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4 Zain fostering tech innovation in Kuwait with global success stories




8 AEC increases capital by issuing first preferred shares in Kuwait



8 Kuwait's BIG Holding plans to list 30% stake on Boursa



14 Tyson says comeback at 57 was 'no-brainer'



Omani Sultan concludes Kuwait visit

Sultan Haitham visits Al-Salam Palace Museum • Kuwait, Oman ink four MoUs to boost cooperation



KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sees off Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq at the airport at the end of his two-day state visit on May 14, 2024. (Right) Sultan Haitham visits the Al-Salam Palace Museum. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

KUWAIT/MUSCAT: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq returned to Muscat Tuesday after a two-day state visit to Kuwait. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials saw off the Sultan and his accompanying delegation at the airport. During the visit, Sultan Haitham and HH the Amir touched on bilateral ties and boosting cooperation between the two countries, said Oman's news agency.

Earlier on Tuesday, Sultan Haitham and the accompanying delegation visited the Al-Salam Palace Museum. HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, head of the honorary delegation, accompanied Sultan Haitham during his visit. At the museum, the Sultan was received by Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. During the tour of the museum, Sultan Haitham was shown historical artefacts and documents related to the history and culture of Kuwait, as well as the grand halls located in Al-Salam Palace, which previous Kuwaiti Amirs frequented. At the end of the tour, Sultan Haitham signed the register of honor at the museum.

Kuwait and Oman on Monday signed four memoranda of understanding for furthering industrial, investment, economic and diplomatic cooperation.

Continued on Page 6

Deadline to submit biometrics extended for citizens, expats

KUWAIT: The ministry of interior announced Tuesday the extension of the deadline for submitting biometric data until Sept 30, 2024 for citizens and until Dec 30, 2024 for residents. The ministry said in a press release that this decision was made based on the directives and instructions of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah to facilitate procedures for citizens and residents and ensure the prompt completion of work.

The ministry also pointed out the designated locations and official working hours for submission of biometrics at the general department of criminal evidence at personal identification investigation departments. It urged everyone to schedule an appointment through the Meta platform via the Sabel application before heading to the designated centers, emphasizing that no walk-in appointments will be accepted. — KUNA

Minister stresses rule of law under Amir's directives

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah affirmed that the directives of HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in his recent speech stating "no one is above the law, regardless of their position or status," serve as a roadmap

and working methodology within the ministry of defense.

This is to monitor and oversee all decisions and actions taken to safeguard public funds and protect them from any encroachments. Sheikh Fahad made these remarks during a meeting held at the defense ministry headquarters on Tuesday, attended by senior army leaders. He expressed his sincere gratitude and immense appreciation to HH the Amir and Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah for the valuable trust bestowed upon him.

Sheikh Fahad said this trust represents a significant commission, responsibility and trust, for which he

Continued on Page 6

Fierce battles rage across Gaza, US sees no genocide

GAZA: Zionist troops fought Hamas fighters in multiple battles across the Gaza Strip, forcing new waves of Palestinian mass displacement on Tuesday. Clashes have rocked the densely crowded far-southern city of Rafah but also flared again in northern and central Gaza, months after troops and tanks first entered those areas.

The United States has urged Hamas to accept a Gaza truce plan and called on the Zionist entity to devise "a strategic

endgame" and post-war plan, said White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. This would help the Zionist entity avoid "getting mired in a counterinsurgency campaign that never ends and ultimately saps (the Zionist entity's) strength and vitality," Sullivan said on Monday.

Sullivan said the US does not believe that genocide is occurring in Gaza but the Zionist entity must do more to protect Palestinian civilians. "We believe (the Zionist entity) can and must do more to ensure the protection and wellbeing of innocent civilians. We do not believe what is happening in Gaza is a genocide," Sullivan told a briefing. The US was "using the internationally accepted term for genocide, which

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah chairs a meeting attended by senior army leaders on May 14, 2024. — KUNA



GAZA: A man carries the body of a child that was recovered from beneath the rubble of a collapsed building in the aftermath of Zionist bombardment in Nusseirat in the central Gaza Strip on May 14, 2024. — AFP

Celebrities face digital backlash over Gaza silence

WASHINGTON: Celebrities who have remained silent on the crisis in Gaza are feeling the wrath of angry fans wielding the "digital guillotine" to block them on social media and streaming platforms. Taylor Swift, Drake and many more have become targets of the "Block Out 2024" movement, which began on TikTok in response to the perceived disconnect between the glamorous Met Gala and the grim realities of the Zionist-Hamas conflict.

For months, pro-Palestinian activists have flooded the comments sections of social media sites, urging

Continued on Page 6

Summer 2023 was the hottest in 2,000 years

PARIS: Last year's northern hemisphere summer was the hottest in 2,000 years, according to a new study published on Tuesday. Scientists say 2023 was the hottest year globally since records began in 1850, but the study in the journal Nature indicates human-caused climate change pushed northern summer highs well beyond anything seen in two millennia. "We shouldn't be surprised," the study's lead author Jan Esper told AFP.

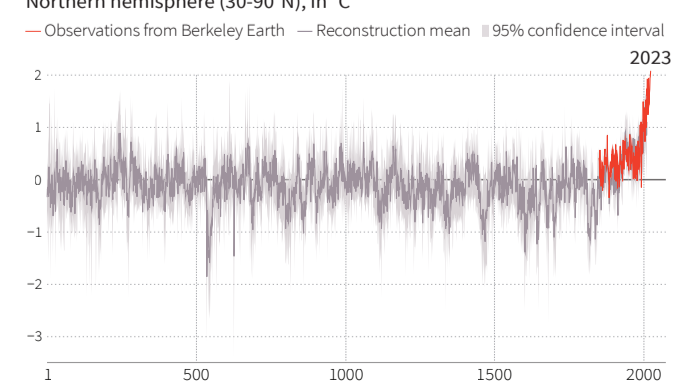
"For me it's just the continuation of what we started by releasing greenhouse gases" that cause global warming, said Esper, a professor of climatology at Germany's Johannes Gutenberg University. Scientists used tree-ring data from sites across the northern hemisphere to estimate global temperatures between the first century AD and 1850, before the advent of modern observational instruments.

The conservative estimate found that 2023 was at least 0.5 degrees Celsius hotter than the warmest northern hemisphere summer of that period in AD246. Otherwise, it was 1.19 degrees warmer. Study co-author Max Torbensohn told reporters that 25 of the last 28 years exceeded the summer highs of AD246 -- the hottest year before modern temperature records began.

Continued on Page 6

2023 summer hottest for 2000 years

Yearly surface air temperature anomaly* from June to August in the Northern hemisphere (30-90°N), in °C



Kuwait celebrates 61 years of UN membership, vows to boost ties

Minister recalls UN's pivotal role in liberating Kuwait

KUWAIT: On the 61st anniversary of joining the UN, Kuwait has commended the decades-long fruitful relations with the international organization and affirmed its commitment to taking this partnership to new highs in the coming years. "As we celebrate the passing of over six decades since Kuwait joined the United Nations, we reiterate our commitment to steering relations with the UN toward broader prospects for cooperation in the coming years," Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya said in a statement.

He pointed out that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has affirmed Kuwait's keenness on retaining and upgrading deep-

ly-rooted relations with the UN during his reception of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday. Minister Al-Yahya said that since joining the United Nations on May 14, 1963, Kuwait has enjoyed a close partnership with the United Nations.

"Kuwait saw the United Nations as a safe haven to guarantee its rights, have its voice heard, and the appropriate forum to harness its active diplomacy in good international efforts," he said. "In turn, the United Nations, from day one as well, saw Kuwait as a reliable partner who loves goodness and peace, a supporter of multilateral international action, and a participant in the noble efforts and good offices of the UN within

the framework of its three basic pillars: peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights," he clarified. Minister Al-Yahya recalled the pivotal role of the UN in liberating Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation.

"This historical UN role has left an indelible memory in the minds of all Kuwaitis," he said, adding that Kuwait's liberation has also emerged as one of the most successful stories of the UN intervention to establish and maintain international security and peace as part of its charter. He shed light on Kuwait's national contributions to supporting the goals and objectives of the United Nations.

"During its membership in the Secu-

riety Council for the periods 1978-1979 and 2018-2019, Kuwait worked effectively with the other members to maintain international peace and security. "In dealing with humanitarian crises, the State of Kuwait was and still is one of the first countries to support international humanitarian response plans to alleviate the suffering of the afflicted peoples." "On the development level, the role of Kuwait is pioneering in supporting people and communities in order to achieve sustainable development," the minister said.

The Kuwaiti top diplomat emphasized that the UN and the international community can also count on the continued active and vital participation of Kuwaiti

diplomacy in United Nations councils, committees, and meetings, especially the United Nations General Assembly, as well as the Human Rights Council, as the State of Kuwait is a member of the Council for the period 2024-2026.

On Sunday, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the occasion of his visit to the country. During the meeting, the two discussed exemplary relations between Kuwait and the UN, mechanisms promoting further cooperation, efforts supporting international peace and security, coordination to achieve development, and humanitarian initiatives. — KUNA



MANAMA: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met Tuesday Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, on the sidelines of the preparatory ministerial meeting for the 33rd Arab Summit. — KUNA

33rd Arab summit tackles challenges

MANAMA: The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain, Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, stressed on Tuesday the significance of the 33rd Arab Summit due in Manama on Thursday, saying it came at a delicate and historic time. Speaking to KUNA, he said the gathering would further promote Arab coordination and cooperation in response to the current challenges, regarding this as a strategic option for the Arab world to achieve security, peace, stability, and development for the Arab people.

The forthcoming gathering would revolve around several pressing Arab issues, chiefly the Palestinian cause, regional security and stability, sustainable development, and ways of maintaining Arab bonds. The Kuwaiti ambassador pointed out that, under the direction of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait attaches special significance to Arab issues, primarily supporting Palestinian rights. He also commended Bahrain's distinguished preparations and arrangements for organizing the summit and creating the congenial atmosphere for a successful gathering.

Arab FMs meet

Meanwhile, the preparatory ministerial meeting for the 33rd Arab Summit kicked off in Manama on Tuesday, with conferees set to examine the summit draft agenda that addresses issues related to joint action and various topics, namely Palestine. Bahraini Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullatif Al-Zayani took over the summit chairmanship from his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who had headed the 32nd session, amid the attendance of Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Ghait and Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, who was on top of his country's delegation.

The ministers are looking into the draft agenda of the forthcoming Arab Summit and the final statement of the top-level Arab conference. The draft agenda includes eight main topics related to common Arab action in the political, economic, social, cultural, media, and security realms, in addition to cooperation with regional and international blocs. Among the issues on the table are the Palestinian cause, the prospects of activating the Arab Peace Initiative, the Zionist occupation breaches in occupied Jerusalem, supporting the State of Palestine's budget, and the Palestinian people's steadfastness.

Also according to the draft agenda, the summiteers are scheduled to follow up on the Zionist occupation's settlement schemes, the racial discrimination wall, the plights of the Palestinian prisoners and the refugees, issues related to the humanitarian mission of the UN agency for the refugees, the UNRWA, developments in the occupied Palestinian territories, and Syria's Arab Golan.

They will also look into other topics such as solidarity with Lebanon, developments in Syria, supporting peace in Sudan, conditions in Libya and Yemen, backing Somalia, the Union of Comoros, and a proposed settlement to the border strife between Djibouti and Eritrea. Moreover, in the summit schedule are Iran's occupation of the UAE's three islands, Iran's intervention in the domestic affairs of the Arab states, taking a unified stand against Turkish forces' breaches of Iraq's sovereignty, Turkish meddling in Arab countries' local issues, and the Ethiopian dam question.

At the international level, it addresses the second Arab-Chinese Summit due to be hosted by Beijing, establishing a partnership forum between the Arab League and Asean, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and supporting Egypt's nomination of Dr. Khaled Al-Anani for the director general's post of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

Furthermore, the agenda includes various economic, social, media, and legal files, as well as the climatic change issue, the Arab human rights strategy, and the common anti-terrorism strategy. The other scheduled topics are maintaining the Arab nation's security, fighting terrorism, setting up an Arab organization for combating terrorism, resolutions filed by the Council of Economic and Social Affairs, and the planned final statement of the summit. Preparatory meetings for the summit started in Bahrain last Saturday. — KUNA

AI vs Gen Z and Gen Alpha education: A losing battle

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Schools' resistance to the use of artificial intelligence is clearly a losing battle. It is only a matter of time before artificial intelligence becomes integrated into student education, particularly for Generation Alpha. Ghadeer Ghafour and Helen, English teachers who recognize the power of artificial intelligence (AI), spoke to the Kuwait Times about AI being not merely a passing trend but a fundamental cornerstone of Gen Zs and particularly Gen Alpha's educational journey in the near future, taking a counterintuitive approach that welcomes AI as a powerful assistant rather than resisting its impact on enhancing educational systems and teaching curriculums.

Helen emphasized preparing students at schools for an AI-influenced job market, saying: "AI should be embraced; we need to prepare students for a job market that will be heavily influenced by AI. Fostering critical thinking and ethical considerations around AI usage is crucial. The discussions on the use of AI could be a starting point."

Gen Z today and Gen Alpha in the near future are

Mina Al-Zour: Kuwait explores economic and environmental benefits

KUWAIT: Kuwait has achieved significant economic and environmental benefits since the establishment and full operation of liquefied gas import facilities in Mina Al-Zour, Chief of Public Relations and Media at the Ministry of Oil Sheikh Tamadhur Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stated. Sheikh Tamadhur said this on Tuesday during a discussion panel organized by the department in cooperation with the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry and its developments, challenges, and horizons.

Economic benefits of LNG import facilities include saving up significant sums of money due to fuel consumption in electric power plants, while environmental benefits lie in limiting carbon emissions and improving air quality as LNG is considered an eco-friendly energy source, explained Al-Sabah. The liquefied gas project is sufficient for Kuwait's current and future demand for clean energy, affirmed Al-Sabah, adding that the projects provide fuel to electric power plants, especially during peak summer times.

The Mina Al-Zour import facility is considered the largest in the world in storage capacity, as it is comprised of eight storages, each with a capacity of 225,000 cubic meters. As for OPEC's gas industry expert, Wael Abdulmuti, he explained that the process is done

NATO, Kuwait enhance ties

KUWAIT: NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy Ambassador Boris Ruge expressed his pride on Monday for the NATO-ICI Regional Center in Kuwait, making it the only one in the region. Speaking to KUNA after a discussion seminar organized by the NATO-ICI Regional Center and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative entitled 'NATO Dialogue', Ruge said that his visit to Kuwait aims at enhancing cooperation with Kuwait in education, training, political dialogue, environmental operations, and looking into Kuwait's prioritized needs.

The aim of the visit is also to enhance the NATO-ICI Regional Center's role in Kuwait's role with the Istanbul initiative, making it an active center for cooperation and training with the participation of Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Bahrain, the ambassador added. The seminar also hosted Kuwaiti figures such as Assistant History Professor at Kuwait University Bader Al-Seef, Defense Undersecretary Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah, and some diplomats.

On his part, Al-Seef said that Kuwait had a piv-



Ghadeer Ghafour



poised to live in a world where AI occupies a vital role. By integrating AI into their educational journey, schools will equip students with the skills and competencies needed to thrive in the digital age. On her part, Ghafour explained to the Kuwait Times that as technology advances, the education sector has to further embrace AI to enhance the learning experience in classrooms.

"AI possesses the capability to execute tasks that typically require human intelligence, offering invaluable assistance to students in their educational journey. A key advantage of AI in education is its ability to tailor the learning process to individual students' needs, abilities, and preferences, ensuring that each

learner receives appropriate support irrespective of their skill level. Through the integration of AI, students benefit from immediate feedback and guidance from virtual assistants, substantially improving their academic performance.

Furthermore, virtual assistants play a crucial role in boosting students' engagement and interest in subjects by providing instantaneous feedback, thereby fostering a desire for further learning. By offering a wide array of interactive tools, AI ensures that learners remain actively involved and enthusiastic about the subject matter, diverging from traditional classroom methods," she said.



Participants take a group photo. — KUNA

over four phases: extratidation, liquefying, transportation, and re-gasification. The liquefying stage is considered the highest expense, taking up around 50 percent of the total cost, according to Abdulmuti. The gas transportation fleet includes some 730 vessels transporting liquefied gas from 21 exporting countries. The large fleet appealed to newer markets, as illustrated by the gas expert.

Arab states make up around 28 percent of to-

tal liquefied gas exports, with more than 112 million tons for the year 2023. Several factors contributed to supporting LNG trade, expounded Abdulmuti, including the desire to diversify resources and revenues, environmental dimensions, and the seasonality of demand in some markets. Mina Al-Zour, operational since 2021, has a unique status in the region, remarked Abdulmuti, adding that it has enabled Kuwait to diversify its gas supply sources. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Undersecretary at Kuwait's Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Mubarak Al-Sabah discussed with a delegation from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on Monday, important topics of mutual interests. According to a statement by the Ministry of Defense, Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Al-Mishal received the NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, Ambassador Boris Ruge and Nora-Elise Beck, Head of the NATO Office at the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait. — KUNA

otal role as the first Gulf country to join NATO as a non-partner member 20 years ago. He added that the NATO dialogue discussed the strategic cooperation between Kuwait and NATO, as Kuwait is an essential partner in boosting regional stability and security in the Arabian Gulf region.

Kuwait was the first country to join NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which is a platform established by NATO to promote strategic cooperation on a bilateral basis between NATO and partner countries in the broader Middle East region, in June 2004. — KUNA

Amir holds banquet in honor of Oman Sultan



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held a dinner banquet Monday in honor of Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said and his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of his state visit to Kuwait. — KUNA photos



Sultan of Oman visits the Al-Salam Palace Museum

KUWAIT: The Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq, and his accompanying delegation visited the Al-Salam Palace Museum on Tuesday. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, head of the honorary delegation, accompanied Sultan Haitham during his visit. At the museum, the Sultan was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. During the tour of the museum, Sultan Haitham was shown historical artifacts and documents related to the history and culture of Kuwait, as well as the grand halls located in Al-Sala Palace, where previous Kuwaiti Amirs frequented. At the end of the tour, Sultan Haitham signed the register of honor at the museum. — KUNA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq visits Al-Salam Palace Museum. — KUNA photos

KFAS organizes lecture to highlight LSE's program

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) organized a scientific lecture to highlight the Kuwait Program at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), which epitomizes cooperation between the Foundation and this prestigious university with the aim of supporting research. The lecture includes a detailed explanation of the program, which contains a set of integrative activities aimed at creating an academic system that supports research.

The lecturers pointed out the importance of the program in building research capabilities and stimulating them to develop energies by creating research funding opportunities. It also pointed to the importance of transferring the required knowledge to specialists and decision-makers in Kuwait, facilitating scientific and cultural exchange, and enhancing the exchange of experiences between Kuwait and the

London School of Economics and Political Science, which is one of the most prestigious universities around the world.

