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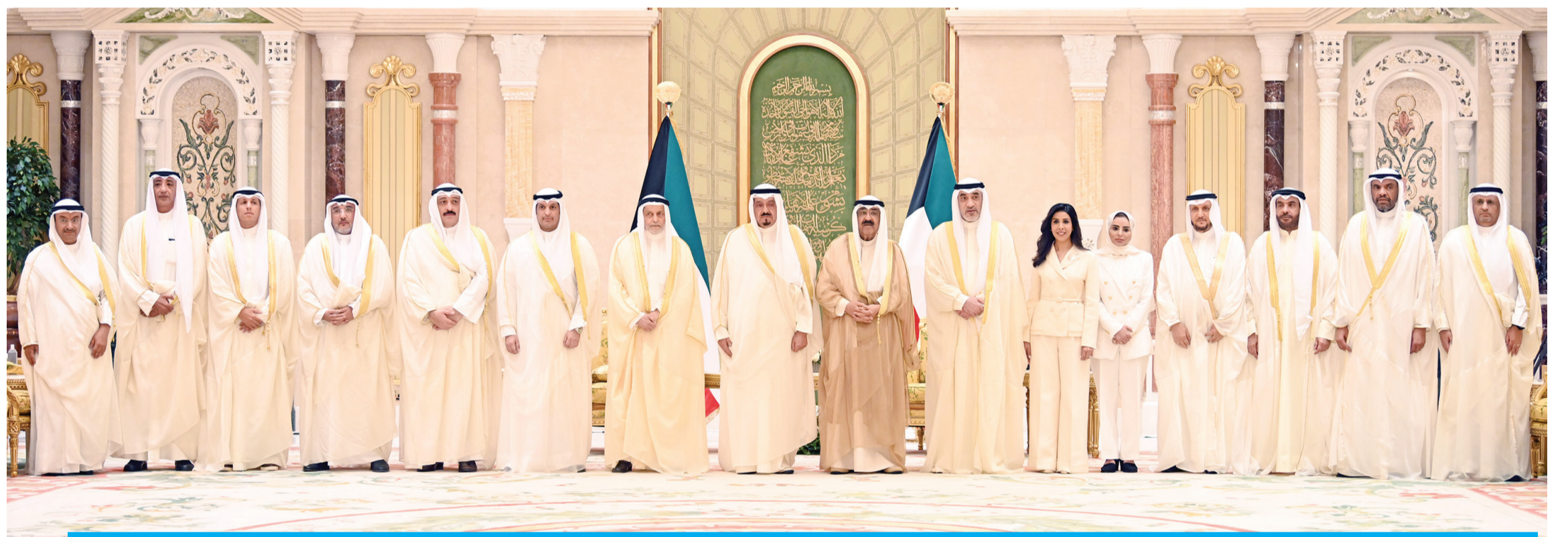


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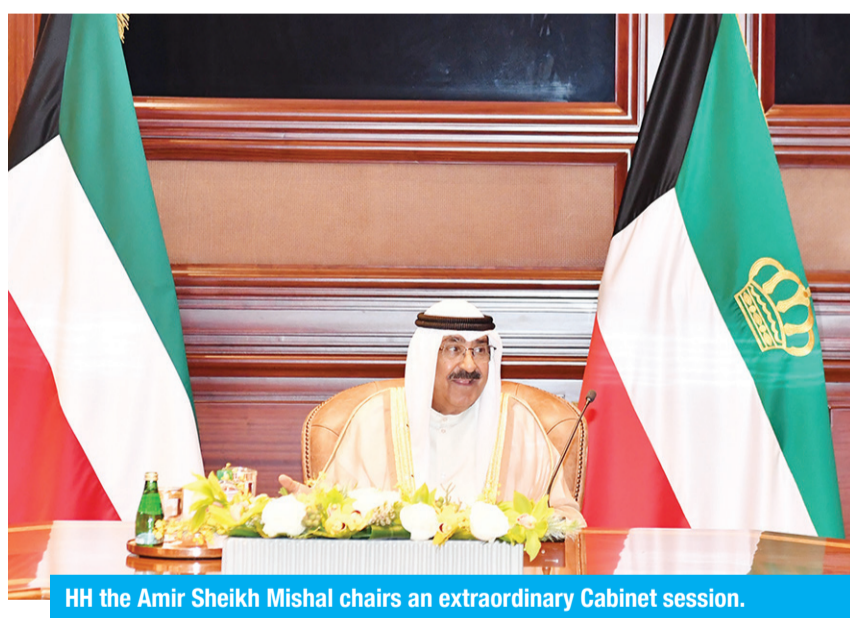


Amir vows reforms in new era

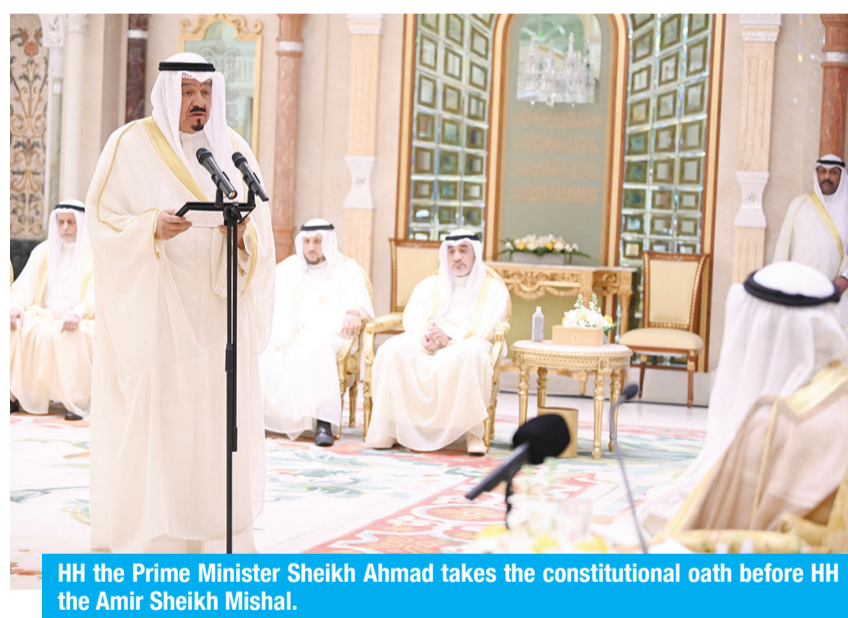
Sheikh Mishal swears in Cabinet, chairs extraordinary session • His Highness title bestowed on PM



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with newly sworn in Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his Cabinet at Bayan Palace on May 15, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)



HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal chairs an extraordinary Cabinet session.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad takes the constitutional oath before HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal.

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stressed Wednesday that Kuwait would usher in a new era of responsible and hard work and unyielding giving for a nation that has rights and citizens whose freedoms, interests and funds must be protected. HH the Amir made the statement during an extraordinary Cabinet meeting held under his chairmanship at Bayan Palace in the presence of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Cabinet ministers, who were sworn in before HH the Amir earlier in the day.

HH the Amir called on the new government to follow up on the implementation of its works and projects and to bring anyone failing to do their duty to accountability. He also urged the government to set priorities, unify efforts, harness energies pursuant to a specific work plan and timetable, and focus on follow-up through continuous inspection tours.

He further requested the new Cabinet to speed up the execution of long-anticipated strategic development projects, tackle dossiers, issues and topics

Continued on Page 6

Slovak PM shot multiple times, fighting for life

BRATISLAVA: Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico was battling life-threatening wounds Wednesday after officials said he was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt condemned by European and US leaders. The Dennik N daily said its reporter in the central town of Handlova heard several shots fired and then saw security



Robert Fico

Continued on Page 6

Palestinians mark Nakba as Gazans endure another

GAZA/RAMALLAH: As the Gaza war raged on, Palestinians on Wednesday marked the anniversary of the Nakba, or "Catastrophe", of mass displacement during the creation of the Zionist entity 76 years ago. Thousands marched in cities across the Zionist-occupied West Bank, waving Palestinian flags, wearing keffiyeh scarves and holding up symbolic keys as reminders of long-lost family homes.

Inside the besieged Gaza Strip, where the Zionist war has ground on for more than seven months, scores more died in fighting. "Our 'Nakba' in 2023 is the worst ever," said one displaced Gaza man, Mohammed Al-Farra, whose family fled their home in Khan Yunis for the coastal area of Al-Mawasi. "It is much harder than the Nakba of 1948." Palestinians everywhere have long mourned the events of that year when, during the war that led to the establishment of the Zionist entity, around 760,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes. But 42-year-old Farra, whose family was then displaced from Jaffa near Tel Aviv, said the current war is even harder.

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NABLUS: Palestinian protesters hold symbolic keys during a rally in this northern West Bank city on May 15, 2024, marking the 76th anniversary of the Nakba or Catastrophe of the creation of the Zionist entity. — AFP

Palestinian state key to Arab plans for postwar Gaza

DUBAI: As the Zionist entity keeps up its campaign against Hamas, Arab leaders are mapping out ways to support post-war Gaza, placing one major condition on their involvement: A pathway to Palestinian

statehood. Major obstacles lie ahead in gaining the support of both US President Joe Biden and the Zionist government, which is currently led by hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch opponent of the two-state solution.

But the Arab quintet of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan and Egypt have made clear that their financial and political support, which would be crucial to the future of the shattered Gaza Strip, comes at a cost. "We have coordinated on this closely with the Palestinians. It needs to be truly a pathway to a Palestinian state," Saudi Foreign Min-

ister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told a World Economic Forum meeting in Riyadh last month. "Without a real political pathway... it would be very difficult for Arab countries to discuss how we are going to govern."

It is not the first time Arab leaders have come together to chart a path towards a two-state solution, the cherished goal that they believe could defuse Middle East tensions and help usher in a period of prosperity. But with the Zionist-Hamas war hobbling regional economies and spilling over into neighboring countries, there is both urgency and opportunity.

Continued on Page 6



Zain supports creative efforts that celebrate Kuwait's art legacy

Company strategic sponsor of 'Abdulhussein's World' show in collaboration with JACC



A scene from Abdulhussein's World.



Zain interacted with audiences through its booth.

KUWAIT: Zain has successfully concluded its strategic sponsorship of the spectacular show Abdulhussein's World, held at the National Theater of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC). The much-anticipated show celebrated the late Kuwaiti comedy icon Abdulhussein Abdulredah and his timeless characters and performances. The event, produced by Fumoon Center and Scene Productions, entertained huge crowds throughout eight consecutive nights.

Zain believes the private sector has a key role to play in supporting artistic, cultural, and creative

projects in Kuwait. This is especially true when it comes to efforts that celebrate Kuwait's rich art legacy and its icons like the late Abdulhussein Abdulredah. By supporting world-class art performances like this one, the company strives to contribute to boosting domestic tourism and highlighting young local talents who work hard to bring world-class experiences to fans in Kuwait.

Zain joined the event by setting up a unique booth to welcome guests before the show and during intermission. The booth was designed with a special nostalgic touch to evoke memories of

old TV screens showing memorable scenes from the late artist's popular performances, giving fans a wonderful opportunity to take pictures, make memories, and enjoy hospitality services. Abdulhussein's World took audiences through a captivating journey to the past, featuring a mix of spectacular performing arts and nostalgic music pieces that captured the most memorable moments from Abdulhussein Abdulredah's shows and characters that span 50 years of television, radio, and theater performances.

Over 80 local talents and artists contributed

to the success of the show. In addition, an expert team and director from the UK who specialize in theatrical production were brought in to help create a show befitting the late artist's legacy. The record-breaking nine shows featured huge crowds throughout eight consecutive nights. Zain is always keen on supporting projects that add value to the local artistic and cultural scenes. The company will spare no efforts to shoulder any project with a creative and ambitious vision to serve the community and contribute to the growth of the local entertainment industry.

Kuwait's kidney transplant success rate exceeds 90%

KUWAIT: The success rate of kidney transplantation in Kuwait exceeds 90 percent, said a leading medical figure on Wednesday. The high rate of success in the transplant field was announced by the President of the Arab Society of Nephrology and Renal Transplantation (ASNRT) and Head of the specialized Kidney Diseases Unit at the Hamed Al-Essa Center for Kidney Transplantation, Dr Turki Al-Otaibi. Dr. Al-Otaibi said in a press statement, after winning the association's elections, that this percentage is attributed to the availability of appropriate medications to suppress immunity and work on matching tissues between the donor and recipient to a greater extent, using modern technology.

He explained that the number of kidney dialysis patients in Kuwait is 2,500, 88 percent of whom are on hemodialysis programs, and the rest are on peritoneal dialysis, receiving treatment through nine kidney dialysis centers spread across all governorates of Kuwait. He mentioned that through regular follow-up at the center, the transplanted kidneys are maintained, and medical and surgical problems are treated promptly, emphasizing that the kidney diseases and transplantation team is responsible for medical care for recipients before and after transplantation.

Dr. Al-Otaibi noted that the main causes of kid-



Dr Turki Al-Otaibi

ney failure - in Kuwait and worldwide - are diabetes, hypertension, and glomerulonephritis, pointing out that the best option for treating said cases is kidney transplantation, which surpasses kidney dialysis in terms of effectiveness. He said that although kidney transplantation is best, it is not the dominant treatment for kidney failure due to global barriers

preventing the replacement of all dialysis treatments with transplantation.

He said that in 2023, 305 potential kidney transplantation recipients were evaluated, including 95 patients undergoing the necessary examinations before kidney transplantations, and that 210 medically suitable patients were added to the transplant waiting list, which included 450 cases. Dr. Al-Otaibi affirmed that in 2023, 140 kidney transplant surgeries were performed at the Hamed Al-Essa Organ Transplant Center (78 from living donors and 62 from deceased donors).

In addition to 80 kidney transplant surgeries performed abroad, all were added to the follow-up list at external clinics, where regular follow-ups and all necessary tests are conducted according to modern international standards. He mentioned that after the opening of the new Kuwait Kidney Transplant Center, this number will increase with the availability of all necessary specialties in one place, facilitating the process for patients. — KUNA

Food allergies: Making informed dietary choices

By Dr Dalal Alhasan

KUWAIT: Understanding food allergies enables individuals to make informed dietary choices, manage risk and adequately care for those affected. There are 170 foods known to cause food allergy reactions. And nine food groups account for 90 percent of serious allergic reactions: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, fish, sesame, wheat, and soy. It is very important to understand that dietary products may contain the food as a whole or only part of it such as its proteins. Either or both can induce a food allergy reaction. Careful reading of dietary product labels, learning the food derivatives and its proteins is essential for indi-

World leaders urged to tackle organized crime and terrorism

VIENNA: The world must address the increasing rate of organized crime and its links to terrorism activities, a Kuwaiti diplomat said on Wednesday. This statement was delivered by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative at the UN and international organizations headquarters in Vienna, Talal Al-Fassam, at the 33rd session of the United Nations' Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in Vienna.

A unified international stance is needed to address

KRCS announces orphan sponsorship project in Gaza

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Wednesday the orphan sponsorship project in Gaza in coordination and cooperation with the Wafaa Capacity Building and Microfinance, The Secretary-General of KRCS, Maha Al-Barjas, stated to KUNA after her meeting with a delegation from the Wafa Foundation at the society's headquarters that the project aims to provide social, educational, and health care for orphaned children who have lost their families by creating suitable environmental conditions for their upbringing.

Al-Barjas added that the society will market the project to donors interested in sponsoring orphans, indicating that the society seeks to sponsor 1,000 orphans from the Gaza Strip. She explained that society seeks to provide psychological and moral support to these children, in addition to providing food, drink and clothing.

She mentioned that KRCS has been keen on providing all relief and medical assistance to the Palestinians since the beginning of the Zionist occupation's attacks on the Gaza Strip. On his part, Muhaisen Atawneh, Wafa Director General and the relief project implementer, expressed his thanks and appreciation to KRCS for the orphan care project in Gaza, noting that the association did not hesitate to support Palestine in all ways and means.



GAZA: Injured Palestinian girls sit at the Kuwait Hospital in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, following Zionist air strikes. — AFP

Atawneh said that this project is an extension of Kuwait's humanitarian and developmental contributions to supporting Palestinian orphans, praising Kuwait's leading role in caring for orphans worldwide. He added that the Zionist aggression continues in Gaza, leaving thousands of orphans without families in a besieged sector devoid of life's simplest necessities, explaining that comprehensive services will be provided to orphans to enable them to live with dignity and become active individuals in their communities, building a better future for them. — KUNA

Visa applicants urged to provide correct info

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Civil Aviation Authority (DGCA) stressed on Wednesday the importance of obtaining travel visas for travelers departing to Schengen countries from their embassies and providing correct information to avoid rejection of the visa application. Acting Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety, Air Transport, and Civil Aviation Security, Abdullah Al-Rajhi, added in a press statement that all tourism and travel offices that assist citizens in obtaining a Schengen visa must not provide incorrect information for travel tickets and accommodation to applicants.

Al-Rajhi pointed out that providing incorrect information to the embassies would lead to the rejection of the visa application, stressing that the DGCA would take the necessary legal action against the offices that violate the instructions. He stated that all travelers must be careful not to submit visa applications that include incorrect reservations and information for travel tickets and accommodation reservations in order to avoid rejection of the visa application and also ensure the validity of the travel visa for the destination country upon departure from Kuwait International Airport. — KUNA

viduals with food allergy and their caregivers to avoid food allergy exposure.

It is also central to know that being allergic to one type of food does not necessarily mean that the individual is allergic to the whole food group. For instance, an individual allergic to chickpeas, may not necessarily be allergic to all types of legumes (beans, lentils, etc). Most of the food groups that are known to cause food allergy reaction are vital for individual growth especially at a young age. Therefore, individuals and their caregivers should learn when to cut off all types of food in a food group and when not to. This ensures the retrieval of significant number of proteins, vitamins, and minerals of food.

The most common food group that causes food allergic reaction varies in different parts of the world. In the United States, the most common food groups that cause allergy are milk and eggs while in Kuwait the most common types of food allergy are peanut followed by shellfish. And although there are general prevention and management strategies for all types of food allergy reactions, recent research advancement

the increasing rates of organized crime now affecting the security and stability of several countries, he indicated, noting that such illicit acts were targeting the youth and the very fabric of society. Al-Fassam affirmed that Kuwait was eager to contribute to global security efforts in line with the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG). Kuwait, on a national level, continues to implement measures to ensure security as well as solidify justice for all, he affirmed, adding that such measures are part of Kuwait Vision 2035.

He revealed that Kuwait had come up with several laws and regulations to bolster transparency, fight crime and corruption, and boost human rights. Ambassador Al-Fassam went on to say that Kuwait had signed and is part of a plethora of international agreements when it came to security cooperation, the handing in of wanted individuals, and efforts to combat corruption.

In connection with cybercrime and criminal activ-

documented specific prevention and management strategies for specific food types linked with good outcomes.

Individuals' education and those who involved in their life such as parents, teachers, administration staff, school nurses, and primary care physicians is crucial to individual's quality of life and health. In Kuwait, 61 percent of food allergy patients are children and 25 percent of severe food allergy reactions happen at schools. Fortunately, in Kuwait there is one designated world class education venue that equips both caregivers and health care professionals with simple up-to-date information about food allergy, Emergency Training Center (ETC).

The center provides courses that discuss food allergy prevention, early recognition, and management. It is the only center that provides approved courses by Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) in MENA. Remember, we need a team to eliminate the suffering of food allergy, everyone should be part of the food allergy blueprint, everyone should be aware and trained. Happy food allergy awareness week!

ities crossing borders, the Kuwaiti diplomat indicated that his country had issued a law in 2015 to counter cybercrime and also signed several regional and international agreements to prevent border-hopping criminal activities. Ambassador Al-Fassam took the chance to highlight the continuous crimes committed by the Zionist occupation forces against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, saying that the recent assault on the city of Rafah was part of a long series of crimes committed by the aggressors.

