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Amir welcomes Sultan of Oman

Sheikh Mishal, Sultan Haitham hold official talks during state visit to Kuwait



KUWAIT: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq and an official accompanying delegation arrived on a state visit to Kuwait on Monday. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sultan Haitham and his accompanying delegation at Kuwait airport. A fleet of Kuwait's air force jets accompanied Sultan Haitham's plane over Kuwaiti airspace. Sultan Haitham was received by Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and senior ministers and state officials. Sultan Haitham is accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation. Upon his arrival, the national anthems of both countries were played. Sultan Haitham greeted several senior state officials of the Kuwaiti government, while HH the Amir welcomed the Omani officials accompanying Sultan Haitham. Artillery fired 21 rounds to welcome the arrival of the Sultan.

Sultan Haitham received Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad at Bayan Palace. The meeting was attended by the head of the accompanying honorary delegation, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal then held an official session of talks with Sultan Haitham at Bayan Palace. During the talks, the deep-rooted ties between the two countries were touched on, as well as boosting bilateral relations in various fields, said Minister of State for Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq during his state visit to Kuwait on May 13, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 2)

Amir opens Sabah Al-Salem University City, honors grads

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday sponsored and attended the opening ceremony of Sabah Al-Salem University City and honored top graduates for the years 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. Receiving HH the Amir was Minister of Education Dr Adel Al-Adwani as well as Deputy Chief of Kuwait University Dr Nawaf Al-Mutairi and university officials. HH the Amir unveiled a plaque announcing the opening of Sabah Al-Salem University City.

Attending the ceremony were Prime Minister-designate Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and Chief of the Supreme Judicial Council and Court of Cassation Dr Adel Boursli, top state officials and families of graduates. — KUNA (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the opening ceremony of Sabah Al-Salem University City on May 13, 2024. — KUNA

Kuwait beacon of humanitarian work, unique UN partner

KUWAIT: Kuwait is a beacon of humanitarian work as well as a vital and unique partner of the United Nations due to its extensive efforts promoting peace in the region and the world, said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Sunday. In an interview with KUNA, Guterres affirmed that his current visit to the Kuwait was to express gratitude to the Kuwaiti people and leadership led by HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



Antonio Guterres

Continued on Page 6

Bader Al-Kharafi: Zain Group Q1 2024 revenue \$1.5bn, net profit \$95m

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced its consolidated financial results for the first quarter (Q1) ended March 31, 2024, with the company serving 42.4 million customers.

Zain Group recorded stable consolidated revenue of KD 466 million (\$1.5 billion) for Q1 2024. EBITDA

for the quarter reached KD 148 million (\$480 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 32 percent. Net income for the quarter reached KD 29 million (\$95 million), reflecting an Earnings Per Share of 7 fils (\$0.02).

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi commented: "Considering the excellent operational progress and digital transformation we have undertaken across our markets, it's unfortunate that exceptional circumstances and network challenges in Sudan severely impacted our financial performance and customer base. Nevertheless, we are pleased with the overall revenue growth across other key markets, and through our mitigation efforts, we are currently seeing improvements on multiple levels in Sudan from the many network service availability and customer initiatives we are undertaking." (See Page 9)



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

Sheikh Nasser hails role of French culture

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah highlighted the profound impact of French culture on various aspects of human civilization, from history and technology to literature, philosophy, politics, and art. During a reception commemorating International

Francophonie Day, an event held annually under his patronage, he described celebrating Francophonie as a recognition of the scientific and technological advancements of modern civilization.

These achievements, he noted, have facilitated global communication and research, spanning vast distances and addressing challenges like energy, healthcare and agriculture. Addressing the current situation in Gaza, HH Sheikh Nasser condemned the loss and suffering experienced by all communities, emphasizing the urgent need for peace in the region. He called for adherence to UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2728, which calls for a ceasefire and an end to hostilities. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks as French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher looks on during a reception marking International Francophonie Day on May 12, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Omani Sultan's visit: Another milestone in historic relations



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq at Kuwait International Airport on May 13, 2024.



Helicopters fly Kuwait and Oman national flags.

KUWAIT: After the historic visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Oman last February, the visit by Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to Kuwait on Monday added another milestone to the historic ties. The last visit by His Highness the Amir to Muscat ushered in a new era in relations through the exchange of top state honors, exemplified by the Order of Al-Said bestowed on His Highness the Amir and the Order of Mubarak the Great bestowed on Sultan Haitham in return.

The past visit also saw the inauguration of the Al-Duqm refinery and petrochemical complex, a globally renowned Kuwaiti-Omani joint petroleum venture at the cost of around \$9 billion. Kuwaiti-Omani ties have always been highlighted by a strong sense of cooperation, a keen sense of brotherhood, and mutual respect shown by the leaderships and people of both countries. Relations between the brotherly nations went beyond mere decades; the Kuwaiti and Omani people had been intertwined in familial and commercial relations for centuries.

Perhaps the biggest indication of the strength of relations came when Kuwait experienced its darkest hours during the Iraqi invasion in 1990, for which the Sultanate of Oman expressed utter condemnation. The Omani involvement in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 had displayed the Sultanate's keenness to turn words of solidarity into action on the ground. On the political level, the leaderships of both countries were keen on



visiting each other in an act to bolster and foster ties for the sake of their development and their peoples.

On September 18, 1991, then Kuwait Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Oman and met with the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, expressing gratitude towards Oman's support of Kuwait during the invasion. On December 23, 1991, Sultan Qaboos visited Kuwait to partake in the 12th GCC Summit, meeting during the occasion with the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad. On May

20, 2002, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, yet again, visited Kuwait, meeting with the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad to inquire about his health condition.

During this visit, Sultan Qaboos held official rounds of talks with Sheikh Jaber, discussing matters pertaining to ties as well as developments within the Arab and Islamic spheres. On June 7, 2005, Sultan Qaboos visited Kuwait, meeting with then-Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, with both officials focusing on the latest develop-

ments back then on the level of bilateral ties and happenings in the world.

On December 28, 2009, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah bestowed on Sultan Qaboos the "Order of Mubarak the Great" during his visit to Kuwait. Sultan Qaboos also bestowed Sheikh Sabah with the "Civil Order of Oman of the First Class." On June 17, 2010, Sultan Qaboos bin Said visited Kuwait and met with Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, discussing during the occasion a number of matters relating to relations and recent happenings in the world back then. On April 16, 2012, Sultan Qaboos was on a four-day visit to Kuwait, where he met with the Amir Sheikh Sabah, discussing with him different issues. The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Oman on February 20, 2017, where he met with Sultan Qaboos and discussed matters pertaining to relations.

On January 12, 2020, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah visited the Sultanate to offer condolences on the passing of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The current Sultan Haitham bin Tariq visited Kuwait on October 1, 2020, to offer his condolences on the passing away of the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sultan Haitham also visited Kuwait on June 18, 2023, to offer condolences over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

On the level of cooperation, Kuwait and Oman had closely coordinated efforts throughout their history, forming in 2001

a cooperation committee to hold regular meetings. Officials from both countries also exchanged regular visits to seek bolstering of cooperation and ways to coordinate stances on issues of importance. On March 11, 2023, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed Kuwait's delegation to the ninth meeting of the joint Kuwaiti-Omani committee in Oman, holding discussions with Omani counterpart Badr Al-Busaidi.

Al-Busaidi, on his part, visited Kuwait on November 16, 2023, where he held an official round of meetings with Sheikh Salem, signing on the occasion agreements in the fields of higher education, economy, environment protection, and industrial exports. On November 21, 2023, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visited Oman, meeting with Omani Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs Shihab bin Tareq.

The two discussed ways to bolster relations within the defensive domain. On the level of oil cooperation, the OQ8 trademark was launched on January 14, 2021, for the Duqm refinery in Oman, a venture amongst Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8) and Oman Oil Company (OQ). CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah, also visited Oman on December 12, 2023, to follow up on the Duqm refinery project. On October 7, 2023, Kuwait hosted the "Oman in the Heart of Kuwait" exhibition with the participation of 50 Omani artists. — KUNA



Ambassadors from Francophonie member countries take a group photo. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah arrives for the event.



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah is pictured with the French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher and other officials.

Sheikh Nasser emphasizes the role of French Culture in Human History

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah highlighted the profound impact of French culture on various aspects of human civilization, from history and technology to literature, philosophy, politics, and art. During a reception commemorating International Francophonie Day, an event held annually under his patronage, he described celebrating Francophonie as a recognition of the scientific and technological advancements of modern civilization.

These achievements, he noted, have facilitated global communication and research, spanning vast distances and addressing challenges like energy, healthcare, and agriculture. Acknowledging the contributions of contemporary civilization post-World War II, His Highness emphasized the development of international law to mitigate armed conflicts and promote peaceful relations among nations.

He also praised the establishment of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice as crucial steps towards ensuring human rights and accountability for atrocities. His Highness affirmed Kuwait's unwavering commitment to supporting these values, particularly, amidst ongoing global challenges,



French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher

as they are essential for maintaining international peace and security.

Addressing the current situation in Gaza, His Highness condemned the loss and suffering experienced by all communities, emphasizing the urgent need for peace in the region. He called for adherence to United Nations Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2728, which calls for a ceasefire and an end to hostilities. He advocated for a peaceful resolution based on the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, promoting religious coexistence and respect for all faiths.

Reflecting on the enduring significance of French language and culture, His Highness noted its continuous contribution to global culture through various institutions and channels of expression. He highlighted Kuwait's adoption of teaching French in schools since 1966, with approximately 30,000 students engaging in French language learning annually.



Officials and attendees pose for a group photo.

His Highness expressed hope for Kuwait's accession to the International Organization of La Francophonie, further enhancing cultural exchange and cooperation between Kuwait and Francophone countries. He affirmed Kuwait's commitment to serving as a beacon of culture and arts in the region, fostering mutual understanding and learning from diverse cultural traditions for the benefit of all.

In a press conference held at the event, French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher said that French is the 5th most spoken language in the world, used daily by over 235 million people and understood by nearly 300 million people. She believes this language offers vast possibilities to strengthen communication

between people, cultures, and to build the world of tomorrow, which Kuwait understood very early and invested in the teaching of it.

She passed her gratitude to the work of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Research and the General Inspectorate for French Education, because of it French is now the 3rd language taught in Kuwait, a sign of the strong and lasting relations between our two countries. She referred to HH Sheikh Nasser as the father of Francophonie in Kuwait, having initiated the first actions in its favor since the 1980s. That is why she stated that, unanimously, the Council for the Promotion of La Francophonie in Kuwait has chosen him as its Honorary President.

Amir inaugurates Sabah Al-Salem University City



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the opening ceremony of Sabah Al-Salem University City and honors top graduates. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsored and attended the opening ceremony of Sabah Al-Salem University City on Monday and honored the top graduates for the years 2018–2019, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021. Receiving His Highness the Amir were Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani, as well as Deputy Chief of Kuwait University Dr Nawaf Al-Mutairi and university officials.

His Highness the Amir revealed a mural announcing the opening of Sabah Al-Salem University City. Attending the ceremony were Prime Minister-designate Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the Supreme Judicial Council and Court of Cassation Counselor Dr Adel Bouresli, top state officials, and families of graduates. The Minister of Education gave a speech welcoming His Highness the Amir and the esteemed guests, thanking the Amir for his never-ending support of the pursuit of education and his support and interest in developing human capital.

This ceremony, he pointed out, coincides with the opening of Sabah Al-Salem University City, saying that it is a translation of directives of political leadership on developing education establishments and public universities and removing any obstacles that may stand in the way of progress. This ceremony, honoring the top students of three batches, is a turning point for education in the country and a step contributing to the comprehensive development process, stated the minister.

Minister Al-Adwani addressed honor students, expressing his pride in their diligent work and congratulating them for their success and excellence. He called on the graduates to take on responsibility for their homeland and work towards its progress and prosperity, as they are its true wealth and investment. The minister's heartfelt speech was followed by President Al-Mutairi, who told the audience of the years of hard work on the path towards opening this university city.

He stated that this contributes to the strategic development goals of the state, as it is one of the biggest projects and a leap in the education pro-

cess. He spoke of the highly intricate design that weaves the old into the new and integrates the traditional with the modern. Dr Al-Mutairi spoke of the utilization of technology and artificial intelligence for the benefit of the students, adding that Kuwait University went beyond its academic role and gained accreditation from the World Health Organization to join the Health Cities Initiative.

Al-Mutairi extended his thanks to those responsible for the edifice and congratulated the honor graduates, calling on them to be acquainted with various cultures while remaining rooted in their own. Honor graduate Sheikh Bader Al-Sabah gave a speech on behalf of fellow graduates, and his voice expressed pride and joy at having His Highness the Amir honor him and his peers.

He vowed to be a driving force behind the development of this country, taking the time to thank professors for their significant efforts and parents for their ceaseless support. A documentary on the University City was played, followed by the honoring ceremony. His Highness the Amir was then presented with a gift to commemorate this momentous occasion. — KUNA

Brief CVs of new Cabinet members



Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah

Prime Minister

Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, born in 1952, did his primary studies in Sharqiya School and High School in Lebanon. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Finance (Banking and Investment) from University of Illinois, US, in 1976. He worked at the Kuwait's Finance Center until 1978 and then transferred to the Central Bank of Kuwait where he worked until 1987.

Sheikh Ahmad was chairman of the board for Burgan Bank from 1987 till 1998, and in July 1999 he was appointed as Minister of Finance and Minister of Communications. On February 14, 2001, he was appointed as Minister of Communications while on July 14, 2003, he was appointed as Minister of Communications, Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Affairs. Sheikh Ahmad was assigned as Minister of Communications and Minister of Health on June 15, 2005. He was appointed Minister of Oil on February 9, 2009, and Minister of Oil and Minister of Information on May 29, 2009. On September 20, 2021, the government approved a draft decree to appoint Sheikh Ahmad as head of the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince.

First Deputy PM, Minister of Defense and Interior

First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, born in 1959, graduated from the Kuwaiti military academy and previously served as an Amiri Guard officer. He was in the previous Cabinet as Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Acting Interior Minister.

Deputy PM, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs

Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, born in 1952, holds a Bachelor's degree in Commerce from Kuwait University 1974. He holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from Harvard University, United States in 1980. Assistant



Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah



Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji,



Dr Emad Mohammad Al-Atiqi



Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi



Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim Al-Wasmi



Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya



Omar Saud Al-Omar



Dr. Adel Al-Adwani



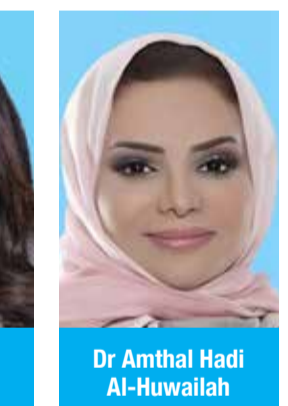
Dr. Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf



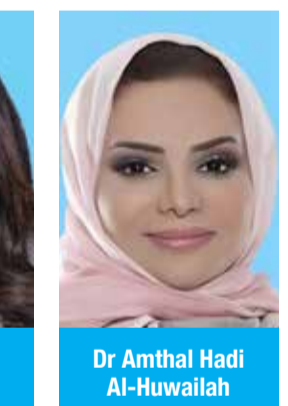
Dr Mahmoud Abdulaziz Bushehri



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi



Dr Noura Al-Meshaan



Dr Amthah Hadi Al-Huwailah

Secretary-General for Administrative, Financial and Technical Affairs in the National Assembly 1983–1993. He also was Secretary-General of the National Assembly 1993–2007. Sharida was also Minister of Transportation and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs 2007. He also was Minister of Justice and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs 2012. Sharida was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs in January 2024.

Deputy PM, Oil Minister

Dr Emad Mohammad Abdulaziz Al-Atiqi - Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister. Born in 1956, he holds a PhD in chemical engineering from Lehigh Pennsylvania College and has previously served in numerous academic roles in Kuwait University, including research department chief.

Minister of Information

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture. He holds a BA degree in Psychology with a minor in Political Science from Kuwait University. He served as a Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs since in the cabinets of December 2020, March 2021 and April 2023. In June 2023, he was reassigned as Minister of Information and Minister of Endowment and Islamic Affairs. He was also the Director General of Public Youth Authority in 2016.

Minister of Health

Dr Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi - Minister of Health, holds PhD in Pediatrics (Kuwait Board) from the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, a PhD in Medicine (MD) from the Arab Gulf University in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and BA in basic sciences from the same university. He served as a Minister of Health in the Cabinets formed in October 16, 2022 and April 9, 2023.

Minister of Finance

Dr Anwar Ali Abdullah Al-Mudhaf - Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic and Invest-

ment Affairs holds a PhD in business management from Claremont College and has been the chairman of Kuwait's Al-Ahli United Bank since 2014.

Minister of Electricity and Water

Minister of Electricity and Water, Renewable Energy, and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Mahmoud Abdulaziz Bushehri holds a doctorate in economics with a minor in Statistics from North Carolina State University, US 2001. He worked as Director of the Quantitative Methods and Modeling Department at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), and then Director of the Department of Studies and Capital Markets Development at the Capital Markets Authority. He occupied many consulting positions in the country, including several related research projects on energy, water, consumer and production support systems, and reform and development of public economic and financial policies. He participated in various conferences and committees, including as visiting scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the years 2010–11.

