposed".

Candidates from the PML-N and PPP claimed most of the seats in Rawalpindi, sweeping aside candidates loyal to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan — the target of a sweeping crackdown. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party called nationwide protests against the alleged rigging on Saturday.

A small number of supporters took to the streets in major urban centers, with the largest gathering of around 4,000 people in its stronghold northern city of Peshawar. In the central city of Lahore, police detained senior party member Salman Akram Raja and around a dozen supporters — surrounding the party headquarters — but said they had all been released by late afternoon.

Senior PTI official Ali Muhammad Khan said after the protests that Chattha's statement proved his party was cheated. "We must be returned our mandate," he told reporters in Islamabad. PTI defied a months-long crackdown that shattered its campaigning and forced candidates to run as independents, gaining more votes than any other party. But it has been unwilling to enter a coalition with its opponents, paving the way for PML-N to form the next government. — AFP

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

# New AI-video tool by maker of ChatGPT worries media creators

## 'Sora' can allow users to create realistic videos with simple prompts

PARIS: A new artificial intelligence tool that promises to create short videos from simple text commands has raised concerns along with questions from artists and media professionals. OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT and image generator DALL-E, said on Thursday it was testing a text-to-video model called "Sora" that can allow users to create realistic videos with simple prompts.

The San Francisco-based startup says Sora can "generate complex scenes with multiple characters, specific types of motion, and accurate details of the subject and background," but admits it still has limitations, such as possibly "mixing up left and right." Here are early reactions from industries that could be affected by the new generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool:

### Studios

Examples of Sora-created clips on OpenAI's website range widely in style and subject, from seemingly real drone footage above a crowded market to an animated bunny-like creature bouncing through a forest.

Thomas Bellenger, founder and art director of Cutback Productions, has been carefully watching the evolution of generative AI image generation. "There were those who felt that it was an unstoppable groundswell that was progressing at an astonishing rate, and those who just didn't want to see it," said Bellenger, whose France-based company has created large scale visual effects for such touring musicians as Stromae and Justice.

He said the development of generative AI has "created a lot of debate internally" at the company and "a lot of sometimes visceral reactions".

Bellenger noted that Sora has yet to be released, so its capabilities have yet to be tested by the public.

"What is certain is that no one expected such a technological leap forward in just a few weeks," Bellenger said. "It's unheard of." He said whatever the

future holds, they'll "find ways to create differently".

### Video games

Video game creators are equally likely to be impacted by the new invention, with reaction among the sector divided between those open to embracing a new tool and those fearing it might replace them. French video game giant Ubisoft hailed the OpenAI announcement as a "quantum leap forward" with the potential to let players and development teams express their imaginations.

"We've been exploring this potential for a long time," a Ubisoft spokesperson told AFP. Alain Puget, chief of Nantes-based studio Alkemi, said he won't replace any artists with AI tools, which "only reproduce things done by humans".

Nevertheless, Puget noted, this "visually impressive" tool could be used by small studios to produce more professionally rendered images. While video "cut scenes" that play out occasionally to advance game storylines are different from player-controlled action, Puget expects tools like Sora to eventually be able to replace "the way we do things."

### Truth vs Fiction

Basile Simon, a former journalist and current Stanford University researcher, thinks there has been "a terrifying leap forward in the last year" when it comes to generative AI allowing realistic-looking fabrications to be rapidly produced. He dreads the idea of how such tools will be abused during elections and fears the public will "no longer know what to believe".

Julien Pain of French TV channel FranceInfo's fact-checking program "Vrai ou Faux" (True or False) says he's also worried about abuse of AI tools. "Until now, it was easy enough to spot fake images, for example by noticing the repetitive faces in the background," Pain said. "What this new software does seems to be on another level."

## Gulf Bank: Customers can increase transfer limits via mobile app

KUWAIT: In its rapid journey towards digital excellence, Gulf Bank's latest mobile application offers a diverse range of high-quality services. Among them is the ability to increase the daily limit on transfers, as well as switching the screen mode to dark mode to provide more privacy when browsing the application near others. Bader Al-Ali, Deputy General Manager of the Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, emphasized the distinctive features of the bank's mobile app, making it the most user-friendly, efficient, and advanced in the banking industry. He highlighted the app's smart user interface, designed to meet the specific needs of each individual customer, ensuring a seamless experience that surpasses customer expectations.

Al-Ali explained that Gulf Bank customers can easily adjust their daily transfer limits, whether for local, international, or intra-bank transfers, through the mobile app, with approval typically obtained within 24 hours. Customers interested in increasing their minimum transfer amounts can do so by accessing the app's profile settings and selecting from four package options: Basic, Standard, Premium, and VIP. Upon selection, a confirmation message will appear, confirming the change in the minimum limit.

Regarding switching to dark mode, Al-Ali outlined two simple methods for customers to achieve



Bader Al-Ali

this. The first involves accessing the login page and navigating to the side menu, where they can select the semi-colored circle to choose between light or dark mode, or maintain identical system settings. The second method requires logging into the mobile app, accessing profile settings from the side menu, and selecting "Application Attributes" to customize the screen mode.

Al-Ali concluded by emphasizing that the new version of Gulf Bank's mobile application represents a significant advancement in customer experience, impacting various banking services and transaction stages. It is accessible to everyone, regardless of location or time, via a simple, fast and secure interface. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank



GENEVA: Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala gestures as she addresses media during a press conference at the World Trade Organization (WTO) headquarters in Geneva on Feb 16, 2024. — AFP

13th ministerial meeting since the WTO's creation in 1995. The WTO is hoping for results, particularly on fishing, agriculture and electronic commerce, but disagreements remain between the organization's members.

Okonjo-Iweala said her team was working around the clock to draft agreements for the talks. She said the mood among diplomats finessing the draft texts for the Abu Dhabi meeting was more positive and constructive than before the last ministerial meeting in 2022, held at the WTO's Geneva headquarters.

However, the "positive atmosphere has to be



WASHINGTON: In this photo illustration, a video created by Open AI's newly released text-to-video "Sora" tool plays on a monitor in Washington, DC on Feb 16, 2024.

While OpenAI and US tech titans may promote safety tools, such as industry-wide watermarks that reveal AI-created imagery, "what about tomorrow's competitors in China and Russia?", he posited.

The Fred & Farid agency, which has collaborated with the Longchamp and Budweiser brands and where a studio dedicated to AI was opened in early January, anticipates that "80 percent of brand content will be generated by artificial intelligence". "Creative genius" will no longer be limited by pro-

duction skills thanks to generative AI tools, one enthusiast contended.

Stephanie Laporte, chief executive and founder of the OTTA advertising and influencer agency, believes the technology will "force the industry to evolve". She also anticipates ad companies with lean budgets will resort to AI tools to save money on workers. A possible exception, she believes, is the luxury segment, where brands are "very sensitive to authenticity" and "will probably use AI sparingly". — AFP



both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

mixed with a dose of realism because negotiating positions are still quite tough" notably on agriculture, she added. They were working to seal new agreements on tackling subsidies that promote overfishing, and extending the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Okonjo-Iweala said she expected the meeting to be tough due to the "economic and political headwinds", from the war in Ukraine, the attacks in the Red Sea, inflation, rising food prices and economic difficulties in Europe and China. She also noted the elections scheduled this year around the world, which she said affected how the countries concerned negotiate.

The US presidential election in November is being closely scrutinized in WTO circles because it could see former president Donald Trump return to the White House. In his previous term, Trump increased numerous customs duties and threatened to pull the United States out of the WTO.

Okonjo-Iweala said the WTO was focused on implementing the appropriate reforms, no matter who comes to power in any country.

If "the WTO becomes irrelevant, everyone including you and me will be in trouble", said Okonjo-Iweala. "If the WTO doesn't exist... it means the rules don't matter. Then what happens is a free-for-all. Anyone can do what they like, you can get up and put whatever tariffs you like on someone else." — AFP

## US wholesale prices rose more than expected in January

WASHINGTON: US wholesale prices rose more than expected in January, according to government data published Friday, as services costs were lifted by a jump in the index for hospital outpatient care. The producer price index (PPI) rose 0.3 percent in January after falling by 0.1 percent a month earlier, the Labor Department said in a statement.

This was above market expectations of a smaller 0.1 percent rise, according to Briefing.com. "PPI inflation surprised to the upside in January," High Frequency Economics chief US economist Ruben Ferooqi wrote in a note to clients. "The data show significant progress on producer prices from rates of change a year earlier," she added. "But like the CPI, monthly changes accelerated to start the year."

The uptick in producer prices follows a similar monthly increase in the headline consumer price index (CPI) inflation measure in January, which rattled financial markets and pushed away expectations of an imminent interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve. Stocks on Wall Street ended the day lower following the new inflation readings. US Treasury yields, which are heavily influenced by interest rate expectations, rose on the news.

The "major factor" behind the rise in the services index was the 2.2 percent monthly rise in hospital outpatient care, while a range of other services also rose, the Labor Department said in a statement. This helped to counteract the decline in the index for final demand goods, which was driven by a 1.7 percent decline in energy prices.

The US Federal Reserve should "resist the temptation to act quickly" as it contemplates the right time to begin interest rate cuts, a senior bank official said Friday. "The economy is healthy, price stability is within sight, and there is more work to do," San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly told a conference in Washington. "To finish the job will take fortitude," said Daly, who is a voting member of the Fed's rate-setting committee this year. "We will need to resist the temptation to act quickly when patience is needed and be prepared to respond agilely as the economy evolves," she added.

The US central bank is currently in a holding pattern, after hiking rates to a 23-year high to tackle surging prices. With inflation inching ever closer to the Fed's long-term target of two percent in recent months, officials have indicated they expect to start cutting interest rates this year.

