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# Horror at Kuwaiti Gaza camp

Kuwait slams Zionist occupation's brutal aggression in Rafah

## Amiri decrees form Civil Service Council, citizenship probe panel



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Saudi Minister of State and Cabinet Member Prince Turki bin Mohammad Al-Saud on May 27, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued Monday forming the Civil Service Council. The decree appoints HH the Prime Minister or whomever he delegates among the ministers as the council's head and deputy prime minister and minister of state for cabinet affairs, health minister, finance minister, education minister and minister of public works as members.

Another Amiri decree was issued forming the Supreme Committee to Investigate Kuwaiti Citizenship. The decree appointed the first deputy prime minister and minister of interior as the committee's head and

deputy prime minister and minister of state for Cabinet affairs, foreign minister and secretary-general of the Council of Ministers as members.

Earlier, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal received at Bayan Palace visiting Saudi Minister of State and Cabinet Member Prince Turki bin Mohammad Al-Saud. The minister conveyed to HH the Amir greetings from King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. HH the Amir returned the greetings and wished for further progress to the kingdom and its people. Senior officials attended the meeting. — KUNA



GAZA: Fire rages following a Zionist strike on the Al-Salam camp for displaced Palestinians set up by Kuwaiti charities in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on May 26, 2024. — Reuters (See Page 5)

GAZA: The Zionist entity faced a wave of international condemnation Monday over a strike that killed at least 45 people when it set off a fire that ripped through a tent city for displaced Palestinians set up by Kuwaiti charities. Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs condemned on Monday the Zionist occupation's aggression against displaced people.

In a statement, the foreign ministry asserted that Zionist occupation's actions against Palestinians exposes its blatant war crimes and unprecedented genocide to the whole world. This calls for immediate

and firm intervention by the international community to compel these forces into adhering to international legitimacy resolutions, including International Court of Justice resolution on immediately ceasing aggression against Rafah and protecting the Palestinian people.

The Zionist entity said it was looking into the "grave and awful" impact on civilians after the latest mass casualty event in the Gaza war. The Zionist military said Sunday evening's attack in the southern Rafah area had targeted and killed two senior Hamas operatives - but it also sparked a

fire that Palestinians and many Arab countries condemned as a massacre. A US National Security Council spokesperson said the Zionist entity "must take every precaution possible to protect civilians".

The UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland called on the Zionist entity to conduct a "thorough and transparent" investigation into the strike, as the Zionist military said it was launching a probe. UN human rights chief Volker Turk decried "horrific" images that "point to no apparent change in the methods and means of warfare

Continued on Page 6

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Egypt guard killed on Rafah border

JERUSALEM/CAIRO: A member of Egypt's security forces was killed in a shooting incident near the Rafah border crossing and an investigation is under way, Egypt's military spokesperson said on Monday. The Zionist military had earlier said it was investigating reports of an exchange of fire between Zionist and Egyptian soldiers. — Reuters

#### Houthis attack ships, US destroyers

DUBAI: Yemen's Houthis said on Monday they launched attacks on three ships in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, and two US destroyers in the Red Sea. The group said the ships were the Larego Desert and the MSC Mechela in the Indian Ocean, and the Minerva Lisa in the Red Sea. — Reuters

#### Hajj flights from Sanaa to Jeddah

SANAA: Forty-four flights carrying a combined 8,200 pilgrims from Yemen's Sanaa International Airport to Saudi Arabia's Jeddah will start operating from May 28, three sources from Yemen's government and the Yemeni Houthi group said. — Reuters

## Kuwait and China discuss Mubarak Port, megaprojects

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on Monday held in-depth discussions with Chinese officials dealing with means of boosting relations in execution of mega development ventures. The minister, according to a statement released by the foreign ministry, received Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei, with the attendance of the head and members of a Chinese government delegation tasked with com-

pleting consultation on joint development projects.

The meeting with the visiting Chinese officials was held at the ministry headquarters, the official statement said, noting that the two sides explored the close bilateral relations and strategic cooperation between Kuwait and China, where they also broached "frameworks of boosting and promoting the relations in various sectors and at diverse levels".

