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Amir congratulates citizens, residents

Kuwait celebrates 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day



His Highness the Amir
Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated citizens and residents of Kuwait on 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day, appreciating their joy on these two occasions that embodied their loyalty to Kuwait. His Highness praised all the great efforts made by the security authorities in the Ministries of Interior and Defense and the National Guard, as well as the effective participation made by other official bodies in preparing for the national celebrations, including the Permanent Committee for Celebrating National Holidays, Ministries of Information, Health, Education, Higher Education and the General Fire Force, Kuwait Municipality, and other relevant bodies, in addition to the extensive media coverage.

His Highness called on citizens to appreciate the blessing of liberation that Allah almighty bestowed on Kuwait, remembering with pride the honorable martyrs who gave their lives in defending this pre-

vious land. His Highness also sent a greeting of appreciation and reverence to his brothers the leaders of Gulf and Arab countries, for sharing the joy of Kuwait's national holidays, representing the depth of the bonds of relations between them and Kuwait. His Highness expressed gratitude for their heartfelt sentiments, and prayed to Allah Almighty to preserve the dear homeland and perpetuate its security, safety and prosperity.

Meanwhile, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi expressed his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and the gracious people of Kuwait on the national days. Minister Al-Mutairi, who expressed the congratulations on his X account, prayed for souls of the martyrs and for sustainable security, safety and

prosperity for "our dear homeland."

Also, the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Prime Minister and the loyal Kuwaiti people on the occasion of the National Day. In a press statement, Minister Al-Awadhi recalled the heroism and sacrifices of the Kuwaiti people to defend their land, adding that the people of Kuwait respect the sacrifices of their martyrs, whose fragrant memory and immortal heroism gave a bright record of lessons, stories, pride and courage in defending their country.

Minister Al-Awadhi pointed out that celebrating the National Day portrayed beautiful images of Kuwait's achievements and loyal people, which contributed to the stability and security of the country under the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing Kuwait more prosperity, security and peace. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Air Force pilots perform as they celebrate Kuwait's 63rd and 33rd anniversaries of the National Day and Liberation Day respectively. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaitis recall freedom from occupiers' claws

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the national days, the Kuwaitis recall with pride their resistance to the 1990 blatant Iraqi aggression and their unity with the sagacious leadership to restore the homeland's sovereignty and freedom. Echoes of "Allaho Akbar" chants on February 26, 1991, still resonate to this day. On this glorious day, the "Desert Storm" liberation operation was launched, resulting in the historic event of the liberation of Kuwait.

At the political level, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister at the time, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, played a major role in rallying Arab and international support for Kuwaiti legitimacy to defend national rights. The Kuwaiti people remember the prime role of the GCC countries, which gave Kuwait all types of support and hosted Kuwaiti citizens.

Continued on Page 6

Zain reaffirms love, loyalty to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Reaffirming its deep-rooted devotion to Kuwait, Zain commemorated the nation's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day with a long list of social activities, engaging entertainment programs, and traditional performances. The company forged a direct connection with audiences of all ages, painting a vibrant picture that reflected the enduring love and loyalty of Kuwaitis towards their nation during this much-cherished season. Zain is always eager to directly participate in the biggest national-themed events every year to underscore its deep belief in the vital role played by private sector companies, especially national ones, in sharing the joys of national celebrations with the people of Kuwait. The company considers itself an integral part in the fabric of the community in which it operates and serves. (See Page 3)



Bader Al-Kharafi and Nawaf Algharabally honor the stars of Zain's TVC: Sanaa Alkharraz, Sulaiman Al Daikan, and Salem Sayyar Al Enzi.

US airman sets himself on fire in Gaza protest

WASHINGTON: A US airman has died after setting himself on fire outside the Zionist embassy in Washington at the weekend in protest over the war in Gaza, the Air Force said Monday. The shocking act was an escalation of recent protests across the United States against Zionist actions

Palestinian PM resigns

RAMALLAH: Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced Monday the resignation of his government, which rules parts of the occupied West Bank, citing the need for change after the Zionist-Hamas war in Gaza ends. Shtayyeh submitted the resignation to the leader of the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority, president Mahmud Abbas, 88. The United States and other powers have called

Continued on Page 6

for a reformed Palestinian Authority to take charge of all Palestinian territories after the end of the war sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack.

Shtayyeh cited "developments related to the aggression against the Gaza Strip and the escalation in the West Bank and Jerusalem", which have also been torn by deadly violence amid the war. He said he had first offered Abbas the resignation last Tuesday, but was formally submitting it "in writing" on Monday. Abbas had yet to formally accept it. The 66-year-old premier said in brief comments that

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Local



KUWAIT: People walk past Kuwaiti national flags on the coast during the country's 63rd Independence Day celebrations as children wave Kuwaiti national flags. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait marks 33rd Liberation Day

Historical turning point displaying solidarity, resilience

KUWAIT: The 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day continues to mark a historical turning point for Kuwait, through which the people of the country proved their solid will and unwavering belief in victory to liberate the land on February 26, 1991, from the Iraqi invasion. With the brutal Iraqi invasion at dawn on August 2, 1990, the people of Kuwait called for the legitimacy of the Al-Sabah family's rulership, achieving rare and unparalleled international support to return legitimacy in accordance with the United Nations (UN) Charter.

Kuwait's foreign policy, along with Kuwait's wise leadership—the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah, and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah—have proven Kuwait's legitimacy to the international community and achieved complete liberation. Kuwait raised its issue in international and regional forums and mobilized global support in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and in the meeting of foreign ministers of non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries that was held on the sidelines of the UN general assembly on October 5, 1990.

Kuwait affirmed at the time that the Iraqi occupation represented a flagrant violation of the UN Charter and the NAM's principals and called on the NAM's members to condemn the aggression and continue their support for the initial actions taken by the international community. Kuwait also demanded that the aggressor pay compensation for the destruction caused to the economic and social environment in Kuwait.

The UNSC held an emergency session based on the demand of many countries on August 3, 1990, and by the end of it, Resolution 660 was issued, condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and demanding that Iraq withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Kuwaiti lands. The United States and the Soviet Union, the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Organization Conference (OIC), issued statements during their 19th meeting in Cairo. Ambassadors of NAM issued statements



Archive photos show Kuwait's Liberation Day celebrations. — KUNA photos

during their meeting in New York, expressing their condemnation of the invasion and demanding that Iraq immediately withdraw its forces.

The United States submitted a draft resolution to the UNSC to impose comprehensive economic and military sanctions on Iraq, forcing Iraqi forces to withdraw from Kuwaiti lands, according to the UNSC's Resolution 660 issued a few hours after the invasion. A few days later, UNSC Resolution 661 on Iraq was issued on August 6, 1990, affirming the council's determination to bring the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq to an end and to restore the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Kuwait.

The third UNSC resolution 662 was issued on August 9, 1990, stating that the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq has no legal validity and is considered null and void, calling upon all states, international organizations, and specialized agencies not to recognize that annexation. The situation in Kuwait had escalated, opening the door for peace-loving countries to send forces to the region, and immediately contacts took place between various world capitals to mobilize an international coalition to liberate Kuwait.

In the meantime, Arab and international



forces began to arrive in Saudi Arabia, and the UNSC issued its fourth resolution (664 regarding the Iraqi invasion), reaffirming the invalidation of the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq. Soon after, the UNSC issued Resolution 674 against Iraq, and the permanent members of the UNSC agreed on a draft resolution that allowed the use of military force against Iraq. At the end of November 1990, the UNSC issued several resolutions related to Iraq, the first of which was Resolution 677.

It condemned Iraqi attempts to alter



the demographic composition of the population of Kuwait and to destroy the civil records maintained by the legitimate government of Kuwait; it mandates the Secretary General to take custody of a copy of the population register of Kuwait. The Council also issued its Resolution 678, authorizing member states to use all necessary means to implement SC Resolution 660 (1990) and giving Iraq until January 15, 1991, to withdraw from Kuwait or else face the risk of a military intervention by international coalition forces.

Following Resolution 678, at dawn on January 17, 1991, the coalition forces began their major attacks on Iraqi military and strategic sites in Kuwait and Iraq. This included air strikes on Iraqi military installations and bases, command and control centers, public facilities, bridges, water and electricity stations, as well as about 60 military bases. International coalition countries also began preparing for their ground attack on the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, as the late US President George H. W. Bush gave the green light to the commander of the coalition forces, the late General Norman Schwarzkopf, to launch the ground attack.

The decision was taken moments before the expiration of the deadline that the allies and the UN had set for Iraq to withdraw. On February 24, 1991, the international coalition forces began their ground attack on the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. The forces of 30 countries, reinforced with the latest mechanisms, attacked the Iraqi forces and destroyed them in Kuwaiti territory. The Iraqi army quickly collapsed due to the strikes of international forces towards Kuwait City. Kuwait had returned to its people, free and proud, after about seven difficult months of occupation. — KUNA



'Sleepless Eyes' celebrating with Kuwaitis and residents

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti security personnel, known as "Sleepless Eyes", on Sunday shared joyfulness with citizens and residents in Kuwait over the country's celebrations marking the 63rd National Day and 33rd

Liberation Day. They were deployed everywhere nationwide in a highly commended effort to provide security protection to everyone in the country and to resolutely and immediately respond to any misconduct or



law-breaking. Also, units of the Ministry of Defense took part in the celebrations marking the national days, amid cheers by jubilant nationals and general residents of the country. The forces paraded armored vehicles, took part in exhibition booths, a brass band as officers briefed the crowds about the military vehicles. As to the air show originally set today, it was delayed to tomorrow due to weather conditions. — KUNA

Embassies mark National Days

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Embassies in a number of countries have held celebrations to mark the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day. In Stockholm, the Kuwaiti Embassy held a reception attended by the Director General of the Global Affairs Department at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dag Juhlin-Dannfeldt, Deputy Speaker of the Swedish Parliament Julia Kronlid, and several other Swedish officials, as well as Arab and foreign ambassadors accredited in Stockholm.

Speaking at the event, Acting Charge d'Affairs at the Kuwaiti Embassy Counselor Abdullah Abu Shaiba extended his warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the government and Kuwaitis. He remembered with great pride and honor "the martyrs who wrote with their pure blood the most wonderful epics of sacrifice for the dear homeland." Counselor Abu Shaiba added that the development and achievements achieved by Kuwait at all levels earned it great appreciation and respect from the international community.

He expressed his best wishes for further progress, prosperity, and security for Kuwait and its people under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Ambassador of Kuwait to South Africa, held a large reception to mark the national day. The ceremony was attended by senior officials of the South African government, heads and representatives of Arab and foreign diplomatic missions accredited in Pretoria, and a group of social and political figures, businessmen, and staff of the Kuwaiti Embassy.

In statements to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Shibli extended his warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the government and people of Kuwait on these dear occasions. He boasted that the achievements that Kuwait has made

since independence have earned it the respect of the entire world, boosted its status on the international stage, and helped it have distinguished relations with all countries based on mutual respect.

In Nouakchott, Kuwait's Embassy held a function to mark the national occasions. The guests were received by the Ambassador of Kuwait to Mauritania, Badah Al-Dosari, and other embassy staff members. During the ceremony, a documentary film was screened highlighting the bilateral cooperation relations between Mauritania and Kuwait, which extend over more than five and a half decades. The Mauritanian government was represented at the ceremony by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Dr. Mohamed Salem Ould Marzoug, Minister of Economy Abdessalam Ould Mohamed Salah, and several other senior officials.

Also attending were Arab and foreign ambassadors accredited to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, leaders of Mauritanian political parties, and economic and cultural figures. The Embassy of Kuwait to Bosnia and Herzegovina stated in a statement to KUNA that it held a reception on these occasions, attended by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Security, ambassadors, and heads of diplomatic missions. Ambassador of Kuwait Dhafer Al-Kharinj observed a moment of silence at the start of the event in remembrance of Palestinian martyrs who fell in the ongoing Zionist occupation war on the Gaza Strip.

He stated that Kuwait, as it celebrates national days, does not forget its pioneering role in humanitarian issues. He lauded strong relations between Kuwait and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ambassador Al-Kharinj extended his warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the government and people of Kuwait. He expressed his sincere wishes for further progress, prosperity, and security for Kuwait and its people under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



Local

Zain reaffirms love, loyalty and belonging to Kuwait during the national celebrations

Company honored stars of its latest National TVC, including the Voice of Kuwait, Sanaa Alkharraz



Bader Al-Kharafi and Nawaf Algharabally honor the stars of Zain's TVC: Sanaa Alkharraz, Sulaiman Al Daikan, and Salem Sayyar Alenzi.



Zain celebrated with the community at South Subahiya Park throughout February.

KUWAIT: Reaffirming its deep-rooted devotion to Kuwait, Zain commemorated the nation's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day with a long list of social activities, engaging entertainment programs, and traditional performances. The company forged a direct connection with audiences of all ages, painting a vibrant picture that reflected the enduring love and loyalty of Kuwaitis towards their nation during this much-cherished season.

Zain is always eager to directly participate in the biggest national-themed events every year to underscore its deep belief in the vital role played by private sector companies, especially national ones, in sharing the joys of national celebrations with the people of Kuwait. The company considers itself an integral part in the fabric of the community in which it operates and serves.

Year after year, the local community anticipates Zain's involvement in the biggest campaigns, gatherings, and programs that celebrate the nation's holidays. Audiences across Kuwait eagerly await the unveiling of Zain's annual National TVC, which always embodies deep emotions of love, belonging, and patriotism. Through its social and creative contributions, Zain always aspires to embody the core values of its brand: Zain, a Wonderful World.

The company recently held its annual national holidays event to celebrate this much-cherished occasion with the Zain family. This year, the event was attended by Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Zain Kuwait Acting CEO Nawaf Algharabally, the company's executive management team, and scores of Zain employees from across divisions and departments who were all eager to join the event to show their love for their nation.

This year's event had a special aura to it with the participation of the stars of Zain's latest National TVC for 2024, including great Kuwaiti singer Sanaa Alkharraz, dubbed the Voice of Kuwait, along with writer and poet Salem Sayyar Alenzi who penned the beautiful lyrics of the commercial, and brilliant composer Sulaiman Ghannam Al Daikan whose brilliant tunes brought the TVC to life. The event was also joined by the talented young students who appeared in the commercial, who recreated the TVC's wonderful traditional dance performances on-stage for Zain employees.

During the event, Bader Al-Kharafi and Nawaf Algharabally joined the stage to recognize the tremendous contributions of all the stars who made this TVC possible, at their forefront Sanaa Alkharraz who took the TVC's audience in a nostalgic journey through the years to the beautiful past. In the mind of every Kuwaiti, Sanaa Alkharraz's voice is deeply linked to the operettas of the 80's and 90's, and this truly contributed to the success of the commercial. Toward the end of the event, poet Salem Sayyar Alenzi delivered a beautiful, patriotic poem to the attendees, invigorating a sense of national unity and patriotism for all.

