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## 'Voter suppression' rumors denied

Govt calls to adhere to national unity • Cabinet expected to set date for snap polls

By B Izzak



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives on Sunday at Seif Palace Governor of the Public Investment Fund in Saudi Arabia Yasser bin Othman Al-Rumayan (left) and Chairman of the Jordanian Senate Faisal Akef Al-Fayez (right). — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The government on Sunday refuted rumors circulating on social media claiming that the government was planning to change the elections law with the aim of preventing thousands of Kuwaiti citizens from voting in the upcoming snap parliamentary polls. Government spokesman Amer Al-Ajmi denied the rumors in an official statement, saying that "circulating such reports destabilizes the nation's unity and creates divisions". Ajmi urged citizens to ignore such reports and adhere to national unity.

The government spokesman was reacting to a heated debate on social media about calls and counter-calls for the government to amend the elections law to prevent naturalized citizens from voting or contesting the elections, which will be held within two months. The Cabinet is expected to set a date for the snap polls following the dissolution of the National Assembly by HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Kuwait slams Zionist racism

DOHA: Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Sabah stressed on Sunday the necessity of confronting Zionist violations and racist practices against the Palestinian people. She called on the international community to take immediate action to stop the aggression of the occupying entity against the Gaza Strip and open corridors to send humanitarian aid. — KUNA (See Page 2)

#### Shift from winter to spring begins

KUWAIT: Al-Ujairi Scientific Center said Sunday that the gradual seasonal shift from winter to spring started on Sunday. The center explained this seasonal shift includes dusty winds accompanied by sudden sharp cold dips in temperature. The change from winter to spring will witness an increase in temperature until it settles in the spring season. — KUNA

#### Man kills 12 relatives in Iran

TEHRAN: A man killed 12 of his relatives in a rare mass shooting in southern Iran, state media reported Saturday. "A 30-year-old man, motivated by a family dispute, killed 12 members of his family including his father and brother with a Kalashnikov weapon near the town of Faryab," Kerman province chief justice Ebrahim Hamidi said. The man was killed during a shootout with security forces trying to capture him. — AFP

#### Jordan kills 5 drug smugglers

AMMAN: The Jordanian army said on Sunday that its border guards had killed five drug traffickers and wounded four others attempting to smuggle narcotics into Jordan from Syria. The operation took place a day after the interior ministers of Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon met in Amman and agreed to establish a "joint communication cell" to combat cross-border drug smuggling. — AFP

## Expatriate numbers surge to 68.3% of Kuwait's population

KUWAIT: The total number of non-Kuwaiti residents in Kuwait has witnessed a significant increase, constituting 68.3 percent of the total population, as revealed by data from the Public Authority for Civil Information. The population growth rate for the year 2023 reached its highest level since 2005, surpassing the recorded rate in 2022.

The number of citizens increased by 1.9 percent to reach 1.53 million, showing a steady but relatively slow growth compared to the average annual growth of 2.5 percent from 2010 to 2019. The working-age population continues to rise, currently accounting for 62.7 percent of the total population, with a large portion being individuals under 15 years old (32.3 percent), who will gradually enter the labor market in the coming years. Additionally, the percentage of elderly citizens has increased significantly (currently at 4.9 percent), aligning with trends in many emerging and advanced economies.

Simultaneously, the non-Kuwaiti population saw another sharp increase of 11 percent, reaching around 3.29 million, narrowing the gap with

pre-pandemic levels (-1.5% compared to the level in 2019). Currently, expatriates constitute 68.3 percent of the total population, a slight increase from the 66.1 percent recorded at the end of 2021 but still lower than the pre-pandemic level of 70 percent.

A significant portion of the rise in the non-Kuwaiti workforce is attributed to the increase in domestic workers, which saw a 16 percent annual increase to approximately 811,000 workers, constituting around 25 percent of the total expatriate population compared to 22 percent at the end of 2019. Over the past 18 months, the total population has remained around 9 percent lower than the projected level of 5.3 million if the pre-pandemic population growth trend had continued.

## Ban mullied on expats owning more than 2 cars

KUWAIT: The traffic department at the interior ministry is considering a proposal to regulate the number of vehicles expatriates are allowed to own and register in their names. The aim is to combat unlicensed trading,

reduce pollution, alleviate traffic congestion and address the scarcity of parking spaces for citizens at commercial complexes, markets and various public places.

The proposed measure includes issuing a decree prohibiting expatriates from registering more than two vehicles in their name for personal use. In the event that an expatriate needs to acquire more than this specified number, they must approach the traffic department with a request and provide justifications. If approval is granted,

fees will be imposed on each vehicle exceeding the limit, subject to passing a technical inspection.

The proposal comes amid the widespread presence of dilapidated vehicles owned by expatriates on Kuwaiti streets, contributing to congestion, chaos and traffic accidents. Additionally, many of these vehicles occupy public spaces and parking lots designated for schools, mosques and commercial complexes. Municipal efforts to eradicate this troubling phenomenon have proven insufficient

despite acknowledging their dedication in this regard.

The proposal aims to address the negative aspects associated with the informal and illegal transformation of public spaces and parking lots into unauthorized markets for buying, selling and leasing vehicles. This practice contradicts official laws and regulations governing commercial activities, as well as those related to public appearance, and it undermines the minimum standards for the safety and security of vehicles.

## Zionists kill scores in Gaza, US to veto UN ceasefire push

GAZA: The Zionist army pushed on Sunday with its campaign in southern Gaza to destroy Hamas as prospects dimmed for a ceasefire in the more than four-month-old war. A total of 127 people died in 24 hours, Gaza's health ministry said, as the main battlefield edged closer to far-southern Rafah, where 1.4 million Palestinians live in crowded shelters and tent camps.

The Zionist entity's top ally the United States signaled it would veto the latest push for a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire, as Washington instead favors a temporary truce and captive release deal. And mediator Qatar acknowledged that separate ceasefire talks had also hit an impasse after Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected some Hamas demands as "ludicrous".

The Zionist entity has concentrated its military operations in Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar. Netanyahu vowed Saturday the ground invasion of Rafah would go ahead, arguing that failing to launch it would mean to "lose the war".

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GAZA: Palestinians identify the bodies of relatives at Rafah's Al-Majjar Hospital on Feb 18, 2024 following overnight Zionist air strikes on the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

## Lula accuses Zionist entity of genocide

ADDIS ABABA: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused the Zionist entity Sunday of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews. In response, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the 78-year-old president's comments "shameful and grave" and said his government had called in Brazil's ambassador in protest.

Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa, where he

was attending an African Union summit, that what was happening in the Gaza Strip "isn't a war, it's a genocide". "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared army and women and children," added the veteran leftist. "What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: When Hitler decided to kill the Jews."

Lula, a prominent voice for the global south whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the G20, previously condemned Hamas' Oct 7 attack on the Zionist entity as a "terrorist" act. But he has since grown vocally critical of the Zionist entity's retaliatory military campaign.

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ADDIS ABABA: Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks at African Union headquarters on Feb 17, 2024. — AFP



## Local

## Kuwait calls for end to Zionist violations

## Arab human rights committee discusses racist practices

DOHA: Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs, Ambassador Sheikh Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Sabah, stressed on Sunday the necessity of confronting the Zionist violations and racist practices against the Palestinian people. In a statement to KUNA during the 53rd session of the Arab Permanent Committee for Human Rights, hosted by Doha, Sheikh Jawaher called on the international community to take immediate action to stop the aggression of the occupying entity against the Gaza Strip and open corridors to send humanitarian aid. She stressed the importance of the items included on the session agenda, such as confronting the violations of the Zionist occupation and racist practices in the occupied Arab territories, in addition to the Arab prisoners and detainees in the occupation prisons.

Health authorities in the Gaza Strip reported Zionist massacres against Palestinian families, resulting in 127 deaths and 205 injuries. The health authorities said in a press statement that the Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip since the Al-Aqsa flood operation on October 7 has resulted in 28,985 martyrs and 68,883 injuries. The authorities explained that the occupation took Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis, out of service and put medical staff in the ma-

ternity building for long hours as they were subjected to physical assault, and stripped of their clothing.

The occupation forces arrested 70 people from the medical staff, leaving only 25 doctors who cannot deal with cases that need intensive clinical care. The authorities allege that occupation forces arrested an intensive care unit doctor, suspended oxygen, and transported dozens of patients to unknown locations, leading to the death of seven patients and concerns over dozens in serious conditions.

## Arab human rights

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights underscored on Sunday the importance of participating at the permanent Arab human rights committee session in the Qatari capital, Doha. Ambassador Al-Sabah told KUNA that various significant items are slated to be discussed during the 53rd session, including Zionist occupation violations, racist practices in occupied Arab lands, and detainees in Zionist occupation prisons. Further on the agenda are the Arab human rights charter, the Arab human rights strategy review, and keeping pace with implementing the Arab plan for education and culture. The 53rd session launched on Sunday, and is set to last until Tuesday. — KUNA



GAZA: People search for victims in the rubble of the Baraka family home in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip after it was hit in a Zionist air strike on February 18, 2024. — AFP



KUWAIT: (Clockwise from top left) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Sunday the Ambassador of Belgium to Kuwait Christian Doms, Ambassador of Australia to Kuwait Melissa Kelly, Malaysian Ambassador to Kuwait Alaa Aldeen bin Mohammad Noor and Mamadou Sow, the head of the Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. — KUNA photos

## KU launches 45th Engineering Exhibition

KUWAIT: Kuwait University (KU) launched its three-day 45th Engineering Design Exhibition with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) with the participation of 325 student engineers in Sabah Al-Salem University City. Acting Director of KU, Dr. Mishari Al-Harbi, affirmed in a press statement during the exhibition's opening that 90 engineering projects, ranging from the digital to the technical, have offered remarkable designs that fit into a clean and renewable energy future plan.

Dr. Al-Harbi called for all participating students to showcase their progressive skills during the exhibition, learn from each other, and grow to benefit Kuwait's future endeavors. On his part, Acting Dean of the College of Engineering and Petroleum, Dr. Khaled Al-Hazza, reiterated in a similar statement that the exhibition included projects by engineering students who have recently graduated and are excited to utilize their learned skills. Dr. Al-Hazza said the exhibition has helped produce thousands of novel engineering projects, provide a motivational space for innovative ideas to flourish, and initiate dialogues between likeminded innovators to encourage friendly competitions between participants. — KUNA



Kuwait University Acting Director Dr. Mishari Al-Harbi inaugurates the 45th Engineering Design Exhibition. — KUNA photos



Kuwait University Acting Director Dr. Mishari Al-Harbi visits the 45th Engineering Design Exhibition.

## NBK supports LOYAC environmental trips

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and LOYAC concluded four environmental local trips to Sulaibiya and Al Wafra. The four trips go with the UNSDGs goal 15 life on land and in line with NBK's Strategy focusing on integrating the UN SDGs into its social programs. In addition to an intensive two weeks of internship of daily learning and application in permaculture at different locations in Kuwait.



Joanne Al-Abduljaleel

NBK's support to LOYAC's trips comes as part of the bank's strategic partnership with the organization.

74 volunteers from different backgrounds aged between 14 and 28 participated in these trips which were designed to introduce regenerative farming principles, explore techniques for maintaining healthy soil; practice cover cropping & mulching techniques; demonstrating composting; introducing crop rotation; creating Swales & learning about keyline designs; in addition to the importance of companion planting.

This support reflects NBK's commitment to its social responsibility as well as the vital role it plays in supporting students, youths and self-building initiatives in Kuwait. "Sulaibiya and Al Wafra field trips were truly an inspiring environmental learning experience that added profound value to the young people involved", said Joanne Al-Abduljaleel, NBK Public Relations Manager. "This is not the first-time we go with Loyacers in field trips. We were happy to join Loyacers in lots of inspiring cultural trips around Asia and Africa.

This time, we had the chance to know better our local farms and actively participate in sustainable agriculture and permaculture activities, including planting, maintaining farms and greenhouses, and applying permaculture principles". "NBK always strives to empower Kuwaiti youth to realize their potentials, build their personalities and motivates



their ambition. These agricultural trips with LOYAC comes in line with our strategy to invest in our society," Al-Abduljaleel added.

Throughout the program, Loyacers had practical training in agriculture with the aim of achieving advanced skills in the field that will allow the trainee

to find job opportunities in existing and expected agricultural initiatives and projects. LOYAC is a non-profit organization that runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.

## Oil ministry's new strategy aims to achieve set goals

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil, Dr. Emad Al-Atiqi, said that the Ministry of Oil's new strategy (2024-2028) aims to provide a comprehensive and integrated roadmap to achieve the set goals. This came in a statement on Sunday, after Minister Al-Atiqi chaired the

meeting of the committee charged with preparing the Ministry of Oil's five-year strategy to be consistent with the vision and strategy of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries for the year 2040.

He stressed the importance of the strategy in organizing work within the Ministry of Oil in boosting the capabilities of the Ministry's employees and developing a sense of responsibility towards their country. The Minister also listened to an explanation provided by the committee members about the progress of work in the ministry's strategy (2024-2028), which

is compatible with the vision of the State of Kuwait for the year 2035.

The meeting was attended by members of the Ministry of Oil's Strategy Preparation Committee, including the Chairman of the Committee, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil, Sheikh Dr. Nimer Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah, and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Sheikh Tamadhour Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Members of the committee from the Arab Planning Institute, headed by the Director General, Dr. Abdullah Al-Shami, and committee members from the Institute also attended the meeting. — KUNA



Local

# PM receives invitation from Saudi Crown Prince to visit the Kingdom

## Premier chairs PMA meeting



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on Sunday chaired a meeting of the government Performance Monitoring Agency (PMA), in the presence of the Agency's Chief, Sheikh Ahmad Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud. During the meeting, Prince Sultan handed His Highness the Prime Minister an invitation from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud to visit the Kingdom.

His Highness the Prime Minister also received the Governor of the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (PIF) Yasir Othman Al-Rumayyan and his accompanying delegation, on his visit to the country. Director General for Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr. Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

In another development, His Highness the Prime Minister on Sunday chaired a meeting of the government Performance Monitoring Agency (PMA), in the presence of the Agency's Chief, Sheikh Ahmad Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. During the meeting, the agency's tasks were reviewed in following up on the latest developments in some government projects, their completion rates, and ways to overcome the difficulties and obstacles they encounter in cooperation and coordination with the relevant government agencies. His Highness the Prime Minister praised the great efforts made by the PMA in monitoring and following up on all state projects, which contributes to saving effort and time and preserving public funds.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received the visiting President of the Senate of Jordan Faisal Al-Fayez and his accompanying delegation.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud.



Participants take a group photo after the conference. — KUNA photos

## Ministry of Health keen on enhancing emergency services

KUWAIT: The Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Allied Medical Services Affairs, Dr. Abdullah Al-Faras, affirmed on Sunday the Ministry's keenness to improve the emergency medical system by honing the skills of the practitioners and services provided to citizens. Al-Faras added in his speech during the emergency medical services, current reality and future aspirations conference that the ministry was keen, through the government's 100-day work program, to support and develop emergency medical services and launch a new fleet of ambulances equipped with the latest technologies.

The conference embodies the ministry's determination to keep up with technological and scientific developments related to medical emergencies, share experiences, and exchange future visions to enhance cooperation between specialists in this field, he added. Dr. Al-Faras said that the ministry would not skimp on supporting emergency medical practitioners and pointed to their role in the relief bridge for Gaza and their expected mission soon to accompany and receive the wounded in Gaza.

On his part, the President of the Conference and



President of the Conference, Director of the Medical Emergency Department, Dr. Ahmed Al-Shatti

Director of the Medical Emergency Department, Dr. Ahmed Al-Shatti, revealed the launch of 10 ambulance centers in 2024, bringing the total number of ambulance centers and clinics to 86 centers and 200 ambulances. Al-Shatti noted that in 2023, the total number of urgent reports reached 126,000, the total number of cases transported by ambulances reached 128,000, and the response rate reached 10 minutes, expressing optimism that the new ambulances would contribute to shortening this time.

He added that the number of cases of road accidents transported by ambulances amounted to 8,757 cases, and the number of cases transported by air ambulances amounted to 808 cases. He noted that medical evacuation to and from Kuwait amounted to 91 cases, and the number of coverage of various events reached 6,662 coverage, while mock exercises jumped from 9 in 2021 to 92



Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Allied Medical Services Affairs, Dr. Abdullah Al-Faras

exercises. He explained that continuous medical training adds credibility and accreditation for international recognition and stressed that training must include mental health and accommodation of the pressure that falls on the working team and patients.

The annual conference for medical emergencies included 40 scientific papers, 10 sessions, and three workshops on emergency medical services, whether in terms of air or sea ambulance services, and how to deal with disasters and crises. The conference coincides with the country's celebrations of national holidays, in addition to keeping pace with Kuwaiti Ambulance Day, which falls on February 20, stressing the importance of attracting qualified cadres in light of global competition to cover shortages of qualified labor and advanced emergency technicians, Al-Shatti stated. — KUNA

## MoH launches blood donation campaign 'Kuwait in my blood'

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health's blood transfusion services management launched the blood donation campaign "Kuwait in my blood" on Sunday under the auspices of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi in the Kuwait Central Blood Bank. The blood donation campaign is in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days and will last until February 29. The blood transfusion services department chief, Dr. Reem Al-Radhwan, said in a statement to KUNA that the campaign was in its eighth consecutive year, promoting selflessness among all those living in Kuwait.



Dr. Reem Al-Radhwan

She emphasized that donating blood is not only a humanitarian duty but also a patriotic one. Souvenirs will be given to all those who donate in gratitude for their action and in commemoration of Kuwait's national holidays, she added. Dr. Al-Radhwan noted that the services department constantly organizes blood



Health ministry's blood transfusion services management launched the blood donation campaign "Kuwait in my blood" on Sunday under the auspices of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. — KUNA photos

donation campaigns in both the governmental and private sectors to enrich and provide the healthcare system with copious amounts of blood and its transferable components.

It is worthy of note that the overall units of donated blood in 2023 went over 93,000 units, a significant five percent increase from 2022. She explained that this increase exceeded expectations, with the blood transfusion services department aiming to reach an additional three percent more. Annual blood donation campaigns make up approximately 24 percent of overall causes of donations, which is a consid-

erable increase from previous years at 15 percent, Dr. Al-Radhwan said.

