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Prosecution detains ex-candidate

Top court jails officers, expats over bribes for driving licenses

Kuwait Times, Kuwait News participate in Kilmitain



KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News team pose for a photo with the Canadian ambassador to Kuwait and Khaleesque representatives at the Kilmitain event on April 24, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The public prosecution on Thursday ordered the detention of former candidate in the April National Assembly elections Musaed Al-Qraifa for 21 days pending investigation and trial on charges of insulting the political leadership during an election campaign.

Qraifa was interrogated for hours by the public prosecution after he was arrested by state security agents, his lawyer Ahmad Al-Mutairi said. Mutairi alleged that the law was not applied in ordering his detention for 21 days because the law clearly states that people accused of expressing opinions cannot be detained during interrogation and before a court verdict.

Qraifa is expected to appear next week before a judge, who will decide whether to keep him in jail or free him until the date of his trial. A large number of MPs and political activists have strongly criticized the way Qraifa, a well-known political activist, was arrested by police instead of calling him to appear before the prosecution to be questioned over the accusations.

Several lawmakers and activists gathered at his residence Wednesday night to express their solidarity with him and to condemn his arrest, as several MPs said the way Qraifa was arrested and later detained clearly breached the law.

Meanwhile, two Kuwaitis on Thursday dropped a petition they had submitted to the constitutional court challenging the April parliamentary polls and calling to annul the entire election process because the children of naturalized Kuwaitis were allowed to vote and contest the polls. The constitutional court is expected to rule on 12 other petitions challenging the results of the parliamentary polls.

Meanwhile, the court of cassation on Thursday issued final verdicts to jail a Kuwaiti officer and eight expats for four years each after convicting them in a bribery case to issue driving licenses to expats who do not fulfill conditions to get the licenses. The court said it found that the officer, with a rank of colonel in the traffic department, accepted bribes of up to KD 300 per license to issue the licenses illegally. The court also ordered the deportation of the expats after serving the jail term.

In another case, the court jailed a Kuwaiti non-commissioned officer and an Egyptian for 10 years for issuing illegal driving licenses to expats. It jailed two other Egyptians for five years and eight others of the same nationality for four years each. All expats will be deported after serving the jail terms. Kuwait has imposed strict conditions for expats to obtain a driving license, including having a high salary, a university degree and at least a two-year stay in the country.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi King leaves hospital

RIYADH: Saudi King Salman left hospital Wednesday following "routine examinations", the royal court said. The tests took place at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Jeddah, the court said. An earlier statement announcing King Salman's arrival at the hospital said the tests were expected to last "a few hours". — AFP

Aramco agrees major FIFA deal

DHAHRAN: Saudi Arabia's state oil giant Aramco and world football governing body FIFA on Thursday announced a major sponsorship agreement until the end of 2027. Saudi Arabia have already been confirmed as the only bid for the 2034 World Cup. In a joint statement, it was confirmed Aramco would become FIFA's Major Worldwide Partner exclusive in the energy category. — AFP

Iraq hangs 11 'terror' convicts

NASIRIYAH: Iraqi authorities have executed at least 11 people convicted of "terrorism" this week, security and health sources said Wednesday. A security source in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province told AFP that 11 "terrorists from the Islamic State group" were executed by hanging at a prison in the city of Nasiriyah, "under the supervision of a justice ministry team". All 11 were from Salahaddin province and the bodies of seven have been returned to their families. — AFP

Venetians protest €5 entry fee

VENICE: Venice on Thursday began charging day-trippers a five-euro ticket for entry, a world first aimed at tackling mass tourism but opposed by protesters objecting to treating the historic Italian city as a museum. Around 13,000 tickets had been sold by late morning, the mayor's office said, either purchased online or at the new ticket office at the Santa Lucia train station. But around 300 people protested near the station on Thursday morning, holding up signs such as "Stick it to the ticket!" and "Venice is not for sale!" — AFP

Pro-Palestinian protests grow at US, France univs

LOS ANGELES/PARIS: College campuses across the United States braced for fresh protests by pro-Palestinian students Thursday, extending a week of increasingly confrontational standoffs with police, mass arrests and accusations of "anti-Semitism". The Zionist war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza has lit a match of shock and divisive outrage in American universities from New York to California. More than 200 protesters were arrested Wednesday and early Thursday at

universities in Los Angeles, Boston and Austin, Texas where a fresh rally was scheduled for midday.

The spreading protests began at Columbia University in New York, where a midnight deadline set by college officials was fast approaching for students to remove an encampment that has become a symbolic epicenter of the movement after more than 100 demonstrators were arrested there last week. Visiting the campus on Wednesday, top Republican leader House Speaker Mike Johnson condemned the nature of the protests and suggested it could be necessary to call out the National Guard.

Student protesters say they are expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, where the death toll has

Continued on Page 6



AUSTIN: Students speak with law enforcement officers during a pro-Palestine protest at the University of Texas at Austin on April 24, 2024. — AFP

Ahead of Rafah invasion, Gazans mourn martyrs

GAZA: Palestinians on Thursday mourned people killed in Zionist bombardment of Rafah, the crowded southern Gaza city where says it is advancing plans for a ground invasion. Global concern has mounted over the looming operation against Hamas militants in Rafah, where much of Gaza's population has sought refuge from more than six months of war in the narrow coastal strip.

Aid groups warn any invasion would add to already-catastrophic conditions for Gaza's 2.4 million people.

Zionist officials have for more than two months vowed to enter Rafah, near the Egyptian border, but even before any ground operation the area has been regularly bombed, including overnight Wednesday-Thursday.

At the city's Al-Najjar Hospital on Thursday, among the mourners were two men crouching, grief-stricken, in front of a white body bag. Those killed in a Zionist strike on Rafah included Abdallah Nabhan, 33, who worked for Belgium's Enabel development agency. Brussels said it would summon the Zionist entity's ambassador to explain the death.

The Zionist government spokesman David Mencer said the Zionist entity's war cabinet was meeting Thursday "to discuss how to destroy the last battalions of Hamas".

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GAZA: Palestinians mourn by the bodies of relatives killed in Zionist bombardment at the Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on April 25, 2024. — AFP

Unusually hot weather bakes southern Asia

BANGKOK: Millions of people across South and Southeast Asia sweltered through unusually hot weather on Thursday, as the Thai government said heatstroke has already killed at least 30 people this year. A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted the region this week, prompting thousands of schools across the Philippines to suspend in-person classes.

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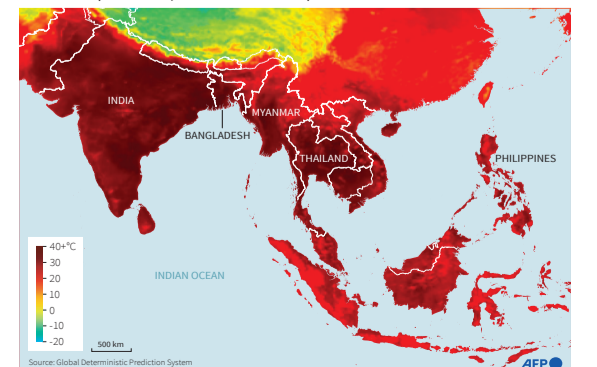
An Indian minister blamed hot weather after he fainted during an election campaign speech as the country's weather bureau said severe heatwave conditions were expected in nine eastern and southern states in the coming days. Even mountainous Nepal issued health warnings and put hospitals on alert on Thursday as temperatures soared in its southern plains.

Scientific research has shown climate change is causing heatwaves to be longer, more frequent and more intense.

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Extreme heat in Southeast Asia

Predicted temperatures in °C, from 0600 - 0900 GMT on April 25



How composting can help reduce food waste in Kuwait

One-third of food lost or wasted globally

News in Brief

Kuwait tackles trafficking

RIYADH: The success or lack thereof in the fight against human trafficking largely hinges on the level of global cooperation against the scourge, a Kuwaiti official said. Human trafficking represents one of the most perilous threats to humanity, Kuwaiti Justice Ministry Acting Undersecretary Hashem Al-Qallaf said in a statement to the press on the sidelines of a seminar on the matter, organized by Saudi Arabia's human rights committee. Such initiatives are paramount to pushing forward international cooperation in a bid to clamp down on human trafficking, he underlined, saying that the seminar would also shed light on some of the measures Riyadh has taken to rid the world of this nefarious deed. The Kuwaiti official hoped that more similar gatherings would follow suit to address the growing significance of the matter, emphasizing that information exchange was crucial for more knowledge on the scourge of human trafficking. — KUNA

Weather will be warm

KUWAIT: The weekend weather will be warm to hot during the day and moderate at night, marked with relative humidity and unsteady and hot southeasterly blows, the meteorological center said on Thursday. The center director, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, said in a statement to KUNA that the weather during the rest of the day would be largely hot, with a temperature forecast of 34–35 degrees, but would turn moderate at night. On Friday, it will tend toward heat with some wetness in coastal regions. The forecast heat will range between 35 and 37 degrees. The weather at night will be moderate, with some humidity. On Saturday, it will be hot, and the heat will range between 36 and 38 degrees and fall to 22–24 degrees at night. —KUNA

Kuwaiti wins Akhlaquna award

DOHA: Yousef Al-Omran, a Kuwaiti entrepreneur, won the 'Akhlaquna' (our ethics) Individual Initiative Award, offered by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development. Speaking after the award ceremony, he dedicated the award, which came in recognition of his 'Bu-Jarrah changes' initiative for rehabilitation of infrastructure in Kuwait, to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti people. Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Qatar Foundation Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser honored the winners of the various categories of the 2024 Akhlaquna award in a ceremony at the Qatar National Library. Sheikhha Moza launched the award in 2017 with a view to highlighting the interrelation between knowledge and ethics and promoting awareness about the moral values of the Prophet (PBUH). In addition to the Individual Initiative, the categories of the award include Akhlaquna Juniors, the Youth, and the Appreciation Award. — KUNA

New oil media strategy

KUWAIT: Head of the Public Relations and Media Department at Kuwait's Ministry of Oil, Sheikhha Tamader Khaled Al-Sabah, said on Wednesday that the latest developments and changes in the oil and gas fields call for developing a new oil media strategy. This was presented by Sheikhha Tamader at the Oil and Gas Industry Basics Forum, which is held at the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headquarters. She stated that oil media covers news and information related to oil, including the production of oil and gas, reports, prices, and other related topics, noting that it aims to provide accurate data to the public. She also added that the Public Relations and Media Department at Kuwait's Ministry of Oil focuses on issuing publications that cover oil activities in Kuwait, noting that it aims to achieve high performance and digital transformation as well as provide a cooperative work environment. — KUNA



Head of the Public Relations and Media Department at Kuwait's Ministry of Oil Sheikhha Tamader Khaled Al-Sabah.



By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: As part of Kuwait Times' efforts to increase media literacy in our community, sixth-grade students at Al-Ghanim Bilingual School, led by their teacher Yara Shaheen, have collaborated with our media organization to explore how composting can contribute to reducing food waste. The collaboration began with a lecture where students got an overview of journalistic writing principles by Kuwait Times Editor Nebal Snan.

Groups of students carried out research and wrote articles under the guidance of their teacher. Students Ahmad Al-Jarrah, Perla Haydar, Mohammad Al-Salhy, Yousef Al-Aryan, Sayed Ahmad, Omar Tamer, Joud Al-Haj, Abdulrahman Emran, Bader Al-Musallam, Abdullah Al-Ali, Lujain Al-Awadhi, Naser Al-Ayyar, Abdullah Al-Hawwaj, Eva Haydar and Mohammad Faisal were selected to contribute to this report.

Produced but never eaten

Did you know that tons of food is wasted around the world every year? According to the World Food Program, one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally. This amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year, worth approximately \$1 trillion. All the food produced but never eaten would be sufficient to feed two billion people. That's more than twice the number of undernourished people across the globe. In Kuwait, an individual wastes 95 kilograms of food annually, a recent report by the United Nations Environment Program suggests. The waste doesn't only affect the global food supply. When we waste food, we also waste all the energy and water it takes to grow, harvest, transport, and package it.

Composting as a solution

Students at Al-Ghanim Bilingual School conducted a survey among their peers to seek out ways to tackle food waste. After much debate, composting came out on top as an easy way to turn waste into useful material. The waste management strategy is relatively easy and not too expensive to implement, making it an increasingly attractive option for food waste management worldwide, researchers and students agree. "It is cheap and helps me grow more food, and I don't know a way other than composting.

So I think composting is the best way to prevent food waste," said one student named Ali.

You might ask, what is composting? Well, you got your back. Composting is a controlled aerobic (oxygen-required) process that converts organic material into a nutrient-rich fertilizer. The process mimics nature's method of decomposition and helps the soil retain moisture and nutrients. Composting also attracts beneficial organisms to the soil and reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizers. It reduces the potential for soil erosion and sequesters carbon in the soil.

Why composting works

As things stand, landfilling is the most prevalent method to handle waste in Kuwait, according to Kuwait University research. Although Kuwait Municipality provides collection and disposal services, it doesn't have a clear strategy for waste reduction or recycling.

A conference paper presented by Kuwaiti researchers in 2020 has found that Kuwait's municipal solid waste is a great candidate for composting or incineration, given its high content of organic material and combustible components. Combining the two methods is likely the most viable sustainable waste management approach for the country — composting can process the organic fraction of the waste, while incineration can handle the remaining components. Researchers concluded that this waste management strategy would not only minimize the negative impacts of waste landfilling but might also have economic benefits.

The main challenges

Eliminating the unpleasant odor which results from composting is one of the main obstacles. The existence of impurities such as heavy metals, plastic or glass and contamination with pathogenic microbes could also affect the quality and safety of the produced fertilizer, and consequently the planted crops, and increase composting costs. Controlling the composition of the food waste and its moisture content, which requires proper pre-sorting, is necessary but might also pose a challenge.

Still, composting is better for the environment when compared to landfilling because the carbon dioxide emitted from the process doesn't contribute to

global warming, according to research.

A source of revenue

Composting is not known to be economically feasible for areas with limited agricultural activities, such as Kuwait. But high-quality compost could be an efficient strategy to improve the quality and fertility of Kuwait's sandy soil texture and boost agricultural opportunities, research suggests. Kuwait can also play its hot climate to its advantage — researchers from Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz University suggest that composting food waste in GCC countries can lead to a total net saving of around \$70.72 million per year. Selling compost can also be a lucrative revenue source, but the challenge is producing compost that satisfies international standards and finding a market to sell it. Many composter facilities worldwide struggle to find markets for their products, as has been the case in Sri Lanka, which produced in 2019 at least 3,000 tons of compost from food waste.

How to compost at home

If you're a beginner and you want to get started on composting, here's some advice for you to get started: Start with a base layer of twigs, mulch or old potting mix to encourage air circulation and provide drainage. Follow with layers of green and brown material — say garden clippings and kitchen scraps, then leaves and wet paper. Chop larger materials as you add them then mix the brown and green materials together.

Maintain the moisture using a damp wrung out sponge. Add water after each layer to keep the pile moist but not too wet. Finish with a layer of soil or finished compost to help reduce odors. Remember that the smaller the items are, the faster they will decompose. When layering, try to add two parts brown material to one-part green. Heat will turn your organic waste into nutrient-rich fertilizer for your plants.

Reducing waste in our kitchen

Some tips to reduce food waste at home include, planning your meals, properly storing your food, knowing your molds and understanding the difference between 'use by' vs 'best before' dates. You should also avoid serving too much food, repurpose waste where possible and share extra food with others.