Zain's 2024 National TVC received wide praise and positive reaction from the local community and has surpassed 3.5 million views on YouTube as of today. The TVC was produced by Joy Productions, and its lyrics sung of Kuwait's glorious history, promoted national unity, and celebrated the nation's prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

This special celebration is one of Zain's top social programs held for employees in February of every year. The event brings together staff and senior ex-



Al-Kharafi and Algharabally with Zain's executive management team during the annual event.



Zain employees eagerly participated in the event to show their love for Kuwait.

ecutive management together to further strengthen the links between members of the Zain family and renew the spirit of teamwork under their united love for their nation. The event featured many fun activities and programs that centered around celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, where the company's employees gathered in a family atmosphere filled with national pride. The event's program also included exciting competitions, prizes for winners, and a special performance by a traditional band that played wonderful traditional Kuwaiti pieces throughout the celebration.

As it does in February of every year, Zain is always eager to interact with the community by being present at the biggest events and social gatherings where Kuwaitis show their love for their nation. In such gatherings, the company finds an invaluable opportunity to share the joys of this momentous occasion with the community by presenting its very own programs.

Zain's interactive national holidays programs this year came in South Subahiya Park, which Zain sponsors in partnership with the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) in continuation of its strategic partnership with the public sector to support the nation's biggest entertainment projects, as well as in Qout Market at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC), which Zain strategically partners in its tenth season.

The programs Zain organized in South Subahiya Park and Qout Market included exciting traditional 'Artha' performances with many local traditional bands, along with several wonderful performances by the young students of Zain's National TVC, who reacted the commercial's dances to the delight of the visiting families.

Zain also presented a plethora of interactive programs and engaging activities for children and families, which all promoted national unity and planted the values of love and loyalty to one's nation from an early age. The company also distributed huge 7m Kuwait flags to visitors in an initiative to revive the old habit of raising Kuwait's flag above every house. Other activities included a weekly PlayStation tournament at the company's booth in South Subahiya Park, special offers on the latest products, and much more.

Zain is proud of its strategic partnership with the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC), which recent-



Huge crowds engaged in Zain's activities.

ly covered some of the nation's biggest recreational projects. Zain has found immense interest from the public sector to bring to life a number of major plans that present the best experiences to the Kuwaiti community. The company is committed to being a main partner in realizing this vision, thus reflecting the key role played by the private sector in achieving the nation's various developmental goals.

South Subahiya Park is Kuwait's latest and most anticipated theme park, and Zain was keen on being among the first of its supporters to help bring an exceptional entertainment destination to families and young people in the community. The Park covers 107,000 square meters and can welcome 10,000 visitors per day. Zain is also proud to be among the first supporters of Qout Market throughout the past years. The event has had a huge success in the past, having gathered families, young people, and other members of the community in a wonderful atmosphere with a special focus on supporting local products and talents.

In addition, and under its strategic partnership with South Subahiya Park in collaboration with TEC, Zain held many exciting activities and competitions for visitors at SSP in collaboration with 360 FM to celebrate Kuwait's national holidays. Zain held the fun activities at its booth in SSP, where large crowds of families, children, and young people joined to take part in the company's competitions for a chance to win special prizes. This continued for five consecutive days during the national holidays vacation, where entertainer Osama Fouda hosted the special activities and interacted with the crowds LIVE on 360 FM from Zain's booth.

Through its extended partnership with the Touristic Enterprises Company, Zain has contributed to bringing the best world-class entertainment destinations to the community. This collaboration has also vitalized the local touristic, economic, and social scenes, supported local entrepreneurs and startup owners, and drove the progress of the national economy.



Zain's National TVC stars performing on-stage.

Kuwait Designer Center partake in Doha Biennale

DOHA: A group of artists from the Kuwait Designer Center, sponsored by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) and in cooperation with the Khaleesque cultural institute, are participating in the first edition of the Design Doha Biennale in the Qatari capital, Doha, which runs until next Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA Sunday, Sheikh Fawaz Al-Sabah, head of Khaleesque, said that she and Kuwaiti artists are showcasing at the Kuwait Designer Center as part of the Biennale activities, which kicked off on Saturday, aiming to spotlight Kuwaiti artistry and talents internationally.

On her side, Mariam Al-Wazzan, the exhibition curator for the Kuwait Designer Center, stated that the center showcased innovative works by Kuwaiti artists who incorporate sustainability and contemporary Arab identity, emphasizing the integration of environmental awareness and cultural heritage in modern design. A group of Kuwaiti artists, including Dalia Ali, Lulwa Al-Radwan, Kawthar Al-Saffar, Jasem Al-Nashmi, and Jasem Al-Nasarallah, are participating in the Kuwait Design Center, sponsored by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) and managed by Khaleesque, she pointed out. — KUNA



Kuwaiti artist Jasem Al-Nasarallah



Kuwaiti artist Jasem Al-Nashmi

Marking National Day, folklore troupes perform Ardha dance

'Youm Al-Bahar' ignites Kuwait's patriotism



KUWAIT: Celebrating the country's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day, Kuwaiti folklore troupes performed the traditional Ardha dance at Youm Al-Bahar Village on Sunday, catching the eyes of large numbers of citizens and residents. The attention-grabbing scene, which reflects how much they cherish the dear nation, is part of wide-scale official and unofficial celebrations nationwide.

'Youm Al-Bahar'

In another development, Youm Al-Bahar traditional village showcased the utmost expressions of

patriotism for the nation during Kuwait's National Days through its cultural and folk heritage, embodying the Kuwaiti spirit. The village represents Kuwait's maritime legacy and history in diving and travel, hosting events that evoke reverence among Kuwaitis while displaying the country's culture and history to visitors from around the world. Some of the expressions seen include the Kuwaiti national teams wearing traditional attire of their ancestors, performing folk dances, waving flags, singing patriotic songs, children joining in by cheering with flags, and females wearing the colors of the Kuwaiti flag. — KUNA



DOHA: Kuwait pavilion at Doha Expo celebrates National days. — KUNA photos



Officials participate in the celebration.

Kuwait pavilion at Doha Expo marks national days

DOHA: The Kuwait pavilion at Doha Expo 2023 held a function to mark the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day of Kuwait on Sunday. The celebration, which gathered a number of Qatari government officials, Kuwaiti diplomats, and environmental activists, aims to enhance public awareness about the importance of environmental protection, Director General of the Kuwait Environment Public Authority (EPA), Samira Al-Kandari, said.

At the behest of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the State of Kuwait is keen

on implementing the development vision "New Kuwait 2035," which gives precedence to sustainable development and active participation in relevant events, she said in a speech at the function.

Participation in the Doha Expo provides a great opportunity to share the experiences of other countries in the combat against desertification and the latest technologies for promoting sustainable agricultural development, as Al-Kandari pointed out. On the Kuwaiti pavilion, she said it showcases the Kuwaiti horticultural experiments and the projects to combat desertification.

The Greenhands Environmental Team and Al-Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society, a non-profit organization, as well as folklore teams, are taking part in the pavilion to shed light on Kuwait's efforts to protect the environment and conserve national heritage, she went on. Since opening, the pavilion has seen 25 workshops and lectures organized in collaboration with the Kuwaiti government and non-government organizations. The pavilion attaches great importance to public

awareness about environmental issues with a view to delivering practical, scientific facts to the public and the new generation, Al-Kandari added. Praising the fraternity between Kuwait and Qatar, she thanked the Qatari leaders and people for facilitating the organization of the Kuwaiti pavilion. On his part, Bader Al-Dafa, the Commissioner General of Doha Expo 2023, praised Kuwait's experience in promoting sustainable development and green farming across developing countries.

He noted that the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) plays an important role in funding agricultural projects and employing innovative technological solutions in farming in several countries. The participants in the Expo, from the public or private sectors, have a chance to build partnerships in agricultural and horticultural areas, he added. Doha Expo 2023, the first international horticultural exhibition in Qatar, the Middle East, and North Africa, opened on October 2 and will conclude on March 28, 2024. — KUNA

Embassies congratulate Kuwait

US Embassy

Karen Hideko Sasahara
US' Ambassador

On behalf of the United States of America, I congratulate Kuwait's Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day. These two days mark pivotal moments in Kuwait's history, celebrating the founding of the modern Kuwaiti state and commemorating the 33rd anniversary of Kuwait's liberation. More than three decades ago, Kuwaiti, US, and Coalition forces drove out Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait, forging a bond that has only grown stronger.

We honor those who fought, suffered, and died for the freedom the Kuwaiti people enjoy today. The United States is proud to have led the coalition of nations that came to Kuwait's aid. Today, our defense partnership — the legacy of 1991 — has evolved to deliver training and capabilities that strengthen Kuwait's Armed Forces and contribute to regional security. As we celebrate the 63rd anniversary of Kuwait's independence, the United States is proud of our excellent bilateral relations bound by our mutual security and peacekeeping values.

We deeply cherish the enduring friendship between our nations that includes commercial, educational, and cultural ties. As the US Ambassador to Kuwait, I look forward to seeing the vibrant celebrations of Kuwait's history and culture during the month of February. Flags adorn every home, and the visible pride of Kuwaiti citizens mirrors the spirit of America during our Fourth of July festivities. During my time in Kuwait, I will continue to explore the country, and deepen my understanding of its rich cultural tapestry, fostering even stronger and deeper ties between our countries.



Indonesia Embassy

Lena Maryana
Indonesia's Ambassador

On the auspicious occasion of the 63rd anniversary of National Day and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day, I have the distinct honor, on behalf of the government of Indonesia, to convey my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Yahya, and to the government and people of Kuwait.

I am pleased to note that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries on February 28, 1968, relations and cooperation between Indonesia and Kuwait have continuously strengthened and shown improvement across various fields, whether at the bilateral, regional, or international level. Kuwait plays a strategic role in maintaining peace, stability and security in the region. In the field of humanitarian and charitable works, Kuwait plays imperative roles to assist friendly countries in the world. Al-Sabah Villages in Indonesia is one of the bridges of continuous cooperation between Kuwait and Indonesia in charitable work.

Indonesia and Kuwait are developing mutually supportive cooperation in handling regional and international issues for the benefit of people of the world. Both Indonesia and Kuwait embrace moderate Islam, which seeks peace and progress. I, therefore, realize that Indonesia and Kuwait could work together to enhance spreading this modern, moderate, and peaceful Islam within the Islamic countries and to the world at large. Being a wealthy nation with substantial oil reserves and abundant employment prospects, Kuwait with 2035 development plan offers vast opportunities for Indonesia to widen cooperation in various sectors.

I am confident that under the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and new administration of Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, our longstanding good relations will further thrive through new areas of cooperation, benefiting both our peoples and countries, and contributing to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. Concluding my message, I would like to extend my best wishes for the good health and success of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah whose wise leadership will lead the continued progress and development of Kuwait and the happiness and prosperity of its people.



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Trump coasts to another victory in race for nomination

Philippines accuses China of attempting to block vessel

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KHAN YUNIS: A man buries his child who was killed in overnight Zionist air strikes on the Muammar home, at a cemetery in east Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 26, 2024. — AFP

Zionists brace for Rafah invasion

UN chief warns invasion would 'put final nail in the coffin' of aid operations

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: Zionist entity said Monday its army had readied a plan to evacuate Gazans ahead of a feared invasion of far-southern Rafah, which the UN chief warned would "put the final nail in the coffin" of aid operations. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that Rafah—where 1.4 million Palestinians live in crowded shelters near the Egyptian border—is also "the core of the humanitarian aid operation" in the besieged Gaza Strip.

In another shock impact of the almost five-month-old war, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh in the occupied West Bank handed in his government's resignation to the head of the Palestinian Authority, president Mahmud Abbas. Shtayyeh cited "the new reality in the Gaza Strip" and "the escalation in the West Bank and Jerusalem", where deadly violence has surged since the Zionist entity war on Gaza which began on Oct 7. Zionist entity's top ally Washington and other powers discussing a post-war Gaza have called for a reformed Palestinian Authority to take charge of both the West Bank and Gaza, which has been ruled by Hamas

since 2007.

Shtayyeh urged intra-Palestinian consensus after years of rift and the "extension of the Authority's rule over the entire land of Palestine". Heavy fighting raged on in Gaza, where Zionist entity forces launched strikes and ground operations, killing 92 people overnight according to the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry. Displaced Gazan Sharif Muammar said he had helped to pull his son's body of from the rubble in Rafah. "There was no one here—only children, they are all children," he told AFP. "There were no fighters at all. We weren't launching missiles... We barely live."

Zionist entity's military campaign has killed at least 29,782 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the ministry. The war broke out after Hamas launched their unprecedented attack which killed 1,160 people in Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures.

Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed Sunday that, despite ongoing talks toward a ceasefire, the army will launch a ground invasion of Rafah to achieve "total victory" over Hamas. Once

land operations are launched there, a Zionist entity victory would be "weeks away", he said, adding that any truce deal would delay, not prevent, the operation.

On Monday Netanyahu's office said the military had shown Zionist entity's war cabinet its plan for evacuating civilians from Rafah. But no details have been released on where those displaced people could go in war-torn Gaza. Neighboring Egypt has built a large walled enclosure next to Gaza, but Cairo has denied any plans to allow the mass flight of refugees across the border.

Foreign governments and aid groups have issued dire warnings that a Rafah invasion would inflict mass casualties. Guterres warned "an all-out Zionist entity offensive on the city would not only be terrifying for more than a million Palestinian civilians sheltering there; it would put the final nail in the coffin of our aid programs". He said that "nothing can justify Hamas's deliberate killing, injuring, torturing and kidnapping of civilians" and "nothing justifies the collective punishment of the Palestinian people."

Desperate families in Gaza's north have

had to scavenge for food as most aid trucks have been halted there, with many people eating animal fodder and the meat of slaughtered horses. "We have no food or drink for ourselves or our children," Omar Al-Kahlout told AFP, as he waited near Gaza City for aid trucks to arrive. Amid the spiraling crisis, the UN aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, has urged political action to avert famine.

Dire food shortages in northern Gaza are "a man-made disaster" that can be mitigated, said Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA chief. "Famine can still be avoided through genuine political will to grant access and protection to meaningful assistance." Aid entering Gaza has halved in February from the previous month, he said. Mediators meanwhile continued stuttering negotiations towards a ceasefire and hostage release deal, with hopes it can be in place before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in about two weeks. Media reports suggest the warring parties are weighing a six-week halt to fighting and the initial exchange of dozens of hostages for several hundred Palestinian detainees held by Zionist entity. — AFP

Qatar Amir due in Paris for talks on Gaza

PARIS: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, whose country has played the key mediation role in the Gaza war, visits Paris this week for talks with President Emmanuel Macron, the French presidency said Sunday.