The international community and the world must put a halt to Zionist crimes against the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, which right now needs an immediate ceasefire to allow the entry of much-needed humanitarian aid, he stressed. He called on the UNSC to take a resolution to ensure justice for the Palestinian people and allow them to establish an independent state within the 1967 borders with east Jerusalem as a capital. — KUNA

Newly formed government takes constitutional oath

KUWAIT: Kuwait's newly formed government swore the constitutional oath Wednesday before His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The deputy chief of Kuwait's National Guard, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah, congratulated Kuwait's new government on taking the oath of office. He wished His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the new Cabinet success. The deputy chief of the National Guard hoped Kuwait's new premier would succeed in bringing national aspirations to fruition, wishing Kuwait persistent prosperity and development under its "wise leadership."

Meanwhile, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani relayed his thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for renewing their confidence in him and reinstating him in position.

Al-Adwani, in a statement on Wednesday after taking the constitutional oath, said that this comes with great responsibilities in facing the challenges opposing the educational sector. The minister asserted his determination to move forward in executing the leadership's directives. He underlined the importance of creating investment opportunities to achieve financial sustainability, indicating that the youth are the true wealth and investment of this country. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister



Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs



Dr Emad Mohammad Al-Atiqi, Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister



Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, Minister of Foreign Affairs



Dr Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi, Minister of Health



Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs



Omar Saud Al-Omar, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Minister of State for Communication Affairs



Dr Mahmoud Abdulaziz Bushehri, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs



Dr Mohammad Ibrahim Al-Wasmi, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs



Dr Adel Mohammad Al-Adwani, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research



Dr Noura Mohammad Al-Mashaan, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Municipality Affairs



Abdulrahman Bdah Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture



Dr Amthal Hadi Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs, Labor, Family Affairs and Childhood and Minister of State for Youth Affairs

Bahrain summit seeks pan-Arab cooperation

CAIRO: The Arab League said that all indications are positive toward the success of the upcoming Arab summit, scheduled to take place in the Kingdom of Bahrain this coming Thursday. In a statement, Arab League Assistant Secretary-General Ambassador Hossam Zaki confirmed that all signs are positive for the success of the Bahraini Summit, indicating the readiness of the League Council's agenda at the summit level in its 33rd regular session, which will be presented to the leaders of Arab countries.

During his tour to the media center for the Bahrain Summit, Zaki added that "the consultative meeting of foreign ministers witnessed consensus on all the topics on the agenda." The ambassador noted that there are many issues to be discussed, some of which are of a special political nature related to Gaza, the aggression of the Zionist

occupation, and all action items related to the Palestinian issue, in addition to topics related to crises in other Arab countries. He added that the Economic and Social Council adopted a number of decisions that have an economic and social nature and are linked to the Arab strategy in various fields such as youth and health, pointing out that there is a special decision on reform that will be presented.

Pan-Arab cooperation

Saudi Arabia is committed to plans aiming to ratchet up cooperation across the wider Arab region, the Gulf Arab kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said, citing the necessity of the move amid existential challenges. This is in line with Riyadh's firm belief in "protecting the rights of the Arab people," subsequently enhancing the principles of peace, security, and development, the Saudi top diplomat told his counterparts from the Cairo-based Arab League in a preparatory meeting ahead of a key summit in the Bahraini capital on Thursday.

Ever since Zionist occupation forces stepped up their "barbaric attacks" against the Palestinian people, Riyadh was quick

to act in shoring up global support for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip in a bid to prevent the conflict from exacerbating, he said, castigating Zionist entity for its "continued breaches" of international laws and conventions. Riyadh remains "firmly committed" to a rigid ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that would allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians there, while the kingdom now sees the path towards a two-state solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict based on 1967 borders as "irreversible," he added.

On the worsening humanitarian situation in Sudan, the Saudi foreign minister called for dialogue to push for a political solution to the conflict in the African nation, one that should be "Sudan-led" and fulfill the aspirations of the Sudanese people. The Saudi foreign minister went on to call for restraint in a number of Arab nations mired in unrest, namely, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya, urging cooler heads to prevail in a bid to prevent a slip into upheaval, he added. Foreign ministers from member countries of the Cairo-based bloc, including Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Yahya, are meeting in a prelude to the Arab Summit in Manama on Thursday. — KUNA

Information centers play role in forging education policies

MUSCAT: Statistical and information centers around the region should contribute towards efforts to shape up educational plans and policies, a Kuwaiti official said on Wednesday, citing such facilities as the framework of an education system. The effective and proper use of these research centers can go a long way in assembling the "core" of a sound education system, Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC) chief Dr. Mohammad Al-Shereka told talks organized by the regional education body in the Omani capital.

Educational policymakers in the region often rely on these facilities in their decision-making, which includes the "scientific and practical" assessment of growth indicators in the national education sector, he added. He went on to say that the data churned

out by these facilities is helpful in addressing any impediments to education growth, which include the lack of adequate research and information to push forward new plans and strategies, pointing out that such data is often assembled without the use of tech-savvy methods.

The talks are part of routine gatherings GASERC holds in a bid to allow information and statistical experts the chance to share their know-how with one another, which subsequently provides them with the platform needed to hone their skills in the field, he said. On new endeavors the talks could yield, the Kuwaiti official cited a plan to forge a comprehensive research and statistical database linking Gulf Arab states, which constitutes a step forward towards bolstering educational cooperation in the region. —KUNA

In my view

Shining source of
artistic creativity

Dr Nirmin Al-Houti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

It has been more than 20 years, and creativity still emanates from the Artistic Creativity Center, which was opened on August 27th, 2022. This mini-cultural center has become the nucleus of an artistic cultural establishment that contributes to graduating young creative generations who present innovative experiences by using state-of-the-art technologies at the service of serious innovations.

This edifice has become a recognized cultural academy in Egypt and the Arab world and has become a model to be followed. Many of the Arab states seek to achieve what the Artistic Creativity Center has achieved by graduating a generation that was not able to join universities and art institutions. These artists have skills and wanted to polish their skills. They only found the Artistic Creativity Center available for them to do so. They not only learn the principles of the theatrical arts; they also learn the cultural nucleus.

The Cultural Development Fund took it upon itself to give opportunity for these talented artists to study, as they were not able to join the academic education, so it built the center and held many theatrical and artistic workshops under the supervision of the genius Khalid Jalal, who played his role as a seasoned academic. Jalal holds basic workshops to build the actors through a curriculum that contains many art and theatrical materials.

That study was prepared for a certain number of weeks, followed by exams at the end of each workshop. At the end of each course, there is a theatrical work that is designed and implemented by the students to become a new nucleus in the world of art with new talents and faces. The creator of this nucleus and the builder of its artistic and theatrical molecules is Khalid Jalal.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Lightning strikes over Kuwait City during a thunderstorm on May 14, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Burgan Bank supports aspiring
job seekers at GUST Career Fair
Bank extends its dedicated human capital development efforts

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently concluded its participation in the three-day Career Fair organized and hosted by the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). The Bank's renewed participation in the annual GUST Career Fair is a testament to its commitment to attracting Kuwait's brightest and most aspiring talents and investing in their professional and personal growth, guaranteeing a brighter future for individuals and the market at large.

Representing Burgan at the event was a team of select staff from the Bank's Human Resources Department who spoke to many job seekers exploring opportunities in the banking and financial sector. The Burgan representatives introduced visitors to the nature of the work culture at the Bank and walked them through the most suitable vacancies based on their educational background, experience, and interests - going as far as setting up one-on-one interviews with the most promising candidates.

Commenting on the Bank's participation in the fair, Abdulwahab Jamal Abdulraheem, Executive Manager - Talent Acquisition at Burgan Bank, said: "Our dedicated and talented HR team spares no ef-

Abdulwahab Jamal
Abdulraheem

fort to find and attract the best talents all year long; however, their prowess truly shines during our participation at the GUST Career Fair.

Being present in person allows for more vibrant dynamics whereby our representatives tailor their conversations to visitors' interests and experiences, allowing each candidate to reveal their true potential, leading to higher success rates for the HR team and more satisfaction for the applicants. We firmly believe that every person has a unique value to add, and we aim in our headhunting and hiring process to ensure that every talent is placed and utilized properly, guaranteeing mutual growth for every individual on our expansive team as well as

the organization as a whole."

Besides discussing employment opportunities, the Burgan representatives also shared valuable information about banking awareness and financial literacy, as part of its unwavering support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) campaign - launched and supervised by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), with the support of Kuwaiti banks. It serves to note that Burgan Bank, a certified Great Place to Work, remains one of the most highly sought employer of choice in the Kuwaiti banking sector, thanks to its vigorous and holistic learning and development program.

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Photos show some of the hospital equipment.

Kuwait Hospital
launches Hyperbaric
Oxygen Therapy Unit

KUWAIT: Kuwait Hospital proudly announces the launch of its Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Unit, led by esteemed medical professionals Dr Abrar Al-Hussaini, Vascular Disease Diagnosis Consultant, and Dr Ahmed Amir, Consultant in Vascular Surgery and Arterial Catheterization. Dedicated to advancing patient care, the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Unit offers specialized sessions of oxygen therapy administered under precise pressure conditions to attain optimal therapeutic outcomes. By elevating the concentration of inhaled oxygen, this innovative treatment method effectively addresses various medical conditions, particularly those associated with poor blood vessel perfusion.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) is a cutting-edge technology that administers oxygen at elevated pressures, allowing patients to breathe high doses of oxygen within a sterile, pressurized environment. Through a series of meticulously controlled sessions, patients undergo a prescribed duration within the oxygenated chamber, facilitating oxygen diffusion into tissues and bolstering blood plasma oxygen levels.

This process not only aids in alleviating tissue irri-

tation but also fosters enhanced blood flow, promoting expedited healing and mitigating the risk of complications. The Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Unit at Kuwait Hospital caters to a diverse range of medical cases, including diabetic foot complications, complex wounds, burns, anemia, and stroke patients.

By leveraging the therapeutic benefits of HBOT, the unit endeavors to enhance patient outcomes, elevate quality of life, and ensure comprehensive care for individuals seeking treatment. Dr Abrar Al-Hussaini and Dr. Ahmed Amir, alongside a proficient medical team equipped with the latest advancements in healthcare technology, stand ready to welcome patients to the Vascular Surgery Unit at Kuwait Hospital. Committed to excellence, they strive to deliver personalized care and innovative treatments tailored to meet the unique needs of each patient.





Philippine civilian
convoy sails towards
disputed reef

Western allies slam Georgia over 'foreign influence' law



KYIV, Ukraine: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) listens to his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba as they look at portraits decorating the Memory Wall of Fallen Defenders of Ukraine in the Russian-Ukrainian War, in Kyiv on May 15, 2024. — AFP

Putin hails Russian advances in Kharkiv

Blinken unveils fresh military aid in Kyiv

KYIV: President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday hailed Russian advances in the Kharkiv region and the recapture of a symbolic town further south that was one of the only prizes of Ukraine's underwhelming counteroffensive last summer. Moscow's claims came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced fresh military aid while in Kyiv and said Washington had not explicitly prohibited Ukraine from using Western weapons to strike targets inside Russia.

The Russian advances on two fronts point to the acute ammunition and manpower shortages crippling the Ukrainian military and paving the way for the Kremlin's army to eat away at Ukrainian territory.

"In all directions our troops are constantly, every day, improving their positions," Putin told Russia's military leaders, including new Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, in a televised meeting. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has cancelled planned trips abroad over the fresh offensive and the military was sending more troops to Kharkiv to hold back Russian advances, Kyiv said.

The Russian defense ministry claims to have captured a handful of villages in the Kharkiv region, which is home to the country's second-largest city, and on Wednesday added the settlements of Glyboke and Lukyantsi to its list. But it also said it had re-

captured the southern Ukrainian village of Robotyne, one of only a handful of settlements Kyiv retook at a huge cost in its summer counteroffensive last year. Zelensky had visited the village in February and had hailed its recapture as a major success in an operation otherwise plagued with setbacks.

Moscow launched a surprise major ground assault on the Kharkiv region last week as it seeks to advance across the battlefield with Kyiv struggling for arms and manpower. The Russian advances have forced the evacuation of around 8,000 civilians from the Kharkiv region under risk of being caught in the crossfire, Ukrainian emergency services said.

A military spokesman conceded earlier on Wednesday on state television that Kyiv had withdrawn troops - including near Lukyantsi - citing overwhelming Russian onslaughts and the need to save soldiers' lives. Authorities in another village under attack, Vovchansk, said there was intense street-to-street fighting in the border town that before the war had an estimated population of 20,000 people.

"We are here and are evacuating people and helping them. The situation in Vovchansk is extremely difficult," police chief Oleksiy Kharkivsky said on social media. The interior ministry announced that three civilians had been killed in the Kharkiv region over the last 24 hours and the national police said five civilians

had been wounded by Russian fire on Wednesday.

At least two people were killed in Russian aerial attacks on the city of Dnipro, local authorities said.

Zelensky's office said the president had postponed upcoming trips and reiterated that the military was rushing reinforcements to the area to prevent Russia from punching through. He had been planning to visit Spain later this week.

Some military analysts say Moscow may be trying to force Ukraine to divert troops from other areas of the front line, such as around the strategic town of Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region, where Russia has also been advancing. "Donetsk and Kharkiv regions are where it is most difficult now," Zelensky said in an address on Tuesday evening.

Blinken's visit came just weeks after the US Congress finally approved a \$61-billion financial aid package for Ukraine following months of political wrangling, unlocking much-needed arms for the country's outgunned troops. Washington's top diplomat said the United States was releasing \$2 billion from the major aid package. He also appeared to tacitly green-light Ukrainian strikes with Western weapons on Russian territory. "We have not encouraged or enabled strikes outside of Ukraine, but ultimately Ukraine has to make decisions for itself about how it's going to conduct this war," Blinken said. — AFP

Biden and Trump agree to debates in June, September

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden and Donald Trump agreed Wednesday to hold a first presidential debate in June after the Democratic incumbent challenged his rival to "make my day" and the scandal-plagued Republican quickly responded he was ready to "rumble."

CNN announced it will hold the first debate on June 27 in Atlanta, Georgia. Biden proposed a second debate for September 10 and Trump accepted. Biden, 81, had set out his own terms for the debates with political showman Trump, such as time limits for speakers and having no live audience - a condition CNN said it had agreed to.



NEW YORK: This combination of pictures shows US President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump. — AFP

In his first formal debate offer after months of stalling, the Democrat also shunned the traditional calendar proposed by the commission that has run debates since 1988 as he sought to exercise control over the format. Trump, 77, accepted the dates even as he set out a starkly different vision with a larger venue for "excitement purposes" and accused the Democrat of being afraid of crowds.

"Donald Trump lost two debates to me in 2020. Since then, he hasn't shown up for a debate. Now he's acting like he wants to debate me again. Well, make my day, pal," Biden said in a video on X. "I'll even do it twice."

Biden also trolled Trump over his ongoing criminal hush money trial in New York, which features a mid-week break, adding: "So let's pick the dates Donald, I hear you're free on Wednesdays."

CNN said in a statement that the debate would be held at its studios in Atlanta in the "crucial battleground state of Georgia." "To ensure candidates may maximize the time allotted in the debate, no audience will be present. Moderators for the debate and additional details will be announced at a later date," it said. Biden's debate offer appeared to show him taking the calculated risk of putting Trump back into American living rooms ahead of November's election, hoping it could reverse the Republican's poll lead in a series of battleground states. The Biden campaign has increasingly been trying to remind voters of what they say is the true face of the mercurial president who lost in 2020, amid what they fear is Trump "nostalgia" in some quarters - even as the Republican details his stark vision for an authoritarian second term in various interviews. For his part, Trump has previously said he would debate his rival "anytime, anywhere" as he seeks to portray Biden as old and incapable of leadership. — AFP

French police hunt killers in prison van ambush

CAEN, France: French authorities on Wednesday were hunting for a group of gunmen who killed two prison officers in an attack at a motorway toll that freed a convict linked to gangland drug killings, with an international alert also issued. The killings and dramatic getaway by the perpetrators have shocked France, with authorities under pressure to catch those responsible, who all remain at large.

More than 450 police officers and gendarmes had been mobilized from Tuesday just for the search in the northern department of Eure where the attack took place, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said.

Global police body Interpol also issued a red notice, at the request of France, which asks law enforcement worldwide to locate and apprehend Mohamed Amra, the convict who escaped in the attack and is reportedly known as "The Fly". "We have put a lot of resources into finding not only the person who escaped", but also "the gang that released him under such despicable circumstances", Darmanin told the RTL broadcaster. "We are putting in considerable resources, we are making a lot of progress," he added. Apparently raising the possibility the fugitives could have fled abroad, he also spoke of "international cooperation". But over a day after the attack, there was still no sign of them being found.

Two prison officers were killed in the attack and three others wounded, Paris prosecutor Laure Beccuau said late on Tuesday. One of the injured men was fighting for his life in hospital and two more were receiving critical care, she said. The incident took place late on Tuesday morning at a road toll in Incarville in the Eure region of northern France. The prosecutor said the prison van was rammed head-on by a stolen Peugeot vehicle as it went through the toll crossing. But the van and another vehicle in the prison convoy were also followed by an Audi.

Gunmen emerged from the two cars and shot at both prison vehicles. French television channels broadcast footage of the attack taken by surveillance cameras at the toll, showing the Peugeot colliding head on with the prison van. In the video, several gunmen dressed in black emerge from both



This undated handout Red Notice (Notice Rouge) image released by Interpol on May 15, 2024, shows Mohamed Amra posing at an undisclosed location, after he was freed in an armed attack on a prison vehicle at a motorway toll both in northern France on May 14, 2024, during which two prison officers were killed. - AFP

attack vehicles. A firefight ensues and one individual appears to be guided away from the van by the gunmen. A vehicle believed to have been used by the attackers was later found as a burned-out wreck at a different location. The prison officers who died, both men, were the first to be killed in the line of duty since 1992, according to Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti.

One of them was married and had twin children while the other "left a wife who is five months pregnant", he said. Prison officer unions announced a day of minimum service on Wednesday and asked for urgent measures to improve the safety of staff.

On Wednesday, officers across the country held a minute of silence outside their prisons to remember the fallen colleagues. "We are in mourning," Vanessa Lefavre, of the FO union at the Fleury-Merogis prison outside Paris told AFP. "We would never have imagined that prison staff would be killed like this."

Prosecutor Beccuau said Amra, 30, had last week been convicted of aggravated robbery and charged in a case of abduction leading to death. But a source close to the case said that Amra was suspected of involvement in drug trafficking and of ordering gangland killings. Another source said he is suspected of being at the head of a criminal network. His lawyer Hugues Vigier said Amra had already made an escape attempt at the weekend by sawing the bars of his cell and said he was shocked by the "inexcusable" and "insane" violence. — AFP

Tunisia remands journalists held over critical remarks

TUNIS: A Tunisian court on Wednesday ordered two journalists to be held in remand until the completion of investigations into critical comments, a court spokesman said. Broadcaster Borhen Bssais and political commentator Mourad Zeghidi were arrested Saturday under a decree criminalizing "spreading false information" among other charges, spokesman Mohamed Zitouna said.

Zeghidi is being investigated over social media statements last February and a post in support of Mohamed Boughalleb, another journalist and critic of President Kais Saied who has been detained separately. Bssais was arrested on accusations of "having harmed President Kais Saied through radio broadcasts and statements" online between 2019 and 2022, according to his lawyer Nizar Ayed.

Their trial is set to begin on May 22, according to their lawyers. Both media figures are prosecuted under a law ratified by Saied in September 2022. The law punishes people with up to five years in prison for the use of social media to "produce, spread (or) disseminate... false news" and "slander others, tarnish their reputation, financially or morally harm them".

Journalists and opposition figures have said it has been used to stifle dissent. Since the decree came into force, more than 60 journalists, lawyers and opposition figures have been prosecuted under it, according to the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

The same night Bssais and Zeghidi were taken into police custody, masked police raided the Tunisian bar association and arrested lawyer Sonia Dahmani, also the same law. On Monday, another lawyer was forcibly arrested at the association's headquarters. The president of the bar, Hatem Mezoui, on Tuesday called for an end to "the abuse of power" and "violence" targeting the lawyers.