The two sides held in-depth discussions, focusing on the necessity to cement technical, development and economic ties in the realm of executing mega development projects in Kuwait. Moreover, they addressed the need to offer proposals and the aspired perceptions for attaining aspirations of the supreme political leadership to press ahead with laying the foundations of a future plan to launch common strategic ventures, namely Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port. — KUNA

## Roadworks of key highways in final stages

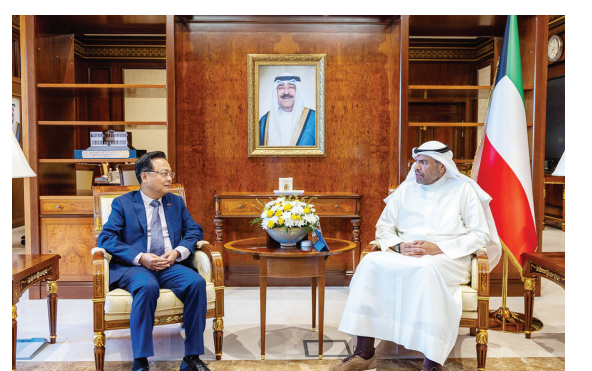
KUWAIT: Most restoration works of the 11-km-long Cairo Street, one of Kuwait's main roads, have been finalized and the remaining tasks are proceeding according to schedule, the minister of public works announced on Monday. Speaking after she inspected the worksites, Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, also Minister of Municipality, said 92.2 percent of the project has been executed, affirming that the venture is in line with the state's approach to provide citizens with top-notch public services.

"This is a bright stage in our efforts to attain the objective of providing an excellent infrastructure," said Mashaan, referring to the Cairo Street project that covers the construction of three tunnels and six causeways. It also includes building seven pedestrian bridges, water and rain networks, phone communications, lighting, traffic signs and urban greenery.



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan visits the Cairo Street project on May 27, 2024. — KUNA

Mashaan, who also examined works for developing the Second and Third Ring Roads, said that up to 97 percent of the renovation works have been accomplished in these locations. She also praised efforts exerted by the personnel of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation. Cairo Street links several residential districts and regions. Kuwait's domestic transport network is distinguished, with up to seven ring roads accessible to all residential districts and workplaces. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya meets Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei on May 27, 2024. — KUNA

## IAEA says nuclear talks suspended after Raisi death

VIENNA: Planned talks between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog aimed at breaking the impasse over Tehran's nuclear program have been put on hold after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi, an agency report said Monday. The temporary suspension of talks between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) comes as its chief Rafael Grossi reiterated his concern over public statements made in Iran regarding its nuclear weapons capability.

In a separate confidential report seen by AFP ahead of an IAEA board of governors' meeting next week, the agency said Iran's estimated stockpile of enriched uranium had reached more than 30 times the limit set out in the 2015 accord between Tehran and world powers. According to the report, Iran's total enriched uranium stockpile was estimated at 6,201.3 kg as of May 11, up by 675.8 kg from the last quarterly report in February. — AFP



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## Local

# Zain presented with distinguished awards in Sustainability and Gender Diversity

## UK-based think tank Cambridge IFA acknowledges Zain

**KUWAIT:** Zain, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, continues to be recognized for its leadership endeavors in the areas of Sustainability and Gender Diversity, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Zain was presented with the Leadership in SDGs Award 2023; and Championship Award in Women Empowerment 2024 at the 9th Annual Global Good Governance Awards organized by Cambridge IFA, a UK-based think tank. The Awards celebrate individuals, governments, public and private sector institutions, and NGOs that exhibit governance and sustainability as their strategic priority.

Zain remains one of the most active organizations in the region with respect to delivering meaningful connectivity that leads to equitable systemic change through its Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) initiatives, with the company playing a crucial role in empowering the markets in which it operates to reap the benefits of digital transformation for the benefit of the communities it serves and beyond. The recognition of these prestigious awards is testament not only to how much Zain believes in its purpose, but how relentless the company is in ensuring its operations are a positive, inclusive force for good, with a commitment to continuing to instill these principles at the heart of the organization.

### Sustainability

Zain Group's 2023 Sustainability Report (SR), marking its 13th annual sustainability report entitled 'The Pathway to Value Creation' reflects the company's progress and efforts to address deficits and challenges across its footprint while providing Meaningful Connectivity that leads to Equitable Systemic Change through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The report demonstrates how the company addresses its social, economic, environmental, and human rights related impacts and how



Zain continues to execute on its five-year, 2025 corporate sustainability strategy aiming to deliver meaningful and sustainable value across Zain's operating companies and beyond.

In 2023, Zain joined the United Nations (UN) Global Compact initiative, a voluntary leadership platform for the development, implementation, and disclosure of responsible business practices as well as committing to the Science-Based Targets Initia-



tion (SBTi) emission. Notably, the A- score that Zain maintained in the latest 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2023', positioned the company first in the region and among leaders globally with respect to climate action initiatives.

