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## Amir honored on Qatar visit

Sheikh Tamim presents Sword of the Founder to Sheikh Mishal



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani presents the Sword of the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammad bin Thani to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his state visit to Qatar on Feb 20, 2024. — KUNA photos

DOHA: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by senior officials, arrived in the Qatari capital on Tuesday on a state visit to the Gulf country. Upon entering Qatari territorial airspace, a squadron of Qatari warplanes accompanied HH the Amir's plane until its landing at the airport, where he was welcomed by the Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and senior officials.

An official reception was held for HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal at the Qatari Amiri Diwan on the oc-

casation of his state visit to Qatar. Upon arrival at the Amiri Diwan, a group of cavalymen and cameleers formed a line, popular troupes performed the Qatari ardhah dance and an 18-gun salute was given to HH the Amir. The national anthems of Kuwait and Qatar were then played. HH the Amir then shook hands with Qatari sheiks and senior officials, while Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim shook hands with HH the Amir's accompanying delegation.

Sheikh Tamim presented the Sword of the Found-

er Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammad bin Thani to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal as a symbol of the distinguished relations between the two countries and their friendly peoples. The Sword of the Founder is the highest national decoration, which is bestowed by the Amir of Qatar and on kings, princes and presidents.

In honor of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and his accompanying delegation, Sheikh Tamim held a lunch banquet on the occasion of his visit to Doha, before HH the Amir departed Qatar, seen off by the

Amir of Qatar and senior officials.

Before arriving home, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent a cable of appreciation to Qatar Amir Sheikh Tamim for his hospitality and warm welcome during his visit to Qatar, displaying the deep brotherly ties between the two states. HH the Amir expressed his gratitude to the Qatari Amir for awarding him the Sword of the Founder, wishing the Qatari Amir and his country health and more prosperity. — KUNA (See Page 3)

### Ban on sales of water guns, water balloons as police keep watch

KUWAIT: The commerce ministry has imposed a ban on the sale of water guns, water balloons and foam spray cans from February 20 to March 31 to prevent water wastage during the national holidays. The interior ministry also warned of strict measures against littering and violations involving water balloons or foam spray during the national celebrations, with the police closely monitoring celebrations for any violations. Violators of environmental laws will receive immediate notifications on the Sahel app, according to the Environment Public Authority.

The environmental police had warned last week that throwing water balloons is considered a violation of the environment protection law in Kuwait, noting it is punishable by up to a KD 5,000 fine or three years in jail. The environmental police urged people to protect their children and follow the law during the national celebrations.

A few years ago, the government banned the use of foam sprays during celebrations, so people resorted to water guns and water balloons. Earlier, the ministry of electricity and water launched an awareness campaign against wasting water during national celebrations. Several people have also complained of being attacked with water balloons by children in various neighborhoods.

### Freeze on public sector jobs lifted

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government has been informed that HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has lifted a total freeze on appointments, transfers and promotions in public jobs, Cabinet spokesman Amer Al-Ajmi said on Tuesday. HH the Amir took the decision to bar all appointments in government jobs on Dec 5 when he was still the Crown Prince. He became the ruler of the country on

Dec 16 following the demise of former Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The decision was taken to prevent the misuse of appointments, especially in senior positions. Almost 80 percent of the Kuwaiti workforce of around 400,000 is employed in the government. Ajmi said the Cabinet was informed of the Amir's decision during its weekly meeting held on Monday night.

The Cabinet was also expected to set a date for the upcoming snap polls to be held after HH the Amir dissolved the National Assembly on Feb 15 over remarks made by some MPs that were deemed offensive to the ruler. But the Cabinet made no announcement of the election date, which must be within two months of dissolving the Assembly, according to the constitution.



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah chairs a Cabinet meeting on Feb 19, 2024. — KUNA

### US vetoes Gaza truce vote amid Zionist carnage

GAZA: The United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Tuesday calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, with the Zionist entity continuing to bombard the territory as concern grew about the growing humanitarian crisis. Global powers trying to navigate a way out of the spiraling crisis have come up short, with so-far fruitless push by mediators to reach a truce, and two rival ceasefire proposals put forward at the UN.

On Tuesday Washington vetoed the first proposal, drafted by Algeria, which demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and "unconditional" release of all captives kidnapped in the Oct 7 attacks. Washington's ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called the vote "wishful and irresponsible", saying it would put "sensitive negotiations in jeopardy".

With US President Joe Biden facing increasing pressure to dial down support for the Zionist entity, Washington has put forward an alternative draft resolution on Gaza. That text, seen by AFP, emphasizes "support for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza as soon as practicable" and expresses concern for Rafah.



NEW YORK: US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield casts a veto vote during a UN Security Council meeting on the Zionist war at UN Headquarters on Feb 20, 2024. — AFP

According to a diplomatic source, the draft stands little chance of being adopted in its current form and risks a Russian veto.

As diplomatic powers wrangled, the Zionist entity continued to hit Gaza with air strikes and ground combat that killed a total of 103 Palestinians in the past 24 hours, its health ministry said. The United Nations has repeatedly sounded alarm over the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and warned food shortages could lead to an "explosion" of preventable child deaths. Despite having only just re-started much-needed deliveries into the hard-hit north, the UN's food program

### Pretoria: Zionist apartheid worse than in S Africa

THE HAGUE: The Zionist entity is applying an even more extreme version of apartheid in the Palestinian territories than experienced in South Africa before 1994, Pretoria told the world's top court on Tuesday. "We as South Africans sense, see, hear and feel to our core the inhumane discriminatory policies and practices of the (Zionist) regime as an even more extreme form

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THE HAGUE: Ambassador of South Africa to the Netherlands Vusumuzi Madonsela speaks during a hearing at the International Court of Justice on Feb 20, 2024. — AFP



# Kuwaiti minister sees link between tourism growth and development

## Gulf has the potential to morph into tourist hotspots

In my view

### This is Kuwait



Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

We have the educated, writers and partisans who form the cultural sea in Kuwait, and the waves of this sea are rising today, and expressions among Kuwaitis are beginning to deviate from the familiar. We were deprived of the etiquette of dialogue by those who are supposed to teach people the etiquette of dialogue. Additionally, politicians and members of elected councils competed and struggled, with each claiming the right for themselves and hurling falsehoods at their opponents. Then the government inserted itself into the picture, completing the scene.

Kuwaiti society was divided between loyalty and boycott, and individuals holding knives were summoned from each side, initiating a divisive process as each side believed they were right and the other corrupted or hired. The rift increased, with each side turning their back on the other, and distances between them growing every day, making it difficult for them to hear one another.

Today, there is a third party in Kuwait, and I hope to be a part of it, as I hope you are too. It is a party whose members do not believe they are on the right side; rather, they look for it in every corner. A party whose members are ready to listen to the other and have the desire to help both sides lay down their knives and change their directions to come closer and hear each other, recognizing that hate only breeds more hatred.

There is optimism today that the fad has passed, and the idea has arrived. It is wrong to categorize any side as victorious because when it comes to homeland issues, we are all either victorious or defeated. I hope people calm down, and many Kuwaitis become more reluctant to scream and doubt, allowing each side to understand the other and uphold the democratic and freedom process that Kuwait is characterized by.

Many are talking today about the start of national reconciliation, which will be the title of "The New Kuwait Book", envisioning the Kuwait of the future, the Kuwait of the future in which our grandchildren will live securely. Despite our happiness with the laughter of our grandchildren, we quickly become concerned for them, as our present, as you see and as revealed by numbers from the World Bank and local and international reports, is a very lackluster present. We did not prepare for them what makes them secure in their future.

Anyone who believes that the right is on their side will be part of the problem, as each side has a piece of the benefit, and when they join together, the interest becomes complete. Holders of knives and beneficiaries are asked today to rethink because they have an interest in protecting their grandchildren. It is not with money alone that a person becomes happy, and if the homeland is lost, there will be no value for a person, even if they wear the best clothes and live in a palace.

Man is the homeland, and whoever loses their homeland will find themselves looking for something more valuable than themselves. If it were not for the hope to return home one day, those who lost their homeland would die in misery and sadness. Let us build our new homeland as the country's celebrations approach. This is Kuwait!

## MoD official commends corps' role

**KUWAIT:** A Ministry of Defense official stressed on Tuesday the importance of the engineering corps' national role, commending both its civilian and military personnel. Undersecretary at Kuwait's Ministry of Defense (MoD), Sheikh Dr Abdullah Meshal Mubarak Al-Sabah, said during his visit to the facilities engineering sector's celebration on the occasion of its 50th anniversary that "the facilities engineering corps was an incubator for the initiatives and creativity of Kuwaiti youth."

He praised some of the figures who had a significant role in this division, including the late Sheikh Engineer Sabah Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah, who established many projects to serve the Ministry of Defense and provide the right environment for its members. On his part, the Assistant Undersecretary for Military Facilities Engineering Corps Brigadier Engineer Salah Nasser thanked all the participants in the celebration for their dedication to this engineering corps, and he wished for further developments in this vital sector.

His Highness the late Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah issued on February 19, 1974 — when he was minister of defense — Ministerial Decision No. 187/73 establishing the Department of Engineering for Facilities to specialize in all engineering and technical works to meet all the needs and requirements of the Ministry of Defense's military and civil sectors. — KUNA

**DOHA:** Tourism growth is often a precursor to broad development and prosperity, Kuwait's Information Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said on Monday, citing the sector as among the most pivotal sources of national income. Thanks in part to their "rich cultural heritage" and "diverse landscapes," Gulf Arab states have the potential to morph into tourist hotspots with the ability to beguile visitors from across the globe, the Kuwaiti minister told a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) wide gathering of tourism ministers in the Qatari capital.

Any measure aiming to develop the tourism industry across GCC states enjoys the full backing of these countries' political leaders, the minister underlined, pointing out that a pan-GCC strategy to develop the region's tourism industry should keep the number of tourist arrivals in

the region on an upward trajectory.

Having welcomed some 100 million visitors recently, he singled out Saudi Arabia as a regional success story in terms of tourism growth, while he acknowledged neighboring Qatar's achievement in hosting global events such as the World Cup. Echoing the Kuwaiti minister's sentiments, the Riyadh-based bloc's chief, Jasim Al-Bedaiwi, said the tourism industry forms an "integral component" of economic growth and development, agreeing that the "pivotal sector" is key to national development plans.

On recent initiatives introduced, the GCC chief mentioned a unified visa scheme within the six-member bloc as among the endeavors aiming to propel the tourism industry to greater levels, saying he expected similar moves to follow suit. Saudi Arabia and Qatar's top tourism



Kuwait's Information Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

officials, Ahmad Al-Khatib and Saad Al-Kharji, respectively, attached equal significance to the crucial sector, agreeing that growth there invariably leads to national development. — KUNA



Private schools gather at Al Shaheed Park to celebrate Kuwait's national anthem.



Students holding the Kuwait flag sing the national anthem. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## In unison and love, private schools, VO sing Kuwait anthem

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** To engage with the 'If You Like It, Sing for It' campaign, the Private Schools Association partnered with VO company to orchestrate a special event involving all private schools in Kuwait to sing the national anthem. This not only aimed to celebrate national pride, but also to deliver a message that Kuwait is home for all. The event gathered 186 schools at Al Shaheed Park on Tuesday, February 20, 2024, where they sang Kuwait's national anthem together under the Kuwait flag.

During the event, Ohoud Salem Al-Sabah, who preferred to present herself as a local citizen, told Kuwait Times: "We have gathered here to participate in the Private Schools Association's efforts to commemorate and celebrate the national anthem. This initiative, led by the Private Schools Association, brings together 186 schools in response to the campaign 'If You Love It, Sing for It.' It is remarkable to note that this whole event was organized in less than a week. As a citizen, I extend my gratitude to them. This initiative is not exclusive to Kuwaitis but extends to all residents, and this is a fact that fills us with pride."

On her part, Zahra'a Dahdari, the CEO of VO company, expressed her joy at the gathering held at Al



Private schools' students release balloons in the colors of the Kuwaiti flag.

Shaheed Park. The Kuwaiti Union for Private Schools has joined hands with this initiative, with over 920 students attending from different private schools to sing the Kuwaiti national anthem in front of the Kuwait flag. "We take pride in organizing this event dedicated to honoring the national anthem, which is a vital symbol representing the State of Kuwait. It is our priority to ensure that our children are familiar with Kuwait's national anthem, and deeply respect it," she said.

Moreover, Lana Al-Ayyar, CEO of Rayan Holding, who is also a member of the Private Schools Association and its secretary, added: "Since the 'If You Love It, Sing for It' campaign appeared, we started thinking about how to participate and support this campaign as a private sector representing approximately 45 percent of students in Kuwait. Based on that, we took about seven representatives from each school to sing the national anthem during the flag-raising ceremony."



Private schools' students meet at Al Shaheed Park, Phase 01.

## Kuwait's Fodari named as SWAAC ELSO's chief

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health announced that the Head of Anaesthesia, Critical Care, and Pain Management Departments, Dr. Huda Al-Fodari, has been chosen as chief of the South West Asia and Africa Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (SWAAC ELSO). In a statement on Tuesday, Dr. Al-Fodari expressed her pride and appreciation for holding the position, feeling honored to represent Kuwait in the organization.

The Extracorporeal Life Support service, "Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation" (ECMO), is considered one of the latest services provided in intensive care for critically ill patients, and the ECMO



Dr. Huda Al-Fodari

Center at Al-Adan Hospital offers a course approved by ELSO. ECMO is used by connecting the patient to an external artificial lung device through fine catheters that are inserted into the arteries and veins of patients with heart failure and acute respiratory syndrome.

Dr. Al-Fodari was chosen for this position due to her influential role in the organization through her membership and her chairmanship of the training committee during the previous years. ELSO is considered a global non-profit organization concerned with providing medical training for ECMO centers worldwide, which have qualified more than 300 doctors, nurses, and technicians. — KUNA

### News in Brief

#### Military official praises 'deep ties' with Jordan

**AMMAN:** Kuwait and Jordan enjoy "deep" bilateral relations across various fields, while military ties have seen the most notable growth, said a Kuwaiti military official on Monday. More military cooperation between Kuwait and Amman has paved the way for progress in relations, Kuwaiti National Guard Major General Dr Faleh Shujaa said in a statement after putting his signature on a bilateral military deal with Amman. The military pact with the Hashemite Kingdom, which dates back to 2017, comprises numerous joint military drills and training courses, which allow the militaries of both nations the chance to exchange their knowhow with one another, he said. Ahead of joint military committee talks slated for Kuwait early next year, he said such gatherings are instrumental in propelling relations to greater levels. — KUNA

#### Kuwait Airport records 1,427,684 passengers

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said that the total number of passengers that traveled through to and from Kuwait International Airport in January reached 1,427,684 passengers. In a statement to KUNA, DGCA's Acting Director-General Emad Al-Jalawi noted that Kuwait's International Airport witnessed a rise in passenger traffic by 5 percent and in flights by 10 percent. Whereas air shipping increased by 34 pct compared to the year prior. He affirmed that last January, the number of arrivals reached 719,092 and the departures reached 708,592. He explained that the number of flights operated from and to Kuwait International Airport reached 11,063 flights compared to 10,098 in 2023. Al-Jalawi revealed the cargo traffic amounted to a total of 19 million kgs, where the volume of inbound cargo reached 15.2 million kg and the outbound cargo reached 3.8 million kg. He stated that the most popular destinations during last January were Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Istanbul, and Doha. — KUNA

#### Appeal Court acquits 'Monster of Khaitan'

**KUWAIT:** The Court of Appeal upheld the acquittal of a defendant, who was known as "the monster of Khaitan." The suspect, an Egyptian Islamic teacher, was accused of kidnapping and indecent assault on an expatriate child. The defendant was earlier convicted in another similar case and sentenced to 10 years in prison. The court found that the statements of the alleged victim and the circumstances of the abduction case do not conform to logic, and there is no concrete evidence of the abduction. — KUNA

# Kuwait, Qatar strengthen ties

## Joint Kuwait-Qatar statement emphasizes deep-rooted relations



DOHA: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani hold talks. During the official talks, they reviewed fraternal relations between Kuwait and Qatar and ways of promoting existing cooperation between both countries. — KUNA photos



Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani welcomes His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

**KUWAIT:** A joint statement released on Tuesday after talks between His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani put much emphasis on the "historic bond" shared between the two Gulf Arab neighbors. His Highness the Amir congratulated Sheikh Tamim on Qatar's assumption of the presidency of the 44th session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

His Highness the Amir also congratulated Sheikh Tamim, expressing sincere pleasure at Qatar's victory at the Asian Cup 2023. Moreover, His Highness the Amir lauded the positive reactions to the Doha 2023 Horticultural Expo and the Qatari efforts made that contributed to achieving its desired goals, which will benefit the region and the world as a whole. The two sides praised the growth of trade and bilateral investments between Kuwait and Qatar, as the volume of trade exchange between the two states until October 2023 reached \$1.94 billion, and they stressed the importance of expanding the horizons of cooperation and economic partnership between them.

### Expanding businesses

They also welcomed Kuwaiti and Qatari investors and companies expanding their businesses in the two countries and taking advantage of the opportunities available in the giant projects taking place in all sectors. Further, the two sides expressed their aspiration to hold the sixth session of the Kuwaiti-Qatari Joint Higher Cooperation Committee scheduled to be held in 2024 in the capital, Doha, and to work on implementing the agreements, memoranda of understanding, and joint programs that were agreed upon.

Both sides affirmed their keenness to strengthen defense cooperation in all fields and develop strategic partnerships to protect the security and stability of the two countries and the region. They also praised the level of security cooperation and coordination existing between the two countries and stressed their desire to enhance cooperation on topics of common interest, including combating crimes in all aspects.

### Economic unity

Regarding the GCC work process, the two sides touched on the outstanding achievements it has achieved in response to the aspirations of the citizens of the GCC countries towards greater interdependence, cooperation, and integration. They



Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani presented on Tuesday, the Sword of the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammad Bin Thani, to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a symbol of the distinguished relations between the two countries.

stressed the importance of maintaining the cohesion, solidarity, and unity of the GCC countries and intensifying efforts to complete the components of economic unity and the joint defense and security systems in a way that guarantees the stability of the countries.

The two sides discussed the latest regional developments and their repercussions on Arab-Arab relations, regional security, and stability, and stressed the importance of the Republic of Iraq's respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait, adherence to bilateral and international pledges and agreements, and all relevant UN resolutions, especially Security Council Resolution No. 833 (1993).

