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## Europe trio recognize Palestine

Kuwait welcomes move by Spain, Norway, Ireland • 10% of Arab Fund profits for Palestine



MADRID: Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is applauded by MPs and members of government after delivering a speech to announce that Spain will recognize Palestine as a state on May 28, at the Congress of Deputies on May 22, 2024. — AFP

MADRID/GAZA: Norway, Ireland and Spain announced on Wednesday that they will recognize a Palestinian state from May 28, sparking delight from Palestinian leaders and fury from the Zionist entity, more than seven months into the devastating Gaza war. The announcement by the three European countries to formally recognize the State of Palestine drew praise from many countries in the Arab and Muslim world.

Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs praised Norway, Ireland and Spain's decision to formally recognize Palestine as an official independent state. In a press release, the ministry considered this decision a positive step in the direction of achieving justice and freedom for Palestinians, affirming Kuwait's support in pushing other countries to take similar decisions.

Kuwait also proposed that 10 percent of profits from the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development be dedicated to the support of Palestine, a Kuwaiti minister said on Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of the Joint Annual Meetings of Arab Financial Institutions 2024 in Cairo, Kuwait's Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf indicated the proposal was approved by the attendees.

The Zionist entity said it was recalling its envoys to Dublin, Oslo and Madrid for "urgent consultations" and also summoned the three European ambassadors for a rebuke. Most Western governments,

including the United States, say they are willing to one day recognize Palestinian statehood — but not before thorny issues are settled, including on final borders and the status of Jerusalem.

But Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said that "recognition of Palestine is a means of supporting the moderate forces which have been losing ground in this protracted and brutal conflict". "In the midst of a war, with tens of thousands killed and injured, we must keep alive the only alternative that offers a political solution for (Zionists) and Palestinians alike: Two states, living side by side, in peace and security."

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said his Zionist counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu was "causing so much pain, destruction and resentment in Gaza and the rest of Palestine that the two-state solution is in danger". And Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris stressed that "a two-state solution is the only way out of the generational cycles of violence, retaliation and resentment". Harris drew parallels with international recognition of the Irish state in 1919. "From our own history, we know what it means," he went on, referring to Ireland's declaration of independence from British rule, which eventually led to formal statehood.

Sweden, which has a large Palestinian community, became the first European Union member in western Europe to recognize Palestinian statehood in 2014.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### No biometrics, no transactions

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Wednesday that all transactions of citizens and expatriates will be stopped if the concerned persons have not submitted their biometric data. Everyone must book an appointment via the Sahel or Meta apps before heading to the assigned biometrics centers. Those who do not take an appointment in advance will be turned back. The grace period for citizens has been extended until Sept 30, 2024. For expatriates, the submission period expires on Dec 30, 2024. — KUNA

#### Ex-candidate jailed for 4 years

KUWAIT: The criminal court on Wednesday sentenced former parliamentary election candidate Musaed Al-Qraifa to four years in jail for offending the political leadership and challenging its powers. The court convicted Qraifa for making statements during an election campaign deemed offensive to HH the Amir and challenging his authority, charges that are state security offenses under Kuwait law. The public prosecution has also remanded two former MPs — Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Anwar Al-Fiker — to detention pending trial over similar charges.

#### France and UAE sign AI deal

ABU DHABI: France and the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday signed a "strategic partnership" on artificial intelligence (AI) aimed at boosting cooperation between them, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told AFP. The agreement signed with Khaldoon Al-Mubarak, managing director of the Abu Dhabi government-controlled fund Mubadala, opens "a new era of economic cooperation" in the burgeoning sector, Le Maire said. The oil-rich UAE aims to become a global AI leader over the next decade. — AFP

### Huge crowds in Tehran for Raisi's funeral

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for late President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday as huge crowds thronged the capital Tehran for his funeral procession. Flanked by top officials, Khamenei said prayers over the coffins of the eight dead from Sunday's helicopter crash, who also included Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

A sea of mourners filled the open space around Tehran University, where the prayers were held before the funeral procession moved on to Enghelab and Azadi squares. State television said Rai-

si, who had been widely seen as Khamenei's most likely successor as supreme leader, had received a "millionfold farewell" from the people of Tehran.

"We have lost a prominent personality. He was a very good brother. He was an efficient, competent, sincere, and serious official," Khamenei told visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani. The leader of Palestinian group Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, joined the procession, as did the deputy leader of Lebanese group Hezbollah, Naim Qassem. "I say once again... we are sure that the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its support for the Palestinian people," Haniyeh told the crowd to chants of "Death to (the Zionist entity)".

Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, later received heads and representatives of countries in

Continued on Page 6



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other clerics and officials pray over the coffins of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and others on May 22, 2024. — AFP

### British PM Sunak announces July 4 general election

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday set a general election date for July 4, ending months of speculation but not doom-laden forecasts about the size of the government's expected defeat. The poll will be the first time Sunak, 44, faces the public while in charge, after he was appointed leader of the largest party in parliament by Conservative MPs in Oct 2022.

The vote — the third since the Brexit referendum in 2016 — comes as Sunak seeks to capitalize on better economic data to woo voters hit by cost-of-living rises. Halving inflation within a year from historic highs of above 11 percent at the end of 2022 was one of the former financier's five key pledges. That happened last year and on Wednesday rates slowed to a near three-year low at 2.3 percent in March, prompting finance minister Jeremy Hunt to declare: "This is proof that the plan is working."

Sunak, in a Downing Street statement made in driving rain after he gathered his top ministers, said he had spoken to head of state King Charles III and requested the dissolution of parliament. "The king has granted this request and we will have a general

Continued on Page 6



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivers a speech to announce the date of the UK's next general election at 10 Downing Street on May 22, 2024. — AFP

### 'Everest Man' claims record 30th summit

KATHMANDU: A 54-year-old Nepali climber known as "Everest Man" reached the peak of the world's highest mountain for a record 30th time on Wednesday, three decades after his first summit. Kami Rita Sherpa, who broke his own record after climbing the 8,849-m peak for the 29th time

earlier this month, has previously said that he was "just working" and did not plan on setting records.

"Kami Rita reached the summit this morning. Now he has made a new record with 30 summits of Everest," Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, his expedition organizer, told AFP. But celebrations were overshadowed after a Romanian mountaineer was confirmed dead, and a British climber and Nepali guide were reported missing — the latest casualties highlighting the risks of the sport.

Sherpa first stood on the top of Mount Everest in 1994 when working

for a commercial expedition. Since then he has climbed Everest almost every year, guiding clients. "I am glad for the record, but records are eventually broken," he told AFP after his 29th climb on May 12. "I am more happy that my climbs help Nepal be recognized in the world."

Last year, Sherpa climbed Everest twice to reclaim his record after another guide, Pasang Dawa Sherpa, equaled his number of ascents. He has also conquered other 8,000-m peaks including the world's second-highest mountain, K2 in Pakistan.

(See Page 14)



Kami Rita Sherpa



## Local

# Platform empowers 'Kuwaiti women leaders for change'

## Bridging the gender gap in Kuwait

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** Recently emerged, "Kuwaiti Women Leaders for Change" is a new and promising platform dedicated to enhancing women's participation in the labor market and supporting their ascent to leadership positions. This initiative launched by The Women and Business Affairs Committee Kuwait and established under the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, marks a significant step towards a new era of economic and social development.

Lina Adlouni, member of the committee, highlighted the main purpose of this platform, which is to "Bridge the gender gap in Kuwait and empower women in the business sector." By providing an accurate reference and gathering sufficient data about all Kuwaiti women leaders, the platform supports decision-makers in the private and government sectors to select qualified Kuwaiti women for leadership positions, she explained.

The initiative aims to bring to light the proven experience, competencies, and qualifications of many Kuwaiti women, providing them with opportunities for growth and development. It seeks to motivate them to engage with the business sector and boost women's contributions across all economic and community

boards of directors, leadership roles in government, state institutions, and councils.

Supporting women in the labor market and in the private and government sectors, as Adlouni stated, marks one of the key factors contributing to elevating Kuwait and its international ranking status. Drawing reference from international studies, she also stated that this would increase economic growth and attract global investments as this aligns with the Kuwait vision 2035.

Adlouni stressed the government's commitment to achieving "justice and equality," which she believes can only be realized by acknowledging the significant role of women in contributing to the development of the labor force and the country as a whole. Currently, the percentage of women in leadership positions, according to data from the Civil Service Commission, has reached 28 percent. With vacant leadership positions across all ministries and government agencies, and ongoing expansion in the private sector, Kuwait envisions that at least 35 percent of leadership roles will be held by women, added Adlouni.

She further highlighted that women in the labor market are highly educated, representing a valuable

resource of untapped talent. This initiative aims to leverage this pool of human capital, ensuring that women are not only participants but leaders in shaping the future by enhancing the economic inclusion and diversity in women's participation to achieve economic and social justice in Kuwait.

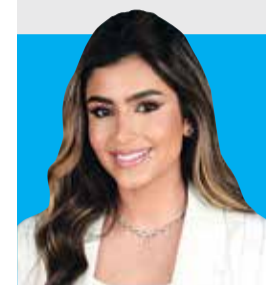
Women leaders who wish to join this platform can do so by registering via its official LinkedIn account, where they can submit their comprehensive professional bios and experiences. Registration through the platform's account entails meeting specific criteria outlined by Adlouni, including a LinkedIn profile - reflecting at least 10 years of experience, details of educational and career advancements, records of workshops attended within the last five years, engagement in forums, involvement in volunteer activities, as well as familiarity with spoken and written English and Arabic.



Lina Adlouni

In my view

### Empowering Kuwait's future gen: Crucial role of private sector, need for govt support



Farah Mahdi Haidar

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**K**uwait's economic narrative is intertwined with the entrepreneurial spirit brought by the merchants, traders and businessmen of the private sector. Because of this, they are considered the driving motion of the country towards prosperity and growth. Their role was not only evident with the bustling pearl markets of the early 20th century, but also essential before and after the Iraqi occupation, and continue to be so until this day as they help shape Kuwait's economic destiny.

As Kuwait today embarks on a new journey towards innovation and modernization with HH the Amir Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the private sector continues to play a crucial role in fostering sustainable growth and development, and we, the new Kuwaiti generation, hope that the government will provide support for this private sector so that our goals and ambitions for a new Kuwait can be attained.

During the late 19th and 20th centuries, and before the discovery of oil, Kuwait's economy relied heavily on pearl diving and the merchants and traders were central to this industry as they facilitated trade between local divers and international markets. Kuwait's strategic location at the northern tip of the Arabian Gulf made Kuwaiti merchants the middlemen in the trade between East and West and eventually fostered the growth of the private sector.

With the progression of time, the role of Kuwaiti merchants expanded and so did their sense of responsibility for building Kuwait and supporting its community. One example of this is the establishment of Al Mubarakiya School, the first school in Kuwait. Al Mubarakiya School was established by the donation from various businessmen including Hamad Al-Khaled and Sabekha Al-Khaled, who donated their two homes located in the heart of the capital as the basis for this school. The education was free and only a onetime enrolment fee was charged. This was the first step in transforming the primitive education system into a modern one.

In 1914, one of the prominent Kuwaiti traders, Helal Fajhan Al-Mutairi, in addition to three other merchants, participated in founding the first desalination company in Kuwait. This not only supplied the Kuwaitis with the water essential for their livelihood, but also created job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth. In 1920, Al-Mutairi also donated 15,000 rupees as a contribution to construct the Third Wall, which was essential for enhancing Kuwait's security.

Kuwaiti traders played an essential role during Kuwait's invasion by the Iraqi troops, especially through the Kuwaiti Popular Conference which was held in Jeddah. This conference was a pivotal moment in Kuwait's history and was significantly shaped by the presence and contributions of numerous Kuwaiti merchants and dignitaries. In this conference, Kuwaiti merchants showcased a united front in rejecting the invasion and affirming their allegiance to the Al-Sabah leadership.

Their roles as business leaders and statesmen were crucial in shaping the conference's outcome and reaffirming Kuwait's political stability and sovereignty during a critical period in its history. In addition, their role extended beyond the conference as they provided support for Kuwaiti immigrants who were pursuing their education on one hand and provided monthly allowances and aid for those in Kuwait.

After Kuwait's invasion, the support of Kuwaiti merchants was persistent. In fact, by the return of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to Kuwait with the end of military operations and the announcement of the liberation of the State of Kuwait on February 26, 1991, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber resided at the Babtain Diwan in response to the invitation of Kuwaiti businessman and poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain, due to the unpreparedness of his residence in Dasman Palace.

The return of the Amir to the homeland marks one of the historical milestones in Kuwait's life, a moment that signifies the victory of legitimacy and the triumph of the leader. The residence of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber at the Babtain Diwan provided an opportunity for many Kuwaitis to meet him and congratulate him on the liberation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwaiti businessmen played a vital role in supporting the nation's response efforts. They contributed generously to health and social initiatives to mitigate the impact of the crisis. For example, the Al-Ghanim family, through their business donated substantial funds to support health-care facilities and provide essential medical supplies. Similarly, the Agility Logistics Company facilitated the distribution of critical medical equipment and supplies across Kuwait. These contributions from the private sector not only helped alleviate the immediate health-care challenges, but also reinforced the spirit of solidarity and cooperation within the Kuwaiti community.

In conclusion, the private sector in Kuwait is essential to the country's economic growth and resilience. As a senior student, I am eager to see increased governmental support for the private sector, recognizing its crucial role in driving innovation, creating jobs and fostering sustainable development. With numerous opportunities for professional growth, the private sector offers a promising path for my future career. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to continue and enhance its support for private enterprises to ensure a prosperous future for Kuwait.



## Amir's Representative in Iran, offers condolences

**KUWAIT:** Representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya arrived in Tehran to offer condolences on the demise of president Ebrahim Raisi. Iranians are mourning the death of the president whose helicopter crashed into a fog-shrouded mountain. Raisi, 63, his foreign minister and seven others died when the aircraft went down on Sunday in a remote area in northwestern Iran, where the wreckage was only found Monday morning. — KUNA



## New program highlights Kuwait youth creativity

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Wednesday launched a new program titled 'Professional Diaries' that sheds light on Kuwaiti young people's creativity through field reports that highlight different professions in various fields. The launch came after the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on activating the media's role in showcasing the government's achievements in executing development projects in the country and highlighting competent citizens in various fields.

The program also explores the nature of different professions, jobs, and work performed by citizens while introducing careers in various aspects, along with interviews and pieces handling different working conditions. KUNA launched its new services, specialized in visual programs and content creation, with the aim of shedding light on human narratives and news stories that emulate Kuwaiti society, to be published through KUNA accounts and social media platforms. — KUNA



## Minister calls for open door policy

**KUWAIT:** The Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs and the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah has called for an open door policy in all sectors and departments. This came in a statement issued by the Ministry after receiving citizens and visitors. The Ministry had announced that the minister would receive citizens every week (on Wednesday) from 10 am until 2 pm in her office in the Ministries Complex, Block 17, second floor. — KUNA



Participants attend the career forum. — KUNA photos

## Initiative empowers people with disabilities

**KUWAIT:** The Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs, Hamidi Al-Mutairi, confirmed on Tuesday that the Authority spares no effort in harnessing all its energies to serve people with disabilities and pays attention to all orientations and policies that will achieve Kuwait Vision 2035 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Al-Mutairi told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the launch of the career forum for the fifth batch. The initiative enhances efforts towards empow-

ering people with disabilities in society and integrating them to serve the country. Al-Mutairi added that about 100 trainees have graduated, pointing out that they are in the process of obtaining suitable career opportunities in the banking sector and the private sector.

For his part, Acting Director General of the Authority for Minors Affairs Tamar Al-Omar confirmed in a similar statement to KUNA the keenness of the Authority to support the project in its fifth edition based on social responsibility towards people with disabilities. This is aimed at enhancing their role and empowering them socially and economically. Al-Omar added that the Authority is a good partner, indicating the impact of training and following up on job opportunities for them.

The general director of the Human Construction So-

ciety, Engineer Awatif Salman, said in a similar statement that the society, through the initiative, is keen to measure the job performance index of the category throughout the previous four batches to follow up on their status. The forum includes a wide range of job opportunities, including in the oil sector, telecommunications, and retail.

The head of the Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Development and Strategic Planning Coordinator Nasser Al-Shatti, told KUNA that the forum will contribute to raising the percentage of employment of people with disabilities and will work to empower them in society after they are provided with the necessary job skills through the initiative, which reflects positively on the country's international ranking. — KUNA

# Kuwaiti women lauded for their contributions

## Women account for 51% of population, 58% of the workforce

GENEVA: Kuwait on Tuesday heaped praises on the contributions of its women as an ad hoc UN committee gathered to discuss the progress of global efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. The need for "constructive dialogue" is paramount to pushing forward efforts aiming to clamp down on all practices seen as discriminatory against women, Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain, told the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva, in which he underlined his country's firm backing for women's rights and empowerment.