National Guards inaugurates blood donation center

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guards inaugurated a blood donation center at Al-Tahrir camp on Thursday in a bid designed to enhance the resources at the Central Blood Bank. Lieutenant General Muhandes Hashem Al-Rifai, the National Guards Undersecretary, said during the inauguration ceremony that the center was opened as a result of a signed cooperation protocol between the Guards and the Ministry of Health.

This step has been taken in line with directions by the National Guards Chief, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and his deputy, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and in implementation of the Guidance Document of the National Guards (protection and back-up 2025), stipulating the significance of the Guards' social role and enhancement of the strategic blood reserves. The National Guards will continue to back up the Central Blood Bank through donation campaigns at the camps where a significant number of personnel have shown up to donate their blood, "out of

their belief that a drop of blood saves a life," he said.

Aiding in the treatment of patients and saving lives through the enhancement of Central Blood Bank resources are humanitarian goals. Meanwhile, the assistant undersecretary at the MoH, Dr. Abdullah Al-Faras, affirmed the National Guards' keenness on providing aid to the ministry to enrich the strategic resources at the Central Blood Bank. Issam Issam, the administrative backup assistant at the Guards, affirmed that such a venture contributes to enhancing the Guards' strategic role, noting that it works round the clock to receive donors. — KUNA



A National Guards personnel donates blood. — KUNA photos

Lebanon news agency praises Kuwait relations

BEIRUT: Lebanon's state-run news agency on Wednesday heaped praise on ties with its Kuwaiti counterpart, describing these relations as "enduring" and for the betterment of pan-Arab journalism. The National News Agency (NNA) and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) share similar ideologies that promote the concept of "free journalism," albeit within established rules and regulations, NNA chief Ziyad Kharfash said as he paid a visit to KUNA's bureau in the Lebanese capital.

Cooperation within Arab news agencies has been on the rise as part of efforts to ensure "accuracy and trust" when providing information to the general public, which runs the gamut from reports covering health to tourism and the environment, he underlined. On day-to-day operations at the Beirut-based news agency, he said staff there bear in mind the nation's "best interests" when covering news stories, in a country renowned for cultural, political and religious diversity, he added. — KUNA



Ziyad Kharfash

Local

Kilmitain workshop discusses how creativity shapes media industry

Entrepreneurs, visionary founders, professionals share invaluable insights



A panel hosted by representatives from Kuwait Times and Kuwait News and Prismic Media Agency. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani among the audience engaging with the panel.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Bringing together a diverse range of talks, panels, and workshops, Kilmitain event, powered by Khaleejesque, explored the pivotal role of creativity and innovation across the realms of media, journalism, business, and advertising. Entrepreneurs, visionary founders, and creative professionals gathered to address crucial topics relevant to today's fast paced world. Drawing from their personal success journeys, they shared invaluable insights, empowering attendees with strategies and tactics crucial for amplifying creative business and achieving new heights.

Given the significant impact of technological changes and evolving consumer behavior on the news industry, Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, along with Prismic Media Agency collaborated to host a panel discussion at Kilmitain event. With Hawrah Al-Yakoob, Marketing and Advertising Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, serving as the moderator of the panel, the discussion explore the impact of recent trends on the media landscape and how journalism is evolving to succeed in the digital era.

Jana Alnaqeeb, Public Relations and CSR Manager at Kuwait Times, Kuwait News, shed light on the primary challenges facing the news business. In a world where all entities, brands, channels are fighting for audience attention, bombarding them with an abundance of information around the clock, she emphasized the short attention spans of viewers as a significant obstacle. Consequently, she added that news agencies must adapt by reshaping their content to match the preferences and behavior of their audiences. She ad-



Jana Alnaqeeb, PR and CSR manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News



Youssef Abu-Ghazaleh, archivist and content creator at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News



Hawrah Al-Yakoob, Marketing and Advertising Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News and moderator of the panel

Event, powered by Khaleejesque, explores pivotal role of innovations

vocated for more journalists to master the skill of visual storytelling, which she considers a game-changer. "News is boring. So, we need to make it interesting," she remarked.

The transformation that Alnaqeeb spoke about involves embracing new trends and utilizing tools such as search engine optimization and Meta technologies to broaden their audience's reach. Alnaqeeb also

spoke of the importance of embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI), providing a real example of 'Fedha,' the first AI-generated news presenter recently created by Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, which gained global attention.

Youssef Abu-Ghazaleh, a content creator at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, believes that journalism will always be fundamental and necessary in the digital age. As he puts it, "it's just simply about people telling stories to each other." For him, the key consideration is how journalism can be used differently in the digital age. One aspect he insists, should never be overlooked in journalism is freedom of speech, especially in the era of social media where it's challenging to control people from sharing their opinions.

The rise of freedom of speech has led to a significant shift in the field of journalism, as highlighted by Omar Al-Othman, managing partner at Prismic Media. He contends that "anyone who can deliver news and change a perspective can be part of journalism." This evolution has reshaped the traditional definition of journalism known for decades ago, where now, whether you represent an agency or run a personal Instagram account, if you offer reliable news, you are considered part of the journalistic landscape. "It's also about 'minimizing your personal biases and maximizing your audiences' biases,'" as Ghazaleh said, highlighting the importance of journalists maintaining objectivity and honesty when reporting news. This approach allows the audience to form their own conclusions.

Austrian business delegation in Kuwait to boost bilateral trade

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: An Austrian business and trade delegation, led by Andreas Stauber, the Austrian Commercial Counselor and Trade Commissioner for Kuwait and Qatar, visited Kuwait on April 24 and 25 to enhance commercial and business relations between Kuwait and Austria, where they engaged in business-to-business (B2B) meetings between Austrian firms and Kuwaiti companies.

The Austrian Embassy announced Austrian businesses view Kuwaiti companies as potential partners for regional sales strategies in the GCC region and as a gateway to Iraq. Statistics show annual imports from Austria in the range of KD 56 million. The primary imports from Austria to Kuwait consist of motor vehicles, machinery and technical equipment. "Additionally, significant export categories include pharmaceutical products, electronic goods, furniture (including office furniture and advertising signs), photographic and measuring devices, surgical and dental instruments, orthopedic devices and specialized plastics and goods," it added.

Tourism

"Kuwaiti visitors contribute significantly to Austria's economy as tourists. They favor Austria as a family-friendly holiday spot, especially during the summer months, with Zell am See, Salzburg and Vienna being the most sought-after destinations," the embassy said. Kuwait Airways operates direct flights between Kuwait and Vienna during the peak summer travel period.

The recent introduction of the five-year Schengen Visa for Kuwaiti citizens will greatly ease year-round travel to Austria. Austria's appeal to Kuwaiti tourists lies in its blend of natural beauty, cultural wealth, summer and winter sports, culinary experiences and historical importance. This unique combination makes Austria an attractive destination for Kuwaiti travelers seeking diverse European experiences.

Investments

Austria offers a generally welcoming environment for Kuwaiti investors, thanks to a bilateral agreement between the two countries to encourage reciprocal protection of investments. "This agreement outlines the legal framework for Kuwaiti investments in Austria and ensures fair treatment," the embassy said.

Austria offers various investment facilities to Kuwaiti investors, including: (1) Real estate investment, where Kuwaiti investors can invest in Austrian real estate, including residential and commercial properties. "Austria has relatively stable property markets, especially in major cities like Vienna and Salzburg," it pointed out. (2) Business Investment: Austrian companies welcome foreign investment. "Kuwaiti investors can consider investing in Austrian businesses across sectors such as technology, manufacturing, tourism, and services."

(3) Banking and Finance: Austrian financial institutions offer investment opportunities, including banking products, investment funds, and private wealth management services. Kuwaiti investors can explore op-



Officials take a group photo.



Andreas Stauber



Austrian Ambassador Marian Wrba

portunities for wealth preservation and growth through Austrian banks. (4) Infrastructure Projects: Austria is involved in various infrastructure projects, including transportation and renewable energy. Kuwaiti investors can participate in public-private partnerships (PPPs) or infrastructure development projects.

The Austrian Energy Supply Company EVN, in partnership with Kuwait, is currently constructing one of the world's most technologically advanced wastewater treatment facilities in Umm Al Hayman. "This facility treats and manages wastewater from southern Kuwait, providing process water to agriculture and industry," the embassy statement said. This project, featuring a complex financing structure, ranks among the largest PPP projects in the Middle East.

(5) Tourism and Hospitality: Austria's tourism sector is vibrant, with opportunities in hotels, resorts, and leisure businesses. Kuwaiti investors can consider hospitality investments in popular Austrian tourist destinations. (6) Startups and Innovation: Austria has a growing startup ecosystem, particularly in areas like technology, biotech, and green energy. Kuwaiti investors can explore investment opportunities in Austrian startups and innovative ventures. (7) Tax Incentives and Treaties: Austria has double taxation agreements with Kuwait, which can be beneficial for Kuwaiti investors looking to minimize tax liabilities on cross-border investments.

The Foreign Trade Center for Kuwait and Qatar ar-

ranges economic missions, market research trips, and trade fair participations annually. "This goes under the umbrella of the RefocusAustria Initiative, launched by the Austrian government to strengthen the country's economy post-COVID-19," the embassy said. It involves collaboration among the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce's global offices, and other government departments.

RefocusAustria promotes Austrian companies worldwide, enabling them to enter new markets and attract investments. It seeks to showcase Austria's reputation for quality products, engineering, and innovation, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, digital transformation, and sustainability practices. Members of the delegation also held discussions with a number of key contributors including Rabah Al-Rabah, Director General of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, along with Austrian Ambassador Marian Wrba.

The program also included visits to key Kuwaiti institutions such as the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), where they met Managing Director Sulaiman Al-Ghunaiman, and the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), where they were hosted by Sheikh Abdullah Sabah Hamoud Al-Sabah, Assistant General Manager for Investment Operations. Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Chairman of Kuwait-Austria Business and Friendship Association (KABFA), will receive the delegation at the White Palace.

Netherlands Embassy marks King's birthday

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Netherlands Embassy holds a reception, on Wednesday, on the occasion of the birthday of King Willem-Alexander. During his remarks, Laurens Westhoff, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Kuwait, stated "Based on that bond, between Royals and citizens, we built a country that is strong in agriculture, trade, and energy. A country that has explored new frontiers for centuries. Around 1750, the Netherlands was the most active European trading partner in the Gulf region. Also here in fledgling Kuwait, as my ancestors and your ancestors became trading partners for the first time."

He continued "In 1964, 60 years ago, Kuwait and the Netherlands decided to establish diplomatic relations. Politically Kuwait and the Netherlands share many principles. Being relatively small countries, with large and powerful neighbors, both our countries embrace the principle of an international rules-based order. Many times, Kuwait and the Netherlands have stood shoulder to shoulder in promoting and defending the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders."

He indicated that during 60 years of diplomatic relations, Kuwait and the Netherlands have continuously marked their shared principles and interests, as well as our commitment to the multilateral system, adding "We cooperated in many areas, held numerous ministerial meetings and have frequent political consultations. Together we continue to uphold an international order in which our countries can grow, and our companies and peoples can enjoy freedom and prosperity."

The ambassador highlighted that over the years European Integration has made the Netherlands a gateway to Europe and countries like Kuwait choose his country as a point of entry into the EU, an ever-growing marketplace of 450 million customers where goods and services move freely between borders, without paperwork and tariffs. An "Internal Market" in which labor and capital can also roam almost unrestricted by bureaucracy.

"Celebrating 60 years of relations is not only about looking back. Issues like food security and climate change are demanding new partnerships. Therefore, we are developing, together with research institutes KISR, KFAS, and Kuwait University, new branches to our relationship," he concluded. In his turn, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs Ambassador Sadeq Marafi emphasized the enduring significance of Kuwait-Netherlands relations, highlighting their distinguished strategic and economic history, adding "With a bond dating back to one of the oldest commercial relationships Kuwait holds, the Netherlands stands as a crucial economic partner, especially as the two countries celebrate their 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties."

He pointed out "The Netherlands' role as a key economic partner in Europe is underscored by Kuwait's substantial presence, boasting over 200 gas stations and fostering robust economic collaboration, particularly in the energy sector. These ties are further cemented by ongoing meetings and engagements with various European countries, demonstrating a commitment to nurturing and expanding these vital partnerships."

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IKEA celebrates Earth Month with 'Together for a Better Planet' event



KUWAIT: IKEA, the leading brand for life at home launched "Together for a Better Planet" sustainability event at Shaheed Park. The larger-than-life sustainability event is a celebration of our beautiful planet and a heartfelt call to action for everyone. The 4-day event showcases the impact we make on the environment in an inspiring way. It intends to build awareness through visibility, shocking facts, and activities. In addition, the interactive workshops and activities with the IKEA team will provide entertaining and educational insights on how little changes on our everyday life can make a big difference.

"This April, we are not only marking Earth Month with our first sustainability event, but also celebrating our 40 years in Kuwait; a journey marked by memorable moments, lots of inspiration and love from all the people of Kuwait, and immense dedication from all our coworkers. Throughout these years, sustainability has remained a core part of our commitment towards Kuwait", said Marino

Maganto, CEO of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco. During the launch event, IKEA also introduced a pledge wall, calling each of us to pledge a personal commitment by taking small actions that can collectively create a lasting positive impact on Kuwait's environment.

"We believe that we all have a responsibility to make a change. Our main goal should be to create awareness, through education, in the schools and universities, through events and activities that make it easier for people to make a change in their lives" Maganto continued. While we know that there is so much more to be done, we thank all the people who took and will take the pledge, committing to a better and more sustainable Kuwait. Our small actions together can make a world of difference, so let us pay it forward for the environment of Kuwait", concluded Maganto. Visit the IKEA installations and take the pledge at Shaheed Park, Phase 2 until 27 April 2024. All the materials of the installations will be reused or recycled after the event.



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Relief planeload heads to Sudan

KUWAIT: The second Kuwaiti plane took off Thursday to Port Sudan, carrying 10 tons of relief items and blankets onboard as part of an air bridge supporting displaced people within Sudan, stated the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. KRCS Director General Abdulrahman Al-Oun

told KUNA that this comes as per the directions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as a show of Kuwaiti solidarity and support for afflicted Sudanese people. The society is coordinating efforts with the Kuwaiti Embassy in Sudan to provide urgent relief, commented Al-Oun, thanking the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense for their contributions. The first planeload took off on April 23, carrying 40 tons of food, medical supplies, and ambulances to Port Sudan International Airport. — KUNA





In south China, silkworm farmers reel from floods

As 'news deserts' spread, US journalism fights on

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Gazans search for loved ones as bulldozers unearth bodies

'My son is on the bulldozer', woman cries

GAZA: Palestinian woman Reem Zidan had been searching for her son for months, and finally found his body on Wednesday as a bulldozer unearthed human remains outside a Gaza hospital. "They told me to move away, but I said, 'my son is on the bulldozer,'" Zidan told AFP from the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, crediting her "maternal instinct" for "knowing" it was the body of 22-year-old Nabil. As combats subsided in Khan Yunis after Zionist forces withdrew from the area in their fight against Hamas, health workers have begun recovering bodies buried next to the city's Nasser Hospital - southern Gaza's largest.

"I haven't seen him for three months, and today I found him", Zidan said, adding that Nabil was killed by shrapnel from an air strike. Gaza's Civil Defence agency said Tuesday that workers had uncovered nearly 340 bodies over several days of people killed and buried by Zionist forces at the hospital. "We were surprised that inside the Nasser Medical Complex there are mass graves made by the occupation" military, Civil Defence spokesman Mahmoud Bassal told AFP.