### Land and sea borders

Security Council Resolution No. 833 (1993), which was passed accordingly, outlines the demarcation of the land and sea borders between Kuwait and Iraq and the importance of completing the demarcation of the maritime borders between the two countries beyond maritime mark 162. Moreover, the two sides also stressed the importance of Iraq's commitment

to the agreement regulating maritime navigation in Khor Abdullah signed between Kuwait and Iraq on April 29, 2012, which entered into force on December 5, 2013, after its ratification by both countries and was jointly deposited with the United Nations on December 18, 2013.

Both sides agreed on rejecting the Iraqi side's unilateral cancellation of the security swap protocol signed in 2008 and its map approved in the joint plan to ensure the safety of navigation in Khor Abdullah signed between the two sides on December 28, 2014, which included a clear and specific mechanism for amendment and cancellation.

Kuwait and Qatar went on to give their backing to the works of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which provides assistance and support to Iraqis, in addition to efforts aiming to identify the remains of "Kuwaitis and third-country nationals." The two sides also stressed that Al-Durra Field is located entirely within the maritime borders of Kuwait, affirming that its natural resources are shared between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

### Palestinian issues

Moreover, both sides touched on the situation in Palestine and other Arab-occupied territories, expressing deep concern regarding the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The two sides stressed the need for the international community, especially the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities to stop military operations in the Palestinian territories and protect civilians under international law and international humanitarian law, and called for pressure on the Zionist entity, the existing authority.

The occupation must stop its aggression and prevent attempts to impose forced displacement on Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, which is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and international laws, they added. Both sides affirmed the need to reach a just settlement of the Palestinian cause by using the principle of the two-state solution as stated in the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant international legitimacy resolutions in a way that guarantees the Palestinian people their right to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kuwaiti side praised the Qatari mediation efforts made within the framework of maintaining international peace and security, especially concerning the exchange of Palestinian prisoners and the introduction of relief aid into the Gaza Strip, and the role played by Doha in coordination with many brotherly and friendly countries, the most recent of which was Qatari-French coordination in January.

Regarding Yemen, the two sides stressed the importance of reaching a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis in accordance with the three terms of reference: the Gulf Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive national dialogue, and Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2216.

On navigation in the Red Sea, the two sides stressed the importance of maintaining the security and stability of the region and respecting the right to maritime navigation therein per the provisions of international law and the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to preserve the freedom of global trade. His Highness the Amir thanked Sheikh Tamim for his hospitality and warm welcome during his visit to Qatar, showing the deep brotherly ties between the two states. — KUNA



An official reception was held for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the Qatari Amiri Diwan on Tuesday on the occasion of his state visit to Qatar.

## 3rd Saudi Media Forum kicks off

RIYADH: The Third Saudi Media Forum kicked off Tuesday with the participation of Kuwait's Information Minister's Representative and Undersecretary Dr. Nasser Mhaisen, 2,000 local and international prominent media professionals, and 80 media entities. In his opening speech, Saudi Minister of Media Salman bin Youssef Al-Dosari said the year 2024 will be dubbed the "year of shaping media," which will encompass all the energies that are worthy of the Saudi leadership and people, indicating that media has contributed, in local production, more than 14 billion Saudi Riyals (SAR) (\$3.37 billion).

Al-Dosari added that they aim to reach SAR 16 billion (\$4.27 billion) this year with a 10 percent increase, emphasizing the media sector, which provides 56,000 jobs with a goal of reaching 67,000 jobs in 2024. He continued that Saudi Arabia is working with strategies with the aim of growing and developing the media system and its integration into the Saudi General Authority for Media Regulation, as well as developing and enriching the Radio and Television Authority and the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) to encourage a friendly, competitive environment.

Al-Dosari clarified that Saudi Media Academy has launched with the aim to empower, develop, and train specializations in regards to future media needs in cooperation with global media platforms such as Google, Huawei, Ali Baba, and others, driven by data and passion for the field. According to SPA, the launch of the Forum came with the launch of the Future of Media Exhibition (FOMEX), the largest specialized media exhibition in the Middle East, featuring the participation of over 200 local and international companies to present the latest technologies and innovations across various media fields throughout the Forum's duration. — KUNA

# Palestinian FM lauds supportive stances of Kuwait as 'honorable'

## Kuwait, Palestine mark 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations

THE HAGUE: Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs Riyadh Al-Maliki spoke highly of Kuwait's supportive stances towards the Palestine question on the state and popular levels. "The long-standing support offered by Kuwait to Palestine is honorable and unparalleled. We are proud of our exemplary relations with Kuwait," Al-Maliki told KUNA at a reception hosted on Monday by the Kuwait Embassy in the Netherlands to celebrate Kuwait's national days.

The celebrations of Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day coincide with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Palestine, he noted. "Both countries have been keen on pushing friendly relations in all areas to new heights since 1964," the Palestinian minister said. Al-Maliki is now on a visit to the Netherlands to attend the hearings of the International

Court of Justice on a case on the legitimacy of the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Palestine brought the case to the ICJ on the grounds that the UN General Assembly approved a resolution and an advisory opinion by the court regarding the nature of actions by the Zionist entity in the occupied territories, he noted. On the ICJ deliberations on the case, Al-Maliki said, "Palestine has offered a verbal presentation at the ICJ today — the first such move that will be followed by presentations by 53 countries and three international organizations in the coming days." "This is a historic moment, and the Palestinian people have been waiting for the outcome of this case for the past 75 years."

"We pin high hopes on the court to rule against the illegal occupation and force the UN member

states to implement the court ruling," he pointed out. He added that today's hearings are excluded from the Gaza genocide case brought to the court by South Africa. On his part, Kuwait's Ambassador to the Netherlands Ali Al-Thaifeiri congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the government and people of Kuwait on the national days.

In similar statements to KUNA, he voiced hope that Kuwait will see more progress and prosperity as it celebrates the national days under the leadership of His Highness the Amir. Besides the Palestinian foreign minister, the reception at the Kuwait embassy gathered dozens of Dutch government officials, businesspeople, and representatives of diplomatic missions and international organizations based in the Hague. — KUNA

## stc releases its 2024 Kuwait National and Liberation Days TVC

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, launched its latest television commercial (TVC) in celebration of Kuwait's upcoming National and Liberation Days. The production comes as part of stc's National Days campaign, which features a range of activities, programs, and special promotions held during the month of February.

stc indicated in a statement that celebrating Kuwait's National Days alongside the people of Kuwait is a special time of the year. In this regard, the Company annually introduces a creative concept for the TVC as a contribution to the people of Kuwait. This year, the production "الكويتى مازال" (The Kuwaiti is still here), aimed to blend tradition with modernity by showcasing Kuwait's persistence in progressing.

The concept and execution of the production was done by Together Production, with Sine Agency as the production house. The production featured the well-known singer Bader Al-Shaeebi, lyricist and composer Ali Bougheith, under the direction of Shamlan Al-Nassar and the director of photography Amin Shamsuddin. Distribution was handled by Ali Al Matrouk, mastering done by Montadhar Al-Zayer, and Dr. Ali bin Hussein who was the stylist for the production.

Focusing on the importance of progression and sustainability, the production featured several influential figures that have played a role in empowering the community, especially the younger generation. Following its long-standing commitment to sustainability, coupled with its extensive corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, the TVC aimed to reflect the values that stc stands by along with the importance of these activities in nurturing and empowering entrepreneurs, innovators, and the younger generation.

stc's support towards these segments can be witnessed through its 'weyak' entrepreneurial initiative as well as other programs the Company has launched, organized, or sponsored. In terms of sustainability, stc invited influential Kuwaiti personality, Youssef Al-Omran, also known as "Bu Jarrah", a well-known advocate for sustainability, as well as other influencers and supporters to be featured in the production as well.



Considering its support towards the local sports community, stc's TVC also showcased Kuwait's National Handball team who marked a significant achievement by qualifying for the World Cup after a 15-year absence after securing the fourth position in the 21st Asian Handball Championship. Additionally, the Kuwaiti award-winning inventor Jenan Al Shehab, along with media influencers Alia Ahmad, Jenan Al Zaid and Ali Najm were featured in the TVC considering their roles as influencers who encourage the importance of knowledge, achievements, and other aspects that drive progression and innovation. Such values run closely to those of stc and the Kuwaiti society.

stc also hosted an exclusive family gathering for stc employees at its headquarters in Olympia Towers. The event was a celebration of Kuwait national holidays and a way for employees to unwind, and bond with each other. The event was filled with excitement and energy, as employees participated in various games and competitions. The highlight of the event was the broadcasting of stc's latest National Day TVC to the employees that was met with great enthusiasm and received positive feedback from employees.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc said, "We would like to congratulate His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect and preserve him, on the celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation holidays. Through its role as a digital pioneer, stc is committed to contributing to Kuwait in various ways, whether it is through driving sustainable practices, educating members of the



community, empowering local initiatives and innovators, or supporting the sports community, amongst others. During celebratory occasions, such as the national holidays, stc is proud to showcase its love, devotion, and patriotism towards the people of Kuwait and the country."

In her comments on the TVC, AlJasem expressed that the positive feedback generated from the public regarding the concept behind the production reflects the values that stc holds closely to its heart when dedicating a message of appreciation to the people of Kuwait. When it comes to Kuwait, stc will spare no effort to reflect the true appreciation and sense of attachment it holds to the country of Kuwait.

AlJasem added, "We dedicate this production to the people of Kuwait. We are proud to celebrate amongst the Kuwaiti population on this special occasion and greatly believe in the private sector's role to spread a positive impact. In line with our mission to provide unwavering support to the local community and the people of Kuwait, stc will continue to participate in and implement initiatives that will leave a long lasting and beneficial impact for the future generations."

AlJasem concluded by expressing her sincere appreciation to Together Production and Sine Agency as well as her appreciation to director Shamlan Al-Nassar and director of photography Amin Shamsuddin for their collaborative efforts in conceptualizing and producing the TVC, as well as the singer Bader Al-Shaeebi and song writer and composer Ali Bougheith, and all those who played a role in the production process.



## FM receives Uzbekistan ambassador's credentials

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received a copy of the credentials of the newly assigned Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the State of Kuwait, Ayoub Khan Yunusof, during a meeting at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters on Tuesday. The foreign minister wished the new ambassador success in his new assignment, hoping to see further elevation of bilateral relations between the two nations. — KUNA

## Gulfood Expo '24 kicks off in Dubai

DUBAI: UAE's Gulfood Exhibition 2024 for food and beverage production kicked off on Monday at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) with the participation of Kuwaiti and worldwide companies to sell their products and expand their businesses in the global market. Kuwait's consul general in Dubai and the Northern Emirates Ambassador Ali Al-Thaify stated to KUNA on the sidelines of the exhibition that the consulate is keen on supporting Kuwaiti companies that participated in the global food exhibitions to enhance Kuwait's products and the exchange of trade in this vital sector.

Al-Thaify praised the Kuwaiti companies that participated in the exhibition, including Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company (KFMB), Americana Foods, and others, stating that these companies contributed to providing food security and economic growth in Kuwait. For his part, Business Development Senior Officer for Kuwait Industries Union (KIU) Ghanem Alghanem told KUNA that KIU's participation in the Gulfood exhibition is important considering it is one of the largest food exhibitions in the world and it helps support Kuwait's food production.

Chief Executive Officer Mutlaq Al-Zayed said to KUNA, "This participation is part of our strategy to strengthen our global presence and to familiarize the international public with our diverse products, and the exhibition is one of the world's leading food exhibitions." — KUNA



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**Grueling wait for Sudanese refugees in S Sudan camps**

## Potholes: A pricey British obsession

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**KYIV: People and activists take part in a march in memory of the Maidan activists, referring to the people killed during the anti-government demonstration of 2014, in downtown Kyiv on February 18, 2024. — AFP photos**

# Ukraine fights Russian surge on anniversary of revolution

**'You can't be fatigued when you're fighting for your future, for your life,' says Ukraine PM**

**KYIV:** Ukraine said on Tuesday it was fighting off dozens of attacks, after President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces were exploiting delays in Western military aid and called the situation "extremely difficult". A heightened Russian offensive in eastern and southern Ukraine saw Moscow's forces capture the key eastern Ukrainian town of Avdiivka last week in a boost ahead of the second anniversary of the Kremlin's February 2022 invasion.

The surge comes as Ukraine marks the 10th anniversary of the shooting of dozens of protesters in Kyiv during a revolution that toppled the country's Moscow-backed leadership. The uprising also signaled the start of Russia's annexation of Crimea in the south of Ukraine and a pro-Russian separatist movement in the east.

"It has been 10 years since the attempts to destroy us and our independence," Zelensky said on Facebook on Tuesday. "But we stood firm 10 years ago and continue to do so today," he said. The head of Zelensky's office, Andriy Yermak, said Russia "sought to turn us into its colony but did not achieve its goal. We will win."

Sviatoslav Yaremko fought for several months in the industrial eastern Donetsk region in 2014, when Kremlin-backed separatists seized towns and cities there in the wake of the Maidan protests. The

40-year-old joined again on February 25, 2022, the day after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"It feels like a different life. After these two years, the fatigue is overwhelming," he told AFP in the town of Kostyantynivka, which was briefly captured by the separatists during the fighting a decade ago. He said there was still resolve among Ukrainian forces to fight until Russia has been pushed out entirely but said he hoped the war would end "as soon as possible".

### 'An existential war'

"I think we'll have to keep fighting for several years — two or three more. It all depends on how much our Western partners will help us. We have a lot of needs — armored vehicles, weapons, ammunition. We need everything."

The Ukrainian army general staff said there had been "81 combat clashes" over the past 24 hours, adding that Russian forces had carried out 87 air strikes. Five civilians died in a strike on a village near the Russian border in Ukraine's Sumy region, the army said.

The Ukrainian military has said it is critically short of ammunition and shells, worsened by the holdup of a \$60-billion US aid package. "The sit-

uation is extremely difficult in several parts of the front line, where Russian troops have concentrated maximum reserves," Zelensky said on Monday after visiting frontline troops in the Kharkiv region. Russian troops "are taking advantage of the delays in helping Ukraine", Zelensky added, highlighting shortages of artillery, frontline air defense and longer-range weapons.

US President Joe Biden told Zelensky on Sunday that he was "confident" the Republican-dominated US Congress would approve the critically needed aid package. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on Tuesday he also believed Congress would come through after it returned from recess. He said his country would "continue our fight" with international support.

Asked about "Ukraine fatigue" in the international community at a press conference in Tokyo, Shmygal said: "I believe the United States will support Ukraine also, like the European Union, like Japan, like all the G7 countries and the IMF and all international financial organizations."

"We can't speak about fatigue because it's an existential war," he said. "You can't be fatigued when you're fighting for your future, for your life ... for (the) global security order."

Biden has said another Ukrainian town could fall



**People light candles at the memorial of the Maidan activists.**

to Russia without the new US aid and Ukrainian commanders had predicted that Russia will move troops from Avdiivka to other parts of the front line. Following the fall of Avdiivka, the US-based Institute for the Study of War said "Russian actors" had conducted a cyber operation "aimed at generating panic in the Ukrainian information space and weakening Ukrainian morale". — AFP

## WHO transfers 32 patients out of Gaza hospital

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization said Tuesday it had transferred 32 patients out of the besieged Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza but said it feared for the patients and medics still inside. WHO staff said the scenes around the hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis were "indescribable", while calling the conditions inside ripe for the spread of disease.

Zionist troops entered the Nasser hospital on Thursday, following days of fighting around the complex. It is the main hospital in the southern Gaza Strip. "The dismantling and degradation of the Nasser Medical Complex is a massive blow to Gaza's health system," the WHO said in a statement.

After being denied access to the hospital on Friday and Saturday, the WHO said it led two missions to transfer 32 patients in a critical state, including two children, from the complex on Sunday and Monday. The missions also provided small supplies of essential medicines and food for remaining patients and staff.

The transferred patients were moved to other hospitals and to field hospitals in the Gaza Strip. "Nasser Hospital has no electricity or running water, and medical waste and garbage are creating a breeding ground for disease," the UN health agency said.

"WHO staff said the destruction around the hospital was 'indescribable'. The area was surrounded by burnt and destroyed buildings, heavy layers of debris, with no stretch of intact road." The patients were transferred by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in four ambulances. "Weak and frail patients were transferred amidst active conflict near the aid convoy," the WHO said, while road conditions slowed down the vehicles.

"Patients transferred during the missions included three suffering from paralysis — two of them with tracheostomy — and several others with external fixators for severe orthopedic injuries. "Two of the paralyzed patients required continuous manual ventilation throughout the journey, due to the lack of



**KHAN YUNIS: This handout photograph taken on February 20, 2024 by the World Health Organization (WHO), shows a convoy of ambulances during a mission to evacuate patients from Nasser Hospital. — AFP**

portable ventilators." One patient with a spinal fracture, who had previously been moved from Al-Ahli hospital in northern Gaza, "had to be transferred again, despite his condition".

### 130 patients remain

The WHO said an estimated 130 patients and at least 15 doctors and nurses remain in the hospital. The intensive care unit was no longer functioning and WHO staff transferred the only remaining ICU patient to a different part of the complex where others are receiving basic care. "WHO fears for the safety and well-being of the patients and health workers remaining in the hospital and warns that further disruption to life-saving care for the sick and injured would lead to more deaths," it said.

WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told a press briefing in Geneva that patients were in darkness in the hospital corridors, lit only by flashlights and mobile phones. "This is something that should not be happening in any hospital to any patients or health workers," he said.

The Zionist army denied that the ICU had no electricity, saying power was running there at all times. "We

have been in touch with the hospital, closely monitoring the situation and making sure that they have sufficient supplies," Colonel Moshe Tetro, who is coordinating the army's humanitarian efforts at the hospital told reporters in an online briefing.

Tetro rejected Gaza health ministry's claim that some patients had died at the facility since the army began its operation. Tetro said those claims were a "pure lie". "No Palestinian died in the ICU because of the IDF operation," he said. The Zionist entity launched its nearly five-month military campaign in Gaza after Hamas attacked southern areas of the entity on October 7. The Zionist assault killed at least 29,195 people in the Palestinian territory, mostly women and children, according to the latest count by Gaza's health ministry.

The Hamas attack resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in the Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Zionist figures. For weeks, the entity has concentrated its military operations in Khan Yunis. "WHO repeats its calls for the protection of patients, health workers, health infrastructure, and civilians. Hospitals must not be militarized, misused, or attacked," it said. — AFP

## Measles cases rose 79 percent globally in 2023: WHO

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization voiced alarm Tuesday at the rapid spread of measles, with more than 306,000 cases reported worldwide last year — a 79-percent increase from 2022. "We in the measles world are extremely concerned," said Natasha Crowcroft, a WHO technical adviser on measles and rubella.

She stressed though that measles cases are typically dramatically under-reported, and that the real number was surely far higher. To get more accurate figures, the UN health agency models the numbers each year, with its latest estimate indicating that there were 9.2 million cases and 136,216 measles deaths in 2022.