Kuwaiti women were lauded just five days earlier on a special day dedicated to their accomplishments at home, which include, but are not limited to, their full-fledged political rights, the Kuwaiti diplomat underlined, highlighting the event as encapsulating state-wide efforts to establish gender parity. Accounting for 51 percent of the national population and 58 percent of the workforce, respectively, Kuwaiti women have contributed immensely towards economic development and the local job market, he added, citing his country as among the longest-standing CEDAW members, having first signed back in 1994.

Kuwait has routinely compiled its national report on measures the country has taken against the discrimination of women, the last of which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw women at the forefront of state efforts to curb the spread of the virus through their participation in various initiatives, he said. In a testament to its unflinching belief in women's rights and empowerment, Kuwait has gradually modified relevant legislation in a bid to keep abreast of global developments on the matter while simultaneously keeping intact the advance-

ments made in the protection of women's rights, added the diplomat.

### Human rights issues

The Foreign Ministry initiated in 2019 a department for human rights affairs out of belief in the importance of prioritizing human rights issues on national and international scales. The department is headed by Ambassador Jawaher Al-Sabah, who was unable to join us today due to private reasons. The Ministry also set up the national standing committee for reporting and following up on recommendations related to human rights under ministerial decree No 54 for December 19, 2019.

The committee works out regular and irregular reports on human rights situations in Kuwait. The Ministry issued ministerial decree No 191 for December 4, 2023, on setting up the national committee on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "women, peace, and security." The committee is tasked with drawing up the policies, programs, and strategic plans for the implementation of the women's agenda. It aspires to work out regular reports and present them to the UN, which could include them in the Secretary General's annual report. The committee organized a number of workshops in this regard in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA).

In cooperation with the Kuwaiti Union of Women's Associations, the Ministry sponsored in February 2024 the regional conference on Arab women, security, and peace - challenges facing women in the Arab world - under the theme of "stop the aggression on Gaza now, not tomorrow." In keeping with Kuwait's voluntary undertakings in the framework of its membership at the

United Nations Human Rights Council in 2024, the Ministry organized an expanded meeting of the national committee on reporting and following up on human rights issues and several civil society organizations in early 2024 to exchange views on human rights.

### Empowering women

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in coordination with the Beirut-based UN Human Rights Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROM-ENA), organized in May 2024 a training workshop for some NGOs to build their capacities regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Kuwait has been paying much attention to empowering Kuwaiti females in all fields in light of combating all types of discrimination against women, Al-Hayen affirmed.

The state's policy towards enabling women to get positions in all fields was shown in providing opportunities in oil, the state's main economic pillar, in which they have achieved tangible accomplishments and valuable contributions in this vital sector, Al-Hayen added. Over the years, the sector has witnessed noticeable development in terms of women's participation and their key role in this domain, he stated.

In December 2020, the CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation announced the launch of the Diversity and Inclusion Council of Oil, which raised the ratio of women leading positions to 12 percent and 18 percent on all boards of directors, he revealed. Kuwaiti women's contributions to this sector are shown in the development and sustainability of this vital industry, as they are an integrated part of the sector's workforce, the ambassador noted.



Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain

### Engineering, research

Those females have positions in engineering, research, oil services, oil wells, project management, marketing, in addition to administrative and field tasks, and others, he pointed out. He elaborated that the ratio of female engineers and administrative workers in this field hit 29 percent and 44 percent, respectively, exceeding the global average of women in this domain. In addition, he referred to Kuwaiti women who have varied positions in this sector, proving that they are efficient due to their ability to learn and adapt to modern techniques and methods.

Kuwaiti women, thanks to their skills in analyzing and making decisions, contribute to improving operations and increasing productivity, diversity, and innovation in a way that enhances industry to face challenges and achieve sustainable development, he said. He also pointed out that Kuwait has been interested in enabling women to participate in sports and making efforts to encourage them to take part in this field as well as other fields. — KUNA

## Winning Arab award reflects fund's SDGs role: KFAED

CAIRO: Winning the Abdlatif Al-Hamad Development Award in the Arab World reflects the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development's (KFAED) leading role in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a top KFAED executive said on Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of the Joint Annual Meetings of Arab Financial Institutions 2024, Acting KFAED Director General Waleed Al-Bahar told KUNA that winning the award from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development came due to the fund's contribution to the Bahr Al-Baqar Treatment Plant in Egypt.

The honoring also displayed its keenness on sustainable projects throughout the Arab world and beyond, said Al-Bahar, noting that the project will serve and provide job opportunities for around 100,000 people. Al-Bahar affirmed that over 50 percent of the KFAED's operations were in the Arab region, adding that the fund was also interested in providing assistance beyond the region. The award is given to the best economic and social development project in the Arab world, either partially or fully funded by a member of the Arab Coordination Group, while giving priority to joint Arab projects. — KUNA



Acting Director General of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Waleed Al-Bahar receives Abdlatif Al-Hamad Development Award for the Bahr Al-Baqar water treatment venture. — KUNA photos

## KFAED contributes to enhancing Arabs' living standards

CAIRO: Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Waleed Al-Bahar, affirmed on Wednesday KFAED's significant role in backing up efforts and plans for enhancing standards of living throughout the Arab region. Al-Bahar was speaking as he received the award for the top development venture in the Arab world - the Bahr Al-Baqar water treatment venture. He expressed pride in earning this prestigious trophy on behalf of the fund.

This is a celebration of the collective efforts by Arab development and financial institutions that have contributed to changing the lives of millions of people, he added. He indicated that the



Acting Director General of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Waleed Al-Bahar

\$416 million project was designed to treat huge amounts of water to spare the environment's harmful effects and contribute to irrigating huge cultivated fields. It also creates jobs and helps enhance income per capita. — KUNA

## GCC welcomes recognition of Palestine state

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) welcomed on Wednesday the official recognition of Palestine by Spain, Ireland, and Norway. In a statement, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, GCC Secretary General, indicated that this recognition was a pivotal and strategic step towards achieving the two-state solution. He added that it was a strong motivation for all countries to take similar steps to recognize the State of Palestine, contributing to the Palestinian people obtaining all their rights and living in peace, justice, and independence after many years of injustice, oppression, and serious violations and living under the pressure of the occupation forces.

Furthermore, he called on the international community, with all its institutions and organizations, to play their role in supporting the Palestinian people to obtain the full right to establish their state. Al-Budaiwi also reaffirmed the firm stance of the GCC in support of the Palestinian cause and reached a solution based on ending the occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul Gheit hailed the announcement made by Norway, Ireland, and Spain in recognizing Palestine. Abul Gheit said on the social media platform X that the decisions put the three countries "on the right side of history in this Palestinian conflict." Furthermore, Abul Gheit called on other countries worldwide to follow the three nations in their courageous initial step. — KUNA



Acting Director General of the Environment Public Authority Dr Samira Al-Kandari

## EPA launches new version of Beatona portal

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) launched on Wednesday the new version of Kuwait's official environmental portal, Beatona (Our Environment). Acting Director General of the authority, Dr Samira Al-Kandari, said that this portal includes reliable environmental information about the Kuwaiti environment, pointing out that the re-launch is a step towards achieving Kuwait's 2035 vision for environmental data.

She added that the authority launched an advanced environmental monitoring system based on geographic information (eMISK) in 2010 to monitor and evaluate the Kuwaiti environment in accordance with the Environmental Protection Law, which the authority is working to develop in several stages to include a geographic database.

She stated that this database includes integrated data and information regarding the Kuwaiti environment and links decision-makers in all parts of the country through this system to enable them to access data, analyses, and maps of environmental indicators, direct monitoring stations, and a group of interactive web applications. Al-Kandari affirmed the authority's commitment to achieve the Kuwait 2035 vision for environmental data through concerted efforts between various entities in the public and private sectors to achieve sustainability and environmental balance. The portal was launched for the first time in 2012 as part of the environmental monitoring information system. — KUNA

## Kuwait investments in Africa valued at \$28 billion

KUWAIT: The dean of the African diplomatic corps and Ambassador of the Republic of Togo, Mohamed Ouro, praised on Wednesday the pioneering role undertaken by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and aid for development in 51 African countries. The ambassador was speaking to KUNA after partaking in a seminar organized by the Kuwait Diplomatic Institute, titled "Sixty Years of Kuwaiti-African Relations," attended by the Foreign Minister's assistant for Institute Affairs, Ambassador Nasser Al-Sebeeh, and heads of foreign diplomatic missions.

Ambassador Ouro said Kuwaiti-African relations are distinguished by brotherly and strong bonds based on fruitful cooperation, citing the endorsement of various accords and visits' swaps by senior officials and diplomats. The cordial dialogue organized by the institute on the 60th anniversary of the distinguished ties is a good opportunity to examine means of fostering these relations further, he said.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister's Deputy Assistant for African Affairs Naif Al-Mudhaf said Kuwait hosts 34 African diplomatic missions, the largest entity in the sector in the country. Kuwait, for its part, maintains up to 17 missions on the African continent. He valued Kuwaiti investments in Africa at \$28 billion and the trade exchange volume at more than \$10 million. KFAED, for its part, has contributed 500 loans worth \$10 million to fund development projects in Africa. — KUNA



Speakers are seen at the seminar titled 'Sixty Years of Kuwaiti-African Relations'. — KUNA photos



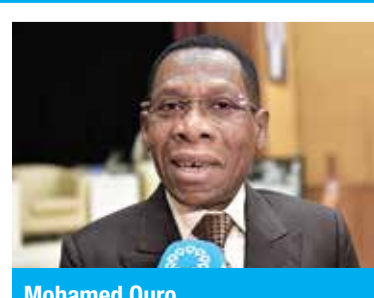
The audience listens to the panelists speak at the seminar.



Mubarak Al-Hajeri



Naif Al-Mudhaf



Mohamed Ouro

## Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan down 4%

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan narrowed 4 percent from a year earlier to JPY 75.5 billion (\$483 million) in April, down for the second consecutive month due to slow exports, government data showed Wednesday. However, Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 16 years and three months, as exports still offset imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report. Overall exports from Kuwait to Japan shrank 8.7 percent year-on-year to JPY 94.6 billion (\$605 million) for the second straight month of decline.

Meanwhile, imports from Japan also fell 23.3 percent to JPY 19.1 billion (\$122 million), down for the fifth month in a row. The Middle East's trade surplus with Japan widened 13.5 percent to JPY 845.6 billion (\$5.4 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region jumping 15.3 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and other natural resources, which accounted for 96.3 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, grew 16.1 percent.

The region's overall imports from Japan surged by 20 percent on demand for automobiles, machinery, and manufactured goods. Japan's global trade balance returned to deficit in April with JPY 462.5 billion (\$3.0 billion), as the weak yen boosted imports bills. Exports gained 8.3 percent from the year before, buoyed by robust shipments of automobiles and semiconductor-making equipment chips. Imports also increased 8.3 percent on crude oil and aircraft as a weaker yen pushed up the value of their imports. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. — KUNA

## Kuwait Airways, German FlexFlight ink agreement

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways signed a cooperation agreement on Wednesday with German FlexFlight, enabling customers to book German services. In a statement to KUNA, the national carrier mentioned that booking services will be made available on the 1st of June for flights operated by Kuwait Airways to Frankfurt, Munich, and Amsterdam. This agreement clarifies the airlines, reinforces commercial and touristic relations between Kuwait and Germany, and is in line with the corporate strategy of diversifying and expanding services as well as providing creative travel solutions. Kuwait Airways was established in 1953 as a private company, but the Kuwaiti government gained full ownership in 1962. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



LONDON: A Kuwait Airways passenger jet comes in over the rooftops of residential houses, to land at Heathrow Airport in west London. — AFP

## Campaign raises awareness on the dangers of smoking



KUWAIT: Kuwait University organizes an awareness campaign entitled "World No Tobacco Day" in cooperation with the Ministry of Health in Sabah Al-Salem University City, Al-Shadadiya.



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KUWAIT: Kuwait University, represented by the Security and Safety Department, organized an awareness campaign entitled "World No Tobacco Day" in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, represented by the Health Promotion Department, in the lobby of the university administration building in Sabah Al-Salem University City, Al-Shadadiya.

The Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Facilities Management Affairs, Muhammad Al-Sulaiman, indicated that the campaign is aimed at raising awareness on the dangers of passive smoking on the health of an individual, especially the harms it causes. This, he said, is not limited to traditional cigarettes but also to shisha and electronic cigarettes.

He indicated the extent of the impact of smoking on public health, which has a negative impact socially, psychologically, and health-wise, stressing the

need to prevent it so as to secure a healthy life free of diseases for all. Acting Director of the Safety Security Department, Yousef Al-Khamis, confirmed that this annual custom came with the aim of promoting awareness, prevention, and public safety.

"This would preserve the safety of employees and visitors to the campus," he said, pointing out that this awareness campaign came with the participation of many different government agencies as well as a number of public benefit associations, with the aim of raising awareness for all segments of society in general and children in particular. "We would like to invite all campus employees and visitors to attend the opening of the first therapeutic clinic in Kuwait on May 27, 2024, at the College of Life Sciences—South Campus in the Shadadiya area. The center will offer advanced treatments and remedies to quit smoking," he added.



## Heart Foundation to hold awareness conference

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Heart Foundation said that the Kuwait Heart Failure Conference will be held on May 25th. This is in cooperation with the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heart Center of the Ministry of Health and with global participation. Participants will discuss the latest findings of specialized research in the field of heart diseases - specifically heart failure.

The Secretary-General of the Society, Dr Rashid Al-Owaish, said in a press statement on Tuesday that the one-day conference will bring together a group of regional and international medical professionals who will exchange experiences and information on modern methods and various

medical skills. "The conference will be attended by about 200 doctors from inside Kuwait and a group of doctors from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, America, and Canada," Al-Owaish added, noting that it is a great opportunity to share experiences and information.

Such conferences will enrich scientific research, increase doctors' information, and refine their expertise and skills. He stressed the association's keenness to keep pace with modern developments and technologies in all medical fields in order to provide the best health services, in addition to continuous scientific communication with international centers. — KUNA



Dr Rashid Al-Owaish



From Libyan hell to migrant boat, 2 young Bangladeshis are saved

## Russia deals symbolic blow to Ukraine with village capture

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Zionist forces move with armored vehicles behind bulldozers digging up a main road in Jenin during a raid.

# Zionist raid on Jenin enters day 2

## Student, schoolteacher and surgeon among eight killed in the occupied West Bank city

JENIN: A Zionist raid on the West Bank city of Jenin stretched into a second day on Wednesday, an AFP correspondent reported, after eight Palestinians were killed the previous day.

Explosions and gunfire were heard from inside the adjacent Jenin refugee camp, the AFP correspondent said. The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said Zionist troops had killed eight people and wounded nearly 20 during the raid, which began on Tuesday morning.

An AFP correspondent saw four bodies at Jenin's Khalil Suleiman government hospital morgue. The Zionist army said Wednesday that troops had "exchanged fire with armed men and killed a number of terrorists, including two terrorists who threw explosives at the forces".

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa and medical charity Doctors Without Borders reported that surgeon Usaed Jabareen, from the government hospital,

was among those killed. A schoolteacher and a student were also among the dead, Wafa reported, quoting hospital director Wissam Bakr. The Zionist forces said they had raided the house of Ahmed Barakat, who was suspected of involvement in an attack on a Zionist civilian last year. Meir Tamari, 32, was killed in May 2023 at the entrance to a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, medics and military officials said at the time.

The streets near the entrance to the camp were deserted on Wednesday afternoon, with drones buzzing overhead. On the outskirts of the city, a group of Zionist armored vehicles were parked near a roundabout, while farm workers picked vegetables across the road.

### 'Criminal mentality'

Palestinian militant group Hamas called the raid a "massacre" and deemed it "conclusive evidence of the criminal mentality

that rules the occupying state and its ideological belief in killing our people".

The office of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas condemned the raid, saying in a statement on Wafa that the Zionist entity was "killing innocent people, doctors, and destroying the infrastructure of Palestinian hospitals, cities and villages".

Jenin has long been a stronghold of Palestinian militant groups and the Zionist army routinely carries out raids into the city and adjacent camp. The West Bank, which the Zionist entity has occupied since 1967, has seen a surge in violence for more than a year, but particularly since the Zionist war on Gaza.

