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## 'I CANNOT REMAIN SILENT'

### Amir dissolves Assembly, suspends some articles of constitution pending revision



HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ordered dissolving the National Assembly and suspending some articles of the constitution for no more than four years, pending "revision of the democratic process in its entirety". In an address to the nation on Friday evening, he said "The State of Kuwait has undergone challenging times that left repercussions on all aspects of life and created negative reality".

"We, as entrusted with looking after this state and its people, had to offer counseling and guidance once and again in order to get out of these conditions with the least possible losses. Unfortunately, we have faced some unimaginable, unbearable difficulties and impediments. Some people attempted resolutely to shut down every way out of the bitter reality. We were left with no option other than taking this hard decision to rescue the country and protect its higher national interests and resources of

the nation," HH the Amir explained.

HH the Amir underscored that a democratic rule requires a great deal of organization of state authorities and distribution of roles according to a clear vision for realizing the national objectives. "This vision makes it inevitable for the legislative and executive authorities to work within specific controls and parameters," he said. Affirming that those controls can never be breached or transgressed, HH the Amir said the parameters of the constitution govern the behavior of all powers and authorities of the state.

"We have noticed, a few days ago, some behavior and actions that ran counter to the stable rules of the constitution," HH the Amir said, in reference to some MPs who threatened and vowed to grill a minister who may be reinstated to their portfolio. He also referred to some MPs who objected to the nomination of ministers to some portfolios, neglecting that the selection of a prime

minister or Cabinet members is a constitutional right of the head of state exclusively.

"Transgressing the constitution reached a point that could never be tolerated as it risked undermining constitutional values and democratic principles," HH the Amir said, noting that those principles had been accepted by everyone for a long time. "Some people went as far as interfering into the powers of the Amir, including his right to select his crown prince," he said, reminding that this is clearly his own right exclusively. HH the Amir added that once a crown prince is handpicked by the Amir, the other authorities of state can play their roles as specified by the constitution.

HH the Amir referred to the sources of national wealth which must not be neglected or used in a way that depletes them and disrupts the interests of the nation through proposals that waste public money and do not achieve the public interest.

Continued on Page 2

### Amir receives call from UAE President affirming solid support

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a telephone call early on Saturday from President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. The UAE President affirmed that the UAE stands with Kuwait with respect to all measures and decisions it has taken to maintain its stability. Sheikh Mohammad assured HH the Amir that he views brotherly relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples. HH the Amir expressed good wishes to the UAE so it may witness further progress, prosperity and development under the wise leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Reciprocating, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal expressed gratitude to the UAE President for the gracious gesture, his true brotherly sentiments that mirror depth of the good and brotherly relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples. HH the Amir expressed good wishes to the UAE so it may witness further progress, prosperity and development under the wise leadership of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the President of the sisterly UAE.

Separately, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya said Kuwait strongly appreciates its partnerships with neighboring and friendly countries, as part of the country's stable policies towards regional and international events. In a statement to KUNA on Saturday, Yahya noted that Kuwait is exerting great efforts to enhance its regional and leadership role on key issues.

The recent visits of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal to friendly countries are part of Kuwait's deep historical ties with its partners, said the minister. He added HH the Amir's visits included talks on key regional and international political topics, mainly the situation in Gaza. During the visits, HH Sheikh Mishal also signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding, related to the economy and investment, Yahya said. — KUNA

### UN votes in favor of Palestinian membership, Kuwait hails vote

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly Friday to grant the Palestinians additional rights in the global body and backed their drive for full membership, which is blocked by the United States. The Zionist entity's UN ambassador Gilad Erdan reacted angrily to the largely symbolic vote, while Palestinian ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said it was historic.

With the war in Gaza raging, the Palestinians in April relaunched a request dating back to 2011 to become full members of the United Nations, where their current status is that of a "nonmember observer state". To succeed, the initiative needed a UN Security Council green light and then a

two-thirds majority vote in the General Assembly. But the United States — one of five veto-holding members on the Security Council and the Zionist entity's closest ally — blocked it on April 18.

Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs welcomed the resolution and called on the UN Security Council to reconsider its stance on this issue. Kuwait has always called on the UNSC to grant the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations, the ministry said in a press statement. Reminding the international community of their legal and historical responsibility for reaching a fair and durable settlement to Palestine cause, the ministry urged providing international protection to

Continued on Page 6



NEW YORK: The results of a vote on a resolution for the UN Security Council to reconsider and support the full membership of Palestine into the UN is displayed during a special session of the UN General Assembly at UN headquarters on May 10, 2024. — AFP

### Zionists bombard Gaza, order more Rafah evacuations

**GAZA:** Zionist strikes on Saturday hit parts of Gaza including Rafah where the Zionist entity expanded an evacuation order and the UN warned of "epic" disaster if an outright invasion of the crowded city occurs. AFP journalists, medics and witnesses reported strikes across the coastal territory, where the UN says humanitarian relief is blocked after Zionist troops defied international opposition and entered eastern Rafah this week, effectively shutting a key

aid crossing and suspending traffic through another.

At least 21 people were killed during strikes in central Gaza and taken to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah city, a hospital statement said. Bodies covered in white lay on the ground in a courtyard of the facility. A man in a baseball cap leaned over one body bag, clasping a dust-covered hand that protruded. The feet of another corpse poked from under a blanket bearing the picture of a large teddy bear.

In Rafah, witnesses reported intense air strikes near the crossing with Egypt, and AFP images showed smoke rising over the city. Other strikes occurred in north Gaza, witnesses said. Zionist troops on Tuesday seized and closed the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing — through which all fuel passes into Gaza — after ordering residents of eastern Rafah to evacuate.

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GAZA: A woman mourns over the body of a child killed in Zionist bombardment on a displaced persons camp at Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on May 11, 2024. — AFP

### More than 300 killed in Afghan flash floods

**LAQAYI, Afghanistan:** More than 300 people were killed in flash floods that ripped through multiple Afghan provinces, the World Food Program said on Saturday, as authorities declared a state of emergency and rushed to rescue the injured. Heavy rains on Friday sent roaring rivers of water and mud crashing through villages and across

agricultural land in several provinces.

Survivors on Saturday picked through muddy, debris-littered streets and damaged buildings, an AFP journalist saw, as authorities and non-governmental groups deployed rescue workers and aid, warning that some areas had been cut off by the flooding. Northern Baghlan province was one of the hardest hit, with more than 300 people killed there alone, and thousands of houses destroyed or damaged, according to WFP.

"On current information: in Baghlan province there are 311 fatalities, 2,011 houses destroyed and 2,800 houses

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LAQIHA, Afghanistan: An Afghan man carries his belongings as he walks through a mud covered street following a flash flood after heavy rainfall in this village in Baghlan-i-Markazi district of Baghlan province on May 11, 2024. — AFP



# Zain: 5G and AI innovations accelerated reliance on data

## Company strategically partnered with 19th Arab Media Forum



Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulrahman Al Mutairi and Nawaf Algharabally with Zain's team.

KUWAIT: Zain announced the continuation of its Strategic Partnership with the Arab Media Forum, which came this year in its 19th edition at the Four Seasons Hotel titled, Future Intelligence. The event came under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah and featured some of the Arab World's top media personalities and executives.

The opening ceremony was attended by the representative of the event's patron, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al Mutairi, Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Algharabally, Arab Media Forum Secretary General Madhi Al Khamees, along with ministers, diplomats, media personalities, and business executives. The Forum featured a special panel discussion titled Media and Technology, which was joined by Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Algharabally, Re-

gional General Manager at Google Ghassan Kosta, and Digital Economy Center Chairman Hani Al Ghufaili from KSA. The session was moderated by Omani media personality Yousef Al Hiti.

During the panel, Algharabally spoke about innovations like 5G and artificial intelligence, and how they are set to spearhead the future of technology. He said that future generations will look back at the era we live in today as a time of great change, as the world transformed from one that relies on machines, to one that relies on data. The CEO noted how innovations like 5G/5.5G, AI, Machine Learning, Big Data, FinTech, drones, and more have reshaped the world around us. He pointed out that Zain has invested in building a robust infrastructure that leverages on the huge potential of such innovations to lead Kuwait's digital transformation journey.



Algharabally speaking at the panel discussion.

Algharabally also said that, in essence, AI combines automation with the capacity to learn from data and experiences, then adapt its behavior accordingly. Ultimately, this will make the applications and machines we rely on today much more intelligent within the next few years, something that many people anticipate with fear. In the end, technology impacts everything around us, including our jobs, businesses, and even the media.

On the other hand, Algharabally explained that others dispel such fears, reasoning that AI is merely a tool that can manage and produce results to improve upon human action. When properly used, AI is a supporting tool that employers can utilize to stimulate efficiency and create a more productive workplace environment. He also said that technology played a significant role in shaping today's media ecosystem,

where huge amounts of information flow easier than ever before and with unprecedented access at the hands of everyone. This, naturally, necessitated that media organizations implement radical changes in the forms and methods of publishing content.

Zain's strategic partnership with the Arab Media Forum extends throughout the past 11 years to further reflect the company's strong belief in the significant role media plays within the community. By supporting the event, Zain strives to contribute to shouldering the local and regional media industries. This year, the Arab Media Forum featured 13 insightful panel discussions joined by high-profile guests from across the Arab world, including media and information ministers, owners and executives of Arab media institutions, media personalities, journalists, authors, and more.

## GCC welcomes UNGA vote for Palestine UN membership

RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Al-Budaiwi welcomed the resolution passed by the UN General Assembly on Friday to support Palestine's bid for full UN membership and called on the UN Security Council to reconsider its previous stance on this issue. "The fact that the resolution was approved by 143 UN member states signals growing support for and strong belief in the right of the State of Palestine to full membership in the UN," he said in a press release.

Al-Budaiwi reaffirmed the GCC support for the Palestine question and the efforts aiming to end the occupation and establish the independent state of Palestine within the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital city, under the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab peace initiative. Earlier today, the UN General Assembly passed, by 143 votes against nine, with 25 abstentions, a draft resolution backing Palestine's bid for full UN membership.

Also, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abulghait on Saturday applauded the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly recommending that the Security Council reconsider the issue of

granting the State of Palestine membership in the UN. The Arab League Secretary-General said in a statement that granting Palestine full UN membership is "a significant step on this path because it places Palestine in the status it deserves and reflects its qualification to attain membership as an independent state."

The full membership of Palestine in the UN constitutes a message of the Palestinians' right to attain an independent state at the time they are targeted with an integrated catastrophe and feel that the world is incapable of halting the massacre perpetrated against them," he said. The arrogant reaction by representatives of the Zionist entity regarding the landslide voice expressed by the UNGA member states reflected the real stand of the occupation state toward international norms and organizations, he added. Abulghait stressed the necessity of pursuing diplomatic pressure on all influential states to embarrass "the parties that provide cover for the Zionist entity inside the international organization, namely the Security Council."

**Kuwait deplores an attack**  
In another development, the Foreign



UNITED NATIONS: The results of a vote on a resolution for the UN Security Council to reconsider and support the full membership of Palestine into the United Nations is displayed during a special session of the UN General Assembly, at UN headquarters in New York City on May 10, 2024. — AFP

Ministry has expressed Kuwait's condemnation of the flagrant and deliberate attack by a group of criminal settlers on UNRWA premises in occupied Jerusalem under the watchful eyes of the Zionist occupation security forces. In a press statement, the ministry denounced this criminal approach to the occupation against defenseless civilians and humanitarian workers. It added that Kuwait urges the UN Security Council and the international community to act to bring to an end these

systematic violations and disregard of all laws and norms, as well as disrespect of the international agencies.

### Arab summit for Palestine

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector at the Arab League, Dr. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, stressed on Saturday the importance of holding the Arab summit in Bahrain in regards to the circumstances that Palestine is going through. This came in her speech

during the opening of the preparatory meetings of the senior officials at the economic and social levels of the 33rd Arab Summit. Abu Ghazaleh pointed to the tireless efforts of Arab countries and the Arab Social Affairs and Health Ministerial Council to provide emergency social, humanitarian, and health assistance to the people of Gaza.

She added that the Arab League was keen to place this matter at the top of the preparatory council's agenda by developing an emergency response plan to deal with the economic and social repercussions of aggression against Palestine. She also added that, taking into account Arab and international economic and social developments, the Arab League was keen to include strategies, plans, and programs in various fields in a way that enhanced joint Arab economic and social action, which reflected positively on Arab citizens.

Abu Ghazaleh emphasized the importance of the youth role, and in support of efforts aimed at increasing their empowerment, the council has proposed various important strategies in a way that contributes to building promising Arab cadres. Abu Ghazaleh concluded by expressing her thanks to Bahrain, her colleagues in the social and economic sectors, and the Council's secretariat for their efforts to prepare the documents for the meeting. — KUNA

## 'I cannot remain silent'...

Continued from Page 1

HH the Amir added that these proposals should serve the national economy within the framework of the development plan. The unhealthy atmosphere Kuwait faced in the past years encouraged the spread of corruption that affected most of the state's facilities, and rather unfortunately reached economic and security institutions, HH the Amir said.

HH the Amir elaborated that corruption even affected justice, which is the resort of people to get their rights and freedom, adding that "we are very sure that the judiciary will purify itself by its sincere men and the help of Allah". All people should know that no one is above law, and those who illegally got some public funds will be punished whatever their position is, he noted. "I will not allow by no means that democracy will be exploited to destroy the state as the interest of Kuwaitis, which are above all, is honesty that we should protect and preserve," HH the Amir stressed. HH the Amir also referred to the behavior of some governments that overlooked grave violations due to parliamentary pressure or unsuccessful efforts that have negative impacts on public interest, vowing that he would not allow such violations under any circumstances.

HH the Amir underlined the utmost importance of security, saying "we will pay much attention to achieve this goal by re-considering the laws of social security". He pointed to the nationality file and those who illegally obtained Kuwaiti citizenship. HH the Amir said that the state would work on two main pillars — security and judiciary — noting that such negative phenomena will not remain and will be re-considered by reliable people, in line with a well-studied plan. HH the Amir frankly said respecting security men is part of the respect of the re-

gime, affirming that "I will not allow by no means to touch their prestige and respect while performing their official duties."

HH the Amir noted that the Kuwaiti people, the founders of democracy, were keen to find a constitution that would serve the interests of the nation and protect the rights and freedoms of the people, and "we did not find in past discussions in the Constituent Assembly or in the councils that followed anything but the pinnacle of respect in their speech, in addition to the sophisticated practices of the constitutional means available to them in the right place or at the right time. But today, we witnessed the opposite of all that: there is a severe misuse of these means and in the style of speech that does not match the customs and traditions of Kuwaiti people".

"Therefore, Abdullah Al-Salem Hall, instead of being a place for practicing true and sound democracy, has become a stage for all that is unaccustomed and undesirable or acceptable in terms of words. Such practices and expressions did not stop at this point, but rather went beyond the use of the constitutional right to interrogate at every opportunity small or big, which wasted the true value of this right as a sophisticated tool for accountability and legislation," HH the Amir said.

"The constitution did not approve such tool of interrogation, but rather it was stipulated to be a means of reform and correcting any distortions, if any. Otherwise, this fine tool lost its value and the reasons for its determination. It is our duty to declare our rejection of all these practices and develop a solution to them in a way that ends them so that Abdullah Al-Salem Hall goes back to its place as a symbol of democracy, which appreciates and respects elders and listens to other points of view, not being an arena for unacceptable verbal battles or unconstitutional practices that are outside the scope of logic and reason," HH the Amir added.

HH the Amir said the turmoil in the country's political scene has reached a stage that "I cannot remain silent towards it, as it is our duty to take

all necessary measures aimed to achieve the highest interest of the country". "I would like to refer to what happened over the past days. After naming the premier and tasking him to form a new government, communication was conducted with some MPs to ensure the participation of some of them in forming the government in abidance by article 56 of the constitution," he said.

"Despite this, and in order to make time available to form the government, we issued decree no. 67 of 2024 adjourning the meetings of the National Assembly of the 18th legislative term to Tuesday, May 14, in implementation of article 106 of the constitution to start a new phase of positive cooperation between the executive and legislative authorities and joint action to achieve desired reform, and to meet aspirations and hopes of citizens hoping for a better and brighter future," HH the Amir elaborated.

However, all these attempts failed due to repercussions that led to the incompletion of forming the government in light of some acts of MPs towards forming the government that includes conditions and dedications, HH the Amir said. The constitution, as a progressive document that responds to the requirements and changes of life, finds its outlet through harmony with the social, political, economic, legal and moral conditions in society, he said. The constitution must be compatible with the new conditions to absorb them to be its outlet in order to continue as a tool that governs the reality of society and its formations, he stated.

HH the Amir added if all outlets are closed, the constitution would not be able to carry out its desired role that people and its leadership want. "In this case, it becomes necessary for us to intervene to correct the path, address distortions and fill shortcomings revealed by the practical application of the provisions of the constitution over the past 62 years without amendment, especially the historic path from which the Kuwaiti constitution derived its articles and provisions were either totally canceled or had several amendments to respond to changes," he noted.

The Kuwaiti constitution allowed amendments and its provisions were reconsidered after five years of implementation, and this indicates the prudence of the members of the Constituent Assembly, he noted. "Therefore, we decided to dissolve the National Assembly and suspend some constitutional articles for no more than four years," HH the Amir explained. "During this period, all aspects of the democratic process will be studied and the outcomes of the study will be tabled to us for revision. We then will take whatever decisions we might deem appropriate," he added.

HH the Amir paid tribute to the founding fathers who laid the foundations of amity and fraternity among people from all walks of life, from civil servants to tradesmen, in the service of the homeland. He called on the new generation to follow the tradition of their forefathers in acting and behaving decently to restore harmony among all segments of the society. HH the Amir prayed to Allah, the Almighty, to help all sons of Kuwait to work for the prosperity and welfare of the dear homeland.

HH the Amir later issued an Amiri decree to dissolve the National Assembly and suspend some articles of the constitution for a period not exceeding four years. The Amiri order stated: Based on the country's best interests, we decree the following: Article One: Dissolving the National Assembly. Article Two: Suspending articles 51, 56 (paragraphs two and three), 71 (paragraph two), 79, 107, 174 and 181 of the constitution for a period not exceeding four years, during which the democratic practice in the country will be reviewed and the findings of a study will be referred to us to take what we deem appropriate.