Minister of Justice

Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim Al-Wasmi, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs is Associate Professor of Commercial and Maritime Law at the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Law from the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University in 2001. He holds a Master's degree in International Trade Law from London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, 2006. He also holds a Doctorate in Philosophy of Law from Brunel University, United Kingdom, 2012.

Minister of Commerce

Omar Saud Al-Omar, Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Minister of State for Communication Affairs was born in 1966. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from California State University, Sacramento 1994. He held several administrative positions at Kuwait Investment Authority, as an internal auditor, and covers the companies

affiliated with the General Investment Authority and funds in the local and international markets. He is the CEO of Zain Kuwait from 2013–15 and the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority from August 2022 to date.

Minister of Education

Dr. Adel Mohammad Abdullah Al-Adwani - Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research has previously served as professor in Kuwait University's faculty of Administrative Sciences. He was also in the previous Cabinet.

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Yahya - Minister of Foreign Affairs was born in 1966. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Management from Western Oregon University in the US. He previously served as Kuwait's ambassador to a number of Latin American countries, including Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. He was in the previous Cabinet.

Minister of Public Works

Dr Noura Mohammad Khaled Al-Meshaan - Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs previously served as Associate Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University.

Minister of Social Affairs

Dr Amthah Hadi Al-Huwailah is the Minister of Social Affairs, Labor, Family Affairs and Childhood and Minister of State for Youth Affairs. She was Assistant Professor (Cognitive Psychology). She holds a Doctorate degree in cognitive psychology, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 2008; Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University, 2001. Bachelor's of Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University, 1987. She supervised a number of master's and doctoral theses at Kuwait University. — KUNA

Committee tackles organized crime and challenges

VIENNA: The 33rd session of the United Nations' Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) launched Monday with the participation of Kuwait and other international delegates in Vienna, Austria. Organized crime is an international threat that makes up five trillion dollars in gross domestic product. The UN's 78th President of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis, and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ghada Waly, will be giving speeches in the opening ceremony of the CCPCJ committee.

Not only would the committee address organized crime challenges, but it would also provide possible solutions for combating information and communications for criminal purposes, enhancing global cooperative efforts in the matter. The five-day CCPCJ session included numerous projects and workshops on combating human trafficking in the digital age, followed by the 14th UN Crime Congress, as well as preparing for the 15th Crime Congress, which will be hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

The CCPCJ committee highlighted issues concerning children in terrorist groups and sought solutions to rehabilitate and integrate them into society to prevent future recidivism. Meanwhile, the session included more than 95 events and 16 exhibitions, with the majority discussing the Doha regional center for combating cybercrime, while other activities underscored international and local criminal justice issues.

The Kuwaiti delegation participated in the session headed by the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and the permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, Talal Al-Fassam, including the Director General of the General Department of Criminal Investigation at the Kuwait Ministry of Interior, Brigadier General Abdullah Al-Hasan. Minister Plenipotentiary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Hassem, Head of the International Agreements Department at the Ministry of Justice Hani Al-Sebae, Ministry of Interior Major Ali Al-Azemi, and Third Secretary Rehab Al-Farhan, the Kuwaiti permanent delegation to the UN organizations in Vienna, are also members of the delegation. — KUNA

NBK kick-starts its 2nd edition of HIPO Mentoring Program

Delivering various workshops in cooperation with IDRAC Training and Consultancy

KUWAIT: Building on the remarkable success of the program's 1st edition in 2022, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has kick started the 2nd edition of its HIPO Mentoring Program for developing future leaders, which is organized in cooperation with IDRAC Training and Consultancy. The program resonates with NBK's consistent endeavors to develop employees' career path and help them build a thriving career that drives its future growth.

To this end, it involves transferring the knowledge and experience of highly qualified and experienced employees to the young talent to maximize their opportunities of progression and rising to leadership roles in the future. The overarching objective of the NBK HIPO Mentoring Program is to ensure that all participants have an increased awareness of the benefits of mentoring including building critical relationships, enhancing communication skills and productivity and exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as increasing the engagement and retention of employees.

With 56 mentors and 170 mentees attending the program this year, it includes an introductory seminar attended by all participants, followed by intensive training for mentors and mentees through various workshops highlighting the meaning and importance of mentoring and how to make use of this relationship to transfer the skills and experiences of high-performing leaders to identified new and less experienced employees, in addition to boosting organizational communication and productivity, and improve the preparation of high-potential employees for transition into senior leadership positions.

On the last day of the program, a matching session will be arranged to allow the mentees to communicate with all mentors, so that each



Emad Al Ablani



mentee will choose the mentor that best suits them to have an ongoing mentoring relationship for 18 months, which can extend further, if it proves successful. This will build a strong relationship between mentors and mentees, which will reflect positively on the performance of the bank's human resources.

Commenting on this program, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Head of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK HIPO Mentoring Program reflects our steadfast commitment to investing largely in our human capital and increasing their efficiency by providing employees aspiring to rise to leadership roles in the future with career progression opportunities." "NBK places the development of its people as a top priority, harnessing all its capabilities to contribute to their career progression by providing training and development programs in line with its belief that di-

verse and high-caliber talent is key to sustaining success and achievements.

Therefore, NBK HIPO Mentoring Program receives significant support from the bank's executive management, being one of the key talent management initiatives serving a pivotal aspect of our human resources strategy, which aims to promote personal and professional growth and to increase the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences among current and future leaders," he highlighted.

"NBK harnesses all its capabilities to develop and upskill its human capital, and improve their performance, in order to ensure the quality of the human factor representing one of the bank's core sustainability drivers," he emphasized. It is worth mentioning that during 2023, NBK has received many prestigious accolades in recognition of its excellence in developing human resources and talent.

Kuwait embarking on digital journey

KUWAIT: Dr. Ammar Al-Hussaini, the Acting Director General of the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), affirmed on Monday that Kuwait is witnessing a speedy digital journey in information technology, with artificial intelligence (AI) playing a pivotal role. Al-Hussaini told KUNA during the third "IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024" that it aims to highlight the essential role of digitization and AI in paving the way for unprecedented improvements in efficiency, productivity, and profitability. He stressed the government's commitment to enhancing its digital agenda in line with the Kuwait Vision 2035 (New Kuwait) and the Kuwait 2040 Upstream Strategy, as well as adopting emerging technologies in both the pub-

lic and private sectors.

Al-Hussaini added that the summit would enhance constructive discussions between leading technology companies in the region and influential decision-makers in the field of ICT, in addition to providing an important platform to explore the advanced role of AI in shaping the future of IT and accelerating digital transformation in all of Kuwait. A group of speakers will participate in the one-day summit to discuss several topics about technology and its impact on technology. The summit's program includes expert-led sessions and panel discussions. — KUNA



Dr Ammar Al-Hussaini

Message from Australian Embassy on sheep exports

KUWAIT: Australia's Minister for Agriculture Senator Murray Watt announced the Australian government's decision to cease live exports of sheep by sea on 01 May 2028. Australia will continue to regulate live exports up to the phase out, with our existing animal welfare requirements for livestock exports remaining in place. Kuwait remains an important partner in the Gulf. Our close cooperation on food security extends beyond livestock to grains, chilled meat, vegetables, and other products. We also enjoy strong ties in investment, education, science and research collaboration. Australia is interested in exploring ways to strengthen our trade and cooperation in support of Kuwait's food security objectives.



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Kuwait Petroleum renews supply deal with China's Unipet

KUWAIT: State-run Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Monday renewed a contract to supply Chinese oil trading powerhouse Unipet with some 300,000 barrels per day of crude oil, the company said in a statement. Hailing the deal as a "significant

step" forward, KPC chief executive Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah said it places the company firmly on track towards bringing future goals and strategies to fruition, according to the statement.

The deal to extend the contract with China's Unipet until the year 2033 will also maintain Kuwait's presence in the Chinese market, which will pay dividends in keeping long-term growth steady, according to the statement. The extension to the supply deal is a testament to Kuwait's durable trade relations with Beijing, said Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti state-run firm's global marketing managing director. — KUNA





India's election resumes with Kashmir poised to oppose Modi

Australian accused of crystal meth sale faces 20-year Bali jail term

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Gazans flee fresh fighting in north

UNRWA reports exodus of 360,000 people from Rafah so far • US warns of post-war 'anarchy'



A smoke plume from an explosion billows in the Gaza Strip as seen from a position along Zionist entity's southern border with the Palestinian territory on May 13, 2024. — AFP

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories: Thousands fled northern Gaza on Monday as renewed shelling pounded areas where Zionist entity says Hamas soldiers have regrouped, despite having announced they cleared months ago. "The army dropped leaflets and sent a message on mobile phones warning everyone to leave Jabalia," said Umm Odai Nassar, after reaching Gaza City from nearby Jabalia refugee camp in the far north of the Gaza Strip. She is one among many Palestinians who had remained in northern Gaza despite the vast devastation to civilian infrastructure inflicted during the early months of the Zionist entity's military campaign against Hamas in the territory.

Zionist entity ruthlessly pounded Gaza, including in far-southern Rafah, despite US warnings against a full-scale invasion of the crowded city and of the threat of post-war "anarchy" across the Palestinian territory.

AFP correspondents in Gaza reported helicopter strikes and heavy artillery shelling in the east of Rafah, as well as battles in northern Gaza's Ja-

balia refugee camp and Gaza City's Zeitun neighborhood. Zionist entity last week defied a chorus of warnings, including from top ally Washington, and sent tanks and troops into the east of Rafah, the city on the Egyptian border where some 1.4 million Palestinians had sought shelter. This has sparked an exodus of nearly 360,000 people from Rafah so far, said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, which warned that "no place is safe" in the largely devastated territory. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday that Washington had not seen any credible Zionist entity plan to protect civilians in Rafah, and that "we also haven't seen a plan for what happens the day after this war in Gaza ends". "Zionist entity is on the trajectory, potentially, to inherit an insurgency with many armed Hamas left or, if it leaves, a vacuum filled by chaos, filled by anarchy and probably refilled by Hamas," he told NBC.

Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, also said that its militants were engaged in ground battles in Rafah and Jabalia. A strike over-

night on a house in Rafah killed at least four people, said the city's Kuwaiti hospital. Rafah residents on Monday received more evacuation orders through phone calls and text messages, prompting yet more people to leave their homes, witnesses said.

While Zionist entity has vowed to destroy remaining Hamas forces in Rafah, the New York Times cited unnamed US officials as saying that both US and Zionist entity intelligence suggested the group's leader Yahya Sinwar was not hiding there. Sinwar - who has not been seen since the Oct 7 attack most likely never left the tunnel network" under southern Gaza's main city of Khan Yunis, the newspaper said.

Amid the fighting, Egyptian, Qatari and US mediation efforts towards a truce appeared to have stalled. UN chief Antonio Guterres urged "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and an immediate surge in humanitarian aid" into Gaza. Palestinians remember Zionist entity's establishment as the "Nakba", or catastrophe, when hundreds of thousands were expelled or pushed out of their homes amid the war, and commemorate it

annually on May 15.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on Sunday that Zionist entity's latest evacuation orders were "forcing people in Rafah to flee anywhere and everywhere". Umm Mohammed Al-Mughayyir, who has had to move her family seven times to escape the fighting, said: "We have reached a point where we wish for death." Residents were told to head to the Al-Mawasi "humanitarian zone" on the coast northwest of Rafah, though aid groups have warned it is not ready for an influx of people.

Hisham Advan, spokesman for the Gaza crossings authority, told AFP on Sunday the Rafah crossing with Egypt has remained closed since Zionist entity troops seized its Palestinian side last Tuesday, "preventing the entry of humanitarian aid". The health ministry said Monday that Gaza's health system was "hours away" from collapse after fighting has blocked fuel shipments through key crossings. Zionist entity's military said Sunday it had opened a new border crossing into northern Gaza as "part of the effort to increase aid routes". — AFP

Zionist soldiers wounded in Hezbollah strike

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group claimed responsibility Monday for a strike that Zionist entity said wounded four soldiers in the country's north, the latest cross-border fire in more than seven months of clashes.

Hezbollah fighters fired "a guided missile" at a Zionist entity's Merkava tank across the border on Monday morning, destroying it "after closely monitoring the enemy's movements," the group said in a statement. The Zionist entity army said "two anti-tank missiles" crossed from Lebanon into the area of Yiftah, a kibbutz community less than two kilometers (1.2 miles) from the border.

The missiles wounded four Zionist entity soldiers, the army said, one of them moderately and the rest lightly. Earlier, Monday Hezbollah said it launched "a swarm of explosive drones" targeting tents and "sleeping quarters" for a Zionist entity artillery battalion. The Zionist entity army said the attack caused no casualties and reported that one drone that crossed from Lebanon fell in a different



DEIR EL-BALAH, Palestinian Territories: Men and children queue to receive food rations from a public kitchen in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on May 13, 2024. — AFP

area. At least 410 people have been killed in Lebanon in months of cross-border violence, mostly militants but also including 79 civilians, according to an AFP tally.

Zionist entity says 14 soldiers and nine civilians have been killed on its side of the border. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced on both sides. — AFP

Sunak says UK at 'crossroads' but refuses to call poll

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak insisted on Monday that his beleaguered governing Conservative party can win a general election despite polls consistently indicating the opposite, but refused to set a date for the vote.

Sunak mounted a defense of the Tories' 14 years in power and claimed that Britain would be less safe under Keir Starmer's Labour opposition, which is widely tipped to come back to power.

The UK leader said he was "confident" his party would win a fifth consecutive term but conceded that Labour, out of government since 2010, may ultimately inflict defeat. "I'm clear-eyed enough to admit that, yes, maybe they can depress their way to victory," Sunak said in a speech in central London, accusing Labour of "scaremongering" and "gaslighting".

"But I don't think it will work because at heart we are a nation of optimists," he added, before warning of several dangers himself. Sunak cited Russia's war in Europe, Iran's firing of missiles in the Middle East and the uncertainty posed by artificial intelligence as threats that needed to be tackled.

He also referred to "authoritarian" states including China and North Korea, Scottish nationalists who want to break away from the United Kingdom and "cancel culture". "Our country stands at a crossroads," he said. "I'm convinced that the next few years will be some of the most dangerous, yet most transformational, our country has ever known," Sunak added.

Sunak's speech at the right-wing Policy Exchange think-tank is a clear pre-election pitch to voters, as Labour increasingly puts flesh on the bones of its policies before a manifesto launch. Its repeated attacks on Starmer also gave an indication of a potentially bitter and personal election battle ahead.

But Sunak refused again to be drawn on when he would call the vote, repeating his well-trodden line that he was aiming for the second half of the year. He can go to the polls no later than January 2025.

Labour has enjoyed double-digit leads over the Tories in surveys since the disastrous short-lived premiership of Liz Truss that ended in October 2022, and inflicted heavy losses on the Conservatives in local elections earlier this month. — AFP

King Charles appoints William to lead Harry's old regiment

LONDON: Britain's King Charles III officially handed over the role of Colonel-in-Chief of the Army Air Corps to Prince William on Monday, in a rare joint engagement with his elder son and heir. The head of state joined William at the Army Aviation Centre in Middle Wallop, southern England, appointing him colonel-in-chief of his younger son Prince Harry's old regiment.

The 75-year-old monarch's decision to hand the role, which he held for 32 years, to William, 41, was seen as a snub to Harry when it was announced last year. Harry, 39, is a former army captain and served as an Apache helicopter pilot with the Army Air Corps

in Afghanistan. But he has become estranged from his father and brother since leaving the royal family in early 2020 and moving to the United States with his American wife, Meghan. The king, who announced he had cancer in February and is receiving treatment, said the event was bittersweet, as it was a "great joy" to attend but sad to hand over the baton after 32 years.

"I do hope you'll go from strength to strength in the future with the Prince of Wales as your new colonel-in-chief," he told the regiment in a speech. "The great thing is he's a very good pilot indeed. So that's encouraging," said the king. William worked as a Royal Air Force search and rescue pilot and also flew for a civilian air ambulance unit before taking up full-time royal duties. His appointment came just days after Harry visited London but did not meet his father due to what he said was the king's "full programme". The lack of meeting - even for a short time - was interpreted as a blow to Harry, who then flew on to Nigeria and a three-day tour with Meghan. — AFP



MIDDLE WALLOP, UK: Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales (center) speaks to service personnel at the Army Aviation Centre in Middle Wallop, England, Monday, May 13, 2024. — AFP

International

India's 6-week vote resumes with Kashmir poised to oppose Modi

Nearly one billion voters eligible to cast ballots in seven phases of election

SRINAGAR: India's six-week election resumed Monday including in Kashmir, where voters were expected to show their discontent with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cancellation of their territory's semi-autonomy and the security crackdown that followed.

His government's decision in 2019 to bring Kashmir under its direct rule—and the subsequent clampdown—have been deeply resented among the region's residents, who will be voting for the first time since the move. "What we're telling voters now is that you have to make your voice heard," said former chief minister Omar Abdullah, whose National Conference party is campaigning for the restoration of Kashmir's former semi-autonomy. "The point of view that we want people to send out is that what happened... is not acceptable to them," he told AFP.