The European Union also expressed concern over a string of arrests of civil society figures in Tunisia - the latest sign of a tightening clampdown on freedoms under Saied. Non-governmental organizations have decried a rollback of freedoms in Tunisia since Saied began ruling by decree after a sweeping power grab in 2021. — AFP

International

Western allies slam Georgia over 'foreign influence' law

Concerns grow the Caucasus country is shifting towards Russia

TBILISI: Georgia faced a blizzard of international condemnation Wednesday as the EU, NATO and UN slammed the adoption of a controversial "foreign influence" law targeting overseas-funded NGOs. Ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers voted through the legislation Tuesday in defiance of protesters worried the Caucasus country is shifting away from its pro-Western course towards Russia. The move has sparked a wave of weeks-long mass protests unprecedented in the recent history of the ex-Soviet republic, where according to opinion polls most of the population wants to join the European Union and NATO, and is staunchly anti-Kremlin.

Fresh protests are planned on Wednesday evening. "The adoption of this law negatively impacts Georgia's progress on the EU path," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a joint statement with the European Commission.

"We urge the Georgian authorities to withdraw the law." The EU statement reiterated condemnation for "intimidation, threats and physical assaults on civil society representatives, political leaders and journalists" during demonstrations against the law. A spokeswoman for the NATO military alliance said the law was a "step in the wrong direction... away from European and Euro-Atlantic integration".

"We urge Georgia to change course and respect the right to peaceful protest," said NATO spokeswoman Farah Dakhlallah. UN human rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement he "deeply regrets" Georgia's adoption of the law.

"Authorities and lawmakers have chosen to

disregard the many warnings by human rights defenders and civil society organizations," Turk said. "The impacts on the rights to freedom of expression and association in Georgia unfortunately now risk being significant."

The flurry of criticism came after the United States Tuesday warned the "Kremlin-style" law would hit Washington's ties with Georgia if it was not withdrawn. The foreign ministers of Estonia, Iceland, Latvia and Lithuania travelled on Wednesday to Georgia to express their concerns over the law's adoption.

During their press conference alongside Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said that "cosmetic changes" would not make the law compatible with European standards. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has signalled his party's readiness to consider Zurbishvili's proposed amendments to the law, should she lay them out in her veto document.

But Zurbishvili—at loggerheads with the ruling party—ruled out the prospect of entering "false, artificial, misleading negotiations" with Georgian Dream. "No one should think that Georgia's president can be used for saving the face of this government," she told the news conference.

The bill requires NGOs and media outlets that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad to register as bodies "pursuing the interests of a foreign power".

Critics say it mirrors repressive Russian legislation used to silence dissent, in a symbol of the ex-Soviet



TBILISI, Georgia: Protesters block a street during a rally against the controversial "foreign influence" bill in Tbilisi on May 14, 2024. — AFP

republic's drift closer to Russia's orbit in recent years. Protests have sprung up against it, and scuffles have even broken out inside parliament between opposition lawmakers and members of Georgian

Dream. Georgian Dream has sought to depict the protesters as violent mobs. It insists it is committed to joining the EU, and portrays the bill as aimed at increasing the transparency of NGO funding. — AFP

Emergency set for New Caledonia after deadly riots

NOUMEA: President Emmanuel Macron moved Wednesday to declare a state of emergency in France's Pacific territory of New Caledonia after a second night of rioting that left three dead and hundreds wounded, his office said. Anger over constitutional reforms from Paris boiled over again after the lower house of parliament overnight backed a hotly-disputed voting reform that the representatives of the indigenous Kanak population say weighs against them. Despite heavily armed security forces fanning out across the capital Noumea, and the ordering of a nighttime curfew, rioting continued overnight virtually unabated in the worst violence there since the 1980s.

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. Colonised by France from the second half of the nineteenth century, it already has special status within France unlike other overseas territories. While it has on three occasions rejected independence in referendums, independence remains support particularly among the indigenous Kanak people.

Macron warned that any further violence would be met with an "unyielding" response and called for a resumption of political dialogue to end the unrest, the Elysee said in a statement. "The president has requested that the decree aimed at declaring a state of emergency in New Caledonia be included on the agenda" of a cabinet meeting this afternoon, the presidency said.

Shops were looted and public buildings torched during overnight violence, the authorities there said. Hundreds of people including around 100 police and gendarmes have been injured in the unrest, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said in Paris.

Giving a new toll, the presidency said three people had been killed, while a police officer

has been very seriously wounded. Macron cancelled a planned domestic trip and moved Wednesday's regular cabinet meeting to hold a crisis meeting with key ministers on New Caledonia earlier on Wednesday.

In Noumea and the commune of Paita there were reports of several exchanges of fire between civil defense groups and rioters. Streets in the capital were pocked with the shells of burned-out cars and buildings, including a sports store and a large concrete climbing wall. "Numerous arsons and pillaging of shops, infrastructure and public buildings—including primary and secondary schools—were carried out," said the High Commission, which represents the French central government in New Caledonia. Security forces had managed to regain control of Noumea's prison, which holds about 50 inmates, after an uprising and escape bid by prisoners, it said in a statement.

Police have arrested more than 130 people since the riots broke out Monday night, with dozens placed in detention to face court hearings, the commission said.

A nighttime curfew was extended, along with bans on gatherings, the carrying of



NOUMEA, France: A local resident clears the roads of burnt debris left by rioters overnight at the N'Gea traffic circle in Noumea on May 15, 2024. — AFP

weapons and the sale of alcohol. The territory's La Tontouta International Airport remained closed to commercial flights.

As rioters took to the streets, France's lower house of parliament 17,000 kilometers (10,600 miles) away voted in favour of a constitu-

tional change bitterly opposed by indigenous Kanaks. The reform—which must still be approved by a joint sitting of both houses of the French parliament—would give a vote to people who have lived in New Caledonia for 10 years. — AFP

Amir vows reforms in new...

Continued from Page 1

pertinent to infrastructure, advance health and housing care and the educational system by adopting procedures where transparency and public money preservation should be taken into account.

All economic and investment sectors should be developed to ensure a sustainable economy, capitalize on human capital, enhance innovation and scientific research, revamp the business environment and government services, and achieve service digitalization, HH the Amir underlined. Furthermore, HH Sheikh Mishal urged the new Cabinet to promote Kuwait's diplomatic relations with brotherly and friendly countries, broaden the scope of cooperation to new horizons and cement Kuwait's humanitarian role.

Finally, HH the Amir emphasized that mass media should work on highlighting government achievements in the implementation of development projects in the country to fulfil the Kuwaiti people's expectations and aspirations. The Cabinet, in turn,

voiced great appreciation and gratitude to HH the Amir for his prudent directives, vowing to absolutely stick to them as a government approach aiming at creating further progress, elevation, stability, security and safety for the nation and citizens.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal earlier pledged to pursue the process of reforms and affirmed that "we are in a new phase of responsible and serious action stages". HH the Amir's statement came during a reception of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad to take the oath on the occasion of his appointment and present the ministers to HH the Amir, who were also sworn in. HH the Amir congratulated the newly elected ministers, stressing that it is a great responsibility, wishing them success in serving the dear homeland and Kuwait's citizens and residents.

Earlier, HH the Amir issued an Amiri order to address Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as His Highness. According to the Amiri order, addressing the Prime Minister must be as follows: His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister. The prime minister and the ministers ought to "execute our order as of the date of its issuance and it should be published by the official gazette," stated the Amiri order by HH the Amir, issued at Seif Palace. — KUNA

cy," he added on X, formerly Twitter. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky condemned the "appalling" shooting and wished Fico a speedy recovery. "We strongly condemn this act of violence... Every effort should be made to ensure that violence does not become the norm in any country," he said in a message on social media.

US President Joe Biden condemned the shooting as a "horrific act of violence". Biden said he and First Lady Jill Biden "are praying for a swift recovery, and our thoughts are with his family and the people of Slovakia." British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on X he was "shocked to hear this awful news". French President Emmanuel Macron also said he was "shocked". "I strongly condemn this attack," Macron said on X. "My thoughts and solidarity are with him, his family and the people of Slovakia."

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda called for a "thorough investigation" and wished Fico "a full recovery". Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala called the news of the attack "shocking". "I hope the prime minister will get well as soon as possible. We must not tolerate violence, it must have no place in society," he said on X. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said: "Robert, my thoughts are with you in this very difficult moment."

As well as his current stint as premier, Fico also headed the government in 2006-10 and 2012-18. Since he assumed office last October, Fico has made a string of remarks that have soured ties between Slovakia and neighboring Ukraine. He has notably questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and called for a compromise with Russia, which invaded in 2022.

After he was elected, Slovakia stopped sending weapons to Ukraine. He pledged during the electoral campaign not to provide Kyiv with "a single bullet". He also sparked mass protests with controversial changes, including a media law that critics say will undermine the impartiality of public television and radio. — AFP

Palestinians mark Nakba as Gazans...

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"When your child is accustomed to all the comforts and luxuries, and suddenly, overnight, everything is taken away from him... it is a big shock."

Thousands marched in the West Bank city of Ramallah, as well as in Nablus, Hebron and elsewhere, carrying banners denouncing the occupation and protesting the war in Gaza. "There's pain for us, but of course more pain for Gazans," said one protester, Manal Sarhan, 53, who has relatives in Zionist jails that have not been heard from since Oct 7. "We're living the Nakba a second time."

Wednesday's commemorations and marches — held a day after the Zionist entity's Independence Day — come as the Gaza war has brought a massive death toll and the forced displacement of most of the territory's 2.4 million people. A devastating humanitarian crisis has engulfed the territory, with the United Nations warning of looming famine in the north.

The sight of desperate families in Gaza carrying their scant belongings through the ruins of war-scarred cities has evoked for many the events of 1948. "Your Independence Day is our Catastrophe," protesters chanted in the Zionist entity on the eve of Nakba Day at a rally joined by many Arab citizens of the Zionist entity, descendants of Palestinians who stayed on their land and now live as a minority in the Zionist entity.

Hamas declared in a Nakba Day statement that "the ongoing suffering of millions of refugees inside Palestine and in the diaspora is directly attributed to the Zionist occupation". The Islamist group said that

"their legitimate right to return to their homes from which they were displaced cannot be compromised or relinquished".

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday insisted there was no "humanitarian catastrophe" in Rafah as he announced nearly 500,000 people had been evacuated from the south Gaza city amid intense fighting. And despite previous threats by US President Joe Biden to withhold some arms deliveries over Netanyahu's insistence on attacking Rafah, his administration informed Congress on Tuesday of a new \$1 billion weapons package for the Zionist entity, official sources told AFP.

Ahmed Al-Akhras, 50, who was displaced from central Gaza to Rafah in the far south, said the war was worse than anything Palestinians have endured before. "Through my experience and conversations with those who lived through the Nakba... the bombings, destruction, displacement, killing and annihilation occurring in this war are unprecedented throughout history," he said.

By comparison, he said, back in 1948 — when his own family fled the destroyed village of Wadi Hunayn in what is now the Zionist entity — for most people "the suffering was limited to forced displacement". The Zionist entity's relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza have since killed at least 35,233 people, mostly civilians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

With the Middle East peace process stalled for many years already, enmity between the Zionist entity's leadership and Palestinian factions has reached fever pitch, while the conflict has also sparked a global wave of pro-Palestinian demonstrations. At the Ramallah rally, 16-year-old Ahmed Nomas said: "We want the world to stop seeing Palestinians as terrorists and to realize that we have no rights." — AFP

Slovak PM shot multiple times...

Continued from Page 1

guards rushing to lift the premier off the ground and into a car. Outgoing Slovak President Zuzana Caputova told reporters that "police have detained the attacker". "I am shocked, we are all shocked by the terrible and heinous attack," she added. Slovak television showed footage of a middle-aged man in jeans being handcuffed on the ground. Separate images from public television RTVS showed a person on a stretcher being taken out of a helicopter and wheeled into a hospital.

"Today, after the government meeting in Handlova, there was an assassination attempt" on Fico, the government said in a post on social media. "He is currently being transported by helicopter to Banská Bystrica in a life-threatening condition, because it would take too long to get to Bratislava due to the necessity of an acute intervention," the government's statement added. Fico was shot multiple times, said a post on his official Facebook page.

Handlova local hospital director Marta Eckhardtova said "Fico was brought into our hospital and he was treated at our vascular surgery clinic". She was unable to describe his injuries. Fico, whose Smer-SD party won the general election last September, is a four-time prime minister and a political veteran accused of swaying his country's foreign policy in favor of the Kremlin.

Slovak president-elect and Fico ally Peter Pellegrini said he learned of the shooting "with horror". "An assassination attempt on one of the highest constitutional officials is an unprecedented threat to Slovak democra-

Palestinian state key to Arab plans...

Continued from Page 1

Last month, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, European and Arab foreign ministers met to discuss how to advance the two-state solution.

Gaza will also be top of the agenda when leaders from the 22-strong Arab League meet in Bahrain on Thursday. Arab countries are "pressuring the United States to achieve two things: Establish a Palestinian state and recognizing it in the United Nations", said an Arab diplomat who is familiar with the talks. "What is currently hindering these intensive efforts is the continuation of the war and Netanyahu's intransigent rejection," said the diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Arab leaders "have been trying to work with the Biden administration to mutually support the so-called day after" plan, said Sanam Vakil, director of the Middle East and North Africa programme at Britain's Chatham House think tank. Central to

their plan is the reform of the Palestinian Authority to clear the way for a reunified administration in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The PA has had almost no influence over Gaza since Hamas militants wrestled control of the territory from the Fatah movement of President Mahmoud Abbas in 2007. "We believe in one Palestinian government that should be in charge of the West Bank and Gaza," Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said on Tuesday. The transition should "not affect the Palestinian cause" or "undermine the Palestinian Authority", he told the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha.

In March, the Palestinian president approved a government led by newly appointed prime minister Mohammed Mustafa, who wants it to play a role in postwar Gaza. However, the biggest roadblock, according to Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a prominent Emirati analyst, is the Zionist government. He noted that Arab outreach efforts have also included the Zionist opposition. Earlier this month, the UAE's foreign minister met Zionist opposition leader Yair Lapid in Abu Dhabi. They discussed the need for negotiations on a two-state solution, according to a statement from the UAE foreign ministry. — AFP

International

Philippine civilian convoy sails towards disputed reef

China Coast Guard shadows Philippine boats heading for shoal

SOUTH CHINA SEA, Undefined: Civilians on board Philippine fishing boats sailed Wednesday towards a China-controlled reef off the Southeast Asian country, handing out aid to Filipino fishermen and dropping buoys to assert their rights to the disputed waterway.

Meanwhile, China Coast Guard vessels on Wednesday began shadowing a convoy of Philippine civilian boats on their way to a disputed South China Sea shoal, a convoy spokesman said. Three clearly marked coast guard vessels sailed within sight of the convoy at dusk and broadcast radio warnings heard aboard one of the Philippine boats as the convoy moved closer to Scarborough Shoal, convoy spokesman Emman Hizon told reporters.

The trip to the waters around Scarborough Shoal comes two weeks after China Coast Guard vessels fired water cannon at two Philippine government boats in the same area, in the latest maritime incident between the countries. Waving small national flags and chanting "the Philippines is ours, China out!", about 200 people boarded five commercial fishing vessels that sailed out of a northern port in the morning, escorted by a number of outrigger boats.

A few hours later, a lone Philippine Coast Guard boat met the convoy in open seas and stood guard as it handed out food and fuel to Filipino fishermen, who sometimes spend weeks out at sea, and dropped a dozen orange buoys marked "WPS is Ours".

WPS is the acronym for the West Philippine Sea, Manila's name for the South China Sea waters immediately west of the Philippines. "The Chinese drove us away. That always happens whenever we try to go to Scarborough Shoal. They always drive us away," fisherman Jay-ar Hilig told AFP as he waited for his turn to receive diesel fuel and a plastic grocery bag.

"This is for the Chinese to see that we Filipinos are united in wanting to take back Scarborough Shoal," added fellow fisherman Luis Pontillas. No Chinese navy or coast guard vessels were in the area as the aid distribution took place, an AFP team aboard the Filipino coast guard vessel said.

The group had said it received reports of a "heavy presence" of Chinese vessels near Scarborough Shoal, which is called Panatag Shoal in the Philip-



AT SEA, Undefined: A Philippine fishing boat speeds past buoys dropped by a civilian-led mission Atin Ito (It's Ours) Coalition, in South China Sea on May 15, 2024. — AFP

ippines. Later, the group issued a statement saying it would "proceed to the second phase of its voyage, aiming to reach the vicinity of Panatag Shoal for another round of supply distribution to Filipino fishermen in the area."

A spokesman for the convoy told reporters via a messaging app that it was "still far from the shoal", while the Philippine Coast Guard said in Manila that it was deploying more vessels for escort duty. In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin asserted Wednesday that China had "indisputable sovereignty" over Scarborough Shoal.

"If the Philippines abuses China's goodwill and infringes on China's territorial sovereignty and jurisdiction, China will lawfully safeguard its rights and take countermeasures," he told reporters.

"Relevant responsibility and consequences will be borne entirely by the Philippines." The Scarborough Shoal has been a potential flashpoint since Beijing seized it from Manila in 2012.

The fish-rich reef is about 240 kilometers (150 miles) west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometers from Hainan, the nearest

major Chinese land mass. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing off rival claims by the Philippines and other countries, and ignoring an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

To press its claims, Beijing deploys coast guard and other boats to patrol the waterway and has turned several reefs into artificial islands that it has militarized. "This civilian supply mission is not just about delivering supplies, it's about reaffirming our presence and rights in our own waters," convoy organizer Edicio Dela Torre said in a statement Wednesday.

"The world is watching, and the narrative of rightful ownership and peaceful assertion is clearly on our side," he added. Tensions over the disputed waters and reefs have intensified in the past 18 months as Manila has pushed back against China's growing assertiveness.

This is the second civilian convoy organized by the Atin Ito group, whose name is Tagalog for "This is Ours". A previous trip to the South China Sea in December was aborted due to shadowing by Chinese vessels. — AFP

India's top court bails jailed editor; Kashmir journalist released

NEW DELHI: India's top court on Wednesday ordered the release on bail of an editor jailed in connection with a case alleging his news website received Chinese funding. Prabir Purkayastha was arrested last year after a New York Times investigation alleged his English-language outlet NewsClick had been financially supported by a network pushing Chinese propaganda.

Relations between New Delhi and Beijing are tense due to a long-running border dispute that devolved into a deadly troop clash in the Himalayas in 2020 and sent diplomacy between the two nations into deep freeze. The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that Purkayastha's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate, India's financial crimes agency, was illegal since it failed to communicate the grounds for detention in writing to him. Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta declared his arrest "invalid in the eyes of law" and said he should be released, subject to furnishing of bail bonds. The court said that its ruling on Purkayastha's confinement was not a state-

ment on the merits of the ongoing case against him.

Last year the New York Times reported that NewsClick was financed by US millionaire Neville Roy Singham, saying it "sprinkled its coverage with Chinese government talking points"—claims Singham rejected. The report also accused Singham of working closely with Beijing and of "financing its propaganda worldwide".

Purkayastha, who has also denied the claims, was arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), a stringent anti-terror law under which formally charged suspects are almost never bailed. His arrest had raised international concerns over the situation for media in a country where press freedom has nosedived since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014.

India has dropped from 140 to 159 on its rankings of media freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders. Journalists critical of the government complain of harassment, and critics say Modi's government has sought to pressure rights groups by scrutinizing their finances and clamping down on foreign funding.

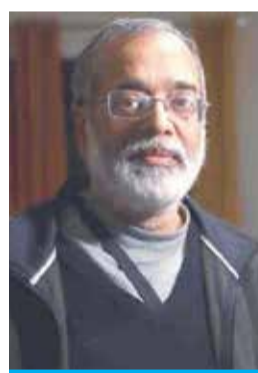
Separately, an award-winning journalist in Jammu & Kashmir who spent more than five years in jail returned home Wednesday after a court in the disputed region granted him bail in an ongoing terrorism case. Aasif Sultan, a reporter with a magazine that is now shuttered, was first arrested in August

2018 accused of "harboring known militants".

Further charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) were leveled against him after he was accused of participating in a jail riot.