Article Three: The Amir and the Council of Ministers shall assume the powers granted to the National Assembly. Article Four: Laws are issued by draft decree. Article Five: The Prime Minister and ministers, each within his jurisdiction, must implement this order, and it shall come into effect once published in the official gazette. — KUNA

Local

# Young musicians showcase talents

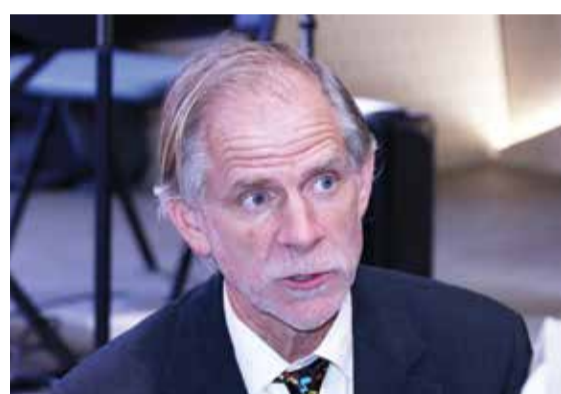
## Ahmadi Music Group holds a charity youth orchestra



Bushman Joins the Youth Orchestra on stage.



Junior violinists performing on stage. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Richard Bushman

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** Investing in the education of children by instilling a strong foundation in music skills from a young age can cultivate their talents and pave the way towards successful careers in music. According to Richard Bushman, emphasizing the importance of music education can lead to a future where the orchestra predominantly comprises Kuwaiti musicians, showcasing the talent and diversity within the local music scene. Under Richard Bushman's guidance, Ahmadi Music Group held a charity youth orchestra located at the Theatre of the American University of Kuwait in aid of KACCH and Bayt Abdullah.

Bushman told the Kuwait Times that the Ahmadi

Music Group, established in 1955, is Kuwait's oldest cultural organization, bringing 65 junior violin players to the orchestra. According to Bushman, this charity orchestra was motivated by the idea of two senior students who wanted to work on a charitable music project by partnering with Beit Abdullah. All proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to them.

Richard extended his gratitude to AUK for providing the theater free of charge and acknowledged the support received from the English School in Salmiya and Bayan Bilingual School, from which many participating students in this charity orchestra came. Ahmadi Music Group's program focuses on both teaching and performance, which has resulted in successful concerts this year.

Bushman further elaborated to the Kuwait Times

about the long-term vision: "The hardest thing in a music program is finding enough really good beginners every year. So, the Ahmadi teaching group has two sides: teaching and performing. We have done two beautiful concerts on the stage this year. Our goal is that in twenty years, our orchestra will be 80 percent Kuwaiti because these children will grow up and push us out."

"That's what we expect, and that's how we work. They will become the orchestra. That's what we want for the children—to come and play with the adults sometimes to gain experience from working with adult professionals. This is our goal in Kuwait: to start with hundreds of beginners in order to find the ones who will remain in the end. There is not only one path through music; everyone is welcome to join."

## Kuwaiti-Bahraini ties 'deep-rooted'

**MANAMA:** Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Sabah has commended the fraternal, historic, and deep-rooted relations between Kuwait and Bahrain. Speaking to KUNA at the end of her accompanying delegation's visit to Bahrain, Sheikh Jawaher said the tour is part of enhancing relations between the two countries and deepening and boosting mutual cooperation in all fields in the implementation of the wise directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa.

The visit came in coordination with the Director-General of Legal Affairs and Human Rights at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Yusuf Abdulkarim Bucheeri, and the head of the human rights sector, Ambassador Arwa Al-Sayed, with the aim of boosting human rights collaboration, Sheikh Jawaher noted. She pointed out that she held some fruitful meetings with some officials in Bahrain, including Sheikh Isa bin Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Undersecretary of Cabinet Affairs and Deputy Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee, and Ghada Habib, Chairperson of the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission (PDR).

These meetings discussed means of sharing expertise and views between the two sides in several human rights fields, like empowering women, supporting children's rights, and combating human trafficking, Sheikh Jawaher noted. She praised achievements made by Bahrain in human rights, mainly its comprehensive and integrated national plan in this field and its completion of a large percentage of desired goals since its launch in the year 2022. Sheikh Jawaher indicated that Bahrain is a role model in combating human trafficking, as all of the of the Kingdom's institutions are interested in this file, in addition to its achievements in alternative punishment systems and open prisons. — KUNA



EU members celebrate Europe Day.

## Kuwait, EU enhance partnership; envoy marks Europe Day

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The EU Ambassador to Kuwait, Anne Koistinen, affirmed her commitment to strengthening partnerships with Kuwait to achieve both countries' shared goals. During her speech at the Europe Day reception, Ambassador Koistinen stated that the EU stands as a close and reliable partner to contribute to the implementation of the Kuwait Vision 2035. Under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, their partnership has thrived, laying the foundation for continued success and prosperity.

"On the 9th of May, we commemorate peace and unity in Europe. This marks my first Europe Day as Ambassador of the European Union in Kuwait. I feel truly privileged to say that Kuwait and its people have been most welcoming and willing to engage to further develop our long-standing partnership," the EU ambassador said.

She indicated that EU members have joined efforts to collaborate across a wide range of areas, undertaking impactful projects in sectors such as Just Green Transition, renewable energy, and women's empowerment, all in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, adding, "Our joint initiatives extend to



EU Ambassador Anne Koistinen takes Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on a tour on the sidelines of the event.

youth empowerment, academia, investment, and human rights. With the EU maintaining its position as Kuwait's second-largest trading partner, there is considerable untapped potential for deeper collaboration."

Ambassador Koistinen expressed satisfaction over the favorable Schengen visa regulations granted to Kuwaiti nationals by the EU, enabling multiple entries over up to five years. Despite this positive development, the ambassador reiterated a steadfast commitment to achieving a full Schengen visa waiver for Kuwaiti citizens, noting that such a goal reflects a dedication to strengthening bilateral relations and facilitating smoother travel experiences between Kuwait and EU member states, ultimately fostering closer ties and mutual understanding.

Meanwhile, the ambassador emphasized the wide-

spread concern felt by people across Europe, Kuwait, and globally regarding the tragic situation unfolding in Gaza, noting that efforts from the EU, Kuwait, and similar allies are actively aimed at easing the severe humanitarian crisis gripping the region. She added, "We in the EU strongly believe in the need to give hope to the Palestinian people."

Therefore, we continue to support UNRWA and remain firmly committed to the two-state solution. We should not also forget the suffering of other vulnerable people in the region and beyond." "As for Europe itself, war is still raging on our doorstep, with Ukraine courageously defending itself from the full-scale Russian illegal aggression. We will continue with our humanitarian, military, and financial support for Ukraine," the EU ambassador concluded.

## Kuwait, UN discuss cybersecurity and communication

**NEW YORK:** Kuwait's delegation discussed at a UN round table the prospects of enhancing capacities in the realm of security technology, communication, and strengthening cybersecurity. The Kuwaiti delegation, headed by President of the National Cybersecurity Center Mohammad Boakri, took part in the high-level meetings during which the officials discussed with peers from other nations the optimum means for enhancing cyber security and stimulating the international community to exert greater efforts at this level.

Boakri, during the round table talks at the UN headquarters, touched on governance and challenges facing the efforts to solidify cybersecurity in the State of Kuwait. The Kuwaiti delegation included the Deputy Foreign Minister for International Organizations Affairs, Mohammad Al-Amiri, and the Director of Information Technology at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Al-Qadiri.

### Strong partnerships

In another development, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya said Kuwait strongly appreci-



President of the National Cybersecurity Center Mohammad Boakri

ates its partnerships with neighboring and friendly countries as part of the country's stable policies towards regional and international events. In a statement to KUNA on Saturday, Minister Al-Yahya noted that Kuwait is exerting great efforts to enhance its regional and leadership roles in key issues.

The recent visits of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to friendly countries are part of Kuwait's deep historic ties with its partners, said the minister. He added that His Highness' visits included talks on key regional and international political topics, mainly the situation in Gaza. During the visits, His Highness the Amir also signed several agreements and memoranda of understanding related to the economy and investment, Al-Yahya said. — KUNA

## Logistics, supply authority supports Kuwait's army

**KUWAIT:** The Chief of Staff of Kuwait's Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Bandar Al-Muzain, affirmed that the logistics and supply authority has played a pivotal role in backing the army and enhancing readiness in a way that provides facilitations and basics for its units. During an inspection visit to some army units, including logistics and supply authority and the command of defense against weapons of mass destruction, Al-Muzain stressed the need to remove any obstacles before operations and duties, according to a press statement issued by the General Staff, quoting Al-Muzain as saying.

Al-Muzain lauded the authority and the command for their efforts and duties, calling for keeping ready and reaching desired levels. He wished success to the two units' personnel in their duties, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Al-Muzain listened to a detailed presentation on the applied measures and the latest duties and missions carried out by the command, as well as training programs approved for



Chief of Staff of Kuwait's Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Bandar Al-Muzain meets with security officials during an inspection visit to some army units. — KUNA

preparing and rehabilitating personnel to deal with different events and incidents.

He was also briefed on the most important technical specifications of the "Fox" armored reconnaissance vehicle, which is equipped with the latest technologies and systems used for disinfection and sterilization that detect chemical, biological, and radiological risks. Al-Muzain was received by the assistant chief of staff of the authority, Major General Dr. Engineer Salah Nasser, and the assistant commander of the command, Brigadier General Hamid Obaid. — KUNA

# Burgan Bank sponsors AUS 'Art's Night' event

## In continued support of Kuwaiti students' growth and development



**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank recently sponsored the annual "Art's Night" event, organized by the American United School (AUS) for its community of teachers, students, and their families. Similar to previous "Art's Night" events, this year's gave students a platform to express themselves authentically through different arts while offering visitors numerous engaging activities that made for an excellent bonding experience between students and their parents.

Burgan Bank's renewed sponsorship of the annual event comes as part of its comprehensive social responsibility program and its unwavering commitment to the holistic development of students across all educational levels in Kuwait. Commenting on the Bank's sponsorship, Talal Hamed Al-Ayar, Senior Officer of Corporate and CSR Communications, said: "We are very proud of the AUS community for their continued efforts to create safe and encouraging spaces where students can unleash their artistic energies and express themselves in a supportive atmosphere.

It was such a delight to sponsor yet another successful 'Art's Night' event and be present on the ground among AUS's lively community as they cheered young talents on and bonded over a vari-



Talal Hamed Al-Ayar

ety of engaging activities. As part of our dedicated social responsibility program, we are committed to supporting all individual and group efforts that aim to foster young Kuwaiti talents and help them pave the way toward a bright future marked with growth and success."

The event garnered many visitors who came together for a night of appreciating "Global Rhythms and Flavors" through live performances, including a musical performance by MSHS band, as well as other solo instrumental and vocal performances, not to mention the drama theater performance that centered on the same theme. Visitors also enjoyed a delicious corner of international foods from Brazil, China, the Philippines, India, Kuwait, Mexico, and Turkey.

In addition to the rhythms and flavors, students

and parents also had the opportunity to share several engaging "Make and Take" art activities, such as puffy paint, wire figurine making, canvas bag painting, screen printing, aluminum sculpturing, postcard making, and badge making.

In an attempt to add an extra layer of value to the community event, Burgan representatives shared vital banking awareness and financial literacy information with parents and students, especially regarding the safest use of banking cards and online payments, which many teenagers and young adults rely on today. This comes under the umbrella of Burgan Bank's continued support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) banking campaign, launched in 2021 by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), with the support of Kuwaiti banks.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank remains one of the most active contributors to the advancement of arts and culture in Kuwait, whether across small communities, such as AUS, or through more public events, such as Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah's (DAI) seasonal festivals. This stems from its firm belief that the preservation of the Kuwaiti identity and authentic heritage is a stepping stone for a brighter cultural and economic future for Kuwait.

## stc organizes workshop for 6th grade students

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, organized a workshop for 6th grade students at the Kuwait English School in collaboration with Injaz Kuwait, a non-profit non-governmental organization that

inspires and prepares young people for the global economy. Titled "Junior Icamp", the workshop was held as part of stc's educational 'upgrade' initiative, which aims to support and empower the younger generation through various programs and initiatives that prepare them for the future.

The "Junior Icamp" workshop, launched in a collaboration between stc and Injaz Kuwait, was designed to challenge students into using their creativity and innovative thinking in various ways. Over 60 students from the Kuwait English School participated in the initiative, which took place at the school's premises, where they were requested to use their creativity and out of the box thinking to develop unique project ideas. Through its role, stc provided the students with valuable insights and constructive

aims to equip the younger generation with the skills and knowledge to contribute effectively to the local economy, while reinforcing its role as a pivotal supporter of community development.

Commenting on the workshop, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "We are proud to partner with Injaz Kuwait to host this unique workshop at Kuwait English School that encourages students to utilize their creativity to come up with innovate ideas. At stc, we highly value the importance of creativity and innovation in shaping the future of our community and youth alike. By fostering an environment that encourages exploration and growth, we aim to inspire a generation that will become proactive and contributing members within their community."



stc staff take a group photo with the students.

guidance to enhance their ideas. The company also participated in the judging panel where the best ideas were selected and recognized. Prizes were distributed to the top winners by stc in recognition of the students' hard work, effort and creativity.

stc's unwavering commitment to the community and the younger generation in Kuwait is witnessed through its diverse array of initiatives organized under its comprehensive CSR program, particularly the educational 'upgrade' initiative. As a pioneer in the telecom, digital transformation and ICT sector, stc has consistently focused on empowering the youth by providing innovative platforms and opportunities that bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application.

Over the years, stc has sponsored numerous workshops, seminars, and collaborations, such as the recent partnership with Injaz Kuwait, to foster creative thinking and problem-solving skills amongst the younger generation. Through these activities, stc

Al-Jasem added, "stc would like to extend its gratitude to Injaz Kuwait for organizing this initiative and to Kuwait English School for engaging their students in this empowering workshop. Following our comprehensive CSR program, stc will continue to contribute in launching and sponsoring activities and initiatives that support Kuwaiti youths in several fields through strategic partnerships with institutions from the government and private sectors, including INJAZ Kuwait, with the aim of leaving a broader positive impact on society.

Through these collaborative efforts, our goal is to continue providing meaningful and sustainable initiatives on a regular basis to develop the capabilities of the younger generation, enhance their skills, nurture future leaders, and enable them to thrive in every aspect of life. We are committed to providing targeted programs directed at youth, nurturing talents, and supporting the aspirations of the Kuwaiti youth generation in several fields."



Students participate in the workshop.

### News in Brief

#### Developing legal fields

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait affirmed its ongoing efforts to become a pioneer in developing the legal field and following international legislative developments. The remarks came in a statement by the head of the Kuwaiti delegation, Consultant Alia Al-Sabah, while taking part in the 44th session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) late Friday, held in New York from May 6 to 10. She noted that such meetings are important to share experience between delegations to develop the economic and trade fields in Kuwait. — KUNA

#### Youth officials meet

**DOHA:** The 37th meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) committee of youth and sports ministers kicked off in Doha on Saturday, with the participation of Acting Director-General of the Kuwaiti Public Authority for Youth Nasser Al-Sheikh. Addressing the gathering, Qatari Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa said work should continue to meet the directives of the GCC leaders and fulfill the Gulf bloc's national vision and goals to serve Gulf young people. He voiced hope that joint efforts targeting young people's empowerment would come to fruition, appreciating Oman's endeavors in this regard during its previous GCC presidency. — KUNA

#### Joint Arab economic work

**MANAMA:** Assistant Deputy Minister for International Cooperation at the Saudi Ministry of Finance, Naif Al-Anezi, affirmed the importance of enhancing efforts to develop joint Arab economic and social work. The remarks came in a speech at the meeting of the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League on Saturday to prepare for the upcoming summit in Bahrain next Thursday. Saudi Arabia had hosted the 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah last year, which resulted in many important articles, he said. The summit's outcome included fulfilling requirements for the Greater Arab Free Trade Area and signing the agreement regulating transit between Arab League countries, said Al-Anezi. Today's meeting will discuss key economic and social issues, aiming to enhance joint Arab work in the fields, he noted. — KUNA



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Released leader Kejrival urges Indians to battle 'dictatorship'

## Iran conservatives tighten grip in parliament election

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RAFAH: A woman reacts as she waits with others before evacuating from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on May 11, 2024. -- AFP

# UN seeks probe into Gaza mass graves

## US report criticizes Zionist entity but does not block arms

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN Security Council on Friday called for an immediate and independent investigation into mass graves allegedly containing hundreds of bodies near hospitals in Gaza. In a statement, members of the council expressed their "deep concern over reports of the discovery of mass graves, in and around the Nasser and Al-Shifa medical facilities in Gaza, where several hundred bodies, including women, children and older persons, were buried."

The members stressed the need for "accountability" for any violations of international law and called on investigators to be given "unimpeded access to all locations of mass graves in Gaza to conduct immediate, independent, thorough, comprehensive, transparent and impartial investigations."

Hospitals in the Gaza Strip have been repeatedly targeted since the beginning of the Zionist entity military operation in the Palestinian territory. The World Health Organization (WHO) said in April that Al-Shifa, in Gaza City, had been reduced to an "empty shell," with

many bodies found in the area. The Zionist entity army has said around 200 Palestinians were killed during its military operations there. Bodies have reportedly been found buried in two graves in the hospital's courtyard.

The UN rights office in late April had itself called for an independent investigation into reports of mass graves at Al-Shifa and at the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis. Gaza officials said at the time that health workers at the Nasser complex had uncovered hundreds of bodies of Palestinians they alleged had been killed and buried by Zionist entity forces. Zionist entity's army has dismissed the claims as "baseless and unfounded." The statement Friday from the Security Council did not say who would conduct the investigations.

But it "reaffirmed the importance of allowing families to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, consistent with international humanitarian law." Zionist entity's offensive has killed at least 34,943 people in the Gaza Strip, mostly women

and children, the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Friday.

Meanwhile, a long-awaited State Department report on Friday said that Zionist entity likely violated norms on international law in its use of US weapons but it did not find enough evidence to block shipments. The report said it was "reasonable to assess" that Zionist entity, which receives some \$3 billion in US weapons a year, has used the arms in ways inconsistent with standards on humanitarian rights but that the United States could not reach "conclusive findings."

The report had been held up for several days amid debate within the State Department on whether to reprimand Zionist entity, a historic US ally which has faced growing criticism over the toll in the seven-month Gaza war. The State Department finally submitted its report two days after President Joe Biden publicly threatened to withhold certain bombs and artillery shells if Zionist entity goes ahead with an assault on the packed city of Rafah. The report does

not affect that decision, with the White House reiterating Friday that it was concerned about Zionist entity's military action around the southern Gaza city, where some 1.4 million Palestinians have taken shelter.