The noteworthy increase in donations in 2023 was from providing more blood donation service locations, such as Al-Adan Hospital, Jahra Hospital, and Farwaniya Hospital, with the intention of offering more donation sites in the future. Dr. Al-Radhwan called on Kuwaiti citizens and residents to participate in donating blood, especially people with negative blood types, in order to save lives. Donation sites are available throughout the month, as well as on weekends and national holidays. — KUNA

## Nazaha organizes Rule of Law Index workshop

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) organized a workshop on Sunday with the World Justice Project (WJP) to discuss the Rule of Law Index for 2023. Nazaha's Vice President, Nawaf Al-Mahamel, stated during his speech at the workshop that Nazaha was keen to cooperate with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to include Kuwait in the Rule of Law Index.

Al-Mahamel added that the aim of including Kuwait in this index is to contribute to detecting and measuring new index factors in the country, in addition to raising awareness on the importance of international indicators and supporting regional and international policies. On her part, UNDP Kuwait's Resident Representative Emma Morley discussed the contribution and strengthening of the Rule of Law Index through surveys and studies, which evaluates people's experiences. The Rule of Law Index is a quantitative assessment tool that shows the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law in practice, noting that Kuwait ranks 52nd out of 142 countries worldwide. — KUNA



Nazaha's Vice President Nawaf Al-Mahamel



UNDP Kuwait's Resident Representative Emma Morley

# Art project beautifies Kuwait



KUWAIT: Artists showcase their talent during the third art project. — KUNA photos



## Conference explores innovations, research in nuclear medicine

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of Nuclear Medicine Departments Council at the Health Ministry Dr Abdulredha Ismail said the annual "Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging Conference" under the theme "new era" will witness the presence of the most renowned academics, researchers and specialized doctors in the training programs which is under the supervision of the Nuclear Medicine College of Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties (KIMS).

The conference is running under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi from Feb 29 until March 2, 2024. The nuclear medicine specialty, he said, had a major effect in diagnosing and treatment of various cases and contributed to improving medical care in the 21st century. Dr Ismail said the conference will provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and research ideas in addition to creating avenues for cooperation. He added that the conference will also explore technology and innovation in the field of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging, while giving the opportunity for discussions in the field of scientific research and its clinical applications.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chairwoman of the Conference Dr Iman Al-Awadhi said the conference will include more than 45 lectures with the participation of 25 speakers, including experts from USA, Germany, India and an elite group of local lecturers who are experienced in the field of nuclear medicine. She said there will be a workshop for technicians of nuclear medicine in the field of Computed Tomography Scan (CT Scan) and the basics of MRI imaging, which is the cornerstone of the future of nuclear medicine.



Dr Abdulredha Ismail

KUWAIT: The activities of the third art project presented by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters to facilitate and simplify the procedure of painting in public places were launched on Saturday. Artists wishing to display their art works are granted permission to paint and beautify bridges and other public places.

The Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Dr. Mohammed Al-Jassar, said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the Al-Masayel murals project that the council cooperates with several parties to transform Kuwait into a permanent art exhibition by giving all artists the opportunity to publish their works on public surfaces and create a distinctive artistic community.

A number of artists are painting a set of transformers and beautifying



them. The advisor at the Amiri Diwan, Sheikh Faisal Al-Homoud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, expressed in a statement to KUNA during his visit to the event that he was pleased to see the young

people participating in the beautification of Kuwait, stressing that the event reflects a high sense of patriotism.

He said that the event brought them together as they expressed

their love and devotion, wishing Kuwait and its people more progress. For his part, Mubarak's governor, Mahmoud Bushehri, expressed his happiness to participate in this artistic project. He praised the efforts of those in charge of the project, the Mubaddar volunteer team, and all participants, pointing out that "art always reflects the development of society, and it is nice for young and old to learn how to employ painting and art in beautifying the country."

The project manager, Engineer Abdullah Yassin, said the platform has been created to facilitate the third art project. He indicated that the committee had previously studied the selection of drawings, colors, and design. The event will be interspersed with sports activities like walking and light jogging on a route marked with flags leading participants around the new murals. — KUNA

## PIC organizes cleaning campaign to celebrate national days

KUWAIT: Coinciding with the celebrations of Kuwait's national days, the Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) organized a campaign to clean Anjafa beach. The event was held in coor-

ordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, and the Ministry of Education, represented by the technical guidance of the scout girls at the Hawally Educational Area and Al-Salam Primary School for Girls.

A group of volunteer workers from the company and the Community Development Center in Bayan participated in cleaning the beach with a number of students and supervisors, with the aim of encouraging students to take care of the environment and enhance their sense of responsibility towards their country. "They are the future of this country, and it is important to instill these values in them from a young age, and to

encourage entrepreneurship and volunteer work, as well as to protect the environment and public facilities, so that our country appears in the best way," they added.

The company also sponsored another National Day celebration held at the Community Development Center hall in Zahra. During the ceremony, the Petrochemical Industries Company was honored and noted for its efforts in the field of social responsibility, as well as its keenness to support such events, and to adopt initiatives aimed at spreading awareness and adopting best practices and customs to protect the environment.



## Commerce ministry and CMA sign MoU

KUWAIT: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed by the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to guarantee timely and complete completion of citizens' transactions at state departments. The MoU will lessen work for government agencies' personnel who serve the citizens. In a joint press release on Sunday, the Ministry of Commerce and

Capital Markets Authority said the MoU was signed by Chief Executive Officer Ahmad Al-Melhem, who doubles as Chairman of the Capital Markets Authority's Board of Commissioners, and Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Jouan.

The memorandum of understanding comes in the context of updating all memoranda of understanding and agreements among state departments. The MoU, to be reviewed every three years, will ensure periodic updates and efficient work completion. It also includes an electronic data exchange mechanism for speedy information exchange and decision-making on violations and penalties. — KUNA



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Long winter for Morocco quake survivors

## UN court to weigh Zionist occupation of Palestine

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RAFAH: Volunteers distribute rations of red lentil soup to displaced Palestinians in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on February 18, 2024. — AFP photos



Zionist demonstrators gather by the border fence with Egypt in the southern Zionist entity on February 18, 2024, as they attempt to block humanitarian aid trucks from reaching Gaza.

# Famine latest threat in north Gaza

## Children die of hunger, prices of essential goods soar amid continued Zionist siege

GAZA: Like many in northern Gaza, Shadi Jenina has resorted to desperate measures to stave off hunger for his five children — grinding up animal feed into flour. “We’re looking for food for birds, animals and livestock ... such as barley, corn, wheat and fodder. We grind them and make flour,” Jenina, 40, explained. “The bread is dry and not suitable for humans but we’re forced to eat it,” he told AFP, adding they struggle to feed their children. The Gaza Strip was already one of the poorest places in the Middle East even before the Zionist entity declared a complete siege on the territory after Hamas’s October 7 attack. “Though much of Gaza was reliant on food aid, enough of it was entering the territory to largely meet the needs of its 2.4 million inhabitants. But now, after more than four months of war that has flattened huge swathes of the Strip, Gazans are inching closer towards famine, according to the UN’s World Food Program. And the situation in the north of the coastal

territory is particularly acute, with international aid agencies unable to get in.

### ‘Pure misery’

Since the start of this year, the Zionist entity has only given permission to 12 out of 77 United Nations evaluation missions to assess the needs of people in northern Gaza. “There are about 300,000 people in the north and I have no idea how they’ve survived,” said Andrea De Domenico, head of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA in the Palestinian territories.

“What we managed to bring up there is absolutely not enough. It is pure misery,” he told AFP. “Repeatedly when we are allowed to cross the checkpoint at Wadi Gaza to deliver food assistance, thousands of people block and unload the trucks at the risk of being shot.” In the last few days, the non-profit organization World Central Kitchen, which made thousands of meals a day, said it had been forced to

leave Gaza City for Rafah in the south. Rafah, on the border with Egypt, has been turned in recent weeks to a vast camp for some 1.4 million people — most of them displaced by the entity’s relentless bombing. The Zionist entity, though, is preparing a ground invasion of Rafah, prompting fears of a bloodbath.

### Back north

As Egypt refuses to house Palestinian civilians on its side of the border, the question now is how to move more than a million people back towards the north to prevent them getting caught up in fighting. “This is a question we are asking ourselves,” said OCHA’s De Domenico. “There is no short-term solution ... what’s clear for the short term is that a ground invasion in Rafah would have dangerous consequences.” Before the war, some 500 trucks carrying a range of goods entered Gaza every day. Since then, the numbers rarely go beyond 200, despite the enormous demand.

The Zionist entity has tightened checks on lorries coming into the territory to prevent arms being brought to Hamas — and the group’s leaders leaving — all of which restricts the flow of aid. At the same time, far-right Zionist groups have blocked trucks at the entry point to Gaza, while the UN also has to have explosives experts on board because of unexploded ordnance in the north.

“We’re going to die from hunger, not by bombs or missiles,” said Mohammed Nassar, 50, from Jabalia in northern Gaza. “The biggest problem is that everything that is available is expensive and we don’t have the money.” The price of one kilogram of tomatoes, for example, has shot up past 50 shekels (nearly \$14) — more than 20 times its cost before the war. Flour has doubled in price from 35 to 70 shekels, he added. “We need food now,” said Nassar. “Children are dying from hunger. How is this our fault or theirs?” — AFP

## Zionist forces kill 2 Palestinians in West Bank raid

TULKARM, Palestine: Two Palestinian men, including one member of an armed group, were killed in a Zionist raid on Sunday, in the latest Zionist attack in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian health ministry said the two, aged 19 and 36, were pronounced dead from gunshot wounds after the raid in the Tulkarm refugee camp, which the UN says houses over 27,000 Palestinian refugees.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas’s Fatah party, identified the elder of the pair as a local commander. His brother also called him “a member of the resistance”, according to AFP.

Palestinian news agency WAFA reported the incursion of an undercover Zionist unit into the Tulkarm refugee camp, accompanied by a large number of military vehicles and an armored bulldozer.

The forces imposed strict restrictions on the refugee camp, as intense confrontations ensued between Palestinian youth and occupation forces who used heavy gunfire, resulting in the murder of Nabil Ata Amer, 19, and the injury of three more Palestinians. Another Palestinian, Mohammad Ahmad al-Oufi, 36, was also shot dead by Zionist occupation forces during the raid, said the agency.

The Ministry of Health, quoting the General Authority of Civil Affairs, said Oufi was killed after being trapped by occupation forces inside his family house in the Tulkarm refugee camp. His body was taken away by the Zionist forces.

The injured individuals were promptly transported to Thabet Governmental Hospital in the city for medical treatment. WAFA said medical personnel



TULKARM: Medics and people walk past blood stains at an apartment where Mohammed al-Oufi was reportedly killed by Zionist soldiers during a raid on the Tulkarm camp for Palestinian refugees. — AFP

were reportedly struggling to attend to the wounded amid the ongoing confrontations, with reports indicating additional injuries inside the camp.

Zionist occupation forces also impeded the arrival of ambulances into the camp, hindering the swift evacuation of those in need, according to local sources and witnesses who spoke to WAFA.

The deaths came with international concern mounting about unrest in the West Bank since Hamas’s October 7 attack on southern parts of the Zionist entity. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday described the situation as being at boiling point and warned that “we could be on the eve of a

greater explosion,” AFP reported.

The Zionist military said its forces were there to apprehend “a senior wanted suspect” believed to have been involved in attacks on its forces and the “killing of individuals in Tulkarm suspected of cooperating with (Zionist) security forces”.

The suspect was killed by Zionist troops in an exchange of fire, then “armed terrorists opened fire and hurled explosive devices at (Zionist) security forces, who responded with live fire”, the army said in a statement. “During the exchange of fire, a (Zionist) Border Police officer was severely injured” and hospitalized, it added. — Agencies

## Lion legal battle over Hindu deity name in India

KOLKATA, India: An Indian Hindu nationalist organization has launched a court petition to stop two lions named after the Hindu deity Sita and a 16th-century Muslim emperor from sharing a zoo enclosure. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a prominent right-wing Hindu organization, went to court in West Bengal state after reports a lioness named Sita had been put together with a lion called Akbar.

Akbar was a Mughal emperor who extended Muslim rule over much of the Indian subcontinent, a time Hindu nationalist groups say was a period of slavery. “Sita cannot stay with the Mughal emperor Akbar,” VHP official Anup Mondal said Sunday, saying it hurt religious sentiments in the Hindu-majority nation. The VHP lodged a plea on Friday calling for a name-change. “Such act amounts to blasphemy and is a direct assault on the religious belief of all Hindus,” the VHP said in its petition to the court.

Critics say religious intolerance has been growing in the world’s most populous country since the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. General elections, likely to be held in April, are expected to see Modi win a third term in power. Mondal said the lion called Akbar had previously been named after the Hindu deity Ram when he was in the neighboring state of Tripura, which is controlled by Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But the lion’s name was changed when he was brought to West Bengal, which is controlled by the opposition Trinamool Congress party. The VHP petition calls for a ban on using religious names for animals in zoos. West Bengal forest department official Dipak Kumar Mandal said “the lion and the lioness are now kept separately”. The case is scheduled for a hearing on February 20. — AFP

## US threatens to block new UN vote on Gaza

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council could hold a vote this week, sought by Algeria, on a resolution seeking an “immediate” ceasefire in Gaza, diplomatic sources told AFP Saturday, although Washington again appeared set to block it.

Algeria launched discussions on a new draft after the International Court of Justice ruled in late January that the Zionist entity must do all it can to prevent genocidal acts in its war in Gaza, which it says is targeting Hamas militants. The latest version of the text, seen by AFP Saturday, “demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire that must be respected by all parties.” It also “rejects forced displacement of the Pal-

stinian civilian population,” and it “demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.”

The Zionist entity’s assault on Gaza has killed at least 28,858 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory’s health ministry. The Hamas October 7 attack, which the Zionist entity says triggered the war, has resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Zionist official figures.

Algeria has requested a UN Security Council vote on Tuesday, but Washington signaled it is likely to veto the measure. US President Joe Biden is working with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the leaders of Egypt and Qatar on a hostage deal that would bring about six weeks of a “prolonged pause in fighting,” US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement on Algeria’s proposed draft.

“The resolution put forward in the Security Council, in contrast, would not achieve these outcomes, and indeed, may

run counter to them,” Thomas-Greenfield said. “The United States does not support action on this draft resolution,” she added. “Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted.”

Like previous texts opposed by the entity and the United States, the new text does not condemn the attack by Hamas. Earlier this month, Thomas-Greenfield said that Algeria’s latest initiative risked derailing the negotiations. “We believe that it is high time now for the Security Council to decide on a humanitarian ceasefire resolution,” Palestinian UN envoy Riyad Mansour said recently, adding there is “massive support” for the text’s elements among council members.

In October and December, despite international pressure over Gaza’s growing humanitarian crisis, Washington vetoed texts calling for a ceasefire. The Security Council has adopted just two resolutions on Gaza since October 7, including one calling for large-scale delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory. — AFP



RAFAH: A girl pushes a cart loaded with a jerrycan while walking past the rubble of a building that was destroyed during Zionist bombardment on February 14, 2024. — AFP

## International

# UN court to weigh Zionist occupation of Palestine

## ICJ advisory rulings non-binding but 'can carry great moral and legal authority': Rights group

**THE HAGUE:** The UN's top court will from Monday hold hearings on the legal consequences of the Zionist entity's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, with an unprecedented 52 countries expected to give evidence.

Nations including the United States, Russia, and China will address judges in a week-long session at the Peace Palace in The Hague, seat of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In December 2022, the UN General Assembly asked the ICJ for a non-binding "advisory opinion" on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of the (Zionist entity) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem."

While any ICJ opinion would be non-binding, it comes amid mounting international legal pressure on the Zionist entity over its assault on Gaza, which it claims was sparked by a deadly attack launched by Hamas on the entity in October.

The hearings are separate from a high-profile case brought by South Africa alleging that the Zionist entity is committing genocidal acts during the current Gaza offensive. The ICJ ruled in that case in January that the Zionist entity must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, but stopped short of ordering a ceasefire. On Friday, it rejected South Africa's bid to impose additional measures on the Zionist entity but reiterated the need to carry out the ruling in full.

### 'Prolonged occupation'

The General Assembly has asked the

ICJ to consider two questions. Firstly, the court should examine the legal consequences of what the UN called "the ongoing violation by (the Zionist entity) of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination".

This relates to the "prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967" and "measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem".

In June 1967, the Zionist entity crushed some of its Arab neighbors in a six-day war, seizing the West Bank including east Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt.

The Zionist entity then began to settle the 70,000 square kilometers (27,000 square miles) of seized Arab territory. The UN later declared the occupation of Palestinian territory illegal. Cairo regained Sinai under its 1979 peace deal with the entity.

The ICJ has also been asked to look into the consequences of what it described as the Zionist entity's "adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures." Secondly, the ICJ should advise on how the entity's actions "affect the legal status of the occupation" and what are the consequences for the UN and other countries. The court will rule "urgently" on the affair, probably by the end of the year.

### 'Despicable'

The ICJ rules in disputes between states and its judgements are binding although it has little means to enforce



**TURMUS AYYA:** A picture taken in the village of Turmus Ayya near Ramallah city shows the nearby Zionist Shilo settlement in the background, in the occupied West Bank on February 18, 2024. — AFP

them. However, in this case, the opinion it issues will be non-binding. In the court's own words: "The requesting organ, agency or organization remains free to give effect to the opinion by any means open to it, or not to do so." But most advisory opinions are in fact acted upon.

The ICJ has previously issued advisory opinions on the legality of Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia and apartheid South Africa's occupation of Na-

mibia. It also handed down an opinion in 2004 declaring that parts of the wall erected by the Zionist entity in the occupied Palestinian territory were illegal and should be torn down.

The entity is not participating in the hearings and reacted angrily to the 2022 UN request, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling it "despicable" and "disgraceful". The week after the UN resolution, the entity announced a series of sanctions against the Palestinian Authority to make it

"pay the price" for pushing for it.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that while advisory opinions are non-binding, "they can carry great moral and legal authority" and can eventually be inscribed in international law. The hearings should "highlight the grave abuses (Zionist) authorities are committing against Palestinians, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution," said Clive Baldwin, HRW senior legal adviser. — AFP

## Myanmar villagers pick through rubble of devastated homes

**NAM HPAT KAR, Myanmar:** A towering golden Buddha statue watches over families sifting through the wreckage of their homes in a northern Myanmar village as they grieve for all they have lost in heavy artillery and air strikes. The statue's right palm is raised in a gesture meant to dispel fear and offer protection. But swathes of Nam Hpat Kar in northern Shan state were reduced to rubble in conflict between the military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which says it captured the village in late January after more than a month of fighting.