The Zionist army has denied troops had dug the graves. Some parents told AFP the bodies recovered had been buried by relatives. Unlike Zidan, others who went to the Nasser complex in hope of recovering their relatives' bodies could not find them. Sonia Abu Rajilah, 52, from Khan Yunis, said her son 29-year-old son Hazem was buried by his friends near the hospital, but that she and her other sons have not been able to find him. "Now I wait among the bodies being pulled out, hoping to recognise his body," she told AFP.

She was looking for the beige shirt and grey trousers he was wearing the last time she saw him, the mother said. Calls for an international investigation into the deaths at Nasser Hospital have grown, including from rights group Amnesty International. "Without proper investigations to determine how these deaths took place or what violations may have been committed, we may never



GAZA: People and health workers unearth bodies found at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on April 23, 2024 amid the ongoing conflict between the Zionist entity and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. — AFP

find out the truth of the horrors behind these mass graves," Erika Guevara, the rights group's policy director, said in a statement.

Buried by relatives

Zionist government spokesman David Mencer said Wednesday that the claims the army had buried Palestinian bodies "are baseless and false", without directly addressing allegations from Gaza's Hamas-run authorities that troops were behind the killings.

He acknowledged that troops had examined corpses buried at the facility in their search for hostages held in Gaza. "Bodies examined, which did not belong to hostages, were returned to their place," Mencer said. Army spokesman Major Nadav Shoshani said on social media platform X that "misinformation is circulating regarding a mass grave that was discovered at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis. The grave in question was dug - by Gazans - a few months ago."

Intense fighting raged in mid-February in the area

around Nasser Hospital, and tanks and armored vehicles surrounded it on March 26. Nawal Al-Zaqzouq, 60, told AFP she has been coming daily to the hospital in search of her son, Alaa Al-Attal, who was killed on January 1. Attal died from bleeding after he was shot by a sniper, Zaqzouq said, and was buried by his brother at the hospital. "We said when things calm down and there's a ceasefire, we'll search for him and retrieve him to bury him in the cemetery," she said. "But we haven't found his body yet". — AFP

Burkina Faso army 'killed 223 villagers in revenge attacks'

ABIDJAN: Soldiers in Burkina Faso's jihadist-hit north killed at least 223 villagers, including 56 children, in two attacks on February 25, Human Rights Watch said in a report on Thursday. Burkinabe officials contacted by AFP did not comment on the allegation, which the New York-based group described as "among the worst army abuse in Burkina Faso since 2015".

"These mass killings... appear to be part of a widespread military campaign against civilians accused of collaborating with Islamist armed groups, and may amount to crimes against humanity". It said: "Soldiers killed 44 people, including 20 children, in Nondin village, and 179 people, including 36 children, in the nearby Soro village, of Thiou district in the northern Yatenga province."

The West African nation has been battered by a jihadist insurgency that swept in from neighboring Mali in 2015. Thousands of civilians, troops and po-

lice have been killed, two million people have fled their homes and anger within the military at the mounting toll sparked two coups in 2022. "The massacres in Nondin and Soro villages are just the latest mass killings of civilians by the Burkina Faso military in their counterinsurgency operations," said Tirana Hassan, executive director of Human Rights Watch.

"The repeated failure of the Burkinabe authorities to prevent and investigate such atrocities underlines why international assistance is critical to support a credible investigation into possible crimes against humanity," Hassan said. HRW said it had interviewed 23 people, including 14 witnesses to the killings, three local civil society activists, and three members of international organizations. "Human Rights Watch verified videos and photographs shared by survivors of the aftermath of the killings and injured survivors," it said.

On February 24 and 25, Islamist armed groups carried out several attacks on military targets, including barracks and bases, and on civilian infrastructure, such as religious sites, killing scores of civilians, soldiers, and militia members. Burkinabe Defence Minister Mahamoudou Sana on February 26 denounced "simultaneous and coordinated" attacks by Islamist fighters but made no mention of the mass killings of civilians in Nondin and Soro. — AFP

Landmark Moulin Rouge's windmill sails collapse

PARIS: The sails of the windmill above the Moulin Rouge cabaret, one of the most famous landmarks in Paris, collapsed overnight, with its operator saying there was no foul play. No one was hurt and there was no risk of further collapse. While the reason for the accident was not yet known, the Moulin Rouge's director Jean-Victor Clerico said there was no sign of "foul play", adding the cause was "obviously a technical problem". "We'll rise to the challenge," Clerico said, adding that "the Moulin Rouge is 135 years on, so it's seen all kinds of things".

The incident around 1:45 am, after the nightspot closed, comes as the countdown to the July-August Olympic Games is ticking with millions of visitors expected. Hundreds of thousands of people watch the Moulin Rouge's daily shows each year, with many more stopping to look from the outside at the landmark at the foot of the Montmartre hill. The collapse would "especially move the showbusiness world and everyone who loves Paris," Culture Minister Rachida Dati posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo told AFP she felt "great pain" at the damage to a landmark "famous the world over". "We're putting everything into getting the sails back onto our iconic windmill as quickly as possible," the Moulin Rouge said in a statement, with both city hall and the culture ministry offering help. The sails had been rebuilt two decades ago to make them lighter, director Clerico said, adding that there are checks every two months - the most recent on March 20.

An AFP journalist saw workers loading the slightly twisted sails of the windmill into the bed of a truck for removal, while barriers were set up around the



This combination of pictures created on April 25, 2024, shows the Moulin Rouge, a famous cabaret and theatre at night in Paris, on October 13, 2023, and the cabaret mill without the blades and part of the missing sign, after the Moulin Rouge windmill collapsed during the night without causing any injuries, firefighters told AFP, in Paris, on Thursday. — AFP

Moulin Rouge. The letters M, O and U had also toppled from the name spelled out on the building's facade. "I can't believe it," said Exaue, a cook at the cabaret who asked not to give his second name. He saw the sails on the ground as he arrived for work around 8:00 am. — AFP

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International

In south China, silkworm farmers reel from floods

Chinese farmers count their losses after deadly flood

QINGYUAN: Hose in hand, 40-year-old Zhu Huangyi cleans a small concrete room once home to his silkworms, two thirds of which were lost in deadly floods hitting southern China this week. Just two hours from the economic powerhouse and megacity of Guangzhou, surrounded by lush subtropical vegetation, lies the village of Sancun, one of the worst hit by the recent bad weather. Around a quarter of households in the village make their living from raising silkworms, insects that secrete precious fibres essential to the textile industry.

Although the water levels had dropped by the time AFP arrived, it reached two meters in some areas - with devastating consequences for residents and the tiny creatures. "We placed the worms high up but that wasn't enough," Zhu Huangyi told AFP, holding up a smartphone showing images of his cocoons floating sadly on the surface of the water. "It hurts my heart," he said. "It's an old family business, my mother got into this 30 years ago," says the breeder, whose property was also flooded in 2022. Behind him, his mother Huang Xiuying scatters white detergent powder on the concrete floor of the enclosures to disinfect the area.

"We continued to feed our worms, even after receiving the weather alert," she says. "We couldn't come to grips with reality," she explains. Breed-

ers sell their worms in their cocoon state, when they are most valuable, for around 40 to 50 yuan for a kilo (\$5.50 to \$7). Zhu was able to save a third of them. "After the flood, prices fell," he says. "We were able to sell those that remained at 34 yuan a kilo." That was their only way to curb their losses - like many in the village, he had no insurance. "Basically, it will cost us 40,000 to 50,000 yuan in losses," he explains - a huge amount in rural China.

Adding to the pain is the loss in the floods of the village's mulberry trees, the silkworms' only source of food. "The other problem is our mulberry trees," Zhu said. The only solution is to cut the heads of the plants once the water level returns to normal, then wait about two weeks for usable leaves to grow back. Only after that will farmers be able to buy new silkworm eggs to replenish their breeding stock, which Zhu estimates will cost 5,000 yuan. Another breeder Lan Zhukui is even less fortunate. "I lost all my cocoons, around 150 kilos of them" with a market value of around 6,000 yuan, he explains to AFP as he cleans the floor of his enclosure. "There's not much to do at the moment except wait at home." At her breeding station, Huang is more philosophical. "We're used to it!" she says. "Before, we were flooded every eight to ten years. Now it's more like every two years." — AFP



YINGDE: A farmer checks a field of damaged white mulberry where silkworms are produced in Sancuncun village, Yingde in China's Guangdong province. — AFP

The Myanmar 'water brothers' salvaging shipwrecks on the tide

YANGON: Diving into the darkness of the Yangon River, Than Nyunt starts another murky sortie in his months-long mission to salvage a sunken ship using the power of the moon. His target is a 53-metre (174-foot) long cargo vessel resting on the silty riverbed in Myanmar's commercial hub, whose steel carcass will fetch a tidy sum as scrap—if he can get it to shore. A hose running from his mask up to an oxygen pump on the boat is his lifeline and only means of communication—one tug on it from a colleague means "come up quickly". He stays in the dark depths for up to three hours at a time, attaching cables to the wreck. The cables run up to the team's boat on the surface, and then to shore. When it rises on the next tide, it will drag the shipwreck a few meters along the bed.

The work is slow and dangerous but addictive, said Than Nyunt, 58. He says he has salvaged around 40 ships, from cargo boats to passenger ferries, since he started diving over four decades ago. "After I excavate one ship I always want to do it again and again," he told AFP from the river, wearing a Manchester United jersey and a pair of gardening gloves. "Besides making money, I want to know the condition of the wreck... I also talk with ship owners about the ship's history, and we both are delighted when we can salvage them." The team's current shipwreck—the Mya Nadi (Emerald River) -- is an old friend for Than Nyunt. He salvaged the vessel in 1981 for its owner, who fitted it with a new engine and set it back to work. Around eight years ago it sank again.

'Water brothers'

There are between 20 and 30 wrecks on the bed of the Yangon, according to Than Nyunt. During the British colonial era, the water thronged with ships taking away teak wood and rice from the hinterlands and bringing in workers from abroad. In World War II, fierce fighting between Japan and Allied forces sent many vessels to the riverbed. Cyclone Nargis, which devastated Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta in 2008, killing at least 138,000 people, sent more to the bottom.

It left the riverbed a rich, if risky, hunting ground for salvagers. Wrapping a metal chain around his body to weigh himself down, Than Nyunt, 38, prepares for a shift unlogging silt from the 'Emerald River'. Working in the darkness, as much as 25 meters (80 feet) down and buffeted by strong currents is risky, he says. "My life is in the hands of the man holding the oxygen pipe... If something happens to the oxygen machine, I can only know if he gives a signal to me." That signal is a tug on the oxygen tube, warning the diver to come up. "However much we argue on the boat, we have to act like brothers when we are under the water," said Than Nyunt.

Tidal cranes

Pulling the wrecks using the tidal surges of the river is organic but plodding and requires much patience. "We don't have a heavy-duty crane to pull the ships," says Than Nyunt. "When the tide rises by up to 12 feet, we can expect the ship to move up to 10 feet and we can pull it to land." After more than four months work, the skeleton of the Emerald River is visible in the shallows.

In the last stage of the salvage, the team fix tyres and sandbags to the wreck to anchor it in place. Another team then moves in to dismember the wreck, working with blowtorches in knee-deep water. — AFP

Blinken urges US, China to manage differences

BEIJING: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Thursday on the United States and China to manage their differences "responsibly" as he landed in Beijing for tough talks with the rival power's leaders. Blinken is expected to address a range of thorny issues including Chinese support for Russia and its treatment of Taiwan, with China likely to raise trade concerns such as new US action against popular social media app TikTok.

Blinken headed straight to a closed-door gathering with leading Chinese scholars on Thursday. On Friday a full day of talks with China's political leadership is planned, including a possible meeting with President Xi Jinping. Blinken arrived from Shanghai, where the top US diplomat attempted a charm offensive that saw him sample local food, watch a basketball game and stroll along the city's famous Bund promenade.

Visiting the local Communist Party leader in a room with sweeping views of the Shanghai skyline, Blinken said US President Joe Biden was committed to "direct and sustained" dialogue between the world's two largest economies after years of mounting tension. "I think it's important to underscore the value - in fact, the necessity - of direct engagement, of speaking to each other, laying out our differences, which are real, seeking to work through them," Blinken said. "We have

an obligation for our people - indeed an obligation to the world - to manage the relationship between our two countries responsibly."

The Chinese Communist Party secretary for Shanghai, Chen Jining, welcomed Blinken partly in English and spoke of the importance of US businesses to the city. "Whether we choose cooperation or confrontation affects the well-being of both peoples, both countries and the future of humanity," Chen told him. Blinken also met students at the Shanghai campus of New York University, where he voiced hope for more Americans to study in China.

He insisted the United States was committed to welcoming Chinese students. Beijing has repeatedly alleged that Chinese nationals with valid travel documents, including students, have been subject to aggressive interrogations and deportations at US airports. "President Biden and President Xi are determined to strengthen our people-to-people ties," Blinken said. He also met US business leaders, telling them that the two countries needed to make sure the "economic relationship is working in the ways that it should work to mutual benefit".

Pressing on Russia

Blinken, the first US secretary of state to visit Shanghai in 14 years, opened his visit Wednesday evening at a restaurant serving steamed buns before going to watch a basketball match between the Shanghai Sharks and the Zhejiang Golden Bulls. Such softer diplomacy, once a staple of US-China relations, would have been unimaginable until recently, with hawks in both countries speaking of an emerging new Cold War.



BEIJING: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (center) watches as US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns (left) shakes hands with Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Jining during a meeting at the Grand Halls in Shanghai. — AFP

Blinken's aides hope his smiling persona at public events draws an implicit contrast to his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov's gruffer approach when he visited China this month. The next leg of Blinken's trip is set to be far less relaxing when he meets top cadres in Beijing. China has not announced plans for Blinken to meet Xi, although a meeting was announced at the last minute during his previous visit in June.

Among the many sticky issues Blinken is expected to raise in Beijing are concerns about China's relationship with Russia. Although US officials were initially pleased that Beijing has not shipped weapons to Russia for its war in Ukraine, they now say that China's alarm at Moscow's setbacks on the battlefield has prompted it to export vast quantities of industrial supplies to Russia. US officials believe China is more receptive to Western concerns

as it seeks to focus on managing economic headwinds at home and wants to avoid friction with the West.

But China is also furious about a series of moves by Biden—who is facing a tough re-election fight in November against Donald Trump - they say serve to constrain the Chinese economy. Most recently, the US Congress approved legislation that would force the divestment of TikTok from its Chinese owners or face a ban in the world's largest economy. Biden supports the legislation, arguing that TikTok, popular among young people, poses security and privacy concerns. China has accused the United States of unfair economic coercion. Unusually, Trump has distanced himself from a TikTok ban. He has otherwise championed a tough line on China, with vows to raise tariffs drastically if he returns to office. — AFP

Malaysian ex-PM faces anti-graft investigation

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's nearly 100-year-old former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad is being probed in a graft investigation involving his two sons, the head of the country's anti-corruption body said Thursday. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in January ordered Ma-

hathir's eldest son, Mirzan Mahathir, to declare all his assets in and outside the country as part of an investigation following revelations contained in the so-called Panama Papers.

MACC's chief commissioner Azam Baki told reporters in the northeastern state of Kelantan on Thursday that Mahathir was also being probed. "I wish to confirm that he (Mahathir) is among those being investigated. This follows an investigation into his sons," he said in a televised remarks. "His two sons were issued with notices to declare their assets," he added, declining to provide details. An aide to Mahathir told AFP on condition of anonymity that "no formal notice has been issued

Indian minister blames heat after fainting at election rally

NEW DELHI: An Indian minister has blamed his fainting while addressing an election rally on hot weather as the country's weather bureau warned of a severe heatwave in parts of the country during the poll. Scorching temperatures have hit many Asian countries this week, prompting the school closures in the Philippines and Bangladesh due to extreme heat forecasts.