At least 513 Palestinians have been killed in the territory by Zionist troops or settlers since the Gaza war broke out, according to Palestinian officials. Attacks by Palestinians have killed at least 12 Zionists in the West Bank over the same period, according to an AFP tally of Zionist official figures. — AFP



A Palestinian youth flashes the V for victory sign as he rides his bicycle next to burning tyres during a Zionist raid on the occupied West Bank city of Jenin on May 21, 2024. — AFP photos



SEOUL: Climate activist Han Jeah poses while holding her closing argument outside the Constitutional Court in Seoul on May 21, 2024. — AFP

## Embryo, children take on S Korea's climate inaction

SEOUL: When he was a 20-week-old embryo — before he even had a real name — Choi Hee-woo became one of the world's youngest-ever plaintiffs by joining a groundbreaking climate lawsuit against South Korea. His case, known as "Woodpecker et al v South Korea" after Choi's in utero nickname, seeks to prove Seoul's modest climate goals — reducing carbon emissions by 40 percent of 2018 levels by 2030 — are a violation of their constitutionally guaranteed human rights.

In Asia's first such climate case — a similar youth-led effort recently succeeded in the US state of Montana, another is ongoing at the European Higher Court — the plaintiffs claim South Korea's legally binding climate commitments are insufficient and unmet.

"I had no idea an embryo could participate," Choi's mother, Lee Dong-hyun, told AFP, adding that she'd been planning to sign up Choi's older sibling before realizing her unborn child could also become a plaintiff. Choi or "Woodpecker" — his parents heard the bird's call after learning they were pregnant, Lee said — is the youngest of the 62 children involved, although most were under five when the suit was first filed in 2022.

Lee is confident the court will rule with the children — which could force revisions to Seoul's climate laws, although the scale

of any potential changes is not clear. "Considering the future of humanity, it's obvious the government should make more active efforts to ensure our survival amid the climate crisis," she said.

"I would be so sorry if my children never experienced a beautiful spring day," she said ahead of the final hearing this week of four climate cases, which for procedural reasons were merged into one, at South Korea's Constitutional Court.

### 'Climate crisis'

Youth climate activist Kim Seo-gyeong, 21, was part of the group that filed the first of the cases in 2020. She said it was taking too long for the government to address young people's demands, as their legal challenge makes its way through the courts. "Four years might not seem too long for a constitutional appeal, but it is too significant for a climate crisis," she said. "For the decision makers, it still isn't enough of a crisis to compel action."

In 2021, South Korea made a legally binding commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 290 million tons by 2030 — and to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. In order to meet this goal, the country needs to reduce emissions by 5.4 percent every year from 2023 — a target they have so far failed to meet.

It's highly unlikely Seoul will meet its official climate goals, said Noh Dong-woon, a professor at Hanyang University in Seoul. "With the current administration's industrial-friendly policies and South Korea's heavy industry structure, we should have done something much sooner," he said. — AFP

## US says Russia launched 'space weapon'

WASHINGTON: Russia has launched a likely space weapon and deployed it in the same orbit as a US government satellite, the Pentagon said. "Russia launched a satellite into low Earth orbit that we assess is likely a counter-space weapon presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low Earth orbit," Pentagon spokesman Air Force Major General Pat Ryder told a press briefing late Tuesday. The Russian "counter-space weapon" launched on May 16 was deployed "into the same orbit as a US government satellite," he said. Ryder added that Washington would continue to monitor the situation and was ready to protect its interests.

"We have a responsibility to be ready to protect and defend the domain, the space domain, and ensure continuous and uninterrupted support to the Joint and Combined Force," he said. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment when asked about reports that Moscow had launched a space weapon. "I can't comment on this in any way. We act absolutely in accordance with international law, do not violate anything, and have repeatedly advocated banning any weapons in space," he told a regular press briefing in Moscow. "Unfortunately, these initiatives of ours were rejected, including by the USA."

Earlier Tuesday, Moscow accused the United States of seeking to weaponize space after Washington joined other members of the Security Council in voting down a Russian non-proliferation resolution at the United Nations. "They have once again demonstrated that their true priorities in the area of outer space are aimed not at keeping space free from weapons of any kind, but at placing weapons in space and turning it into an arena for military confrontation," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

### Rival UN motions

The world powers have traded accusations over weaponizing space in recent months. They have proposed rival non-proliferation resolutions at the UN as part of the spat. Russia vetoed the US initiative last month, while

Moscow's proposal failed after receiving only seven votes in support, with seven against, and one abstention, on Monday.

US envoy Robert Wood said Russia's proposal, which called on all countries to "take urgent measures to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space", was a distraction and accused Moscow of "diplomatic gaslighting".

He said that Russia's "likely" counter-space weapon was "presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low Earth orbit". "Russia deployed this new counter-space weapon into the same orbit as a US government satellite," he said in remarks ahead of Monday's vote. "Russia's May 16 launch follows prior

Russian satellite launches likely of counter-space systems to low Earth orbit in 2019 and 2022."

In February, the White House said Russia was developing an anti-satellite weapon, the existence of which was confirmed after lawmakers warned of an unspecified but serious threat to national security. Space has been a rare area where the two countries have maintained a degree of cooperation despite a swathe of Western sanctions and dire relations after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both countries ferry each other's crew members to and from the International Space Station (ISS), where their astronauts are jointly stationed. — AFP

## CONDOLENCES

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Let us keep the bereaving  
family in our prayers.

May his soul Rest in Peace

## International

# Russia deals symbolic blow to Ukraine with village capture

**Klishchiivka's capture came as Russian attacks in the city of Kharkiv injured at least 12**

KYIV: Russia said Wednesday that its forces had retaken Klishchiivka, one of a handful of villages on the eastern front that Ukraine took control of in a lackluster counteroffensive last summer.

Russian forces in recent weeks have made their biggest territorial gains in the war-battered east in the last 18 months as Ukraine waits for desperately needed US and European weapon supplies.

Klishchiivka lies in the industrial Donetsk territory in the east that the Kremlin claimed to have annexed in late 2022 even as its forces were struggling at great cost to gain ground there. The Ukrainian army has come under intense pressure in the past two weeks, fighting off a new ground offensive in the Kharkiv region and further stretching their critically short supplies of soldiers and ammunition.

"Units of the Southern grouping of troops liberated the village of Klishchiivka" in the Donetsk region, the Russian defense ministry said. Russian troops first captured Klishchiivka in January 2023, but Ukraine clawed it back in September at the end of its mostly unsuccessful counteroffensive.

Klishchiivka is just south of the destroyed front-line city of Bakhmut, now held by Russia. Before the conflict it had a population of about 500 people. Ukraine did not immediately comment on the Russian claims but President Volodymyr Zelensky warned in an evening address Tuesday that fighting on the front line was "extremely difficult".

## Fatal attacks

Russia's gains since launching its ground assault in

Ukraine's northeast has forced Kyiv's stretched army to rush in resources and troops from elsewhere. A Russian drone attack killed a Ukrainian police officer who was evacuating civilians from the front-line village of Vovchansk, Ukraine's Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said. "The occupiers hit the evacuation vehicle with an FPV (first-person view) drone. The two officers in the car were on their way to rescue civilians," Klymenko said in a Telegram post.

On Monday, Russia said it had captured the coveted Ukrainian stronghold of Bilogorivka, paving the way for it to fully control the eastern Lugansk region. Klishchiivka's capture came as Ukrainian officials said Russian forces had attacked the city of Kharkiv - Ukraine's second-largest urban hub - with artillery, injuring at least 12.

Russia meanwhile said Ukraine had launched deadly strikes on its border region of Belgorod and on the occupied eastern Ukraine city of Lysychansk. Belgorod sits directly across the border from Ukraine's northeast Kharkiv region, where Russia launched its major ground assault on May 10. "Several air targets were shot down as they approached the village of Belenkoye. To our great sorrow, one civilian was killed," Belgorod regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

One civilian was injured, while a Ukrainian aerial attack near the town of Shebekino, close to the border, injured another, he said. The Kremlin has said its new Kharkiv offensive is aimed at creating a "security zone" to prevent future Ukrainian attacks on its border region.



**KHARKIV:** This handout photograph shows buildings destroyed as a result of a shelling in Kharkiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Separately, Russian proxy officials said Ukraine had shelled Lysychansk in the eastern Lugansk region, leaving "one dead and two wounded". Lysychansk, close to the eastern front, was captured by Russian forces in mid-2022. Officials at the Rus-

sian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine also accused Kyiv's forces of launching a drone at the facility. It said the device hit a transport workshop but there were "no casualties or critical damage". — AFP

## Forgotten D-Day cameramen out of shadows

COLLEGE PARK: Seated side by side behind an antiquated viewer, the sisters run and rerun the 35 mm black-and-white film reel, whispering to each other about the images captured by their father, the only cameraman on Omaha Beach on D-Day.

In the footage taken on June 6, 1944 in northern France, a handful of US soldiers advance on shore. One falls to the ground, a victim of German bullets. And even though he suffered a wound to his left arm, Sergeant Richard Taylor kept filming.

Ahead of the 80th anniversary of the Allied beach landings in Normandy, Taylor's daughters are working hard to honor his memory, one of the many stories largely lost in the dustbin of history. Jennifer Taylor-Rossel, 66, and Patricia Spae, 65, have come to a darkened room at a National Archives facility outside Washington for the first time to look at the film, at the invitation of French documentary filmmaker Dominique Forget.

Taylor-Rossel will be in Normandy in June to retrace her father's footsteps. "It's going to be emotional," Spae told AFP, which accompanied Forget to the

meeting. Taylor-Rossel struggled to hold back tears. "What he saw ..." she said, trailing off.

### 'Resentful'

The world's collective memory of D-Day is often summarized by the work of Robert Capa - 11 indelible yet blurry photos of Omaha Beach that have become legendary. But, under German fire, Taylor was also documenting history.

His unit was meant to take images of the landings, but he was the only one to bring home video footage of American troops that day in Colleville-sur-Mer. His reels, like millions of other military documents from World Wars I and II, are kept in the massive cement National Archives facility in College Park, Maryland.

These records are at the heart of an upcoming two-part television documentary by Forget, who has been tracing the images for years until he found the descendants of Taylor and others who were in Normandy that fateful day.

"They're the ones that went in. And they're the ones that took the risk of their lives, and went in and filmed and continued to film when they got shot," said Taylor-Rossel, admitting she was a "little resentful" about the aura around Capa's work. "I think it's time that these photographers got the recognition that they so deserve."

Taylor-Rossel has been digging through her father's souvenirs and belongings for several years. He died

in 2002 at the age of 95. She showed AFP a German beret with a swastika. She found it in an inside pocket of her father's uniform, which bore a patch on the sleeve that read: "Official US Army photographer."

### 'Bits and pieces'

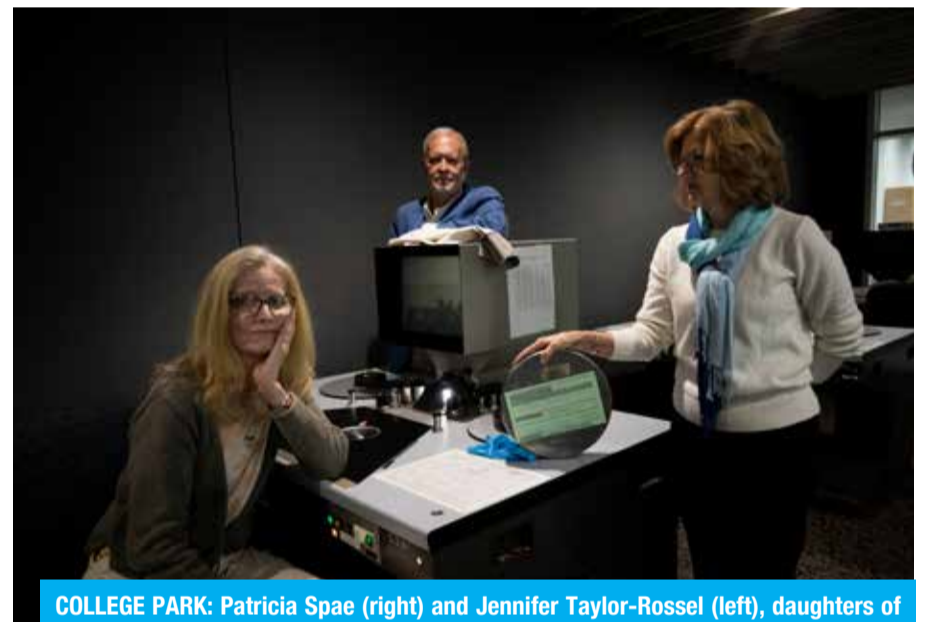
Taylor, who had worked as a photographer in New York, enlisted in December 1942, and then insisted on being sent to the front as a combat photographer. After being wounded on D-Day, he returned to the battlefield to document the advance of Allied forces into Germany — a journey he detailed in about 200 letters sent to his family.

Page by page, Taylor-Rossel came to know, posthumously, her father, who she remembered as "tough" and "difficult to love." He dismissed the scar on his left arm simply by saying "I got shot on D-Day," Taylor-Rossel recalled, over the din of the film reel spooling out. "He didn't elaborate, never did elaborate," said Spae.

Taylor-Rossel replied: "No, it would just come out in bits and pieces. (...) He's like, 'Yeah, I was on the third wave.' Okay, but then that was it." For Spae, his letters to his family made clear that his war experiences were "just so emotional, and just devastating."

### The other forgotten one

In another featureless room at the Archives facility, the sisters find rare



**COLLEGE PARK:** Patricia Spae (right) and Jennifer Taylor-Rossel (left), daughters of combat photographer Richard Taylor, and Robert Neal Marshall, grandson of war correspondent Jack Lieb, pose at the National Archives on May 10, 2024. — AFP

pictures from that era. The US Army extracted still shots from their father's video footage. On the back of some of them was typed "Taylor." "To see his name on the back ..." Taylor-Rossel said. "All these stories that he told us about the war... I was trying to find the proof, and now we have the proof." "I don't know, it's like I'm touching him back then," she said, her voice choked with emotion.

A few steps away, Robert Neal Marshall was also perusing some images

- those taken by his grandfather Jack Lieb at Utah Beach. "I'd never seen that, that's new," the 63-year-old said in French as he looked at the rare color footage. Lieb shot both black-and-white footage for American newsreels and personal images in color.

"It's like looking through my grandfather's eyes," he then said in English, visibly moved as he gazed at the screen. "I wish I could talk to him and tell him how powerful this is." — AFP



**GAZA:** A Palestinian man reacts as he identifies a loved one at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah following Zionist bombardment early on May 22, 2024 on the nearby town of Al-Zawaida in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

## Europe trio recognize...

Continued from Page 1

A Palestinian state was recognized by Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania before they joined the EU. In March, Slovenia and Malta signed a statement with Spain and Ireland expressing their willingness to recognize a Palestinian state. Slovenia's government this month passed a decree on recognizing a Palestine state that will be sent to parliament for approval by mid-June.

According to the Palestinian Authority, which rules parts of the occupied West Bank, 142 of the 193 UN member countries already recognize a Palestinian state. The Palestine Liberation Organization, seen internationally as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, hailed the European moves as "historical". Hamas also welcomed "an important step towards affirming our right to our land", while Bassem Naim, a senior Hamas political bureau member, said it would mark "a turning point in the international position on the Palestinian issue".

A Palestinian in war-torn Gaza's southern city of Rafah, Ismail Hassuna, 46, said the European trio's decision was a step that "will restore hope" and should help in ef-

orts to "stop (the Zionist entity) from its heinous crimes". Political analyst Ines Abdul Razek, who heads the Palestine Institute for Public Democracy, labeled the decision symbolic but said it was "not a great victory". "What we need is actual measures, including sanctions and arms embargoes, that can stop the genocide, the erasure of our people and colonization of our land, which (the Zionist entity) has been conducting with total impunity," said Abdul Razek.

The Zionist entity's offensive has killed at least 35,709 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. It also imposed a siege that has deprived Gaza's 2.4 million people of most water, food, medical supplies and fuel, and brought much of the population to the brink of famine. Fierce fighting has raged around Rafah, the last part of Gaza to face a ground invasion, where an AFP team reported more air and artillery strikes early Wednesday.

Heavy battles have also rocked Gaza's northern and central areas where Hamas forces have regrouped, and more Zionist air strikes have hit Gaza City, Jabalia and Zeitun. Ten people were killed in the central town of Al-Zawaida during the night, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. And the Gaza civil defense agency said six bodies were recovered from the rubble of a family house in Jabalia.