With military aircraft closing in, Nann May and her family fled the house they had recently built. "From where I was hiding I heard the sounds of fighter jets flying overhead and I thought our village ... will be destroyed completely," Nann May, who earns a living selling daily goods, told AFP last week.

After KIA fighters seized the village and the fighting ended, Nann May returned to Nam Hpat Kar — which sits on Myanmar's main highway to China — to find her home and many others damaged or destroyed. Most people from her neighborhood now "have nowhere to live," she said, requesting a pseudonym for security reasons. "Residents can't do any work. There are no jobs and no homes here for us. We are grieving for our losses."

The loss of Nam Hpat Kar is one of many suffered by Myanmar's ruling junta in recent months. An offensive launched in October by an alliance of ethnic minority armed groups has seized chunks of territory along the China border, as well as control of lucrative trade crossings. The successes have also inspired so-called "People's Defence Forces" — dedicated to reversing the 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government — to launch attacks of their own across the country.

Analysts say the onslaught has put the embattled junta in its most vulnerable position since seizing power. Last



**NAM HPAT KAR, Myanmar:** (Left) In this file photo a woman sits next to a cat in front of her damaged house following fighting between Myanmar's Military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). (Right) Debris is pictured next to a damaged Buddha statue. — AFP photos

week it announced it would begin conscripting young men and women into its ranks due to the "current situation". Remnants of the military's retreat from Nam Hpat Kar were scattered across the village, AFP footage showed. Combat boots and uniforms were strewn inside a concrete hut pockmarked with bullet holes.

Near a network of empty trenches, dozens of shell casings littered the ground around a destroyed communications aerial. Atop the local military unit's flagpole, the KIA's green and red banner hung in the still air.

Outside the village, locals took pictures of the wreckage of a jet the KIA says it shot down recently. The downing of the plane would be a rare victory against the junta's overwhelming air power, which it has used to shore up its embattled ground troops.

The junta's use of air strikes against civilian areas has

drawn heavy condemnation, including from the United Nations and the United States, which last year imposed further sanctions on jet fuel imports. The KIA has fought the military for decades for autonomy and control of the lucrative trade in jade and timber in the far north. It has clashed regularly with the military since the coup and has given training and equipment to newer "People's Defence Forces".

Its fighters in Nam Hpat Kar were unavailable for interview. For villagers returning home to houses obliterated by air and artillery strikes, talk of victory rings hollow.

One family sat cooking rice on a makeshift stove a stone's throw from the ruins of their house. A nearby building had been reduced to a pile of concrete chunks, its electric wiring and steel supports exposed.

A Chinese calligraphy print extolling the importance of maintaining peace within one's family hung on one interior

wall that was still standing. Aye Aye Tin — also a pseudonym — has not heard from her nephew or niece since they fled the village for a city on the border with China when the fighting broke out.

"I heard from my friend that my nephew and niece were shot dead (by the military) while they tried to flee," she told AFP. "Another niece who was wounded in the arm has been sent to hospital." "I never thought I would face this fate," Maung Soe, another resident, said he knew a man who had been killed by a shell during the fighting. Thousands have been killed and around 2 million displaced by conflict since the 2021 coup, according to the United Nations. For many in Nam Hpat Kar who survived the fight over their village, the next struggle will be surviving day to day, said Maung Soe. "We have faced trouble getting meals, clothes and shelter," he said. — AFP

## 'Voter suppression' rumors denied...

Continued from Page 1

on Feb 15 over remarks by some MPs deemed offensive to HH the Amir.

Under Kuwaiti law, fresh elections must be held within two months of dissolving the National Assembly. The Cabinet, which meets Monday, is considering setting that date in light of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which is due to start on March 11. Local reports said the government may decide to hold the polls either just before the last 10 days of Ramadan, around the end of March, or just after Eid Al-Fitr and before April 15, the last legal day for elections.

The rumors that the government denied claimed that a plan was underway to amend the election law to cancel a 1994 law that treated children of naturalized citizens as original Kuwaitis. Under Kuwaiti law, Kuwaitis by birth, known as original citizens, who or their ancestors had lived in the

country before 1920, hold first-degree citizenship. Naturalized Kuwaitis hold citizenship from two to eight, depending on the article in the law upon which they were given citizenship.

Under the election law before the amendment, only original Kuwaitis could vote and contest the polls. Naturalized Kuwaitis can only vote after 20 years of obtaining citizenship and are barred for life from running in elections. However, in 1994, the National Assembly introduced a major amendment to the law known as law 44/1994, stating that children of naturalized Kuwaiti men born after obtaining citizenship are considered Kuwaitis by birth or original citizens.

That gave thousands of Kuwaitis the right to vote and contest parliamentary polls, which dramatically changed the Kuwaiti election map. For several months, some activists have bluntly called for canceling law 44/1994, which effectively means depriving hundreds of thousands of citizens of the right to vote and contest polls. The debate over this critical issue intensified after the dissolution of the Assembly and before crucial snap polls in the next 60 days.

refugees, UNRWA, after the Zionist entity accused some of its employees of involvement in the Oct 7 attack. Lula, who met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh Saturday on the sidelines of the summit, has said Brazil will increase its own contribution to the agency, and urged other countries to do the same. He reiterated his call for a two-state solution to the conflict, with Palestine "definitively recognized as a full and sovereign state". — AFP

## Zionists kill scores in Gaza, US to...

Continued from Page 1

The military says it is working to move civilians from the area to minimize casualties, but has not revealed the exact details of its evacuation plan.

Netanyahu's government also rejected pressure from some Western governments that would aim for unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state. The government later unanimously approved a declaration that said "(the Zionist entity) utterly rejects international diktats regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. A settlement, if it is to be reached, will come about solely through direct negotiations between the parties, without preconditions."

Latest strikes and fighting killed at least 10 people in Rafah and in central Gaza's Deir al-Balah overnight, said the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. At the morgue of a Rafah hospital, mourners bent down to give a final kiss to a loved one wrapped in a white body bag. "That's my cousin — he was martyred in Al-Mawasi, in the 'safe area'," said Ahmad Mohammed Aburizq. "And my mother was martyred the day before. There's no safe place. Even the hospital is not safe."

The Zionist entity's bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza have killed at least 28,985 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. In Tel Aviv, thousands took to the streets Saturday against Netanyahu's government, accusing it of abandoning the captives and calling for immediate elections. "Take politics out of decisions about our loved ones' lives," demanded Nissan Calderon, brother of hostage Ofer Calderon. "This

is the moment of truth. There won't be many more like it if the Cairo initiative collapses."

Next week's possible Security Council vote appears unlikely to advance the ceasefire effort, with Washington already voicing opposition. "The United States does not support action on this draft resolution," said US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield. "Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted." Algeria's draft resolution seeks an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, but Thomas-Greenfield said the United States instead supports a truce-for-captives deal that would pause fighting for six weeks.

US President Joe Biden had "multiple calls" with Netanyahu as well as Egyptian and Qatari leaders this week "to push this deal forward", she said. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani called those talks "not very promising". He said the efforts had been complicated by the insistence of "a lot of countries" that any new truce involve further releases of hostages. Hamas has threatened to suspend its involvement in the talks unless relief supplies reach Gaza's north, where aid agencies have warned of looming famine. "Negotiations cannot be held while hunger is ravaging the Palestinian people," a senior source in the Palestinian militant group told AFP. The head of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA in the Palestinian territories, Andrea De Domenico, said he had "no idea" how an estimated 300,000 people still in Gaza's north had survived.

The Zionist entity's military on Sunday said troops in Khan Yunis are still operating "in the Nasser Hospital" and adjacent to it. Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said Zionist troops had turned Nasser Hospital "into a military barracks". He said one more person had died due to lack of oxygen because power has been out for three days, bringing the total of such deaths to seven. — AFP

## Lula accuses Zionist entity...

Continued from Page 1

Lula criticized Western countries' recent decisions to halt aid to the UN agency for Palestinian

## International

# Long winter for Morocco quake survivors

## Hundreds protest delayed government aid while others endure cold in tents, temporary barracks



DOUZROU, Morocco: People walk amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in the earthquake-hit village of Douzrou, in central Morocco on February 13, 2024. — AFP photos



A woman walks past huts built by Moroccan and Dutch NGOs at a camp near the earthquake-hit village of Douzrou.

**DOUZROU, Morocco:** Long, cold months have passed since an earthquake levelled Abdallah Oubelaid's impoverished village in Morocco's High Atlas mountains. Every day, he or other villagers come to inspect the debris. They hope to find pieces of wood for heating and cooking, or even to recover objects of value that have so far escaped them, and all the while a bitter Oubelaid wonders when he will get the government aid that he applied for. "Every time I ask, they tell me it's going to happen," Oubelaid, 35, said. "But I have children to feed and to clothe."

Moroccan authorities said around 3,000 people died during the 6.8 magnitude earthquake that struck on September 8, leaving more than 60,000 houses damaged. From Oubelaid's village of Douzrou, around 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Marrakesh city, residents give

a death toll of about 80.

A pink and white mosque minaret stands out among the rubble of the village that clung to a corner of the mountainside. The survivors, 150 families, found refuge a few kilometers away on rocky ground beside a road with a view of snow-capped mountains.

Around 120 of them have received help from the government. They either got a 2,500-dirham (\$249) monthly stipend or 20,000 dirhams for reconstruction. The rest, like Oubelaid, said they don't know why they received nothing.

### Protests

By the end of January, the Moroccan government said around 57,600 families had received the monthly stipend and more than 44,000 households obtained the reconstruction aid. Prime Minister

Aziz Akhannouch said the government "sets itself the challenge of responding to the expectation of the local population with promptness and efficiency."

Yet some remain desperate for help. Local media said hundreds of people from areas south of Marrakesh in Taroudant province and the town of Talat Nyacoub have demonstrated since January to protest the delayed payments and reconstruction aid during the difficult winter conditions.

Last month, a left-wing government member of parliament, Fatima Tamni, said while questioning Interior Minister Abdelouafi Laftit that reconstruction efforts "remain immersed in obscurity and improvisation". She called on Laftit to take action, according to the Hesperess news website.

The Moroccan government said some

applications were rejected because residents did not live in the affected areas at the time of the earthquake or because their homes were still inhabitable.

In larger towns like Amizmiz, workers and backhoes are busy. Things seem to have returned to normal, even as families still live in dozens of yellow tents donated by the authorities. Covered with tarpaulins for protection against the rain and mountain cold, the tents occupy every patch of empty land.

### 'It saved us'

In their misfortune, the Douzrou survivors feel lucky that Moroccan and Dutch NGOs built barracks for them, and they are insulated from the cold. "There would've been a lot more victims with the wind lately if we didn't have that," said Hamed Oumhend, 68, looking at the hut

built beside others. From above, they look like rolls of aluminum foil. "It saved us."

The elderly villager has been collecting signatures for a petition asking for the reconstruction of Douzrou — a little lower on the mountain than their camp, in hopes it would be safer there. They are determined to stay on their land but conscious of the fact that the name of the resilient village means "under the rock" in the local Berber language, also known as Amazigh.

They fear another disaster in the community whose isolation means few doctor visits and dwindling provisions, and where Oumhend said people are still in a state of shock. They all lost a relative or barely managed to save themselves when their village disappeared. "People had to crawl out of the rubble to get out of their homes," he recalled. "Some are still traumatized." — AFP

## Seoul hopes egg freezing can help baby crisis

**SEOUL:** As South Korea's birth rate hits fresh lows, Seoul city officials have a plan to help — subsidized egg freezing. But experts warn the initiative is unlikely to reverse precipitous demographic decline. At just 0.7 births per woman late last year, South Korea has one of the lowest birthrates in the world, far below the replacement rate, meaning the population is ageing — and shrinking — rapidly.

The government has poured billions of dollars into trying to encourage more births, with one of the latest efforts involving Seoul city authorities offering to subsidize the cost of a round of egg freezing. Jeong, who is in her 40s, decided to take them up. "I felt the pressure to have a baby because of my age, which led me to consider getting married quickly," Jeong, who asked to be identified only by her surname, told AFP.

"When I reached my mid-30s, I suggested to the men I dated that we should get married as soon as possible. But it just didn't work out," Jeong added. So she turned to a backup plan. While single women can freeze their eggs, in reality the scheme will only assist women who go on to marry, as clinics offering intrauterine insemination (IUI) and in vitro fertilization (IVF) typically require marriage certificates, making the procedures virtually impossible for singles or same sex couples to access.

Egg freezing theoretically allows women to preserve their fertility, although it is seen as being more likely to succeed if women undergo the procedure before egg quality starts to sharply decline, typically from age 38 onwards.

Having frozen her eggs, Jeong said she no longer felt "as anxious" about being single and missing out on having a baby — and was ready to wait until she found the right person. "Now that I have my frozen eggs as insurance, I can take my time," she told AFP.

Helping Korean women to freeze their eggs was determined by Seoul city authorities to be "the most practical solution" for "investing in future childbirth possibilities", the municipal government said. "As the age of marriage and pregnancy continues to rise, and women's participation in society becomes more prominent, there is a growing



SEONGNAM: This video grab from AFPTV shows researchers checking frozen eggs at a fertility research lab of CHA Bundang Medical Center. — AFP

interest among unmarried women who aspire to conceive and give birth in the future," it added.

### Beyond fertility

The technology to freeze eggs has been available in South Korea since the late 1990s, but there was little awareness and minimal demand for the procedure. Cha Kwang-yul, who runs the CHA Medical Group, developed one of the world's first vitrified egg-freeze preservation methods in 1998, and has run an egg bank since 1999. But only women with cancer, who might lose fertility through medical treatments, were interested in the procedure, he said. "It's only been a few years since the culture ... changed and people (started) saying: 'Hey, if you don't (plan on getting) married, store your eggs well.'" Cha's research has focused on the potential of eggs for stem cell technology, which he said could offer help for many medical concerns such as organ transplants — not just fertility issues. But in recent years, as more information on the procedure's potential to help extend female fertility has moved into the mainstream, he has seen growing demand for the procedure. The number of egg freezing procedures carried out at the CHA Medical Center has risen exponentially in just a few years, from 72 in 2015 to more than 1,000 in 2022.

(RSF). Elhassan fled the capital Khartoum in July, joining his wife and three children who had already sought refuge 180 kilometers (110 miles) further south in the town of Wad Madani.

But in December the RSF attacked the town in Jazirah state, which had become a "humanitarian hub" for the region. "It was horrific, I moved out from Jazirah just with the clothes" on my back, he said. "On the road, there was thousands of people moving on foot, in a state of panic. Most of them were women and children."

He and his family found shelter some 400 kilometers east of there, in the provincial capital of Kassala state near the Eritrean border, where they still live and he says he sees a constant trickle of new arrivals. "People arrive in Kassala exhausted, some of them sick, starving. Many of them told me they are bankrupt," he said. "I have seen thousands of people here sheltering in very poor conditions," he added.

### 'People will die'

The war in Sudan has killed thousands, including 10,000 to 15,000 people in the single town of El Geneina in the western region of Darfur, according to UN

figures. It has displaced more than six million people inside the country, while more than a million have fled abroad, mostly to neighboring Chad and Egypt.

The United Nations says outbreaks of diseases pose a growing threat, particularly in overcrowded shelter sites, with the country already facing outbreaks of cholera and dengue fever. Inside the country, some 25 million people — more than half the population — need humanitarian aid.

Of those, 18 million face crisis or worse levels of hunger. Ten months on from the start of the conflict, many are struggling to find food to eat. William Carter, country director for Norwegian Refugee Council, visited Darfur in recent weeks. "Aside from the trauma and the physical loss, what struck me is the level of hunger," he said. "People have sold everything. Bakeries are not producing even the half of what they do usually because they have no flour nor wheat."

France-based non-governmental organization Solidarites International warned that Sudan — already one of the poorest countries on the planet — would be "going straight into a famine" if nothing was done. "It will be the largest humanitarian crisis Sudan has

## Thai ex-PM back home after release on parole

**BANGKOK:** Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole Sunday, just six months after he was arrested following a dramatic return to the kingdom from 15 years of self-imposed exile.

The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, was jailed for eight years on graft and abuse-of-power charges upon his return in August. But his sentence was cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn within days of his return and the government said last week the 74-year-old was eligible for early release because of his age and health. Thaksin — wearing a neck brace and sitting next to his daughters Paetongtarn and Pintongtarn — was driven away Sunday from the police hospital in central Bangkok where he had spent the past six months.

A handful of people protesting against his release had gathered in front of the hospital. The car then drove to Thaksin's home, where a welcome banner was tied across the gates. One woman wearing a T-shirt with a picture of Thaksin emblazoned across the front said she had stood outside his house for two days. "I want to tell him to fight," she told local media. "If he is (here), the country will develop."

The department of corrections confirmed his release on parole Sunday but the exact details of his freedom are unclear. Thaksin may be subject to monitoring — possibly with an ankle tag — and restrictions on his right to travel.

Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin suggested Sunday that Thaksin would not involve himself in politics but said, if and when he is ready to give advice, "everyone in the government is ready to listen".

Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn posted a picture on Instagram Sunday of him sitting in front of a swimming pool at his home, his arm in a sling. "After no fresh air and sunlight for 180 days and 17 years away from home, Dad sits outside for a long time," she wrote. — AFP



GEDAREF, Sudan: People use makeshift donkey-drawn tanks to re-supply with water as traders and donkey farmers gather in an open market. — AFP

## 'Starving': Sudan aid workers sound alarm over crisis

**PARIS:** Sudanese aid worker Shakir Elhassan and his family were among millions forced to flee their homes and former lives after war broke out last year in Sudan. Some 10 months later, he is one of many voices in the sector warning of a devastating humanitarian crisis that could soon spiral into famine. "The needs are unprecedented," the communications manager at Care International said, deploring a lack of global attention. "There is a huge gap in medicines, food," he said, speaking to AFP from the east of the country after what he described as 10 days without internet.

