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Zionists hit Rafah, ignore ICJ order

Kuwait welcomes verdict • Zionist soldier burns Holy Quran • Macron meets Arab FM's



GAZA: A medic prepares the body of a child killed in a Zionist strike ahead of a group funeral at a clinic in Gaza City on May 25, 2024. — AFP

GAZA: Zionist air strikes and artillery pounded Rafah on Saturday, as the government dismissed a UN top court's order to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gazan city. At the same time, renewed international efforts were underway aimed at securing a ceasefire in the war. A Zionist official said on Saturday the government had an "intention" to restart stalled negotiations "this week".

In a case brought by South Africa alleging the Zionist military operation amounts to genocide, the International Court of Justice ordered the Zionist entity to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the immediate release of captives still held by Palestinian fighters. The Hague-based ICJ, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also instructed the Zionist entity to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which Zionist troops took over earlier this month, effectively shutting it.

Kuwait on Saturday welcomed the International Court of Justice's verdict against the Zionist occupying forces to stop their aggression on Rafah. In a press release, the ministry of foreign affairs stressed the necessity to implement all temporary measures announced by the ICJ since South Africa filed the lawsuit against the Zionist occupying forces. The press release reiterated the call on the international community to shoulder its due responsibilities and oblige the Zionist entity to halt all forms of aggression against the Palestinian people.

The Zionist entity gave no indication it was preparing to change course in Rafah, insisting the court had got it wrong. The ruling said the Zionist entity must "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part". Hamas, the Islamist group that has ruled Gaza since 2007, welcomed the ICJ ruling on Rafah but criticized its decision to exclude the rest of the Palestinian territory from the order.

The Zionist entity carried out strikes throughout the Gaza Strip early on Saturday as fighting raged between the army and Palestinian fighters. Witnesses and AFP teams reported Zionist strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir al-Balah, Gaza City and Jabalia refugee camp in the north, and elsewhere.

"We hope that the court's decision will put pressure on (the Zionist entity) to end this war of extermination because there is nothing left here," said Umm Mohammad Al-Ashqa, a Palestinian woman from Gaza City displaced to Deir al-Balah by the war. Mohammed Saleh, also interviewed by AFP in the central Gazan city, said the Zionist entity "considers itself above the law" and would not stop "the shooting or the war".

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Saudi spending big for a place on gaming map



TOKYO: Chairman of the Saudi eSports Federation Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan Al-Saud speaks alongside Savvy Games Group CEO Brian Ward on May 24, 2024. — AFP

TOKYO: Saudi Arabia is moving aggressively with its investments in more gaming companies, the Canadian industry veteran steering the kingdom's push to become a global hub for the sector told AFP Friday. The kingdom has already been spending heavily with a \$38-billion push into gaming under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 program, part of a plan to diversify the economy away from oil.

"We don't pause. We don't do neutral," Savvy Games CEO Brian Ward said in a joint interview in Japan with Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan Al-Saud, chair of the Saudi eSports Federation. "It's a good time to be in the market, looking for good teams in studios," said Ward, a former executive at "Call of Duty" maker Activision Blizzard, Electronic Arts and Microsoft. Prince Mohammed had been due to visit Japan this week but canceled the trip on Monday when his father King Salman suffered a lung infection.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) has bought stakes in "Resident Evil" maker Capcom and Japanese giant Nintendo, as well

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RFK Jr defends liberties, slams Trump, Biden

WASHINGTON: Independent White House hopeful Robert F Kennedy Jr on Friday accused Joe Biden and Donald Trump of trampling on the US constitution as he launched a trenchant defense of Americans' civil liberties. In a guest speech in front of a small crowd at the Libertarian Party's national convention in Washington, the anti-vaccine activist berated the president and his Republican predecessor over pandemic-era health curbs and threats to free speech.

"If you treasure freedom, you'd better elect leaders who are inspired by it and who will wield it to inspire others, lead-

ers who believe in freedoms and hold the Bill of Rights in reverence," Kennedy said in a speech delivered to a hall with dozens of empty seats. "I'm sorry to say that neither President Trump nor President Biden passed this critical examination. Neither of them upheld the Constitution when it really counted."

Kennedy, the scion of America's most famous political clan, considered joining the Libertarian Party after a failed primary bid as a Democrat but ultimately opted to run for president as an independent. The environmental lawyer has no chance of winning in November, but Democrats and Republicans worry that so-called wildcard candidates could sway close contests in key swing states.

Kennedy attacked Trump over COVID lockdowns and enforced social distancing and faulted Biden for

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WASHINGTON: US Independent presidential candidate Robert F Kennedy Jr speaks at the Libertarian National Convention at the Washington Hilton on May 24, 2024. — AFP

Modi's struggling rivals vote as India election resumes

NEW DELHI: Two top rivals of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who accuse his government of targeting them in unjustified criminal probes cast their votes in New Delhi on Saturday as the country's six-week election resumed. Hindu nationalist Modi, 73, remains broadly popular after a decade in office and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is widely expected to win a third term next month after a poll hit by high summer temperatures.

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NEW DELHI: Indian National Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi (left) and Delhi Chief Minister and leader of the opposition Aam Aadmi Party Arvind Kejriwal (right) leave after casting their ballots on May 25, 2024. — AFP photos



At least 24 dead, mostly children, in India arcade fire

NEW DELHI: At least 24 people were killed, most of them children, when a fire broke out at a packed amusement park arcade in India on Saturday, officials said. Footage posted on social media, which AFP was not able to immediately verify, showed a ferocious blaze engulfing a structure, with black smoke pouring into the sky.

Prabhav Joshi, the district collector of Rajkot, in the western state of Gujarat, told AFP that 24 people had died in the inferno, "mostly children", and another half-dozen were hospitalized. "The police have detained four persons associated with the game zone for questioning," he said. "We are trying to get more details about the owners of the facility."

More than 300 people were in the two-storey structure at the TRP amusement and theme park when the blaze broke out as it was a summer holiday weekend, Rajkot fire officer Ilesh Kher told reporters. "People got trapped as a temporary structure at the facility collapsed near the entrance, making it difficult for the people to come out," he said. The flames spread rapidly because of its flammable material, he added.

Pictures from the scene showed a corrugated metal structure largely in ruins. Gujarat is the home state of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who posted on X: "Extremely distressed by the fire mishap in Rajkot. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. Prayers for the injured."

It took nearly an hour to douse the fire, with about a dozen ambulances carrying the injured to hospital. Fire department officials said a short-circuit was suspected as the cause and police at the site said the bodies of the dead were heavily burned, making identification difficult. Pictures from an Instagram account that appears to belong to the facility show a lively gaming and recreational center, with teenagers enjoying activities such as bowling, go-karting and trampolining. — AFP



Kuwait launches initiative to politically support UNRWA

EU's Borrell commends efforts to back organization spearheaded by Kuwait, Slovenia and Jordan

NEW YORK: Ambassadors of Kuwait, Jordan, and Slovenia to the UN launched an initiative to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

In a press statement, Jordan's permanent envoy to the UN Mahmoud Hmoud noted "the numerous operational, political and financial challenges" that UNRWA faced especially in recent months.

Hmoud spoke of UNRWA's "vital role in providing life-saving humanitarian assistance and human development services to generations of Palestinian refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory" as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. He added that "it is important for countries to reaffirm their support for the work of the agency and its indispensable role in providing assistance and relief and send signals of strong political support for UNRWA."

He listed several aspects that would be addressed in the initiative, including "UNRWA's role in Gaza and for regional stability to its financial crisis, questions relating to the principles of neutrality, recognition of the tireless efforts of UNRWA's staff, the importance of cooperation with the agency and other aspects."

Kuwait has always been a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and the UNRWA. Last April, Kuwait announced a voluntary contribution to the UNRWA worth \$30 million and renewed calls for the recognition of Palestine as a full UN member.

"Kuwait is Palestine, Palestine is Kuwait, Kuwait's membership in the United

Nations is Palestine's membership, your concerns are our concerns, and your challenges are our challenges," said Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Faisal Al-Enezi after making the announcement.

EU reinstates funding

Josep Borrell, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy and vice-president of the European Commission, said that he commends the initiative in favor of UNRWA, describing it as "an indispensable lifeline in Gaza and in the region." "All EU donors have now resumed their support to the Agency, still in critical financial situation. We have to step up our support; the needs are only growing," he said in a statement on X.

Allegations by the Zionist entity of the involvement of UNRWA staff in the October 7 Hamas attack led major donors in January to cut their funding to the agency. At the end of April, Germany said it would restore cooperation and funding to UNRWA operations in the Gaza Strip after an independent review said the entity had not provided evidence to back up its claims.

Germany's decision followed those made earlier by several other major donors, including Australia, Canada, Sweden and Japan, to restore ties with the UN agency. Last week, Austria also said it would restore its funding to UNRWA. A total of \$3.7 million in funds have been budgeted for 2024, and the first payment is expected to be made in the summer, Austria's foreign ministry said in a statement.



KUWAIT: Ambassadors of Kuwait, Jordan and Slovenia to the UN launch an initiative to support the UNRWA. — KUNA

A 'significant step'

Palestine's UN envoy Riyad Mansour welcomed the Kuwaiti-Jordanian-Slovenian initiative. "The indispensable role UNRWA has played and continues to play is only possible with the international community's support for its general assembly mandate." Emphasizing that UNRWA not only needs financial support

but also political support, Mansour said the initiative is a "significant step."

"We urge action to uphold UNRWA's mandate in all fields of operation in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, to enable continued delivery of its core services, and life-saving aid that have for decades contributed to the welfare and

development of Palestine refugees," he added. Expressing hopes to garner strong support for the initiative, Jordan's permanent envoy to the UN Hmoud said that he and his Kuwaiti and Slovenian counterparts, Ambassadors Tariq Al-Bannai and Samuel Zbogor, will send a letter to ambassadors of member countries inviting them to join the initiative. — Agencies

Heart disease deaths in Kuwait jump post-COVID

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Secretary General of Kuwait Heart Foundation (KHF) Dr Rashid Al-Owayesh said specialized conferences were especially important in providing doctors with the most recent information and scientific research worldwide as well as discussing the latest developments in treating heart diseases in order to enhance the health system in Kuwait.

He made the remarks during the opening of the Kuwait Heart Failure conference that is organized by KHF in cooperation with Sabah Al-Ahmad Heart Center Saturday. The conference deals with several issues related to heart failure and reviewing the most modern treatments in addition to providing doctors with the most recent developments in the field of diagnosis and treatment.

Cardiologist at Sabah Al-Ahmad Heart Center and Conference Chairman Dr Bassam Abu Albanat said the number of deaths due to heart disease in Kuwait have increased after the pandemic after consistently dropping over the past 10 years. He added that it would be a challenge to go back to how things were before COVID-19 and that it might take 10 or more years to restore the low death rates previously achieved in the country.

He pointed to a study published in 2015 that showed the ages of those with heart diseases who are admitted to hospitals in Kuwait and the Arabian



Dr Bassam Abu Albanat



Dr Hani Sabour

Gulf region are 10 years younger than those in Europe and America, with the average age in the West being 59 years.

Owayesh said the conference, in which a large number of local and international elite doctors are participating, aims at providing society with the needed information on heart failure and



KUWAIT: Attendees listen to a presentation at the Kuwait Heart Failure conference on Saturday, May 25, 2024.

creating an effective health awareness campaign. The conference is also an opportunity for health professionals to exchange experiences and get to know the most modern means of treatment, especially in the fields of technology and artificial intelligence.

One of the doctors at the conference Cardiologist at Cleveland Hospital in Abu Dhabi Dr Hani Sabour said heart deficiency is one of the causes of death in the region, adding that with the advancement of science, data must be updated continuously in order to help and support patients.

He said heart failure occurs following a heart attack or other diseases that affect the heart. It can also result from gradual damage due to diabetes, hypertension and coronary artery diseases.

He added that obesity is one of the main reasons leading to heart muscle failure, in addition to high cholesterol, smoking, and repeated heart attacks. Dr Sabour said there are more than 20 types of medications for the condition, in addition to the scientific advancements. He pointed out that many patients of heart disease or those who have risk factors do not maintain the suitable level of cholesterol to prevent heart diseases.

He said those with heart disease or those who have risk factors such as diabetes, obesity or those who smoke should aim at maintaining the Low Density Cholesterol (LDL) below 70 mg adding that every one point increase in LDL leads to raising the danger of having a heart attack by 25 percent.

Kuwaiti aid keeps some Lebanese in the south afloat

BEIRUT: Lebanese citizens who haven't left their homes in the southern towns and villages of the country are praising the Kuwait Red Crescent Society's support, which has allowed them to remain in their homes despite Zionist shelling. The residents of the south noted the food and in-kind aid distributed by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society through the Lebanese Red Cross during the past days for those who remained in their towns and those affected by the military confrontations in the south. The society concluded the first phase of aid distribution Saturday.

Joseph Salameh, the mayor of the town of Qulayaa, told KUNA that the Lebanese "are mainly suffering from the deteriorating economic situation" and difficult living conditions, and the military confrontations and the transformation of the south into a battlefield "made the situation of southern families worse and more difficult".

Salameh added that the ongoing military confrontations since last October have damaged agricultural land and deprived farmers, who make up most of the population of Qulayaa, from cultivating their land and benefiting from their crops, in addition to damaging shops and stifling the town's economy.

Salameh thanked the State of Kuwait and the Kuwait Red Crescent Society for their assistance, which will help the town's residents, some 2,000 people, who have remained in their homes despite security risks and economic constraints.

Tariq Al-Masri, a resident of Shebaa and a father of three, thanked the Kuwait Red Crescent Society for their help during these difficult times. "We have been left alone to face our fate. Kuwaiti aid has come to save us in a time of need."



This file photo taken from a position near the northern Zionist border with Lebanon shows smoke billowing during Zionist bombardment in south Lebanon. — AFP

Masri told KUNA, who works as a painter, that work has been suspended in Shebaa and neighboring towns due to the ongoing war, pointing to the inability of the people to benefit from their land, on which they relied to meet some of their basic needs, as the military assault has killed the planting season.

Taha Saab, another resident of Shebaa, told KUNA that the families in the town lack various basic needs considering the interruption of work and the tough situation in the south. Saab explained that many families preferred to stay in the south because it was difficult to leave their homes behind and bear the high cost of living elsewhere. He stressed the importance of the humanitarian initiative carried out by the Kuwait Red Crescent So-

ciety in keeping families at home and saving them from displacement.

The Kuwait Red Crescent Society has distributed aid, including food and cleaning materials, in cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross, to 2,500 families still residing in their towns in southern Lebanon, despite the continuation of military confrontations, which are approaching their eighth month. Lebanese Red Cross relief coordinator Youssef Boutros told KUNA that the second phase of aid distribution by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to the southern families will begin soon. He explained that the association will distribute Eid sacrifices to Lebanese families and families of Syrian and Palestinian refugees for the coming Eid Al-Adha. — KUNA

Kuwaiti dermatology team places first in Gulf championship

ABU DHABI: A team of Kuwaiti newly graduated dermatologists has won first place in the Gulf Championship for trainee dermatologists. The first-of-its-kind educational medical competition was held in the UAE for newly graduated dermatologists from residency programs in a number of (GCC) countries.

Twelve doctors from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait participated in the competition. Each country was represented by three doctors, who were required to answer to a series of medical and histology questions and also general cultural questions. The Kuwaiti team was the winner, with the UAE team in second place.

Speaking to KUNA, Dr Abeer Al-Bathali, Director of the Kuwaiti Board Program of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties and Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Dermatologists Association, expressed her great happiness and pride in this honorable achievement and the distinguished performance of the Kuwaiti Dermatology Board doctors, wishing them all success in raising the name of Kuwait in international forums. She added that the Kuwaiti delegation participated in the Abu Dhabi Dermatology and Cosmetic Medicine Conference included Dr Nasser Ashkanani, Dr Farah Al-Ali, and Dr Aseel Al-Enezi from the Kuwaiti Board for Dermatology.

The competition was held as part of the 10th edition of the International Conference in Dermatology and Aesthetics (AIDA), currently being held in Abu Dhabi, and run by the Scientific Committee and Conference Organizing Committee. The winning Kuwaiti team received a trophy, certificates and prizes. — Agencies

Local

GCC celebrates 43rd anniversary

Bloc remains a model of sustainable strategic partnership



Gulf leaders pose for a picture at the fourth GCC summit in 1983. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has a rich history of strategic cooperation, said Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, as the bloc celebrated 43 years since its establishment on Saturday.

In a statement to KUNA on Saturday, the Kuwaiti top diplomat said the efforts and wise policy of Gulf states' leaders played a great role in pushing forward and developing cooperation amongst their countries on all levels, achieving their goals for the good of their peoples.

The GCC also succeeded in enhancing its regional and international role, becoming a key partner in achieving international peace and stability, he noted. The council was also able to develop strong relations with regional countries and international economic groups, the minister pointed out. Yahya said the GCC believes in respecting every country's sovereignty, supports joint work, and is committed to the articles of international law and UN principles and goals.

How it all began

The idea of establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council came at the initiative of the late Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the late President of the United Arab

Emirates, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. The preparatory meetings of the foreign ministers of the six Gulf countries culminated in the holding of the Abu Dhabi Summit on May 25, 1981, which was attended by the leaders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, and the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the countries announced an integrated system which has since then brought them together to achieve mutual goals. During the past four decades, the GCC has seen major achievements in various fields — at the economic, political, military and security levels and left its mark in regional and international arenas.

A united front

Perhaps one of the most prominent achievements of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the field of foreign policy is participation in ending the Iran-Iraq war, liberating the State of Kuwait from the brutal Iraqi invasion, supporting the unity, stability and sovereignty of Iraq, supporting the cause of the three occupied UAE islands, achieving Gulf reconciliation and supporting the Palestinian cause.

In the field of joint military action, the first meeting of the chiefs of staff of the armed forces of the



Gulf leaders pose for a picture at the 42nd GCC summit in 2021.

GCC States, held in the Saudi capital Riyadh in 1981, was the beginning of a discussion in areas of military cooperation among the GCC States, where many studies, regulations and strategies were approved through the course of four decades, which included many ways of joint military action.

At the level of security cooperation, the meeting of the GCC Ministers of the Interior in Riyadh in February 1982 marked the beginning of the launch of security coordination and cooperation among the GCC States, which was represented in a comprehensive security strategy and cooperation in the field of counterterrorism, civil defense and drug control.

In the field of economic cooperation, the statute for the establishment of the GCC represents the first reference towards achieving economic integration among the six Gulf states, starting with the unified economic agreement signed in 1981, to the economic agreement of 2001. The states have been holding discussion to unify their currency, establish the Gulf common market and promote economic nationality.

A sustainable partnership

Bahraini Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah Al-Zayani praised the achievements the GCC, which has become an example of sustainable strategic

partnership. Zayani praised the GCC's firm commitment to security, stability, and achieving the aspirations of the peoples of brotherly member states by promoting full economic citizenship, advancing progress and prosperity, and constructive cooperation in laying the foundations of regional, international, and civilizational dialogue.

He stressed the Kingdom's support to achieve the aspirations of the leaders of the GCC countries in promoting joint Gulf action, strengthening the defense and security systems, and following up on the implementation of joint development and economic projects.

The Bahraini foreign minister valued the successes of the GCC as an active and pivotal partner in consolidating security, stability, and peace at the regional and international levels and supporting sustainable development goals through its constructive strategic partnerships and dialogues with many countries and international groups. He praised the pioneering achievements of all its members in organizing Arab, regional, and international summits, conferences, activities, and competitions in various fields and their efforts in the fields of diplomatic mediation, conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping. — KUNA

Envoy: Kuwait key partner for China's global initiatives

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait, Zhang Jianwei, underscored the robust and growing bilateral ties between China and Kuwait, encompassing a wide range of mutual interests and major concerns in humanitarian, political, economic, and cultural domains. During a recent press conference, the Ambassador emphasized the reciprocal support between the two countries on both local and global levels.