Sultan was briefly bailed in February but rearrested two days later on fresh charges under the act. A relative and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said Sultan had been released again this week. "He returned home today, but the bail conditions are very harsh. He is virtually banned from talking to anyone outside the family," the relative told AFP, declining to be named for fear of reprisal.

Kunal Majumder of CPJ said on social media platform X that Sultan had been bailed on Tuesday. A court document seen by AFP and dated Friday said that Sultan's detention did "not serve any purpose" and granted his bail on strict conditions. Sultan was forbidden from travelling outside Kashmir, using encrypted communication apps such as WhatsApp and allowing anyone else to use his phone. — AFP



Prabir Purkayastha

16 citizens killed fighting in Ukraine war, says Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: At least 16 Sri Lankan mercenaries have been killed fighting in the war between Russia and Ukraine, the island's deputy defense minister said Wednesday.

Tens of thousands of Russian soldiers have been killed in Ukraine since the invasion began more than two years ago, and Moscow has been on a global quest for more troops.

Soldiers from Sri Lanka's regional neighbors India and Nepal have also signed up to fight since last year, with several confirmed deaths in combat from citizens of both countries. Sri Lan-

ka opened an inquiry last week into the recruitment of its citizens for the conflict that has since identified the participation of 288 retired soldiers from the island nation, deputy defense minister Pramitha Tennakoon said.

"We have confirmed information about 16 who have been killed," he told reporters in Colombo.

Tennakoon did not say which side of the conflict the soldiers had been fighting on. But ruling party lawmaker Gamini Waleboda told parliament on Monday that most had been recruited to fight alongside the Russian army. Those who joined had been duped with promises of high salaries and falsely told they would be given non-combat roles, Waleboda said.

Tennakoon said the recruitment of Sri Lankans was being treated as a human

trafficking enterprise and urged military officers not to fall prey to the recruitment drive. The Sri Lankan government was also in talks with both the Ukrainian and Russian foreign ministries to track down Sri Lankans in the two countries and bring them back safely.

"This is a delicate issue," Tennakoon said. "We are friends with Russia, we are friends with Ukraine. Both are important for us so we are talking to the foreign ministries to get our people back safely."

Complaints began pouring in from relatives after the defence ministry established its probe last week to collect information on those who had travelled to both countries to join the war effort. Sri Lanka has repeatedly warned its citizens against travelling to Russia or Ukraine to join the fighting.

away by the deluge of volcanic material, mud and rain. The mixture of ash, sand and pebbles carried down a volcano's slopes by rain is known in Indonesia as lahar, or cold lava.

Heavy equipment was deployed to clear debris from the areas worst hit by flooding and cold lava flows, which have affected transport access in six districts, said Suharyanto, who goes by one name.

As the search effort continued, volunteers in rubber boats joined rescuers. "We have been scouring the areas that cannot be reached with cars. The currents in the river are extreme, so the search is quite dangerous," Ritno Kurniawan, a 38-year-old member of the local rafting community, told AFP.

"We usually found the bodies along the riverbanks, buried under volcanic material or rocks."

More than 3,300 people have been forced to evacuate from affected areas. Provincial search and rescue official Hendri, who goes by one name, told AFP rain, stacks of logs and large volcanic rocks in rivers were hindering the search. Eka Putra, mayor of Tanah Datar, told Metro TV one village was still inaccessible by car or motorbike.

To aid the rescue effort, authorities on Wednesday



TANAH DATAR: People drive their motorcycles over a makeshift pathway made from wooden slabs to avoid the mud that was caused by flash floods at Rambatan Village, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, on May 14, 2024. — AFP

deployed weather modification technology, the term Indonesian officials use for cloud seeding. In this case, it is being used in a bid to make clouds rain earlier so the precipitation's intensity is weakened by the time it reaches the disaster-struck area. — AFP

News in Brief

Cardiovascular diseases kill 10,000 Europeans a day: WHO

COPENHAGEN: Cardiovascular disease is responsible for 40 percent of deaths in Europe, the WHO said on Wednesday, urging Europeans to cut their salt intake. That amounts to 10,000 deaths a day, or four million a year. "Implementing targeted policies to reduce salt intake by 25 percent could save an estimated 900,000 lives from cardiovascular diseases by 2030," Hans Kluge, the director of the Europe branch of the World Health Organization said in a statement. In Europe, one in three adults between the ages of 30 and 79 suffer from hypertension, often due to salt consumption. — AFP

Indonesia volcano belches ash tower 3 miles into sky

JAKARTA: A volcano in eastern Indonesia spewed ash five kilometers (3.1 miles) into the sky on Wednesday in one of its largest eruptions this year. No damage or casualties were immediately reported but images showed a tower of ash soaring into the sky above Mount Ibu, located on the remote island of Halmahera in North Maluku province. The huge grey and black ash column was "seen in thick intensity and leaning towards the west", said Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation in a statement. It called on locals and tourists not to go within five kilometers of Ibu's crater. — AFP

German court convicts stateless man over train rampage killings

ITZEHOE, Germany: A German court on Wednesday sentenced a stateless man of Palestinian origin to life in prison over a knife attack on a train that claimed two teenagers' lives. The accused, named by the court only as Ibrahim A., 34, had gone on a stabbing spree in January 2023 on a train travelling between the northern cities of Kiel and Hamburg. A 17-year-old girl and a 19-year-old man who were acquainted with each other were killed in the attack and five people wounded. Given the severity of the crime, the court, in its verdict also ruled out any early release usually offered after 15 years' imprisonment for life sentences. — AFP

Weak impact of disasters boosts Allianz results

BERLIN: German insurance group Allianz said Wednesday it had seen an increase in net profits in the first quarter, as the "benign" impact of claims from natural catastrophes supported its results. Allianz recorded a profit of 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) over the first three months of 2024, up 21.8 percent on the same period last year. Revenues across its businesses rose by 5.3 percent to 48.8 billion euros in the same time frame. In damages, revenues rose 5.7 percent on the back of "good price-driven growth", driving a 10.4-percent increase in the division's operating profit to 2.1 billion euros. — AFP

Russia suspends two airports' traffic over drone threat

MOSCOW: Russia said Wednesday that a major airport near the city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from Ukraine, had been temporarily closed after the region was targeted by a Ukrainian attack drone. Ukrainian forces have in recent weeks escalated aerial attacks on Russian border regions but have also been able to strike targets deep inside Russian territory. The defense ministry said it had downed a Ukrainian drone over the central region of Tatarstan but did not specify what was the target of the attack. — AFP

Dublin-NY live link suspended over 'inappropriate' behavior

DUBLIN: A public sculpture in Dublin billed as a real-time visual bridge between the Irish capital and New York has been suspended after a week due to "inappropriate behavior" by users. Designers of the sculpture are "investigating possible technical solutions to inappropriate behavior by a small minority of people in front of the Portal," Dublin City Council (DCC) said. Each sculpture features a 24/7 visual livestream from the portal in the other city, allowing real-time interaction between people on both ends. Viral video footage posted on social media showed people in both cities flashing body parts and one person in Dublin holding up an image of the Sept 11, 2001 attack in New York. — AFP

Indonesia floods kill 67 as rescuers race to find missing

TANAH DATAR, Indonesia: Indonesian rescuers raced Wednesday to find dozens of people still unaccounted for after heavy rains caused flash floods and washed volcanic debris into residential areas over the weekend, sweeping away houses and leaving 67 people dead. Hours of torrential rain on Saturday caused mud and rocks to flow into districts near one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes, destroying dozens of houses and damaging roads and mosques.

"Some of the missing ones have been found. According to the police identification, 67 people died," national disaster agency chief Suharyanto said Wednesday in a press conference, raising the death toll from 58. He added that 20 people remained missing, with rescuers saying many of the retrieved bodies were found in or around rivers after being swept

THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024

Qatar eyes more long-term gas supply deals this year

QatarEnergy secures sales of 25 million tons of LNG in 2023

DOHA: Qatar expects to sign more long-term natural gas supply deals this year to meet growing international demand, Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi said on Wednesday. The minister, who is also chief executive of QatarEnergy, said the state-owned giant had secured sales of 25 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the past year and expected to be "signing more this year."

"It's just agreeing on terms and conditions and pricing... but I think there's a huge demand out there, whether it's from Asia or Europe," Kaabi told the Qatar Economic Forum. "I think even Europe is realizing now they have to do something different to secure long term," he added. Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers alongside the United States, Australia and Russia.

Asian countries led by China, Japan and South Korea have been the main market for Qatari gas, but demand from European countries has grown since Russia's war on Ukraine threw supplies into doubt. In February, Qatar announced plans to expand output from its North Field, saying they would boost capacity to 142 million tons per year before 2030. Kaabi said there could be further expansions to the emirate's LNG production capacity. "The technical capability of doing more in Qatar is going to be assessed in the future and, if there is more, we probably will do more," he said.

In recent months, Qatar has inked LNG deals with France's Total, Britain's Shell, India's Petronet, China's Sinopec and Italy's Eni among others.

TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne and ExxonMobil chief Darren Woods both rejected concerns about overcapacity in the market as consumer countries move away from fossil fuels in a bid to limit global warming. "I'm not afraid. I think there is a place, a clear place for the gas in the transition," Pouyanne said. "Things will not happen in a night like some people are dreaming," he said, adding: "Population is growing, energy demand is growing."

Woods echoed the comments of the TotalEnergies boss. "Demand for energy is being driven by economic growth and people's living standards rising," he said. "There are billions of people around the planet who deserve better lives and are going to require affordable, available and reliable energy sources. And I think that's the challenge going forward." — AFP



DOHA: Chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil Darren Woods (right), Chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies Patrick Pouyanné (second right) and Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President & CEO of QatarEnergy Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, attend a session at the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha on May 15, 2024. — AFP

US retail sales cool in April

WASHINGTON: Retail sales in the United States were flat in April, government data showed Wednesday, despite analyst expectations that they would continue growing and in a sign that consumer spending is cooling. Overall sales held steady from March at a revised \$705.2 billion, said the Commerce Department in a report. Analysts expected a 0.4 percent jump, according to Briefing.com. While sales at gas stations were up 3.1 percent from March to April, the broader figure was bogged down by a slump in motor vehicle and parts dealers.

From a year ago, retail sales were 3.0 percent higher. Economists have been expecting demand to cool this year as interest rates remain high, while households draw down on accumulated savings from the COVID-19 pandemic. "The accelerated shift towards online retail has turbo-charged non-store sales over the past few years, but the size of last month's jump is hard to explain and looks unsustainable," said analysts at Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent note.

"We expect a softish retail sales report in April, supporting the idea that consumers are starting to tire," the report added. Economists have warned that retail numbers are often revised heavily as well. Generally, consumption growth is anticipated to slow further in the second quarter. "Consumer spending is slowing as elevated interest rates weigh on rate-sensitive spending and as the labor market cools," said Oxford Economics deputy chief US economist Michael Pearce.

But he said that the jobs market is "cooling rather than collapsing," meaning the slowdown will be gradual. The economy's resilience allows the Federal Reserve to also focus on incoming inflation data in its interest rate decisions, pointing to a gradual start to rate cuts in September, Pearce said. While momentum in household spending has cooled in the first quarter, economist Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said "the data signal that spending continues to be positive and remains supportive of growth for now."

US consumer inflation eased slightly last month, according to US government data published Wednesday, a positive sign for President Joe Biden ahead of November's election. The data supports the Biden adminis-



US inflation eased slightly last month, although the index for gasoline prices rose sharply. — AFP

tration's messaging that the US economy has turned a corner, as it looks to quell consumers' concerns about the impact of rising prices going into the likely rematch against former president Donald Trump. The annual consumer price index (CPI) came in at 3.4 percent in April, down 0.1 percentage point from March, the Labor Department said in a statement.

This was in line with the median forecast of economists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. Monthly inflation came in at 0.3 percent, slightly below expectations. "Overall, price pressures remain elevated but are moving in the right direction," High Frequency Economics (HFE) chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients. — AFP

EU lowers inflation forecast for 2024 despite uncertainty

BRUSSELS: The EU on Wednesday predicted eurozone inflation to fall faster in 2024 but warned the single-currency area's economy still faced risks from geopolitical tensions including wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The European Commission expects inflation to fall to 2.5 percent in 2024, down from a previous forecast of 2.7 percent—news that will be welcomed by the European Central Bank (ECB).

But the EU's executive arm said it foresaw lethargic growth of 0.8 percent in 2024 for the 20-country eurozone, unchanged from February's forecast. The European Central Bank (ECB) has halted its aggressive rate-hiking campaign launched in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 assault on Ukraine.

The bank is widely expected to cut rates in June as inflation falls and higher borrowing costs take their toll on the eurozone. "The last mile of the disinflationary process may be more challenging in the EU," the EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said.

"This could lead monetary authorities to ease monetary conditions at a slower pace than currently expected by markets," he added. Inflation



The European Commission expects inflation to fall to 2.5 percent in 2024, down from a previous forecast of 2.7 percent.

reached record levels after Moscow's invasion sent energy costs soaring and forced Europe to hastily find alternative sources to Russia. Gentiloni appeared upbeat, pointing to EU data from April that showed the eurozone economy grew by 0.3 percent in the first quarter of 2024.

"Now we believe we have turned a corner. We expect an uptick in growth this year and further acceleration next year. Meanwhile, inflation is set to fall further and reach the ECB target in 2025," Gentiloni said. But he warned the forecast faced "downside risks" from wars raging but also multiple elections around the world, including later this year in the United States.

Google to use AI-generated answers

MOUNTAIN VIEW, US: Google on Tuesday said it would introduce AI-generated answers to online queries, in one of the biggest changes to its world leading search engine in 25 years. "I'm excited to announce that we will begin launching this fully revamped experience, 'AI overviews,' to everyone in the US this week," Google chief executive Sundar Pichai said at an event in California.

The change will soon spread to other countries, he added, making it accessible to more than a billion people. Google's search results will feature an AI summary at the top of the page before the more typical unfurling of links. The AI blurbs generated by Google's Gemini technology will offer succinct summaries of what it found on the internet with links to the online sources that supplied the information. "You can ask whatever's on your mind or whatever you need to get done - from researching to planning to brainstorming - and Google will take care of the legwork," said Google Search team boss Liz Reid.

The change comes as Google feels growing pressure from AI-powered search engines like Perplexity, and from the repeated rumors that OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, is building its own AI search tool. Searches through AI chats have also appeared on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, with users able to get information from the web without Google. These alternatives are praised by some for their cleaner experience than the often cluttered results of a classic query.

Creators and small publishers are nervous about the change, fearing users will no longer click through to websites to find information. Research firm Gartner predicts traffic to the web from search engines will fall 25 percent by 2026 because of AI bot use. Google pushed back at the suggestion that ChatGPT-style AI interactions could impact its business, which depends almost exclusively on advertising sales from its search engine. "We've found that with AI Overviews, people use Search more, and are more satisfied with their results," Reid said.

"You can ask your most complex questions, with all the nuances and caveats you have in mind, all in one go." The company said such generative AI tools are making life easier for users, whether they're looking for a yoga studio open on Sundays, planning a trip or preparing a meal with special dietary requirements. The company will also soon start testing applying AI to searches based on video content as the query source, according to Reid. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank launches its 2030 ESG sustainability strategy

Bank establishes a clear roadmap and structural plan for the next six years



Gulf Bank Acting CEO
Waleed Khaled Mandani

- The strategy reflects our commitment to achieving a sustainable future both within and beyond the bank.
- We believe that implementing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards is essential for our long-term success.



Head of Strategy at Gulf Bank
Meshal Al-Wazzan.

- We aim to enhance collaboration and cooperation between the bank, shareholders, customers, and stakeholders.
- The strategy showcases the bank's transparency and guarantees that it addresses the expectations and concerns of all stakeholders.

KUWAIT: Building on the pivotal role of embedding sustainability principles in society, Gulf Bank has announced its ambitious Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) spanning from 2024 to 2030. This strategy will serve as a roadmap and a clear structural plan for the next six years.

On this occasion, the Acting CEO of Gulf Bank, Waleed Khaled Mandani, stated, "At Gulf Bank, our commitment to environmental, social, and governance principles is foundational to who we are. It highlights our dedication to fostering a sustainable future, not just within our organization, but also in the broader community. This is a reflection of our aspirations to be a leading banking institution in Kuwait."

Mandani pointed out that the strategy establishes specific goals for implementing measurable sustainability standards and key performance indicators. This will lead to the adoption of selected high-quality initiatives, aimed at boosting environmental and social sustainability as well as corporate governance. These initiatives are designed to reflect our core values and guide every aspect of our banking practices and operations.

He added, "We believe that implementing ESG standards is essential for our long-term success and achieving our 2030 strategy will stand as a testament to our dedication to making a positive impact on society. Aligning our values and business objectives with ESG principles assists us in conducting responsible banking practices, empowering various social groups, and maintaining a fair work environment."

Mandani further explained, "Our 2030 ESG standards extend beyond mere financial metrics, to ensure that Gulf Bank's practices, procedures, and decisions align with the wider community and environmental obligations and adhere to the highest standards in the banking industry, as well as local regulations." He emphasized that the bank's success and continued growth depend on integrating environmental, social, and governance considerations – governed by a clearly defined comprehensive strategy that aligns with the bank's values, shareholders, and customers.

The general framework

On his part, Meshal Al-Wazzan, Head of Strategy at Gulf Bank, highlighted the general framework and broad outlines of the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategy for the year 2030, which are as follows:

• Regulatory compliance

The strategy is designed to ensure Gulf Bank adheres to local laws and regulations regarding sustainability and responsible business practices. Additionally, it seeks to showcase the bank's ability to compete by aligning with the industry's best practices and adapting to emerging standards.

• Sustainable value

The strategy is designed to enhance the bank's role in contributing to reducing negative environmental impacts while empowering customers, shareholders, and the community. This approach preserves sustainable value, which is advantageous to both the bank and its partners.

• Performance accountability

ESG governance standards will serve as a comprehensive mechanism enabling the bank

to measure and monitor its performance and progress in achieving its goals. This will be achieved through measurable actions and objectives that make Gulf Bank a leading example in defining and clarifying responsibilities.

• Risk management

Gulf Bank recognizes that environmental, social, and governance factors present both risks and opportunities. The ESG 2030 standards are designed to efficiently identify, assess, reduce, and manage these risks, ensuring the bank is safeguarded against potential threats to its reputation, operational integrity, and ongoing viability.

• Engagement of customers, shareholders, and stakeholders

The strategy encourages collaboration and engagement among the bank, its shareholders, customers, and both internal and external stakeholders, aiming to achieve specific environmental, social, and governance objectives. It also showcases the bank's commitment to transparency and ensures that actions are taken to address the expectations and concerns of all involved parties effectively.

Al-Wazzan further stated: "To advance the implementation of our strategy, we must adopt a comprehensive and dynamic approach that ensures our strategic goals and commitments are aligned with the board of directors' overarching vision. This approach should also take into account evolving regulatory frameworks, emerging risks related to environmental, social, and governance issues, and the growing expectations of shareholders and customers."

The bank emphasized its commitment to reducing its impact on the surrounding environment, making sufficient efforts to decrease carbon emissions, optimizing resource usage, responsibly managing waste, and addressing all other environmental risks.

Bank officials commit to ESG principles for a sustainable future

Furthermore, several bank officials affirmed their commitment to driving positive change by aligning their business objectives with the principles of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) outlined in the strategy. They view these principles as a proactive mechanism to support the bank's values and achieve its vision for a sustainable future. The officials emphasized that the bank's responsible banking practices significantly contribute to the overall well-being of society, while also specifically benefiting shareholders and customers.

They stated: "We recognize that fulfilling our environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments requires collective effort and collaboration from various bank departments and employees, as well as engaging with shareholders, customers, and stakeholders. By seeking their feedback, we can collectively continue our journey toward a more sustainable future."

Enhancing Gulf Bank's leadership in sustainable innovation

Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, stated: "Our goal is to reinforce Gulf Bank's position as a leader in offering innovative services to our shareholders, customers, and stakeholders that foster sustainable growth.