The ruler's trip on Tuesday and Wednesday will be his first state visit to France since he became amir of the small but gas-rich and hugely influential emirate in 2013, according to the Elysee. Qatar has emerged as the key player in mediation between Zionist entity and Hamas to agree a truce in Gaza and release more hostages abducted by the Palestinian militant group in its attack on Zionist entity on Oct 7. It hosts the political bureau of Hamas but also enjoys warm relations with the United States. "Qatar is notably working on the release of the hostages, which is a priority for us," said a French presidential official.

Three French nationals are among those still held by Hamas.

The discussions will also focus on "ongoing efforts to obtain a ceasefire... and enable massive aid to be provided to the Gazan population," added the official. A previous week-long truce in November saw more than 100 hostages and 240 Palestinian prisoners freed but so far no other such deal has been agreed despite intense efforts over the last weeks.

Egyptian, Qatari and US experts met in Doha on Sunday for talks also attended by Zionist entity and Hamas representatives, state-linked Egyptian media said, seeking to secure a truce before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The Doha talks followed a weekend meeting in Paris, without Hamas, where representatives "came to an understanding among the four of them about what the basic contours



RAFAH: A displaced Palestinian child stands outside a makeshift tent attached to a school hosting families from other parts of the Gaza Strip in the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza on Feb 26. — AFP

of a hostage deal for temporary House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told CNN.—AFP

Zionists hit east Lebanon, kill 2

BAALBEK: Zionists struck Hezbollah targets near the city of Baalbek on Monday, killing two group members, security sources said, the first such attack on Lebanon's east since hostilities began after the Gaza war erupted. The Zionist army said the strikes targeted Hezbollah air defense systems in retaliation for the Iran-backed group downing one of its drones in south Lebanon earlier on Monday. "Two Hezbollah members were killed in the Zionist strikes near Baalbek," a security official in Lebanon told AFP. Another security source confirmed the toll.

Earlier Monday, one of the sources had said Zionist strikes hit a building used by Hezbollah in a Baalbek suburb, and a warehouse near Baalbek belonging to a Muslim group. Both sources requested anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the press. The army said it struck Hezbollah "aerial defense" sites in the Bekaa valley in response "to the launch of a surface-to-air missile" which downed the drone.

During a funeral procession for a Hezbollah fighter, one of the group's lawmakers, Hassan Fadlallah, lambasted the strikes on Baalbek, a Hezbollah bastion near the border with Syria. "This Zionist encroachment will not push us to retreat, it will rather increase our determination," Fadlallah said in a televised address. Zionist "aggression on Baalbek or any other region will not remain unan-

swered, and the resistance will respond in the appropriate manner," he added. In January, a strike widely attributed to Zionists killed Hamas's deputy leader Saleh Al-Aruri and six militants in Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold - the most high-profile Hamas figure to be killed during the war.

On Sunday, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said there would be no let up in action against Hezbollah, even if a ceasefire and hostage deal were secured in Gaza. Hezbollah has said it will stop launching attacks on Zionist entity if the military stops its Gaza offensive. At least 280 people have been killed on the Lebanese side since fighting erupted, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 44 civilians, according to an AFP tally. On the Zionist side, 10 soldiers and six civilians have been killed, according to the Zionist army. — AFP



LAHORE: Governor of Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman (left) administer oath to the newly-elected Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab province Maryam Nawaz Sharif during a ceremony at the Governor's House in Lahore. — AFP

Sharif's daughter takes helm of Pakistan's Punjab

LAHORE: The daughter of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif took control of Pakistan's most populous region on Monday, becoming the country's first woman to govern a province. Maryam Nawaz Sharif was elected chief minister in her family's long-time power base of Punjab province, after Pakistan held national and provincial polls on Feb 8.

Her father—widely known as the "Lion of Punjab"—was prime minister three times, his last stint ending in 2017. Her uncle Shehbaz, also a previous premier, looks set to rule again after the family's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party agreed to govern in coalition with the Pakistan Peoples Party. The alliance also saw the PPP's Punjab lawmakers back Maryam for the chief minister's office, where she will preside over the province of 127 million Pakistanis—more than half the national populace. Nawaz and Shehbaz flanked Maryam as she was sworn in. Maryam said Monday that her appointment was "the making of history". "It is a victory for every woman, a triumph for every daughter and mother," she told regional lawmakers after they elected her to the role. "It is proof that being a woman and being a daughter cannot constrain your dreams."

Nepotism and cronyism are entrenched in Pakistani politics, with family connections sometimes boosting elite daughters into power despite social conservatism shutting most women out. Benazir Bhutto became Pakistan's first female leader in 1988 but the opportunity was credited to her lineage in the Bhutto dynasty which has historically rivalled the Sharifs, rather than social progress. Only around a dozen women were elected to national office in this month's elections. Most female lawmakers enter parliament in seats reserved for women and religious minorities. Female politicians also face sexist criticism in patriarchal Pakistan, and Maryam has in the past been targeted over her appearance and taunted with suggestive remarks.

Analysts suggest the 50-year-old is being groomed to succeed the Sharif brothers, who are in their 70s and have suffered ailing health. Both served as Punjab chief minister before leading the country. Maryam's cousin Hamza Shabbaz also recently held the post. Like her father Nawaz, Maryam has been jailed in the past over graft. PML-N had been tipped to win this month's polls after securing the backing of the powerful military establishment. —AFP

International

Philippines accuses China of attempting to block vessel

Philippine vessel managed to evade the blocking attempts: Report

MANILA: The Philippines on Sunday accused the Chinese coast guard of attempting to block a Filipino government vessel delivering supplies to fishermen, the second such alleged incident near a disputed reef in two weeks. The BRP Datu Sanday was supplying fuel to fishermen near the Scarborough Shoal when it was harassed by a China Coast Guard vessel and three other Chinese ships on Feb. 22, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

Three of the four Chinese vessels came within 100 meters (328 feet) of Datu Sanday's bow, it said in an incident report that also listed shadowing, vessel transponder jamming and other "dangerous maneuvers".

"Despite these maneuvers, the skipper of BRP Datu Sanday exhibited excellent seamanship skills and managed to evade the blocking attempts," said Commodore Jay Tarriela, the Philippine coast guard spokesman on South China Sea issues. A week earlier, the Philippine Coast Guard said the BRP Datu Tamblot had a similar encounter in the area. Scarborough Shoal — a

triangular chain of reefs and rocks — has been a flashpoint between the countries since China seized it from the Philippines in 2012.

Since then, Beijing has deployed patrol boats that Manila says harass Philippine vessels and prevent Filipino fishermen from accessing a fish-rich lagoon there. On social media, China's state-run Global Times said on Saturday that the China Coast Guard had repelled the Datu Sanday "when the vessel illegally intruded into waters adjacent to China's Huangyan Island," using the Chinese name for the shoal. Scarborough Shoal lies 240 kilometers (150 miles) west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometers from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan.

China claims almost the entire sea and has ignored an international tribunal ruling that its assertions have no legal basis. Tense standoffs between China and the Philippines around disputed reefs last year saw collisions and Chinese ships blasting water cannon at Philippine boats. — AFP



This handout photo from the Philippine Coast Guard shows China Coast Guard personnel onboard a rigid-hulled inflatable boat (right) as they shadow a Philippine fishing boat (left) during the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) mission to bring supplies to fishermen near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal in the disputed South China Sea. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Four Egyptian workers drown

GIZA, Egypt: Four Egyptian construction workers died on Sunday when their boat sank in a canal near Giza, state media reported, adding that five others were rescued and four passengers were still missing. The small boat was carrying 13 workers when it went down near the northern Giza village of Nekla, around 30 kilometers (18 miles) northwest of the capital Cairo, state-owned newspaper Al-Ahram said. "Rescuers managed to recover the bodies of four victims and save five others," while efforts to find the remaining four passengers were ongoing, the paper said. The health ministry said four of the rescued had been transported to hospital, and three were later discharged. — AFP

Pope cancels audiences due to flu

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis cancelled his public meetings Monday, as he had on Saturday, due to continued "light flu symptoms", the Vatican said. The 87-year-old had however delivered his Angelus prayer as usual on Sunday. "Light flu symptoms persist, without a fever. However, this morning's audiences are suspended as a precaution," the Vatican said in a statement. Saturday's audiences had also been cancelled for the same reason. Pope Francis, who had part of a lung removed in his youth, was forced to cancel a visit to COP28 UN climate talks in Dubai in December after a bout of flu-like symptoms. — AFP

Hostages released in PNG

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: An Australian helicopter pilot and two local contractors kidnapped at gunpoint in Papua New Guinea's restive highlands have been freed unharmed, police and an aviation company spokesman said Monday. The trio were taken on Monday afternoon near Mount Sisa, in central Hela Province, while working at a remote telecommunications tower, but were now free, "safe and unharmed", police said. With police and the army closing in on the area, it appears the assailants dropped their demands and allowed the three men to get back in the chopper and fly away to safety. — AFP

Drug sharply cuts food allergens

WASHINGTON: A drug long used to treat asthma can help protect people from dangerous — even fatal — food allergies, a study published Sunday in the respected New England Journal of Medicine found. The randomized study, funded partly by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, tested the drug Xolair (chemical name omalizumab) on 118 children known to be allergic to peanuts and at least one other food, like milk or eggs. The survey, carried out at 10 US medical centers, found that after treatment 67 percent of the children were able to tolerate a small amount of peanut protein without symptoms. Of 59 other children given a placebo, only 7 percent were able to do so. — AFP

25 killed in Tanzania road crash

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: A road crash in northern Tanzania has killed at least 25 people including several foreigners, President Samia Suluhu Hassan said on Sunday. The accident occurred on Saturday evening when a truck driver lost control of his vehicle on the road linking Arusha and Namanga and collided with three other vehicles, she said in a statement. The victims included one girl, 10 women and 14 men. Among them were an American, a Kenyan, a South African and a Kenyan national. — AFP

Philippine protesters march on anniversary of anti-Marcos uprising

MANILA: Hundreds of Filipino protesters marched through Manila on Sunday, marking the anniversary of the uprising that ousted Ferdinand Marcos, while vowing to prevent his son from repeating the dictatorship.

Marcos Jr won the presidency in a landslide in 2022, nearly four decades after a "People Power" uprising ended his late father's 20-year rule and chased the clan into exile in the United States.

While Marcos Jr remains popular, his campaign to alter the 1987 constitution has proved divisive. Critics warn the effort could lead to the abolishment of term limits, with presidents currently allowed just one six-year stint in office.

"The theme of this protest is to reject Marcos' charter change moves which is a move to remain (in) power... which is basically what happened 38 years ago," said economist Rosario Guzman, 58, who told AFP that she had also taken part in the 1986 uprising. "No to Cha-Cha (charter change)," read a protest banner displayed behind a mock black coffin marked "Freedom and Democracy".

Marcos maintains he is primarily seeking to amend the charter's economic provisions to allow more foreign investment, and ideally create more jobs. He has said the political aspects, including term limits, should be tackled later. According to police in Manila, a few hundred people joined Sunday's march, a far cry from the crowd that paralyzed the capital's main avenue over four days in February 1986 until the military withdrew its support for the elder Marcos. Rights groups say Marcos Sr's regime jailed, tortured or killed tens of thousands of critics, including religious leaders, journalists and student activists, while corruption left the country impoverished.

Indian runaway train takes 70-km journey

NEW DELHI: Indian Railways said Monday it had ordered an investigation after a runaway freight train loaded with gravel travelled 70 kilometers (43 miles) without a driver. Around 50 carriages set off solo, careering from the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir to Punjab, before being brought to a halt by wooden blocks placed on the tracks on Sunday.

S Korea urges doctors to return to work

SEOUL: South Korea called Monday for trainee doctors to come back to work, warning they could face prosecution if they do not return to hospitals in the next three days, as protests over medical reforms entered a second week.

Official figures show more than 10,000 junior doctors — 80.5 percent of the trainee workforce — have resigned as part of a spiraling action against government plans to sharply increase medical school admissions in the face of shortages and a rapidly ageing society.

The mass work stoppage has resulted in cancellations and postponements of surgeries for cancer patients and C-sections for pregnant women, with the government raising its public health alert to the highest level over the fallout. Doctors are considered essential workers in South Korea and are restricted by law from striking. The government has repeatedly claimed the mass resignation is unlawful.

As of Monday, 9,006 trainee doctors had not shown up for work, and the government warned that legal action — including prosecution and the suspension of medical licenses — against those on strike will soon be "inevitable". "Please return to your workplaces by the end of this month, February 29," Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told a press briefing. "If you return to the hospital you left by this



MANILA: Supporters pose for a photo in front of the People Power Monument during the 38th anniversary of the "People Power" revolution in Quezon City, metro Manila on Feb 25, 2024. — AFP

At the 38th anniversary march, 21-year-old demonstrator Giu de Sagun said he felt like he was "watching history repeat itself."

Some protesters wore shirts and hats vowing "never again". At a small, official anniversary event in Manila, a group of government workers raised Philippine flags after laying a wreath in front of the People Power Monument. No senior government officials attended. Marcos Jr and his family returned to the Philippines after his father's death in 1989, and began a remarkable political comeback. His presidential victory was fuelled by a massive online misinformation campaign that portrayed his

father's time in office as a golden era.

He has since won praise for pivoting away from his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte's brutal drug war, which left thousands dead. Under the younger Marcos' government, rights campaigner and vocal Duterte critic Leila de Lima was also freed after nearly seven years behind bars. "Under (Marcos Jr), we are given the opportunity to make use of a democratic space in transition from the authoritarian regime that was Duterte's," she told reporters last week. "This is our breathing room from the seven years of nightmare that we thought was all over in 1986," she added. — AFP

"We have ordered an inquiry," Northern Railways spokesman Deepak Kumar told AFP, adding that no one was hurt in the incident. The train, running at 100 kilometers (62 miles) per hour, was captured in a video that went viral on social media. The incident happened after the train stopped at a railway station in Jammu for a crew change, local media reports said. But it began moving down a slope after the driver and his assistant got off.

All road crossings on the route were closed to prevent accidents. The incident is the latest to hit India's creaking rail network, which carries millions of passengers each day. However, India has invested huge sums of money to upgrade the network with modern stations and electronic signaling systems. — AFP

date, you will not be held responsible for the past," he added. Those who fail to return to work will have their medical licenses suspended for at least three months, Park warned, noting that this measure would remain on their record and might affect the junior doctors' future career prospects, including overseas employment. "It is not too late, so please return to your patients immediately," he said.

Hospitals across the country have struggled with a shortage of doctors in the past week, with local media reporting Monday that more doctors — including fellows and even fresh medical school graduates — were joining the protests. Seoul says it has one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed countries, and the government is pushing hard to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools annually, starting next year.