But they remain divided over the best time to do so, with some voicing concern about prematurely declaring victory over inflation. On Friday, Daly cautioned against being overly optimistic about projections that show the world's largest economy on track to vanquish inflation. "Projections and expectations are just that: views about what we think will happen," she said.

"We need more time and data to be sure that they will be realized," she continued, adding that the Fed could afford to take a more "gradual approach." "Gradual doesn't mean slow, it doesn't mean weak," she said. — AFP

## WTO chief insists global trade body still counts

GENEVA: The head of the World Trade Organization insisted Friday the WTO was still relevant as it prepares for its main gathering with few major deals on the table.

WTO members' trade ministers have their biennial meeting in Abu Dhabi from February 26-29, at which they could put the final touches to a further fisheries deal. But other potential agreements seem stuck in the weeds as anxiety swells over the impact of current geopolitical tensions.

The global trade body's chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala dismissed claims that the organisation was no longer relevant. "I reject the use of the word irrelevant," she told journalists at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva.

"People don't realize, they've taken for granted that 75 percent of world trade is taking place on WTO terms: 75 percent, in spite of all the FTAs (free trade agreements) and regional agreements.

"Can you imagine if those rules did not exist to govern world trade? What would it be? "Be careful what you say." The Abu Dhabi talks will be



Business

# NBK unveils 'NBK Wealth' brand

## A world class wealth management group and one of the largest in the region

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) revealed the launch of its prestigious "NBK Wealth" brand, positioning itself as a leading global organization and one of the most significant regional groups in comprehensive wealth management. The brand features a unique visual identity that accurately represents the Group's business orientation and encapsulates the trust, credibility, and success associated with NBK Group, the leading financial institution in the Middle East.

as well as investment management and advisory services. This is facilitated through a vast global network of integrated operations spanning 9 cities across five countries worldwide.

The Group, boasting personal financial assets of approximately \$37.6 billion as of the end of 2023, is supported by an elite team of over 100 investment professionals and traders, each with extensive experience in their field. NBK Wealth stands as a premier destination and a trusted partner for delivering inno-



vision is realized through holistic investment strategies, leveraging our global presence in key financial and business hubs, and our extensive experience in delivering exceptional service that fulfills all their aspirations," Al-Hamad noted.



Faisal Al-Hamad

- NBK Wealth marks a significant milestone in assisting our clients to accumulate wealth and create a lasting legacy for future generations.
- Our motto, "Guiding Your Path Beyond Wealth" embodies our forward-looking approach to wealth management for both individuals and institutions.
- NBK Wealth stands at the forefront of offering cutting-edge and sophisticated solutions in wealth management.

NBK Wealth, set for its official brand launch next April, encompasses a range of services and products under its umbrella. This includes the private banking services of NBK - Kuwait, Watani Investment Company, Watani Wealth Management Company (Saudi Arabia), NBK Banque Privée (Suisse), as well as National Bank of Kuwait (International) PLC and Watani Financial Brokerage Company (WFBC).

NBK Wealth provides an extensive array of comprehensive solutions in private banking services, covering financial planning and wealth management,

as well as investment management and advisory services. This includes investment management and alternative investments, alongside traditional investments, and trading solutions.

The new brand caters to a sophisticated group of ultra-high-net-worth individuals and institutions with a passion for maintaining and accelerating their financial wellness. It offers financial consulting services aimed at growing and sustaining their wealth through holistic investment and banking solutions.

Within wealth management, NBK Wealth presents

a broad spectrum of innovative solutions, backed by an extensive network of investment professionals with specialized knowledge, and a distinguished team of highly skilled asset management experts. The valuable collaborations with JP Morgan Asset Management and Interset further leverage multiple dimensions, including advisory services and the development of new investment solutions.

Commenting on this news, Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO - NBK Wealth, stated: "The introduction of the NBK Wealth brand marks a pivotal moment in our dedication to offering unmatched wealth management services and solutions. It underscores our role in assisting our clients as they navigate the path to accumulating significant wealth and creating a lasting legacy that will benefit many generations."

"At NBK Wealth, our approach is client-centric and comprehensive, aimed at thoroughly understanding our clients' needs to offer solutions that align with their aspirations. Our objectives extend beyond merely generating wealth; we strive to fulfill their requirements and deliver long-term added value from a holistic and integrated standpoint," Al-Hamad added.

Furthermore, the CEO elaborated that the Group is dedicated to reinforcing its status as the premier and trusted option in wealth management, both regionally and globally, backed by an extensive global network of integrated operations. "Our motto, 'Guiding Your Path Beyond Wealth,' encapsulates our vision for ushering in a new era of wealth management for both high-net-worth individuals and institutions. This

- Our extensive global network spans the key financial and business capitals worldwide, ensuring integrated operations across the most significant markets.
- We are dedicated to solidifying our status as the primary and reliable option for wealth management on both a regional and global scale.
- By adopting a holistic, client-centric approach, we aim to fully understand our clients' needs and deliver tailored solutions that align with their goals.

### NBK Wealth in numbers

- \$37.6 billion in personal financial assets as of the end of 2023.
- More than 100 investment professionals and traders, and 80 relationship managers.
- Presence in 5 countries and 9 key financial hubs around the world.
- Offers private banking solutions, encompassing financial planning, wealth management, and banking services.
- Asset management solutions covering investment management, alternative investments, traditional investments, and trading solutions.

Alessandro Gariglio, a lawyer for Greenpeace Italy, said the parties exchanged documents—including technical and expert findings—on Friday, and the court is expected to set a date for the next hearing soon. Scientists say climate change driven by human activity is boosting the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts and wildfires. Greenpeace Italy and ReCommon have published a report detailing how Eni has known about the climate impacts of fossil fuel extraction since the 1970s. The lawsuit also includes Eni's two main shareholders, Italy's economy ministry and state lender Cassa di Risparmio di Venezia (CRV), which together hold the Italian government's one-third ownership stake. The Rome court is being asked to rule on whether all three have violated "human rights to life, health, and private and family life".—AFP

## Climate change trial against energy giant Eni opens

ROME: A trial pitting Italian energy giant Eni against environmental groups hoping to force the state-controlled company to slash its emissions and admit its contribution to climate change opened in Rome Friday. Greenpeace Italy and fellow campaigners ReCommon filed the suit along with 12 citizens from areas of Italy severely affected by extreme weather events.

The group accuses Eni of policies "in blatant violation of the Paris Agreement", the landmark 2015 deal aimed at limiting global warming, as well as using "lobbying and greenwashing" strategies to downplay its responsibility. Inspired by a 2021 court case in the Netherlands, which saw oil giant Shell forced to slash its emissions, the plaintiffs hope to force Eni to reduce its carbon footprint by 45 percent by 2030, compared to 2020 levels.

They also want Eni to be obliged to make a "declaration of responsibility" over damage caused by its greenhouse gas emissions, which they say are globally greater than those generated by the whole of Italy. Eni said Friday it "will prove in the legal proceedings the groundlessness of Greenpeace and ReCommon's claims, both legally and factually."



BRUSSELS: France and Germany on Friday refused to back controversial EU rules covering app workers in the gig economy.

## France, Germany block EU deal on app worker law

BRUSSELS: France and Germany on Friday refused to back a watered-down agreement on controversial EU rules covering app workers in the gig economy, European diplomats said. The European Union's objective was to bring in bloc-wide rules that supporters hoped would improve conditions for app workers in the gig economy by reclassifying some as employed. But the latest text scaled back those efforts, by scrapping any formal list of criteria and letting states decide how to classify workers. For any approval, there needed to be a qualified majority of 15 out of 27 EU nations, representing at least 65 percent of the bloc's population.

During a meeting of member states' ambassadors in Brussels, the EU's two most populous countries, France and Germany, blocked the text with the support of Estonia and Greece, denying the qualified majority, diplomats told AFP. There were concerns that the text did not harmonize rules across Europe and would create legal uncertainties, a French diplomat said. "Unfortunately, the necessary qualified majority voting wasn't found," Belgium, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said on social media.

"We'll now consider the next steps," it added. EU diplomats said the presidency would not give up. "Why would they? There are 23 countries supporting this deal," one said. Others were skeptical, saying time is running out to find a new compromise and complete the legislative process before June's European elections.

The draft rules have been a source of controversy since the European Commission first proposed the text in 2021. Member states and the European Parliament struck a first agreement on the draft text in December 2023 but days later, a France-led blockade stopped the deal in its tracks.

EU negotiators returned to the table and reached a new deal last week. The original text agreed in December said that if a worker met two out of five criteria, it will be presumed they are an employee, giving them access to benefits like sick pay. The idea was to end the practice of courts across Europe handing down decisions that varied wildly. Workers' groups slammed the failure to reach an agreement on even the latest watered-down text. "Millions of precarious platform workers with little or no rights will remain at the mercy of unscrupulous platforms," the European Transport Workers' Federation said.

Left-wing French MEP, Leila Chaibi, accused French President Emmanuel Macron of defending Uber's interests. "To the very end, Macron will have torpedoed this directive and prevented millions of workers from having any rights and until the end he will have defended the interests of Uber," she told AFP. —The industry welcomed the failure to back the text. The rejection "confirms that member states do not want to approve a deal that would have created more legal uncertainty for the hundreds of thousands of ride-hailing drivers in Europe," said Aurelien Pozzana, Move EU chair.—AFP

## UK bank NatWest shakes off CEO turmoil as profits fall

LONDON: British bank NatWest on Friday said net profit jumped nearly a third in 2023 on higher interest rates, adding that Paul Thwaite would become permanent chief executive following boardroom turmoil. Profit after tax increased 32 percent to £4.4 billion (\$5.5 billion), NatWest said in a statement. Revenue climbed 12 percent to around £14.8 billion.