Conflict broke out in April last year between Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, his former deputy and commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces

ever known," said its regional director Justine Muzik Piquemal. "If food cannot be brought in through the humanitarian route, people will have nothing because there is nothing on markets," she added. "People will die of hunger." — AFP

# Business

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2024

## Ordable/: Empowering individuals to realize their business dreams

Co-founders outline how Ordable/ helps entrepreneurs thrive in a digital marketplace



Ordable/'s team poses for a group photo.



Co-founder Mona Al-Baker discussing work with her team.

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Ordable/ is an idea that was born out of a desire to assist a close friend in managing her business more effectively. Witnessing the rapid growth and success of their friend's venture inspired co-founders Salem Marafi and Mona Al-Baker to expand their assistance to others engaged in similar online businesses. Motivated by the impact they could make on entrepreneurs' lives, they embarked on a mission to provide accessible tools and support to aspiring business owners.

From this initial act of kindness, Ordable/ blossomed into a platform dedicated to empowering individuals to realize their entrepreneurial dreams and thrive in the digital marketplace. Kuwait Times spoke with Ordable/'s co-founders, who explained the revolutionary solution they offer for entrepreneurs looking to thrive in the digital marketplace.

**Kuwait Times:** Can you provide an overview of Ordable/'s platform and its key features for online businesses?

**Marafi:** Our story started with helping one friend manage her business, and it all grew from there. Ordable/ is an affordable commerce platform backed by unmatched support that helps businesses launch, manage and scale with ease. Ordable/'s products are fast, fit and reliable, backed by unmatched service and a dedicated support team.

**Al-Baker:** We work to inspire people and create possibilities for businesses everywhere. We offer four products and plenty of benefits: Online ordering, POS, B2B, QR menu and table ordering, and have a local dedicated customer support team.



**KT:** How does Ordable/ differentiate itself from other e-commerce platforms?

**Marafi:** Ordable/ is an affordable commerce platform backed by unmatched support that helps you launch, manage and scale your business with ease. What sets us out from the market is our commitment to our customers' success. We aim to be a catalyst for your growth, a source of optimism and a bridge to a prosperous future. We bring value to our customers through close relationships and putting their evolving needs at the core of our business. We focus on giving them a positive experience throughout their lifetime with Ordable/.

Our products are always developed and enhanced towards customers' needs and by them. We have a really good product that serves customers' specific needs. We built it inwardly and that's what sets us apart. We might not be looking to get all the solutions, to be the top technology; conversely, we look to be there for our customers, enable them towards success and build long-lasting relationships with them.

**KT:** What types of businesses typically benefit the most from using Ordable/?

**Al-Baker:** Entrepreneurs, small businesses and

and then brought back only days later. OpenAI led a revolution in artificial intelligence when it placed its ChatGPT program online in late 2022. The immediate success of the interface sparked tremendous interest in the cutting-edge technology, capable of producing text, sounds and images upon demand.

Microsoft, already an investor in the start-up, redoubled its involvement. The software giant has injected some \$13 billion into OpenAI in the past few years. It is locked in fierce competition with Google to develop and roll out new tools using AI's generative abilities, to the point that the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in January launched an investigation into the enormous investments by Microsoft, Google and Amazon in the specialized start-ups. OpenAI, founded as a non-profit in 2015, faced a major crisis last November.

Its board fired CEO Sam Altman, one of Silicon Valley's more charismatic figures, accusing him of a lack of "transparency." In the following days, Microsoft tried to hire him, while both executives and a majority of OpenAI employees demanded that those behind Altman's ouster resign and that he be rehired. — AFP

leum's \$12 billion takeover of CrownRock, another Permian producer.

"Consolidation in the space was a bit overdue because the exploration and production space is fairly fragmented, or had been, until all these deals," said CFRA Research analyst Stewart Glickman.

"People have this idea that it's very monopolistic," Richard Sweeney, an economics professor at Boston College, said of the oil industry in places like the Permian. "The US oil and gas market is incredibly fragmented," Sweeney said. "There's, like, easily 50 firms that drill a substantial number of wells in Texas." One large deal that doesn't involve the Permian is Chevron's \$53 billion purchase of Hess Corporation. However, Chevron highlighted the appeal of Hess's assets in the Bakken region in the state of North Dakota, another big shale region.

Such shale basins take advantage of horizontal drilling techniques, which permit the drilling of wells from miles away once large companies buy neighboring sites. The addition of the Pioneer acreage "means fewer wells" and lower capital spending, said Kathryn Mikells, chief financial officer at ExxonMobil. — AFP

home businesses. Ordable/ works for anyone who has a product and wants to sell it online, it also works great for restaurants, flower shops, fashion stores, catering, bakeries, etc.

**KT:** How does Ordable/ help businesses manage their online presence and streamline their operations?

**Marafi:** Ordable/ enables businesses to manage their business seamlessly. Our dashboard is designed to empower business owners to streamline their operations, adjust their online store to fit their brand and use marketing tools to ensure customer loyalty.

**KT:** What tools and resources does Ordable/ offer to help businesses grow and scale their online operations effectively?

**Al-Baker:** Wherever there's an order, there's Ordable/. We help businesses take and manage orders — all types of orders — better than any other solution in the world. This includes online websites, applications, POS, B2B orders, table dine-in orders, call center orders, drive-in orders, pick-up orders — every order to the moon and back.

**KT:** Can you walk us through the process of registration and setting up an online store using Ordable/?

**Marafi:** It's a super simple 3-step process: 1) Fill in the form online or reach out to us. 2) A sales consultant will help you pick a package with the right features. 3) A success manager will help you set up and go live.

**KT:** How does Ordable/ ensure security for both businesses and customers?

**Marafi:** Security is a broad and important topic. Our first line of defending customers and businesses



Co-founder Mona Al-Baker

Co-founder Salem Marafi

is working with world-class providers end-to-end. Our infrastructure is protected by the world's best network security provider Cloudflare. Merchant payment providers are also certified including upayments, hesabe, tap, myfatorah, benefit, KNET and Mada. We have a second and third layer of security internally to protect infrastructure and we have data backup processes in place that allow us to retain data up to the minute.

**KT:** What level of customer support does Ordable/ provide to its users?

**Al-Baker:** Ordable/ is obsessive about customer success — to that end, we ensure our support is local, accessible and available. We have sales managers to help prospects pick the right package for their goals, success managers to get customers to their first order and beyond, and live chat for the highest level of accessibility and support.

## OpenAI in deal valuing it at \$80bn: Media

**SAN FRANCISCO:** OpenAI has concluded a deal with investors that reportedly values the California start-up at \$80 billion or more, after a roller-coaster year for the inventor of ChatGPT. The agreement, reported by The New York Times but not yet confirmed by OpenAI, would mean the value of the company — a world leader in generative artificial intelligence — would have nearly tripled in under 10 months. The reported deal would have the San Francisco-based firm selling existing shares to investors led by Thrive Capital.

It would permit executives and employees to sell shares at a highly favorable price, just three months after the firm survived a major crisis when company co-founder and chief executive Sam Altman was fired

## Wave of deals puts US shale oil back in focus

**NEW YORK:** American shale oil is back at the center of the global petroleum game, a driver of major deals involving petroleum giants more inclined to buy up rivals than to undertake wildcat exploration.

On Monday, Diamondback Energy announced the \$26 billion acquisition of Endeavor Energy, combining two of the top 10 producers in the Permian Basin, which has the largest unconventional petroleum reserves in the United States. The Permian, which is located in western Texas and eastern New Mexico, has emerged as an especially hot commodity.

In October, ExxonMobil announced the acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources, the biggest Permian producer, for about \$60 billion. That was followed in December by Occidental Petro-

## Could mini nuclear stations plug South Africa's power gaps?

**PRETORIA:** South African nuclear scientists want to build a new generation of mini nuclear reactors, both to plug holes in their own country's blackout-plagued grid and to build an export industry for the future. One company has designed a gas-cooled small modular reactor that it says can be installed within three years on a site smaller than a football field and safely produce enough power for a city.

Similar projects are underway in other countries, as the world confronts the challenge of powering a future economy of electrified transport, heating and data centers while slashing carbon emissions.

Europe is divided on the way forward. Some countries, led by France, are betting on nuclear. Others, like Germany, are hoping that renewables like wind and solar will replace fossil fuels and make-up for the loss of access to Russia's natural gas exports. South Africa will rely on coal for some time to come but, with power already in short supply, it is betting on building up its nuclear program.

And some experts like Kelvin Kemm, a nuclear physicist and chief executive of Pretoria-based private outfit Stratek Global, think South Africa is uniquely placed to take the lead in developing fourth generation reactors.

"I believe the future is not only around the corner, I believe the future has arrived," Kemm told AFP in an interview in his garden in the Pretoria suburbs. "I see in the next half dozen years, there is going to be a massive worldwide proliferation of nuclear power of all sizes, that there will be a huge change of heart over the next 24 months. I believe South Africa is already a leader."

South Africa's civilian nuclear journey began in 1976 when construction began on the Koeberg nuclear power plant, on the South Atlantic coast just north of Cape Town. It was commissioned 40 years ago and has a capacity of just under 2,000 megawatts, a small chunk of the 27,000 MW that South Africa's much-derided state electricity firm Eskom can deliver, thanks largely to carbon-intensive coal-fired plants.



**JOHANNESBURG:** A general view shows trails of lights from passing vehicles in Braamfontein, Johannesburg that is submerged in darkness due to load-shedding (rolling blackout) on Jan 31, 2023. — AFP

But domestic demand for power often peaks at more than 32,000 MW per day, and South Africans face rolling blackouts or "load-shedding" of up to 12 hours a day, a serious burden on the economy of what should be the continent's powerhouse. In December, the government announced that it planned to bring the first of a new series of nuclear plants on stream by 2033, adding another 2,500 megawatts of capacity, while planning to renew Koeberg and extend its life for another 20 years.

But, even with solar panels springing up on homes and developments across the country, that still leaves the country short of power in the medium term. This is where, in the plans of nuclear evangelists like Kemm, small modular plants come in. Large plants like Koeberg, with its two French-designed pressurized water reactors (PWR), must be situated by the ocean to allow for 80 tonnes of cold water a second to be pumped in to cool its reactors.

Most of South Africa is dry, however, and its commercial hub Johannesburg and its energy intensive mines and industry are far from the sea. The capital Pretoria is as far from Cape Town's cool Atlantic shore as Rome is from London. This is where Stratek hopes to come in with its High Temperature Modular Reactor (HTMR-100). According to Kemm, who is already in talks with international operators from as far away as France as well as South Africa, these helium gas-cooled reactors can be installed in groups of up to 10 or typically six to power off the shelf steam turbines. — AFP



# Nabil Shuail shares his experience with Gulf Bank's new mobile app

## Gulf Bank's digital leap: 'Ya Shams' commercial garners 7.7 million views

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has recently made significant strides in its digital services, notably with the launch of a new mobile banking app. As a result, the statement "Switch to Gulf Bank today and enjoy its benefits forever" has shifted from just words to a concrete reality.

Customers are now directly reaping the benefits, as this application distinguishes itself as the most user-friendly, efficient, and top-tier option in the banking industry. Its recognition stems from its innovative technology, which not only surpasses customer expectations, but also sets new standards in digital banking experiences. Therefore, it's not surprising that this exact phrase serves as the closing statement of a Gulf Bank commercial starring the acclaimed singer Nabil Shuail, promoting the "Ya Shams" campaign. In this entertaining and witty commercial, Shuail and his team shifted the spotlight to showcase their excitement for Gulf Bank's digital progress and the diverse benefits offered by its mobile app.

The commercial features a group of young talents alongside Nabil Shuail, presenting an engaging and humorous narrative that praises the bank's digital advancements and the extensive features and services offered by its mobile app. Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, voiced her satisfaction regarding the partnership with the acclaimed singer Nabil Shuail and the commercial team. She also emphasized the commercial's rapid success, accumulating over 7.7 million views on YouTube, and various social media platforms within days. Additionally, she announced plans for ongoing collaboration with Nabil Shuail in upcoming projects.

Al-Eisa highlighted that the new mobile application from Gulf Bank represents a substantial improvement in customer experience, encompassing an extensive array of banking services. This enhancement ensures that banking with Gulf Bank becomes more accessible and convenient for customers globally, featuring a user-friendly, fast, and secure interface.

She elaborated on the features of the new application, such as account management, statement access, quick payment links, expense tracking, account transfers, increased transfer limits, dark mode, information updates, and secure local and international transfers. Additionally, customers can handle bill payments, financial installment repayments, electronic voucher purchases, ATM and credit card management, prepaid card requests, new credit



Gulf Bank's marketing team poses for a photo with Nabil Shuail.

card activations, and card blocking for security purposes. Furthermore, customers can access their debit or credit card PIN and Gulf Rewards points, redeemable for complimentary flight reservations, manage their security settings, update profile information, and safeguard accounts through biometric registration (facial recognition and fingerprint).

In conclusion, Al-Eisa highlighted Gulf Bank's digital transformation journey, which includes branch and ATM developments, customer service center updates, and enhancements to the interactive voice

response system. These efforts align with the bank's 2025 strategy to reinforce its prominent role in Kuwait's banking industry and deliver exceptional solutions and services to its customers.

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



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 15 FEBRUARY 2024

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	36,617	8,039.43	1.0%	1.0%	7.5%	693,365,077	277,116,464	42,300	18.1	1.4	80.8%
Main Market	8,715	6,007.69	1.5%	0.6%	7.9%	687,470,544	90,589,187	40,096	12.8	0.8	19.2%
All Share	45,332	7,333.73	1.1%	0.9%	7.6%	1,380,835,621	367,705,650	82,396	14.4	0.9	100%

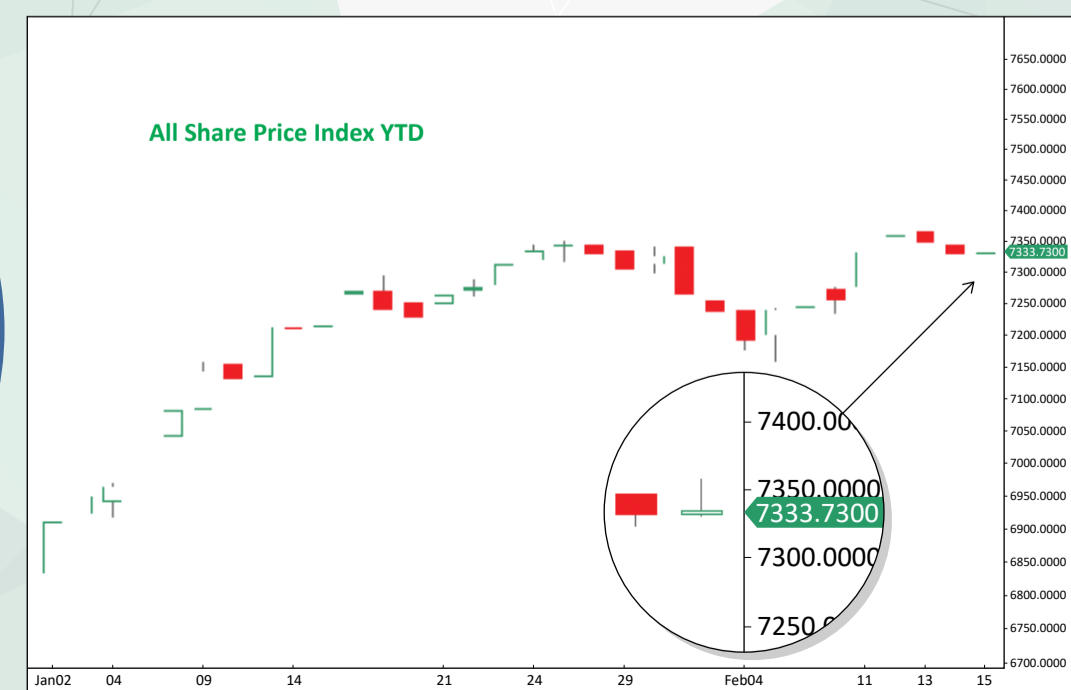
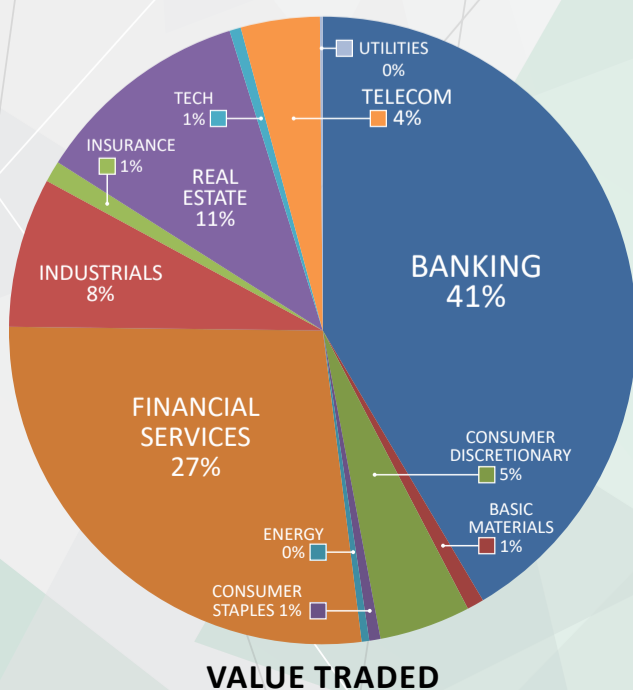
Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	27,337	1,777.88	0.9%	1.2%	7.9%	272,663,519	152,494,673	17,404	17.4	1.2	60.30%
Basic Materials	431	763.98	2.3%	0.6%	2.4%	5,459,664	3,216,229	1,432	10.4	2.3	0.95%
Consumer Discretionary	1,139	1,657.79	7.8%	4.7%	3.4%	53,534,079	17,297,332	7,620	13.5	1.3	2.51%
Consumer Staples	214	704.21	0.0%	-0.1%	6.9%	3,764,328	2,129,410	223	15.0	1.3	0.47%
Energy	225	1,077.84	4.6%	5.4%	13.6%	13,998,647	1,444,946	1,399	10.7	0.8	0.50%
Financial Services	4,863	1,351.90	-0.3%	-0.5%	11.5%	576,256,476	99,894,627	23,468	21.2	0.9	10.73%
Health Care	238	479.42	2.1%	-0.6%	-0.6%	0	0.000	0	12.9	1.0	0.52%
Industrials	3,524	1,018.81	1.3%	3.4%	12.2%	76,192,204	28,370,252	7,721	14.1	0.9	7.77%
Insurance	949	2,320.37	0.5%	-1.7%	1.2%	61,396,071	4,028,617	4,377	8.8	1.1	2.09%
Real Estate	2,737	1,275.22	3.3%	4.2%	5.1%	273,030,875	41,175,493	13,309	18.2	0.6	6.04%
Technology	29	2,102.47	-0.3%	4.3%	263.5%	7,414,094	2,164,804.12	514	NM	2.4	0.06%
Telecommunications	3,464	1,133.58	0.1%	-4.8%	2.6%	33,905,780	14,959,434	4,533	10.3	1.4	7.64%
Utilities	182	434.21	0.6%	-2.9%	-4.6%	3,219,884	529,832	396	12.8	1.4	0.40%

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ENERGYH	200	173.97%	1,455,382	225,126	551
PAPCO	210	135.96%	8,586,532	2,182,016	2,936
WETHAQ	39	52.36%	53,637,642	2,273,538	2,733
TAHSSILAT	38.3	41.85%	7,487,767	324,568	535
GFC	88	37.50%	1,080,453	105,268	367

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
FTI	209	-13.64%	2,803,808	623,183	1,243
UNICAP	104	-7.96%	20,730,175	2,230,833	1,020
AGHC	529	-7.19%	2,703,071	1,472,690	515
AMAR	65	-5.66%	39,094	2,640	24
EKHOLDING	251	-5.64%	907,811	228,662.37	81

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	786	1.03%	136,216,217	107,869,518	8,489
ARZAN	227	1.34%	79,483,304	17,795,049	1,927
KINV	195	-5.34%	56,409,305	11,363,836	2,143
WETHAQ	39	52.36%	53,637,642	2,273,538	2,733
IFA	435	-0.68%	52,706,703	23,342,791	2,400

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	786	1.03%	136,216,217	107,869,518	8,489
IFA	435	-0.68%	52,706,703	23,342,791	2,400
ARZAN	227	1.34%	79,483,304	17,795,049	1,927
NBK	977	0.51%	14,968,669	14,628,192	2,312
KINV	195	-5.34%	56,409,305	11,363,836	2,143



**Market Summary:**

- Premier volume dropped 8% while value increased 17%. Main market volume increased by 23%, while value dropped by 14.
- The Premier index hit resistance and retreated while the Main held its position, showing stability.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7333, with support levels at 7318, 7303, and 7286, and resistance at 7379. The Premier index closed at 8039, support levels at 7997, 7945, and 7916, and resistance at 8044. The Main index closed at 6007, with support levels at 5990, 5970, and 5925, and resistance at 6023.