Doctors have voiced fierce opposition to the government's plan, maintaining it would hurt the quality of service. Proponents of the reform say doctors are mainly concerned the reforms could erode their salaries and social status.

Junior doctors say the reforms are the final straw in a profession where they already struggle with tough working conditions. They also argue that the over-reliance on trainees in the current healthcare system is not reasonable or fair. But polls suggest up to 75 percent of the South Korean public supports the increase in medical school admissions, with those living in remote areas struggling to access quality health care. An editorial carried by the country's Chosun Ilbo newspaper said a "significant increase" in the number of medical school students was "inevitable", adding the issue should be resolved through dialogue. "Doctors will know better than anyone else the reality of a shortage of medics," it said. — AFP

Japan's Moon lander revives after lunar night

TOKYO: Japan's Moon lander has produced another surprise by waking up after the two-week lunar night, the country's space agency said Monday. The unmanned Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) touched down last month at a wonky angle that left its solar panels facing the wrong way. As the sun's angle shifted, it came back to life for two days and carried out scientific observations of a crater with a high-spec camera, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said. It went to sleep again as darkness returned and, since it was "not designed for the harsh lunar nights", JAXA had been uncertain whether it would reawaken.

"Yesterday we sent a command, to which SLIM responded," JAXA said on X, formerly Twitter, on Monday. "SLIM succeeded in surviving a night on the Moon's surface while maintaining its communication function!"

It said that communications were "terminated after a short time, as it was still lunar midday and the temperature of the communication equipment was very high."

But it added: "Preparations are being made to resume operations when instrument temperatures have sufficiently cooled." SLIM, dubbed the "Moon Sniper" for its precision landing technology, touched down within its target landing zone on January 20. The feat was a win for Japan's space program after a string of recent failures, making the nation only the fifth to achieve a "soft landing" on the Moon, after the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India.

But during its descent, the craft suffered engine problems and ended up on its side, meaning the solar panels were facing west instead of up. The latest news comes after JAXA toasted a successful blast-off for its new flagship H3 rocket on February 17, making it third time lucky after years of delays and two previous failed attempts. Countries including Russia, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates are also trying their luck to reach the Moon. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Burgan Bank wins elite JP Morgan's Quality Recognition Award for 2023

Award cements bank's leading position within Kuwaiti banking sector



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank receives the coveted 'Quality Recognition Award' for the year 2023 from JP Morgan Chase in recognition of its consistently high-quality performance.

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced receiving the coveted 'Quality Recognition Award' for the year 2023 from JP Morgan Chase N A in recognition of its consistently high-quality performance. The award acknowledges the advanced standards maintained by the bank across the complete range of clients' US dollar funds transfer operations by the management and staff.

Burgan Bank received the award in light of achieving 99.92 percent straight-through processing (STP) in the MT103 category and 99.99 percent in the MT202 category of payments, which entitles the bank to the 'Elite Quality Recognition Award' in both categories. Highlighting the best-in-class STP rates, Burgan was among a few banks across the MENA region to receive the Elite category of the award for both its customer and bank-to-bank transfers.

Commenting on the Bank's accomplishment, Mo-

hammad Al-Zayed, General Manager – Operations at Burgan Bank, said: "As the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the JP Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award consecutively during the period 2001-2023, we are proud of the legacy that Burgan continues to build over the years. This prestigious award testifies to the Bank's commitment to offering premium quality, efficiency, and reliability to its customers and stakeholders, which further cements its leading role in Kuwait's banking sector."

Al-Zayed added that the JP Morgan Chase awards reflect Burgan Bank's steadfast adherence to its new vision for being the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait, whilst being driven by the bank's employees, customers, and community to deliver the best-in-class products and services that cater to the customers' requirements and aspirations. Divided into two groups, the 2023 Qual-



Mohammad Al-Zayed

ity Recognition Awards are each designated by a SWIFT message type (MT) within which the awards are presented to those who achieve optimal performance. The MT103 awards are based on a minimum of \$10,000 MT103 debit transactions, wherein the Quality Recognition Award applies to 90 percent to 98.9 percent STP Rates.

Meanwhile, the Elite Quality Recognition Award is applied to 99.0 percent and higher STP Rates. The MT202 awards are based on a minimum of \$8,000 MT202 debit transactions, which constitutes the

Quality Recognition Award from 98 percent to 99.69 percent STP Rates. This is followed by the Elite Quality Recognition Award, which applies to 99.7 percent STP Rate and higher.

It is worth noting that Burgan received multiple awards in 2023, underscoring the bank's commitment to excellence and its outstanding performance on multiple fronts. Among these accolades, Burgan Bank was celebrated as the first bank in Kuwait to be a certified Great Place to Work, in addition to receiving the Brandon Hall Human Capital Management (HCM) Excellence Silver Award for its outstanding application in the "Learning and Development – Learning in the Flow of Work" category, as well as the GCC Excellence Award in the Recruitment and Development of Nationals from the Council of Ministers of Labor and Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the GCC States Executive Bureau.

Multilateralism 'under attack', warns WTO

ABU DHABI: The World Trade Organization pushed for reform at a high-level ministerial meeting in Abu Dhabi Monday, warning that economic headwinds and geopolitical tensions are threatening global commerce and multilateral trading systems. The WTO's 13th ministerial conference (MC13), scheduled to run until Thursday in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, is the first in two years.

The WTO is hoping for progress, particularly on fishing, agriculture and electronic commerce. But big deals are unlikely as the body's rules require full consensus among all 164 member states—a tall order in the current climate. Speaking on the first day of MC13, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said that "multilateralism is under attack from all sides," highlighting a need to "reform the multilateral trading system" and boost international cooperation.

"Looking around, uncertainty and instability are everywhere," the WTO chief said, adding that the world is in an "even tougher place today" compared to two years ago when WTO trade ministers last met. Okonjo-Iweala did not name countries, but tensions have risen between the West and Russia and China in recent years. The war in Gaza and related attacks by Yemeni rebels on ships in the Red Sea have added to the challenges.

Reiterating warnings that signs of "fragmentation" are appearing in the global economy, Okonjo-Iweala said trade volumes for 2023 likely fell below the WTO's October forecast. Trade volumes may also not reach WTO's growth estimates for this year, she warned.

Disney, India's Reliance agree merger deal

NEW DELHI: India's Reliance Industries has signed a "binding pact" for a merger deal with Walt Disney's local unit, Bloomberg News reported Monday, a major shakeup for the country's multi-billion dollar entertainment industry. India's entertainment market is already one of the world's biggest, with the expected merger set to create a vast and powerful entertainment giant.

The report of the deal comes as billionaire tycoon Mukesh Ambani, chairman of oil-to-telecoms giant Reliance Industries, readies to host Disney chief Robert Iger on March 1 for his son's wedding in India's western Gujarat state.



ABU DHABI: Delegates take a group picture during a session on fisheries subsidies during the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi of Feb 26, 2024. — AFP

Her push for reform was echoed by UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, who said he hoped MC13 would serve as a "launch pad" for necessary reforms.

"The world has changed. And institutions like the WTO need to evolve too," European Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said on Monday, adding that "geopolitical tensions are on the rise. We are faced with crises wherever we look."

During the WTO's last ministerial meeting, held at its Geneva headquarters in June 2022, trade ministers nailed down a historic deal banning fisheries subsidies harmful to marine life and agreed to a temporary patent waiver for COVID-19 vaccines. They also committed themselves to re-establishing a dispute settlement system which Washington had brought to a grinding halt in 2019 after years of blocking the appointment of new judges to the

Bloomberg said the deal is expected to see the media unit of Reliance and its affiliates hold at least a 61-percent stake in the merged entity, with Disney holding the rest.

There was no immediate response from either Disney or Reliance. Disney has been under significant pressure ever since Iger left the company only to be brought out of semi-retirement more than a year ago when his successor underperformed. Ambani, 66, is the world's 10th-richest person according to the Forbes real-time billionaires list. He has invited a guest list of powerful businessmen and politicians to celebrate the wedding of his son Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant, the daughter of an industrialist, from March 1-3.

Broadcaster CNBC-TV18, partially owned by Reliance, said Ambani's guest list included Meta head Mark Zuckerberg, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen, along with investment and banking chiefs, plus Bollywood and cricket stars. Other guests include Ivanka

WTO's appeals court.

"Our challenge this week is to... demonstrate that MC12 wasn't a one-off miracle," Okonjo-Iweala said. "I have seen the US engage more and I have to say they have been quite constructive," she told a press conference, dismissing claims of an American leadership vacuum.

The WTO faces pressure to eke out progress on reform in Abu Dhabi ahead of the possible re-election of Donald Trump as US president. During his four years in office from 2017 to 2021, Trump threatened to pull the United States out of the trade body and disrupted its ability to settle disputes.

"There will be the US elections in November... so this is the last chance," a diplomatic source in Geneva told AFP on condition of anonymity. On Monday, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said "reform is squarely on the agenda for this week." — AFP



Trump, the former US president's daughter, as well as ex-Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper and the King of Bhutan. Last month a proposed \$10 billion merger between India's Zee Entertainment and the local unit of Japanese giant Sony was called off, reportedly because of disagreements over who would lead the new entity. — AFP

Qatar to boost gas output with new field expansion

DOHA: Qatar on Sunday announced new plans to expand output from the world's biggest natural gas field, saying it will boost capacity to 142 million tons per year before 2030. The new North Field expansion, named "North Field West", will add a further 16 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year to existing expansion plans, Qatari Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi said at a press conference.

"Recent studies have shown that the North Field contains huge additional gas quantities estimated at 240 trillion cubic feet, which raises the state of Qatar's gas reserves from 1,760 (trillion) to more than 2,000 trillion cubic feet," said Kaabi, who also heads the state-owned QatarEnergy firm.

These results "will enable us to begin developing a new LNG project from the North Field's western sector with a production capacity of about 16 million tons per annum," he said. This will bring Qatar's production capacity to 142 million tons once "the new expansion is completed before the end of this decade"—a nearly 85 percent rise from current production levels, Kaabi added.

The QatarEnergy chief said the firm will "immediately commence" with engineering works to ensure the expansion is completed on time. Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers alongside the United States, Australia and Russia. Asian countries led by China, Japan and South Korea have been the main market for Qatari gas, but demand has also grown from European countries since Russia's war on Ukraine threw supplies into doubt. The latest expansion plans follow a flurry of announcements for long-term Qatari gas supply deals. Earlier this month, Qatar said it would supply 7.5 million tonnes of LNG per year for 20 years to India's Petronet, with the first deliveries expected from May 2028.

And at the end of January, QatarEnergy announced a deal with US-based Exxcelerate Energy to supply Bangladesh with 1.5 million tons of LNG per year for 15 years. Last year, Qatar inked LNG deals with China's Sinopec, France's Total, Britain's Shell and Italy's Eni. — AFP



Saad Al-Kaabi



Egypt Kuwait Holding achieves net profits of \$179m; total revenue \$801m for 2023

Board of Directors recommends cash dividend of 6 cents per share for 2023

KUWAIT: Egypt Kuwait Holding (EKH) closed FY2023 with revenues of \$801 million, surpassing pre-Ukraine war historical averages. Profitability remained robust in FY23, with gross profit reaching \$358 million and a 45 percent margin, well above historical averages. EBITDA recorded \$359 million, implying an EBITDA margin of 45 percent. EKH closed the year with a net profit margin returning to normalized levels at 27 percent. Attributable net income for the year amounted to \$179 million.

On a quarterly basis, EKH reported revenues of 213 million, marking a 6 percent increase over the previous quarter. This growth was propelled by a 26 percent increase in NatEnergy's revenues, translated into USD, and an improvement in urea prices at AlexFert compared to the lows observed in 1H23. Profitability remained resilient, ending the quarter with a 43 percent gross profit margin. EBITDA for the quarter reached 95 million in 4Q23, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 45 percent, aligning with historical averages. EKH's net income for the quarter demonstrated resilience, standing at 50 million in 4Q23, with a net income margin of 23 percent, consistent with the 24 percent recorded in 3Q23. Attributable net income for 4Q23 totaled \$43 million in 4Q23, exhibiting an 18 percent increase quarter-on-quarter from the \$36 million reported in 3Q23.

Commenting on the Group's performance, EKH Chairman Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi said: "In the face of formidable global challenges, I am pleased to announce that EKH has demonstrated remarkable resilience and strong performance throughout 2023. This



EKH Chairman
Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi

- The group has invested over \$250 million in enhancing our products and services while seizing promising opportunities in the market.
- We have successfully expanded our operational capacities, maintaining strong profitability rates, and enhancing the performance of all subsidiaries.
- Our focus remains on diversifying income sources by ramping up exports and bolstering cash flows in foreign currencies.

success is further bolstered by solid profitability metrics, including a strong gross profit margin and EBITDA, which have contributed to impressive revenues for the year. Additionally, this achievement has led to an increased attributable net income for our shareholders."

In 2023, EKH strategically invested over \$250 million, reinforcing our commitment to sustained growth and diversification. Our initiatives included bolstering our product and service portfolio, pursuing opportunities in new markets, and enhancing vertical integration. Additionally, we increased our stake in AlexFert to boost export sales and secure higher USD-denominated revenues.

As we reflect on our accomplishments in 2023, I wish to express sincere gratitude to Sherif El Zayat, our outgoing CEO, who has been an integral part of our success over the years. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors. I also wish to welcome Jon

Rokk as our new CEO, who was meticulously selected for his distinguished leadership roles in various multinational companies across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. With expertise spanning multiple sectors, including oil & gas, petrochemicals, infrastructure, and nuclear power, Jon aligns seamlessly with the diverse business areas of EKH and our ambitions for expansion and growth. Under his leadership, we are confident that EKH will continue to thrive and reach new heights.

Looking forward, our strategy emphasizes integration, diversification, and resilience. Specifically, our focus is on expanding exports, enhancing foreign currency streams, and growing our regional presence to drive growth and add resilience to our business, aligning with our long-term strategy for sustainability and enhanced shareholder returns.

In line with our commitment, we are pleased to propose a dividend distribution

of USD six cents per share to our esteemed shareholders at the upcoming general assembly, supported by our robust operational performance, healthy cash flows, and a resilient balance sheet," Al-Kharafi said.

On the Fertilizers front, EKH doubled formica sheets production, inaugurated a new SNF factory, and launched a state-of-the-art sulfuric acid facility, contributing to feedstock for the Group's portfolio products. At AlexFert, EKH increased ownership to over 75 percent, enhancing USD-denominated revenues.

In the Energy and Energy-Related Segment, NatEnergy's subsidiaries expanded installations, connecting over two million households. Meanwhile, at Kahraba, NatEnergy's power distribution and generation subsidiary, the company's successive investments over the years have increased power generation capacity to 135 MW, while on the distribution front, capacity has already passed 350 MW



EKH CEO Jon Rokk

as of 2024, with plans for further expansion to 645 MW by 2030.