We are committed to utilizing technology and innovation to improve the experiences of our individual and small to medium-sized business clients, simplifying their access to our services. Furthermore, we are devoted to implementing environmentally friendly practices throughout all our branches and operations."

Human resources

Salma Al-Hajjaj, the General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank, emphasized the importance of continuing to establish fair work practices, achieving diversity and inclusion, empowering women, youth, and people with disabilities, and providing exceptional training. These initiatives help create an ideal workplace, boost employee well-being, and enhance their productivity and personal growth, while ensuring a harmonious balance between their professional and social lives.

Corporate banking services

Faisal Al-Adsani, the General Manager of Corporate Banking at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are dedicated to incorporating environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards into our offerings by providing financing solutions that support sustainable projects advantageous to both the environment and climate. Moreover, we will focus on high-value sectors and improve access to financing for small and medium-sized enterprises."

Risk management

Abdulrahman Al-Saddah, the Acting Chief Risk Officer at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are dedicated to adhering to the Capital Markets Authority regulations by integrating sustainability factors into our risk management processes and incorporating sustainability risks into the board of directors' roles and responsibilities. We also comply with the Central Bank of Kuwait's guidelines that establish standards for evaluating climate-related risks. Our goal is to promote financing for projects that positively impact and address climate change, as well as to analyze and assess how ESG standards affect the bank's performance and financial stability. Additionally, we are evaluating climate-related risks.

Additionally, we are dedicated to advancing sustainable development goals that involve integrating climate change initiatives into national policies, strategies, and planning. This commitment includes improving educational initiatives, increasing awareness, and building both human and institutional capacities to tackle climate change through mitigation, adaptation, and reduction of its impacts. Additionally, we are focusing on strengthening early warning systems and ensuring our activities are in line with the first pillar of Kuwait's Vision.

Enhancing community and cybersecurity through sustainable initiatives

Najla Al-Eisa, Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, stated: "Our primary focus is on supporting community initiatives that instill principles of sustainability within society. We achieve this by sponsoring and organizing a variety of events that promote environmental and social sustainability, and by empowering women and youth. Additionally, we conduct banking awareness campaigns that educate our customers about essential banking services, enhance their ability to conduct transactions securely, and en-

ESG Strategy

2024-2030



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An infographic explaining the main themes of Gulf Bank's 2030 sustainability strategy.

sure transaction safety. We also advocate for financial inclusion and economic stability by providing comprehensive education on customers' rights and responsibilities, informing them about the benefits of electronic financial transactions, and teaching them how to mitigate associated risks, all with the goal of enhancing cybersecurity."

Four pillars of 2030 sustainability strategy

The key pillars of the bank's 2030 strategy are as follows:

- Responsible governance
- Fair work environment
- Community engagement
- Banking responsibility

These are in alignment with Kuwait's Vision, the Central Bank, the Capital Markets Authority, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Al-Wazzan further noted that aligning Gulf Bank's strategy with the Sustainable Development Goals, the regulations of the Capital Markets Authority, the guidelines of the Central Bank of Kuwait, and Kuwait's new vision boosts the bank's

reputation. It ensures adherence to regulatory standards, strengthens financial stability, provides access to capital markets, and fosters significant community engagement. This cements Gulf Bank's status as a forward-thinking bank and establishes a foundation for ongoing success in a dynamic business environment.

ESG 2030 strategy presentation

Al-Wazzan presented Gulf Bank's ESG 2030 strategy, focusing on environmental, social, and corporate governance, at a high-level seminar. This seminar was organized by the European Union Mission in Kuwait, in collaboration with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the International Labour Organization. Titled "Supporting a Just Transition Towards a Greener Economy in Kuwait: The Role of the Private Sector," the seminar explored the private sector's role in developing effective strategies and providing sustainable financing to support a fair transition to a sustainable society and a greener economy.

Push for new US lithium mine leaves some Americans wary

LINCOLNTON: When Kristal Lee and her husband bought a house in Gaston County, North Carolina two years ago, they envisioned a "forever home". But a planned lithium mine is bringing Lee sleepless nights.

Nearby is an area earmarked for a \$1.2 billion project to produce battery grade lithium for US electric vehicle (EV) supply chains—one of only a few such sites in the country. "You get very anxious when you hear about it," she said of the project by Piedmont Lithium.

"We don't really have an option of moving right now, especially with the economy and inflation." With President Joe Biden working to build domestic EV and battery industries, companies are seeking supplies in United States—which has major lithium deposits in Nevada, North Carolina and California.

Biden's aims include furthering the energy transition and lowering dependence on China, which supplies the bulk of global lithium-ion battery exports. Lithium-ion battery demand is set to grow nearly 30 percent annually from 2022-2030, according to McKinsey & Company.

However, pushback against Piedmont and oth-

ers underscore how officials' efforts leave some residents skeptical.

Top risks of mining include water pollution and reducing water supplies, said Aimee Boulanger, executive director at the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA). "Moving rock to get minerals opens up land and risks the soil and metals normally locked in the earth washing into streams, rivers, and drinking water," added Boulanger, whose organization certifies mines for major companies.

Lee, 41, has five children and worries about dust and noise from the open pit mine where Piedmont plans to conduct blasting once or twice daily as needed. The company maintains that this would not cause structural damage nearby. Her neighbors also fear water contamination or a supply disruption.

Piedmont plans to test and treat water that drains into its pits before using or discharging it.

The company's back-ups involve potentially drilling new wells, providing access to municipal water supplies, or supplying bottled water—but this has failed to quell jitters. "We need to work to ensure that (mines) don't cause harm that outweighs or outlasts" benefits, said Boulanger.

Resident Jim McMahan said the mine life of around a decade is another concern. "They will provide jobs for a period of time," the 65-year-old retiree, who has taken up farming, said. But eventually "the jobs will be gone and maybe, the farms will be gone."

Reducing emissions can be a legitimate argument for developing new industries, notes Locke

Bell, 73, a retired county district attorney. "I want clean air," he said, "but I don't want reckless destruction of the earth and the waters to produce a minimal amount of lithium."

This month, Piedmont Lithium received a North Carolina state mining permit, but it needs further local permissions. Chad Brown, chair of the Gaston County Board of Commissioners, said: "We have to get it right. They have to make sure they assure us."

He said a decision could be reached by November. Lee learned about the mine a year after moving into her current home—when Piedmont mailed the family a gift of coffee and a note. "I've lost enough sleepless nights," she said.

Piedmont's project is expected to produce 30,000 metric tons of lithium hydroxide annually, "significantly" boosting US capacity. The world's top lithium producer Albemarle is also working to reopen a dormant mine in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. The company said it benefited from policies like the Inflation Reduction Act and received nearly \$150 million via a Department of Energy grant to support costs. Biden has been struggling to win over Americans with his economic policies, despite the surge in investments they have triggered. In Gaston County, the situation leaves a "negative" view of the government's clean energy push, Bell said.

Lee said she supports clean energy but is less convinced of EVs, citing a lack of charging infrastructure and high costs even with tax rebates. McMahan described the lithium mining process as "invasive."



LINCOLNTON, US: A sign against a planned lithium mine is seen on April 21, 2024 in Lincolnton, North Carolina. — AFP

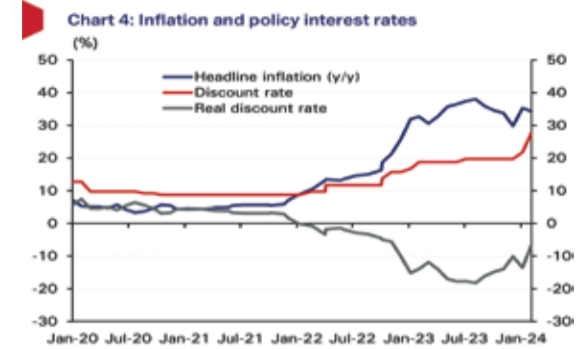
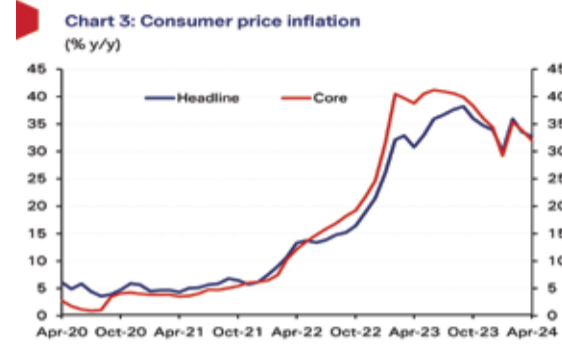
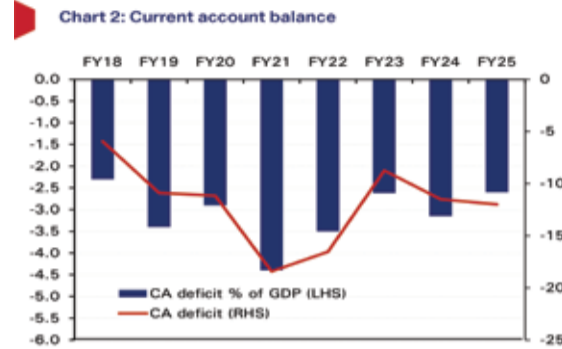
"I really do not feel that the push for electric vehicles is something that is being done in the way that it should be done," he said. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Egypt's reform initiatives fuel growth; capital inflows resume

Growth expected to bottom out and bounce back in FY24/25



KUWAIT: The Egyptian economy looks to have turned a corner in recent months following the resumption of capital inflows, the devaluation of the currency and the introduction of measures linked to the IMF program. Inflation also looks to be trending down. Egypt's GDP growth should accelerate to 3.5 percent in FY24/25 from an expected 2.5 percent in the current year, while in the external sector, we see a manageable net financing gap of close to \$10 billion in the next 3 years, benefiting from the Ras El Hekma and other financing deals.

Risks to the outlook include regional geopolitical conflict and 'higher for longer' interest rates on the downside, while greater than expected reform benefits and lower than expected inflation and interest rates are upside risks.

The Egyptian government has embarked on the long-awaited economic reform process, having secured a wave of new investment and loan commitments from the UAE government, the IMF and other international bodies that provide a much stronger financial platform. As part of the upgraded deal with the IMF, the authorities shifted in March to a more free-floating regime for the pound, which has subsequently dropped by 34 percent. Stricter fiscal consolidation is on the agenda, with energy subsidies cut and non-tax revenues increasing on the back of a privatization program

that appears to be accelerating. Financial transparency has also improved, with the first ever General Government budget produced and more frequent financial reporting on the performance of state-owned enterprises. While it is still too early to judge the success of these initiatives, there are already some promising signs, and the outlook for Egypt's economy is much improved versus six months ago.

Economic growth slowed to 2.5 percent in first half 23/24 from 4.2 percent in first half FY22/23, a rate that we see maintained for the full year. This is well down on FY22/23's reading of 3.8 percent and comes amid tighter monetary policy (an 8 percent hike in interest rates in March), gradually unwinding import restrictions, high - though moderating - inflation (down to 3.3 percent in April) and the weaker pound. Recent policy reforms will help growth bounce back in FY24/25 to the 3.5-4.0 percent range as inflation cools further, interest rates begin easing (potentially in Q3 2024) and foreign currency liquidity becomes more readily available, helping sectors such as the energy, manufacturing, wholesale & retail trade and the consumer sector, recover. Moreover, the government has said that it is committed to reducing its footprint in key sectors of the economy to enable the private sector to play a greater role in the market.

External financing gap

In addition to the \$35 billion Ras El Hekma investment deal the authorities signed with the UAE in February, Egypt received around \$18 billion in L.C.Y. debt investments and concluded financing agreements worth \$20 billion over the next three years. Also adding to the F.C.Y. pile since March is a recovery in remittances, tourism and exports following the EGP float. Given these developments, Egypt's external risk metrics are at their most favorable in some time: 5-yr CDS rates have compressed to 613bps from 1835 bps a year ago and 5-yr Eurobond yields are in single digits for the first time in several months - and should improve further over the forecast period. We estimate that the net cumulative external financing gap will fall to \$10 billion by the end of FY25/26 (from a high of \$40bn last year), a figure that could easily be covered through annual Eurobond issuance of \$3-4 billion. Reducing the financing gap will, of course, be contingent on maintaining a flexible exchange rate that reflects the external dynamics of the economy.

Investment policies

Given the importance of imports in Egypt's current account and of consumption for the economy (accounting for more than 90 percent of GDP), which will take time to shift under a new economic model, it is key that investment inflows (and technological know-how) are maintained to help finance

a current account deficit that we expect at around 2-4 percent of GDP in the medium term. This will require a business environment more conducive to stimulating foreign investment (both direct and portfolio) across a range of sectors. A favorable regulatory environment built on a solid institutional framework should be a central plank of government FDI and business policy, as well as sound macroeconomic management. A high level of vocational education attainment will also be critical in providing the skilled labor force to realize business ends and compete with other emerging markets.

Regional geopolitics

Egypt has been sensitive to spillover from a succession of geopolitical confrontations in recent years, from the Russia-Ukraine crisis (impact on tourism) to the conflict in Gaza (refugees) and disruptions to Red Sea shipping (Suez Canal receipts). A global monetary environment of 'higher for longer' interest rates would also adversely affect Egypt, raising external borrowing costs. On the upside, the government's recent commitment to reform and the tenets of the IMF program looks serious and is unlikely to waver over the forecast period. Reforms could yield economic benefits more quickly or more strongly than we expect, boosting economic growth. There is also potential for inflation to fall more rapidly than forecast, allowing interest rates to be cut and growth to accelerate more sharply.

News in Brief

IEA lowers global oil-demand growth forecast for 2024

PARIS: Global oil demand will grow slower than anticipated in 2024 following a first-quarter drop in developed economies due to a mild winter and a declining diesel car fleet, the IEA said Wednesday. Demand is expected to increase by 1.1 million barrels per day, or 140,000 fewer than forecast in the International Energy Agency's previous monthly report. Global demand is forecast to reach 103 million bpd for the year, it said. Demand in OECD countries contracted by 70,000 barrels per day in the first three months of the year, the Paris-based organization reported. — AFP

Burberry profit slumps as luxury sector takes hit

LONDON: Burberry on Wednesday said its annual net profit almost halved and predicted struggles ahead as the luxury fashion sector navigates weak demand, particularly in China since the start of 2024. Profit after tax stood at £270 million (\$340 million) in the 12 months to the end of March, down 45 percent compared with its 2022/23 financial year, Burberry said in a statement. Revenue fell four percent to £2.97 billion, while the group said it expected to face further cost increases. "Executing our plan against a backdrop of slowing luxury demand has been challenging," said chief executive Jonathan Akeroyd, adding in the earnings statement that "results underperformed" group expectations. — AFP

Thyssenkrupp cuts outlook as steel struggles persist

BERLIN: German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp on Wednesday said it was tempering its expectations for 2024, as its long-troubled steel unit weighed on results again. Thyssenkrupp cut its net loss in the second quarter to 72 million euros (\$78 million), from 203 million euros in the same period last year. But the group faced "a still gloomy market environment", Thyssenkrupp CEO Miguel Lopez said in a statement. In steel, the "weak economy... as well as higher energy costs compared with its international competitors" resulted in a "very challenging environment", the group said. — AFP

Philippines departs 165 suspected scammers to China

MANILA: The Philippines said Wednesday it had deported 165 Chinese citizens it accused of working in an online scam centre based in the north of the country. The group were flown to Shanghai on Tuesday and forever barred from returning to the Philippines, the immigration bureau said in a statement. The deportees were among hundreds of employees, Filipino and foreign, rounded up by an anti-crime government task force in a raid of an office compound in the northern municipality of Bamban on March 14. The 165 were involved in "scamming activities" and did not have proper travel documents, making them "undesirable aliens", the immigration statement said. — AFP

Russia economy resilient: EBRD

LONDON: Russia's economy will grow further this year despite Western sanctions over its Ukraine invasion, while Zionist entity's war against Hamas in Gaza will weigh on neighboring nations, Europe's development bank forecast Wednesday.

The London-based European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) issued fresh GDP projections for the regions in which it operates on the second day of its annual meeting, held this year in the Armenian capital of Yerevan. Russia's resilient economy is set to expand 2.5 percent in 2024, the EBRD predicted, adding that it was back above levels seen prior to its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

That represented a major upgrade from the prior guidance of 1.0 percent that was given in September, as Moscow offsets the impact of sanctions with vast expenditure on its war machine. However, it still marks a significant slowdown from the 3.6 percent growth it registered in 2023.

"I think it was unrealistic to expect that sanctions against Russia would lead to a deep economic and financial crisis, as many had hoped," EBRD chief economist Beata Javorcik told AFP. Russia has "refocused its economy on the war effort", she noted. "So this is leading to faster growth" but "is this growth translating into greater wellbeing of its people? That's doubtful," Javorcik remarked.

Western sanctions do not function perfectly but they have nevertheless curbed technology imports into Russia. And more generally, the Ukraine conflict has also helped spark an exodus of both multinational companies and highly skilled labor from Russia to elsewhere, the bank added.

Javorcik highlighted that sanctions helped spark a record annual loss for Russian state energy giant Gazprom in 2023, as the European market was practically shut to its gas exports. "Russian growth in the medium term will be lower than it would have been in the absence of sanctions," she concluded. The EBRD, founded in 1991 to help former Soviet bloc countries switch to free-market economies, has since extended its reach and now includes countries in the Mid-

Chief of state oil company in Brazil dismissed

BRASILIA, Brazil: The CEO of Brazil's state oil company Petrobras has been sacked, the government announced Tuesday.

The move follows a recent spat between Petrobras and shareholders over dividend payments, which heightened concerns about the government's influence in the publicly traded company's decision-making. Jean Paul Prates, a former state senator and ally Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, "has been dismissed," a presidential spokesman said Tuesday evening.

A lawyer and economist, Prates was appointed last January by the Petrobras board of directors soon after leftist Lula was sworn in for a third term. He previously held office from 2003-2011. Prates previously served as a senator in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and was a member of Lula's Workers' Party.

A presidential spokesperson later told AFP that Lula intends to nominate former top regulator Magda Chambrind to be the next CEO, pending approval by the company's board. Chambrind led Brazil's oil and natural gas agency (ANP) from 2008-2016 and is the only woman to have held the post.



MOSCOW: A vendor sells oysters at the Moscow's Fish Market on the outskirts of Moscow on April 17, 2024. — AFP

dle East and North Africa. The lender, which invests alongside the private sector, has an operating area which spans Central and Eastern Europe, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, and Central Asia.

The institution forecast Wednesday that Mediterranean countries will be hampered due to delays in public investment projects in Egypt and the war in Gaza. "The conflict's negative effects on tourism in Jordan and Lebanon may prove to be lasting," it warned. Lebanon's economy was forecast to expand by just 0.2 percent this year. That marked a vast downgrade from prior guidance of 3.0 percent. Egypt's economy suffered due to slumping Suez Canal fees after shipping attacks by Houthi rebels who are protesting over Zionist entity's war in Gaza. But this was partially offset by pledges of multi-billion-dollar funds from the IMF and other international partners.

Despite simmering tensions over the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts, the EBRD issued a bright forecast for its entire operating zone. The region's economy is

predicted to accelerate with 3.0-percent growth this year thanks to easing inflationary pressures, according to the EBRD. However, that was weaker than its September forecast of 3.2 percent. The bank blamed the downgrade partly on Gaza war fallout, as well as slower-than-expected growth in Central Europe and the Baltic States.

It also cited a stabilization in trade flows passing through Central Asia nations, which have acted as a hub between Russia and the West in a bid to avoid sanctions. Turning to Armenia, the EBRD forecast its GDP will jump 6.2 percent this year, up from the 4.5 percent it forecast previously.

The upgrade came despite the resumption of hostilities with Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. This was mainly because "the (Armenian) government has helped integrate refugees from Karabakh through public spending" and "and that also stimulated the economy", Javorcik noted. — AFP

She served under Lula and his successor Dilma Rousseff, also a member of the Workers' Party.

When Lula nominated Prates for the CEO position, he described him as a specialist in the energy sector with 30 years experience in the oil, natural gas, biofuels and renewable energy sectors. But the 55-year-old faced fierce criticism in recent months after Petrobras announced it would not pay an extraordinary dividend to investors following its second-highest net profit ever last year.