He particularly noted a significant meeting between President Xi Jinping and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which took place last September in Hangzhou, China. The meeting underscored China's support for Kuwait's sovereignty and its commitment to non-interference in internal affairs, a principle Zhang referred to as the "golden rule" for developing countries.

In addition, the meeting showed Kuwait's unwavering support to the one-China policy, noting, "China highly values Kuwait's consistent and just position on upholding the one-China principle." This principle, as Zhang has stated, has been embraced by 183 countries worldwide.

Zhang highlighted the shared values between China and Kuwait regarding the future and destiny of humanity. "Both China and Kuwait advocate for global multilateralism, and economic inclusiveness, calling for all countries to work together to respond to global challenges and achieve shared prosperity," Zhang remarked. He referenced President Xi Jinping's vision of constructing a community with a shared future for humankind, which resonates with Kuwait's leadership.

"III the Amir Sheikh Mishal has endorsed China's Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative," Zhang highlighted, positioning Kuwait as a pivotal partner in these global endeavors. China and Kuwait continue to reinforce their political relationship through mutual respect and shared goals, adhering to the



Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei is seen during the press conference.

principles of the United Nations Charter.

Zhang added that both countries advocate for an international order based on international law and multilateralism, emphasizing solidarity, cooperation, equity, and justice in international relations. They are committed to protecting the interests of developing nations. Notably, he mentioned how both nations steadfastly support the just cause of the Palestinian people, seeking a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution based on the "two-state solution."

60 Chinese companies

On the economic front, Zhang stated that China and Kuwait enjoy complementary advantages, achieving mutual benefits and shared gains. Since 2015, China has consistently maintained its position as Kuwait's largest trading partner. In 2023, bilateral trade between China and Kuwait reached a total of \$22.39 billion. Kuwait is also the ninth-largest source of crude oil imports for China, with China importing 24.53 million tons of crude oil from Kuwait.

Chinese oil companies have signed long-term agreements to purchase crude oil from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. Currently, around 60 Chinese companies operate in Kuwait, participating in over 80 engineering contracting projects. These Chinese companies bring strong capabilities, advanced technology, and rich experience in infrastructure construction, with many successful models in the region. He stressed China's encouragement for inviting more capable and reputable Chinese companies to en-

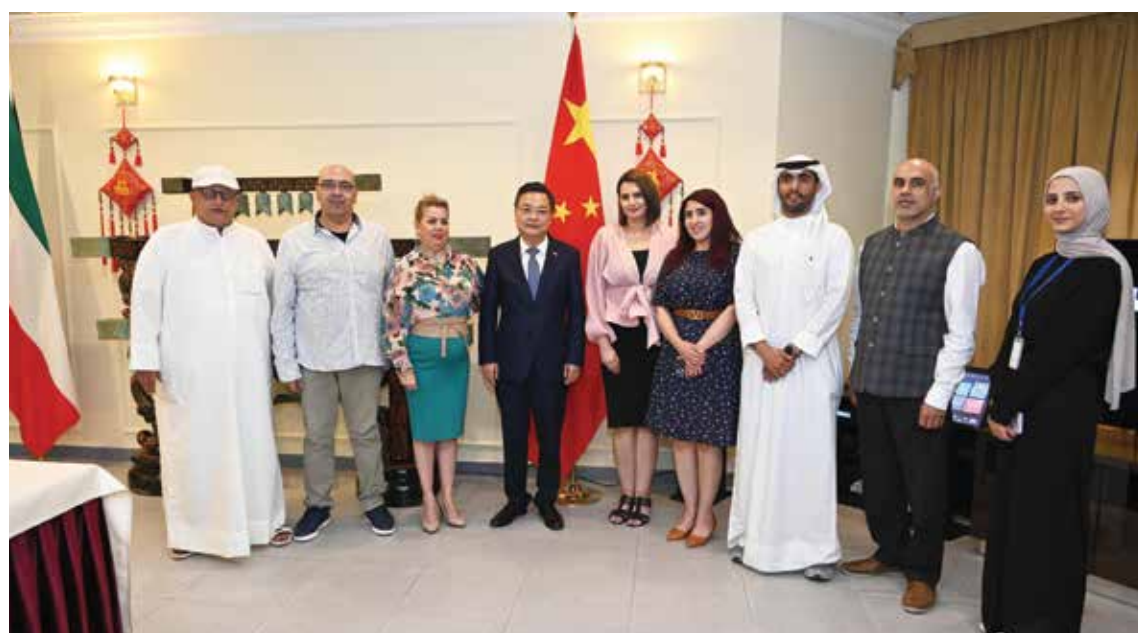
Ambassador Al-Hayen hailed WIPO's role in preserving heritage, as well as in finding a balanced international system for intellectual property, which encourages innovation and creativity.

What genetic resources are

Genetic resources are contained in, for example, medicinal plants, agricultural crops, and animal breeds. While genetic resources themselves cannot be directly protected as intellectual property, inventions developed using them can, most often through a patent. Some genetic resources are also associated with traditional knowledge through their use and conservation by indigenous peoples as well as local communities, often over generations. This knowledge is sometimes used in scientific research and, as such, may contribute to the development of a protected invention.

What the treaty does

Negotiations for this Treaty began at WIPO in 2001, initiated in 1999 with a proposal by Colombia, where discussions were notable for their inclusion of indigenous peoples as well as local communities. It's not only the first WIPO Treaty to tackle issues at



KUWAIT: Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei poses for a photo with local media. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

gage in Kuwait's construction and development.

Culturally, as Zhang pointed out, both nations advocate for dialogue and exchanges between civilizations, protecting the diversity of world civilizations, rejecting discrimination and prejudice against specific civilizations, and opposing the "clash of civilizations" theory. In recent years, cultural exchanges between the two countries have increased. For instance, Zhang referred to a Kuwaiti egg carving artist who showcased his exquisite skills at the Maritime Silk Road Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition in Quanzhou, China.

9,000 visit visas

Last year, cultural troupes from Shandong and Yunnan visited Kuwait, presenting stunning performances such as acrobatics, singing, and dancing. "The Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait, the first of its kind in the Gulf region, has been successfully operating and organizing various cultural activities, including lectures on traditional Chinese medicine and Tai Chi." Zhang remarked, currently, the center offers its first Chinese language class, with over 40 stu-

dents from various Kuwaiti governmental and social sectors, receiving widespread acclaim from different Kuwaiti communities.

Zhang noted a growing interest among Kuwaitis in visiting China, particularly drawn by its appeal as both a business hub and tourist destination. He highlighted that China issued approximately 9,000 visas to Kuwaiti visitors last year, emphasizing the streamlined visa application process, which typically takes just two to three days to complete, accompanied by reasonable fees.

The Chinese ambassador concluded by discussing future collaborations between the two nations, notably mentioning the Chinese President's interest in visiting Kuwait. He highlighted the ongoing efforts to enhance strategic partnerships, including the development of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, which is still in the process of planning, as Zhang stated, "It's a huge and strategic project that will definitely bring better future for Kuwait, so it needs to be very well planned ahead." His remarks underscored a shared enthusiasm for the future relations not only between Kuwait and China but also with other nations.

Kuwait adopts historic intellectual property treaty

GENEVA: Kuwait was among more than 100 members of Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) who concluded an agreement which will provide additional protection for traditional knowledge.

The treaty is expected to protect the intellectual property of people in the global south, who have centuries of traditional wisdom. Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organizations Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen said it is continuously taking part in preserving heritage with the international community. The remarks came as he chaired Kuwait's delegation at the conference meant for adopting the treaty.

The agreement is the first of its kind to address the interface between intellectual property, genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge.



Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Nasser Al-Hayen.

the intersection between intellectual property, genetic resources and traditional knowledge, but also the first WIPO Treaty to include provisions specifically for Indigenous peoples as well as local communities. Once the treaty enters into force with 15 contracting parties, it will establish an international

law on new disclosure requirement for patent applicants, whose inventions based on genetic resources and/or associated traditional knowledge.

Where a claimed invention in a patent application is based on genetic resources, each contracting party shall require applicants to disclose the country of origin or source of the genetic resources. Where the claimed invention in a patent application is based on traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources, each contracting party shall require applicants to disclose the indigenous peoples or local community, as applicable, who provided the traditional knowledge. The current patent legislation does not have a mandatory provision requiring patent applicants to disclose the country of origin or source in case where the invention is based on genetic resources.

At present, only 35 countries have some form of disclosure obligations, most of which are not mandatory and do not have appropriate sanctions or remedies in place for effective implementation. This treaty will require contracting parties, including the developed world, to bring changes in their existing legal framework for enforcing disclosure of origin obligations on patent applicants. — Agencies

Kuwait leadership 'pays attention to women's issues'

KUWAIT: Kuwait's political leadership attaches attention to women, backs their issues, and enhances their role, a Kuwaiti official said. Maryam Al-Azmi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, made the statement during a session held to discuss Kuwait's sixth periodical report on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, currently held at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Kuwait was among the first countries in terms of approving many laws and legislation and paying special attention to protecting women and supporting their role in society, she said, pointing to the establishment of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs. She elaborated that the organizational structure of the council is coordinating with the relevant ministries to get an integrated plan for family development, provide care and basic services, and work to unify the directions of governmental and voluntary social care for the family, in addition to proposing necessary means to activate the cognitive role of families in preserving the environment and supporting adults' education.

The council is keen on implementing laws such as the children's protection law and the protection from domestic violence law, she said, referring to the establishment of centers for protection from domestic violence and child protection. She highlighted taking some steps and adopting several pieces of legislation to ensure the rights of women suffering from domestic violence. Al-Azmi said the council is working to enhance collaboration with the social development office by organizing various courses and benefiting from the office's expertise in providing psychological and social support for domestic violence cases and following up on treatment even after the end of their shelter.

The council is keen on empowering women as it marks International Women's Day and Kuwaiti Women's Day, she indicated, referring to honoring some successful women in various fields on these occasions. The council is seeking to build international and regional partnerships to empower women: this was shown by cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) regarding the project of the Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region (ISPAR) to raise the Kuwait index relating to women. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The full moon rises over Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Envoys and residents celebrate Africa Day



Kuwait Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya joins Africa Day celebration. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya took part in a celebration commemorating Africa Day on Thursday evening under an invitation from heads of African diplomatic missions based in Kuwait. Congratulating the African ambassadors on the occasion, Al-Yahya spoke highly of the deep-rooted historical relations between Kuwait and the African countries. He reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to continue strengthening cooperation with the African nations on the basis of mutual respect and reciproc-

ity, expressing his best wishes for Africa.

The celebration featured traditional, folkloric songs and dances that materialize the genuine culture of Africa and the close relationship between Kuwait and the continent. An art exhibition, held in parallel with the celebration, showcased works of art by contemporary African artists. On May 25, Africa Day commemorates the historic day in 1963, when African nations came together to form the Organization of African Unity, the precursor of the African Union. — KUNA

Kuwait and China discuss commercial cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communication Affairs Omar Al-Omar discussed with the vice chairman of the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) the prospects of promoting commercial cooperation. The meeting took place on Thursday following the minister's participation in the China-GCC Forum on Investment and Industrial Cooperation in Xiamen city, Fujian province, southeast China, according to a statement from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Both sides commended the growing economic relations between Kuwait and China, which gained momentum from the visit to China by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-



Jaber Al-Sabah, in September. During the visit, His Highness the Amir met Chinese President Xi Jinping, and both countries signed a number of MoUs on mega-development projects. Al-Omar told the Chinese official that Kuwait attaches great importance to the implementation of the documents that were endorsed by the competent agencies in both countries, the statement added. — KUNA

Public works begins offering digital services

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works announced Saturday that it launched its first service to be offered through the "Sahel" app. Citizens can now submit an application through the app for the delivery of treated water to agricultural lands they own in both Wafra and Abdali.

Last week, the Ministry of Social Affairs said it was expanding its services through the app to allow citizens to book appointments to meet with the social affairs minister. The ministry spokesman said the



move was in line with the government's open-doors approach. The government is putting great emphasis on addressing citizens' concerns hands-on – Minister of Education Dr Adel Al-Adwani has also started meeting citizens in his office as of last Thursday to listen to their complaints. — KUNA



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Life in water and mud; Colombians fed up with constant flooding

War games simulate strikes to 'cut off Taiwan's blood vessels'

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Hundreds feared dead as massive landslide hits Papua New Guinea

Disaster wipes out swathes of the hillside settlement

PORT MORESBY: Rescue crews arrived at the site of a massive landslide in Papua New Guinea's remote highlands Saturday, helping villagers search for hundreds of people feared dead under towering mounds of rubble and mud. The disaster struck an isolated part of Enga province around 3:00 am Friday, according to government officials, wiping out swathes of the hillside settlement as villagers slept. "At this time, we are still searching for bodies who are buried by the massive landslide," local leader Mark Ipaia said Saturday, adding he feared "more than 300" people were buried under the debris.

Both the United Nations and Red Cross have said the death toll could be substantially higher than 100, although they cautioned it could take days until a reliable estimate emerges. "While verified casualty numbers are still pending, people living in the approximately 60 destroyed homes are unaccounted for," said a UN situation report seen by AFP on Saturday.

So far, at least four bodies have been recovered, a UN official based in the capital Port Moresby told AFP. "There are a lot of houses under the debris that cannot be reached," said UN official Serhan Aktoprak, who estimated more than 3,800 people lived in the village. "The land continues to slide and move, and that makes it dangerous for people to operate," he said. At some points, the landslide - a mix of car-sized boulders, uprooted trees and churned-up earth - was eight meters deep, Aktoprak added.

Aid agencies said the catastrophe had effectively wiped out the village's livestock, food gardens and sources of clean water. A rapid response team of medics, military and police began pouring into the disaster zone Saturday morning after a journey complicated by the rugged terrain and damage to major roads. "While the area is not densely populated, our

concern is that the death toll could be disproportionately high," humanitarian agency CARE said as the first reinforcements arrived.

'A big problem'

Locals suspected the landslide may have been triggered by heavy rains that have saturated the region in recent weeks. Papua New Guinea has one of the wettest climates in the world, according to the World Bank, with the heaviest downpours concentrated in the humid highland regions. Research has found shifting rainfall patterns linked to climate change could exacerbate the risk of landslides in the country. Images showed a scene of total devastation, with a vast bite of earth cleaved from densely vegetated Mount Mungalo.

Barefoot workers used shovels, axes and improvised tools to loosen and shift the earth, while others picked through mangled piles of corrugated iron that once provided shelter. Volunteers hauled a covered body away from the scene on top of a makeshift stretcher. Nickson Pakea, president of the nearby Porgera Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said little progress would be made until the damaged roads were patched up and heavy machinery trucked in. "The destruction is massive," he told AFP. "They need machinery and other equipment to uncover these bodies. We are facing a big problem."

'Completely buried'

Pakea said the village was a busy trading post frequented by the alluvial miners who panned for gold in the region. "It's a centre of the community. People come from near and far to do their alluvial mining, and then they come to this place to trade." Steven Kandai, a community leader at the scene, told AFP



ENGA PROVINCE: People gather at the site of a landslide in Maip Multitaka in Papua New Guinea's Enga Province. — AFP

many residents had no time to flee.

"All of a sudden there was a big landslip. The mountain just collapsed all of a sudden while people were still sleeping," he said, adding their homes were "completely buried". Offers of support have poured in from around the globe. President Joe Biden said he was

"heartbroken by the loss of life and devastation", adding the United States stood "ready to assist" in recovery efforts with partners including Australia and New Zealand. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that "all Australians grieve for our brothers and sisters in Papua New Guinea after the terrible landslide". — AFP

Raw cow's milk infected with bird flu sickens mice

WASHINGTON: Mice fed raw cow's milk infected with bird flu experienced high levels of the virus in their lungs, according to a study published Friday that suggests risk to humans who consume the drink. Over the past few years, a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus called HPAI H5N1 has spread to infect more than 50 animal species, including, from March, dairy cattle in the United States.

To date, 52 herds across the country have been affected, with two human infections involving farm workers who developed mild symptoms, including pink eye. In the new study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Texas A&M fed droplets of raw milk from infected cattle to five mice. The rodents developed signs of illness, including lethargy, and were then euthanized four days later to study their organs.

The researchers found high levels of virus in their nasal passages, trachea and lungs, and moderate-to-low levels of virus in other organs. "An important consideration is that the consumption of raw, unpasteurized milk is becoming increasingly popular," said Rowland Kao, a professor of veterinary epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh, who was not involved in the research. Raw milk laws vary by state in the US, with some permitting its sale in retail stores, others only allowing it to be sold on the farm it was produced, and others still prohibiting it altogether. — AFP

Syria refugees face Lebanon expulsion

BEIRUT: For weeks, refugee Maryam Janhat has been living in fear of deportation as Lebanon cracks down on Syrians, with politicians ramping up calls for them to be forced home. Refugees from Lebanon's war-torn neighbor face a dilemma: should they stay and contend with stricter measures and growing anti-Syrian sentiment, or should they return home and risk poverty and repression? Standing at her husband's vegetable stall by the side of the road outside the village of Minyara in Lebanon's impoverished north, Janhat, 38, said she lives in a state of constant worry.

"I am scared when (my husband and children) come to work at the stall. I am afraid they could take my son at any moment... we are afraid to walk the streets," she said. Syrians make up about half of Minyara's 8,000 residents, the municipality says, with most living in tent camps adjacent to vast agricultural fields. Janhat, who took refuge in the village a decade ago after fleeing violence in the central Syrian province of Homs, feels lucky to be living in a house rather than a flimsy tent.

But she and her family have been unable to renew their residency in Lebanon, and they fear being deported to Syria where she says they have "no house, no work, and no security". A few steps away, 70-year-

old Ibrahim Mansour is offloading crates of fruit and vegetables from his van to sell. Syrians "have stalls everywhere, competing with us in every sector", he said. "When they leave, the situation will improve a lot."

'Open the seas'

Many Lebanese, including politicians, have long pushed for Syrians who have fled 13 years of civil war at home to return, blaming them for exacerbating Lebanon's woes, including a crushing economic crisis that began in late 2019. Lebanon says it currently hosts around two million people from Syria - the world's highest number of refugees per capita - with almost 785,000 registered with the United Nations. In recent months, politicians have ramped up anti-Syrian rhetoric, with Hassan Nasrallah, who heads the powerful Hezbollah group, urging Beirut to open the seas for migrant boats to reach Europe to pressure for more Western aid.

Earlier this month, the European Union announced \$1 billion in aid to Lebanon to help tackle illegal migration, mostly of Syrians to nearby Cyprus, the bloc's easternmost member. Lebanon has long heavily relied on Syrians for manual labor, especially in agriculture and construction. Minyara mayor Antoun Abboud said Syrians were needed in the workforce but that his village cannot accommodate large numbers of refugees or provide them with basic services. "We are not telling them to leave. We just want to reduce... and organize Syrian presence" in Lebanon, he said.

'Can't sleep at night'

Lebanese security forces have intensified a crackdown on Syrians without residency permits, shutting down their businesses and forcing them to evacuate their homes. "Hate campaigns, legal restrictions, and unprecedented measures to make it difficult to obtain residency" are on the rise, said Sahar Mandour, Amnesty International's Lebanon researcher. This means most Syrians find themselves without legal residency, she said, adding that "voluntary returns are impossible in these conditions".

In one of the informal camps near the village, children play in the dirt, while men sit idle, too frightened to leave. "Everyone is scared," said herder Hajem, 37, who declined giving his last name for security concerns. "Syrians cannot move anymore. Even laborers in the fields are skipping work," he said, shearing his sheep near the camp, while women around him collected the wool.