Such modelling has not yet been done for last year, but Crowcroft pointed out that 2022 had already seen a 43-percent jump in deaths from the year before. Given the ballooning case numbers, "we would anticipate an increase in deaths in 2023 as well," she told journalists in Geneva, via video-link from Cairo. "This year is going to be very challenging."

She warned that more than half of all countries globally are currently believed to be at high risk of measles outbreaks by the end of the year. And some 142 million children are estimated to be susceptible to falling ill.

Measles is a highly-contagious disease caused by a virus that attacks mainly children. The most serious complications include blindness, brain swelling, diarrhea, and severe respiratory infections. A major cause of the swelling numbers is the "backsliding immunization coverage", Crowcroft said.

At least 95 percent of children need to be fully vaccinated against the disease in a locality to prevent outbreaks, but global vaccination rates have slipped to 83 percent. There is a great deal of inequity in the distribution of cases, and even more so when it comes to deaths. Crowcroft pointed out that 92 percent of all children who die from measles live among less than a quarter of the global population, mainly in very low-income countries. — AFP

## International

# Potholes: A pricey British obsession

## Craters inspire art, appear in election pledges as damages cost motorists £474 million in 2023

**LONDON:** Dotting the asphalt, they come in various shapes and sizes, costing drivers a fortune in vehicle repairs and even lives. In Britain, potholes are increasingly a scourge and an obsession. Potholes across the UK are thought to number more than one million, according to vehicle-breakdown company RAC, owing to a widely-perceived lack of government investment for long-lasting repairs.

The bothersome road craters are formed in the winter when water that seeps into road cracks, freezes and bursts. For some, the poor state of Britain's roads is symptomatic of the crumbling state of infrastructure across the country, including Victorian-era hospitals, schools and sewers.

### 'Mr Pothole'

"Our roads are in a horrendous state because of lack of investment over decades by successive governments and authorities," lamented Mark Morrell, an ardent 63-year-old activist, dubbed "Mr Pothole". "The UK road network is like the blood supply to the UK economy and it's been neglected," he told AFP.

Morrell's eye-catching social media content includes floating rubber ducks in a pothole, filling another with instant noodles and riding a bright orange tank to parliament in London.

He pleads for a long-term road maintenance policy, to avoid the return of the craters at the slightest frost. Morrell predicts that potholes will be among the five biggest issues in the UK general election expected this year.

They have also caught the attention of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose Conservative party is trailing badly behind the main opposition Labour in polls. Sunak in November pledged to tackle "the scourge of potholes" with an "unprecedented" £8.3 billion (\$10.5 billion) of funding over 11 years for road repairs in England.

Controversially, the money forms part of sav-

ings delivered after Sunak scrapped a key leg of a planned new high-speed railway, HS2, due to soaring costs. Morrell meanwhile claims the amount set aside is a fraction of what is needed.

### Snipers and canyons

Potholes are not unique to Britain and nor do they all look the same, earning them different nicknames. "There's no escaping" the Alcatraz, or cluster of potholes, RAC claims in a light-hearted assessment on its website. The Sniper is hard to spot, while a chasm-like Canyon is "a complete nightmare for two-wheelers".

To mark National Pothole Day, Britain's biggest vehicle-breakdown company, the AA, said it dealt with nearly 632,000 pothole-related incidents in 2023, the highest in five years. It added that pothole damage cost UK motorists £474 million last year. According to the Asphalt Industry Alliance, more than £14 billion is needed to fix a backlog of repairs in England and Wales.

### Hard road for Ferraris

In 2022, singer Rod Stewart was filmed filling a pothole with gravel near his plush home close to London. The performer, who released "Hard Road" in 1974, said at the time: "My Ferrari can't go through here at all."

Morrell is meanwhile not alone in harnessing his creative side to highlight the UK's pothole plague. Across the country, people spray paint around the damage, hoping it will force local councils to act quickly.

Such artistic endeavors also alert drivers and riders, even more so when a hole is surrounded by a phallus, as drawn by the artist known as Wankys, in Manchester, northwest England.

Comedy on the road can be found also in Essex, the county where Stewart carried out his DIY



LIVERPOOL: A car is driven past a pothole in a damaged road in Liverpool, north west England on January 30, 2024. — AFP

work. A resident there creates pothole scenes using his grandchildren's toys. One shows a Playmobil figure water skiing in a rain-filled hole, while another features a model Loch Ness Monster partially submerged.

Taking inspiration from street artist Banksy for his alias, Wankys got to work after seeing his cyclist friends end up in hospital. In the last decade, 23 cyclists have died in accidents blamed on potholes and other road defects, noted Duncan Doli-

more at lobbyists Cycling UK.

The organization's work involves having local councils fix potholes. "It's partially successful but the big win would be to move them into a culture of maintaining the roads before the defect arises," he told AFP.

Repair techniques may soon be transformed, however. The University of Liverpool is helping to develop a pothole-filling robot powered by artificial intelligence. — AFP

## Global operation smashes harmful cyber crime group

**LONDON:** An international operation led by UK and US law enforcement has severely disrupted "the world's most harmful cyber crime group", the Russian-linked ransomware specialist LockBit, officials announced Tuesday.

LockBit and its affiliates have targeted governments, major companies, schools and hospitals, causing billions of dollars of damage and extracting tens of millions in ransoms from victims. Britain's National Crime Agency (NCA), working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Europol and agencies from nine other countries in Operation Cronos, said it had infiltrated LockBit's network and taken control of its services.

"We have hacked the hackers, we have taken control of their infrastructure, seized their source code, and obtained keys that will help victims decrypt their systems," NCA director general Graeme Biggar told reporters in London.

LockBit's website — selling services that allow people to organize cyber attacks and hold data until a ransom is paid appears — was taken over on Monday evening. A message appeared on the site stating that it was "now under control of law enforcement". "As of today LockBit is effectively redundant, LockBit has been locked out," Biggar said.

The US Justice Department (DOJ) said the agencies had seized control of "numerous public-facing websites used by LockBit to connect to the organization's infrastructure" and taken control of servers used by LockBit administrators.

The NCA added that it had obtained more than 1,000 decryption keys and will be contacting UK-based victims in the coming days and weeks to offer support and help them recover encrypted data. Biggar said the network had been behind 25 percent of all cyber attacks in the past year.

Lockbit has targeted over 2,000 victims and received more than \$120 million in ransom payments since it formed four years ago, according to the (DOJ). Those targeted have included Britain's Royal Mail, US aircraft manufacturer Boeing, and a Canadian children's hospital.

In January 2023, US law enforcers shut down the Hive ransomware operation which had extorted some \$100 million from more than 1,500 victims worldwide. Following that action, Lockbit had been seen as the biggest current threat.

### Dark Web

Hive and Lockbit are part of what cybersecurity experts call a "ransomware as a service" style, or RaaS — a business that leases its software and methods to others to use in extorting money. Ariel Ropek, director of cyber threat intelligence at cybersecurity firm Avertium, told AFP last year that this structure makes it possible for criminals with minimal computer fluency to get into ransomware by paying others for their expertise. On the so-called dark web, providers of ransomware services pitch their products openly. At one end are the initial access brokers, who specialize in breaking into corporate or institutional computer systems. They then sell that access to the hacker, or ransomware operator.

But the operator depends on RaaS developers like Hive or Lockbit, which have the programming skills to create the malware needed to carry out the operation and avoid counter-security measures. Typically, their programs — once inserted by the ransomware oper-



LONDON: A handout picture released by Britain's National Crime Agency (NCA) in London on February 20, 2024 shows a screen shot of the seized cyber crime group 'LockBit' site. — AFP

ator into a target's IT systems — are manipulated to freeze, via encryption, the target's files and data.

RaaS developers offer a full service to the operators, for a large share of the ransom paid out, according to Ropek. When the ransomware is planted and activated, the target receives a message telling them how much to pay to get their data unencrypted. That ransom can run from thousands to millions of dollars, usually depending on the financial strength of the target.

On Tuesday, the US unsealed an indictment against two Russian nationals, bringing to five the number of Russians it has charged in connection with LockBit. In May last year the US offered a \$10 million reward for information leading to the arrest of one of them, Mikhail Pavlovich Matveev.

Biggar said a "large concentration" of the cyber criminals are in Russia and are Russian speaking but law enforcement agencies have not seen any direct support for LockBit from the Russian state. "There is clearly some tolerance of cyber criminality within Russia," he added. — AFP

## Swedish PM to meet Orban ahead of NATO bid vote

**BUDAPEST:** Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson will meet Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban on Friday, three days ahead of a key parliamentary vote on Sweden's bid to join NATO, officials said Tuesday.

Following Turkey's ratification last month, Hungary remains the last NATO member stopping Sweden from joining the alliance. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sweden applied to join NATO in May 2022, at the same time as Finland. Although it says it supports Stockholm in principle, Budapest prolonged the process by asking Sweden to stop "vilifying" Orban's nationalist government. Kristersson's talks with Orban in Budapest will include "defense and security policy cooperation between Hungary and Sweden," the Swedish government said in a statement.

Orban wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that it would be his "pleasure" to welcome Kristersson to Budapest. Hungary's parliament will vote on Sweden's NATO bid on Monday. Earlier, when announcing the vote, Mate Kocsis, leader of the ruling party Fidesz parliamentary group, said his group "intended to support" Sweden's membership. Orban announced on Saturday that Hungary was "on course" to ratify Sweden's bid. "The good news is that our current dispute with Sweden is moving towards a conclusion," he said. "Together with the Swedish PM, we have taken important steps in order to rebuild trust," he said, without giving details. — AFP

## US vetoes Gaza truce vote amid...

Continued from Page 1

said Tuesday it had been forced to stop after having "faced complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order". The World Food Programme resumed deliveries Sunday but its convoy was met with gunfire, violence, looting, people trying to climb onto the vans, and a truck driver was beaten, it said Tuesday. The WFP acknowledged that halting deliveries meant the situation "will deteriorate further and more people risk dying of hunger". More than four months of relentless fighting have flattened much of the coastal territory, pushed 2.2 million people to the brink of famine and displaced

three-quarters of the population, according to UN estimates. The scarcity of food and safe water has triggered a steep rise in malnutrition, the UN children's fund warned Monday, with one in six children in northern Gaza now acutely malnourished. "How many of us have to die... to stop these crimes?" said Ahmad Moghrabi, a Palestinian doctor in southern Gaza's main city, Khan Yunis. "Where is the humanity?"

After months of struggling for a united response, all EU members except Hungary called Monday for an "immediate humanitarian pause". They also urged the Zionist entity not to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering, many in makeshift tents. The city — the last untouched by Zionist ground troops — is the main entry point for desperately needed relief supplies via neighboring Egypt. The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 29,195 people in Gaza, mostly women and children,

according to the latest count by the territory's health ministry. For weeks, the Zionist entity has concentrated its military operations in Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas' leader in the territory Yahya Sinwar.

On Tuesday, the World Health Organization said it had transferred 32 patients out of the city's Nasser Hospital, which Zionist troops raided last week after days of fighting around the medical facility. Seven patients have died in the besieged hospital since Friday due to a lack of oxygen amid power cuts, according to the Gaza health ministry.

The WHO said it feared for patients and staff still inside and warned the damage to the hospital — the chief facility in southern Gaza — was a "massive blow". Witnesses said Gaza City's southern Zeitun neighborhood had also come under heavy bombardment. "We don't know where to go — every place is being bombed," said resident Abdullah Al-Qadi, 67. Farther south in Al-Za-

wayda, Ayman Abu Shammali said his wife and daughter had been killed in a Zionist missile strike. "People in the north are dying from hunger, while here we are dying from bombing," he said.

The Zionist entity has rebuffed repeated calls to spare Rafah, including from closest ally the United States. It has warned that, unless all Zionist hostages still held in Gaza are freed by the start of Ramadan on March 10 or 11, it will push on with its offensive during the Muslim holy month, including in the city.

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh meanwhile arrived in Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials, the group said, days after mediators said prospects for truce had dimmed despite meetings with both Zionist and Hamas negotiators last week. The lack of progress in securing the release of more Zionist hostages has fueled protests in the Zionist entity against the government's handling of the war. — AFP

## Pretoria: Zionist apartheid worse...

Continued from Page 1

of the apartheid that was institutionalized against black people in my country," said Vusumuzi Madonsela, South Africa's ambassador to the Netherlands, where the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is based.

An unprecedented 52 countries are taking the stand at the ICJ, which has been asked to provide a non-binding "advisory opinion" on the legal implications of the Zionist entity's occupation of Palestinian territories. "It is clear that (the Zionist entity's) illegal occupation is also being administered in breach of the crime of apartheid... It is indistinguishable from settler colonialism. (the Zionist entity's) apartheid must end," said Madonsela. He said South Africa had a "special obligation" to call out apartheid wherever it occurs and ensure it is "brought to an immediate end".

The case is separate from a high-profile case brought by Pretoria against the Zionist entity for alleged genocide during its current offensive in Gaza. In that case, the ICJ ruled that the Zionist entity should do everything in its power to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza and allow in humanitarian aid. The hearings kicked off on Monday with three hours of

testimony from Palestinian officials, who accused the Zionist occupiers of running a system of "colonialism and apartheid".

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki urged the judges to call for an end to the occupation "immediately, totally and unconditionally". The ICJ rules in disputes between states. However, it can also be asked to provide a legal opinion on a topic of international law. The United Nations asked it in Dec 2022 to provide guidance on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of the Zionist entity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

When the ICJ rules in contentious cases between states, its judgement is binding but it has little means of enforcement. It ordered Russia to stop its invasion of Ukraine, for example. In contrast, an advisory opinion is completely non-binding but would likely add to the mounting international pressure on the Zionist entity over its Gaza offensive. The court will rule "urgently" on the affair, probably by the end of the year.

The Zionist entity is not participating in the oral hearings but sent a written contribution in which it described the questions the court had been asked as "prejudicial" and "tendentious". Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement that the conflict should be resolved through negotiations. — AFP



GAZA: Onlookers gather around a car that was destroyed in a Zionist raid in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 20, 2024. — AFP

## International



RENK, South Sudan: (Left) A Sudanese woman who has fled from the war in Sudan gets off a truck loaded with aid supplies during a cash assistance programme in Renk. — AFP photos (Right) Sudanese men who have fled from the war in Sudan line up during a cash assistance programme in Renk. — AFP photos

# Grueling wait for Sudanese refugees in S Sudan camps

Many stay in overcrowded transit camps, others move further down S Sudan seeking better lives

RENK, South Sudan: A new truck arrives in the South Sudanese town of Renk, packed with dozens of elderly men, women and children, their exhausted faces betraying the strain of their traumatic journey out of war-ravaged Sudan.

They are among more than half a million people who have crossed the border into South Sudan, which is struggling to accommodate the new arrivals. Renk is just 10 kilometers (six miles) from Sudan, where fighting broke out in April last year between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Since then, Renk's two UN-run transit centers have been overwhelmed by an uninterrupted influx of frightened people, fleeing for their lives. The journey is rife with danger, said Fatima Mohammed, a 33-year-old teacher who escaped with her husband and five children from El-Obeidi city in central Sudan.

"The bullets were entering our house. We were trapped between crossfire in our own street. So, we understood that we needed to leave for the good of our kids," she told AFP, describing the situation in Sudan as "unsustainable". It took them five days to make their escape, with Sudanese soldiers and RSF fighters "making (it) difficult for us to leave the country". "They took all our phones at one checkpoint, a lot of our money (at) another one. We saw abuses happening at those checkpoints," she said.

## 'Stuck here'

Since the start of the conflict, nearly eight million people, half of them children, have fled Sudan. Around 560,000 of them have taken refuge in South Sudan, according to the United Nations, which estimates that around 1,500 new arrivals turn up in the country every day. Many spend months waiting in the transit camps, hopeful that someday soon they will be able to return home. Iman David fled fighting in Sudan's capital Khartoum with her then three-month-old daughter, leaving her husband behind.

"It was supposed to be a short stay, but I am still stuck here in Renk after seven months," the 20-year-old told AFP. "My hope is to go back to Khartoum and reunite with my husband but I don't know his fate."

The war has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians, according to UN figures. Around 25 million people, more than half of Sudan's population, need humanitarian assistance, while around 3.8 million children under the age of five are suffering from malnutrition, the UN says.

## 'Better than Khartoum'

While many in Renk long to return home, others hope to travel onwards to the town of Malakal in Upper Nile state, which is also hosting a huge number of refugees. At Renk port, hundreds of people lined up under the oppressive glare of the midday sun, waiting hours to hop aboard the metal



A Sudanese girl who has fled from the war in Sudan with her family stands after crossing the border while waiting to be registered by the authorities at the Joda Border Crossing Point, near Renk.

boats which make the trip at least twice a week. As she waited, Lina Juna, a 27-year-old mother of four, told AFP her final destination was the South Sudanese capital Juba. "I have nothing to do in Juba, no family members or friends, no business or work to take care of because I have spent all my life in Sudan," she said.

"But I still expect Juba to be much better than Khartoum," she added, recalling days struggling to find food as heavy fighting rocked the city. Several hours later, she managed to board a boat, one of two carrying some 300 people each. "Today

is a good day for us," said Deng Samson, who works for the International Organization for Migration.

"Some weeks we have seen ourselves completely overwhelmed," he told AFP, adding that the approaching monsoon made him nervous. "We are truly afraid of what will happen when the rainy season comes, with waters rising from the river and disrupting the normal functioning of the port." With up to 10 trucks and buses turning up in Renk every day, the UN is trying to mobilize the international community, launching an appeal for \$4.1 billion this month to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs. — AFP



LONDON: Wife of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Stella Assange (center) is surrounded by supporters as she leaves Britain's High Court during a break in proceedings. — AFP

## Assange absent at last-ditch hearing against US extradition

LONDON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was absent from a London court due to illness Tuesday, as his lawyers launched a likely last UK bid to appeal against his extradition to the United States to face espionage charges. Washington wants the Australian extradited after he was indicted multiple times between 2018 and 2020 over WikiLeaks' publication of secret military and diplomatic files on the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kicking off two days of arguments in front of two senior judges at the High Court, the 52-year-old's leading lawyer said he would show "errors of law" in previous rulings against him in recent years. "Mr Assange was exposing serious state criminality," Edward Fitzgerald said, describing the charges against him as "politically motivated".

"He is being prosecuted for engaging in ordinary journalistic practice of obtaining and publishing classified information," he added. "There is a real risk that he will suffer flagrant denial of justice," if sent to the US, Fitzgerald argued. Earlier, he had told the judges that Assange was "not well today" and would not attend in person or via video link. Lawyers for the US will present their arguments on Wednesday. It is unclear if Assange will attend then.