The BJP has not fielded any candidates in the Kashmir valley for the first time since 1996, and experts say the BJP would have been roundly defeated if it had. "They would lose, simple as that," political analyst and historian Siddiq Wahid told AFP last week, adding that Kashmiris saw the vote as a "referendum" on Modi's policies.

The BJP has appealed to voters to instead support smaller and newly-created parties that have publicly aligned with Modi's policies. But voters are expected to back one of two established Kashmiri political parties calling for the Modi government's changes to be reversed.

"I voted for changing the current government. It must happen for our children to have a good future," civil servant Habibullah Parry told AFP. "Everywhere you go in Kashmir today you find people from outside in charge. Everyone wants that to change."

In rural districts outside Srinagar,

the region's biggest city, army soldiers patrolled roads in convoys of bullet-proof vehicles. Several polling booths around the constituency had more than two dozen paramilitary troops guarding voter queues.

Boycotts called by rebel groups left few Kashmiris willing to participate in past elections, with just over 14 percent of eligible voters in Srinagar casting a ballot during the last national poll in 2019. By mid-afternoon on Monday nearly 30 percent of people in the constituency had voted, with booths still open for several more hours.

India's election 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. More than 968 million people are eligible to vote in India's election, with the final round of polling on June 1 and results expected three days later.

Voter turnout elsewhere in India has so far declined significantly from 2019, according to election commission figures. India's weather bureau has forecast more hot spells in May and the election commission formed a taskforce last month to review the impact of heat and humidity before each round of voting.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Varanasi to rally votes from the Hindu faithful. "Modi has reinvigorated the Hindus like never before. He is the custodian of our faith and that is why I love him," said bank manager Ritesh Kumar. Like tens of thousands of others, Kumar waited for hours in sweltering early summer temperatures to catch a glance of the leader. Modi has represented Varanasi since the election that swept him to power a decade ago, and the immense crowd that gathered to greet him was a



SRINAGAR: Voters queue up to cast their ballots at a polling station during the fourth phase of voting in India's general election, in Srinagar on May 13, 2024. — AFP

testament to his enduring popularity there.

As with his prior appearances there on the campaign trail, tens of thousands of supporters thronged the roadside. Many waved flags bearing the lotus emblem of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as Modi was driven past atop a flatbed truck, flanked by unsmiling bodyguards. Modi arrived in Varanasi to formally register his nomination for re-election on Tuesday morning, with the city to vote on June 1.

But since the vote began last month, Modi has made a number of strident comments against India's 200-million-plus Muslim minority in an apparent effort to galvanize support. He has used public speeches to refer to Muslims as "infiltrators" and "those who have more children", prompting condemnation from opposition politicians. Modi has also accused Congress, the main party in a broad opposition alliance competing against him, of planning

to reallocate the nation's wealth to Muslim households. The ascent of Modi's Hindu nationalist politics despite India's officially secular constitution has made the country's Muslims increasingly anxious.

"We are being painted as villains and terrorists," shopkeeper Faiyaz Ali, 69, told AFP. "Islamophobia has reached new levels in the country under Modi. But no one seems to care, we have been left to fend for ourselves." — AFP

Trump's former fixer Michael Cohen testifies at trial

NEW YORK: Donald Trump's one-time fixer and the star prosecution witness in the former president's historic criminal trial testified Monday in a dramatic courtroom face-off with his former boss. Michael Cohen's testimony followed last week's court proceedings in which adult film star Stormy Daniels gave toe-curling detail about her alleged sexual encounter with Trump which is at the heart of the case.

Trump, 77, is accused of falsifying business records to reimburse his lawyer Cohen for a hush-money payment to Daniels on the eve of the 2016 presidential election, when the story could have proved politically fatal. Cohen spent just over 13 months in prison and a year and a half under house arrest after he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for lying to Congress and financial crimes. In the first weeks of the trial, jurors have heard from witnesses that Cohen was a difficult character who bullied and cajoled others to get his way, while the defense counsel have painted him as a pathological liar and convicted criminal.

A source close to Cohen told AFP ahead of his ap-

pearance that "everything he says is backed up by documents. He has a high bar to prove his sincerity—but he's proven he can." Daniels, who claims to have had sex with Trump in 2006, denied she threatened him if he did not buy her silence for \$130,000, a payment that prosecutors say Trump then covered up. The trial is taking place six months before the November election, when Trump will try to defeat Democratic President Joe Biden.

During nearly eight hours over two days last week, Daniels walked the New York jury through the one-night stand she said she had with Trump at a celebrity golf tournament, and then the financial settlement she says ensued.

Trump had sat impassively for much of Daniels' testimony, apparently cursing at times, and railing against proceedings in his comments to reporters as he entered and left the Manhattan courtroom. Trump has denied having sex with Daniels, and his lawyers asked the judge for a mistrial on the grounds her testimony was "extremely prejudicial" in what is essentially a financial records and election-related case.

Judge Juan Merchan denied two mistrial requests last week. Merchan has imposed a gag order on Trump prohibiting him from publicly attacking witnesses, and the ex-president—who has traded insults with Daniels for years, calling her "horseface" and other crude slurs—has not commented directly on her testimony. Trump spoke at a rally on a beach in New Jersey on Saturday and condemned the judge as "conflicted" and the prosecutor in the case, Alvin Bragg, as a "radical Democrat." — AFP



NEW YORK: Former US President Donald Trump looks on during his criminal trial for allegedly covering up hush money payments at Manhattan Criminal Court, in New York City, on May 13, 2024. — AFP

Tunisian lawyers launch strike after pundit arrested

TUNIS: Tunisian lawyers protested and launched a nationwide strike on Monday over the arrest of a lawyer and political commentator in a weekend police raid. "The strike was observed 100 percent," Laroussi Zeguir, head of the bar association's Tunis division, told journalists at the Tunis court of first instance. Several rallied outside the court against the arrest of commentator and lawyer Sonia Dahmani, demanding her immediate release and chanting that the judiciary is working "under orders".

Masked police on Saturday raided the bar association headquarters in the capital Tunis, where Dahmani had sought refuge after she refused to appear in court over comments she had made on television. During a show on the Carthage Plus TV channel last Tuesday, Dahmani had responded to another pundit's claim that sub-Saharan migrants were seeking to settle in Tunisia.

"What extraordinary country are we talking about?" she asked sarcastically.

A judicial report on Thursday said Dahmani's comments were in response to a speech by President Kais Saied in which he vowed Tunisia would not become a place for the resettlement of sub-Saharan migrants prevented from crossing to Europe. She was arrested under Decree 54, which outlaws "spreading false news" online or in the media, and which journalists and opposition figures argue is being used to stifle dissent. Signed by Saied in 2022, the decree mandates up to five years in prison for the use of communications networks to "produce, spread (or) disseminate... false news" or to "slander others, tarnish their reputation, financially or morally harm them".



TUNIS: Lawyer and human rights defender Leila Ben Debba (R) stands with a colleague in front of the Tunis Court on May 13, 2024. — AFP

Broadcaster Borhen Bssais and political commentator Mourad Zeghidi were also arrested Saturday under Decree 54 for making critical comments, lawyer Ghazi Mrabet told AFP. Mrabet said the judiciary on Sunday placed both under a "48-hour detention warrant" and that they would have to appear before an examining magistrate. — AFP

Kuwait beacon of humanitarian work...

Continued from Page 1

who continues the legacy of fruitful cooperation with the UN. Guterres reflected on the Kuwaiti-UN cooperation throughout the years, commending Kuwait for its numerous humanitarian stances, especially towards the Syrian crisis. The UN chief lauded Kuwait's invaluable assistance towards Syria, remembering that Kuwait was the chief contributor to humanitarian efforts there via donating \$500 million to the inaugural international donors' conference for Syria, which the Gulf state organized on three occasions.

The UN official also commended the mediating role played by Kuwait to end the rift among countries involved in the Gulf crisis, saying that was reflective of Kuwait's positive stance towards unity in the region. Whether in the Arab League or the UN, Kuwait continued to play a pivotal role in boosting cooperation amongst nations, he said, noting the Kuwaiti mission at the UN headquarters in New York was very active in preparation for the upcoming 2024 Summit of the Future, an event important to address upcoming global challenges.

On the UN honoring of late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a global humanitarian leader and Kuwait as an international hub for humanitarian efforts, Guterres stressed it was fit of Kuwait's relentless efforts in such domains. He added that Kuwait had recently announced a \$30 million contribution to UNRWA, the backbone UN entity aiding the Palestinian people, saying that Kuwait had

proven itself worthy of the international humanitarian center mantle by supporting this agency despite many hesitating to do so.

On the situation in the Gaza Strip, Guterres said that it was unfortunately reaching the point of complete destruction whether on the humanitarian level or infrastructure with unfathomable civilians dead and infrastructure completely dissipated in a span of less than six months. The loss of civilian lives in the Gaza Strip is unprecedented, which points to a dangerous and serious flaw in the way the (Zionist) occupation military campaign was carried out, said the UN chief, who called for an immediate ceasefire to end the slaughter.

The "two-state" solution is the only way to achieve peace in the region, affirmed Guterres, who reiterated the necessity of an independent Palestinian state and the right of Palestinians to determine their fate and destiny. He said that there was a growing demand by the global community, including some countries supporting the (Zionist) occupiers, to end the war in the Gaza Strip and give the Palestine people their full rights.

With regards to challenges of natural disasters, health, climate change and poverty, Guterres said that the UN paid attention to the mounting challenges. The increasing number of natural disasters and issues of climate change must be addressed for the sake of humanity or the world would suffer the consequences, said the UN chief, who also mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that the world did not address the issue adequately and there must be a better reaction for any future health crises. He also touched on the imbalance in the international financial structure, which the world must fix to avoid the negative impact of poverty and hunger across the globe. — KUNA

International

Australian accused of crystal meth sale faces 20-year Bali jail term

Ukrainians, Russian face death over Bali drug lab

DENPASER, Indonesia: An Australian man faces up to 20 years in prison on the resort island of Bali and a fine of more than \$600,000 for allegedly attempting to sell crystal meth, police said Monday. Indonesian police said the 49-year-old suspect - named by his initials TAS and identified by Australian media as Troy Smith - was arrested on April 30 at his hotel on the popular tourist island.

He was allegedly found with 3.19 grams of crystal methamphetamine and his wife, a foreign national only identified by her initials TIM, was also held but found not to be involved. Smith was charged with a "drug transaction", which means offering to sell or become a broker of narcotics. Ponce Indriyo, Bali police deputy director of drugs investigation told a news conference. The charge carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years and a fine of 10 billion rupiah (\$622,000). Smith was also charged with drug possession, which carries a lower maximum sentence of 12 years in prison and a maximum fine of 8 billion rupiah.

Authorities made him take a urine test which came back positive for meth, the police official said. The suspect had received a package carrying the meth sent by a friend in Australia, Indriyo said.

A Bali police press statement said the package contained "one Colgate toothpaste tube containing 3.15 grams of alleged crystal meth". Smith did not appear at the press conference but authorities in Indonesia typically parade drug suspects to the media. But there was no evidence his wife TIM - named as Tracy Ijusa in Australian media reports - was involved, Indriyo said.

Indonesia has some of the world's toughest drug laws including the death penalty for traffickers. There are dozens of traffickers on death row in Indonesia, including a cocaine-smuggling British grandmother and a Philippine woman accused of smuggling heroin.

Separately, two Ukrainians and a Russian national face the death penalty in Indonesia af-



DENPASAR: Tracy Ijusa wife of Australian Troy Smith, heads to meet her husband after a press conference at the Denpasar police headquarter on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on May 13, 2024. - AFP

ter police raided a suspected drug lab on the popular resort island of Bali, police said Monday. Authorities said four suspects, including an Indonesian national, were arrested earlier this month at a villa on the island. They are accused of operating a hydroponic marijuana and mephedrone manufacturing laboratory.

The Ukrainian suspects, named only by their initials IV and MV, were in charge of producing and mixing materials to manufacture the drugs, said Wahyu Widada, head of Indonesia's criminal investigation agency. The Russian suspect identified as KK



DENPASAR: Bali Police's Deputy Director of Narcotic Unit Ponce Indriyo (center) updates the media on detainee Australian Troy Smith during a press conference at the Denpasar police headquarter on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on May 13, 2024.

was a drug marketer under a network called Hydra, he added. All were charged with drug offences that carry a maximum punishment of the death penalty and a fine of 10 billion rupiah (\$622,000).

Police confiscated at least 10 kilograms of hydroponic marijuana, 684 grams of mephedrone, and 107 grams of cocaine. "We also confiscated ecstasy molding equipment by which they attempted to produce the drugs but their production had always been unsuccessful," Wahyu said in the press release. Police said the Indonesian suspect was also being

investigated for an earlier drug lab case in capital Jakarta. Indonesia has some of the world's toughest drug laws including the death penalty for traffickers.

There are dozens of traffickers on death row in the country, including a cocaine-smuggling British grandmother and a Philippine woman accused of smuggling heroin. Earlier on Monday, Bali police said a 49-year-old Australian faces up to 20 years in prison and a fine of more than \$600,000 for allegedly consuming and attempting to sell crystal meth. — AFP

Indonesian flood death toll rises to 44 with 15 missing

TANAH DATAR, Indonesia: The death toll from flash floods and cold lava flow from a volcano in western Indonesia over the weekend has risen to 44 with 15 more missing, officials said Monday. Hours of heavy rain caused large volcanic rocks to roll down one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes into two districts on Sumatra island Saturday evening, while flooding inundated roads, homes and mosques.

"As of 13:00, the number of dead victims was 44 people," national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) spokesman Abdul Muhari said in a statement on Monday.

Rescuers were still searching for 15 missing people in two districts - Agam and Tanah Datar - that were the worst hit by the floods and home to hundreds of thousands of people.

Residents said they heard rocks thundering down roads outside their homes when the heavy rains struck. Refki Amelia, a 39-year-old mother-of-three in Agam, survived but lost her 65-year-old mother and her 15-year-old niece. "My parents' house was right across from my home. (My mother) wanted to run outside but did not have the time, a big rock came crashing down," she told AFP on Monday.

"Her body was found two kilometers away. My surviving sister... is traumatized, so is her son."

Abdul Malik, head of the local search and rescue agency in provincial capital Padang, said Sunday that the bodies retrieved included two children - a three-year-old and an eight-year-old. Ilham Wahab, a West Sumatra disaster mitigation agency official, encouraged "people to evacuate to relatives' places, which are safer" than tent shelters in heavy rains. "We are focused on first, searching and rescuing the victims, second, protecting the evacuees, protecting the vulnerable people," he said.

Provincial Governor Mahyeldi Ansharullah told reporters on Monday that around 130 people had evacuated to an elementary school in Agam, while more than 2,000 people were evacuated to several places in Tanah Datar.

Roads in the districts were turned into rivers, with mosques damaged and houses destroyed.



TANAH DATAR, Indonesia: This handout image taken and released by Indonesia's National Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS) on May 13, 2024 shows personnel taking part in a search operation in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra. - AFP

Muhari said 71 houses were completely swept away and 125 houses were moderately damaged. Heavy rains inundated neighborhoods with muddy flood waters and swept vehicles into a nearby river, while volcanic ash and large rocks rumbled down Mount Marapi. Cold lava, also known as lahar, is volcanic material such as ash, sand and pebbles carried down a volcano's slopes by rain.

Authorities sent a team of rescuers and rubber boats to look for the missing victims and to transport people to shelters. The local government set up evacuation centers and emergency posts in several areas of Agam and Tanah Datar. The BNPB said 84 homes, 16 bridges and two mosques were damaged in Tanah Datar, as were 20 hectares (50 acres) of rice fields. Survivors recounted their horror when the flooding and rockfall began.

"I heard the thunder and the sound similar to boiling water. It was the sound of big rocks falling," housewife Rina Devina told AFP, adding that three of her neighbors were killed. "It was pitch black, so I used my cellphone as a flashlight. The

thick brown sludge where homes once stood. Neither Omari nor his 70-year-old father have ever seen "such havoc-wreaking floods", he said. The WHO has already warned of rising cases of water-borne diseases in flood-affected regions.

In a country with a health system already on its knees, some health facilities were rendered non-operational by the flooding, which damaged or destroyed thousands of homes and swamped agricultural land. "The full extent of the damage is not yet known, and the country lacks the necessary resources to manage a disaster of this magnitude," it said in a situation report Sunday. Omari and some 70 other villagers took refuge in a house on higher ground.

"God protected us along with 60-70 people and we survived it," he said, but his house and all his belongings were washed away. All that was left were the clothes on his back. Scant aid had arrived with Taleban government agencies and a few humanitarians, who braved washed-out roads for hours to reach the isolated village with food and water. Tents had been set up near the village to provide health aid, as government officials surveyed the damage. "We hope shelter will be provided for us," Omari said, adding that women and children had been "scattered" to other areas to stay with relatives.

Amanullah, who like many Afghans goes only by one name, said families had been sleeping in the open

road was muddy, so I chanted 'God, have mercy!' over and over again," she said of her evacuation to a local official's office. Dwikorida Karnawati, head of Indonesia's meteorology agency, told reporters Monday that West Sumatra was a "unique location" because in parts of the province, rain could fall almost all year round.