Thwaite takes over from Alison Rose, who resigned as CEO in July after admitting a "serious error of judgment" in speaking to a reporter about the banking affairs of arch-Brexitier Nigel Farage. Thwaite had filled the role on an interim basis after an internal promotion.

He said Friday that it was "an honor to lead" a bank "which plays a vital role in the lives of the 19 million customers". "With that, comes a great sense of responsibility to succeed for our customers, colleagues, and shareholders.

"Our customers' needs and expectations are changing at pace, as they engage with emerging technology, adapt to new social trends, and build ever more resilience to a fast-evolving world," the new CEO added in a statement. An independent probe in October found that NatWest displayed "serious failings" in its treatment of the banking affairs of Farage—ex-leader of the Brexit Party and the anti-immigration party UKIP.

Farage had complained about the closure of his account with upmarket NatWest division Coutts, claiming he was removed for his political views. NatWest remains 38-percent owned by the government after a state bailout of the lender in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008. As the bank slowly returned to health, the government sold off chunks of its majority stake.

The bank on Friday added that operating pre-tax profit came in at £6.2 billion, the highest since 2007, or eve of the crisis. The bank revealed also lower-than-expected impairment charges linked to defaults on mortgages as borrowers struggle with high interest rates.

Following the earnings update, NatWest's share price soared 6.5 percent, topping London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, which was up 1.4 percent overall. "In all, these are a robust set of results," noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at trading group Interactive Investor.

Despite Friday's strong investor reaction, "the share price has tended to be dogged by the general outlook for the UK economy" in recent months, he added. Official data Thursday showed the British economy in recession, although economists expect it to be short-lived.

Figures Friday showed a sharp rebound in UK retail sales. — AFP

### Invitation to run as a candidate for Board Membership

## Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)

### Kuwaiti Shareholding Company (Public)

**First: Nominate Invitation for BOD Membership (7 Seats)**

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company **stc** is pleased to invite the **stc's** shareholders and those who meet the membership requirements outlined in Article (18) of the Company's Articles of Association and Article (181) of the Companies Law 1/2016, to nominate for membership on the company's BOD for the next three years.

**The following documents will be submitted to the company's headquarters:**

- Criminal cases clearance certificate (Ministry of Interior).
- Copy of the Civil ID.
- Proof of shareholding in the company.
- Candidate's CV and copy of educational & professional certificates.

**Second: Nominate Invitation for BOD Membership (Independent Member) (2 Seats)**

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company **stc** is pleased to invite the **stc's** shareholders and those who meet the membership requirements outlined in Article (18) of the Company's Articles of Association and Article (181) of the Companies Law 1/2016, to nominate for membership on the company's BOD (Independent Member) for the next three years.

Below are the controls of independent members' independence, which is considered void in case of any of the following, for example, and without limitation:

- The member holds 5% or more of the company shares, for which he is nominated or represented.
- To have first-degree relation with any of the Members of a BOD or executive management members in the company or any other company in its Group or the relevant main parties.
- To be a BOD Member in any company of the Group.
- To be an employee in the company or any company in the Group or for any of the Stakeholders.
- To be an employee for corporate entities who own control shares in the company.

The independent member must have qualifications, experiences and technical skills which are constituent with the company's activity.

**The following documents will be submitted to the company's headquarters:**

- Criminal cases clearance certificate (Ministry of Interior).
- Copy of the Civil ID.
- Candidate's CV and copy of educational & professional certificates.

To apply and obtain the Nomination Application Forms, please visit the company's headquarters located in Olympia Tower Salmiya - Block 2 - Salem Al-Mubarak Street - Legal Department 14th floor. Applications will be received in person Stating from 18 February 2024 to 3 March 2024 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

## Business

# ABK holds analyst conference call for the 2023 end of year financial results



**Abdulla Al-Sumait:** The 2023 financial results reflect the Group's commitment to enhancing its position in the competitive banking industry



**Shiamak Soonawalla:** Our investment in digital technologies contribute to lowering operating expenses and improving operational efficiency



**Abdulaziz Jawad:** Our ABK2X strategy is yielding tangible outcomes, driving significant market share growth

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently hosted its analyst conference to discuss the results of the year ending Dec 31, 2023. The conference was attended by Abdulla Al-Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer; Shiamak Soonawalla, Group Chief Finance Officer; Abdulaziz Jawad, Chief Strategy Officer; and Yaqoub Almulla, Senior Manager of Investor Relations.

The conference entailed a review of ABK Group's financial indicators, highlighting the key developments in 2023, as well as an outline of future plans to bolster its competitive position in Kuwait's banking sector and the markets it operates in, including the UAE and Egypt.

## Strong financial results

Al-Sumait expressed his satisfaction, stating, "I am delighted to present the impressive results of another successful year, demonstrating our resilience and unwavering commitment to strengthening our position. Our financial performance in 2023, which saw a 40 percent increase in Net Profit to KD 45.2 million, a 46 percent increase in EPS from 13 fils to 19 fils, and an improved capital adequacy ratio of 16.74 percent and a healthy NPL ratio of 1.33 percent, highlights our capacity to adapt to economic shifts and effectively address local, regional, and global challenges."

He added that ABK has maintained a positive momentum throughout the previous year, as evidenced by positive growth ratios in profitability, ROAA, ROAE, and improving asset quality ratios well above regulatory requirements, emphasizing its financial strength for the year.

## Distinctive position

Al-Sumait noted, "The Group continues to leverage its distinctive position among Kuwaiti banks, particularly with our extensive geographic reach. This is instrumental in driving revenue, facilitating loan distribution, and gathering deposits. Notably, our international operations, including our UAE branches and ABK-Egypt subsidiary, contribute 41.6 percent of our Operating Income and 38 percent of our assets."

Furthermore, the Group's sustained efforts to implement its digital transformation plans, marked by the inauguration of the first hologram-powered digital branch in the Kuwaiti market at Al-Khiran Mall, demonstrate the Group's dedication to leveraging cutting-edge banking technologies. The Group plans to introduce additional digital branches in the future to provide seamless service to customers around the clock. In terms of its regional footprint, Al-Sumait revealed that the Group has expanded its presence in Egypt. This involves the opening of four new branches equipped with state-of-the-art technologies, aligning with the Group's strategy to expand its

presence and serve customers across Egypt.

Looking ahead, Al-Sumait affirmed that the Group remains diligent and confident in its commitment to driving innovation, growth, and enhancing its market position in the banking sector by consistently delivering added value to its customers.

## Growth indicators

On his part, Soonawalla said, "In terms of operational performance, our Operating Income has reached KD 185 million, with an operating profit of KD 97.1 million. Regarding risk management and stability, the Group's NPL ratio is 1.33 percent and the Group loan loss coverage ratio is 445 percent." He added, "We maintain excess provisions of KD 213 million, well above the IFRS requirements as per the guidelines set by the Central Bank of Kuwait, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to prudent financial practices." Furthermore, the Group has maintained operational stability with a Net Interest Margin of 2.2 percent and an operating profit to average assets ratio of 1.5 percent, indicating healthy performance and sustained growth across the Group's diverse businesses.

Additionally, Soonawalla disclosed, "Our liquidity position remains strong, with a net stable funding ratio of 113 percent, a liquidity coverage ratio of 225 percent, and a self-backed balance sheet supported by customer deposits totaling KD 3.8 billion, representing 68 percent of our total liabilities."

He added that ABK is currently examining the key factors influencing changes in income, margins, and costs. He continued, "total operating income has seen an 8 percent increase compared to 2022. Notably, the Group's ROAE of 6.8 percent has risen by 36 percent compared to the previous year."

Breaking down the operating income of KD 185 million, 49 percent comes from commercial banking, 43 percent from retail banking, and 8 percent from treasury operations. In terms of asset allocation, 58 percent is in commercial banking, 13 percent in retail, and 29 percent in treasury.

Soonawalla continued, "Total Interest Income for YE 2023 is KD 413.5 million, a significant growth of KD 144 million or 54 percent from the previous year. This growth is primarily attributed to increased asset levels and an improved interest rate environment."

Furthermore, the majority of non-interest income is derived from core banking activities, providing stability compared to more volatile income from trading activities. This, together with an increase in net interest earnings, has had a positive impact on operating profit, which increased by 7 percent.

## Excellent investments

Soonawalla emphasized, "The Group's commit-

ment to excellence is evident in our ongoing investments in key business initiatives, digital technologies, and process enhancements, contributing to lowering operating expenses and improving operational efficiency."

The cost-to-income ratio for 2023 is 47.5 percent, up from 47.2 percent in 2022. The Group has maintained a prudent and conservative approach in managing credit exposures and provisioning. ABK's geographical footprint plays a crucial role in driving revenue, facilitating loan distribution and gathering deposits. Soonawalla added that contributions from international operations, including the UAE branches and ABK-Egypt subsidiary, have been significant.

As of the end of 2023, the Group's total assets reached KD 6.3 billion, with net loans and advances increasing by 5 percent from KD 4 billion in 2022 to KD 4.3 billion in 2023. Soonawalla stated, "We have diversified our funding sources, securing more long-term borrowings through international markets, enhancing the stability and reliability of our funding and improving balance sheet efficiency."

In summary, the financial results for 2023 demonstrate continuous improvements in key operational factors. These include increased loans, decreased provisions and impairments, a strong balance sheet, ample liquidity, and a solid capital base.