The March announcement caused the company's share price to plummet and was seen by some analysts and opponents as direct government intervention. Lula has repeatedly accused Petrobras executives of thinking only of satisfying the group's shareholders, to the detriment of consumers.

Prates at the time said on X that it was "legitimate" for the board to take a position "guided by the President" and his ministers. "That is exactly what happened" in relation to the dividend decision, he added.

The Petrobras board eventually approved the dividend payment in late April.

The company confirmed in a statement Tuesday it had received a request for the board to meet on the early termination of Prates' mandate. Just over half of Petrobras' capital is held by the Brazilian state, and the rest by private shareholders. The firm previously experienced a turbulent period during the four-year term of Lula's predecessor, far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who voiced strong oppo-



Petrobras CEO Jean Paul Prates

sition to the company's pricing policies. During that time, the company saw changed four CEOs in rapid succession. — AFP

THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024



An aerial view of Mount Fuji.



Visitors climb the slopes of Mount Fuji, Japan's highest peak at 3,776 meters (12,388 feet). — AFP photos

Japan to introduce online booking for **Mount Fuji trail**

An online booking system for Mount Fuji's most popular trail was announced on Monday by Japanese authorities trying to fight overtourism on the active volcano. Japan's highest mountain has become increasingly crowded during the summer hiking season, raising concerns over safety and environmental damage.

To ease congestion on the Yoshida Trail, the preferred route for most hikers, the Yamanashi region is planning to cap daily entries to 4,000 people, who will be charged \$13 each. But to address some climbers' fears that they will be rejected once the daily limit is reached, this year online bookings will also be introduced for the first time.

The system will guarantee people

entry through a new gate, "allowing them to plan ahead," Katsuhiro Iwama, an official from the Yamanashi regional government, told AFP. Online bookings open on May 20 for the July-September hiking season. Each day at least 1,000 places will be kept free for on-the-spot entry.

Mount Fuji is covered in snow most of the year, but in the summer more than 220,000 visitors trudge up its steep, rocky slopes, many climbing through the night to see the sunrise. Some attempt to reach the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) summit without breaks and become sick or injured as a result. Tourists are also flocking to surrounding areas to snap the majestic mountain, which is seen as a symbol of Japan but whose popularity is proving a burden to locals.

In one photo spot where Mount Fuji emerges behind a Lawson convenience store, exasperated officials are constructing a huge black mesh barrier to block the view. People who work and live nearby had complained about mostly foreign tourists trespassing, littering and dangerously crossing the street to get the perfect Instagram post. Record numbers of overseas tourists are travelling to Japan, where in March monthly visitors exceeded three million for the first time. Residents of Kyoto's geisha district have also banned tourists from private alleys after complaints that some were rudely demanding selfies with the kimono-clad entertainers. — AFP



People watch the sunrise from the summit of Mount Fuji.

Make Buddhism cool again: South Korea's controversial DJ 'monk'



Youn Sung-ho known as 'NewJeansNim' leaves the stage.



Youn Sung-ho poses for a photo before an electronic dance music party (EDM) event.



With a shaved head and flowing monk robes, a South Korean DJ chants traditional Buddhist scripture mixed with Gen-Z life advice over a thumping EDM beat, as the crowd goes wild. Meet Youn Sung-ho, a comedian-turned-musician whose viral Buddhism-infused sets are credited with reviving the religion's popularity among young South Koreans, even as his performances have ruffled feathers regionally, including triggering police reports in Malaysia. In South Korea's Zen Buddhist tradition, which holds that the religion's truth transcends the physical, Youn has been welcomed with open arms by senior clergy, who see him as a means to engage with young people.

A senior monk even bestowed upon Youn the monk name NewJeansNim, under which the 47-year-old, who is not ordained, now performs. The moniker is a mash-up of "Seunim", a respectful Korean title for Buddhist monks and other devotional words - with no connection to K-pop girl group NewJeans. "Pain! Because I don't get a raise. Pain! Because Monday comes too quickly," NewJeansNim chants on stage as hundreds of mostly young Korean revelers dance, waving their hands in sync.

"This too shall pass! We will overcome!" he adds, citing classic Buddhist tenants, as the beat drops at an electronic dance music (EDM) event marking a lantern festival for Buddha's birthday, which falls on Wednesday. Footage of his quirky, high-energy performances has gone viral, with striking visuals of a be-robed, shaven-headed Youn dancing, singing and spinning turntables. "Never did I expect this re-



South Korean comedian Youn Sung-ho known as 'NewJeansNim' wearing monk's robes performs during an electronic dance music party (EDM) event for the annual lotus lantern festival to celebrate the upcoming Buddha's birthday in Seoul. — AFP photos

action. It's overwhelming," Youn told AFP ahead of his performance in Seoul at the weekend. He says he comes by his Buddhist DJ identity honestly.

"My mother was a Buddhist and I also went to temples from a young age so Buddhism comes naturally to me." And his motivational lyrics are "just what I said to myself last year when I had no work and was really struggling - good days do come".

Malaysia ban?

For many South Koreans, his words have resonated. "His messages provide comfort to those in their twenties and thirties who are burnt out and feel hopeless," says Kang Min-ji, a 26-year-old, who said they did not have any interest in Buddhism before watching NewJeansNim. "I always thought Buddhism was conservative until I saw his

DJ performances," she added.

But in neighboring Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country with a significant Buddhist minority, where NewJeansNim performed in early May, a second gig planned for later this month was cancelled after his performance offended local Buddhists. "There have been police reports lodged against DJ NewJeansNim's performance in Malaysia by Buddhist societies and individuals," Eow Shiang Yen, secretary-general of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, told AFP. "The way he chooses to perform and his dress is not appropriate to Buddhist beliefs and practices," he said, adding: "We do not want others to misinterpret Buddhist practices." One Malaysian lawmaker has said NewJeansNim should not be allowed to perform in Kuala Lumpur using the trappings of Buddhism.

Buddhism for all

But in South Korea, the president of the country's largest Buddhist sect, the Jogye Order, has urged NewJeansNim to continue, seeing the DJ as a means of attracting new, younger followers. "Young people think that Buddhism is difficult and old," the Venerable Jinwoo Seunim has said. "In order to break this, it is better not to be too bound by tradition," he added. As in many advanced economies, religious interest has dwindled along with South Korea's population, official statistics show, and "Buddhism is the religion that is suffering the most," said Ja-hong Seunim, a 33-year-old monk.

"We are not in a position to stop anyone from spreading Buddhism to young people," he told AFP. The non-traditional approach could also be seen at the International Buddhism Expo this year in Seoul, when attendees could pray with an AI Buddha, buy scripture clothing and eat Buddha-shaped chocolates. NewJeansNim played a set for the grand finale. Attendance was up threefold from last year, with 80 percent of attendees in their twenties or thirties, event organizers said.

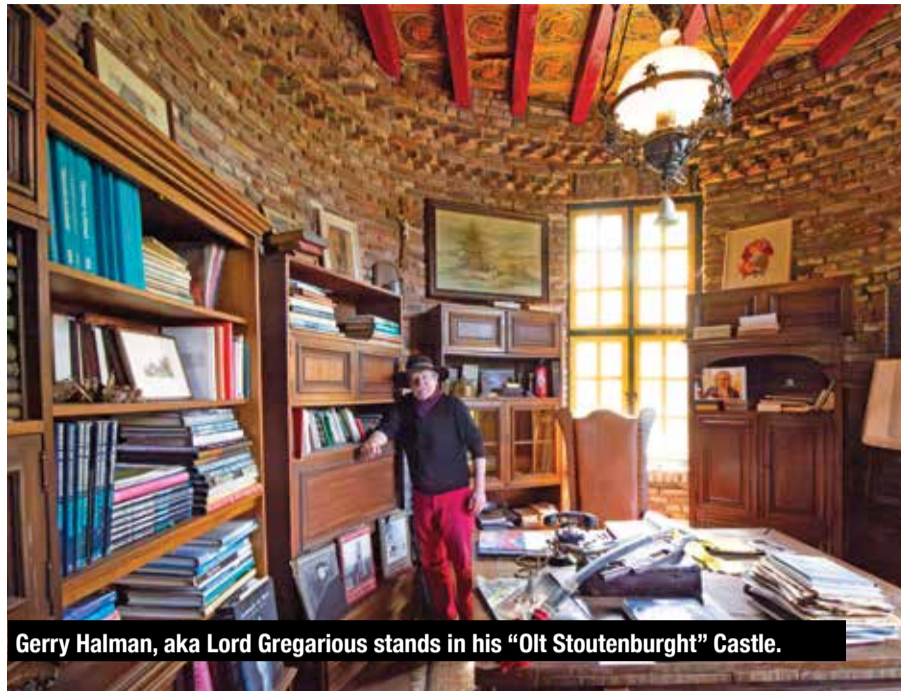
"There are definitely more Buddhist events for young people to enjoy, and basically they are 'hip' now," Choi Kyung-yoon, a 28-year-old who lives in Seoul, told AFP. NewJeansNim himself downplays his contribution to making Buddhism cool again in South Korea. "I didn't do anything really," he told AFP. "The monks are very open-minded, and I am just flowing with them." — AFP



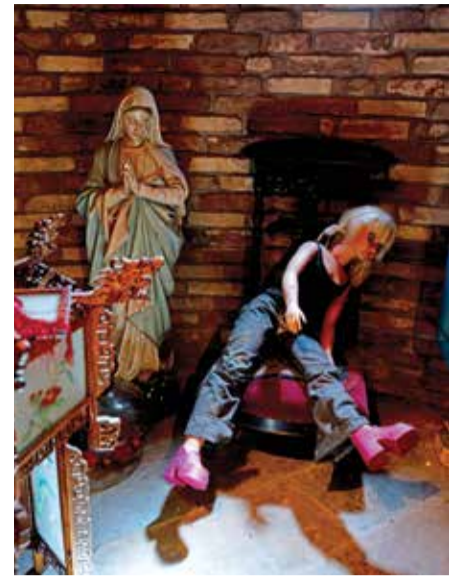
Lifestyle



This photograph shows Gerry Halman, aka Lord Gregarious' "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle (Old Naughty Citadel), that he built since the last 34 years in his back garden, in Blesdijke.



Gerry Halman, aka Lord Gregarious stands in his "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.



This photograph shows religious miniatures and a doll in Lord Gregarious' "Olt Stoutenburgh".

LORD OF HIS MANOR: DUTCHMAN BUILDS HUGE ROMAN CASTLE IN GARDEN



Lord Gregarious reacts in his "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.



Lord Gregarious stands next to a mannequin dressed in combat armor in his "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.



Lord Gregarious stands in his "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.

Meet Lord Gregarious, a 76-year-old Dutchman who has single-handedly built a five-storey Roman-style castle in his back garden, complete with knights, damsels, and a shimmering dragon fashioned from recycled metal. The towers of the Olt Stoutenburgh Castle ("Old Naughty Citadel") rise unexpectedly from the flat fields around the tiny village of Blesdijke in the northern Dutch countryside. The pensioner, real name Gerry Halman, has spent 34 years on his labor of love, painstakingly sourcing materials from dozens of countries, drawing inspiration from China, the Roman Empire, and ancient Egypt.

"One morning in 1990, I said to my wife, 'I'm ready. I have a complete picture. I know what the building looks like, from the bottom to the flag', the mustachioed Halman told AFP, resplendent in a jaunty fur hat. Since then, constructing and furnishing the castle has been his "passion", travelling all over the world to source materials that do justice to his vision. Above the vaunted main hall hangs a metal chandelier from Istanbul and ornate Jugendstil iron railings from Libya.

The room is equipped with a wooden bar taken from the Orient Express dining wagon, embossed with signs entreating gentlemen not to urinate on the floor. Hundreds of books about art and history adorn the walls of the library, with a duelling pistol and Indonesian ritual suicide dagger strewn casually across the desk. For 35 years, Halman ran a costume shop in nearby Zwolle and has populated his castle with a cast of characters including knights in shining armor, damsels in distress, and a statue of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

On top of the 26-metre-high (85-foot) building coils a dragon made from hundreds of pieces of recycled metal -- a nod to the Chinese tradition of protecting the home. Next to the dragon lies a cobra, also made of glittering



This photograph shows the garden of Lord Gregarious' "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.

metal and a symbol of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt.

'I'm not mad'

What drives someone with no architectural or building experience to start such a project? "What drives people to cycle for three weeks through France or go to the gym?" a good-natured Halman replied to this question, describing the urge to create the castle as an "obligation". "I've always been a fan of the fantasy world since I was a kid, not the real world." But he ran up against the real world when he took his plans to the local authorities for planning permission. "The mayor said: 'He's crazy. He is not a builder. He has no architecture experience and he wants to build a castle.'" However, he eventually won planning permission after much back-and-forth with the authorities, so long as the castle was lower than 28 meters.

Most of the materials are recycled or sourced from Halman's trips around

Europe's antique markets. It's all self-financed but he has no idea what the total bill is -- "Don't ever ask how much it costs, otherwise you would never dare do it." Like the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona, the Olt Stoutenburgh is "never finished", he said. "I have a motto. You can always improve on beauty." His three children will carry on his life's work when he dies. His granddaughter, 16-year-old Sara van den Kamp, recalled frolicking in the castle grounds as a little girl and family Christmas feasts in the grand hall.

"It's pretty cool. Not many people can say their grandfather owns a place like this and has built a place like this. "It's very unique," she told AFP. Halman's wife of 50 years "likes" the project but "stays away," he said. "I do my own thing... this is for me. We have the perfect marriage." Tourists come from all over to admire the castle. Monique Meijer, a 55-year-old nurse, gasped when she entered the hall. "It's just fantastic,"



This photograph shows a bedroom with paintings in Lord Gregarious' "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.



This photograph shows the entrance of Lord Gregarious' "Olt Stoutenburgh" Castle.

she gushed. "I find it bizarre how he did this on his own. Very beautiful inside. Lots of arches and beautiful brickwork. Lots of imagination," she told AFP. Halman says that many people walk away from a visit thinking he's crazy, but he cites a line from Spanish artist Salvador Dali, another inspiration. "The only difference between me and a madman is that I'm not mad." —AFP

\$27.7 million Bacon tops New York art auction sales

A portrait by British painter Francis Bacon of his great love sold for \$27.7 million at Sotheby's spring sales in New York on Monday, topping the first night of contemporary art auctions that grossed \$234.6 million.

The work fell short of the \$30 million to \$50 million range the house had estimated for the portrait -- the first in a series of 10 the painter made of George Dyer between 1966 and 1968 -- which was making its debut at auction.

The highest price paid for a single-panel portrait by Bacon is \$70.2 million, which came from the same Dyer cycle. American painter Joan Mitchell, whose works have led a revaluation of paintings by women artists, was one of the stars of the evening.

Her work "Noon" exceeded \$22.6 million, maintaining an upward trend that began last November, when two pieces by the "second generation" American abstract expressionism artist fetched over

\$20 million for the first time. Her record sale stands at \$29.1 million.

The night set other records such as the \$19 million paid for a work by Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, the highest ever paid for a collaboration of this kind, and the nearly \$23 million for a work by Lucio Fontana, the highest price ever paid for the Italian artist at auction. A sculpture by Frank Stella also went for over \$15 million. Another rising star was recently deceased African-American artist Faith Ringgold, whose work was sold for more than \$1.5 million, three times more than her last record.

French-Zionist Patrick Drahi's auction house will hold another evening of modern art sales on Wednesday, featuring works by Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, Rene Magritte and British artist Leonora Carrington. With sales of \$14.9 billion last year, the art market dropped 14 percent compared with 2022, although online transactions saw a 285 percent jump.

Sotheby's hopes to collect between \$549 and \$784 million this week in New York, after the good results in Europe, in a market led by American investors and collectors, closely followed by buyers from Asia. —AFP



Britain's Queen Camilla (fourth left) watches as Britain's King Charles III (second right) unveils an official portrait of himself, by artist Jonathan Yeo (fifth left), depicting the King wearing the uniform of the Welsh Guards, of which he was made Regimental Colonel in 1975, in the Blue Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace in London.—AFP photos

King Charles III sees red in new portrait

King Charles III on Tuesday unveiled the first completed official portrait of himself since his coronation -- a striking red depiction of the British monarch in uniform.

The 230cm by 165.5cm (7.5 feet by 5.4 feet) oil on canvas was painted by Jonathan Yeo, who has previously depicted Charles's wife Camilla in 2014, and his father, Prince Philip, in 2008.

It shows the 75-year-old head of state in the ceremonial red uniform of the Welsh Guards against a red background, with a butterfly hovering over his shoulder. Yeo, 53, was commissioned for the work in 2020, when Charles was still prince of Wales, to mark his 50 years as a member of The Drapers' Company.

The portrait will go on public display until next month and eventually hang in Drapers' Hall, the base of the historic merchants' guild and philanthropic body in the City of London.

Charles, who became king in September 2022 after the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II, had four sittings with Yeo from June 2021 to November 2023. He is currently receiving treatment for cancer and has only recently resumed official public engagements.

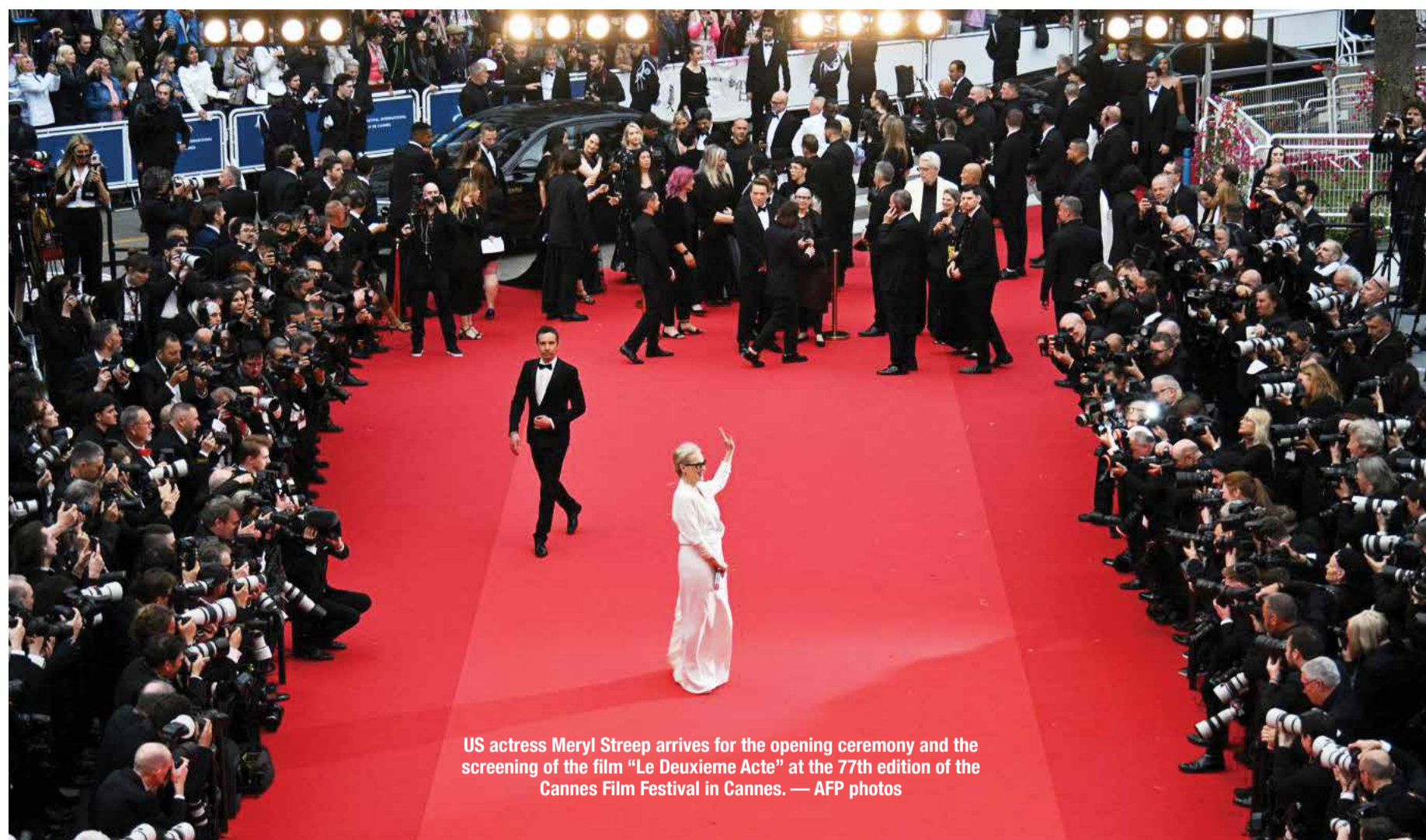
"Much like the butterfly I've painted hovering over his shoulder, this portrait has evolved as the subject's role in our public life has transformed," Yeo said before an unveiling at Buckingham Palace. "I'm unimagnably grateful for the opportunity to capture such an extraordinary and unique person, especially at the historic moment of becoming king," he added in a statement.