He fled to Lebanon illegally eight years ago, at the height of Syria's war, and cannot return because he says he is wanted by Damascus. He said he has been too scared to venture outside for work since security forces began to clamp down more forcefully on Syrians. "I can't sleep at night because the army or security forces could deport us at any moment," he said. His elderly father is also filled with worry. "If we leave, we will die of hunger. There are no opportunities in our country," he said. "It would be better to throw oneself into the sea." — AFP

'Cyberapostle' to become first millennial saint

VATICAN CITY: A London-born Italian teenager who spent his short life spreading the faith online will become the Catholic Church's first millennial saint, after the Vatican attributed to him a second miracle. Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 aged 15, was beatified four years ago after the Vatican ruled he had miraculously saved another boy's life. He will now become a saint after Pope Francis on Thursday approved another miraculous act, an intercession on behalf of a young woman in Florence who suffered severe head trauma in July 2022.

Carlo's mother Antonia Salzano described the decision as a "great joy", telling Vatican Radio that "many had prayed for this canonization". "I was not an example of sanctity, but for me Carlo was like a teacher, he was special, never a complaint, never a criticism." Carlo was born in London on May 3, 1991, to Italian parents and moved with them to Milan as a young boy, where he grew up with a huge interest in computers. "He was considered a computer genius... But what did he do? He didn't use these media to chat and have fun," Salzano said at the time of his 2020 beatification.

Instead, "his zeal for the Lord" drove him to make a website on miracles, she said. Dubbed "the Cyberapostle", Carlo also warned his contemporaries that the internet could be a curse as well as a blessing. While his mother said the family rarely attended church, Carlo was religious from a young age. — AFP



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Life in water and mud

Colombians fed up with constant flooding

LA MOJANA: The Berrio family moves around their home on raised planks, upon which their beds and furniture have been raised, to avoid the knee-high, murky waters that have invaded their modest brick house. For the fourth year in a row, Colombia's northern La Mojana region has been flooded, drowning crops and animals in a worsening crisis exacerbated by deforestation and mining.

On top of that, a sandbag dike meant to protect the 500,000 residents of the vast plains, surrounding wetlands and swamps, collapsed on May 6, sparking a major corruption scandal around faulty repair efforts after a previous breach. This sent waters from the polluted Cauca River flooding into cattle grazing land and rice fields, impacting some 32,000 people, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Everything drowned," laments Rosiris Berrio, who lives with her partner and two small children in the village of La Sierpe.

The few remaining animals balance on planks or stand with their feet in the water. "They are dying. This water is very infectious," said Berrio. At home, they negotiate the plank system. "We stumble, we scratch ourselves. Yet we have to continue our everyday activities," she said, adding she had received no help from the state. Elsewhere in the village, residents travel by canoe from one house to the other. Luckier households, where the water has receded, have to contend with the mud.

'A very bad situation'

Concerned inhabitants say the flooding has become more frequent, and more severe. "We have been flooded for four consecutive years. Economically, we are in a very bad situation. We used to cul-

tivate this land, we lived happily," said Jose Ruendes, a 59-year-old farmer standing with water up to his waist. He has used sticks to build a makeshift ledge to keep his bicycle, bed, and electrical appliances above water. Official figures show the region flooded over 300 times between 1998 and 2020.

Environment Minister Susana Muhamad, has warned that deforestation is filling rivers with sediment, making them more likely to overflow. Carlos Carrillo, director of the state National Risk and Disaster Management Unit (UNGRD) said mining is another culprit. Illegal mining operations use dredging to search for gold in rivers, which "generates very complex changes in the dynamics of the river," which is increasingly shallow. Carrillo told AFP. These illegal mines have also contaminated the river waters with mercury, authorities say.

President Gustavo Petro maintains that rebuilding the dam is not a long-term solution. He wants residents relocated to lots purchased by the government on higher ground. "But where does one go? It is not easy to start over, to look for work," said Berrio. In a nearby camp of plastic tents, Ana Dolores Valerio is ready to move "elsewhere." She says it is the fifth time in the past two decades that floodwaters have forced her to camp on the side of the road. With 13 children and grandchildren to take care of, she longs for "dry land to be able to work."

'Inhumane'

Local leaders are calling for immediate action to address what the United Nations calls a "grave humanitarian crisis." "Some families only eat one meal a day, it's inhumane," denounces Nestor Ortiz, president of the village of La Sierpe, one of the worst affected. The village's only school is closed and its



LA MOJANA: Aerial view of La Mojana after the Cauca river overflowed its banks following the collapse of the artificial dam 'Caregato' in northern Colombia. — AFP

aqueducts collapsed, sending sewage spilling into homes. Meanwhile, the state disaster agency is under investigation for corruption linked to the construction of the dike, which had just been repaired in February after a previous collapse.

Carrillo, who took on the role of director this year after the complaints forced the departure of his predecessor, admits that reconstruction works, valued

at \$34 million, are not moving as fast as they should. "The contractor does not seem to be giving his all to close the gap" of about 70 meters, he said. Meanwhile, distant thunder warns the residents of La Mojana that the rainy season is just beginning. "We already know what's coming," says Cristo Sanchez, an elderly man whose home stands out on a piece of dry land surrounded by water. — AFP

Families of US school shooting victims sue gunmaker, Instagram

HOUSTON: Several families whose children were killed or wounded in a mass shooting at their Texas school two years ago have sued the gun manufacturer as well as Instagram and video game company Activision for marketing the weapon, their lawyer said Friday. Nineteen young children and two teachers were killed in the city of Uvalde on May 24, 2022 when a teenage gunman went on a rampage with an AR-15 style assault rifle at Robb Elementary School, in America's deadliest school shooting in a decade.

The families accuse the companies of wrongful death and gross negligence, saying gun manufacturer Daniel Defense, as well as Meta-owned Instagram and Microsoft-owned Activision, whose "Call of Duty" video game features the weapon, marketed it to "insecure, adolescent boys," according to a statement from lawyer Josh Koskoff.

Koskoff insisted there was a direct line between the companies' conduct and the Uvalde shooting because the gunman purchased the weapon immediately after turning 18, the legal age in Texas to purchase long guns such as rifles. "Well before he was old enough to purchase it, he was targeted

and cultivated online by Instagram, Activision and Daniel Defense," Koskoff said in his statement.

"This three-headed monster knowingly exposed him to the weapon, conditioned him to see it as a tool to solve his problems and trained him to use it." Activision issued a statement saying the Uvalde shooting was "horrendous and heartbreaking in every way" and expressed sympathies to the families. It added: "Millions of people around the world enjoy video games without turning to horrific acts." Meta and Daniel Defense did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Earlier this week, Uvalde families reached a \$2 million settlement with the Texas city over what the Justice Department called "critical failures" by police in responding to the shooting. Officers eventually shot and killed the gunman but waited more than an hour before storming the classroom where he was holed up. School shootings have become a regular occurrence in a country where about a third of adults own a firearm and regulations on purchasing even powerful military style rifles are lax. — AFP

Restaurant collapse kills 4 on Spanish isle

PALMA: Spanish fire crews picked through the wreckage of a beachfront restaurant on the holiday island of Mallorca on Friday, searching for clues after it partially collapsed, killing four people and injuring 16. Authorities said the tragedy may have been caused by the excess weight of a crowd on the building's terrace, which had recently been renovated. Those killed were two German women, aged 20 and 30, a 44-year-old Senegalese man and a 23-year-old Spanish woman who worked at the venue, a police spokesman said.

The packed two-storey building collapsed late on Thursday afternoon in a busy tourist area of Palma de Mallorca, the capital of the Mediterranean island. The tourist season is already in full swing in the Balearic Islands, which also includes Ibiza and Menorca. Firefighters were deployed in numbers, ambulances rushed victims to hospital and the street was sealed off by police to allow rescue teams to work, an AFP journalist saw. Of the 16 people who were injured, eight remain in hospital, all of them Dutch nationals,

Palma de Mallorca mayor Antonio Jimenez told reporters after observing a minute of silence for the victims. "The seriously injured are out of danger," he added.

'Lot of commotion'

The Senegalese man and the Spanish woman who died were both residents on the island, Jimenez said, adding that it was a "very sad" day for the city. Local media said the Senegalese man and a compatriot had rescued a swimmer from drowning in December 2017, winning him a police medal the following year. The building comprised the Medusa Beach Club - a street-level restaurant with a rooftop terrace - and a basement bar called CocoRico, which were all crowded at the time of the disaster.

The head of the Palma fire service, Eder Garcia, said the restaurant floor had collapsed onto the bar below, which is "where we found the most victims". "The causes are being investigated. The first hypothesis is that it was possibly due to excessive weight," he told reporters at the scene, adding the building has "an old structure".

The Medusa Beach Club had promoted a new rooftop terrace in a message posted on social media on Wednesday a day before the tragedy. Local resident Vicky Garcia said the venue had only recently reopened after being refurbished. "We heard

a roar, then a lot of police, a lot of firemen, a lot of commotion," she told local television IB3. A technical team was at the site on Friday to determine the cause of the collapse.

'A real mess'

Yeray Exposito, a delivery driver whose friend works in the restaurant, said he "started to hear screams, people trying to call for help." "And then the fire brigade, the ambulance and the health service started to come, and it was a real mess," he told AFP. Local authorities have declared three days of mourning. Speaking at a business forum in Barcelona, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez conveyed his condolences to the victims' families. "I would also like to express my best wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured," he added.

Mallorca is known for its pristine waters and beaches, and the Balearic Islands attract more tourists than all other Spanish regions except Catalonia. More than 14 million foreign tourists visited the islands last year, according to official figures. Thursday's collapse took place at the start of the archipelago's peak tourist season, on a beachfront avenue home to several shops and entertainment venues. A 2009 collapse of a three-storey building in Palma de Mallorca killed seven people, including three Colombians and two Germans. — AFP

Zionists hit Rafah, ignore ICJ order...

Continued from Page 1

Yahya, a 34-year-old in Gaza who did not give his full name for security concerns, said: "Perhaps these decisions... that (the Zionist entity) has not complied with, will make the Western world move more strongly (in favor) of our cause." The ICJ ruling came days after Ireland, Spain and Norway said they would formally recognize a Palestinian state - a move the leaders of two other European states, Germany and Portugal, said Friday they were not ready to join. Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said on Saturday that "the precautionary measures set out by the ICJ... are compulsory. (The Zionist entity) must comply with them."

In its ruling, the ICJ ordered the Zionist entity to allow UN-mandated investigators "unimpeded access" to Gaza to look into the genocide allegations. It also instructed the Zionist entity to open the Rafah crossing for the "unhindered provision at scale" of humanitarian aid and also called for the "immediate and unconditional release" of the captives held by Hamas in Gaza. The Zionist offensive has killed at least 35,903 people in Gaza, mostly women and children.

The Zionist army said Friday it had opened an investigation after images and a video were posted on social media of Zionist soldiers in Gaza burning books, including a copy of the Holy Quran. The viral video shows a soldier throwing a Holy Quran into a fire. Both the video and a photo were broadcast on Zionist television.

A journalist from investigative website Bellingcat said the bookshelves that appeared in the photo matched those in a library in Gaza City's Al-Aqsa University. Since the war in Gaza broke out, Zionist soldiers have on multiple occasions been accused of posting content on their social media accounts that degrades Palestinian civilians.

A video that went viral in November showed a Zionist soldier dedicating an explosion in Gaza to his daughter on her birthday. Another video circulating in January showed

a soldier dressing up in a dinosaur costume and loading a tank with shells. In February, the Zionist entity's top military lawyer opened criminal investigations into several incidents of alleged misconduct by soldiers during the war. The incidents "raised suspicion of detainee mistreatment, deaths of detainees, pillaging, and the illegal use of force", the Military Advocate General's Corps said in a statement at the time.

On the diplomatic front, efforts have resumed to seek the first ceasefire in Gaza since a week-long truce and hostage release in November. The Zionist official told AFP that "there is an intention to renew these talks this week, and there is an agreement." The official did not elaborate on the agreement, but Zionist media said Mossad chief David Barnea had agreed with US and Qatari mediators on a new framework for negotiations.

Barnea met with CIA chief Bill Burns and Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani over the weekend in Paris in a bid to relaunch negotiations, the reports said. The Qatari premier on Friday also attended a five-way meeting in Paris with President Emmanuel Macron and the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan over the Gaza war and ways to set up a Palestinian state alongside the Zionist entity, the French presidency said.

The French leader reaffirmed his opposition to the Zionist entity's offensive in Rafah and new settlements in the occupied West Bank. He also called for an "immediate" ceasefire with the release of "all hostages" in Gaza.

The Zionist entity sent tanks and troops into Rafah in early May, defying global opposition. It has since ordered mass evacuations from Rafah, with the UN saying more than 800,000 people have fled the city. Troops took over the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, further slowing sporadic deliveries of aid for Gaza's 2.4 million people. The White House said on Friday that Egypt had agreed to temporarily send UN aid through another crossing near Rafah. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi agreed in a call Friday with his US counterpart Joe Biden to allow UN aid through the crucial Kerem Shalom crossing to conflict-torn Gaza, the White House said. — Agencies

sure we're making the right steps and not just throwing cash out there to see what hits," he said.

In eSports, Savvy also bought tournament organizer ESL Gaming and the platform FaceIt. Riyadh will also host the eSports World Cup in July and August, when 2,500 gamers will battle for \$60 million in prize money. Prince Faisal, who credits video games for giving him insights into real-life history, said the tournament would help put Saudi Arabia on the global gaming map. "A gaming industry is something you can start now and you'll see the results in five to 10 years. And so to start momentum going, to start a conversation, esports is a great entry point," he said.

Saudi Arabia aims to create 250 gaming companies and studios on its soil, 39,000 game-related jobs, be in the top three of professional gamers per capita and to produce a blockbuster "AAA" game by 2030. — AFP

RFK Jr defends liberties, slams...

Continued from Page 1

vaccine mandates and "colluding with the FBI" to coerce Big Tech companies to censor the speech of Americans. In a speech unsurprisingly heavy on references to hard-fought American freedoms, he went after Trump for the "persecution" of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is fighting extradition to the United States over alleged national security breaches.

He said he would drop the case against Assange and pardon US whistleblower Edward Snowden on his first day in office. The environmental lawyer is in third place and averaging just over 10 percent in polls including Trump, Biden and two minor candidates. Kennedy challenged Trump to a debate at the convention, in an open letter published on X that pointed to data from polling firm

Zogby showing him beating Trump and Biden in hypothetical two-way matchups.

The independent is officially on the ballot in seven states so far - including the crucial battleground state of Michigan - and says it has collected enough signatures for access in eight more. Trump, who is due to deliver the keynote speech at the four-day convention on Saturday, has been escalating attacks against Kennedy, underscoring the threat he believes the nephew of John F Kennedy could pose to his campaign.

But Trump focused on Biden in a statement previewing his appearance at the event in a plush downtown Washington hotel, calling his rival "the worst president in the history of the United States by far." "If Libertarians join me and the Republican Party, where we have many libertarian views, the election won't even be close," he said. "We cannot have another four years of death, destruction, and incompetence." Biden was also invited to speak at the convention, but officials say his team didn't respond. — AFP

Modi's struggling rivals vote as India...

Continued from Page 1

But accusations that the BJP has sought to sideline its opponents via the justice system have sparked concerns from UN rights chief Volker Turk and rights groups over the election's fairness. Rahul Gandhi, the most prominent leader of India's opposition Congress party, cast his ballot at a polling station in New Delhi, where temperatures were forecast to reach 43 degrees Celsius.

A son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers, Gandhi paused after voting to take a selfie with his mother Sonia but did not speak to crowds of reporters. The scion of a dynasty that dominated Indian politics for decades, he was convicted of criminal libel last year after a complaint by a member of Modi's party. His two-year prison sentence saw him disqualified from parliament until the verdict was suspended by a higher court.

After voting, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, 55, leader of the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), urged citizens: "Please vote, use your right to vote, and vote against dictatorship." Kejriwal was arrested in March in a long-running graft case and detained for several weeks before the Supreme Court granted him bail earlier this month and he returned to the campaign trail. Investigators "had no proof and yet they jailed him", opposition voter Yogesh Kumar, 42, told AFP. "This is a blunt show of power."

Congress is spearheading an opposition alliance of

more than two dozen parties competing jointly against Modi, including the AAP. Kejriwal's organization grew out of an anti-corruption movement a decade ago - its name means Common Man's party - and has been elected to office in the Delhi region and the state of Punjab, but has struggled to establish itself as a nationwide force.

In February, authorities froze several Congress bank accounts as part of a running dispute over income tax returns filed five years ago, a move Gandhi said had severely impacted the party's ability to contest the election. "We have no money to campaign, we cannot support our candidates," the 53-year-old told reporters in March. Modi's political opponents and international rights campaigners have long sounded the alarm on India's shrinking democratic space. US think-tank Freedom House said this year that the BJP had "increasingly used government institutions to target political opponents".

India is voting in seven phases over six weeks to ease the immense logistical burden of staging an election in the world's most populous country. Turnout is down several percentage points from the last national poll in 2019, with analysts blaming widespread expectations of a Modi victory as well as hotter-than-average temperatures heading into the Indian summer. Modi's championing of India's majority Hindu faith is at the heart of his popular appeal, but Muslim AAP supporter Ghosya Tahir said she and others were experiencing increasing discrimination under the BJP's rule. "We want peace and harmony," the 34-year-old told AFP. "Even the people who were good to us have started to avoid us because they think we are not good people." — AFP

Saudi spending big for a place...

Continued from Page 1

as in Activision Blizzard and Electronic Arts. Savvy, a PIF subsidiary, in 2022 bought a \$1.1-billion stake in Sweden's Embracer in 2022 and bought Scopely, the US mobile games company behind "Monopoly Go!", for \$4.9 billion last year.

"There's a lot we want to do to get it done and to reach our targets at 2030," said Prince Faisal, who is also Savvy vice-chairman. "But we also want to make sure that we are taking the time to study things, to look at things. And make

International

War games simulate strikes to 'cut off Taiwan's blood vessels'

China denounces 'confession of independence'

BEIJING: China has ended two days of military drills around Taiwan that saw jets loaded with live munitions and warships practice seizing and isolating the self-ruled island. The exercises simulated strikes targeting Taiwan's leaders as well as its ports and airports to "cut off the island's 'blood vessels'", Chinese military analysts told state media. Beijing considers the democratic island part of its territory and has not ruled out using force to bring it under its control. The war games kicked off Thursday morning, as aircraft and naval vessels surrounded Taiwan to conduct mock attacks against "important targets", state broadcaster CCTV said.

Codenamed "Joint Sword-2024A", the exercises were launched three days after Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te took office and made an inauguration speech that China denounced as a "confession of independence". Beijing's defense ministry spokesman Wu Qian said Friday that Lai was pushing Taiwan "into a perilous situation of war and danger". "Every time 'Taiwan independence' provokes us, we will push our countermeasures one step further, until the complete reunification of the motherland is achieved," he said.

Taiwan has been self-governed since 1949, when nationalists fled to the island following their defeat by the Chinese Communist Party in a civil war on the mainland. The drills are part of an escalating campaign of intimidation by China that has seen it carry out a series of large-scale military exercises around Taiwan in recent years. Beijing has also amped up its rhetoric, with its foreign ministry on Thursday using language more typical of China's propaganda outlets.

"Taiwan independence forces will be left with their heads broken and blood flowing after colliding against the great... trend of China achieving complete unification," spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters. On Saturday, Taiwan's presidency said the public could be assured it had "a full grasp of the situation and appropriate responses to ensure national security". "China's recent unilateral provocation not

only undermines the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait but it is also a blatant provocation to the international order," Presidential Office spokesperson Karen Kuo said.