### Gender Diversity (WE)

Zain has been actively working on narrowing the gender divide in leadership roles at the company.



Under its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Women Empowerment (WE) pillar, Zain Group has been a pioneering force for women empowerment regionally since 2017. This gender diversity initiative was created at a time when only 14.5 percent of Zain's leadership comprised of women, and a target was set to increase this percentage of women leadership to 25 percent by 2025. Three Zain operations have already achieved their WE leadership targets in 2023, Zain Jordan at 27.3 percent, UAE based ZainTECH at 27.0 percent, and Zain Kuwait at 26.9 percent.

For some time now, women have represented

the higher proportion of university graduates in the region, yet this does not translate into positions within the workforce, let alone senior positions. Hence, the issue of women's empowerment is an important topic for Zain, which has embedded this issue into the DNA and heart of the company's corporate strategy. During 2023, women made up over 33 percent of Zain's total recruitment, and the company recently revolutionized its staff-friendly Family Leave Policy clauses, reinforcing its position as one of the most impactful DEI organizations in the region, if not the world.



Attendees explore different sections at the Chinese Cultural Center. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait, the first of its kind in the region

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** The Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait hosted the Chinese Cultural Experience Day, an event that aims to foster cultural exchange and strengthening the bond between Kuwait and China. The event was attended by Miao Haiyan, the wife of the Ambassador of China to Kuwait, who warmly welcomed the attendees to participate in the various activities that were designed to celebrate and share the rich cultural heritage of China.

The event underscored the center's role as a pivotal bridge connecting the people of Kuwait and China through art and cultural activities. The Chinese Cultural Experience Day featured a diverse array of activities that highlighted the essence of Chinese culture, including Chinese language sessions, a photo exhibition, performances of Chinese songs and dances, and a sampling of traditional Chinese cuisine. A special session was organized in the dancing room, allowing participants to immerse



Director of the Chinese Cultural Center Xia Jianfeng

themselves in the art of Chinese dance, thereby providing a hands-on experience of this integral aspect of Chinese culture.

On his part, the Director of the Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait, Xia Jianfeng emphasized the significance of the center's role in promoting cultural understanding and cooperation between the two nations. "You might be aware that this center is carrying the agreements between the Chinese and Kuwaiti governments. Since we commenced operations in September last year, we have witnessed numerous cultural activities that have advanced mutual understanding between the people of Ku-



Performers and attendees take a group photo.



Chinese cuisine section at the Chinese Cultural Center.



Dancers perform during the event.

wait and China. This center is the first of its kind for China among GCC countries, aimed at fostering more people-to-people and cultural exchanges in the region," he said.

The Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait stands as a symbol of the friendship and collaboration between China and Kuwait. It serves as a bridge linking the two nations and facilitating deeper relations and cultural exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and cultural appreciation. The Chinese Cultural Center in Kuwait continues to play a crucial role in building a strong foundation for ongoing friendship and cooperation between the two countries.



Chinese calligraphy showcased.

## Georgia urges Kuwaiti investors to explore business opportunities

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** The Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs, Ambassador Sadiq Marafi, highlighted the positive state of Kuwaiti-Georgian relations during his participation in a ceremony organized by the Georgian Embassy in Kuwait, celebrating Georgia's Independence Day, which took place on Sunday, May 26, 2024.

During the ceremony, the Georgian Embassy emphasized their commitment to elevating this partnership to a new qualitative level. They highlighted the increasing closeness and multi-dimensional nature of the friendship and cooperation between the two countries, and special thanks were extended to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his leadership, which has transformed Kuwait into a beacon of stability amidst regional unrest.

The embassy also highlighted that the Georgian government places high importance on deepening political and economic cooperation with Kuwait. Efforts are ongoing to enhance relations in tourism, culture, and education as well as facilitating increased investment and trade partnerships with



Georgian Ambassador to Kuwait and Ambassador Sadiq Marafi, the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs.

Kuwait. Georgia's inclusion among the top ten countries globally for "ease of doing business," as ranked by the World Bank, underscores its favorable business environment, comparable to the United States and the United Kingdom in terms of investor convenience. Kuwaiti businesspeople and the general public were invited to visit Georgia and explore the various business opportunities it offers.



Diplomats and top dignitaries take a group photo during Georgia's Independence Day event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Dancers perform during the event.