Yeo's previous notable subjects include the first painted portrait of Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai and Britain's former prime minister Tony Blair. —AFP



An official portrait of King Charles III, painted by artist Jonathan Yeo, is pictured during its unveiling, in the Blue Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace





US actress Meryl Streep arrives for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Le Deuxieme Acte" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. — AFP photos



US actress Meryl Streep receives the Honorary Palme d'Or.



US actress Meryl Streep receives the Honorary Palme d'Or from French actress Juliette Binoche.

STREEP HONORED AT OPENING OF DRAMA-FILLED CANNES FILM FESTIVAL



French actress and master of the ceremony of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Camille Cottin delivers a speech on stage.

Meryl Streep was guest of honor at the opening of the Cannes Film Festival on Tuesday, unfolding this year against the background of a director's daring escape from Iran and mounting #MeToo pressure on the French industry. Streep is among a host of Hollywood A-listers flocking to the Cote d'Azur for the festival that runs to May 25, including legendary directors George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola.

"I'm just so grateful that you haven't gotten sick of my face," Streep, 74, joked to the audience as she received her honorary Palme d'Or from French actor Juliette Binoche. 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 22 entries for the top prize Palme d'Or, facing a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig.

"This is holy to me. Films are sacred and I cannot believe that I'm getting the opportunity to spend the next 10 days in this house of worship," an emotional Gerwig told the audience.

Other entries include recent Oscar-winner Emma Stone reuniting with Yorgos Lanthimos for "Kinds of Kindness", Demi Moore trying her hand at horror in "The Substance", and Richard Gere in Paul Schrader's "Oh Canada".

Outside the race for the Palme d'Or, George Miller's latest "Mad Max" installment, "Furiosa", will get its world premiere on Wednesday, while Kevin Cost-



Lebanese director and member of the Jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Nadine Labaki arrives on stage.

ner returns to the Western genre with "Horizon, an American Saga".

'Systemic' sexism

Binoche presented the award to Streep with a tearful speech, telling her she had "changed the way we look at women". Streep has only been to Cannes once before in 1989, when she won best actress for "A Cry in the Dark".

"Thirty-five years ago when I was here last time, I was already a mother of three, I was about to turn 40 and I thought that my career was over. And that was not an unrealistic expectation for actresses at that time," she said.

With France's film industry in the midst of a renewed #MeToo reckoning,

Binoche was among 100 stars calling for a comprehensive new law to crack down on "systemic" sexism and gender-based violence in an open letter Tuesday.

The host of the opening ceremony, Camille Cottin, star of hit series "Call My Agent!" and an outspoken feminist, also took digs at the "biggest bad guy of all time: the patriarchy".

"The late-night work meetings in hotel rooms of all-powerful gentlemen are no longer part of the Cannes vortex," she said. Gerwig earlier told reporters she was optimistic about the progress made by women in cinema. "It's not a destination we all reach together, it's something we will keep discussing and figuring out how we want our industry and cinema to be," she said.

Escape from Iran

As the festival opened, Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof announced he had escaped in secret from his country, just days after being sentenced to eight years in prison on security offences.

Rasoulof had been under pressure from Iranian authorities to withdraw his film, "The Seed of the Sacred Fig", from the Cannes competition. He urged the world film community to support his colleagues back home.

"My thoughts go to every single one of them and I fear for their safety and well-being," Rasoulof said in a statement to AFP. Cannes director Thierry Fremaux said the festival was working with the French foreign ministry in the

hope that Rasoulof can attend his premiere next week.

Trump, Coppola, Cronenberg

Other entries for the Palme d'Or include Donald Trump biopic "The Apprentice", and "Emilia Perez", an unlikely-sounding musical about a Mexican cartel boss having a sex change from previous Cannes winner Jacques Audiard. Film fans are also hungry to see new works from body-horror maestro David Cronenberg ("The Shrouds") and Italy's Paolo Sorrentino ("Parthenope").

But the hot ticket is undoubtedly Coppola's "Megalopolis", starring Adam Driver, on Thursday.

There is a growing anticipation over whether the veteran director - who self-funded the lavish epic - can match his masterpieces of the 1970s, when he twice won the Palme d'Or for "Apocalypse Now" and "The Conversation".

Playing out of competition is "She's Got No Name", one of China's biggest-ever productions, which features megastar Ziyi Zhang tackling the sensitive topic of women's rights.

Legendary Japanese animators Studio Ghibli - makers of "Spirited Away" and "My Neighbour Totoro" - will receive an honorary Palme d'Or, the first offered to a group rather than an individual. The festival will round off on May 25 with a final honorary award for "Star Wars" creator Lucas. — AFP



(From left) Member of the Jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda, French actress and model Eva Green, Italian actor Pierfrancesco Favino, French actress and master of the ceremony Camille Cottin, French actress Juliette Binoche, US actress Meryl Streep, US director and president of the Jury Greta Gerwig, members of the Jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Lebanese director Nadine Labaki, US actress Lily Gladstone, Spanish director, producer, and writer Juan Antonio Bayona, French actor and comedian Omar Sy and Turkish actress and screenwriter Ebru Ceylan pose on stage after US actress Meryl Streep received the Honorary Palme d'Or during the opening ceremony.



French actress Frederique Bel arrives for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Le Deuxieme Acte".

A-list stars, superheroes in Cannes VR competition

From a voyage through the human body with Cate Blanchett, to a feminist superhero satire featuring giant tampons and octopus demons, the Cannes Film Festival launches its first competition for virtual reality films on Wednesday. Blanchett, Jessica Chastain and Colin Farrell are among the A-list talent attached to projects in the "Immersive" section, a new venture for the world's most famous film festival, which is currently taking place in the south of France.

Eight VR films will compete for a new award recognizing the rapidly growing medium, including "Maya: The Birth of a Superhero", which takes viewers on a surreal and interactive journey through puberty and the many

global stigmas surrounding menstruation. It puts the audience in the role of a young South Asian girl as she navigates a London classroom packed with bullying teenagers, a confrontation with her mother in her bedroom and various mystical dreamscapes. Indian-born director Poulomi Basu said immersing people through a VR headset was the "perfect way to tell the story".

"The experience of every girl of coming into your femininity and womanhood is a very isolating experience - one that is claustrophobic, one that is psychologically difficult.

"To encounter shame in such a close proximity... we feel like we matched the medium and the message perfectly."

But the technology allows audi-

ences to use their hands to fight back, shooting fire at villains who are both human and demon in a film that "uses the superhero trope almost as a satire".

"We wanted this to be the last word on superhero-origin stories, period," said co-director C.J. Clarke.

Hollywood voices

Elsewhere, Blanchett narrates "Evolver", which takes viewers on an abstract journey through the human body. Chastain's voice accompanies the audience into and through a black hole in space in "Spheres", while Farrell narrates a clash between man and zombie in "Gloomy Eyes".

Cannes' introduction of the new section comes seven years after Mexi-

can auteur Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu showcased the groundbreaking "Carne y Arena" at the festival.

A virtual reality installation that took viewers on the harrowing migrant trail through the Sonoran desert into the United States, "Carne y Arena" later won a special Oscar. Other major festivals, including Venice, already have established sections for immersive film.

Basu said it was "massive" that Cannes was now giving the burgeoning medium its own space and financial support.

"I think Cannes accepts that it is a cinematographic art form... it needs its own celebration," she said. — AFP



Cate Blanchett

Sports

Stubbs gives Delhi IPL play-off hope with win in last match

Win takes Delhi to 14 points in 14 matches

NEW DELHI: Fiery fifties from Abhishek Porel and Tristan Stubbs helped Delhi Capitals sign off their IPL league phase on a high as they beat Lucknow Super Giants by 19 runs on Tuesday.

The win took Delhi to 14 points in 14 matches and they remain technically in the mix to reach the play-offs of the T20 tournament, but a run-rate in the negative keeps their chances slim.

"We are still in contention even after the last game," Delhi skipper Rishabh Pant said after he returned to lead the side following a one-match ban for slow over-rate.

"We had a better chance of qualifying if I would have had a chance to play in the last game (which Delhi lost)." The left-handed Porel hit 58 before Stubbs smashed an unbeaten 57 off 25 balls to steer Delhi to 208-4 after being invited to bat first at their high-scoring home venue, Arun Jaitley Stadium. Pant, a left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman, made 33 to cap off an impressive season after he came back in the IPL from a horror car crash in December 2022.

"Personally, it was fantastic to come back," said Pant, who has been picked in India's squad for the T20 World Cup next month. "It was heartening to see the support from entire India. Was a long time to wait after one-and-a-half years. I want to be on the field all the time. Don't want to miss any action."

KL Rahul-led Lucknow have 12 points with one more match to play and have their hopes hanging by a thread. The result confirmed a play-off spot for Rajasthan Royals, who became the second team to

enter the final four alongside table-toppers Kolkata Knight Riders. The top four teams make the play-offs. The final is on May 26 in Chennai.

Ishant rattles Lucknow

Ishant Sharma led the bowling charge with three early wickets as Delhi restricted Lucknow to 189-9 despite valiant knocks from Nicholas Pooran, who smashed 61, and Arshad Khan, who hit an unbeaten 58. Delhi lost attacking opener Jake Fraser-McGurk for a duck but Porel and Shai Hope, who struck 38, put on 92 runs to lay the foundations of the big total.

Delhi stuttered in the middle after they lost Porel, Hope and then Pant at regular intervals and Lucknow bowlers checked the flow of runs. But Stubbs had other ideas and he hit back with a flurry of fours and sixes to fire Delhi past the 200 as the last three overs cost Lucknow 45 runs. Lucknow suffered early blows after pace spearhead Ishant took down Rahul, for five, and Quinton de Kock, for 12, inside three overs. Marcus Stoinis was stumped by Pant off spinner Axar Patel and Ishant, who was named man of the match, struck again to make Lucknow slip to 44-4.

Stubbs made it count with his off-spin as he sent back impact substitute Ayush Badoni out for six to end a 27-run partnership with Pooran.

The left-handed Pooran attempted to drive the chase in his 27-ball knock laced with six fours and four sixes but he left a lot to be done when he de-



NEW DELHI: Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran (R) plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

parted in the 12th over. Number eight Arshad then raised hopes of a turnaround with his late charge as he raised his first T20 50 in 25 balls to give Del-

hi a scare. Arshad kept losing partners as he continued the charge but in the end failed to match up the asking-rate. — AFP



LONDON: (FILES) Britain's Tyson Fury (L) and Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk challenge each other during a press conference in London on November 16, 2023, ahead of their undisputed heavyweight world championship contest scheduled to take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Usyk looking for heavyweight legacy on the Fury road

RIYADH: Oleksandr Usyk may be the reigning WBA, WBO, IBF and IBO heavyweight world champion but to many the Ukrainian is the underdog going into Saturday's long-awaited unifying title fight with Tyson Fury in Riyadh.

Size matters, it seems, with southpaw Usyk conceding 15 centimetres (6 inches) in height to the 2.06 metre (6 foot 9 inch) Fury, 18cm in reach, and close to 22 kilos (49lbs) in weight. And yet, he is not perturbed. "To win this, I don't need to be heavy, I need to be fast, and quick," he told Ring magazine in February just before the Fury fight was postponed after the Briton picked up a cut in training.

"You never see a fat wolf in the forest." It is easy to see Usyk as the lean wolf, cunning, quick and ruthlessly effective. His perfect record of 21 wins and no defeats as a pro, 14 of those inside the distance, speaks for itself.

And apart from those three heavyweight belts he can also look back on a career that brought him Olympic gold in London in 2012 and the undisputed cruiserweight championship of the world. Beyond the undoubted pedigree in the ring, he also has the fire within that a boxer desperately needs when he has reached the comfort of the mountain top.

The war in Ukraine, which followed Russia's invasion in February 2022, has ensured that. It gave Usyk an extra dimension when he faced Anthony Joshua in Jeddah in August that year, almost a year after he had taken the Briton's titles in London.

"In the ninth round I realised that if I fall now, the spirit of the fighters who defend our country will also fall," he told AFP. "I didn't box for myself, I boxed for all those who defend the country."

Eighteen months on from that fight and the Russians continue to wage war on Ukraine, adding fuel to the Usyk fire.

'Legacy, not money'

In some ways, it marks a shift in perception of the 37-year-old who also beat Daniel Dubois in Poland last August. Born in the Crimean town of Simferopol, he was accused by many Ukrainians of sitting on the fence over Russia's annexation of the peninsula in 2014 and castigated for saying that Russians and Ukrainians were the same people.

Since Russia's 2022 invasion however the tune has changed with promoter Alexander Krassyuk saying that Usyk "is the real inspiration for Ukraine, for the guys on the frontline".

"When he speaks, these words inspire the Ukraine people and the soldiers to fight the enemy and to have courage," Krassyuk told ProBox TV in August last year.

"Usyk is not fighting for himself anymore." Usyk has felt the war close up. Immediately after the invasion he returned to Kyiv and spent time on patrol. Then his former teammate Oleksiy Dzhunkivskiy was shot dead by the Russians. He was persuaded, however, to return to the ring, to fight the war in a more public arena. —AFP

Nepal's ex-cricket captain acquitted of rape on appeal

KATHMANDU: Nepali cricket star Sandeep Lamichhane had his eight-year jail sentence for rape quashed on appeal on Wednesday after the former national captain challenged his conviction. Lamichhane was once the poster boy for cricket in Nepal and his onfield success as a leg-spinner dramatically boosted the sport's profile in the Himalayan republic.

He was accused of raping a young woman in a Kathmandu hotel in 2022 but was freed on bail and returned to the team to compete in international tournaments while his lengthy trial dragged on. The 23-year-old was convicted of rape late last year and sentenced in January but remained at liberty after challenging the verdict.

"Sandeep Lamichhane has been acquitted," Patan High Court spokesman Bimal Parajuli told AFP. Lamichhane was suspended by Nepal's cricket board after the initial verdict. He has consistently denied the charge against him and enjoyed strong public support despite the accusation.

"I am innocent and I will be indebted to those who believe and sympathize with my innocence," Lamichhane posted on Facebook this month. Lamichhane was in court to hear the verdict and dozens of fans cheered and celebrated outside after it was announced. "We all know he is innocent so they have gathered here and united for his justice," said 21-year-old fan Asmita Chettri.

T20 World Cup squad

In 2022, when an arrest warrant in the case was first issued, Lamichhane initially failed to return from Jamaica, where he was playing in the Caribbean Premier League. He was dismissed as national captain and arrested but Nepal lifted his playing ban after he

New dad Scheffler, divorcing McIlroy add emotion to PGA

LOUISVILLE: Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler ends a three-week layoff at the PGA Championship with plans to use a back-up caddie Saturday while second-ranked Rory McIlroy will compete after a shock divorce filing.

But don't write off the oddsmakers' darlings just yet even as tension builds for Thursday's opening round at 7,609-yard Valhalla, where McIlroy won his most recent major crown 10 years ago.

It's an epic emotional contrast between Scheffler's return to action after becoming a father last week and McIlroy's return to Valhalla following a split from wife Erica after seven years of marriage, but those are just the sparks that can produce gripping drama on golf's greatest stages.

Both players have won their past two starts. McIlroy at last month's PGA Tour pairs event with Irishman Shane Lowry and on Sunday at Palm Hollow ahead of a Monday divorce filing at Palm Beach, Florida, and his arrival Tuesday at Valhalla

Albon signs new multi-year F1 deal with Williams

LONDON: Alex Albon has committed his long-term future to Williams after it was announced Wednesday he had signed a "multi-year" contract extension with the British Formula One team. The Thai driver had been linked with Mercedes following Lewis Hamilton's move to Ferrari for 2025 and also a return to Red Bull.

But instead he has decided to stay with Williams, after winning 27 of their 28 points in the



KATHMANDU: (FILES) Nepali former national cricket captain Sandeep Lamichhane (C) is escorted by police following his release on bail after three months in custody for sexual assault charges, outside the central jail in Kathmandu on January 13, 2023. — AFP

was freed on bail. This allowed him to remain on the national team, including for the World Cup qualifiers and the 2023 Asia Cup.

But his continued playing career has also sparked anger and caused some Nepalis to disavow the team. Scotland's cricketers refused to shake hands with him after their matches during an international tournament in Dubai.

Wednesday's acquittal comes with the Nepali team in the United States to prepare ahead of next month's T20 World Cup. Cricket does not enjoy the same adulation in mountainous Nepal as it does elsewhere in South Asia.

But the sport has been growing in popularity,

for practice as news of the split became public.

Scheffler, whose wife Meredith gave birth to their first child last week, has four wins and a runner-up effort in his past five starts, taking titles at Bay Hill and the Players, losing a Houston Open playoff, then winning the Masters and Heritage crowns in back-to-back weeks last month. Scheffler said time away has not weakened his game.

"I'm definitely rested going into this week. I don't really feel like any rust has accumulated," he said. "I was able to practice and play a lot at home. I'm able to do stuff at home to simulate tournament golf, especially on the greens, competing and gambling with my buddies. I don't really want to lose to them." Scheffler isn't worried about his mental game either.

"I feel like I'm in a good head space," he said. "I've just been playing some really good golf."

"The last couple months it seems like it has felt fairly easy at times. I think that's always what you're striving for and it has been nice to see some of the benefits of the work I've put in and see some results on the course as well."

Ted Scott, Scheffler's caddie, will miss Saturday's third round to attend his daughter's high school graduation. Scheffler pal Brad Payne, the PGA Tour chaplain, will fill-in as the third-round bagman.

2023 drivers' championship as the team finished seventh place in the Constructors' Championship—their best placing since 2017.

Albon, however, has yet to win a point from this season's opening six races. "I'm incredibly happy to be remaining with Williams Racing and to continue working with such a talented and dedicated team of people," said Albon in a Williams statement. "It has been a difficult start to the year, but since joining Williams we have made significant progress together and I have seen the huge changes happening behind the scenes to take us back to the front of the grid."

"This is a long-term project that I really believe in and want to play a key role in which is why I have signed a multi-year contract. The journey will take time but I am confident we are building the right

with Nepal given one-day international status by the world governing body in 2018. Lamichhane was a major part of this rise as the most sought-after Nepali cricketer in lucrative leagues around the world.

The leg-spinner's big break came when he was snapped up for the Indian Premier League, the world's richest cricket tournament, in 2018. About 2,300 rape cases were reported in Nepal in the 2021-22 fiscal year, according to police, but rights advocates say many more assaults go unreported.

Only a handful of women in Nepal spoke out during the #MeToo movement, and those accused have faced little or no repercussions over the allegations. — AFP



LONDON: (FILES) Irish golfer Rory McIlroy and wife Erica sit on centre court to watch Serbia's Novak Djokovic play Japan's Kei Nishikori during their men's singles quarter-finals match on the ninth day of the 2018 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon. — AFP

"Something we talked about from the beginning of our relationship was family always comes first," said Scheffler. "It was a pretty easy decision."

Four-time major winner McIlroy, who said after his win Sunday that playing golf serves as an escape from stressful things beyond the sport, has played in a similar situation before. — AFP

team to move forward and achieve great things in the years to come."