'Closer than ever'

A total of 111 Chinese aircraft and dozens of naval vessels took part in the drills over two days, according to Taiwan's defense ministry. On Friday evening, China's army published images of the drills' "highlights", featuring missile-launching trucks ready to fire, fighter jets taking off and naval officers looking through binoculars at Taiwanese ships. Meng Xiangqing, a professor from Beijing-based National Defense University, told state news agency Xinhua that People's Liberation Army vessels "were getting closer to the island than ever before".

Beijing launched similar exercises in August and April last year after Taiwanese leaders visited the United States. China also launched major military exercises in 2022 after Nancy Pelosi, then the speaker of the US House of Representatives, visited Taiwan. The scale of the most recent drills was "significant, but is nowhere near as big, it seems, as last August's", Wen-Ti Sung, a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, told AFP.

Sung and other analysts told AFP that the geographic scope of the exercises had increased, with a new focus on isolating Taiwan's outlying islands. The drills took place in the Taiwan Strait and to the north, south and east of the island, as well as areas around the Taipei-administered islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu and Dongyin. Tong Zhen, an expert from the Academy of Military Sciences, told Xinhua the drills "mainly targeted the ringleaders and political centre of 'Taiwan independence', and involved simulated precision strikes on key political and military targets".

Calls for restraint

The dispute has long made the Taiwan Strait



This handout photograph taken and released by Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army shows a Chinese fighter jet taking off during the 'Joint Sword-2024A' military drill at an unknown location. — AFP

one of the world's most dangerous flashpoints. The United Nations called for all sides to avoid escalation. The United States, Taiwan's strongest partner and military backer, on Thursday "strongly" urged China to act with restraint. The Pentagon announced on Friday that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin would meet his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun at the end of the month at the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual gathering of defense officials from around the world. "Beijing is trying to use this very high-profile show of force to not only show displeasure against Taiwan, but also... to deter and dissuade other countries and partners from con-

templating further cooperation or engagement of Taiwan," said the Atlantic Council's Sung.

"That furthers isolation of Taiwan, which allows Beijing to negotiate with Taiwan going forward from a position of strength." Chinese military analyst Meng noted that the drills to the east - considered by the PLA the most likely direction from which external intervention could come - was designed to reinforce that message. "Taiwan independence" separatists have long considered the island's eastern direction to be their backyard and 'shelter', but the drills have shown that we can control that eastern area," Meng told Xinhua. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mexico heat waves kill 48

MEXICO CITY: Mexico has registered 48 deaths in a series of heat waves since March, the government said Friday, as scientists warned that new temperature records could be coming. More than 950 people have suffered various health effects over the same period, according to the health ministry. Last year, Mexico reported a record 419 heat-related deaths in the hot season, which runs from March to October, in a country of 129 million people. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador described this year's heat as "exceptional." "It's a very regrettable natural phenomenon related to climate change," he said at his regular morning news conference. High temperatures and a lack of wind were exacerbating the pollution problem in Mexico City in particular, Lopez Obrador added. The capital, which sits at 2,240 meters above sea level, has traditionally enjoyed a temperate climate and few homes have air conditioning. — AFP

Deposed ruler returns

KANO: An influential Nigerian traditional ruler returned to the throne amid celebrations from his supporters on Friday, four years after he was ousted from his palace in a bitter political dispute. Muhammad Sanusi II's reappointment as the Emir of Kano follows a long-running battle that illustrated the difficult balancing act facing traditional monarchies in modern-day Nigeria. Sanusi, a former central bank chief who ascended the throne in 2014, was an advocate for social change and criticized political and religious leaders in the mainly-Muslim north's largest city. But the emir was deposed in 2020 after being accused of disrespecting local authorities including former state governor Abdullahi Ganduje, whose re-election he opposed. — AFP

Mali junta comes under fire

BAMAKO: The political movement behind Mali's civilian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga on Friday openly criticized the West African nation's military rulers for the first time. The M5-RFP movement came out strongly against the colonels who seized power in 2020, further extending their rule after they failed to meet a March deadline to hold elections and hand over power to a civilian government. The M5 statement also opposed proposals to promote the colonels to the rank of generals and to launch talks with armed jihadists. The proposals emerged from recent national consultations organized by the junta which intends to carry them out. — AFP

Chile arrests suspects

SANTIAGO: A firefighter and a forestry official have been arrested in Chile on suspicion of starting a blaze that killed 137 people in the resort city of Vina del Mar in February, authorities said. "An arrest warrant was issued today against the person who started the fires in February in the Valparaiso region," where Vina del Mar is located, police director Eduardo Cerna told a news conference. A little later, the Valparaiso regional prosecutor's office confirmed the arrest of a second suspect, an official of the National Forestry Corporation (Cona), the body responsible for fighting forest fires and managing national parks. Both men will be remanded in custody on Saturday on charges of arson resulting in deaths. — AFP

Google tweaking AI Overview after search result gaffes

SAN FRANCISCO: Google said it is taking "swift action" to improve AI summaries of search results, after users mocked blunders like Barack Obama being the first Muslim US president. Google users took to social media to lampoon erroneous "AI Overview" responses to queries such as whether people should eat stones or stare into the sun, or how many Muslim US presidents there have been. "Many of the examples we've seen have been uncommon queries, and we've also seen examples that were doctored or that

we couldn't reproduce," a Google spokesperson said in response to an AFP inquiry.

"We're taking swift action where appropriate under our content policies and using these examples to develop broader improvements to our systems, some of which have already started to roll out." The Obama example pointed out to Google violated its policies and was taken down, according to the spokesperson. An Overview response that adding non-toxic glue to pizza sauce was a way to stop cheese from sliding off was evidently traced to a child's Reddit post, prompting some on social media to question whether AI was gullible enough to believe everything it reads online.

The vast majority of AI Overviews provide reliable information and guardrails built into the technology are designed to prevent harmful content from appearing, according to the Silicon Valley Internet

litian. Google recently rolled out AI-generated answers to searches in the United States, in one of the biggest changes to its world leading search engine in 25 years. Google's search results began featuring an AI summary at the top of the page before the more typical unfurling of links.

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

Border spat with Niger strands Benin travelers

COTONOU: At a bus station in Benin's economic capital Cotonou, passengers headed for neighboring Niger were dismayed on Friday to find their travel plans thwarted. "We aren't travelling to Niger any more," an employee of the Nigerien Rimbo bus company says, indicating people should not bother waiting around. Disappointed passengers who wanted to take a bus to northern Benin and then cross the river into Niger have no choice but to take their luggage and leave the bus station. Authorities in Benin imposed a ban this week on crossings of the Niger River that marks the border with Niger.

It follows growing tensions over the movement of goods between the two countries since the military seized power in Niamey in a July coup. Many from Niger or elsewhere had become used to taking a boat from the northeastern Beninese town of Malanville to Niger. But crossing the river is now banned from the Benin side for goods as well as people. Issa Hamadou, 68, who was travelling to Niger with his wife and baby, was left close to tears. "I was leaving to take care of myself and to relax, but they tell me trips are no longer happening," he said.

The only authorized crossing point is the Malanville bridge - but that's closed on the Niger side. Niger's new military leaders were targeted by sanctions - including border closures - by the West African bloc ECOWAS after the ousting of its democratically elected president. The sanctions were lifted in February and the border was reopened on the Benin side. However, landlocked-Niger has still not reopened its border with its neighbor, despite Benin's calls for it to do so.

Having turned a blind eye until now to the comings and goings across the river, Benin has now hardened its stance. The closure of the river traffic is the latest in a series of decisions impacting trade between the two countries. Benin's President Patrice Talon blamed informal border trafficking for the increase in the cost of living in Benin, which last month triggered a protest



COTONOU: Boats loaded with passengers and goods moor on a shore near the Dantokpa market, one of the largest open-air markets in West Africa, in Cotonou. — AFP

over high costs. Benin said earlier this month it would allow exports of Nigerian oil through its port of Seme, in a resolution of one of their points of dispute.

'Let them agree'

At the Rimbo bus station in Cotonou's Gbeganey neighborhood, staff would normally be busily directing passengers onto vehicles. Instead, they sit chatting, while a bus stands unoccupied, its doors shut. At another bus station in the Zongo district where STM runs services, Nigeriens have gathered to discuss the latest development. "It's very painful to experience what the governments of Benin and Niger are doing to us," one said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Let them agree to stop our suffering." Beautician Sabirath Ella

wanted to get to Niger and has already travelled from Ivory Coast but, she said, she was told "any travel to Niamey is suspended until further notice".

Eric Samba, who works for STM, indicates the situation is out of their hands. "We no longer travel there. We're waiting for the decision of the government," he said. The ban on crossing the river at Malanville quietly came into effect early on Wednesday without any official announcement. Security arrangements were stepped up at the site on Thursday, witnesses said. Residents spoke of a permanent police presence from the town's outskirts to the river, with checks on vehicles transporting goods or passengers. "We are vigilant against any means of circumvention" of the ban, a police source said. — AFP

Pandemic talks end without agreement

GENEVA: Negotiations on a landmark global agreement on handling future pandemics has ended without a deal - though countries said they wanted to keep pushing for an accord. Scared by the devastation caused by COVID-19 - which killed millions of people, shredded economies and crippled health systems - countries have spent two years trying to hammer out binding commitments on pandemic prevention,

preparedness and response.

The talks gathered momentum in the final weeks, but failed to meet a final deadline before next week's World Health Assembly - the annual gathering of the World Health Organization's 194 member states. "This is not a failure," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted as the talks ended at the UN health agency's headquarters in Geneva. He urged countries to see it as a "good opportunity to re-energize". "The world still needs a pandemic treaty and the world needs to be prepared," he commented.

The assembly, which runs from Monday until June 1, will take stock and decide what to do next. The talks co-chairs Roland Driece and Precious Matsoso told AFP that countries clearly wanted to reach a final agreement. "It's not the

end," stressed Matsoso, noting that the same ministers who decided they wanted a pandemic agreement would be the ones deciding on the next steps.

"They are the ones who are going to say, 'OK, you haven't finished this. Please go back, finalize it,'" she said. Driece said the draft they would send to the assembly was "not an agreed document, but it is a document - and we started with a blank sheet of paper. With nothing." "I would think it would be very stupid if they would not finish this," he said. After arm-twisting, horse-trading and 3:00 am finishes as the talks ramped up, Matsoso said 17 pages out of 32 had been fully agreed by countries.

"It's clearly a pause. Most member states want to carry on and lock in the gains," an Asian diplomat in the talks

told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We're not yet there with the text we have on the table. The big question is, what will it take for the north and the south to get to convergence? It needs time."

The main disputes revolved around access to pathogens detected within countries, and to pandemic-fighting products such as vaccines derived from that knowledge. Other tricky topics were sustainable financing, pathogen surveillance, supply chains, and the equitable distribution of tests, treatments and jabs but also the means to produce them. "The best thing is to have a good, inclusive text. Whether that is now or later doesn't matter," one African negotiator told AFP. "We want to continue the process. We really want this text." — AFP

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2024

Gulf Bank launches prepaid cashback card in partnership with LuLu and Mastercard

The first-of-its-kind card offers cashback rewards of up to 5%

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to rewarding customers and improving their shopping experience, Gulf Bank has officially launched a prepaid cashback card in partnership with LuLu Hypermarket and Mastercard. With no annual fee for the first year, this card offers customers special discounts and cashback of up to 5 percent at all LuLu Hypermarket branches in Kuwait.

On this particular occasion, Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, expressed his excitement about the distinctive strategic partnership with LuLu Hypermarket. He noted that the launch of the first-of-its-kind prepaid cashback card in Kuwait, tailored specifically for LuLu Hypermarket customers, offering them exclusive discounts & offers throughout the year.

Apart from earning a cashback of up to 5 percent on all LuLu Hypermarket purchases, Al-Qattan highlighted that customers will also receive a 1 percent cashback on all their other local and international spends. Cardholders can enjoy a generous annual cashback of up to KD 600, making their shopping experience more rewarding.

Al-Qattan also mentioned, "Customers have the convenience of using the card to make purchases at 2 million ATMs and over 33 million stores worldwide. Furthermore, the card issuance is free for customers during the first year."

He further stated, "At Gulf Bank, we continuously assess markets and interact with customers to understand their needs. Our primary objective is to deliver exceptional services to our customers, ensuring they enjoy a unique shopping experience at various LuLu Hypermarket branches in Kuwait."

Al-Qattan highlighted Gulf Bank's strategy to strengthen its significant position in Kuwait as the bank that shapes the future. This is achieved by offering services distinguished by simplicity and innovation, with the ultimate goal of simplifying customers'



Mohammad Al-Qattan:

• We are excited to partner with LuLu Hypermarket and Mastercard to provide customers with an enhanced shopping experience.

lives and promoting sustainable growth.

While expressing the happiness with LuLu's long and strong association with Gulf Bank, Mohamed Harris – Director for LuLu Group Kuwait Operation said that he is excited about launching this unique and rewarding card in collaboration with the leading bank in the region to provide Kuwait's first ever co-branded shopping prepaid card in the retailing business sector.

"As a retailer, we continuously strive to add more value to our loyal customer's base. We believed that with Gulf Bank's support, we could offer a new and remarkable experience for our customers which will certainly makes this card as the most popular and valuable card in the country for shopping for daily needs," he said.



A group photo of Gulf Bank officials with representatives of LuLu Hypermarket and MasterCard.

Moreover, Erdem Cakar, the Country Manager for Kuwait and Qatar at Mastercard, said, "Our partnership with Gulf Bank and LuLu Hypermarket builds on our shared dedication to keeping customers at the heart of everything we do. We are delighted to launch the value-added Mastercard prepaid cashback card, which connects cardholders to a wide variety of lifestyle benefits, exciting deals and priceless experiences," he said.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of their

roles in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank gives its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to driving significant environmental, social and governance developments through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



STRESA, Italy: Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors pose for the family picture at the G7 Finance Ministers meeting in Stresa, on May 24, 2024. — AFP

G7 ministers cite 'progress'; no deal on Russian assets

STRESA, Italy: G7 finance ministers cited "progress" on Saturday in finding ways to use profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine, envisioning a concrete proposal to present to a leaders' summit next month. A search for creative yet legally sound solutions was top of the agenda at the two-day Group of Seven meeting in Stresa, northern Italy that wrapped up on Saturday, as Kyiv continues its urgent appeals for more funds from Western allies in its third year of war with Russia.

"We are making progress in our discussions on potential avenues to bring forward the extraordinary profits stemming from immobilized Russian sovereign assets to the benefit of Ukraine, consistent with international law and our respective legal systems," the ministers said in a draft final statement seen by AFP. They hope to present a proposal that is "defined in all its dimensions" to G7 leaders

ahead of a summit in Puglia, southern Italy, on June 13-15. Italian Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti told a final press conference on Saturday.

"Progress has been made," Giorgetti said, adding that there was a "strong political positioning by all the G7 countries" over the idea. An agreed proposal "is clearly not yet finalized because it has significant technical and legal issues", Giorgetti cautioned.

"We do not deny the difficulties but there is a firm determination to arrive at a solution," he added.

G7 finance ministers reiterated in the draft that Russian assets frozen by the Group of Seven nations "will remain immobilized until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine". But they went further, saying they were "committed to further financial and economic sanctions... including continuing to target Russia's energy revenue and future extractive capabilities". "(The G7 is) ready to impose sanctions on individuals and entities that help Russia acquire advanced materials, technology, and equipment for its military industrial base," added the draft statement.

The summit wrapped up a day after the United States announced a new \$275-million package of aid for Kyiv, part of a \$61-billion military aid deal

passed by Congress last month after months of delays. Kicking off the finance summit, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had urged her counterparts to embrace "ambitious options" in considering how to use the frozen Russian assets.

A debated US proposal would tap the interest generated by the 300 billion euros (\$325 billion) of Russian central bank assets frozen by the G7 and EU, creating a \$50-billion loan facility backed by future interest on the assets. Giorgetti - whose country Italy holds this year's G7 presidency - called the US proposal a "flexible and pragmatic" plan that answered the legal and regulatory concerns shared within the EU.

Last week, the European Union agreed to a more modest plan, using interest from Russian assets frozen by the bloc in what it estimates could generate up to three billion euros a year.

The G7 ministers also expressed concern in the draft statement over China's trade policies and industrial overcapacity, warning the bloc could take measures to counter them. The United States has led growing concerns that a surge of low-cost Chinese exports fuelled by Chinese government support in key sectors like solar and electric vehicles pose a risk to global markets. — AFP

WB: Palestinian Authority risks fiscal collapse

WASHINGTON: The Palestinian Authority is facing the possibility of financial collapse, the World Bank said in a report as revenue streams run dry and economic activity drops precipitously against the backdrop of the Gaza war. "The fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority has dramatically worsened in the last three months, significantly raising the risk of a fiscal collapse," the World Bank said in a statement. "Revenue streams have largely dried up due to the drastic reduction in clearance revenue transfers payable to the Palestinian Authority and a massive drop in economic activity."

In the coming months, the authority's deficit is expected to reach \$1.2 billion, doubling the funding gap of \$682 million at the end of 2023. The Palestinian economy was projected to contract between 6.5 and 9.6 percent, although the Bank noted that the outlook remains "highly uncertain."

"Increased foreign assistance and the accumulation of further arrears to public employees and suppliers are the only available financing options for the Palestinian Authority," the World Bank said. Zionist entity's offensive has killed at least 35,800 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. At the same time, violence has also surged in the West Bank, which Zionist entity has occupied since 1967.

Close to half a million jobs in the Palestinian economy have been lost since October 2023, according to the World Bank. That includes an estimated loss of 200,000 jobs in the Gaza Strip and nearly 150,000 jobs in Zionist entity held by people living in the West Bank. Poverty has increased and "at present, nearly every Gazan lives in poverty," the World Bank said. — AFP

Soaring towers shape Hong Kong's urban landscape

HONG KONG: Home to some of the world's densest living districts and tallest skyscrapers, Hong Kong has for decades mesmerized locals and visitors alike with its famed skyline. The Chinese finance hub has more than 550 buildings that are at least 150 meters (492 feet) tall and is the "number one tallest city" in the world, according to the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat skyscraper database.

Hong Kong saw a construction boom in the latter half of the 20th century as its population skyrocketed, and development kept pace after the former British colony was handed over to China in 1997.

The city's two tallest buildings, the International Commerce Centre (484 meters) and the two International Financial Centre (412 meters), stand gleaming on opposing sides of the Victoria Harbour and cast shadows on the rushing traffic below. Meanwhile, many of the city's 7.5 million residents live in cramped flats, with households having a median per capita floor area of around 16 square metres in 2021.

A cluster of residential blocks nicknamed "Monster Building" in Quarry Bay was catapulted to international fame after it was featured in the 2014 blockbuster "Transformers: Age of Extinction".

Older public housing complexes, such as Ping Shek Estate and Lai Tak Tsuen, have well-like central courtyards whose dramatic visual signature has made them popular with photographers.

Constrained by natural geography and a restrictive land policy, Hong Kong's urban development in decades to come has nowhere to go but up, scholars say. — AFP



HONG KONG: This picture taken on May 15, 2024 shows apartment buildings in Hong Kong. — AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: The new president of Petrobras, Magda Chambriard (left), receiving her company badge from Petrobras Corporate Affairs Director, Clarice Coppetti, in Rio de Janeiro on May 24, 2024.—AFP

Ex-regulator confirmed as new Petrobras chief

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: Brazil's state-run oil company, Petrobras, confirmed former regulator Magda Chambriard as its new chief executive Friday, 10 days after left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva sacked her predecessor.

Lula has been pushing for Petrobras to invest more, saying it will boost Latin America's biggest economy—a spending spree resisted by investors. Petrobras said its board had named Chambriard as a member and elected her chief executive, effective immediately. She is the second woman to hold the post, after Graca Foster, from 2012 to 2015.