They reviewed the role of the program in supporting collaborative research between researchers from Kuwait and faculty members on the issues of national importance and expanding global scientific knowledge. The most important areas of the program were discussed. They include: improving the level of health care in the country; diversifying sources of energy consumption in an oil-rich economy; developing environmental public policies; pushing for digital transformation; developing education policies; supporting talented people; improving water and food security; shaping economic and legal perceptions to diversify sources of income; and improving the role of the Sovereign Wealth Fund in advancing development.

The Kuwait Program, which is an umbrella for joint cooperation between KFAS and LSE, has succeeded over the past 15 years in supporting various research projects and providing vocational training opportunities for a number of executives in the public and private sectors. It has also been hosting a number of decision-makers and specialists in the field of public policy and development at the University of London.

Al-Sadu Society kicks off London exhibition

LONDON: Kuwait's Al-Sadu Society launched its cultural exhibition at the Embassy of Kuwait in London on Monday as part of the International Crafts Week event, which coincides with the 125th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-British partnership. The week-long exhibition, entitled "Mawra the Loom: Contemporary Expressions of the Art of Sadu," presents a group of contemporary expressions inspired by the traditions and aesthetics of the art and craft of Sadu.

The exhibition includes a variety of artworks designed by Kuwaiti artists, including textiles, jewelry, furniture, and modern vehicles, all inspired by traditional Sadu textile designs, to tell a cultural story about modern artistic expression and innovation in Kuwait. A number of Kuwaiti artists are participating in the exhibition, including Ali Al-Yusifi, Alia Al-Fares, Farah Bastaki, Nadi Al-Marzouq, Hussam Al-Rashid, Kawthar Al-Saffar, Laila Al-Hamad, Manal Al-Maimoni, and Munira Al-Sharhan.

The society's Art and Design Committee, headed by Sheikh Bibi Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, supervised the development and organization of the event. Marking the occasion, Sheikh Bibi Al-Duaij invited visitors to this exhibition to enjoy and taste the artistic creations of skilled craftsmanship, their contemporary translation, the basics of Sadu inscriptions and designs, their bright colors, decorations, and cultural meanings and history. Al-Sadu Society is a non-profit, self-sustaining organization dedicated to



Kuwait Ambassador to UK Badr Al-Awadhi and the British Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and the UN Lord Tariq Ahmad attend the opening of the Sadu Association exhibition at the Kuwait Embassy in London.

preserving, documenting, and promoting Kuwait's rich and diverse textile heritage.

Cementing Kuwait-UK ties

Meanwhile, Kuwait Ambassador to the United Kingdom Badr Al-Awadhi has affirmed the significance of cultural and artistic exhibitions for bolstering the bonds of friendship and cooperation between Kuwait and the UK. The ambassador made the remarks as he inaugurated Al-Sadu Society's exhibition at the Kuwaiti Embassy in London - an event that coincided with the two countries' celebration of the 125th partnership anniversary.

The ceremony was attended by the British Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and the United Nations, Lord Tariq Ahmad, Arab and foreign diplomats, British MPs, and academics. Ambassador Al-Awadhi expressed



Kuwait, Oman officials ink four MoUs for boosting cooperation. — KUNA photos

Kuwait, Oman ink four MoUs

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Oman on Monday hammered out four memoranda of understanding for furthering industrial, investment, economic, and diplomatic cooperation. The memos were signed on the sidelines of the Kuwaiti-Omani trade and investment forum held at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the occasion of the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said's state visit to Kuwait. The signed memos deal with cooperation in standardization, direct investment, diplomatic studies, and training, as well as cooperation between the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Omani Investment Authority.

Speaking during the forum, Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of Communications Affairs, Omar Al-Omar, said trade relations between the two Arabian Gulf countries have been remarkably developed over the past years. He noted that the value of non-oil trade exchange between the two countries will reach over KD 124 million (about \$403.2 million) in 2023, compared to KD 103 million (about \$334.9 million) in 2022, up 20.4 percent.

"This reflects the strength and diversity of trade relations and their continuous growth and development," Minister Al-Omar said. He stated that the forum serves as a platform for exchanging visions and ideas, exploring investment opportunities, dis-

cussing challenges and obstacles facing investors, and putting forward recommendations for improving trade and investment exchange.

He stressed Kuwait's keenness to overcome the challenges and difficulties that may face Omani companies wishing to enter the Kuwaiti market and to facilitate the entry of Kuwaiti companies into the Omani market. In his speech, Omani Minister of Trade, Industry, and Investment Promotion Qais Al-Yousef said the forum, attended by an elite group of business owners from both sides, is the best evidence of the two countries' interest in enhancing trade and investment cooperation.

The Sultanate of Oman seeks to diversify its imports and enhance its exports, he said, urging business owners from both sides to explore the emerging opportunities in the Omani and Kuwaiti markets. Al-Yousef pointed out that the two governments seek to provide all facilities, incentives, and capabilities to allow the private sector to contribute to achieving prosperity and sustainable growth in the two countries. He affirmed that sisterly Kuwait is a vital strategic partner for the Sultanate of Oman. — KUNA



Minister Omar Al-Omar

Kuwait supports ALECSO programs

JEDDAH: Kuwait is an active partner in supporting ALECSO programs, said Acting Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, Mansour Al-Daihani, on Tuesday. This came in remarks to KUNA by Al-Daihani during his participation in the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization's 121st executive council meeting in Jeddah, led by Saudi Arabia. Al-Daihani praised the efforts of the cooperating Arab nations

in holding meetings periodically and shedding light on what needs to be seen regarding cultural and educational standards.

Al-Daihani expressed his gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their efforts in organizing the meeting, which saw the participation of 22 Arab countries. Part of the agenda is taking an important step to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which led to the destruction of countless schools, educational institutes, and infrastructure, said Al-Daihani. He also pointed to Kuwait's history with ALECSO, mentioning some prominent examples in which Kuwait played a crucial role, including projects in Somalia, Jerusalem, and others. — KUNA



Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is pictured with other attendees during the event.

gratitude to the two countries' foreign departments, the Al-Sadu Society, represented by Chairperson Sheikh Bibi Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for supporting such a distinguished cultural event that promotes the creative works of Kuwaiti citizens.

Cultural activities contribute to diplomacy and constitute a substantial foundation for strengthening bonds and ties between the two countries, he said. On his part, Lord Ahmad lauded the society's organization of the exhibition marking the 125th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-British partnership. Lord Ahmad said his participation in the event sincerely reflected the special status of Kuwait in the UK and London's keenness to promote bilateral relations.

Such activities contribute to interaction among nations and give a chance to the youth to partake in shedding light on the national heritage, he added. On her part, Sheikh Bibi expressed gratitude



Al-Sadu Society kicks off London exhibition, celebrating Kuwait-British ties. — KUNA photos

to the Kuwaiti ambassador and his staff for lending a hand in organizing the gallery. The exhibition aims at promoting the national Kuwaiti heritage in a fashion mixing ingenuity and modernity, she said. Al-Sadu Society launched the exhibition as part of the International Crafts Week event, which coincides with the 125th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-British partnership.

The week-long exhibition, entitled Mawra the Loom: Contemporary Expressions of the Art of Sadu, presents a group of contemporary expressions inspired by the traditions and aesthetics of the art and craft of Sadu. The exhibition includes a variety of artworks designed by Kuwaiti artists, including textiles, jewelry, furniture, and modern vehicles, all inspired by traditional Sadu textile designs, to tell a cultural story about modern artistic expression and innovation in Kuwait. — KUNA

In my view

Kuwait my country,
may you be safe
and glorious!

Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

There are pivotal moments in the life of a nation, where some individuals may not prioritize their homeland, and others may be misled, betraying their country and sowing discord. Both forget that the homeland is our refuge and security; without it, we're like aimless feathers drifting in the wind. Protecting the homeland is a shared responsibility among all its people, whether leaders or citizens, each playing a crucial role in safeguarding the nation. Leaders' efforts alone are futile if the people are indifferent, and vice versa.

Kuwait will endure as long as the Sun rises from the East. It's our cherished land, from which we ask for little but carry the weight of alienation and shield ourselves from the agony of loss, scarcity and indignity. Kuwait, my homeland, may you remain safe and glorious. To our youth: Believe in our homeland, for it is our everything. Do not let those who incite discord shake your confidence in Kuwait or fracture our unity.

Regardless of how much corruption spreads or indifferent voices grow louder, or oppressors multiply, they are mere foam atop Kuwait's sea, swiftly washed away on the nearest shore. Kuwait will endure and thrive. Those who sold their properties after the invasion, doubting Kuwait's survival, all lost their gamble. Those who believed in and earnestly worked for Kuwait will triumph. Our homeland will remain the pearl among nations, the epitome of beauty. My heart will forever beat with love for Kuwait, and my eyes will tear up at the sight of it after every journey abroad. It is our glorious homeland, transcending disputes and fears. Kuwait, my country, may you remain safe and glorious.

Zain fostering tech innovation in
Kuwait with global success stories

Zain hosts special talk with Bertrand Nepveu



Nepveu meets Bader Al-Kharafi and Zain's executive management team.

KUWAIT: Zain hosted a special talk at its headquarters in Shuwaikh featuring Canadian technopreneur Bertrand Nepveu, the creator of the technology behind the Apple Vision Pro mixed reality headset. Nepveu took the stage to share his success story and key chapters from his journey in entrepreneurship and tech innovation. The session came in collaboration with Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) – a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), Warba Bank, and ALGAS Events.

During his visit to Zain, Bertrand Nepveu met with Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Group Board Member and Omantel CEO Talal Mamari, Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Algharabally, and Zain's executive management team. This session came as part of a series of insightful talks the four partners hosted in Kuwait to introduce the local community to this global success story, making the most out of Bertrand Nepveu's first ever visit to the Middle East. The series included a special session for Zain and strategic partners' employees at the company's HQ, a public session for tech enthusiasts and entrepreneurs at Four Seasons Hotel, and a special session for university students held at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST).

Bertrand Nepveu was born into a family with a rich entrepreneurial legacy, where he inherited his love for innovation and creativity. Since 2005, he worked on developing his passion for virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) experiences when he founded his own startup, Vrvana. Bertrand's journey took a transformative turn when he and his team collaborated with Apple in California. Together, they pushed the boundaries of technology, culminating in the creation of the Apple Vision Pro



From the special talk at Zain's headquarters.

mixed reality headset. Bertrand's visionary leadership played a pivotal role in shaping the future of mixed reality experiences.

During the session, Nepveu shared with Zain and strategic partners' employees the biggest milestones of his success story, and how he transformed his passion for technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship into real-world success. He also shared the biggest challenges he faced in his journey and how he overcame them. Towards the end of the session, the employees asked Nepveu their own questions to make the most out of this experience.

This step came under Zain's Innovation Nation

initiative that strives to foster creativity, innovation, digital upskilling, and entrepreneurship in the community. The initiative strives to share global success stories with students and entrepreneurs across Kuwait and has contributed to empowering thousands of aspiring young people through tens of interactive programs. This session also adds to the long list of programs co-presented by Zain and Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity under their joint vision to achieve a number of strategic pillars, like fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, upskilling young people, empowering startup owners, investing in youth's digital skills, and more.

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Burgan Bank launches
'Burgan Lean in Circle for
Women Empowerment'

KUWAIT: Following a series of dedicated efforts aimed at encouraging employees' holistic development and growth, Burgan Bank announced the launch of "Burgan Lean in Circle for Women Empowerment", the circle explores and addresses all challenges faced by women in the workplace, diminishing any obstacles that slow down their professional or personal growth. This initiative is part of Burgan's expansive human capital development strategy and its commitment to remaining a top employer of choice in the Kuwaiti banking and financial market.

"At Burgan Bank, we are committed to creating an inclusive workplace where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, and the 'Burgan Lean in Circle' is a testament to that commitment," said Fatma Ahmad, Acting Senior Manager – Learning and Development at Burgan Bank, in light of the new initiative's launch. "On our mission to empower the women of our community, beginning with our staff, it is vital to create a safe space where all women are free to express themselves and are heard loud and clear.

Not only does the 'Burgan Lean in Circle' allow us to get valuable insights about the gaps that need bridging in our female employees' work experience, but it also fosters empathy and connectedness among our community members, reminding them that they are not alone in their struggles and that together we strive." The "Burgan Lean in Circle" journey begins with a message that is sent out to all female Burgan employees, inviting them to join

the initiative and benefit from its monthly meet-ups, workshops, mentorship programs, and networking events, through which participants are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to thrive in their careers and beyond.

The women empowerment initiative has several vital topics on its agenda, such as the challenges of navigating career advancement opportunities as well as balancing work and family responsibilities, among many others. "We firmly believe that empowered women empower women, and by enabling and supporting the women of Burgan to speak up and own their progress, we are effectively planting seeds of empowerment that will eventually blossom across our society," added Fatma.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank continues to offer and develop one of the most dynamic staff development programs, as per its comprehensive human capital development strategy, which aims at contributing to the overall advancement of Kuwait's pool of professional talents. In recognition of its unwavering efforts, Burgan was the first Bank in Kuwait to receive the Great Place to Work certification as well as the Brandon Hall Human Capital Management (HCM) Excellence Silver Award and the GCC Excellence Award in the Recruitment and Development of Nationals from the Council of Ministers of Labor and Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the GCC States Executive Bureau.



Fatma Ahmad



Lebanon resumes 'voluntary' repatriations of Syrians

Putin to meet Xi in Beijing seeking greater support for war effort

Page 7

Page 6



KHAN YUNIS: People move past destroyed buildings along a street in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on May 14, 2024. — AFP

Nearly 450,000 displaced from Gaza's Rafah since May 6: UN

Record 76 million people displaced worldwide, says monitor

RAFAH/GENEVA: The United Nations said Tuesday that nearly 450,000 people have been displaced from Rafah since Zionist entity began issuing evacuation orders for the south Gaza city eight days ago.

At the same time, another 100,000 people have fled their homes amid renewed fighting in northern Gaza, the UN said, meaning that around a quarter of Gaza's population of around 2.4 million people has been displaced again in just over a week. UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said Tuesday that it estimated "nearly 450,000 people have been forcibly displaced from Rafah since May 6".

That was the day Zionist entity issued an initial evacuation order for eastern Rafah, and it has repeatedly expanded the areas ordered emptied of civilians since then as it prepares for a widely feared ground assault. While it has not yet announced a large-scale operation, Zionist entity defied international opposition and entered Rafah with tanks and troops last week, seizing its key crossing on the Egyptian border.

The UN has warned of an "epic" disaster if Zionist entity conducts an outright invasion of the city where 1.4 million people—many displaced from elsewhere in war-torn Gaza—had been sheltering.

"Empty streets in Rafah as families continue to

flee in search of safety," UNRWA said on X, formerly Twitter. "People face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate ceasefire is the only hope."

Zionist entity has asked people in the designated evacuation areas in Rafah 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. UNRWA warned later on Tuesday that the infrastructure in Khan Yunis was "completely destroyed".

"There are no water, electricity nor sewage services," it said, cautioning that "displaced people fleeing Rafah are moving back to destroyed areas that are in no way fit for them to live in". "Families keep fleeing where they can—including to rubble & sand dunes—in search of safety. But there's no such thing in Gaza," the agency said in another post.

Zionist entity's relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza have since killed at least 35,173 people, mostly civilians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Conflict in Gaza and Sudan pushed the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) worldwide to a record 75.9 million at the end of 2023, an NGO monitor said on Tuesday. The Internal Displacement

Monitoring Centre (IDMC) said the figure was a new end-of-year numerical high, with the number of people displaced within their own borders having increased by more than 50 percent in the last five years. The figure was up from 71.1 million at the end of 2022.

While refugees are those who have fled abroad, internal displacement refers to the forced movement of people within the country in which they live. In its annual Global Report on Internal Displacement, the IDMC said that 68.3 million people worldwide were displaced by conflict and violence, and 7.7 million by disasters.

Over the past five years, the number of IDPs resulting from conflict has increased by 22.6 million, with the two biggest increases in 2022 and 2023. At 9.1 million, Sudan has the highest number of IDPs recorded for a single country since records began in 2008, the monitor said.

IDPs account for 18.4 percent of the population of around 49.4 million, according to AFP calculations using United Nations population figures. In the Gaza Strip, 1.7 million Palestinians were internally displaced by the end of 2023, with 3.4 million new movements.

That means 77 percent of the population of 2.2

million have been forced from their homes, according to AFP calculations based on UN figures. The bloodiest-ever war in Gaza broke out in October last year.

"Over the past two years, we've seen alarming new levels of people having to flee their homes due to conflict and violence, even in regions where the trend had been improving," said IDMC director Alexandra Bilak. "Conflict, and the devastation it leaves behind, is keeping millions from re-building their lives, often for years on end."

The monitor also keeps track of the number of internal displacements—each new forced movement of a person within their borders. People can be displaced several times over.

Almost half of all IDPs live in sub-Saharan Africa. Last year there were 46.9 million forced movements of people -- 20.5 million internal displacements by conflict and violence, and 26.4 million by disasters. Fighting in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Palestinian territories accounted for nearly two-thirds of new movements of people due to conflict in 2023. Throughout 2023, there were six million forced movements of people caused by the violence in Sudan—more than in the previous 14 years combined. — AFP

Sri Lanka says around 280 citizens recruited for Russia-Ukraine war

COLOMBO: Around 280 Sri Lankans have been recruited to fight on both sides of Russia's war in Ukraine, officials tasked with investigating its citizens' involvement in the conflict said Tuesday. Complaints began pouring in from relatives after the defense ministry set up a special unit last week to collect information on those who had travelled to both countries to join the war effort.

"We have received complaints from approximately 280" family members, public security minister Tiran Alles told AFP. Most had been recruited for the Russian army and duped with promises of high salaries and falsely told they would be given non-combat roles, lawmaker Gamini Waleboda told parliament on Monday. There was no official count of how many Sri Lankans may have died in the conflict. Sri Lanka has repeatedly warned its citizens against travelling to Russia or Ukraine to join the fighting.

But there are no restrictions on Sri Lankans travelling abroad and large numbers have left the island nation in the wake of an unprecedented economic crisis in mid-2022. A notice on the defense ministry website published since the taskforce was established asked relatives to "provide information about retired Sri Lankan military personnel who have joined the Russia-Ukraine war". Police have arrested two retired army officers, including a major general, for illegally acting as recruiting agents for Russian mercenary firms.

Sri Lanka's South Asian neighbors India and Nepal have also confirmed that numerous citizens of those countries had been recruited to fight alongside the Russian army over the past year. More than two years since Russia's invasion began, tens of thousands of its soldiers have been killed in Ukraine, and Moscow has been on a global quest for more troops. — AFP



VARANASI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (second right) waves to supporters next to Home Minister Amit Shah (right) and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath (left) after filing his nomination papers in Varanasi on May 14, 2024. — AFP

Modi files papers for India election in Hindu holy city

VARANASI, India: Crowds greeted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday as he submitted his nomination papers for a holy city's parliamentary seat in a general election. Varanasi is the spiritual capital of Hinduism, where devotees from around India come to cremate deceased loved ones by the Ganges river, and the premier has represented the city since came to power a decade ago.