Roads minister Nitin Gadkari fainted during his speech on Wednesday at a small town in the western state of Maharashtra, where he was campaigning for the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Footage of the incident showed the

minister falling unconscious and being carried off the stage by handlers.

"I felt uncomfortable due to the heat during the rally," Gadkari wrote on social media platform X later that day. "But now I am completely healthy," he said, adding that he was going ahead with his election campaigning. The Indian Meteorological Department said on Thursday that severe heatwave conditions were likely to continue in at least nine eastern and southern states over the next five days.

"Heatwave to severe heatwave conditions (are) very likely to prevail," the statement said, with temperatures already reaching 44 degrees Celsius (111.2 Fahrenheit) in some locations. Large outdoor campaign rallies are being staged across India with the country in the middle of a marathon election staggered across six weeks. Tens of millions of people are due to vote in the poll's second phase on Friday.

India's election commission said this week that it was reviewing the impact of heatwaves and humidity before each round of voting with a view to "mitiga-

tory measures" that would still allow citizens to cast their ballots. Years of scientific research has found climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense. —AFP



NEW DELHI: File picture shows Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president, Nitin Gadkari, gestures at a function in New Delhi on November 5, 2012. — AFP

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024

Car giants vie for EV crown at Beijing Auto China show

Firms offer customers the coolest accessories at lowest prices



BEIJING: A battery from the Contemporary Amperex Technology Co, Limited (CATL) company is displayed at the Beijing Auto Show on April 25, 2024. — AFP

BEIJING: Chinese car giants locked in a cut-throat price war descended on the capital for the start of the Auto China show Thursday, vying to draw consumers and headlines in the world's biggest electric vehicle market and abroad. China's EV sector has exploded in recent years, and firms are now engaged in a no-holds-barred battle to offer customers the coolest accessories at the lowest prices.

EV makers from China have made inroads into markets from Europe to Southeast Asia and Tesla's Elon Musk described them in January as "the most competitive car companies in the world". Beijing's Auto China show, which lasts until May 4, sees dozens of firms square off in a bid to draw customers at one of the country's biggest car shows. Thursday saw crowds surge into the convention complex hosting the event, which takes place every other year but had not been held since 2019 because of the pandemic.

Several of the Chinese automotive world's top stars addressed audiences at the expo — including CEOs He Xiaopeng of XPeng and Lei Jun of Xiaomi — while visitors milled around the booths, snapping pictures of the shiny new vehicles on display.

There are a staggering 129 EV brands in China, but just 20 have managed to achieve a domestic market share of one percent or more, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Chinese consumers, especially in the premium market, expect smart functions in their EVs, something domestic firms are far better placed to provide than foreign companies, experts said.

'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em'

Chinese EV makers "are looking at the car much more like Apple looks at the phone or the iPad or the laptop. They're looking to really amp up the experience," said Daniel Kollar, head of automotive and mobility at the consultancy Intralink. "That's... what the Chinese consumer expects." For established foreign firms trying to compete in the Chinese market, that poses a challenge. "Companies like VW and Stellantis, they are trying to take an 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' approach," Kollar told AFP. "That's why you're seeing partnerships pop up with the likes of XPeng. They feel like they're behind and the best way to jump to the front of the line is to partner with some of these native smart EV (original equipment manufacturers)."

Among the most closely watched firms at Auto China is BYD — "Build Your Dreams" — a Shenzhen-based battery and automotive giant that beat Tesla in last year's fourth quarter to become the world's top seller of EVs. Tesla reclaimed that title in the first quarter of this year, but BYD remains firmly on top in its home market. The firm is expected to unveil its first electric pickup — the BYD Shark — at the event. The Shark's price has yet to be disclosed, but BYD has said it will be equipped with the firm's dedicated off-road technology platform.

Rapid growth abroad

The show comes amid an intensifying price war between EV companies, made all the more competitive as consumer spending slows in China. On Monday, Beijing-based Li Auto slashed the prices of its models by up to 30,000 yuan (\$4,141). That followed a decision by Tesla in China to lower its prices by 14,000 yuan. And as competition turbo-charges in China, the rapid expansion of its EV production has raised eyebrows in the West, where regulators fret that an oversupply of cheap Chinese vehicles could outpace local competitors.

Beijing has labelled foreign con-

cerns of overcapacity "groundless", insisting that the success of its EV sector is down to innovation and advanced supply chains, not subsidies. But it had long given EV firms a boost, funneling generous amounts of state cash towards domestic manufacturers and offering purchasing discounts in a bid to spur growth and speed up the shift towards clean-energy cars. Those central government retail subsidies were phased out in late 2022. But as firms push aggressively into countries across Europe, Southeast Asia and Latin America, they are increasingly under the spotlight.

The European Union launched an investigation last year into Chinese state EV subsidies, which it said had given companies from the country an "unfair" leg up in the local market. The probe coincides with reports of Chinese vehicles piling up at European ports, as logistics networks struggle to cope with the surge and local consumers are slow to buy them. Those headwinds haven't stopped BYD from launching a future EV factory in Hungary, making it the first Chinese firm to manufacture passenger cars in Europe. And last week, state-owned Chery signed a deal to produce mainly electric vehicles in Spain. — AFP

Middle East tensions threatening progress on inflation

WASHINGTON: The ongoing tensions in the Middle East threaten to halt - or even reverse - some of the recent progress made in tackling global inflation, the World Bank said Thursday. Ongoing military campaign in Gaza has caused tensions to rise across the region and pushed up oil prices. "Heightened tensions in the Middle East have been exerting upward pressure on prices for key commodities, notably oil and gold," the World Bank announced in its outlook for global commodity markets. "Disinflationary tailwinds from moderating commodity prices appear essentially over," it added.

A worst-case scenario shock to oil prices meanwhile could raise global inflation. Regional tensions remain high more than 200 days into devastating war in Gaza, according to an AFP tally of Zionist official figures. Zionist retaliatory military offensive has killed at least 34,262 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

Disinflation 'hit a wall'

"A key force for disinflation - falling commodity prices - has essentially hit a wall," World Bank chief economist Indermit Gill said in a statement. "That means interest rates could remain higher than currently expected this year and next," he continued. "The world is at a vulnerable moment: a major energy shock could undermine much of the progress in reducing inflation over the past two years," he added. The World Bank estimated that a "moderate conflict-related supply disruption" could raise the average cost of a barrel of Brent crude oil to \$92 per barrel, while a "severe disruption" could push it above \$100. That worst-case scenario would have the impact of raising global inflation by nearly one percentage point this year, the World Bank said. As well as delaying interest rate cuts, it could also cause an increase to food insecurity, which had already "worsened markedly last year reflecting armed conflicts and elevated food prices," the Bank added. — AFP



HANOVER: Visitors test Meta Quest 3 goggles at the booth of Meta Platforms at the Hanover technology Fair in Hanover, northern Germany, with Norway as partner country. — AFP

Meta's profits soar but costs of AI cause worry

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook-owner Meta on Wednesday said its quarterly profits soared last quarter, but worries about the cost of artificial intelligence saw its share price take a hit on Wall Street. The company founded by Mark Zuckerberg said that net profit in the January to March period rose to \$12.4 billion with total revenue, mainly from selling ads, up an impressive 27 percent, at \$36.5 billion. "We estimate that more than 3.2 billion people use at least one of our apps each day and we're seeing healthy growth in the US," Zuckerberg, who is also CEO, told analysts on an investor call.

According to analyst Debra Williamson of Sonata Insights, Meta's growth is due in particular to its sophisticated advertising tools and the success of "Reels", the algorithm-fueled short videos to be

scrolled through in succession, copied from TikTok. In another potential boost to its business, by the end of the year, Meta could also start selling advertising on Threads, its text message platform similar to X (formerly Twitter).

With ads on Threads, "advertisers who are looking to reach audiences during real-time moments will finally have a viable alternative to X," said Mike Proulx, vice-president at Forrester. The rise in sales and profit continued Meta's rebound of 2023, which came thanks to drastic cost-cutting, including massive layoffs in what Zuckerberg dubbed the "year of efficiency" that saw tens of thousands of employees let go after a miserable 2022. Meta said its global workforce now stood at 69,329, slightly more than last quarter, but down from a peak of more than 87,000 employees in 2022.

The company ended last year with record revenues and since then its share price has been soaring on Wall Street, thanks in particular to enthusiasm for AI with its stock almost tripling last year, and up another 40 percent in 2024. But shares for Meta were down nearly 17 percent in after hours trading on Wednesday, with investors concerned by signs that expenditure was creeping back up. — AFP

News in Brief

Algeria signs \$3.5bn deal

ALGIERS: Algeria signed a 3.5-billion-dollar deal with Qatar's largest dairy producer Baladna on Wednesday, establishing a vast cattle-breeding farm for powdered milk, a highly sought-after product in the North African country. With an expected yield of 200,000 tons of powdered milk per year, the project would help meet 50 percent of national demand for the product, according to reports. The project, which covers an area of 170,000 hectares in the Adrar province, includes a farm for growing cattle feed, "a farm for cattle and producing milk and meat, and a factory for the production of powdered milk," the Algerian agriculture ministry said in a statement. The deal was signed in Algiers between Souad Assous, head of agricultural and land investments at the Algerian agriculture ministry, and Baladna chairman Mohamed Moutaz Al-Khayyat, the statement added. Algeria, a country of almost 45 million, has seen several milk shortages in recent years and heavily relies on imports for powdered milk and other food products. — AFP

AstraZeneca profit jumps

LONDON: British pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca on Thursday said net profit jumped 21 percent in the first three months of the year thanks to strong growth in sales of cancer drugs. Profit after tax climbed more than one fifth compared with the first quarter last year to \$2.18 billion, AstraZeneca said in a results statement. "AstraZeneca had a very strong start in 2024," chief executive Pascal Soriot said in the statement, which noted a 26-percent increase in revenue from oncology treatments. Total group sales increased 19 percent to \$12.7 billion in the first quarter. "Our strong pipeline momentum continued and already this year we announced positive trial results for Imfinzi and Tagrisso that were unprecedented in lung cancer," added Soriot. AstraZeneca's share price jumped 5.7 percent to £120 following the update. "Cancer treatment sales remain buoyant, generating two-fifths of overall revenues in this latest quarter," noted Keith Bowman, equity analyst at Interactive Investor. — AFP

Equinor's profit drops

OSLO: Norwegian energy giant Equinor said on Thursday that its net profit dropped by 46 percent during the first quarter, dragged down by falling gas prices. The decrease continued last year's trend, when the group's net profit sank by 59 percent to \$11.9 billion over 2023. First quarter profit in 2024 stood at \$2.67 billion, compared with \$4.96 billion during the same period last year, the group said in a statement. The drop was mostly due to a fall in gas prices in the United States and Europe, which fell by 38 percent and 55 percent, respectively. Adjusted earnings, which exclude certain exceptional elements, dropped by 37 percent to \$7.53 billion, it said. Global energy giants saw their profits fall in 2023, as oil and gas prices receded after surging in the wake of Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. — AFP

BNP Paribas net profit falls

PARIS: French banking giant BNP Paribas posted a 30-percent drop in first-quarter net profit on Thursday but the result was better than expected by analysts. The lender said its profit after tax reached 3.1 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) in the first three months of the year. It fell sharply compared with the first quarter of 2023, as BNP Paribas had booked at the time a capital gain of three billion euros from its sale of US unit Bank of the West. The bank said its revenues were stable at 12.5 billion euros. Its net profit was 27 percent higher than expected by analysts, the investment bank Jefferies said in a note. BNP Paribas reported "strong growth" of 6.1 percent in global banking operations while revenues from trading in bonds, currencies and commodities sank by 20 percent. — AFP

Deutsche Bank profits soar

FRANKFURT: Deutsche Bank reported Thursday a 10-percent jump in first-quarter profits on booming business at its investment banking division, offsetting declines elsewhere as the boost from higher interest rates fades. Net profit attributable to shareholders at Germany's biggest bank came in at 1.28 billion euros (\$1.37 billion), up from 1.16 billion a year earlier. Sales rose one percent to 7.78 billion euros, better than analysts from FactSet had predicted. Revenues at the group's investment banking jumped 13 percent, propelled by an increase in deal-making. In contrast, sales at the retail banking division declined slightly year on year, as the effect of the European Central Bank's rate hikes fades. Banks globally had profited from rising borrowing costs but most central banks are now holding rates steady, and moving towards making cuts, as inflation eases. — AFP

NBK holds workshops for KFAED employees

Part of bank's strategic partnership with government entities

KUWAIT: In line with its strategic partnership and solid relationships with many public and private sector entities, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted a series of workshops for the employees of Kuwait Fund For Arab Economic Development (KFAED). This cooperation between NBK and KFAED aims to promote financial awareness and to deepen the understanding of KFAED's mission, and offering valuable insights into treasury and treasury operations, funds transfer processes, and trade finance activities.

Held at NBK headquarters over two days, 21 and 22 April 2024, and attended by 9 participants from KFAED's employees, these sessions covered crucial areas related to the Fund's activities and included interactive discussions and knowledge sharing to foster a stronger connection between KFAED and NBK, and ensure continued support for its vital contributions and strategic initiatives in global economic development.

The Fund plays an active role in the international development efforts by providing technical assistance, as well as loans on concessionary terms to finance development projects in many developing countries. Speaking on this, Ghena Ben-Ghareeb, Head of HR Strategic Business Partners, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said, "At NBK,



Ghena Ben-Ghareeb

we are committed to deliver our social responsibility towards all companies and entities, especially in government sector, as we are the main banking partner for the public sector, with close relationships across its different sectors."

"We are constantly working in partnership with state entities to develop human resources being a crucial factor to ensure continued success and one of the enablers of a sustainable economy in Kuwait. The national cadre training plans come within NBK's effective contribution in preparing a national workforce that stands out as highly competitive and pro-



ductive," she added.

"NBK is always keen to host various kinds of training activities including workshops, awareness sessions, and open discussion panels, reflecting its belief in the powerful impact of these programs, which primarily aim to serve the community and upskill national talent, while also demonstrating NBK's leading role in supporting state entities for many decades," she noted.

"Underscoring its commitment to supporting national economy and serving the country's strategic agenda, NBK always strives to extend all means of support to familiarize public sector employees with the banking business as per the latest international standards, thus helping strengthen trust in national economy and boost Kuwait's credit ratings," she emphasized.

It is worth mentioning that this is the third series of workshops, as NBK pre-

viously hosted a series of two workshops at its Headquarters over 4 days with 25 participants from KFAED employees. NBK's initiatives underline its profound vision for investing in the human capital and raising financial awareness in entities across all sectors in Kuwait. To this end, the bank engages a selection of prominent banking experts to share their knowledge and expertise with the promising talents.

NBK Economic Report

Egypt records eventful first quarter

KUWAIT: Egypt finally embarked on long-awaited macroeconomic reforms in March, devaluing the currency and raising interest rates sharply. The bold moves came soon after the government managed to secure a major FX buffer via a \$35bn mega-investment deal with the UAE over the Ras Al Hekma area. Since then, the string of positive news has continued with the IMF approving an expanded loan of \$8bn (from \$3bn), the World Bank approving a new loan of \$6bn, and the EU providing \$8bn of loans and investments.