## Business

# Burgan Bank records operating profit of KD 106 million in 2023

## Bank reports KD 222 million in revenue and KD 43.5 million in net income

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank ("Burgan" or "the Bank") announced its financial results for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023 (FY'23). The Bank capped off a pivotal transformational year with healthy revenue, stable asset levels and a solid capital base.

By year-end, Revenue reached KD 222 million, supported by 8 percent growth in non-interest income to reach KD 87 million, along with a solid net interest income of KD 135 million. The bank's operating profit for the year reached KD 106 million.

The bank generated shareholders' net income of KD 43.5 million in FY'23, with income falling marginally due to the impact of Turkey's hyperinflation-related monetary loss and no income from Bank of Baghdad (BoB), which was sold in Q1'23. On the other hand, Burgan's asset quality continues to be stable with a non-performing loan (NPL) ratio of 2 percent for 2023, with the cost of credit for the year falling to 10bps, an improvement of 40bps compared to last year.

Burgan also continued to implement one of the key facets and top priorities of its new transformational roadmap, with the strategic reallocation of its asset portfolio. After having sold its stake in BoB in Q1'23, the bank subsequently sold 52 percent of its stake in Burgan Bank Turkey (BBT) in Q4'23. As a result of these transactions, the bank's capital levels increased substantially in 2023, while also improving its risk profile. Burgan's CET1 ratio increased by 270bps to 13.5 percent and Tier 1 ratio increased by 290bps to 16.1 percent while the Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) increased by 320bps to 20.0 percent as of FY'23.

Commenting on Burgan's financial results, the Bank's Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah said: "This past year proved to be one of the most pivotal in Burgan Bank's almost fifty-year history, as we set about laying the groundwork for our expansive and progressive long-term strategy, with a new mission and vision in place. We have long-maintained a solid financial base and a responsive business model, but to ensure our sustainable growth in the years to come, it was essential that we adopt a much more aggressive and progressive approach to development." He added: "Our strategy necessitates major investments in our operations, our digital and technology infrastructure, and our human capital. Therefore, it was crucial that we balanced the ambitious growth potential with a prudent risk profile, safeguarding the Bank and its shareholder value."

The Chairman further stressed Burgan's renewed focus on its Kuwait operations, saying: "One of the central tenets of our transformational roadmap is strengthening our core Kuwait business. Our goal is to continue to reallocate assets across our portfolio, reassessing and optimizing certain aspects of our overall operations in line with our core business goals." According to the Bank's Chairman, this includes restructuring Burgan's portfolio, pursuing the sale of non-core assets, investing in new markets



Burgan Bank Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al-Sabah

and seeking growth opportunities in untapped segments.

The Chairman also noted that a clear indication of Burgan's solid financial core and its stable standing is its credit rating, as the Bank continues to be rated in investment grade by all the leading rating agencies with a stable outlook.

The bank continues to be rated well by all the major credit rating agencies. Burgan's Long-term Issuer Default Rating by Fitch is "A" with stable outlook, its Long-term Deposit Rating by Moody's is "Baa1" with stable outlook, and its Issuer Credit Rating by S&P is "BBB+" with stable outlook. Lastly, Capital Intelligence has affirmed the Bank's Long-term Foreign Currency ratings at "A+" with stable outlook.

### Leading with innovation for a seamless, modern banking experience

In 2023, Burgan Bank continued to accelerate its efforts to enhance and develop its banking experience for all segments of customers. According to the Chairman, streamlining and enhancing the banking experience is at the heart of Burgan's new strategy. "When it comes to our banking journey and our solutions, we have adopted an integrated, innovation-driven approach. We seek to interweave our digital transformation with our ESG commitments to deliver the most modern, most inclusive and most personal experience possible to our customers. Digitization undoubtedly remains a central theme, but it goes beyond that. Our aim is to enable and empower our customers to bank better, bank smarter and bank more sustainably," said the Chairman, adding: "Our transformation has only just started, but 2023 set the stage for what we seek to establish as the 'Burgan way of banking.'"

In line with its new vision, Burgan Bank continues to pursue focused development across its entire business and operations. This includes continuing to grow its segment base: serving retail, corporate, and SME clients with a more diversified product portfolio; maintaining a constantly evolving offering of modern financial solutions; and providing an elevated, customized level of service.

In 2023, Burgan Bank launched Tija-rati Pay, a new and unique enhancement to its market-leading small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) platform, Ti-

jarati. The bank's one-of-a-kind offering to local businesses, especially entrepreneurs and SMEs, is the first of its kind in the region, and it integrates multiple aspects of payment collection and monitoring, thereby transforming how merchants manage their finances.

Additionally, in another first for the market, Burgan Bank introduced biodegradable and braille-friendly debit cards to facilitate transactions for visually impaired customers, offering a smart solution that promotes sustainability and inclusivity. In the last quarter of 2023, the bank also launched its new virtual card, an eco-friendly alternative. This innovative product combines the security and utility of traditional bank cards with the convenience and versatility of a digital experience.

The bank also expanded its digital payment offerings in 2023 by launching Google Pay and Apple Pay to allow its customers to make secure contactless payments across Android and iOS platforms. Burgan was also the first bank in the MENA region to implement a Visa solution allowing cardholders to easily enroll in multiple digital wallets and eCommerce merchants within their mobile banking app.

On another front, Burgan Bank continued to expand its segment offerings. In late 2023, and in an effort to elevate the banking experience it offers to its more affluent customer segment, the bank announced the launch of Elite Banking, a new banking segment for distinguished customers with an array of the finest services that unlock a world of luxury. The bank also revamped its existing premier banking to better serve another segment of customers.

Additionally, in 2023, Burgan revamped its Kanz Draw Account, which is already considered one of the strongest in the market, in order to reward its customers and maximize their chances of winning valuable and life-transforming prizes. The remodeled draw account prizes grant customers an exclusive opportunity to win KD 2,000 in the monthly draw and KD 500,000 in the semi-annual draw, while the annual draw awards one lucky winner with the grand prize of KD 1,500,000.

### A continued investment in Kuwaitization

Furthermore, the Chairman noted that one of the most important components of Burgan's new strategy is its investment in people and human capital. He said: "This year, we rolled out a comprehensive restructuring across the entire organization, including a number of strategic appointments and promotions at the leadership level, in order to truly position Burgan as the most progressive and dynamic Bank in Kuwait."

Burgan Bank continued to prioritize investing in its human capital and empowering its top Kuwaiti talents, especially in critical leadership positions. In fact, the Bank remained dedicated to nurturing employee potential and fostering a culture of dynamic development and



Burgan Bank headquarters building.

constant growth, enabling all employees to collectively lead the Bank's ambitious transformation plans.

In 2023, Burgan Bank became the first bank in Kuwait to be officially certified as a 'Great Place to Work', in addition to being named one of the 20 Best Workplaces in Kuwait and being ranked 27th on the 'Large Organizations' list of Best Workplaces in Asia 2023. This serves as the ultimate testament to the bank's people-first commitment and the soundness of its human capital investment and proves Burgan is well positioned as an employer of choice in the Kuwaiti market.

By year-end, the bank had reached an impressive 83 percent Kuwaitization rate among its workforce – surpassing the minimum regulatory requirements by 13 percent – and marking one of the highest rates in Kuwait and across the banking sector. In fact, in 2023, 95 percent of all new hires during the year were Kuwaitis. Additionally, female employees accounted for 48 percent of the workforce at Burgan Bank by year-end, cementing the bank's inclusive and equity-based approach to human capital development.

The bank's impressive human capital philosophy resulted in it receiving the GCC Excellence Award in the Recruitment and Development of Nationals from the Council of Ministers of Labor and Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the GCC States Executive Bureau for the year 2023. The coveted award, which recognizes private institutions' outstanding efforts in employment and localization across the GCC, underscores Burgan's unwavering commitment to the localization of its workforce.

In addition to the dedication to recruiting Kuwait's brightest professionals,

Burgan Bank sought to ensure a path of continued growth and improvement for all employees, with the Bank dedicating more than 46,994 training hours to the development of its Kuwaiti talents.

Burgan's commitment to bespoke development tracks is also reflected in the Bank's dedication to designing the ideal model for professional bank employees through the Ro2ya Program, which is regarded as one of the most forward-looking human capital development programs of its kind in the local market. In 2023, a total of 52 Burgan employees graduated from the Ro2ya program. The bank's development strategy led to it receiving the prestigious Brandon Hall Human Capital Management (HCM) Excellence Silver Award for its outstanding application in the "Learning and Development – Learning in the Flow of Work" category.

Finally, the Chairman concluded his statement by thanking the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) for their support to Burgan and the wider banking sector. He also extended his gratitude to Burgan Bank's Board of Directors, Executive Management, shareholders, customers, and all employees across every department for their dedication, loyalty, and notable contributions to the bank.

It serves to note that the consolidated financials for Burgan include the results of the Group's operations in Kuwait, as well as its share of results from its subsidiaries, namely: Burgan Bank Turkey, Gulf Bank Algeria, and Tunis International Bank. Through this regional reach, Burgan Bank has one of the largest regional branch networks across Kuwait, Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia and a representative office in the United Arab Emirates.

### NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

## US inflation sticky as Japan, UK enter technical recession

**KUWAIT:** Higher than expected inflation data in the US drives significant movements in currencies, equities, and bonds across the board while the consumer price index report showed a higher-than-expected figure for January, at a 0.4 percent month-over-month beating expectations of 0.3 percent. Meanwhile the year-over-year figure was up 3.1 percent, down from 3.4 percent in December, while remaining higher than the 2.9 percent expected figure. The report release was followed by a drop in major equities with the Dow Jones index dropping 1.35 percent and the S&P 500 dropping 1.37 percent. Meanwhile the 10-year bond yield reached 4.3104 percent up from 4.1514 percent. Expectations for rate cuts in 2024 were pushed down, with expectations for a rate cut in March dropping to 8.5 percent, as sticky inflation and a robust labor market is not going to add to Fed confidence that inflation is going to move sustainably towards 2 percent with looser monetary policy.

### US core retail sales

US retail sales in January dropped the most in 10 months coming in at -0.8 percent and the so-called core retail sales which excludes automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services decreased 0.4 percent in January. The plunge more likely reflects seasonal adjustments and freezing weather. In addition, the strong job market and wage growth suggests consumer spending will remain healthy, supporting the overall economy. January's 0.8 percent sales decline was surprising, exceeding forecasts and marking the biggest drop since March 2023. However, economists point out the drop was driven by

factors like a 4.1 percent drop in home improvement and a 1.7 percent plunge in auto sales, exceeded expectations due to larger-than-anticipated seasonal adjustments. The still-solid labor market and rising wages indicate ongoing consumer spending power, which should keep the economy expanding. Despite these weaknesses, signs point towards slowing goods price deflation and sustained economic growth.

Import prices climbed in January, suggesting inflation pressures might persist, but a strong labor market and wage growth indicate consumer spending should remain a pillar of the US economy.

### Unemployment claims

The US labor market showed few signs of cooling last week. New claims for unemployment benefits fell to 212,000, below economists' expectations of 220,000. However, the 4-week average rose to 218,500, and claims for continued benefits reached 1.895 million. Overall, the US job market remains tight, with new claims for unemployment benefits falling below expectations of last week. However, the four-week moving average of claims rose, and claims for continued benefits remained elevated. This suggests that the labor market is not cooling as quickly as some economists had expected.

### US producer price index

Wholesale prices jumped unexpectedly in January, dealing another blow to hopes of easing inflation. The producer price index rose 0.3 percent, exceeding predictions of a 0.1 percent increase and marking the biggest jump since August. Meanwhile, the core PPI which excludes volatile food and energy came in at 0.5 percent, surpassing expectations of 0.1 percent. This hotter-than-expected inflation at the wholesale level suggests potential continued inflation pressures for consumers down the line. The greenback traded sideways over the past week, closing at 104.296.

### UK consumer price index

Inflation in the UK held steady at 4.0 percent in January, lower than expectations of 4.1 percent. Core inflation also remained unchanged at 5.1 percent, while services inflation rose to 6.5 percent, up from

6.4 percent the previous month. The data release came as a relief for the Bank of England, as markets anticipate a rate cut in the near future since inflation seems to be moving towards the 2 percent target. On the contrary, wage growth rose by 6.2 percent annually, double the pace that the BOE views as consistent with getting inflation back at 2 percent.

UK's economy dipped into a technical recession in late 2023, dealing a blow to PM Sunak's growth promises before key elections. GDP figures showed a 0.3 percent contraction in the last quarter compared to a 0.1 percent decline previously. This puts Britain alongside Japan in a technical recession, though it's likely mild. Investors expect interest rate cuts, businesses want government aid, and voters face falling living standards. On the contrary, the Bank of England is expecting signs of an upturn in the economy, with Governor Andrew Bailey stating that forecasts of a "somewhat stronger growth story" is expected ahead. The sterling underperformed over the past week, last seen at 1.2598.

### Asia-Pacific

Japan's economy unexpectedly entered a recession in Q4 2023, shrinking 0.4 percent after a previous 3.3 percent decline, allowing Germany to now become the world's third biggest economy. This technical recession comes with doubts about the central bank's ability to exit its ultra-loose monetary policy. Weak domestic demand, including sluggish consumption and investment, are major concerns. Additionally, rising costs and labor shortages add pressure, while external demand offers some limited support. The Bank of Japan faces a tricky balancing act, considering global trends and potential risks. Opinions vary on the timing of potential policy shifts by the Bank of Japan as some see tight labor markets and corporate spending plans as reasons for optimism, while others warn of lingering risks and the need for caution despite signs of improvement in global growth forecasts. The yen over performed over the week, closing at 150.21.

### China's consumer prices

Consumer prices in China slid deeper into de-

flationary territory last month, suffering the biggest drop since the global recession in 2009. The country's Consumer Price Index dropped by 0.8 percent y/y in January, marking the steepest fall since September 2009 and marks fourth consecutive month of decline. The National Bureau of Statistics attributes the weak figure to the strong demand in January 2023 for the Lunar New Year when CPI rose 2.1 percent. This year the Lunar New Years falls in February, causing distortions to the base. Beijing is currently struggling to revive both consumer and investor confidence as it faces many challenges, including a real estate slump, stock market meltdown and weaker exports. Nevertheless, many analysts believe consumer prices are likely to rise from February onwards. The USD/CNY currency pair traded sideways over the week, last trading at 7.1929.

### Australia

The Reserve Bank of Australia held its policy interest rate steady at 4.35 percent in a widely anticipated decision which followed 13 consecutive rate hikes since 2022. It noted that goods inflation was lower than forecast, but that services inflation remained high, with overall inflation at 4.1 percent. RBA Governor Michelle Bullock held a press conference after the meeting stating that the country was on track to get inflation within the bank's 2 percent to 3 percent target band by 2025, and to reach the midpoint of that range by 2026. Bullock added that while there were "encouraging signs," the RBA remains "vigilant" to upside risks that would make it difficult to achieve its target. In its statement announcing its decision, the RBA said it didn't exclude further rises. "We're not ruling in or out anything," Bullock said. "We are focused on bringing inflation down. We still think the risks are balanced but, as you would know, the further out we go with our forecasts, the more uncertainty there is around them".

The AUD/USD currency pair traded sideways over the week, last trading at 0.6531.

### Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar  
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30800.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2024



Bad Bunny



Jennifer Lopez

## BAD BUNNY, JENNIFER LOPEZ AMONG MET GALA CO-HOSTS

Showbiz A-listers Bad Bunny, Jennifer Lopez, Zendaya and Chris Hemsworth will be the co-hosts of this year's Met Gala, one of the highlights of the New York social calendar, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced. They will join Vogue Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour in hosting the May 6 gala, which sees the entertainment world's brightest stars parade through the museum in extravagant outfits, and marks the opening of the annual exhibit at the Met's Costume Institute.