## Promising economic forecast

Turning to the Chief Strategy Officer Jawad emphasized that the global economy is displaying macroeconomic resilience, with the IMF forecasting global economic growth to 3.6 percent in 2024, up from 3.0 percent in 2023. Slight fluctuations are expected in the economic growth of advanced economies this year, driven by geopolitical challenges and uncertainties. However, this is expected to be offset by growth in other emerging economies, resulting in world GDP similar to 2023's level.

He continued, "GCC economies are positioned favorably to demonstrate a promising economic forecast, while remaining cautious and exposed to the overall global backdrop. In the case of Kuwait, the economy presents a promising outlook and we are optimistic of the commitment to accelerate the awards pipeline across various projects."

In 2023, project awards surpassed KD 2.5 billion, a remarkable achievement attributed to the backlog of awards from the pandemic era. Jawad added, "The IMF forecasts a GDP growth rate for Kuwait slightly over 3.6 percent, surpassing both the global and GCC averages, with projections to more than KD 5-6 billion worth of project awards in the pipeline. These projects are primarily in the energy and oil sector, with additional growth in foreign investments."

## A new phase

Jawad disclosed that ABK is committed to precisely implementing its strategy throughout 2024, positioning it to consistently create added value for stakeholders. He claimed, "ABK advances into a new phase of progress. Our steadfast commitment has been reaffirmed by credit ratings of A from Fitch in November, and A2 from Moody's."

He expressed the Group's commitment to delivering enhanced value to shareholders, highlighting the Board's proposal to distribute cash dividends of 9 percent equivalent to 9 fils per share, valued at KD 21.23 million as well as bonus shares of 5 percent equivalent to 5 shares for every 100 shares, valued at KD 11.87 million.

Jawad continued, "The implementation of our ABK2X strategy is yielding successful results, with 95 percent of critical milestones slated for delivery by 2023 completed as planned, and 102 initiatives executed so far. Our strategy is yielding tangible outcomes, driving significant market share growth across multiple products and expanding our customer base." He also discussed the introduction of Elite Plus to cater to the affluent segment, while targeted acquisition campaigns are capturing market share among key salaried Kuwaiti segments and higher-income expats. Furthermore, the successful launch of 'ABK Advantage Rewards' has led to increased customer adoption, prompting enhancements to credit card offerings to better meet evolving customer needs.

## Nine syndicated loan transactions

In the realm of international business, 2023 proved to be an exceptional year, marked by nine syndicated loan transactions, concluded by ABK-DIFC. These transactions spanned across various jurisdictions, including the GCC, Europe, and Asia.

Jawad shared, "As of 11 February 2024, ABK has been upgraded to the Premier Market, moving into a relatively larger and more liquid arena in Boursa Kuwait. The listing signifies the Bank's successful compliance with the requirements of Kuwait Capital Market Authority."

## Sustainability and governance

Jawad emphasized ABK's commitment to advancing its ESG and sustainability agenda through a 5-year group ESG strategy consisting of six pillars: Climate Resilience; Responsible Banking; Community Investment; Robust Governance Foundation; Empowering Our People; and Financial Inclusion. In order to ensure the proper integration of these elements, ABK implemented an ESG e-learning program for approximately 1,000 staff members in Kuwait and the UAE.



SINGAPORE: Leow Ban Tat, CEO and founder of the Aquaculture Centre of Excellence (ACE) Farm Eco Ark fish farm, stands outside the facility in Singapore.



SINGAPORE: Fish in a tank at the Aquaculture Centre of Excellence (ACE) Farm Eco Ark fish farm in Singapore. — AFP photos

## Singapore engineer pivots from oil rigs to 'fish farm of future'

**SINGAPORE:** A high-tech fish farm floats just off the coast of Singapore, part of a plan by a retired engineer who once built oil rigs to bring diners cleaner, healthier seafood. The tiny city-state imports 90 percent of its food but hopes to locally source about a third of it by 2030 to guard against supply disruptions such as climate change, disease and conflict.

So officials are backing projects such as Eco Ark, a giant aquafarm that produces seabass, grouper and threadfin for restaurant tables across the city of nearly six million. The facility harvests 30,000 kilograms

(66,000 pounds) a month, which ex-engineer Leow Ban Tat, founder of Eco Ark and the Aquaculture Centre of Excellence, says is 20 times more per hectare than traditional open-net cage farms. "There is a great difference in what we do because we believe in technology," Leow, who once built oil rigs, told AFP.

The structure, which sits on a purpose-built submersible platform, filters seawater through an ozone machine to kill disease-causing pathogens before then transferring it into fish tanks six meters (20 feet) deep. The tanks simulate ocean conditions to keep the fish swimming against the current, making them leaner and more nutritious, and shield them from threats such as disease, plankton blooms and oil spills.

Leow, 65, said the water is so clean that, unlike other farms, Eco Ark has no need to add antibiotics, which help protect fish from disease but can cause resistance in humans over time and affect the environment. Adult fish are given frozen squid as well as

pelleted feed, with younger ones also given probiotics "which helps with both digestion and physiological function and improves the performance of the animal", he said.

Leow is also looking to cut emissions from his "fish farms of the future" by adding solar panels and has built a hatchery after finding that juvenile fish imported from Malaysia and Australia carried diseases. Eco Ark's fish are delivered to more than 80 restaurants, supermarkets and specialty shops that put a premium on them being freshly harvested and healthy. Leow hopes eventually to export not only the fish but the technology for the Eco Ark, which he says can be built near coastal areas to shorten delivery time and cut costs. Daniel Teo, the co-founder of Singapore's Kin Hoi restaurant, which buys fish from the Eco Ark facility, said: "It is very important that local farmers (who) actually know the economy" should be encouraged to help meet demand. — AFP

for soldiers, has largely shielded the economy from the worst consequences of Western sanctions.

The central bank said high interest rates would need to be maintained "for a long period" to bring down inflation, caused by intense labor shortages in non-military parts of the economy. At the same time, it said higher rates of saving among households and "cooling demand for imports" was helping to "put the economy back on a balanced growth path." Price rises are a particularly sensitive topic for Russian households, where memories of sharp currency devaluation and hyperinflation in the 1990s are vivid. The topic is also in focus inside the Kremlin ahead of March's presidential election, in which President Vladimir Putin is a shoo-in to secure another six-year term. — AFP

## Hot US inflation report stops Wall St stocks rebound

**NEW YORK:** A larger-than-expected rise in US wholesale prices Friday rekindled worries over the timing of interest rate cuts and brought a halt to Wall Street's recent rebound. Markets shuddered after data released on Tuesday showed US consumer price inflation slowed less than expected in January, dealing a blow to hopes of an early interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

After staging a small rebound, US equities slipped once more to finish the trading day firmly in the red. The Dow Jones Industrial Average ended 0.4 percent lower, while the broad-based S&P 500 Index lost 0.5 percent and the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dropped 0.8 percent. Meanwhile, US Treasury yields, which can act as a proxy for interest rate expectations, rose on dwindling expectations of an early cut. "Inflation concerns continued to drive Fed rate cut expectations lower and Treasury yields higher ahead of the weekend as import prices and the latest (Producer Price Index) release both came in quite hot," said Oxford Economics lead analyst John Canavan in a note.

Speaking in Washington Friday, San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly said the US central bank should "resist the temptation to act quickly" as it contemplates the right time to begin interest rate cuts. The Fed needs "more time and data" to ensure it realizes positive projections of inflation continuing to fall, she continued, adding that the Fed could afford to take a more "gradual approach." "Gradual doesn't mean slow, it doesn't mean weak," she said. "It simply means not abrupt and urgently when you're facing a lot of uncertainty, and you already have policy in a good place."

Europe's stocks rallied Friday, with Frankfurt and Paris striking more record peaks after solid Asian gains, as investors shrugged off recessions in Britain and Japan. London equities also jumped as investors drew comfort from a January rebound in UK retail sales, one day after the gloomy news that Britain had entered a technical recession. UK retail sales volumes surged 3.4 percent in January, the fastest increase in almost three years, after sliding 3.3 percent in December, official data showed.

Sentiment was also buoyed by a jump in annual net profit at NatWest, which sent the UK bank's share price up over seven percent. In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei index ended at a new 34-year high, partly supported by the Wall Street rally on Wednesday and Thursday, including in tech shares. Japan also entered recession at the back end of 2023, according to data released Thursday, with the Asian nation being overtaken by Germany as the world's third-largest economy. — AFP

## Russia's central bank holds rates amid high inflation

**MOSCOW:** Russia's central bank held its key interest rate unchanged at 16 percent on Friday, warning price rises and intense labor shortages were a lingering threat to the country's heavily militarized economy.

The bank hiked rates in a series of moves last year as it battled high inflation and a volatile currency amid the Kremlin's dramatic increase in spending for its offensive against Ukraine. "Current inflationary pres-

sures have eased compared with the Autumn months but remain high," the central bank said in a statement.

"Domestic demand is still outstripping the capabilities to expand the production of goods and services," it said, adding that inflation risks remained elevated over the medium-term. Prices rose by 7.4 percent on an annual basis in January, Russia's federal statistics office said earlier this week—well ahead of the central bank's official four percent target.

Governor Elvira Nabiullina has largely led Russia's domestic economic response to the fallout of Moscow's assault on Ukraine. Fast inflation remains a blemish on what Moscow sees as an otherwise impressive economic record since it ordered troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Massive investment in military production, as well as high salaries and benefits

# Burgan Bank crowns its second Kanz Millionaire, winner of KD 1,500,000 prize

As part of bank's overarching strategy for rewarding its loyal customers



Fadel Mahmoud Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Kuwait at Burgan Bank with the Burgan Bank team.

KUWAIT: Stemming from its committed strategy for rewarding its customers, elevating their lifestyle, and supporting them in achieving their aspirations, Burgan Bank crowned the second winner of the Kanz annual KD 1,500,000 draw prize, Zinab Maylood Albader, in a celebration that was held at the Burgan head office and attended by the Bank's top management only.