The World Health Organization has said northern Gaza's last two functioning hospitals, Al-Awda and Kamal Adwan, were besieged by Zionist forces, with more than 200 patients trapped inside. — Agencies

## Huge crowds in Tehran for...

Continued from Page 1

the Middle East, North Africa, Asia and Europe. Tunisian President Kais Saied and Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani attended an afternoon ceremony in which around 60 countries took part, said state news agency IRNA. Egypt's top diplomat, Sameh Shoukry, was also at the ceremony. He is the first Egyptian foreign minister to visit Tehran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Member countries of the European Union were among the absentees of the ceremony while some non-member countries, including Belarus and Serbia had their representatives. In the capital, huge banners have gone up hailing the late president as "the martyr of service", while others bade "farewell to the servant of the disadvantaged".

Tehran residents received phone messages urging them to join the funeral procession. "I was sad, I came to calm my heart and calm the heart of the supreme leader," said one mourner who gave her name only as Maryam and said she had travelled from Varamin, south of Tehran, to pay her last respects.

## British PM Sunak announces July 4...

Continued from Page 1

election on July 4," he said, adding: "Now is the moment for Britain to choose its future." Political commentators have increasingly suggested that Sunak, trailing badly in the polls to the main opposition Labour party, could try to seek a bounce from the healthier outlook. But critics point out that is more to do with changes in the global economy than government policy. Sunak had previously batted back all efforts to name a date, saying only that he would go to the country in the second half of this year.

Speculation mounted again after Sunak and his top officials on Wednesday refused to deny fresh talk that he was about to call an election on the back of the more positive data. Rumors went into overdrive when Foreign Secretary David Cameron was recalled from a trip to Albania and Defense Secretary Grant Shapps delayed a trip

Raisi's helicopter crashed into a fog-shrouded mountainside in northwestern Iran on Sunday as his entourage headed back to the city of Tabriz after attending a ceremony on the border with Azerbaijan. A huge search and rescue operation was launched, involving help from the European Union, Russia and Turkey. State television announced Raisi's death early on Monday. The Iranian military said Wednesday that domestically produced drones had played the key role in locating the crash site.

Funeral ceremonies for Raisi and his entourage began on Tuesday with processions through Tabriz and the Shiite clerical center of Qom, drawing tens of thousands of black-clad mourners. From Tehran, the bodies will be taken to Iran's second city of Mashhad, Raisi's hometown in the northeast, where he will be buried on Thursday evening after funeral rites at the Imam Reza shrine.

Khamenei, who wields ultimate authority in Iran, has declared five days of national mourning and assigned vice president Mohammad Mokhber, 68, as caretaker president until a June 28 election for Raisi's successor. Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri, who was Amir-Abdollahian's deputy, has been named acting foreign minister. The country's armed forces chief Mohammad Bagheri has ordered an investigation into the cause of the helicopter crash. — AFP

to eastern Europe to attend a cabinet meeting. Hunt also cancelled a scheduled television interview for Wednesday evening. ITV's political editor said, as journalists, photographers and camera crews flocked to Downing Street.

The economy — hit by external factors such as COVID and more self-inflicted wounds such as Brexit and former premier Liz Truss — will be a key battleground. But Sunak faces an uphill task to convince the public that the country's finances are still safe in Tory hands after 14 years in power. Sunak has tried to steady the ship since succeeding Truss, whose 49-day tenure ended after her unfunded tax cuts sent household bills soaring, spooked the markets and crashed the pound. Immigration — another key issue since the government's vote-winning pledge to "take back control" of Britain's borders after Brexit — remains politically troublesome. Sunak — the Tories' fourth leader since 2016 — has talked tough to "stop the boats" of irregular migrants crossing the Channel from northern France. But his controversial scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda has yet to get off the ground, as costs and legal challenges mount. — AFP

## International

# From Libyan hell to migrant boat, 2 young Bangladeshis are saved

The 2 migrants hope to apply for asylum in Italy after coming 'so close to death'



AT SEA: A migrant from Bangladesh watches the sunset on the main deck of the Ocean Viking rescue ship following a rescue operation off Malta, on May 21, 2024. — AFP photos



Migrants from Bangladesh handwash their clothes onboard the rescue ship.

**ABOARD THE OCEAN VIKING:** They never thought they would end up in Europe by leaving their native Bangladesh. But for Siam and Mohammad, hopes for a better life in Libya turned into a hell to escape at all costs, even if it meant risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean. "They beat me on my legs and they punched my body also, so many times," said Mohammad, 25, aboard the rescue ship Ocean Viking just hours after being rescued off Malta, speaking of traffickers in Libya.

Recounting to an AFP reporter in broken English how armed Libyan traffickers terrorized him for months, Mohammed recalled his captors threatening to "take off my nails", "I will die if I will stay here," he remembered thinking of Libya, a country he originally thought could provide him with money to send to his family. With jet-black hair and big, round eyes, Mohammad tinkers with the zipper of his tracksuit, scan-

ning the horizon from the main deck. "So I decided, whatever will happen, I have to leave this place."

Siam, 20, said that "If you can give money, you'd pay and you'd be free. Otherwise they'd beat you". The traffickers "make videos of beating you and tell your family to give money, otherwise they will kill you", he said. Arriving in Libya on flights from the United Arab Emirates for a few hundred euros, both young men — who met only while crossing the Mediterranean — had hoped to find jobs there in agriculture, oil or construction. But instead they found themselves trapped in a merciless migrant trade that crushes thousands of people every year, in a country plunged into chaos since 2011.

#### Escape or ransom

Both of them fatherless, Siam and Mohammad had promised to provide for their families back in Bangladesh,

where almost half the population lives on less than a dollar a day. "All depends on me — medical, food, everything. That depends on me," Mohammad told AFP aboard the ship.

Thanks to an intermediary, Siam found a small job as a cleaner in a Benghazi hospital but "was only given half my salary. When I asked for my due, they slapped me," he said. Fleeing became the only way out. But risking one's life on the world's most dangerous migration route comes at a price — \$5,000. Where would the money come from?

His family begged for money from anyone who could help, Siam said. "And then my family sold my house. Sold my house to save me," he said. Locked up in unsanitary prefab buildings, tossed from one trafficker to another, Mohammad finally managed to escape his jailers along with two companions. Without a roof over his head or any money, he gave away all he had left: his phone

and his clothes. Luckily, a smuggler accepts his pittance. So he found himself aboard a fibreglass boat, along with Siam, bound for Sicily.

#### Nothing left

The young men recalled huddling at the bottom of an eroded hold, cold and bathed in salt water, the smell of gasoline pervading the air. "The ocean had very big waves, like five meters, six meters. And, the boat was very small," Mohammad said.

After three days in which the boat travelled 600 kilometers (370 miles), water, food and fuel were running out and the boat began to take on water. Bottles, sponges, clothing — everything was used to bail. Thanks to a telephone, the migrants managed to communicate their GPS position to the Alarm Phone migrant hotline that tracks boats in the Mediterranean. It was nearly four in the morning Monday when the Ocean Viking, oper-

ated by the SOS Mediterranean migrant rescue group, noticed the small boat in distress and began its approach.

Mohammed recalled wondering whether they were pirates: "But what could they possibly take from us? We've got nothing left." Staggering to stay on their feet and exhausted, the 35 migrants on the boat were plucked from the sea. "You are a blessing ... You have loved us very much," Siam told his rescuers. "You saved our life."

Both men now wish to apply for asylum. But under Italy's far-right government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the task could be difficult. This month, Italy designated Bangladesh — the country from which most migrants to Italy departed last year — as a "safe country", complicating asylum requests. Not that Mohammad, who hopes to be a baker or pastry chef, is discouraged. "I came so close to death. Being here is a second birth," he said. — AFP

## 20 people in intensive care after Singapore Airlines flight

**BANGKOK:** Twenty people were in intensive care in Bangkok hospitals on Wednesday after a terrifying high-altitude plunge on a flight from London during which an elderly passenger died and more than 100 were injured. Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 hit "sudden extreme turbulence" over Myanmar 10 hours into its journey to Singapore on Tuesday, abruptly rising and plunging several times.

One passenger said people were thrown around the cabin so violently they put dents in the ceiling during the drama at 11,300 meters (37,000 feet), leaving dozens with head injuries. Photos from inside the plane show the cabin in chaos, strewn with food, drinks bottles and luggage, and with oxygen masks dangling from the ceiling.

The plane, carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew, made an emergency landing at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, where medical staff used gurneys to ferry the injured to ambulances waiting on the tarmac. "I was flung up to the roof and then as the plane dropped forward so did I," one passenger told Australian media on Wednesday after arriving in Sydney. "I then hit the floor quite hard and all the breakfast items and glass flew forward as well. The poor crew was preparing breakfast for everyone, so they got the worst injuries."

A 73-year-old British man died and 104 people were injured on the flight. A hospital in Bangkok said Wednesday its staff were treating, or had treated 85 of those injured, including 20 people who were currently in intensive care units. The 20 were from Australia, Britain, Hong Kong, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the Philippines. Samitivej hospital said, without specifying how many were passengers or crew. A relief flight carrying 131 passengers and 12 crew landed at Sin-



SINGAPORE: Passengers of Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 from London to Singapore, which made an emergency landing in Bangkok, greet family members upon arrival at Changi Airport in Singapore on May 22, 2024. — AFP

apore's Changi Airport on Wednesday morning.

Relieved relatives greeted the arrivals with hugs, but all were too shaken to talk to waiting reporters. Andrew Davies, a British passenger aboard the Boeing 777-300ER, told BBC radio that the plane "suddenly dropped" and there was "very little warning". "During the few seconds of the plane dropping, there was an awful screaming and what sounded like a thud," he said, adding that he helped a woman who was "screaming in agony" with a "gash on her head".

Separately, he told a BBC podcast he feared the plane was going to crash. "Remembering the plane now — the huge dents in the roof that peo-

ple had obviously hit with their head. There was a water bottle stuck in a gap in the ceiling," he said. Singapore Airlines chief executive Goh Choon Phong said Wednesday the carrier is "very sorry for the traumatic experience" endured by those on board, and expressed condolences to the family of the deceased.

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong sent his "deepest condolences" to the family and loved ones of the dead man — identified as Geoff Kitchen, a musical theatre director from near Bristol. The city-state is sending investigators to Bangkok to probe the incident and Wong posted on Facebook that they were "working closely with Thai authorities". — AFP

## Accepting 'truth' is path to peace for Srebrenica survivors

**SREBRENICA, Bosnia And Herzegovina:** For the relatives of the Srebrenica massacre victims, forgiving feels impossible, nearly 30 years on. But if Serbs in Bosnia and Belgrade stop denying and accept that the atrocity was an act of genocide, as states a draft UN resolution due to be put to the vote Thursday, that would enable finding peace, some survivors say. "Those who led their people into this position (of genocide denial) must accept the truth, so that we can all find peace and move on with our lives", Kada Hotic told AFP.

The 79-year-old co-director of an association of Srebrenica mothers for nearly three decades, saw her entire male family including her son, husband and two brothers killed in the 1995 massacre. Along with a handful of oth-

er women, she has fought to discover the remains of the victims dumped into dozens of mass graves and to construct a memorial center just outside the ill-fated town.

The remains of 6,751 victims have been buried there to date. On July 11, 1995, a few months before Bosnia's inter-ethnic war ended, Bosnian Serb forces captured the eastern town.

In the following days they killed more than 8,000 Bosnian men and boys in its vicinity. The worst atrocity of Bosnia's 1992-1995 war, that claimed nearly 100,000 lives, was deemed an act of genocide by two international courts.

A UN court sentenced Bosnian Serb wartime political leader Radovan Karadzic and his army chief Ratko Mladic to life in prison for war crimes including the Srebrenica genocide. But many Serbian political and religious leaders, as well as many ordinary Serbs, still refuse to call the massacre genocide.

They include Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic, who has been fighting for weeks against the resolution to declare July 11 the "International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide

in Srebrenica" starting next year. For Hotic the most difficult battle has always been against the genocide denial and she voiced hope that the resolution would set a "seal on the truth".

If the resolution is adopted it will be a satisfaction for Bosnian Muslims, she says, adding it should also be a source of satisfaction for Serbs. "My child will never be alive again. I will never forgive the criminals. I have no right to, in the name of his life", she said sitting amidst the memorial centre's tall white tombstones. But asking for forgiveness and the condemnation of war criminals "would be a remedy for us all", Hotic maintains.

Sadeta Suljic, 57, who lost her brother and father in the massacre, also hopes that the UN resolution will put an end to "lies and denial". "We're not accusing the whole (Serb) people. We want the guilty to be punished," said Suljic, who heads another association of victims' relatives. "I don't understand that people. How can they deny it? "They pass by, they see (the cemetery). "If the resolution is passed, many of them will say 'Look, we have to stop, we have to say that it (genocide) happened'," she stressed. — AFP

## Bearing witness: The citizens lining up to watch Trump trial

**NEW YORK:** A handful of courtroom hopefuls have braved all kinds of weather as they queue to catch a glimpse of Donald Trump's seismic New York criminal trial, sometimes paying lavishly for "sitters" to hold their places in line. Teacher Richard Partington, 43, described the trial as "one of the most fascinating and exciting experiences of my life," arriving outside the imposing courthouse two days before proceedings to boost his chances of getting inside.

After running the gauntlet of strict security checkpoints, ancient elevators and a long fluorescent-lit corridor, Partington and six or seven others have each day been able to watch the first ever criminal case play out against a former US president. Trump is accused of falsifying business records to hide a reimbursement to his former lawyer Michael Cohen for paying off porn star Stormy Daniels, with whom it is claimed the property tycoon had a sexual encounter.

On hard wooden benches, the public spectators have joined around 50 journalists and Trump's entourage of Republican grandees, supporters and family to see the twists and turns of the historic court case. "I learned a lot from the news, but I think there's some truth that you really pick up when you're in the courtroom — you see Donald Trump walking by eight times a day, you see the judge (and) the jury," said Partington. "The result of this trial will likely sway this election in one way," he added, affirming his fear of a second Trump presidency.

Along with some protesters — both anti- and pro-Trump — eager courtroom spectators have come from across the four corners of the United States. Retired lawyer Peter Osetek traveled almost 3,000 miles from San Diego on the other side of the country to visit his son in New York and to see "history being made."

Trial followers often have more luck in an overflow room, where a live feed is streamed to around 30 members of the public and journalists unable to be in the main trial space. Justin Ford, an IT worker from Connecticut, said he was drawn to line up for a chance to see "a former president of the United States (who) is on trial, and it's not televised. I want to witness it with my own eyes." — AFP



NEW YORK: Anti-Trump protesters demonstrate outside Manhattan Criminal Court during the trial of former US President Donald Trump, on May 20, 2024. — AFP

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2024

# Zain Group holds extraordinary general assembly with a quorum exceeding 81%

## Assembly approves amendment of one of the Articles of Association

KUWAIT: Zain Group on Wednesday held an Extraordinary General Assembly with a quorum exceeding 81 percent that witnessed the Assembly's approval of the Board of Directors' recommendation to approve the amendment of Article 15 of the Company's Articles of Association in accordance with the requirements of Article 2-2 of Module Fifteen "Corporate Governance".

Following the Assembly's approval, Article 15 now stipulates:

"The Company shall be managed by a Board of Directors consisting of ten members. Each shareholder, whether a natural person or a legal entity, may appoint representatives to the board in proportion to the shares that they own. The General Assembly shall elect the remaining members by secret ballot. The number of Board members appointed in said manner shall be deducted from the aggregate number of Board members that are elected. Shareholders having representatives on the Board of Directors may not participate with other shareholders in electing the remaining members of the Board of Directors, except in relation to those shares that exceed the percentage used for the appointment of their representatives to the Board of Directors.

Subject to compliance with the provisions of the law, any number of shareholders may collaborate to jointly appoint one or more representatives to represent them on the Board of Directors in proportion to their joint shareholding. Appointed representatives shall have the same rights and duties as those of elected members, and each shareholder shall be responsible towards the Company, its creditors, and shareholders for the acts of its appointed representatives.

The term of membership of the members of the Board of Directors shall be three years and can be renewed. Independent Board Members shall be elected

according to applicable laws and regulations whereas independent members must meet the requirements of the regulatory bodies and their number shall not exceed half of the total number of Board members. Independent members need not be shareholders in the Company. If it is not possible to elect a new Board of Directors by the scheduled date, the existing Board shall continue management of the Company's affairs pending the resolution of the relevant issues and election of a new Board of Directors."