The combined agreements have diminished market fears of a credit event for Egypt, with external risk metrics improving reflecting a more positive outlook among investors. In the near term, the economy will inevitably face more headwinds as the devaluation keeps inflation and interest rates high and household and business spending compressed. But the following few months will also be important for Egypt to regain financial and macro stability and restore market confidence, laying the foundation for a sustainable economic recovery in 2025.

We believe that for economic growth to reach levels of 6 percent on a sustained basis, the government will need to commit to and make progress on other key structural reforms, including limiting public investments (from both government and quasi-government entities), and giving more space for the private sector to drive growth. A good start could include the appointment of more technocrats in any forthcoming cabinet reshuffle, following the start of President Sisi's third term in office in April that will last until 2030.

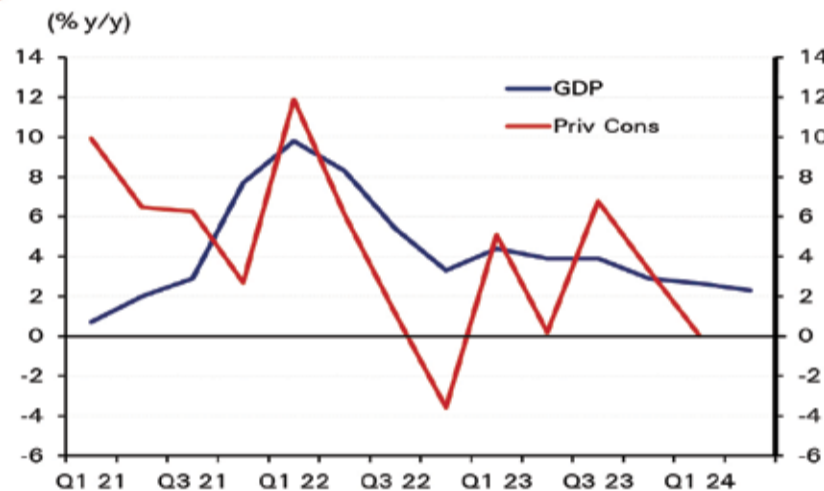
Growth at lowest levels

Economic growth, as expected, has continued its downward path in FY23/24 (ending June 2024) with growth decelerating sharply to 2.5 percent in H1 compared to 4.2 percent for H1 the previous year. Growth for the full year FY23/24 could come in close to 2.5 percent, which is lower than both the government's forecast of 3.5 percent and our initial forecast of 3 percent as well. Elevated costs, import restrictions and general uncertainty continued at a strong rate into FY23/24, taking a toll on private consumption.

The available breakdown up to Q1 FY23/24 show private consumption flat at 0 percent y/y versus 3.3 percent in the previous quarter, though the high base from the same quarter in the previous year (growth was at 5 percent) played a role. The biggest contributor to growth in the quarter was net exports, which recorded a positive balance of EGP5bn versus EGP70bn a year earlier. However, import restrictions were the main driver of this change, and once imports start to recover in the coming period, the positive net export balance will likely fade away. Government consumption grew by 11 percent y/y while investments contracted by 16 percent.

Reflecting the tough macro-economic conditions, the PMI activity indicator dropped in Q3 (Jan-Mar 2024) to 47.6 versus 48.2 for Q2 thus remaining signifi-

Chart 1: GDP and private consumption (% y/y)



Source: Ministry of Planning, NBK estimates
Note: Quarters are for the fiscal year, so Q1 24 = Q1 FY23/24

cantly below the 50 'no change' level with firms reporting weak sales, difficulties sourcing raw materials from abroad and rapid price rises.

Looking ahead, businesses should start getting access to FX allowing for a smoother import process and an improved production cycle – though the anticipated recovery in orders and demand could take a few months as inflation is expected to remain high in the near term following the currency devaluation. In our opinion, growth should bottom out this year at around 2.5-3.0 percent with elevated price pressures and the rise in interest rates keeping demand subdued. But as some of these pressures fade, growth will start recovering next year (FY24/25) towards 3.5-4.0 percent.

Current account deficit narrows

The goods trade deficit narrowed by \$1.2bn in Q1FY23/24 to \$8bn (1.9 percent of GDP), mainly driven by a 15 percent y/y drop in imports. Meanwhile, the services surplus widened by 28 percent to \$5.2bn on the back of higher tourism and Suez Canal revenues during that period (Suez Canal disruptions only started more recently). Overall, the current account deficit narrowed by 12 percent y/y to stand at \$2.8bn in the quarter. We expect similar trends through Q2 and Q3 with FX pressures limiting remittance and portfolio inflows into the LCY debt market, as well as exports. We expect the current account deficit to end the full year at \$11.5bn (3.2 percent of GDP).

For FY24/25, we forecast the current account deficit to remain within a similar range at \$12bn (2.6 percent of GDP). We expect imports to pickup by 15-20 percent but the impact on the deficit to be offset by a strong recovery in remittances, continued strong tourism proceeds, and the maintenance of a more flexible exchange rate that keeps the pound in line with its fair value.

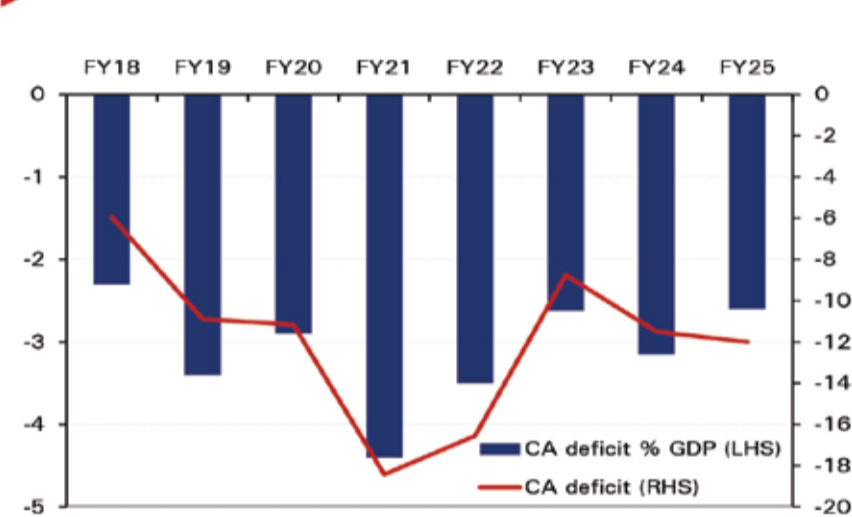
More broadly, the external financing picture for the next 2-3 years has been transformed positively by the policy changes and financing agreements made in recent weeks. The latter are worth a combined \$59bn (\$48bn excluding the UAE deposits at the CBE which have been converted into FDI) over the coming years (until FY25/26), with the majority skewed towards the current year. The Ras El Hekma deal with the UAE (\$35 bn) is due to be delivered in the current fiscal year with \$22bn already delivered and the remainder in May 2024.

The rest of the agreements – from World Bank, IMF and EU – will be disbursed over the coming 3 years (\$7-8bn a year on average). As well as financing

regular trade flows, this will be used to remove the import backlog, pay down dues to international energy firms, reduce net foreign liabilities in the banking system, pay off any maturing external debt and potentially lift official reserves.

Given the above, we project a net cumulative financing gap of \$10bn over the coming 2 years until the end of FY25/26. This gap could be covered through Eurobond issuance at a pace of \$3-4bn per year, in addition to possible debt restruc-

Chart 2: Current account balance



Source: Central Bank of Egypt, NBK estimates

ture weakness of the EGP in the parallel market to all-time highs of EGP70/\$, which was subsequently reversed following the devaluation in March given improved dollar availability. Inflation averaged 4.9 percent m/m during January-March, significantly higher than 1.2 percent m/m in the previous quarter.

We saw in March the first-round effects of the EGP devaluation but second-round effects could persist for 2-3 months (April-June). These would include

policy rates again even though the magnitude of the hike would be significantly smaller (1-2 percent) than the previous one. However, as the devaluation passes through fades and inflationary pressures show signs of easing, we think that the bank may have a window to cut rates by the end of this year.

Private credit growth slows

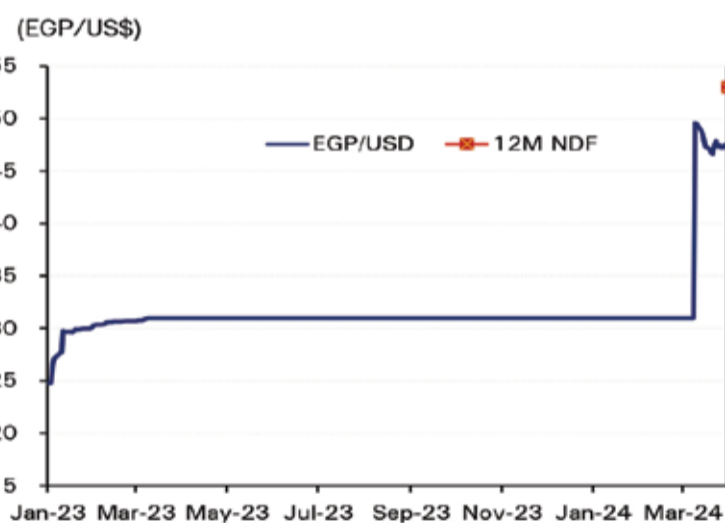
The latest available data for credit are as of February 2024, and thus not reflecting the impact of the March rate hike and other policy changes. Credit to the private sector slowed significantly to 16.8 percent y/y from a 2023 peak of 35 percent in February 2023. Household credit growth held up better at 24 percent y/y versus 25 percent y/y in February 2023. On a real-terms basis, credit to both private sector businesses (-18 percent) and households (-11 percent) were both heavily negative.

Meanwhile, despite the high interest expense and the tough macro-economic conditions, public sector credit growth continued to surprise, expanding by 80 percent y/y in February, a continued rally from a low of 41 percent y/y in May. This was also a strong 44 percent y/y on a real-terms basis. Public credit growth expanded by 14 percent q/q for the 3 months to February up from 8.5 percent q/q for the 3 months to November of last year.

The Ministry of Finance released fiscal data for the first 8 months (July-February) of FY23/24 showing the deficit widening significantly to 6.6 percent of GDP from 5.0 percent a year earlier. This suggests to us that the full-year deficit will come in at around 8-8.5 percent of GDP, higher than the budgeted forecast of 7 percent. However, the primary surplus (ie excluding debt interest payments) improved to 1.4 percent of GDP from 0.4 percent a year earlier. We expect a primary surplus of 2.2 percent of GDP for the full-year, only slightly short of the government's budgeted figure of 2.5 percent.

Revenues increased by 35 percent y/y to EGP1.08tn in the first 8 months, while spending surged by 52 percent to EGP2.0tn, leaving a deficit of EGP0.9tn. The rise in expenses came mainly on the back of a 100 percent increase in interest costs as treasury yields averaged 26.5 percent versus 13.2 percent a year earlier. The budget for FY24/25 projects a deficit of 7.2 percent of GDP (EGP1.4tn) and a primary surplus of 3.5 percent of GDP. Spending is expected at EGP6.4tn and revenues at EGP5.05tn. We expect the subsidy bill to increase by 32 percent and interest expenses by 38 percent, leading to a rise of 36 percent in spending for this year.

Chart 3: Egyptian pound exchange rate (EGP/US\$)



Source: Central Bank of Egypt, NBK estimates

turing, over and above the agreed loans, from some of the multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and others. An additional upside could be strong portfolio inflows linked to the carry trade given high domestic interest rates.

Financial markets and rating agencies have applauded the developments. Yields on Egypt's 5yr-Eurobond have fallen significantly to below 10 percent from 15 percent in February and 5-yr CDS levels (a measure of default risk) improved to around 550bps from 1100 bps and above. The 12M currency forward rate is currently trading at EGP54/\$, 12 percent weaker than the official rate. Moody's & S&P have upgraded Egypt credit outlook to positive from negative and stable, respectively. Finally, investors poured a net total of \$12.5bn into LCY debt and now represent 25 percent of the total versus 9 percent in February and remittances have risen up since the exchange rate unification.

Inflation to remain above 35%

Inflation slowed to 33.3 percent y/y in March after jumping to 35.3 percent (and 11 percent m/m) in February. February's spike was likely due to the extreme

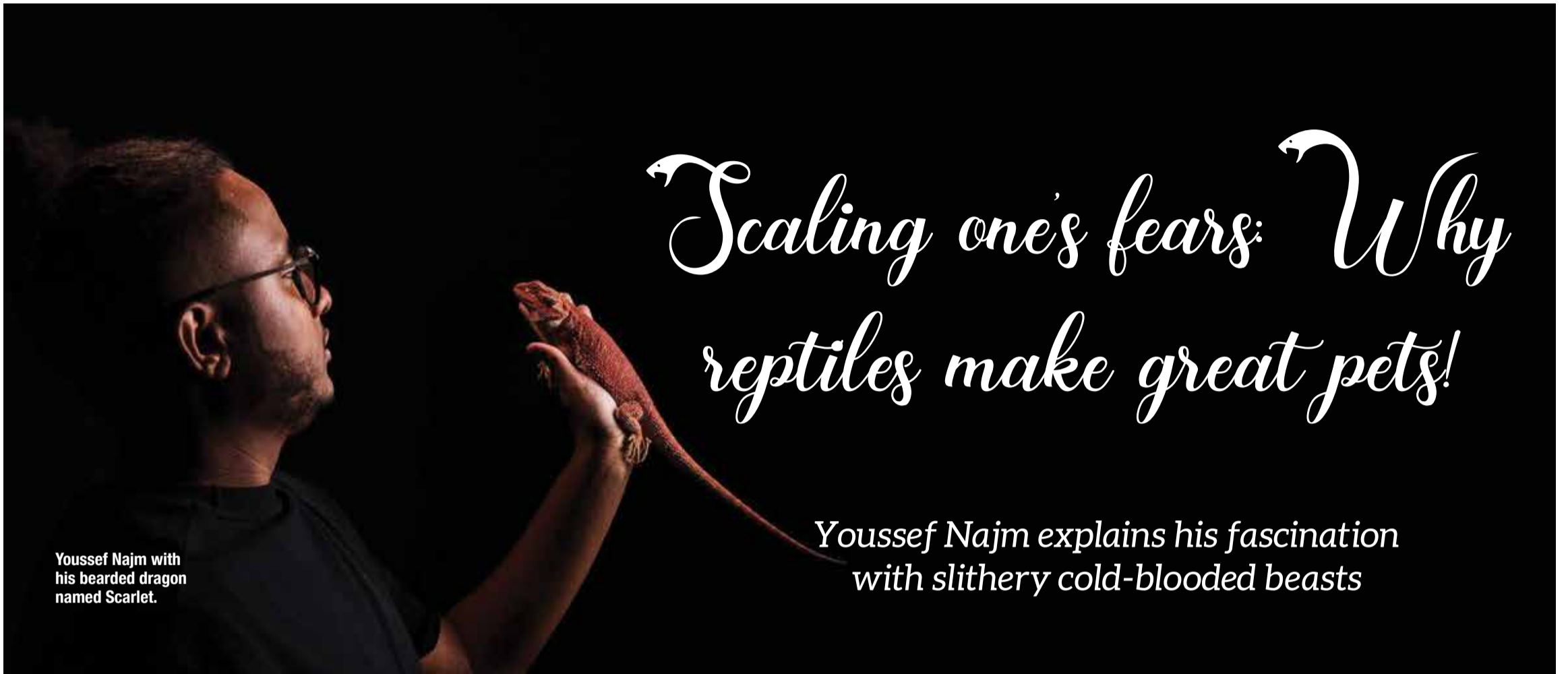
further product repricing by companies and higher utility prices (petroleum, electricity). This in addition to an unfavorable base effect from last year could cause inflation to head back towards 40 percent in the current quarter, before starting to decelerate from July and ending the year below 35 percent. This will still be far from the central bank's target set for Q4 2024 (CY) of 7 percent +/-2 percent which we expect to be revised.