The 66-year-old chemical and civil engineer started her career at Petrobras in 1980, then led Brazil's oil and natural gas agency, ANP, from 2012 to 2016. She replaces Jean Paul Prates, whose sacking was announced on May 14, after less than 18 months on the job, triggering turbulence at Petrobras, the key player in the world's seventh-biggest oil-producing country.

Prates's ouster followed a spat between Petrobras and shareholders over dividend payments, which heightened concerns about the government's influence in the publicly traded company's decision-making. Prates, a former state senator, faced fierce criticism after Petrobras announced it would not pay an extraordinary dividend to investors following its second-highest net profit ever last year, \$24.8 billion.

The March announcement caused the company's share price to plummet. Lula accused Petrobras executives of putting the company's shareholders ahead of the Brazilian people. The Petrobras board eventually approved the dividend payment in late April. Just over half of Petrobras's capital is held by the Brazilian state, and the rest by shareholders.

Chambriard's confirmation was widely expected. Lula's office had said the same day Prates was sacked that the government would nominate her to replace him as CEO. Petrobras shares were up after the news was announced, trading just under one percent higher on the Sao Paulo stock exchange. Petrobras, Brazil's biggest company, has been through turbulent times recently. Chambriard is its sixth CEO in under three years.

The oil giant was devastated by a massive corruption scandal in the 2010s under Lula's Workers' Party, when investigators uncovered a massive pay-to-play scheme in which a laundry list of politicians received bribes for ensuring construction companies' access to juicy Petrobras contracts.

More recently, the company's pricing policies incensed far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), under whom Petrobras went through four CEOs in rapid succession. Chambriard, who previously spent more than two decades at Petrobras, will face the challenge of steadying the company after weeks of instability triggered by rumors Prates was on his way out.

She will also face competing pressures to chart a course for the energy transition even as Lula looks to invest big in traditional oil and gas projects. Experts interviewed by AFP said Chambriard's priorities will likely include exploring for oil near the mouth of the Amazon river, which studies suggest could hold massive crude deposits.

The proposal has divided the Lula administration and infuriated environmentalists, who warn of potentially devastating impacts on the ecologically sensitive region. Chambriard "will have to guarantee Petrobras's production horizon beyond the next 10 years, until 2040 at least," said economist Luis Eduardo Duque Dutra of Rio de Janeiro Federal University. He told AFP the company's deep-water production curve is currently set to decline from 2034.

"We're talking about an expansion frontier with highly impressive potential," analyst Mauro Rochlin of the Getulio Vargas Foundation said of the Amazon estuary. Experts say the new deposits could double Brazil's oil production, currently around three million barrels a day.

Oil drilling is a sensitive subject for Lula, who has cast himself as a leader in the fight against climate change but says Brazil still needs fossil fuels to develop its economy. — AFP

تعلن شركة إمبرس انترناشيونال للاتصالات ش.م.ك. (مفقلة) عن وظائف شاغرة لديها بحسب الشروط الواجب توافرها في المتقدمين:

مدير فني أول – تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات
ICT - Senior Technical Manager

مهام الوظيفة:

1. القدرة على تحليل البنية التحتية لمشاريع تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات وتقييمها وإدارة العمل من خلال فريق.
2. المسؤولية التامة عن مركز البيانات (الدمج، النقل، الترحيل، التخزين، الخوادم، الشبكات، إدارة قواعد البيانات، الدعم الفني).
3. تخطيط وتنظيم وتوجيه إدارة المشاريع لضمان تحديد أولويات المشاريع التي تستجيب بشكل أفضل لطموحات الشركة واستراتيجيتها.

شروط عامة:

1. الحصول على بكالوريوس في أحد فروع هندسة الاتصالات وتكنولوجيا المعلومات.
2. خبرة في مجال الحوسبة السحابية مع إرفاق الشهادات الدالة على ذلك.
3. خبرة لا تقل عن 10 سنوات بنفس المهام في مشاريع ترحيل البنية التحتية من الخوادم إلى الحوسبة السحابية.
4. إجادة اللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
5. أن يكون المتقدم كويتي الجنسية.

محاسب Accountant

مهام الوظيفة:

1. إعداد البيانات المالية والحسابية والتحليلات والتقارير اللازمة.
2. المشاركة في إعداد اللوائح والإجراءات الخاصة بالقسم المالي والإداري.
3. إعداد التسويات اللازمة والتوصية بحل الفروقات من خلال عمل تحليل البيانات المالية.

شروط عامة:

1. أن يكون حاصلاً على شهادة البكالوريوس في إدارة الأعمال أو التمويل أو التجارة.
2. إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية، وإجادة تطبيقات الحاسب الآلي.
3. الحصول على شهادة مهنية في مجال المحاسبة.

على الراغبين في التقدم لهذه الوظيفة ممن تنطبق عليهم الشروط المذكورة ارسال السيرة الذاتية على البريد الالكتروني الخاص بالشركة

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وذلك في موعد أقصاه ١٥ يوماً من تاريخ الإعلان.

Impulse International for
Telecommunications K.S.C. (Closed)

Announces Vacancy for
"Director – Investments"

مهام الوظيفة:

1. Proactively explore opportunities for the company's future and existing investments through attending conferences and events to meet industry personal and enhance the deal pipeline as well as maintaining existing relationships.
2. Periodic meetings with portfolio companies to review and monitor overall company performance and present periodic reports.
3. Leading the investment department team and assessing the performance of the individuals in order to enhance the efficiency and team effectiveness.
4. Supervise the preparation of the fact sheet, concept paper, investment memorandum and recommended action.
5. Risk assessment and control Plan investment focus, objectives and action plans.
6. Coordinate with all related parties (target company, finance, legal, etc) to ensure deal execution.

شروط عامة:

1. Solid understanding of deal structuring and VC/PE term sheets and due diligence process.
2. Demonstrate strong competencies in understanding of ICT sector, space, and updated with market trend and regional transactions.
3. Excellent analytical, numerical, and problem-solving skills are necessary.
4. A previous position in a board of directors for companies with similar business stream (previous experience as a Financial Advisor is desired).
5. Hold a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, IT, Telecommunication Engineering or a similar discipline, with relevant experience.
6. Has an experience of 15 years' experience in Investment Management experience in related industry (ICT).
7. Fluent in Arabic and English.
8. Preference for Kuwaiti national candidate.

Those wishing to apply for this position who meet the mentioned conditions should send their CVs to the company's

recruitment@impulse.com.kw

, no later than 15 days from the date of this announcement.

شركة إمبرس انترناشيونال للاتصالات ش.م.ك. (مفقلة)

تعلن عن حاجتها لشغل وظيفة «المدير التنفيذي – إدارة الاستثمار»

مهام الوظيفة:

1. استكشاف الفرص المتاحة لمستقبل الشركة واستثماراتها الحالية بشكل استباقي من خلال حضور المؤتمرات والفعاليات لمقابلة شخصيات الصناعة وتعزيز مسار الصفقات بالإضافة إلى الحفاظ على العلاقات الحالية.
2. عقد اجتماعات دورية مع شركات المحفظة الاستثمارية لمراجعة ومراقبة الأداء العام للشركة وتقديم التقارير الدورية.
3. قيادة فريق إدارة الاستثمار وتقييم أداء الأفراد من أجل تعزيز كفاءة وفعالية الفريق.
4. الإشراف على إعداد صحيفة الحقائق وورقة المفاهيم ومذكرة الاستثمار والإجراءات الموصى بها.
5. تقييم ومراقبة المخاطر، خطة مركزة للاستثمارات والأهداف والعمل.
6. التنسيق مع جميع الأطراف ذات الصلة (الشركة المستهدفة، المالية، القانونية، إلخ) لضمان تنفيذ الصفقة.

شروط عامة:

1. الفهم الراسخ لهيكل الصفقات ومذكرات الشروط لعمليات رأس المال الاستثماري وحقوق الملكية الخاصة والإجراءات المتبعة لاستيفاء المتطلبات.
2. الإلمام والمعرفة بقطاع تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات ومستحدثات التحول الرقمي على المستوى المحلي والإقليمي.
3. من الضروري وجود مهارات تحليلية وعديدة وحل المشاكل بشكل ممتاز.
4. منصب سابق في مجلس إدارة الشركات ذات تيار الأعمال المماثل (يفضل وجود خبرة سابقة كمستشار مالي).
5. أن يكون حاصلاً على درجة البكالوريوس في إدارة الأعمال أو تكنولوجيا المعلومات أو هندسة الاتصالات أو تخصص مماثل مع الخبرة ذات الصلة.
6. يتمتع بخبرة ١٥ عامًا في مجال إدارة الاستثمار في الصناعة ذات الصلة (تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات).
7. إجادة اللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
8. أولوية التعيين للمتقدم الكويتي.

على الراغبين في التقدم لهذه الوظيفة ممن تنطبق عليهم الشروط المذكورة ارسال السيرة الذاتية على البريد الالكتروني الخاص بالشركة

recruitment@impulse.com.kw

وذلك في موعد أقصاه ١٥ يوماً من تاريخ الإعلان.

Impulse International for
Telecommunications K.S.C. (Closed)

Announces Vacancy for
"Investment Manager/ Senior Investment Manager"

مهام الوظيفة:

1. Sources attractive investment opportunities that fit the company mandate through networking, attending investments/technology related events.
2. Performs high level assessment for financial model and the business plan.
3. Provides concept paper recommendation to the Investment Review Committee for final decision.
4. Conducts the operational due diligence such as analysis for the executive team, market opportunities and company's solutions.
5. Follows up on the performance of the new investment to make sure it is performing as per standards.

شروط عامة:

1. Solid understanding of deal structuring and VC/PE term sheets and due diligence process.
2. Demonstrate strong competencies in understanding of ICT sector, space, and updated with market trend and regional transactions.
3. Ability to evaluate both direct opportunities and fund investments.
4. Held a previous position in a board of directors for companies with similar business stream.
5. Hold a master's degree in Business Administration, Finance or a discipline of Communication Engineering and Information Technology.
6. Has an experience of 10-5 years in a similar role with a top tier investment field.
7. Fluent in Arabic and English.
8. Preference for Kuwaiti national candidate.

Those wishing to apply for this position who meet the mentioned conditions should send their CVs to the company's

recruitment@impulse.com.kw

, no later than 15 days from the date of this announcement.

شركة إمبرس انترناشيونال للاتصالات ش.م.ك. (مفقلة)

تعلن عن حاجتها لشغل وظيفة «مدير استثمار / مدير أول – استثمار»

مهام الوظيفة:

1. البحث عن الفرص الاستثمارية في مجال التكنولوجيا والمعلومات وعقد الاجتماعات واتخاذ كافة الإجراءات اللازمة.
2. القيام بتقييم الفرص الاستثمارية والنماذج المالية وخطط العمل.
3. تقديم التوصيات الفنية للجنة الاستثمار حول مذكرات الإيضاح المتاحة لاتخاذ القرارات المناسبة.
4. إدارة الأعمال وكافة الإجراءات المرتبطة بنفي الجهالة لاتمام الصفقات الاستثمارية.
5. متابعة أداء الاستثمارات والتأكد من مطابقتها واستيفائها لكافة المعايير.

شروط عامة:

1. الفهم الراسخ لهيكل الصفقات ومذكرات الشروط لعمليات رأس المال الاستثماري وحقوق الملكية الخاصة والإجراءات المتبعة لاستيفاء المتطلبات.
2. الإلمام والمعرفة بقطاع تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات ومستحدثات التحول الرقمي على المستوى المحلي والإقليمي.
3. القدرة على إدارة وتقييم كل من الصناديق والمحافظ الاستثمارية والفرص المباشرة وعمليات رأس المال وحقوق الملكية الخاصة.
4. شغل مناصب في مجالس إدارات سابقة لشركات ذات طبيعة عمل مماثلة للشركة.
5. الحصول على درجة الماجستير في إدارة الأعمال أو التمويل أو أحد فروع هندسة الاتصالات وتكنولوجيا المعلومات.
6. خبرة تتراوح ما بين 10-5 سنوات في مجال التمويل والاستثمار.
7. إجادة اللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
8. أولوية التعيين للمتقدم الكويتي.

على الراغبين في التقدم لهذه الوظيفة ممن تنطبق عليهم الشروط المذكورة ارسال السيرة الذاتية على البريد الالكتروني الخاص بالشركة

recruitment@impulse.com.kw

وذلك في موعد أقصاه ١٥ يوماً من تاريخ الإعلان.

Business

NBK-Egypt reports EGP 1.28bn in net profit for first quarter of 2024

Bank records a remarkable growth of 96.32%

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (NBK-Egypt) has announced net profits of EGP 1.28 billion (KD 11.71 million) for the first quarter of 2024, a significant increase from the EGP 652 million (KD 6.88 million) reported in the first quarter of 2023, showcasing an impressive growth rate of 96.32 percent.

Net operating income stood at EGP2.75 billion, recording a substantial increase of 48.6 percent from EGP1.85 billion recorded in the corresponding period of 2023. In the meantime, Net interest income grew by 53.9 percent, reaching EGP 2.37 billion compared to EGP 1.54 billion in 1Q2023.

On the other hand, net operating income (excluding interests) increased to EGP 382.67 million in 1Q 2024, compared to EGP 321.64 million in 1Q 2023, up by 18.97 percent, while cost to net operating income dropped from 37.51 percent in 1Q 2023 to 26.15 percent in 1Q 2024.



Shaikha Al-Bahar:

- NBK-Egypt's exceptional results are rooted in its robust operational performance across key business sectors.
- We are committed to expanding our market share, enhancing banking transactions, and elevating their quality to meet the surging demand.



Yasser El-Tayeb:

- We maintain our robust performance, consistently surpassing growth projections across all financial metrics.
- We are actively advancing our electronic services and product offerings to reinforce the bank's competitive edge in the digital landscape.

cent increase recorded by the loans and credit facilities in foreign currencies on the back of the appreciation of foreign currencies against the Egyptian pound.

Meanwhile, customer deposits grew by 19.64 percent to reach EGP 126.73 billion in 1Q 2024, compared to EGP 105.93 billion by the end of 2023. This in-

Commenting on the financial results announced by NBK-Egypt, Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, National Bank of Kuwait, and Chairman of NBK-Egypt, said: "In the first quarter of 2024, National Bank of Kuwait - Egypt continued to achieve strong operating performance across its main business sectors, despite the challenging macroeconomic landscape."

Al-Bahar stated that Egypt remains one of the most prominent strategic markets for the growth of the Group's business, consistently regarded as its second local market. The bank, as the largest Kuwaiti investment on Egyptian soil, has established a significant presence as one of the fastest-growing banks within the Egyptian banking sector. This growth is reflected in the financial indicators and record business results achieved by NBK-Egypt, particularly in recent years.

Al-Bahar emphasized that the continued expansion of the balance sheet and the growth of all financial indicators affirm the success of the bank's business diversification strategy and its accelerated digital transformation efforts. This strategy aims to increase the bank's market share, particularly in retail banking services, in the region's largest market by population.

"We are committed to enhancing the quality of our services, expanding our geographical footprint, and reaching a more diverse customer base. This is made possible by the significant advancements

in our digital infrastructure, information technology, and electronic channels. These developments have positioned NBK-Egypt as a strong competitor in the Egyptian banking market, especially amidst the rising demand for banking services and the growing rates of financial inclusion," Al-Bahar added.

Meanwhile, Vice Chairman, CEO, and Managing Director of National Bank of Kuwait-Egypt, Yasser El-Tayeb, said: "The strength of the bank's business results, which have exceeded all expectations and targets for this period of the year, reflects the resilience and adaptability of our business model. This growth continues despite the exceptional market challenges we face locally, regionally, and globally."

El-Tayeb emphasized that NBK-Egypt is experiencing balanced growth across all activities and business sectors while maintaining efficiency rates and risk ratios that align with this expansion. This approach ensures business sustainability and customer satisfaction alike, thanks to the bank's prudent policies and its robust business model capable of meeting customer needs and diversifying income sources. This balanced growth is evident in the bank's diverse credit operations within the corporate sector, which includes large, medium, and small enterprises. Additionally, the retail banking sector has seen significant growth, with NBK-Egypt continually strengthening its position through advanced services and

products tailored to various customer segments and lifestyles. This comprehensive approach establishes NBK-Egypt as a "one-stop-shop" that meets all financial needs. Furthermore, the bank is committed to its horizontal expansion plan, opening new branches to cover key cities and governorates across Egypt. "We strive to support the global trend towards sustainable finance and the transition to a green economy," he added. "Our focus is on backing environmentally friendly projects that achieve sustainability and increasingly rely on renewable energy. We are also committed to exploring available solutions to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and reduce carbon emissions. Sustainable finance has become one of the most crucial tools for supporting and maintaining long-term financial stability," Al-Tayeb added.

"Recognizing the significance of technology and electronic channels in the banking sector and their substantial role in bolstering competitive advantage among banks, we have consistently reinforced our electronic services," El-Tayeb emphasized. "We actively encourage customers to broaden their usage of these services for payments, aligning with the overarching policy of the state and the Central Bank of Egypt. This initiative aims to foster financial inclusion and integrate new customer segments into the official banking system, contributing to the shift towards a less cash-dependent society."

- With the Egyptian economy ranking among the largest in the region, abundant potential and growth prospects abound.
- The modernization of digital infrastructure and information technology has positioned NBK-Egypt as a strong contender in the Egyptian banking market, reinforcing its competitive edge.
- Our commitment extends to strengthening our presence in both corporate and retail banking segments.
- Prioritizing sustainable finance, we align with the global shift towards a greener economy, expanding our efforts in this realm.

Total assets reached EGP 155.56 billion in 1Q 2024, up by 19.10 percent compared to the year-end balance of EGP 130.61 billion in 2023. Furthermore, the net balance of loans and credit facilities expanded to EGP 86.14 billion in 1Q 2024, reflecting a growth rate of 13.25 percent compared to EGP 70.06 billion recorded at the end of 2023, including a 45.5 per-

cent increase recorded by the loans and credit facilities in foreign currencies, influenced by the appreciation of the exchange rate and higher return rates on deposits. The Return on Average Assets (ROAA) rose from 2.5 percent in 1Q 2023 to 3.6 percent in 1Q2024, while the Return on Average Equity (ROAE) increased from 23.7 percent in 1Q 2023 to 33.6 percent in 1Q 2024.

Inflation slows in Japan sparking questions over rates

TOKYO: The pace of Japanese inflation slowed in April as gas bills fell, government data showed Friday, raising questions about when the Bank of Japan will hike interest rates again. The Consumer Price Index excluding volatile fresh food prices came in at 2.2 percent, compared with the 2.6 percent logged in March by the internal affairs ministry.

The figure was in line with market expectations and comes even as the weak yen inflates prices for imported goods. The data "probably reflects a move by companies to restrain price hikes in response to sluggish consumer demand", Taro Kimura from Bloomberg Economics said. "But the core gauge is still above the Bank of Japan's two percent target—and the latest data is unlikely to deter the central bank from normalizing policy," it said.

While the United States and other major economies have battled sky-high inflation in recent years, price rises in Japan have been less extreme. The Bank of Japan's long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policies are meant to banish stagnation and deflation from the world's number four economy. It is targeting sustainable demand-driven inflation of two percent, as opposed to inflation caused by unstable, temporary factors such as the war in Ukraine.

In March—in part thanks to meeting its target—the BoJ hiked borrowing cost rates for the first time



The pace of Japanese inflation slowed in April to 2.2 percent as gas bills fell, government data showed Friday, with the figure remaining above the Bank of Japan's two percent target. — AFP

since 2007. Some analysts have predicted its next rise could come in the summer or October.

The central bank "appears confident that a virtuous wage-price cycle will buoy inflation going forward", Kimura said, referring to expectations that rises in wages will help realise the sustainable inflation sought by bank officials. "An expected rise in utility fees will also lift the inflation data in coming months, providing good optics for BoJ rate hikes" in July and October, he added.