At ONS, the company's strategic plan to optimize reserve management, extend well-life, and enhance production efficiency has borne fruit. ONS expanded the concession area by 140 km², totaling 440 km². With a USD 70 million capex for Phase-3B (2023 to Q1 2024), two new wells (ATON1 + KSE2) have been drilled in the new extension area using WH platforms, ensuring the continuation of the company's operational success.

Finally, the significant contributions of Delta Insurance and Mohandes Insurance teams have played a pivotal role in ensuring the resilient performance of the companies amidst a challenging operating environment. Additionally, EKH's microfinance subsidiary, Bedyati, consistently maintained a robust bottom line.

Furthermore, the management is pleased to highlight the upcoming commencement of operations at the Nile Wood production facility in 2024, a joint venture with Homann Holzwerkstoffe GmbH that enhances the group's strategic positioning.

Egypt Kuwait Holding



Indicators of the year 2023

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| 179 | Million USD Attributable net income |
| 6 Cents Per Share | Board of Directors recommended cash dividends |
| 801 | Million USD Total operating revenues |
| 1.7 | Billion USD Total assets value |
| 640 | Million USD Total shareholders equity |
| 250 | Million USD Total capital expenditure allocated for the new expansions |
| 818 | Million USD Total distributed cash dividends since inception of the company |



Business

Gulf Bank holds panel discussion on women's empowerment, professional skill development

With participation of the Chair of 'European Women on Boards' and EU Ambassador



A group photo of Gulf Bank leaders and employees with the guests after the panel discussion.



Gulf Bank executive management officials with Anne Koistinen and Hedwig Nuyens following the working lunch.

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts towards women's empowerment and promoting diversity and inclusion policies, Gulf Bank organized a podcast as part of the "Lead the Way" program titled "Own Your Career" for female executives at the bank. The podcast guest speaker was Hedwig Nuyens, Head of the International Banking Federation and Chair of the European Women on Boards, a non-for-profit organization that supports women's empowerment and gender diversity in corporate boards. The podcast was moderated by May Al-Owaish, Chief Data and Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank, and hosted by Dalal Al-Dosari, Deputy General Manager of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank. Anne Karién, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Kuwait, also participated in the event, appreciating Gulf Bank's role in supporting and empowering women in leadership. This podcast marks the first collaboration between the Kuwaiti private sector and the European Union Delegation to Kuwait.

The discussion covered various topics, including women's empowerment, leadership, sustainability, increasing female participation in the financial sector, and ways to achieve greater diversity in senior leadership positions in companies and banks.

The guest speaker shared her significant experiences in promoting women's empowerment and sustainable leadership in the European Union countries, and the best global practices implemented in this context, commending Gulf Bank's achievements in empowering women.

On this occasion, Salma Al-Hajjaj, General Man-



Salma Al-Hajjaj

- We remain dedicated to fostering diversity within our workforce, particularly in support of women's leadership at the executive management and C-suite.
- At Gulf Bank, we are keen to select and provide the best training opportunities for our workforce, especially in refining leadership skills and professional development in various managerial and technical fields to enhance the capabilities of our employees

ager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank, said: "As we continue our journey towards enhancing diversity, inclusion, and women's leadership, we are honored at Gulf Bank to have Nuyens as a guest speaker on the 'Lead the Way' podcast under the title: 'Own Your Career,' where Nuyens shared her significant experiences with our potential women leaders at the Bank. We are a firm believer in the power of sharing inspiring stories to derive the future for women empowerment in Kuwait. At Gulf Bank, we remain dedicated to fostering diversity within our workforce, particularly in support of women's leadership at the executive management and C-suite."

She added: "We are also honored by the visit of Anne Karién, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Kuwait, where she shared with us her valuable insights about the European Union's efforts in promoting gender equality."

It is worth mentioning that Gulf Bank hosted a

networking lunch for the founding members of the Kuwait Women Economic Empowerment Platform (KWEPP), welcoming Anne Karién, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Kuwait and Hedwig Nuyens. During the lunch, members exchanged experiences on various aspects related to women's empowerment in the private sector and how to create an inclusive and diverse working environment. Al-Hajjaj stated: "The networking lunch created a great opportunity to exchange experiences and explore opportunities on various aspects related to women's empowerment in the private sector and creating an inclusive and diverse professional landscape in Kuwait."

As part of the series of events organized by the European Union Delegation to Kuwait recently aimed at exchanging best experiences and practices on increasing women's participation in executive leadership positions in the private sector, a num-

ber of female leaders from Gulf Bank participated in a special mentoring workshop organized by the European Union Delegation to Kuwait for a group of Kuwaiti women leaders from various sectors to discuss the tools and knowledge necessary to excel in their professional careers, overcome challenges, and achieve their potential. Commenting on Gulf Bank's female leaders' participation in the workshop, Al-Hajjaj said: "At Gulf Bank, we are keen to select and provide the best training opportunities for our workforce, especially in refining leadership skills and professional development in various managerial and technical fields to enhance the capabilities of our employees."

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.

Ryanair boss seeks Boeing compensation over delivery delays

DUBLIN: Ryanair chief executive Michael O'Leary has blasted the "debacle" at US manufacturer Boeing, and said that the low-cost carrier will seek compensation for flight cancellations caused by quality problems and production delays. Speaking to reporters at the airline's Dublin headquarters on Friday, O'Leary said a recent incident at Boeing, when a door blew out from a plane, has led to production delays that are affecting deliveries to airlines, including Ryanair.

In early January, a door blew out from the cabin of a Boeing 737 MAX 9 during an Alaska Airlines flight. The incident resulted in only a few minor injuries. The US authority the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) subsequently suspended flights of 171 from 218 737 MAX 9 aircraft already delivered. A preliminary report by the US Transportation Safety Agency (NTSB) concluded that four bolts that were supposed to block the door were missing.

The Ryanair head said the firm expects to receive "modest compensation" from Boeing. Its contracts with Boeing take into account "excusable delays" said O'Leary, but "if you're drilling the holes in the wrong places, and then you are delaying the delivery... it's inexcusable." —AFP

Denmark closes Nord Stream sabotage probe

COPENHAGEN: Danish police said Monday that they were closing their investigation into the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines linking Russia and Germany, a move dubbed "close to absurd" by the Kremlin. Neighboring Sweden closed its investigation in early February citing a lack of jurisdiction, meaning only Germany now has an ongoing investigation into the leaks.

"Based on the investigation, the authorities can conclude that the sabotage of the pipelines was intentional," Copenhagen police said in a statement. "At the same time, it is also assessed that there is not the necessary basis for pursuing a criminal case in Denmark," it said.

Different theories about who is responsible for the sabotage have emerged—pointing the finger at Ukraine, Russia or the United States. All have denied involvement. Four large gas leaks were discovered on Nord Stream's two pipelines off the Danish island of Bornholm in September 2022, with seismic

WTO: The sick man of global trade?

GENEVA: The WTO, which launches its 13th ministerial meeting Monday, regulates large swathes of global trade but is handicapped by a rule requiring full consensus and a dispute settlement system crippled by the United States.

The World Trade Organization, which will hold its two-yearly ministerial conference in Abu Dhabi until February 29, is the only international organization that deals with the rules governing trade between countries. But as the organization itself acknowledges on its website, it "is not Superman, just in case anyone thought it could solve—or cause—all the world's problems!"

The WTO was created on January 1, 1995, but is based on a trading system established nearly half a century earlier, in 1948, with its predecessor the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

The GATT was part of a framework of international organizations created after World War II to discourage policies such as protectionism that were considered to have aggravated the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The WTO was formed at the end of the eighth round of GATT trade liberalization negotiations, known as the Uruguay Round, which stretched from 1986 to 1994. Whereas the GATT mainly dealt with trade in goods, the WTO and its agreements now also cover trade in services, inventions, creations and designs.

"The system's overriding purpose is to help

institutes recording two underwater explosions just before. The pipelines had been at the centre of geopolitical tensions as Russia cut gas supplies to Europe in suspected retaliation for Western sanctions over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. While the leaks were in international waters, two were in Denmark's exclusive economic zone and two in Sweden's. The pipelines were not in operation when the leaks occurred, but they still contained gas which swelled up through the water and into the atmosphere.

Russian energy giant Gazprom holds a majority stake in the twin pipelines, with the rest owned by German, Dutch and French companies. Denmark, Sweden and Germany have kept a tight lid on their investigations, which analysts have said was because of the potential diplomatic fallout of what they might uncover. The decision to close the Danish investigation was immediately criticised by Russia.

"The situation is close to absurd. On the one hand, they recognise that a deliberate sabotage took place, but on the other hand they are not moving forward," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. Peskov had previously described the Swedish decision to close its probe as "remarkable."

Copenhagen police said that the investigation—which had been carried out together with Denmark's intelligence service PET—had been "complicated and extensive."

trade flow as freely as possible—so long as there are no undesirable side-effects—because this is important for economic development and well-being," the WTO says. But some accuse the organization of becoming too bulky, a massive bureaucratic machine. With a budget of nearly 205 million Swiss francs (\$234 million) this year, it employs about 600 people at its Geneva headquarters, including an army of lawyers, economists and statisticians. The WTO's 164 member states call the shots.

And making decisions is no easy feat: any agreement requires full consensus, meaning every member holds veto power. Around three-quarters of the WTO's members are considered developing or among the least-developed countries, which benefit from more flexibility in the way trade rules are applied. All large economies are members, but around 20 countries are currently on a waiting list to join, including Iran, Algeria, Serbia and Iraq.

The accession process can take years, as it entails long negotiations with all WTO members, which each have the power to block a country from joining. East Timor and the Comoros are expected to join the WTO soon, in the least-developed countries category. Their membership bids will be formally presented in Abu Dhabi. The WTO is a forum where governments negotiate multilateral trade deals affecting all member states.

But amid the difficulty of obtaining full consensus, more and more plurilateral agreements—deals with a narrower number of signatories—are being reached, applying only to the participating countries.

This is the case for instance with an important agreement offering exemptions from customs du-



ABU DHABI: Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Saudi Minister of Commerce and Investment Majid Al-Qasbi pose for a picture during the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi of Feb 26, 2024. — AFP

ties on electronic transactions.

Once painstakingly agreed, the international trade rules often require interpretation, with the WTO serving as an arbitrator in disputes.

Countries of any size can file complaints with the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body over alleged trade rules violations, and it is not uncommon for the world's biggest economies to be tripped up in disputes filed by smaller ones.

But the system is in disarray since Washington brought its appeals court to a screeching halt in late 2019 after years of blocking the appointment of new judges. — AFP



It added that it was not in a position to "provide further comments" in the case. When the Swedish probe was closed, the country's Prosecution Authority said its primary purpose had been to establish whether Swedish citizens were involved and whether

Swedish territory had been used to carry out the act. The authority said nothing had emerged to indicate this. Mats Ljungqvist, the Swedish prosecutor leading the probe, had previously said the "primary assumption is that a state is behind it". — AFP

Business

NBK-Egypt reports EGP 4.021bn (KD 41.4m) in net profit in FY 2023

Bank sets a remarkable growth record of 120%



Shaikha Al-Bahar

In 2023, we achieved our highest historical profits driven by robust operational performance across our business segments.

NBK-Egypt stands as one of the fastest-growing banks, with a significant presence in the Egyptian market.

All financial indicators validate our trajectory towards expanding further and strengthening our market share.



Yasser El-Tayeb

Once again, NBK-Egypt maintains its robust performance, achieving remarkable growth rates across all financial indicators.

We are committed to strengthening our presence, not only in the corporate sector but also in the retail banking segment.

NBK-Egypt is actively advancing its electronic services and embracing digital transformation initiatives.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (NBK-Egypt) has announced net profits of EGP 4.021 billion (Equivalent to KD 41.4 million) for the financial year 2023, a significant increase from the EGP 1.826 billion (equivalent to KD 30.7 million) reported in 2022, showcasing an impressive annual growth rate of 120.21 percent.

Net operating income stood at EGP 8.66 billion, recording a substantial increase of 87.04 percent from the EGP 4.63 billion recorded in 2022. In the meantime, net interest income jumped by 82.51 percent, reaching EGP 6.99 billion compared to EGP 3.83 billion in 2022.

On the other hand, net operating income (excluding interests) increased to EGP 1.67 billion in 2023, compared to EGP 0.8 billion in 2022, up by 108.75 percent, while cost to net operating income dropped from 37.14 percent in 2022 to 28.02 percent in 2023.

Total assets reached EGP 130.61 billion in 2023, up by 24.22 percent compared to the year-end balance of EGP 105.14 billion in 2022. Furthermore, the net balance of loans and credit facilities expanded to EGP 76.06 billion 2023, reflecting a growth rate of 38.42 percent compared to EGP 54.95 billion recorded at the end of 2022. Moreover, customer deposits continued to grow, rising by 25.42 percent to reach EGP 105.93 billion in 2023, compared to EGP 84.46 billion by the end of 2022.

The return on average assets (ROAA) surged from 2 percent at the end of 2022 to 3.4 percent at the end of 2023, while the return on average equity (ROAE) increased from 16.9 percent at the end of 2022 to 30.7 percent by the end of 2023.

Commenting on the financial results announced by NBK-Egypt, Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, National Bank of Kuwait, and Chairman of NBK-Egypt, said: "In 2023, NBK-Egypt achieved its highest annual profits to date, accompanied by record growth rates. This success is credited

to a strong operational performance, highlighting the resilience of our financial position and the flexibility of our business model, which allows for profit generation despite operational challenges.

"At NBK-Egypt, our objective is to enhance banking transactions and elevate their quality to meet growing market demand. We pursue this goal by focusing on the advancement of our digital services, leveraging the expertise and excellence of the Group in this domain. Additionally, we aim to expand our loan portfolio for SMEs, broaden the scope of our operations, and diversify them to encompass a wider geographical reach and cater to various customer segments," Al-Bahar added.

Al-Bahar emphasized that Egypt stands as one of the key strategic markets for fostering the Group's business growth, consistently regarded as the second domestic market. Being the largest Kuwaiti investment in Egypt, the bank holds a significant presence in the Egyptian banking sector, evident in its rapid growth trajectory and strong financial performance. The Bank's positive momentum underscores its commitment to expanding further and strengthening its market position.

Al-Bahar also highlighted that the Group perceives the Egyptian market as a strategic long-term investment. Given that the Egyptian economy ranks among the largest in the region, it holds substantial growth potential once it regains momentum.

She further emphasized that Egypt represents a significant growth market, and that the Bank is committed to its continuous expansion. The operations in Egypt continue to be among the most profitable within the Group, boasting the highest rates of return on shareholders' equity and assets.