This Extraordinary General Assembly meeting is to be followed by a call to hold an ordinary general assembly in order to elect an additional member of the Board of Directors, as a second independent member, in order to fulfill the regulatory requirements.

Zain Group recently held its annual Ordinary General Assembly, which approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 25 fils per share, for the second half of the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2023, noting that the group distributed semi-annual cash dividends of 10 fils per share, thus total 35 fils for 2023. This reflected a 70 percent payout ratio, one of the highest in the region. In 2023, Zain adopted a minimum cash dividend policy of 35 fils per share for three years.

Following the successful achievements of Zain's 4SIGHT strategy over the past five years, the company has plans to launch of a new operational strategy by the end 2024, accelerating the opportunities in the digital arena and creating value for shareholders in new business verticals.

Zain's Board of Directors and executive management teams have worked effortlessly to overcome socio-economic regional challenges across its markets, where the company maximized value creation by investing heavily in our networks, technologies, and people. This resulted in Zain extending market leader-



Zain HQ building

ship in many highly competitive and evolving markets. The multiple digital transformational initiatives and expansion of new business verticals has driven business growth and positioned Zain firmly as a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications, delivering meaningful connectivity that empowers societies.

Zain's focus on catering to the evolving requirements of its individual, enterprise, and government customers has seen its sustainability-conscious mindset develop and proactively act with a sense of urgency, innovating to enhance the digital experiences and introduce appealing, demanded services.

Today through its state-of-the-art offering of Wholesale carrier and submarine cable services coupled with Cloud services, Cybersecurity, IoT, AI, Big Data, Smart Cities, Drones, Robotics, and other emerging technologies, Zain is paving the way to becoming the digital transformation partner of choice for governments and enterprises across the region.

As a result of its efforts in offering the full spectrum of mobile, fixed, data and ICT services complemented by exceptional customer experience on all touch points, Zain saw its brand valuation increase 11 percent from \$2.7 billion to \$3 billion by Brand Finance in its 2024 global valuation report.

## Leading AI firms pledge 'responsible' tech development

SEOUL: Some of the world's biggest tech companies pledged to work together to guard against the dangers of artificial intelligence as they wrapped up a two-day AI summit, also attended by multiple governments, in Seoul.

Sector leaders from South Korea's Samsung Electronics to Google promised at the event, co-hosted with Britain, to "minimize risks" and develop new AI models responsibly, even as they push to move the cutting-edge field forward. The fresh commitment, codified in a so-called Seoul AI Business Pledge Wednesday plus a new round of safety commitments announced the previous day, build on the consensus reached at the inaugural global AI safety summit at Bletchley Park in Britain last year.

Tuesday's commitment saw companies including OpenAI and Google DeepMind promise to share how they assess the risks of their technology—including those "deemed intolerable" and how they will ensure such thresholds are not crossed.

But experts warned it was hard for regulators to understand and manage AI when the sector was developing so rapidly. "I think that's a really, really big problem," said Markus Anderljung, head of policy at the Centre for the Governance of AI, a non-profit research body based in Oxford, Britain.

"Dealing with AI, I expect to be one of the biggest challenges that governments all across the world will have over the next couple of decades."

"The world will need to have some kind of joint understanding of what are the risks from these sort of most advanced general models," he said. Michelle Donelan, UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, said in Seoul on Wednesday that "as the pace of AI development accelerates, we must match that speed... if we are to grip the risks."

## ECB can start cuts before Fed, says Finnish bank chief

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank did not have to take its cues from the US Federal Reserve and could start to lower rates as soon as June, Bank of Finland governor Olli Rehn told AFP. "While we don't make policy in a vacuum, the ECB is not the 13th Federal district of the US Federal Reserve," which is split into 12 zones, said Rehn. "What the Fed does will not determine the case for a rate cut by the ECB," said Rehn.

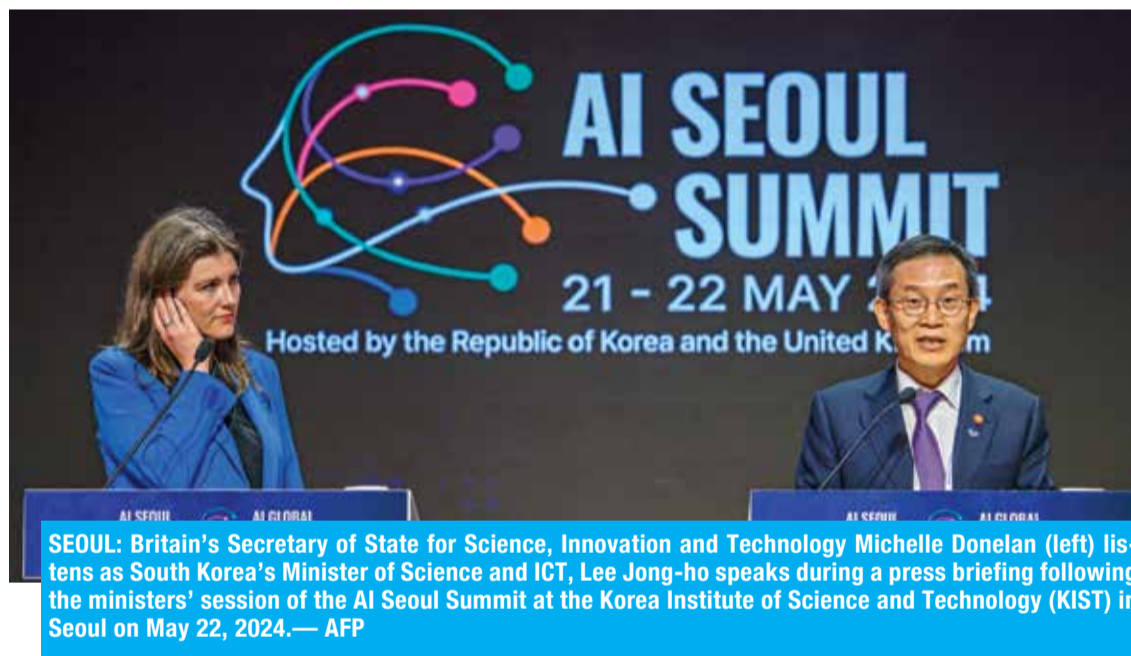
When inflation began to climb upwards, the Fed was faster to respond than the ECB, kicking off a series of interest rate hikes in March 2022.

After some initial hesitation, ECB policymakers followed suit in July of that year, raising rates faster and farther than ever before in the history of the eurozone. But with consumer prices now having come off the boil, it looks like European policymakers might be poised to move first to reduce borrowing costs at their next meeting in June. Lingering inflation pressures in the United States have seen Fed policymakers back away from reducing rates again too soon.

But in the eurozone, the "declining trend" in inflation and "moderating wage growth" meant there was

a "strong case for starting to ease monetary policy and cut rates in June", Rehn said. "Beyond that, let's see if the trend continues," said Rehn, who is one of 25 people on the ECB's governing council, which sets the course for interest rates in the eurozone. Another cut at the ECB's meeting in July was far from a certainty for Rehn, who echoed statements made by many of his colleagues. "We are not pre-committing to any rate path," Rehn said, an opinion shared by ECB President Christine Lagarde.

As for the Fed, observers should not pay "too much attention to possible small deviations in monetary stance" with the ECB's own decisions, said Rehn. Concerns have been expressed that lowering rates first in the eurozone could lead to the depreciation of the euro relative to the dollar, potentially importing new inflation. But the economic cycles in the United States and the eurozone could not be perfectly synchronised, "especially after such exceptional shocks that we have experienced", said Rehn in an allusion to turbulences caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Growing differences in the economic development of the United States and Europe was a "major concern", however, Rehn said. The United States has recorded stronger growth than the eurozone for 25 years, thanks to demographic advantages and bigger increases in productivity. The price shock caused by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the dwindling of gas supplies from the east also underlined Europe's dependence on Moscow for its energy imports. —AFP



SEOUL: Britain's Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology Michelle Donelan (left) listens as South Korea's Minister of Science and ICT, Lee Jong-ho speaks during a press briefing following the ministers' session of the AI Seoul Summit at the Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) in Seoul on May 22, 2024. — AFP

She said there would be more opportunities at the next AI summit in France to "push the boundaries" in terms of testing and evaluating new technology. "Simultaneously, we must turn our attention to risk mitigation outside these models, ensuring that society as a whole becomes resilient to the risks posed by AI," Donelan said.

The stratospheric success of ChatGPT soon after its 2022 release sparked a gold rush in generative AI, with tech firms around the world pouring billions of dollars into developing their own models.

Such AI models can generate text, photos, audio and even video from simple prompts and its proponents have heralded them as breakthroughs that will improve lives and businesses around the world. However, critics, rights activists and governments have warned that they can be misused in a wide variety of ways, including the manipulation of voters through fake news stories or "deepfake" pictures and videos of politicians.

Many have called for international standards to govern the development and use of AI.

"I think there's increased realization that we need global cooperation to really think about the issues and harms of artificial intelligence. AI doesn't know borders," said Rumman Chowdhury, an AI ethics expert who leads Humane Intelligence, an independent non-profit that evaluates and assesses AI models. Chowdhury told AFP that it is not just the "runaway AI" of science fiction nightmares that is a huge concern, but issues such as rampant inequality in the sector.

"All AI is just built, developed and the profits reaped (by) very, very few people and organizations," she told AFP on the sidelines of the Seoul summit. People in developing nations such as India "are often the staff that does the clean-up. They're the data annotators, they're the content moderators. They're scrubbing the ground so that everybody else can walk on pristine territory". — AFP

## Bundesbank says German economy grew in Q1 2024

BERLIN: The Bundesbank said Wednesday it expected the German economy to have grown gently in the second quarter of 2024, after a positive first three months of the year. "Economic output is likely to increase slightly again in the second quarter of 2024," the German central bank said in its monthly report.

Europe's largest economy exceeded expectations in the first quarter, when it posted growth of 0.2 percent. The positive figures came as a relief after German output shrunk by 0.5 percent in the last quarter of 2023 at the end of a difficult period of high inflation.

An improvement in the services sector was behind much of the rising German growth figures. Businesses in the sector could see their "recovery continue", the Bundesbank said. The trend could "broaden and intensify" if there was a renewed increase in private consumption, the central bank said. Households had seen their purchasing power shrink amid high inflation, but slowing consumer price rises and increased salaries has seen the picture brighten. The rise in energy prices which drove the inflation wave likewise weighed on energy-intensive sectors, such as chemicals and steel. —AFP

## Temu triples net profit in Q1, says owner Pinduoduo

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Pinduoduo announced Wednesday its net profit for the first quarter more than tripled, as the Temu owner continues to boost its competitiveness in its home market and abroad. Pinduoduo is one of China's leading online retailers—owing largely to its success in reaching consumers in rural areas with a diverse offering of low-cost products.

The company's overseas platform, Temu, has surged since its September 2022 launch to become one of the most popular online shopping sites in the United States, propelled by a marketing strategy that featured multiple prime-time Super Bowl advertisements.

Pinduoduo said net profit for the first three months of 2024 was \$3.88 billion, up 246 percent from the same period last year. The Shanghai-based firm added that sales in the first quarter were about \$11.2 billion, an increase of 131 percent from the same period in 2023.

Temu expanded last year into the EU market, where it says its shopping app amassed an average of around 75 million monthly active users in the 27-country bloc. But the shopping app's rise has also encountered turbulence. In March, a promotional campaign in Britain and France backfired due to concerns over data privacy. In April, regulators in South Korea opened an investigation into Temu on suspicion of unfair practices including false advertising and poor product quality.

Earlier this month, European consumer rights groups accused it of using manipulative sales techniques and lacking transparency about traders on the platform.

Despite the setbacks, Pinduoduo remains the newest competitor to established e-commerce juggernauts, including Amazon in the United States and Alibaba in China. At home, Pinduoduo has found growing success with low-price products as Chinese consumers curb their spending against a backdrop of economic slowdown and high youth unemployment.

In March, the company announced near-double annual profits in 2023, a year in which it briefly surpassed Alibaba—owner of Chinese e-commerce behemoth Taobao—in terms of market capitalization for the first time. In pre-market trading on the Nasdaq on Wednesday, Pinduoduo's stock price rose around eight percent. On Tuesday, it was valued at around \$202 billion, compared to Alibaba's \$209 billion. And Pinduoduo co-founder Chen Lei indicated there was still space to grow. "Our global business is still in the exploration stage and there's plenty of room for improvement," he said. Pinduoduo's executive director and co-CEO Jiazhen Zhao said this year would be "critical" to "deepen the execution of our high-quality development strategy." "We will focus our efforts on improving the overall consumer experience, strengthening our supply chain capabilities, and fostering a healthy platform ecosystem." — AFP





## Business



KUWAIT: Photos from the closing ceremony of "Bankee" Program for School Year 2023/2024 hosted by NBK.

# NBK celebrates conclusion of 'Bankee' program for school year 2023/2024

## 250 participating teachers and principals honored at the ceremony

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held the closing ceremony of "Bankee" Program for School Year 2023/2024, to celebrate the achievements made during the first year of its official implementation in a number of public and private schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE), Kuwait Authority for Anti-Corruption (Nazaha) and Creative Confidence.

The ceremony, which was held at Arraya Ballroom, featured honoring 250 teachers who trained students on using the Bankee program in 30 public and private schools in addition to a special needs school for learning difficulties (Joan Al-Kuwait Elementary School), during school year 2023/2024. The honorees also included the principals of participating schools, in recognition of their efforts and pivotal role in achieving the program's goal to increase financial literacy among school students, by guiding, directing, and assisting them to set their financial goals, monitoring their progress and extending required support to ensure successful implementation of the classroom economy model.

### Success stories

The ceremony included sharing many success stories achieved by the Bankee program in its first year.

Commenting on this, Manal Al-Mattar, Head of Group Corporate Communications at National Bank of Kuwait said, "Students showed remarkable engagement with the program's attractive content, to the extent that it has become an integral part of their daily classroom activities. It also made a tangible difference in the lives of many of them by equipping them with the skills required to manage their finances and make decisions that support their financial future, in addition



to the noticeable advancement in their financial culture and the positive changes in their behaviors after implementing the program in their schools."

"Bankee" is Kuwait's first hands-on school financial literacy program, which was launched by NBK with the aim of promoting financial inclusion, especially among school students, in an effort to set the younger generation in Kuwait on a path to a resilient financial future. The program aims to familiarize students with key financial concepts including earning, spending and saving, and financial responsibilities and instilling financial culture, which is done in an innovative and interactive way using classroom economy model," she remarked.

"Moreover, Bankee aims to instill the main values including integrity and transparency, personal growth and development, accountability and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork. It also seeks to raise a young Kuwaiti generation who recognize the importance of financial welfare and independence,

and have the required financial knowledge and skills to achieve sustainable development, economic welfare for individuals and the community at large," she explained.

### Digital bank

Bankee digital platform serves as a virtual bank, on which students receive their allowance, salaries, bonuses, and fines, and pay their expenses. Each student participating in the program has a virtual bank account, which simulates real-life financial transactions. In Bankee, students are given the chance to apply for classroom-specific or school-wide jobs, which offer them an opportunity to earn additional income or salary. Classroom jobs are tailored to each classroom and encompass roles such as attendance monitor or teacher's assistant. On the other hand, school jobs involve participating in extracurricular activities at the school level, such as joining the student council and school radio team.

To instill core values and accountability, Bankee incorporates a system of bonuses and fines. Students can receive bonuses for exceptional performance or positive behaviors, while fines may be imposed for rule violations or inappropriate conduct.

### 15,000 students

Having achieved a remarkable success in its pilot phase, Bankee encouraged more schools and students to join it when it was officially kicked off at the beginning of school year 2023/2024. Out of 150 applicants, 30 schools have been enrolled in the program so far, in addition to a special needs school for learning difficul-

### Manal Al-Mattar

- 'Bankee' aims to build a generation equipped with the required financial skills to achieve sustainable development
- The program saw many success stories in its first year
- Remarkable engagement from students, significant advancement in their financial culture, and positive changes in their behaviors

ties (Joan Al-Kuwait Elementary School), with a total of 15,000 students and 3,000 teachers.

Bankee also launched its website in Arabic and English, as well as social media pages on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, to enable all participants to benefit from the provided content, activities and events held at different schools all year round. It is worth mentioning that NBK has recently been honored with the Bronze Award from Qorus in the Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) category for Bankee Program. This recognition underscores the bank's commitment to incorporating innovations that integrate sustainability and ESG standards into its activities.