## 'Two big days'

The two-day session is the latest in his long-running legal saga in Britain, and is seen as his last chance to fight extradition in the country's courts. The judges will decide whether to grant him another full appeal hearing, to be held at a later date, or if they rule against him, he will have exhausted his UK legal options.

However, Stella Assange has said her husband will then ask the European Court of Human Rights to temporarily halt the extradition, warning he would die if sent to the United States. "Please keep on showing up, be there for Julian and for us, until Julian is free," she told a crowd of supporters outside court.

"We have two big days ahead. We don't know what to expect, but you're here because the world is watching," she added. "They just cannot get away with this. Julian needs his freedom and we all need the truth." The couple, who met when Stella worked on his legal case in the mid-2010s, have two children together.

## 'Enough is enough'

US President Joe Biden has faced sustained domestic and international pressure to drop the 18-count indictment against Assange in a Virginia federal court, which was filed under his predecessor Donald Trump. Major media organizations, press freedom advocates and the Australian parliament are among those decrying the prosecution under the 1917 Espionage Act, which has never been used over the publishing of classified information.

Australia's parliament passed a motion to end his prosecution last week, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese denouncing the years-long legal pursuit and saying, "enough is enough". But Washington has maintained the case, which alleges Assange and others at WikiLeaks recruited and agreed with hackers to conduct "one of the largest compromises of classified information" in US history.

Detained in the high-security Belmarsh Prison in southeast London since April 2019, Assange was arrested after spending seven years holed up in Ecuador's London embassy. He fled there to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faced accusations of sexual assault which were later dropped.

UK courts previously blocked his extradition, but the High Court reversed the decision on appeal in 2021 after Washington vowed not to imprison him in its most extreme prison, "ADX Florence". It also pledged not to subject him to the harsh regime known as "Special Administrative Measures" and eventually allow him to be transferred to Australia.

In March 2022, the UK's Supreme Court refused permission to appeal there, arguing Assange failed to "raise an arguable point of law". Months later, ex-interior minister Priti Patel formally signed off on his extradition. Assange's lawyers are now appealing on various grounds, including that the decades-long prison sentence he faces in the US is "disproportionate" and that US is acting in "bad faith". — AFP

## Family of murdered Italian student in Cairo still seeking justice

ROME: A second trial of four Egyptian security officers accused of kidnapping and brutally murdering an Italian student in 2016 opened in Rome Tuesday with his parents vowing to uncover the truth. Giulio Regeni, 28, had been conducting academic research when he was abducted in January 2016. His body was found nine days later, dumped on the outskirts of the Egyptian capital, bearing extensive signs of torture.

The murder severely strained ties between Italy and Egypt, while Italian MPs later accused Cairo of being "openly hostile" to attempts to try the suspects. In 2021, Italian judges threw out the first trial the day it opened because prosecutors had not been able to officially inform the four suspects of the procedures against them.

But the Constitutional Court ruled in September that the case could go ahead in their absence. On the new trial's opening day Tuesday, Regeni's parents, Claudio and Paola, and his sister Irene unfurled a large yellow banner bearing the words "Truth for Giulio Regeni", before entering the court.

After a hearing that lasted one-and-a-half hours, the family's lawyer, Alessandra Ballerini, said her clients looked forward to "finally (having) a trial against those who did all the evil in the world to Giulio." "We have been waiting eight years for this moment," Ballerini told journalists outside the courtroom.

None of the four defendants — General Tariq Sabir, Colonels Athar Kamel and Uhsam Helmi, and Major Magdi Ibrahim Abdelal Sharif — were present in court.

All face charges of kidnapping, while Sharif is also charged with inflicting the fatal injuries on Regeni. Defense lawyers asked that the case be thrown out, arguing that the charges indiscriminately targeted the group without attributing specific acts to each individual. The court said it would rule on their legal objections at the next hearing March 18. — AFP



ROME: Giulio Regeni's parents Claudio Regeni (left), Paola Regeni (second left) and Giulio Regeni's sister Irene Regeni (right) arrive at a courtroom in Rome in this file photo. — AFP



FRANKFURT: Flowers are seen placed around a portrait of Alexei Navalny at a makeshift memorial in front of the former Russian consulate in Frankfurt. — AFP

## Navalny's mother calls on Putin to release body

MOSCOW: The mother of Alexei Navalny urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to "immediately" release the body of her son, in her first comments since his death in an Arctic prison. Putin's main political opponent died in his penal colony on Friday, Russian authorities said. His team says the 47-year-old was murdered.

His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, who has vowed to continue her husband's work, echoed his mother's call and repeated accusations against Putin over Navalny's death. Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, travelled to the remote IK-3 penal colony on Saturday, the morning after his death was announced, and has since been barred from seeing his body. "I appeal to you, Vladimir Putin. The solution to the issue depends only on you," she said, dressed all in black, in a video published by his team. "Let me finally see my son. I demand that Alexei's body be released immediately so that I can bury him in a humane way."

Behind her was the barbed wire of the IK-3 prison above the Arctic Circle — one of Russia's harshest jails and the place where Navalny spent his last weeks. "For the fifth day, I cannot see him. They don't give me his body and I am not even told where he is," Lyudmila Navalnaya said.

Navalny's allies have said she mother has been barred from morgues and was on Monday told by investigators that his body could be kept for "at least two weeks". Navalny's team also published a written letter to Putin by Lyudmila Navalnaya — who is not a public figure — making the demand.

The Kremlin has refused to say when the body will be handed over and Putin has been silent on the death of his main political opponent. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday brushed off Yulia Navalnaya's statement that Putin killed her husband as "unfounded and vulgar".

"I do not give a damn how the press secretary of a murderer comments on my words," Navalnaya shot back on social media. "Give back the body of Alexei and let us bury him with dignity. Do not stop people from bidding farewell to him," Navalnaya said. — AFP

# Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

## Alghanim Industries unveils office expansion at Al-Hamra Tower



**KUWAIT:** Kutayba Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim, Sheikh Faisal Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Bader Al-Kharafi, Bader Al-Rezaihan and Mahmoud Samara along with a number of team members at Alghanim Industries during the opening ceremony.

**KUWAIT:** Demonstrating its sustained growth and business expansion, Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, has proudly announced a significant extension to its main head office within the iconic Al-Hamra Tower in Kuwait City. The opening ceremony of this expansion was led by Kutayba

Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, alongside Sheikh Faisal Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Chairman of Al-Hamra Real Estate Co. and witnessed by a gathering of distinguished leaders from the private sector. The latest expansion encompasses the 74th and 75th floors, increasing Alghanim Industries' offices in Al-Hamra



**KUWAIT:** Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Hania Al-Thukair and Bader Al-Kharafi along with Sheikh Faisal Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah tour the newly-opened office.

Business Tower to a total of six floors, starting from the 70th. This move is a testament to Alghanim Industries' dedication to fostering an innovative and collaborative work environment. Designed to accommodate over 280 additional employees, the newly-expanded spaces are aimed at enhancing teamwork and enabling seamless virtual communica-

tion with teams across the company's vast network, stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.

The expansion features state-of-the-art meeting rooms, a training center, a theater hall, among other amenities, designed to ensure employees' comfort and well-being while fostering an environment conducive to innovation and productivity.



**SINGAPORE:** Pilatus PC-21 aircraft from the Royal Australian Air Force aerobatic team, also known as the Roulettes, perform during a preview of the Singapore Airshow in Singapore. — AFP photos



**SINGAPORE:** Members of South Korea's 'Black Eagle' aerobatics team perform during an aerial display at the Singapore Airshow in Singapore on February 20, 2024.

## Boeing announces Dreamliner deal at Singapore Airshow

**SINGAPORE:** Boeing said on Tuesday that Thai Airways had placed an order for 45 Dreamliner aircraft, the first major deal announced by the embattled US plane-maker at the Singapore Airshow.

It was one of several purchase agreements unveiled on the first day of Asia's biggest airshow where European plane-maker Boeing with its C919 aircraft, Beijing is seeking to challenge the decades-long dominance of Airbus and Boeing while reducing its reliance on foreign technology.

In addition to the 45 Dreamliners for Thai Airways, Boeing announced that Royal Brunei Airlines had ordered four of the 787 aircraft. It did not provide a value for the deals. At list prices, the Thai order would be worth \$13.16 billion, but customers usually get a discount when making bulk aircraft orders. Thai Airways chief executive Chai Eamsiri said the planes would be equipped with the latest fuel-efficient engines to help the carrier cut its carbon emissions.

"We are confident that the acquisition of the 787 Dreamliners will ultimately benefit our customers

and support the growth of our country's economy," said Chai. State-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) said it secured an order from China's Tibet Airlines for 40 of its C919s and 10 of its ARJ21s.

Henan Civil Aviation Development and Investment Group also bought six ARJ21s which it will use for firefighting, medical service and emergency management, COMAC said in a statement. A spokesperson for COMAC at the airshow would not give a value for the order.

### A 'third option'

The single-aisle C919 is a potential competitor to the market-leading A320, made by Airbus, and the 737 MAX from Boeing. But it has yet to attract buyers outside China, and analysts said it might struggle to find a big-name buyer at the airshow.

"There's still a stigma with the 'made-in-China' brand in the aviation industry, even if China now leads the world in the electric vehicle market," said aviation analyst Shukor Yusof of Singapore-based consultancy Endau Analytics. "It will take time for the C919 to land an order from a major carrier," he said, even though it's "a matter of when, not if, a top-tier airline buys a Chinese-made commercial jet".

Brendan Sobie, who runs his own consultancy Sobie Aviation, said the Chinese brought the C919 to the airshow to "raise awareness and as a symbolic first step" to it being certified internationally.

year will also play an important role in encouraging governments to toughen up their decarbonization targets. Jaber said finance was "the key enabler of positive change at the speed and scale" needed.

"But not normal scale finance — we need finance at every level," he said, at an event in Paris organized by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Countries are expected this year to hammer out a new target for the amount of annual support rich nations will provide to poorer ones for their energy transitions and adaptation to climate impacts from 2025. The failure of wealthy nations to meet their previous goal of \$100 billion per year by 2020 has soured trust, with indications the target was likely reached only in 2022.

Needs already far outstrip the money available. The UN-backed climate finance expert group has estimated that emerging economies except China will need to spend around \$2.4 trillion a year by the end of the decade. "The world must now raise the bar to address the challenge we face," Jaber said.

He said airlines are eager to have a "third option" apart from Boeing and Airbus but "persuading them to buy the C919 is challenging".

### Still smarting

While Boeing was in attendance at the airshow, it has not brought any physical commercial aircraft, unlike in previous years. Boeing is still smarting from a near-catastrophic incident in January, when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight.

The incident, which caused only minor injuries, led the US Federal Aviation Administration to ground more than 170 MAX 9 planes for around three weeks. More than 1,000 aviation and defense companies are taking part in the airshow, which is held every two years. China, South Korea and the Czech Republic have country pavilions for the first time, and Airbus is showcasing its new long-range A350-1000 plane. Organizers expect the show to draw 50,000 trade attendees from around the world — close to pre-pandemic levels.

A watered-down airshow was held in 2020 after many of the exhibitors pulled out, and the 2022 edition went ahead but without the two days open to the public. "2018 was the highest we've ever had. We are close to the best we've ever had," said Leck Chet Lam, managing director of event organizer Experia. This reflects the global recovery of air travel, he said. — AFP

"We need to start thinking trillions, not billions." Recognition of the scale of support needed has put the focus on expanding sources of funding. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund are under pressure to initiate sweeping reforms to align their lending with the Paris deal goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. Other initiatives under discussion include new taxation, especially on polluting industries, as well as redirecting fossil fuel subsidies into green development. The United Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan and the 2025 COP host Brazil are launching an initiative to maintain global focus on keeping the 1.5C goal alive. Jaber warned that there was a risk that "political momentum can dissipate and then fade away or disappear between COPs".

IEA chief Fatih Birol said the energy agency, which has become a key player in promoting the energy transition, would offer countries help to beef up emissions-cutting targets, with enhanced decarbonization plans expected this year and in 2025. — AFP

## EU gives green light to Orange, MasMovil merger

**BRUSSELS:** The EU on Tuesday approved the merger between French telecoms giant Orange and Spanish rival MasMovil that will create the biggest mobile operator in Spain, provided they fulfill a package of commitments.

The two companies announced in July 2022 a 18.6-billion-euro (\$20.1 billion) deal but the European Commission, the bloc's powerful antitrust authority, last year expressed concerns the takeover could restrict competition in the Spanish market. In an initial probe, the commission found that the transaction would have created the largest operator by customer numbers in Spain and eliminated a competitor for Orange since MasMovil had attracted a "significant number" of customers from the giant.

EU regulators feared this would mean price rises for Spanish consumers, "well above 10 percent", the commission said. Brussels hopes that two commitments, also known as remedies, will alleviate those fears. "The approval is conditional upon full compliance with a commitments package offered by Orange and MasMovil," the commission said in a statement. Firstly, the companies agreed to sell spectrum to Romania's Digi, a mobile network operator in Spain, which the commission said would allow Digi "to build its own mobile network".

Such a move would enable Digi to "exert a strong competitive constraint on the joint venture", the commission added. Secondly, Digi will also be to use their network to complement its own, it said, as part of an optional national roaming agreement. The EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, said the commitments "will ensure that consumers in Spain continue to benefit from a competitive telecom market, in terms of prices, quality and 5G connectivity".

Orange and MasMovil welcomed the "favorable" decision. "Today's announcement is a crucial moment for the future development of the Group in Europe. Our proposed Joint Venture with MasMovil will create a single, stronger, and more sustainable player in Spain," Orange CEO Christel Heydemann said in a statement. The companies plan to finalize the deal by the end of March. — AFP

## World needs 'trillions' for climate action: COP28 president

**PARIS:** The world needs "trillions" of dollars to spur on the green transition and tackle global warming, the head of last year's COP28 climate talks said Tuesday, warning that political momentum can evaporate without clear action. COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber hailed progress made at UN negotiations last year in Dubai, where countries agreed to triple global renewables capacity this decade and "transition away" from polluting fossil fuels. But the deal lacked important details, including on funding, putting the onus on this year's COP29 meeting in Azerbaijan.

With impacts accelerating as global heat records are smashed, experts say that funding agreed this



**PARIS:** COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber talks to state secretary and special envoy for International Climate Action Jennifer Morgan (left) during a high-level round table on COP energy and climate commitments organized by the International Energy Agency (IEA) at its headquarters in Paris on Feb 20, 2024. — AFP



Business



Activities of Gulf Bank 642 Marathon.



Mohammad Al-Qattan and Ahmed Al-Majed on the sidelines of a press conference.

# 9th edition of Gulf Bank Marathon set to kick off on March 2, 2024

One of Kuwait's most prominent sporting events, distinguished by its worldwide acclaim

**KUWAIT:** In its commitment to supporting sustainability initiatives in the community, Gulf Bank has once again, extended its annual invitation to athletes, beginners, and all sectors of society to take part in the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon on Saturday (March 2, 2024). This event is one of Kuwait's most significant sports and social events, distinguished by its worldwide acclaim.

The Gulf Bank Marathon this year offers a range of categories designed to accommodate participants of varying athletic levels. These encompass a 5-kilometer race for walking or running, a 10-kilometer running race, and a half marathon covering 21 kilometers. Eligibility spans from ages 11 and up for the 5-kilometer race, ages 16 and above for the 10-kilometer race, and ages 18 and older for the half marathon. It is worth mentioning that the 42-kilometer race has been excluded from this year's event and replaced by a special race designed for children aged 3 to 9 on February 29, 2024.

The Gulf Bank Marathon stands as the largest sports event held in the heart of Kuwait City, guiding runners through the scenic landmarks of Kuwait. Notably, the Gulf Bank Marathon is the sole marathon in Kuwait accredited by "World Athletics" with the prestigious "Road Race Label" designation and listed among international marathons by the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS). Moreover, participants in the marathon have the chance to accumulate points and qualify for the "AbbottWMM Wanda Age Group World Rankings," granting them entry into the world championship for age groups over 40 years old.

### Promoting community wellbeing

During yesterday's press conference announcing the launch of the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "We are thrilled to witness the return of the marathon for running enthusiasts. Its postponement from November 2023 to March 2, 2024, was due to unexpected regional and local circumstances. We are committed to



Mohammad Al-Qattan addresses the press conference.

- "We are thrilled to witness the return of the marathon for running enthusiasts, and are committed to ensuring that the ninth edition of the marathon will be outstanding."
- "The marathon goes beyond being a one-day race; it serves as an invitation to transform one's approach and lifestyle."
- "The marathon represents an initiative aimed at addressing the rising rates of diabetes, obesity, and heart diseases, which pose significant threats to society."

ensuring that the ninth edition of the marathon will be outstanding. It remains the largest local sports event held annually in the heart of Kuwait City, attracting thousands of athletes." He highlighted that the Gulf Bank Marathon goes beyond being a one-day race; it serves as an invitation to transform one's approach and lifestyle, aiming for sports to become ingrained routines and essential components of everyday life. He emphasized that the marathon represents an initiative aimed at addressing the rising rates of diabetes, obesity, and heart diseases, which pose significant threats to society. This highlights the need for increased focus on sports and lifestyle adaptations.

Al-Qattan emphasized that the marathon is a social sporting event aimed at bringing together individuals and families from all segments of society, a role that Gulf Bank always values in all its activities. This stems from the bank's distinctive position in integrating sustainability principles into the community, as part of its 2025 strategy. He added: "Our commitment at Gulf Bank, to annually sponsor the marathon, originates from our position as one of the largest private sector institutions dedicated to promoting sustainability across society, the economy, and the environment. This dedication is evident through thoughtfully

chosen initiatives aimed at reforming approaches and fostering societal progress."

### A success story of growth and community engagement

Ahmed Al-Majid, COO at Suffix, a company specializing in sports event management, expressed his pride, stating, "We are honored to continue our partnership with Gulf Bank in organizing this distinguished social sports event, which achieves success year after year, amidst increasing local and regional participation." He emphasized, "As we aim to raise the bar for sporting events in the region by organizing exceptional sports activities, we encourage everyone to register and take part in the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, to immerse themselves in one of the most exciting days of the year!"

Commenting on the significant increase in the number of participants in the Gulf Bank Marathon, Al-Majid stated, "The Gulf Bank Marathon started with only 400 participants in its inaugural edition. Before the pandemic, it attracted nearly 10,000 participants, totaling 57,600 participants across the previous ninth editions. Additionally, the marathon consistently involves over 500 volunteers annually."