"I swear on God... I will have faith and allegiance to India's constitution," Modi said before handing over the paperwork to an election registrar, flanked by a Hindu mystic dressed in a loin cloth. Hundreds of supporters had gathered to applaud Modi out-

side the local government office where he lodged his nomination, at the end of a two-day campaign stop packed with numerous public displays of worship.

"It's our good fortune that Modi represents our constituency of Varanasi," devout Hindu Jitendra Singh Kumar, a 52-year-old farmer, told AFP while waiting to catch a glimpse of the leader. Modi waved to the gathered crowd after emerging from the office before leaving with his entourage, made up of senior figures from his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The 73-year-old premier, who has made acts of religious devotion a fixture of his premiership, had spent the morning visiting temples and offering prayers at the banks of the Ganges. 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. In public speeches he has referred to Muslims as "infiltrators" and "those who have more children", prompting condemnation from opposition politicians and complaints to India's election commission. — AFP

Turkey arrests 544 over suspected ties to Erdogan foe

ANKARA: Turkish authorities said Tuesday they arrested 544 people suspected of links to preacher Fethullah Gulen, whom President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuses of being behind an attempted coup in 2016. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya posted on X that arrests were made in 62 of the country's 81 provinces, targeting "individuals intended by FETO to enter various levels of the civil service," using the acronym favored by Ankara to designate Gulen's movement.

"We will not leave members of FETO alone," the minister said. The suspects are accused of signing up for public service exams under orders of the Gulen movement, and of communicating through the Bylock messaging app, which the Turkish government considers to be controlled by the self-exiled preacher.

Gulen, who has lived in the United States since 1999, has always denied that his movement was behind the attempted July 2016 coup. Once a close ally of Erdogan, the preacher was accused by Turkish authorities of being behind corruption allegations against the government in 2013, when Erdogan was prime minister. Erdogan accuses the imam of trying to create an alternative state via its network of schools present on all continents.

The post-coup crackdown saw tens of thousands of people arrested, more than 140,000 fired or suspended from their jobs and nearly 3,000 sentenced to life in jail.

Turkey regularly asks other countries to extradite Gulen's followers, and tried to make that a condition of accepting Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO before finally dropping those demands. — AFP

International

Lebanon resumes 'voluntary' repatriations of Syrians

Beirut hosts around two million Syrians, world's highest number of refugees per capita

BEIRUT: Beirut repatriated several hundred Syrians on Tuesday in coordination with Damascus as pressure mounts in cash-strapped Lebanon for the hundreds of thousands of refugees to go home. Vans and small trucks were waiting in the Arsal area near the border early in the morning to ferry home the returnees, an AFP photographer reported.

The vehicles were piled high with mattresses and other belongings and some were even accompanied by livestock. "I'm going back alone for the moment, in order to prepare for my family's return," said a 57-year-old man originally from Syria's Qalamun area, declining to be identified by name.

"I am happy to go back to my country after 10 years" as a refugee, he told AFP. Around 330 people had registered to be part of the "voluntary return", Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said. Syrian state news agency SANA reported that an unspecified number of people had arrived from Lebanon as part of the initiative.

Lebanon, which has been mired in a crushing economic crisis since late 2019, says it hosts around two million Syrians, the world's highest number of refugees per capita, with almost 785,000 registered with the United Nations. Earlier this month, the European Union announced \$1 billion in aid to Beirut to

help stem irregular migration to the bloc, but in Lebanon the package has been criticized for failing to meet growing public demands for Syrians to leave.

Parliament is set to hold a session on Wednesday to discuss the EU assistance. Lebanon began the "voluntary" return of small numbers of Syrians in 2017 based on lists sent to the government in Damascus, with the last such group crossing the border in 2022.

Human rights group Amnesty International said at the time that Lebanese authorities were putting Syrians at risk of "heinous abuse and persecution upon their return", adding that the refugees were "not in a position to take a free and informed decision about their return".

On Monday, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah urged Lebanese authorities to open the seas for migrant boats to put pressure on the European Union, whose easternmost member, Cyprus, is less than 200 kilometers (125 miles) away.

Nicosia on Tuesday expressed concern at the remarks and said Nasrallah's message "certainly should concern us". "We are in contact with the authorities of Lebanon, and we believe that through these contacts, we will be able to manage it (irregular migration)." Cypriot government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis told reporters. — AFP



ARSAL, Lebanon: A boy waves from inside a vehicle as Syrian refugees prepare to leave Lebanon back to Syria, in Arsal in the Bekaa Valley, on May 14, 2024. — AFP

Riots rock France's New Caledonia over voting reform

NOUMEA: France's prime minister on Tuesday urged the restoration of calm in New Caledonia after the French Pacific archipelago was rocked by a night of rioting against a controversial voting reform that has angered pro-independence forces.

Shots were fired at security forces vehicles torched and shops looted in the rioting, the worst such violence in New Caledonia since deadly unrest in the 1980s. More than 80 people were arrested.

New Caledonia, which lies between Australia and Fiji, is one of several French territories spanning the globe from the Caribbean and Indian Ocean to the Pacific that remain part of France in the post-colonial era. It already has special status within France unlike other overseas territories. And while it has on three

occasions rejected independence in referendums independence retains support particularly among the indigenous Kanak people.

"Shots were fired at the gendarmes using high caliber weapons and hunting rifles. There have been no deaths," High Commissioner of the Republic Louis Le Franc told reporters. Authorities announced a night-time curfew Tuesday and a ban on public gatherings while the main airport was closed and the government dispatched security reinforcements from mainland France.

"Violence is never a solution," Prime Minister Gabriel Attal told reporters during a trip to eastern France, adding that the government's "priority... is to re-establish order, calm and serenity" in New Caledonia. New Zealand said Tuesday Foreign Minister Winston Peters had cancelled his visit to New Caledonia due to the unrest.

One business group said around 30 shops, factories and other sites in and around capital Noumea had been set ablaze, while an AFP journalist saw burned-out cars and smoking remains of tyres and wooden pallets littering the streets. — AFP



NOUMEA, France: People walk next to a burnt-out car while a man (center) holds a flag of the Socialist Kanak National Liberation Front (FLNKS) after a supermarket was looted and shops vandalized in the N'Gea district of Noumea, on May 14, 2024. — AFP

Omani Sultan concludes Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

The memos were signed on the sidelines of the Kuwaiti-Omani trade and investment forum held at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the occasion of Sultan Haitham's state visit to Kuwait. The signed memos deal with cooperation in standardization, direct investment, diplomatic studies and training, as well as cooperation between the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Omani Investment Authority.

Speaking during the forum, Kuwait's Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of State for Communications Affairs Omar Al-Omar said trade relations between the two Arabian Gulf countries have been remarkably developed over the past years. He noted the value of non-oil trade exchange between the two countries reached over KD 124 million (\$403.2 million) in 2023, compared to KD 103 million (\$334.9 million) in 2022, up 20.4 percent.

"This reflects the strength and diversity of trade relations and their continuous growth and devel-

opment," Omar said. He stated the forum serves as a platform for exchanging visions and ideas; exploring investment opportunities; discussing challenges and obstacles facing investors; and putting forward recommendations for improving trade and investment exchange.

He stressed Kuwait's keenness to overcome the challenges and difficulties that may face Omani companies wishing to enter the Kuwaiti market and to facilitate the entry of Kuwaiti companies into the Omani market. In his speech, the Omani Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais Al-Yousef said the forum, attended by an elite group of business owners from both sides, is the best evidence of the two countries' interest in enhancing trade and investment cooperation.

The Sultanate of Oman seeks to diversify its imports and enhance its exports, he said, urging business owners from both sides to explore the emerging opportunities in the Omani and Kuwaiti markets. Yousef pointed out that the two governments seek to provide all facilities, incentives and capabilities to allow the private sector to contribute to achieving prosperity and sustainable growth in the two countries. He affirmed that the sisterly State of Kuwait is a vital strategic partner for the Sultanate of Oman. — KUNA

Fierce battles rage across Gaza, US...

Continued from Page 1

includes a focus on intent" to reach this assessment, Sullivan added. Biden wanted to see Hamas defeated but realized that Palestinian civilians were in "hell", Sullivan said.

The Zionist entity last week defied a chorus of warnings — including from top ally Washington which paused a shipment of bombs — and sent tanks and troops into the east of Rafah to pursue militants. At the same time, fighting has flared in north Gaza four months after the army said Hamas' command structure there had been dismantled, and six months after Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Hamas had "lost control" of Gaza.

Recent battles and heavy Zionist bombardments have been reported around Rafah as well as in Gaza City and Jabalia refugee camp in the north and Nu-seirat camp in the center. More than seven months into the war, Zionist strikes and ground combat claimed another 82 lives in Gaza over the past 24 hours, the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said. That is the highest daily toll reported by the ministry in more than two weeks.

Nearly 450,000 Palestinians have been newly displaced from Rafah in recent days, and around 100,000 from northern Gaza, UN agencies said. That means around a quarter of Gaza's population of 2.4 million people have been freshly displaced in the past week. Palestinian mother Hadeel Radwan, 32, who is displaced in western Rafah, told AFP the constant shelling left her terrified while enduring shortages including of drinking water. Many people had fled her Tal al-Sultan district, but she said joining them would be hard because, "I had a C-section and moving quickly, under threat, would be difficult for me".

The Zionist entity's offensive that has killed at least 35,173 people, mostly civilians, according to the Gaza health ministry. The Zionist military says 272 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza campaign since ground operations began on Oct 27. Talks toward a truce and hostage release deal have stalled after months of efforts involving US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said that "unfortunately things didn't move in the right direction and right now we are on a status of almost a stalemate". "Of course, what happened with Rafah has set us backward," he added of the Zionist entity's insistence on launching a ground attack in the city. "There is no clarity how to stop the war from the (Zionist) side. I don't think that they are considering this as an option... even when we are talking about the deal and leading to a potential ceasefire," Sheikh Mohammed said.

Since Zionist troops moved into eastern Rafah, the aid crossing point from Egypt remains closed and nearby Kerem Shalom crossing lacks "safe and logistically viable access," a UN report said late on Monday. It said fuel shortages threaten health services, and acute child malnutrition is rising.

A convoy of trucks delivering humanitarian aid from Jordan was attacked and vandalized by Zionist far-right activists on Monday, its cargo spilt onto a road near a crossing with the occupied West Bank. The United Nations said an Indian member of its security services was killed and another wounded when their UN vehicle was struck on the way to a hospital in Rafah. The UN said it had informed Zionist authorities of the movements of the vehicle. Human Rights Watch said it had identified at least eight occasions since the war began when the Zionist entity had targeted known aid worker locations in Gaza, after their coordinates were shared to ensure their protection. — AFP

Minister stresses rule of law under...

Continued from Page 1

prayed to God Almighty for strength to carry out and fulfill his duties correctly, Sheikh Fahad emphasized that the security of Kuwait is a responsibility borne by the sons of the country, particularly those within the military establishment. The political leadership's trust, support, and encouragement entail a serious commitment from them to safeguard the

country's security, stability and territorial integrity.

He reiterated that enhancing the efficiency and capability of the Kuwaiti army receives direct attention from HH the Amir and the Prime Minister. "We will, in turn, work with the help of God Almighty, following their directives and instructions, with continuous and constant monitoring of all efforts, taking into account the mobilization of all resources and overcoming various obstacles to achieve the desired vision and goals," he said. The meeting was attended by the Chief of General Staff of the Army Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain and the Deputy Minister of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Celebrities face digital backlash...

Continued from Page 1

stars to join calls for a ceasefire in Gaza's deadliest war. But matters came to a head after last week's Met Gala, a glitzy fundraiser and the biggest night in fashion featuring A-list stars from screen, stage, sports and the world's runways.

Dressed in an extravagant gown, influencer Haley Kalil posted on TikTok lip-synching "Let them eat cake" — a phrase notoriously associated with Marie Antoinette that symbolizes the callous disregard of 18th-century French aristocrats towards the poor. Fellow TikToker ladyfromtheoutside, who started the movement, responded: "It's time for the people to conduct what I want to call a digital guillotine, a digitine, if you will," referring to the execution apparatus used during the French Revolution. "Take our views away, our likes, our comments, our money," she urged.

Her message was taken up as a rallying cry for the pro-Palestinian movement, and early signs suggest the boycott may be having an impact. Reality star Kim Kardashian — who attended the ball in New York — has lost hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers in recent days, according to analytics site Social Blade. Global music superstar Taylor Swift, who opted to focus on her Eras Tour rather than appear at the event, has also seen a decline of more than 200,000 followers since last Thursday.

"This is about lives and justice — if she can rally all of us

to vote, she has the power to speak up about injustice," said a TikToker who described herself as a "Palestinian Swiftie" and said it was time to block, unfollow and stop streaming her idol. It's uncertain whether the movement is directly responsible for the social media hits seen by some celebrities, or if other trends are at play.

Moreover, the losses could be short-lived, Natasha Lindstaedt, a University of Essex professor who has studied celebrity activism, told AFP. "Sometimes people make a decision based on an emotional response to an issue and decide that if a celebrity isn't on the same side... they don't want to follow them anymore, but that takes a second," she says.

This phenomenon is known in academic circles as "slacktivism" — substituting low-stakes online actions like posting memes or liking posts, or choosing to unfollow a favorite star — for meaningful political engagement. Instead of responding, celebrities might find it wiser to wait out the backlash, especially given the sensitive nature of the Gaza conflict, which has proven perilous for many stars.

Oscar-winning actress Susan Sarandon was dropped by her talent agency UTA after speaking at a pro-Palestine rally in November. More recently, Jerry Seinfeld, long the model of an apolitical celebrity, has faced criticism for affiliating himself more closely with the Zionist entity. That backlash against the Jewish comedian intensified after a report said his wife Jessica donated to a group of pro-Zionist counter-protesters at UCLA, where violence broke out against pro-Palestinian demonstrators. She later wrote on Instagram that she supported a peaceful rally days earlier and did not support or contribute to any violent actions. — AFP

Summer 2023 was the hottest...

Continued from Page 1

By contrast the coolest summer of that 2,000-year period was nearly four degrees below 2023 summer temperatures in the northern hemisphere due to a major volcanic eruption. Scientists say volcanic activity could bring about cooler conditions in future as they did in the past, but that ultimately humanity's release of greenhouse gases would keep trapping heat in the atmosphere.

In 1992, an eruption the previous year helped soften the impact of the El Nino weather system, which warms the Pacific Ocean and can bring hotter global conditions. After the effect subsided, temperatures soared in 1998, which the study noted was one of the warmest summers after 2023 and 2016 respectively — both also

El Nino years. Esper said the only way to curb rising temperatures was to immediately start cutting emissions and "the longer we wait, the more difficult and expensive it will be".

A separate study published on Tuesday warned that higher temperatures and ageing populations would see tens of millions of older people being exposed to dangerous heat extremes by 2050. Already 14 percent of elderly people are exposed to days exceeding 37.5 degrees, which can aggravate health conditions and even lead to death, said the study in the journal Nature Communications. That number is expected to climb to 23 percent by the middle of the century, the study said.

"Different countries in the world are facing similar issues... but the level of preparedness, the adaptive capacity of people and of society is different," the study's lead author Giacomo Falchetta told AFP. Europe has systems in place to support people during heatwaves but faces considerable change as one of the fastest warming regions on Earth, said Falchetta of the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change. — AFP

International

Putin to meet Xi in Beijing seeking greater support for Ukraine war

China remains a crucial lifeline for Russia after Western sanctions

BEIJING: Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit China this week, both countries announced Tuesday, meeting his "dear friend" Xi Jinping as he seeks to win greater support from Beijing for his war effort in Ukraine and isolated economy.

It will be Putin's first trip abroad since his March re-election and his second in just over six months to China, a crucial economic lifeline for Russia after the West hit it with unprecedented sanctions over its military offensive in Ukraine. Beijing has rebuffed Western criticism of its ties with Moscow, hailing their "no limits" partnership as it enjoys cheap Russian energy imports and access to vast natural resources, including steady gas shipments via the Power of Siberia pipeline.

But as that economic partnership comes under close scrutiny in the West, Chinese banks fearing US sanctions that might cut them off from the global financial system have begun turning the screws on Russian businesses. "The Russians want China to do more to support it, which China is reluctant to do because it doesn't want to jeopardize its relationship with the West," Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, told AFP.

Putin will be in Beijing from Thursday to Friday, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in a statement. "President Xi Jinping will exchange views with President Putin on bilateral ties, cooperation in various fields, and international and regional issues of common interest," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a briefing. The Kremlin said the two leaders would discuss their "comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation" as well as "define key areas of development of

Russian-Chinese cooperation and exchange views on international and regional issues".

Trade between China and Russia has boomed since the Ukraine invasion and hit \$240 billion in 2023, according to Chinese customs figures. But after Washington vowed to go after financial institutions that facilitate Moscow, Chinese exports to Russia dipped during March and April, down from a surge early in the year.

An executive order by President Joe Biden in December permits secondary sanctions on foreign banks that deal with Russia's war machine, allowing the US Treasury to cut them out of the dollar-led global financial system. That, coupled with recent efforts to rebuild fractured ties with the United States, may make Beijing reluctant to openly push more cooperation with Russia - despite what Moscow may want, analysts said. "If China aims to... maintain the tactical thaw in its relationship with the United States, and limit transatlantic convergence on China policy, it must take seriously America's threat to sanction its financial institutions," Ali Wyne at the International Crisis Group told AFP.

Eight people from both countries involved in cross-border trade told AFP in recent days that several Chinese banks have halted or slowed transactions with Russian clients.

"Chinese banks are concerned about reputational costs as they seek to forestall major sanctions," Elizabeth Wishnick, a senior research scientist at the naval analysis centre CNA, said. "Certainly major Chinese banks would want to avoid that scenario given current economic difficulties domestically."

Putin's post-election trip to Beijing echoes Xi's



QINGDAO, China: A large video screen shows China's President Xi Jinping (right) shaking hands with Russia's President Vladimir Putin (left) before a meeting with head of state members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at the SCO Summit in Qingdao, China's Shandong province in this June 10, 2018 file photo. — AFP

own visit to Russia after his re-anointing as leader last year. Experts expect this week's highly symbolic meeting to result in toasts to the "no limits" partnership, as well as some deals signed and pledges to increase trade. The two leaders are set to sign a joint declaration following the talks, the Kremlin said Tuesday, and attend an evening marking 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Putin will meet with Premier Li Qiang - China's number two official - and travel to the northeastern city of Harbin for a trade and investment expo, the statement added. The Russian leader knows full well that Beijing remains determined to back Moscow - seen by Chinese policymakers as a crucial bulwark against the West and a critical ally in its fight against a US-led world order, analysts said. — AFP

French climber dies in Nepal, two Mongolians missing

KATHMANDU: A French climber died on Mount Makalu, the world's fifth-highest peak, expedition organizers said Tuesday, while search and rescue operations were underway for two Mongolian men who went missing while attempting to summit Mount Everest. Johnny Saliba, 60, died at an altitude of 8,120 meters (26,640 feet) during his summit push on Sunday, becoming the second fatality of this year's spring climbing season in Nepal.