Local

# Tajikistan plans freshwater exports to Kuwait and Gulf

## UN Office supports Kuwaiti government's efforts to elevate water sustainability issues

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda unveiled a project to export freshwater from Sarez Lake in Tajikistan to Gulf countries and other areas facing water scarcity. This announcement was made during a meeting in collaboration with the United Nations Office in Kuwait, briefing on the current state of affairs of the 3rd High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development," 2018-2022. Notably, he mentioned Sarez Lake is an abundant source of freshwater, 61 kilometers long and 500 meters deep.

Additionally, he stated that Tajikistan, which accounts for about 60 percent of Central Asia's water, and has among the lowest electricity tariffs in the region, aims to transmit electricity from the Rogun Hydropower Plant to neighborhood countries once it is completed, such as India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This plant, which is still under construction, and located on the Vakhsh River, will feature six 600 MW power units with a total capacity of 3,600 MW, making it the most powerful hydroelectric plant in Central Asia.

### Kuwait exempted from Tajik visa

Additionally, the Tajik ambassador said this strong relationship extends to the tourism sector, inviting visitors from Kuwait to explore the beauty of Tajikistan. He highlighted the convenience of travel arrangements, noting that Kuwaiti citizens enjoy visa exemptions, while expatriates in Kuwait can obtain visas at Tajikistan airports, and there is a direct travel route from Kuwait to Tajikistan.

Zubaydzoda, who is also the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Kuwait, highlighted Kuwait and Tajikistan's strong commitment to fighting terrorism together in the upcoming International Conference on Combating Terrorism and its Financing, part of the "Dushanbe Process". Scheduled for November in Kuwait, he stressed the importance of the initiative. "Our bilateral relations with Kuwait are crucial. We aim to strengthen our ties in all areas, especially in politics," Zubaydzoda said, adding political discussions on this topic between the two countries will take place in Dushanbe in June.



Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda

### Strengthening political ties

He discussed the upcoming Water for Sustainable Development conference in Dushanbe, scheduled for June 10-13, 2024. He highlighted its main aim — to boost collective efforts and back the implementation of commitments made in the UN Water Conference's Water Action Agenda. This involves sharing best practices, fostering partnerships and emphasizing the role of water in sustainable development.

The conference seeks to raise awareness and build political support to speed up progress toward achieving the water-related goals of the 2030 Agenda, contributing to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the preparatory process of the UN Water Conference in 2026.

It will also provide a mechanism to encourage governments, the United Nations and all other partners to translate intentions into actions on the ground and catalyze new commitments to be registered in the Water Action Agenda. "It should be noted that there is almost no region in the world currently that does not experience water issues, and according to the analysis, this issue will become even more complex unless effective collective measures are taken," added Zubaydzoda.

Ghada Al-Taher, UN Resident Coordinator to Kuwait, expressed her gratitude to Zubaydzoda for this initiative. "The United Nations values its relationship with Tajikistan and its role in hosting the annual water conference, demonstrating its commitment to elevating water issues," she said. She stressed the im-



Ambassador of Tajikistan is pictured with UN resident coordinator to Kuwait Ghada Al-Taher.

portance of accessing clean water as a fundamental human right, highlighting its pivotal role in sustainable development for all nations. She acknowledged the global challenges in this realm, pointing out that over 2.2 billion individuals endure hardships due to water scarcity, and climate change.

### Combating water issues

Taher noted a growing trend among nations toward ensuring access to safe and clean water, alongside efforts to enhance sanitation services. "The

effects of climate change are evident worldwide, leading to droughts or floods, both resulting in significant losses affecting food security and quality of life," she remarked. She particularly referred to Kuwait, as she highlighted it among the countries affected by climate change.

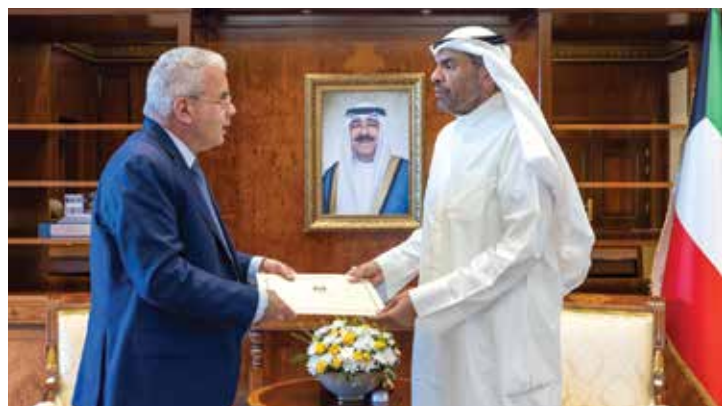
Regarding the UN Office in Kuwait's support for the Kuwaiti government in elevating water sustainability, Taher mentioned the UN's role in providing consultations on water provision as an essential human right, which aligns with the UN's mission in Kuwait, linked to the Sustainable Development Program and Kuwait Vision 2035, stressing cooperation between the two sides within this framework.