He highlighted the record-breaking attendance of

### Ahmed Al-Majid

- "We are honored to continue our partnership with Gulf Bank in organizing this distinguished social sports event."
- "We encourage everyone to register and take part in the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, to immerse themselves in one of the most exciting days of the year!"

the previous marathon edition, with 11,000 participants, among them 2,000 runners from outside Kuwait, representing approximately 107 Arab and foreign nationalities. Furthermore, he added, "In an effort to showcase local talent, we partnered with Kuwait University students to craft medals for the Gulf Bank Marathon winners, an event ranked among the top 100 sporting events globally."

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.



A group photo taken during the celebration.

## AAW and Bosch celebrate 45 years of partnership in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) celebrated on Tuesday 45 years of partnership with Bosch Home Appliances at the company's headquarters. The event was attended by Bosch Middle East CEO Tomas Alonso and AAW Deputy CEO Khalid Faisal Al-Mutawa.

Bosch Middle East CEO, Tomas Alonso said: "AAW, the exclusive distributor of Bosch products in Kuwait, has served as an outstanding representative for our brand. Their dedication and expertise have played a key role in contributing to our leadership position in the Kuwaiti market. We are confident that this successful partnership will continue to thrive and bring even more innovative and advanced home appliance solutions to the customers in Kuwait."

AAW Deputy CEO, Khalid Faisal Al-Mutawa said: "Over the past 45 years, AAW and Bosch have shared a journey, driven by a mutual commitment to quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction. This partnership has enabled us to offer our customers

a wide range of cutting-edge home appliances that enhance their lives. We are incredibly proud of what we achieved together in serving households in Kuwait and look forward to further strengthening our collaboration with Bosch in the years to come."

Bosch is a German manufacturer of home appliances and one of the leading companies in the sector worldwide. The company's product portfolio spans the entire spectrum of modern household appliances, extending from stoves, ovens, and extractor hoods to dishwashers, washers and dryers, refrigerators and freezers, and small appliances (consumer products) such as vacuum cleaners, coffee machines, electric kettles, and many more.

## UK bank Barclays logs falling profit but shares rally

**LONDON:** UK bank Barclays said on Tuesday its annual profit slid on a large restructuring charge, but shares rallied on a £10-billion (\$12.6-billion) plan to return cash to investors. Profit after tax slid 15 percent to £4.3 billion last year on a £900-million charge for the fourth quarter, Barclays revealed in a results statement.

The lender, fresh from axing 5,000 jobs last year, outlined a plan to slash another £2.0 billion in costs in the coming years but did not specify further cutbacks. Barclays added that it planned "to return at least £10 billion of capital to shareholders between 2024 and 2026, through dividends and share buybacks."

"Our new three-year plan... is designed to further improve Barclays' operational and financial performance, driving higher returns and predictable, attractive shareholder distributions," chief executive C S Venkatakrishnan said in the earnings release. The news sent Barclays' share price rallying more than six percent in early deals to top London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, which dipped slightly overall.

Its share price later pared gains to stand at 155.18 pence, still a gain of 4.2 percent from Monday. The group returned £3.0 billion to shareholders in 2023, up almost 40 percent from the year before. Revenue grew two percent last year to £25.4 billion on the back of rising interest rates, which attract savers and also increase returns on bank loans. — AFP

## Polish farmers resume Ukraine border blockade

**RYKI, Poland:** Farmers in Poland resumed a blockade of around 100 roads to the Ukrainian border on Tuesday morning to protest against "uncontrolled" imports and demand a change to EU agricultural policy.

For weeks Polish farmers have been blocking Ukrainian goods lorries from entering their country in anger at what they say is unfair competition from cheaper imports from Poland's war-torn neighbor and ally. Across Europe, angry farmers have been protesting over rising costs, high fuel prices, bureaucracy and the environmental requirements in the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its forthcoming "Green Deal".

Dozens of tractors travelled to Ryki, a town 100 kilometers (60 miles) southeast of the capital Warsaw, to

block a major highway that leads to the Ukrainian border. Farmers hung red and white Polish flags on their tractors along with placards that said: "Stop the uncontrolled influx of Ukrainian goods" and "Farming is dying little by little". Roads into EU member Poland have been an export lifeline for Ukraine, particularly its agriculture sector, after the 2022 Russian invasion complicated major trading routes through the Black Sea.

But the increase in road imports has angered Polish logistics companies and farmers, who say their Ukrainian rivals are undercutting them.

"I'm here to get rid of the restrictions introduced by the European Union regarding fallow land, the Green Deal and above all to stop Ukrainian food flowing in," Tomasz Golak, who runs an animal and cereal farm in a nearby village, told AFP. "This year wheat is selling for half the price it did last year," he added. The 27-nation EU last month eased restrictions that obliged farmers to keep part of their land fallow and this month extended that exemption under pressure from protests. On Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the blockade demonstrated an "erosion of solidarity" and could not be "considered normal or ordinary." — AFP



Polish farmers with their tractors and vehicles arrive to block the highway linking Warsaw and Lublin outside the town of Ryki, Lublin region, during a protest of farmers across the country against EU climate measures on Feb 20, 2024. — AFP

## Business

# NBK offers complimentary limo ride for private and privilege banking customers

## Bank seeks to offer best benefits and services to customers



**Nora Al-Najjar:**

- NBK always seeks to be closer to customers by providing them exceptional offers for more luxury
- We are dedicated to serve customers' needs by maintaining close communication with them through various channels

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to enhance customer banking experience by providing the best exclusive offers and exceptional benefits that suit their different segments. In this context, the bank has announced providing complimentary limo ride for private and privilege banking customers. According to the offer valid from Feb 22 to March 2, 2024, private and privilege banking customers can avail a complimentary one-time limo ride through Q'go Concierge by calling their designated number 1888125.

This service from NBK is one of the many services provided by "Q'go Concierge" including fast-track check-in, extra luggage allowance, free baggage delivery, hotel offers and umrah packages, in addition to cash delivery of up to KD 10,000. It also features Messenger Services including renewing and applying for

ministry documentation, business special consultation and set-up, airport transportation, limo service, and airport Meet & Assist in Kuwait.

Speaking on this offer, Nora Al-Najjar, Manager, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said, "At NBK, we always strive to provide our customers with the best benefits and services to enhance their banking experience. We also seek to be always closer to them by providing exceptional offers that offer them more luxury and peace of mind." "We are well aware of our customers' preferences, as we maintain close communication with them through various channels. This goes in line with our keenness to maximize their benefit from the services, special offers and exceptional rewards that we carefully tailor to fit the lifestyles and needs of their different segments and ages," she added.

It is worth mentioning that over the past years, NBK was able to maintain top-notch Privilege Banking services, and is always striving to offer customers an even more innovative banking experience.

NBK provides Premium Banking Customers with an exclusive array of services, including: a dedicated relationship manager for our Privilege Customers and a Personal Banking Officer for our Thahabi Customers taking care of all customers' banking needs. It also provides them with access to Premium Banking lounges, diverse investment solutions including: SmartWealth and Watani Brokerage, Family Banking package, Premium Banking Teller Services which grants them priority in making their transactions in a quick and easy way, in addition to card home delivery service, priority status when contacting NBK Call Center on 1801801 available 24/7.



Choose Your Destination and Enjoy a Free Ride to the Airport

## 'This hunger is too much': Nigerians protest economic hardship

**IBADAN, Nigeria:** Hundreds of Nigerians demonstrated against the soaring cost of living in the south of the country on Monday after huge protests in the north earlier this month.

Nigeria is suffering an economic crisis and soaring prices have left many people struggling to afford food. Demonstrators in the southwestern city Ibadan were furious with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's leadership, according to an AFP journalist at the scene. Watched over by armed police and soldiers, the protesters closed a road and chanted, carrying signs that said "End bad government", "End food scarcity" and "End Nigerian hardship". "This hunger is too much," said 26-year-old student Olaide Alamu.

"It's not been like this before... we are starving. Tinubu should do something... he promised to do better. Look at us now." After coming to office last year Tinubu ended a fuel subsidy and currency controls, leading to a tripling of petrol prices and a spike in living costs as the naira has slid against the dollar. Tinubu has repeatedly called for patience to allow his reforms to take effect, saying they will help attract foreign investment, but the measures have hit Nigerians hard.

The country's inflation rate reached almost 30 percent in January, according to the national bureau of statistics. Many poor Nigerians have had to give up products considered a luxury, such as meat, eggs and milk. Dire conditions in the north have sparked protests in several cities including Suleja near the capital Abuja, Minna in Niger State, and the economic hub of Kano. The crisis has forced people in the north to skip meals and eat poor-grade rice used as fish food.

To feed their children, women have even resorted to digging up anthills in search of grain stored by the insects, according to videos on social media. Earlier this month the influential traditional emir of Kano Aminu Ado Bayero warned that Nigerians faced "economic hardships, hunger and starvation" and called on the president to take urgent action.

Titilayo Olusegun, a 38-year-old business owner at the demonstration in Ibadan said that "if (the president) cannot solve our issues, he should vacate the office." "There is too much hunger. We can't pay our children's school fees, we can't pay our rent... it's difficult to eat," she said. "The pain is too much." — AFP

## EU removes Bahamas, Seychelles from tax haven blacklist

**BRUSSELS:** The EU removed the Bahamas, Seychelles and two other jurisdictions from its tax havens blacklist on Tuesday, a move anti-poverty group Oxfam said showed the list was "a waste of time". The list, approved by the EU's member states, now counts 12 jurisdictions deemed non-cooperative for tax purposes, particularly where it comes to sharing tax information.

The European Union removed Bahamas, Belize, Seychelles, and Turks and Caicos Islands from the list. It now has: American Samoa, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Fiji, Guam, Palau, Panama, Russia, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, US Virgin Islands and Vanuatu.

"The Council regrets that these jurisdictions are not yet cooperative on tax matters and invites them to improve their legal framework in order to resolve the identified issues," the council, made up of the EU's 27 member states, said in a statement.

Oxfam urged Brussels to "overhaul" the list. "Today's update highlights once again that, without reform, this list is a waste of everyone's time," said Chiara Putaturo, Oxfam EU tax expert.

"The Bahamas is one of the world's worst tax havens, yet it has been removed from the list. The same for the Seychelles, a hotbed of shell companies where multinationals reap massive profits. Meanwhile, EU tax havens get a free pass," Putaturo added. "If the EU is serious about ending tax avoidance, the new (European) Commission must urgently overhaul this list to serve its intended purpose," Putaturo said in a statement. — AFP

## Philip Morris receives CDP 'Triple-A' rating for climate, forest and water

**DUBAI:** For the fourth consecutive year, Philip Morris International Inc (PMI) (NYSE: PM) has received a "triple-A" rating from CDP for its disclosures on climate change, forests, and water security — placing PMI among the world's leading companies in environmental transparency and action.

PMI has maintained a position on CDP's Climate A List for the past 10 years, reflecting its commitment to transparency and performance as the company progresses toward achieving its science-based targets, as well as carbon neutrality for scope 1+2 by 2025, and net zero by 2040 for scope 1+2+3. PMI's efforts to halt deforestation, moving to zero net deforestation in managed forests by 2030, have further been recognized by CDP, which placed the company on its Forests A List for the fourth consecutive year.

## China cuts key mortgage rate to boost economy

**BEIJING:** China's central bank on Tuesday cut a key benchmark lending rate used to price mortgages, as Beijing seeks to rescue its housing market from a deepening crisis and boost flagging growth in the country's economy.

China has struggled to kickstart growth as it battles a prolonged property sector downturn, soaring youth unemployment and a global slowdown that has hammered demand for goods from the world's second-largest economy.

The five-year loan prime rate (LPR) was lowered from 4.2 to 3.95 percent, the People's Bank of China announced, in the first cut since June. It is the largest cut to the rate since it was introduced in 2019, according to Bloomberg, deeper than that expected by economists polled by the financial newswire.

The one-year LPR, which serves as a benchmark for corporate loans, remained unchanged at 3.45 percent. The one-year rate was last lowered in August, while the five-year LPR had previously been reduced in June. Tuesday's moves are aimed at encouraging commercial banks to grant more credit and at more advantageous rates. They come in stark contrast to most other major economies, where rates have been raised in a bid to curb inflation — part of a global slowdown that is hitting demand for Chinese exports.

China last year recorded one of its worst annual growth rates since 1990, dampening hopes for a rapid economic recovery following the end of draconian COVID restrictions in late 2022.

In January, consumer prices fell at their quickest rate in more than 14 years, piling pressure on the government to make more aggressive moves to revive the battered economy. At the heart of the country's woes is an unprecedented crisis in real estate, a key engine of growth that has long represented more than a quarter of GDP.

Financial troubles at major firms such as Evergrande and Country Garden have fuelled

## Europe stocks climb after China rate cut

**LONDON:** European equities mostly rose Tuesday, following gains in Hong Kong and Shanghai, after China's central bank sprang a record cut to a benchmark lending rate in a bid to boost the nation's struggling economy. London won ground with Barclays jumping to the top of the risers board after the UK bank revealed plans to slash costs and return £10 billion (\$12.6 billion) to shareholders.

The Paris stock market advanced, aided by solid results from industrial gas giant Air Liquide, but Frankfurt dipped. Chinese shares were buoyant

This is the fifth year that PMI has been featured on CDP's Water A List as the company works toward its water optimization targets, which include optimization of 10 million cubic meters of water in its tobacco growing areas by 2030.

"External recognition from organizations like CDP encourages us to continue our transformation journey and commitment to sustainability. We are pleased PMI has received CDP's 'triple-A' distinction for the fourth consecutive time," said Scott Coutts, Senior Vice President of Operations. "Clear and transparent reporting of our progress helps us find new opportunities for action, identify and tackle growing risks, and get ahead of regulatory and policy changes."

PMI is also committed to advancing the adoption of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) recommendations and intends to publish its first TNFD-aligned report for financial year 2025. Accordingly, PMI has been included in an inaugural cohort of organizations that intend to become TNFD Early Adopters.

"We recognize the urgency to address climate change and protect biodiversity, and this is why our



ZHENGZHOU, China: People attend a job fair in Zhengzhou, in central China's Henan province on February 19, 2024. — AFP

buyer mistrust against a backdrop of unfinished housing developments and falling prices. Property was for years seen by many Chinese as a safe place to park savings, but price drops have hit their wallets hard and Beijing's support measures for the sector have so far had little effect.

One analyst said Tuesday's moves could be "another step in the right direction to address the deflation problem China faces". Deflation, which harms employment and demand, can be a brake on the profitability of companies.

"I think there will be more rate cuts to come this year in China," said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. The decision to cut rates deeper than expected, Zhang added, "may indicate that the policy makers recognize the urgency to take action quickly".

"The cut is clearly intended to boost the faltering property markets," Ting Lu, chief China economist at Nomura, said in a note. But,

after the Lunar New Year, leading gains in most Asian markets thanks to a holiday boost, although Tokyo stumbled on profit-taking.

Oil prices headed lower as demand fears eclipsed concern over potential disruption to supplies from the crude-rich Middle East, while the dollar traded mixed.

"China provided a fresh boost to risk appetite... after the People's Bank of China (PBoC) announced cuts in another step to the nation's economic stimulus policy," said ActivTrades analyst Pierre Veyret. The PBoC announced it was lowering the five-year loan prime rate (LPR), used to price mortgages, from 4.2 to 3.95 percent.

Beijing's measures are intended to rally dwindling growth and counter rate hikes in other major economies, as the world's second-largest economy battles a prolonged property-sector crisis and a global slowdown. "This news... gave investors reasons to buy the dip while waiting for other crucial macro developments," added Veyret. The

decarbonization strategy and progress are closely tied to preserving natural ecosystems," said Jennifer Motles, Chief Sustainability Officer. "We are proud to be an early adopter of the TNFD framework and will be reporting on it in 2025, which builds on the work we have already done to incorporate climate-related risk and opportunities into our overall business strategy and disclosure efforts, following the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) recommendations."



CLIMATE FORESTS WATER

## Business

PROCAPITA annual report 2023/2024

## Labor market trends and practices in GCC

**KUWAIT:** PROCAPITA, a leading HR consultancy firm in the region, has officially released on Tuesday its second annual report for the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) for the year 2023/2024. The report conducts a thorough analysis of the labor market in the region, shedding light on the latest developments and trends in the field of human resources. It covers essential aspects, including economic highlights, recruitment & manpower planning, technology, talent management, compensation and benefits, and board remunerations.

To provide valuable insights, PROCAPITA executed a meticulously designed survey, involving over 1,200 organizations from various sectors in the GCC. Their active participation significantly contributed to enriching the depth and accuracy of the findings presented in the report.

Commenting on the report, Mohammed Abu Al-Rob, CEO of PROCAPITA and founder of ZENTHR, stressed the importance of this annual report, which has become an invaluable resource for companies navigating the evolving landscape of the labor market in the GCC countries, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the economic developments and the resulting transformations concerning human resources and employment patterns in the GCC countries. It also provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the operational processes in the organizations, as well as the compensation provided to members of the boards of directors of companies that offer their shares for public trading in the GCC countries.

Abu Al-Rob also highlighted the effective role of PROCAPITA's strategic partners, ZENTHR for HR Intelligence Solutions and Thomas International, which specializes in conducting behavioral and professional assessments of employees. Their expertise has expanded and deepened the understanding of various precise aspects related to talent dynamics in organizations and industries across the region. Furthermore, this collaboration embodies a steadfast commitment to providing the best value to all partners. He noted that the increase in the number of participants reflects a deep confidence in the team's efforts to understand the dynamic landscape of human resources in the Gulf Cooperation Council region. Key findings of the report:

#### RECRUITMENT & MANPOWER PLANNING

##### Employment growth rate

Employee growth rate remained positive in the GCC, with 66.7 percent of the participating organizations citing increases in 2023. The highest growth rate was recorded in KSA, which could be attributed to various labor reforms, including private sector investment and entrepreneurship initiatives, boosting the Saudi talent market forward. On the other hand, organizations in Qatar cited a low employee growth rate in 2023 po-



Mohammed Abu Al-Rob

tentially due to the completion of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which reduced the demand for talent.

70.1 percent of participating organizations in the GCC expect the employee growth rate to increase in 2024. Organizations in KSA have the highest expectation of growth potentially due to investment in various mega projects to boost tourism and the hiring for mega-projects such as NEOM. The outlook for the GCC is promising, as organizations anticipate

favorable advancements that will lead to economic growth and progress.

#### Causes of employees quitting

In the GCC, 64.6 percent of the organizations identified the prospect of new job opportunities as the main reason to quit their positions. Participating organizations in UAE, are the highest to cite such reason, which could be related to the "Green Visa" initiative.