Biden, facing a furor over the war from within his Democratic Party months before elections, had in February issued a memorandum known as NSM-20 that asked countries that receive US military aid to make "credible and reliable" assurances they are complying with human rights laws.

"The nature of the conflict in Gaza makes it difficult to assess or reach conclusive findings on individual incidents," it said. "Nevertheless, given Zionist entity's significant reliance on US-made defense articles, it is reasonable to assess that defense articles covered under NSM-20 have been used by Zionist entity security forces since Oct 7 in instances inconsistent with its IHL obligations or with established best practices for mitigating civilian harm," it said, referring to international humanitarian law. --AFP

## MG ranked second place in car sales in March 2024



- According to the traffic report and the Federation of Car Agencies.
- 3 car showrooms and 13 maintenance centers spread throughout Kuwait, with a spare parts availability rate of 96%.

- 50% of MG's sales come through recommendations and referrals from existing customers.
- With several options available to own MG Cars through lease-to-own, operational lease, or exclusive offers.



Mr. Marzouq Adel Alghanim



MG Showroom at Alrai, Kuwait

Adel Alghanim Automotive Company, part of Alghanim Sons Group and the exclusive dealer for MG cars in Kuwait, recently celebrated a milestone achievement since the brand's launch in Kuwait, with remarkable sales figures reported. Securing the second spot in car sales in Kuwait during the month of March 2024, according to the local traffic report as well as the Federation of Car Agencies, this achievement highlights the widespread recognition of MG's success in the Kuwaiti market.

The surge in sales experienced by MG can be attributed to the confidence customers have in the brand. Across Kuwait and the wider Arabian Gulf region, MG cars have garnered a loyal following, reinforced by their reputation for reliability, performance, and value.

Moreover, the ease of ownership has been further improved with a variety of options available to potential buyers. Whether through

lease-to-own arrangements, operational leases, or exclusive offers, MG ensures that owning one of their vehicles is a straightforward and accessible experience for everyone.

MG's dominance on the roads and its leading position in the automotive market have contributed significantly to the notable increase in sales volume. This success is underpinned by the competitive pricing of MG's range of vehicles, maintenance as well as spare parts, all of which are key factors driving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Highlighting the brand's commitment to excellence is the fact that 50% of MG sales stem from recommendations and referrals by satisfied customers. This speaks volumes about the trust and confidence placed in MG cars and their enduring quality. Moreover, Adel Alghanim Automotive Company ensures that spare parts are easily accessible, with an impressive 96%

availability rate. This is facilitated by a state-of-the-art warehouse spanning 2,400 square meters in Kuwait, complemented by another facility in Jebel Ali, UAE.

Beyond sales figures, MG's footprint in Kuwait is expanding, with three showrooms strategically located in Al-Rai, Shuwaikh, and Jahra areas, along with 13 maintenance centers spread across Kuwait. This extensive network highlights MG's commitment to serving customers and providing unparalleled support throughout their ownership experience.

The appeal of MG cars lies not only in their reliability but also in their diverse range of offerings, including sedans, SUVs, and electric vehicles. Characterized by elegant designs, advanced technologies, and competitive pricing, MG cars cater to customers seeking quality and distinctive value in their automotive choices.

One of the key strengths of MG lies in its ability

to offer customizable options that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of drivers. This flexibility has resonated with customers and further solidified MG's position as a leading automotive brand in Kuwait.

In his statement, Marzouq Adel Alghanim emphasized the significance of this occasion, stating: "We at Alghanim Sons Group believe in the importance of this milestone and reaffirm Alghanim Sons Group's commitment to delivering exceptional service and experiences to valued customers."

Furthermore, to provide customers with complete peace of mind, all new MG models are backed by the company's renowned 6-year or 200,000 Km warranty. Additionally, specific attention has been paid to the durability of the cars, evident in the 3-year or 100,000 Km warranty on the front shock absorbers, ensuring reliability and longevity for MG owners.



## International

# Released leader Kejriwal urges Indians to battle 'dictatorship'

## Modi accused of targeting opponents with criminal probes during election

**NEW DELHI:** A top opponent of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged his compatriots to resist "dictatorship" on Saturday, after the country's top court provisionally released him from jail to campaign in national elections. Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the capital Delhi and a key leader in an opposition alliance formed to compete against Modi in the polls, was granted bail on Friday after weeks in custody.

He is among several leaders of the bloc under criminal investigation, with his party describing his arrest as a "political conspiracy" orchestrated by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to sideline its opponents ahead of the vote. In a defiant press conference the day after his release, Kejriwal said the outcome of the election would determine whether India remained a democracy.

"I have come to beg 1.4 billion people to save my country," he said. "Save my country from this dictatorship." Kejriwal also personally accused the prime minister of targeting his opponents with criminal probes. "Modi has started a very dangerous mission," he said. "Modi will send all opposition leaders to jail."

Kejriwal's government was accused of corruption when it liberalized the sale of liquor in 2021 and gave up a lucrative government stake in the sector. The policy was withdrawn the following year, but the resulting probe into the alleged corrupt allocation of licenses has since led to the jailing of two top Kejriwal allies.

Rallies in support of Kejriwal, who refused to relinquish his post after his arrest, were held in numerous other big cities around India after he was taken into custody. More than 1,000 cheering supporters

greeted him as he walked free from the capital's Tihar Jail on Friday night.

Kejriwal, 55, has been chief minister for nearly a decade and first came to office as a staunch anti-corruption crusader. He had resisted multiple summons from the Enforcement Directorate, India's financial crimes agency, to be interrogated as part of the probe.

Kejriwal has consistently denied any wrongdoing since allegations of corruption were first leveled against him, including again on Saturday. "They sent me to jail and the PM says he is fighting against corruption," he said.

"If you want to fight corruption, learn from Arvind Kejriwal." The Supreme Court said Friday he could temporarily leave jail to campaign in India's six-week election, on the condition that he returns to custody after the last day of voting on June 1. "No doubt, serious accusations have been made, but he has not been convicted," the court's ruling said. "He is not a threat to the society."

His release was also made conditional on his agreement not to make public comment on the case against him, not to interact with witnesses in the case and not to visit the offices of the Delhi government.

Modi's political opponents and international rights groups have long sounded the alarm on India's shrinking democratic space. US think-tank Freedom House said this year that the BJP had "increasingly used government institutions to target political opponents".

Rahul Gandhi, the most prominent member of the opposition Congress party was convicted of criminal libel last year after a complaint by a member



**NEW DELHI:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal (C) waves to supporters during a press conference at the party headquarters in New Delhi on May 11, 2024. — AFP

of Modi's party. His two-year prison sentence saw him disqualified from parliament until the verdict was suspended by a higher court, and raised concerns over democratic norms. Kejriwal and Gandhi are both leading members of an opposition alliance composed of more than two dozen parties that is

jointly contesting India's election. Voting is conducted in seven phases over six weeks to ease the immense logistical burden of staging the democratic exercise in the world's most populous country. Four more rounds will be staged over the coming weeks, with results expected on June 4. — AFP

## Russia claims gains in ground offensive in Kharkiv region

**KHARKIV, Ukraine:** Russia on Saturday said it had captured six villages in Ukraine's east during a surprise ground offensive that prompted mass evacuations, as President Volodymyr Zelensky made an urgent call for military aid. The Russian defense ministry said its troops had "liberated" five villages in Ukraine's Kharkiv region near the border with Russia—Boryshivka, Ogirtseve, Pletnivka, Pylna and Strilecha—as "a result of offensive actions".

The village of Keramik in the Donetsk region was also now under Russian control, it said.

Ukrainian officials said that the country's forces were resisting but there was heavy fighting in the Kharkiv region near the border. "Fighting for villages... continues in the border area", Ukrainian military spokesman Nazar Voloshyn said on national television, while "the enemy is currently localised".

There is "heavy fighting" in the border area and 1,775 people have been evacuated, Kharkiv regional

governor Oleg Syneubov wrote on social media. He insisted there was "no threat of a ground operation" for the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest. At an arrival point for evacuees near Kharkiv, groups of people were arriving in vans and cars loaded with bags. Evacuees—many of them elderly—received food and medical assistance in makeshift tents.

One 61-year-old woman, Lyubov Nikolaieva, told AFP she had fled the border village of Lyptsy along with her 81-year-old mother.

"It's impossible to live there," said Nikolaieva, adding that her family "stayed there until the last moment". "There is constant incoming fire: those guided aerial bombs and mortar shells whistling overhead. It became very scary," she said. The Kharkiv region has been mostly under Ukrainian control since September 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said troops must "return the initiative to Ukraine" and urged Kyiv's allies to speed up arms deliveries. "Every air defense system, every anti-missile system is literally what saves lives," Zelensky said. "It is important that our partners support our soldiers and Ukrainian resilience with timely deliveries—really timely ones," he stressed.

"The package that really helps is the weapons brought to Ukraine, not just the announced ones."

Ukrainian forces have multiplied attacks inside

Russia and Russia-held areas of Ukraine, particularly on energy infrastructure. On Saturday a missile strike hit a restaurant called Paradise in the city of Donetsk, eastern Ukraine. The attack using US HIMARS precision rocket launchers killed three civilians—two diners and a restaurant member of staff—and wounded eight, the head of the region's Russian-backed administration, Denis Pushilin, said.

Moscow-installed authorities in the Russian-occupied Lugansk region in eastern Ukraine said four people were killed by a Ukrainian strike with US-made missiles on an oil depot in Rovenky.

Governor Leonid Pasechnik said the strike "enveloped the oil depot in fire and damaged surrounding homes". In Russia, two people were reported killed by Ukrainian strikes in the Belgorod and Kursk regions. Ukrainian officials also reported a total of six civilians killed in Russian shelling in the Donetsk, Kharkiv and Kherson regions over the past day.

Officials in Kyiv had warned for weeks that Moscow might try to attack its northeastern border regions, pressing its advantage as Ukraine struggles with delays in Western aid and manpower shortages.

Ukraine's military said it had deployed more troops. "Reserve units have been deployed to strengthen the defense in these areas of the front," it said. Military expert Olivier Kempf told



**VINNYTSIA, Ukraine:** Azov Brigade fighters and others hold flares during the funeral ceremony for Mazarly Gryntsevych, a Ukrainian soldier of the Azov Brigade who was killed on the battlefield, at a football stadium in Vinnytsia, on May 10, 2024. — AFP

AFP Saturday that Russia's ground operation was most likely aimed at creating a buffer zone near its Belgorod region, recently raided by pro-Ukrainian units, or diverting Ukraine's resources from the Donetsk region. — AFP

## Zionists bombard Gaza, order more...

Continued from Page 1

While mediation efforts towards a truce and hostage release appear to stall, Hamas armed wing released a video of a captive seen alive in Gaza — the third such footage released in less than a month. The man is seen speaking in the 11-second clip, which is superimposed with text in Arabic and Hebrew that reads: "Time is running out."

The new evacuation order for eastern Rafah was posted on social media platform X by military spokesman Avi-chay Adraee. The Zionist offensive has killed at least 34,971 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. A US State Department report on Friday said it was "reasonable to assess" that the Zionist entity violated norms on international law in its use of weapons from the United States but it did not find enough evidence to block shipments.

The State Department submitted its report two days after President Joe Biden publicly threatened to withhold certain bombs and artillery shells if the Zionist entity goes ahead with an all-out assault on Rafah, where the United

Nations said 1.4 million had been sheltering. Hamas in a statement said the Zionist entity's "continued control" and closure of the Rafah crossing exacerbate the "humanitarian catastrophe" in the besieged territory.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged to "eliminate" Hamas battalions in Rafah, after the army in January said it had dismantled the Hamas command structure in northern Gaza. But on Saturday Adraee said Hamas "is trying to rebuild" there, and ordered evacuations from the north's Jabalia refugee camp and Beit Lahia areas.

After rising criticism from Washington over the civilian impact of the Zionist entity's war against Hamas, the threat to withhold weapons was the first time Biden raised the ultimate US leverage over the Zionist entity — its military aid which totals \$3 billion annually. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday that Gaza risked an "epic humanitarian disaster" if the Zionist entity launched a full-scale ground operation in Rafah.

On Friday the White House said it did not yet see a "major ground operation" in Rafah but was watching the situation "with concern". Biden's administration had already paused delivery of 3,500 bombs as the Zionist entity appeared ready to attack Rafah. More than 100,000 people fled the city after the initial evacuation order, the United Nations said on Friday. — AFP

community of free nations." But Zionist ambassador Erdan fired back, saying the UN Charter was being abused and making his point by putting a printout of the charter through a shredder as he stood at the podium.

The United States opposes any recognition of statehood outside of a bilateral accord between the Palestinians and the Zionist entity, whose right-wing government is adamantly opposed to a two-state solution. US deputy ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said after the resolution passed that while "our vote does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood... it remains the US view that unilateral measures at the UN and on the ground will not advance this goal." The resolution gives the Palestinians "additional rights and privileges" starting in the next session of the General Assembly, in September. — Agencies

Abdul Mateen Qani, spokesman for the interior ministry, told AFP that 131 people had been killed in Baghlan, but that the government toll could rise. "Many people are still missing," he said. Another 20 people were reported dead in northern Takhar province and two in neighboring Badakhshan, he added.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, "Hundreds of our fellow citizens have succumbed to these calamitous floods", in a statement posted to X earlier on Saturday. "Moreover, the deluge has wrought extensive devastation upon residential properties, resulting in significant financial losses," he added. — AFP



**CAMBRIDGE:** MIT graduate student union members demonstrate outside the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on May 10, 2024. — AFP

## Arrests as police clear MIT, UPenn Gaza protests

**CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts:** Police carried out pre-dawn swoops Friday on students protesting the war in Gaza at two prestigious US universities, in the latest unrest on campuses across the country. And late Thursday, police broke up a pro-Palestinian protest at the University of Calgary in western Canada using tear gas. The police action at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) near Boston in the northeast resulted in around 10 arrests, according to university president Sally Kornbluth, who said she had "no choice" but to dismantle the "high-risk flashpoint".

At the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, officers in tactical gear forcibly removed several dozen students who had linked arms around a statue of Benjamin Franklin, NBC reported. It said they had been given two minutes to leave. Students did not resist arrest at either US university and both of those actions appeared to have been relatively peaceful.

The demonstrations have spread to campuses abroad. The clash in Canada's Alberta province pitted police in tactical gear against about 150 students at the University of Calgary. It was not immediately clear how many arrests were made, if any. At MIT, Kornbluth

offered a timeline of the weeks of protest and negotiations on the campus, culminating in four warnings to students and finally her decision to ask police to clear the encampment, which she described as a "last resort".

For the demonstrators, she wrote, the encampment "symbolized a moral commitment that trumped all other considerations, because of the immense suffering in Gaza". But for those supporting the Zionist entity, it "delivered a constant assertion, through its signs and chants, that those who believe that (the Zionist entity) has a right to exist are unwelcome at MIT. As a result, the encampment became a flashpoint."

She said those students who refused to leave were escorted "calmly" off campus before being placed under arrest. But student organizers remained defiant and scheduled an "emergency rally" Friday at 3:00 pm (1900 GMT) to protest what they said was the university's "unjust discipline, eviction & arrest". "You cannot suspend the movement. We will be back," a protest coalition wrote on Instagram.

Police have arrested more than 2,000 people nationwide in the weeks of US campus unrest. Students have been protesting the Zionist entity's war against the Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza, and demanding that their schools divest financially from US weapons manufacturers and Zionist entities. Campus authorities have sought to support the right to protest while acting against complaints of "anti-Semitism" and "hate speech" at the demonstrations. In at least one incident, counter-protesters physically attacked demonstrators at the University of California, Los Angeles. — AFP

## UN votes in favor of Palestinian...

Continued from Page 1

the Palestinian people and restoring their legitimate rights, including the right to establish an independent state within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Before Friday's vote, Palestinian ambassador Mansour said: "I have stood hundreds of times before at this podium, but never for a more significant vote than the one about to take place, an historic one. The day will come where Palestine will take its rightful place among the

## More than 300 killed in Afghan...

Continued from Page 1

damaged," Rana Deraz, a communications officer for the UN agency in Afghanistan, told AFP. There were disparities between the death tolls provided by the government and humanitarian agencies. The UN migration agency, the International Organization for Migration, said there were 218 deaths in Baghlan.

## International

# Iran conservatives tighten grip in parliament election

## Vote to finalize makeup of conservative-dominated chamber

TEHRAN: Iran's conservatives and ultra-conservatives clinched more seats in a partial rerun of the country's parliamentary elections, official results showed Saturday, tightening their hold on the chamber. Voters had been called to cast ballots again on Friday in regions where candidates failed to gain enough votes in the March 1 election, which saw the lowest turnout -- 41 percent—since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Candidates categorized as conservative or ultra-conservative on pre-election lists won the majority of the 45 remaining seats up for grabs in the vote held in 15 of Iran's 31 provinces, according to local media. For the first time in the country, voting on Friday was a completely electronic process at eight of the 22 constituencies in Tehran and the cities of Tabriz in the northwest and Shiraz in the south, state TV said. "Usually, the participation in the second round is less than the first round," Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi told reporters in Tehran, without specifying what the turnout was in the latest round.

"Contrary to some predictions, all the candidates had a relatively acceptable and good number of votes," he added. Elected members are to choose a speaker for the 290-seat parliament when they begin their work on May 27. In March, 25 million Iranians took part in the election out of 61 million eligible voters. The main coalition of reform parties, the Reform Front, had said ahead of the first round that it would

not participate in "meaningless, non-competitive and ineffective elections". The vote was the first since nationwide protests broke out following the September 2022 death in

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was among the first to cast a ballot as voting began. "If God wishes, dear people, everyone should participate in these elections and vote. Greater participation signifies a stronger parliament," he said. In March, 25 million Iranians took part, out of 61 million eligible voters. The main coalition of reform parties, the Reform Front, had said ahead of the first round that it would not take part in "meaningless, non-competitive and ineffective elections".

The vote was the first since nationwide protests broke out following the September 2022 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22. Amini, an Iranian Kurd, had been arrested for allegedly flouting the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi on Wednesday said participation in the second round was "as important" as the first. "Those with influence among the people should encourage the nation to participate in it," he said, according to Mehr news agency.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, first-round turnout was above 61 percent, before falling to 42.57 percent in 2020 when elections took place during the COVID pandemic. — AFP



TEHRAN: Iranians queue to vote at a polling station in Tehran during the parliamentary runoff elections on May 10, 2024. — AFP

## Pyongyang to deploy new multiple rocket launcher this year

SEOUL: North Korea will equip its military with a new 240mm multiple rocket launcher starting this year, state media said Saturday, adding a "significant change" for the army's artillery combat capabilities was under way. Leader Kim Jong Un on Friday oversaw a live-fire test of the "technically updated" rocket system, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said. The announcement comes as analysts say the nuclear-armed North could be testing and ramping up production of artillery and cruise missiles before sending them to Russia for use in Ukraine.