## Turkey bets on Togg to give its car industry electric edge

GEMLIK, Turkey: On the shores of the Sea of Marmara, a grey and turquoise factory built at breakneck speed is churning out electric cars by the hundreds.

Turkey is hoping its first major electric carmaker will put the country in the driving seat of the automotive industry. Inside the plant, robot arms weld the passenger compartment of its first SUV, the T10X, which launched last year. After painting, the parts are then sent for assembly, before finally passing through a luminescent tunnel to be scrutinized by workers for imperfections.

The batteries, made in partnership with Chinese

manufacturer Farasis Energy, are assembled in a next-door building. It takes an hour for the plant to produce 20 vehicles. "Last year, we produced 20,000 vehicles without any loss. Tesla produced only 2,000 in their first year," a production manager told AFP on condition of anonymity. The manager also praised the plant's "highly educated" workers, 40 percent of whom are women. In half a century, the Marmara region around Istanbul has become one of the leading centers of the world's automobile industry. Major carmakers including Fiat and Renault opened plants there at the beginning of the 1970s, with others like Ford, Toyota and Hyundai following, taking advantage of Turkey's position at the crossroads between Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

"They initially invested to supply the local market, which for a long time was protected by tariffs," independent consultant Levent Taylan told AFP. But after the European Union-Turkey Customs Union agreement came into force in 1995, opening the European mar-

ket to cars made in Turkey, exports revved up. "Today the Turkish automobile industry exports around 70 percent of its production to Western Europe," Taylan said. A vast network of 530 automotive subcontractors has also sprung up, employing more than 230,000 people, according to Albert Saydam, President of the Turkish Association of Automotive Parts and Components Manufacturers (TAYSAD). "Most cars around the world have a part which is produced in Turkey. For example, the horn of (the) first car in space, the Tesla Roadster, was supplied from one of our members," he told AFP.

In 2018, Tesla boss Elon Musk blasted a Roadster into space aboard a Falcon heavy rocket as a publicity stunt, with the car's sound system set to play David Bowie's hit "Space Oddity" on loop. That same year Togg was founded as a joint venture between four Turkish companies and the country's chamber of commerce to steer its car industry towards the electric future. "The project represents a significant milestone in Turkey's automotive industry and symbolizes the country's ambition to become a prominent player in the global electric vehicle market," Saydam said. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has sought to make the carmaker a point of national pride, with the T10X model launched in March 2023 right before the country's presidential elections. "We have not missed the boat on electric cars," he said again in mid-May.

Nevertheless, Togg says the government's support is limited to allowing it the free use of land for its seaside Gemlik factory and a commitment to purchase 500 vehicles a year. Since its launch, the Togg T10X has taken nearly a third of electric car sales in Turkey, according to data from the Turkish Automotive Distributors Association (ODMD), with 19,583 vehicles sold in 2023.

And the market is booming. EV sales increased nine fold there last year, making the Turkish market bigger than Italy and Spain's. Despite Togg's hopes that the T10X will hit the road in Germany by the end of the year and in France next year, Taylan believes the company still has a long way to go. The car "is considered to be expensive and only about 25,000 models a year are being sold," he said. To have a chance of being profitable, a car plant would have to make at least "200,000 vehicles a year", Taylan argued. — AFP

## WEF founder Schwab to retire from leadership role

GENEVA: Klaus Schwab, the founder and longtime face of the World Economic Forum, will step away from executive leadership in the coming months, the organization said. The WEF, which hosts the annual meeting of wealthy, famous and influential global elites at the luxury Swiss ski resort of Davos, said in a statement late Tuesday that its 86-year-old founder would soon "transition from executive chairman to chairman of the board of trustees".

The shift would take place before the next edition of the annual meeting, in January 2025. No successor was immediately named. The announcement that Schwab will be stepping back from executive leadership after more than 40 years at the top marks the culmination of WEF's long transformation, since 2015, from a "founder-managed organization to one where a president and managing board assume full executive responsibility", the body said. At the same time, the Geneva-based forum, which employs some 800 people worldwide, said it had been transitioning from being merely a "convening platform" to "the leading global institution for public-private cooperation".

The WEF did not spell out who would officially take the helm, but the number-two executive behind Schwab is currently president Borge Brende, a 58-year-old former Norwegian foreign minister. — AFP



BURSA, Turkey: This photograph taken in Bursa on May 17, 2024 shows employees working on a car assembly line at a factory of Togg at the Gemlik Togg Technology Campus. — AFP



Klaus Schwab

# Burgan Bank signs deal with TCS BaNCS

## Agreement to help the bank upgrade its core banking system

Monumental deal marks a significant leap in Burgan Bank's expansive technology and digital transformation strategy

**KUWAIT:** In continued efforts to enhance and fortify its technology infrastructure, Burgan Bank announced signing an agreement with market-leading Tata Consultancy Services to upgrade its core banking system by implementing the TCS BaNCS suite of products. This monumental deal marks a significant leap in Burgan Bank's expansive technology and digital transformation strategy, which aims to facilitate a smooth transition from traditional to digital banking. It also confirms Burgan's commitment to technology and digital transformation as a primary pillar of its strategy and a core tenet of its vision to become Kuwait's most modern and progressive Bank, where customer service and employee productivity are always on an upward trajectory.

"We have embarked on a very broad technology and digital transformation journey that will create an integrated banking ecosystem: one that not only meets the current market expectations but also exceeds them," said Tony Daher, Group Chief Executive Officer at Burgan Bank. "Modernizing our core systems will support our ongoing focus on innovation and delivering val-

ue to our customers through defining personalized offerings and intuitive, streamlined experiences. This will pave the way for sustainable growth."

Venkateshwaran Srinivasan, Global Head, Financial Solutions, TCS, said: "We are pleased to partner with a progressive institution such as Burgan Bank in their transformation journey. TCS BaNCS has a strong presence in Kuwait and the larger GCC region in the form of multiple mission-critical deployments of our solutions at leading institutions. This selection by Burgan Bank is a testament to our continued investments in the TCS BaNCS product suite to make it market-ready, compliant with regulations, and our commitment to successful execution."

The Bank's decision to deploy TCS BaNCS reflects its commitment to adopting the latest technology to enhance customer service and employee productivity, which resonates with Burgan's strategy and vision to become the most modern and progressive Bank in Kuwait. With the new centralized core banking platform, the Bank has a greater capacity to innovate and launch products faster, standardize processes, enhance customer



A group photo of Tony Daher and Fadel Abdullah with the Tata Consultancy Services team during the signing of the agreement.

journeys, and significantly optimize operational efficiency by enhancing digitization and automation. It also enables the Bank to build better and stronger relationships with its customers, ensuring that it remains a reliable financial partner.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank remains one of the most dedicated

champions of technology and digital transformation in the Kuwaiti banking and financial sector. Under the umbrella of its digital transformation strategy, the Bank has launched numerous products and services that offer customers faster and safer ways to fulfill their everyday banking needs. This includes

the development of Burgan's flagship product, "Tijarati", an unprecedented one-stop-shop platform for merchants. Other efforts include the introduction of virtual cards, an enhanced AI-powered chatbot assistant, and the constant development of the Bank's digital banking platform.

## UK inflation slows to near three-year low



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak prepares to give a statement in Downing Street, central London, on May 22, 2024 about the latest inflation figures in the country. — AFP

**LONDON:** Britain's annual inflation rate slowed to a near three-year low in April as energy prices cooled further, official data showed Wednesday, boosting the governing Conservatives before this year's general election.

The Consumer Prices Index slowed to 2.3 percent from 3.2 percent in March, the Office for National Statistics revealed in a statement, though it was still faster than the 2.1 percent analysts were expecting. April marked the lowest level since July 2021, when inflation had stood at the Bank of England's 2.0-percent target.

The news comes after the British central bank this month signaled a summer interest rate cut, as it held borrowing costs at a 16-year peak of 5.25 percent to further dampen price rises.

Following the inflation data, most analysts said a rate reduction was unlikely to occur as soon as June, when the European Central Bank is forecast to decrease eurozone borrowing costs. The Federal Reserve is also expected to cut US interest rates this year as global inflationary pressures subside.

Sharply lower inflation sets the scene for this year's general election, as beleaguered Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives trail the main opposition Labour Party in opinion polls. "Today marks a major moment for the economy, with inflation back to normal. This is proof that the plan is working and that the difficult decisions we have taken are paying off," insisted Sunak, who has made cutting inflation a top priority. However, Labour finance spokesperson Rachel Reeves slammed the Tories' stewardship of the economy, which emerged in the first quarter from a shallow recession.

"Inflation has fallen but now is not the time for Conservative ministers to be popping champagne corks. Prices have soared, mortgages have risen and taxes are at a seventy year high," Reeves argued. Prices are still rising on top of the sharp increases seen in recent years but at a far slower rate, with businesses and households weathering a cost-of-living crisis.

That has been worsened by elevated BoE interest rates which ramp up the cost of loans, denting disposable incomes and company investment, thereby crimping economic activity. The International Monetary Fund warned Tuesday that premature BoE rate cuts could risk higher inflation—but delayed easing could "stall or even reverse" the recovery. "We will likely see the BoE hold interest rates for a little longer," said ADSS analyst Mahmoud Alkudsi in response to the data. "This encouraging inflation data may be the tipping point for the BoE, but they will likely want to see this level of inflation sustained before relaxing" monetary policy.

Inflation slowed rapidly last month after energy regulator Ofgem decreased the price cap on energy bills for most UK households to the lowest level for more than two years. Gas and electricity bills sank in April on lower wholesale energy prices, which had surged in the wake of key producer Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Food and drink price rises also slowed further to reach the lowest level since late 2021. — AFP



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a photo during the Cedar-IBSi Digital Banking & AI Summit.

## Cedar-IBSi summit draws industry leaders to Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The Cedar-IBSi Digital Banking & AI Summit, held at the prestigious Waldorf Astoria on May 21, successfully concluded, setting a new benchmark for the future of finance in Kuwait and beyond. Industry leaders, innovators, and policymakers gathered to explore and discuss transformative digital banking technologies and the dynamic role of artificial intelligence in shaping the financial landscape.

The event featured plenary discussions on the critical themes of digital innovation, the integration of AI in banking, and the strategic importance of fostering a technologically advanced banking environment. Prominent speakers from Swift, Boubyan Bank, Warba Bank, and Gulf Bank provided insights into the latest trends and strategies.

### Highlights from the summit

**Digital Banking and Payments:** Shahzad Anjum Chief Information Officer, Gulf Bank discusses how customer service taught the banks to prioritize API-first approach and cloud technologies in today's fast-paced market.

**Next Generation Corporate & Transaction Banking:** Deepa Santhanam, Senior Vice President, Digital Transaction Banking, Intellect Design Arena Ltd high-



lighted the challenges faced while tracking payments but with newer technologies, it has become more manageable & innovative transaction banking solutions are redefining corporate banking standards.

**Financial performance through advanced data:** Visionaries like Marwa M Ahlat, Director of Operations, Kamco Invest shared the importance of maintaining data, emphasizing the role of emerging technologies in banking.

"The role of banks has shifted towards customer-centricity, focusing on serving their dreams beyond merely meeting their needs. Banks also need to prioritize technology as digital transformation has become a mandate. This shift has been especially aggressive in Kuwait," said Farida Shaker Anany Executive Manager - Emerging Technologies, at Warba Bank.

The summit also showcased a potential collaboration with local banking associations, which aims to promote continuous innovation and adherence to



international standards in the banking sector. "Data is vital. When considering the types of data, preparing for the future is essential, especially as unstructured data, such as social media data becomes more prominent. We are ensuring that we cater to this kind of unstructured data. Protecting data privacy is crucial, and it's arguably easier to protect oil than data. We focus on training, standard data protection, and raising awareness about cybersecurity. KYC, profiling, and capital investments are currently the dominant types of data, but more structured data is anticipated in the future," mentioned Salman Olayan, CFA, CMA - Strategic Planning, Kuwait Financial Centre - Markaz

As the financial sector continues to evolve, the Cedar-IBSi Summit remains a pivotal platform for critical discourse and networking among the top minds in the industry, driving forward the agenda for a robust, secure, and innovative financial future.

## AI dominates Paris startup event VivaTech

**PARIS:** Thousands of tech enthusiasts filed into Europe's self-declared biggest startup event VivaTech in Paris on Wednesday, with artificial intelligence stealing the show this year. Over four days, the event, now in its eighth year, will host more than 150,000 guests, 11,000 startups and 450 speakers, according to the organizers.

The star turns will take to the stage on Thursday—former US climate envoy and secretary of state John Kerry is expected to make a push for a green tech revolution, and billionaire Tesla, SpaceX and X owner Elon Musk will appear via video link to answer audience questions.

"AI will be at the core of everything that you will see," said VivaTech founder Maurice Levy in his opening address. On the same stage, France's minister for digital affairs Marina Ferrari urged the public: "Don't be afraid" of AI. "With the acceleration of AI we are living a real revolution, which could be compared to printing or electrification," she said. Alongside

dire warnings from critics that sentient AI could take over the world, the technology uses vast energy resources.

Firms like OpenAI, which use publicly available information for their programs, are widely accused of copyright and privacy breaches—most recently apologizing to actor Scarlett Johansson after appearing to use her voice for their chatbot.

As guests squashed into the Paris conference centre, a slew of startups began giving presentations and making pitches for funding. On "AI alley", firms from France to South Korea demonstrated how AI can be deployed for anything from controlling devices in the home hand movements, to fighting against disinformation.

Dima Gazda, CEO of US startup Esper Bionics, showed off his firm's innovative robotic limbs, tailored to an individual's needs by AI. "We hope to get potential partners and new teammates and potential investors," Gazda said of his first trip to VivaTech. Established players like ChatGPT maker OpenAI, Anthropic and Mistral will take to the main stages to outline their latest innovations. In the face of this "AI tsunami", said Ben Wood of CCS Insight, companies should be careful not to overwhelm their potential customers. "There's a lot of exciting things about AI, but you need to very clearly articulate what the benefits are for consumers," he said. — AFP

## OpenAI says AI is 'safe enough' amid scandals

**SEATTLE:** OpenAI CEO Sam Altman defended his company's AI technology as safe for widespread use, as concerns mount over potential risks and lack of proper safeguards for ChatGPT-style AI systems. Altman's remarks came at a Microsoft event in Seattle, where he spoke to developers just as a new controversy erupted over an OpenAI AI voice that closely resembled that of the actress Scarlett Johansson.

The CEO, who rose to global prominence after OpenAI released ChatGPT in 2022, is also grappling with questions about the safety of the company's AI following the departure of the team responsible for mitigating long-term AI risks. "My biggest piece of advice is this is a special time and take advantage of it," Altman told the audience of developers seeking to build new products using OpenAI's technology.

"This is not the time to delay what you're planning to do or wait for the next thing," he added.

OpenAI is a close partner of Microsoft and provides the foundational technology, primarily the GPT-4 large language model, for building AI tools.

Microsoft has jumped on the AI bandwagon, pushing out new products and urging users to embrace generative AI's capabilities. "We kind of take for granted" that GPT-4, while "far from perfect...is generally considered robust enough and safe enough for a wide variety of uses," Altman said.

Altman insisted that OpenAI had put in "a huge amount of work" to ensure the safety of its models. "When you take a medicine, you want to know what's going to be safe, and with our model, you want to know it's going to be robust to behave the way you want it to," he added.

However, questions about OpenAI's commitment to safety resurfaced last week when the company dissolved its "superalignment" group, a team dedicated to mitigating the long-term dangers of AI. In announcing his departure, team co-leader Jan Leike criticized OpenAI for prioritizing "shiny new products" over safety in a series of posts on X (formerly Twitter). "Over the past few months, my team has been sailing against the wind," Leike said. — AFP

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2024



A young man with disabilities serves a customer at a restaurant run by the Centre for Integration and Help through Work (CIAT), in the Moroccan city of Sale. - AFP photos



A young man with disabilities serves a customer at a restaurant run by the Centre for Integration and Help through Work (CIAT).



A young woman with disabilities works in the kitchen of a restaurant.

## Moroccan enterprises give jobs, hope to people with disabilities



A young man with disabilities works in the kitchen of a restaurant.

Fadoua Lamrani was elated when she was hired as a waitress at a restaurant in Morocco which employs people with disabilities. The 33-year-old is among some 60 people with health conditions working at the eatery located on a farm and run by the Centre for Integration and Help through Work (CIAT). "I was very happy when I was called to work here" in 2016, said Lamrani as she readied for the usual lunch service at the restaurant in Sale, a city near the capital Rabat. Before then, she said, "I had been spending my days at home".