On this occasion, Nasser Al-Qaisi, General Manager - Retail Banking at Burgan Bank, said: "We are extremely happy for Ms Zinab Maylood Albader, and on behalf of Burgan's top management, I extend my warmest congratulations to her on being the second Kanz millionaire and we wish all Kanz account customers better luck in the upcoming draws."

He added: "The annual Kanz draw prize of KD 1,500,000 is designed to be a turning point for the draw winners, setting them up for a life of more accessible possibilities where dreams are within reach. The Kanz account and its yearlong draw prizes are harmoniously in sync with our overarching transformation strategy, which the Bank continues to act upon on all fronts as it marches toward new horizons and a future of sustainable banking products and services."

#### 'Kanz'... Realizing Dreams and Increasing Savings

Burgan's Kanz account constitutes a pivotal element of the Bank's ongoing retail banking strategy. It

also manifests Burgan's steadfast pursuit of innovation and development, which culminated in a varied range of banking products and services that are specially designed to reinforce the savings culture and deliver an outstanding banking experience for all customers, while responding to their evolving needs and aspirations.

Among several other offerings, Kanz pays great attention to the importance of rewarding customers for their loyalty throughout the entire year. In the case of Kanz, this is reflected in the valuable draws and cash prizes, which offer winners an opportunity to take confident action toward realizing their dreams and leading more fulfilled lives. Throughout the year, Kanz offers three types of draws: Monthly, semi-annual, and annual. Whereas each month, 20 draw winners receive a KD 2,000 cash prize each, the semi-annual draw awards one winner a cash prize worth KD 500,000, while the annual lucky Kanz draw winner receives a KD 1,500,000 cash prize.

The Kanz account, which accepts a minimum deposit of KD 200, offers multiple easy and fast means for topping up the deposited amount, whether through any of the Bank's digital platforms or by visiting the nearest branch. With every KD 25 accounting for a coupon, customers are encouraged to increase their Kanz savings for bigger chances of winning any of the year-round Kanz draws. It's worth noting that

all draws are selected electronically and randomly under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and external auditors, and in adherence to the standards and regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

#### Encouraging and Adopting the Savings Culture

Stemming from the Bank's core philosophy, "Driven by You", Kanz today sets a benchmark in the domestic market, for the wide range of benefits and rewards that it offers the Bank's customers, serving as an ongoing expression of gratitude for their loyalty. Through the Kanz draws, benefits, and rewards, Burgan Bank seeks to raise its community's awareness of the importance of maintaining a sound, balanced, and sustainable financial plan, which adopts, at its core, the concept of savings as an integral part of the plan.

Responding to its vital role as a trusted financial partner for its customers and community members, Burgan Bank spares no effort to continue innovating new solutions that deliver an outstanding banking experience and help customers make the best financial decisions, promising higher returns for them and their families.

In parallel, Burgan Bank continues to uphold its dedicated support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) banking awareness campaign – led by the CBK and

Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), with the support of all banks in Kuwait – for the fourth year in a row. As part of its social responsibility program and active contribution to Diraya, Burgan remains adamant about continuously producing valuable educational content about financial literacy and the importance of savings, which serves to aid the Bank's customers and members of the community in their decision-making process, guiding them toward a more elevated and stable lifestyle.

#### Solutions That Serve Customers' Needs

In these times of ever-evolving financial needs, especially the need for achieving financial stability, banking safety, and guaranteed returns, Burgan Bank continues to tune its digital banking innovations to serve its customers' constant and changing aspirations and offer seamless solutions to their everyday needs – with Kanz serving as one prominent example of the Burgan's efforts to enable its customers to fulfill their banking needs with ease and efficiency. With a vision to become the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait, Burgan Bank continues to adopt the latest financial technologies to provide an unparalleled banking experience that is delivered through a wide range of progressive digital solutions, allowing its customers to lead a lifestyle of more convenience and control over their financials.



The announcement of the winner.



The Burgan Bank team during the ceremony.





Photos show snow-capped Lebanese mountains. — KUNA photos



# Lebanon's snow-capped mountains paint captivating scene, attract ski enthusiasts

The snow-capped Lebanese mountains, with heights ranging between 900 to 2,400 meters above sea levels, have ski enthusiasts dashing to join the much anticipated winter sports season. Lebanese Minister of Tourism, Waleed Nassar, spoke to KUNA on the unstable local and re-

gional conditions affecting the country, commenting that despite such conditions the ski season kicked off with satisfactory turnout. He mentioned that the Ministry working on readying popular ski sites to promote Lebanon as the Arab capital for winter tourism 2024. The country, he elucidated, is in possession of all factors attracting Arab and foreign tourists, but remains in need for stability to arrive at its full potential. Number of tourists last December reached around 300,000 with most being Lebanese expatriates,

rouz, told KUNA of the effects of climate change on the ski season, delaying it so that it now begins in January rather than December. He commented that all ski sites are poised and ready to receive ski enthusiasts, and that they have logged adequate numbers in spite of regional conditions, and the Gaza crisis. Keirouz added that weekend and public holidays invigorate the scene with hotels and restaurants buzzing with visitors.

He hoped that snow would continue to fall throughout March to allow for the highest numbers of enthusiasts to visit. Nicole Wakim, manager at a ski resort, told KUNA that turnout is picking up pace, saying that facilities such as this one anticipate the season fervently to be able to practice its activities. She touched on rising price of resorts and services, attributing it to the increasing price of combustibles any by extension logistics. She spoke of the resort saying that it provides skiers an alpine experience with sharp twisting routes, high leaps, hiking trips and snowmobiles. —KUNA



President of Lebanese Ski Federation, Fredy Keirouz.



Lebanese Minister of Tourism, Waleed Nassar.

gional conditions affecting the country, commenting that despite such conditions the ski season kicked off with satisfactory turnout. He mentioned that the Ministry working on readying popular ski sites to promote Lebanon as the

Arab capital for winter tourism 2024. The country, he elucidated, is in possession of all factors attracting Arab and foreign tourists, but remains in need for stability to arrive at its full potential. Number of tourists last December reached around 300,000 with most being Lebanese expatriates,

## AL-BALAD: UNESCO's World Heritage site in Jeddah

Historic Jeddah, known as Al-Balad, was built on a beautiful coastal land, where ancient homes were transformed using the latest technologies and expertise into art galleries, gathering people from different cultures. Al-Balad's authentic architectural style with 'Al-Rawashin balcony' hanging overhead on every building, was listed on UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site in 2014. Al-Balad unveils a human heritage with eight gates, each is known for its historical stories, in addition to various ancient houses praised for their distinctive designs and the names of their families. —KUNA



Ancient homes of historic Jeddah.



The city was listed on (UNESCO) World Heritage sites in 2014. — KUNA photos

Authentic architectural style with 'Al-Rawashin' balcony.





# LONDON FASHION WEEK BLENDS TWEED AND Y2K AMID ECONOMIC GLOOM



From tweed to the iconic low-rise jeans of the early 2000s, London Fashion Week unveiled a spectrum of styles on Friday, kicking off its 40th season which has been dimmed by the UK's gloomy economy.

Some 60 designers, ranging from rising talents to renowned brands like Burberry, will show their new designs over five days, hoping to draw the interest of buyers and fashion influencers.

Irish-American designer Paul Costelloe's show, titled "Once upon a Time" -- a reference to the iconic 1984 film "Once Upon a Time in America" -- showcased wide-belted coats in ecru, anthracite and checkered tweed. Costelloe, 78, who is bedridden with a virus, was absent from the event.



### Gen Z favourite

In another early show, Ukrainian Masha Popova, a "Gen Z" favourite, presented a collection inspired by early 2000s so-called Y2K era. Performed against a backdrop of techno music and in front of a crowd of influencers, it featured models in low-waisted pants, washed out denim -- and heels topped with long gaiters. Elsewhere, Turkish designer Bora Aksu delivered a gloomier mood, aimed at finding and celebrating "the purest beauty amidst the most vivid of horrors".

Slender models wearing bodices paired with wide sleeves, lace gowns, flowing skirts, blouses and masculine jackets paraded to slow-beating music, with cream, grey, black and dark blue the predominant colours. The designer, who was inspired by the work of sculptor Eva Hesse who fled Nazi-Germany as a child in 1938, used tones of pink and blush to retain a light, feminine energy, while making use of old stock and rejected rolls for his garments.

On Friday night, British-Nigerian Tolu Coker was given rapturous applause after her show, which featured a runway made to resemble a traditionally African street, with yellow, blue and green umbrellas, stacks of tyres and a "Give Way" street sign. Beige, brown and black and white were the prominent colours, with the models wearing coats, heels, boots and skirts. The packed audience snapped photographs on their cell-phones when one model walked the runway wearing a multi-coloured calabash head decoration.

Another model drew applause as she paraded wearing a green jacket and beige skirt. At the end of the show the stern-faced models huddled on the catwalk before breaking into smiles and waving their hands, drawing cheers from the audience. Coker waved and smiled as she followed the models down the runway.

challenging times," LFW's director Caroline Rush told AFP. But what can be garnered from 40 years, she said, "is that in the most economically challenging times, you see the most incredible creativity".

"There's almost this visceral reaction to what's happening at home," Rush added. "I'm hoping that the cre-

Since then, London has lost some of its allure, with the departure of star designers and houses preferring Paris, such as Alexander McQueen or Victoria Beckham. However, the BFC's NEWGEN sponsorship program, which supports young designers, has affirmed London's position as a talent incubator. And while it remains less prestigious



### Tumultuous time

Despite the audience's excitement, the showcase comes at a tumultuous time for Britain's fashion industry, amid post-Brexit trade barriers and the country's inflation-fuelled cost-of-living crisis. The situation has prompted some nascent designers to question the viability of investing in British fashion events.