"As geopolitical tensions in the region subside, economic recovery efforts will receive a significant boost. By restoring confidence in the economy and currency, substantial opportunities will emerge. We

maintain an optimistic outlook on future prospects, buoyed by the momentum generated from the Egyptian government and the Central Bank of Egypt's reform and exceptional measures," Al-Bahar confirmed.

Meanwhile, Vice Chairman, CEO, and Managing Director of National Bank of Kuwait-Egypt, Yasser El-Tayeb, said: "The robust financial results and key indicators serve as the most compelling evidence, showcasing the bank's capacity to maintain growth and attain favorable business outcomes throughout 2023, notwithstanding the unprecedented challenges faced both locally and globally. These challenges include the aftermath of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Gaza war, import crises, and fluctuations in the foreign exchange rate against the Egyptian pound."

El-Tayeb emphasized that NBK-Egypt maintains a well-balanced distribution of revenues across diverse business activities. This strategic approach is coupled with efficient operational rates and risk ratios, aligning with the dual objectives of achieving growth and ensuring business sustainability. Credit for this success is attributed to the bank's prudent policies and a sound business model, demonstrating its capability to meet customer needs.

El-Tayeb further explained that the majority of NBK's income sources in Egypt are derived from credit operations in both the corporate sector and the rapidly expanding retail banking sector. The latter has notably increased in prominence, particularly in recent years, with a very diversified credit portfolio including a wide range of businesses across various sectors ranging from large scale corporations to SMEs. Meanwhile, the retail banking portfolio is also well diversified. This solid position reflects the Bank's strength and the diversity of its revenue streams. He also highlighted that going forward, NBK-Egypt strives to further strengthen its position in retail banking by offering innovative services and products to its retail customers, in ad-

dition to continuing the horizontal growth plan by inaugurating new branches covering key locations throughout the Egyptian market.

El-Tayeb also emphasized the Bank's firm belief in the pivotal role of technological advancements and electronic channels within the banking sector. Recognizing their significance in bolstering competitive advantages among banks, we, at NBK-Egypt have prioritized a robust expansion of our electronic banking services, making substantial investments in this area. Our ultimate goal is to provide customers with an exceptional banking experience, offering a unique facility that enables them to conduct the majority of their banking transactions conveniently, anywhere, anytime. Furthermore, we aim to encourage customers to utilize electronic means and channels for payments, aligning with the broader policy objectives of the state and the Central Bank of Egypt in this regard.

Furthermore, El-Tayeb highlighted NBK-Egypt's commitment to align its strategies with the global movement towards sustainable finance and the transition to a green economy. The Bank aims to actively support environmentally-friendly projects that promote sustainability and the utilization of renewable energy sources to mitigate climate change, since sustainable financing has emerged as a fundamental mechanism and an instrument for facilitating and maintaining enduring financial stability.

In terms of the bank's social responsibility, El-Tayeb highlighted that since NBK Group entered the Egyptian market in 2007, NBK-Egypt has remained dedicated to serving the Egyptian community. This commitment is demonstrated through the support, donations, and contributions extended to numerous charitable organizations. Additionally, the Bank actively collaborates with reputable civil society institutions, establishing partnerships aimed at becoming the operational arm of the Bank's development initiatives.

Stock markets mostly lower on profit-taking

LONDON: Major Asian and European stock markets mostly retreated Monday, with traders banking profits after last week's rally. Gains still appeared, however, with Tokyo's key Nikkei index closing at a fresh all-time high, after Friday beating a record that had stood since 1989. Two of the three main US indices also hit record peaks on Friday.

Last week's strong gains were fuelled by stellar results from US technology titan Nvidia, a bellwether for artificial intelligence. Investors were looking ahead to the Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation, due Thursday, in the hope of gaining a clearer handle on when the US central bank would start cutting interest rates amid cooling inflation.

Following publication of the US Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) price index, focus will turn to Chinese manufacturing data due Friday. "All eyes are on this week's PCE release," Harry Murphy Cruise from Moody's Analytics told AFP. "For Asian markets, a higher print — combined with the Fed's fear of easing too early — could see rate cuts delayed."

China's economy is in the doldrums and losses in Shanghai Monday came despite Beijing saying it wanted to boost sales of cars, appliances and other consumer products in "piecemeal incentives to stimulate the economy", noted Rodrigo Catril, senior currencies strategist at National Australia Bank.

Cruise added that "the property market's woes have worsened, and manufacturers continue to sit on the sidelines". Government interventions have stabilized the market, with Chinese stocks rebounding from early February lows. But underlying weakness means "investors are crying out for larger economic supports to be rolled out", Cruise said.

Market players are watching to see if extra spending and an ambitious growth target will be announced in March to help China's economy gain momentum through the year, according to Cruise.

Elsewhere on Monday, oil prices extended losses. "Lack of demand (for crude) remains a concern," Catril said. —AFP

Thousands protest as hunger grows amid Argentine austerity

BUENOS AIRES: Thousands protested across Argentina on Friday to demand food aid for the poor as soaring inflation and President Javier Milei's harsh austerity measures take their toll. Since he took office in December, Milei has slashed public spending, winning the approval of the International Monetary Fund and securing a budget surplus for the first time in 12 years in a country whose previous governments oversaw rampant inflation and multiple fiscal crises.

However, annual inflation has still risen to 254 percent, the price of bus tickets has more than tripled, and the government has frozen crucial aid to soup kitchens that have ever more mouths to feed. "In a little more than two months, this government has generated a very critical situation of poverty," Alejandro Gramajo of the UTEP union told AFP.

"No to the increase in transport costs," protesters chanted, along with cries of "Hunger doesn't wait" and "Pots are empty, pockets are too."

Argentina's 38,000 meal centers, which provide a hot plate of food to those in need, received their last batch of government-provided supplies in November before Milei — a libertarian and self-described "anarcho-capitalist" — was inaugurated.

Milei's government says it plans to audit the needs of each individual soup kitchen and put in place a system of direct aid, aiming to exclude intermediaries such as social movements he describes as "poverty managers."

"There is no money," said Milei when he took office, vowing to put an end to "decades of decadence" by his overspending predecessors, whose governance was marked by repeated inflationary crises and debt. The 53-year-old leader devalued the peso by over 50 percent, cut tens of thousands of public jobs and halved the number of government ministries. An outsider elected on a wave of fury over the country's decline, Milei has warned the population that the economic crisis will get worse before it gets better. "When we hit rock bottom, we will bounce back," he said.

Social tensions are rising, with train drivers and healthcare workers going on strike this week, and teachers due to down tools next.

However, Milei's government has received praise from the International Monetary Fund — to which it owes \$44 billion — for its "bold actions to restore macroeconomic stability." The government says that monthly inflation is coming under control and should be in the single digits by the second half of the year.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Milei in Buenos Aires on Friday, and said the "work that is being done to stabilize the economy is absolutely vital." "We see extraordinary opportunity here in Argentina," he said, adding the country could "count on" the United States as it works to end its economic crisis.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund has urged the government of Argentine President Mil-



BUENOS AIRES: In this aerial view members of social organizations gather outside the Ministry of Human Capital to protest against food scarcity at soup kitchens and President Javier Milei's government's austerity plan in Buenos Aires. — AFP

ei to shield the poor as he pursues harsh austerity measures to cut government spending, according to an interview published Sunday. The IMF has praised Milei's government for efforts to balance the books after years of overspending, but his drastic measures have led to strikes and raised concerns about growing hunger.

IMF deputy managing director Gita Gopinath told La Nacion newspaper that austerity measures must be "calibrated to ensure that social assistance continues to be provided and that the burden does not fall entirely on the poorest groups." Gopinath visited Buenos Aires last week to evaluate Argentina's \$44 billion credit program and met with Milei, members of his government, economists, union leaders and civil society organizations.

Since taking office in December, the libertarian Milei has devalued the peso by over 50 percent, cut tens of thousands of public jobs and halved the size of the government.

He also ripped away generous state transport and energy subsidies and froze aid to 38,000 soup kitchens pending an audit, hitting the poor hard as annual inflation soared to 254 percent.

"The economy that this government inherited was close to a crisis, and required bold and decisive action to move it away from the precipice," said Gopinath. However, she said more social measures were needed to "ensure that the reduction of the fiscal deficit does not fall on the vulnerable."

Gopinath estimated Argentina's monthly inflation — which stood at 20 percent in January — would drop to single digits by the middle of 2024. "But I think it will take at least a year to bring inflation to low levels, and then maintaining it at those levels until

2025 will also require efforts."

She said that for the IMF, it would be "critical" for the government to invest in human capital.

"Child poverty rates of more than 55 percent are extremely worrying. It is important to ensure that this percentage drops greatly and to be able to invest more in education." — AFP

US aluminum giant Alcoa to acquire Alumina

WASHINGTON: US aluminum producer Alcoa will acquire Australia's Alumina in a \$2.2 billion all-stock deal, the companies said in press releases Sunday.

Alcoa, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, will offer 0.02854 of its own stock for each Alumina share, a 13 percent premium to the Australian group's Friday closing price. Under the terms of the agreement, Alumina shareholders would own 31.25 percent and Alcoa shareholders would own 68.75 percent of the combined company.

The deal must first be approved by shareholders. The two companies are already part of a joint venture, Alcoa World Alumina and Chemical (AWAC), which mines bauxite and produces aluminum. The acquisition "would consolidate Alcoa's ownership of one of the world's largest bauxite and alumina producers," the company said. — AFP

Lifestyle



Sebastian Stan



South Korean director Hong Sang-soo (R) is awarded with the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize for 'A Traveler's Needs' by Spanish director Albert Serra. — AFP photos



Emily Watson

'Dahomey' documentary on looted African art wins Berlin's Golden Bear

"Dahomey", a documentary by Franco-Senegalese director Mati Diop probing the thorny issues surrounding Europe's return of looted antiquities to Africa, won the Berlin film festival's top prize Saturday.

Kenyan-Mexican Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o, the first black jury president at the 74th annual event, announced the seven-member panel's choice among 20 contenders for the Golden Bear award at a gala ceremony. Diop said the prize "not only honors me but the entire visible and invisible community that the film represents". "To rebuild we must first reconstitute, and what does reconstitution mean? To reconstitute is to do justice," she added.

South Korean arthouse favorite Hong Sang-soo captured the runner-up Grand Jury Prize for "A Traveler's Needs", his third collaboration with French screen legend Isabelle Huppert. Hong, a frequent guest at the 11-day festival, thanked the jury, joking "I don't know what you saw in this film".

French auteur Bruno Dumont accepted the third-place Jury Prize for "The Empire", an intergalactic battle of good and evil set in a French fishing village. Dominican filmmaker Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias won best director for "Pepé", his enigmatic docudrama conjuring the ghost of a hippopotamus



French-Senegalese filmmaker and actress Mati Diop (left) poses with the Golden Bear for Best Film for the film "Dahomey" with Kenyan-Mexican actress and President of the International Jury 2024 Lupita Nyong'o.

owned by the late Colombian drug baron Pablo Escobar.

'Collusion'

Marvel movie star Sebastian Stan picked up the best performance Silver Bear for his appearance in US satire "A Different Man". Stan plays an actor with neurofibromatosis, a genetic disease causing disfiguring tumors, who is cured with a groundbreaking medical treatment. The Romanian-American

heartthrob called it "a story that's not only about acceptance, identity and self truth but about disfigurement and disability — a subject matter that's been long overlooked by our own bias".

Britain's Emily Watson clinched the best supporting performance Silver Bear for her turn as a cruel mother superior in "Small Things Like These". The film starring Cillian Murphy is about one of modern Ireland's biggest scandals: the Magdalene laundries network of

Roman Catholic penitentiary workhouses for "fallen women".

She paid tribute to the "thousands and thousands of young women whose lives were devastated by the collusion between the Catholic church and the state in Ireland". German writer-director Matthias Glasner took the Silver Bear for best screenplay for his semi-autobiographical tragicomedy "Dying", a three-hour tour de force by some of the country's top actors depicting a dysfunctional family.

The Silver Bear for outstanding artistic contribution was awarded to cinematographer Martin Gschlacht for the chilling Austrian historical horror movie "The Devil's Bath", about depressed women in the 18th century who murdered in order to be executed.

A separate Berlinale Documentary Award went to a Palestinian-Zionist activist collective for "No Other Land" about Palestinians displaced by the Zionist troops and settlers in the West Bank. Many of the award winners including Diop criticised the war in Gaza from the stage and called for an immediate ceasefire.

'Some kind of miracle'

Diop's taut, dreamlike film traces the 2021 journey home of 26 precious artifacts of the Dahomey kingdom to

Benin from a Paris museum. In the movie, Diop has one of the statues recount in a haunting Fon-language voice-over his land being pillaged by the French, the circumstances of his own exile and his ultimate repatriation in Cotonou museum.

Upon the collection's arrival, local students debate in fascinating, unscripted scenes the historic importance of the restitution gesture and whether it is cause for rejoice or outrage. The New York Times called the documentary "some kind of miracle, packing an extraordinary amount of information, inquiry and wild, persuasive imagination into a slim, 68-minute runtime".

Variety said "Dahomey" was a "striking, stirring example of the poetry that can result when the dead and the dispossessed speak to and through the living". Diop's supernatural Netflix drama "Atlantics" made her the first black woman to compete in Cannes in 2019, when she picked up the runner-up Grand Prix award.

While acknowledging restitution's importance, Diop told AFP during the festival she had no intention of "celebrating" the gesture by French President Emmanuel Macron. Only 26 artefacts were returned "against the more than 7,000 works still held captive" in Paris, she noted. — AFP



US film maker Ben Russell (left) and Servan Declé (right) pose with Palestinian keffiyehs draped on their shoulders as they are joined by French film maker Guillaume Cailleau (second right) and Jay Jordan during the awards ceremony. — AFP

Germany probes pro-Palestine comments at Berlin film festival

German officials will investigate how Berlin film festival winners were able to make "one-sided" comments condemning the Zionist entity's attack on Gaza at the event's finale, a government spokeswoman said on Monday.

At Saturday's awards ceremony, several winners were accused of making anti-Semitic remarks on stage in relation to the entity's nearly five-month military assault, which it claims is in retaliation for an attack carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023.

The Hamas attack on October 7 killed 1,160 people in the Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Zionist figures. The Zionist retaliatory military offensive has killed at least 29,782 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

US filmmaker Ben Russell, wearing a Palestinian scarf, accused the Zionist entity of committing "genocide" with its bombardment of the densely populated Gaza Strip. Palestinian filmmaker Basel Adra said the Palestinian population were being "massacred" by the Zionist entity, to applause from the audience.

"It is unacceptable that ... the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October was not mentioned," German government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann told a press briefing in Berlin on Monday. Chancellor Olaf Scholz "agrees that such a one-sided stance cannot be allowed to stand", she said. "In any debate

on this topic, it is of course important to keep in mind the event that triggered this renewed escalation of the Middle East conflict — namely the Hamas attack on 7 October", she added.