"He was heading to the summit but his guide brought him down after he suffered symptoms of altitude sickness. And then he passed away," said Bodha Raj Bhandari, expedition organizer at Snowy Horizon Treks and Expedition. Bhandari added that Saliba's family had been informed and efforts were underway to retrieve his body.

He was part of a French team on the 8,485-metre-tall (27,838-foot) moun-

tain and the other members safely returned to the base camp. Last week, a 53-year-old Nepali guide died on the same peak as he was descending after reaching the summit. The Mongolian climbers attempting to climb Everest, Usukhjargal Tsendendamba, 53, and Prevsuren Lkhagvajav, 31, were last in contact Sunday evening from Camp 4 at 7,900 meters. "They informed on Sunday evening that they were heading to the summit at 7:30 pm from Camp 4. We have not been able to reach them after that," Pemba Sherpa of 8k Expeditions, which handled their base camp stay and permits, told AFP.

Sherpa said the two men were climbing without guides and that their walkie-talkie had been found in their tent, with four Nepali guides dispatched to search for them. Nepal's tourism department said in a statement that another team had spotted the duo



Jason Kennison (left) died while descending Mount Everest.

"heading towards Everest's summit" on Monday morning but both climbers had been "out of contact" since. Hundreds of climbers have flocked to Nepal - home to eight of the world's 14 highest peaks - for summits in the spring climbing season when temperatures are warm and winds are typically calm. Nepal has this year issued 59

permits to foreign climbers for Makalu - costing \$1,800 each, compared to \$11,000 for Everest - and dozens have reached the top after a rope-fixing team submitted the peak last month. Nepal has issued more than 900 permits for its mountains this year, including 414 for Everest, earning over \$5 million in royalties. — AFP

Mumbai police open probe as billboard collapse toll hits 14

MUMBAI: Police in India's financial capital have opened a criminal case against the owner of a huge billboard that collapsed on a petrol station and killed 14 people, media reports said Tuesday. The giant 70 by 50-metre (230 by 164-foot) hoarding in Mumbai's east collapsed on Monday as fierce winds buffeted the city, accompanied by rain and dust storms.

Local authorities confirmed Tuesday that 14 people had died in the accident with 75 more injured, with rescue operations still underway. "Medical treatment is currently being provided to 44 injured individuals, with 31 already discharged after receiving treatment," the city's municipal corporation said in a post on social media platform X.

"Unfortunately, 14 people (succumbed) to death in this mishap," it added. "Rescue operations are ongoing at the site." Gaurav Chauhan of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) told AFP that the billboard's collapse on top of a petrol pump had complicated rescue efforts. "We are not able to use equipment in case of fire and other hazards... so we are using heavy cranes just to remove the debris," he said. Media reports said Mumbai police had filed a culpable homicide case against the owner of Ego Media, the



MUMBAI: National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel (right) and rescue workers inspect the site a day after an advertisement billboard collapsed at a petrol station following a storm, in Mumbai on May 14, 2024. — AFP

company identified as having installed the signage. Police in the city could not be reached for comment by AFP on Tuesday morning and there was no sign that the owner had been taken into police custody.

City councillor Rakhee Jadhav told AFP that the collapse was avoidable, blaming shoddy construc-

tion. "This is not a disaster. If this hoarding would have been properly installed... these casualties would have not happened," she said. "This area is a marshland and it is also a low-lying area," she added. "The foundation of that hoarding should have gone more near the rock." — AFP

Indonesia flood death toll rises to 57 with 22 missing

AGAM, Indonesia: Rescuers recovered more bodies on Tuesday after weekend flash floods and cold lava flow on Indonesia's Sumatra island killed at least 57 people and left another 22 missing, provincial officials said. Hours of heavy rain caused large volcanic rocks to roll down one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes into six districts on Sumatra island Saturday evening while flooding inundated roads, homes and mosques.

"To date, 57 victims have been found dead," Ilham Wahab, West Sumatra disaster mitigation agency official, told AFP, adding 22 people were still missing. Workers cleaned up damaged buildings after the deluge while rescuers deployed a thermal drone to help the search, using excavators and

their bare hands to try to find survivors in the rivers and rubble.

"For the emergency response, heavy equipment has moved to clean up the disaster areas. And after this, we will go to shelters to ensure affected communities are served well," national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) chief Suharyanto told reporters Tuesday. More than 3,300 people have also evacuated from the affected areas, according to authorities. They warned the death toll could rise further as the search for the dozens missing continued.

The search was urgent as rescuers only had a "golden time" of six days to find survivors, Suharyanto said. Residents described the terror late Saturday as the floods, bringing along



TANAH DATAR, Indonesia: People clean a home that was damaged by mud and logs swept away by flash floods at Rambatan Village, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, on May 14, 2024. — AFP

volcanic materials and logs, inundated their neighborhoods and destroyed their houses. Meli Karmila, a 29-year-old mother-of-one, said she rushed

from her home carrying her only child when the flood hit, climbing over a car stuck in another house to shelter on the house's second floor. — AFP

News in Brief

Hunger striking Thai right activist dies in detention

BANGKOK: A Thai rights activist detained on royal defamation charges died Tuesday while on hunger strike in custody, the kingdom's department of corrections said. Netiporn Sanae-sangkhom, an activist from the pro-democracy "Thalung" group, had been held in pre-trial detention since January. She was charged under Thailand's tough royal insult laws over a royal motorcade protest in 2020 during the peak of the kingdom's youth-led pro-democracy movement. — AFP

Austrian court lets incest rapist Fritzl's transfer to regular jail

VIENNA: An Austrian court said Tuesday it had approved the transfer of incest rapist Josef Fritzl to a regular jail as the 89-year-old was now unlikely to commit a crime. Fritzl, who has changed his name, repeatedly raped his daughter he locked in a cellar for over 24 years, fathering seven children with her. Served with a life sentence in 2019, Fritzl has been held in a jail for the mentally ill who pose a high degree of danger in Krems, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Vienna. In a ruling published Tuesday, the Krems regional court said Fritzl "can be transferred... to normal detention" since he "no longer poses a danger that requires placement" in a psychiatric unit in jail. — AFP

UK MPs arrested for sexual offences face parliament ban

LONDON: UK MPs arrested on suspicion of serious sexual or violent offences could be barred from attending parliament after lawmakers changed the rules in a narrow vote late on Monday. Parliament decided by just one vote that any MP arrested over such accusations should face a risk assessment, which could lead to them being excluded from entering the House of Commons. The move toughens up a proposal by the Conservative government, which had said MPs should only be barred if they were actually charged with an offence after being arrested. — AFP

Putin appoints ex-security chief as aide for shipbuilding

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday appointed his long-serving national security council secretary as a presidential aide responsible for shipbuilding in an apparent demotion as the head of state reshuffles his military leadership. Nikolai Patrushev, 72, a shadowy but influential figure and key Putin ally, served for 16 years as secretary of the national security council, a body of top officials who meet with Putin to discuss national security matters. — AFP

Former Rwanda MP arrested over possession of weapons

KIGALI: A former ruling party lawmaker was arrested in Rwanda over the illegal possession of weapons, police said. A member of the Rwandan Patriotic Front party, Eugene Barikana, 57, became a lawmaker in 2013 before resigning his position prior to the arrest. "He is being prosecuted for possessing weapons illegally, he says that he got them while living with soldiers and forgot to return them," the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) said in a statement late Monday. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2024

AEC increases capital through issuance of first preferred shares in Kuwait

NIC acts as the sole financial advisor to AEC in this historic transaction

KUWAIT: Action Energy Company (AEC) has completed a capital increase by way of issuing convertible preferred shares, which is the first of its kind in Kuwait. This primary issuance will strengthen the company's financial position and



الشركة العمالية للطاقة (ش.م.ك.م)
Action Energy Company (K.S.C.C.)

help it expand its fleet of modern oil rigs and equipment to serve the Kuwait market and its growing demand.

AEC Chairman Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah stated, "This investment is an important milestone in the growth plans of AEC, which are focused on expanding our services offering; on transferring technology for the benefit of the local economy; and on



AEC Chairman Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah

entering new markets, including the Saudi market, while aiming potentially for a future public offering of AEC shares. AEC is committed to serving the changing needs of the energy sector while contributing to

the regional economy."

The issuance by AEC of preferred shares marks a first in Kuwait and is part of the innovative products approved and supervised by the Capital Markets Authority for professional investors. The



شركة الاستثمار الوطنية
NATIONAL INVESTMENTS COMPANY

preferred shares issuance was fully subscribed by Gulf Investment Corporation.

NIC Chairman Khaled Waleed Al-Falah stated: "We are proud to act as the sole financial advisor to AEC in this historic transaction and lead the inaugural issuance of preferred shares in Kuwait. This milestone is a testament to NIC's commitment to providing bespoke and innovative solutions for its clients."



NIC Chairman Khaled Waleed Al-Falah

Al-Falah, on behalf of NIC, extended his sincere gratitude to the Capital Markets Authority, Competition Protection Agency, and Kuwait Clearing Company for their valuable cooperation and contribution to the successful

completion of this transaction.

AEC was established in 2015 to serve the upstream operations including drilling and well services in Kuwait in partnership with global oil and gas service companies. It has grown its fleet of modern rigs rapidly while deploying in-the-field capabilities successfully. Expanding its asset base and its team of professional operators serves the needs of the local market with an eye on cross-border expansion.

Founded in 1987 and listed on the Premier Market segment of Boursa Kuwait, NIC remains at the forefront of excellence and innovation. Renowned for its proficiency in mergers and acquisitions, capital raising, listing, and advisory services, NIC has earned widespread acclaim and trust from clients spanning diverse sectors.

OpenAI gives ChatGPT new powers to see, hear

SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI on Monday released a higher performing and even more human-like version of the artificial intelligence technology that underpins its popular generative tool ChatGPT, making it free to all users.

The update to OpenAI's flagship product landed a day before Google is expected to make its own announcements about Gemini, the search engine giant's own AI tool that competes with ChatGPT head on. "We're very, very excited to bring GPT-4o to all of our free users out there," Chief Technology Officer Mira Murati said at the highly anticipated launch event in San Francisco.

The new model GPT-4o - the "O" stands for omni - will be rolled out in OpenAI's products over the next few weeks, the company said, with paid customers having unlimited access to the tool.

The company said the model could generate content or understand commands in voice, text, or images. "The new voice (and video) mode is the best computer interface I've ever used. It feels like AI from the movies," said OpenAI CEO Sam Altman in a blog post. Altman has previously pointed to the Scarlett Johansson character in the movie "Her" as an inspiration for where he would like AI interactions to go.

"Talking to a computer has never felt really natural for me; now it does," he added. Murati and engineers from OpenAI demonstrated the new powers of GPT-4o at the virtual event, posing challenges to the beefed-up version of the ChatGPT chatbot. The demo mainly featured OpenAI staff members asking questions to the voiced ChatGPT, which responded with jokes and human-like banter.

The bot served as an interpreter from English to Italian, interpreted facial expressions and walked one user through a difficult algebra problem. The company said that GPT-4o had the same powers as the previous version when it came to text, reasoning, and coding intelligence, and set new industry standards for multilingual conversations, audio, and vision.

In one demonstration, ChatGPT successfully interpreted an employee's surroundings through a smartphone camera, speaking in a friendly, feminine voice, not unlike the AI bot in the film "Her".

"Hmmm from what I can see it looks like you're in some kind of recording or production set-up with lights, tripods... you might be gearing up to shoot a video or make an announcement?" the ChatGPT bot said.

Anticipation was high in recent weeks that OpenAI would release an AI-amped version of an online search tool to compete with Google search engine, but on Friday Altman said this would not be the case. Observers were also waiting for the launch of GPT-5, but Altman said last week that his company would "take our time on releases of major new models."

The event is just the latest episode in the AI arms race that has seen OpenAI-backer Microsoft surpass Apple as the world's biggest company by market capitalization.

OpenAI and Microsoft are in a heated rivalry with Google to be generative AI's major player, but Facebook-owner Meta and upstart Anthropic are also making big moves to compete.

All the companies are scrambling to come up with ways to cover generative AI's exorbitant costs, much of which goes to chip giant Nvidia and its powerful GPU semiconductors. Making the new model available to all users may raise questions about OpenAI's path to monetization amid doubts that everyday users are ready to pay a subscription. Until now, only lower performing versions of OpenAI or Google's chatbots were available to customers for free. — AFP

Kuwait's BIG Holding plans to list 30% stake on Boursa Kuwait

DUBAI: Kuwait's Beyout Investment Group (BIG) Holding, which provides human resources and real estate services, said on Tuesday it plans to float a 30 percent stake on Boursa Kuwait in the first potential listing in the country in around two years.

The final offering price will be determined through a bookbuilding process to be held May 19-23 and the shares are expected to debut on the Kuwaiti stock exchange next month.

There has been a flurry of initial public offerings (IPOs) in the Gulf region in recent years, including from private businesses, as part of broad plans to deepen capital markets, grow the private sector and

attract investment. So far this year, private firms such as Saudi Arabian flour mills company Modern Mills and UAE super-market franchisee Spinneys have listed, while others such as SMASCO and BIG Holding have announced intentions to float.

"The best way that the private sector grows is by becoming public and (to) grow the stock market of the same country. I think Kuwait would be following the same trend that is coming in the region," BIG Holding CEO Abdulrahman Al-Khannah told Reuters.

Founded in 1991, the firm provides manpower solutions and manages real estate projects including build-operate-transfer and public-private partner-



BIG Holding CEO Abdulrahman Al-Khannah

US to raise tariffs on \$18bn of China imports including chips

WASHINGTON: The United States is hiking tariffs on \$18 billion worth of Chinese imports, targeting strategic sectors like electric vehicles, batteries, steel and critical minerals, the White House said Tuesday. The decision - which drew a fiery response from Beijing - comes as President Joe Biden gears up for a re-run of his 2020 contest with Republican rival Donald Trump in November's election, with officials criticizing Trump's record on trade as they made the announcement.

The tariff rate on EVs is set to quadruple to 100 percent this year while the tariff for semiconductors will surge from 25 percent to 50 percent by next year, the White House said.

The action is aimed at encouraging China to "eliminate its unfair trade practices regarding technology transfer, intellectual property and innovation," it added. This follows a review of tariffs imposed during a trade war between Washington and Beijing, during which then-president Trump introduced levies on some \$300 billion in goods from China.

China's commerce ministry warned that the new tariffs would "severely affect the atmosphere for bilateral cooperation," urging Washington to cancel the measures. Calling this a politicization

of economic issues, Beijing added that it "resolutely opposes" the actions. The so-called Section 301 investigation was the primary tool the Trump administration used to justify tariffs, and the US Trade Representative is required to look into the impact of the levies after four years.

Tuesday's actions were also taken under Section 301 of the Trade Act. Beyond EVs and semiconductors, Washington is roughly tripling tariffs on some steel and aluminum products, and on lithium-ion EV batteries and battery parts. The tariff rate on natural graphite and some other critical minerals will surge from zero to 25 percent, and that on solar cells doubles to 50 percent.

But some tariff hikes, such as on non-EV lithium-ion batteries, take effect later to allow for a transitional period as the country builds up its domestic battery production, a senior US official said on condition of anonymity. Beijing's foreign ministry said it "opposes unilateral tariff hikes in violation of WTO rules" when asked about reports of the new measures.

China "will take all necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests", spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Tuesday.

The latest moves impact both products already targeted by the Trump tariffs as well as additional ones. The levies will ensure that investments in jobs, spurred by Biden's policies, are not undercut by "undepreciated exports from China," National Economic Advisor Lael Brainard said. The Biden administration has pumped massive funding into areas like semiconductor manufacturing and research, alongside efforts to boost green investments.

Australia touts plans to become 'renewable energy superpower'

CANBERRA: Australia touted plans to become a "renewable energy superpower" in an annual budget Tuesday, but the government's books also laid bare the depth of the economy's dependence on mining and fossil fuels.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers said the country was on track to bank a budget surplus of US\$6 billion (Aus\$9 billion) this year, a windfall propped-up in part by surging prices for iron ore and coal. While heavily-polluting commodities were projected to fuel Australia's economy for years to come, Chalmers said the mining giant could no longer ignore the clamor for clean energy.

"We know the global energy transformation represents a golden opportunity for Australia," Chalmers said in his budget speech. "If we hang back, the chance for a new generation of jobs and prosperity will pass us by. This budget invests in our renewable energy superpower ambitions."

At the centre of the budget was the fledgling "Made in Australia" program, which aims to catalyze homegrown clean energy and advanced manufacturing industries.

Modeled on the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States, it will pour US\$15 billion into solar panel manufacturing, low-carbon fuels, tax breaks for critical miner-



als, and other priority areas. Blessed with abundant sunshine, windswept coastlines, and teeming deposits of rare metals and minerals, Australia's potential as a renewables superpower has been talked up for years.

But these dreams have invariably come to nothing as policy makers grapple with the country's long reliance on iron ore, thermal coal, and natural gas - which remain among its most lucrative exports. Iron ore alone accounted for 18 percent of Australia's exports last year, according to budget papers.

"But those massive economic windfalls from mining and coal will soon start to drop off as economies decarbonize," energy analyst Tim Buckley told AFP. "With this plan in the works, and if we make the right choices, that renewables dream could become a reality within the next decade."

Buckley said the push for local manufacturing could

ship deals. Its customers include US army contractors as well as the Kuwait Oil Company. Al-Khannah said the IPO would help to diversify the company's shareholder base while boosting growth opportunities in the countries where it operates. BIG Holding held early roadshows with over 40 potential investors in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and London, including institutional investors and funds, between mid December and mid January, he said.

The firm has delivered average revenue growth of 12.6 percent and a normalized core profit margin of around 30.4 percent over the last three years. Proceeds from the offering, for which National Investments Company (NIC) and EFG Hermes UAE have been appointed as joint coordinators, will go to the selling shareholders. Companies domiciled in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region raised \$1.2 billion in IPO proceeds in the first quarter of this year, down 66 percent compared from a year earlier, according to data from consulting firm EY. — Agencies

But Brainard accused Beijing of powering its growth "at the expense of others." "As a result of unfair practices, China's anticipated manufacturing capacity in solar is more than double the forecasts of near term global demand," she said. Brainard also took aim at the Trump administration, saying it "failed to follow through" with investments, and to ensure China complied with a deal marking a truce in the trade war.