Rising star Dilara Findikoglu made headlines last September after she cancelled her show days before the event for financial reasons.

The industry, which employs close to 900,000 people in the UK and contributes £21 billion (\$26 billion) to the British economy, is facing "incredibly

activity that we see over the next few days will be incredibly uplifting, that it will talk about the role of culture and creativity in society." The first edition of British Fashion Week was held in 1984 in a tent set up in the parking lot of the former Commonwealth Institute in West London. Initially overlooked, the British capital earned its rebellious reputation thanks to legends like Vivienne Westwood and John Galiano, who put the city on the fashion map. Then there was the "Cool Britannia" era in the 1990s, a cultural euphoria period when Stella McCartney or Matthew Williamson dressed supermodels Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell.

than Paris or Milan, London Fashion Week is celebrated for being freer, more radical, and less formulaic.

This anniversary edition also aims to highlight greater diversity and inclusivity, in terms of body shapes, ages, or skin colours of the models, as well as in the designers' collections, with identities or inspirations from the Caribbean, Iran, India, or Ethiopia. The weekend will feature more familiar names like JW Anderson, Richard Quinn, Ahluwalia, and Simone Rocha, before Burberry's show scheduled for Monday evening. —AFP



Models present creations by British-Nigerian designer Tolu Coker during a catwalk presentation for her Autumn/Winter 2024 collection during London Fashion Week in London.—AFP photos

## Sports

# Wembanyama upset in NBA 'Rising Stars' clash

## Lue fined \$35,000 over ref 'cheating' outburst

LOS ANGELES: Victor Wembanyama's hopes of victory in the NBA All-Star week's 'Rising Stars' tournament came to an abrupt end on Friday as his team suffered an upset 41-36 defeat in the semi-finals. San Antonio Spurs rookie Wembanyama spearheaded a strong-looking line-up coached by Spanish legend Pau Gasol that many tipped to cruise into Friday's final. But their opponents - coached by Germany's three-time NBA All-Star Detlef Schrempf and drawn from the NBA's G-League development league - tore up the script with a deserved win in the first-to-40 semi-final.

Mac McClung led the scoring with 12 points for the underdogs while Alondes Williams finished with 11 points. France's Wembanyama meanwhile caught the eye with 11 points, seven rebounds, two blocks and a steal, but it was not enough to carry "Team Pau" to victory. Wembanyama, the No.1 pick in last year's draft who has been billed as a once-in-a-generation talent comparable to LeBron James, was part of a strong line-up that also included in-form Golden State player Brandin Podziemski and No.2 draft pick Brandon Miller of the Charlotte Hornets.

However Schrempf's line-up were soon in control, opening up a 10-point lead at 23-13 before closing out the win. The underdogs found the going harder in Friday's final however, being beaten 26-13 by a team coached by Jalen Rose in the final. The Rising Stars tournament is the highlight of the opening day of All-Star weekend, followed by the skills competition on Saturday and Sunday's NBA All-Star game.

### 'Cheating' outburst

In another development, Los Angeles Clippers head coach Tyrone Lue has been fined \$35,000 after accusing referees of "cheating" following his team's win over the Golden State Warriors, the NBA said Friday. League official Joe Dumars said in a statement Lue had been fined for "public criticism of the officiating" and "questioning the integrity" of game officials in Wednesday's 130-125 victory over the Warriors in San Francisco. Lue was ejected in the fourth quarter of a



INDIANAPOLIS: Victor Wembanyama #1 of the San Antonio Spurs blocks the shot of Tyler Smith #11 of the G League Ignite in the second game of the Panini Rising Stars on February 16, 2024 — AFP

chaotic game at the Chase Center, with the Clippers roaring back from nine points down to claim victory.

Afterwards, footage posted across social media showed a fired-up Lue shouting in the corridor near the Clippers locker room. "Where the refs at now?"

Cheating. That's all they be doing," Lue was heard to say. Lue also appeared to be hunting for James Williams, one of the three officials refereeing the game. "Where James at? The referee. I want to kick him in the mouth," Lue said. The Clippers have been on a hot

streak recently, winning seven of their last 10 games to move up to third spot in the Western Conference with 36 wins and 17 defeats. The Clippers are two games back from leaders Minnesota heading into the NBA's All-Star break.— AFP

## Ashwin out of Test due to 'family emergency'

RAJKOT: India's Ravichandran Ashwin withdrew from the ongoing third Test against England on Friday due to "a family medical emergency", just hours after becoming only the ninth player in history to take 500 Test wickets. "Ravichandran Ashwin has withdrawn from the Test squad, effective immediately due to a family medical emergency," said Jay Shah, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Off-spinner Ashwin, 37, had dismissed England opener Zak Crawley for 15 in Rajkot to become only the second Indian to reach the 500-wicket milestone after fellow spinner Anil Kumble. "The BCCI extends its heartfelt support to the champion cricketer and his family," added Shah in a BCCI statement. "The health and well-being of the players and their loved ones are of utmost importance. The Board requests respect for the privacy of Ashwin and his family as they navigate through this challenging time."

BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla, on 'X', wrote: "Wishing speedy recovery of mother of @ashwinravi99. He has to rush and leave Rajkot test to Chennai to be with his mother." India may now have to play with only 10 men for the rest of the three days in Ashwin's absence.

Ashwin, an all-rounder who was playing his 98th Test since his debut in 2011, scored a crucial 37 with the

bat, including a 77-run eighth-wicket stand with debutant Dhruv Jurel, to help India post 445 all out in their first innings at Rajkot. "It's a good time to celebrate, probably go have dinner and think about how far I have come in life," Ashwin had said after the day's play.

### 'Poor motor skills'

Ashwin began the Test on 499 wickets and entered the exclusive club with a full-length delivery at leg-stump which Crawley top-edged to Rajat Patidar at fine leg. His Indian teammates hugged the bowler, who raised his hand to the applauding crowd. He joined fellow spinners Muttiah Muralitharan (Sri Lanka - 800), the late Shane Warne (Australia - 708), Kumble (619) and Nathan Lyon (Australia - 517) in the exclusive club.

It remained an eventful day for Ashwin on the field when he was punished for running down the middle of the pitch with India handed a five-run penalty as a result. Ashwin was reprimanded by on-field umpire Joel Wilson in the morning session and England started their first innings with five for no loss as a result of the offence. Ashwin attempted to argue his case with Wilson, who then put his arm around the batsman's shoulder and indicated five to signal the penalty.

"My poor motor skills did not allow me to get off the pitch in time," said Ashwin. India now remain a bowler short with England racing along at 207-2 at close of play after Ben Duckett, 133 not out, slammed a century in 88 balls. India are already without Virat Kohli, who missed the series due to "personal reasons" and KL Rahul, forced out injured in the second and third match. The five-Test series remains level at 1-1 after England won the opener and India bounced back in the second match.— AFP



RAJKOT: India's Ravichandran Ashwin delivers a ball during the second day of the third Test cricket match between India and England at Niranjan Shah stadium on February 16, 2024. — AFP

## Records tumble as Australia crush SA

PERTH: Australia thumped South Africa (SA) by an innings and 284 runs Saturday in the first-ever women's Test between the two countries, which saw records tumble. Having beaten the hosts for the first time in ODIs and T20s during their tour, South Africa were hoping to go out on a high with a momentous Test win at Perth's WACA Ground.

But they were rocked by star player Marizanne Kapp being ruled out ill before the match started and Australia emphatically showed who was boss. "I'm very proud. It's been an amazing series," said Australia skipper Alyssa Healy. "The white ball series was really hard fought at times and we were really tested but the way we continued to bounce back right throughout was really impressive. "To come here to the WACA and finish like we did really caps off the Aussie summer for us, which is cool." It was only South Africa's second Test match in a decade and captain Laura Wolvaardt

admitted it had been a learning experience. "All credit to Australia, we were pretty much outplayed in all facets of the game," she said. "But a great experience for us and we enjoyed the opportunity. "I personally would love to," she added of wanting to play more red ball cricket. "It was a huge challenge, but I think the girls really enjoyed themselves out there." South Africa were bundled out for just 76 in 31.2 overs on a searing hot opening day after Healy won the toss and sent them into bat - South Africa's lowest Test score. Speedster Darcie Brown took 5-21 and allrounder Anabel Sutherland 3-19.

In reply, the hosts racked up a massive 575-9 before declaring with the highest total by a women's Test side. The ominous score was spearheaded by an imperious 210 from 22-year-old Sutherland - the fourth biggest women's score in Test cricket and at 248 balls the fastest double century. South Africa put up stiffer resistance in their second innings with Delmi Tucker and Chloe Tryon both hitting 64, before the tail folded and they were out for 215 on day three. Brown took 2-47 to claim seven for the game while player-of-the-match Sutherland picked up another two.— AFP



CALIFORNIA: Tiger Woods of the United States reacts to his putt on the second green during the second round of The Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club on February 16, 2024.— AFP

## Ailing Woods withdraws from Genesis Invitational

LOS ANGELES: Golf superstar Tiger Woods withdrew midway through the second round of the Genesis Invitational because of illness, the US PGA Tour said Friday. Woods, who hosts the tournament at The Riviera Country Club, had teed off on the seventh hole but was soon seen being taken from the course in a golf cart. The 15-time major champion was playing his first US PGA Tour event since withdrawing from the third round at the Masters last April.