The central bank hiked policy rates by a total of 8 percent during Q1CY2024 (2 percent in February then 6 percent in March) taking the discount rate to 27.75, while average 1-yeartreasury bill yields reached an all-time high of 32 percent in the first week of March, before dropping back to 25.5 percent on huge demand for LCY debt from foreign investors. The 6 percent policy rate hike exceeded expectations but was not enough to offer a positive real yield in the short term. Real yields – using the discount rate – stood at -6 percent in March and will remain negative though improve towards the end of the year.

As we expect inflation to remain high in the coming months, we do not rule out the possibility that the CBE might raise

Weekender

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024



Scaling one's fears: Why reptiles make great pets!

Youssef Najm explains his fascination with slithery cold-blooded beasts

Youssef Najm with his bearded dragon named Scarlet.

By Passant Hisham



It's natural to find snakes and lizards roaming in a zoo, desert or forest. But, what if your first encounter with them is at your friend's house? Not only that, but among a spider, owl, scorpion and a few cats? It must feel pretty insane! It's for that reason that many of Youssef Najm's friends never set foot inside his apartment, which, at some point, housed around 80 pets from various species. "I think I just watched National Geographic too much as a kid," he quipped, explaining his passion for pet hoarding and pet breeding.

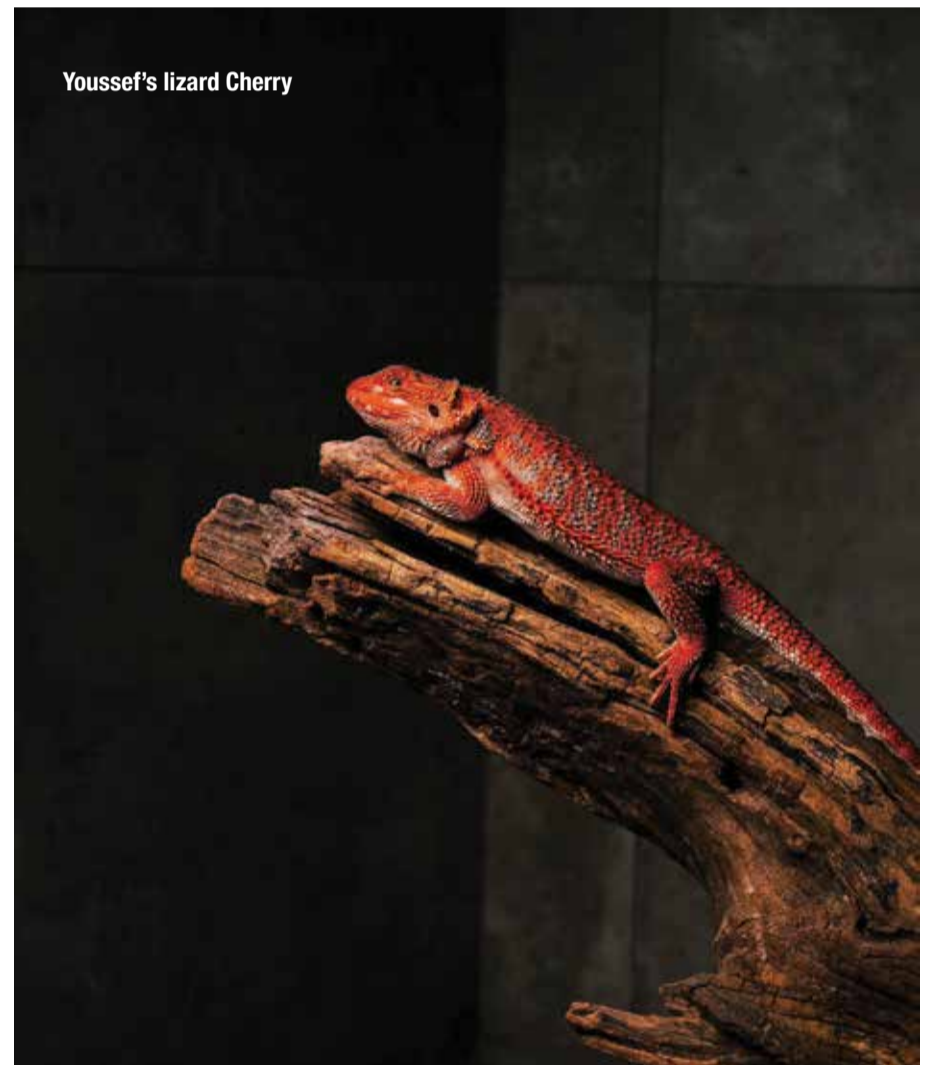
With a particular interest in reptiles, Najm's hobby grew into a message of awareness, educating people about how they can keep reptiles as pets. Drawing from his experience of caring for around 60 snakes and seven lizards, he noted that these cold-blooded animals are not as harmful or scary as commonly perceived. He believes that our misconceptions about them are often rooted in childhood myths and Hollywood movies.

Najm gave an example of a certain reptile, describing it as the "nicest pet in the world". It's the bearded dragon, which experts have found to possess a remarkably gentle and friendly personality. They can stay in the same place all day, barely exploring to chase roaches for food. They don't harm any human being; they might rarely bite, but only when they feel threatened, Najm told Kuwait Times.



Youssef's pet bull snake named Casper

Similar misconceptions surround snakes, with people always imagining their elongated bodies weirdly moving and sniffing humans, ready to attack at any moment. However, Najm refuted this belief, noting it's typically the snakes that fear humans, and all the incidents he remembers from getting bitten by them were due to errors he made, such as making a sudden movement.



Youssef's lizard Cherry

Therefore, he highlighted the importance of understanding the body movements of each reptile for better communication and avoiding any risk. Yet, even in the event of a snakebite, Najm reassured that snakes are relatively harmless, with only around 20 percent of them being venomous. "I would choose to get bitten by one of my snakes than one of my cats. Cats can rip my hand, but snakes would just bite and let go," Najm remarked. According to him, they are also the most convenient pets that one could own. "If you can't take care of a cat, dog or bird, get a snake. All you need is to feed it once a week."

Najm acknowledged that despite his love for reptiles, their relationship isn't as intimate as one might have with a dog, for example. He summarized it as "just food, fight and flight". What he finds most unique about reptiles compared to other animals is their personalities, behaviors and breeding systems. He particularly admires how mixing their genes can result in infinitely fascinating variations, such as producing offspring with unique combinations of colors, stripes, spots or other markings.

One challenge he encountered with reptiles was the lack of awareness about their health issues in Kuwait, with 99 percent of veterinarians unfamiliar with reptile care and unwilling to treat them. Najm recalled an unfortunate incident when one of his bearded dragons got sand in its eye, resulting in permanent blindness because he couldn't find professional help to address the issue. "Therefore, as pet lovers, we have no choice but to do our own research and be their veterinarians ourselves," he rued.



Black Brazilian tarantula



Youssef's pet owl Nugget



Youssef's bearded dragon named Charizard on his shoulder, who lost sight in its right eye.

The time Kuwait led the charge to kick Zionists out of Asian football

By Ahmad Jabr

Have you ever wondered why the Zionist entity's football team plays in Europe instead of Asia, where it is geographically located on top of occupied Palestine? Not many people know that the team representing the Zionist entity had actually played in Asian competitions when the entity was first established, before it was kicked out following a charge by Arab countries led by none other than Kuwait.



Kuwait Football Association President Ahmad Al-Saadoun (circa 1973)

After 1948, when the Zionists declared a state on occupied Palestine, their football team joined the Asian Football Confederation as a founding member in 1954, and later participated in the first AFC Asian Cup in 1956. In total, the Zionists' team participated four times in the tournament, finishing in second place in 1956 and 1960, hosting and winning the cup in 1964 and standing third in 1968.

During that time, Arab teams refused to square off against the Zionist play-



South Korea celebrate after winning the 1956 AFC Asian Cup.

ers, leading to a wide-scale boycott of the first four tournaments held under the AFC umbrella. The boycott and subsequent lack of competition also paved the way for the Zionist entity to achieve good results in the early years of the tournament.

A new crisis arose when the Zionist entity was set to host the 1972 AFC Asian Cup. Kuwait, which aspired to participate in the tournament after becoming an AFC member in 1964, decided that only boycotting was not enough, and that more action was needed. That's when then Kuwait Football Association President Ahmad Al-Saadoun made his first move.

First on agenda

Before he was a lawmaker and multiple-time parliament speaker, Saadoun became president of the KFA in 1967. Expelling the Zionist entity from the AFC was first on his agenda, and for that he embarked on a mission around the continent to gather support.

Several Arab federations joined the AFC in the years that followed — Bahrain in 1969, Iraq, Jordan and Syria in 1970, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 1972 and the UAE in 1974. In the years leading up to the 1972 AFC Asian Cup, the Saadoun-led Kuwaiti delegation visited officials at the newly established football federations in Arab countries, seeking a unified stance in support of a

motion to expel the Zionists from Asian football.

That effort bore fruit when pressure from Arab states — and even some other non-Arab Asian countries that refused to recognize the Zionist entity — such as North Korea — forced the Zionists to withdraw from hosting and participating in the 1972 AFC Asian Cup. The tournament was then moved to Thailand, and coincidentally, Kuwait qualified for the tournament for the first time.

Once and for all

But that was still not enough. Kuwait believed that Arabs and Zionists who were occupying Arab land could not coexist, even on the football field. Kuwait wanted to settle this matter once and for all. For that goal, Kuwait initiated a resolution at the AFC in 1974 to expel the Zionists, which was adopted by a vote of 17 to 13 with 6 abstentions. Kuwait's efforts to gather support for the resolution in the years leading to its initiation are credited for making sure that the resolution passed.

The Zionists were left after their expulsion without a federation where they could compete at a high level or for a chance to qualify for the World Cup. To address this issue, FIFA allowed them to compete in competitions organized under the umbrella of the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). In 1992, UEFA admitted the Zionist entity's football federation as an



Ahmad Jabr is a journalist with a constant eye out for news. His passion for his home country of Palestine is always evident, including in his writings. When he's not on the hunt for new, innovative ways to tell stories, he's either listening to music, watching anime or supporting his favorite basketball team (all with a big mug of coffee in hand).

associate member, and then as a full member two years later.

The story of how Kuwait led the charge to expel the Zionists out of Asian football serves as a testament to the country's unwavering support for Palestine, and its unchanged position against the occupation of their land. To this day, Kuwaiti athletes refuse to compete against players representing the Zionist entity, reflecting their country's strong stand against normalization and rejection of any compromise that negates Palestinian rights.



What's cooking in our kitchens

Food has the magical ability to bring people together. Cooking with others or sharing recipes close to one's heart can be a great way to get to know people and appreciate different cultures.

PALESTINIAN MUSAKHAN

By Faten Omar



Musakhan, my forever favorite Palestinian dish, embodies the rich Palestinian cuisine with its vibrant flavors and aromatic spices. Every bite of Musakhan evokes how rich our cuisine is. I make my dish with love, using ingredients that come from my beloved lands such as olive oil from Tulkarem in Palestine and Jordanian sumac. This is a dish that fills my heart and soul.

Ingredients

- Whole chicken
- 1 cup of olive oil
- 3 large spoons of sumac
- Pine nuts or almonds
- 3 large onions, cut into thin slices
- 4 Iranian flatbreads
- Salt
- Black pepper
- Bay leaves and cardamom (whole spices)

How to make it

1. First, cut the chicken into pieces then boil the chicken with the whole spices (bay leaves and cardamom) and a spoonful of olive oil. Set the stock aside after the chicken is cooked.
2. Now start with the onions. Place the onions in the pan over low heat, adding a little salt and olive oil. Add

some of the chicken stock then cover the pan with a glass lid so you can easily see the amount of remaining water.

3. Stir the onions from time to time so they cook evenly. When the water evaporates and the onions are cooked well, add the sumac.
4. Grill the chicken inside the oven then let it soak in the onions and olive oil.
5. Soak the bread with the olive oil and onions and place them on a serving plate, then place half of the onions on top of it, then add a little chicken stock on top and arrange the grilled chicken.
6. Add more sumac on the top.
7. Roast the pine nuts or the almonds and decorate your dish.



PAV BHAJI

By Shakir Reshamwala



Pav bhaji is a beloved street food dish originating from the bustling streets of Mumbai. It consists of a flavorful vegetable curry known as "bhaji" served alongside buttered and toasted bread rolls called "pav", which are also a key part of Bombay's other iconic street-side snack — vada pav. Pav bhaji is a culinary delight that combines spicy, tangy and buttery flavors, making it a favorite among food enthusiasts.

Ingredients

- 3 medium-sized potatoes, boiled and mashed
- 1 cup finely chopped cauliflower florets, carrots and green beans
- ½ cup green peas, boiled
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 large tomato, finely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper (capsicum), finely chopped
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1-inch piece of ginger, grated
- 2-3 green chilies, finely chopped (adjust according to spice preference)
- 2 tablespoons pav bhaji masala
- 1 teaspoon red chili powder (adjust to taste)
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon oil
- Fresh coriander leaves, chopped for garnish
- Lemon wedges for serving
- Pav (bread rolls), sliced and lightly toasted with butter

How to make it

1. Heat oil and butter in a large pan or kadai over medium heat.
2. Add minced garlic, grated ginger and chopped green chilies. Sauté for a minute until fragrant.
3. Add chopped onions and cook until they turn translucent.
4. Add chopped tomatoes and cook until they soften and become mushy.



5. Add chopped bell pepper (capsicum) and cook for a few minutes until they are slightly tender.
6. Add finely chopped mixed vegetables and boiled green peas. Mix well.
7. Add pav bhaji masala, red chili powder, turmeric powder and salt. Mix until all the vegetables are well coated with the spices.
8. Add the mashed potatoes and mix everything together.
9. Using a potato masher or the back of a spoon, mash the vegetables until you get a smooth consistency. You can also leave it slightly chunky

10. Cook the bhaji for another 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally. If it looks dry, you can add a little water to adjust the consistency.
11. Once the bhaji is cooked and the flavors are well combined, turn off the heat.
12. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves and a dollop of butter.
13. Serve hot with lightly toasted pav (bread rolls) and lemon wedges on the side.

Enjoy your homemade pav bhaji!



Book Review



Inspired by resistance in "The Handmaid's Tale", protesters in many parts of the world tend to protest wearing the handmaids' dress in Gilead.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

By Ghadeer Ghloom

In Margaret Atwood's dystopian modern classic novel, "The Handmaid's Tale", women's physical and psychological oppression through raping ceremonies, constant monitoring, control, objectification and dehumanization under Gilead's patriarchal totalitarian regime is skillfully portrayed through the narration of Offred, the protagonist handmaid. Women are reduced to mere wombs for giving birth as their bodies are exploited for the state's procreation goals. Women are divided in hierarchy based on their fertility, which perpetuates competition, envy and distrust among each other, reinforcing



Margaret Atwood

Gilead's oppressive structure by pitting them against each other.

The protagonist's narration introduces readers to open their eyes to the struggles of the handmaids, shedding

light on her own suffering for living under Gilead's regime, and the resilience required to navigate a world where a woman is controlled by others. In case of fertility failure, the blame falls completely on the woman, for there is no acceptance of the fact that many of Gilead's commanders are sterile. Handmaids who fail to get pregnant are called "unwomen" and are sent to the colonies to clean toxic waste till the end of their lives.