Hiking tariffs on Chinese EVs would be "a pre-emptive strike" given that few such cars are imported, said Paul Triolo, partner for China at Albright Stonebridge Group. The impact from EV tariffs alone is expected to be minimal. "It is really a signal to US automakers that the Biden administration is protecting the industry from Chinese EVs," he told AFP.

But tariffs covering EV batteries and supply chains would be "a much bigger issue, because of the dominance of Chinese companies in the finished battery space and for critical minerals across the battery supply space," he said. China is likely to retaliate with tariff increases of its own, Triolo said.

Beijing is likelier to retaliate strongly if Washington takes measures seen as suppressing Chinese companies, like imposing more trade restrictions on semiconductor firms. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told reporters Monday, when asked about possible tariffs: "I'm hopeful that they will see that the actions that we're taking are targeted." She added in a statement that issues like overcapacity "will not be solved in a day," and that she would continue to directly address concerns with Chinese counterparts. — AFP

also limit Australia's exposure to external economic shocks. "We can accept that China has cornered the market in an area like solar panels, and resolve to just buy from them forever," he said. "Or we can build some domestic capacity as a kind of energy security policy." Many climate activists already question whether Australia is capable of phasing out fossil fuels, or is simply paying lip service to the idea. Just last week the Australian government made clear its intent to continue relying on natural gas - a fossil fuel - as a key source of energy over the next 30 years.

Australia will spend big as it embarks on its biggest military overhaul in a generation, a raft of investments largely designed to keep a rising China at bay. First and foremost is a 30-year plan for Australia to manufacture its own nuclear-powered submarines, part of the tripartite AUKUS pact between Washington, London and Canberra. Early trickles of AUKUS funding, outlined in the budget, will help Australia recruit and train the 20,000-strong workforce needed to build a nuclear industry from scratch.

Meanwhile, the army will be re-tooled with an arsenal of missiles and long-range strike weapons, while six Hunter class frigates and three Hobart class destroyers will bolster an ageing naval fleet.

Australia has also earmarked major upgrades to key military bases on its northern coast, the first line of defense if flashpoints in the Taiwan Strait or South China Sea one day spiral out of control. This military muscle will be complemented by a renewed diplomatic push into the South Pacific, where China has long been eager to build its influence. — AFP

Business

Egypt Kuwait Holding achieves net profit of \$62.6 million in Q1 2024

Attributable net income rose by 4.3% y-o-y to \$62.6 million

KUWAIT: Egypt Kuwait Holding recorded revenues of \$193.0 million in Q1 2024, primarily impacted by the softness in urea prices globally following the all-time peak reached in 2022, as well as the devaluation of the EGP towards the end of the quarter. Despite the volatile operating conditions, EKH's profitability reflects continued resilience, with gross profit and EBITDA margins standing at 44 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Net profit closed at \$71.9 million, resulting in a net profit margin of 37 percent, while EKH's attributable net income rose by 4.3 percent year-over-year to \$62.6 million.

Supported by EKH's solid performance and strong cashflows, the company distributed a dividend of USD six cents per share to shareholders in April 2024, affirming the company's unwavering commitment to delivering sustainable value to shareholders. EKH has successfully distributed over \$67 million in dividends in FY 2023 and approximately \$800 million since inception.

Commenting on the Group's performance, EKH Chairman Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi said: "During the first quarter of the year, we continued to reap the rewards of the strategic investments we've diligently made over the past year, aimed at diversifying, and strengthening our portfolio. We worked meticulously to grow our earnings, despite challenging macroeconomic conditions, building a solid base for the rest of the year and reiterating EKH's resilience and ability to deliver superior returns."

"In 2024, we will focus on directing our main efforts towards exploring expansion opportunities in regional markets and venturing into new and diverse sectors. Our goal remains to foster sustainable growth and optimize revenue streams in foreign currencies. Concurrently, our team remains unwavering in its commitment to enhancing profitability. With steadfast confidence in our new executive management, we plan on capitalizing on these achievements to propel the company along its growth trajectory."

Commenting on the Group's performance, EKH CEO Jon Rokk said: "I am pleased to report on EKH's performance during my first quarter as Company CEO. During Q1 2024, the company achieved revenues of \$193 million, accompanied by a gross profit margin of 44 percent. This resulted in a notable y-o-y increase of 4.3 percent in net profit attributable to the company, reaching \$62.6 million."

"Our strategic investments in fertilizers and petrochemicals front have ensured resilience and yielded positive results despite challenges such as global urea price volatility and the EGP devaluation. Specifically, investments in SpreaMisr have opened up lucrative opportunities, driven by increased production capacities in the existing production lines and the opera-

EKH strategic investments continue to bear fruit with the Group recording a top-line of \$193.0 million in Q1 2024, demonstrating solid profitability with gross profit margin and EBITDA margin recording 44 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Attributable net income reached \$62.6 million, supported by resilient performance and growth across the business.



EKH Chairman Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi

EKH CEO Jon Rokk



Alexandria fertilizer factory

tion of new production lines. Meanwhile, at AlexFert, revenues are gradually rebounding following peaks in urea prices, with our increased ownership of 75.33 percent significantly enhancing USD-denominated revenues."

"In the Energy and Energy-Related segment, ONS has showcased robust performance driven by expansion efforts, including enlarging our concession area to

440 sq km and drilling two new wells. Meanwhile, NatEnergy's downstream natural gas distribution subsidiaries have prioritized expanding household installations, while Kahraha continued to reap the rewards of our new concession awarded in 2022 for the 10th of Ramadan South Industrial Developers Zone, effectively doubling its distribution volumes y-o-y." "In our Insurance & Diversified segment, Delta Insurance's

growth has offset the adverse effects of EGP devaluation, while Bedayti, our microfinance subsidiary, has experienced rapid growth since its establishment, with revenues up by 32 percent y-o-y and net profit up by 18 percent y-o-y in the Q1 2024."

"Lastly, I am pleased to add that we are working hard to ensure that our Nilewood production facility, a joint venture with renowned German MDF producer Holzwerkstoffe GmbH, is on track to commence operations, marking growth and diversifying revenue streams as well as positively impacting our bottom line."

"As we move forward into 2024, our primary focus remains on executing growth initiatives to enhance scale and create value for our stakeholders while also exploring opportunities for regional expansion and diversification into new sectors, all with the aim of driving growth and resilience across our business."

Egypt Kuwait Holding Co cash dividends

The company distributed cash dividends of six cents per share for 2023, with \$67 million in total. This distribution was made possible by the company's outstanding performance and strong cash flows. Consequently, the total cash dividends distributed since the company's establishment amount to \$800 million approximately.

Founded in 1997, Egypt Kuwait Holding Company is listed on both the Kuwait and Egyptian stock markets. Over the past decades, it has emerged as one of the largest, leading, and fastest-growing investment companies in the Middle East. Its diverse portfolio spans five major sectors: fertilizers, petrochemicals, gas upstream and distribution, power production and distribution, insurance and non-bank financial services. The Egypt Kuwait Holding Company is aiming to continue achieving high return on investment rates for its investors based on a strong investment portfolio and a competent management team.

\$2.2bn pledged to end deadly cooking methods

PARIS: The International Energy Agency announced on Tuesday that \$2.2 billion had been pledged by governments and companies to improve access to less deadly and polluting cooking methods in Africa. More than two billion people cook on basic stoves or over open fires and exposure to this smoke is a leading cause of early death around the world. These cooking methods also harm the planet, with carbon-absorbing forests stripped for firewood and emissions from burning these dirty fuels a major contributor to global warming.

Only around one-third of the money needed to drive the global switch to cleaner cooking methods like LPG or electric stoves is raised every year, according to the IEA. At a world-first summit, representatives from 60 nations and leaders from business and development sectors pledged \$2.2 billion to help African households combat the scourge. "This summit has delivered an emphatic commitment to an issue that has been ignored by too many people, for too long," said IEA executive director Fatih Birol, whose agency co-hosted the Paris gathering with the African Development Bank. "We still have a long way to go," he added.

A little over half of the money pledged came from the private sector, with around 30 percent in the form of favourable loans from public funds and the rest in carbon credits. It is still modest: the IEA says around \$8 billion is needed annually to address the problem, half of that in Africa, but only around \$2.5 billion is raised worldwide. Progress has been made in Asia but in sub-Saharan Africa, four out of five households still rely on highly polluting cooking fuels like wood, charcoal, coal, animal dung and agricultural waste. — AFP

Amazon cloud division head steps down

SAN FRANCISCO: The head of Amazon's AWS cloud computing business, Adam Selipsky, who was helping lead the company's expansion into AI, told workers he was stepping down Tuesday. Amazon Web Services is a key subsidiary of the tech giant, having made \$25 billion worldwide in the first quarter, capitalizing on the growing appetite among businesses for remote computer and artificial intelligence services.

In a memo to staff, Selipsky said he was leaving with "mixed emotions," but "given the state of the business and the leadership team, now is an appropriate moment for me to make this transition."

Selipsky was promoted to the leadership of AWS in 2021, replacing Andy Jassy, who took over the reins of the entire Amazon juggernaut when founder Jeff Bezos stepped down as CEO. Matt Garman, senior vice pres-

ident of sales and marketing at AWS, will succeed Selipsky, Amazon said.

"Matt has an unusually strong set of skills and experiences for his new role," said Amazon CEO Jassy. A pioneer of e-commerce, Amazon also dominates the cloud. AWS had 31 percent of the cloud computing market at the end of 2023, according to Stocklytics. But rivals Microsoft and Google are gaining ground with their cloud businesses, with 24 percent and 11 percent market share respectively.

The race has become particularly heated since the deployment of ChatGPT-style artificial intelligence that the cloud companies are offering to clients who want to buy into the AI revolution. But AWS is less known to the public and Amazon does not have the flagship AI brands such as ChatGPT or Google's Gemini that are being deployed across those firms' lines of products.

AWS in April cut hundreds of jobs, particularly in sales and marketing, to better focus on AI and other priorities.

But Selipsky told AFP in an interview on April 13 that AI has not replaced any of the cloud platform workers. "AWS has thousands of job postings online today, and yesterday, and the day before, and we will also have (them) tomorrow," he said. — AFP



Adam Selipsky

US wholesale prices rise more than expected in April

WASHINGTON: US wholesale prices rose continued to accelerate last month, according to fresh US government data published Tuesday, rising by more than expected on a sharp rise in the cost of services. The rise provides yet more evidence that the US Federal Reserve's fight against inflation is far from over, and will likely lead the US central bank to keep interest rates at their current highs for longer than previously thought.

The producer price index (PPI) jumped by 0.5 percent in April, the Labor Department said in a statement, marking a sharp increase from a revised 0.1 percent slowdown a month earlier. This was well above market expectations of a 0.3 percent monthly rise, according to Briefing.com. Wholesale prices rose at an annual rate of 2.2 percent for the 12 months ending in April, its highest level for a year. "PPI inflation surprised to the upside in April across measures," High Frequency Economics chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients. — AFP



Egypt Kuwait Holding

Transformative Investments Addressing Global Challenges

First Quarter 2024 Results

Total Revenues

193 Million Dollars



Net Profit Attributable to Shareholders

62.6 Million Dollars

With an Increase of 4.3%

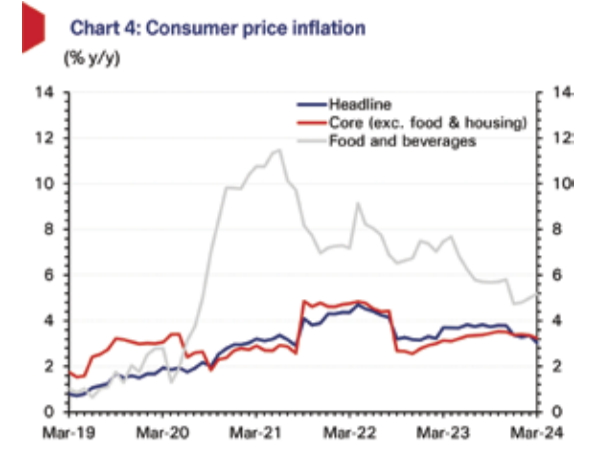
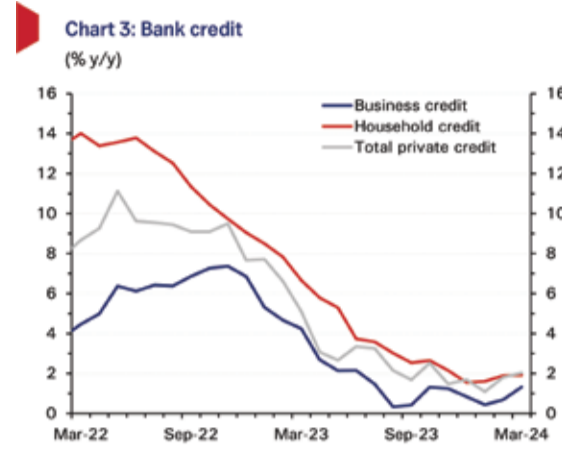
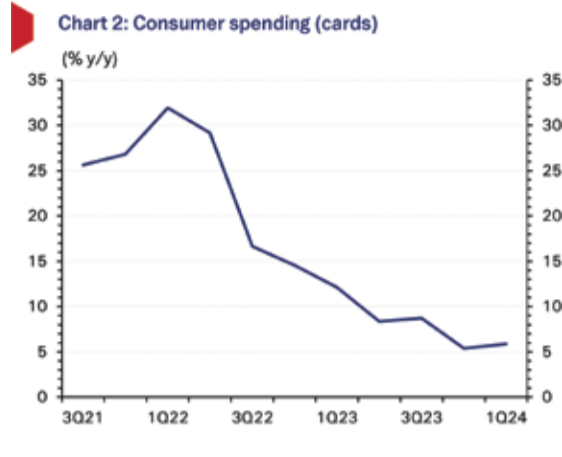
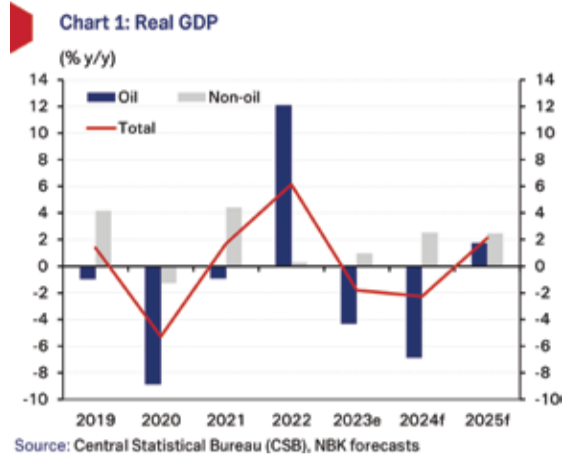
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Business

NBK ECONOMIC BRIEF

Oil sector cuts weigh on Kuwait's GDP growth; country to post modest deficit

Inflation to ease; moderate non-oil growth expected in 2024-25



KUWAIT: Kuwait's economic growth was weighed down last year by cuts to oil output and a further slowdown in consumer spending. Non-oil growth could pick up this year albeit from a low base, but the near-term recovery is unlikely to be a vigorous one given still elevated interest rates by recent standards, projected cuts in government spending and ongoing structural impediments which the new government should look to address. The public finances have flipped back into deficit, with capex being squeezed. Accelerating economic reforms are an upside risk to the outlook, while lower oil prices and persistently high interest rates are downside risks.

Economic growth has been ranging at modest levels with oil sector output constrained by Kuwait's participation in OPEC+ production cuts (-400 kb/d since 2022) and subdued non-oil growth following its post-pandemic consumption-driven boost of 2021. Oil GDP is expected to contract further in 2024 (-6.9 percent) as Kuwait extends its deeper voluntary crude oil production cuts (-135 kb/d to 2.4 mb/d) from H1 to year-end. Next year should see some of these volumes return, albeit gradually, to ease oil market tightness. Headline growth, estimated at -1.8 percent in 2023, is not expected to turn positive until 2025 (+2.1 percent).

Non-oil growth

Growth in the non-oil sector, meanwhile, has been relatively muted, dropping to 0.3 percent in 2022, according to official figures, before rising to an estimated 1 percent in 2023 (based on provisional GDP figures for Q1-Q3 2023). Some pick-up is expected for 2024-25, at 2.5 percent per year. This part-

ly reflects the low base of previous years – which is well below trend – but also that the slowdown in consumption growth through 2022-23 has largely run its course and that investment spending could pick up following a substantial rise in project awards last year. We also believe that other activity metrics such as credit growth (only +1.7 percent in 2023) and real estate sales (-22 percent in 2023) have likely bottomed out, while interest rates could also be cut. Still, any near-term recovery is unlikely to be vigorous given the still-high level of global interest rates, scheduled cuts in government spending and also structural impediments to economic growth, especially bureaucracy, which the new government appointed in May 2024 should look to address. One positive has been the 615 kb/d Al-Zour refinery project, which since its launch in 2022 has ramped up output of higher value-added products for export.

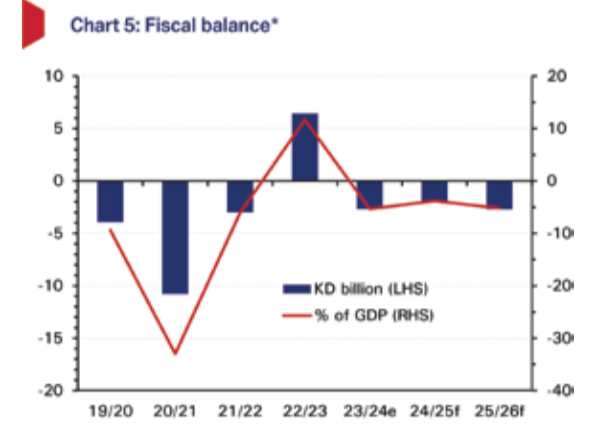
Inflation

Inflation has slowly trended lower (+3.0 percent in March) after persisting in the 3.7 percent range for most of 2023 on broad-based price rises, but especially in the food and clothing categories. Amid softer consumer demand versus earlier years, we expect inflation to fall to 2.5 percent (year average) by 2025 from 3.6 percent in 2023. Meanwhile, US monetary is expected to be loosened through 2024-25. The Central Bank of Kuwait's policy discount rate currently stands at 4.25 percent, having increased by 275bps over the recent tightening cycle that began in 2022, versus 525 bps of tightening by the US Fed.

Deficits in the near-term

The public finances, following a first surplus in 2022 (11.5 percent of GDP) since 2014, are estimated to have reverted to a shortfall in FY2023/24 of KD 2.7 billion (-5.3 percent of GDP). This is on the back of double-digit expenditure growth (inflated by one-off items) and a sharp drop in oil revenues. This deficit is, nevertheless, well below budget estimates (KD 6.8 billion) thanks mostly to higher-than-expected oil prices (\$84 versus \$70 in the budget).