Two weeks later he had ankle surgery to address lingering pain in his right foot from injuries suffered in a 2021 car crash. Although Woods said Thursday that back spasms contributed to a surprising shank at the 18th hole of his one-over par first round there was no indication that any of the myriad injuries that he says affect him every round contributed to Friday's withdrawal.

Woods would have been battling to make the cut in the elite event. He opened Friday with a birdie at the par-five first but bogeyed the third and fifth. He was in the fairway at the seventh when he called it quits. It's an unwelcome setback for the 48-year-old Woods, who said in December at the unofficial Hero World Challenge that he hoped his various physical problems would allow him to play a limited schedule of one tournament a month.

After his first competitive round in more than 10 months on Thursday he admitted the jury was still out on whether that plan would pan out and whether it would allow him to be competitive. "I'm hoping that's the case, hoping that I play that much," Woods said. "As far as the physical ups and downs, that's just part of my body, that's part of what it is. "That's all right, I accept it and accept the challenges," he said. Woods has played only nine official events in the last four seasons. He has missed the cut twice and withdrawn three times.— AFP



DOHA: Iga Swiatek of Poland hits a return against Victoria Azarenka of Belarus during their Quarter-Final Women's Singles tennis match at the Qatar WTA Open.— AFP

## Swiatek gets walkover into Qatar Open final clash with Rybakina

DOHA: Defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek was on Friday handed a walkover into the Qatar Open final where Elena Rybakina will stand in her way of a third successive title at the Gulf event. Four-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek had been scheduled to face Karolina Pliskova in her semi-final. However, the Czech, who won the Cluj tournament in Romania last weekend, withdrew suffering from a lower back injury.

Former Wimbledon champion Rybakina was stronger at the key moments as she beat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-2, 6-4 to reach Saturday's final. Rybakina, the third seed, converted four of six break points while her unseeded opponent could only exploit one of the nine she had. "I am happy that in the end I managed to finish the match, playing a little better in these important moments," Rybakina, who represents Kazakhstan, said in her on-court interview. Rybakina broke Pavlyuchenkova in the fifth game of the opening set and broke again in the eighth.

Pavlyuchenkova saved three set points in the next game but also squandered a break point of her own before succumbing. "The first set it was very close, we were both fighting," said Rybakina. Rybakina broke easily in the second-set opener before holding serve to take a sixth straight game. Pavlyuchenkova held to end that streak and then had six break points in the next game, but could take none of them. She finally converted her eighth break point as she came back from 30-0 down in the eighth game. She then held serve as Rybakina wobbled on her forehead.

With Rybakina serving for the match, Pavlyuchenkova had another break point but hit long. She saved one match point but Rybakina then produced an ace to seal victory. The 32-year-old Pavlyuchenkova is finding her form again after a long struggle with a knee injury. "Great to see her back," said Rybakina. "She played really well. It was a really tough match." On facing Swiatek in the final, she added: "She's a great champion so it is going to be very difficult. But I will try to enjoy it and do as much as possible." Rybakina is aiming for a third title this year, after winning in Adelaide and last week in Abu Dhabi.— AFP

Sports

# Inter Milan stretch their lead at the top of Serie A to 10 points

## Inzaghi eyes first league title of his coaching career

**MILAN:** Inter Milan stretched their lead at the top of Serie A to 10 points on Friday after cruising past sorry Salernitana 4-0 ahead of their Champions League clash with Atletico Madrid. Simone Inzaghi looks increasingly likely to claim the first league title of his coaching career with a rampant Inter team who made short work of rock-bottom Salernitana. Star strike partnership Marcus Thuram and Lautaro Martinez set Inter on their way with two goals in the space of two first-half minutes, before Denzel Dumfries tapped home the third five minutes before the break and Marko Arnautovic completed the scoring late on.

It was yet another show of force from Inter who started with a line-up close to Inzaghi's favored starting XI and want to beat local rivals AC Milan to 20 league crowns. "It's a great feeling because the team is playing at a really high level... I'm really pleased with that," said Inter captain Martinez to DAZN. Juventus can cut the deficit back to seven with a game more played if they win at struggling Ve-

rona on Saturday.

But Inter have won all eight matches since the turn of the year and look a cut above their rivals as they warmed up for Atleti's visit for the first leg of their last 16 tie on Tuesday night. "It's definitely a different team from last year, we've had a lot of changes but we have to keep trying to improve and look ahead to the next match," added Martinez.

"Tuesday is very important for us... so we need to have the same approach, rest a bit and play with the serious intensity." Salernitana were blown away in their first match under Inzaghi's former Lazio teammate Fabio Liverani who replaced the elder Inzaghi brother Filippo earlier this week. Liverani has a massive job on his hands as Salernitana are six points behind Sassuolo, who sit just outside the relegation zone and are at Champions League chasers Atalanta on Saturday night.

"It wasn't really a playable match tonight, even though we did everything we could to make it easier for them," said Liverani to DAZN. "I was aware that we

have serious problems in terms of tactics and technique but not regarding their hunger and desire to get out of the situation they find themselves in." By the time Thuram swept Inter ahead from Carlos Augusto's cross in the 17th minute the France forward and Nicolò Barella had both hit the woodwork. And when Martinez took his Serie A tally for the season to 20 shortly afterwards, evading Jerome Boateng before curling home a lovely finish, the match was as good as done with less than 20 minutes gone.

Salernitana didn't have single shot on target as Inter hemmed them in from the first whistle, the manner of victory so comprehensive that Inzaghi had the luxury of substituting his star players with half an hour remaining. And the night was complete when Arnautovic, who has struggled since signing for Inter in the summer, tapped in Dumfries' deflected low cross in the final minute. Inter now turn their attentions to Tuesday's clash at the San Siro as they try to repeat last season's run to the Champions League final. — AFP



Inter Milan's Italian coach Simone Inzaghi

## Southampton back to 2nd in Championship

**LONDON:** Southampton got their bid for promotion from English football's second-tier Championship back on track with a 2-0 win away to West Bromwich Albion on Friday. The Saints' 25-game unbeaten run had come to an end with a 3-1 defeat at Bristol City on Tuesday. But Ryan Fraser's first-half volley and substitute David Brooks' strike 17 minutes from full-time ensured normal service was resumed at The Hawthorns. Southampton were helped on their way after West Brom manager Carlos Coberan was sent off in extraordinary fashion in just the seventh minute as his club's prospective new American owner watched from the stands.

West Brom were then denied a penalty after Jack Stephens' handball. Victory for Southampton meant they leapfrogged Leeds into second place but still left

the south coast side 11 points behind leaders Leicester. Leeds, however, can regain second position away to Plymouth on Saturday. All three clubs relegated from the Premier League last season are in pole position to bounce straight back up. But only the top two teams at the end of the regular campaign are guaranteed automatic promotion, with the other place among English football's elite decided by a series of play-games involving the next four clubs. Friday's result left West Brom in fifth spot.

"We were really disappointed with how things went during the week so today was all about putting that right," Southampton midfielder Stuart Armstrong told Sky Sports. "Some parts of the game weren't spectacular but we got the three points and it's a good performance in the end." United States national flags were on show as Baggies fans welcomed Florida-based entrepreneur Shilen Patel to The Hawthorns. Earlier this week, West Brom announced Patel and his father had agreed a deal worth a reported £60 million (\$75.6 million) to acquire Guochuan Lai's 87.8 per-

cent majority stake in the Midlands club.

The purchase, approved by the English Football League, is set to be completed next week. But it was Southampton, unbeaten in any competition since September 23 until their defeat by Bristol City, who dominated the early stages. Coberan, renowned for talking to his players from the touchline, was then sent off after leaving his technical area to retrieve the ball when in fact it had not gone out of play. Seven minutes later, Southampton went ahead when Fraser fired home from Armstrong's ball to the back post.

Albion were angered in first half stoppage time when Conor Townsend's shot struck Stephens' arm in the box, only for their penalty appeals to fall on deaf ears. The Saints doubled their lead in the 73rd minute when Brooks calmly passed the ball into the bottom corner from eight yards out to score his first Southampton goal since a January loan move from Bournemouth. Southampton goalkeeper Gavin Bazunu maintained the 2-0 scoreline when he turned over Okay Yokuslu's free header. — AFP

## Momota powers Japan into badminton semis

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Two-time world champion Kento Momota staged a mighty comeback Friday winning eight straight points to propel Japan into the Badminton Asia Team Championships semi-finals against defending champions Malaysia. Momota's skill and tenacity earned Japan a 3-2 victory over India. India initially looked destined to make it into the last four of the men's event in Malaysia. K Srikanth led 19-12 in the deciding match, before the 29-year-old Momota turned the screws to reel off eight consecutive points, which he converted in deuce much to the delight of the fans who chanted his name throughout the 77-minute duel.

Momota won 17-21, 21-9, 22-20. Momota, who was fortunate to survive a car crash in Malaysia

in 2020 after winning the Malaysia Masters, said he had been given an extra boost by the crowd's support. "It was a match where we almost lost, but thanks to the support from everyone, we prevailed. For me, playing without giving up led to the win," he told reporters. Since the 2020 accident, Momota has struggled to regain his supremacy whereas prior to it he had collected a record 11 titles in 2019.

Japan will go on to face Malaysia, who defeated Singapore 3-1 despite playing with a weak squad with Lee Zii Jia absent and Ng Tze Yong retired after three minutes. World number 10 Lee did not play after he was told to rest due to a sinusitis issue, and Ng who stepped in his place retired after just three minutes. Malaysia however secured the victory thanks to wins by Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik, Leong Jun Hao and Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin. South Korea and China will face off in the other men's team semis. The women's semis will pit Indonesia against Thailand, while Japan take on India. — AFP



Japan's Kento Momota

## Madrid fans await arrival of Mbappe

**MADRID:** Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe seems to be edging towards a Real Madrid move, with excitement already building in the Spanish capital. The 25-year-old France captain informed PSG officials he intends to leave in the summer at the end of his contract, a source close to the Ligue 1 champions said. Madrid are in pole position to sign a player whom they have moved for several times in the past only to be rebuffed, although they declined to comment when asked by AFP.