The evening's dress code will be "The Garden of Time" — which draws inspiration from the 1962 short story of the same name written by English writer J.G. Ballard, and is in essence about the ephemeral nature of beauty. The theme parallels the show "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion," an exhibit that will focus on the most fragile pieces of the Costume Institute's vast collection "visually united by iconography related to nature." It will be on view to the public from May 10

through September 2. The Costume Institute relies on the Met Gala to fund its work, including exhibitions and acquisitions.

The gala was first held in 1948 and for decades was reserved for New York high society. Wintour, the high priestess of fashion, took over the show in the 1990s, transforming the party into a catwalk for the rich and famous. It's also become a social media extravaganza — both the gala and the exhibit are co-sponsored by TikTok. — AFP

## HARRISON FORD'S 'STAR WARS' SCRIPT FETCHES £10,795 AT UK SALE

An original draft "Star Wars" script left in a London apartment by "Han Solo" actor Harrison Ford sold at a UK auction for £10,795 (\$13,600). The script was used when Ford was in London for the filming of the first installment of the epic saga, originally entitled "The Adventures Of Luke Starkiller", at Elstree Studios north of London.

The fourth draft of the screenplay, dating from March 15, 1976, was snapped up by an Austrian collector when it went under the hammer at Excalibur Auctions in Hertfordshire, north of London. Ford left the script at the London flat he rented at the time along with shooting schedules, which sold

for £4,826, and a letter from an agent or friend, which sold for £177.80.

The landlords renting the property found the items and kept them for decades. The incomplete and unbound script contains revisions, and introduces Han Solo on page 56.

The 1977 film catapulted Ford to international fame and he starred in sequels "The Empire Strikes Back" (1980) and "Return Of The Jedi" (1983), before taking on the role again in "The Force Awakens" (2015). Excalibur Auctions' auctioneer Jonathan Torode said this sale saw a new record set for a Star Wars script, "which shows how a personal link to the items is so enticing to Star Wars fans". — AFP



British actress Helen Mirren, recipient of the 37th American Cinematheque Award, poses with US actor Harrison Ford during the 37th Annual American Cinematheque Awards at The Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

## McCartney reunited with his missing 'Beatlemania' bass guitar

Paul McCartney has expressed his gratitude after the Beatles legend was reunited with a missing bass guitar that he owned in the 1960s and used on several Fab Four tracks. McCartney played the original Höfner bass throughout the Beatlemania decade, including at Hamburg's Top Ten Club, at the Cavern Club in Liverpool and on early Beatles recordings at London's Abbey Road studios. It was used to record hits including "Love Me Do", "She Loves You", and "Twist and Shout".

The instrument was then thought to have been lost during the London "Get Back/Let It Be" recording sessions in January 1969, but an investigation last year discovered that it was actually stolen in 1972. The investigation was led by a guitar expert and two journalists, who launched a fresh drive to reunite the guitar with McCartney, vowing to solve what they branded "the greatest mystery in rock and roll".

After receiving hundreds of leads and suggestions, the "Lost Bass Project" pinpointed when and where it was stolen and other information before eventually discovering its most recent whereabouts. "Following the launch of last year's Lost Bass project, Paul's 1961 Hofner 500/1 bass guitar, which was stolen in 1972, has been returned," a post on McCartney's official website stated.

"The guitar has been authenticated by Hofner and Paul is incredibly grateful to all those involved." The "Lost Bass Project" said it was "thrilled". "Despite many telling us that it was lost forever or destroyed, we persisted until it was back where it belonged,"



the search team said on its dedicated website.

### 'Beatlemania history'

McCartney bought the left-handed Hofner 500/1 Violin Bass for around £30 - about £550 (\$585) today - in Hamburg in 1961, during The

Beatles' four-month residency at the Top Ten Club. Its appearance became unique after being overhauled in 1964, including with a complete respray in a three-part dark sunburst polyurethane finish, with McCartney maintaining it as a back-up bass.

The search team say it learned that the guitar had been stolen in 1972 from a van in London's Notting Hill neighborhood and was then given to a local pub landlord. Eventually, it ended up in the attic of a terraced house in the south coast of England, with the homeowner only realizing that the prized instrument was there following last year's publicity.

The original thief "didn't set out to steal the Beatles' bass and he didn't know he was taking such a piece of Beatlemania history," Scott Jones, one of the trio involved in the hunt, told BBC radio. "It was too hot to handle and that's when he decided to give the bass up to his local pub."

Jones' wife Naomi added: "the amazing thing is we thought when we started this search, that it could have been anywhere in the world." She noted there are big Beatles collectors in Japan and the team had tips that it could be in a millionaire's house in Jamaica. "Actually the geography of all of this is just a few miles in and around Notting Hill." — AFP

## Family of Beach Boys' Brian Wilson seeks conservatorship

The family of Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson have asked a court to put him under a conservatorship as he struggles with a neurocognitive issue and requires help with daily life following his wife's recent death, they said. Wilson, regarded by many as a singular musical genius, has "a major neurocognitive disorder," according to court documents filed in Los Angeles this week, media reported. He "is unable to properly provide for his own personal needs for physical health."

Following the death of Wilson's wife Melinda in late January, his family has asked the court for his business manager LeeAnn Hard, as well as his publicist and manager Jean Sievers, to be appointed to manage his affairs, a statement on the musician's website said. "This decision was made to ensure that there will be no extreme changes to the household and Brian and the children living at home will be taken care of and remain in

the home where they are cared for," the family's statement said.

"Brian will be able to enjoy all of his family and friends and continue to work on current projects as well as participate in any activities he chooses." Sievers told The New York Times that Wilson, 81, had been "diagnosed with dementia." Wilson's wife Melinda died at their Beverly Hills home on January 30 at the age of 77, he said on social media.

"Melinda was more than my wife. She was my savior. She gave me the emotional security I needed to have a career. She encouraged me to make the music that was closest to my heart. She was my anchor," he wrote at the time. A towering figure in the world of music, Wilson is responsible almost single-handedly for the California sound pioneered by the Beach Boys in the 1960s.

His signature blend of easy-sounding pop, underlaid by complex harmonies and often deeply poetic lyrics, elevated the band



Former Beach Boy Brian Wilson (left) and his wife Melinda Ledbetter

far beyond its disposable surf-song image. The five-piece lineup melded innovative vocalizing with the driving rhythms of rock and roll, and used unconventional recording techniques to create an instantly recognizable sound.

Wilson's ferocious talent was, at times, overshadowed by mental health challenges that have dogged him throughout his adult



Brian Wilson, leader and co-founder of the rock band the Beach Boys

life. In 1964, he suffered a breakdown while on tour, forcing him to focus on recording, but heralding a period of extreme creativity that produced "Pet Sounds," amongst other albums. Experiments with drugs were coupled with bouts of depression and auditory hallucinations, as well as a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder, according to a biographer. — AFP

## Ancient viruses responsible for our big brains and bodies: Study

Ancient viruses that infected vertebrates hundreds of millions of years ago played a pivotal role in the evolution of our advanced brains and large bodies, a study said. The research, published in the journal Cell, examined the origins of myelin, an insulating layer of fatty tissue that forms around nerves and allows electrical impulses to travel faster.

According to the authors, a gene sequence acquired from retroviruses — viruses that invade their host's DNA — is crucial for myelin production, and that code is now found in modern mammals, amphibians and fish. "The thing I find the most remarkable is that all of the diversity of modern vertebrates that we know of, and the size they've achieved: elephants, giraffes, anacondas, bullfrogs, condors wouldn't have happened," senior author and neuroscientist Robin Franklin of Altos Labs-Cambridge Institute of Science told AFP.

A team led by Tanay Ghosh, a computational biologist and geneticist in Franklin's lab, trawled through genome databases to try to discover the genetics that were likely associated with the cells that produce myelin.

Specifically, he was interested in exploring mysterious "noncoding regions" of the genome that have no obvious function and were once dismissed as junk, but are now recognized as having evolutionary importance. Ghosh's search landed upon a particular sequence derived from an endogenous retrovirus, long lurking in our genes, which the team dubbed "RetroMyelin." To test their finding, researchers carried out experiments in which they knocked down the RetroMyelin sequence in rat cells, and found they no longer produced a basic protein required for myelin formation.

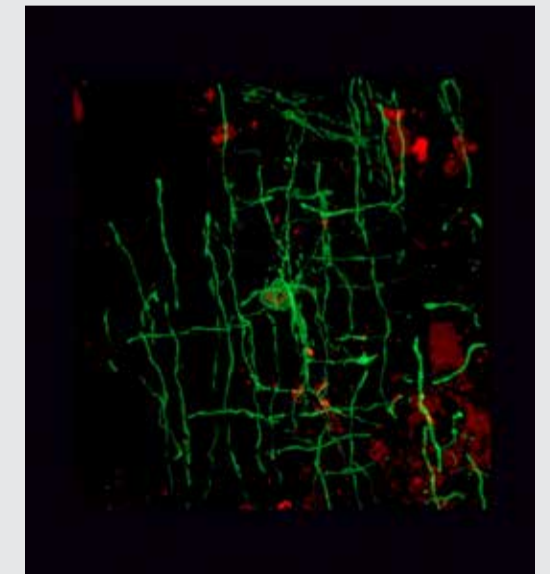
### Faster reactions, bigger bodies

Next, they searched for RetroMyelin-like sequences in the genomes of other species, finding similar code in jawed vertebrates — fellow mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians — but not in jawless vertebrates or invertebrates. This led them to believe the sequence appeared in the tree of life around the same time as jaws, which first evolved around 360 million years ago in the Devonian period, called the Age of Fishes.

"There's always been an evolutionary pressure to make nerve fibers conduct electrical impulses quicker," said Franklin. "If they do that quicker, then you can act quicker," he added, which is useful for both predators trying to catch things, and prey trying to flee.

Myelin enables rapid impulse conduction without widening the diameter of nerve cells, allowing them to be packed closer together. It also provides structural support, meaning nerves can grow longer, allowing for longer limbs.

In myelin's absence, invertebrates have found other ways to transmit signals faster — giant squids for example have evolved wider nerve cells. Finally, the team wanted to learn whether



This handout picture courtesy of the Altos Labs-Cambridge Institute of Science and obtained shows an oligodendrocyte, a type of cell responsible for myelin in the central nervous system, seen under a confocal microscope. — AFP

the retroviral infection happened once, to a single ancestor species, or whether it happened more than once. They used computational methods to analyze the RetroMyelin sequences of 22 jawed vertebrate species, finding the sequences were more similar within than between species, which suggested multiple waves of infection.

### More discoveries await?

"One tends to think of viruses as pathogens, or disease causing agents," said Franklin. But the reality is more complicated, he said: at various points in history retroviruses have entered genomes and integrated themselves into species' reproductive cells, allowing them to be passed down to future generations.

One of the most well known examples is the placenta — one of the defining characteristics of most mammals — which we acquired from a pathogen embedded in our genome in the deep past — and there probably many more discoveries waiting to be made, said Ghosh. Brad Zuchero, a neuroscientist at Stanford University not affiliated with the research, said it "fill(s) in a major piece of the puzzle about how myelin came to be during evolution," calling the paper "exciting and insightful." — AFP

# LONDON FASHION WEEK SHOW AT BRITISH MUSEUM IRKS GREECE



Models present creations by Designer Erdem Moralioglu.

The Greek Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, expressed her anger late on Saturday after a London Fashion week show took place in front of the Parthenon Marbles at the British Museum. Designer Erdem Moralioglu chose the impressive setting of the Athens Parthenon sculptures show-room at the British Museum to present the autumn winter 2024 collection of his eponymous brand Erdem, inspired by Greek singer Maria Callas and her interpretation of the opera Medea in 1953.

"By organizing a fashion show in the halls where the Parthenon Sculptures are exhibited, the British Museum, once again, proves its zero respect for the masterpieces of Pheidias," Mendoni said in a statement.

"The directors of the British Museum trivialize and insult not only the monument but also the universal values that it transmits. The conditions of display and storage of the sculptures, at the Duveen Gallery, are constantly deteriorating. It is time for the stolen and abused sculptural masterpieces to shine in the Attic light," she added. The sculptures were taken from the Parthenon temple at the Acropolis in Greece in the early 19th century by British diplomat Thomas Bruce, the earl of Elgin. Athens maintains the marbles, which

are a major draw for visitors at London's British Museum, were stolen, while the UK claims they were obtained legally. The 1963 British Museum Act prohibits the removal of objects from the institution's collection.

But officials at the museum, which is under pressure to repatriate other foreign antiquities, have not ruled out a possible loan deal. Late November, a diplomatic spat raised eyebrows when Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis expressed his "displeasure" over UK counterpart Rishi Sunak's last minute cancellation of a bilateral meeting set to discuss their long-running dispute over the Parthenon Marbles.

At issue for London was the Greek leader's comments in a BBC interview a day before the meeting about ownership of the 2,500-year-old marbles. Sunak was allegedly angry about Mitsotakis's comments that having some of the marbles in London and others in Athens was like cutting the Mona Lisa in half. — AFP



## UK MODELING AGENCY BREAKS CATWALK TABOOS

Smashing the fashion world's rigid conventions, UK modeling agency Zebedee has been filling catwalks with a diverse array of models for seven years. On the catwalks at London Fashion Week, it is now common to see models from all ethnic backgrounds, with minorities now making up around half of shows, compared to 14 percent just 10 years ago, according to a report published in January.

Zebedee also works to find greater exposure for models with visible disabilities or who are transgender. "It's still incredibly rare to see any-

have a disability", with catwalk representation even worse, pointed out Winson.

### Relentless campaign

Two Zebedee models will tread the catwalk at London Fashion Week: Vic, a young woman in a wheelchair who will show for Gasanova, and Oscar, a transgender model with autism, who will display for Helen Kirkum. It is reward for Winson's years of relentless campaigning to convince designers and brands of the advantages of employing a diverse roster of models.

"The first thing is, of course, it's morally the right thing to do, everybody should be awarded the same equality of opportunity," she explained. "Secondly, you can develop some amazing creative campaigns. We know that our models can do the job."

"And then the third reason, and which is what interests most customers, is the financial aspect," because people with disabilities represent an important market, she added. For Zebedee, success really began in 2020 when Gucci chose one of their models, Ellie Goldstein, who has Down syndrome.

Goldstein has since graced the cover of British Vogue, and Zebedee has also gone from strength to strength, representing more than a thousand models in Europe, the United States and Australia.

### 'Genuine change happening'

Junior B, a Briton who uses the non-binary pronouns they/them, started working with the agency in 2020. Suffering from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, Junior B often uses a wheelchair. "Before modeling, I didn't think any job was possible for anyone in my position," Junior B told AFP. "I think there is definitely some genuine change happening," particularly among small businesses "or those where younger people are in charge," added the model.

"Some brands have really got the message". Despite the wins, Winson complained that progress is still too slow. "Everybody knows who we are, everybody knows we exist. They can book disabled models if they want to... but for some reason, it's not happening," she complained. "So I am getting to the point where somehow brands need to be held to account," she added. — AFP



Albino model Nan M

body with a disability feature. London, Paris, Milan, New York, it's still very, very rare," Zebedee's co-founder Laura Winson told AFP. A former social worker who often worked with disabled people, Winson founded the agency in 2017 with her sister-in-law Zoe Proctor, a former model.

"We launched it because we felt that there was a lack of representation and fashion and media," she explained. Zebedee works like any other agency, except that all of its models have a "visible difference". Some are in wheelchairs, have atrophy of limbs or albinism, while others have Down syndrome. Around 15 percent of the world's population, or one billion people, live with some form of disability, according to UN figures. "Yet figures show that maybe around one percent of people featured in advertising



Hassan Al-Sarraf - Work in progress



## Hassan Al-Sarraf, Four Seasons Hotel tie up to showcase limited edition of 'Prive'

Hassan Al-Sarraf, the master perfumer and creative director known for his passion for perfumery and exquisite scents, has recently tied up with The Four Seasons Hotel to showcase the latest masterpiece exclusively, 'Prive,' launched to coincide with the romantic allure of Valentine's Day, 'Prive' promises to elevate the season's essence with its enchanting fragrance, available throughout February.

Setting a new standard of luxury and exclusivity, Hassan Al-Sarraf has meticulously crafted a limited edition of 'Prive,' which is reserved for a discerning connoisseur seeking an unparalleled experience. This singular creation embodies sophistication and refinement, offering collectors a rare opportunity to possess a unique scent.

Reflecting on the significance of the launch and collaboration, Hassan Al-Sarraf expressed his delight, stating, "This moment marks a significant milestone for me as a perfumer to build on all previous successes which have flourished through dedication and innovation over the years. 'Prive' epitomizes the essence of my distinguished fragrance collection, garnering praise from discerning clients. I am confident that 'Prive' will soon become a coveted addition to the fragrance rep-

ertoire of individuals seeking elegance, style, and allure."

In working with The Four Seasons Hotel - Burj Al Shaya as a partner for the fragrance launch, Hassan Al-Sarraf found a perfect partner synonymous with luxury and sophistication. "We are thrilled to collaborate with The Four Seasons Hotel, a beacon of refinement and luxury. This partnership reflects our commitment to offering unparalleled experiences to luxury seekers," remarked Al-Sarraf, hinting at future collaborations with the esteemed establishment.

Beyond its availability at The Four Seasons Hotel, 'Prive' offers an immersive sensory journey within the romantic ambiance of the hotel's private cabanas. Enriched by aromachology and aromatherapy, this sensory experience engages all the senses, inviting patrons to indulge in the essence of love.

"As we launch 'Prive' with The Four Seasons, we are doing more than introducing a fragrance; we are pioneering a new way to experience stories through scent. For those inspired to craft unforgettable moments, join us. Together, we will set trends and build legacies. Let's make history," concluded Al-Sarraf.

# Family ties and city life stitch style into London Fashion Week



Models present creations by Irish designer Robyn Lynch during a catwalk presentation for her Autumn/Winter 2024 collection during London Fashion Week in London.

Irish designer Robyn Lynch

Family nostalgia, cultural roots and the frenetic pace of London life marked the second day of the city's Fashion Week on Saturday as up-and-coming designers showed off their styles for the season ahead. Some 60 designers, ranging from rising talents to renowned brands like Burberry, are exhibiting their new designs over five days, hoping to draw the interest of buyers and fashion influencers. The

40th anniversary edition of the event is also introducing greater diversity and inclusivity in terms of body shapes, ages, or skin colors of the models, as well as in the designers' collections.