For the current fiscal year, in line with the still-to-be ratified budget, we see expenditures falling (-5 percent y/y) from the inflated FY23/24 base, which, with oil prices broadly steady, should result in a narrower deficit (3.8 percent of GDP). Our base case is that the government returns to a mildly more expansionary fiscal stance in FY25/26 (spending +4.5 percent y/y) focusing on accelerating investment spending on delayed infrastructure projects. This should support demand in the economy, while seeing the deficit widen slightly. Fiscal reform remains a priority for the government. Key targets in the government's 2023-2027 work agenda included setting medium-term expenditure ceilings, improving procurement practices, reforming subsidies, repricing public services, launching a corporate tax and approving the public debt law. Kuwait has preserved a very high sovereign credit rating over the past year and has enormous fiscal and external buffers held by the KIA (more than \$930 billion), but access to the latter remains restricted by law. The flip back into persistent fiscal deficits from last year could eventu-



ally (over a run of years) result in a liquidity squeeze, until the contentious debt law is approved.

Lower oil prices the main risk

While our base case is that progress on economic reforms remains slow-going, accelerating reforms and investment-focused policy-making is a major upside risk to the outlook. Meanwhile, higher oil prices could ease budgetary pressures and result in higher public spending that boosts demand, while lower interest rates could deliver a faster recovery in consumer spending. Commensurately, a sharp drop in oil prices and persistently high interest rates are downside risks.

China giant Alibaba posts modest yearly revenue growth

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba announced Tuesday a modest increase in annual revenue, as the firm pursues a major overhaul and regulatory curbs on the country's tech sector are relaxed. The Hangzhou-based company is one of the biggest players in China's tech industry, with operations spanning retail, digital payment, artificial intelligence and entertainment. Alibaba posted revenue of 941.2 billion yuan (\$130.4 billion) in the fiscal year ending March 31, up eight percent year-on-year, a statement by the firm showed.

Net income for the period stood at 71.3 billion yuan, up nine percent year-on-year, the statement also showed. Alibaba announced plans last year to undergo a significant restructuring that would see it split into six entities, each managed by its own CEO and board of directors.

"During fiscal year 2024, we repurchased US\$12.5 billion of shares and our board of directors has approved a \$4.0 billion dividend for fiscal year 2024," said Toby Xu, the group's Chief Financial Officer. China's tech sector has suffered under a regulatory crackdown by Beijing that began in 2020, prompted in part by the government's fears that too much power and capital had been amassed by a few firms.

But Beijing has signaled recently that the period of intense regulatory scrutiny is winding down, as new headwinds threaten to drag on the world's second-largest economy. Alibaba's decision to restructure is seen by analysts as intended to make the firm more nimble and help isolate parts of the business from potential future crackdowns.

But the firm's planned overhaul has encountered obstacles. In March Alibaba withdrew a planned initial public offering (IPO) for its logistics arm Cainiao, saying it would support the platform "to execute a long-term strategic expansion of its global logistics network".

And last November saw the firm cancel a spin-off of its cloud computing business—a planned move that was also part of the overhaul blueprint. Uncertainty about Alibaba's future development has persisted ever since top leaders in Beijing scuttled a planned IPO of its financial services arm, Ant Group, in late 2020. The cancelled public listing—which would likely have been the biggest in history—was followed one month later by an announcement that Alibaba was under formal investigation in China for alleged monopolistic practices.

Alibaba on Tuesday said it was still committed to long-delayed plans to convert to a dual primary listing in both New York and Hong Kong, nearly two years after announcing the plan. "We have been preparing for our primary listing in Hong Kong and currently expect to complete this conversion by the end of August 2024," it said in its filing on Tuesday. Tuesday's release of annual earnings was the first since Alibaba announced in September the surprise departure of former CEO Daniel Zhang. — AFP

NBK first bank in Kuwait to adopt 'DHL GoGreen Plus' service

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has entered into a strategic partnership with DHL, a prominent global logistics company, to use the "DHL GoGreen Plus" service, strengthening its leading position as Kuwait's first bank to participate in this global initiative.

The collaboration underscores the Bank's commitment to advancing sustainability efforts into the business, culture, and operations, thereby facilitating the shift towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy. This strongly aligns with NBK's pledge to attain carbon neutrality by 2060.

Through its participation in GoGreen Plus, NBK ensures that all its international shipments are transported using Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) rather than traditional jet fuel. This transition leads to a substantial reduction in carbon emissions. Under this strategic partnership, NBK will be awarded an annual sustainability certificate, which was announced to NBK's Group Administration Services during the signing ceremony of the agreement.

Commenting on the partnership, Fahad Al-Thuwaini, GM – Head of Group Administration Services at NBK stated, "This step is part of NBK's efforts to move towards a sustainable future, focusing on industry leading ESG practices, aligning with our goals of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, and our aspiration to achieve net-zero operationally by 2035."

"Last year, NBK took decisive steps into embedding ESG principles into its supply chain management by revising the bank's procurement policies and procedures, implementing a more sustainable procurement strategy and methodology," Al-Thuwaini added.

On behalf of DHL, Makram Raad- Country Manager Kuwait said, "We are thrilled to forge this strategic alliance with NBK, a financial institution of significant size and stellar reputation. Being the first bank in Kuwait to sign up for DHL GoGreen Plus service underscores NBK's commitment to environmental sustainability. This partnership will bolster

Foxconn reports sharp rise in Q1 net profit

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn on Tuesday reported a 72 percent jump in net profit during the first three months of 2024 as demand for artificial intelligence technology grows. The firm—also known by its official name Hon Hai Precision Industry—is the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer and assembles devices for several companies, most notably Apple's iPhones. It said net profit for January-March rose to \$679 million from \$396 million in the same period last year.

While the boost is the third consecutive quarter of



A group photo taken during the event.

our joint efforts to reduce emissions, advancing our aim of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050."

Raad highlighted that the "GoGreenPlus" service enables DHL's customers to mitigate the carbon emissions linked to their air cargo by utilizing sustainable aviation fuel. This fuel is produced from alternative raw materials sourced from sustainable energy, such as cooking oil, waste, and hydrogen. SAF can provide greenhouse gas emission reductions of up to 80 percent over its lifecycle compared with the conventional jet fuel it replaces.

Acknowledging NBK's leadership in sustainability both locally and regionally, the bank was recently awarded the Best Bank in the Middle East for ESG-Related Loans Award 2024, by Global Finance. In its fourth annual survey, Global Finance acknowledged prominent global and regional organizations for their sustainable finance initiatives in 2023, which significantly mitigated the adverse effects of climate change and fostered the development of a more sustainable future for humanity. In 2023, NBK embarked on a new trajectory in its ESG strategy by integrating ESG standards into business activities and expanding its offerings to green mortgage loans, consumer loans for electric vehicles, sustainability-related financing, and low-emission housing loans.

profit growth, it is still below expectations, and Foxconn spokesperson James Wu sought to paint an upbeat picture during Tuesday's earnings call.

"We expect that the strong demand for AI servers will bring a new huge market, which is why we are optimistic about this industry," he said. He added that "Hon Hai is almost the only manufacturer that can develop every key component by itself, from modules, basic servers, high-speed network switches, to data centers".

Foxconn's leadership also released a statement right before the earnings call to reaffirm its commitment to Japanese electronics maker Sharp, in which the Taiwanese firm holds the largest stake of more than 30 percent. Its low base in 2023 was attributed to the losses of Sharp, according to comments made during the call. "(Sharp) listed asset impairment... which affected Foxconn's non-operational and net profit performances in the first quarter," said Wu. But "the worst is behind Sharp", he added. "Its future only gets better from here."



Fahad Al-Thuwaini and Makram Raad during the signing ceremony.

For the second consecutive year, NBK has upheld its robust ratings in the CDP initiative, earning a score of "C" in the categories of Climate Change and Forests in 2023. This accomplishment reinforces the bank's prominent standing as the only bank in Kuwait to secure a rating from CDP, a global non-profit organization acclaimed for its environmental disclosure platform. This recognition positions NBK as one of the leading financial institutions in the GCC for upholding the highest standards of environmental stewardship.

The company said Sharp would be transforming its Sakai factory into an "AI data centre", with no further details about what that would entail. Wu said Foxconn intended to collaborate more with the Japanese firm "in the areas of smart products for people, vehicles, home and office... to seize new opportunities in the AI server technology revolution".

Foxconn had credited its recent steady performance growth to strong demand for generative AI, a technology that has seen a surge in demand in recent years. And as a downturn in China has impacted consumer sentiment, and with the bulk of its manufacturing supply chain and investments there, Foxconn is hoping to expand beyond electronics assembly. Despite being China's largest private-sector employer with more than a million workers, Foxconn is looking to diversify its manufacturing supply chain after production was impacted by three years of strict COVID policies, a bout of industrial unrest and diplomatic tensions with the United States. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2024

French Miss Africa contests proudly celebrate dual cultures in Paris



Joueriadou Cherif Haidira (left), Lyse Amisshah (center) and Ama Kouadio (right) stand on stage after the announcement of the results of the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest in Paris. — AFP photos

The recent scene in a Paris theatre was loud and tumultuous with hundreds of spectators backing their favorites in the Miss Ivory Coast/France 2024 contest, one of many events at which France's African diaspora celebrate their dual culture. "Our parents made beautiful children in Europe," remarked a master of ceremony as the 19 contestants took to the stage wearing, in turn, traditional wax dresses, swimsuits and evening wear. After four hours of suspense, Lyse Amisshah, contestant number 18, was declared the winner.

"I am very touched, grateful and proud," said the 22-year-old student who was born in Paris to Ivorian parents. A few weeks earlier, during rehearsal, Amisshah - who wears her hair short and dyed blond - said that the contest represented more than just winning a beauty pageant. "It's a way to get as close to my roots as possible," she said, adding she had always been "steeped in Ivorian culture". Flora Sy, president of the Miss Ivory Coast/France committee, said that although the contestants are "very proud" to be French, "it is also important for us to show our Ivorian culture". Things weren't always this upbeat, remembered Mams Yaffa who organized the very first such African contest in France, Miss Mali/France in 2002.

'Role models'

Casual xenophobia and racism were widespread at the time, including at the highest level of state. As recently as 1991, Jacques Chirac, who later became French president, targeted "Muslims and blacks" in a speech, saying "the noise and the smell" they generated drove their French neighbors "crazy". The image



Joueriadou Cherif Haidira (left), Lyse Amisshah (center) and Ama Kouadio (right) are seen after the results were announced of the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest.

of Malians was "horribly stigmatizing", said Yaffa, who is now deputy mayor in Paris's 18th district where many residents are of African background. The first Miss Mali/France contest "provided the framework for activism" and the women competing were "role models for our younger sisters", he said.

Their activism was aimed at promoting hygiene, education and health, and to persuade women not to bleach their skin. Topics today include illegal immigration.

Miss Senegal/France recently talked with young people in Senegal "to convince them not to get into one of those boats", said Mamadou Thiam, who runs the Franco-Senegalese organizing committee.

Amisshah is using her fame to help end the "taboo" surrounding endometriosis in Ivory Coast. Close contacts created by the beauty contests between France and African countries sometimes contrasts with deteriorating diplomatic relations between France and

some of its former colonies on the continent. A recent example is Mali, where the military government asked French troops to leave after 10 years of anti-jihadist missions there. But Yaffa brushed off such tensions, saying his organization will never allow itself to become the "collateral damage" of diplomacy. "The problem is governments, not the population," he said. — AFP



Candidates dance on the stage during the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest in Paris.



Lyse Amisshah (center) celebrates her victory with other candidates on the stage after the results announcement of the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest.



Candidate Vanessa Sidibe (center) prepares backstage during the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest.



Candidate Shamira Didier puts on her makeup prior to the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest.



Candidates Shamira Didier (left) and Kristelle Leconte (right) look on backstage during the Miss Ivory Coast France beauty contest.

French art group uses brainwaves and AI to recreate landscapes

The hypercolour image of a dark hill and lava flow is pretty enough - but its high-tech artificial intelligence origins make it special. It is the product of the brainwaves of one member of French art collective Obvious, collected in an MRI machine at the Brain Institute of the Pitie Salpetriere hospital in Paris. "I was thinking very hard about a volcano," said Pierre Fautrel, one of the trio. He admits the resulting work was not exactly what he had in mind, "but it has kept the basic elements: a flaming mountain with flowing lava and a landscape on a light background".

The trio of thirty-somethings, Fautrel, Hugo Caselles-Dupre and Gauthier Vernier, already gained international attention in 2018 by selling an AI-generated artwork at Christie's in New York for more than

400,000 euros. For the latest project, "Mind to Image", they used an open-source program, MindEye, which is able to retrieve and reconstruct viewed images from brain activity, combining it with their own AI program to create artworks. They tried two different versions - one in which they looked at pictures and tried to replicate them simply through their brainwaves captured in the MRI. They also tried recreating their invented images based on written descriptions. For each, they repeated the process many times over 10 hours to create a database for their AI.

Reconstructing 'imagined' images "We've known for around 10 years that it's possible to reconstruct a viewed image from the activity of the visual cortex," said Alizee Lopez-Persem, a researcher at the Brain



Obvious Artists collective members (from left) Hugo Caselles-Dupre, Gauthier Vernier and Pierre Fautrel pose in Paris in front of the first print from their "Mind-to-Image" project. — AFP

Institute. "But not an 'imagined' image - that's a real challenge." It took the team many hours to sort through the data collected in the MRI, before Obvious fed it into their own AI program, which gives it a specific vibe influenced in part by Surrealism. "Two years ago, I would never have believed that this could exist," said Charles Mellerio, a neuro-radiologist who assisted the project.

He credits huge advances in the quality of medical imaging, as well as the sudden emergence of generative AI, which can create



Obvious Artists collective members (from left) Pierre Fautrel, Hugo Caselles-Dupre and Gauthier Vernier handle the first print from their "Mind-to-Image" project in Paris.

images from written prompts. "There are very real links between art and science," said Caselles-Dupre, while acknowledging that this technology "can be very scary if used in the wrong way". The results of their project will be on display at the Danysz gallery in Paris in October and the group says they want to expand the project to sound and video. — AFP

Cambodia's famed Kampot pepper withers in scorching heatwave



Cambodian farmer Mok Yen looks at dead pepper plants at his farm.



Cambodian farmer Nguon Lay checks peppercorns at his pepper farm.



Cambodian farmer Chhim Laem picks peppercorn from dead pepper plants at his farm in Kampot province. — AFP photos

Farmer Chhim Laem shakes his head as he walks between long rows of dead bushes, their brown leaves scorched by heat and drought that have devastated Cambodia's famed Kampot pepper crop. Known for its intense floral flavor, Kampot pepper is prized by top chefs around the world and sells for up to \$200 per kilo.

Nurtured for generations in two provinces in southwest Cambodia, the pepper industry survived the genocidal Khmer Rouge and decades of instability, but now faces the threat of extreme weather driven by climate change. "It is so hot this year, no rains, and we have no water to water the pepper plants," Laem told AFP. "So they all died."

South and Southeast Asia have sweltered in recent weeks under record temperatures, with governments closing schools, people dying of heatstroke and farmers praying for rain. Scientists warn that human-induced climate change will produce more frequent, longer and more intense heatwaves. In parts of Cambodia, the mercury nearly hit 43 degrees Celsius (109 Fahrenheit) in late April - after a



Peppercorns after being sorted by workers at a pepper farm.



Cambodian farmer Chan Deng points at the low water level of a pond at his pepper farm.



A worker dries peppercorn at a pepper farm in Cambodia's Kampot province.

six-month drought that pushed farmers to a breaking point. All 264 of Laem's pepper bushes perished, the 55-year-old explained, thanks to water shortages and hot weather. Production has grown in recent years, boosted by the European Union granting the spice a "protected geographical indication" in 2016 - meaning that only pepper grown in a designated area can be called Kampot.

The Kampot region produced about 120 tons of peppercorns last year, but farmers say that excessive heat and rain have made 2024 the worst on record. Laem earned about \$1,000 from his farm last year, but said he expects a fraction of that now. "I am so sad, but I don't know what to do," he said.

'The worst year'

Nguon Lay is a fourth-generation pepper farmer, harvesting nine tons from his nearby five-hectare farm last year. But the 71-year-old farmer expected to harvest nothing this year. "This year we meet the biggest obstacle," he said, while examining a dying pepper bush. Torrential rain destroyed the plants' flowers earlier in the season, with more dying in the prolonged drought that followed. "So it is the worst year. We don't know what to do. We see problems, but we can't resolve them," Lay said. Like other farmers, Lay said he knew the problems came from the weather and the environment.

Several ponds used to water his plants have dried up, and his workers only water the crop once every five days. "We have been prepared. We know about climate change, we have stored water, we built roofs to protect our peppers from the hot weather, but it was not enough."

"So many pepper plants are dying," he said, adding that he no longer goes to his farms because it is too painful. "This year we think we will get nothing," he said, adding that what little can be harvested is of lower quality because of the weather.

'Fight against nature'

Kampot pepper gained global acclaim during the French colonial occupation of Cambodia when it was exported widely, but the industry was nearly wiped out during the Khmer Rouge era. In more recent years it has bounced back, gracing hip restaurant menus across the globe. The pepper comes in green, black, red and white varieties - the color changes as the corn ripens, with green the youngest and white the most mature. Lay said consumers had no idea of the difficulties facing Kampot farmers, but they will soon see the effects. "For 2024 and 2025, we won't have abundant pepper for them to eat," he said. "It is zero!"

Kann Sinouch, president of the Kampot Pepper Promotion Association, said he expects this year's



This aerial photo shows a general view of a pepper farm in Cambodia's Kampot province.

pepper yield to be halved - and warned of an export shortage in 2025. He told AFP the changing weather meant farmers were unable to expand their farms, and instead were stuck struggling to keep their existing plants alive. But Chan Deng, who has been growing pepper since the 1960s, said he would not surrender to the unpredictable weather. "This year, it is strangely hot," Deng, 67, said. His pepper yield

plummeted from 300 kilos last year to around 10 kilos in 2024, with 20 percent of his plants dying due to the hot weather. But Deng said he will dig more ponds to store water, hoping that in three years a good yield will return. In the meantime, he said, "we will fight against nature". — AFP



A Cambodian farmer sorts pepper at a farm in Kampot province.



Cambodian farmer Chhim Laem holds dried peppercorn from dead pepper plants at his farm.



A worker packs peppercorn packets at a pepper farm in Kampot province.



A packet of Cambodia's Kampot pepper in Phnom Penh.



A worker sprays water on pepper plants at a farm.



Cambodian farmer Mok Yen picks peppercorn at his pepper farm.

Lifestyle

Swiss nursery lets robot do the talking

At in a circle on the nursery floor, a group of Swiss three-year-olds ask a robot called Nao questions about giraffes and broccoli. By the time these children become adults, interacting with robots may well be as commonplace as using a smartphone, experts believe. So one Lausanne creche has decided to give them a head start. Nao has been a regular visitor at the Nanosphere nursery on the campus of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology university since the New Year. He is what is called an "interactive learning companion" rather than a substitute teacher.