Pyongyang in February said it had developed a new control system for its 240mm multiple rocket launcher that would lead to a "qualitative change" in its defense capabilities, and last month executed a test-firing of new shells. The updated rocket launcher will be "deployed to units of the Korean People's Army as replacement equipment from 2024 to 2026", KCNA said Saturday.

South Korea's defense ministry told AFP it could not confirm the Friday test launches. But Pyongyang said eight shells had "hit point target to intensively prove the advantage and destructive power of the updated 240mm multiple rocket launcher system". Images released by state media showed leader Kim

conversing with military officials during an inspection of the launcher, as well as what appeared to be the live-fire test of the system. The tests also proved the power of the "controllable shells for (the) multiple rocket launcher", it added. The largely isolated country has recently bolstered military ties with Russia, and Pyongyang thanked Moscow last month for using its UN Security Council veto to block the renewal of a panel of UN experts that monitored international weapons sanctions on Kim's regime.

South Korea and the United States have accused North Korea of supplying weapons to Russia, despite UN sanctions banning such a move. KCNA said Saturday that Kim discussed ways to raise production of the new rocket launcher system and shells to "the highest level".

It also said a "significant change will be soon made in increasing the artillery combat ability of our army", without providing details. Inter-Korean relations are at one of their lowest points in years, with Pyongyang declaring South Korea its "principal enemy". It has jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and threatened war over "even 0.001 mm" of territorial infringement.

While escalating its military threats towards South Korea, the North is "also signaling its intentions to participate in weapons exports and other defense-related economic activities via ongoing technical advancements," said Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. In the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Pyongyang has "indirectly verified the performance of its existing weapons" by supplying them to Russia, he said. — AFP



This picture taken on May 10, 2024 and released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on May 11, 2024 shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspecting the 240mm multiple rocket launcher system at an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP

## 'Miracle' survivor found 5 days after S Africa collapse

JOHANNESBURG: Rescuers and onlookers cheered and applauded Saturday as a survivor was rescued after 116 hours from underneath the rubble of a collapsed building in South Africa, with the tragedy having killed at least 13.

"It is a miracle that we have all been hoping for" provincial premier Alan Winde said on X. An apartment block under construction in the southern city of George crumbled Monday afternoon while a crew of 81 were on site. "When we went down to the side of the slab we had uncovered, we heard somebody inside and we stopped all the heavy operations," Colin Deiner, head of rescue operations, told reporters. Rescuers then called out to the survivor and he spoke back, Deiner said.

"He indicated to us that he's got weight on his legs, and we're very concerned about that after such a long period of time." After several hours, the survivor was extricated and rushed to a hospital. Rescue teams have been working against time ever since the structure came crashing down. — AFP

## N Korean hackers stole court data: S Korean police

SEOUL: North Korean hackers stole sensitive data, including individuals' financial records, from a South Korean court computer network over two years, Seoul police said Saturday. The nuclear-armed North is known to operate an army of thousands of hackers operating both inside the largely isolated country and apparently overseas, and has been blamed for several major cyberattacks in the past.

South Korean national police said the hackers pilfered 1,014 gigabytes of data from a court's computer system from January 2021 to February 2023, citing a joint investigation with the country's spy agency and prosecutors.

The hackers' malware transmitted stolen data, including South Koreans' marriage and personal debt records, to "four domestic and four overseas servers" before it was finally "detected by antivirus software", the national police said in a statement sent to AFP.

The data breach was found to be the work of a North Korean hacking outfit after authorities compared the detected malicious programs, server payment details and IP addresses with those identified in earlier hacking cases attributed to Pyongyang. — AFP



MUCUM, Brazil: Aerial view after flooding caused by heavy rains in Mucum, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil, taken on May 10, 2024. — AFP

## Fresh rains pound Brazil's south as evacuations double

PORTO ALEGRE: The skies opened once again Friday in southern Brazil, offering little respite for those whose homes have been swallowed by floodwaters, while the number of people forced to evacuate doubled in 24 hours.

Residents of the state of Rio Grande do Sul were bracing for a weekend of heavy rainfall, hitting just as waters that turned city streets into rivers had begun to subside. The deluge—which experts link to climate change exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon—has affected almost two million people, leaving 126 dead and 756 injured.

Another 141 people are still missing, according to authorities. The state capital Porto Alegre, home to 1.4 million inhabitants, tried to resume some normalcy on Friday, with some businesses opening and traffic blocking streets as waters receded. But then, the menacing grey clouds delivered a fresh downpour.

The region expects precipitation with "intense winds and hail," according to the National Institute of Meteorology. The MetSul Meteorologia site reported "a new period of intense atmospheric instability," with up to 200 mm (7.9 inches) of rain by Monday.

The state's Guaiba River, which runs through Porto Alegre, reached historic levels this week. In the past 24 hours, the number of people forced to flee their homes almost doubled to around 411,000 people, according to civil defense figures. More than 71,000 are being housed in shelters. With water supplies still cut, bottles of clean drinking water are a scarce commodity in Porto Alegre, while tanker trucks deliver to shelters and hospitals.

In the devastated town of Eldorado do Sul, boats pass through the flooded streets, carrying food to those who refuse to leave their homes, fearing looting.

Katiane Mello waited for a boat to take her to check on her home, which she fled a week ago when the Guaiba River overflowed and waters rose to the second floor of the house where she lived with her husband and five-year-old daughter.

"We lost our source of livelihood, our store. And the house..." she said, her eyes filling with tears as she surveyed the damage. The muddy floodwaters have destroyed more than 85,000 homes, and struck a blow to the economy of the important agricultural region.

In the rice-growing areas surrounding Porto Alegre, farmer Daniel Dalbosco said he had lost crops under "up to two meters of water." His neighbors "lost between 40 and 50 hectares (100 and 125 acres). It was very, very complicated," he said. The disaster in Rio Grande do Sul is the result of the "double whammy of El Nino plus climate change," said Clare Nullis, spokeswoman for the UN meteorology agency WMO, at a media briefing in Geneva.

"Even when El Nino fades, which it will do, the long-term effects of climate change are with us. Every fraction of a degree in temperature increase means that our weather will become more extreme.

"Our weather is on steroids. When we are at war with nature ... nature strikes back, and nature has unfortunately, you know, hit back in Brazil." — AFP

### News in brief

#### Trump's son Barron, 18, pulls out of political debut

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's youngest son Barron, 18, on Friday stepped back from his planned political debut, withdrawing as a delegate at the Republican Party convention in July. Barron, who has been largely shielded from the public eye, made global headlines this week when it appeared he would be the latest member of the Trump family to enter the political arena. But a statement from the office of his mother Melania Trump, the former president's third wife, soon put a stop to the convention plan. "While Barron is honored to have been chosen as a delegate by the Florida Republican Party, he regrettably declines to participate due to prior commitments," it said. — AFP

#### Ex-I Coast leader Gbagbo candidate for election he banned from

ABIDJAN: Former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo was named on Friday as his party's candidate for a 2025 presidential election even though he is banned from running because of a 20-year jail term. Gbagbo, the West African nation's president from 2000 to 2011, was the first former head of state to face a crimes against humanity trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague where he was acquitted in 2019. The 78-year-old was however ordered jailed for 20 years in 2018 for his role in the looting of a bank. He was pardoned in 2022 but still cannot run for public office. His African Peoples' Party-Ivory Coast (PPA-CI) still named him their candidate on Friday. — AFP

#### Ex-Peru president Fujimori says he has tongue cancer

LIMA: Former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori, released from prison in December after serving 16 years for crimes against humanity, said on Friday he had been diagnosed with a malignant tongue tumor. President from 1990 to 2000, Fujimori has been in poor health and was freed for humanitarian reasons after only serving part of his 25-year sentence. Fujimori, now 85, was sent to prison in 2009 over massacres committed by army death squads in 1991 and 1992 in which 25 people, including a child, were killed in supposed anti-terrorist operations. "Now that I've regained my freedom, I face a new battle," Fujimori said in a video posted on social media platform X. — AFP

#### Virginia school board restores Confederate names

WASHINGTON: A Virginia school board voted Friday to restore the names of Civil War Southern generals to two schools, four years after they were removed following a wave of protests for racial justice. The move by the Shenandoah County school board, in a five to one vote, bucks a nationwide trend of striking the names of prominent figures in the pro-slavery Confederacy from schools, US military bases and monuments. Honey Run Elementary School will once again be known as Ashby-Lee Elementary, while Mountain View High School will go back to being Stonewall Jackson High. — AFP

#### Madagascar leader's former aide jailed in UK for graft

LONDON: The former chief of staff of Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina was sentenced to three and a half years in jail for bribery on Friday at a British court. Romy Andrianarisoa, 47, was convicted in February of seeking a bribe from a British mining company to secure licenses to operate in the island republic off the southeastern coast of Africa. Andrianarisoa denied the accusations after being charged in August last year alongside her associate, 54-year-old French national Philippe Tabuteau. He pleaded guilty in September. Handing down the sentence, judge Christopher Butcher said Andrianarisoa played a "leading role in the enterprise" and "abused" a position of "significant trust and responsibility". — AFP

SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2024

# UK economy exits recession in pre-vote boost for PM Sunak

## GDP expands 0.6% in Q4 with strong growth in services and car manufacturing

**LONDON:** Britain has emerged from a short-lived recession with better-than-expected growth in the first quarter, official data showed Friday, boosting embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak before this year's general election.

Gross domestic product expanded 0.6 percent in the first three months of this year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said, with strong growth in services and car manufacturing. That beat market expectations of 0.4-percent growth and sent London's stock market to a fresh record peak, with sentiment buoyed also by the Bank of England (BoE) on Thursday signaling an interest-rate cut in the summer. Sunak—whose governing Conservatives are trailing the main opposition Labour Party in polls before a general election—has made growth one of his top priorities.

The economy contracted slightly for two quarters in a row in the second half of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession that was caused by elevated inflation that has prolonged a cost-of-living crisis. "There is no doubt it has been a difficult few years, but today's growth figures are proof that the economy is returning to full health for the first time since the pandemic," said finance minister Jeremy Hunt. Labour finance spokesperson Rachel Reeves slammed the government's stewardship of the economy.

"From no growth to low growth—is that really the scale of the Conservatives' ambitions? Food prices are still high, families are paying more on their monthly mortgage bills and working people are worse off," she said. Richard Carter, head of fixed interest research at wealth manager Quilter Cheviot, said the UK was "clearly entering a more optimistic period".

"The government will be hoping to take advantage of this in the lead up to the general election," he added. Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown, said that the UK economy "has jogged out of recession" after output shrank 0.3 percent in the final quarter of last year and by 0.1 percent in the prior three months.

## Air India Express staff end strike after flight disruptions

**MUMBAI:** Air India's budget subsidiary said its cabin crew had ended a strike that caused two days of severe disruptions to its flight schedule and stranded passengers at airports across the country. The airline was taken over by Indian conglomerate Tata Group in 2022 after a government effort to privatize the heavily indebted carrier. Media reports linked the sudden industrial action to simmering staff discontent over new policies on hiring and promotion imposed by its new ownership.

Dozens of Air India Express cabin crew staff called in sick at the last minute from Tuesday night, forcing the airline to delay or cancel at least 175 flights in the following days. In a statement issued Thursday night, an airline spokesperson said the airline was working to "swiftly restore" its schedule af-



LONDON: People shop for fruit and vegetables at Borough Market in London on May 10, 2024. — AFP

ter a successful meeting with staff. "We are pleased with the progress we made at the conciliation meeting and welcome our cabin crew colleagues back at work," the statement said.

"We sincerely apologize to those inconvenienced by these unintended disruptions," it added.

Indian media reports said the airline had also withdrawn termination letters issued to at least 20 striking staff. An Air India Express spokesperson said earlier Thursday that the airline had taken "appropriate steps against certain individuals", but did not provide further details.



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She added: "It's clear a corner has been turned, as intense cost-of-living pressures subside, and consumers and companies eye lower borrowing costs on the horizon." The Bank of England on Thursday left borrowing costs at 5.25 percent, the highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis, hurting borrowers but boosting savers.

The BoE maintained its main interest rate for a

sixth meeting in a row, mirroring a wait-and-see approach by the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank. Signaling that a rate cut was on the horizon, two members of the bank's nine-strong Monetary Policy Committee voted for rates to be cut by 0.25 percentage points. Cautioning over the timing of a cut, Hunt on Thursday said the BoE should not "rush into a decision that they had to

reverse at a later stage".

Latest data showed UK annual inflation fell less than expected in March to 3.2 percent, keeping it well above the BoE's two-percent target. The rate, however, has come down sharply from a four-decade high above 11 percent in late 2022, when energy and food prices soared following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

New Delhi airport saw chaotic scenes Wednesday after the strike began as agitated passengers waited for updates on delayed and cancelled flights, according to local media.

Air India Express said in a statement earlier that it had made "every possible effort to minimize the inconvenience caused to our guests" but had been forced to cancel 85 flights on Thursday. "We urge our guests booked to fly with us to check if their flight is affected by the disruption before heading to the airport," it added.

More than 90 other flights had been "disrupted" since Tuesday by the resulting staff shortages, the airline said in a separate statement on Wednesday, without clarifying whether they had been delayed or cancelled. Chief executive Alok Singh said Wednesday that the airline had been forced to curtail its flight schedules over the coming days. "Since last evening, over 100 of our cabin crew colleagues have reported sick prior to their rostered flight duty, at the last minute, severely disrupting our operations," Singh said. "This act is certainly not representative of the 2,000-odd cabin crew colleagues in the company who continue to respond to the call of duty." — AFP



COTONOU: General view of the Dantokpa market, one of the largest open-air market in West Africa, in Cotonou. — AFP

sence of a "fair agricultural policy" from the government in the face of declining purchasing power. The World Bank said Benin's economy in 2023 was still resilient despite the external economic shocks the country had to weather.

At a cabinet meeting this week, the government temporarily suspended shipments of cereals outside the country in a bid to ease pressure on prices.

Political protests have become less common in Benin since President Patrice Talon came to power in 2016, with some major opposition leaders either in exile or jailed. Critics regularly accuse the cotton magnate of taking an authoritarian turn in a country once praised as a beacon of pluralism in West Africa.

Protesting over high costs, the main unions organized a demonstration in Cotonou on April 27 which was banned by the police who used tear gas to break up the rally. Nearly 30 demonstrators and leaders of the trade union movement were arrested on that day,

before being released a little later. "The workers are struggling to make themselves heard. We have demands, but no way of expressing them," explained nurse Arsene Olory-Togbe, aged 48.

On May 1, the Confederation of Benin Workers' Unions (CSTB Benin), the country's main trade union, rallied in a new demonstration, which was immediately banned by the authorities. This time, 72 demonstrators were arrested, including 21 placed in pre-trial detention for cannabis consumption.

"Our motivations relate to the unhappiness among citizens today. The high cost of living and the decline in purchasing power," said Anselme Amoussou, general secretary of CSA Benin, the country's second largest trade union organization. Despite the ban and cancellation of demonstrations in recent days, trade unionists have once again called on the population to protest against the high cost of living on May 11 in the economic capital of Benin. —AFP

## US to raise tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles: Report

**WASHINGTON:** The United States is planning to increase tariffs on Chinese clean energy goods, news reports said Friday, with levies on electric vehicles expected to roughly quadruple. The move, reported by the Wall Street Journal, comes at the end of a long-awaited review of tariffs that were imposed during a trade war between Washington and Beijing.

Then-president Donald Trump imposed tariffs on some \$300 billion in goods from China. Officials have since initiated a review of the actions, with the US Trade Representative required to look into the impact of the levies—first introduced in 2018 -- after four years. A decision, expected on the coming Tuesday according to news reports, would come as President Joe Biden gears up for a rematch with Trump in November's presidential election.

Last month, he urged for a tripling on tariffs for Chinese steel and aluminum as he courted blue-collar voters in the battleground state of Pennsylvania. In particular, higher tariffs are set to impact critical minerals and solar goods as well as batteries from China, said the Wall Street Journal. The tariff rate on EVs is also due to rise from 25 percent to around 100 percent, the report added.

This is unlikely to deal an immediate blow to Chinese EV companies, which do not have a large presence in the United States due to existing levies. But officials appear to be guarding against Chinese imports. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen recently warned against overcapacity in China, which risks a flood of below-cost goods in the global market, potentially impacting burgeoning US industries. — AFP

## Frankfurt, London and Paris stocks close at records

**PARIS:** Europe's leading stock exchanges closed at record levels on Friday as investors looked forward to cuts in interest rates. The Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London and Paris stock exchanges all closed at their highest ever levels.

The London and Frankfurt stock exchanges hit new records at the open Friday as data showed the UK emerged from recession in the first quarter. The British capital's FTSE 100 index advanced 0.5 percent to 8,426.95 points. Frankfurt's DAX also rose about 0.5 percent to 18,773.30 points in early deals before slightly paring down some gains.

Both exchanges had jumped to record peaks on Thursday after the Bank of England maintained its interest rate at a 16-year high but signaled that cuts were on their way. The Paris CAC 40 stock index climbed to a new all-time high Friday, joining London and Frankfurt which also hit fresh records earlier in the day. The French stock exchange gained 0.8 percent to 8,256.62 points in later morning deals, beating its previous record set on March 28, as hopes of interest-rate cuts sent European markets higher. — AFP

## Tensions soar in Benin over cost of living

**COTONOU, Benin:** In the heart of Cotonou's large Dantokpa market, Diane Makpenon's family corn shop is less busy than usual these days. The business run by her mother like others in Benin's economic capital has been slowing down as they struggle with rising prices. The price of a kilo (2.2 pounds) of corn, one of the country's most widely consumed foods, rose from 200 CFA francs (0.30 euro cents) to 450 CFA francs, before falling again to 400 CFA francs within a few days, according to traders.

A 120-kilo bag is now sold for between 33,000 (about 50 euros, nearly \$54) and 36,000 CFA francs compared to barely 30,000 CFA francs before. The increase in food costs in the small West African nation prompted Benin's labor unions to call for an unprecedented series of protests against the cost of living—the first was dispersed by police firing tear gas and a second banned by the authorities. A third planned for Cotonou on Saturday has been granted authorization by city officials.