"So the potential for floods and landslides are always present," she said. During the rainy season, generally from October to March, Indonesia is prone to landslides and floods. In 2022, about 24,000 people were evacuated and two children were killed in floods on Sumatra island, with environmental campaigners blaming deforestation caused by logging for worsening the disaster.

Trees act as natural defenses against floods, slowing the rate at which water runs down hills and into rivers. Marapi's last major eruption took place in December and spewed an ash tower about 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky, taller than the volcano itself. At least 24 climbers, most of them university students, died in the eruption. — AFP



BAGHLAN, Afghanistan: An Afghan man sits in a house after floods in Burka district of Baghlan province on May 12, 2024. — AFP

air since the destruction. "We have an urgent need for tents," the patriarch of a family of 25 people told AFP. "Where should we go, where should we live, there are no tents, no food... we don't have any life left, or the means to start over," said the 60-year-old, who watched the waters engulf his home and livestock, a precious commodity in a country where 80 percent of the more than 40 million people depend on agriculture to survive. — AFP

Survivors hunt for the missing days after Afghan floods

FULOOL, Afghanistan: Survivors of flash floods in Afghanistan's northern Baghlan province were still searching for the missing on Monday, days after torrents of water ripped through villages, killing hundreds. Heavy rains sparked flash flooding in multiple Afghan provinces on Friday, killing more than 300 people in Baghlan alone, UN agencies and Taleban officials said.

Rescue workers and aid have been struggling to reach some of the worst-affected areas with the World Health Organization echoing Taleban government and nonprofit warnings that the death toll could rise significantly. Samiullah Omari had found the bodies of seven of his relatives, but his uncle and uncle's grandson were still missing.

"We have been searching but we haven't found them," the 24-year-old day laborer told AFP in his village of Fulool. For kilometers around, mud covers everything, debris and limbs of livestock jutting out from

News in Brief

3 kids killed in Vietnam landslide

HANOI: Three young children were killed in a landslide in Hanoi, state media and a local resident said Monday, after soil and rocks fell from a hill onto a play centre after heavy rain. Vietnam's capital city experienced heavy rain, lightning and thunder for more than an hour on Sunday evening, flooding streets and disrupting traffic. The rain caused the sudden landslide in Bai Trai commune, in the suburbs of Hanoi. "The kids were playing there when the accident happened," a local resident told AFP.

UK charges 3 for assisting HK intel

LONDON: UK police said Monday that they had charged three men for allegedly assisting Hong Kong intelligence services, with the suspects due to appear in court later in the day. "A number of arrests were made and searches carried out across England as part of this investigation," said Dominic Murphy, Head of the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command. The three men were charged with assisting a foreign intelligence service and also with foreign interference, in violation of the 2023 National Security Act. "The foreign intelligence service to which the above charges relate is that of Hong Kong," police said. The three men charged were named as Chi Leung Wai, 38, Matthew Trickett, 37, and Chung Biu Yuen, 63, all from south east England. — AFP

S Africa building collapse toll 26

JOHANNESBURG: The death toll from the collapse of a building in South Africa has risen to 26, with another 26 people still missing, authorities said Monday, a week after the structure came crashing down. Six bodies were recovered during the night and the morning at the site in the southern city of George, city officials said. Rescue teams have worked tirelessly since the five-storey apartment block, which was under construction, suddenly collapsed last Monday. Eighty-one people, mostly construction workers, were at the site at the time. Twenty-nine people have been rescued so far. They include a man who was pulled out on Saturday after 116 hours under the rubble. — AFP

Armenia detains 151 protesters

YEREVAN: Armenian police said on Monday they had detained dozens of people attempting to block streets in the capital Yerevan as part of protests against government plans to concede land to Azerbaijan. Armenia has agreed to hand over territory it has controlled since the 1990s and has started border delimitation efforts, in a bid to secure an elusive peace deal with Baku and avoid another bloody conflict. The territorial concessions have sparked weeks of protests by demonstrators, who have blocked major roads in an attempt to force Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to change course. Protest leader Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan had urged opponents of the deal to flood the streets of Yerevan on Monday in a fresh show of opposition to the deal. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2024

Emirates Group books \$5.1bn profit

Airline company sets a new record for second year in a row

DUBAI: Dubai's Emirates Group announced annual profits of \$5.1 billion on Monday, a rise of 71 percent, as the airline company set a new record for the second year in a row. Citing strong customer demand, it said group profits for the past two years hit \$8.1 billion, surpassing the losses seen during pandemic-hit 2020-2022.

"The Emirates Group has once again raised the bar to deliver a new record performance," chair-

man and chief executive Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum said in a statement. State-owned Emirates Group, operator of the world's largest long-haul carrier, announced a record \$3.0 billion in profits last year as it returned to the black after the COVID pandemic. Emirates has now erased the \$1.1 billion loss in 2021-2022 and the heavy \$5.5 billion deficit a year earlier, when it was forced to ground its fleet and lay off staff.

"The Group's excellent financial standing today places us in a strong position for future growth and success. It enables us to invest to deliver even better products, services, and more value to our customers and stakeholders," Sheikh Ahmed said. The airline business alone returned record profits of \$4.7 billion, up 63 percent. Emirates Group also encompasses airport services company Dnata, whose profits more than quadrupled to \$400 million. The Emir-

ates Group workforce grew 10 percent to a record 112,406 employees. The airline will receive 10 new Airbus A350s from August but remains plagued by delays to Boeing's 777X, with 205 on order.

The positive financial results come despite a period of turmoil in the region since the Zionist-Hamas war started in October, setting off a wave of political tensions. "The business outlook is positive, and we expect customer demand for air transport and travel to remain strong in the coming months," said Sheikh Ahmed, adding that possible hazards included "volatile environments caused by socio-political changes". The air travel upswing has prompted Dubai to expand the Al-Maktoum International Airport, which has received a relatively small share of the Gulf fi-



FINANCIAL RESULTS Q1 2024

KD 466 Million Revenue

EBITDA

KD 148
Million

NET INCOME

KD 29
Million

EPS

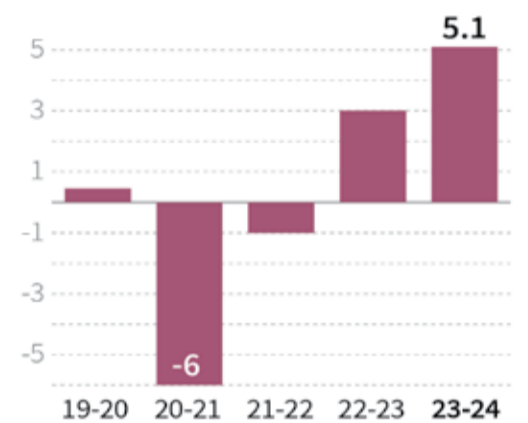
7
Fils

CUSTOMERS

42.4
Million

Emirates Group

Profit/loss*, in billions \$



*Financial year from April 1 to March 31

Source: The Emirates Group annual reports



nancial hub's air traffic since 2010.

Last month, the wealthy emirate announced that work had begun on a new terminal at Al-Maktoum on Dubai's outskirts, which the Gulf emirate's ruler said will become "the world's largest" at a cost of almost \$35 billion. Once fully operational, the airport will "handle a passenger capacity of 260 million annually", the government said in a statement.

The first phase of the project is expected to be ready within 10 years, with a capacity to accommodate 150 million passengers annually. Authorities want it to replace Dubai International Airport, which can handle up to 120 million passengers annually and whose city-centre location prevents expansion. —AFP

Turkey unveils 3-yr austerity plan to slow high inflation

ANKARA: Turkey announced Monday a three-year austerity plan aimed at reducing public spending to calm inflation that reached heights of nearly 70 percent year-on-year in April. The government said it will limit recruitment and transport spending for public servants, among other measures.

"Our priority is to combat the high cost of living. Low single-digit inflation is essential for sustainable growth," Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said during a presentation of the economic plan in Ankara. The plan includes numerous budget cuts "for the entire public service" some of which will require legislative changes to be submitted to parliament, the minister said.

The purchase or lease of any new public service vehicle will be banned for three years, except for "mandatory requirements" concerning the health, security and defense sectors. The use of imported vehicles will also cease within the public service, the minister said. The construction or purchase of public buildings is also suspended for three years, except for those built to reduce earthquake risks or those affected by natural disasters.

Other budget cuts are also planned to "discipline spending", such as a 10 percent reduction in public budgets for the purchase of goods and services and a 15 percent cut in investments—with the exception of spending in regions affected by the February 2023 earthquake. The minister did not specify the government's policies on salaries but the number of recruitments in the civil service will be limited to the number of retirements. In mid-April, Turkey's Labor Minister Vedat Isikhan announced a freeze of the minimum wage, which is usually raised in July. The net minimum wage was raised by almost 50 percent on January 1 to 17,002 Turkish lira (\$528).

Inflation reached 69.8 percent year-on-year in April—up from 68.5 percent in March, according to official data published in early May.

Last week, the head of Turkey's central bank, Fatih Karahan, estimated that inflation would start slowing in June and raised the year-end inflation forecast to 38 percent, up from a previous estimate of 36 percent. Simsek forecast a return to single-digit inflation at the end of 2025.

The staggering rise of consumer prices and the collapse of the Turkish lira against the US dollar and euro are deemed responsible for the severe electoral setback inflicted on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP party in the March 31 municipal elections. A group of independent Turkish economists, ENAG, estimated inflation at over 124 percent year-on-year in April—up five points month-on-month. —AFP

Business

Zain Group reports Q1 2024 revenue of \$1.5 billion, net profit of \$95 million

Group's consolidated EBITDA reaches \$480 million • Data revenue grows to \$595 million

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced its consolidated financial results for the first quarter (Q1) ended March 31, 2024, with the company serving 42.4 million customers.

Zain Group recorded stable consolidated revenue of KD 466 million (\$1.5 billion) for Q1 2024. EBITDA for the quarter reached KD 148 million (\$480 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 32 percent. Net income for the quarter reached KD 29 million (\$95 million), reflecting an Earnings Per Share of 7 fils (\$0.02).

Key operational notes for Q1 2024

- Zain Group maintained stable revenue due to strong top-line performance across main operations including Iraq (+14 percent), Kuwait (+7 percent), KSA (+5 percent) and Jordan (+3 percent). This is despite the ongoing crisis and associated network operational challenges in Sudan where network services and coverage areas are gradually improving.
- Group customer base was significantly impacted by the Sudan crisis due to damaging military attacks on business operating systems, inaccessibility to customer data centers, limited network coverage and retail distribution challenges. Moreover, it is estimated that 6.5 million people have been internally displaced with two million migrating to neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the recovery plan and new data center is seeing an exponential uptake in customers in Q2 2024.
- The decrease in Q1 2024 net income compared to the restated Q1 2023 net income, is mainly due to a one-time gain on sale and leaseback of the Zain KSA tower transaction.
- The restatement of the Q1 2023 consolidated statement of profit and loss was due to the accounting of KSA tower transaction which was revisited in the Q4 2023 due to the significant judgements and estimations involved in assessing transfer of control. Excluding this impact of the restated KSA tower net profit gains, the drop in Q1 2024 Y-o-Y net income would be significantly less.
- There is no impact on Zain Group of the above restatement and reclassifications on the net profit and the consolidated financial statement reported and issued as of Dec 31, 2023, as all necessary adjustments required have already been accounted for in the consolidated financial statements for the year ended Dec 31, 2023.
- Data revenue grows 1 percent to reach \$595 million, representing 39 percent of the Group's overall revenue.
- During the quarter, Group invested \$39 million in CAPEX rolling out 5G and FTTH.
- Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain and Jordan continue to grow their 5G customer bases.
- Fintech services Group-wide (Tamam in KSA, Zain Cash in Iraq and Jordan) report exponential growth as total revenue grows 49 percent, with transaction value increasing 82 percent to reach \$3 billion.
- Enterprise revenues witnessed healthy growth as ZainTECH reports five-fold increase in revenues and key market's B2B teams secure multiple deals with businesses and governments.
- Digital services including Dizlee API platform continue to witness revenue growth totaling 22 percent.
- Zain's digital operator Yaqoot in KSA, and oodi in Iraq evolve their product offerings as customer base continues to grow.

Osamah Al-Furaih, Chairman of the Board said, "The Board is working closely with executive management to address major socio-economic challenges in several key markets. In Sudan in particular, we acknowledge and pray for the safety of our dedicated workforce, who are making many personal sacrifices to provide meaningful connectivity to the local community. Zain Sudan is an important member of the Zain Group family and we will spare no efforts in supporting the team there to maintain the network and general operations."

"Notwithstanding, we remain focused on mitigating the impact of the Sudan crisis through different Group-wide operational measures including cost optimization, network upgrades, driving enterprise revenues, and the development of new lucrative business verticals across our footprint. Moreover, our Environmental, Social and Governance practices continue to be at the forefront of our sustainability and business strategies."

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "Considering the excellent operational progress and digital transformation we have undertaken across our markets, it's unfortunate that exceptional circumstances and network challenges in Sudan severely impacted our financial performance and customer base. Nevertheless, we are pleased with the overall revenue growth across other key markets, and through our mitigation efforts, we are currently seeing improvements on multiple levels in Sudan from the many network service availability and customer initiatives we are undertaking."

"Thanks to the on-the-ground efforts of our brave and talented team, whose safety remains a priority for us, they have focused on maintaining connectivity through the establishment of a new data recovery center in Port Sudan, which is playing a critical role in connecting families. This is a real success story as we continue to offer connectivity and grow the business in these uncertain times."

"Our 5G customer base in Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain, and Jordan continues to grow, as these high-speed and reliable networks empower us to offer appealing digital technologies and services to both our individual and enterprise customers, enhancing their data experience."

"We remain focused on further driving the rev-



Chairman Osamah Al-Furaih

The Board continues to work closely with executive management to overcome major socio-economic challenges in several key markets



Vice-Chairman & Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

Solid operational performance and revenue growth across key markets; focus on maintaining network services and mitigating operational issues in Sudan

Group Key Performance Indicators (KD and USD) for Q1 2024

Total Managed Active Customers	42.4 million
Revenue	KD 466 million (\$1.5 billion)
EBITDA	KD 148 million (\$480 million)
EBITDA Margin	32%
Net Income	KD 29 million (\$95 million)
EPS	7 fils (\$0.02)

enue and customer growth in several of our digital and enterprise-focused initiatives, namely our fintech services in KSA (Tamam), Jordan and Iraq (Zain Cash) which are witnessing impressive growth quarter on quarter. Likewise, our digital operators in KSA (Yaqoot) and Iraq (oodi), Red Bull Mobile (Kuwait); the Dizlee API platform; and related VAS activities are all witnessing growth in revenue and customer terms. Our recently launched fintech 'Bede' brand in Bahrain is well positioned to offer much-needed financial services and we look forward to receiving a Digital Bank license in Kuwait soon."

"Our integrated digital solutions provider, ZainTECH is witnessing impressive revenue growth through working closely with operations across our footprint and we will continue to foster this lucrative collaboration. ZainTECH also took a significant step forward strategically having officially opened its offices in Riyadh, KSA, offering an extensive portfolio of ICT transformational solutions to enterprises and governments. The launch of ZainTECH in KSA follows a similar unveiling earlier in the year in Bahrain, reinforcing ZainTECH's ambition to have the best in-country resources and expertise across the region."

"Furthermore, additional subsea cables and partnerships implemented by Zain Omantel International (ZOI) are driving revenue growth and providing Zain with operational independence in empowering digital transformation initiatives for our regional operations, particularly for cloud and IoT services."

"Our unrelenting operational activities do not distract us from our important parallel efforts to reduce any harmful impact of our business on the environment. The recent publication of our 2023 Sustainability Report highlights the company's efforts to provide meaningful connectivity leading to equita-

ble systemic change and empowering communities through the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are proud to have maintained our leadership position of A- score in the 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2023' for the third year in a row. This grade, first achieved in 2021, positioned Zain as the highest ranked and only telecom operator in the Middle East and Africa to achieve this high rating."

Al-Kharafi concluded, "Our staff remain our greatest single asset, and we are extremely proud of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, which resulted in Zain being included in the Fast Company Middle East's inaugural edition of Best Workplaces for Women, which recognizes companies across the region that are empowering women by creating an inclusive environment, affirming our corporate leadership in this area."

Financial KPIs of key markets for first quarter (Q1) ended March 31, 2024

KUWAIT: Maintaining its market leadership, the flagship operation saw its customer base grow 2 percent to serve 2.7 million. Revenue for Q1 2024 reached KD 93 million (\$303 million), a 7 percent YoY growth. EBITDA reached KD 31 million (\$100 million), representing an EBITDA margin of 33 percent. Net income reached KD 18 million (\$57 million) for Q1 2024, with data revenue accounting for 36 percent of total revenue.

SAUDI ARABIA: For Q1 2024, Zain KSA revenue grew by 5 percent to \$676 million, EBITDA for the period increased 11 percent to reach \$206 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 31 percent. Net income for the three months was \$18 million (Q1 2023 restated: \$303 million). The decrease in net income is mainly attributed to tower transaction in Q1 2023.

The operator's data revenue grew 7 percent, representing 41 percent of total revenue, and active customers increased 1 percent to stand at 8.8 million.