#### Average Employee Tenure in the GCC per country in 2023

	OMN	KUW	QTR	UAE	BAH	KSA	GCC
Avg. Tenure	5.7	5.3	5.2	4.4	4.2	4.0	4.8

Moreover, compensation and benefits stand as the second reason at 43 percent for talent quitting their jobs, compared to last year when compensation was the main reason at 71.5 percent according to PROCAPITA's 2022 annual report. This shift indicates a change in the talent hiring trends, suggesting new attractive career opportunities for skilled professionals.

#### Recruitment challenges

43.3 percent of participating organizations perceive competitive compensation offered by the neighboring markets to be a challenge and this leads to 'talent drain'. Moreover, 39 percent find the lack of skilled professionals to be another challenge. Bahrain faces a challenge resulting from the attractive compensation and benefits offered by neighboring countries, which hinders the recruitment process. Kuwait suffers from the challenges of laws to attract talent.

#### New hires success rate

In the GCC, more than 75 percent of employees who completed their probation period were successfully hired, as reported by 56 percent of participants with the highest being in the UAE, reflecting a high success rate in the hiring process. However, Bahrain had the lowest hiring rate as reported by the participating organizations which signifies a need to work on talent acquisition and retainment.

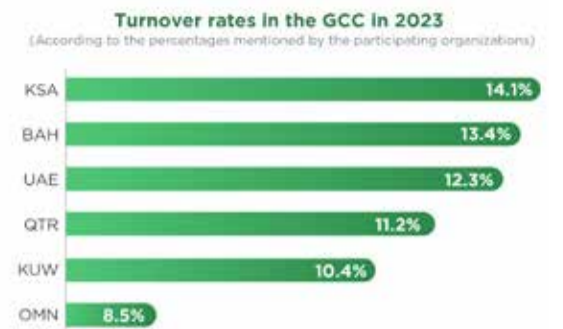
#### Turnover rate

KSA recorded the highest turnover cited at 14.1 percent, which might be attributed to various initiatives and mega-projects fueling economic growth and creating a vibrant market, such a dynamic environment encourages talents to move and seize better opportunities arising from the current transformation.

#### Technology and impact of AI

According to the report, 60.8 percent of participating organizations that invested in AI in the GCC have anticipated benefits from implementing AI in 1-3 years. Furthermore, 31.3 percent report that they have already benefited from AI applications in their operations. UAE and KSA are already starting to notice the effects of AI as reported by participants.

According to the participating organizations, the areas of Human Resources that are most impacted by AI, are



GCC achieved a promotion rate of 57 percent, with KSA at the forefront in awarding the most promotions, closely followed by Qatar, while Oman provided the least promotions.

#### COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

##### Increases in 2023

77.6 percent of participating companies in the GCC countries have granted increments to their employees during 2023, with the most common "performance-related increase" at 46.7 percent, followed by "fixed rate increase" at 32.1 percent.

##### Average salary increment in 2023

The average salary increment in the GCC countries in 2023 recorded 6.7 percent compared to 2022, which recorded 5.2 percent on average. This increase is due to several factors, including the strong performance of the labor market, which reached an unprecedented peak in the past decade, especially in KSA and UAE.

##### Increases & bonuses for 2023

64 percent of the participants provided annual bonuses to their employees for 2023, reflecting an increase from 2022's 62.7 percent. UAE is the highest country providing bonuses to attract and retain employees, followed by Saudi Arabia. Participating organizations in Bahrain offer the lowest bonuses.

##### BOD remuneration

In the GCC for the year 2022, the average number of board members stood at 9, with their total compensation averaging \$2,031,549. On average, listed companies distributed 0.98 percent of their profits as BOD compensation, resulting in an average cost per member of \$230,799. Oman has the highest remuneration as a percentage of total profits at 0.850 percent. However, the UAE has the highest board remuneration at \$391,810.

## Walmart says it will buy TV maker Vizio for \$2.3bn

**NEW YORK:** Walmart announced Tuesday it will buy smart television maker Vizio for \$2.3 billion, boosting the retail giant's advertising venture as growth slows in its legacy business from the pandemic boom. With the all-cash purchase, the US shopping behemoth gains access to Vizio's more than 18 million accounts as another source of strengthened potential connection to those households.

Based in California, Vizio is known for what Walmart called "immersive entertainment" through a "customer-centric platform" that lets viewers stream content for free by watching ads.

Analysts said the deal would propel further growth in Walmart's advertising business, which until now has centered on the company's website and stores. Walmart has targeted advertising as a major growth area as it competes with Amazon for market share across an increasing panorama of economic goods and services.

Walmart announced the deal along with the release of fourth-quarter earnings, in which it reported solid revenues growth of 5.7 percent to \$173.4 billion.

Profits fell 12.4 percent to \$5.5 billion because, it said, of higher equity investment-related gains in the prior year. The quarter included a solid four percent rise in comparable sales in the company's namesake US stores, which account for about two-thirds of sales.

However, four percent comparable US store growth is less than half the rate Walmart reported three years ago under the same metric. As a provider of "essential" goods, Walmart was a major beneficiary of added sales during COVID-19.

Walmart pointed to share gains in grocery and general merchandise, primarily among higher-income households. For all of last year, Walmart's revenues rose six percent to \$648.1 billion. Chief Executive Doug McMillon pointed to e-commerce sales of more than \$100 billion as a key threshold crossed last year. Amazon, which is often seen as Walmart's chief rival, reported 2023 revenues of \$574.8 billion.

The Vizio deal comes as Walmart turns to advertising as a prospective area of growth. Vizio's operating system "provides great viewing experiences at attractive price points," said Walmart Chief Revenue Officer Seth Dallaire, adding that the transaction will help "redefine the intersection of retail and entertainment."

Analyst Neil Saunders of GlobalData said Walmart sees Vizio's advertising platform as an area of potential. "The Vizio deal essentially takes Walmart Connect from being an advertising provider through stores and websites, to one that can penetrate consumers' homes via television," Saunders said. "This multichannel approach gives Walmart a lot more power and reach in the world of advertising and puts it on a more level playing field with the likes of Amazon."

More long-term, Walmart may also use Vizio to develop original content, stepping up another flank in the rivalry with Amazon, "which has built a highly successful ecosystem which helps to promote loyalty with both advertisers and consumers," Saunders said. McMillon described advertising as a "key driver" of profitability, but declined to comment extensively about plans for Vizio on a conference call because the transaction had not closed. Walmart shares jumped 4.7 percent in pre-market trading. - AFP



**N'DJAMENA, Chad:** Nan-Arabé Lodoum (third left), 34, poses with other members of the Association of Unemployed Graduates in N'Djamena on Feb 19, 2024. These young Chadians in their thirties have graduated for more than ten years but are still unemployed. - AFP

## Chad's unemployed graduates cling to public sector dream

**N'DJAMENA, Chad:** For 10 years, Chadian biomedical science graduate Nan-Arabé Lodoum has relied on odd jobs to get by but clings to his dream of becoming a civil servant. The 34-year-old is far from alone.

Studying certain subjects with a selective entrance exam in Chad is supposed to guarantee a job in the public sector later on. But mass youth unemployment has dashed many people's expectation of walking into a stable, well-paying job after studying.

Prime Minister Succes Masra, a former long-time opponent of Chad's ruling military junta, called the problem a "time bomb" in his inaugural speech in January. "We didn't think we were going to be the unlucky ones," Lodoum said. "The older generation were automatically integrated (into the civil service), some are university professors," he added.

Lodoum is the coordinator of the Association of Unemployed Graduates, a youth-led collective that supports and campaigns for those facing the same predicament. Some 60 percent of young graduates in Chad were unemployed in 2017, according to the most recent figures available from the national statistics institute. Lodoum received his degree in 2014 and a decade on, he works as a temporary teacher in an institute of higher education specializing in health. He's on a contract to teach 30 hours a year for 90,000 CFA francs (\$148, 137 euros). It's a far cry from the 400,000 francs a month (610 euros) that a junior laboratory technician in the public sector could expect to earn.

He tops up his income by riding a motorcycle taxi, while others in the same situation work on building sites or as street vendors.

#### 'Want to succeed'

"If you find yourself unemployed for 10 years with a degree, it's just because you don't have the right

connections," Lodoum complained. Several times a month, Benjamin Roukika Pontchombe, 33, who also graduated in 2014, checks on the progress of his application for a job.

Signs at the Ministry of the Civil Service warn that information is only given out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "Don't insist", the sign reads. Pontchombe's is one of the many dusty files piled on the floor for years, waiting to be digitalized. But giving up on the chance of a public sector job is not an option, the graduates say. "We don't want to give up what we've built, we want to succeed," Lodoum insisted.

In 2022, 60 percent of job applications came from graduates aged between 25 and 35, according to the United Nations.

Prime Minister Masra, who was appointed after returning to Chad from exile, has said he wants to turn the country into a "start-up nation". He has promised 100,000 private-sector jobs for young people but has not said when or how the positions will be created.

Chad is the second least developed country in the world, with more than 42 percent of the population living below the poverty line of around \$2 a day, according to the UN in 2022. In early 2021, Chad's late former leader Idriss Deby Itno, who ruled with an iron fist for more than 30 years, made employment for "all" unemployed young graduates the main theme of his presidential campaign.

After he was killed by rebels in April of that year, the army proclaimed his son General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno transitional president at the head of a 15-member junta. He will stand in presidential elections scheduled for this year, in which the youth vote will be key. Chad has some 57,000 students in higher education, according to the government. But graduates like Wilfried Modjim are despondent about their prospects. "University is practically without job opportunities," the 25-year-old, who has a law degree, complained.

"The job market doesn't respond to the training," said Modjim, who earns 62,000 francs CFA a month growing lettuce. Another graduate Luc Ayang Ndikdandji was also feeling desperate. "The only thing they can offer is the army," he grumbled. And at the age of 35, he has only five more years before he will be too old to join the civil service anyway. - AFP

#### News in Brief

##### E-vehicles lose market share

**PARIS:** The market share of electric vehicles dropped below 11 percent in Europe last month, despite an increase in sales as the overall auto market rebounded, data released on Tuesday by the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) showed. A total of 92,741 electric vehicles were sold in Europe last month, an increase of 28.9 percent from January last year. That gave electric vehicles a 10.9-percent share of the overall market, down from the record 14.6 percent for 2023 as a whole. An end to an environmental bonus for electric cars in Germany available to households made them much more expensive compared to traditional internal combustion engine vehicles. The sale of diesel vehicles, which has been declining for the past few years, moved ahead of electric vehicles in terms of market share at 13.4 percent. - AFP

##### S Africa's unemployment up

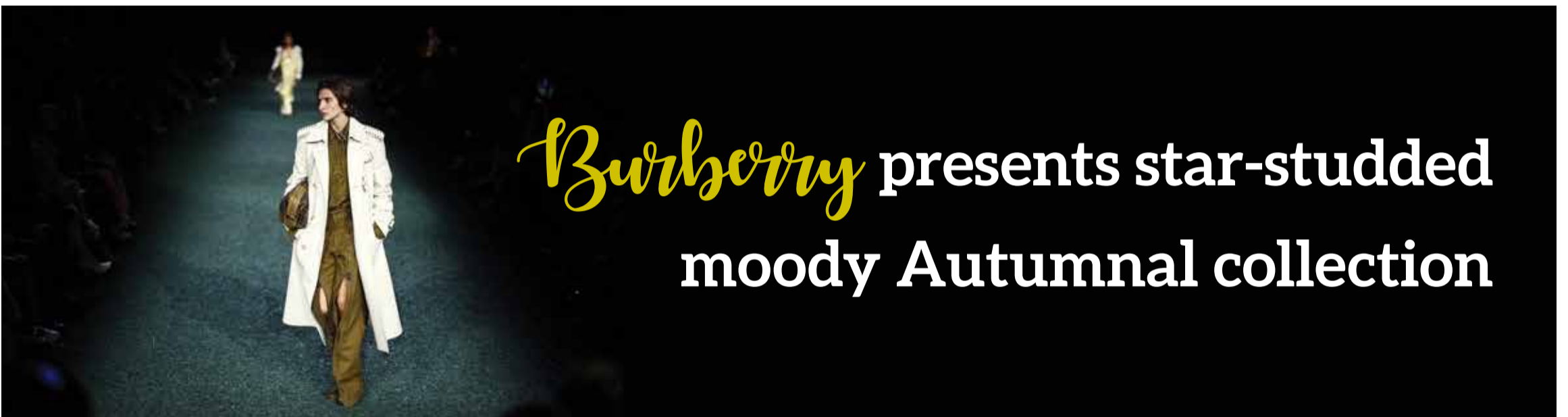
**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa's jobless rate rose in the fourth quarter of last year, official data showed on Tuesday, in another worrying sign for the government ahead of a general election. The unemployment rate reached 32.1 percent from October to December 2023, up 0.2 of a percentage point on the previous quarter, the national statistics agency, StatsSA, said. "The number of employed persons decreased by 22,000 to 16.7 million," it said. High unemployment is a key political issue ahead of national and provincial elections, which should take place between May and August.

##### Malaysian ringgit plunges

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's ringgit hit its lowest level since the Asian financial crisis on Tuesday, as emerging Asian currencies suffered against the dollar. In trade Tuesday the Malaysian ringgit fell nearly 0.3 percent to almost 4.8 against the greenback, its worst reading since January 1998 during the Asian financial meltdown. The currency had suffered a more than 4 percent drop already this year, thanks in part to poor export performance and rising US interest rates. Malaysia's central bank governor Datuk Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour said Tuesday that the currency's performance had been affected by "external factors" such as US rate hikes, geopolitical concerns and uncertainty about China's economic prospects. - AFP

##### Capital One to buy Discover

**NEW YORK:** US banking giant Capital One announced Monday it will acquire financial services company Discover in a \$35.3 billion all-stock deal combining two of America's major credit card firms. Under the deal, Discover shareholders will receive 1.0192 Capital One shares for each Discover share, a premium of 26.6 percent over Discover's closing price on Friday. Acquisition of Discover will help "build a payments network that can compete with the largest payments networks and payments companies," said Capital One founder and CEO Richard Fairbank in a statement. Once the deal goes through, Capital One shareholders will own approximately 60 percent of the combined company, and Discover shareholders will own approximately 40 percent. - AFP



# Burberry presents star-studded moody Autumnal collection



**B**urberry's creative director, Daniel Lee, on Monday showed his third brief at London Fashion Week, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary, with an ode to the brand's outdoor heritage for the luxury house's autumn-winter 2024 collection. Set in a dark marquee in London's Victoria Park where guests sat on big fluffy brown cushions, songs from late British singer Amy Winehouse set the mood for the night.

The star-studded show was attended by actress Olivia Coleman, US Vogue Editor in Chief Anna Wintour, model Jordan Dunn, and Irish actor Barry Keoghan among others. Monday's show heavily featured outerwear and sporty silhouettes with bomber jackets and Burberry's iconic trench coat that sat alongside flowy beaded and velvet dresses.

It noticeably lacked the brand's new signature 'Knight Blue', the same color featured in its "takeover" of British department store Harrods this month. Models walked down a grass runway on chunky-soled leather boots, parading leather and faux-fur coats in shades of muted green and brown, oversized stripy suit jackets and trousers with sipper detailing.

British models Naomi Campbell, Agyness Deyn and Lily Cole were among those sashaying on the catwalk. Burberry's famous beige, black and red check was reimagined into the moody Au-

tumnal color palette and featured on the inside of floor-sweeping skirts with long slits down the side.

Accessories included checked umbrellas, large canvas, leather and faux-fur bags in cream, brown and green - often adorned with gold detailing - and paired with scarves worn over the head. Lee, who was behind the revamp of Italian fashion brand Bottega Veneta, is facing pressure to produce a winning collection for Burberry which is battling a slowdown in demand for luxury goods. The 168-year-old company issued a warning on its profits in January, a setback for Chief Executive Jonathan Akeroyd who is seeking to reposition the brand as "modern British luxury".



Models present creations during a catwalk presentation for British fashion house Burberry's Autumn/Winter 2024 collection, at London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos



Mob Wife Aesthetic

# FROM THE SOPRANOS TO TIKTOK



The Sopranos took the TV world by storm 25 years ago. As the landmark show celebrates its anniversary, it's no coincidence that the 'mob wife' aesthetic is going viral on TikTok. The rise of the mob wife look is a rejection of the minimalism of recent years, swapping 'barely there' makeup for smoky eyes and loungewear for vintage fur coats.

At Dashe Beauty Kuwait, we're having clients sit down in our salon chairs with photographs of Adriana La Cerva and Carmela Soprano as their inspiration. While movies like The Godfather serve as key inspiration, the aesthetic has made a comeback thanks to TikTok – the same platform that made the 'clean girl' aesthetic famous.



Even Francis Ford Coppola, the Director of The Godfather, another source of inspiration for the 'mob wife' aesthetic has weighed in. He described the character of Connie Corleone as "a sultry, delightful Italian princess" with her flashy jewelry, fur coats, and animal prints.

The 'mob wife' aesthetic has bounced back onto the scene as 2024's first major trend – all thanks to one video by a TikTok influencer named Kayla Trivieri, who declared that "clean girl is out, mob wife is in". She accurately predicted that the switch back to bold glamour would lead Millennials and Gen Z to explore the aesthetic for the first time.

2024's version of the 'mob wife' look is a counterbalance to the 'quiet luxury' aesthetic popularized by Sofia Richie. It's more grown-up than other trends like 'coquette' and 'Y2K'. It's an aesthetic that uses hyper-glam hair, makeup, and clothing to make women feel confident in their sexuality. We can expect this new era of



the 'mob wife' to have a distinctive Gen Z feel, incorporating trends from the '70s to Y2K and focusing on buying vintage and second-hand.

**How to recreate the 'mob wife' look**

There's no shortage of inspiration for anyone looking to experiment with the 'mob wife' look. Celebrities like Kris Jenner, Nicki Minaj, Hailey Bieber, and Dua Lipa have all played with aspects of the aesthetic. The 'mob wife' look offers beauty lovers the glamour they've been missing since 2019, bringing bold lips, smudged-out eyeliner, and false lashes. Your makeup should look 'lived in' rather than natural.

Pamela Anderson's iconic messy updos fit right into the 'mob wife' look. The aesthetic is all about 'big' hair, adding as much volume and bounce as possible. It's time to start backcombing your hair

and trying structured updos that are sultry but sophisticated.

The easiest way to try out the aesthetic is with your makeup. A mob wife is instantly recognizable by her dramatic eye makeup and stiletto nails, favoring over lined nude lipstick just as much as a sultry red. It's unapologetically bold glamour that embraces maximalism. If you're swapping out your 'clean girl' makeup bag for the 'mob wife' look, swap for formulas with stronger and bolder pigments.