Benin's consumer prices and economy have been hit by fallout from the Ukraine war and by the closure of the border with major trading partner Niger to the north following a coup there last July. Neighboring Nigeria's naira currency devaluation and abrupt end of a decades-long fuel subsidy have also impacted Benin's fuel prices and trade.

"Going to the market has become torture. Everything costs us so much that we are helpless," said Roberte Akododja, 42, owner of a bistro in Cotonou's popular Bgbeamey district. "Even in restaurants, you have to pay more for usual meals or settle for small portions," said Delphin Agossouhou, a private administration executive.

Camille Segbedji, one of the leaders of the National Union of Secondary Teachers and Administrative Personnel of Benin (SYNEPAS), criticized the ab-



# Gulf Bank wins two awards from MEED Magazine for MENA region

## Bank excels in implementing diversity and inclusion and women empowerment initiatives

KUWAIT: In recognition of its pioneering role in executing initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion within the bank and externally, Gulf Bank was honored by MEED magazine with two prestigious awards: The "Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives" and the "Best Initiative for Women in Business" award for the Middle East and North Africa region. The awards were presented at a grand ceremony in Dubai, last week.

On this occasion, Salma Al-Hajjaj, the General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank, said upon receiving the award: "We are delighted that Gulf Bank has been honored with this prestigious

dividuals with special needs are also fundamental to our strategy and aligns with our vision for Kuwait.

Al-Hajjaj also emphasized, "We firmly believe that creating a fair work environment not only fosters greater success for the bank, but also cultivates a healthier work culture for all, thereby enhancing its esteemed position as a top choice for employment in the Kuwaiti financial sector."

Al-Hajjaj mentioned that the award encourages the bank to persist in its exceptional efforts to empower women, noting a rise in the percentage of female leaders from 10 percent to 30 percent over the past decade, while women now make up about 42

### Najla Al-Eisa

- The bank is fully committed to empowering women, helping them advance in their careers and step into leadership roles.
- We firmly believe that establishing a fair work environment contributes to achieving more success for the bank, and enhances its esteemed position.

### Salma Al-Hajjaj

- We are delighted to receive this prestigious award, which represents the culmination of our dedicated efforts, to establish a work environment enriched with diversity and inclusion.
- We believe that fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion enhances employee performance and supports their development, creativity, and innovation.



Salma Al-Hajjaj and Najla Al-Eisa receive awards from MEED magazine.

award. It represents the culmination of our dedicated efforts to uphold the principles of sustainability, and to establish a work environment enriched with diversity and inclusion, guaranteeing equal opportunities for everyone."

She continued, "We are convinced that fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion not only boosts the bank's positive reputation, but also enhances performance, and supports the development, creativity, and innovation of our employees. It strengthens their relationships and encourages the exchange of ideas and experiences. Empowering women, youth, and in-

percent of the bank's total workforce. She highlighted that Gulf Bank was one of the first in Kuwait to sign the United Nations principles for empowering women, and was the first Kuwaiti bank to eliminate all forms of discrimination between its female and male employees, achieving complete equality in employment benefits.

She stressed the need to persist in empowering women to narrow the gender gap, noting that such efforts boost institutional productivity, strengthen the national economy, and increase the Gross Domestic Product. She further stated, "We recognize

the critical role of women in economic growth and in upholding sustainability principles, which aligns with the bank's strategy and Kuwait's vision."

### Fair work environment

Upon receiving the "Best Initiative for Women in Business" award, Najla Al-Eisa, the Deputy General Manager and Chief Marketing Officer of Gulf Bank, expressed her joy over the bank's accomplishment. She noted that the award signifies the success of the extensive efforts the bank has invested in this field. She pointed out that the bank is fully committed to women's empowerment at all levels, addressing the significant challenges that women face in society. This commitment is demonstrated by organizing the annual "Lead the Way" conference, which brings together representatives from the government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations.

Additionally, the bank organizes a monthly "WOW Diwaniya" gathering to address internal challenges and strongly focuses on the training and professional development of women: aiming to support their career advancement and leadership opportunities.

Al-Eisa mentioned that Gulf Bank firmly believes that establishing a fair work environment contributes to greater success for the bank, fosters a healthier work culture for everyone, and enhances its prestigious status as one of the top employment destinations in the Kuwaiti financial sector.

She continued, "It is important to note that this recognition is just one of several prestigious awards Gulf Bank has received. Notably, we were awarded the 'Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion' at the Middle East and North Africa Human Resources Management Summit 2023, which took place in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The summit brought together leading experts and professionals from the Human Resources sector, representing some of the

region's most distinguished companies and financial institutions. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Diversity and Inclusion and Women's Empowerment Awards.

## Chip giant TSMC's April revenue jumps 60% on-year

TAIPEI: Taiwanese chip giant TSMC said on Friday that April revenue jumped nearly 60 percent on-year, riding a huge wave of demand for the advanced semiconductors used in AI hardware. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company controls more than half the world's output of chips, and supplies them for everything from Apple's iPhones to Nvidia's cutting-edge artificial intelligence hardware.

Consolidated revenue for April was "approximately NT\$236.02 billion (US\$7.2 billion)... an increase of 59.6 percent from April 2023", the firm said in a statement. This compares with a 34.3 percent on-year jump in March. The company said last month that first-quarter revenue increased 13 percent on-year to US\$18.87 billion, and expects a 27.6 percent rise in the second. The wild success of OpenAI's ChatGPT has sparked an AI gold rush, with demand surging around the world for the cutting-edge chips needed to train and run AI services.

TSMC dominates the global chip industry, and the bulk of its fabrication plants are based in Taiwan, a self-ruled island that is claimed by neighboring China. Beijing has said it would not rule out the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, and has in recent years ramped up pressure by sending in record-breaking numbers of warplanes and naval vessels around the island.

The semiconductor supply chain is highly vulnerable to shocks, and concerned governments have lobbied TSMC to move more production away from Taiwan. The United States in particular has made a huge push, passing the Chips and Science Act in 2022 to overhaul the semiconductor industry on American soil. US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Wednesday during a US House hearing on the department's budget that an invasion of Taiwan by China and a seizure of TSMC would be "absolutely devastating" to the American economy.—AFP



HSINCHU, Taiwan: Visitors watch a wafer shown on screens at the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) Renovation Museum at the Hsinchu Science Park in Hsinchu.— AFP



MADRID, Spain: This combination of file pictures shows the logo of Spanish bank BBVA in a building in Madrid (left) and the logo of Sabadell Bank in a building in Sant Cugat de Valles. — AFP



## BBVA's takeover bid for rival faces obstacle course

MADRID: The hostile takeover bid launched by Spanish banking giant BBVA for its smaller rival Banco Sabadell has sparked a political uproar in the country. The operation announced on Thursday would have to overcome a series of regulatory hurdles before it could be completed, making its success uncertain. Here are some of the key challenges the deal faces:

BBVA is offering an exchange of one if its shares for every 4.83 Sabadell shares, a 30-percent premium over the April 29 closing price of both banks. Sabadell has said this "significantly undervalues" its value. It accuses BBVA of breaching takeover rules since it provided "incomplete information that could affect the market". Spain's fourth-largest bank has reported its concerns to stock market regulator CNMV.

BBVA Chair Carlos Torres Vila played down this opposition on Thursday, saying he had been contacted by shareholders in favor of the deal. But Sabadell's capital is held by multiple of investors, none of them holding more than 5.0 percent of the lender, making the takeover unpredictable since many players must be convinced.

Economy Minister Carlos Cuelpo has warned his leftist government "will have the last word when it comes to authorizing the operation" which he said would be "potentially damaging" for the economy.

Cuelpo did not detail what steps the government can take but Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz said Spanish banking supervision law allowed it "to authorize or not authorize this type of operation".

This hostile takeover bid, the first in the Spanish banking sector in nearly four decades, is "extremely risky" for the economy and against the country's "interests", she added. The takeover bid has also come up against hostility in Catalonia, the northeastern region where Sabadell originated and has a strong

presence, and the neighboring region of Valencia where it currently has its headquarters.

They both fear a reduction in the number of branches, which they say would be detrimental to businesses and individuals. Pere Aragones, a moderate separatist who heads the regional government of Catalonia, has said the takeover bid could "weaken the economic weight" of the region. The issue has been in focus in the final days of campaigning for Sunday's regional election in Catalonia, with parties across the political spectrum voicing concerns. "For some time, there's been a strategy to kill the Catalan banking industry," former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont, the head of hardline separatist party JxCat who led Catalonia's failed 2017 secession bid, wrote on X. The hostile offer "must be responded to with full force, with all the law and with all reason," he added.

Spain's two main trade union confederations, the UGT and Comisiones Obreras, have also sounded the alarm over possible job losses. Workers must not "pay the cost of this operation," the UGT warned. Asked about these concerns at a news conference on Thursday, BBVA Chair Carlos Torres Vila ruled out any "traumatic measures" for employees and highlighted the career opportunities the merger would create. But he did not rule out any staff cuts. BBVA employs around 121,000 people worldwide, while Sabadell has some 19,000 workers.

The main obstacle for BBVA lies with supervisors. The operation needs the green light from the European Central Bank, Spanish stock market regulator CNMV and the competition authorities in the countries where the two lenders operate. The Spanish banking sector is already highly concentrated, with 56 percent of the market in the hands of three groups—Santander, BBVA and CaixaBank.

"This rate would rise to 64 percent" if BBVA's takeover bid is successful, which could lead to a "significant reduction in competition," according to broker XTB. The operation will take up to eight months to complete, according to BBVA. "There is going to be a war of attrition," economist Javier Santacruz told Spanish public radio, adding BBVA will have to do a great deal of "persuasion" to be successful.—AFP

## Airports in spat over right to use name 'San Francisco'

LOS ANGELES: Lawsuits are flying in a dispute between two California airports over the right to use the name "San Francisco"—despite neither of them being in the city. San Francisco International Airport (SFO) is suing the recently renamed San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport (OAK), insisting the similar sounding names might confuse potential passengers.

Their lawsuit has been met with a counterclaim from The Port of Oakland asking a judge to rule its airport's new moniker—which replaced "Metropolitan Oakland International Airport"—is not a copyright infringement. "Changing 'Metropolitan' to 'San Francisco Bay' in Oakland Airport's name accurately describes OAK's geographic location on the Bay and presents the airport as an additional choice for travel into the San Francisco Bay Area," said port attorney Mary Richardson on Thursday, announcing the lawsuit.—AFP

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### Cedar-IBSI Digital Banking and AI Summit

MAY 21, 2024  
WALDORF ASTORIA KUWAIT

# MEED names Adel Al-Majed '2024 MENA CEO of the Year'

In recognition of his contributions to growth of banking industry in Kuwait and region



Adel Al-Majed receiving the award



Al-Majed (center), Al-Tuwaijri and Al-Fahad.

KUWAIT: MEED, the internationally renowned publication, has named Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer, Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, as "MENA CEO of the Year", in recognition of his exceptional leadership and significant contributions to the growth of the banking industry over the past years. This came as a part of its 2024 MENA excellence awards.

Al-Majed received the award in a special ceremony held by the institution in Dubai in the presence of Boubyan Bank's CEO - Private, Consumer, and Digital Banking, Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri, Ahmed Al-Fahad, General Manager and Secretary to the Board of Boubyan Bank, and a group of elite bankers, economists, and leaders from various economic sectors to recognize the institutions that won the awards at the Middle East level.

Al-Majed is an example of leading Kuwaiti bankers, who succeeded over more than four decades in making a clear mark in the banking business, and who has had outstanding achievements that contributed to the growth and reinforcement of the banking industry ever since joining the National Bank of Kuwait where-in he came up through the ranks until he assumed the position of the Deputy CEO of the bank before joining Boubyan Bank in 2009 to embark upon a new journey marked with many successes.

MEED congratulated Adel Al-Majed on this well-deserved achievement owing to his prominent and key role in the successful journey of Boubyan Group, where he - along with his special team - led the transformation up to the success which made Boubyan a banking example to follow in Islamic banking in general, and financial and banking institutions in particular. They stated that the most unique thing about that prestigious award won by Al-Majed was being given for the first time ever to the most prominent and top visionary CEOs, with the ability to effect a significant

## Adel Al-Majed:

- The group's excellence and success are mainly attributed to our professional team
- Boubyan is now the leading franchise in the digital scene and in customer service among all Islamic and conventional local banks



Logo of the 2024 MENA CEO of the Year Award.

contributed to this achievement, as well as many other achievements that placed Boubyan in the lead of the banking business. Any excellence or success is mainly attributed to the professional team and the sincere efforts exerted to achieve success."

## Factors of success and excellence

Al-Majed's journey with Boubyan Bank since he moved from the National Bank of Kuwait back in 2009 is considered an example of domestic success stories. Back then, Boubyan Bank was at the bottom of the table of local banks in terms of financial and economic indicators. Following which, Boubyan Bank witnessed

translation of all those into real solutions that meet customers' needs.

## Excellence in customer service

Ever since the first day of the bank's transformation journey in 2009, Boubyan's management has always been working to improve the quality of services and products to improve and enrich a banking experience that meets the needs of customers and becomes part of their lifestyle, which led the bank to be in the lead of customer service in Kuwait as it has been named 2023's "Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service" for the 14th year in a row since 2010 by Service Hero, the consumer-driven customer satisfaction index, making the bank a leading franchise in the banking industry, by following a tailored path that reinforces customer satisfaction levels, leading to receiving a 96% customer-satisfaction score among all Islamic and conventional local banks.

## Key financial indicators of growth

Under the leadership of Al-Majed and the executive team of the Group, Boubyan managed to have many repeated successes that pushed the bank's figures to record levels, thus making the bank a unique example among banks in Kuwait and the region. In numbers and over the past 10 years alone, the bank's assets grew from \$7.1 billion (KD 2.2 billion) to \$27.4 billion now (KD 8.4 billion). Moreover, over the past five years the operating profits grew from \$270.0 million (KD 83.0 million) to \$349.7 million (KD 107.5 million), while the bank's share of Islamic financing grew from 8.55 percent to 11.67 percent, and its share of deposits grew from 8.13 percent to 11.30 percent.

## Expansion regionally and internationally

Coinciding with its 20th anniversary, Boubyan has become a group now comprising three banks (Boubyan Bank, The Bank of London and the Middle East, and Nomo Bank "the Group's digital arm"), in addition to another three companies, namely, Boubyan Takaful Insurance Company, Boubyan Capital Investment Company, and Boubyan National), to continue Boubyan's strategy towards domestic and international expansion.

Furthermore, and as a part of its regional expansion, Boubyan established a subsidiary of BLME in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in addition to BLME's headquarters in London and Dubai, and Boubyan now owns 71 percent of BLME's shares. In line with the strategic approach aiming to reinforce the global presence of Boubyan Bank with focus on digital banking services, Nomo was established as a sustainable



Al-Majed during the ceremony

brand in Kuwait and the UK as the world's first Islamic digital bank. Nomo succeeded in doing so as it serves as a platform for Sharia-compliant digital services and solutions, which is on track to penetrate GCC markets with steady steps towards further expansion.

## Shaping the digital future

Boubyan Bank's digital transformation strategy gained a significant momentum, being a real and living example for succeeding in being highly competitive regionally and internationally in digital services and in encouraging innovation and sustainable digital growth towards accelerating transformation and making financial transactions more convenient, thus enabling Boubyan to be in the forefront of the digital banking scene, globally, regionally, and domestically, evidenced by retaining the award for the World's Best Islamic Digital Bank by Global Finance for 9 years in a row.

It can be safely said that owing to the proactive vision and well-studied plans of Boubyan Bank's management, the bank managed to prove that digital transformation was the fulcrum of regional expansion to upgrade the digital infrastructure of the bank's services and to reinforce its digital solutions' portfolio to be in the lead of institutions that support investing in digital services, and to provide the banking sector with many digital banking services launched for the first time in Kuwait by Boubyan, such as contactless payment services, thus succeeding in offering revolutionary exceptional digital experience worldwide.

## Prior awards to Al-Majed

Over the past years, Al-Majed received many recognitions and awards, chief among which:

- 2022 MENA Islamic Banker of the Year Award from MEED
- 2021 Outstanding Contribution to Islamic Finance Award from Global Finance in recognition of his efforts in this vital economic sector over the past years, especially since taking up the leadership of Boubyan Bank back in 2009.
- 2021 Arab Banker of the Year Award by the Union of Arab Banks, making him the first Kuwaiti banker ever to receive this highest recognition given by the Union of Arab Banks for excellent achievers in the Arab financial and banking business.

- The award is given for the first time ever as a special recognition to celebrate the prominent banker in the region
- A banking career extending for more than 40 years where he helped shape the future of the banking industry

change not only institution-wise but also across the MENA banking scene as a whole.

On his part, Al-Majed commented as he accepted the award: "I would like to thank everyone for this recognition. I am proud and grateful for receiving this award, which crowns the efforts of a journey that extends for over 40 years of ongoing and ceaseless work in facing and overcoming challenges, up to where we stand right now."

He went on to add: "I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all my colleagues who accompanied me throughout this extended journey, and all those who

major transformations and cemented its leadership position among the top 3 banks in Kuwait, and it ranks even first in some key indicators and market shares.

Despite all the challenges faced by Al-Majed and his team, a new strategy was developed that focused on core banking, and bringing up a new spirit to the bank's employees based on innovating in order to upgrade the bank's services, in addition to the importance of introducing cutting-edge banking solutions that meet the demands of both retail and corporate customers in line with analytics, studies, and ideas, regardless of all potential challenges towards

## LuLu Hypermarket brings taste of tropics with 'Mango Mania'

KUWAIT: Lulu Hypermarket launched the eagerly-awaited annual 'Mango Mania' extravaganza at all its outlets across Kuwait. The week-long event, which ran from 8-14 May, was inaugurated on May 9 at the LuLu Hypermarket Fahaheel by Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika, accompanied by Counselor Sanjay K Muluka, along with LuLu Group International, Chairman and Managing Director M A Yusuff Ali, in the presence of top management of LuLu Kuwait and a large gathering of shoppers and well-wishers.

All of LuLu's outlets were adorned with a mind-boggling variety of over 50 mango types sourced from seven different countries. Customers were swept away by amazing price discounts on the king of fruits, including the ever-popular Alphonso, Mango Badami, Mallika, Thotapuri, and Rajapuri from India, and the famous Galpatur varieties from Yemen. But the sweetness did not stop there. The Mango King's tropical reign showed the customers with a delicious selection of mango-inspired delights, in-

cluding fresh refreshing mango juices and smoothies. Shoppers were further indulged with decadent mango halwa and payasam, while exploring a world of savory treats like mango snacks, curries, salads, and pickles. For those with a sweeter tooth, the Mango Mania offered a range of mousse cakes, tarts, trifles, muffins, pastries, and even Swiss rolls made from succulent mangoes.