The restatement of the Q1 2023 consolidated statement of profit and loss for Zain KSA was due to the accounting of its tower transaction which was revisited in the fourth quarter of 2023 due to the significant judgements and estimations involved in assessing transfer of control. There is no impact on Zain KSA of the above restatement and reclassifications on the net profit and the consolidated financial statement reported and issued as of Dec 31, 2023, as all necessary adjustments required have already been accounted for in the consolidated financial statements for the year ended Dec 31, 2023.

IRAQ: Zain Iraq's Q1 2024 revenue increased 14 percent to reach \$253 million and EBITDA increased 22 percent to reach \$93 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 37 percent. Net profit for the period reached \$15 million. The customer base increased 2 percent to 18.7 million, reflecting a market leading position.

SUDAN: The operational and network challenges in Zain Sudan impacted the results significantly. Revenue for the quarter reached \$50 million, a drop of 70 percent, with EBITDA down 86 percent amounting to \$12 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 23 percent. Net income decreased by 71 percent.

It should be noted that the operation's customer base was significantly impacted by the crisis due to damaging military attacks on business operating systems, inaccessibility to customer data centers, limited network coverage and retail distribution challenges. Moreover, it is estimated that 6.5 million people have been internally displaced and 2 million migrating. Nevertheless, the recovery plan inclusive of a new data center in Port Sudan, is resulting in gradual improvements in network services and coverage areas, and seeing an exponential uptake in customers in Q2 2024.

JORDAN: For Q1 2024, Zain Jordan revenue grew 3 percent to reach \$132 million, EBITDA increased 6 percent to reach \$55 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41 percent, with net income at \$17 million. Data revenue grew 7 percent on the back of its 5G network, representing 52 percent of total revenue. The customer base increased by 4 percent to stand at 4 million, maintaining a market leading position.

BAHRAIN: Zain Bahrain generated revenue of \$52 million, an increase of 7 percent EBITDA increased 3 percent to reach \$15 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 29 percent. Net income reached \$2.8 million, with data revenue growing 7 percent to represent 45 percent of total revenue.

- Compared to previous period, Q1 2024 net-profit is impacted due to the one-off gains from KSA Tower sale in Q1 2023 and operational issues in Sudan due to crisis
- Revenue remained stable as strong revenue growth in Iraq (+14 percent), Kuwait (+7 percent), KSA (+5 percent) and Jordan (+3 percent) offset the negative impact from Sudan
- Group consolidated EBITDA reaches \$480million (KD 148 million)



Gulf Bank announces winning teams of Datathon competition

Third edition held in collaboration with KU's College of Life Sciences • Over 400 participate



Salma Al-Hajjaj and Dr Nawaf Al-Hajri pose for a group photo with the Digital Transformation & Innovation Unit team at Gulf Bank.



The jury panel is headed by Mai Al-Owaish.

• **Salma Al-Hajjaj:** Gulf Bank is dedicated to utilizing all its resources to promote data literacy and assist young individuals in developing their skills.

• **Ghaith Ghazi:** Gulf Bank plays a vital role in supporting Kuwait's talent base in terms of both quantity and capabilities.

KUWAIT: With the participation of more than 400 young talents and aspiring professionals from Kuwait, Gulf Bank announced the winning teams at the third edition of the Datathon competition, the first of its kind platform in Kuwait aimed at empowering data specialists, school and university students, and those interested in working in the fields of data and analytics.

The third edition of the Datathon, which took place at Kuwait University's Cultural Center in collaboration with Kuwait University's College of Life Sciences and the "Kuwait Code" Academy,

who actively engaged in workshops with data science experts. She emphasized Gulf Bank's dedication to utilizing its resources to promote data literacy within society, encouraging young individuals to enhance their skills in the field of data to meet Kuwait's future demands.

This commitment aligns with Kuwait Vision 2035, which aims to cultivate a creative human capital, and with Gulf Bank's strategy to cement its position as a forward-looking financial institution.

Al-Hajjaj emphasized that the third edition builds on the impressive success and outstanding youth participation in

ing bank in the field of data and digital services, as well as helps spread data literacy across society, with a particular emphasis on the youth. She pointed out that the competition provided unique opportunities for university students and recent graduates seeking high-level training opportunities in data analysis and programming. Additionally, it catered to high school students aged 16 and above, experienced data enthusiasts, and even members of the public with an interest in data science.

Dr Nawaf Al-Hajri, the Dean of the College of Life Sciences, conveyed his pleasure in hosting this esteemed competition at the Sabah Al-Salem University City campus, in partnership with Gulf Bank. He also expressed satisfaction with their accomplishment of attracting greater participation from various sectors, such as students from schools and universities, along with employees from government and private sectors, to actively engage in the event.

Ghaith Ghazi, Tableau's Area Vice President, emphasized the vital role Gulf Bank plays in organizing such competitions to support Kuwait's talent base in terms of both quantity and capabilities, which in turn positively impacts the economy as a whole.

Categories of participants

• **University Students:** Currently enrolled or recent graduates seeking ed-



Workshop in progress.

ucational opportunities to gain experience in data analysis, programming, and problem-solving.

• **High School Students:** For the first time, high school students aged 16 and above are able to join all three categories,

learning new skills and engaging in data culture.

• **Data Enthusiasts:** Individuals experienced in data analysis and interpretation.
• **General Public:** Anyone interested in the field of data and its applications.

• **Dr Nawaf Al-Hajri:** We are thrilled to host this esteemed competition and to have successfully attracted more young individuals to participate in this field.

and with the participation of the global company TABLEAU, attracted a notable number of eager young participants and skilled individuals interested in competing across the event's three categories: "Data Modeling," "Data Visualization," and "Artificial Intelligence (AI) - GenAI."

On this occasion, Salma Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, extended congratulations to the winning teams and all participants

the competition, along with the valuable insights gained from the workshops. Consequently, measures were taken to incorporate new age groups in the latest edition by reducing the minimum age requirement for participants from 18 to 16 years old, allowing them to register for all categories. Moreover, the GenAI category was introduced for the first time.

She mentioned that this annual event enhances Gulf Bank's position as a lead-

that such measures would be used to support major projects of strategic significance.

"The main result of such issuance will be to replenish capital for domestic banks because most of those bonds will be held by banks," Dan Wang, chief economist at Hang Seng Bank China, told AFP.

"Given the contraction in the issuance of new bank credit, we are likely to see more long-term bond issuance in the future," Dan said. "It won't help resolve the liquidity problem in the market, but only drive down the long-term financing cost for government projects," she added.

China has only sold such government bonds on a handful of occasions in the face of major economic headwinds, such as in early 2020 to help fund efforts to counter the pandemic.

Consumer prices in the country have been in positive territory for three straight months, official data showed Saturday, but domestic spending remains relatively weak. Real estate development once served as a key driver of growth in the country, but mounting debt at several of the sector's biggest firms in recent years has caused activity to stall. The crisis is being exacerbated by falling home prices and increasing consumer wariness of investing in property.

Authorities have responded by lifting previous restrictions on buying homes in certain areas, including in the major cities of Hangzhou and Xi'an on Thursday, in a bid to spur purchasing. — AFP



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

China to sell initial batch of long-dated bonds this week

BEIJING: China will start selling an initial batch of long-dated bonds this week, the Ministry of Finance announced Monday, as Beijing looks to boost support for the world's second-largest economy. The central government will begin issuing some 30-year bonds on Friday as part of a planned sale of more than \$138 billion of debt, according to a notice posted to the ministry's website.

Other bonds with tenors of 20 years and 50 years will go on sale on May 24 and June 14 respectively. The Ministry of Finance did not specify the number of bonds that will be issued.

A volatile property market and high unemployment - particularly among youth - are key issues dragging down China's economy. Leaders have set a target of around five percent for this year's growth, a figure seen as ambitious by many economists. The bond sales are expected to lift that growth figure by one percentage point, Xing Zhaopeng of Australia and New Zealand Banking Group told Bloomberg.

The move had been hinted at in recent months by Beijing, with Premier Li Qiang saying in March

Chinese firms exit Romania solar tender after EU probe

BRUSSELS: Two Chinese-owned solar panel manufacturers have withdrawn from a public procurement tender in Romania after the EU launched an anti-subsidy probe, Brussels said Monday. The EU wants to defend European industry against growing threats from China and the United States, and has launched multiple probes into Chinese firms over state subsidies.

But Brussels must balance its desire to build up Europe's renewable energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while simultaneously moving away from excessive reliance on cheaper Chinese wind and solar technology.

The European Commission in April started an investigation into two consortiums suspected of receiving subsidies that Brussels feared undercut firms in Europe. "As a result of the withdrawal, the Commission will close its in-depth investigation," it said.

France gets 'record' foreign investments worth \$16.2 billion

PARIS: France has received combined investment commitments from foreign companies of more than 15 billion euros (\$16.2 billion), President Emmanuel Macron's office said Monday. The announcement came as Macron kicked off a day of meetings with foreign business leaders at the Chateau de Versailles, called "Choose France".

The biggest single commitment is by Microsoft which on Sunday announced four billion euros in investment for developing data centers. Microsoft's president Brad Smith told AFP the move to strengthen its artificial intelligence and cloud computing infrastructure was the tech giant's biggest-ever investment in France since its arrival 41 years ago.

A new data centre will be created in eastern France, while existing sites in the Paris region and the southern city of Marseille will be expanded. E-commerce behemoth Amazon will invest more than 1.2 billion euros in France, creating more than 3,000

The investigation had been launched under new rules that came into force last year and seek to prevent foreign subsidies from undermining fair competition in the EU. "We are massively investing in the installation of solar panels to decrease our carbon emissions and energy bills - but this should not come at the expense of our energy security, our industrial competitiveness and European jobs," the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, said. The new rules ensure "foreign companies which participate in the European economy do so by abiding to our rules on fair competition and transparency", he added.

The probe focused on two consortiums, one of which includes the Enevo group in Romania and a German subsidiary of Chinese parent company Longi Green Energy Technology.

Longi is the world's biggest solar panel manufacturer. The second consortium was made up of two subsidiaries both fully owned and controlled by Chinese state-owned firm, Shanghai Electric group.

They had applied to design, construct and operate a photovoltaic park in Romania, partly financed by EU funds. The estimated value of the contract was around 375 million euros (\$405 million). — AFP

jobs, Macron's office said earlier on Sunday.

The money will help develop Amazon Web Services' (AWS) cloud infrastructure, mainly generative artificial intelligence, and the logistical infrastructure of its parcel delivery service, a statement added.

Several pharmaceutical companies, including US group Pfizer and Britain's AstraZeneca, announced on Sunday commitments to invest more than a billion euros more in France's health sector. The largest industrial project announced so far is a potential fertilizer factory, which could significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

France was Europe's top destination for foreign investment for the fifth year running last year, according to an EY survey, with more than 1,200 investment announcements. "This is a result of the stability of our economic policies," Finance Minister Brune Le Maire told public broadcaster France 2.

Macron's office said that the 15-billion-euro investment total - spread over a "record" 56 projects - would potentially lead to 10,000 job creations. Sylvain Bersinger, chief economist at economic consultancy Asteres, said France's attractiveness for foreign money was based on its education system, tax regime, innovation culture and solid domestic market. — AFP

Business

Burgan Bank issues KD 150m worth of first KWD Additional Tier 1 Bonds

Issuance jointly managed by Kamco Invest and Gulf Bank

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the successful completion of its issuance of KD 150 million Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Bonds. The demand for the bonds exceeded expectations and the issuance was oversubscribed, confirming strong investor interest in the bank's offerings.

This issuance stands as a landmark achievement, being the largest Kuwaiti Dinar Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Bond issuance in Kuwait. Furthermore, it is also the first Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Bond issuance denominated in Kuwaiti dinar by a bank and ranks among the largest Kuwaiti dinar issuances, underscoring its significance within the financial market.

Rated BBB- by Capital Intelligence, the bond presents rewarding returns for investors in both tranches, the fixed-interest bond, and the floating-interest bond. The fixed rate tranche offers a return of 7.25 percent per annum for the initial five years, followed by 3.00 percent over the prevailing CBK Discount Rate. On the other hand, the floating rate tranche provides a return of 3.25 percent over the CBK Discount Rate per annum, with a cap at 1.00 percent over the fixed rate tranche, determined quarterly.

Kamco Invest played a pivotal role as the Sole Issuance Coordinator and Joint Lead Manager and Placement Agent, while Gulf Bank contributed as a Joint Lead Manager and Placement Agent, in the successful issuance of the bonds.

Tony Daher, Group Chief Executive Officer of Burgan Bank, said: "Despite being one of the largest issuances in Kuwaiti dinar, the successful completion of this transaction in a short period is a testament to the bank's robust financial position, investment grade rating, and the positive developments it is undergoing. This issuance will enhance the capital ratios at the bank and will provide long-term liquidity to support long-term strategic initiatives."



A group photo taken during the bond issuance signing ceremony.

Faisal Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer of Kamco Invest, said, "This issuance marks a significant milestone as the first Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Bond denominated in Kuwaiti dinar by a bank, highlighting our pioneering role in structuring innovative debt instruments for the local capital market. The dedication of our Debt Capital Markets team and the efforts and collaboration demonstrated by all parties involved were instrumental in the successful completion of this notable transaction. Burgan Bank's strong financial position and strategic vision were pivotal in swiftly

closing the issuance, which was oversubscribed."

Waleed Khaled Mandani, the Acting CEO of Gulf Bank, expressed his satisfaction, stating, "We are delighted to join Kamco Invest as Joint Lead Managers in the successful issuance for Burgan Bank. This issuance, one of the largest in Kuwaiti Dinars, has attracted significant interest from investors."

Mandani indicated that Gulf Bank continuously strives to enhance its pivotal role in stimulating the local capital market, providing unique investment opportunities for all its clients, and achieving the

best returns for them. He noted that the establishment of Gulf Capital Investment Company, known as "InvestGB", highlights this direction and contributes to providing a comprehensive range of distinguished investment products and services.

Daher concluded by expressing his gratitude to investors for their trust and confidence, as well as to all regulatory authorities, specifically the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority. He also thanked the joint lead managers and other stakeholders for their efforts and collaboration.

NBK ECONOMIC BRIEF

Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar economies to grow at slow pace

KUWAIT: Economic growth in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar is forecast to proceed at a moderate pace on average in 2024 and 2025 on decent projected growth in non-oil activity. Oman also stands to benefit from strong reform progress and rising planned investment, which will be key growth catalysts going forward. Fiscal consolidation efforts in Bahrain and Oman have led to reduced fiscal vulnerabilities and improved metrics, while spending restraint in Qatar has delivered a further decline in public debt. Downside risks stem mainly from adverse regional geopolitics and lower energy prices, while higher project spending, better-than-expected results from economic reforms and higher energy prices are risks to the upside.

Bahrain

Having moderated to 2.5 percent last year amid tighter financial conditions and negative oil sector growth, economic growth is expected to rise in 2024, led by a recovery in the hydrocarbon sector as maintenance works on the Abu Safah field are completed. Growth in the non-oil economy, which now constitutes an overwhelming 84 percent of GDP, is seen on a mildly slowing trajectory at about 3 percent in both 2024 and 2025 from 3.5 percent last year, weighed by still elevated (if falling) interest rates and government fiscal consolidation efforts. Positive factors include rising tourism (hotel GDP grew 19 percent y/y in Q4 23) and strong growth in the service sector more broadly, while the government's economic recovery plan targets higher project spending and FDI, and vigorous job growth for Bahraini nationals.

Bapco's much anticipated refinery expansion project is also expected to be completed by 2025, providing a boost to non-oil activities. Inflation, meanwhile, was negligible in 2023 and should re-

main well below 2 percent this year.

Fiscal consolidation efforts since the pandemic have yielded very positive results, though the deficit is forecast at a wider 3-4 percent of GDP in 2024-25 on higher interest rates, slower progress on non-oil revenue growth, and lower commodity prices versus their peak in 2022. The government's balanced budget target date (2024) may be extended but credible spending control and revenue raising efforts will ensure that GCC fiscal support remains high. More elevated roll-over costs (due to higher interest rates) could contribute to a higher debt-to-GDP ratio of 117 percent by 2025. The key downside risk to the outlook stems from vulnerability to negative oil price shocks which could undermine ongoing fiscal consolidation, a still low credit rating versus peers and pressure low FX reserves.

Oman

The narrative on Oman's economy has become more positive, following a concerted fiscal consolidation program and progress on key reforms under the government's Vision 2040 program. Non-oil economic growth is projected at 2.5-3.0 percent in 2024 and 2025, despite headwinds from still-high interest rates, public spending restraint and a fading post-pandemic rebound in job growth. We see the government remaining committed to its transformation of the economy (including lowering the hydrocarbon sector's share of GDP to 8 percent by 2040 from around 30 percent recently), which has already seen state-owned firms overhauled, subsidy programs pared back, successful steps to boost female labor force participation and in January 2024 the creation of the \$5 billion Oman Future Fund aimed at catalyzing domestic investment in sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and green energy. Oil GDP in 2024 will be hit by participation in OPEC+ cuts, but condensate output may expand while multiple energy sector IPOs could boost investment this year.