Jeemin Bang of Moody's Analytics said "inflation should cool in the months ahead... but an extraordinarily weak yen and the phase-out of energy subsidies mean the overall pace of deceleration will be slow". Wage growth in the second half of the year should lift consumer spending and

"provide for a modicum of demand-driven price pressure", Bang added.

"But wage data has been wobbly," which "complicates the outlook for the Bank of Japan as it looks to raise interest rates" further, she cautioned. Other major central banks including the US Federal Reserve still have much higher interest rates, and the wide differential has put huge pressure on the yen, which hit a 34-year low last month, leading authorities to intervene in forex markets to provide support. A weaker yen is good for Japanese exporters and foreign visitors, but it makes imports and foreign travel for outbound tourists more expensive. Stripping out both fresh food and energy, prices rose 2.4 percent in April, also matching the market consensus, down from 2.9 percent in March. — AFP

Stocks stabilize after choppy trading week

NEW YORK: Wall Street swung higher Friday ahead of the long Memorial Day weekend, marking a positive end to a choppy week of trading that saw the Nasdaq set a fresh record even as concerns the US Federal Reserve could keep interest rates higher for longer weighed on markets. US stocks regained lost ground Friday to trade higher amid renewed enthusiasm for generative AI-linked companies like Nvidia, which closed up 2.6 percent.

"We know that expectations were very high, and yet they seem to meet or exceed them on more than one level," Tom Cahill from Ventura Wealth Management told AFP.

"So whether we like it or not, artificial intelligence now is an important factor when it comes to the stock market sentiment," he added. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index finished the day up 1.1 percent, while the broad-based S&P 500 rose 0.7 percent. The Dow Jones Industrial Average stabilized after tumbling 1.5 percent on Thursday to close almost unchanged.

The gains in New York helped European markets recover to close the day flat or with narrow losses.

European and US indices have rallied to new records recently thanks to solid first quarter earnings by companies and their positive outlook despite on-



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading on May 24, 2024 in New York City. — AFP

going fears that bumpy inflation will keep the Fed on hold for the rest of the year. While Nvidia's recent blockbuster earning helped propel the Nasdaq Composite to new highs this week, other markets have been hobbled by concerns that the market is now overbought. "With earnings season largely behind us, we will now see markets following the economic data more closely, and unfortunately we look set for a protracted period of high rates if recent inflation data is anything to go by," said Scope Markets analyst Joshua Mahony.

Other data showing the US economy is coping with high interest rates—and reducing any pressure on the Fed to cut them—has also been denting confidence that cuts are on the way. — AFP

US new home sales miss expectations

WASHINGTON: Sales of new US homes were weaker than analysts expected in April, government data showed, with slower mortgage demand appearing to bog down the number of transactions. New single-family home sales came in at an annual rate of 634,000 last month, seasonally adjusted, down 4.7 percent from March's 665,000 rate, said the Commerce Department. The figure for March was revised lower, while April's numbers were below a Briefing.com consensus forecast of 680,000.

Home sales have taken a hit since the Federal Reserve raised the benchmark lending rate rapidly in 2022 to curb surging inflation. But significantly higher mortgage rates have also made homeowners reluctant to sell their properties, leading to tighter supply and pushing buyers into the market for new construction. While a 30-year fixed-rate US mortgage averaged around three percent in May 2021, the average rate as of May 16 was around 7.0 percent. This has given the new homes market a boost in past months.

Compared with the same period a year ago, however, sales of new homes were 7.7 percent lower in April. The median sales price was \$433,500, slightly lower than in March, the Commerce Department said. While sales data can be volatile and revised later, the April selling pace was lower than the first quarter average of 653,000, noted Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. — AFP

Maldives seeks easier funding to mitigate climate change effects

MALE, Maldives: The Maldives on Saturday demanded international funding to battle rising sea levels, saying the low-lying Indian Ocean archipelago was being unfairly excluded from the most generous support measures.

"The Maldives is liable for just 0.003 percent of global emissions, but is one of the first countries to endure the existential consequences of the climate crisis," President Mohamed Muizzu wrote in Britain's Guardian newspaper. "Wealthier nations have a moral responsibility to communities like ours."

His comments came ahead of a once-a-decade conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) -- many of them known as luxury tourism destinations but threatened by rising sea levels—he will co-chair in Antigua and Barbuda, which opens Monday. SIDS receive "only about 14 percent of the finance that the least developed countries receive", he said.

According to the IMF, the Maldives has a higher GDP per capita than Chile, Mexico, Malaysia or China, but Muizzu called gross domestic product a "legacy metric". "Thanks to the Maldives' healthy tourism industry, we are ranked as an emerging economy and therefore shut out from the cheaper financing set aside for the lowest income countries."



Mohamed Muizzu

Muizzu has said that his country needs about \$500 million to mitigate the effects of climate change and the tourism-dependent economy was unable to raise the money on its own. The first SIDS meeting was in 1994, five years after Maldives' then-president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom warned that his atoll nation of 1,192 tiny coral islets faced extinction if sea levels rose by a meter (3.3 feet).

Gayoom successfully initiated a land reclamation to build an artificial island two meters above sea level and twice the size of his congested two-square-kilometer (0.8-square-mile) capital island Male. Muizzu, who was elected in September, has unveiled plans for a bigger man-made island with 30,000 apartments, "Ras Male", to battle rising waves. But the project was not eligible for climate funding as it was classed as infrastructure work, he lamented. Muizzu is seen as pro-Beijing and according to government officials, much of the construction work is expected to be carried out by Chinese firms. — AFP

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2024



Food prepared with Solein protein is pictured at the headquarters of the Solar Foods company.



A technician works in a lab at the headquarters of the Solar Foods company in Vantaa, Finland. — AFP photos

Finland's wizards making food out of thin air

At a factory in Finland, the "farmers of the future" are making a new food protein by feeding a microbe air and electricity, proving that protein can be produced without traditional agriculture. Livestock farming is one of the main culprits in greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of global warming. Cellular agriculture, where food or nutrients are grown from cell cultures, is increasingly seen as a green alternative to animal agriculture. Lab-grown meat, eggs and milk have made headlines in recent years, with scientists using animal cell cultures - a process some have criticized as unnatural, highly processed, energy-consuming and costly. But at Solar Foods' recently opened factory outside Helsinki, scientists are using new technology to grow protein out of cells using air and electricity. By feeding a microbe with carbon dioxide, hydrogen and some minerals, and powering the process with electricity from renewable sources, the company has managed to create a protein-rich powder that can be used as a milk and egg substitute. "We can source our main feedstock for the microbe from the air," Solar Foods chief executive Pasi Vainikka told AFP, as he gave a tour of the company's new facilities near Helsinki. "We have started the production of



Food prepared with Solein protein is pictured at the headquarters of the Solar Foods company.

the world's most sustainable protein." Founded by Vainikka and Juha-Pekka Pitkanen in 2017, Solar Foods launched the "world's first factory growing food out of thin air" in April. "Much of the animal-like protein of today can actually be produced through cellular agriculture and we can let agricultural land re-wild and thereby build carbon stock," Vainikka said, referring to the process whereby forests and soil absorb and store carbon.

One kilo of the new protein, dubbed "solein", emits 130 times less greenhouse gases than the same amount of protein produced by beef production in

the European Union, a 2021 scientific study claimed. Vainikka navigates his way through the factory's laboratory and into the control room, where a dozen people at computer screens monitor the production process. "These are our future farmers," Vainikka said.

Part of the solution

Transforming food production and consumption is at the heart of combating the climate crisis and preventing biodiversity loss, according to Emilia Nordlund, head of industrial biotechnology and food research at the VTT Technical Research Centre. Yet current projections show the consumption of meat is expected to increase in coming years. "Industrial food production, especially livestock production, is one of the biggest causes of greenhouse gas emissions (and) the biggest cause of biodiversity loss, eutrophication and freshwater usage," she said.

New food production technologies can help cut emissions and "decentralize and diversify food production", Nordlund said. "However, at the same time, we must improve the existing food production methods to make them more sustainable and resilient," she added. Fermentation technology used to produce different nutrients, such as proteins, has been around for decades.



Food prepared with Solein protein is pictured.

But the field has expanded significantly in recent years with new technological solutions and research projects emerging worldwide.

Slow progress

Some of the most active start-up hubs focusing on cellular agriculture are in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Israel, Nordlund said. "We are in a crucial phase as we will see which start-ups will survive," she said, adding that stalling bureaucracy was slowing cellular agriculture's take-off in the EU. Dressed in protective gear to prevent

bacteria contamination in the factory, Vainikka showed off a giant steel tank in a shiny production hall.

"This is a fermenter holding 20,000 liters," he said, explaining that the microbe multiplies inside the tank as it gets fed the greenhouse gas. Liquid containing the microbes is continuously extracted from the tank to be processed into the yellowish protein-rich powder with a flavor described as "nutty" and "creamy". "The fermenter produces the same amount of protein per day as 300 milking cows or 50,000 laying hens," Vainikka said. That equals "five million meals' worth of protein per year".

For now, the main purpose of the small Finnish plant employing around 40 people is to "prove that the technology scales", so it can attract the necessary investments pending European regulatory approval. While the protein has been cleared for sale in Singapore where some restaurants have used it to make ice cream, it is still awaiting classification as a food product in the EU and the United States. To have any real impact, the aim is to "build an industrial plant 100 times the size of this one", Vainikka said. - AFP



A sample of the new protein dubbed "Solein" is pictured at an early stage of production.



Chef Miikka Manninen prepares a dessert with ingredients prepared with Solein protein at the headquarters.



The production area is pictured.

Judge blocks auction of Elvis estate Graceland

A judge in Tennessee temporarily halted a foreclosure sale of Graceland, the historic home of Elvis Presley in the southern US state. The auction of the property had been scheduled to take place on Thursday but was paused by Shelby County Chancellor JoeDae Jenkins. Presley's granddaughter, actress Riley Keough, had filed a lawsuit seeking to block the sale of the sprawling estate in Memphis. A company called Naussany Investments & Private Lending was seeking to auction off Graceland, claiming that Keough's mother, Lisa Marie Presley, had put it up as collateral in 2018 for a \$3.8 million loan. Lisa Marie Presley,

Elvis's only child, died in January 2023. Keough, 34, who starred in "Mad Max: Fury Road" and "The Girlfriend Experience," claimed in her lawsuit filed on May 15 that the loan documents were fraudulent. "Lisa Marie Presley did not give a deed of trust to Graceland - or to any other property - to Naussany Investments & Private Lending," the suit said. "These documents are forgeries." Jenkins said he was halting the auction until a trial can be held to determine the authenticity of the documents.

"The court will enjoin the sale as requested," the judge said at a live-streamed court hearing. "The real es-

tate is considered unique under Tennessee law and, being unique, the loss of the real estate would be considered irreparable harm." Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc. welcomed the decision. "As the court has now made clear, there was no validity to the claims," it said in a statement. "There will be no foreclosure. "Graceland will continue to operate as it has for the past 42 years, ensuring that Elvis fans from around the world can continue to have a best in class experience when visiting his iconic home." - AFP



Visitors queue to enter Elvis Presley's Graceland mansion on August 12, 2017 in Memphis, Tennessee. — AFP

Spanish police recover stolen Francis Bacon painting

Spanish police said Thursday they have recovered a five-million-euro (\$5.4 million) painting by late British artist Francis Bacon that was stolen with four other of his works in 2015. The work is one of five portraits of Spanish banker Jose Capelo by Bacon, together worth over 25 million euros (\$27 million), which were stolen from Capelo's Madrid home in July 2015. The thieves also made off with a safe that contained coins and jewels in what was described at the time as one of the biggest contemporary art thefts in Spain. Police recovered three of the five paintings in 2017.

In a statement, police said they had arrested two people suspected of involvement in the theft, which allowed them to recover one of the stolen works still missing at a property in Madrid. Police have so far arrested 16 people suspected over the theft since 2015, including the person believed to have ordered the heist and those who carried it out, the statement added. "Investigations are continuing to locate the remaining work and arrest those in possession of it, with the focus on

Spanish nationals with links to organized groups from Eastern Europe," the statement said.

Police did not provide further details about the people involved in the robbery or how they were identified. Bacon is regarded as one of Britain's greatest recent painters, with some of his expressionist works achieving record amounts at auction. His triptych "Three Studies of Lucian Freud" sold for



An image grab taken from a handout video released by the Spanish Interior Ministry on May 23, 2024 shows a painting by Francis Bacon recovered by Spain's National Police in Madrid, valued at 5,000,000 euros, stolen in the Spanish capital in 2015. — AFP

\$142.4 million at auction in New York in 2013, making it one of the world's most expensive works at the time. Bacon often visited Madrid, where he spent time studying old masters paintings in the Prado Museum, and died in the city in 1992, aged 82. — AFP



Aerial view of boats close to the shore in Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador. — AFP photos



Aerial view of the long tall ship Oosterschelde in Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.



The long tall ship Oosterschelde sails in Puerto Ayora.

In Darwin's footsteps: Scientists recreate historic 1830s expedition



Details of the long tall ship Oosterschelde are pictured.



Details of the long tall ship Oosterschelde are pictured.



Sarah Darwin, descendant of Charles Darwin, checks notepads on a copy of the 'On The Origin of Species' book by Charles Darwin, onboard the long tall ship Oosterschelde.

Like Charles Darwin did in 1831, a group of scientists and environmentalists last year set sail from the English port of Plymouth, headed for the Galapagos islands off the coast of Ecuador. But what they found on their arrival last month differed vastly from what naturalist Darwin saw while visiting the archipelago in 1835, in a trip key to developing his world-changing theory on natural selection. The Galapagos today is under protection, part of a marine reserve and classified a World Heritage Site. Yet the area faces more threats than ever, from pollution and illegal fishing to climate change.

There to observe the challenges, with a well-thumbed copy of her great-great-grandfather's "On the Origin of Species" in hand, was botanist Sarah Darwin. "I think probably the main difference is that, you know, there are people working now to protect the islands," the 60-year-old told AFP, onboard the "Oosterschelde," a refurbished, three-mast schooner built more than 100 years ago. The ship has been on a scientific and awareness-raising expedition since last August, stopping so far in the Canary Islands, Cape Verde, Brazil and Chile among other locales.

Darwin's 'heirs'

In colonial times, the islands - located in one of the world's most biodiverse regions - served as a pit stop for pirates who caught and ate the giant turtles that call it home. During World War II, the archipelago hosted a US military base. "I think if (Darwin) were able to come back now and see the efforts that everybody is making, both locally and globally, to protect these extraordinary islands and that biodiversity - I think he'd be really, really excited and impressed," the naturalist's descendant told AFP.

Sarah Darwin first visited the Galapagos in 1995, where she illustrated a guide to endemic plants. She then



Aerial view of Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.

devoted herself to studying native tomatoes. She also mentors young people as part of a project to create a group of 200 Darwin "heirs" to raise the alarm about environmental and climate threats to the planet.

Calling at several ports on the journey from Plymouth to the Galapagos, the Oosterschelde took on new groups of young scientists and activists at every stop, and dropped off others. One of them, Indian-born Laya Pothunuri, who joined the mission from Singapore, told AFP the Galapagos "has a very important place in scientific terms." She was there, she said, to im-

prove the irrigation systems in the islands' coffee-growing regions. "I plan to do it using recycled plastic, which also, again, is a big problem over here," she said, noting that plastic waste ends up being consumed by wildlife.

Plastic peril

In the Galapagos, the expedition members worked with researchers from the private Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), the Charles Darwin Foundation and the NGO Conservation International on both confronting invasive species and protecting endemic ones. Last year, a study by the Charles

Darwin Foundation found that giant turtles in the area were ingesting harmful materials due to human pollution.

Samples revealed that nearly 90 percent of the waste consumed was plastic, eight percent was fabric and the rest metal, paper, cardboard, construction materials and glass. From Galapagos, the Oosterschelde set sail again on Sunday to continue its world tour, with stops expected in Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. — AFP



Aerial view of boats close to the shore in Puerto Ayora.



Details of the long tall ship Oosterschelde are pictured.



Sarah Darwin talks to crew members onboard long tall ship Oosterschelde.



Details of the long tall ship Oosterschelde are pictured.



A copy of 'The Evolution of Charles Darwin' by Diana Preston, is pictured onboard of long tall ship Oosterschelde sailing.



Crew members talk onboard long tall ship Oosterschelde.

Lifestyle

Escaped Iranian director receives ovations at Cannes

It is one of the most dramatic storylines ever delivered at Cannes: Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof walked the red carpet Friday after fleeing a prison sentence in his home country just days before the film festival. He received raucous standing ovations before and after the gala screening of "The Seed of the Sacred Fig", which is competing for the top prize Palme d'Or.

"I hope the entire apparatus of oppression and dictatorship will disappear from Iran," he told the packed Cannes theatre, where he brandished photos of the movie's actors.

Made underground in Iran on a tiny budget, it tells the story of a court prosecutor whose family life is torn apart by the "Women, Life, Freedom" protests that convulsed the country in 2022-23.

Friday was the last day of the Cannes Film Festival screenings, with the winners from the 22 entries to be announced on Saturday by a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig.

Rasoulof came under pressure in Iran to withdraw his latest from the festival, but he already knew during the production that he faced a new eight-year prison sentence for "collusion against national security" and hatched a plan to escape the country. He attended the premiere on Friday alongside his daughter and Iranian actor



CANNES: Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof leaves after the screening of the film "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 24, 2024. — AFP

Golshifteh Farahani, who lives in exile in France.

Speaking after the premiere, Rasoulof said he was thinking of "everyone who allowed this film to be made -- those who are here, and those who were prevented from coming." An outspoken critic of Iran's rulers, Rasoulof had already served two prison terms over his uncompromising political films and had his passport revoked in 2017.

It took 28 days on the road, moving between border villages, to get out of the country, he told Deadline magazine. "The good thing about going to prison in Iran is that you meet all kinds of youthful people who can help you in such conditions," he told the magazine.

Gore and Moore

The final film to screen in the competition, later Friday, is "The Most Precious of Cargoes", the first animated film to compete for the Palme d'Or since 2008's "Waltz With Bashir".

It is the tale of a twin thrown to safety from a death train transporting his Jewish parents to Auschwitz, from Michel Hazanavicius, director of the Oscar-winning "The Artist". The 77th edition of the world-famous festival has seen a lot of gore and #MeToo-related issues.

A late frontrunner is "All We Imagine as Light", which premiered Thursday.

The first Indian entry in 30 years, it is a poetic monsoon-set portrayal of two nurses who have migrated to Mum-

bai, described as a dreamlike five-star "triumph" by The Guardian.

"Emilia Perez", an audacious musical about a Mexican narco boss having a sex change, has also been a favourite. Demi Moore has emerged as a serious contender for the best actress award after rave reviews for her "fearless" performance in "The Substance", an ultra-gory horror film about the pressures women face to maintain bodily perfection as they age.

There has been a lot of love for "Anora", a raw and often-hilarious story about a New York erotic dancer who strikes gold with a wealthy client, only to face the wrath of his Russian oligarch parents.

Francis Ford Coppola's ambitious fable "Megalopolis" has its admirers but proved sharply divisive, while Donald Trump biopic "The Apprentice" has drawn strong reviews as well as legal threats from the former US president.

Also on Friday, George Lucas arrived in town to accept an honorary Palme d'Or. "It's always great to be recognised," said the "Star Wars" creator.

"Obviously we have a lot of fans and all that kind of stuff. But in terms of awards, I don't make the kind of movies that win awards!" —AFP



CANNES: US director George Lucas attends a "Rendez-Vous With George Lucas" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 24, 2024. — AFP

Lucas on 'Star Wars' critics, diversity, and sneaking into Cannes

George Lucas told Cannes on Friday how he had to sneak into his own first premiere at the French film festival and explained why "Star Wars" movies have always been for kids. The 80-year-old legendary filmmaker also responded to criticism of a lack of diversity in his movies, and reflected on making cult classics in the 1970s.