"Cooperation involves providing consultations to the Kuwaiti government through partnerships with specialized UN programs and organizations, such as the UN Development Program, Human Settlements Program and UN Environment Program. These organizations offer consultation not only on water but also on environmental matters like sandstorms, funded by the Kuwait Development Fund," Taher highlighted. "Water consumption should be an individual responsibility, not just a governmental concern," she noted, adding that raising awareness about the serious consequences of water scarcity and promoting the efforts to mitigate its effects due to climate change are essential.



Attendees of the event.

## Amir receives letter from Palestine leader



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a letter from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The letter was handed to Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya by the Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub. — KUNA



## Officials discuss Gulf's municipal action plan

**DOHA:** The 43rd preparatory meeting for the 40th meeting of the Committee of GCC senior municipality officials took place on Sunday in the Qatari capital, Doha. Qatar News Agency (QNA) said that the Director of the Technical Affairs Department of Doha Municipality, head of the current session, Ibrahim Al-Harmi, chaired the meeting with the participation of members of the Coordination and Follow-up Committee in the field of municipal work in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the Municipalities and Housing Administration of the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

During the meeting, many topics on the agenda were discussed, most notably the implementation of the decisions issued by the Supreme Council in previous sessions regarding the municipal field regarding strategic urban planning and the urban environment, as well as the decisions of the Ministerial Council regarding the Gulf building code. Participants also tackled the development of legislation, municipal control mechanisms, conditions and mechanisms for classifying contractors, and the joint Gulf municipal action plan for the years 2024-2030.

In addition, member states delved into following up on the implementation of previous decisions of the Committee of Ministers concerned with municipal affairs regarding the "Gulf Municipal Week" and signing agreements with specialized organizations that serve the municipal field. Participants also talked about the Gulf Municipal Work Conference, the Cooperation Council Award for Municipal Work, and highlighting Gulf municipal work in regional and international forums. The meeting concluded with a number of recommendations that will be submitted to the meeting of senior municipal officials in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. — KUNA

## Arab Media meeting discusses strategy to combat terrorism

**MANAMA:** Preparatory meetings for the 54th session of the Council of Arab Information Ministers began on Monday in Bahrain, with the participation of Kuwait and the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA). FANA participated as an observer of the media meetings, represented by the Vice President of the Federation and Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr Fatima Al-Salem, and the Secretary-General of the Federation, Dr Farid Ayyar.

A delegation of Kuwait's Ministry of Information also participated in the meeting and was represented by the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Foreign Media Sector, Bader Al-Tararwa, the Director of the

Arab Media Department, Awad Al-Fiker, and the Director of the Foreign Media Affairs Department, Aisha Al-Asousi. Assistant Secretary-General and Head of Media and Communications Sector Ambassador Ahmad Khattabi, in his speech at the meeting of the 101st regular session of the Permanent Committee for Arab Media, expressed sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Information in the Kingdom of Bahrain for generously hosting the meeting.

He expressed his aspirations for this committee to play its full role in developing media plans and strategies and discussing the reports of the expert committees affiliated with the Council of Information Ministers. He pointed out that the draft agenda is rich and diverse, starting with the continued media support for the Palestinian issue, especially in the context of the terrible repercussions of the occupation's aggression against the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The agenda also includes the implementation of the decisions of the Bahrain summit, including the joint Arab



Vice president of the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA), Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatima Al-Salem and Secretary General of the Union Dr Farid Ayyar.

media strategy to combat terrorism, which requires the activation of its interim implementation plan 2024-2027 in partnership with the concerned parties. At the end of his speech, he expressed his wishes for more practical recommendations and proposals that enhance cooperation between Arab media representatives. — KUNA



Photo shows the audience and the ambassadors.



## Bringing music rhythms from Belgium to Kuwait

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** A live performance by the renowned Belgian artist Karim Baggili was featured at Yarmouk Cultural Center as the Belgian Embassy, in

collaboration with Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiya, hosted a unique musical evening. The evening was graced by the presence of numerous audience members, including the Belgian ambassador to Kuwait and other diplomatic members.