Whether you're channeling Carmela Soprano or Sharon Stone in 'Casino', the mob wife aesthetic is a welcome change from the minimalism and laid-back beauty trends of recent years. Get more inspiration by visiting our website [dashebeauty.com](https://dashebeauty.com) or follow up at our beauty blog. — Dashe Beauty Kuwait

## Lab-grown diamonds put natural gems under pressure

The glittering diamonds sparkle the same but there are key differences: mined natural gems are more than a billion years old, while laboratory-made rocks are new and cost less than half the price. Man-made gems are reshaping the \$89 billion global diamond jewelry market, especially in the west Indian city of Surat where 90 percent of the world's diamonds are cut and polished.

In Smit Patel's gleaming lab, technicians drop crystal diamond "seed" slices into reactors mimicking the extreme pressure far underground. "Once the customer sees it for herself, they are sold. I believe this is the future," said Patel, director of Greenlab Diamonds and the third generation of his family to deal in diamonds. From seed to ring-ready jewels, his team takes less than eight weeks to produce a diamond virtually indistinguishable from a mined gem. "It's the same product, it's the same chemical, the same optical properties," Patel said.

**Gas, heat, pressure**

Lab-grown diamond exports from India tripled in value between 2019 and 2022, while export volumes rose by 25 percent between April and October 2023, up from 15 percent in the same period a year earlier, according to the latest industry data. "We've grown at 400 percent year on year in volume," Patel told AFP.

Reactors in labs such as Patel's are pumped full of carbon-containing gases such as methane and the crystal grows under heat and pressure. Rough diamonds are then taken to another facility where hundreds of workers design, cut and polish the stones. The global market share by value of lab-grown gems rocketed from 3.5 percent in 2018 to 18.5 percent in 2023, New York-based industry analyst Paul Zimnisky told AFP, and will likely exceed 20 percent this year. That has heaped pressure on an industry already racked by geopolitical turmoil and slumping demand.

**'Clean' stones**

Machine-made diamonds were first developed in the early 1950s but it took technological leaps to create a commercially viable process less than a decade ago. Producers boast that their gems

come at a lower carbon cost, although there are questions about whether the energy-intensive process is any better for the environment. Patel said his lab uses solar energy from the local grid, although others suck up electricity from carbon-heavy sources. And while mined gem sellers say "conflict diamonds" from war zones are kept off the market through the international Kimberley Process certification scheme, lab producers argue their facilities guarantee a clean record.

Such environmental and humanitarian claims have helped make lab-grown stones a popular choice for engagement rings. In February 2023, 17 percent of diamond engagement rings sold in the United States — the world's biggest consumer of natural stones — used lab-grown gems, according to industry analyst Edahn Golan. By Golan's assessment, it is now 36 percent. This has partly been made possible by hundreds of companies in China and India, both among the largest producers of man-made stones.

**'Perfect storm'**

Indian lab diamond makers exported 4.04 million carats between April and October 2023, a 42 percent year-on-year increase, according to India's Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC). In contrast, natural diamond companies in India reported a more than 25 percent drop, to 11.3 million carats, over the same period.

While natural diamond sales during the Covid-19 pandemic surged as affluent shoppers sought to brighten lockdowns with luxury purchases, demand dropped when economies reopened. Top companies were left holding expensive



This photograph shows Rita Davariya, founder at Elmas Diamond arranging lab-grown diamond jewellery at her brand showroom in Surat.



This photograph shows employees working at Greenlab Diamonds, a firm manufacturing lab-grown gems on the outskirts of Surat. - AFP photos

excess stock. Ajesh Mehta from D.Navinchandra Exports, whose group is one of global diamond giant De Beers Group's authorized buyers, or "sightholders", said it was the worst slump in his 30-year career. "This is a totally different kind of lack of demand," Mehta told AFP. "Everything came like a perfect storm." Factors other than competition from lab-grown rivals included slowing economic growth in the all-important US and China markets, as well as oversupply and sanctions against Russian rough-cut diamonds.

India's natural diamond industry was forced into a rare voluntary import ban on rough diamonds in October. "We had to press the reset button," Mehta said. "Otherwise people would panic." At least five Indian sightholders told AFP that the De Beers Group had cut prices by between 10 and 25 percent for different categories of diamonds at the first sale of its year, when buyers restock after the US holiday season.

**'No monopoly'**

The lab-grown industry has had its problems, too. Supply has skyrocketed and prices have dropped drastically, with wholesale prices down by 58 percent in 2023 alone, according to Golan's analysis. Retailers in Surat told AFP the price of a lower-quality one-carat polished stone had fallen from \$2,400 in 2022 to a little over \$1,000 in 2023.

WD Lab Grown Diamonds, the second-biggest US producer of the man-made stones, filed for bankruptcy in October. But Patel argues that falling prices will spur demand. "We knew that prices would come down, because there's no monopoly in this industry," he said. Customers in a jewelry showroom in India's commercial capital Mumbai appeared to agree. "A mined diamond would be five times more expensive," said 29-year-old Lekha Prabhakar. "If you want something you want to wear daily... a lab-grown diamond works. I really like that." — AFP

## Cape Town hosts retrospective of iconic South African artist Esther Mahlangu

From an old BMW painted in colorful shapes to abstract works and historic photographs, a retrospective of celebrated South African artist Esther Mahlangu opened this week in Cape Town. The exhibition follows the 88-year-old painter and mural artist's unusual trajectory from rural South Africa to global acclaim. After Cape Town, it will be taken on an international tour.

Despite having no formal art training, Mahlangu earned an international reputation with works referencing her Ndebele heritage and using skills passed down for generations. "It's in my genes to paint Ndebele," the artist, wearing traditional, brightly coloured blue, yellow and brown garments and jewelry - and white sneakers - told AFP in an interview.

Mahlangu learnt the art of Ndebele design as a child from her mother and grandmother. With just a chicken feather, she first painted mud huts and chipboards before moving on to luxury cars, vodka bottles, skateboards and footwear as her intricate patterns became huge commercial hits. "The Ndebele art is within me, I was born with it. It is important for me, I don't pretend to love it, I love it," she said.

The retrospective, which opened at the Iziko South African National Gallery on Sunday, features pictures, a short film and more than 100 contemporary works.

Among them is Mahlangu's iconic BMW Artcar - a sedan she painted with her trademark colorful geometric shapes in the 1990s as part of a collaboration with the German carmaker. Yet the art-

ist said she was hard-pressed to pick her best work. "I love everything I have painted, everything! I have no favourite," she said.

Mahlangu's first big international break came in 1989, when she was 54. Her ornately decorated house had caught the eye of French researchers who invited her to the Pompidou Centre. However, South Africa was not quick to recognize Mahlangu's talent - she gained international prominence at a time when the art scene in her home country was focused on contemporary styles.



Artist Esther Mahlangu

"The retrospective pays homage to Dr. Mahlangu's unique approach to art, which intersects African culture with modernity and the contemporary, symbolizing pride, self-determination and innovation," said curator Nontobeko Ntombela. After Cape Town the exhibition will move to Johannesburg's Gauteng province before departing for the United States and beyond. — AFP



Artist Esther Mahlangu in front of her BMW Art Car at Iziko South African National Gallery, 2024.

## Sports

# Mathews gives Lanka unassailable Afghanistan T20 series lead

## Afghanistan searching for their first win on the tour

**DAMBULLA:** All-rounder Angelo Mathews starred with a quickfire 42 and two wickets as Sri Lanka secured the three match T20 series against Afghanistan by winning the second match by 72 runs on Monday. Sri Lanka wrapped up the series with a game to spare in front of a capacity crowd at Dambulla on Monday.

"It is all about the mind," Afghanistan's skipper Ibrahim Zadran said after the match. "If you do not execute your plans, you cannot win." Former skipper Mathews was doubtful for the game in the afternoon with tightness in the hamstring, but the 36-year-old smashed an unbeaten 42 off 22 balls with four sixes and two fours. He was particularly harsh on Azmatullah Omarzai, hitting him for three consecutive sixes in the penultimate over.

"Whatever the team wants me to do, I am willing to adapt myself according to the situation," Mathews said. His big hitting gave much needed momentum, and Sri Lanka finished on 187 for six in 20 overs, with 34 runs coming in the last two overs.

### 'Credit to the batters'

Mathews was involved in a 66-run partnership for the sixth wicket with Sadeera Samarawickrama, who posted the only half-century in the game. Samarawickrama's 51, which came in 42 balls with five fours, is his career best score in this format. "Credit goes to the batters," captain Wanindu Hasaranga said.

"They batted really well," he added, giving credit

to Mathews and Samarawickrama who "finished well to get to a big score". Mathews then took the new ball and dismissed the openers in his first two overs to put the Afghans on the back foot.

After Maheesh Theekshana trapped Rahmanullah Gurbaz leg before wicket, Binura Fernando claimed two wickets in an over to reduce Afghanistan to 31 for five inside five overs. With half the side down even before Matheesha Pathirana was introduced to the attack — Man of the Match in the previous game — Afghanistan were in deep trouble.

Mohammad Nabi tried to salvage some pride making 27 off 17 balls and adding 39 runs for the sixth wicket with Karim Janat, before Dasun Shanaka in his first over produced the breakthrough. Karim Janat's 28 runs in 23 balls was the Afghan's top score, and Afghanistan were bowled out for 115 in 17 overs. One of the highlights of the game was Wanindu Hasaranga accounting for his 100th wicket in T20 internationals, when he cleaned up Najibullah Zadran. He became the second quickest bowler in the game to the 100-wicket milestone, having got there in 63 games.

Only Lasith Malinga has taken 100 wickets in T-20 Internationals for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka emerged victorious in all three formats in the series as they had won the one-off Test before sweeping the ODI series 3-0. Sri Lanka won the first of the three-match T20 series by four runs. Afghanistan are now searching for their first win on the tour, with the third T20 on Wednesday. — AFP



**DAMBULLA:** Afghanistan's Najibullah Zadran (L) is clean bowled by Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga (not pictured) during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between Afghanistan and Sri Lanka at the Rangiri Dambulla International Cricket Stadium in Dambulla. — AFP

## England double down on 'Bazball' despite Test humiliation

**LONDON:** England's hyper-attacking "Bazball" approach is coming under intense scrutiny after a crushing Test defeat in India but captain Ben Stokes appears determined to stick to his guns. The visitors slumped to a humiliating 434-run loss in the third match of the series in Rajkot—England's biggest defeat in terms of runs since 1934.

But it was the manner of their capitulation, which meant they now trail 2-1 in the five-match series, that has led to calls for serious reflection on their swash-buckling approach. England started the third day of the third Test in a good position - 207-2 in response to India's first-innings score of 445 after opening batsman Ben Duckett went on the charge.

But it all fell apart at dizzying speed as the tourists lost their last eight wickets for 95 runs, handing the advantage to India. Former captain Joe Root came in for some of the harshest criticism for the manner of his dismissal — caught for 18 after trying to play a risky reverse scoop off Jasprit Bumrah — the top-ranked bowler in Test cricket.

Seyld Berry, the chief cricket writer for Britain's Daily Telegraph, called it the "worst, most stupid, shot in the history of England's Test cricket". Yashasvi Jaiswal took the game decisively away from England with a swashbuckling 214 not out in India's second innings, borrowing from the tourists' playbook. Bullish Duckett, when asked what his side could realistically chase in the fourth innings, said "the more the better" but they were shot out for a paltry 122 in just 39.4 overs.

### 'Bazball' success

England have enjoyed notable success since Stokes teamed up with coach Brendon McCullum in 2022, winning 14 out of 20 Tests before the Rajkot loss. Together they injected new life into the side after just one win in 17 matches in a moribund spell under previous skipper Root and their approach was dubbed "Bazball", in reference to McCullum's nickname. But former England Test



**RAJKOT:** India's Dhruv Jurel runs out England's Ben Duckett (R) during the fourth day of the third Test cricket match between India and England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot. — AFP

captain Michael Vaughan believes the latest defeat must serve as a "wake-up call". "Even when this England team have lost in the last two years you have always been able to take positives... or they haven't been hammered," he said on X.

"This is looking like a wake-up call that surely sends a message you can't just play one way against quality teams." England have registered some eye-catching Test victories playing their never-say-die form of cricket, including against India and Australia.

But BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew says Bazball is at a crossroads, agreeing with Vaughan that it is time to adopt a more nuanced approach. "Their attacking style should not be binned altogether, of course," he said. "But now is the time for this team to be more sensible, more flexible, in how they play."

Agnew, a former England Test bowler, believes while certain players such as Duckett should be given freedom to attack, Root is struggling and should be encouraged to play to his strengths, as

a classical Test batsman. "It is screamingly obvious they need to play a slightly different way," he said. "They will not face criticism for playing in a tighter, more circumspect fashion at times. They would actually gain respect for it."

But neither Stokes nor McCullum appear to be in the mood to change their gung-ho approach as the fourth Test in Ranchi looms. "Our batting line-up is full of international-class players, we give them the freedom to play what's in front of them," said the skipper, whose team started the series with a memorable victory in the first Test in Hyderabad before losing the second in Visakhapatnam.

"It's disappointing, but we'll leave it behind us and move on to the next one." McCullum, a former New Zealand Test captain, told the BBC he understands the criticism but said the team will block out "outside noise". "The dressing room is a very strong place where confidence is high and guys are backed to go out there and allow their talent to flourish," he said. "If we allow the outside noise to seep in, that's our problem." — AFP

## NZ vow to 'fight' in T20 series with Australia

**WELLINGTON:** Captain Mitchell Santner vowed Tuesday that his "underdogs" New Zealand will put up a "fight" in their three-match Twenty20 home series against a full-strength Australia. With the World Cup looming in June, the rivals will meet in front of a sell-out crowd in Wellington on Wednesday, followed by games in Auckland on Friday and Sunday.

New Zealand triumphed in their last meeting in the shortest format, by 89 runs in October 2022 in Sydney at the World Cup, but Australia have since lifted the 50-over World Cup and are coming off a 2-1 T20 series win over the West Indies.

"We're probably underdogs but we are used to that tag and don't think much of it," Santner told reporters. "It's always a pretty cool time when the Aussies come over. You always want to challenge yourself against the best in the world, and they're up there for sure."

The Black Caps and Australia last met in a T20 series three years ago, with hosts New Zealand winning 3-2. "It's special," Santner said. "We probably don't play Australia as much as we probably should, but the trans-Tasman clash is always good fun." "Looking at their squad at the moment, they're a very, very good team with all bases covered," added the all-rounder.

"We've just got to do our thing, we've got our plans in place." The tourists, captained by Mitchell Marsh, are at full-strength. David Warner, who recently retired from Test cricket, is 54 runs away from overtaking former captain Aaron Finch as Australia's all-time leading scorer in men's T20s.

New Zealand have rested world-class batsman Kane Williamson but added experienced seamer Trent Boult to their attack. "We know how good they're going to be and how explosive their team is," Santner said of the Australians. "So for us it's just about staying in for as long as we can and see what happens." "We want to put up a good fight this series, then we can look forward after that." The T20 series is followed by two Tests. — AFP

## Capuozzo defends Italy's place in 6 Nations ahead of France test

**TOULOUSE:** Ange Capuozzo is best known for his attacking forays down the touchline but the Italian full-back showed the other side of his game when he leapt to the defence of Italy's record in the Six Nations.

After two defeats in their opening matches, Italy head to Lille on Sunday (Feb 25) to play France facing the possibility of adding another Six Nations wooden spoon to the 18 they have registered since they joined the old Five Nations in 2000.

Further failure would undoubtedly add fuel to the arguments of critics who question their right to an automatic place in Europe's top international competition, ahead of the likes of Georgia and Portugal. "The Six Nations has always been a closed league so it's not meant to be up and down," the 24-year-old Capuozzo told AFP.

"It's a very, very old competition and I would ask critics to take a look at the archives to see the low periods that certain nations have experienced. France in particular, Scotland..." The stats are not kind to the Italians: of the 120 matches they had played in the competition up to this season, Italy won just 13 and drew one. According to Statista, this is by far the worst record of any nation in the tournament, the next being Scotland who won 39 of their first 120. "Yes, Italy have been in the Six Nations for just over 20 years," said Capuozzo.

"That may seem like a long time, but it's also a very short time in terms of experience of this competition. "It's not enough to create a real policy, a real change in culture in our country... to get children into rugby schools earlier, to attract more people to the stadiums. "It's a process that takes time and I think



**DUBLIN:** Italy's full-back Ange Capuozzo (R) vies with Ireland's centre Robbie Henshaw during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Ireland and Italy at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin. — AFP

that from where Italy started, it's been a long, hard road to get to where we are today." Italy suffered a chastening World Cup at the end of 2023, losing 60-17 to France and, humiliatingly for a Tier 1 team, 96-17 to New Zealand.

### 'Extraordinary moment'

In spite of that the Toulouse flier insists the World Cup was a high point of his career. "Even though it took an enormous amount of energy out of us, both physically and psychologically, it remains an extraordinary moment in a player's career and I have nothing but good memories of it," said Capuozzo for whom those big defeats were also of benefit.

"It's a moment that makes us grow in our approach to our sport, our preparation and our moti-

vation." Italy's new reality, under new coach Gonzalo Quesada, began encouragingly as they took England to the wire in Rome before losing 27-24 in their Six Nations opener.

After that came a less encouraging 36-0 hammering from Ireland in Dublin which puts even more pressure on the French test in Lille. Capuozzo, who was born and bred in France and qualified for Italy through his paternal grandparents, plays down the added pressure of playing on 'home soil' and trying not to sing along to the Marseille. "I think I'm past the emotional stage," he said. "I've already played France twice, in the Six Nations and in the World Cup. Even though I've ticked it off, of course, and it will always be a match apart, I'm giving it the same importance now as the others." — AFP

## 2025 AFCON to be played in July-August

**CAIRO:** The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has reached an agreement in principle for the 2025 Cup of Nations to be played in July and August next year in Morocco, a CAF official has told AFP. Earlier this month CAF president Patrice Motsepe refused to confirm the dates of the next Africa Cup of Nations, with organizers left with little time to stage a qualifying competition were it to be held in January and February.

However, playing it in June and July next year would mean a clash with FIFA's expanded Club World Cup which is due to take place in North America. On Monday a member of the competitions committee told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity, that there was "an agreement in principle between CAF and the Moroccan Football Federation for the AFCON to be held during the summer, more precisely in July and August" 2025.

"This agreement was found with the support of FIFA after talks that began several months ago and which intensified during the last edition which finished this month in Ivory Coast," the source added. "The dates currently proposed are July 20-August 16 or 17, 2025." The last two Africa Cup of Nations were both pushed back from the original dates. The 2021 tournament, hosted by Cameroon, was played in January and February of 2022. The most recent edition had initially been planned for June and July last year but was rescheduled over weather concerns.