Funded by both public and private partners, CIAT aims to overcome social and cultural constraints to help people with disabilities into jobs they would usually find hard to obtain, Said Beqqal, head of the program, told AFP. Employ-

ers tend to be "afraid of hiring people with disabilities and of not knowing how to manage such situations", Beqqal added. While some of the workers in Sale cook and work the tables, others attend to the field where the vegetables are grown or look after livestock with the help of supervisors.

The unemployment rate among people with disabilities in the North African country was near 48 percent in 2014, the latest publicly available figures from the national disability survey. The Mohammed VI National Centre for People with Disabilities (CNMH) initiated in 2010 a program to assist people with disabilities, who are most affected by unemployment. The center provides training in the hospitality, retail and agriculture sectors for people with disabilities.

Mohammed Hommani, who was enjoying a meal at the Sale restaurant, said "we came here because it's nice, and also because it's good to take part in initiatives like this one". Working on the farm, 31-year-old Imad Moufid said enthusiastically that he has learnt to "grow all types of vegetables or fruits". After an apprenticeship in agriculture and poultry farming at the CNMH, he can now financially help his mother, he said.

### 'Change society's view'

While Lamrani said she was still glad to be working at the restaurant, she also wanted to try her luck elsewhere, "like any other waitress in any other restaurant". Her colleague, Ismail El Tabaa, 33, is even considering opening up his own restaurant. Six other centers for people with disabilities have been

launched since 2016, providing apprenticeships for 228 people. 42 of those trainees "have found positions in other companies", said Abdellatif Moutadid, head of the CNMH.

In Temara, a city south of the capital, CIAT already manages another restaurant employing people with disabilities. Additionally, it has been participating in job fairs and other public events to "spotlight" its employees, Beqqal said. Yet these efforts "remain insufficient to meet the needs of people with disabilities nationwide", Beqqal added. Dounia Zine El Abidine, a reservations manager at the Sale restaurant, said the goal is "to change society's view on disability", adding that "it's a challenge". — AFP

## For sale: Unique piece of land in strategic Arctic Archipelago

The last piece of privately owned land in the strategic Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic is up for grabs, a property likely to entice China but which Norway does not intend to let go without a fight. The archipelago is located halfway between mainland Norway and the North Pole, in an Arctic region that has become a geopolitical and economic hotspot as the ice melts and relations grow ever frostier between Russia and the West.

For 300 million euros (\$326 million), interested parties can acquire the remote Sore Fagerfjord property in southwestern Svalbard. Measuring 60 square kilometers (23 square miles) - about the size of Manhattan - the property is home to mountains, plains, a glacier and about five kilometers of coastline, but no infrastructure. "It's the last private land in Svalbard, and, to our knowledge, the last private land in the world's High Arctic," said lawyer Per Kyllingstad, who represents the sellers. "The Chinese are naturally potential buyers since they've been showing a real interest in the Arctic and Svalbard for a long time," he told AFP, adding that he had received "concrete signs of interest" from the country.

### Special treaty

Since China's 2018 white paper on the Arctic - a sign of its interest in the region - the country has defined itself a "near-Arctic state" and plans to play a growing role in the region. Svalbard is governed by a 1920 international treaty

A boat with tourists onboard leaves Longyearbyen, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.



that leaves ample room for foreign interests. It recognizes Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard, but citizens of all signatories - including China - are equally entitled to exploit the region's natural resources.

Russia, for example, has maintained a coal mining community on Svalbard, via the state-run company Trust Arktikugol, for decades. But times have changed. Keen to protect its sovereignty, Norway would not look kindly on the Sore Fagerfjord property falling into foreign hands. Especially hands in China, which Norway's intelligence services say poses the biggest security risk to the Scandinavian country after Russia. Norway's Attorney General has therefore ordered the owners - a

company controlled by a Russian-born Norwegian, according to local media - to call off the planned sale.

"The land can't be sold without the Norwegian authorities' approval," Trade and Industry Minister Cecilie Myrseth told AFP. "Nor is it possible to hold negotiations about the property," she added. That argument is based on clauses of an old loan granted by the state in 1919. Kyllingstad insists the clauses' statute of limitations has expired.

### 'Red flag'

The Norwegian state owns 99.5 percent of Svalbard and has declared most of the land, including the Sore Fagerfjord property, protected areas

where construction and motorized transport, among other things, are prohibited. But the sellers don't see things that way, and cite the 1920 treaty. "All parties (who signed the treaty) have the same rights," stressed Kyllingstad, noting that Norway had built housing, an airport and a harbor in Longyearbyen, the archipelago's main town.

"Imagine if Norway now adopted rules limiting the activities of Russian holdings," he said. "It would be World War Three." According to Andreas Osthagen of the Fridtjof Nansen research institute, the Sore Fagerfjord land has "minimal" economic value and its possible sale does not represent "a huge threat" to Norway. But, he noted, "owning land on Svalbard could have a strategic value in 50 or 100 years." In the meantime, any mention of possible Chinese interest in Svalbard property raises "a red flag to force the Norwegian authorities to do something."

In 2016, the government paid 33.5 million euros to acquire the second-last piece of private land on Svalbard, near Longyearbyen, which was also reportedly being eyed by Chinese investors. Critics subsequently accused the government of being misled over unsubstantiated arguments. In 2018-2019, the state had already engaged in negotiations to buy Sore Fagerfjord but the talks collapsed over the price. Trade and Industry Minister Myrseth said the option was still open if the terms were "realistic". — AFP



### Frida Kahlo museum denies lending painter's clothes to Madonna

A Mexico City museum dedicated to the painter Frida Kahlo has denied lending her clothing and jewelry to pop superstar Madonna during a visit by the American singer to the Mexican capital. The controversy erupted after the 65-year-old, who gave several concerts in Mexico in late April, posted a picture of herself wearing a shawl and embroidered dress during a visit to what she said was Kahlo's "family home." "A beautiful souvenir - visiting the family home of my eternal muse," she said in a post on Instagram. "For me it was magical to try on her clothes and jewelry, to read her journals and letters and to look at photos I'd never seen before," Madonna added. The image provoked a mixture of reactions, with some defending the singer.

"They say that we Mexicans are born wherever we want. Madonna was born in Michigan but she is very Mexican," said one comment. Others said ordinary people would never be given the opportunity she was. "I'm Mexican, and I can almost assure you they would NEVER let a Mexican do that," another said. But the Frida Kahlo Museum, also known as the Casa Azul, said that the singer was unable to personally visit its collection in the house where the surrealist painter - who died in 1954 at the age of 47 - lived for 36 years.

"We want to clarify that the clothes, photos and objects that Madonna published on her different social media sites do not belong to the Casa Azul collection," it said. The clothing and jewelry in its collection were "subject to strict conservation measures" and "not loaned for personal use," added the museum. According to the newspaper Reforma, the photo posted by Madonna was taken during a private visit to a home of Kahlo's relatives, including the painter's great-grandniece. — AFP



Telecommunication domes of KSAT, Kongsberg Satellite Services, are pictured on a mountain top near Longyearbyen, in Svalbard Archipelago. - AFP photos



Picture taken on May 16, 2024 from a boat shows the view of Longyearbyen, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.



# FEAR BREWS IN TURKEY'S LANDSLIDE-PLAGUED TEA HILLS



This photograph shows Rize's Representative of the Chamber of Geological Engineers, Hakan Yanbay, as he attends an interview for AFP, in Deginiksu near Rize, in the Turkish province of Rize.



A plucker harvests tea leaves in a field near the village of Abdullahhoca, in the North-eastern Turkey province of Rize.

Every time it rains heavily in Turkey's spectacular Black Sea tea growing region - where it rains a lot - Zikrullah Komurcu starts to worry. Last August he was almost swept away by a mudslide when a tea garden above his home in the village of Abdullahhoca began to slide down the mountain during a downpour. The house above his was destroyed with part of the field ending up in his kitchen. "It's a miracle that no one was killed," Komurcu told AFP, an electricity pylon still perched dangerously over his mud-splattered home. The tea-growing province of Rize in Turkey's northeast has been repeatedly hit by major landslides over the last 50 years.

Nearly twice as wet as Ireland, with 2.2 meters (86 inches) of annual rainfall, the Turkish disaster agency AFAD said last year alone there were 355 serious landslides there affecting homes. And it is going to get worse, experts warn, with climate change making the Black Sea warmer and rainstorms even more violent, putting still more pressure on the soil.

### Dangerous monoculture

Hakan Yanbay, of the province's chamber of geological engineers, said the "uncontrolled" construction of roads cut into the sides of mountains to link its scattered villages has exacerbated the problem. They undermine the stability of the soil of the mountainous region,



A villager is seen walking, in Deginiksu near Rize, in the Turkish province of Rize.

80 percent of which is made up of steep hillsides. Yanbay blames the spread of tea plantations over the last century for much of the soil erosion. Long encouraged by the state, they now take up a staggering 90 percent of the region's agricultural land. While no one has died in a landslide in Rize in nearly three years, three workers were swept away in one in neighboring Trabzon province in March - 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Abdullahhoca.

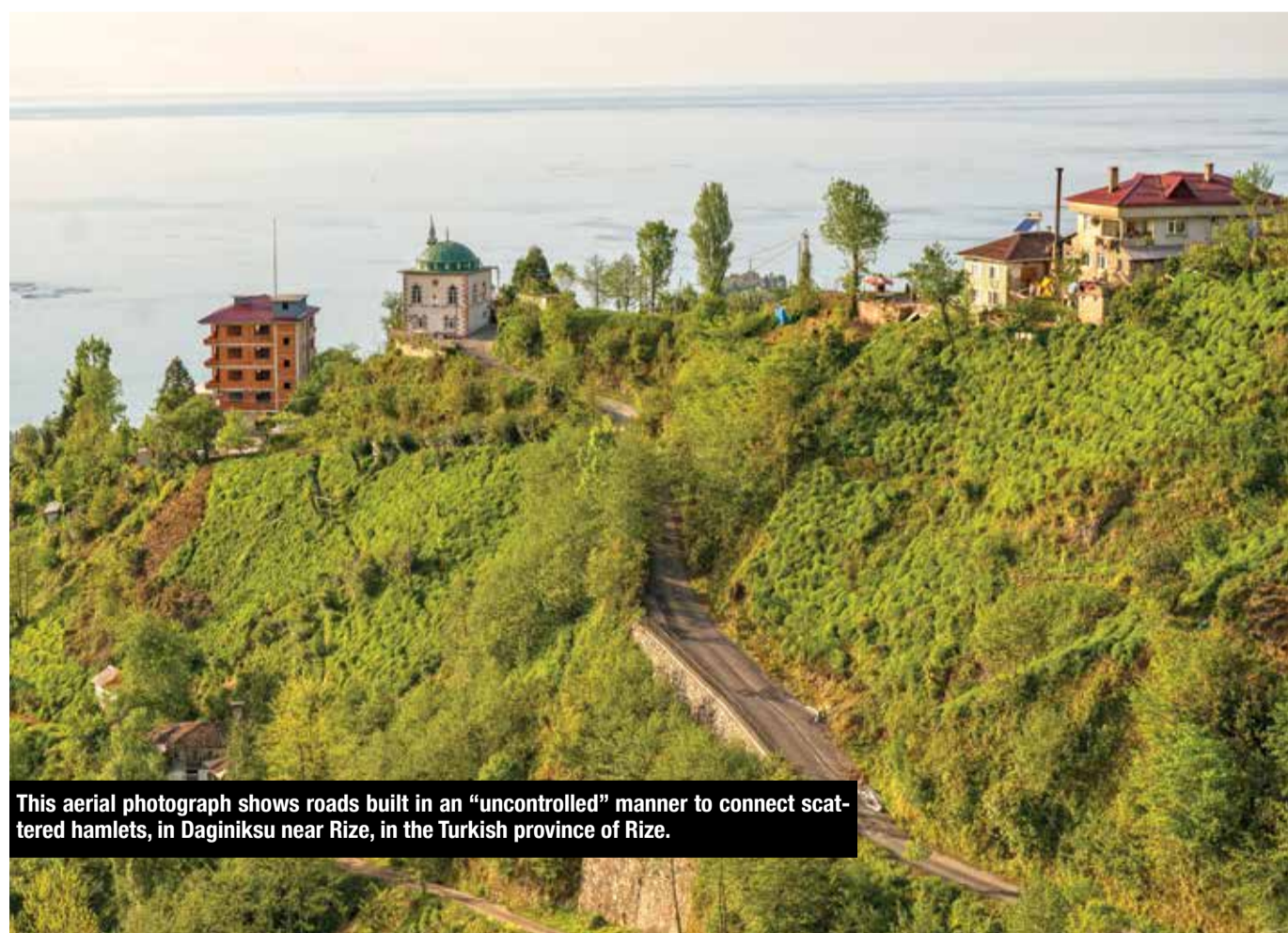
But painful memories of other disasters that have claimed 130 lives in Rize

after that disaster. "They turning the soil into mud," he added.

### 'Man-made disasters'

But three years later "no serious measures have been taken", insisted Tahsin Ocakli, the only opposition MP in the province dominated by Erdogan's AK party. Ocakli, who has demanded a parliamentary inquiry, said that "these events, which are now happening several times a year, are no longer natural catastrophes but man-made disasters." The Rize chamber of agriculture raised the alert about discounted nitrogen fertilizers being sold in February, warning they were likely to further undermine the soil. But experts say the real problem is the tea plants themselves whose roots are not deep enough to stabilize the ground.

They recommended planting trees like poplars and eucalyptus whose deeper roots absorb more water. To try to reduce the risks, the authorities have begun building drainage channels and retaining walls below some tea gardens. A concrete barrier has been built to protect the home of Zikrullah Komurcu's nephew, who lives near him in Abdullahhoca. Komurcu and his wife Medine are waiting for a similar one to shield them. "Every time it rains, we wonder if there will be another landslide," Medine said. "I don't sleep anymore - we're afraid." — AFP



This aerial photograph shows roads built in an "uncontrolled" manner to connect scattered hamlets, in Deginiksu near Rize, in the Turkish province of Rize.



An individual collecting tea in an area prone to landslides, in Cayeli, in the Turkish province of Rize.



Pluckers harvest tea leaves in a field near the village of Abdullahhoca, in the North-eastern Turkey province of Rize.



This aerial photograph shows roads built in an "uncontrolled" manner to connect scattered hamlets, in Deginiksu near Rize, in the Turkish province of Rize.

## German love story 'Kairos' wins International Booker Prize

German writer Jenny Erpenbeck along with translator Michael Hofmann were on Tuesday named winners of the International Booker Prize for the novel "Kairos". The book, originally written in German, tells the story of a young woman's "destructive affair" with an older man in 1980s East Berlin. The prestigious award, handed out at a ceremony at London's Tate Modern gallery, recognizes works of fiction from around the world that have been translated into

English and the £50,000 (\$62,000) prize is split equally between the author and the translator.

Chair of the 2024 judges Eleanor Wachtel praised Erpenbeck's "luminous prose", evoking "the complexity of a relationship" and the atmosphere of East Berlin. "It starts with love and passion, but it's at least as much about power, art and culture," she said. "The self-absorption of the lovers, their descent into a destructive vortex, remains connected to

the larger history of East Germany during this period, often meeting history at odd angles," she added.

For Erpenbeck, who is also an opera director, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 represented a "breaking free". "What interested me is that breaking free is not the only thing that can be told in such a story," she said in a statement. "There are years before and years after," she said. Last year the International Booker Prize was awarded to Bulgarian writer Georgi

Gospodinov and translator Angela Rodel for the novel "Time Shelter" — a first for a book written in Bulgarian. — AFP

German writer Jenny Erpenbeck poses with her novel "Kairos" on the red carpet upon arrival for the 2024 International Booker Prize 2024 award announcement ceremony, at Tate Modern in central London. — AFP



Lifestyle



(From left) French actor Jonathan Couznie, French writer Vanessa Schneider, French actress Marie Gillain, French actress Anamaria Vartolomei, French director Jessica Palud, Matt Dillon, French producer Marielle Duigou arrive for the screening of the film "Maria" (Being Maria) at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos



French director Jessica Palud poses during a photocall for the film "Maria" (Being Maria) at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

# Cannes relives infamous assault in 'Last Tango in Paris'

As France reels from a renewed #MeToo reckoning, a new film transports audiences back to the early 1970s when directors were all-powerful and the consent of their actresses was the last thing on their mind. "Being Maria", which premiered out of competition in Cannes, revisits one of the most infamous rape scenes in cinema -- Marlon Brando's sexual assault in the 1972 film "Last Tango in Paris". French director Jessica Palud said her own experience decades later inspired her to make the film. "I worked as an assistant on several films, I saw things on sets -- humiliated actors, ways of working that struck me," Palud, 42, told AFP.