Lucas is in town to receive an honorary Palme d'Or, a version of the festival's top prize. Despite grossing billions at the box office, the US director has never won a competitive Oscar in his home country. "It's always great to be recognized," he said. "Obviously we have a lot of fans and all that kind of stuff. But in terms of awards, I don't make the kind of movies that win awards!"

Cannes debut

Lucas first came to Cannes in 1971 for his avant-garde sci-fi movie "THX 1138". It was a box office flop, and studio Warner Bros refused to pay for him to travel to France when it was selected for the festival. Lucas paid his own way, and arrived to find it "raining like crazy".

"We got to see the movie. We snuck in. We didn't have tickets. We didn't have anything. We just went in," he said. Asked years later by journalists why he hadn't shown up at a press conference for the movie, he replied: "I didn't know there was one."

'Star Wars'

"THX 1138" became "a cult classic, because people would drop acid and watch it", recalled Lucas. His next film, "American Graffiti", was also initially hated by its studio. But it went on to gross over \$100 million.

Lucas recalled how he was then approached by a Fox executive, offering to make "anything you want... you got any other movies?" "I said: 'Well, I've got this sort of science-fiction fantasy, crazy 1930s movie... dogs driving spaceships and stuff.'" Amazingly, they agreed. The rest is history.

John Williams

Duh-duh-duh-duh... the "Star Wars" phenomenon arguably would not exist without its epic score by composer John Williams. It nearly didn't happen, but for the intervention of "Steve" -- that is, Steven Spielberg.

Spielberg recommended that Lucas consider Williams, who at the time was known in the industry as more of "a jazz guy". Thankfully, Spielberg convinced Lucas that Williams could provide the classical treatment he wanted.

"When I heard it with the full orchestra, I went: 'Oh my God,'" recalled Lucas. "Sound is half the movie... it's the secret sauce."

Prequel hate

Lucas returned to "Star Wars" in 1999 with "Episode I - The Phantom Menace". "The critics and fans who had been 10 years old when they saw the first one... hated it," admitted Lucas.

The director compared the hatred levelled at its goofy alien sidekick Jar Jar Binks with adults' initial dislike of the droid C3PO, and cuddly Ewoks, from the original trilogy. "Star Wars" is for kids who are 12 years old," said Lucas. "It's a kid's movie. It's always been a kid's movie."

Diversity criticism

Lucas also batted off criticism of "Star Wars" for being too white and too male. "Most of the people are aliens," he said. "Even if they're big and furry, or whether they are green... the idea is all people are equal."

As for suggestions that the films lack women, Lucas asked: "Who do you think the heroes are of those films?" "What do you think Princess Leia was? She is the head of the rebellion." — AFP

China back at Cannes with women's rights blockbuster

One of China's biggest-ever productions, "She's Got No Name", premiered in Cannes on Friday, bringing megastars like Zhang Ziyi to the red carpet as well as the thorny issue of women's rights. Another Chinese film, Guan Hu's "Black Dog" was also announced as the winner of the side section, Un Certain Regard.

Hu, the director of some of the biggest blockbusters of recent years such as wartime epic "The Eight Hundred," returned to his indie roots for his new film. "When we make films that are a little more intimate, there is less pressure, they become more sincere films," he told AFP. "She's Got No Name," playing out-of-competition, by acclaimed Hong Kong director Peter Chan, has been generating a lot of buzz on Chinese social media thanks largely to its cast.

Zhang starred in the Oscar-winning "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Rush Hour" alongside Jackie Chan, and earned a Golden Globe nomination for "Memoirs of a Geisha". Alongside her are Lei Jiayin, Yang Mi and Jackson Yee, of hugely successful boyband TFBoys and Oscar-nominated 2019 film "Better Days". Also bound to draw attention is the subject matter, which is based on a notorious murder case during the 1940s Japanese occupation of Shanghai. Zhang plays Zhan-Shou, a resilient woman in an unhappy marriage who is charged with the dismemberment of her husband.

Women's rights are sensitive territory in today's China. Under President Xi Jinping, authorities have cracked down on almost every kind of feminist activism, restricting NGOs, arresting high-profile figures, and suspending social media accounts. Anything seen as feminist is increasingly considered a challenge to authority, and celebrities often feel the need to publicly disavow feminism.

Lockdown drama

Cannes has seen a return of Chinese cinema this year after a notable absence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's stringent lockdown. The heavy-handed response of authorities to the pandemic was the subject of "An Unfinished Film", which

premiered out-of-competition at the festival last week. The highly "meta" drama shows a film crew meeting near Wuhan in early 2020. When one falls ill, others are forcibly locked in their hotel rooms for months.

Featuring amateur footage of anti-lockdown protests, the film was produced in Singapore and Germany, and is unlikely to see the light of day in China, due to strict censorship. Other Chinese films at Cannes this year have included auteur Jia Zhang-ke's latest Palme d'Or entry, "Caught By The Tides", and "Twilight Of The Warriors: Walled In", a well-received martial arts thriller.



Chinese actress Yang Mi arrives for the screening of the film "She's Got No Name" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

Meanwhile, "Black Dog" told the story of a man who returns to his home town after a spell in prison is far from the flag-waving patriotism of his commercial films. Its director claimed there was markedly less censorship in the film industry these days. "A few years ago, it could have hindered my work... but I find in recent years, there has been a clear improvement (in regard to censorship)," Hu told AFP. "Today, it is the market that decides everything."

He also said international festivals were vital to diplomacy. "It's very important to exchange with different cultures. But if we really want to understand each other, we need to go and shoot films abroad and also have others come and shoot in China. I have this desire," he said.



CANNES: (From left) Chinese director Peter Ho-Sun Chan, Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi and Chinese actor Da Peng arrive for the screening of the film "She's Got No Name" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 24, 2024. — AFP photos



PARIS: This photograph taken on May 23, 2024 shows the Eiffel tower and roofs of Paris. — AFP

Eiffel Tower ticket prices to rise by 20 percent

Paris city hall on Friday voted to increase the Eiffel Tower adult admission price by 20 percent from next month to help pay for urgent renovation work. Visitors currently pay 29.40 euros (\$31.90) for a ride by lift to the top of the Eiffel tower, a price tag that is set to rise to 35.30 euros on June 17. The Paris city council also backed a recapitalization for Eiffel Tower operator SETE, and lowered the annual fee it charges the operator for running one of the world's most famous monuments.

Lower visitor numbers during the COVID pandemic combined with spiraling renovation costs have pushed SETE deep into deficit. Staff at the Eiffel Tower went on strike earlier this year, protesting against what unions said was insufficient investment. The Eiffel Tower booked a shortfall of around 120 million euros

during the COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Unions argued that previous recapitalization of 60 million euros was insufficient given the need for major maintenance work, including a fresh paint job. The masterpiece by architect Gustave Eiffel has been repainted 19 times since it was built for the 1889 World Fair.

Eiffel recommended at the time that it should be painted every seven years to keep inevitable rust at bay. But the 300-metre (985-foot) iron structure -- 330 meters tall when the high-frequency antenna at the top is included -- has not been given a full paint job since 2010. Visitor numbers recovered to nearly six million last year, having dropped to 1.5 million in 2020 because of COVID restrictions. — AFP

Sports

Cummins eyes another title

Hyderabad face Kolkata in IPL final

CHENNAI: Australia's World Cup-winning captain Pat Cummins will need a spectacular turnaround to secure another major title on Sunday, when his Sunrisers Hyderabad face Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League final only five days after a heavy loss. Hyderabad beat Rajasthan Royals by 36 runs in the last qualifier in Chennai on Friday to secure a place in their third IPL final.

But that win came after a crushing eight-wicket defeat by two-time champions Kolkata in the first play-off in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. Hyderabad's only title in the world's most lucrative T20 tournament came in 2016 under another Australian, David Warner. Fast bowler Cummins, for whom Hyderabad paid \$2.5 million in the IPL auction, led Australia to both the world Test championship title and an ODI World Cup triumph last year.

"It's been a great couple of years but I haven't captained any T20 cricket before this series, so I wasn't too sure what to expect," Cummins told reporters. "Obviously quite fast-paced, the T20 game, but I think, drawing on particularly the ODI captaincy over here last year didn't feel too far off." Cummins and the Australians broke millions of hearts when they beat India in the 50-over final at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad in November.

"Very practical guy, very humble, very empathetic with his fellow team-mates and coaching staff," Hyderabad assistant coach Simon Helmot said of Cummins. "He is into the statistics, gets the information he needs against a particular opposition in certain conditions. Doesn't waste time in team meetings, our team meeting today went for 35 seconds," he told reporters. Hyderabad have racked up record IPL totals of 277 and 287 in a high-scoring tournament, with

Cummins' astute leadership and rotation of bowlers also an advantage when defending totals.

Standing in Cummins' way will be fellow Australian and Kolkata quick Mitchell Starc, who rattled Hyderabad's top order in the first qualifier. Left-arm quick Starc became the most expensive player in IPL history when Kolkata paid \$2.98 million for his services, overtaking Cummins in the same auction in December. Starc justified the outlay when he returned figures of 3-34 on Tuesday, including bowling fellow Australian and Hyderabad opener Travis Head for a duck.

Kolkata the team to beat

Kolkata, led by India's Shreyas Iyer, have been the side to beat in the competition and topped the 10-team table with 20 points in the league phase. Apart from the big signing of Starc, Kolkata brought Gautam Gambhir on board as mentor after the former India batsman led the team to two titles in 2012 and 2014.

Kolkata beat home side Chennai Super Kings to lift their first title the last time they played a final at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium. "I feel he has got immense knowledge about how the game is played. He has won two titles and his strategies have been spot on," Iyer said of Gambhir's presence. "He adds (a) lot of cream in the team and hopefully we keep continuing with the same momentum in the final as well with his knowledge out there." Kolkata have lost just three matches all season, with all-rounder Sunil Narine promoted to open the innings and leading their batting charge with 482 runs, including a century.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy and fast bowler



CHENNAI: Sunrisers Hyderabad's captain Pat Cummins plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 second qualifier cricket match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. — AFP

Harshit Rana have also shared 37 wickets between them. However, Kolkata's bowlers will be wary of Hyderabad's left-handed opening pair of Head and Abhishek Sharma, who have given their team many strong starts. Head has scored 567 runs, with a cen-

tury and four fifties, to stand fourth in the IPL batting chart led by Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli on 741. Abhishek, 23, has been described as a future India star with his 482 runs and a punishing strike rate of more than 207. — AFP

News in Brief

Ruud rolls into Geneva final

GENEVA: Norway's Casper Ruud will face Novak Djokovic's conqueror Tomas Machac in the Geneva Open final later Saturday after seeing off a strong challenge from Flavio Cobolli in the semis. Second seed Ruud, the world number seven, is at home in the Swiss clay court tournament, having won the Geneva title in 2021 and 2022. He beat Italy's in-form Cobolli 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) in a roller coaster match on the Parc des Eaux-Vives clay. The contest between two-time French Open runner-up Ruud and Cobolli, who is on a career-high ranking of 56, was meant to take place on Friday evening but was called off due to persistent rain. "It was very, very difficult. I was one point away from losing," said Ruud. "I just was able to hang in there and it was a really tough match. I was happy to be able to come back in the third set and pull through. "It was a good confidence win for me. I'll just take a shower, rest, have some lunch and then start again," added the 25-year-old. — AFP

Lookman to make impact

LAGOS: Ademola Lookman fresh from a historic hat-trick in the Europa League final will hope to make a similar impact for Nigeria in June's 2026 World Cup qualifiers after being named in new head coach Finidi George's squad. A formidable squad boasts Napoli striker Victor Osimhen and Victor Boniface of German champions Bayer Leverkusen, although the latter and his club were ripped apart by Atlanta striker Lookman in last Wednesday's Europa League final. Lookman became the first player to score a hat-trick in a Europa League final - the first in a European final since 1975 - to secure Atlanta's first ever continental trophy. Nigeria face South Africa on June 7 in Uyo, before playing Benin in Abidjan three days later. George has kept faith with the bulk of the squad who were beaten by hosts Ivory Coast in the Africa Cup of Nations final in February. The squad has been further strengthened by the return of Leicester City midfielder Wilfred Ndidi and Boniface, who did not feature at the Africa Cup of Nations due to injury. — AFP

Riley grabs two-shot lead

LOS ANGELES: Davis Riley made six birdies in a six-under par 64 on Friday to take a two-shot lead in the US PGA Tour's Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. The 27-year-old ranked 250th in the world was 10-under and in the lead but facing a par putt at his final hole when play was halted for more than an hour because of thunderstorms in the area. "Luckily, it was a three-footer straight up the hill, so (there) wasn't too much to stress about," Riley said. "I knocked in about five three-footers before walking over there to cap off the round - hit it center cut and made it. "It was nice to finish the day and made for a good, pretty stress-free six-under." — AFP

Espargaro takes the pole

MONTMELO: Spaniard Aleix Espargaro will start from pole in what will be his final Catalunya MotoGP on Sunday after posting the fastest time on his Aprilia in qualifying. The 34-year-old Spaniard - who hails from Catalonia - announced on Thursday he will retire at the end of the season. But that decision has taken none of the edge off his competitiveness as he claimed the sixth pole of his career on Saturday. Espargaro is seeking to achieve the double of the sprint and the race itself as he did last year. "I do not have 100 pole positions to my name," said Espargaro, who is seeking a fourth MotoGP success. "Therefore even if it is just the qualifying I am very happy to have achieved this at home. I made several errors on my first fast lap but my second is perhaps the best one of my life." Ducati's two-time defending world champion Francesco Bagnaia and South African Brad Binder on a KTM complete the first row. — AFP

Leclerc stays ahead of Verstappen in Monaco practice

MONACO: Local hero Charles Leclerc continued his ascendancy in practice at the Monaco Grand Prix on Saturday when he topped the times in the final session by almost two-tenths of a second ahead of defending champion Max Verstappen. The 26-year-old Monegasque driver clocked a best lap in one minute and 11.369 seconds to outpace Red Bull's Verstappen by 0.197 seconds. Lewis Hamilton maintained his Friday pace for Mercedes to finish third ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren, Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull and George Russell in the second Mercedes.

Carlos Sainz was seventh for Ferrari ahead of Lando Norris in the second McLaren, Yuki Tsunoda of RB and Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, once again shining on the roads of the famous Mediterranean street track. Leclerc drove with impeccable precision and speed, but it was the attacking verve of Verstappen, in his uncomfortable Red Bull, that caught the eye as he charged hard in the final frantic minutes. "If I do more laps like this I'll end up in the fence," said the Dutchman in exasperation, punctuated by expletives. He was then called to see the stewards for driving too slowly in the final sector.

On a warm sunlit Riviera morning, Russell was the first out of the pit lane on fresh soft tyres, immediately reporting that his steering was distinctly different to Friday when he complained of lack of precision. "There's no vibrations, which is obviously good," explained the Mercedes driver. Kevin Magnussen set a first marker time for Haas before Hamilton went top before his former team-mate Valtteri Bottas lost control of his Sauber and smacked the barriers as he came out of the Swimming Pool complex.

Scrum the key as Sharks win European Challenge Cup final

LONDON: Scrum dominance proved decisive as the Sharks became the first South African side to win a major European rugby trophy by beating Gloucester 36-22 in Friday's Challenge Cup final in London. No 8 Phepsi Buthelezi, full-back Aphelele Fassi and wing Makazole Mapimpi all scored tries for the Sharks, with fly-half Siya Masuku landing eight of his nine goal-kicks in a 21-point haul at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

But it was South Africa prop Vincent Koch who was named man-of-the-match after anchoring the Sharks' scrum. "Being in South Africa with a South African team...I haven't won any trophies in South Africa so being with the Sharks first year back, it's unbelievable," Koch told TNT Sports. "We knew they (Gloucester) had a good scrum and line-out," added the 34-year-old, a double world champion with the Springboks, who also twice lifted the elite European Champions Cup with London club Saracens. "We had to be at our best and the boys showed that today."

Sharks captain Eben Etzebeth said Friday's win, achieved in South African teams' second year of senior European competition, was the highlight of his club career. "I think this will rate third, obviously the two World Cups will always be number one and two," the second row star told reporters. "But at club level this is by far the best—the last championship I won was the Currie Cup in 2012." Victory saw the Sharks qualify for next season's Champions Cup.

No foothold for Gloucester

By contrast, defeat meant English Premiership side Gloucester failed to add to their Challenge Cup final victories of 2006 and 2015. "We didn't really get a foothold in the game," said Gloucester boss George Skivington. "We started well and we finished well but between that we got sucked into a battle of scrums." Both the Sharks and Gloucester were looking to put poor domestic seasons behind them.

The Sharks, despite a squad featuring several World Cup winners, including Etzebeth, Mapimpi and Koch, are languishing in 13th place in the 16-team



MONACO: Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc drives during the third practice session of the Formula One Monaco Grand Prix on May 25, 2024. — AFP

Red flag

This prompted a red flag as he was stranded at the Rascasse hairpin until he was recovered. On resumption, Leclerc clocked 1:12.521 to move clear of Piastri by 0.163 seconds, a time he trimmed down to 1:12.092. Behind him, Verstappen was showing improved form after Friday when his Red Bull was jumping excessively and was soon up to third and then second.

"I know where we can gain time," the reigning world champion reported. "It's just not possible. We know why." As he struggled, Sainz jumped to second, two-tenths adrift of team-mate Leclerc before Hamilton narrowly avoided the barriers, sliding over the kerbs at the Swimming Pool. Leclerc then clocked 1:11.977 to go three-tenths

clear while Hamilton and Russell returned to the pits for new tyres, Mercedes clearly sensing potential for strong grid positions in qualifying later Saturday.

Stimulated by the contest, a seemingly-inspired Leclerc did a lap in 1:11.369 to go six-tenths clear of Sainz with Alonso third, the Ferrari duo clearly relishing their car's Monaco set-up. With 11 minutes remaining, Hamilton moved again to jump above Alonso for third, six-tenths off Leclerc who was close to his Friday best, which was faster than last year's pole lap by Verstappen. It signaled a final flurry from all of the leading contenders as Verstappen, twice, and Piastri, jumped to second in a very competitive finale that promises a close battle for grid spots later Saturday. — AFP



LONDON: Sharks' South African number 8 Phepsi Buthelezi, Sharks' Congolese flanker Vincent Tshituka and Sharks' South African flanker James Venter celebrate with their medals after the European Challenge Cup rugby union final match between Gloucester and the Sharks at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on May 24, 2024. — AFP

United Rugby Championship with one round of the regular season remaining while Gloucester finished second-bottom in the English Premiership. Gloucester, roared on by their loyal fans, dominated the opening stages, but superb Sharks defence repelled a driving maul that threatened a try, although Fassi was sin-binned in the sixth minute. Soon afterwards, Gloucester almost had a try but centre Chris Harris touched down inches short as he stretched out.

From the ensuing scrum the Sharks won a penalty and cleared their line, with Gloucester having nothing to show for their early efforts. Instead it was the Sharks, still a man down, who opened the scoring when Masuku landed a 14th-minute penalty from a scrum. Scrum-half Caolan Englefield drew Gloucester level with a superb penalty from inside his own half in the 23rd minute. But three minutes later the Sharks had a try when Buthelezi sprinted in from 35 metres after powering through four tackles.

Masuku converted and soon afterwards landed an-

other penalty. The Sharks all World Cup-winning front row then forced a fourth scrum penalty, with Masuku on target from 34 metres to leave his side 13 points ahead at the break. Skivington changed his entire front row at half-time in a bid to shore up a creaking scrum. But yet another scrum penalty, in front of the posts, allowed Masuku to nudge the Sharks further ahead at 19-3. And that became 22-3 when Masuku landed his fifth penalty after Argentina wing Santiago Carreras illegally challenged Mapimpi in the air.