Mango Mania was more than a rush of sweetness, it had a rush of thrill to offer as well. It was a full-fledged family fun fest with customers capturing their sweetest moments at the selfie booth and unleashing their creativity with the mango cut-out displays. Customers had their mango knowledge put to the test with themed games and puzzles, while children had the opportunity to celebrate the king of fruits with the exciting kids' mango cake decoration competition.

From the vibrant displays of sun-kissed and succulent mangoes to the aroma of freshly squeezed juices, and the playful echoes of children's laughter during the cake decorating competition, Mango Mania was a feast for all senses. With bellies full and hearts brimming with sweet memories, Kuwait bid farewell to what has become a much-anticipated annual tradition in the country's shopping calendars. The event once again underlined LuLu Hypermarket's abiding resolve to provide customers with the best of what the world offers, at the most competitive prices.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika inaugurates LuLu Hypermarket's annual 'Mango Mania' extravaganza at its Fahaheel outlet. Indian Embassy Counselor Sanjay K Muluka, LuLu Group International Chairman and Managing Director M A Yusuff Ali and top management of LuLu Kuwait were also present on the occasion.



'Mango Mania' extravaganza at its LuLu Hypermarket's Fahaheel outlet.



Mangoes are brought to the hypermarket in the Malayalam movie fame lorry 'Spadikam'.

# NBK bags 6 prestigious banking excellence awards from MEED

In the magazine's annual survey for MENA region for 2024



Mohamed Al-Othman and Al-Kharafi with the NBK team while receiving the banking awards.



Mohamed Al-Othman receives the award for the Best Banker in Personal Banking Services in the Middle East and North Africa.



Mohammad Al-Kharafi receiving the award for the best innovation program in the Middle East and North Africa.

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received six prestigious awards from MEED international magazine within its MENA Banking Excellence Awards for 2024. The accolades come in recognition of its excellence in consumer banking and enhancing customer digital experience through innovative solutions, as well as achievements in sustainable investment and delivering market-leading wealth management services through NBK Wealth.

#### Excellence in retail banking and digital innovation

The awards won by NBK during the annual ceremony organized by MEED in Dubai included: Best Retail Bank –Kuwait (NBK), Best Digital Bank –Kuwait (Weyay). The bank also received two awards for Best Innovation Program in MENA, and Excellence in Sustainable Investment in MENA for NBK Academy, whereas NBK Wealth was awarded MENA Fund Manager of the Year.

On the other hand, Mohamed Al-Othman, CEO – Consumer and Digital Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait was named MENA Retail Banker of the Year for the third year in a row.

These awards are a testament to NBK's leadership locally and regionally and its pioneering innovative digital achievements and catering to customers' banking needs by introducing top-notch banking services and advanced payment solutions, making the name "NBK" associated with everything new in digital banking products and services in Kuwait and across the MENA region.

#### Al-Othman MENA Retail Banker of the Year

Naming Al-Othman as MENA Retail Banker of the Year reaffirms his pivotal role, along with Consumer Banking Group team in attaining these achievements and providing a comprehensive digital banking experience that not only meets customers' needs, but exceeds their expectations. This award recognizes exceptional leadership and dedication to providing the best banking services, in addition to constantly working to set ambitious goals and implement innovative strategies that have not only had a significant impact on NBK customers, but also on the Kuwaiti and regional banking landscape. It also highlights the long-term impact of Al-Othman's contributions as a role model for banking leaders who are driving progress and innovation in the industry in the region.

As for Best Digital Bank award won by Weyay Bank, the first digital bank in Kuwait, it recognizes the exceptional growth seen by the bank in digital banking services since its launch in 2021, strengthening its position as a local pioneer in this area through unwavering endeavors to introduce new innovative banking products. It also reflects its instrumental role in providing advanced services which cater to

- Mohamed Al-Othman named MENA Retail Banker of the Year
- NBK earns Best Retail Bank in Kuwait
- Best Innovation Program in MENA
- NBK Academy recognized for Excellence in Sustainable Investment in MENA
- "Weyay" awarded Best Digital Bank –Kuwait
- NBK Wealth secures the coveted MENA Fund Manager of the Year

the evolving needs and lifestyle of the digital-native generation, through a wide range of digital banking products and services.

#### Excellence in sustainable investment

On the sustainability front, NBK received the award of Excellence in Sustainable Investment in MENA for NBK Academy program which boasts a legacy of success for 16 years. The Academy was launched with the aim of qualifying Kuwaiti fresh university graduates to join the banking sector by providing them with the best-in-class training programs developed in cooperation with leading inter-

national institutions and universities to meet the demands of the labor market.

Founded in 1957, MEED is a leading magazine focused on economic and business news and intelligence related to the Middle East. In partnership with leading financial services publications Retail Banker International and Private Banker International, both issued by GlobalData, MEED introduces MENA Banking Excellence Awards to celebrate the best-in-class banking and financial services institutions and individuals for their innovative offering and commitment to customer excellence.



National Bank of Kuwait wins six prestigious awards for banking excellence.

## NBK Wealth MENA Fund Manager of the Year

**KUWAIT:** NBK Wealth made a special presence at the MEED Awards ceremony this year by securing the coveted award of MENA Fund Manager of the Year.

NBK Wealth recently unveiled its brand identity as the largest local and regional wealth management group with AUM exceeding US\$ 20 billion. It also strengthened its global footprint with an extensive network of comprehensive operations spanning nine cities across five countries worldwide.

NBK Wealth provides clients with numerous unique advantages, ensuring them an unmatched experience. This encompasses personalized services customized to meet their specific needs and financial objectives, delivered by a dedicated team of over 125 investment professionals and traders, in addition to 75 relationship managers.



Shadi Khader, Head of Regional Asset Management in the Middle East and North Africa region at NBK Wealth.

NBK Wealth provides distinctive services such as asset management, brokerage, lending, deposits, and a range of customized and innovative solutions tailored for high-net-worth individuals and institutional clients, thus contributing to strengthening the Group's diversification endeavors. In KSA, NBK Wealth Management led the companies in terms of increase in AUM with a 1,004 percent QoQ increase in Q4 2023.

NBK Wealth has carved a niche for itself as a premier wealth management provider, offering a comprehensive suite of meticulously crafted financial solutions tailored to the specific needs of high-net-worth individuals and families across the MENA region. The company draws strength and stability from its association with the esteemed NBK Group. Leveraging its extensive market knowledge, unparalleled global reach, and a commitment to innovation in investment strategies, NBK Wealth empowers its clients to achieve their long-term financial goals with unwavering confidence.

This prestigious award underscores not just NBK Wealth's dedication to exceptional investment performance, but also its unwavering commitment to exceeding client expectations on every level. The group prioritizes fostering strong, long-term relationships with each client, built on a foundation of trust, transparency, and a deep understanding of their unique financial aspirations.

As NBK Wealth celebrates this remarkable achievement, the group remains steadfast in its commitment to continuous development. The team is committed to staying at the forefront of the wealth management industry, continuously innovating and adapting its strategies to meet the evolving needs of its clients in a dynamic and ever-changing financial landscape.

## Lifestyle

## Beach Boys' Brian Wilson placed under conservatorship

Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson has been placed under a conservatorship by a Los Angeles judge, following his struggles with dementia and the recent loss of his wife. Wilson, 81, regarded by many as a singular musical genius, has required help with his daily life since his diagnosis, which was publicly revealed last year.

Shortly after the death of his wife Melinda in January, Wilson's family asked the court for his business manager LeeAnn Hard, as well as his publicist and manager Jean Sievers, to be appointed to manage his personal and medical affairs. Their legal guardianship was approved at Los Angeles County Superior Court on Thursday by Judge Gus May, who said Wilson suffers from a "major neurocognitive disorder" and is "unable to care" for himself, according to US media.

In a statement posted on his website earlier this year, Wilson's family said a conservatorship would ensure that "Brian and the children living at home will be taken care of and remain in the home where they are cared for."



Brian Wilson

Wilson has seven children, who must be consulted on all healthcare decisions. His finances are already held in a trust, Rolling Stone reported.

A towering figure in the world of music, Wilson was responsible almost single-handedly for the California sound pioneered by the Beach Boys in the 1960s. His signature blend of easy-sounding pop, underlaid by complex harmonies and often deeply poetic lyrics, elevated the band far beyond its disposable surf-song image.

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

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

In 1964, he suffered a breakdown while on tour, forcing him to focus on recording, but heralding a period of extreme creativity that produced "Pet Sounds" -- since hailed as one of the best and most influential albums in pop music history -- among others.

Wilson's experiments with drugs were coupled with bouts of depression and auditory hallucinations, as well as a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder, according to a biographer. —AFP

## Oscars Academy, at pivotal point, launches \$500m fundraising drive

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Friday launched a \$500 million fundraising drive, pegged to the upcoming centenary of the Oscars. Named Academy100 -- ahead of the 100th Oscars ceremony, set for 2028 -- the drive is intended to diversify finances for the group, which plays a key role in fostering new filmmakers and preserving movies, as well as handing out the annual Academy Awards.

It comes at a time when viewership of the Oscars has drastically shrunk, and as the Academy's lucrative, long-standing broadcast deal with ABC for the ceremony telecast is nearing its end. "The Academy will soon enter its second century, and we want to ensure that we continue to be the preeminent leader of our international film community," said Academy CEO Bill Kramer, in a statement.

"Like all healthy organizations, the Academy needs a sustainable and diverse base of support," he added.

Sponsors have already committed more than \$100 million to the campaign, the Academy said. The Academy's members -- there are around 10,000 -- are invited to join based on their filmmaking achievements. They range from directors and producers to A-list actors and visual effects artists.

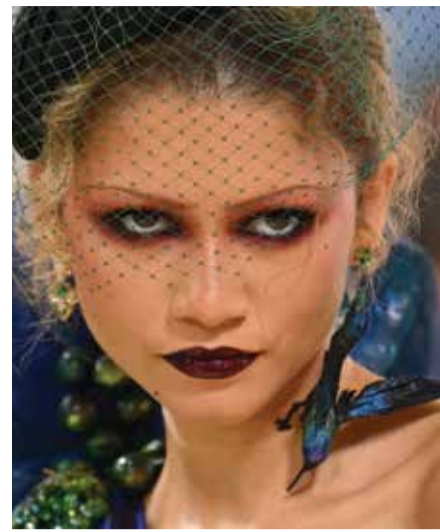
Membership has become increasingly international and diverse in recent years. Academy100 is intended to "deepen our worldwide reach and impact," said Kramer. The group also launched the popular Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles in 2021. —AFP



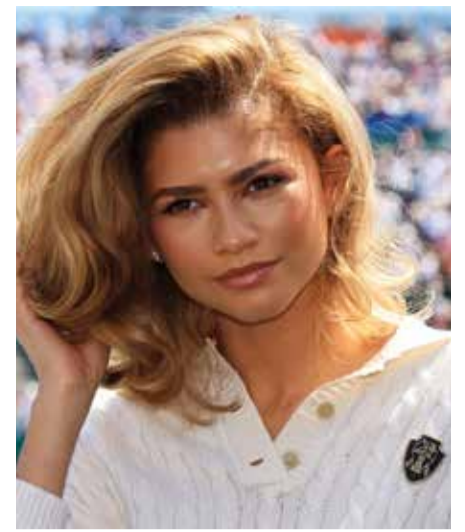
File photo shows US actress and singer Zendaya arrives for the premiere of "Dune: Part Two" at Josie Robertson Plaza at Lincoln Center on February 25, 2024, in New York City.—AFP photos



File photo shows US actress Zendaya poses with the Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress In A Drama Series for "Euphoria".



US actress Zendaya arrives for the 2024 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 6, 2024, in New York.



File photo shows US actress Zendaya poses for a photocall as part of the promotion of the film "Challengers" at the Monte Carlo Country Club.



## Zendaya: A superstar, not a challenger

From film to fashion, former teen actor Zendaya has emerged as one of the few bona fide A-list superstars of her generation, thanks to a stunning recent run of hits on both the screen and the red carpet. The 27-year-old American leads two of Hollywood's highest profile movies of the year so far -- "Dune: Part Two" and "Challengers" -- while also finding time to co-host New York's Met gala earlier this week.

Her appearance in two separate dazzling outfits at the annual showbiz summit in Manhattan set social media ablaze, and wowed critics who increasingly refer to Zendaya as a "fashion icon." That is just the latest accolade in a career that has seen Zendaya become the youngest lead actress in a drama winner at the Emmys, with "Euphoria," release a musical album, star in multiple Marvel superhero movies, and move into producing.

"To me, Zendaya is a thousand years old. She has already lived many lives before this one. And yet, she is as young as springtime," Zendaya's "Dune" director Denis Villeneuve told Time Magazine in 2022. "She is timeless, and she can do it all," said Villeneuve, calling Zendaya "a cultural icon in the making."

Born Zendaya Coleman in California in 1996, the future star initially struggled with extreme shyness, according to her parents, who are both teachers. After trying her hand at sports including basketball, Zendaya discovered a passion for the stage. Her mother Claire worked a second job at a theater in Oakland.

"She would beg me to bring her to technical rehearsals," recalled her mother, in a 2021 interview. Noting her transformation on stage, Zendaya's par-



US actress Zendaya arrives for the 2024 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 6, 2024, in New York.

ents decided to take her to Los Angeles for auditions. Aged 14, she landed a role in Disney Channel series "Shake It Up." More success quickly followed, as she released a self-titled pop album in 2013, before making her big-screen debut in superhero smash hit "Spider-Man: Homecoming."

She played the role of MJ, the girlfriend of Peter Parker/Spider-Man, played by English actor Tom Holland.

As the film spawned sequels, the pair became -- and remain -- a couple in real life.

## 'Euphoria'

But it was Zendaya's role in dark HBO teen drama "Euphoria" that established her as a formidable, grown-up star. She played the show's main character Rue, a troubled youth plagued by addiction and self-destructive behavior.

The role earned her the prestigious lead actress in a drama Emmy at 24, and she repeated the award two years later. Between those wins, Zendaya appeared in Villeneuve's first "Dune" movie, in a small part that was nonetheless highlighted in the movie's marketing. Villeneuve praised Zendaya's "authenticity"

as "a new superpower," and she features heavily in the sequel, which came out in March and has earned \$700 million globally.

Her other major role this year, "Challengers," casts Zendaya as a tennis prodigy at the center of a love triangle in which rivalry, friendship and lust intertwine. Zendaya also produced the movie, having been sent the script while shooting "Euphoria" and "falling in love" with the character of Tashi. "It's a female character that doesn't have to be likable and doesn't care about you liking her and doesn't ask for forgiveness... that was refreshing to me," she told a press conference. Zendaya dazzled the red carpet at premieres for both films, in a cyborg outfit for sci-fi "Dune" and wearing outside chic for "Challengers."

## Outspoken

For now, Zendaya has stepped away from her music career. Asked last month, she expressed distaste for the business side of the music industry, before adding that she would "maybe put out a little song" in the future. She remains focused and outspoken on issues of diversity and representation. During her later teen years at Disney, Zendaya pushed for the inclusion of a Black family in the series "K.C. Undercover." She has been openly criticized beauty standards and race in the entertainment industry. "I am Hollywood's... acceptable version of a Black girl, and that has to change," said Zendaya, whose mother is white and whose father is Black, in one interview. "As a light-skinned Black woman, it's important that I'm using my privilege, my platform, to show you how much beauty there is in the African-American community." —AFP

## Somebody to love: Justin and Hailey Bieber to have a baby

Pop titan Justin Bieber and his model wife Hailey are going to be parents, the couple announced.

The pair posted pictures of the 27-year-old fashionista and businesswoman cradling her baby bump while wearing a sheer lace dress. Followers of the couple's separate social media accounts were also treated to a video that apparently shows them renewing their vows at an open-air ceremony.

The video also shows Hailey, the daughter of actor Stephen Baldwin, encoined in a passionate kiss with the Canadian megastar.

Other pictures show Bieber, 30, taking photos of his pregnant wife in what

appears to be some kind of tropical setting. The Instagram posts come weeks after the couple were spotted in Hawaii, with Hailey wearing a flowing dress that covered up her usually svelte figure, sparking online speculation that she might be expecting.

Entertainment outlet TMZ quoting "sources with direct knowledge" said the pregnancy was over six months along. Bieber first shot to global stardom as a teen pop sensation in 2009, since then churning out hits that included the mega-selling "Baby", featuring rapper Ludacris, and "Somebody to Love." —AFP



Canadian singer-songwriter Justin Bieber (left) and US model Hailey Bieber arrive for the 64th Annual Grammy Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on April 3, 2022.—AFP



Northern lights or aurora borealis illuminate the night sky near London, Ontario, during a geomagnetic storm.—AFP photos

# FIRST 'EXTREME' SOLAR STORM IN 20 YEARS BRINGS SPECTACULAR AURORAS

The most powerful solar storm in more than two decades struck Earth on Friday, triggering spectacular celestial light shows from Tasmania to Britain -- and threatening possible disruptions to satellites and power grids as it persists into the weekend.

The first of several coronal mass ejections (CMEs) -- expulsions of plasma and magnetic fields from the Sun -- came just after 1600 GMT, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Space Weather Prediction Center.

It was later upgraded to an "extreme" geomagnetic storm -- the first since the "Halloween Storms" of October 2003 caused blackouts in Sweden and damaged power infrastructure in South Africa. More CMEs are expected to pummel the planet in the coming days. Social media lit up with people posting pictures of auroras from northern Europe and Australasia.

"We've just woken the kids to go watch the Northern Lights in the back garden! Clearly visible with the naked eye," Iain Mansfield in Hertford, England, told AFP.

That sense of wonder was shared in Australia's island state of Tasmania. "Absolutely biblical skies in Tasmania at 4am this morning. I'm leaving today and knew I could not pass up this opportunity," photographer Sean O' Riordan posted on social media platform X alongside a photo.

Authorities notified satellite operators, airlines and the power grid to take precautionary steps for potential disruptions caused by changes to Earth's

magnetic field. Unlike solar flares, which travel at the speed of light and reach Earth in around eight minutes, CMEs travel at a more sedate pace, with officials putting the current average at 800 kilometers (500 miles) per second.

The CMEs emanated from a massive sunspot cluster that is 17 times

be my advice because if you see the aurora, it's quite a spectacular thing," he said. People with eclipse glasses can also look for the sunspot cluster during the day.