"Being Maria" follows Maria Schneider's rise to fame after Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci cast her in "Last Tango in Paris", and its impact on her life and career. In the notorious scene, Schneider, who was 19 at the start of shooting, is depicted as being sexually assaulted by



(From left) French actor Jonathan Couznie, French actress Celeste Brunnquell, US actor Matt Dillon, French director Jessica Palud, French actress Anamaria Vartolomei, Italian actor Giuseppe Maggio and Belgian actress Marie Gillain pose during a photocall for the film "Maria" (Being Maria).

the middle-aged Brando on a Paris apartment floor. "Being Maria" stars Matt Dillon as Brando, while Anamaria Vartolomei -- who broke out

in the abortion drama "Happening" -- plays Schneider as an aspiring actress not fully briefed about how the scene will play out.

### 'Humiliated'

"What I wanted to understand was what she felt," said Palud, who herself started out as a 19-year-old crew member on the set of another racy Bertolucci film, "The Dreamers", in 2003. She said she tracked down the original script for "Last Tango in Paris", which was banned in several countries and sparked a popular myth that the scene was real. "The scene wasn't written," said Palud. It later emerged that Schneider had been kept in the dark about what was to happen by Brando and Bertolucci, who were both nominated for Oscars.

"Even though what Marlon was doing wasn't real, I was crying real tears," Schneider later said. "I felt humiliated and to be honest I felt a little raped, both by Marlon and by Bertolucci. After the scene, Marlon didn't console me or apologize. Thankfully, there was just one take." Despite a career of some 50 films, she remained traumatized by "Last Tango in Paris", and attempted suicide.

### 'Men my age'

In 2016, Bertolucci told Elle magazine he did not tell Schneider about the infamous scene because he "wanted her reaction as a girl not as an actress", sparking outrage.

In a 1976 documentary titled "Be Pretty and Shut Up", 23-year-old Schneider recounted working in a male-dominated industry. "The producers are men, the technicians are men, the directors are men... The agents are men and I feel they have subjects for men," she said. The actor, who had just filmed "The Passenger" with Jack Nicholson, said she wanted to avoid playing "crazy women or murderers", and it would be nice to play opposite men "my age". "I mean even Nicholson is better than Brando. But it's not great. He's 40, or almost," she said. Palud said she had been struck by the footage. "What moved me was this woman in the 1970s who was talking, saying things that no one seemed to be hearing, whereas... what she was saying was very modern," the director said. —AFP



Romanian-US actor Sebastian Stan poses during a photocall for the film "The Apprentice" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

## Trump 'more relatable than we want to admit': Biopic star Sebastian Stan

Sebastian Stan immersed himself 24/7 in Donald Trump's early life to research the new biopic "The Apprentice" -- and came to an unexpected realization. "A lot of the behavior and the personality is much more relatable than we want to admit," said the Hollywood star, who has won critical acclaim for his uncanny performance. The film, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, has drawn huge controversy and legal threats from the ex-president, particularly for a scene in which Trump is shown sexually assaulting his wife. But much of the film portrays a younger Trump as a nervous, naive outsider from New York's outer boroughs, trying to find his way in a cut-throat and elite Manhattan world he knows little about.

It is an approach sure to surprise, or even anger, anyone expecting or wanting a left-wing political hatchet job. For Stan, who was born in Communist Romania and did not move to the United States until he was 12, that sense of Trump striving to belong resonated. "My mother told me that I had to become somebody," he told AFP in an interview.

"There was a lot of shame, when I grew up, coming from Romania... 'don't tell people' and 'blend in.'" The 41-year-old Stan has rocketed to fame in recent years, in large part due to his role as the Winter Soldier in a number of record-breaking Marvel superhero films. But Stan drew parallels between his mother's message, and the intense pressure put on Trump and his brothers by their brutally tough father Fred.

As the film starts, Donald Trump is failing to convince his father that he can pull off a daring hotel deal. Instead it is Roy Cohn, a formidable lawyer with powerful political connections, who believes in the young property developer, taking him under his wing.

While Trump is initially queasy about Cohn's willingness to "violate a few

technicalities", he quickly adopts and even surpasses his mentor's embrace of the dark arts in pursuit of fame. The movie shows how "anyone that grows up in America" can be corrupted by a capitalist society that rewards greed, ruthlessness and ambition, said Stan. "Nothing is ever good enough. You look at people achieving things, but there's always more, you've got to have more," he said.

### 'Hardest scene'

Stan prepared for the role by devouring magazine interviews, watching videos and obsessively listening to audio of Trump from the late '70s and early '80s. He would listen "non-stop," whether driving, walking, shopping or even "on headphones in the bathroom." Stan tried to avoid the many "Saturday Night Live"-style parodies of later-era Trump, noting that "you just had to put the noise away." The role calls on Stan to gain weight as the years progress and he "tried to eat as much as I could" before certain shoots. Because not everything was shot in sequence, other scenes required prosthetics. And then there is the much talked-about rape scene. It occurs after an argument, in which Trump's first wife Ivana belittles him for growing fat and bald. In real life, Ivana accused Trump of raping her during divorce proceedings but later rescinded the allegation.

Stan said preparing for that scene did not particularly trouble him. Instead, "the hardest scene, that I was always afraid of", was another in which Trump mourns the loss of his older brother Freddy, an alcoholic who died aged 42. Trump is shown genuinely caring for Freddy as well as Ivana, before his humanity is eroded by the power and wealth that devours him. "It's interesting how much we don't want to remember about him," said Stan. —AFP

## 'Monk' DJ not allowed to drop the beat in Singapore: Minister

An unconventional South Korean DJ "monk" who dispenses Buddhist wisdom and Gen-Z life advice over his thumping beats will be barred from performing in Singapore, the interior minister said Wednesday. Youn Sung-ho, who goes by the moniker NewJeansNim, is a comedian-turned-musician. He is credited with reviving Buddhism's popularity among young South Koreans -- even as his performances have ruffled feathers regionally. He had been slated to perform at a nightclub in Singapore, where laws restrict speech or actions viewed as harmful to religious harmony.

"Police have told the nightclub owners that action will be taken if the performance proceeds. They understood our position, and have agreed to cooperate," K. Shanmugam said on his Facebook page. "This news has come out on Vesak Day, an unfortunate coincidence. But the Buddhist community, (like other communities) knows that the Government will take firm action, in respect of such things," he added, referring to the holy Buddhist holiday.

## Breakdancer, 40, on cusp of fulfilling Olympic dream

At age 40, Japanese competitive breakdancer Ayumi Fukushima has been busting moves for longer than some of her rivals have been alive. But the former kindergarten teacher won a qualifier in Shanghai and is in pole position for a prized spot at the Paris Olympics. A repeat performance in Budapest next month would send her to this summer's Games as one of the favorites for gold. Breakdancing, or "breaking" as the sport is officially called, will make its Olympic debut in the French capital. "I'm old but I don't feel too much old," Fukushima told AFP in English after her victory in China at the weekend.

Fukushima has long been a trailblazer for "B-girls" -- women breakdancers -- in what has traditionally been a male-dominated scene. In 2017 she became the first woman to compete at the Red Bull BC One World Finals. She has since won at the 2021 WDSF World Breaking Championship in Paris, where the competition was split into men and women categories. She also took bronze at the 2022 World Games and 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. Fukushima first dabbled in breakdancing as a shy 21-year-old student. "In my generation it was kind of normal to start when we're in university," she said in Shanghai, where she topped the B-girl competition.

"But these days most of the people start when they're kids," Fukushima nev-



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

er thought she would have a chance to compete in the Olympics. Given her age, it could be her first and last shot at it. "It's a new thing for us, for the Olympics, so I'm really happy to be in this process," she said. Japan has long been a breakdancing powerhouse, with three Japanese B-girls and one B-boy making it onto the podium in Shanghai on Sunday. "All the young people are very strong," Fukushima said of her teammates. "It's not only winning, we enjoy this moment." —AFP



Japan's Ayumi Fukushima competes in the women's Breaking B-Girls semi-final during the Olympic Qualifier Series for breaking, BMX freestyle, skateboarding, and sport climbing events ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Shanghai. — AFP

## Sean 'Diddy' Combs accused of sexually assaulting model in new lawsuit

Another sexual assault lawsuit has been filed against Sean "Diddy" Combs, the latest in a string of allegations against the American rapper as he increasingly comes under scrutiny for his treatment of women. Former model Crystal McKinney said Tuesday that Combs had forced her to perform a sexual act on him at a party in 2003. The assault occurred after she was "pressured to imbibe" alcohol and marijuana, including a joint she believed to be laced with another narcotic, the lawsuit said. Combs is the target of several civil lawsuits that characterize him as a violent sexual predator who used alcohol and drugs to subdue his victims, and his homes were raided this year by federal agents.



Singer and model Cassie Ventura (left) and Rap mogul P Diddy (aka Sean Combs) arrive for the traditional Clive Davis party on the eve of the 60th Annual Grammy Awards on January 28, 2018, in New York. —AFP

Combs, who has denied previous accusations, has not responded to the latest allegation. However, last week, he issued an apology after video surfaced of him physically assaulting his then-girlfriend Cassandra Ventura in 2016. The footage, which was published by CNN, shows the rap mogul hitting, dragging and kicking Ventura, who in a recent lawsuit said Combs subjected her to more than a decade of coercion by physical force and drugs, plus a 2018 rape. Ventura sued Combs in federal court last fall in a bombshell suit that was settled out of court but succeeded by a string of similarly lurid sexual assault claims against the hip-hop star. McKinney's suit cited Ventura's case, plus four others against Combs in New York, saying she felt "a moral obligation to speak up" after seeing the other lawsuits. "To this day, Plaintiff experiences bouts of depression, anxiety, body image issues, feelings of worthlessness and intimacy issues because of Combs's assault," the lawsuit says, while also accusing the rapper of using his influence to stifle her career. —AFP





## Celtics grind to OT Pacers win in East finals opener

'We almost dropped the game on our own floor'



BOSTON: Tyrese Haliburton #0 of the Indiana Pacers fouls Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics during overtime in Game One of the Eastern Conference Finals at TD Garden on May 21, 2024 in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

**LOS ANGELES:** The Boston Celtics needed a late rally to force overtime against the Indiana Pacers before emerging with a 133-128 win in game one of the Eastern Conference Finals on Tuesday. Boston's Jaylen Brown sank a three-pointer from the corner with 6.1 seconds remaining to tie the scores at 117-117 and take it to overtime.

Then Jayson Tatum made a crucial late three-pointer to push the Celtics to victory and a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven series. Tatum top scored for Boston with 36 points, 10 of them in overtime, collecting 12 rebounds and four assists with Brown putting up 26 and Jrue Holiday 28. Indiana, who fought back from large deficits several times in the game, were led by Tyrese Haliburton's 25 points, 10 assists and three re-

bounds with Pascal Siakam making 24 points, seven assists and 12 rebounds.

Brown was far from happy with the performance from Boston, who had almost a week off after their 4-1 series win over Cleveland. "A lot of ups and downs. I don't think we played our best," said three-time All Star Brown.

"We almost dropped the game on our own floor. So we have got to come out and be better," he added. The Pacers came into the game on the back of a gruelling game seven win against the New York Knicks on Sunday and Boston were the fastest out of the traps.

With the loud home crowd sensing Indiana were struggling, Al Horford's 26-foot three pointer made it 12-0. The Pacers got back into the game and levelled it 64-64 at half-time. A

13-point run in the third put Boston 87-77 up but again Indiana came back and with less than two minutes to go they led 115-100.

### Costly turnovers

Indiana turned the ball over twice in the final 30 seconds of regulation before Brown's crucial three pointer, over the top of Siakam. When Haliburton was unable to get off a last-gasp shot the game went to overtime.

A step back three-pointer from Tatum with 43 left put Boston four points up. After Derrick White's layup extended the advantage to six with 25 seconds left, the game was beyond the Pacers. "We were able to make some plays at the end but we have got to be better to be honest,

but I'll take the win," said Brown.

Pacers head coach Rick Carlisle said he was to blame for allowing the Celtics to take the game to overtime. "The loss is totally on me," he said. "With 10 seconds left in regulation, we should have just taken the time out, advanced the ball and found a way to get it in and made a free throw or two and ended the game.

"But it didn't happen and we made some other mistakes," he added, referring to the team's turnover problems. "We know we made mistakes and that is an area we have got to clean up," said Carlisle. "We have been a tough-minded, resilient team for almost the entire second half of the year but we have to continue with that and come back here on Thursday night." — AFP

## US fund Oaktree 'assumes ownership' of Inter Milan

**MILAN:** Inter Milan entered an uncertain new era on Wednesday after US fund Oaktree took control of the Serie A champions following outgoing owners Suning defaulting on a debt worth hundreds of millions of euros.

Oaktree announced they had "assumed control" of Inter after the non-repayment of a "three-year loan to Inter Milan's holding companies that matured on 21 May 2024 with a total balance due of approximately 395 million euros (\$428 million)".

Chinese conglomerate Suning and president Steven Zhang have relinquished control of Inter to Oaktree three days after the team were officially crowned Italian champions for the 20th time.

Suning borrowed 275 million euros at over 12 percent interest three years ago to pay staff and players as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the finances of clubs across Europe, putting up their controlling stake in the club as collateral.

Inter have ended up in the hands of Oaktree in a manner similar to the way another US fund, Elliott Management, took control of their local rivals Milan in 2018. Elliott became Milan's owners when Chinese businessman Li Yonghong was unable to repay a loan he had taken out when he bought the club from the late Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest the previous year.

Inter became a powerful force at home and abroad after Suning acquired around 68 percent of the club in 2016, with seven trophies including two Serie A titles and two European finals. Simone Inzaghi's team cruised to this year's championship, winning the Scudetto with five matches remaining by beating AC Milan in a thrilling local derby.

Oaktree, which manages \$192 billion in assets, said they are "committed to working closely with Inter Milan's current management team, partners, the league and governing bodies to ensure the club is positioned for success on and off the pitch". — AFP

## Spurs fall to Newcastle in Melbourne penalty shoot-out

**MELBOURNE:** James Maddison celebrated his inclusion in England's Euro 24 squad with a goal but it was in vain as Newcastle beat Tottenham Hotspur on penalties in a post-season friendly watched by 78,000 fans in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Playing barely 48 hours after a long trip from London at the end of the Premier League season, the two sides nevertheless put on an entertaining show at the cavernous Melbourne Cricket Ground. Maddison fired Spurs ahead in the 32nd minute before Alexander Isak netted to level the scores on the cusp of half-time.

With mass changes after the interval, neither side could deliver the winner with the game ending 1-1 and going to penalties, which appeared to be a surprise to the players. Spurs' winger Bryan Gil's opening effort was saved, with Newcastle making no mistakes to win 5-4.

"It was a decent game, the first half was all good and the second half did feel like a friendly," said Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou. "But I think there was enough there for the punters

to get something out of the game."

It was a solid effort on a chilly night given both teams boarded a plane just hours after the season ended on Sunday and effectively lost Monday on the 24-hour journey. Eddie Howe started eight of the Newcastle team that won against Brentford on Sunday, while Spurs also fielded eight of the side that beat Sheffield United. They included Newcastle defender Kieran Trippier and Maddison, who came through unscathed in a relief for England manager Gareth Southgate. Both were included in England's provisional Euro 2024 squad this week, as was Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon, who did not travel to Australia as he recovers from a calf injury.

Spurs enjoyed the bulk of the early possession, but the chances were few and far between with the first serious effort in the 21st minute when Maddison whipped a long-range strike wide. But Postecoglou's side kept pressing and the opener came after a sloppy clearance by Newcastle keeper Nick Pope landed with Maddison who dribbled past two men and



MELBOURNE: Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min (2nd R) and Newcastle United's Bruno Guimaraes (2nd L) fight for the ball during the friendly football match between Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne on May 22, 2024. — AFP

lashed the ball into the top corner.

Pope made amends with a point-blank save minutes later to keep Newcastle alive and they equalised just before the break, with Swedish striker Isak tapping in from close range after Jacob Murphy's low cross.

With a string of changes in the sec-

ond half, the standard slipped as both sides searched for the winner, with Spurs seeing most of the ball without being able to deliver the killer blow. While Tottenham's season is now over, Newcastle have another friendly against an A-League All Stars side on Friday, again in Melbourne. — AFP