Qualifying for the 2025 AFCON has yet to start. A preliminary round is due to be played next month. The 2027 Cup of Nations will be jointly hosted by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. — AFP

Sports

# All change again at crisis club Napoli as Barca come to town

## Walter Mazzarri sacked after just three months in charge

MILAN: Napoli are once again trying to start afresh as they face Barcelona in the Champions League after sacking their second manager of a disastrous season. With the Italian champions ninth in Serie A and in a worse position than they were under the first casualty of this wretched campaign, Rudi Garcia, Walter Mazzarri was sacked on Monday night after just three months in charge.

To replace him Napoli's outspoken owner Aurelio De Laurentiis has plumped for Slovakia coach Francesco Calzona, who has the daunting task of Barca at home for his first match in charge of a top-tier club.

As well as being a glamorous fixture, Wednesday's last 16, first-leg clash is a key match for Napoli as the competition is their only chance to grab some glory from a season in which their defence of a historic third league title has long since ended.

Napoli are a whopping 27 points behind league leaders Inter Milan and their chances of qualifying into next season's

revamped Champions League are slim, even if Italy wins a fifth spot. Calzona's new team are nine points behind both fourth-placed Atalanta and Bologna in fifth, and have shown little sign of being able to claw back that gap, failing to score in nine of Mazzarri's matches in all competitions.

But Victor Osimhen should be newly available as he continued his post-Africa Cup of Nations comeback in training on Monday. Before being sacked Mazzarri said that he "hoped" Osimhen would be able to start against Barca as Napoli have been struggling to score.

"It's always painful to sack a friend," said De Laurentiis in a short interview with Sky Sport on Monday, but Mazzarri won just four of 12 Serie A matches since taking over, collecting 15 points. That is even less than the 21 that Garcia managed from his 12 league matches in charge, a total that had Napoli fourth when the Frenchman was dismissed.

Calzona, who has guided Slovakia to Euro 2024, has been charged by De Laurentiis with giving Napoli army of fans "something extra" to get them back on-side. The 55-year-old faces a huge job at the club where he was an assistant under Maurizio Sarri and during Luciano Spalletti's trophy-less first season with the club.

The 55-year-old Calzona will reportedly keep his job with Slovakia while also trying to drag Napoli back up the table after the disappointing end to Mazzarri's brief second spell in charge of southern Italy's biggest club. Mazzarri brought Napoli out from the doldrums between 2009 and 2013, winning the Italian Cup to claim the club's first trophy in over two decades.

He left in May 2013 after finishing second in Italy's top flight with a thrilling team which boasted Ezequiel Lavezzi, Marek Hamsik and Edinson Cavani in attack. Now Napoli have entrusted a former assistant with salvaging something from this season, a choice which is unlikely to inspire fans who have watched their team crash and burn from the highest of heights. — AFP



PORTO: (FILES) Slovakia's coach Francesco Calzona gives a press conference ahead of the EURO 2024 first round group A qualifying football match between Portugal and Slovakia at the Dragao stadium in Porto on October 12, 2023. Walter Mazzarri has been sacked by Napoli to become the second man sent packing by the ailing Italian champions this season. — AFP

## Arsenal want to win it all: Odegaard

LONDON: Martin Odegaard has urged Arsenal to use the momentum from their recent goal spree to fuel the club's historic bid for Champions League and Premier League glory. The Gunners head to Porto on Wednesday for the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie in buoyant mood after demolishing Burnley 5-0 last weekend.

Mikel Arteta's side have started a calendar year with five successive league wins for the first time in their history, scoring 21 goals in those games. Arsenal are just two points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool and can turn their attention to Porto safe in the knowledge they are firmly in the hunt for a first title since 2004.

As well as reigning supreme in England for the first time in 20 years, the north Londoners are convinced they can also conquer Europe. Arsenal have never won the Champions League — losing their only final appearance against Barcelona in 2006.

Buoyed by the recent string of high-scoring wins, Gunners captain Odegaard is confident his team can mount a thrilling bid for both trophies. "That's what we want to do, we want to compete in every com-

petition we play in," the Norway midfielder said.

"Of course Champions League is a massive one, so we are excited for it. "We just want to focus on ourselves each game, keep improving every game and we will see how it goes. "We are in a good moment now. We have to use that momentum, keep building on it and we will see."

### Blistering run

Arsenal lost their opening game of the year to Liverpool in the FA Cup. Revitalised by a warm-weather training camp in Dubai, they crushed Crystal Palace 5-0 and beat Nottingham Forest. They put Liverpool to the sword in a 3-1 league victory that served notice of Arsenal's hunger to make amends for last season's late collapse in the title race.

They then thrashed West Ham 6-0 before crushing Burnley. Porto, a disappointing third in the Portuguese league, could be next to suffer against Arsenal's suddenly ruthless attack. For much of the season, critics suggested Arsenal's lack of a genuine penalty-box predator could ruin their title chances.

Gabriel Jesus's recurring injury problems have hardly helped but, even with the Brazilian playing just twice in 2024, Arsenal have been scoring with ease. "I think that's what we were missing a little bit in the last few weeks before the break. We created so much but we didn't score the goals," Odegaard said.

"But within the last few games, we've been brilliant in front of goal.



LONDON: (FILES) Burnley's English midfielder #21 Aaron Ramsey (C) vies with Arsenal's Norwegian midfielder #8 Martin Odegaard (2L) during the English Premier League football match between Burnley and Arsenal at Turf Moor in Burnley. — AFP

We get so many people in the box and so many situations around the box." England winger Bukayo Saka has been one of the key figures in Arsenal's blistering run. Stopping him will be an essential part of Porto's game-plan at the Estadio do Dragao.

The 22-year-old scored twice against Burnley, giving him seven goals in his last seven games. "The boss told us we're the first Arsenal team to win five in a row at the start

of the year, so it's a nice achievement and we'll definitely build momentum going forward," he said. "Not only that I'm playing well, the team's playing well and we're scoring a lot of goals because we've got some really important fixtures coming up, starting on Wednesday. "I can't wait to go there. I'm really excited, looking forward to it and hopefully we can take this form into that game as well." — AFP

## Glasner replaces Hodgson as Crystal Palace new boss

LONDON: Crystal Palace named former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Oliver Glasner as their new manager on Monday after confirming Roy Hodgson was stepping down following a terrible run of results for the struggling Premier League club. Former England boss Hodgson, who had been under growing pressure, was hospitalized after falling ill during a training session last week as reports swirled that he was going to be sacked.

Hodgson, 76, said in a club statement that he was stepping aside to allow the club to "bring forward their plans for a new manager". Shortly afterwards, Palace announced they had appointed Glasner as Hodgson's replacement, with the Austrian signing a deal until the end of the 2025/26 season.

"I am very happy to join Crystal Palace FC as manager," said the 49-year-old Austrian, who led Eintracht Frankfurt to Europa League glory in 2022 and has also managed LASK and Wolfsburg. "I am looking forward to working with the talented squad, meeting the club's supporters and experiencing the Selhurst Park atmosphere I have heard so much about."

Palace chairman Steve Parish said: "I'm delighted to welcome Oliver to the club. He has an outstanding record, and we believe he is the right manager to take the club forward at this pivotal stage. "Wherever Oliver has gone so far in his managerial journey, success has been quick to follow, and we believe his ambition, as well as his exciting and attacking approach, is the perfect fit."

Palace are in deep trouble after losing 10 of their past 16 league games to slide to 16th in the table, just five points above third-bottom Everton, whom they face later on Monday. Hodgson's assistants, Paddy McCarthy and Ray Lewington, are set to take charge of the team for the match at Goodison Park.

Hodgson's final match as Palace boss was a 3-1 home defeat against Chelsea on February 12, a loss that came after a 4-1 embarrassment at arch-rivals Brighton. After the Brighton defeat he insisted he had the "strength, the resilience and the determination" to turn the team's poor form around. — AFP

## Germany's Andreas Brehme dies at 63

BERLIN: Andreas Brehme, whose 85th-minute penalty sealed victory for West Germany over Argentina in the 1990 World Cup final, died overnight into Tuesday at the age of 63, his former club Bayern Munich said. "FC Bayern is deeply shocked by the sudden death of Andreas Brehme," the club said in a statement.

"We will always keep Andreas Brehme in our hearts. As a world champion and as a very special person." A versatile left-back, Brehme spent two seasons with Bayern Munich between 1986-1988, winning the Bundesliga in 1987.

As well as his World Cup heroics at the Olympic Stadium in Rome, Brehme left a mark at club level, playing for Kaiserslautern and Inter Milan, as well as Bayern, Saarbruecken and Real Zaragoza. Brehme spent 10 years at Kaiserslautern, sensationally leading the team as captain to the league title in 1998 as a newly promoted side.

Over two stints at the club as a player, Brehme also lifted the German Cup and went on to coach the "Red Devils" for two seasons in the early 2000s. In Italy, Brehme will be remembered for the partnership he formed with compatriots Juergen Klinsmann and Lothar Matthaeus at Inter Milan.

"A magnificent player, a true Interista," the Nerazzurri said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. "Ciao Andi, forever a legend," said Inter, for whom Brehme made over 150 appearances and won the Serie A title. Inter said their players would wear black armbands in honour of Brehme during their Champions League clash against Atletico Madrid later on Tuesday at the San Siro.

### 'Our World Cup hero'

Brehme's World Cup-winning teammates reacted with shock at the passing of the national team hero. "Andi was always positive and radiated pure life. He was a great person, a great friend," defender Guido Buchwald told SID, AFP's sports news subsidiary. Brehme's passing comes shortly after the death of another German footballing legend, Franz Beckenbauer.

Beckenbauer, who died in January, was the manager when West Germany won their third World Cup title. "Unfortunately, the sad news doesn't stop," midfielder Pierre Littbarski told SID. "This is very, very sad for German football and especially for us, the 1990 world champions."

Rudi Voeller, another of Brehme's national team colleagues, said the death left him "infinitely sad". "Andi was our World Cup hero, but for me even more — he was my close friend and companion," Voeller said in a statement published by the German Football Association (DFB).



Andreas Brehme

### 'I didn't think anything'

Brehme played 86 times for his country, although nothing would top his exploits against Diego Maradona's Argentina in Rome. Brehme scored the only goal in the 1990 final, stepping up to take the penalty instead of team captain Matthaeus, who did not want to take on the responsibility after changing his boots at half-time.

"No matter where I am, at the airport, out shopping, I am always asked about it," Brehme had told SID. "I didn't think about the significance of this penalty. I didn't think anything," said Brehme, who coolly slotted the ball into the corner to the goalkeeper's right. "Andreas Brehme is one of the greatest and best football players in German history," DFB president Bernd Neundorff said in a statement. — AFP

English Premier League	
Liverpool v Luton Town	22:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
UEFA Champions League	
Napoli v Barcelona	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
Porto v Arsenal	23:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN Sports FR HD 1	

# Classifieds

## Clinics & Hospitals

### Clinics

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

### Industrial Shuwaikh

Qadsiya	24814764
Dasmah	22515088
Bneid Al-Gar	22532265
Shaab	22531908
Qibla	22518752
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22459381
Mirqab	22451082
Sharq	22456536
Salmiya	22465401
	25746401

### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

## Change of Name

I, **IZZAT MANHA**, holder of Indian Passport No. V7783368 having permanent address Kerala, India 678506 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) IZZAT MANHA and (surname) ALAMEEN. (#5164 21/2/2024)

I, **ANAM LOGDE**, holder of Indian Passport No. T8757472 having permanent address at Adi, post: Kolmandla Tal: Mhasla, Di: Raigad, Maharashtra, pin: 402105, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) ANAM MUZAFFAR and (surname) LOGDE. (# 5163 21/2/2024)

## Onana rescues Everton as new Palace boss Glasner watches

'Thank you Roy' and 'One of our own'



LIVERPOOL: Crystal Palace's English goalkeeper #01 Sam Johnstone (R) makes a save during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Crystal Palace at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Everton midfielder Amadou Onana rescued a 1-1 draw against fellow strugglers Crystal Palace with a late equalizer just hours after the Eagles hired Oliver Glasner as their new manager on Monday. Sean Dyche's side were in danger of a damaging defeat in the fight for Premier League survival after Jordan Ayew blasted Palace ahead with a fine finish in the second half at Goodison Park.

But Onana levelled with six minutes left to lift Everton out of the relegation zone above Luton on goal difference. If Palace had held on, they would have moved eight points clear of the bottom three, but instead the gap to Luton is five points.

It was a blow to former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Glasner, who was appointed by Palace after Roy Hodgson stepped down earlier on a dramatic day for the south London club. Hodgson's assistants Paddy McCarthy and Ray Lewington were in charge against Everton, but Glasner was seated alongside Palace chairman Steve Parish and sporting director

Dougie Freedman in the Goodison stands.

"It was a wonderful goal by Jordan Ayew, but we couldn't hold on. There's lots of quality and Glasner is coming into a squad with plenty of character," McCarthy said. "I'm sure the players were aware he was watching. There are lots of positives he will have seen and I'm sure he cannot wait to get to work."

Everton boss Sean Dyche added: "We let in a bad goal from our point of view, but there was a lot of good in that second half. "Our mentality has been key the last few weeks and will be going forward." Glasner has agreed a contract until June 2026 and will be in charge for the first time when Palace host second bottom Burnley on Saturday in another crucial clash.

He faces a tough task to revive a team with only three wins in their last 20 games in all competitions during an alarming slide towards the relegation zone. Former England and Liverpool manager

Hodgson's departure was suitably respectful for a boyhood Palace fan who served them well in two spells as manager. Palace supporters who made the trip to Goodison appeared to have made peace with Hodgson as they held up signs reading 'Thank you Roy' and 'One of our own'.

### Hodgson's legacy

Now it is up to Glasner to ensure Hodgson's legacy of top-flight survival is not wasted. The 49-year-old Austrian led Eintracht to Europa League glory in 2022 and reached the Champions League last 16 the following year before leaving at the end of last season.

Glasner's first glimpse of his new team showed a group high on perspiration but lacking inspiration. Plagued by fitness and form issues, Dominic Calvert-Lewin's miserable season showed no signs of improving as the Everton striker headed wide from Dwight McNeil's cross.

Palace went close just before half time when Jean-Philippe Mateta's header was alertly cleared off the line by Ashley Young. Tyrick Mitchell should have ended the stalemate from Mateta's pass, but the Palace defender took too long to shoot, allowing Jordan Pickford to block his chipped effort.

Everton mustered a moment of genuine menace when James Tarkowski's header was well saved by Sam Johnstone, with the rebound reaching Doucoure, whose miscued close-range effort was clawed away by the Palace keeper. Palace took the lead in the 66th minute as Mateta held off Jarrad Branthwaite and knocked the ball back to Ayew, who drilled a superb strike in the far corner from the right-hand side of the penalty area.

Just as panic was setting in among Everton's players and fans, they snatched a priceless equalizer in the 84th minute when Onana rose highest to meet McNeil's corner with a powerful header from 10 yards. — AFP

### مبارك الذهبية



Kuwaiti runner Ibrahim Al-Dhefiri

## Kuwaiti runner Al-Dhefiri wins gold medal

TEHRAN: Kuwaiti runner Ibrahim Al-Dhefiri won the gold medal on Monday in 800m race at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championship held in Tehran, Iran. Al-Dhefiri was able to clinch the race with a record of one minute, 46 seconds. The silver medal was delivered to Iranian runner Subhan Ahmadi, and the bronze to Qatari Abubaker Abdalla. The first Asian Indoor Athletics Championship was held in Tehran in 2004 and takes place biennially making this edition the 11th, and usually occurs in February, this year has 26 Asian countries participating. — KUNA

## Sabalenka crashes out to Vekic in Dubai opener

DUBAI: Reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka suffered an opening round upset at the hands of familiar foe Donna Vekic, going down 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-0 in Dubai on Tuesday. Contesting her first match since her successful title defence at Melbourne Park, Sabalenka blew a 7-6, 2-0 lead to succumb to her Croatian opponent in two hours and 22 minutes.

The 31st-ranked Vekic, who now owns a 6-2 head-to-head lead in lifetime meetings against Sabalenka, was aggressive throughout the match and enters her next clash with big-hitting Romanian Sorana Cirstea searching for her first WTA 1000 quarter-final of her career.

"At all times I didn't give up. I didn't stop believing that I can win. I just kept fighting," said Vekic, who is 9-13 against top-five opposition. "To be honest, I didn't have big expectations coming to Dubai. Told my coach that I'm taking this week as half holidays. I can tell you I spent more time on the beach than on the court. Maybe that's a good way going forward," she added with a laugh.

In windy but warm conditions in Dubai, Sabalenka recovered from a break down then squandered a 5-3 lead before securing the opening

set on her sixth opportunity on the 69-minute mark. The world number two leapt to a 2-0 advantage in the second set but Vekic struck back and claimed another crucial break in game eight to level the contest and force a decider.

With the wind in her sails, Vekic put together a nine-game winning run, outlasting her powerful opponent, to deliver a final-set bagel and book her place in the last 16.

### Sakkari halts losing run

Earlier on Centre Court, eighth seed Maria Sakkari snapped a three-match losing streak and claimed her first-ever Dubai main-draw victory, on her fourth attempt, with a 6-2 6-4 triumph over in-form American Emma Navarro. After suffering opening round exits in Abu Dhabi and Doha, Sakkari was admittedly nervous ahead of her clash with Navarro, who is already a title-winner in 2024 and has amassed 13 victories in the first two months of the season.

"It was very tough. Last night I couldn't sleep just because I was overthinking about it and it wasn't easy. No one wants to keep losing first round. But I told myself to treat it as the first match of the season. Obviously



Aryna Sabalenka

ly it wasn't my best, best tennis but it was good enough to beat a top-form player," said Sakkari, who faces Leylah Fernandez or Jasmine Paolini next.

Sakkari is in search of a new coach having ended her six-year partnership with Tom Hill. The Greek world number 11 briefly worked with Sergi Bruguera during the offseason and after the Australian Open but needs to find a full-time coach given Bruguera's commitment to ATP player Arthur Fils. She is confident she will have found a new coach by the time Indian Wells commences next month.

Speaking of her split with Hill, Sakkari said: "It was very tough. I just felt like we couldn't really help each other, we couldn't move forward but we remain very, very good friends, that's never going to change."

In Dubai, Sakkari is joined by her mother Angeliki, who is a former top-50 WTA player, and her hitting partner Julien Cagnina. "She's my emergency coach, that's what I call her," said Sakkari of her mother. "It's nice to have her, we've been going out for dinners every day, it's been a very relaxing week with them." — AFP