Atwood also highlights that while many submit to oppressive power, individuals with a free mind and spirit are capable of challenging that status quo by embodying the theme of resistance through characters like

Offred, who engages in acts of defiance against Gilead's regime to reclaim her identity.

Atwood portrays the practice of stripping women of their identities through different examples, such as giving them names that reflect their belonging to men who are Gilead's commanders. Offred's name signifies her belonging to a commander named Fred, symbolizing women's lack of autonomy and role as possessions to certain men. Other handmaids are similarly named, depending on the name of the commander possessing them. This erasure of true names is one of the main reminders of women's subordinate status in Gilead.

Who is Margaret Atwood?

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author, known for her multiple works including novels, essays and poetry. Her book "The Handmaid's Tale" has achieved wide success, receiving numerous awards. The novel has been translated into multiple languages including Arabic, and has been adapted into a popular television series. The book explores insightful themes about dystopian societies, politics and feminism.



Reading culture in the digital age

By Ghadeer Ghloom

Kuwait Times stepped into the world of literacy in its modern shape, discovering the level of digital integration, community engagement and reading culture in Kuwait. In an interview with an owner of a local bookstore and keen observer of literary trends, who preferred to remain anonymous, Kuwait Times gleaned a better understanding of this topic.

TikTok's impact

The bookshop owner highlighted a crucial aspect, which is the role of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, in shaping readers' choices and preferences. She pointed out how Netflix and TikTok have significantly influenced the reading habits of individuals in Kuwait. Moreover, the availability of counterfeit books from South Asia at competitive prices has also played a pivotal role in attracting readers to bookstores, underscoring the allure of affordable yet questionable quality reads.

Consumer demands

As the landscape of bookstores in Kuwait continues to evolve, she emphasized the adaptation of these establishments to cater to the changing interests of readers. In particular, there has

been a noticeable shift towards stocking books trending on TikTok to align with the evolving tastes of the audience, reflecting a proactive approach to meet consumer-demand and preferences.

Book clubs and literary events

Furthermore, she shed light on the instrumental role played by book clubs and literary events in nurturing a vibrant reading culture in Kuwait. These platforms not only serve as forums for discussing and recommending books, but also impart valuable insights on the importance of acquiring original copies, thereby combating the proliferation of counterfeit publications and promoting ethics.

Bestselling genre in Kuwait

Regarding literary preferences, she



identified romance and fantasy as the bestselling genres in Kuwait, reflecting the enduring appeal of love stories among readers. Additionally, notable

Kuwaiti authors like Layla Al-Ammar, Nejoud Al-Yaqout, Chelsea Abdullah and Shahad Al-Shammery were highlighted during the discussion, symbolizing the

local talent making significant strides in the literary domain.

In a nutshell

In the wake of the digital age, she discussed the impact of technological advancements on reading habits in Kuwait. While digital platforms like TikTok have propelled certain books to popularity and kindled interest in reading, concerns regarding the quality of content promoted online have also been raised. In response to these developments, bookstores in Kuwait are leveraging digital mediums to rejuvenate readers, enthusiasm and engagement to adapt to the changing literary landscape.



Event: The Cooks' Competition puppet show
Location: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre
Date: April 25 to 27, 2024

Event: Speak up Kuwait
Location: Yarmouk Cultural Center
Date: April 27, 2024

Event: Macintosh Music Festival
Location: The Arena
Date: April 27, 2024

Event: Teatro Choral
Location: Teatro Entertainment Center - Dasman Complex
Date: April 27, 2024

Event: Reflection Expo
Location: Museum of Modern Art
Date: April 28, 2024

Event: World Dance Day
Location: LAPA, Al-Qibla School
Date: April 29, 2024

Sports

India's Pant boosts World Cup hopes with IPL batting blitz

Delhi's fourth win in nine matches keep their playoff hopes alive

NEW DELHI: Rishabh Pant smashed an unbeaten 88 as he led Delhi Capitals to a tense IPL win over Gujarat Titans on Wednesday, boosting his chances of playing for India at the T20 World Cup. Delhi posted 224-4 courtesy of a 113-run stand between Pant and fellow left-hander Axar Patel, who hit 66, after they slipped to 44-3 inside six overs at their home Arun Jaitley Stadium. The hosts kept Gujarat down to 220-8 to win by four runs after David Miller's 23-ball 55 and an unbeaten 21 off 11 deliveries by Rashid Khan. Mukesh Kumar kept his nerve in the final over for Delhi's fourth win in nine matches as they kept their playoff hopes alive in the T20 tournament.

Pant, 26, struck his third half-century of this season after 14 months away from top level cricket following a frightening car accident when his Mercedes rammed into a barrier, flipped and caught fire in December 2022.

Pant, a wicketkeeper-batsman, suffered multiple injuries and was rushed to hospital before being airlifted to Mumbai for further treatment and surgery. "Everyday that I'm in the middle, I feel better," man of the match Pant said after his 43-ball blitz studded with five fours and eight sixes. "Every hour on the field matters, I love being on the field. I try to give it my 100 percent. I think the first six in the match gives me the confidence in a game." Pant has not only fired with the bat in the IPL but his sharp work behind the stumps prompted Delhi's director of cricket Sourav Ganguly and coach Ricky Ponting to back the India star for making the national team for the World Cup in June.

'Great fight'

Up and coming Australian batsman Jake Fraser-McGurk gave Delhi a strong start with his 14-ball 23 but medium-pace bowler Sandeep Warrier took three wickets including two in one over. Patel, a bowling all-rounder promoted to number three in the batting, brought up his fifty with a boundary off Rashid before another Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad had him caught at long-on.

Pant reached his fifty in style with a six off Mohit Sharma and then hammered the medium-pace bowler in a 31-run 20th over when he finished with a six, four and three hits over the fence to raise the roof.

South African Tristan Stubbs watched the blitz from the other end after he smashed Sai Kishore in the 19th over, which went for 22 runs, for his unbeaten seven-ball 26. In reply, Gujarat lost skipper Shubman Gill for six off Anrich Nortje before impact substitute Sai Sudarshan smashed 65 off 39 balls.

Gujarat lost regular wickets but the left-handed Miller smashed Nortje for three sixes and a four to give Delhi a scare before his departure in the 18th over. Rashid kept up the fight till the end as Gujarat needed 19 off the final over and five on the last ball.

"I think we played some really good cricket, disappointing to lose in the end, but great character shown by everyone," said Gill. "Great fight till the end and we never thought we were out of the game at any point." — AFP



NEW DELHI: Delhi Capitals' captain Rishabh Pant (L) plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Titans at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

Osaka seals first win on clay since 2022 in Madrid

MADRID: Naomi Osaka says she is "embracing the clay a lot more now" as she captured her first victory on the surface since 2022 in the Madrid Open first round on Wednesday. The Japanese former world number one grew up playing on hard courts in the United States and has mostly struggled on the red dirt over the years. But back at the Caja Magica for the first time in two years, Osaka looked comfortable during her 6-4, 6-1 win over Belgian lucky loser Greet Minnen to book a second-round meeting with 15th seed Liudmila Samsonova.

It was just the fourth victory on clay for Osaka since the start of 2021 and the four-time Grand slam champion is hopeful it won't be her last in Madrid this fortnight. "I've had several 'incidents' on clay but I'm embracing it a lot more now," the 26-year-old Osaka told reporters in the Spanish capital.

"I feel like there's definitely beauty to it. I'm taking a lot of inspiration from people that do very well here. I'm not expecting to be like, Iga (Swiatek), or something, but I just want to do the best with what I have." On Arantxa Sanchez stadium on Wednesday, Osaka was breezing through her service games in the opening set but couldn't convert any of her first three break point opportunities before she finally got the break she needed in the 10th game to take a one-set lead.

The second set was a stroll compared to the first as Osaka built a 5-0 advantage and secured the win with a backhand winner on the 79-minute mark. "I

think I slid a couple of times to my forehand pretty well, so I was excited about that," explained Osaka. "She was hitting really good drop shots but I think I got to a couple quite well. I think just movement-wise I'm feeling a lot more comfortable. I think shot-wise, I hit a couple of heavy balls. Hopefully I'm able to continue that."

Osaka has extra motivation to do well on clay this season due to the fact the Olympic Games will be played on the red dirt at Roland Garros this summer. "The Olympics are a really big goal for me. I would really love to play them," she said.

Raducanu struggles

Fellow former US Open champion Emma Raducanu was not as fortunate as the Briton fell 6-2, 6-2 to Argentinian qualifier Maria Lourdes Carle. Raducanu has played just six matches this month — across three events — but blamed mental and physical fatigue for her performance and said she will take a few days off to rest after competing in the Billie Jean King Cup, Stuttgart and Madrid in the last two weeks.

"I think from the performance today it was very clear that mentally and emotionally I was exhausted," said Raducanu. "I was trying to push through. I was pushing through Stuttgart and was just unable to push through today. It's a shame that I was feeling so good on the court and today happened but I guess this sport is just pretty brutal."

Fresh off a title run in Rouen last week, 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens picked up a sixth consecutive win on clay with a hard-fought 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 success against Italian Martina Trevisan. Home favourite and former world number two Paula Badosa, who is struggling with long-term back pain since she sustained a stress fracture last year, crashed out 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 to

French Open has 'fingers crossed' for Nadal appearance

PARIS: French Open organizers have their "fingers crossed" that Rafael Nadal will be able to play this year's event, tournament director Amelie Mauresmo said on Thursday. Nadal, the record 14-time Roland Garros champion, said on Wednesday he would only play the clay-court Grand Slam this year if he felt "capable enough to compete".

The 37-year-old Spaniard did not play last year after the Australian Open due to a hip injury and has hinted strongly he will retire after this season. But Mauresmo is hopeful Nadal will be able to play the French Open, which starts on May 26.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed for him, but also for us because we want to welcome him here to Roland Garros," Mauresmo told a press conference. "He is at home (here) and he knows it. Knowing whether there will be a tribute (to Nadal) or not, this year, next year, is very dependent on him and the decisions he takes."

"We're waiting to see and we will follow his wishes." This year, the French Open will have two covered courts for the first time, with Court Suzanne Lenglen to join Court Philippe Chatrier in having a retractable roof. "The roof will allow us in the event of bad weather to have a little more flexibility in our programming throughout the fortnight," said Mauresmo, who ruled out extra night session matches being played on Court Suzanne Lenglen. The scheduling of night sessions has often been criticised in the past for too often featuring men's matches instead of women's ties. — AFP

Norman sees Adelaide success as blueprint for LIV Golf events

ADELAIDE: Entertainment, star names and awareness of culture are the three key ingredients Greg Norman has used to build LIV Golf, with the Australian confident the formula can be transplanted anywhere to capitalize on pent-up demand. Now in its second full season, spanning 14 tournaments, the Saudi-backed league and its 54-hole format, punctuated by thumping music, has injected itself as a rival to the PGA Tour, poaching a slew of high-profile talent.

Its fledgling success is nowhere more evident than in Norman's homeland, with fans flocking to the tour's Adelaide stop last year and capacity expanded at this week's event to cater for demand. "This event here, from last to this year, is the benchmark for LIV," said Norman. "We get all the other events, 13 events around the world to take a look at what we've delivered here and what Adelaide has delivered and what the state government has delivered and what the local community and the region has delivered, and you go, it can be done. Here it is."

South Australia state premier Peter Malinauskas took a gamble on agreeing to host the tournament in the face of blowback over concern about Saudi Arabia's human rights record. But the risk paid off, with Adelaide named the world's best golf event of 2023 by the World Golf Awards, which are part of the World Travel Awards.

"We always took a calculated risk as a government that Australian golf fans had been starved of high-quality professional golf for decades ... and they responded in droves," he said. "What I think will take this event to another level this year is that there are a lot more people here. We've increased the capacity of the facilities here at Grange (Golf Club)."

Norman believes the LIV formula in Adelaide, with an interactive fan village, pop-up food options, golf-focused entertainment and live music at the end of the day, can be taken anywhere, particularly markets deprived of elite golf such as Australia. "Every market is different because we've got to look at the different cultures that we work with," he said. "But when you look at the three specific things, you have entertainment and you have golf and you have culture. "So if you take those three ingredients everywhere you go in the world, you'll be able to figure out the right way to inject a LIV event somewhere."

'Quality golf'

Marc Leishman, part of the all-Australian "Ripper" team, sees unlimited opportunities, with the potential for each of the 13 LIV teams to host a "home" tournament. "There's opportunities all around the world, markets that haven't been hit yet like Adelaide hadn't been," he said. "You've got Torque (team) - there's an opportunity for a tournament in Chile, the South African lads I'm sure would love to have one in South Africa, you've got all of Asia and India. "There's just so many opportunities, places that haven't seen world-class golf for a long time."

Fellow Australian and former major winner Cameron Smith added: "I'm definitely putting my hand up for more of an international schedule and getting fans out that haven't seen quality golf for a while and showing them what LIV is all about."

Norman is already planning LIV's 2025 and 2026 schedules, despite uncertainty around what the global golf calendar may look like. A framework merger agreement between the PGA Tour, DP World Tour and Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF) - LIV Golf's financial backers - was unveiled last June to controversy. Talks have since been extended about a deal to bring all sides together in a partnership, but no outcome is in sight. "I would love to give you insight but I don't have any," said Norman. "I really don't want to know what's going on over there because we are so fixated on growing and developing and building out what LIV is today and looking and doing our schedule for 2025 and going into 2026. "Our responsibility is to look after our people, our players, and where we want to go." — AFP



Kuwait Special Olympics holds medical tests

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Special Olympics carried out medical tests for its players within the "healthy societies" program that is being carried out by the Special Olympics in 2024. The tests that were done over two days included the mouth, teeth and healthy nutrition at Tomooh Club clinic, as several students were examined by a selected groups of doctors approved by the International Special Olympics including doctors Yousuf Al-Awadhi, Ahmad Arif, Shireen Abdulsalam and (5) volunteer doctors from the center, as four cases were referred to the specialized health centers, as instructed by the healthy societies program. In all 47 players were tested at the healthy nutrition clinic under the supervision of specialist Dalal Buhandi, who is accredited by the

International Special Olympics along with 15 volunteers and Tomooh Club coaches, as tests included measuring height, weight, BMI and blood pressure.

The National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli said the examination aimed at finding out the health and physical efficiency of the players to give them the healthy pattern of life, that qualify them to practice their sport with high efficiency and to bring out the best in them during sport events.

She said this test comes within the healthy societies program that concerned with dealing with

health challenges the special needs players face through societal solutions. She added the program works on enhancing care and prevention programs to improve health conditions and deal with what they may face in the form of health problems through several programs that were carried out by Kuwait Special Olympics over six years most notably players testing program, healthy families gathering, enhancing physical fitness programs in addition to the programs of qualifying specialists in the fields of the health program. Buresli thanked all those who contributed to the program.



Sports

Monaco win makes PSG to wait for another French Ligue 1 title

‘As long as the school year is not finished we cannot get our final grade’

PARIS: Monaco's 1-0 win over Lille on Wednesday left Paris Saint-Germain to wait at least until this weekend before securing yet another French Ligue 1 title. Ousmane Dembele and Kylian Mbappe both scored twice as PSG eased to a 4-1 victory at Lorient earlier, meaning a slip-up by second-placed Monaco in the day's late game would confirm the Qatar-owned club as champions. However, Youssef Fofana's second-half strike proved enough to give in-form Monaco their fourth consecutive win as they strengthened their grip on second place. The principality club are the only team who can still mathematically catch PSG with four games remaining, but the gap is 11 points and will surely not be made up.