The culture minister and the Berlin mayor will review what happened and hold talks with the festival's incoming director to ensure it does not happen in future, she said. But Culture Minister Claudia Roth and mayor Kai Wegner have also found themselves in hot water over the ceremony. A report in top tabloid Bild carried a picture it said showed the pair applauding Adra's remarks.

Germany — influenced by its own dark history during World War II, when millions of Jews were killed by the Nazis — has steadfastly backed the Zionist entity following the October 7 attack. The festival, known as the Berlinale, receives substantial government funding.

Asked whether the funding would now be reviewed, Hoffmann said the current focus was on ensuring such incidents were not repeated. After controversy erupted at the weekend, the film festival put out a statement late on Sunday saying that winners' remarks were "independent, individual opinions (which) in no way reflect the position of the festival". But, it added, "We understand the outrage, and that the statements of some of the award winners were perceived as too one-sided." — AFP

Indigenous musician goes, reluctantly, for Oscars glory

Scott George spends his weekdays providing affordable housing for Native American families in Oklahoma, and his weekends singing at traditional Osage dances. That schedule will have to be interrupted next month as he travels to Hollywood for the Oscars, where the song he wrote for Martin Scorsese will compete with tracks from Billie Eilish, Mark Ronson and Jon Batiste for an Academy Award.

"I guess you could use the word surreal. But I don't really know what that means any more compared to this," George told AFP. "Music is — even though it's something I wake up with every day — it's something we pursue on the weekends," he said.

George is a proud member of the Osage Nation, whose often tragic history forms the subject of Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon." The movie, which is up for 10 awards on March 10, tells the story of how the Osage struck enormous oil wealth in the early 20th century, only to be exploited and murdered by their duplicitous white neighbors.

The film was made with the deep collaboration of the Osage people, and filmed on location in their heartland. Its lead actress Lily Gladstone has Blackfeet and Nez Perce heritage, and the movie's musical score was composed by the late Robbie Robertson, who also is of Native American ancestry. Both are also Oscar nominees.

Scorsese also was determined to have an authentic Osage song at the finale of his epic drama. George recalls one of his fellow musicians spotting the director in the stands at a ceremonial dance, as they took a break between sets. "It was like, 'Oh wow, so he's watching us,'" said George. "So when he asked us about the song, or about putting a song in there, we knew what he wanted."

Even so, the initial answer was no. Many Osage songs contain the names of old warriors from two or three centuries ago. "These are ours. This belongs to us," explained George. "And so we said, 'Well, we can't give him that. We can do something close, but we can't give him that.'" "So that's where that came from. We started composing our own song for him."

'Poems'

The result was "Wahzhazhe (A Song for My People)," a powerful six-

and-a-half minute anthem featuring thunderous drums, and lyrics encouraging the Osage people to stand up and be proud after surviving so many ordeals.

The movie and song came at a perfect time for tribal elders, who were embarking on a campaign to educate younger members about their history, and to remind them that "we're still here, we are not relics," said Geoffrey Standing Bear, chief of the Osage na-

tion. "Outside of that, it gets a little touchy."

Having now seen his song embraced by Academy voters, George does see it as important that a form of music that had often been "comically depicted in cartoons" is now being recognized. "I just want the world to see it and understand it, maybe develop an ear for it. Because it's out there. You can go to YouTube and listen to pow-wows," he said. "We understand it's got



Members of the Osage Native Americans Tribe (from left) consulting producer Chad Renfro, songwriter Scott George, performers Julia Lookout, Angela Toineeta and Vann BigHorse participate in a Q&A about the Martin Scorsese movie "Killers of the Flower Moon". — AFP

"We're not that trusting of outsiders given our history. But Scorsese and his team showed that trust to us, and us to them," he recalled. "So when you see our ceremonies, and you see all the different activities, and you hear the music? That's Osage ... these songs are poems."

Having made the 15-strong Oscars shortlist, the track was not considered a favorite to earn a best song nomination, meaning the announcement last month was greeted with euphoria by many attached to the film. "Isn't it great? For me to be nominated for playing an Osage character, it's so important that an Osage person has also been nominated," best actress contender Gladstone told AFP.

But for George, describing his Oscar nomination as an "achievement" does not sit well, because it was "not something I aspired to do." "I'm comfortable providing music for my peo-

ple," he said. "Outside of that, it gets a little touchy."

Though not yet confirmed this year, it is traditional for all five nominated songs to be performed live during the Oscars ceremony, typically by their original singers. George has already attended stary events including the Academy's annual nominees luncheon in Los Angeles, where he rubbed shoulders with his "rivals" such as Eilish and Batiste.

"We were on a Zoom call the other day with all of us, and I was a little starstruck. 'Who are these people and what am I doing here?'" he recalled. "My wife put it best — 'You've been singing for 45 years, that should put you somewhere.' I guess so." — AFP



Ayo Edebiri



Elizabeth Debicki



Steven Yeun



Lily Gladstone



Cillian Murphy



Pedro Pascal



Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series the cast of "The Bear" poses in the press room.

'Oppenheimer' wins top SAG prize as actors hail strike success

Oppenheimer" took top honors at the Screen Actors Guild Awards on Saturday, as Hollywood stars partied at their union's first prize-giving gala since staging its longest-ever strike last year. The prestigious prize for best performance by a cast at the SAG Awards is historically a strong predictor for the Oscars, and makes "Oppenheimer" a formidable frontrunner for best picture.

Christopher Nolan's epic drama about the father of the atomic bomb also took the awards for best actor for Cillian Murphy, who plays the titular scientist, and best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr, portraying his bitter rival. "Thank you for the invitation to play a genuine part in making this scarily important film," said Kenneth Branagh, speaking on behalf of the cast.

The mood at the gala was celebratory all round, as members of SAG-AFTRA — the union that represents some 120,000 performers, including A-list stars — congregated in numbers for the first time since the strike ended in November.

Branagh recalled how the film's cast had walked out of their London premiere last July as the work stoppage was about to begin. "We went from the red carpet and we didn't see the film that night. We happily went in the direction of solidarity with your good selves. "So this, this is a full circle moment for us," he said, to loud applause.

The guild ultimately extracted hard-fought gains including better pay and protections against artificial intelligence (AI) from studios including Disney and Netflix. "You survived the longest strike in our union's history with courage and conviction," said SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher. Warning that AI could "entrap us in a matrix where none of us know what's real," Drescher said "seminal" gains made in talks would "set the trajectory for many generations to come."

Oscars best picture race

"Oppenheimer" has been relentlessly scooping up awards all season. The movie has already won top prizes at the Golden Globes, Critics Choice Awards, Directors Guild of America Awards, and Britain's BAFTAs. It now adds the top SAG-AFTRA award for best cast, which has led to recent best picture Oscar wins for movies such as "Parasite," "CODA" and "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Many of the same actors who vote for the SAG Awards also make up the largest voting bloc for the Academy Awards, which will be held this year on March 10. "Oppenheimer" saw off "Barbie," "Killers of the Flower Moon," "American Fiction" and "The Color Purple" for top honors.

In the best actress category, Lily Gladstone ("Killers") bested her main rival Emma Stone ("Poor Things") in a closely watched result that throws the Oscars race wide open. The Indigenous actress, who portrays an Osage woman being exploited by nefarious white neighbors in Martin Scorsese's 1920s-set epic, began and ended her acceptance speech in her native Blackfeet language.

Supporting actress prizes have been going consistently this season to Da'Vine Joy Randolph ("The Holdovers"), and Saturday's gala was no different. And Barbra Streisand received a lifetime achievement award, earning a rapturous standing ovation in a rare public appearance for the 81-year-old.

Netflix and chill

The night also honored television. "The Bear" took comedy wins for its overall cast, and for stars Jeremy Allen White and Ayo Edebiri. "Succession" won the drama series cast prize, while Elizabeth Debicki won best actress for "The Crown" for her portrayal of the late princess Diana.

Pedro Pascal took best actor for "The Last of Us," admitting he was drunk as he became one of many performers to take advantage of the Netflix telecast's relaxed tone — and different rules on what is permissible — by dropping an F-bomb.

The 30th SAG Awards became the first Tinseltown award show to stream globally on Netflix. The streamer has been cautiously moving into the live events space in recent years, with a Chris Rock comedy special and a celebrity golf tournament.

Moving to Netflix from smaller US cable networks TBS and TNT gave the SAG Awards access to the streaming giant's 260 million-strong subscriber base — and meant no commercial breaks. "Personally, I can't wait to get home and have Netflix recommend this show to me based on all the other stuff that I've watched myself in," joked Idris Elba, who opened the gala. — AFP

Winners

FILM

- Best cast in a motion picture: "Oppenheimer"
- Best male actor in a leading role: Cillian Murphy, "Oppenheimer"
- Best female actor in a leading role: Lily Gladstone, "Killers of the Flower Moon"
- Best male actor in a supporting role: Robert Downey, Jr., "Oppenheimer"
- Best female actor in a supporting role: Da'Vine Joy Randolph, "The Holdovers"
- Best stunt ensemble: "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One"

TELEVISION

- Best ensemble in a drama series: "Succession"
- Best male actor in a drama series: Pedro Pascal, "The Last of Us"
- Best female actor in a drama series: Elizabeth Debicki, "The Crown"
- Best ensemble in a comedy series: "The Bear"
- Best male actor in a comedy: Jeremy Allen White, "The Bear"
- Best female actor in a comedy: Ayo Edebiri, "The Bear"
- Best male actor in a limited series or TV movie: Steven Yeun, "Beef"
- Best female actor in a limited series or TV movie: Ali Wong, "Beef"
- Best television stunt ensemble: "The Last of Us"



Robert Downey Jr



Ali Wong



(From left) Benny Safdie, Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr, Josh Hartnett, Alden Ehrenreich, Casey Affleck, Emily Blunt and Kenneth Branagh, winners of the Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture award for 'Oppenheimer'.



The cast of "Succession", winners of Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series.

Sports

Gill, Jurel help India clinch Test series against England

'A lot of challenges were thrown at us, but we responded'

RANCHI: Shubman Gill and Dhruv Jurel guided India to a series-clinching five-wicket win over England on day four of the fourth Test on Monday. Chasing 192 for victory, India slipped to 120-5 but Gill (52) and Jurel (39) put on an unbeaten stand of 72 to achieve the target during the second session in Ranchi.

The win gave India an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series after they lost the first Test. "It's been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good," India's skipper Rohit Sharma said.

"A lot of challenges were thrown at us, but we responded." It was the first series defeat for captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum since they took charge in 2022 and changed England's fortunes with their attacking philosophy dubbed "Bazball".

"It was a great Test match, the scoreboard doesn't give enough credit to the game as a whole, the ebbs and flows," Stokes said, adding that he "couldn't be more proud" of his spin bowlers. "So much credit to our spinners, being exposed to a situation like that at the start of their careers," Stokes said.

Gill played the anchor in his 124-ball knock as he and Jurel, who made 90 in India's first innings, staved off a mini-crisis when Shoaib Bashir took two wickets in two balls soon after lunch.

'Under pressure'

India still needed 72 more but Gill and Jurel rotated the strike coolly to pick off singles before the former raised his fifty with two successive sixes off Bashir. "We were put under pressure... but Jurel came out and took the pressure off, he saw the situation and played accordingly," Gill said.

'We want to win'

Indian spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav set up the victory after they shared nine second-innings wickets to bundle out England for 145 on day three. England had recovered from 112-5 in their first innings courtesy of Root's unbeaten 122.

India were without pace spearhead Jasprit



RANCHI: India's Dhruv Jurel (L) plays a shot during the fourth day of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England at the Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) Stadium in Ranchi on February 26, 2024. — AFP

Bumrah, who was rested, but the bowling stood up — including debutant quick Akash Deep, who took three early wickets after England elected to bat. Anderson reached 698 Test wickets in the match and needs two more to become only the third bowler to 700 after Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800)

and late Australia spin wizard Shane Warne (708). The fifth and final Test begins on March 7 in the Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala. "We turn up to every Test thinking we want to win," Rohit said, adding he was "confident we will put on a good show" for the last match. — AFP

'Next MS Dhoni' among praise heaped on Jurel

RANCHI: India's wicketkeeper-batsman Dhruv Jurel said on Sunday he was determined to win the series against England after his defiant fourth Test innings of 90 was widely praised.

Jurel moved from his overnight 30 to raise his first Test half-century, in only his second Test, as part of a key partnership of 76 with Kuldeep Yadav to turn the match on its head. Batting great Sunil Gavaskar said during commentary that "watching the presence-of-mind of Dhruv Jurel makes me think he's the next MS Dhoni in the making."

India recovered from 177-7 to post 307 and then dismissed England for 145 to set themselves a target of 192 for victory to clinch the five-match series, which they lead 2-1.

"Obviously, it is a good feeling to hear a legend like Sunil Gavaskar talk about me," 23-year-old Jurel told reporters. "The mood was great, there were no specific instructions — just to go and play... and the longer I play, the better it is."

England spinner Tom Hartley denied Jurel a century but the young Indian said he was fo-



RANCHI: India's Shubman Gill (L) and Dhruv Jurel celebrate their win at the end of the fourth day of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England at the Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) Stadium in Ranchi on February 26, 2024. — AFP

cused on the series and not his own score. "I am not worried too much about the century, this is my debut series," Jurel said.

"I am desperate to lift the trophy in my hands, to

play Test cricket was one big dream for me."

Jurel's mother reportedly sold off her jewellery to pay for his first kit bag and he celebrated his fifty with a salute to his father, a former soldier. — AFP

US rookie Knapp wins Mexico Open in ninth PGA start

MEXICO CITY: American rookie Jake Knapp captured his first PGA Tour title in only his ninth series start, outdueling Finland's Sami Valimaki down the back nine Sunday to win the Mexico Open. The 29-year-old former nightclub bouncer from California squandered a four-stroke lead on the front nine but ground out victory on the back nine at Vidanta in Puerto Vallarta.

Knapp hit only two fairways in firing a level-par 71 final round to finish 72 holes on 19-under 265 and defeat Valimaki by two strokes after the Finn fired a closing 69. "Didn't necessarily have my best stuff today, that's for sure," Knapp said. "Knew it was going to be nerve-wracking. Knew it was going to be tough. "It would have been nice to hit driver better and hit it a little bit better, but I was super-pumped on how I played the finishing stretch. Just grinded it out." Valimaki, making only his 11th PGA start, failed to become the first Finnish player to capture a PGA title.

Taiwan's C.T. Pan, Germany's Stephan Jaeger and American Justin Lower shared third on 270 with American Patrick Rodgers and Scotsman Robert MacIntyre another stroke adrift. Knapp, ranked 101st, became the third rookie to win this season, matching the total for all of last season.