Williams then sent in Fassi for a 55th-minute converted try. Gloucester replacement Albert Tuisue was driven over for a converted try, only for a diving Mapimpi to score following a precise kick out of hand by Masuku. Gloucester replacement fly-half Stephen Varney's try was then disallowed for an offside in the build-up by former England wing Jonny May, making his last appearance for the club. Santi Socino and Freddie Clarke did score tries in the closing minutes but they were too little, too late for Gloucester. — AFP

Sports

Leeds and Southampton clash for lucrative Premier League return

Promotion to English top-flight worth an estimated £140 million

LONDON: Leeds and Southampton will slug it out for a lucrative place in the Premier League when they meet in football's single richest match at Wembley on Sunday. Promotion to the English top-flight is worth an estimated £140 million (\$178 million) for the Championship play-off final winner. No other game can offer such wealth, given the vast increases in matchday, broadcast and commercial revenue available to clubs who reach the Premier League.

Financial experts Deloitte say the team promoted this weekend could eventually bank £305 million if they avoid relegation next season. While the cash prize is a huge bonus, it is the prestige of competing with Manchester City and Arsenal, rather than second-tier minnows like Plymouth and Oxford, that will fuel two

sides desperate to regain their Premier League status after a year in exile. Relegation from the top tier can be ruinous but Leeds and Southampton handled their demotion astutely enough to move within one win of a return to the promised land.

There were regrets for Leeds, who finished in third place in the Championship, three points clear of fourth-placed Southampton, after losing their grip on an automatic promotion place that went instead to Ipswich. Leeds recovered to show their potential in a 4-0 demolition of Norwich in the play-off semi-final second leg. Southampton, who beat Leeds twice during the regular season, also impressed with a place in the final on the line, defeating West Bromwich Albion 3-1 in their second leg.

Both clubs feel the Premier League is a more fitting arena for their sizeable fan-bases and history of sustained spells in the top tier. But the past also holds painful memories for Leeds, who have failed in five previous attempts to win promotion via the play-offs. The three-time English champions have not won at Wembley since the 1992 Charity Shield against Liverpool and will be making their first appearance there in 17 years. They can take heart from the presence of boss Daniel Farke, who guided Norwich to automatic promotion to the Premier League in 2019 and 2021.

'Didn't like his decision'

"We know it's a massive game. It's a final, and for that you're always more focused, but it's also important to stay calm

and find a good balance," said Farke. "It's a 50-50 game. But this also means it's a great chance of promotion back to the Premier League at the first time of asking. For that we are really excited." Promotion would be a Hollywood ending for Leeds, just weeks after movie star Will Ferrell became a shareholder in the club's 49ers Enterprises ownership group. That star-studded consortium also includes actor Russell Crowe, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps and golfers Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas.

In a plot twist, Farke has a contentious history with Southampton boss Russell Martin, who played under the German at Norwich before having his contract terminated by mutual consent in 2018. Farke was complimentary about Martin on Friday, saying: "He was my captain at Nor-

wich and always looked at things through a manager's eyes." But Martin, who skippered Norwich in their Championship play-off final win against Middlesbrough in 2015, conceded the Carrow Road exit was a difficult time in his career. "I really didn't like his decision at the time. I can't sit here and pretend that is the case," he said.

"We never had a personal problem. I think people really wanted us to, and they still want us to now because it is a nice story." Despite his placatory attitude, winning promotion at Farke's expense would clearly be a sweet moment for Martin, who urged his team to seize their chance. "It is such a privilege to play in a game of this magnitude," he said. "They have the chance to feel something spectacular that they will remember forever." — AFP

Crusaders stun Blues to stay in Super Rugby contention; Force crash

CHRISTCHURCH: The Canterbury Crusaders upset the table-topping Auckland Blues 29-27 on Saturday to maintain their slim chance of qualifying for the Super Rugby Pacific quarter-finals. The seven-time defending champions fought back from 10 points down in Christchurch to hand the Blues their second loss of the season. It was only the third win for the Crusaders, whose playoff hopes would have ended with defeat.

Instead, they can still sneak into the top eight if they beat Moana Pasifika in the final round next week and other games fall in their favor. Their cause was helped by ninth-place Western Force being thumped 59-13 by the Queensland Reds in a nineties-to-one thrashing in Brisbane. The Force face a must-win clash with the ACT Brumbies next week to keep their playoff dream alive. All hope seemed lost for the Crusaders when the Blues surged ahead 22-12 soon after half-time through a converted try to winger AJ Lam.

But the home side regrouped and crossed through Christian Lio-Willie and Noah Hotham to reclaim the lead and hold it to the end, even after conceding a second try to Lam. "This means so much. It was a big week for us, we haven't put in the performances we

wanted to over the last couple of weeks," said Crusaders scrum-half Hotham. "In our last games, we've dropped off on those last 20 minutes so it was just trying to learn lessons and play the full 80." A bonus point left the Blues level on top of the standings with the Wellington Hurricanes but still in first place because of a superior points differential.

Poor discipline

Blues captain Patrick Tuipulotu said they need to improve their discipline after a yellow card to full-back Stephen Perofeta swung the contest in the Crusaders' favor. "We were on the back foot and they had a lot of the momentum in that second half," Tuipulotu said. "They made us pay, playing with one man down." Prop Ofa Tu'ungafasi scored two first-half tries to help put the Blues 15-12 ahead at the break, with Ethan Blackadder and Chay Fihaki having crossed for the Crusaders.

An ill-disciplined Force conceded a try in the fifth minute and were always on the back foot in Brisbane, going to the break 25-6 behind. It got worse after the interval as the Reds ran away with the match to consolidate fifth spot on the ladder. Tim Ryan (three), Fraser McReight (two), Jock Campbell, Seru Uru, Matt Faessler and Josh Nasser all bagged tries for the home team. Earlier, Moana Pasifika beat NSW Waratahs 27-12 in Auckland to knock the last-placed Australian side out of playoff contention. Veteran former Wallabies prop Sekope Kepu was among the try-scorers, one day after announcing he would retire at the end of the Super Rugby season. — AFP



SHAH ALAM: Selangor FC Board of Directors member Shahriil Mokhtar speaks during a press conference on the progress of Malaysian national team and Selangor FC footballer Faisal Halim, who was injured in an acid attack, at a hospital in Shah Alam. — AFP

Malaysia footballer discharged after acid attack

KUALA LUMPUR: A top Malaysian footballer who suffered severe burns in an acid attack was discharged Saturday from a hospital where he had undergone multiple surgeries, the CEO of his club said. Selangor FC and Malaysia winger Faisal Halim suffered burns on the neck, shoulder, hands and chest in the assault at a shopping mall outside capital Kuala Lumpur on May 5. Faisal's case was the most high-profile of separate crimes committed against four top-flight Malaysian footballers this month, which are not believed to be linked but have nonetheless shocked and angered the nation.

Selangor FC chief executive Johan Kamal Hamidon told AFP the footballer was discharged from hospital on Saturday afternoon. "We will schedule a separate media session with Faisal Halim once he is ready," he said, without giving more details. Shahriil Mokhtar, chairman of the technical committee at

Selangor FC, said on Wednesday that Faisal was recovering well after a major skin graft surgery. Shahriil also said the footballer could be back on the pitch as early as August.

Faisal had a three-hour skin allograft surgery on Monday which went "better than expected", team doctor Muhammad Hazwan Khair said this week. Nicknamed "Mickey", the 26-year-old player scored an equalizer against South Korea that was voted best goal of the 2023 Asian Cup. Malaysia's domestic football season was slated to begin on May 10 with a curtain raiser between Faisal's Selangor and Super League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT). Selangor pulled out, citing "a series of criminal incidents and recent threats", but the league got underway the following day.

In early May, three days before the acid attack, another national player, Akhyar Rashid, was injured in a robbery outside his home in the eastern state of Terengganu. In a third incident, two days after the attack on Faisal, former Malaysia skipper Safiq Rahim escaped unharmed after he was threatened with a hammer and his car windscreen was smashed by two assailants. International defender Khuzaimi Piee became the fourth Malaysian footballer this month to become a victim of crime after police said Thursday his house was burgled. — AFP



Xavi Hernandez

'I am leaving Barcelona with clear conscience'

BARCELONA: Sacked Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said Saturday he was leaving the club with a "clear conscience". President Joan Laporta took the decision to remove the former midfielder great on Friday, mere weeks after saying he was delighted Xavi was staying for the final year of his contract. In January the coach said he would leave at the end of the season but after a surge in form in April he and Laporta announced that he would remain in charge next season.

Despite media reports saying Laporta had decided to sack Xavi over the past fortnight, the coach insisted he was looking forward to next season and had heard nothing from the board, until the axe finally dropped. "I'm doing OK, it's not been easy, it's been a tricky time," Xavi told a news conference ahead of his final match at the helm, against Sevilla on Sunday in La Liga. "We can be proud of the work that we've done, it's not been easy because of the situation the club is going through.

"I have a clear conscience, in general, I am happy - we have done good work even though this year we did not achieve our objectives. Content, satisfied, grateful." Barcelona won La Liga and the Spanish Super Cup last season but this year finished without any silverware. Real Madrid regained the Spanish title with ease and Paris Saint-Germain knocked Barcelona out in the Champions League quarter-finals.

Xavi, 44, reiterated he was grateful to Laporta and the board for giving him the chance to coach the club, that he was leaving "in peace" and hoped one day to work with Barcelona again. "They have decided this, thinking about the club and that it needed a change in direction, I can only accept it and respect it," continued the coach. "We need a rest, and (if Barca need me again) we will evaluate the circumstances. "I hope we can return to work for and with the club of our lives."

As a player Xavi made 767 appearances for the Catalan club, behind only Lionel Messi, winning eight La Liga titles and four Champions Leagues among other trophies. Former Bayern Munich and Germany coach Hansi Flick is heavily tipped to replace Xavi. Flick, 59, has not coached since Germany sacked him in 2023 after a poor run of results. Previously Flick steered Bayern to a treble in 2020, including an 8-2 thrashing of Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals. — AFP

game of the best-of-seven series at home. Carter Verhaeghe scored and Bobrovsky made 29 saves for Florida, who saw their playoff road winning streak halted at four games. Trocheck gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead at 4:12 of the first period with a tap-in off a pass from Adam Fox.

Verhaeghe's power-play goal tied it 1-1 at 18:09 of the first. Stung by the 3-0 defeat on home ice in game one, the Rangers came out with intensity. A multiplayer showing match erupted after Trocheck's goal, with Verhaeghe and Panthers teammate Matthew Tkachuk as well as Alexis Lafreniere of the Rangers sent to the penalty box. Rangers forward Jimmy Vesey absorbed a big hit and departed in the second period with what the team called an upper-body injury. — AFP

Rangers top Panthers, tie NHL playoff series

NEW YORK: Barclay Goodrow scored at 14:01 of overtime to lift the New York Rangers to a 2-1 victory over the Florida Panthers that knotted their NHL Eastern Conference final at one game each on Friday. Goodrow collected a pass from Vincent Trocheck and snapped a wrist shot past Panthers goalie Bobrovsky to launch the celebrations at Madison Square Garden.

Trocheck had a goal and an assist, and Igor Shesterkin made 26 saves for the Rangers, who had dropped the first

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I, **DHANRAJ**, holder of Indian Passport No. M1847868 having permanent address 3-63-1 Balkudru, Hungarcutta, Udipi District, Karnataka State, India, Pincode 576218, presently residing in Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) **DHANRAJ NAGESH** and (surname) **POOJARY**.
(#4094, 23/05/2024)

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Man Utd stun City to lift FA Cup

Victory gives Ten Hag hope of avoiding the sack



LONDON: Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes lifts the trophy to celebrate their victory at the end of the English FA Cup final against Manchester City at Wembley stadium on May 25, 2024. — AFP

LONDON: Erik ten Hag made a convincing case to be spared the sack as Manchester United upset Manchester City to win the FA Cup with a shock 2-1 victory in Saturday's final. Ten Hag was reportedly set to be dismissed regardless of the result at Wembley after a troubled campaign that even the United manager described as "terrible" this week.

But United's hierarchy might be having second thoughts after Ten Hag's tactical masterclass ruined City's history bid. City were hot favorites to win a second successive Premier League and FA Cup double. Yet Ten Hag found a way to neutralize Pep Guardiola's side as first half goals from Alejandro Garnacho and Kobbie Mainoo put United on course to win the FA Cup for the first time in eight years. Jeremy Doku squeezed an 87th minute strike past Andre Onana's weak attempted save but it was too late to rescue City.

Ten Hag celebrated by kissing the Cup as he held it aloft in the Royal box. Asked if he was worried about his future, he said: "I don't know. The only thing I'm doing is preparing my team. This is a project for me. When I came in I can say it was a mess.

Now we are better. We are not where we want to be." Guardiola added: "Congratulations to United. It was a tight game. It can happen. At the end they scored two goals and we couldn't score more."

Having ended a turbulent season on a high note, if Ten Hag's two-year reign does end, his exit would provoke memories of fellow Dutchman Louis van Gaal's Old Trafford departure. Van Gaal was fired just two days after United's FA Cup final victory against Crystal Palace in 2016. Ten Hag will hope a more apt comparison is Alex Ferguson's 1990 FA Cup final win against Palace, which kick-started his remarkable run after calls for his sacking earlier that season.

Ferguson was in attendance as a match labeled Ten Hag's funeral turned into a triumph for the much-maligned Dutchman. United shareholder Jim Ratcliffe, who has control of football operations at Old Trafford, was also watching from the stands alongside co-owners Joel and Avie Glazer.

Linked with Thomas Tuchel, Mauricio Pochettino and Gareth Southgate, among others, there is still plenty for Ratcliffe to ponder after United finished eighth in the Premier League this season —

their lowest final position since 1990 — and crashed out of the Champions League in the group stage. Ten Hag believes a lengthy injury list was the root of the problems and can point to the two trophies he has won in three cup final appearances with United as proof of what he can do when his team are at full strength.

Ten Hag ended United's six-year trophy drought by winning the League Cup last year and has now avenged their 2-1 loss to City in the FA Cup final 12 months ago despite finishing 31 points behind the champions this term.

Stay of execution

United will also qualify for the Europa League, avoiding a first season without European action since 2014-15. They benefitted from an unusually tepid City performance as their double bid fell flat in their first domestic defeat since losing at Aston Villa in the league 171 days ago. Last weekend, City became the first team to win the Premier League in four consecutive seasons.

But Guardiola's men looked hungover after the

celebrations that followed their sixth title in seven years. Content to sit deep with all 11 men behind the ball, United stifled City impressively and gleefully accepted their gift-wrapped opener in the 30th minute. Diogo Dalot's punt forward should have been dealt with by Josko Gvardiol, but the left-back hesitated as he looked for an offside flag.

Gvardiol headed the ball over City keeper Stefan Ortega, who had rashly rushed off his line, leaving Garnacho with the simple task of tapping into the empty net as Ten Hag clenched his fist in celebration. Just nine minutes later, Mainoo punished more sloppy City defending. Garnacho advanced unchecked down the right wing and found Fernandes, whose superb first-time pass reached the unmarked Mainoo for a clinical close-range finish.

City pushed harder after the interval but although Doku's shot slipped through Onana's grasp to set up a tense finale, it wasn't enough to deny United. As the final seconds ticked away, Ten Hag stood in the sunshine nervously waiting to celebrate a dramatic win that could earn an unexpected stay of execution or serve as his final fling. — AFP



Kuwait SC and Al-Qadsia SC players are pictured during the game. — KUNA photos

Kuwait crowned Zain League champions for the 19th time

KUWAIT: Al-Kuwait SC football squad have deservedly claimed the title of Zain Professional League 2023-2024 season after hammering Al-Qadsia 3-0 in the 27th round of the competition on Friday. Mohammad Dahham scored the opener at minute 10, while Al-Qadsia's Youssef Al-Haqan scoring mistakenly in his own net, and then Youssef Nasser scored the third goal at minute 59.

The game, held at Mohammad Al-Hamad Stadium, saw Al-Kuwait raising their tally of points to 66 - a comfortable margin from the next rival, Al-Arabi whose tally froze at 59 points after a 1-1 draw with Al-Fahaheel following a concurrent game. Today's results put Al-Kuwait atop of the League rankings, followed by Al-Arabi and Al-Qadsia with 51 points. Al-Kuwait has thus secured their 19th League title - the highest number of trophies, followed by Al-Arabi - 17 trophies. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait SC players celebrate after the game.

Mavericks edge T'Wolves for 2-0 NBA series lead

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic drained the go-ahead three-pointer with 3.8 seconds remaining to lift Dallas to a 109-108 victory over Minnesota on Friday in another NBA Western Conference finals thriller. Doncic delivered a triple-double of 32 points, 10 rebounds and 13 assists, and the Mavericks - who trailed by 18 in the second quarter - handed the Timberwolves a second straight home defeat to take a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series.

Kyrie Irving got off to a slow start and was hindered by foul trouble, but he scored 13 of his 20 points in the frantic fourth quarter, which featured 11 lead changes. The Timberwolves were up 108-103 with 1:29 remaining, but Doncic found Irving for a three-pointer from the corner, and after a Mavs timeout, the Slovenian superstar got the ball and wrong-footed Rudy Gobert, nailing a three over Minnesota's Defensive Player of the Year for what proved the decisive basket.

Naz Reid made seven of nine three-point attempts for Minnesota and had a last chance for the Timberwolves, but his long-range effort bounced out at the buzzer. "That was an exciting playoff game," Irving said. "Luka fricking carrying us, man - that's what we're talking about right there in terms of leadership." Daniel Gafford scored 16 points and five blocked shots, P.J. Washington scored 10 and Derek Lively chipped in 14 off the bench for the Mavericks. "Everybody contributed," Irving said.

Anthony Edwards scored 21 points with five rebounds and seven assists for Minnesota but connected on just five of 17 shot attempts on another tough shooting night. Mike Conley scored 18 points for the Timberwolves, Gobert had 16 points and 10 rebounds and Karl-Anthony Towns scored 15 points. Leading 32-26 at the end of the first quarter, the Timberwolves pushed their lead to as many as 18 only for the Mavs to close the first half on an 8-2 scoring run to whittle the deficit to 60-48 at the break.

Doncic scored 11 points in the third quarter, when the Mavs cut the deficit to two points three times in the waning minutes. Irving's floater in the lane pulled the Mavs within 79-77, but Gobert drove for a layup and Reid



MINNEAPOLIS: Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks shoots a three point basket against Rudy Gobert #27 of the Minnesota Timberwolves during the fourth quarter in Game Two of the Western Conference Finals on May 24, 2024. — AFP

drilled a three-pointer that saw Minnesota take an 86-79 lead into the fourth. Irving gave Dallas their first lead since the first quarter with a three-pointer that put the Mavs up 87-86 early in the final frame. Reid restored Minnesota's lead with a three-pointer of his own and the back-and-forth battle was on.

Dallas coach Jason Kidd said it was up to Doncic whether to decide if he should go for a three-pointer out of the team's final overtime. "The play was to get Luka the ball and let Luka do what Luka does in those moments," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "We talked about taking a two, but when he got to dancing with Gobert you could see the step-back was coming and the rest was history." Timberwolves coach Chris Finch, who said after his team's Game One defeat that they needed to be better in clutch moments, pointed to two crucial turnovers in the final minute.

He said 22-year-old rising star Edwards needed to "pick up his decision making" but shrugged off the suggestion he needed more minutes of rest. "Maybe we should have gotten him out at the beginning of the fourth, but it's the Western Conference finals, man," Finch said. "You can't look to hide people or try to take breaks. I don't see Kyrie shying away from a matchup out there." Dallas will try to press their advantage when they host Game Three on Sunday. The winner of the series will face either the Boston Celtics or Indiana Pacers in the NBA Finals. — AFP