In the United States, this could include places such as Northern California and Alabama, officials said. NOAA's Brent Gordon encouraged the public to

er lines, which can potentially lead to blackouts. Long pipelines can also become electrified, leading to engineering problems.

Spacecraft are also at risk from high doses of radiation, although the atmosphere prevents this from reaching Earth. NASA has a dedicated team looking into astronaut safety and can

es could also be affected. Pigeon handlers have noted a reduction in birds coming home during geomagnetic storms, according to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Officials said people should have the normal backup plans in place for power outages, such as having flashlights, batteries and radios at hand.



People stop along a country road near London, Ontario to watch the Northern lights or aurora borealis during a geomagnetic storm.



Windmills turn in a field near London, Ontario as the Northern lights or aurora borealis illuminate the night sky during a geomagnetic storm.

wider than our planet. The Sun is approaching the peak of an 11-year cycle that brings heightened activity.

### 'Go outside tonight and look'

Mathew Owens, a professor of space physics at the University of Reading, told AFP that how far the effects would be felt over the planet's northern and southern latitudes would depend on the storm's final strength.

"Go outside tonight and look would

try to capture the night sky with phone cameras even if they couldn't see auroras with their naked eyes. "Just go out your back door and take a picture with the newer cell phones and you'd be amazed at what you see in that picture versus what you see with your eyes."

### Spacecraft and pigeons

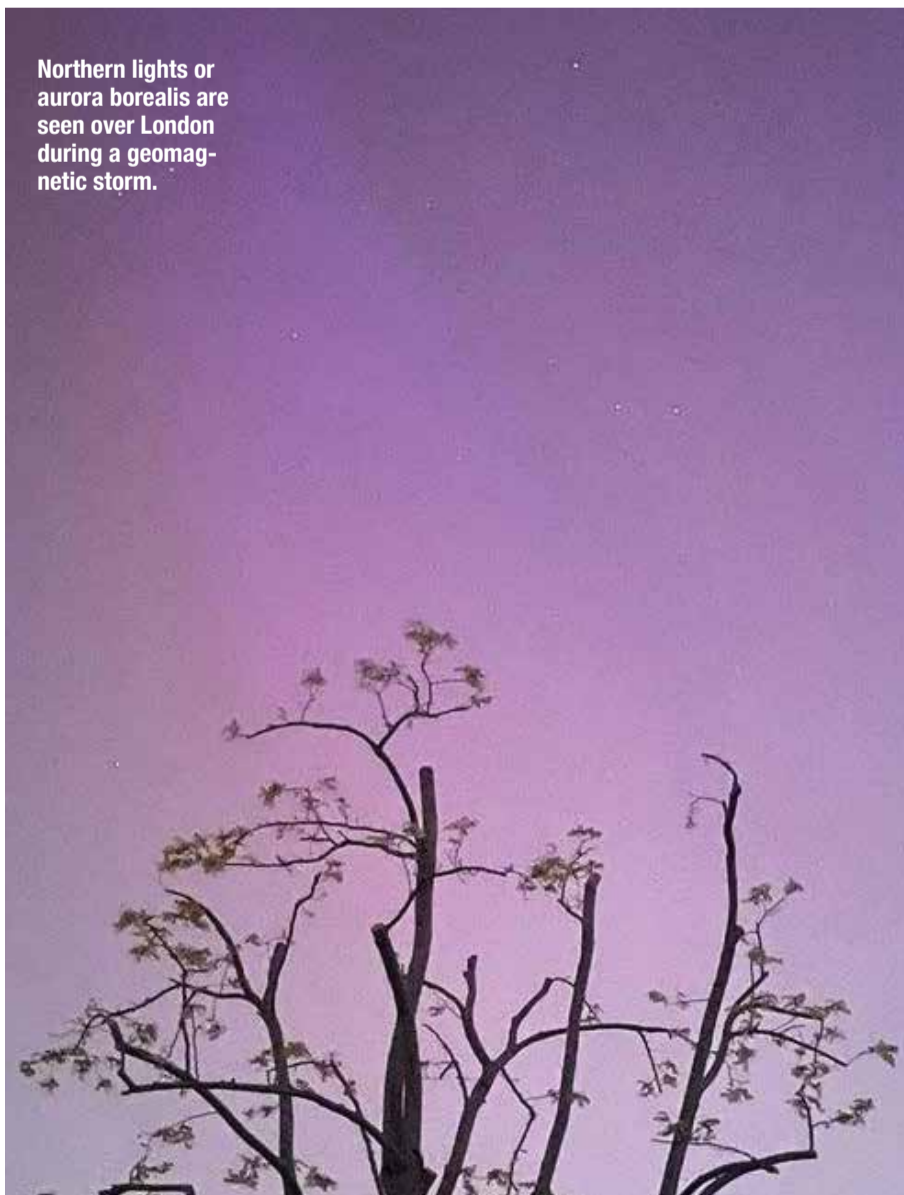
Fluctuating magnetic fields associated with geomagnetic storms induce currents in long wires, including pow-

er lines, which can potentially lead to blackouts. Long pipelines can also become electrified, leading to engineering problems.

Following one particularly strong flare peak, the US Space Weather Prediction Center said users of high-frequency radio signals "may experience temporary degradation or complete loss of signal on much of the sunlit side of Earth."

Even pigeons and other species that have internal biological compass-

The most powerful geomagnetic storm in recorded history, known as the Carrington Event after British astronomer Richard Carrington, occurred in September 1859. Excess currents on telegraph lines at that time caused electrical shocks to technicians and even set some telegraph equipment ablaze.—AFP



Northern lights or aurora borealis are seen over London during a geomagnetic storm.



People stop along a country road near London, Ontario to watch the Northern lights or aurora borealis during a geomagnetic storm.



Northern lights or aurora borealis are seen over Margate, Kent, South East Britain, during a geomagnetic storm.



This image shows the Northern lights or aurora borealis over Ohio, during a geomagnetic storm.

## Sports

# Nuggets, Pacers claw back in NBA conference semi-finals

## In Indianapolis, Haliburton scores 35 points

LOS ANGELES: The NBA champion Denver Nuggets roared back into their Western Conference semi-final series with Minnesota with a 117-90 victory over the Timberwolves on Friday as the Indiana Pacers clawed back a game against the New York Knicks. NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray scored 24 points apiece, with Jokic adding 14 rebounds and nine assists for the Nuggets, who cut the deficit in their best-of-seven series to 2-1.

Denver dispelled any suggestion they would bow out quietly after they were humbled by the young Timberwolves in games one and two in Denver. The Pacers, who dropped the first two games of their Eastern Conference semi-final series in New York, also avoided an 0-3 hole with a 111-106 victory over the Knicks in Indianapolis.

"Everybody knows what it looks like when you go down 3-0," Pacers star Tyrese Haliburton said, a nod to the fact that no NBA team has rallied from that deficit to win a playoff series. "We had to come out play desperate, play hard," added Haliburton, whose Pacers will now try to level the series at home on Sunday. Denver will try to pull level on Sunday in Minneapolis, where Jokic said the Nuggets went into the contest determined to "play like a champion."

"I think we played much simpler," Jokic told broadcaster ESPN. "We were aggressive, more aggressive than them, and I think that's definitely the thing that changed the game." Murray, who scored just 25 points over the first two games and was fined \$100,000 for letting his frustration boil over and throwing a heating pad onto the court during game two, connected on 11 of 21 shots and came up with three steals. "Our guys answered the bell," Nuggets coach Michael Malone



MINNEAPOLIS: Naz Reid #11 of the Minnesota Timberwolves accepts the Sixth Man of the Year award before Game Three of the Western Conference Second Round Playoffs against the Denver Nuggets at Target Center on May 10, 2024. - AFP

said. "They showed me that they still believe." Michael Porter Jr. added 21 points as all five Nuggets starters scored in double figures against a Timberwolves team that coach Chris Finch called "sluggish" and "slow." Anthony Edwards led Minnesota with 19 points. Karl-Anthony Towns scored 14, but the Timberwolves didn't play with the pace that overwhelmed the Nuggets in Denver. They trailed by as many as 34 points, to the dismay of fans at the Target Center who were eager to see the kind of show the Timberwolves had put on in

Denver. "Not a lot of good things on either end of the floor, really," Finch said.

In Indianapolis, Haliburton scored 35 points and Andrew Nembhard emerged as an unlikely hero, draining a three-pointer from deep as the shot clock was running down to put the Pacers ahead 109-106 with 17.8 seconds left to play. It was just his second basket of the night, but it turned the tide for good in a physical, back-and-forth battle in which the Pacers surrendered an early 12-point lead and rallied from nine down in the fourth quarter.

"I put (Nembhard) in kind of a bad situation and he just made an unbelievable shot," said Haliburton, who passed to Nembhard with just four seconds on the shot clock after finding himself unable to get a shot off in the face of a swarming Knicks defense. "Big, big shot," Haliburton said. "He really stepped up to the moment when we needed him most." Haliburton had six of Indiana's 12 three-pointers. Pascal Siakam scored 26 points and Myles Turner added 21 and 10 rebounds for Indiana. The banged-up Knicks, already missing Julius Randle, Mitchell Robinson and Bojan Bogdanovic, were also without OG Anunoby after he suffered a hamstring strain in game two.

Knicks star Jalen Brunson, who wasn't confirmed to start until after pre-game warm-ups after hurting his right foot on Wednesday, got off to a slow start, but New York briefly pulled ahead in the second quarter - foreshadowing a third-quarter surge that saw them take a 90-85 lead into the final period. Donte DiVincenzo led the Knicks scoring with 35 points, connecting on seven of 11 from three-point range. Brunson finished with 26 points and six assists, hitting a game-tying three-pointer with 42.4 seconds left. - AFP

## Scheffler prepares to face fatherhood as PGA looms

LOUISVILLE: Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler has been golf's hottest sensation over the past two months, but he's about to face a new challenge that will test him in unprecedented ways - fatherhood. The 27-year-old American, who won his second Masters crown in three seasons last month at Augusta National, has been off for three weeks as he and his wife, Meredith, await the birth of their first child. "Hopefully I'll be a good dad. I'm going to do my best," Scheffler said last month. "It's an exciting time for Meredith and me. It's an exciting time for the rest of our family. We're looking forward to this next journey in our life together."

Scheffler has until Tuesday afternoon to decide whether or not he will play at next week's 106th PGA Championship at Valhalla in Louisville, Kentucky. His impressive early season run has included wins at Bay Hill and The Players Championship in March, a runner-up effort after losing a Houston Open playoff, then wins last month at the Masters and Heritage tournaments. Scheffler became the first player since 1985 to win the Masters and at the Heritage the following week. After winning the Masters for a second time, Scheffler said he does not plan on fatherhood dimming his competitive desires.

"Will definitely enjoy the birth of my first child. But with that being said, I still love competing," said Scheffler. "My priorities will change here very soon. My son or daughter will now be the main priority, along with



Scottie Scheffler

my wife, so golf will now be probably fourth in line. "But I still love competing. I don't plan on taking my eye off the ball anytime soon, that's for sure." That's not good news for Scheffler's competitors, including US pal Max Homa.

"You want to beat people at their best. He's making that incredibly difficult," Homa said. "I will say if there's one thing that could slow him down it's parenthood. It's hard." "Scottie is frustratingly well rounded as a human being," Homa added. "He's a hard worker at golf. I know he's going to be an amazingly hard worker as a dad. I know he's going to dominate both. "Yeah, he's probably going to have to make some adjustments with sleep and the practice and dividing your time amongst that when you're home." "Scottie is on track to be one of the best of all time. - AFP



Vasiliy Lomachenko

## Lomachenko unruffled by brash Kambosos ahead of title fight

PERTH: Ukrainian boxing great Vasiliy Lomachenko brushed aside rival George Kambosos' taunts of sending him into "retirement" ahead of their lightweight world title fight on Sunday in Perth. The 36-year-old Lomachenko (17-3, 11 knockouts) is in the twilight of a glittering career that boasts three division professional world titles and two Olympic gold medals. He's also regarded as the greatest ever amateur having compiled an incredible 396-1 record.

Lomachenko is a heavy favourite to claim the vacant IBF lightweight world title, but will have to contend with the brash Australian who will have a sold-out 15,000 crowd right behind him at an expected febrile RAC Arena. "When I beat Lomachenko, there'll be no more road for him to go," the heavily tattooed Kambosos told reporters during the week. "This is retirement for him, I truly believe it."

Lomachenko was unruffled by former champion Kambosos' barbs, but remained coy over his future. "I have heard this not for the first time. I am not surprised. We will see what happens," he said. "Nobody knows (about his future). I don't know what will happen after this fight and how my body will be." Both fighters have a point to prove after mixed results in recent years. Lomachenko failed in his bid to become the undisputed lightweight champion after a contentious unanimous decision loss to American Devin Haney in Las Vegas last year.

Kambosos shocked the world in 2021 after stunning Teofimo Lopez at Madison Square Garden in one of boxing's biggest upsets. But he crashed back to earth after consecutive losses to Haney prompted critics to dub Kambosos a one-hit wonder. An unconvincing and controversial win over England's Maxi Hughes last year did little to alter his reputation. A motivated Kambosos (21-2, 10 knockouts) believes victory over Lomachenko, once considered the world's best pound-for-pound boxer, will finally cement his legacy. At 5-foot-9 (1.75m), he is two inches taller than his opponent and also considerably younger at 30 years of age. Kambosos and Lomachenko were comfortably under the 135-pound limit at Saturday's weigh-in ahead of a 12-round showdown that has been a long time coming.

After plans in 2019 failed to materialize, a slated fight three years later was scuppered when Lomachenko returned home to his family due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The anticipation boiled over during the week when Lomachenko and Kambosos had to be separated after two stare downs lasted more than three minutes each. They were particularly intense square offs even in a sport known for its theatrics. "This is destiny. - AFP



SPOLETO: Pink jersey Team UAE's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar rides in the pack during the 8th stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race, 152km between Spoleto and Prati di Tivo, on May 11, 2024. - AFP

## Pogacar turns screw on Giro with stage 7 time trial win

ROME: Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar won stage 7 of the Giro d'Italia, a 40-kilometre time trial, to extend his race lead in Perugia on Friday. Pogacar, who had already won stage 2, finished 17 seconds ahead of Italian time-trial specialist Filippo Ganna and two minutes in front of his great rival, Welsh rider Geraint Thomas. The UAE Team Emirates team leader is now 2min 36sec ahead of Colombian rider Daniel Martinez in the overall standings.

"I prepared well for this time trial and worked a lot on the time trials, my position on the time-trial bike," said Pogacar. "I felt good after the world championships last year, today was my first race on the time-trial bike again. "It was a lot of prepara-

tion for this and a lot of ups and downs since last year in the time trial so I'm super happy that today I felt good." After Ganna set a testing time of 52:01 all eyes were on Martinez, who began the day 47sec off the lead, Thomas, who was one second ahead of him, and Pogacar. While Thomas, who turns 38 on May 25, and Martinez struggled to chew up the tarmac between Foligno and Perugia, Pogacar shifted into overdrive clocking 51.44 at an average speed of 47.1 km/h.

Only 11th at the halfway point, 44 seconds behind Ganna, Pogacar finished very strongly indeed, taking advantage of the last six kilometers of uphill sections to knock out the competition. "I remained cautious until the last climb when I gave it my all," he said, admitting he did not have a lot of information from the team car. "I heard only two times the time gap, and also I wasn't so sure what they said on the radio. I was just focusing on myself," said Pogacar. "I knew the climb suits me, suits me better than other people for sure. That was my advantage on the climb, especially because it was quite steep. - AFP

### News in Brief

#### Como seal Serie A return

ROME: Como secured a return to Serie A on Friday for the first time since 2003 with a 1-1 draw at home to Cosenza that earned them the runners-up spot in Italy's second tier. They will be joined in the top flight next season by Serie B champions Parma, who made sure of their promotion at the start of the month. Como suffered multiple bankruptcies and tumbled down the pyramid after being relegated from Serie A little over two decades ago. The club from Lombardy have former Arsenal teammates Cesc Fábregas and Thierry Henry as minority shareholders, with ex-Chelsea midfielder Dennis Wise a board member. Como only returned to professional football with their promotion to Serie C in 2019. But, bankrolled by Indonesian tobacco giants Djaram, they have stormed through the divisions. The third promoted club will be decided by play-offs featuring the teams finishing between third and eighth, which include Venezia and Sampdoria. - AFP

#### Girona's hopes hit by draw

MADRID: Girona's hopes of taking the runners-up spot behind La Liga champions Real Madrid took a hit on Friday when a goal from Alaves's Jon Guridi in the ninth minute of added time restricted them to a 2-2 draw. Eric Garcia put Girona ahead after just four minutes at the Mendizorrosa stadium in Vitoria before Guridi levelled for the home side eight minutes later. Artem Dovbyk, the league's leading goalscorer with 20, did not get on the scoresheet but a minute before half-time he teed up Yangel Herrera for what appeared to be the winner. But as the game stretched deep into added time Guridi popped up to share the spoils. Girona move to 75 points, 12 behind Madrid and more important only two points clear of their Catalan rivals Barcelona. Barca do not play until Monday but they will go second if they beat a Real Sociedad team still looking to seal a Europa League place. - AFP

#### Brest open door for Lille

PARIS: Brest stumbled to a 1-1 home draw against managerless Reims in Ligue 1 on Friday, giving Lille the chance to leapfrog them this weekend in the race for Champions League qualification. Marshall Munetsi headed Reims ahead in Brittany midway through the first half before Brest equalised on the stroke of half-time through Lilian Brassier. Third-placed Brest, who had never finished higher than eighth before in the top flight, pressed for a winner but had to settle for a point, leaving them with only one win from their last five matches. They are three points ahead of Lille, who visit Nantes on Sunday and have a marginally better goal difference. Reims are winless in six outings and parted ways with coach Will Still at the start of month after the club slipped out of contention for European football. Nice also remain in the mix for a Champions League spot following a 1-0 victory over Le Havre. - AFP

#### Guirassy winner lifts Stuttgart

BERLIN: Serhou Guirassy scored his 26th Bundesliga goal of the season as Stuttgart won 1-0 away to Augsburg on Friday to climb above Bayern Munich and into second place. The Guinea international latched onto a long ball over the defense early in the second half before poking past Augsburg goalkeeper Tomas Koubek to end a three-match goal drought. Guirassy is second to Harry Kane (36) in the scoring charts in Germany's top flight despite missing six games because of injury and Africa Cup of Nations duty. Stuttgart sit a point clear of Bayern and are set for their best finish since coming third in the 2008-09 season, two years after they last won the Bundesliga title. Bayern host Wolfsburg on Sunday following their agonizing Champions League semi-final defeat by Real Madrid this week, which left the club facing a first trophyless season since the 2011-12 campaign. - AFP

#### Sagstrom shares LPGA lead

NEW YORK: Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom shot a six under-par round of 66 in cold and wet conditions to grab a share of the lead at the LPGA Founders Cup with American Rose Zhang. World number one Nelly Korda put herself in contention for a record-breaking weekend, however, matching Sagstrom's 66 with a bogey free round leaving her four shots behind the leaders. The 25-year-old Korda equalled Annika Sorenstam and Nancy Lopez for the all-time record win streak of five in five starts by taking last month's Chevron Championship. The rain made for tricky conditions at Upper Montclair Country Club in Clifton, New Jersey, particularly in the wet, deep rough. However, Sagstrom evaded much of the worst weather and was in exceptional form, reaching the turn five-under for her round. She came unstuck with a double bogey on the 10th, but after a birdie at the next hole she eagled the par-5 12th before her eventful stretch saw her bogey the par-4 13th. - AFP

Sports

# Malaysian football kicks off under heightened security after attacks

## Series of attacks against players shocked the country

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's premier football league kicked off Saturday under the shadow of heightened security after a series of attacks against players shocked the country and forced the cancellation of the season opener. An acid attack last week left star winger Faisal Halim in critical condition, just days after his Malaysia teammate Akhyar Rashid was injured in a robbery outside his home.