Luis Enrique's side will have the chance to guarantee the championship on Saturday with a victory when they entertain relegation-threatened Le Havre. It will be a record-extending 12th French league championship triumph for the Parisians, and a 10th in the last 12 campaigns going back to the start of the Qatar era which has transformed Ligue 1.

PSG have a potential treble in their sights, with an upcoming Champions League semi-final against Borussia Dortmund and the French Cup final against Lyon next month. They made short work of relegation-threatened Lorient in Brittany despite making a host of changes, with captain Marquinhos, Achraf Hakimi and Vitinha among the players rested.

"We did our job. We were serious and we got all three points, despite making numerous changes," Luis Enrique said. "As long as the school year is not finished we cannot get our final grade," he added when asked about the prospect of clinching the title.

"What is happening is exciting. We are close, but we still have a month of the season to go, with other things to accomplish. "There are seven or eight match-

es left, and to get to the eighth we will need to remain fully focused," added the Spaniard in reference to the Champions League final at Wembley on June 1.

Dembele gave PSG the lead at the Stade du Moustoir on 19 minutes, collecting a Senny Mayulu pass and coming in from the right flank before sending a shot low into the bottom-left corner.

Mbappe's 43 goals

Nuno Mendes then cut the ball back for Mbappe to double their lead midway through the first half. PSG were looking to extend their unbeaten run in Ligue 1 to 25 games going back to September and their only loss of the campaign so far, at home to Nice.

Lorient, in contrast, were aiming to avoid a fourth consecutive defeat and climb out of the automatic relegation places. Mbappe produced a brilliant piece of skill to get away from Nathaniel Adjei on the touchline to the left of the box before squaring low for Dembele to tap in the third goal on the hour mark.

That took Dembele's tally for the season to five, after he also netted in both legs of the Champions League quarter-final win against Barcelona. Lorient pulled one back on 73 minutes when Benjamin Mendy crossed for Ivorian striker Mohamed Bamba to head in.

However, Mbappe completed the scoring for PSG in the 90th minute with a trademark strike across the goalkeeper from the left-hand side of the box. That took Mbappe to 43 goals for the campaign in all competitions in 43 appearances, with 26 goals coming in Ligue 1. Monaco's win leaves them five points clear of third-placed Brest and six ahead of Lille in fourth, meaning a return to the Champions League for the first time since 2018/19 is highly likely for Adi Huetter's team. The top three in Ligue 1 will qualify automatically for the new, expanded Champions League, with the



LORIENT: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe (CR) and Lorient's French defender #15 Julien Laporte (CL) fight for the ball during the French L1 football match between FC Lorient and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at the Stade du Moustoir in Lorient. — AFP

team in fourth entering in the preliminary rounds. Lille are four points better off than fifth-placed Nice, who drew 2-2 at Marseille in Wednesday's other game.

Terem Moffi gave Nice the lead, but Jonathan Clauss levelled for Marseille who then had Faris Moumbagna sent off at the end of the first half. Pierre-Emerick

Aubameyang then put 10-man Marseille ahead from a penalty for his 26th goal of the season in all competitions. However, Melvin Bard equalised for Nice, and Marseille are a point adrift of seventh, which could yet be enough to qualify for Europe depending on the outcome of the French Cup final. — AFP

Xavi to remain Barcelona coach

BARCELONA: Xavi will remain as coach of Barcelona, the Spanish giants told AFP on Wednesday, despite having announced in January that he planned to quit at the end of the season due to the "cruel and unpleasant" nature of the job. Spanish media reported that the 44-year-old, who had signed a contract extension until 2025 last autumn, decided on his dramatic change of mind after a day of meetings with club president Joan Laporta and sporting director Deco.

Xavi's decision comes just a week after Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League in the quarter-finals by Paris Saint-Germain. On Sunday, the defending champions fell 11 points behind Real Madrid in La Liga's title race following a 3-2 Clasico defeat to their bitter rivals. Former Barcelona midfielder Xavi said he felt "liberated" when he made his decision to stand down. He had repeatedly said the job was his "dream" but admitted the pressure of the role eventually proved too much.

"You are made to feel every day that you are not good enough," he said after a shock 5-3 home loss to Villarreal. "It happened to all the coaches: Pep (Guardiola) told me, it happened to (Ernesto) Valverde, I saw Luis Enrique suffer." He added: "You often feel there is lack of respect, you feel that your work is not appreciated. It wears you down in terms of health, of mental health, your mood, your emotional state. I am a positive guy but the energy goes down, down, down, until the point at which you say: it makes no sense. It makes no sense to continue."



SANT JOAN DESPI: Barcelona's Spanish coach Xavi addresses a press conference at the Joan Gamper training ground in Sant Joan Despi, near Barcelona, on April 25, 2024. — AFP

Barcelona, who have struggled with financial issues in recent seasons, appointed Xavi as boss in November 2021 and he helped turn their fortunes around, lifting the league title last term. But this season they were also thrashed 4-1 by Real in the Spanish Super Cup and were dumped out of the Copa del Rey by Athletic Bilbao. "The announcement liberated me on a personal level," he said in January. "From June 30 I will not continue as Barca coach ... as a Barca fan, I think the club needs a change of dynamic." — AFP



PARIS: (FILES) Triathlon athletes dive in the Seine river during the men's 2023 World Triathlon Olympic Games Test Event in Paris, on August 18, 2023. — AFP

Paris to hold swimming events in murky Seine

PARIS: Organizers of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris can be forgiven for feeling a little queasy over their commitment to hold open water swimming in the spectacular but not quite yet pristine river Seine.

Last August, the swimming marathon 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 Pont Alexandre III bridge and, with the Invalides and Eiffel Tower in the background, head one kilometre 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 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 to swim in 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. 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 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 — the worst in nearly six decades, according to officials — sent E. coli readings to six times the target level set by World Aquatics. The city of Paris insisted they had "learned" from the sampling problems at the test events. National and local authorities have also invested 1.4 billion euros (more than \$1.5bn) in five projects designed to store and clean the water, which are due to come on stream in the next few weeks.

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", officials concede, with the main fear being "exceptional rainfall". Even so, if new water treatment and storage projects "had been ready, we would have had no problems at the test events last August", insisted the city's deputy mayor, Pierre Rabadan. — AFP

Hearn threatens to move World Snooker Championship

SHEFFIELD: Promoter Barry Hearn has threatened to move the World Snooker Championship from its Sheffield home in favor of a rotation of host venues potentially including Saudi Arabia. The viability of Sheffield's Crucible Theatre to stage the World Championship came into question ahead of the latest edition of the tournament, which started last weekend.

Seven-time champion Ronnie O'Sullivan suggested it should be moved to Saudi Arabia or China in order to maximize profit potential. Underlining the issues with the ageing venue, Iran's Hossein Vafaei blasted conditions at the Crucible, calling it "smelly" and comparing practice room facilities to playing in a garage after losing in the first round to Judd Trump.

The Crucible's current deal expires in 2027 and Hearn said there should be no room for sentiment over the future of the venue. Hearn, a former World Snooker chairman and current president of Matchroom Sport, told the BBC: "I am doing absolutely everything I can to stay in Sheffield and it takes two to tango - I'll stay here while we're wanted, and I think we're wanted."

"But they've got to be realistic. We've said for the last few years we need a new venue that seats 2,500 to 3,000 people." Saudi Arabia's growing interest in the sport has dramatically changed the landscape for discussions, with the first ranking tournament due to be staged in the Gulf State next season.

Hearn would have no qualms about taking the tournament away from the venue which has staged every World Championship since 1977, and even proposed a scenario where it could be moved around the world on a rotational basis. — AFP

Today's Matches

SPANISH LEAGUE		
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid CF		22:00
beIN Sports HD1		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE SERIE A		
Frosinone Calcio v Salernitana		21:45
beIN Sports		
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
VfL Bochum v TSG 1899 Hoffenheim		21:30
beIN Sports		
FRENCH LEAGUE		
HSC Montpellier v FC Nantes		22:00
beIN Sports		

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **Kutbuddin** holder of Indian Passport No. M0404244, do hereby change my name to Kutbuddin (as given name) Bagidorawala (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Kutbuddin Bagidorawala and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.
(#5198, 24/04/2024)

Emergency call 112

Liverpool's title bid rocked by Everton

Fernandes spares Ten Hag's blushes as Man Utd survive Blades' scare



LIVERPOOL: Everton's English defender #06 James Tarkowski heads at goal during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool's Premier League title bid suffered a devastating blow in a 2-0 defeat at Merseyside rivals Everton, while Manchester United spared Erik ten Hag's blushes with a 4-2 victory against lowly Sheffield United on Wednesday.

Jürgen Klopp's side were beaten at Goodison Park for the first time in 14 years in a brutal setback to their hopes of catching leaders Arsenal. Jarrad Branthwaite put Everton ahead in the 27th minute as the defender prodded the ball under Liverpool keeper Alisson Becker via the post after the Reds made a hash of clearing a free-kick.

With Liverpool's Mohamed Salah once again struggling to convert chances to equalise, Everton striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin delivered the knockout punch with a 58th-minute header. Second-placed Liverpool remain three points behind Arsenal, who have a vastly superior goal difference, with both sides having four games left.

Third-placed Manchester City, who visit Brighton on Saturday, will be crowned English champions for an unprecedented fourth successive season if they

win their last six matches. Liverpool have reportedly opened talks with Feyenoord's Arne Slot to take over from Klopp, whose long goodbye looks set to end with a whimper.

It hardly the scenario Klopp envisioned when Liverpool beat Chelsea in the League Cup final in February. Back then, his team were in contention for a quadruple that would have capped his final season in spectacular fashion. Instead, the end of Klopp's nine-year reign is becoming a damp squib, with Liverpool knocked out of the FA Cup quarter-finals by Manchester United and losing to Atalanta at the same stage of the Europa League as their title challenge evaporates.

"Arsenal and Manchester City must have a very bad moment," Klopp said when asked if Liverpool can win the title. "I don't know. I can only apologise for today to the people. We should have done better but we didn't." At Old Trafford, Ten Hag's side twice trailed to the league's bottom club before Bruno Fernandes came to his beleaguered manager's aid in the second half.

Jayden Bogle put the Blades ahead and al-

though Harry Maguire equalised before half-time, Ben Brereton Diaz restored the visitors' advantage soon after the interval.

Fernandes to the rescue

Fernandes bailed out Ten Hag with a penalty equaliser before the Portugal midfielder's long-range rocket put United in front with nine minutes left. Rasmus Hojlund got United's fourth to ensure they could finally enjoy a first league win in five games since beating Everton on March 9. It was a temporary reprieve for Ten Hag, who hopes to salvage sixth-placed United's dismal season by winning the FA Cup and finishing high enough to qualify for the Europa League. Ten Hag endured stinging criticism after United stumbled into the FA Cup final with a spluttering penalty-shootout win after blowing a three-goal lead against second-tier Coventry on Sunday.

"I think we played quite well, also creating many more chances. Many positives. But also negatives. Conceding two goals from giveaways. It's unacceptable. We want to play dynamic, attacking football,"

Ten Hag said. Referee Stuart Attwell was embroiled in further controversy after contentiously disallowing a Wolves goal in Bournemouth's 1-0 win at Molineux.

Attwell was already in the spotlight for his role as VAR in denying Nottingham Forest three penalties in Sunday's 2-0 defeat at Everton, which led Forest to insinuate bias as he supports relegation rivals Luton.

This time, he adjudged Matheus Cunha to have fouled Justin Kluivert in an off-the-ball incident in the build up to Hwang Hee-chan's second-half equaliser, which looked to have cancelled out Antoine Semenyo's opener.

Attwell remained in the thick of the action as he showed a straight red card to Bournemouth defender Milos Kerkez for a foul on Matt Doherty.

Jean-Philippe Mateta scored for a fifth consecutive home match to fire Crystal Palace to a 2-0 win over Newcastle.

Mateta broke the deadlock in the 55th minute and added the second late on to end Newcastle's four-match unbeaten run and damage their prospects of qualifying for Europe. — AFP

BJK Cup Finals replaced by knock-out round

PARIS: The 2024 Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Seville will be played as a straight knock-out competition without a group phase for the first time, the International Tennis Federation announced Thursday. Organisers have scrapped the group stage for the finals, scheduled for November 12 until November 20 this year.

The top four seeded nations will receive byes into the quarter-finals at La Cartuja Stadium in Seville, with the other eight teams to play in round one. The Billie Jean King Cup and Davis Cup Finals, which will be held in Malaga from November 19, will also overlap for the first time, creating a "fortnight of World Cup tennis".

"This provides us with a great opportunity to maximise viewing and fan engagement across both World Cup of tennis competitions," said ITF president David Haggerty. "This is also an exciting way for fans to enjoy both the men's and women's events and, by travelling between two cities, take full advantage of the Andalusian region."

The qualifying rounds were completed earlier in April. Reigning BJK Cup champions Canada were joined in the Finals by Australia, the Czech Republic, Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the United States and hosts Spain. — AFP

Heat barrage stuns Celtics, Thunder thrash Pelicans

LOS ANGELES: The Miami Heat unleashed a barrage of three-pointers to score a series-leveling 111-101 upset over the top-seeded Boston Celtics in their NBA Eastern Conference playoff duel on Wednesday. Eighth seeds Miami, playing without the injured Jimmy Butler, produced a battling performance to knot the best-of-seven-series at 1-1 as the teams head back to Florida for game three on Saturday.

Tyler Herro led the Miami scoring with 24 points, part of a balanced offensive effort that saw all five Heat starters post double-digit points. But the key to the Miami victory was their accuracy from long-range, with the Heat draining 23 three-pointers from 43 attempts compared to Boston's 12 of 32.

Herro knocked down six threes while Caleb Martin added five in his tally of 21 points. Bam Adebayo also finished with 21 points while Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 14 and Nikola Jovic 11. Boston, meanwhile, was led by 33 points from Jaylen Brown, with Jayson Tatum finishing with 28 in a losing effort.

The win was all the more unexpected given Miami's 20-point drubbing by Boston in game one on Sunday—something Herro said had motivated the Heat for game two. "We lost badly in game one and everybody responded tonight, and that's all you can ask for from a group of guys," Herro said afterwards.

Herro revealed that he had been encouraged by Butler to take on a leadership role in the absence of the injured Miami talisman. "Just before this series, JB texted me to take the team and you know lead these guys, just make every right play," Herro said.



BOSTON: Payton Pritchard #11 of the Boston Celtics can't find a way around Duncan Robinson #55 of the Miami Heat during the third quarter of game two of the Eastern Conference First Round Playoffs at TD Garden on April 24, 2024 in Boston. — AFP

Thunder rout Pelicans

Boston star Tatum meanwhile said the Celtics had expected a backlash after their comfortable game one victory. "We knew it wasn't going to be easy," Tatum said. "There's a lot of history between these two franchises, especially recently." "Regardless of seeding or who's in or who's out—it's the playoffs... we've got a chance to play another one on Saturday—should be a fun one." While the Eastern Conference top seeds were left licking their wounds, there were no such problems for Boston's Western Conference counterparts Oklahoma City.

The No.1 ranked Thunder took a commanding 2-0

lead in their first-round series against the eighth-seeded New Orleans Pelicans with an emphatic 124-92 thrashing. The Thunder took the lead early in the first quarter and were in complete control throughout, holding a double-digit advantage from the second quarter onwards which reached 34 points at one stage late in the fourth quarter.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the scoring for Oklahoma City, finishing with 33 points from 13-of-19 shooting from the field. Chet Holmgren added 26 points while Jalen Williams chipped in with 21. Luguentz Dort added 15 points including four three-pointers. — AFP