A small fiscal surplus is seen over the forecast period, with earlier vulnerabilities reduced by a combination of high oil prices and policy discipline. The budget for 2024 provides for a modest 3 percent rise in spending, with capex unchanged. The government has prioritized reducing debt which has

broadly halved since 2020 to 34 percent of GDP in 2023, triggering a string of credit rating upgrades, though smaller fiscal surpluses going forward will slow future debt reductions. The main upside risk to the outlook is more rapid non-oil growth if the reform program yields stronger-than-expected results. The main downside risk would be a sharp drop in oil prices which pushes the budget back into large deficit and halts reform momentum.

Qatar

Non-oil growth is expected to accelerate to 2-3 percent in 2024 and 2025, having dipped last year in the aftermath of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. A recent pickup in credit growth, above-50 PMI readings, and still elevated visitor numbers are supportive of domestic demand which should drive non-oil growth over the forecast period. The fading effects of an exceptionally strong 2022 and - eventually - interest rate cuts albeit from high levels are additional drivers. Total GDP growth, however, will be relatively modest amid growth-neutral budgets and negligible gains in hydrocarbon output until 2026, when the first phase of Qatar's massive LNG capacity expansion is expected to be completed, bringing LNG output to 110 mtpa (43 percent increase). Crude output is seen broadly steady at 0.6 mb/d in 2024-25.

We forecast solid fiscal surpluses in 2024 and 2025 (around 7-8 percent of GDP) on account of modest projected increases in hydrocarbon revenues and continued spending restraint. Consequently, gross public debt is expected to continue to decline to an estimated 45 percent of GDP in 2025 from above 60 percent in 2021. Beyond 2025 we see the potential for larger fiscal surpluses following the ramping up of LNG exports which can be deployed on development plan-linked capital spending. Indeed, a near doubling of LNG capacity by 2030 to 142 mtpa from the current 77 mtpa is now planned, higher than earlier estimates of a 127 mtpa target, allowing Qatar to control a larger share of the global LNG market. Given the above, risks are skewed to the upside, especially in the event of higher gas prices due to a shortage or stronger demand, while downside risks stem mainly from adverse geopolitics or lower gas prices and demand in the event of a global recession.

Maldives gets IMF debt warning as more China loans loom

MALE, Maldives: The International Monetary Fund warned the Maldives against looming "debt distress" Monday, as the small but strategically placed luxury tourist destination looks set to borrow more from main creditor China.

Since winning office last year, President Mohamed Muizzu has reoriented the atoll nation—known for its upmarket beach resorts and celebrity vacationers—away from traditional benefactor India and towards Beijing. Last month his party won parliamentary elections in a landslide after promising to build thousands of apartments, reclaim more land for urban development and upgrade airports, all with Chinese funding. Without naming the archipelago's main lender, the IMF said the Maldives remained "at high risk of external and overall debt distress" without "significant policy changes".

"Uncertainty surrounding the outlook is high and risks are tilted to the downside, including from delayed fiscal consolidation and weaker growth in key sources markets for tourism," the IMF said in a statement. It urged the Maldives to urgently raise revenue, cut spending and reduce external borrowing to avoid a major economic crisis.

The Maldives is a small nation of 1,192 tiny coral islets scattered 800 kilometers (500 miles) across the equator, but it strategically straddles key east-west international shipping routes.

Tourism is a crucial source of foreign exchange for the country, home to white sandy beaches and secluded resorts offering Robinson Crusoe-style holidays. China has pledged more funding since last year's victory by Muizzu, who thanked the country for its "selfless assistance" for development funds on a state visit to Beijing shortly after he took power. Official data showed the Maldives' foreign debt reaching \$4.038 billion last year, about 118 percent of gross domestic product and up nearly \$250 million from 2022.

As of June 2023, the Export-Import Bank of China owned 25.2 percent of the Maldives' external debt and was the country's biggest single lender, Maldives finance ministry figures showed.

Debt-burdened neighbor Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt in 2022 after a foreign exchange crisis that brought months of food and fuel shortages. More than 50 percent of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt is owed to China and the island nation is still struggling to restructure its borrowings with IMF assistance.

Unable to service a huge Chinese loan to build a port in the south, Sri Lanka allowed a Chinese state company to take over the facility on a 99-year lease in 2017.

The deal raised fears about Beijing's use of "debt traps" in exerting its influence abroad, including in the Indian Ocean. —AFP

India, Iran sign 10-year deal to develop port project

TEHRAN: India and Iran on Monday signed a 10-year contract to develop and equip the strategic Chabahar port in Iran as India seeks to grow trade in west and central Asia. The agreement will give India 10-year access to use the port, located close to Iran's southeastern border with Pakistan, according to Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

The contract will in turn see India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) invest \$370 million into "providing strategic equipment" and "developing the transport infrastructure of the port".

Iran's urban development minister Mehrdad Bazr-pash and India's ports and shipping minister Sarb-nanda Sonowal signed contract in the town of Chabahar, in a ceremony broadcast live on state media. India in 2016 agreed to finance the development of the Iranian port as a trading hub for central Asia as Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to revive economic ties with Tehran after the lifting of sanctions. Modi and former Iranian president Hassan Rouhani oversaw the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the provision of a line of credit from India's EXIM Bank to develop the port.

The development of the port however stalled, despite waivers to sanctions that the United States



India and Iran signed a new deal for operational control over a section of the Chabahar Port.

began reimposing in 2018 after withdrawing from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"Chabahar... can act as a focal point in the transit development of the region," Bazr-pash said at the signing ceremony. "We are pleased with this agreement, and we have full trust in India," he added.

"Iran and India are seeking to develop Chabahar port as much as possible, taking into account

the interests of the two countries for joint access to regional markets," the Indian minister said.

This "long-term contract symbolizes the enduring trust and effective partnership between India and Iran," he added. In 2019, before the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, both countries agreed to speed up the project after a visit by India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to Tehran. Chabahar port is on the Indian Ocean.—AFP

Lifestyle

Heatwave hammers Thailand's stinky but lucrative durian farms



This photo shows baskets of durian at the durian suppliers Paeng Jae Ting at Noen Sung wholesale fruit market in Thailand's eastern Chanthaburi province. — AFP photos



Workers stacking durians on a truck at the durian suppliers Paeng Jae Ting at Noen Sung wholesale fruit market.



This photo shows baskets of durians being weighed by vendors.

Clambering hand-over-hand, sweat dripping into his eyes, a durian laborer expertly slices a cumbersome fruit from a tree before tossing it down to land with a soft thump in his colleague's waiting arms some 15 meters (50 feet) below. Among Thailand's most famous and lucrative exports, the pungent "king of fruits" is as distinctive in its smell as its spiky green-brown carapace, and has been farmed in the kingdom for hundreds of years. But a vicious heatwave engulfing Southeast Asia has



This aerial photo shows durian farms in Thailand's eastern Chanthaburi province.



This photo shows workers checking the ripeness of durian.



A worker harvesting durian at BB Garden durian farm.

resulted in smaller yields and spiraling costs, with growers and sellers increasingly panicked as global warming damages the industry. "This year is a crisis," durian farmer Busaba Nakpipat told AFP bluntly.

The weather-beaten 54-year-old took over her parents' farm in eastern Chanthaburi province—Thailand's du-

rian heartland—three decades ago. "If the hot weather continues to rise in the future, it'll be over," she said. "Farmers wouldn't be able to produce durian anymore." Durian season usually lasts from March until June, but the soaring temperatures—which in her province have hovered around 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit)

for weeks—and subsequent drought have shortened the harvest.

Busaba said the heat causes the durian, which is graduated by weight and size, to ripen faster so it does not grow to its fullest—and most valuable—size. "The quality of the durian won't meet the standard," she said. And not only is she getting less money for the crop, Busaba's operational costs have risen. Since March a drought has sucked water from the wells, so to keep her precious durian trees alive Busaba is forced to bring in thousands of liters by truck. "We have to buy 10 water trucks for 120,000 liters of water for one-time watering the whole 10-rai (1.6 hectares) of our farm," she said, repeating the process every other day, at a cost of thousands of dollars. "We have prayed for

rain," she said. "But there was no rain."

This year, less

Thailand's durian exports are worth billions and are the kingdom's third most valuable agricultural product—behind rice and rubber. But in the nearby durian market, anxiety is running high among stall-holders, many of them with family businesses going back generations. Siriwan Roopkaew, manning her mother's stall, said the lack of water has impacted the size of the fruit, but for now prices remain high thanks to demand from China. Around 95 percent of Thailand's durian exports are to China, which shipped nearly \$4.6 billion worth of the love-it-or-hate-it fruit from the kingdom in 2023, according to data from Bei-

jing's commerce ministry. But the weather is threatening Thailand's dominance.

In May Chinese state media reported an almost 50 percent rise in durian imported from Vietnam, citing heat and drought in Thailand. "Hot weather means there will be less durian. Even this year, there is less durian," Siriwan, 26, said. "Normally, my stall would be full of durian by now."

While farmers worried about water, she said, sellers like her family were more concerned about the knock-on economics. "Less durian means our earnings are less," she said, "so it'd be hard for us to live the whole year." Meanwhile, back at the farm, Busaba sighed as she considered the months ahead. "The future of durian, it's over if there's no water," she said. —AFP



A worker catching a durian at BB Garden durian farm in Thailand's eastern Chanthaburi province.



Photo shows the inside of a durian.



Photo shows baskets of durians for sale at Wat Si Muang temple.



A worker harvesting durians.



A worker harvesting a durian at BB Garden durian farm.



This aerial photo shows durian farms in Thailand's eastern Chanthaburi province.



This photo shows durian vendors unloading durians from a truck to sell at Wat Si Muang temple.

Lifestyle

CANNES FILM FEST RETURNS WITH COMEBACKS, STRIKES, TRUMP AND METOO

The Cannes Film Festival starts Tuesday with an action-packed script including the comeback of Hollywood icons, fears of a strike, a Donald Trump biopic and the shadow of MeToo accusations. The return of "The Godfather" director Francis Ford Coppola with his decades-in-the-making epic "Megalopolis" is the most anticipated of this year's entries for the top prize Palme d'Or. It is one of 22 films competing for the affections of a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig, which will announce its verdict on May 25.

Those walking the red carpet include actors Richard Gere, Demi Moore and Kevin Costner, all present in new films. Three-time Oscar-winner Meryl Streep and "Star Wars" creator George Lucas will also receive honorary awards. And the latest from George Miller's "Mad Max" universe, "Furiosa", starring Anya Taylor-Joy, will also get its world premiere on Wednesday.

But there are darker plotlines at the 77th edition of the festival. France's film industry is in the midst of a belated MeToo reckoning, with a string of accusations against its biggest star, Gerard Depardieu, and rumors in the run-up to Cannes of more accusations to come against high-profile figures. Actor Judith Godrèche, who has accused two directors of assaulting her when she was a teenager, is presenting a short film, "Moi Aussi" (Me Too) aimed at encouraging more women to come forward.

Meanwhile, one of the directors in competition, Iran's award-winning Mohammad Rasoulof, has just been



Workers hang the official poster of the 77th Cannes Film Festival on the facade of the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, south-eastern France.--AFP

jailed in his home country on security charges days before he was due to present "The Seed of the Sacred Fig". And a group of festival employees have called for a strike over pay and conditions that could cause disruption at the event.

Trump, Coppola, Stone
Among the entries for the Palme d'Or is "The Apprentice", a biopic of Trump's formative years from Iranian-born director Ali Abbasi. It stars Sebastian Stan, known for playing the Winter Soldier in Marvel films. And

"Emilia Perez" has quite the synopsis: a musical about a Mexican cartel boss undergoing a sex change to escape the authorities, directed by France's own Golden Palm winner Jacques Audiard. Pop superstar Selena Gomez appears in a supporting role.

But the hot ticket is undoubtedly Coppola's "Megalopolis" on Thursday. A Roman epic set in modern-day New York, it stars Adam Driver as a visionary architect seeking to rebuild the crumbling city. There is a growing sense of anticipation over whether the 85-year-old director can match his masterpieces of the 1970s, when he twice won the Palme d'Or for "Apocalypse Now" and "The Conversation".

Elsewhere, Emma Stone reunites with director Yorgos Lanthimos, fresh from their Oscar triumph with "Poor Things", for "Kinds of Kindness". It co-stars up-and-coming actor Margaret Qualley, daughter of Andie McDowell, who also features in Demi Moore's unlikely comeback, slash-er-horror "The Substance". Film fans are also excited for new works from body-horror maestro David Cronenberg ("The Shrouds"), Italy's Paolo Sorrentino ("Parthenope") and Oliver Stone ("Lula", a documentary about Brazil's president).

Playing out of competition, Costner returns to his favorite genre, the Western, with the epic "Horizon, An American Saga". And one of China's biggest-ever productions, "She's Got No Name", features megastar Ziyi Zhang tackling the highly sensitive topic of women's rights. Legendary Japanese animators Studio Ghibli -- makers of "Spirited Away", "My Neighbor Totoro" and "Howl's Moving Castle" -- will receive an honorary Palme d'Or, the first offered to a group. — AFP



Runway's cofounders (from left) Anastasis Germanidis, Alejandro Matamala-Ortiz and Cristóbal Valenzuela are immigrants who met while studying as art students at New York University.

AI film festival gives glimpse of cinema's future

With fantastical characters including mud people and giant grandmothers, an AI film festival is giving a glimpse of the storytelling made possible by the novel technology. Nearly 3,000 short films were submitted to the festival organized by Runway AI, one of the leading start-ups in the field of AI-powered video generation. The 10 films selected put the filmmakers' vivid imaginations on display, with their stories set in aesthetically stunning universes.

"There is a perception of ... AI-driven filmmaking and creation as having a very specific style," Runway co-founder and chief technology officer Anastasis Germanidis told AFP. But each of the selected films "feels very different from the other one," he said Thursday at the festival's awards ceremony. Movie making and animation having grown by leaps and bounds in the past 50 years, past feature films like "Inception," "The Matrix" and "Loving Vincent" come to mind when watching the AI shorts.

But the latest technology allows films to be made on a fraction of a typical movie budget, and by anyone with access to a computer and the software. With just a prompt, Runway can transform a series of still images into a short video, or turn a photo into a painting. In February, generative AI leader OpenAI launched its video creation software, dubbed Sora, while Google and Meta are developing their own versions, called Lumiere and Emu, respectively.

Not yet perfect

For his short that won an Honoree prize at the festival, Leo Cannone generated hundreds of images using the AI application Midjourney, then animated them with Runway, making countless edits along the way. Current AI technology is still underdeveloped in some areas, particularly in providing multiple camera angles and creating flawless human-like speaking characters. "I couldn't really have (human) characters or dialogue, so that set the aesthetic of the film," the French director said of his short, about what happens to grandmothers after they die. (Spoiler: they become giants.)

With the AI-generated visuals "there were still a lot of defects in each scene, so I had to retouch a lot. It doesn't come out of the software ready to use." Runway co-founder Alejandro Matamala conceded the technology wasn't yet perfected. "If you want a photorealistic character that is human... we are not as advanced to do that. But we are saying, there are more different types of ways to tell stories."

A sea change

Runway is currently developing something it calls "General World Models," an AI system that can simulate a real-world environment by anticipating how future events unfold in a dynamic setting. The three Runway co-founders do not come from computer engineering backgrounds, rather, they studied art-related fields at New York University. The trio are focused on creating a "common language" for programming and creativity, citing Apple and Pixar as examples. — AFP

The films competing at the Cannes Film Festival

Here are the 22 films competing for the Palme d'Or, the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival on May 14-25, and some of the films showing out of competition.

In competition

'Megalopolis' (Francis Ford Coppola)

This self-funded epic -- a Roman drama transplanted to modern-day New York starring Adam Driver -- has been in the works for more than 40 years. Coppola has twice won the Palme d'Or -- for "The Conversation" (1974) and "Apocalypse Now" (1979).

'The Apprentice' (Ali Abbasi)

A biopic about Donald Trump's formative years from an award-winning Iranian director is bound to grab attention. It stars Sebastian Stan, best-known as the Winter Soldier in Marvel films and rocker Tommy Lee in series "Pam and Tommy", alongside Jeremy Strong of "Succession" fame as Trump's lawyer.

'Kinds of Kindness' (Yorgos Lanthimos)

Three short stories in one, this is the latest team-up between the Greek director and Emma Stone, just weeks after she won an Oscar for "Poor Things", also starring Willem Defoe and Margaret Qualley.

'The Shrouds' (David Cronenberg)

The horror maestro's latest supernatural drama is about a man who builds a device to connect with his dead wife -- a deeply personal project for the Canadian director who lost his wife in 2017. It stars Vincent Cassel and Diane Kruger.

'Oh, Canada' (Paul Schrader)

The iconic writer-director has been on a roll lately with a string of dramas about obsessive and dangerous men. He reunites with his "American Gigolo" star Richard Gere for the story of a dying man reflecting on his past mistakes.

'Emilia Perez' (Jacques Audiard)

Quite the synopsis -- a musical about a Mexican cartel boss undergoing a sex change to escape the authorities, with pop superstar Selena Gomez in a supporting role. The unpredictable French director has tried many genres, from "The Prophet" and "Rust and Bone" to his Palme d'Or-winning "Dheepan".

'The Substance' (Coralie Fargeat)

An unlikely comeback vehicle for Demi Moore -- an ultra-violent horror film from the French director of 2017's "Revenge" that will "leave a lot of blood on the screen", according to festival director Thierry Fremaux.