As the children were dropped off, Nao -- who is only 58 centimeters (less than two feet) tall -- stood on a bench to greet them at eye level. "Hello, my name is Nao. I'm happy to be at the Nanosphere today," he said, in a child-like high-pitched voice. "I left my planet some time ago to come and meet you. I look forward to getting to know you and being able to talk with you in the weeks ahead." Some children walked straight past, some waved, pointed,

touched his hand or simply gazed at him transfixed.

'No squabbling!'

"What will the children's future be like? Will they have to work with robots? Very probably yes," Olivier Delamadeleine, director-general of the Educalis group of nurseries and primary schools in Lausanne, told AFP. "So as we are in a place of learning it is important to get them familiarized early so that they're used to working with robots," he added. Back in the class, teacher Eve L'Eplattenier and the 14 children sat in a circle on the floor with Nao in the middle. "He's going to come and explain things to you," she said.

"Do you like broccoli? It's very good for your health," the robot said. L'Eplattenier picked him up and put him on a table. She said Nao would not grow any taller as children do. The children gathered excitedly around, some jockeying for space. "No squabbling!" Nao told them. Prompted by their teacher, the children tried to catch him out with questions such as, "I am an animal with



Preschoolers interact with educational and interactive robot Nao at "La Nanosphere" creche in the university campus of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, western Switzerland. — AFP photos

a trunk. What am I?" When he got it right, they giggled.

'Little know-it-all'

Gabriel Paffi, a masters student in robotics, sat in the corner feeding Nao his answers. He programmed the robot and is working on how to adapt it for a nursery's needs. "The goal is to make it automated so that he no longer needs me to move around and respond to the children," Paffi said. The first Nao robots hit the market in 2008. Now on generation six, the brand is owned by

the Germany-based United Robotics Group and more than 15,000 units have been sold.

The plan is for this Nao to spend several years in the Educalis nurseries as his capacities expand. L'Eplattenier said the children are thrilled when Nao turns up, and have bonded with their diminutive friend. "They are curious to see what he will say, what he will do," she said. "He's a companion with little tips and bits of advice. "I think he will quickly position himself as the little know-it-all of the group." As for the parents, they too are keen to see how Nao will settle in.

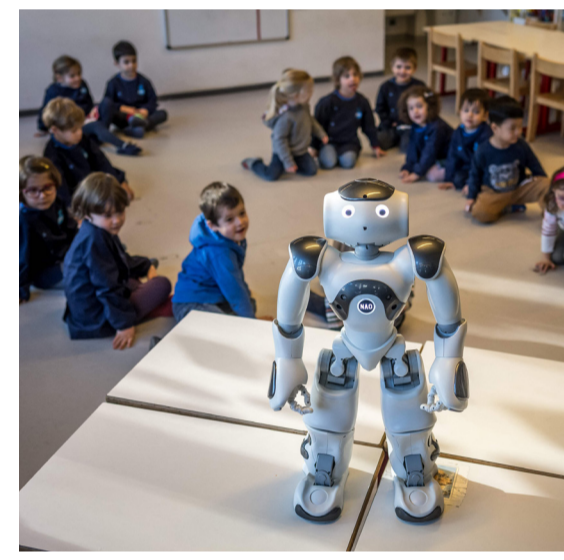
"I think it's a good way to help the children progress with new technologies," said Guillaume Quentin. When it was time for Nao to "fly back into space", each child in turn shuffled towards him to say goodbye and give him a wave. He replied to each by name. "I love you. I will come back soon," he told them. —AFP



Preschoolers interact with educational and interactive robot Nao at "La Nanosphere" creche.



Educational and interactive robot Nao welcomes a preschooler and her father at "La Nanosphere" creche.



Preschoolers look at the educational and interactive robot Nao at "La Nanosphere" creche.

Dutch fine Fortnite maker for 'pressuring' kids with ads



Dutch authorities slapped a 1.1-million-euro fine on Fortnite maker Epic Games on Tuesday, judging that vulnerable children were exploited and pressured into making purchases in the game's Item Shop. The Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) hit Epic Games with two separate fines totaling the equivalent of \$1.2 million, after finding that underage gamers "could experience pressure in several ways to make purchases." Epic Games has filed an objection against the decision and proposed several changes to the game that the ACM said would resolve their concerns. "The findings... contain significant factual errors about how Fortnite and the Item Shop operate," the firm said.

The ACM imposed the first fine over phrases in the game such as "Get it now" or "Buy now". Adverts directly exhorting children to make purchases are "an illegal aggressive commercial practice under all circumstances," said the ACM. The second fine was imposed for "deceptive" and "misleading" countdown timers that pressured children to make purchases quickly because they believed the item would disappear when the clock hit zero—which was not always the case. "Children's vulnerabilities were exploited and were thus pressured into making purchases," said ACM board member Cateautje Hijmans van den Bergh.

"With this decision, we are sending a clear signal: children must be able to play online games without being put under undue pressure," she said. It ordered Epic Games to comply with the order by June 10, 2024. The gaming firm has already implemented several changes, including removing countdown timers from the Item Shop worldwide, the ACM said. For under-18s in the Netherlands, the firm will only offer purchases in the Item Shop that are available for 48 hours or more.

"ACM is of the opinion that Epic will comply with the binding instruction if it implements the above changes," the statement said, adding that it would check after June 10. However, Epic Games said in its statement that the changes would result in a "poor experience for players." "While our appeal is pending, players in the Netherlands that are under the age of 18 will not be able to see or purchase items that are in the shop for less than 48 hours, beginning May 24, 2024," said the firm. —AFP

Hollywood heads to Cannes as off-screen drama soars



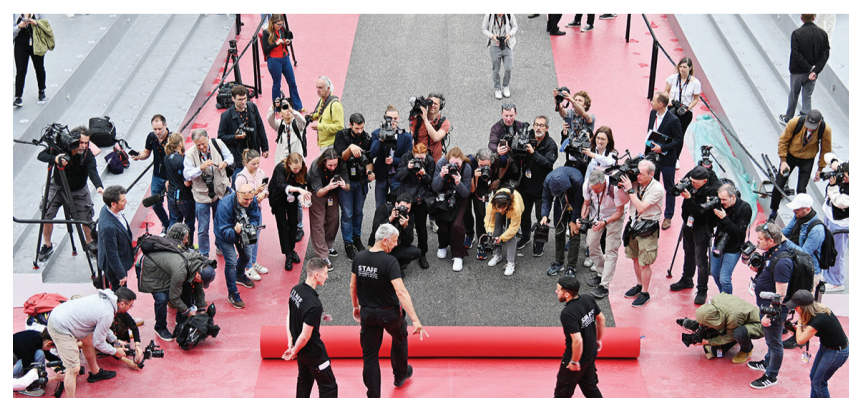
(From L) Cannes Film Festival director Thierry Fremaux, Festival President Iris Knobloch and members of the Jury of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival French actor and comedian Omar Sy, Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu, Turkish actress and screenwriter Ebru Ceylan, Lebanese director Nadine Labaki, US actress Lily Gladstone, US director and president of the Jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Greta Gerwig, Spanish director, producer, and writer Juan Antonio Bayona, French actress Eva Green and Italian actor Pierfrancesco Favino smile during a dinner of the jury at the Grand Hyatt Cannes Hotel Martinez, on the eve of the opening ceremony of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 13, 2024. — AFP photos

Hollywood stars jetted into Cannes on Tuesday as the world's premier film festival got under way in dramatic circumstances, including a fugitive director's daring escape from Iran, and a looming cloud of fresh #MeToo allegations. The 12-day festival officially kicks off in the evening with an honorary award for Meryl Streep -- just one of a host of international A-listers flocking to the sun-drenched Cote d'Azur, where legendary directors George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola top the VIP guest list. Coppola's decades-in-the-making epic "Megalopolis," an Ancient Rome-inspired saga set in a corrupt modern-day city, is the most anticipated of this year's entries for the top prize Palme d'Or.

"Cannes is important to him and he is important to Cannes. He comes as an artist," said festival head Thierry Fremaux, praising the 85-year-old director of "The Godfather". Twenty-two

films are competing for the affections of a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig. Richard Gere will star in Paul Schrader's "Oh Canada", recent Oscar winner Emma Stone reunites with Yorgos Lanthimos in "Kinds of Kindness", and Demi Moore tries her hand at horror in "The Substance". Outside the race for the Palme d'Or, George Miller's latest "Mad Max" instalment, "Furiosa", will get its world premiere on Wednesday, while Kevin Costner returns to the Western genre with "Horizon, an American Saga".

But darker, off-screen plotlines have emerged on the eve of the festival's 77th edition. In a last-minute twist, director Mohammad Rasoulof -- also competing for the Palme d'Or -- announced on Monday he had escaped in secret from Iran, just days after being sentenced to eight years in prison on security offences. Rasoulof had been under pressure from Iranian authorities to withdraw his latest film, "The



Employees check the last details before installing the red carpet down the stairs of the Palais des Festivals, ahead of the opening ceremony of 77th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

Seed of the Sacred Fig", from Cannes. "I am grateful to my friends, acquaintances, and people who kindly, selflessly, and sometimes by risking their lives, helped me get out of the border and reach a safe place on the difficult

and long path of this journey," he wrote on Instagram. Cannes director Thierry Fremaux said the festival was working with the French foreign ministry in the hope of ensuring Rasoulof can attend his premiere next week. —AFP

Sports

Mike Tyson says comeback at 57 was 'no-brainer'

Tyson faces Paul on July 20 at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington

NEW YORK: Former heavyweight king Mike Tyson said Monday his decision to step back into the ring at the age of 57 was a "no-brainer", brushing off recent criticism that he was too old to make a comeback. At a press conference in New York to promote his upcoming bout against YouTuber-turned-fighter Jake Paul, Tyson admitted training for his return had taken a toll.

"I'm doing great but my body is shit right now, I'm sore, I'm really sore," said Tyson, who faces Paul on July 20 at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, that is home to the Dallas Cowboys NFL team. But the boxer who terrorized the heavyweight division in the 1980s and 1990s as the self-styled "baddest man on the planet" insisted he had no reservations about lacing up his gloves again, nearly two decades after his last professional fight in 2005.

"It was a no-brainer," said Tyson. "He's a new up-and-coming guy on the scene. And I like shaking the sports world to its core and I am doing it now. It's just something that I want to do."

Tyson, who turns 58 in June, takes on the 27-year-old Paul in a professional bout comprising eight two-minute rounds that has been sanctioned by boxing authorities in Texas.

However several members of the boxing community, including former heavyweight champion De-

ontay Wilder, have voiced reservations about the fight, expressing concern Tyson could be hurt. Tyson dismissed the doubters though when asked for his response on Monday.

"I'm beautiful, that's all I can say," Tyson said. "The people who said that wish that they were up here. No one else can do this." Paul meanwhile said he is ready to deal with Tyson's experience and power. "A lot of people are doubting me," Paul said. "I see the comments, saying, 'if Jake wins this fight it's rigged' because of how incredible he looks. Age doesn't matter."

"He's a killer. He's a warrior. He's been doing this his whole life so it's second nature to him. I've only been doing this for four years and at a super high level. "On July 20, I'm going to show the world that I can outbox Mike Tyson and prove everyone wrong, and show that I'm going to be the one doing the killing."

Tyson meanwhile said he held no animosity towards his much younger opponent. "I really like Jake a lot. But once he's in that ring, he has to fight like his life is depending on it, because it will be," Tyson quipped. The former heavyweight icon even refused to rule out further fights down the line. "Maybe we'll do it again," Tyson said. "But can I take care of Jake first, please?" — AFP



NEW YORK: (From L) Irish boxer Katie Taylor, US former boxer Mike Tyson, YouTuber Jake Paul and Puerto Rican boxer Amanda Serrano pose at a press conference at the Apollo Theatre in New York. — AFP



DHAKA: The chief selector of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Gazi Ashraf Hossain addresses a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

Bangladesh pick injured Taskin for T20 WCup

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Tuesday named Taskin Ahmed to their 15-member squad for next month's Twenty20 World Cup despite a lingering injury the pacer picked up against Zimbabwe. Taskin, 29, was in fine form for the five-match 20-over series at home but missed the final game after suffering a side strain.

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain said the 29-year-old still needed more time to recover and was unlikely to play in a three-match warm-up series against the United States in Houston next week. "The information we have is he will be fit at some stage during the World Cup," Ashraf told reporters in Dhaka. "As per the rules this year, we can carry an injured player. If he does not make enough progress, he can be replaced." Taskin, who was also named vice-captain, claimed eight wickets in four matches against Zimbabwe, won by the hosts 4-1.

All-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, who claimed eight wickets against Zimbabwe on return from an 18-month injury lay-off, was left out in favour of Tanzim Hasan Sakib. "Looking at both players, we found more confidence in Sakib. His integrity kept him ahead," Ashraf said.

Ashraf said the high number of right-handed batsmen among group rivals Nepal and the Netherlands prompted the selection of an extra-spinner in left-arm twerker Tanvir Islam. Travelling reserve pace bowler Hasan Mahmud will take Taskin's place in the US warm-up series from May 20 to 24. — AFP

Gujarat out of IPL play-off race after washout

AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Titans have been knocked out of the play-off race after rain forced their IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders to be abandoned without a ball bowled in Ahmedabad on Monday. The two teams took one point each, confirming a top-two finish for table-toppers Kolkata, who remain the only side to have already qualified for the next stage.

The last times Kolkata ended in the top two in the league stage, they went on to win the tournament in 2012 and 2014. The top four teams will make the play-offs, but the first and second-placed sides have the advantage of two chances to qualify for the final on May 26 in Chennai.

The unseasonal rain in Ahmedabad left thousands of fans disappointed at the world's biggest cricket stadium. Rain was unrelenting for close to five hours as the two captains eventually shook hands without even going for the toss.

Shubman Gill-led Gujarat, who won the IPL in their debut season in 2022 under Hardik Pandya, joined Mumbai Indians and bottom-placed Punjab Kings to be out of the title race. Kolkata, led by Shreyas Iyer, have been the team to beat in this edition with 10 wins and 19 points in 13 matches to stay ahead of second-placed Rajasthan Royals.

Six teams including defending champions Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru stay in the hunt for the remaining three spots for the play-offs. — AFP

ECHR to make final decision on Semenya

STRASBOURG: Caster Semenya's costly legal marathon enters its last lap as the highest chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Wednesday begins a hearing into whether the double Olympic champion can be required to lower her testosterone levels to compete.

The 33-year-old runner won an earlier round at the ECHR, which last July ruled she was the victim of discrimination from the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). "My hope is that World Athletics, and indeed all sports organisations, will take account of the ECHR's decision and ensure that the dignity and human rights of athletes are respected," Semenya said.

Semenya, who is classed as having "differences in sexual development (DSD)" but has always been legally identified as female, has refused to take drugs to reduce her testosterone levels since track and field's governing body World Athletics introduced its original rules in 2018.

CAS ruled against her in 2019 and the decision was validated by the Swiss Federal Court in Lausanne in 2020. It declared "fair competition" a "cardinal principle of sport" and said that a testosterone level comparable to that of men gave female athletes "an insurmountable advantage".

Last July, a seven-member ECHR panel ruled, by four votes to three, that the Swiss court's decision constituted discrimination and a violation of Semenya's privacy. The decision was largely symbolic as it did not call into question the World Athletics ruling nor pave the way for Semenya to return to competition without taking medication.

Swiss authorities, supported by World Athletics, appealed to the European court's 17-member Grand Chamber. Its ruling is not expected for several months but will be binding. Semenya, the Olympic 800m champion in 2012 and 2016 and world gold medalist in 2009, 2011 and 2017, is barred from competing at her favoured two-lap distance and was forced to make an unsuccessful move up to 5,000m,

Scheffler seeks third major title

LOUISVILLE: New dad Scottie Scheffler arrived at Valhalla on Monday afternoon and began practice for the 106th PGA Championship, searching for his third major title and fifth triumph in six starts. World number one Scheffler, who captured his second Masters title last month, has been idle the past three weeks while his wife Meredith gave birth to their first child, a son named Bennett whose arrival last week set the stage for Scheffler to compete for the Wanamaker Trophy.

"I had high expectations of what that would feel like and those were far exceeded," Scheffler told The Golf Channel. "I thought it would be pretty great and it's a pretty amazing feeling."

"It was fairly challenging leaving the house this morning but I'm here, I'm committed to playing this week, I'm excited to be out here competing. I told my little man when I was leaving, 'I don't want to leave but I got to leave.'"

The 27-year-old American's status had been uncertain with no public confirmation of the baby's arrival. Scheffler said he was able to "get some good work in but not my usual stuff" for the major showdown. "I feel like I'm extremely prepared," Scheffler said. "I feel like I'm in a good spot."

Scheffler has won four of his past five starts, only a Houston Open playoff loss keeping him from a perfect stretch including Bay Hill and The Players in March and the Masters and Heritage in April. "I'm called to come out here and do things to the best of my ability. I knew I had to be here today to get some practice in," he said. "It would have been challenging if I had left Wednesday night but it was pretty challenging this morning."

As for those challenges, Scheffler asked, "If anybody has got any diaper advice, I could use it." Scheffler spent time on the practice range and short-game area, including chats with defending champion Brooks Koepka and two-time major winner Jon

a distance which World Athletics opted not to include in its rule.

'Respect for human rights'

Semenya will be in Strasbourg to present her case. Her original victory before the ECHR was seen by some experts as a landmark. "This ruling will go down in history, because it touches on the autonomy of sports organisations to regulate access to their competitions, which will have to be set against respect for human rights", said Antoine Duval, a

the case before courts in Switzerland among the main expenses, her lawyer Gregory Nott told the press conference.

Semenya has said her career at the top is over. "I don't want to talk more about sports as I have accomplished everything I've ever wanted," Semenya said. She said she was now focused on being an advocate for young athletes facing similar challenges.

"We all know what this case is all about, it is about the differences in women's body. And the main goal is to make sure that we protect...these young kids



EUGENE: (FILES) Caster Semenya of Team South Africa competes in the Women's 5000m heats on day six of the World Athletics Championships Oregon22 at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon. — AFP

specialist in sports law at the Asser Institute in The Hague. The interminable legal battle has come at a huge financial cost for Semenya, who hasn't raced since March 2023 and launched an appeal for donations in February. "We lack funds. We have a lot of experts that come in that we need to pay," she told a press conference in Johannesburg.

Overall, her decade-long legal battle has cost in the region of 30 million rand (\$1.5 million) with fees for experts and lawyers authorised to present

so they can be able to compete." Last year, World Athletics altered its rules. DSD athletes like Semenya now have to reduce their amount of blood testosterone to below 2.5 nanomoles per litre, down from the previous level of five, and remain below this threshold for two years.

World Athletics also removed the principle of restricted events for DSD athletes, meaning that they are barred from all distances unless they meet the testosterone criteria. — AFP



Scottie Scheffler

Rahm, before playing the back nine. "I'm sure right now he welcomes talking about anything but golf," said Rahm, a father himself.