#### Old photographs

In her show Saturday, Dublin-born menswear designer Robyn Lynch drew inspiration from her sister's career as a Gaelic dancer, using old photographs of high kicks, spangled costumes and passionate spectators for inspiration. "I vividly remember spending all these weekends in sports halls at competitions seeing all the glitz and drama that happened on and off stage," said the designer, who used Celtic knots and monograms in her designs.

Lynch's designs featured diamante encrusted jorts (long shorts), a long line hoodies with elastic toggle belt and laser etched jeans with a color palette of hickory brown, screen blue, matte black and oat milk white.

#### Life in the metropolis

Earlier, models paraded in London's famous red double-decker buses in outfits inspired by traditional dance. British designer Ricky Wesley Harriott kicked off with his brand SRVC with a collection named "Human Resource", inspired by modern "professional women's outfits".

The designer had his models, all perched on vertiginous heels, parade on the iconic red double-decker buses of London to "celebrate life in the metropolis". The show featured rigid and structured jackets with pronounced shoulders, in dark colors with flashy accessories, from XXL silver hoop earrings to rings covering every finger.

#### Fairy tales

Designer Priya Ahluwalia, who draws inspiration from her Indian-Nigerian heritage, was cheered after her show, which featured male and female models in earthy reds, oranges and blues parading to thumping house music. Indian and West African fairy tales that she grew up with like "The Prince Who Wanted The Moon", "The Magic Fiddle" and "How The Leopard Got His Spots", were used in her designs for the season, she told British Vogue. "I was thinking about how stories have affected my life—why do we like the stories we like, and how do they get passed on," she said.

Ahluwalia said the corset-like detailing in the knitwear of her designs was inspired

by Netflix's "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story", which she watched while conducting research for her collection. The designer, who launched her brand Ahluwalia in 2018, works with limited quantities of fabrics, often upcycling and using patchwork techniques to limit waste. LFW 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 difficult economic situation has even 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 challenging times," LFW's director Caroline Rush told AFP. — AFP



London-based fashion brand SRVC



Irish designer Robyn Lynch



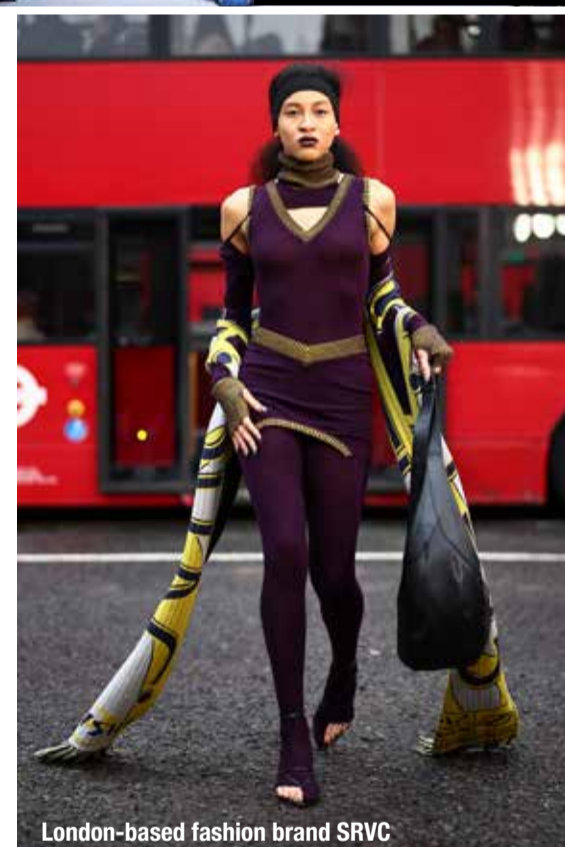
London-based fashion brand SRVC



London-based fashion brand SRVC



Irish designer Robyn Lynch



London-based fashion brand SRVC



Irish designer Robyn Lynch



Models present creations by London-based fashion brand SRVC during the catwalk presentation for their Autumn/Winter 2024 collection during London Fashion Week in London.— AFP photos

## Sports

# India crush England with record win to lead Test series

## We've got to win the next two to win the series: Stokes

**RAJKOT:** Yashasvi Jaiswal hit an unbeaten double century to help India to its biggest-ever win Sunday, crushing England by 434 runs in the third Test to take a 2-1 lead in the series. Chasing 557 for victory, England's batting fell like a pack of cards with the loss of eight wickets in the final session to be dismissed for 122 on day four in Rajkot.

"In Test cricket... when you're playing well you have to make it big," Jaiswal told broadcasters after the stunning win. "Test cricket is hard, but I thought that when I'm in there, I need to give my 100 percent," he said. Ravindra Jadeja got Mark Wood out for 33 as the final wicket — and his fifth — and he kissed the pitch as India registered their greatest win in terms of runs.

England lost their openers, including first-innings centurion Ben Duckett run out on four, before tea and Jadeja then rattled the middle-order with his left-arm spin. Jonny Bairstow and Joe Root extended their poor run in the five-match series, out for four and seven respectively. Skipper Ben Stokes attempted to resist the Indian bowling but fell lbw to left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav for 15 in his 100th Test. "We're 2-1 down in the series but still have two games left," Stokes said. "We leave this game behind — know we've got to win the next two to win the series."

### 'Bat till the end'

The left-handed Jaiswal stood out with his 214 off 236 balls to flay the opposition attack before

India declared their second innings on 430-4. The opener returned to bat in the morning session after he retired hurt on 104 late on day three due to back pain. "Today when I came, I wanted to make sure that I take the game forward and bat till the end," Jaiswal said.

He raised his second double ton in consecutive matches with a single off Root and jumped for joy. Jaiswal hit a record-equaling 12 sixes in his knock, which included three straight hits over the fence off James Anderson — a first for the veteran quick who has 696 wickets in 185 Tests.

Jaiswal now stands level with former Pakistan great Wasim Akram, who also hit 12 sixes in an innings against Zimbabwe in 1996. He put on marathon stands that included an unbeaten 172-run partnership with debutant Sarfaraz Khan, who made 68 for his second half-century of the match.

The 22-year-old Jaiswal, who hit a match-winning 209 in the second Test, remains the leading batsman in the series with 545 runs. Indian bowlers set up victory after they bowled England out for 319 in the first innings, after the tourists' batting collapsed from 299-5 despite the absence of star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Saturday.

Ashwin, who left the Test midway on day two due to a family emergency hours after taking his 500th Test wicket, returned to the field and got his 501st wicket on the fourth day. Off-spinner Ashwin, 37, became only the ninth bowler in Test history and the second Indian after fellow spinner Anil



**RAJKOT:** India's Ravindra Jadeja (L) celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Joe Root (C) during the fourth day of the third Test cricket match between India and England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot on February 18, 2024. — AFP

Kumble (619) to reach 500 wickets.

Skipper Rohit Sharma's 131 and 112 by Jadeja steered India to 445 in the first innings after they

elect to bat. England won the opener by 28 runs but India bounced back in the second match. The fourth Test starts on Friday in Ranchi. — AFP



Mike Procter

## South Africa cricket legend Procter dies at 77

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa cricket legend and former national coach Mike Procter died on Saturday at the age of 77, his wife told AFP. "He suffered a complication during surgery, became unconscious and never woke up," Maryna Procter said.

Procter was an outstanding all-rounder who became South Africa's first coach in the post-isolation era and had a controversial stint as an International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee. On Monday his family revealed that he had suffered a "cardiac incident" while recovering in a hospital intensive care unit following routine surgery.

Procter was being treated in a hospital near his hometown, the coastal city of Durban. Procter's international playing career with South Africa was cut short in 1970 when his country was banished from world cricket because of its apartheid government.

However, he refused to feel bitter over being deprived of a lengthy Test career. "Yes, I lost a Test career. But what is a Test career compared to the suffering of 40 million people?" he famously said.

### 'Unjust system'

"Lots of people lost a great deal more in those years, and if by missing out on a Test career we played a part in changing an unjust system, then that is fine by me." Before the ban, South Africa won six of the seven Tests in which he played, all against Australia.

Procter was renowned primarily as a fearsome fast bowler, taking 41 wickets at an average of 15.02 runs in his seven Tests. But he was also a flamboyant batsman, and equalled a world batting record when he hit six first-class centuries in successive innings.

Post-democracy, South Africa returned to international cricket, Procter became coach of the international side and led them to the semi-finals of the 1992 World Cup. Procter played first-class cricket for 16 years, including 14 seasons with English county Gloucestershire, five of them as captain, where he achieved legendary status.

David Graveney, a former Gloucestershire teammate of Procter, said the South African "was a fantastic player and quite rightly regarded as one of the best all-rounders that has ever represented Gloucestershire".

He added: "I don't think people realize that when Mike played he was playing through great pain in his knee, but that didn't stop him from performing at the level he did. He was just one of the best I ever played with."

"The phrase 'Procter'shire' was very apt for Mike. He put in the biggest performances in the biggest games." In South Africa, Procter played most of his cricket for Natal, the province where he was born. His six successive centuries were made for the then Rhodesia between 1970 and 1971, culminating in a career-best 254 against Western Province.

He scored 21,082 runs in first-class cricket at an average of 36.92, hitting 47 centuries, and took 1,357 wickets at an average of 19.07 runs. Journalist Pat Murphy who worked alongside Procter hailed "the superb all-rounder". — AFP

## Jericho blank Jaffa in Palestinian mini goal championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The Palestinian Children "Mini Goal" Championship concluded Saturday at the Social Culture Society in Maidan Hawally, which was organized by the Mini Goal Committee of Kuwait Olympic Committee in cooperation with the Conference for Palestinians Abroad, and continued for four days with the participation of 16 teams for adults and eight for children, representing Kuwaiti clubs and academies that were named after Palestinian cities.

In the children's category from 11 to 13 years, Beit Lahya defeated Shajaeia 1-0 and won the title while in the adults' category Jericho defeated Jaffa 2-0 in a highly competitive and exciting match.

Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sport Hamid Al-Hazeem, Chairman of Kuwait Mini Goal Committee Hassan Al-Khawaja, Head of the Coordination Committee Conference for Palestinians Abroad Nader Abu Hanaina, Chairman of Social Culture Society Ahmad Dashti and other dignitaries awarded the winners.

Several participants were happy to be involved in such an event and called for organizing more championships as it is an ideal opportunity to promote this new sport in Kuwait and the ease of teaching juniors to practice it.

Hassan Al-Khawaja thanked all participants and businesses that sponsored the championship and

## Al-Roudhan wins at showjumping championship

**KUWAIT:** National team and Hawally club rider Abdallah Azzam Al-Roudhan won the title of the International Showjumping Championship which concluded Saturday at the Marina Beach.

Al-Roudhan succeeded in qualifying for the differentiation round of the grand prize at the height of 145 cm without faults, along with riders Ghazi Al-Jraiwi and Abdallah Al-Awadhi.

Al-Roudhan ended in first place in 40:11 seconds with three fault points, and he was followed by rider Ghazi Al-Jraiwi in second place while Abdallah Al-Awadhi was able to win third and fourth places as he competed in two categories.

Representative of the International Equestrian Federation, international Judge Kareem Badarou said "the championship is unique and the organizers succeeded in bringing it out as required and that Kuwait is able to continue with this beautiful sport".

He said Kuwait succeeded in organizing an international tournament as all involved lauded the orga-

## Cantlay leads by two heading into final round at Riviera

**LOS ANGELES:** Patrick Cantlay faltered late on the way to a one-under-par 70 on Saturday that saw his lead cut to two strokes heading into the final round of the Genesis Invitational at The Riviera Country Club.

World number seven Cantlay, seeking a ninth US PGA Tour title and his first since 2022, started the day with a five-shot lead. He was four up with five to play, but after a bogey at the par-five 17th he finished with a 54-hole total of 199 — just two clear of his good friend Xander Schauffele and Will Zalatoris.

Schauffele and Zalatoris both carded six-under-par 65s and were a stroke in front of American Luke List, who signed for a 68. With tournament host Ti-



**KUWAIT:** The winners of the men and children categories pose with their trophies with the officials.

support to the Palestinian children, adding that part of the revenue was allocated for the innocent children of Gaza who are under the most cruel aggression humanity has ever experienced.

He said the committee is keen on organizing such tournaments as they promote the culture of physical activity and makes sport an indivisible part of the daily routine of the society.

The Mini Goal game was officially recognized by Kuwait Olympic Committee in 2020 and played by 4 players in each side without a goalkeeper. The playground is 30 meters long and 15 meters wide, while the goal is one meter long and one meter high. It is played in two halves 10 minutes each.



Children posing with the Palestinian flag.



**KUWAIT:** The winners of the International Show Jumping Championship pose with their medals at the Marina Beach.

nization as well as the good results of Kuwaiti riders who were the top five winners.

Abdallah Al-Roudhan was happy with the win following a very tough competition, and dedicated the achievement to all supporters of the show jumping sport.

ger Woods sidelined by flu — which saw him withdraw from his first official tour event in more than 10 months midway through Friday's second round — the final pairing of friends and frequent match play partners Cantlay and Schauffele will be in the spotlight on Sunday.

"I played solid golf today," Cantlay said. "I didn't make any long putts or anything, didn't really give myself too many chances, but all in all a solid day and in good position for tomorrow." Cantlay's day got off to a promising start with an eight-foot birdie putt at the par-five first. He bogeyed the third, but birdies at the 11th and 13th had his lead at four strokes before he found a fairway bunker off the tee at 17.

His third shot was short of the green, a poor chip left him 14 feet and he two-putted for a bogey on the second-easiest hole on the course. Meanwhile, Schauffele, the world number five who is chasing an eighth tour win, launched his second straight bogey-free round with a 13-foot eagle at the par-five first. — AFP

## Kriechmayr wins shortened super-G

**KVITFJELL:** Vincent Kriechmayr won Sunday's super-G at Kvitfjell in Norway as Swiss star Marco Odermatt continued his march towards another crystal globe by tying for third. Kriechmayr, a 32-year-old Austrian, finished 0.17sec ahead of Canadian Jeffrey Read, who claimed his first World Cup podium place.

Odermatt and Italian Dominik Paris were another 0.02sec back in third. The competition was run from a significantly lower start due to poor visibility at the top of the course and the risk of ice forming on the skiers' masks.

"It was a short super-G. The feeling on the snow is pretty smooth, not that bumpy, no ice," Kriechmayr said at the finish line. "I skied pretty perfect. Just the left turn after the first split was not amazing but good enough to win."

Odermatt could have clinched the super-G crystal globe if he finished in the top two will have to wait more than a month for the next race. He still holds an 81-point lead over the day's winner. "I am very happy with a podium here," he said. "It is another step in the right direction." "I thought it was two small mistakes," he said. "So the first thought at the finish was 'ah, not again'."

Kriechmayr could take the title if he wins at the World Cup finals which are in Saalbach in Austria from March 16 to 24. The Super-G there is on March 22. "I have no hope for this," said the Austrian. "Odermatt is impressive and 80 points is impossible against Odermatt."

"I want to have fun and just try to push on the limit." The Swiss skier, who has already racked up ten victories this winter, mainly in the giant slalom where he is unbeaten for almost a year, has continued to cruise towards his third overall crystal globe.

He has 1,602 total points, more than twice as many as his nearest challenger Cyprien Sarrazin on 684. The Frenchman missed the weekend after suffering an injury in training. Read, the son of former skier Ken Read, had gained his best World Cup downhill result when he finished sixth on Saturday. "It's tough to be close," he said. "But for me it's the first time even close to the lead, so I'm stoked." — AFP

## Sports

# Rodri salvages point but Man City stumble in Premier League title race

## City move four points behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal

**MANCHESTER:** Rodri's late equalizer extended Manchester City's year-long unbeaten record at home but a 1-1 draw against Chelsea on Saturday handed Liverpool and Arsenal a huge boost in the Premier League title race.

Raheem Sterling gave Chelsea a first-half lead on his return to the Etihad and City were headed to a first defeat on home soil for 34 games until Rodri's deflected effort seven minutes from time. City move four points behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but have a game in hand on both their title rivals.

A 3-1 Champions League win in Copenhagen in midweek was City's 11th consecutive victory in all competitions as they appeared well set to defend the treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup they won last season. But Chelsea exposed chinks in the champions' armour. City have kept just seven clean sheets in 24 Premier League games this season.

"I think we weren't great in the first half. We conceded another easy goal. I think we have to defend better," said Rodri. "We knew about their counter-attacks and fast players, but we have to defend the counter-attack better. From there, it's always more difficult to come back." Mauricio Pochettino's men have often saved their best performances for the biggest challenges during a difficult season for the Blues.

Chelsea took points off all three title contenders at home earlier in the season and finally produced a counter-attacking display on the road that offers Pochettino hope ahead of next weekend's League Cup final against Liverpool.

"I feel like the lads are confident," said Chelsea

midfielder Conor Gallagher. "We have had some good performances, and then today against a top team. I feel like we are going into the next game with a lot of confidence and we are excited for it."

### Haaland's night to forget

Chelsea should have led much earlier in the first half as Nicolas Jackson failed to beat Ederson when clean through after a slick counter-attack cut City wide open. Pep Guardiola's men did not learn their lesson as another ex-City man Cole Palmer sent Jackson in behind and he picked out Sterling, who coolly cut inside Kyle Walker and fired into the far corner on 42 minutes. Sterling's celebrations were muted, but the goal would have been greeted with glee in Merseyside and north London.

Erling Haaland had headed over City's only clear chance of the opening 45 minutes, but they flew out of the blocks after the break. Kevin De Bruyne's dipping free-kick landed on the roof of the net before Sterling was exceptionally lucky to avoid conceding a penalty for bringing down Walker inside the area.

However, as City chased an equalizer they became even easier to pick off on the counter. Ederson produced a stunning save to deny Sterling his second and Ruben Dias needed to head Ben Chilwell's follow-up effort off the line.