Williams did not specify the length of Albon's new deal but said the renewed agreement with the 28-year-old, who was born on London, would take "the partnership into the new era of Formula One regulations and demonstrates a shared belief in the upward trajectory of the team".

Williams' statement added: "Since joining Williams Racing, Alex Albon has showcased exceptional determination and dedication both on and off the track. His performance since he joined ahead of the 2022 FIA Formula 1 World Championship has been integral to the team's progress and success, and his efforts significantly contributed to the team's best championship finishing position since 2017 of seventh last year." — AFP

Sports

Bellingham, Vinicius shine as champions Madrid smash Alaves

'We've had just one defeat in the league': Ancelotti

MADRID: Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior inspired runaway Spanish champions Real Madrid to a 5-0 rout of Alaves on Tuesday. Carlo Ancelotti's side continued warming up for the Champions League final with a comprehensive demolition of their Basque visitors at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Bellingham scored the opener and played a part in Madrid's next three goals, two scored by Vinicius, finding his best form at the business end of the season.

Turkish teenager Arda Guler added a late fifth to put the cherry on Madrid's cake and moving them 17 points clear of second-place Barcelona.

"We've had just one defeat in the league and I think that a big part of the success is because of (the defence)," Ancelotti told reporters after his side's 30th consecutive league game unbeaten.

Madrid celebrated their title with an open-top bus parade on Sunday but with the Wembley final a little over a fortnight away, nobody is letting their concentration slip. Least of all Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who made a fine double save from Samu Omorodion in the opening minutes.

After missing most of the season with a severe knee injury, Courtois is hoping for a Champions League final start and boasts three clean sheets in three matches since his return. "I knew I'd come back strongly - I'm the same Courtois, or even better," said the goalkeeper.

Ancelotti selected the vast majority of his first choice line-up after resting them at the weekend, and Madrid's usual suspect opened the scoring. It was Bellingham, with his 19th league goal and perhaps his luckiest.

The England international directed Toni Kroos' cross towards the far post where Dani Carvajal was running in, but the ball sank directly into the net.

Bellingham trails La Liga's top scorer, Girona's Artem Dovbyk, by one goal. Madrid doubled their lead after Bellingham threaded a pass through for Eduardo Camavinga.

The French midfielder burst forward in the box and unselfishly squared for Vinicius to tap home when other players might have taken the chance to shoot. Alaves midfielder Ianis Hagi, son of legendary Romanian playmaker Gheorghe Hagi, stung the palms of Courtois with a fierce drive at the other end.

The visitors have enjoyed a strong season and are safely ensconced in mid-table, avoiding the stress of a relegation battle.

However, Madrid dismantled them with consummate ease and Fede Valverde rattled home the third in first-half stoppage time after Bellingham played him in.

The Uruguayan midfielder hammered a strike into the top corner at the near post for his second league goal of the season, far fewer than his tally of seven last year due to his deeper role.

Five-star Madrid

Courtois denied Omorodion and Hagi again in the second half as he continued stating his case to Ancelotti, and he ended up making nine saves altogether.

Vinicius extended Madrid's lead after Bellingham played him in, lashing home his second of the night with a fine finish.

"I'm at my best," said Vinicius. "Now we've got time to train and that lets us stay calm, do good work and arrive better than ever at Wembley."

Rodrygo should have added the fifth but goalkeeper Jesus Owono denied him from close range after Vinicius teed him up, and so it was Guler instead after a deflected effort fell his way in the box. "Every time a small team comes here, it's a tor-



MADRID: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward #07 Vinicius Junior kicks the ball and scores his team's fourth goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Deportivo Alaves at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

ment," lamented Alaves coach Luis Garcia Plaza. Eder Militao and Carvajal ended the game with apparent physical issues, but they turned out to be nothing serious.

"What happened with the knee is nothing," Militao said after the game, while Ancelotti confirmed the Spanish defender was also fine.

Elsewhere high-flying Girona, third, fell to a 1-0 home defeat against Villarreal - Barcelona can move four points clear if they win at Almeria on Thursday.

Mallorca, 15th, rescued a 1-1 draw at Osasuna to add one more point in their battle for survival. The Copa del Rey runners-up are seven points clear of the relegation zone. — AFP

City do feel tension of title race: Guardiola

LONDON: Manchester City will be affected by the nerves of going for a fourth consecutive Premier League title on Sunday, said Pep Guardiola despite his side's experience. City moved to the top of the table, two points ahead of Arsenal, thanks to Erling Haaland's second-half double to beat their bogey side Tottenham on Tuesday.

It is the first time Guardiola's men have won at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in the Premier League, but it was a far from vintage performance. After Haaland opened the scoring early in the second period, substitute goalkeeper Stefan Ortega had to make three crucial saves before the Norwegian striker settled the visitors with a penalty in stoppage time.

City have won eight straight Premier League games and are unbeaten from open play in any competition since December 6. But they host West

Ham on the final day knowing anything less than victory will allow Arsenal to take the title should they beat Everton.

"They were playing for the consequences of the result. When you play football thinking about the consequences, you are going to lose the Premier League, you cannot perform at your best level," said Guardiola of his side's display.

"But they are human beings so I can understand the pressure is there. "It will be the same against West Ham. We will feel the pressure." In the same circumstances two years ago City needed a late rally from 2-0 down to beat Aston Villa 3-2 and deny Liverpool the title.

"They feel it there and they know it. They are not celebrating, there is relief but there is still a job to do," added Guardiola. "The tennis players say 'the serve to win Wimbledon is the most difficult one'.

"(We need to) prepare well, completely focus and try to win there." Rodri said City are ready to rewrite the record books once more by becoming the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles.



Pep Guardiola

"We know it wasn't our best performance but we came here to win and that's what we do," said the Spanish midfielder. "We have the experience of Aston Villa. We know it is going to be tough but with our people, our crowd, we know we can make history."

On a tense evening in north London, Arsenal needed their local rivals to do them a favor and Tottenham gave City a scare. Ortega replaced Ederson after

the Brazilian suffered a head knock in challenge with Cristian Romero.

Ederson was visibly frustrated to be removed but Ortega proved to be City's hero with one huge stop to deny Son Heung-min an equalizer five minutes from time. "Stefan was simply incredible", added Rodri. "I know Edi was upset but the substitution makes sense because he had a concussion." — AFP

Mbappe sits out PSG trip to Nice

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe will sit out Paris Saint-Germain's rearranged Ligue 1 game at Nice due to a minor injury, the French champions said. PSG had said on Tuesday that Mbappe took no part in training due to "discomfort" in his left hamstring, and was missing from the squad named on Wednesday morning.

Mbappe will leave PSG when his contract expires at the end of this season and played his final home game for the club on Sunday, scoring his 44th goal of the campaign in a 3-1 defeat against Toulouse. It remains to be seen if the France captain, who is expected to sign for Real Madrid, will return for this weekend's match at Metz, PSG's final Ligue 1 game of the season.

He is set to make his final appearance for the Qatar-owned club in the French Cup final against Lyon on May 25. Ousmane Dembele, Randal Kolo Muani, Nuno Mendes, Achraf Hakimi and Keylor Navas were also left out of PSG's squad for the match in Nice, which was initially postponed earlier this month to help them prepare for their Champions League tie against Borussia Dortmund. While PSG have already won the title, Nice go into the game in fifth place and still have a chance of qualifying for next season's Champions League. — AFP

Five years after 13-0 WCup mauling, Thai women look to future

BANGKOK: Thai women's goalkeeper Sukanya Chor Charoenying will never forget her World Cup debut five years ago - a record 13-0 defeat to the USA. FIFA meet in Bangkok on Friday to name the 2027 Women's World Cup hosts - reviving painful memories for Sukanya and captain Kanjana Sungngoen who have turned their 2019 nightmare into inspiration for the future.

Sukanya, now 36 and teaching sport at a Bangkok university, said she wept all the way back to the team hotel after the 2019 mauling in France.

"We were so ready to play against them. We truly believed that we'd put up a hard game for them," she told AFP. Instead Sukanya was on the receiving end as Megan Rapinoe's all-conquering US team inflicted the biggest defeat in a World Cup finals match, men's or women's. "I couldn't accept it," Sukanya admitted.

"I used to refuse to watch any clips from that game for years. I didn't talk to my family about it at all." A respectable 3-0 defeat in a warm-up against hosts France gave Thailand some confidence going into their opening match against the defending champions. At half-time they were 3-0 down in Reims, but worse was to come as the USA ran riot with 10 second-half goals to set them on their way to lifting the trophy for a fourth time.

"You know what made me really sad about it? It's that I knew everyone was watching back home," Sukanya said, fighting back tears. "That day we were heartbroken that we had disappointed the Thai people." Sukanya and her teammates came in for cruel mockery online in the wake of the defeat. But there was also fierce criticism of the Americans for their treatment of Thailand, who were making only their second appearance at the World Cup proper.

'Wake-up call'

Some pundits and fans said the wild celebrations of the Americans after their later goals were crass and unsporting. The US players stood by their behavior and Thai skipper Kanjana insisted she had no complaints. "I think if they went easy on us, that is far more disrespectful," Kanjana, who scored Thailand's



BANGKOK: This photograph taken on April 28, 2024 shows former captain of Thailand's 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup football team Kanjana Sungngoen (L) during her club's training session at a stadium in Bangkok. FIFA meet in Bangkok on May 17, 2024 to name the 2027 Women's World Cup hosts - reviving painful memories for Sukanya and captain Kanjana Sungngoen who have turned their 2019 nightmare into inspiration for the future. — AFP

only goal in the tournament, told AFP. "To not hold back, that's the way of professional football."

The 37-year-old, now a player-coach at Bangkok FC, said the USA defeat was a "wake-up call" for the women's game in Thailand. "We realized that we had to put as much effort into development as them to be at the same level," she said. "At the time, being a professional footballer wasn't a career."

Kanjana said the Thai women's game was better structured and run more efficiently now, but a shortage of top clubs means the first division season lasts only a few weeks. Teams have to contend with poor facilities and a men's game that grabs most of the attention.

'It was an inspiration'

Nuengrutai Srathongvian, the national coach in 2019, told AFP: "Many people don't know about women's football... so we could provide more information." Kanjana has hopes for the future after the election in February of the Thai FA's first wom-

an president, insurance tycoon Nualphan Lamsam. Nualphan has set a target of qualifying for the 2027 Women's World Cup.

FIFA's Congress in Bangkok on Friday will choose the hosts which will be either Brazil or a joint bid from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Sukanya, now retired from playing, will be watching and hopes the current team can draw on the lessons of 2019 as they chase qualification. After the 13-0 defeat, American Carli Lloyd, one of the greatest women's players of all time, was among the first to console the Thai players.

"She told me to keep going and not quit. That made me feel really good," Sukanya said. "It was an inspiration, but not for me to keep playing. Instead I thought 'I couldn't beat you today, so I will go back and train our young players so they can.'" And the pride of having represented her country at a World Cup still burns bright. "Just to have played there against the best in the world - I can talk about it until I die," she said. — AFP

Rangers keep Celtic waiting to clinch title

GLASGOW: Rangers roared back from a 2-0 deficit to thrash Dundee 5-2 on Tuesday and make Celtic wait to mathematically seal the Scottish Premiership title. Dundee needed to win to maintain any hope of qualifying for Europe and stunned Ibrox as goals from defenders Jordan McGhee and Antonio Portales put the visitors in command.

Ross McCausland pulled a goal back just before the break but that did not save the Rangers players for being booed from the pitch at half-time. A 2-1 defeat to Celtic on Saturday that realistically ended Rangers' hopes of winning the title was fresh in the minds of the home fans.

But Philippe Clement did get a response from his injury-hit side in the second half. "I was very angry," said the Belgian on what he said at half-time. "We need to stand up and show more. After the disappointment of losing in the Old Firm, you need to bounce back fast. In the first half, we were not good enough without the ball."

Cyriel Dessers' header levelled before Todd Cantwell's intended cross flew in at the far post. Substitute Scott Wright added two more goals late on to at least eat into Celtic's goal difference advantage and keep the title race alive.

The Hoops need just one point from their final two games, away to Kilmarnock on Wednesday and home to St. Mirren on Saturday, to be sure of their 12th Scottish title in 13 years. Rangers must hope for two unlikely Celtic defeats, win away to Hearts on Saturday and overturn a four-goal deficit on goal difference to win the league. — AFP

Today's Matches

SPANISH LEAGUE		
Las Palmas v Real Betis		20:30
beIN Sports HD 3		
UD Almeria v FC Barcelona		22:30
beIN Sports HD 1		
Real Sociedad v Valencia C.F		23:00
beIN Sports HD 3		



LONDON: Manchester City's Croatian midfielder #08 Mateo Kovacic (L) fights for the ball with Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh striker #22 Brennan Johnson during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. — AFP

Haaland double puts Man City on brink of Premier League history

Win takes Guardiola's team two points clear of Arsenal at top of the table

LONDON: Erling Haaland scored twice to settle Manchester City's nerves as the Premier League champions beat Tottenham 2-0 to take a giant step towards a historic fourth straight English title on Tuesday. The Norwegian forward tapped home a pinpoint Kevin De Bruyne cross early in the second half to score City's first-ever league goal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

And he netted a late penalty to seal the three points for the visitors, minutes after substitute goalkeeper Stefan Ortega saved brilliantly from Son Heung-min. The win takes Pep Guardiola's team two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the table after 37 games.

Victory at the Etihad against West Ham on Sunday will make them champions for a fourth consecutive season, regardless of the Gunners' result against

Everton. No team in English top-flight history has ever won four titles in a row. Defeat for Spurs also guarantees that Aston Villa will finish in the fourth Champions League spot, joining City, Arsenal and Liverpool in Europe's top-tier competition next season.

"We gave the chance in our hands for the last game," Guardiola told the BBC. "The tennis players say 'The serve to win Wimbledon, the last game, is the most difficult one'." "It happened in our period against Aston Villa (in 2022). And many, many years ago it happened with Sergio Agüero (scoring) in 93 minutes 20 seconds against QPR. So there will be the typical game."

Guardiola called for help from City's fans to get them over the line. "We know what we're playing for," he said. "The tension is there, the rival is so

good. It's why it is difficult, we know that. "Everyone come to the stadium and make noise. These games are more difficult but you have to do it. We'll have one day off, two days to prepare, and then we will do our best."

"Stand up if you hate Arsenal"

The build-up to the game in north London was dominated by a fierce debate over whether home fans wanted their own team to lose in order to leave City in the driving seat, with Arsenal their nearest challengers.

The Spurs supporters made their feelings towards their bitter local rivals clear in the opening minutes, with chants of "Stand up if you hate Arsenal" ringing around the stadium. Tottenham had the first sight of goal, with City's Ederson tipping over a fierce Rodrigo

Bentancur effort before Spurs goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario kept out Phil Foden's close-range shot.

City, who came into the match unbeaten in 21 league matches, were short of their fluent best while Spurs struggled to put the finishing touches to their attacking moves. Moments after the re-start Vicario dived full length to keep out a stinging De Bruyne effort.

But the visitors broke the deadlock in the 51st minute when Bernardo Silva found De Bruyne in the box and the Belgian crossed for Haaland to slot home from point-blank range. Thousands of Spurs fans chanted "Are you watching Arsenal" as the City faithful celebrated in their corner.

The game then became disjointed as De Bruyne was raked down the Achilles by Pape Sarr before Ederson took a blow to the head in denying Cristian Romero

and was replaced shortly afterwards by Ortega. The German was called into action immediately, denying substitute Dejan Kulusevski from close range. Time stood still when Son burst through with five minutes of normal time remaining but Ortega saved with his legs when the South Korean seemed certain to score.

Guardiola fell to the ground, clutching his head in disbelief. Instead City were awarded a penalty when Pedro Porro brought down substitute Jeremy Doku and Haaland smashed home in the 91st minute to spark wild celebrations from the players in front of the City faithful, taking his league tally to 27 goals for the season.

Last year's treble winners will prepare for Sunday's finale knowing they stand just 90 minutes away from creating another slice of football history. — AFP

NY Knicks crush Pacers, Jokic and Nuggets on a roll

NEW YORK: Jalen Brunson was back to his best on Tuesday as the New York Knicks dominated the Indiana Pacers 121-91 to take a 3-2 lead in their Eastern Conference semi-final Game 5. A win on Friday night in Indianapolis will see the Knicks advance to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time in 24 years.

After losing Game 4 by 32 points, it was an emphatic response from the Knicks, with Brunson piling up 44 points with seven assists and four rebounds. "He's willing to share everything with his teammates, and to me, that is the best part of him," said Knicks head coach Tom Thibodeau.

"His play is spectacular, but who he is as a teammate, as a leader, it makes us that. Big shot after big shot." The Knicks destroyed Indiana on the boards, with Isaiah Hartenstein leading the way with 17 rebounds (12 offensive) while Josh Hart had 11 rebounds (nine defensive).

Brunson's impact had been limited in the past two games in the series, with concerns that his heavy workload and a foot injury may have slowed him down. But there were no signs of fa-

tigue as he reached the 40 mark for the fifth time this post-season.

Brunson, who had only 18 points in Sunday's loss, shot 18 for 35 and put up 28 points in the first half—a playoff record for the Knicks. It was his seven straight points, including a three-pointer to open up a 20-point lead at 106-86, that made sure of the victory.

"I just love that there is never any excuse-making from him. He's never talking about injuries," said Thibodeau. "A lot of times when you hear people talking about their injuries, a lot of it is excuse-making and you never get that from him."

The Pacers got off to a strong start and led 25-20 before the Knicks put together an 11-0 run to end the first quarter up 38-32. By halftime, it was 69-54 and New York were in no mood to let the lead slip. Thibodeau said he expected the response to the blowout defeat from his team. "They've shown that all year, that's who they are. We still need one more win, so we can't be too excited about it," he said. Pascal Siakam led Indiana with 22 points.

"Still desperate"

In the West, the Denver Nuggets made it three straight wins in their semifinal with the Minnesota Timberwolves, with Nikola Jokic leading the defending champions with 40 points. Having trailed 2-0 in the series, Denver are now just one win away from a return to the Western Conference finals.

Jokic was presented with his Most Valuable Player of the year award—the third of his career—before the game, then quickly provided another re-



NEW YORK: Ben Sheppard #26 of the Indiana Pacers defends against Precious Achiuwa #5 of the New York Knicks during the third quarter in Game Five of the Eastern Conference Second Round Playoffs at Madison Square Garden. — AFP

minder of his value. Denver led 50-44 at halftime, with Jokic scoring 19 of their points. Then, after the Wolves went on an 11-3 run early in the third quarter, Jokic scored another 16 to extend the Nuggets' lead to 88-74.

Denver were able to keep Anthony Edwards quiet, with the Timberwolves star limited to 18 points on 5-of-15 shooting. The 22-year-old had scored 44 points in Sunday's Game Four loss. But after the shock of losing the opening two games of the series, Jokic knows a tough test awaits on Thursday in Minnesota. — AFP

Clark struggles in WNBA debut

NEW YORK: Women's basketball sensation Caitlin Clark scored 20 points but gave up 10 turnovers on a tough WNBA debut as her Indiana Fever team fell to a 92-71 loss to the Connecticut Sun on Tuesday.

Clark, NCAA Division I basketball's all-time leading scorer, has brought unprecedented attention to women's basketball with her college career which rewrote the record books and shattered attendance and television viewing records. Indiana took her as the number one draft pick, maintaining the buzz around Clark which had peaked with her run to the national championship game with Iowa. The hype in the build-up was always going to be hard to live up to, but Clark and her team endured a tough night against a strong Suns defense.

"There's a lot to learn from, it's the first one," Clark told a post-game press conference. "There's going to be good ones, there's going to be bad ones." The game at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Connecticut, was sold out, with courtside seats being offered for as much as \$4,262 on secondary markets.

While she was making her debut on the road, it was evident from the crowd reactions that many had come just to see the star of last month's NCAA tournament. Clark's 20 points made her the Fever's top scorer and came on 5-of-15 shooting, 4-of-11 on three-pointers and 6-of-6 on free throws. She also had three assists, two steals and 10 turnovers. — AFP