At the par-5 14th, Knapp pitched to just outside two feet and tapped in for birdie to reach 19-under, stretching his lead to two strokes. Knapp made pars to keep that edge to the par-5 18th, where he found a fairway bunker but landed his third shot 12 feet from the hole and two-putted to seal victory.

"He kept it going on the back nine so I feel like I didn't lose it," Valimaki said. "I played solid. It was a tough grind." Knapp's thoughts were upon his late grandfather, who inspired him to play golf before dying last year of cancer.

"He'd be pretty pumped," Knapp said. "He would probably say, 'Yo dude, good playing, winner winner chicken dinner.'" Knapp, whose best prior PGA finish was a share of third last month at Torrey Pines, had won three times on a Canadian developmental tour.

Valimaki is a two-time DP World Tour winner, capturing the 2020 Oman Open and 2023 Qatar Masters, both in playoffs. Knapp made bogeys at the first and third holes while Valimaki sank an eight-foot birdie putt at the fourth. — AFP



VILLENEUVE-D'ASCQ: Italy's full back Ange Capuozzo scores a try during the Six Nations rugby union international match between France and Italy at Stade Pierre Mauroy in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, near Lille, northern France, on February 25, 2024. — AFP

Pumas claw NZ to seal Canada Sevens three-peat

VANCOUVER: Holders Argentina came from behind to defeat New Zealand 36-12 to win their third straight Canada Sevens crown in Vancouver on Sunday, tightening their grip on the eight-leg World Rugby SVNS Series.

The Pumas, fresh from victories at the Cape Town and Perth tournaments, once again signalled they are the form team of seven-a-side rugby with a scintillating performance to overwhelm their opponents. New Zealand, which had knocked out Antoine Dupont and France in the semi-finals earlier Sunday, raced into an early 12-0 lead after tries from Joe Webber and Brady Rush in the first three minutes at BC Place. But once Argentina clicked into gear, the New Zealanders were unable to cope, with Matias Osadczuk scoring a brilliant hat trick alongside tries from Marcos Moneta, Matteo Graziano and Luciano Gonzalez.

The win follows Argentina's victories in Vancouver in 2023 and 2022. The Pumas have now gone 18 games unbeaten in the tournament during that peri-

od. "It's incredible. I'm very proud of this team," Argentina skipper Santiago Alvarez said after the win. "We give all for this team and you can see it on the field. I'm very proud. We are trying to be better each day and this is the focus for us." Argentina now top the overall standings with 78 points from four tournaments, 24 points clear of Ireland and Fiji, who each have 54 points.

Earlier Sunday, Argentina had advanced to the final with a 35-19 drubbing of the United States in their semi-final. New Zealand, meanwhile, reached the final after eliminating France 28-26. Despite the defeat, France's tournament ended on a bright note with a 42-12 romp over the United States to claim third place.

France's 15-a-side superstar Dupont — who had scored a last-gasp try to seal Saturday's quarter-final win over Ireland — capped an encouraging tournament with a superb playmaking performance against the Americans that included a try.

Dupont has opted to skip this year's Six Nations in order to focus on the abbreviated form of the game with an eye on this year's Paris Olympics. The French superstar will now head to Los Angeles for the fifth stop on the global circuit next week. In the women's event, meanwhile, New Zealand's Black Ferns cruised to a 35-19 win over France with veteran Portia Woodman-Wickliffe scoring a hat trick. — AFP

Paris holds its breath for Olympic swimming events

PARIS: Organizers of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris may be feeling a little queasy over their commitment to hold open water swimming in the scenic but often polluted Seine. Last August, the marathon swimming test events were cancelled because the water was too dirty, as were the swimming legs on two of the four days of triathlon and para-triathlon tests.

The city of Paris has insisted "there is no plan B". The course for the men's and women's 10-kilometre events will start at the iconic beaux-art Pont Alexandre-III and, with the Invalides and Eiffel Tower in the background, head 1km down river past other famed attractions, including the Musee d'Orsay, and the Grand Palais.

Perhaps appropriately, it passes the newly-renovated Paris Sewer Museum and the more minimalist Pont d'Alma before looping back. The triathlon swims are shorter and will turn back sooner. It is a route chosen to showcase the beauty of Paris.

It is also politically symbolic: swimming has been banned in the Seine since 1923 but various Paris mayors have vowed to open it up. In 1990, when he was mayor before becoming French president, Jacques Chirac promised the river would "soon" be clean enough in which to swim and that he would celebrate by taking a dip. He never did.

The current mayor, Anne Hidalgo, a vigorous promoter of green initiatives, has also promised she will take the plunge before the Olympics start and that the public will be allowed to swim at three locations by 2025. She has yet to get her feet wet.

City officials argue that the quality of the water has improved, but none of the samples collected between June and September 2023 met European standards on the minimum quality of water for swimming.

The big problem is faecal matter. The bacteria in the water increases sharply when heavy rain sweeps debris and untreated wastewater into the river from the banks and the overflowing drains and sewers. The city tests the water at 14 points. In 2022, water quality at three of them was judged to be "sufficient" but had deteriorated by last summer.

The open-water swimming last August was cancelled after heavy rain sent E. coli readings to six times the target level set by World Aquatics (FINA). The city of Paris insisted they had "learned" from the sampling problems at the test events. National and local authorities are also investing 1.4 billion euros (more than \$1.5bn) in five projects designed to clean the water.

'Valve malfunction'

According to a Paris city official, the failed tests for the team triathlon and, two weeks later, the para triathlon swimming were caused not by rain but by a "valve malfunction" in the Paris sewage system. The weather remains the "main risk", acknowledges the Paris town hall, which fears "exceptional rainfall".

The only backup plan for the swimming is postponing the events by a few days. "There is no solution to move the event, the triathlon and open water swimming will be held in the Seine next year," Tony Estanguet, Paris 2024 organizing committee, said after the cancellations last August.

For the athletes these are the Olympics and dirty water is a constant risk in open-water competitions. At the end of the test event in 2019 ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, swimmers protested against the quality of the water in Tokyo Bay. Before the Rio Olympics in 2016, the polluted Guanabara Bay made headlines. "A glittering setting," Italian double world champion Gregorio Paltrinieri told Italian media in January. "Even if the water is dirty, I would rather swim in an electric atmosphere in the centre of Paris than in an anonymous stretch of water." After winning silver at the world championships in Qatar earlier in February, Frenchman Marc-Antoine Olivier said he was excited by the venue. — AFP

Liverpool win League Cup as Van Dijk strikes late to sink Chelsea

Liverpool's first trophy following Klopp's announcement to step down



LONDON: Liverpool players pose with the trophy after the English League Cup final football match between Chelsea and Liverpool at Wembley stadium, in London. Virgil van Dijk scored the only goal deep into extra-time as Liverpool won the League Cup for a record tenth time. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool won the League Cup in dramatic fashion as Virgil van Dijk's header late in extra-time sealed a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp's injury-hit side finished a gruelling clash with a host of raw youngsters on the pitch, but it was their experienced captain who clinched the club's 10th League Cup triumph.

Van Dijk earlier had a goal controversially disallowed by VAR, but the Dutch defender pounced to nod home with just two minutes left. It was Liverpool's first trophy following Klopp's bombshell announcement that he will step down at the end of this season.

"What happened here today is absolutely insane. These things are not possible besides a team, squad, academy full of character," Klopp said. "The craziest thing is we deserved it. I couldn't be prouder of them. Wow! It was really cool. 'I'm sure we brought on all the kids! We needed fresh legs. They were very young, but they did the job.'" Klopp has now won seven major trophies in his nine-year

Anfield reign. The German will hope Liverpool's first silverware since the 2022 FA Cup will be the springboard for an incredible farewell tour.

Quadruple-chasing Liverpool sit top of the Premier League, face Southampton in the FA Cup fifth round on Wednesday and take on Sparta Prague in the Europa League last 16. It was another bitter Wembley experience for Chelsea, who lost the 2022 League Cup and FA Cup finals against Liverpool.

Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino has asked Chelsea fans not to judge him on "winning titles" in the midst of a troubled first season in charge. But Chelsea remain without domestic silverware since the 2018 FA Cup and had only themselves to blame after missing a host of chances in normal time.

"That was the key. We created four, five or six big chances and we didn't score. In a game like this, whoever scores first will have a big advantage," said Pochettino, who is still to win a trophy in English football. "We felt the disappointment of not winning in normal time. We didn't have the energy in extra-time. They scored in the last minutes

and it was difficult to react." Ravaged by injuries to 11 players, Liverpool's list of star absentees included Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Alisson Becker, Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota and Dominik Szoboszlai.

That meant starts for 20-year-olds Conor Bradley and Harvey Elliott, while Bobby Clark (19), James McConnell (19), Jarell Quansah (21) and Jayden Danns (18) all came off the bench.

Goals ruled out

Despite their youthful line-up, Liverpool settled quickly as Luis Diaz led the charge. Taking advantage of Chelsea's hesitant defending, Diaz advanced into the area for a fierce strike that forced a good save from Djordje Petrovic.

Against the run of play, Chelsea should have taken the lead with their first incisive raid. Conor Gallagher's cross deflected to Cole Palmer just six yards out, but his strike produced a superb save from Caoimhin Kelleher.

Ryan Gravenberch joined Liverpool's ev-

er-growing injury list when he was stretchered off after the midfielder's leg twisted awkwardly in a challenge with Moises Caicedo. Liverpool looked to have broken the deadlock on the hour when Van Dijk climbed above Ben Chilwell to head in Andrew Robertson's free-kick.

But VAR intervened, prompting referee Chris Kavanagh to disallow the goal for offside against Wataru Endo, who blocked Levi Colwill from marking the Dutch defender. Chelsea were left to rue Axel Disasi missing a sitter and Gallagher hitting the post before taking a heavy touch that allowed Kelleher to save.

In a pulsating finale, Kelleher made saves from Palmer and Christopher Nkunku to force extra-time. Danns almost guided his header over Petrovic and Elliott was inches away when he volleyed against the post. Liverpool would not be denied and with penalties just two minutes away, Van Dijk met Kostas Tsimikas's corner with a header that flashed past Petrovic as Klopp raised his arms with a smile that bordered on disbelief. — AFP

Baez sweeps to Rio title

RIO DE JANEIRO: Sebastian Baez eased past Argentine compatriot Mariano Navone in straight sets to win the Rio ATP clay-court tournament on Sunday for his fifth title. Baez, 23, defeated the 113th-ranked Navone, who came through qualifying, 6-2, 6-1 and will rise to a career-high 21 in the world on Monday.

"All week I felt so good here. I said before, I compare it to home because of the crowd, the people, everything," Baez said. "In the pre-season I did one week here, so I know this place, I

know the people and I enjoyed my time inside and outside the court." Navone hadn't won a match on the main tour before the Rio tournament but made the final in style by defeating defending champion Cameron Norrie in the semi-finals. However, he never settled on Sunday, quickly slipping a double break down to trail 4-0 on his way to defeat in 83 minutes.

Baez converted six of his 14 break points. "I think it's so important because in your first final you'll be more nervous," added Baez. "I think I did so well in the start in both sets, so I think that was the key." Despite the defeat, Navone will have the consolation of breaking the top 100 for the first time when he will rise to 60 in the world. — AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: Argentina's Sebastian Baez holds his trophy after winning against Argentina's Mariano Navone during the ATP 500 Rio Open tennis singles final match in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

NBA suspends five for roles in Heat, Pelicans brawl

NEW YORK: Miami Heat scoring leader Jimmy Butler was among five players suspended by the NBA on Sunday for their roles in an on-court brawl between the Heat and New Orleans Pelicans. Butler and Pelicans forward Najj Marshall were each suspended one game without pay for instigating and engaging in an on-court altercation in Miami's 106-95 victory on Friday at New Orleans.

Heat center Thomas Bryant and Pelicans guard Jose Alvarado of Puerto Rico were each suspended three games without pay for leaving the bench area during an on-court altercation and fighting. Miami forward Nikola Jovic, a 20-year-old Serbian, was banned for one game without pay for leaving the bench area and entering the skirmish.

Miami's Kevin Love sparked the incident when he committed a foul to prevent a basket by Zion Williamson of the Pelicans with only 41 seconds elapsed in the fourth quarter. Alvarado, Bryant, Butler and Marshall were whistled for technical fouls and ejected from the game.

Alvarado was set to begin to serve his suspension on Sunday when the Pelicans play host to Chicago, with Marshall serving his ban then also. Bryant will begin serving his suspension on Monday when the Heat visit Sacramento Butler and Jovic will also serve their suspensions when Miami plays the Kings. The Heat rank eighth in the Eastern Conference at 31-25 with a three-game win streak while the Pelicans are fifth in the Western Conference at 34-23. — AFP

Everton's 10-point EPL deduction reduced to six

LONDON: Everton's penalty for breaching Premier League financial rules has been reduced from 10 points to six following an appeal, the English top flight announced on Monday. The club were hit with the punishment — the biggest in Premier League history — for breaching profit and sustainability rules (PSRs) in the three-year assessment period ending in 2021/22.

The original deduction left Sean Dyche's side 19th in the table and fighting to beat relegation. But an independent appeal board has cut the punishment by four points, which moves the Merseysiders up from 17th to 15th place.

"Everton FC appealed the sanction imposed

against it on nine grounds, each of which related to the sanction rather than the fact of the breach, which the club admitted," the Premier League said in a statement.

"Two of those nine grounds were upheld by the appeal board, which has substituted the original points deduction of 10 for six." Everton said they were satisfied the appeal had resulted in a reduction in the points sanction.

The club face a second PSR complaint over breaching rules over the period running to the end of last season. That complaint was laid on January 15 and under standard directions for PSR cases the commission hearing must conclude no later than 12 weeks afterwards, which would be April 8.

Everton said in a statement they were "particularly pleased with the appeal board's decision to overturn the original commission's finding that the club failed to act in utmost good faith". "That decision, along with reducing the points deduction, was an incredibly important point of principle for the club on appeal," the statement added. "The club, therefore,

feels vindicated in pursuing its appeal."

"Notwithstanding the appeal board's decision, and the positive outcome, the club remains fully committed to cooperating with the Premier League in respect of the ongoing proceedings brought for the accounting period ending in June 2023."

Nine-time English champions Everton have been a continuous presence in the top flight since 1954 and have never been relegated from the Premier League. But they only avoided the drop by two points last season and have spent years in the shadow of city rivals Liverpool. Everton last won a trophy in 1995.

Premier League champions Manchester City were charged last year with 115 alleged breaches of financial fair play regulations in a case that is ongoing. Only two other clubs have received points deductions in Premier League history. Middlesbrough were deducted three points for failing to fulfil a fixture against Blackburn during the 1996/97 season, while in 2010 Portsmouth were deducted nine points after going into administration. Both clubs ended the season with relegation. — AFP