Spanish media report Madrid's offer to Mbappe

is lower than in 2022 when he decided to renew his PSG contract, with Cadena SER saying he wants 50 million euros (\$54 million) gross a season along with a hefty 120 million euros signing-on bonus. Media outlet Marca claimed that Mbappe has already informed club bosses "that he only wanted to play for Real Madrid" and added that he informed the Spanish giants of his decision to leave PSG on Tuesday, 48 hours before it was revealed from a source close to PSG.

With the numbers and financial fair play impact left for Madrid's accountants to manage, supporters and local media are starting to dream of what may come. "The countdown has started," wrote Marca earlier in the day. "Seven years later everything points to Mbappe's arrival being a reality from July 1." Mbappe had the chance to join Madrid from Monaco in 2017

but chose PSG instead, perhaps cowed by the difficulty of ousting Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale or Karim Benzema from the attack. Now he could lead the line alongside Vinicius Junior and Jude Bellingham.

"That would be perfect," Luis Caceres, the president of Real Madrid's fan club federation told AFP. "He's the best player in the world, that's undeniable. We've seen him play and we know what he can do, he's a great player." Mbappe, yet to win the Champions League, could still cross paths with record 14-time winners Madrid in this year's competition. Spanish newspaper AS say Madrid will "keep silent" on Mbappe while the two sides are still competing in Europe. Last June a Real Madrid fan did manage to lure club president Florentino Perez into giving a clue away about Mbappe's future. — AFP

Today's Matches	
<b>English Premier League</b>	
Sheffield United v Brighton	17:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
Luton Town v Man United	19:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
<b>Spanish League</b>	
Rayo Vallecano v Real Madrid	16:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports 1 FR	
Granada v Almeria	18:15
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports FR 4 HD	
Real Mallorca v Real Sociedad	20:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
Real Betis v Deportivo Alaves	23:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
<b>Italian League Serie A</b>	
Lazio v Bologna	14:30
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Empoli v Fiorentina	17:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Udinese v Cagliari	17:00
beIN Sports FR 5 HD max	
AD SPORTS Premium 2	
Frosinone v Roma	20:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Monza v AC Milan	22:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
beIN Sports 1 FR	
<b>German Bundesliga 1st Div</b>	
Freiburg v Eintracht Frankfurt	17:30
beIN Sports HD 5	
VEL Bochum v Bayern Munich	19:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports FR HD 1	



Kylian Mbappe

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

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

#### Clinics

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

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## Liverpool rout Brentford 4-1

Mohamed Salah returns in style



LONDON: Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Liverpool on February 17, 2024. — AFP

LONDON: Mohamed Salah returned in style with a goal in Liverpool's 4-1 rout of Brentford as the Premier League leaders survived a rash of injuries to step up their title charge on Saturday. Salah came off the bench to replace the injured Diogo Jota in his first Liverpool appearance since their win over Newcastle on New Year's Day. Having returned from the hamstring injury he sustained on Egypt duty at the Africa Cup of Nations, Salah made up for lost time with his first goal for the Reds since the Newcastle game.

The 31-year-old's 19th goal in all competitions this term put Liverpool on course for a sixth win in their last seven league games. The much-maligned Darwin Nunez had given Jurgen Klopp's side the lead with a sublime chip late in the first half at the Gtech Community Stadium. Alexis Mac Allister doubled Liverpool's advantage after the interval with just his second goal this season.

Ivan Toney got one back for Brentford, but Cody Gakpo netted in the closing stages as Liverpool moved five points clear at the top. Second placed Manchester City and third placed Arsenal, who play later on Saturday against Chelsea and Burnley respectively, can reduce the gap to Liverpool, who are chasing a first title since 2020. While the victory was

valuable for Klopp, it came with a downside as first half injuries to Jota and Curtis Jones added to Liverpool's increasingly packed treatment room.

Nunez didn't come back out for the second half either, although whether that was tactical or due to injury was unclear. With the League Cup final against Chelsea looming on February 25 and Liverpool also competing in the FA Cup and Europa League, the injuries could derail Klopp's hopes of a trophy-filled farewell season. Conor Bradley, back from compassionate leave after his father's death, started at right-back for Liverpool in place of the injured Trent Alexander-Arnold.

### Back in the groove

Bradley had impressed prior to his absence and the youngster nearly gave Liverpool an early lead when he burst into the area for a shot that Mark Flekken pushed away for a corner. Brentford boss Thomas Frank this week labelled Liverpool "the best offensive team in the league". Klopp would have appreciated the compliment and Liverpool underlined why Frank rates them so highly in the 35th minute. Virgil van Dijk's high clearance from deep inside his own half looped towards Jota, who rose tenaciously above Sergio Reguilon to nod a header into the path

of the unmarked Nunez. The Uruguay striker accelerated into the area and deftly chipped a fine finish over Flekken for his 13th goal this season.

Nunez's goal was marred by the injury to Jota that led the Portugal forward to be stretchered off after he collided with Mac Allister and landed awkwardly. That brought Salah into the fray and missed a chance immediately, letting Luis Diaz's cross bounce off his leg with the goal at his mercy. Salah misfired again with a woeful finish after he took Van Dijk's header and sprinted clean through on goal. The Egyptian made amends for his miscues with a superb pass that picked out Mac Allister's run into the area.

Taking a clever touch to elude Brentford defender Ben Mee, Mac Allister snapped up the chance with a clinical finish to double Liverpool's lead after 55 minutes. Salah was back in the groove and he killed off Brentford in the 68th minute. Gakpo flicked on Caiohin Kelleher's long clearance and Salah showed poise and power as he worked just enough space to guide a composed strike into the far corner. Toney fired home from close-range after Reguilon's shot was saved by Kelleher in the 75th minute. But Liverpool landed one last blow in the 86th minute when Nathan Collins' comical miscued clearance allowed Gakpo to score with a precise low finish. — AFP

## Atletico thrash Las Palmas 5-0

MADRID: Atletico Madrid moved provisionally third in La Liga with a thumping 5-0 victory over Las Palmas on Saturday. Marcos Llorente and Angel Correa struck twice each and Memphis Depay was also on target as Diego Simeone's side strolled to victory despite resting key player Antoine Griezmann. Trailing league leaders Real Madrid by 10 points despite the victory, Simeone decided to keep the French forward fresh for Tuesday's Champions League last 16 visit to face Inter Milan.

Without the injured Alvaro Morata, Atletico lined up with Correa and Llorente up front and it worked perfectly against promoted side Las Palmas, flying high in eighth. "I'm very happy, given the effort the team made, what we planned worked well," Correa told DAZN. "We stole the ball back to get the early goal and from there it was all easier." Llorente pounced from close range to put Atletico ahead after 15 minutes and then struck again shortly afterwards with another simple finish. Correa extended Atletico's lead with a volley at the start of the second half and then added a penalty.

Depay wrapped up the win after he was sent through, firing home with aplomb to complete the



MADRID: Las Palmas' Spanish goalkeeper #13 Alvaro Valles (top left) clears the ball as Atletico Madrid's Mozambican defender #23 Reinildo Mandava jumps for a header during the Spanish league football match on February 17, 2024. — AFP

demolition of what had been the division's second strongest defense. "It's painful because we believed in our chances... we have to learn from the defeat and carry on," said Las Palmas defender Sergi Cardona. "We made mistakes that Atletico don't let you

get away with." Atletico overtake Barcelona on goal difference but the champions visit Celta Vigo later Saturday. On Sunday leaders Real Madrid visit Rayo Vallecano, while second-place Girona visit Athletic Bilbao on Monday. —AFP

### News in Brief

#### Kuwaiti shines at Qatar rally

DOHA: Kuwait's Dhari Al-Thufairi won the third position Saturday at auto race as part of the second round of Qatar international rally held in the Qatari capital, Doha. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Thufairi said the contest enhances experience and skills of drivers and helps them make achievements in future. He said that he came fourth in general auto ranking, extolling the championship's organizing and hoping for further progress in the next round slated for April. The championship, which kicked off on February 10, includes auto and motorbike contests. — KUNA

#### Crisis-club Napoli held

MILAN: Napoli's crisis deepened on Saturday after beating held to a 1-1 home draw by Genoa, another heavy blow for the ailing Serie A champions ahead of the midweek visit of Barcelona. Cyril Ngonge saved a home point for Napoli in the final minute after Morten Frendrup had given Genoa the lead with a powerful first-time finish just after half-time. Napoli ran away with the league title last season but are now 27 points behind current leaders Inter Milan in ninth place meaning their chances of a place in next season's revamped Champions League are increasingly slim. Six points separate Napoli from fourth-placed Atalanta and that gap could easily be extended to nine as they host struggling Sassuolo on Saturday night. — AFP

#### Women's League record

LONDON: Arsenal set a new attendance record in the English Women's Super League with a capacity crowd of 60,160 for their 3-1 win at home to Manchester United on Saturday. It was the first time the Emirates Stadium in north London, home to leading English men's top-flight football club Arsenal, had sold out for a WSL match. "60,160 Emirates Stadium sold out for the first time in @BarclaysWSL history," said a statement posted by Arsenal on X, formerly Twitter. "Another league record. Another historic moment. Thank you, Gooners." Arsenal held the previous WSL attendance record, with 59,042 fans present when they beat champions and London rivals Chelsea in December. — AFP