Scheffler said he was happy at being able to see players and get their congratulations on Monday. "More significant break than I would have but I wouldn't have traded it for anything," Scheffler said. "As the week goes on, I'll get more and more immersed in what I'm doing, just try and do my best to stay as present as I can on the golf course."

Scheffler and world number two Rory McIlroy will both tee off Thursday having won their prior two starts. Scheffler at Augusta National and the Heritage. McIlroy's wins came last month in a pairs event with Ireland's Shane Lowry and Sunday with his fourth career title at Quail Hollow at the Wells Fargo Championship. Four-time major winner McIlroy took his most recent major victory 10 years ago at Valhalla, edging Phil Mickelson by a stroke for his second PGA Championship.

"I'm a way better player now than I was back then," McIlroy said on Sunday. "I haven't had the major record to back that up, but I've had the wins. "I've done everything else there is to do in the game since 2014. The only thing I need to do is get another major." The 35-year-old from Northern Ireland has had 20 top-10 finishes in 35 major starts since that Valhalla victory a decade ago, which came after two prior wins. — AFP

News in Brief

Giroud to leave AC Milan

MILAN: Olivier Giroud confirmed on Monday that he will leave AC Milan at the end of the season to end his long career in Major League Soccer. France's all-time top scorer Giroud is expected to sign for Los Angeles FC, where his former Les Bleus teammate Hugo Lloris already plays, after three years with Serie A giants Milan. "I will be playing my final two matches with Milan and will continue my career in the MLS," Giroud said in an interview published on social media by the club. "I'm very proud of what I've achieved at Milan in the last three years. My time with Milan might be finishing this year but the club will remain in my heart." Giroud signed for Milan from Chelsea in the summer of 2021 and won the Serie A title in his first season with the seven-time European champions. — AFP

Varane announces Man Utd exit

LONDON: Raphael Varane announced on Tuesday he will leave Manchester United at the end of the season when his contract expires following a three-year spell at Old Trafford. The former France defender, 31, arrived at the club from Real Madrid in 2021 for an initial fee of about £34 million (\$43 million) and has made 93 appearances, scoring twice. He was part of the team that won the club's first trophy for six years—the 2023 League Cup. Varane, whose United career has been disrupted by injuries, has not played since a 4-3 defeat to Chelsea on April 4 but hopes to be available again before the end of the campaign. "To you guys, supporters of Manchester United it's been an amazing few years to play for this special club and wear that shirt," Varane said on social media. — AFP

Sports

Barcelona beat Real Sociedad to move second above Girona

'If you don't score these teams end up scoring against you'

BARCELONA: Lamine Yamal and Raphinha struck to earn Barcelona a 2-0 win over Real Sociedad on Monday, taking their team second, a point above Catalan rivals Girona. Defeat is a setback to La Real's ambitions of playing Europa League football next season, leaving them seventh behind Real Betis, who won on Sunday.

Last season's champions Barcelona are playing for nothing but pride in the final weeks of a disappointing campaign, and finishing above high-flying minnows Girona is imperative to achieve even a modicum of that. Real Madrid sealed their title win at a canter after Barcelona were beaten 4-2 by Girona little over a week ago.

Barca's brightest light Yamal opened the scoring after 40 minutes and Raphinha added a late penalty to seal the win. "La Real are a great team, it's an important victory for us, we had a good game in general," Barca coach Xavi told Movistar.

Xavi benched Uruguayan centre-back Ronald Araujo, bereft of form this season and whose red card against Paris Saint-Germain contributed heavily to their Champions League collapse.

With Madrid swiping La Liga back off the Catalans, they end the season trophyless and licking their wounds. Xavi, who will stay in charge next season after ditching his exit plan, started defender Inigo Martinez in place of Araujo and Pedri Gonzalez in midfield.

The Canary Islander is still building form and fitness after a string of injury problems ahead of Euro 2024, and helped Barca control the game. Striker Robert Lewandowski was unusually active in his team's pressing, perhaps motivated by the race to finish as La Liga's top scorer.

At the other end Marc-Andre ter Stegen denied

Sheraldo Becker after he burst beyond Pau Cubarsi, but the Suriname international had pushed the young defender in any case. Shortly afterwards Becker got in behind Barcelona's high line again and this time fired home, but was correctly flagged offside.

Real Sociedad stopper Alex Remiro saved well from Yamal after the 16-year-old winger combined with Ilkay Gundogan to break into the area. Raphinha struck the post towards the end of the first half with a long-range effort and Gundogan turned the rebound over after it fell to him at an awkward angle.

It was a warning Real Sociedad did not heed with Yamal sending Barca ahead soon after. Lewandowski fed Gundogan well with a low through-ball and the German teed up the winger to steer home his fifth league goal of the season.

'We leave here hurt'

Barcelona started the second half strongly with Raphinha twice coming close with fine long-range efforts. Real Sociedad almost levelled when Brais Mendez won the ball back high up and fired inches wide of Ter Stegen's far post.

Remiro denied Barca substitute Ferran Torres and Yamal's effort was deflected wide after a fine solo dribble with the hosts struggling to kill off the game. Eventually they managed it when Alvaro Odriozola's handball led to a penalty - with VAR calling the referee to check the incident long after it occurred - and Raphinha dispatched it with aplomb.

"They took a few minutes to go to the VAR (but) if they gave it then it was a penalty," said Real Sociedad midfielder Benat Turrientes. "We leave here hurt, we came to win, we've got a lot on the line to try and get into Europe and I think we had chances, especially in the first half, to go in front."



BARCELONA: Real Sociedad's Spanish goalkeeper #01 Alex Remiro deflects the ball during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Real Sociedad at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Barcelona. — AFP

"If you don't score these teams end up scoring against you." Xavi took off Lewandowski with 15 minutes remaining and the Polish forward, who has 17 goals to his name this season in La Liga, trailing Girona's Artem Dovbyk by three, did not seem thrilled by the decision.

"We needed more fuel, more legs, we put in great effort and Robert did very good work," said Xavi. "I understand Lewandowski's annoyance, I didn't like being taken off either." Barcelona face Almeria on Thursday and Rayo Vallecano on Sunday as they try to stay in second place. — AFP

Seminar on what do you know about the Special Olympics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli pointed to the importance of working along with all sectors of the society to achieve the concept of the disabled inclusion in practice. Buresli spoke during a seminar and operations management club at the college of business administration, in a lecture titled (what do you know about the Special Olympics).

Buresli started by presenting the efforts of the State of Kuwait since the 1950s to care for the disabled, and the developments of those efforts culminated in law 8/2010 regarding the rights of the disabled, and this law exceeds the goals of the international treaty on the right of the disabled.

She also spoke about the international organizations related to sports of the disabled including the International Special Olympics which is considered the most important international organization concerned with the special needs established in the United States in 1968 by Eunice, sister of US President John Kennedy, which Kuwait joined in 1986, and reactivated in 2018 after approval by the Special Olympics MENA. The lecture enjoyed an outstanding turnout by Kuwait University students and was interactive through the questions about the topics that were presented and prizes were given to the top five places of the correct answers.

A documentary titled (Tomooh story) that showed the role of Special Olympics in caring for



Special Olympics participants.

player Mariam Theyab and her successful march in representing the sport of the disabled as an official spokeswoman of the MENA region for five years.

The seminar witnessed the honoring of Special Olympics champions of all games. Buresli thanked Kuwait University and Dr Ali Dashti of the College of Business Administration for giving the opportunity to include the disabled with the college students, and she lauded the top organization of the event.

Meanwhile, Dr Ali Dashti was pleased with the turnout and the presentation to introduce the Kuwait Special Olympics and its role in promoting the special needs' inclusion in the society through the development of their sports abilities. He said this event is just a start in this field and hoped that it be held in all Kuwait University colleges.

representative of this league," he added. "I will miss it for sure. It is a part of my life that is coming to an end. What is coming next is very exciting but that is something else." Mbappe played his final home game for PSG on Sunday and scored as the champions suffered a shock 3-1 defeat against Toulouse.

That goal took him to 27 for the season in Ligue 1, eight goals more than the next best marksman, Lille's Canadian striker Jonathan David. The season is not finished yet, with Mbappe's PSG having two more Ligue 1 games to play this week before the French Cup final against Lyon on May 25. Mbappe saw off the other nominees for an award voted for by his fellow players and handed over by Marie-Jose Perec, the French former 200m and 400m Olympic champion. His PSG teammate Ousmane Dembele had also been in contention along with Pierre Lees-Melou of Brest, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of Marseille and Edon Zhegrova of Lille.

PSG's domestic dominance was reflected in the other awards, with teenage midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery named young player of the season and Gianluigi Donnarumma the best goalkeeper. Eric Roy of Brest was named coach of the year after leading the



Rihab Buresli



Dr Ali Dashti



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kyllian Mbappe (L) receives the trophy of Best Players Ligue 1 from former French athlete and Olympic gold medalist Marie-Jose Perec at the end of the TV show. — AFP

modest Brittany club to European qualification for the first time in their history - with one game left they are guaranteed to finish at least fifth, meaning a Europa League place at worst. — AFP

Emirates Stadium to become home for Arsenal women's

LONDON: Arsenal's Emirates Stadium will become the main home for the women's team from next season as a result of an "extraordinary" explosion of interest, the club said on Tuesday. Arsenal announced plans for 11 games to be played at the ground in the 2024/25 campaign - eight Women's Super League (WSL) and three Champions League games, if qualification for the group stages is secured.

Home legs in any Champions League knockout ties would also be staged at the Emirates. Remaining fixtures, including all domestic cup matches, will take place at Arsenal's Meadow Park ground, in London's commuter belt. Six WSL games played at the Emirates this season were watched by an average crowd of just over 52,000, which included two sell-outs and three WSL attendance records.

"We have recently seen extraordinary growth in supporters coming to Emirates Stadium for games held here, which include two complete sell-outs this season," said Arsenal chief executive Vinai Venkatesham.

"The next step in our journey is to make Emirates Stadium our main home for Arsenal Women. We are looking forward to giving more supporters the chance to watch our women's team play." Arsenal Women head coach Jonas Eidevall said: "We have a special connection with our supporters, who have shown up in huge numbers and pushed us forward every step of the way." — AFP

Today's Matches

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Brighton & Hove Albion v Chelsea 21:45
beIN Sports HD 2
Manchester United v Newcastle United 22:00
beIN Sports HD 1

SPANISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Sevilla FC v Cadiz CF 20:30
beIN Sports HD 3
Rayo Vallecano v Granada CF 20:30
beIN Sports HD 3
Celta de Vigo v Athletic de Bilbao 23:00
beIN Sports HD 3
Getafe CF v Atletico de Madrid 23:00
beIN Sports HD 3

FRENCH LEAGUE
OGC Nice v Paris Saint-Germain 22:00
beIN Sports
Stade de Reims v Olympique de Marseille 22:00
beIN Sports

Mbappe wins France player of the year award

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe was named France's player of the year on Monday at an awards ceremony in Paris, as he comes to the end of his seven-season stay with Paris Saint-Germain. Mbappe, 25, picked up the prize for the best player in Ligue 1 at the UNFP (French players' union) Trophies gala for the fifth time in a row after a season in which he has scored 44 goals in all competitions for PSG.

The France captain last week confirmed he will leave PSG at the end of the campaign when his contract expires, with Real Madrid expected to be his next destination. "It is a page that is turning, a chapter of my life that is going to close," Mbappe said.

"Ligue 1 will always have an important place in my life. It is the only league I have known in my career up to now. "I have always tried to be an honorable rep-

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

Industrial Shuwaikh

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, 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: Sangamalla. (#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)

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Duran double salvages draw for Aston Villa against Liverpool

Just a brilliant effort towards the end: John McGinn



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa's Brazilian midfielder #06 Douglas Luiz (R) reacts as he clashes with Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Liverpool at Villa Park in Birmingham. — AFP

BIRMINGHAM: Jhon Duran struck twice in the final five minutes to salvage a 3-3 draw for Aston Villa against Liverpool but they fell short of guaranteeing a place in next season's Champions League on Monday.

Villa looked set for a fourth consecutive defeat in all competitions as an Emiliano Martinez own goal and strikes from Cody Gakpo and Jarrell Quansah put the visitors on course for victory in Jurgen Klopp's final away game in charge.

But substitute Duran's double edged Unai Emery's men closer to Europe's top table for the first time since 1983. Victory for title-chasing Manchester City at Spurs on Tuesday would secure Villa's place in the top four. But they are stumbling over the finish line as the strain of combining a challenge for the Champions League alongside a run to the Europa Conference League semi-finals has taken its toll. "Just a brilliant effort towards the end," said Villa captain John McGinn.

"It's been a tough couple of weeks. The manager won't admit it but the boys are out on their feet, giving absolutely everything. "We'll have our Man City

tops on tomorrow night." Martinez's return to fitness after he missed last weekend's 1-0 defeat at Brighton should have been a major boost for the home side.

But the Argentine World Cup winner's howler handed Liverpool the opening goal after just two minutes as he fumbled Harvey Elliott's deflected cross into his own net. Villa did respond positively as Ollie Watkins burned Quansah for pace and pulled back a cross for Youri Tielemans to equalise.

However, momentum swung back in Liverpool's favour in an end-to-end encounter when Gakpo tapped in after Martinez could only parry Joe Gomez's effort. Villa should have been level again before half-time when Diego Carlos somehow turned wide with the goal gaping after nudging Watkins out the way. Instead, they were 3-1 down just three minutes into the second half as Quansah rose highest to head in Elliott's free-kick.

Duran a 'nightmare'

There was still time for Villa to mount a memorable comeback as Liverpool's own defensive weaknesses were laid bare. "It got away from us tonight,

there's no doubt about that," said Klopp.

"We make a mistake for the 3-2 and in that moment we open the door for them, the atmosphere was there and they score the equaliser." Watkins was denied his 20th Premier League goal of the season after Leon Bailey ran offside in the build-up, having cut across the run of Moussa Diaby.

After an angry exchange of words between Bailey and Watkins, it was then the latter who was guilty of getting in Douglas Luiz's way when the Brazilian would have had a clear sight of goal. Had it not been for an injury to substitute Nicolò Zaniolo, Duran may not even have entered the field.

But the Colombian produced a stunning finale as he pounced on a mistake from Alexis Mac Allister to drill home from the edge of the box. Duran did not know much about his second as Diaby's pass ricocheted in off his thigh, but Hollywood star and Villa fan Tom Hanks was one of the 40,000 who did not care. "Big Jhon is a bit nuts," added McGinn. "He's a nightmare sometimes to have in your team but he's got moments of quality." Only a brilliant save from Alisson Becker denied Diaby a winner in stoppage time. — AFP

Medvedev battles past Medjedovic and into Rome last 16

ROME: Daniil Medvedev continued his Rome title defence with Monday's hard-fought 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-5 win over qualifier Hamad Medjedovic as the men's tournament was left wide open by big-name exits, the latest being fourth seed Andrey Rublev.

Russian Medvedev will face Tommy Paul in the last 16 at the Foro Italico on Tuesday after battling past Next Gen champion Medjedovic in a gruelling clash of big hitters. The second seed has a great opportunity to win his first tournament of the year but will be drained by a match which pushed three hours in length and suggested that 20-year-old Medjedovic is a far superior player than his world ranking of 121. "I'm not really pleased. I felt like I started the match well and then in a way it was only going downhill," said Medvedev. "I'm happy that by not playing my best I could win and tomorrow I'm going to try to find my best tennis."

Rome is missing the world's top three men following Novak Djokovic's third-round elimination on Saturday, with Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz both withdrawing ahead of



ROME: Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return to Serbia's Hamad Medjedovic during the Men's ATP Rome Open tennis tournament at Foro Italico in Rome. — AFP

the event. And Russian Rublev, fresh from claiming the Madrid title, suffered a shock third-round defeat by French qualifier Alexandre Muller, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2. Sixth seed and reigning Monte Carlo champion Stefanos Tsitsipas is still in the fray after beating Briton Cameron Norrie in straight sets 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) but is concerned at the impact of a punishing schedule on the top players.

"The extension of the days in the Masters 1000s I think plays a massive role and contributes a lot to the fact that these players are getting injured," Tsitsipas

told reporters. Another contender is Rafael Nadal's vanquisher and seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz, who faces Sebastian Baez on Tuesday and could be Medvedev's quarter-final opponent.

No Sabalenka handshake

Elena Svitolina again refused to shake hands with Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka after losing their first meeting since their row at the 2023 French Open. Belarusian second seed Sabalenka came back from a set down to win 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (9/7) to beat Ukrainian Svitolina, who following their quarter-final at Roland Garros last year accused Sabalenka of inflaming tensions surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war by insisting on a handshake that was not going to come.

Ukrainian players have refused to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian rivals in protest at the ongoing war and Svitolina again walked straight to her chair after the match. Sabalenka will face world number 10 Jelena Ostapenko in the quarter-finals after squeezing past two-time Rome winner Svitolina in a brilliant match for those who stayed late in the centre court stands. The 26-year-old, who has never won in Rome but is a two-time champion on the Madrid clay, has a chance to match her 2022 run to the last four in front of a crowd who were on her side and roared with delight after she won a thrilling time break at the second time of asking. — AFP

Celtics push Cavs to brink of elimination

LOS ANGELES: The Boston Celtics fought off short-handed Cleveland to take a 3-1 stranglehold in their NBA playoff series Monday as Oklahoma City leveled their series with Dallas.

Jayson Tatum scored 33 points and grabbed 11 rebounds and Jaylen Brown added 27 points for the Celtics, who beat the Cavaliers 109-102 for a 3-1 lead in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference semi-final.

The Celtics will try to finish off the series at home on Wednesday. Western Conference top seeds Oklahoma City head home tied 2-2 with the Mavericks after a furious fourth-quarter rally carried them to a 100-96 victory in Dallas. Oklahoma City trailed most of the night in the face of a stout Dallas defensive effort that included 13 blocked shots.

But the Thunder broke through in the fourth quarter, tying it at 86-86 on Shai Gilgeous-Alexander's fade away jump shot with 4:02 to play. Rookie Chet Holmgren followed with a three-pointer that gave the Thunder the lead for good. Dallas had the deficit down to one point with 10.1 seconds left, but Holmgren and Gilgeous-Alexander each made a pair of free throws and the Thunder closed it out.

"We just stuck to it," said Gilgeous-Alexander, who scored 22 of his 34 points in the second half. "We just plugged away, took it possession by possession and eventually the game turned for us." Holmgren finished with 18 points and Luguentz Dort had 17 for the Thunder, who made 23 of their 24 free-throws and withstood a triple double of 18 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists from Dallas star Luka Doncic.

P.J. Washington led Dallas with 21 points but star guard Kyrie Irving was held to nine. Doncic said it wasn't a defensive breakdown that cost the Mavs but too many mistakes in the "little details." He called it "unacceptable" that Dallas made just 12 of their 23 free-throws, and the Mavericks also coughed up 14 turnovers leading to 19 Thunder points. — AFP