Haaland's pace and power finally took him clear of the Chelsea defence 25 minutes from time, but Djordje Petrovic was equal to his deflected effort at the near post. The Norwegian had nine shots on goal, but his night to forget was then rounded off when he left the 53,000 capacity crowd aghast as he headed well off target with the goal gaping from a perfect-



**MANCHESTER:** Chelsea's Argentinian midfielder #08 Enzo Fernandez (L) and Chelsea's Senegalese striker #15 Nicolas Jackson fight for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Chelsea at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

ly-weighted De Bruyne cross.

City did at least salvage a point as Rodri maintained his own personal year-long unbeaten record. The last time the Spaniard was on the losing side in a City shirt was February 5, 2022. The man who scored

the winner in last season's Champions League final needed the aid of a deflection as his driven effort flew into the top corner off Trevoh Chalobah. An unexpected point lifts Chelsea back into the top half of the table and within six points of the top six. — AFP

## Juve hand Inter nine-point lead as Napoli crisis grows

**MILAN:** Juventus trail Serie A leaders Inter Milan by nine points after a 2-2 at relegation-threatened Verona, while a 1-1 draw with Genoa left champions Napoli deep in crisis.

Massimiliano Allegri's side had their league title hopes further damaged following an entertaining encounter in which Adrien Rabiot saved Juve from losing a third consecutive match.

France midfielder Rabiot rifled home second-placed Juve's leveller nine minutes after the break, moments after Tijjani Noslin had put hosts Verona ahead for the second time in the match.

Michael Folunsho, whose touch led to Noslin's goal, had smashed Marco Baroni's team into the lead early on with a stunning volley only for Dusan Vlahovic to equalize from the penalty spot in the 28th minute. "We should have done more, we've dropped points along the way recently. But we started playing too late and it's those details which make the difference," said Rabiot.

"We need to get back on track, regain trust in ourselves and starting winning again." The draw didn't do a huge amount for Verona as they stay just inside the relegation zone, level on points with 17th-placed Sassuolo who were beaten 3-0 by Atalanta but have a game in hand.

However it was a strong performance for a club that let a raft of players go in January, and it also extended Juve's winless run to four matches. That poor form means that Juve are not only watching Inter charge off into the distance, they are now also looking over their shoulders at AC Milan. A win at Monza on Sunday night would allow Milan, two points behind Juve in third, to snatch second spot from their rivals. "We need to be realistic," added Rabiot. "Inter are going their own way and we need to fight to keep hold of second place."

### Napoli booed off

Napoli's draw was another heavy blow for the



**VERONA:** Juventus Polish forward #14 Arkadiusz Milik (C) fights for the ball with Hellas Verona's French defender #6 Reda Belahyane (R) during the Italian Serie A football match between Hellas Verona and Juventus at the Marcantonio Bentegodi stadium in Verona. — AFP

ailing Serie A champions ahead of the visit of Barcelona in the Champions League on Wednesday. Cyril Ngongue 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 Inter in ninth spot meaning their chances of a place in next season's revamped Champions League are increasingly slim. Nine points separate Napoli from fourth-placed Atalanta who ensured that they will stay in the top four for at least another week with a fifth win in as many games.

"The players do what they can but things just don't go our way," said Napoli coach Walter Mazzarri, whose position is under serious threat after collecting just 15 points from 12 matches since taking over in November. "The few errors we make we

always have to correct because we end up conceding. We try everything but we struggle to score goals. It's hard to explain." Ngongue's low finish meant Napoli avoided a ninth defeat in all competitions since Mazzarri replaced Rudi Garcia, but being booed off the pitch was awful preparation for their last 16 tie with Barca.

Neither Napoli nor Barca are having stellar seasons but it would have been impossible to imagine how far Napoli would fall so soon after last season's historic third league title. Mazzarri said that he "hopes" to have star striker Victor Osimhen back for Wednesday's first leg in Naples after sitting out Saturday's defeat. But Napoli's goal problems run deeper than Osimhen having been at the Africa Cup of Nations with Nigeria and they created very little against 12th-placed Genoa, making a result against Barca look like a huge task. — AFP

## Mbappe scores as sub to help PSG see off Nantes

**PARIS:** Kylian Mbappe came off the bench and scored a penalty as Paris Saint-Germain beat Nantes 2-0 on Saturday after the France captain informed the club this week he plans to leave at the end of the season. Lucas Hernandez's deflected strike broke the deadlock on the hour at the Stade de la Beaujoire before Mbappe made sure of the points after he was fouled inside the area. PSG stretched their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 14 points with a record-extending 12th title surely now a formality after Nice suffered a fifth loss in nine games Friday.

The main talking point in Paris though will be the future of Mbappe, who is seemingly entering the final months of a seven-year stint with the French champions. The 25-year-old has told club officials he intends to depart on a free transfer when his contract expires, and has been widely tipped to move to Real Madrid. It is understood that Mbappe's exit will be formally announced in a few months' time. "It's all going very well with Mbappe, there's no problem," PSG coach Luis Enrique told Canal Plus after the game. PSG toiled for an hour without the league's top scorer as Mbappe, who struck in the 2-0 win over Real Sociedad in the Champions League in midweek, started on the bench in Nantes.

"It's very easy yet difficult to explain," Luis Enrique said of the decision to leave Mbappe out of the lineup. "After our Champions League match two days ago I thought we needed energy to play well and that it was necessary to give minutes to those who didn't play (on Wednesday). "We have ambitious goals and we need all the players." Nantes had the clearer chances in the first half. Mostafa Mohamed denied by Gianluigi Donnarumma's foot and Nicolas Cozza thwarted by a desperate Marquinhos block. Nicolas Pallois' volley was ruled out for offside just before the break, with his dipping long-range drive tipped over by Donnarumma early in the second half. PSG benefited from a considerable degree of good fortune to go in front as Hernandez's shot hit Moussa Sissoko and left Nantes goalkeeper Remy Descamps stranded. — AFP

## Lewandowski double snatches tame Barca win at Celta

**VIGO:** Robert Lewandowski's brace snatched champions Barcelona a 2-1 win over lowly Celta Vigo to leave them third in La Liga, trailing leaders Real Madrid by seven points. Xavi Hernandez's side needed a stoppage-time penalty converted by Lewandowski at the second attempt to find a way past a Celta Vigo side battling relegation, down in 17th place.

Lewandowski slammed the visitors ahead at Balaídos before half-time but Iago Aspas levelled for Rafa Benitez's Celta early in the second half. Barcelona lamely struggled to find a way through before being gifted a late spot-kick for a clumsy foul on Lamine Yamal, which Lewandowski dispatched for his 12th goal of the season.

Lewandowski's first penalty attempt was saved by Vicente Guaita but as the goalkeeper was off his line, the striker was given another chance and he converted. "On the second penalty I scored and that's the important thing," Lewandowski told DAZN.

"In attack we didn't put much together, we have to play (well) for more than 45 minutes. I think that's the main objective for the future, to play at the same level for 90 minutes." The Catalans are unbeaten in four matches since Xavi said he would depart at the end of the season and face Napoli on Wednesday in the Champions League last 16, with Europe the club's last realistic chance of silverware this season.

"I felt we played well until we got into the final third ... we lacked the final ball, we were well positioned, they created little against us," Xavi told



**VIGO:** Barcelona's Polish forward #09 Robert Lewandowski challenges Celta Vigo's Spanish goalkeeper #25 Vicente Guaita during the Spanish league football match between RC Celta de Vigo and FC Barcelona at the Balaídos stadium in Vigo. — AFP

DAZN. "I think the team had effort, attitude, commitment, the decision I made (to leave) was to get that, and it's going well - 10 points from 12."

Xavi handed Brazilian forward Vitor Roque his first start for the club on the left of the attack, alongside Lewandowski and 16-year-old sensation Yamal. The latter was Barcelona's brightest player once again, with the Catalans dependent on his skill and speed on the right flank to create danger.

Despite controlling the first half Barcelona failed to threaten much beyond a Yamal shot which Vicente Guaita did well to tip away. At the other end Ronald Araujo sprinted back well to stop Jorgen Strand Larsen running through on goal. Barca broke the deadlock in the 45th minute when Yamal fed Le-

wandowski, who lashed home superbly from just inside the area. The lead did not last long, with Aspas pouncing two minutes into the second half to level.

A slick move from Celta was finished by the veteran forward after former Barcelona defender Oscar Mingueza backheeled the ball into his path. Aspas' strike bounced in off Jules Kounde, with the deflection taking the ball over the outstretched arm of Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Guaita got his fingertips to a swirling Raphinha free-kick as Barcelona hunted for the winner without success, until Yamal won a penalty in stoppage time. Celta's Fran Beltran accidentally kicked the winger when trying to clear the ball and Lewandowski converted from the spot to steal Barcelona three points. — AFP

## Lyles pips Coleman to win US indoor crown

**LOS ANGELES:** Noah Lyles produced a dramatic late burst to defeat rival Christian Coleman in the 60m at the US Indoor athletics championships in New Mexico on Saturday. Lyles, the reigning 100m and 200m world champion, took the tape in a world-leading time of 6.43sec to book his place on the US squad for next month's World Indoor Championships in Glasgow.

The 26-year-old from Florida had never beaten world record-holder Coleman over 60m before Saturday's race in Albuquerque. Out of the blocks, it looked as if that losing streak might continue as Coleman exploded clear of the field with a superb start. But Lyles accelerated through the gears smoothly to pip Coleman at the line. Coleman took second in 6.44sec, with Ronnie Baker third in 6.51.

"I've dreamed of the day that my 60m got faster: I come out every year trying to get faster and faster and faster," Lyles said after the win. Lyles said the blistering performance leaves him and Coleman as the men to beat at the world championships.

"World domination, we're the best in the world," Lyles said of the duo's prospects in Glasgow. "World domination — there ain't nothing else to say. We're going to make sure that everybody knows we're real world champions." The 60m duel was the highlight of the final day of competition on Saturday. In other races, Aleia Hobbs left it late before overhauling training partner Mikiah Brisco to win the women's 60m title in 7.02sec. Brisco made an electric start to edge clear early on but Hobbs surged home in the final 10 meters to take the tape. — AFP

## Rayo hold Liga leaders Madrid

Real have suffered just one defeat and are unbeaten in 19 league matches



MADRID: Real Madrid's Ukrainian goalkeeper #13 Andriy Lunin deflects the ball during the Spanish league football match Rayo Vallecano de Madrid and Real Madrid CF at the Vallecas stadium in Madrid on February 18, 2024. — AFP

MADRID: La Liga leaders Real Madrid stumbled to a frustrating 1-1 draw at neighbours Rayo Vallecano on Sunday but stretched their lead at the top to six points. Joselu fired the visitors in front early on but former Madrid youth player Raul de Tomas levelled for Rayo from the penalty spot in coach Inigo Perez's first match at the helm.

Carlo Ancelotti's side extended their lead over surprise challengers Girona before the Catalan minnows face Athletic Bilbao on Monday. After Los Blancos thrashed Girona last weekend to take a five-point lead in the title race, the draw allows their closest pursuers a chance to cut the gap. Dani Carvajal was sent off at the death for Madrid after appearing to elbow Kike Perez. "We have to win all our games, but to win a league, the games you can't win, you can't lose them (either)," Madrid coach Ancelotti told reporters.

"Sometimes draws can hurt a bit but it could be a positive step to take us closer to winning the league." Real Madrid have suffered just one defeat in the top flight and are unbeaten in 19 league matches. Rayo, 14th, sacked Francisco Rodriguez earlier this week and appointed Perez, with Madrid's visit a baptism of fire.

It took only three minutes for Madrid to take the

lead, with Fede Valverde racing down the right on a sharp counter-attack. The Uruguayan crossed for Joselu to bundle home and despite initially being called offside, VAR showed the goal should stand.

Joselu headed home a second but this time it was correctly disallowed after Lucas Vazquez had taken the ball out of play before crossing for his Spanish compatriot. Despite taking an early lead, Madrid failed to create many clear openings. Los Blancos were without top goalscorer Jude Bellingham, currently recovering from an ankle injury. They earned a 1-0 win over RB Leipzig in the Champions League in midweek and perhaps tiredness told against an energised, hard-working Rayo.

### De Tomas delivers

The hosts pulled level through De Tomas' penalty after 27 minutes, slammed down the middle after Eduardo Camavinga handled Oscar Trejo's shot. Valverde, heavily involved, cracked a shot against the post from 20 yards as Madrid looked to restore their lead.

At the other end Andriy Lunin was alert to save at the near post from Alvaro Garcia after Rayo picked Luka Modric's pocket. Substitute Toni Kroos forced

a good save from Rayo goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski with a free-kick as the clock ticked down. The Macedonian stopper also fielded a long range Carvajal drive in stoppage time.

The defender was then dismissed for swinging an elbow at Kike Perez in frustration after his shirt was pulled to earn a second yellow card and end a disappointing afternoon for Madrid. "We started very well, good with the ball, we scored, they ruled out another one marginally, Federico hit the post ... until the penalty we did everything well," added Ancelotti.

Rayo have not won in seven matches across all competitions but will be proud of the draw. De Tomas, brought into the team by Perez as a starter, was happy to score his first goal of the season, with Rayo midfielder Isi Palazon giving him the ball to take the spot kick.

"With the run we've been on this draw will do us a lot of good," De Tomas told Movistar. "(Scoring) took a weight off me, I'm grateful Isi let me have the penalty knowing that I've gone a long time without scoring a goal."

Later Sunday, Granada face Almeria in a battle between the bottom two, while Real Sociedad visit Mallorca and Real Betis host Alaves. — AFP

## Brighton push Sheffield Utd closer to drop as Holgate sees red

SHEFFIELD: Brighton pushed Sheffield United closer to relegation as the Premier League's bottom club capitulated after Mason Holgate's dismissal in Sunday's 5-0 rout at Bramall Lane. Holgate was sent off early in the first half for the United defender's ugly foul on Kaoru Mitoma.

Brighton made the most of Holgate's exit as Facundo Buonanotte and Danny Welbeck struck in quick succession. Jack Robinson's second half own goal was followed by Simon Adingra's late brace, condemning the shambolic Blades to a sixth defeat in their last nine league games.

Chris Wilder's team are languishing seven points from safety with 13 games left to avoid an immediate return to the Championship. United's 65 goals conceded in the Premier League this season are the most ever by a side in their first 25 matches in the competition.

A victory at fellow strugglers Luton last weekend had breathed new life into the Blades' hopes of avoiding relegation. Yet they reverted to type with a self-inflicted loss that edged them nearer to the drop.

Brighton were winless in their last six Premier League away matches, but they had won 5-2 at Bramall Lane in the FA Cup fourth round in January and ended their barren stretch on their return to Yorkshire. United threatened a goal inside two minutes when James McAtee picked out Jayden Bogle on the edge of the area and his drive was pushed away by Bart Verbruggen.

That proved a crucial moment as Brighton took control. Wilder's men were reduced to 10 men in the 13th minute when Holgate's studs-up high challenge left Mitoma writhing in pain. Holgate was initially booked but referee Stuart Attwell upgraded his decision to red card after using the pitchside monitor to review the on-loan Everton right-back's crude foul.

Brighton needed just seven minutes to make their numerical advantage count. United complained that Brighton should not have been given as a corner because the ball appeared to come off Welbeck last.

From the controversial set-piece, Buonanotte made the Blades pay as he scrambled his effort over the line just before it was hacked clear. Brighton struck again four minutes later, with former Manchester United forward Welbeck lashing high into the net from close-range after Wes Foderingham pushed Mitoma's shot into his path.

Wilder was left cursing his luck when Ben Osborn's close-range volley was ruled out by VAR for a tight offside call against the defender. Roberto De Zerbi's side wrapped up their second league win of 2024 in the 75th minute when Robinson turned Mitoma's cross into his own net. — AFP

## Bukhov grabs world title, urges Olympics ban on Russians

DOHA: Ukraine's Vladyslav Bukhov sprung a surprise as he claimed his first world swimming title in Doha on Saturday and then said Russia should "absolutely not" be allowed at the Paris Olympics. After the 21-year-old edged the two previous world champions to the wall to win the men's 50m freestyle, he said his preparation had been tough.

"It's hard, really hard," he said. "We train while Russian rockets are flying round the swimming pool. You never know if you stay alive or not. It's difficult. For all Ukrainians." Asked if Russians should compete at the Paris Olympics in five months, he said: "Absolutely not."

"I want to say Russia is dangerous and should not be supported in competition." Bukhov had the slowest reaction time off the starting blocks, but claimed his first world championship medal as he beat Australian defending champion Cameron McEvoy to the touch by one hundredth of a second.

Britain's Ben Proud, the winner two years ago in Budapest, was 0.09sec back. "Really tough. Never know who wins," said Bukhov. "I just did my job." Pan Zhanle swam another blazing 100m freestyle relay leg as he set China on track for another gold with the leadoff in the mixed 100m relay.

Pan swam 47.29, faster than his winning time in the individual final but slower than his world record 46.80sec leading off the men's 100m relay final last Sunday. The Chinese quartet led throughout to finish in 3min 21.18sec, set an Asian record and beat Australia by 0.60sec. The United States were another half second back in third.



DOHA : (L to R) Australia's silver-medallist Cameron Mcevoy, Ukraine's gold-medallist Vladyslav Bukhov and Britain's bronze-medallist Benjamin Proud pose on the podium of the men's 50m freestyle swimming event during the 2024 World Aquatics Championships at Aspire Dome in Doha. — AFP

Pan and 18-year-old Wang Haoyu, who were also part of the Chinese team that took the men's 200m freestyle relay, both collected their third team golds of the competition. Li Bingjie, who was part of China's victorious women's 200m quartet, won her second relay gold of the championships. Sprint queen Sarah Sjöström collected her 13th world title when she won the 50m butterfly.

The Swede, who claimed her first world title in 2009 in Rome, won in 24.63sec, finishing a decisive 0.81sec ahead of French swimmer Melanie Henique. Egyptian Farida Osman was third. The 30-year-old remains the only woman to break 25sec in the event. Sjöström's

12 individual titles have all come over 50m or 100m in either freestyle or butterfly but she withdrew from the 100m free in Doha.

"I don't want to be greedy," she said. "Look at all my medals I won already and you will know why I don't have to do that many races any more." Saturday's victory was her sixth straight 50m butterfly world title.

Henique and Osman each won a third world championship medal, neither has yet won a gold. Henique took a silver behind Sjöström two years ago. Osman has three bronzes, all in races Sjöström won. American Claire Curzan completed a sweep of the women's individual backstroke events as she won the 200m. — AFP