'The Most Precious of Cargoes' (Michel Hazanavicius)

The first animation in competition since 2008's "Waltz With Bashir" is the tale of a twin thrown to safety from a death train transporting his Jewish parents to Auschwitz, from the director of the Oscar-winning "The Artist".

'Limonov' (Kirill Serebrennikov)

The exiled Russian director tackles the bizarre true life of dissident poet Eduard Limonov, who fled the Soviet Union but returned to found a new Bolshevik Party after the Cold War.

'Parthenope' (Paolo Sorrentino)

Another love letter to his native Naples from

the Oscar-winning director of "The Great Beauty" and Netflix series "The Young Pope".

'Bird' (Andrea Arnold)

The celebrated British auteur returns with a coming-of-age tale set in an English suburb, starring Barry Keoghan ("Saltburn"). Arnold won an Oscar for short film "Wasp" and made acclaimed features "Red Road" and "Fish Tank".

'The Seed of the Sacred Fig' (Mohammad Rasoulof)

Imprisoned for criticizing Iran's government and barred from leaving the country, Rasoulof has already faced pressure to pull his latest film from the Cannes line-up. Its plot remains under wraps.

'Anora' (Sean Baker)

A darling of the US indie scene for his portraits of marginalized characters in "The Florida Project" and "Red Rocket", Baker returns with a "romantic adventure" starring "Scream" actress Mikey Madison.

'Caught by the Tides' (Jia Zhang-Ke)

One of China's most celebrated auteurs offers a view of the country "we are not necessarily used to seeing", according to Fremaux.

'All We Imagine As Light' (Payal Kapadia)

The first Indian entry in 30 years tells the intimate stories of a Mumbai nurse and her roommate.

'Beating Hearts' (Gilles Lellouche)

The French actor-director adapts an Irish novel, "Jackie Loves Johnser OK?", with Francois Civil and Adele Exarchopoulos.

'Wild Diamond' (Agathe Riedinger)

A debut film about a young French girl seeking fame on reality TV.

'Three Kilometers to the End of the World' (Emanuel Parvu)

A surprise last-minute entry about a gay



A photo shows the festival logo ahead press conference to announce the official selection of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, at the UGC Normandie cinema in Paris, on April 13, 2024.— AFP

teenager ostracized by his village community in Romania.

Out of competition

Here is a selection of the films playing in the 'Out of Competition' and 'Special Screenings' sections of the festival.

- 'Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga' (George Miller)
- 'Horizon, An American Saga' (Kevin Costner)
- 'Lula' (Oliver Stone)
- 'She's Got No Name' (Peter Ho-Sun)
- 'The Count of Monte Cristo' (Alexandre de la Patelliere and Matthieu Delaporte)
- 'Rumors' (Evan Johnson, Galen Johnson and Guy Maddin)
- 'Ernest Cole, Lost and Found' (Raoul Peck)
- 'The Invasion' (Sergei Loznitsa)

Sports

Bengaluru win five in row to keep IPL play-off hopes alive

Gaikwad lead holders Chennai to a five-wicket win over Rajasthan

BENGALURU: Rajat Patidar's attacking fifty and inspired bowling set up Royal Challengers Bengaluru's fifth straight win to improve their IPL play-off hopes with a 47-run thrashing of Delhi Capitals on Sunday.

Bengaluru posted 187-9 after Cameron Green hit an unbeaten 24-ball 32 and bowlers then combined to bowl out Delhi for 140 in 19.1 overs at their home M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. Bengaluru, who moved to fifth, have mounted a late charge to make the play-offs but will need to win their last league match and other results to go in their favour to be in the top four.

Delhi slipped to sixth and go into their final match with 12 points. Bengaluru have also 12 points from 13 matches, but boast a better run-rate.

"Brilliant, we put in some good performances and I'm really pleased. It's just confidence," Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis said.

"First half of the season, things didn't quite come together and from that batting perspective and bowling perspective we have been able to put it together now."

In the first match of the day, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad led holders Chennai Super Kings to a five-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals and boost their play-off hopes. Gaikwad moved to 14 points and third place with seven wins in 13 matches.

Rajasthan remain second in the 10-team table led by Kolkata Knight Riders, who are the only team to have already qualified for the next stage. The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in Chennai.

In match two, star batsman Virat Kohli took charge

after he smashed 27 off 13 balls to lay the foundation of Bengaluru's total in a match where Delhi missed skipper Rishabh Pant, who was suspended after a slow over-rate offence. Kohli remains the leading batsman this season with 661 runs including one century and five half-tones.

Jadeja 'obstructing field'

Patidar, who hit 52, soon took control in a 88-run stand with England batsman Will Jacks, who smashed 41, before a late charge by Green.

Delhi faltered in their chase after they lost David Warner for one off left-arm spinner Swapnil Singh.

Left-arm quick Yash Dayal took down Abishek Porel and then ran out Jake Fraser-McGurk in successive balls and soon Delhi slipped to 30-4.

Stand-in-skipper Axar Patel put up a fight with his 57 off 39 balls but fell to Dayal in the 16th over and the wheels came off the chase.

Australia's Green took a wicket and ran out Tristan Stubbs to add to his batting cameo and was named player of the match for the first time this season.

"When your main players are run out and you lose four in powerplay, you're chasing the game," said Patel. "Anything can happen (in the race to the play-offs), but we haven't thought that far ahead."

In the earlier match, five-time champions Chennai restricted Rajasthan to 141-5, a total they overhauled with 10 balls to spare in their last home game at MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Gaikwad anchored Chennai's tricky chase as they lost wickets at regular intervals including when Ravindra Jadeja was called out for "obstructing the field".



BENGALURU: Delhi Capitals' Mukesh Kumar (L) stumps out Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Karn Sharma during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Delhi Capitals at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru. — AFP

Jadeja was sent back by Gaikwad while attempting a second run and he changed direction on the pitch when the throw from wicketkeeper Sanju Samson hit his hand and the third umpire ruled him out

after an appeal from the opposition. Gaikwad kept his cool and put on an unbeaten 24-run stand with impact substitute Sameer Rizvi, who hit the winning boundary. — AFP

News in Brief

Iraola signs new contract

LONDON: Bournemouth manager Andoni Iraola has signed a new contract, extending his stay at the Premier League club until at least the end of the 2025/26 season. The Spaniard, 41, signed a two-year deal when he joined the south coast club in June last year from Rayo Vallecano. Bournemouth, who have registered their highest-ever Premier League points total this season, are 11th in the English top flight with one game remaining. "I'm very happy to sign the contract. For me, it is a matter of renewing the confidence from both sides," Iraola said on Monday. "We have had a good experience with our first season together in the Premier League, and I am happy that both sides want to continue the relationship further. "I'm proud that we achieved the points record. We are playing in a difficult competition, with very good opposition. The season started slowly, but I think we improved a lot and are playing in the right way. Bournemouth owner and chairman Bill Foley said: "Andoni has made a huge impact since arriving at the club and we are thrilled to agree to this extension. — AFP

Miedema to leave Arsenal

LONDON: Arsenal and Netherlands forward Vivianne Miedema is to leave the Women's Super League club when her contract expires at the end of the season, it was announced on Monday. The 27-year-old has scored 125 goals and provided 50 assists in 172 appearances for the Gunners since joining from Bayern Munich in 2017. She is the WSL's record scorer with 78 goals and won the league title with Arsenal in 2018/19. Miedema has made 13 appearances this season for Jonas Eidevall's team following her return from an anterior cruciate ligament injury, scoring once. Arsenal sporting director Edu said in a statement: "On behalf of everyone at the club, we thank Viv for her huge contribution towards the success of the team during her seven years with us. "Viv's goals and overall performances as an Arsenal player have been of the highest quality and she has created so many wonderful memories for us over the years." — AFP

Zhang stuns Sagstrom

NEW YORK: Rose Zhang produced a scintillating late rally to sweep past Madelene Sagstrom and claim her second professional title with victory at the LPGA Founders Cup in New Jersey on Sunday. The 20-year-old from California rattled off four birdies in her final five holes to card a six-under par 66 to finish on 24-under, two shots clear of Sweden's Sagstrom. In cool, overcast conditions at the Upper Montclair Country Club in Clifton, overnight leader Sagstrom had looked to be cruising to victory after rolling in her fifth birdie of the day on the 12th to go three shots clear. Sagstrom retained that hefty three-shot cushion after paring the 13th along with Zhang, who gave no clue of the pyrotechnics to follow. — AFP

McIlroy races away to victory at Quail Hollow

WASHINGTON: Rory McIlroy delivered a blistering back-nine performance as he powered to victory at the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow on Sunday with a final round six-under 65. McIlroy had begun the day a shot behind Xander Schauffele and trailed him by two strokes after the American made an eagle on the seventh.

But from then on the world number two was sensational as he left Schauffele in his trail, playing the next eight holes at eight-under, including a pair of eagles. "I just went on a run that, for whatever reason, I'm able to go on with this golf course," said

Osaka's Rome run ended by Zheng in last 16

ROME: Naomi Osaka's return to the Rome Open ended at the last 16 on Monday after the four-time Grand Slam champion fell 6-2, 6-3 to seventh-seed Zheng Qinwen. Japan's Osaka was playing at the Foro Italico for the first time in three years after taking a break from the tour to have her first child and is ranked at 173 in the world.

The furthest she has gone in any tournament so far this season was her run to the quarter-finals in Doha, which she could not replicate in the Italian capital. However it was a positive tournament for Osaka, who has never won a title on clay but beat a top-20 ranked player on the surface for the first time, against Mar-

ta Kostyuk in the second round on Thursday. China's Zheng breezed past Osaka in one hour and 24 minutes to set up a last-eight clash with either Paula Badosa or third seed Coco Gauff. Later Iga Swiatek continues her bid for a third Rome title against Angelique Kerber, while Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka will face Elina Svitolina for the first time since their handshake row at last year's French Open.

World number one Swiatek is yet to drop a set and is red-hot favourite to make the quarter-finals past unseeded German Kerber, who at 331 is the lowest-ranked player ever to reach the last 16 in the Italian capital.

Three-time French Open champion Swiatek arrived in Rome off the back of a thrilling triumph in Madrid, her third WTA 1000 title of the season after also winning at Indian Wells and Doha. Belarusian second seed Sabalenka was accused by Ukraine's Svitolina of inflaming tensions surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war after the Roland Garros quarter-finals in 2023.

Sabalenka waited at the net for a handshake after



ROME: China's Qinwen Zheng returns to Japan's Naomi Osaka during the Women's WTA Rome Open tennis tournament at Foro Italico in Rome on May 13, 2024. — AFP

beating Svitolina, even though Svitolina had already insisted she was not going to offer one, as all Ukraine players refused to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian rivals in protest at the ongoing war. — AFP

All Blacks captain Cane to retire from international rugby

SYDNEY: New Zealand captain Sam Cane will retire from Test rugby at the end of 2024, the side said Monday, calling time on a World Cup winning 12-year international career. "Having played 95 Tests -- 27 as captain—the 32-year-old has decided to focus on spending more time with family and sign a long-term contract with Suntory Goliath in Tokyo," New Zealand Rugby said in a statement.

His retirement is not a complete surprise. The All Blacks haven't played since they were defeated in the Rugby World Cup final by South Africa last year and Cane was already on a sabbatical in Japan. Cane said the prospect of a three-year deal with the high-spending Tokyo club was too good to pass up. "I had to weigh up everything and, in the end, with a young family, it seemed like the best decision to help set up our future," he said. "It was a very hard one because I love the teams that I represent here in New Zealand."

Cane won the World Cup with New Zealand in 2015 and has twice been part of Super Rugby championship-winning sides with the Waikato Chiefs. But his experience since taking over as All Blacks captain from Kieran Read in 2020 was not always smooth.

Cane at times struggled with his own form and was sent off during last year's Rugby World Cup final in the 28th minute. With talents such as of Ardie Savea and Dalton Papali snapping at his heels, there had been calls for him to be dropped from the side.

During his tenure New Zealand lost a first Test series at home to Ireland in 2022 and a few weeks later suffered a shock defeat to Argentina in Christchurch. "I'm really grateful for the time

McIlroy after his fourth win at Quail Hollow, where he enjoyed the first of his 26 PGA Tour victories as a 20-year-old back in 2010.

The round was only slightly blemished by a double bogey on the 18th, where he found the water beyond the green but the Northern Irishman's total was still the lowest round of the day. After his win at the Zurich Classic of New Orleans team event last month, with Shane Lowry, McIlroy now heads into the second major of the season, the PGA Championship at Valhalla with back-to-back wins.

McIlroy has not won a major since capturing his fourth at Valhalla 10 years ago but he is now in buoyant mood. "My golf swing feels a lot more comfortable than it has done, so going to the venue next week where I've won, it feels like the stars are aligning a little bit," said the 35-year-old.

"But I've got a lot of golf to play and a lot of great players to try to beat next week but I'm going into the next major of the year feeling really good about myself," he added. — AFP



MELBOURNE: (FILES) New Zealand's Sam Cane reacts next to the trophy after winning the Rugby Championship after the match against Australia at Marvel Stadium in Melbourne on September 15, 2022. New Zealand captain Sam Cane will retire from Test rugby at the end of 2024, the side said on May 13, 2024. — AFP

that I had to wear the captain's armband. It was a huge honour and privilege—a lot of lessons out of it and growth," Cane said.

Recently arrived All Blacks coach Scott Robertson said the pair had discussed Cane's decision to take up the new contract in Japan "at length". "I fully understand the reasons behind his decision and support him," Robertson said.

"The position he plays asks a lot of you mentally and physically—both of those things ramp up when

you are captain. "So to do what he's done over such a long period is an incredible feat. I fully respect him taking this opportunity."

Cane will return to New Zealand at the end of the current Japanese club season and will be eligible to be selected for the All Blacks for the rest of 2024, but will no longer be captain. "It's part of the natural process that happens in rugby," Cane said. "I had my time as captain and it was a huge honour and privilege." — AFP

Pakistan defeat Ireland to level Twenty20 series

LONDON: Pakistan beat Ireland by seven wickets in the second Twenty20 international in Dublin on Sunday to set up a deciding showdown in the three-match series.

Ireland made a dynamic start after being put into bat as the hosts blasted 29 runs in the first three overs. But Shaheen Shah Afridi put the brakes on Ireland's assault, dismissing opening pair Paul Stirling and Andrew Balbirnie in the fourth over.

Lorcan Tucker and Harry Tector (32) put on 62 for the third wicket, with the former scoring 51 in 34 deliveries. Curtis Campher (22) and George Dockrell (15) boosted the score before Gareth

Delany's 28 off 10 balls helped the hosts post 193 for seven. Pakistan spluttered at the start of their chase as Saim Ayub was caught in the first over and skipper Babar Azam nicked Graham Hume behind to depart for a duck in the second.

But Ireland's hopes of sealing a famous series win with a game to spare were dashed as Mohammad Rizwan (75 not out) and Fakhar Zaman (78) put on a stunning 140-run partnership. Azam Khan added 30 from 10 balls to take Pakistan home with 3.1 overs unused.

"I'm relieved, credit to all batters," said Azam. "We lost a few wickets early on but we kept the momentum going. It was a good decision to bowl first because it was overcast and there was a bit of rain." Ireland had claimed their first ever T20 victory against Pakistan in the series opener on Friday, winning by five wickets with one ball to spare.

Pakistan will also face Ireland in the group stage of next month's T20 World Cup in the United States and the West Indies. — AFP

Sports

Man Utd crush Spurs to lift Women's FA Cup for first time

'There is a lot of support and love for our team and the growth'

LONDON: Manchester United made history as they won the Women's FA Cup for the first time with a 4-0 rout of Tottenham in the final at Wembley on Sunday. United were beaten by Chelsea in last year's final, but they made amends with a swaggering display in the north London sunshine.

Ella Toone started United's goal spree with a fine finish late in the first half. Rachel Williams headed home soon after the interval before a blunder by Tottenham keeper Becky Spencer presented Lucia Garcia with the killer third goal three minutes later.

Garcia netted her second late on to put the seal on United's sublime performance as they erased the bitter taste of a disappointing season in the Women's Super League. "We are obviously not where we want in the league right? But we are history makers for Manchester United. I didn't need to remind the owners of that, they know. There is a lot of support and love for our team and the growth," United boss Marc Skinner said.

"We want to compete for titles but you all know how important adding that first piece of silverware is. We've got nothing but growth ahead." It is the first time since Birmingham's victory in 2012 that the Women's FA Cup has not been won by Arsenal, Chelsea or Manchester City.

"In all honesty I felt that first half was just frustration because we didn't score. I thought we offered more of a threat, we controlled most of their threat," Skinner said. "As much as I am exhausted now it is a magical feeling. I told Tooney on the podium you have to remember it, because it comes and goes too quick. From start to finish today we thoroughly deserved our success."

Skinner's side started their march towards the club's first major women's trophy confidently against a Tottenham team playing in their maiden FA Cup final. Toone fired over the bar, while Tottenham's Martha Thomas made an excellent block to clear Millie Turner's header off the line.