In a third incident on Tuesday, former Malaysia skipper Safiq Rahim escaped unharmed after he was threatened with a hammer and his car windshield was smashed by two assailants. But football authorities said Malaysia Super League games would go ahead, starting with Polis DiRaja Malaysia (PDRM) FC against Kedah on Saturday just north of capital Kuala Lumpur. The football association said players should hire bodyguards while reigning champions Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) ramped up security for its squad after its season-opener was cancelled.

Hundreds of fans turned out Saturday for the PDRM-Kedah match, some holding up banners in support of the attacked players. Police numbers were increased around the stadium and officers were armed with pistols. "We are not afraid and will not allow the series of attacks on football players to rattle our enthusiasm for this great sport," said 38-year-old utility worker and Kedah fan Syakirin Said. "Look around, the police presence is strong. If we unite, we can fight back against these ugly perpetrators."

### 'Should feel safe'

Local district deputy police chief Abang Kaderi Abang Wasli told AFP security was doubled at the stadium with about 60 officers on site. "We will frisk anyone that looks suspicious. We also have plain



**KUALA LUMPUR:** Fans watch the Malaysia Super League match between Kedah Darul Aman Football Club and Polis DiRaja Malaysia Football Club in Kuala Lumpur on May 11, 2024. An unprecedented spate of attacks against footballers in Malaysia has left the country shocked and angry, prompting authorities to impose tighter security a few days before the super league season opens. — AFP

clothes officers inside the stadium to ensure security," he said. "Fans should feel safe to come and watch the match, don't be afraid." The scheduled opener between two of Malaysia's top football clubs, JDT and Selangor FC, was called off after the latter cited "a series of criminal incidents and recent threats".

The motive for the attacks is yet to be determined

and one suspect remains under arrest for questioning in connection with the acid attack on Selangor and Malaysia winger Faisal. The 26-year-old nicknamed "Mickey" was left with fourth-degree burns in intensive care, with his motion and speech affected after the attack last week at a shopping mall outside the capital.

Officials said he was responding well after undergoing skin allograft surgery. Syakirin, the Kedah fan, called on other supporters to carry on watching their teams so as not to let the attackers win after the assaults disrupted the league. "I appeal to all football fans in Malaysia: let's unite and show solidarity with the players to reject violence," he said. — AFP

## Blues beat Hurricanes to go top of standings

**AUCKLAND:** Harry Plummer's perfect goalkicking proved the difference as the Auckland Blues beat the Wellington Hurricanes 31-27 on Saturday to take over as Super Rugby competition leaders. A thrilling top-of-the-table match in Auckland was decided after the final hooter as the home side repelled waves of Hurricanes attacks. Reserve Blues scrum-half Sam Nock ripped the ball from lock Isiaia Walker-Leawere to seal his side's eighth successive win and propelled them two points ahead of their opponents on the standings.

Blues captain Patrick Tuipulotu hoped his team could retain top spot through the remaining three rounds of the regular season. "Very big result, it was a Test match for us," he said. "With a couple more games to go until the finals, it puts us in good stead. "Those are the games you want to be a part of. Very

tough and a see-saw battle right down to the wire." The Blues' only loss this season under new coach Vern Cotter was a 29-21 setback in the third round against the Hurricanes in Wellington.

It was just the second defeat for the Hurricanes, who matched the Blues' four tries but weren't as accurate off the kicking tee as fly-half Plummer, who landed all five of his shots at goal. The ACT Brumbies remain third, four points behind the Hurricanes and one in front of the Waikato Chiefs, after beating the New South Wales Waratahs 29-21 in Sydney. In a match played in torrential rain, the Brumbies only confirmed their ninth win when reserve prop Sefo Kautai scored his team's fourth try with two minutes remaining.

The Waratahs are still in 11th, with their two wins this season having both been secured against the Canterbury Crusaders. The Crusaders suffered another blow to their title defense, beaten 32-29 by the Otago Highlanders in Dunedin. The 13-time champions outscored the home side by four tries to two but paid for their lack of discipline, with Highlanders five-eighth Cam Millar landing six penalties in a 22-point haul. It ended a 19-match losing streak for the Highlanders against other New Zealand teams, leaving them seventh while the Crusaders are 10th. — AFP



Harry Plummer

## Iga Swiatek battles into Rome last 16

**ROME:** Iga Swiatek fought past Yulia Putintseva 6-3, 6-4 to reach the last 16 of the Rome Open on Saturday, as Novak Djokovic said he was "fine" to continue his tournament after being hit in the head with a water bottle. World number one Swiatek will next face either Angelique Kerber or Aliaksandra Sasnovich as she bids to become the first person since Serena Williams to claim a third title at the Foro Italico.

Swiatek won the 2021 and 2022 editions before exiting a year ago in the quarter-finals to eventual champion Elena Rybakina, who withdrew with illness on Friday. The 22-year-old came into the event having won the Madrid Open last weekend and will also be gunning for a fourth French Open crown later this month. She made harder work than expected of Saturday's match after comfortably taking the first set, finding herself 4-1 down and having to save four break points to stop unseeded Putintseva from serving for the second.

However Swiatek broke back before levelling the set and rattled off five games in a row to take her record against Putintseva to four wins without dropping a set. Swiatek is one of a host of stars to grace a baking centre court on Saturday, as she will be followed by Rafael Nadal who continues his comeback in a second-round clash with seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz. Nadal has said that he will only play at the French Open, where he has won 14 times, if he feels competitive after a raft of injury problems over the last two years which have left him languishing 305th in the world rankings.

Second seed Daniil Medvedev kicks off his title

defense against Briton Jack Draper before women's third seed Coco Gauff takes on lucky loser Jaqueline Cristian. Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka has a third-round clash with 10th-seed Daria Kasatkina in the Grand Stand Arena. Osaka is ranked at 173 in the world after taking a break from the tour to have her first child but has looked in good form in straight-set wins over Clara Burel and Marta Kostyuk.

World number one Djokovic's continued presence in Rome was in doubt on Friday evening after being left crouched on the ground in agony as a bottle struck him on the back of the head while he greeted fans after his second-round win over France's Corentin Moutet. "Thank you for the messages of concern," Djokovic wrote Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. "This was an accident and I am fine resting at the hotel with an ice pack. See you all on Sunday." Djokovic was later seen arriving for training wearing a cycling helmet. — AFP



**ROME:** Poland's Iga Swiatek returns to Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva during the Women's WTA Rome Open tennis tournament at Foro Italico in Rome on May 11, 2024. — AFP

Today's matches	
<b>English Premier League</b>	
Man United v Arsenal	18:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
<b>Spanish League</b>	
Cadiz v Getafe	15:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
Atletico de Madrid v Celta de Vigo	17:15
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports 1 FR	
Valencia v Rayo Vallecano	19:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
Real Betis v Almeria	22:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
<b>Italian League</b>	
Lazio v Empoli	13:30
beIN Sports 2 FR	
Genoa v Sassuolo	16:00
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Hellas Verona v Torino	16:00
beIN Sports Fr 7 HD max	
Juventus v Salernitana	19:00
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Atalanta v Roma	21:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
<b>German Bundesliga</b>	
Darmstadt 98 v 1899 Hoffenheim	16:30
beIN Sports HD 5	
Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg	18:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
Bochum v Bayer 04 Leverkusen	20:30
beIN Sports HD 5	
<b>French League</b>	
Paris Saint-Germain v Toulouse	22:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
Strasbourg v Metz	22:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 3	
Stade Rennais v Lens	22:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 1	
Marseille v Lorient	22:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
Clermont Foot 63 v Lyon	22:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
Nantes v Lille	22:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 2	
Montpellier v Monaco	22:00
beIN Sports HD 9	

## Inter Milan reboot Serie A title parade

**ROME:** Inter rebooted their Serie A title parade on Friday with a 5-0 thumping of relegation-threatened Frosinone which extended their massive league lead to 21 points. Simone Inzaghi's side, who lost at Sassuolo last weekend, widened the chasm separating them from the rest of Italy's top flight with a reminder of why they secured their 20th Scudetto with five matches remaining. Davide Frattesi got the ball rolling in the 19th minute at the Stadio Benito Sturpe but it wasn't until the final half an hour that Inter really began to run riot. Marko Arnautovic added the second on the hour mark and from there 17th-placed Frosinone collapsed.

Tajon Buchanan drilled home in the 77th minute and three minutes later Lautaro Martinez spun and lashed in his first goal since the end of February, his 27th of the season in all competitions. Marcus Thuram put the cherry on the cake for Inter with six minutes remaining by charging through unopposed and dinking in the 13th goal of a superb debut Serie A season. Frosinone stay two points above Udinese who are just inside the relegation zone and are at Lecce on Monday. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	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
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

### Change of Name

**I, Irfan Ahmad Abdul Latif Jamadar** - India holder of Indian Passport No. T6759433 having permanent address 16/23 Worli B.D.D. Chawl, Mumbai - 400018, Maharashtra, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Irfan Ahmed Abdul Latif (surname) Jamadar.

(#5607 10/5/2024)

## City go top of Premier League

Gvardiol double sinks Fulham 4-0



LONDON: Manchester City's English midfielder #47 Phil Foden celebrates scoring the team's second goal during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Manchester City on May 11, 2024. — AFP

### Kuwaiti women players hailed as KTech Women's Futsal League begins



KUWAIT: Al-Fatat Women's Futsal Club achieved a major victory over Burgan in the first KTech Women's Futsal League match with a score of 10-0 held on Saturday at the Al-Fatat Sports Club hall. Al-Fatat were able to achieve a clear victory after the players presented an outstanding level of attack and defense. In the second match, Al-Oyoun Girls Club defeated Salwa Al-Sabah Club 3-1. Both teams played with strength and enthusiasm to achieve victory.

Director of Women's Football at Kuwait Football Association Ayat Al-Shamali expressed her pride in the achievements of Kuwaiti women, which proves their determina-



Ayat Al-Shamali

tion and the strength of their will to play and win. Coach of Al-Fatat Club Mohammad Al-Kandari expressed in a similar statement his happiness after the overwhelming victory by his team. — KUNA

LONDON: Manchester City swept to the top of the Premier League as Josko Gvardiol's double inspired a vital 4-0 victory against Fulham on Saturday. Pep Guardiola's side are two wins away from lifting an unprecedented fourth successive English title after a commanding display at Craven Cottage. Gvardiol put City ahead early on before Phil Foden's 25th goal in all competitions this season increased their lead. By the time Gvardiol netted his second, City were strolling to three priceless points on a sunlit afternoon on the banks of the River Thames.

Julian Alvarez underlined City's superiority with a late penalty after Fulham's Issa Diop was sent off for fouling the Argentine. Now two points clear of second-placed Arsenal, City will look for a favour from their arch rivals Manchester United, who host the Gunners on Sunday. If Arsenal fail to win at Old Trafford, City will be crowned champions if they beat Tottenham on Tuesday or West Ham in their final game on May 19.

"Gvardiol's goals were absolutely unexpected. He is unbelievable with both feet," Guardiola said. "We played really well and now we recover, then come back to London to play the big final (against Tottenham) to try to retain our title." Regardless of Arsenal's remaining results against United and Everton, City know two more victories will make it a remark-

able six titles in the last seven seasons.

"The great players enjoy playing with great pressure. These players in the last few years have been able to do it and we are again in the latter stages," Guardiola said. "Our dream was to arrive in the last games with it in our hands, to play West Ham at home with the destiny belonging to us." City's 16th successive win against Fulham - the longest run of consecutive victories over one team in English football history - also mathematically ended third-placed Liverpool's title challenge.

Asked why he was wearing a jumper in the searing west London heat, the superstitious Guardiola added: "I used this outfit many times so we keep it as it is. Even if it is 45 degrees!" Guardiola had labelled the Fulham game as the first of four "finals" for City as they aim to clinch the title and then beat Manchester United in the FA Cup final. They rose to his challenge in style and will head to Tottenham next week boasting a 21-game unbeaten league run, having also trimmed Arsenal's goal difference advantage over them to just two.

#### Relentless City

A social media video of Fulham players flying a kite during training this week had raised questions about just how focused the hosts would be in a match that had little riding on it for them. Arsenal's fears were

confirmed as City carved Fulham apart in typically swaggering style to take the lead after 13 minutes.

Guardiola had revealed City practiced on a dry pitch with high grass this week in a bid to prepare for a similar surface to the one that caused them problems on their previous visit to Craven Cottage. City's preparation worked a treat as a flowing 19-pass move climaxed with Kevin De Bruyne clipping a pass to Gvardiol on the edge of the edge. The Croatian defender took two deft touches as he glided through the Fulham defense before planting a composed low finish past Bernd Leno.

Guardiola's men monopolized possession, with Manuel Akanji wasting a golden opportunity just before half-time with a wild swipe that sailed over from De Bruyne's corner. City took complete control in the 59th minute as Bernardo Silva accelerated into the area, his progress halted by Joao Palhinha's tackle, only for the alert Foden to pounce with a perfectly-placed strike into the far corner. Guardiola's team struck again in the 71st minute as Gvardiol stretched to turn in Silva's cross with an agile close-range finish for his fifth goal in his last seven appearances. Alvarez put the seal on a clinical performance from the relentless champions, converting a stoppage-time penalty after Diop chopped him down. — AFP

### Mbappe to leave PSG at end of the season; Real eyed

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe confirmed on Friday that he will leave French champions Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season, with Real Madrid widely expected to be his next destination. The announcement brings an end to a prolific association with his hometown team, which began when he signed from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth 180 million euros (\$194 million). "I wanted to announce to you all that it's my last year at Paris Saint-Germain. I will not extend and the adventure will come to an end in a few weeks," Mbappe, 25, said in a video posted on social media. "I will play my last game at the Parc des Princes on Sunday."

PSG have already secured the Ligue 1 title, their 10th in the last 12 seasons, and the Qatar-owned club will pick up the trophy after Sunday's game against Toulouse, which will be their last of the campaign on home turf. Luis Enrique's side were eliminated from the Champions League by Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals on Tuesday when a 1-0 loss in the second leg at home sealed a surprise 2-0 aggregate defeat. It means Mbappe will be denied the send-off he had hoped for in the Champions League final at Wembley on June 1 and will end his seven-year spell at PSG without ever having won Europe's elite club competition.

Mbappe informed PSG privately in Febru-



BAD LIPPSPRINGE: A sand sculpture of French football player Kylian Mbappe is on display at the 'Sandwelten 2024' garden show in Bad Lippspringe, western Germany. — AFP

ary of his intention to depart when his contract expires at the end of the current campaign. The 2018 World Cup winner had never confirmed publicly he was leaving, though, far less said where he will be going next, but it appears certain that he is bound for Real Madrid. Spanish media have claimed for several months that Mbappe has signed an agreement which would see him join the Liga champions in July once his PSG deal runs out.

"It's a lot of emotions, many years where I had the chance and the great honor to be a member of the biggest French club, one of the best in the world," said Mbappe. "It allowed me to arrive here, to have my first experience

in a club with a lot of pressure, to grow as a player of course, by being alongside some of the best in history, some of the greatest champions," he added. "It's hard and I never thought it would be this difficult to announce that... but I think I needed this, a new challenge, after seven years."

Mbappe's arrival in the capital as a teenager in 2017 came after he had helped Monaco win the league title. After initially joining PSG on loan, his transfer fee became—and still is—the second largest in football history. It came just weeks after PSG paid a world-record 222 million euros to sign Neymar from Barcelona. — AFP

### Djokovic 'fine' after bottle strike drama

ROME: Novak Djokovic insisted on Saturday that he was "fine" and ready to play after being hit on the head by a water bottle as he signed autographs following his second-round win at the Rome Open. World number one Djokovic was left crouched on the ground in agony on Friday as the bottle struck him on the back of the head as he greeted fans on centre court at the Foro Italico. "Thank you for the messages of concern," Djokovic wrote Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. "This was an accident and I am fine resting at the hotel with an ice pack. See you all on Sunday."

The 36-year-old had gotten off to a winning start in the Italian capital, beating France's Corentin Moutet 6-3, 6-1 to advance to the third round. He will face Chile's Alejandro Tabilo next as the Serb warms up for the French Open Grand Slam with a great chance to add to his six titles in Rome, where only Rafael Nadal has won more with 10.

There had been fears that Djokovic might join the list of players to withdraw from the tournament after the 24-time Grand Slam winner was covered by se-

curity staff as he was led from the arena on foot. However tournament organizers later released a short statement saying Djokovic's "condition is not a cause for concern", and shared a video showing that the bottle had accidentally slipped from a spectator's grasp.

Djokovic's absence would have been a blow for the last major tournament before the French Open which is already without Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz. Home fans have also been deprived of cheering on former Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini and Lorenzo Musetti who both pulled out, Musetti while losing to France's Terence Atmane on Friday morning. On Saturday Djokovic's great clay-court rival Nadal continues his comeback in a second-round clash with seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz.

Nadal has said that he will only play at the French Open, where he has won 14 times, if he feels competitive after a raft of injury problems over the last two years which have left him languishing 305th in the world rankings. — AFP