Toone curled narrowly wide with the eighth shot of United's opening salvo. Their pressure was rewarded three minutes into stoppage time when Toone patiently wove her way forward before lashing a superb long-range strike into the top corner.

United doubled their advantage in the 54th minute when Williams rose highest to meet captain Katie Zelem's free-kick and directed her towering header into the back of the net. Three minutes later, Spencer completely mishandled a clearance, directing her pass straight at Garcia, who gleefully accepted the gift



LONDON: Manchester United's English midfielder #10 Katie Zelem lifts the FA cup Trophy while celebrating with her team after winning the English Women's FA Cup final football match between Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley Stadium, in north west London. — AFP

with a simple finish. Tottenham were still looking for their first shot on target until skipper Bethany

England clipped the crossbar with her header. But Tottenham's hopes of salvaging some pride were shattered in the

74th minute as Melvine Malard's cross was rifled home by Garcia to start the United celebrations in earnest. —AFP

Germany eyes huge party as it hosts Euro 2024

MUNICH: Germany is gearing up to host the Euro 2024 football championship under high security as global threats cast a shadow, but on the field, the home team will be looking to prove they are finally back in form. Six weeks before the start of the Paris Olympics, Germany will be the centre of the European football world's attention when the hosts face Scotland in the curtain-raiser in Munich on June 14.

While 2022 World Cup finalists France are favorites alongside England, Germany are enjoying new-found belief after wins against the French and the Netherlands in March. The team's young coach, 36-year-old Julian Nagelsmann, was to have left the international set-up after the tournament but in a sign of his confidence in the team he is moulding, he has signed on until the 2026 World Cup finals despite reported interest from former club Bayern Munich.

It augurs well too that Bundesliga champions Bayer Leverkusen will be in the Europa League final against Atalanta on May 22, while Borussia Dortmund will face Real Madrid in the Champions League final at Wembley Stadium in London on June 1.

On Thursday, both Germany and France will announce their 26-man Euro 2024 squads, with England doing so the following Thursday. As the lead of the tournament organizing committee, former Germany defender Philipp Lahm said he was looking forward to a "big festival together" but admitted the tournament would be better if Germany performed well. "It always helps when the home team is in the tourna-



MUNICH: This photo taken on May 13, 2024 shows Teddy bear Albaert, mascot of the Euro 2024 and Bavaria's State Premier and leader of the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) party Markus Soeder posing with the trophy for the UEFA Euro 2024 European Football Championship. — AFP

ment for a long time," the 2014 World Cup-winning captain told AFP in a recent interview.

Mammoth task

Euro 2024 takes place three years after the previous tournament, which was postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Hosted in countries across the continent with the final at Wembley, the 2021 edition took place in front of drastically reduced capacity.

This time around, there will be no more restrictions - and the stadiums are expected to be packed. An estimated 2.7 million fans will attend 51 matches across 10 stadiums, culminating in the final at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on July 14. But even more will be outside the grounds, with each host city setting up

fan zones ready to welcome the 12 million supporters expected to come to the country.

Attack threats

The tournament however also takes place against the backdrop of a tense global climate with major conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, making securing the event a mammoth task. Germany has been on high alert for Islamist attacks since the outbreak of the Zionist entity-Hamas war in October. An attack in Moscow, claimed by the Islamic State group, at the end of March which claimed 144 lives, had cast a further shadow over security at the tournament. The Champions League quarter-final first legs in Paris, London and Madrid in April were all held under close surveillance after an apparent threat made by Islamic State. — AFP

Atalanta close in on CL, Bologna and Juve qualify

ROME: Atalanta took a big step towards Champions League football on Sunday by beating Serie A top-five rivals Roma 2-1, a win which also guaranteed spots for Bologna and Juventus in Europe's elite club event.

A brilliant brace from Charles De Ketelaere in the first 20 minutes gave Atalanta, still on a high from reaching the Europa League final, a fully deserved win in Bergamo. Gian Piero Gasperini's side sit in Italy's fifth and final Champions League spot, three points ahead of Roma with a game in hand against Fiorentina which they will play the weekend after the scheduled end of the season.

Atalanta, who also face Juventus in the Italian Cup final on Wednesday, looked set to sweep Roma aside in the same manner in which they dealt with Marseille on Thursday to reach their first ever European final. But they had to overcome a tense finale after Lorenzo Pellegrini's 66th-minute penalty gave the away side hope, despite a dominating display from the hosts who also hit the post twice. "We weren't clinical enough in front of goal, otherwise we would have won it sooner without having to suffer so much at the end," said Gasperini to DAZN.

Defeat for Roma followed up their heartbreaking last-four elimination from the Europa League at Bayer Leverkusen. Daniele De Rossi's team, who were missing injured talisman Paulo Dybala, have little chance of finishing fifth but can still reach the continent's top club competition even if they finish sixth, if Atalanta win the Europa League.

Thanks to Atalanta's win Bologna will make their first appearance in the modern Champions League as they and Juve, who could only draw with relegated Salernitana, are seven points ahead of Roma with two rounds of fixtures remaining.

Third-placed Bologna hailed their qualification with a simple "Bologna, we did it" on social media. Bologna played one match in the old European Cup in 1964, the same year they won the last of their seven league titles, and effectively sealed their place with a 2-0 win at Napoli on Saturday. Juve will be delighted with Atalanta's win as they were crawling over the line with five straight league draws, the latest of which came thanks to a stoppage-time leveller from Adrien Rabiot. Since the start of February, Juve, in fourth, have won just three times in all competitions.

A point behind Roma are local rivals Lazio following their 2-0 win over Empoli in the day's early match, when the capital city club celebrated the 50th anniversary of their first league title. Lazio have won the Scudetto twice, in 1974 and 2000, and the first title winners are both beloved by fans and notorious in Italy for their outlaw behavior. The '74 vintage was led by deceased bad boy striker Giorgio Chinaglia, who later played with Pele and Franz Beckenbauer for the New York Cosmos in the North American Soccer League. — AFP

Mbappe bids farewell to PSG fans

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored on his final home appearance as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Sunday but the French champions suffered a surprise 3-1 defeat against Toulouse on the night they picked up the Ligue 1 championship trophy.

Mbappe confirmed in a video posted on social media on Friday that he would be leaving PSG when his contract expires at the end of the season, ending a seven-year association with the club. Real Madrid is expected to be the next destination for a player whose departure from Paris had been an open secret since February, when he privately informed the club of his intention to move on.

Mbappe wore the captain's armband and opened the scoring early on

against Toulouse to take his tally for the season to 44 goals in all competitions. However, This Dallinga quickly equalized for the visitors against a PSG side which showed 10 changes to the team knocked out of the Champions League by Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals in midweek, with Mbappe the only player to keep his place.

Yann Gboho put Toulouse ahead with a brilliant strike in the second half, and Frank Magri wrapped up the win in stoppage time as PSG suffered just their second Ligue 1 loss this season, and their first in 27 games since September. Mbappe has now scored 256 times for PSG, a club-record tally, since signing from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth 180 million euros (\$194 million).

His tally of 191 goals in France's top flight - including 16 with Monaco at the beginning of his career - puts him in seventh place in the all-time list. Coach Luis Enrique described the 25-year-old as "a club legend" when he spoke to media on the eve of the game.

PSG had indicated that celebrations



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe (2R) celebrates with the French Ligue 1 championship's trophy during a ceremony following the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Toulouse (TFC) at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

after Sunday's match would be dedicated to their title triumph, rather than any specific tribute to Mbappe himself. There were even some jeers from the crowd for the striker when the teams

were read out before the game, although a huge display was unfurled before kick-off at one end of the stadium depicting Mbappe in a trademark pose with his arms folded. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707	Qadsiya	22515088
Rawda	22517733	Dasmah	22532265
Adaliya	22517144	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Khaldiya	24848075	Shaab	22518752
Kaifan	24849807	Qibla	22459381
Shamiya	24848913	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Shuwaikh	24814507	Mirqab	22456536
Abdullah Salem	22549134	Sharq	22465401
Nuzha	22526804	Salmiya	25746401
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Announcement

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons for General Trading & Contracting Co. would like to attract the attention of its customers who have given their devices for repair at the Al-Yousifi Service Center located in Ardiya Industrial Area until 2024-3-31, and did not yet come and collect their devices till this date, to urgently contact Al-Yousifi Service Center on 1809809 in order to collect their devices within a period of only 2 weeks from the date of this Ad. The company will not be responsible under any matter in the future for these devices after the mentioned grace period is over.

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Change of Name

I, SANGAMALLA EMANUEL PREM SAGAR, holder of Indian Passport No: U0196158 having permanent address 19-14/40 Raghavendra Nagar, 2nd street Near Baba Temple, Tirupati Urban PC 517501 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare henceforth my name will be read as Given Name: Emanuel Prem

Sagar and Surname: Sangamallla. (#5606 13/5/2024)

I, Amandeep Kaur Hari W/O Balwinder Singh, R/O Village Bassian, Tehsil Rajkot, Dist. Ludhiana have changed my name to **Amandeep Kaur Kaila.** (#5608 13/5/2024)

Arsenal down Man Utd to take EPL title race to the wire

Arsenal host Everton on the final day next Sunday, City entertain West Ham



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Argentinian midfielder #17 Alejandro Garnacho vies for the ball with Arsenal's English midfielder #07 Bukayo Saka during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Arsenal at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

Saudi billion-dollar football league a work in progress



RIYADH: Nassr's Portuguese forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo warms up with his team ahead of the Saudi Pro League football match between Al-Nassr and Al-Wehda at Al-Awwal Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP

RIYADH: Anyone expecting immediate results from Saudi Arabia's unprecedented splurge on football stars was probably disappointed as the billion-dollar spending created a lopsided season with no international silverware so far.

Despite last year's pyrotechnical unveilings for superstars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Neymar, the new-look Saudi Pro League has provided few fireworks since. On Saturday, Al Hilal cantered to their fourth title in five years with three games to spare, even without the services of Neymar who was injured on Brazil international duty in October.

None of the Saudi teams reached the Asian Champions League final, hosts Al Ittihad exited in the second round of the Club World Cup in Jeddah, and Roberto Mancini's Saudi national side lost in the Asian Cup's last 16.

Al Hilal were so dominant that they won 34 consecutive games in all competitions - a record for a top-flight team - and remain unbeaten in the Pro League. Victories of 9-0, 7-0 and 6-1 highlighted the gulf between Al Hilal, one of four clubs bought last year by the Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia's oil-funded sovereign wealth

vehicle, and the rest. Al Hilal, Ronaldo's Al Nassr, Riyad Mahrez's Al Ahli and Al Ittihad, Benzema's new employers, occupy four of the top five positions in the league table. "The lack of a proper distribution of players among all the teams created a clear gap between the big and small teams and killed the competition in favor of Al Hilal," Mohamed Mandour, a Paris-based journalist from the Sportsdata website, told AFP.

World Cup here we come

The league's administrators, also newly hired, say it is a long-term project and it will take time to reach their goal: Becoming one of the world's top five domestic competitions by metrics such as quality of players, stadium attendances and commercial success. Already on the horizon is 2034, when Saudi Arabia, keen to present a new image and prepare for the post-oil era, becomes the second Gulf country to host the World Cup, after neighbors Qatar in 2022.

Last summer's \$957 million spend on players, second only to the English Premier League and unheard of in Saudi football, has undoubtedly drawn extra interest to the competition, even if it is yet to hit the heights. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Arsenal kept their Premier League title dreams alive by ending an Old Trafford hoodoo to grind out a 1-0 win at Manchester United on Sunday, moving back top of the table and taking the championship battle down to the last weekend.

Leandro Trossard scored the only goal on 20 minutes as Arsenal won for just the second time in 17 games away at United to go a point clear at the summit. Manchester City still have the destiny of the title in their own hands as the defending champions have two matches left to Arsenal's one.

However, the Gunners kept the pressure on Pep Guardiola's men ahead of their tricky trip to Tottenham on Tuesday. "Our history wasn't very optimistic (here) but we found a way to win it and that says a lot about how much the team wants it," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "We want to knock that door and open that box of dreams to have in front of our people the opportunity to win the Premier League."

Arsenal host Everton on the final day next Sunday, while City entertain West Ham. Defeat further dented United's chances of competing in Europe next season. Erik ten Hag's men showed more spirit than in a dismal 4-0 defeat to Crystal Palace on Monday, but have now won just one of their

last eight Premier League games.

United remain eighth in the table, three points adrift of both Newcastle, who they face on Wednesday, and Chelsea. Arsenal have been in scintillating form in 2024 to remain in the race for their first league title in 20 years.

Arteta's men have won 15 and drawn one of their 17 league games since the turn of the year. But Arsenal were far from their flowing best as the expected onslaught of an injury-ravaged United never materialized under unusually stifling heat in England's north-west.

The manner of defeat at Palace had increased the scrutiny on United boss Ten Hag. The Dutchman's options were again hamstrung by a lengthy list of absentees with captain Bruno Fernandes among those sidelined and a bench littered with youngsters.

'Hands tied behind back'

"It's like trying to swim with your hands tied behind your back," said Ten Hag of United's injury crisis. "You see the fans are behind us. They fought with us. Today we gave them (something) back but that should be the standard in every game."

"You see even when we miss seven starting players we are competitive with one

of the best teams in the league." However, Ten Hag's decision to retain Casemiro as a makeshift centre-back after his woeful showing against Palace will become another stick with which to beat the beleaguered coach.

After United had managed to keep the free-scoring visitors at bay for the opening 20 minutes, Casemiro was culpable for the goal. The 32-year-old was labored in pushing up from a United goal-kick to play Kai Havertz onside and Trossard then stole in on the blind side of Casemiro to tap in the German's cross.

United's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe was in attendance at Old Trafford rather than at Wembley to see the club's women pick up their first ever major trophy in the FA Cup final. The work that lies ahead of Ratcliffe has been laid bare in recent weeks and he saw first hand the improvements that are also required at Old Trafford as rain poured through a leaking roof once the sun turned to a thunderstorm late on.

Alejandro Garnacho was United's one live wire but Arsenal were rarely seriously troubled as they held out for a sixth clean sheet in their last seven away league games. The Gunners victory also set a club record of 27 wins in a Premier League season. Yet, even that may not be enough should City maintain their ruthless run. — AFP

Nuggets outgun T'Wolves, Pacers thrash Knicks

LOS ANGELES: The defending champion Denver Nuggets outgunned the Minnesota Timberwolves 115-107 to level their NBA playoff series on Sunday as the Indiana Pacers pulled even with the New York Knicks.

The Nuggets, fueled by 35 points from NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic, Aaron Gordon's 27 points on ruthlessly efficient 11-of-12 shooting and 19 points from Jamal Murray, claimed a second straight win in Minneapolis to knot their best-of-seven Western Conference semi-final series at two games apiece.

The Pacers dismantled the Knicks 121-89 in Indianapolis to level their Eastern Conference semi-final at 2-2. "Now it's best of three," Jokic said, adding that the Timberwolves' stunning victories in games one and two in Denver had only strengthened the defending champions.

"We took a hit and we bounced back and hopefully we can defend the home court now,"

said Jokic, looking forward to game five in Denver on Tuesday. The Nuggets withstood a 44-point performance from Anthony Edwards, but the Timberwolves star just didn't have enough scoring support despite an energetic effort from the hosts.

Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 13 points but was 0-for-7 in the first quarter, when the Nuggets closed the period on a 14-2 run to seize a five-point lead. Edwards' dunk with less than a minute left in the first half cut what had been a 16-point deficit to seven.

Jokic then came up with a steal and fed Michael Porter Jr. for a dunk and Murray grabbed a steal, turned and unleashed a buzzer-beating shot from beyond the halfcourt line that swished through and sent the Nuggets into the break with a 64-49 lead.

Murray scored 12 points in the third quarter to keep the Nuggets in control as early foul trouble sent Jokic to the bench. Jokic returned to score 16 in the fourth and the Nuggets kept the Timberwolves at bay.

In Indianapolis, the Pacers finally got their high-octane offense firing. After the first two games of the series came down to the final minutes the Pacers fashioned a blow-out as a raft of injuries at last caught up with the weary Knicks. Tyrese Haliburton scored 20 points and

the Pacers connected on 56.8% of their shots, drilling 14 three-pointers and dominating in the paint. T.J. McConnell scored 15 points off the bench for Indiana, who had six players score in double figures. After a dunk by Knicks center Isaiah Hartenstein to open the game, the first quarter was all Pacers, Indiana pushing their lead to as many as 23 points. Knicks talisman Jalen Brunson was 0-for-5 in the opening quarter and the Pacers bench out-scored the Knicks reserves 17-0 in the period.

The domination continued in the second quarter, Haliburton sending the crowd into a frenzy with a three-pointer over Donte DiVincenzo that put the Pacers up by 30 with 5.9 seconds left in the first half. They would lead by as many as 43 before it was over, but despite the rapturous ovation from fans at Gainbridge Fieldhouse, Haliburton said the Pacers must remain focused on the task ahead.

"We did our job," Haliburton said. "They did their job and won two at home, we did our job and won two at home. "We understand the magnitude of game five and we'll be prepared for that one." The Knicks were again without OG Anunoby, who injured a hamstring in game two to join key contributors Julius Randle, Mitchell Robinson and Bojan Bogdanovic on the sidelines. — AFP