Karim Baggili is a distinguished Belgian musician and composer of Jordanian and Yugoslavian descent. He is acclaimed for his mastery of the oud, a traditional Middle Eastern string instrument, and the guitar. Baggili's music is a fusion of various styles, including Arabic, flamenco, and jazz. Over the years, he has released several albums and is celebrated for his innovative approach, blending

diverse cultural influences into his compositions.

His international performances and collaborations with various artists have earned him acclaim for his unique sound and musical versatility. Karim Baggili's performance created a unique and musical atmosphere that captivated the attendees. The audience enjoyed the evening thoroughly, as Baggili's music resonated with the diverse cultural elements he integrates into his work. The event was a significant cultural experience, highlighting the collaborative efforts of the Belgian Embassy and Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiya in promoting cultural exchange and appreciation.



Karim Baggili performs at Al-Yarmouk Culture Center.



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# Burgan Bank lights up headquarters in blue

## In celebration of Al-Zour Refinery's opening

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank recently lit up its headquarters in blue from May 25 to June 6, joining numerous public and private entities in the nationwide celebration of Al-Zour Refinery's opening on May 29 under the patronage of HH the Amir of Kuwait Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In addition to being the world's largest grassroots refinery, Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company's (KIPIIC) mega project marks a turning point for Kuwait's economy and its capacity for influencing the global oil and gas industry.

Commenting on the Bank's participation in the nationwide celebrations, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager - Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, said: "The opening of Al-Zour Refinery is a win for Kuwait's economy and all of its respective industries. In celebration of this national milestone, we are very proud to be among many

institutions in Kuwait that are lighting up their buildings in blue, which symbolizes energy. This unified act showcases the continuous support and importance of positive economic and social change in our community. As we stand at the forefront of the domestic banking and financial market, it is not hard to foresee the resounding positive impact that Al-Zour Refinery will have on our domestic economy and the overall development of our industry."

Al-Najadah also underscored the importance of mega national projects such as Al-Zour Refinery, which resonate with Burgan's unwavering commitment to the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles. In addition to providing over 1,000 job opportunities for Kuwaiti nationals, the refinery integrates stringent green features and state-of-the-art technologies that minimize possible harm to people or the environment.

These efforts include recycling and reusing wastewater, controlling emissions, monitoring the ambient air, and using smoke-free and low-noise flares. As an engaged corporate entity, Burgan Bank remains committed to encouraging and supporting all social and economic efforts that contribute to the overall development of Kuwait's economy and propel the country toward achieving its ambitious 2035 vision.



Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah



## KFAED participates in BADEA meetings

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) participated on Monday in the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) annual group meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, between May 27 and 31 to boost international cooperation. In a press release, KFAED said that it is partaking in the 59th meeting of the Board of Governors of the African Development Bank and the 50th meeting of the Board of Governors of the African Development Fund under the slogan "Transformation of Africa and the African Development Bank Group and Reform of the Global Financial Structure".

It added that the meetings aim to enhance the discussion on reforming the global financial structure to support Africa's transformation and sustainable growth on the continent, and that the meetings focus on the issue of African debt as one of the main points of the discussions. It also seeks to discover ways of motivating private funding, locally and internationally, providing natural capital, and promoting the transition towards green growth in Africa.

KFAED extends loans on a concessionary basis to finance development projects in developing countries. It also provides technical assistance to finance the costs of the feasibility studies of projects as well as the training of nationals of the borrowing countries. In addition, the Fund subscribes to the capital of international and regional development institutions. — KUNA



Dr. Husna Majid Al-Shaheen and Dr. Asaad Al-Rashid cut the ribbon.

## Anti-smoking clinic assists smokers and creates awareness

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Society for Smoking and Cancer Prevention (KSSCP) announced the opening of an anti-smoking clinic at the Life Science College of Sabah Al-Salem University City on the occasion of World No Smoking Day. KSSCP board member and treasurer, Dr. Husna Majid Al-Shaheen, in her opening speech, lauded the efforts of the university in completing the clinic. Dr. Al-Shaheen spoke about the dangerous harms smoking (of all types) causes, be they physical or psychological, in addition to the social harms. She said the clinic has been successful in assisting smokers

and those who want to quit smoking.

"The clinic creates an opportunity for those who wish to stop this harmful habit, as youths are the target of the tobacco mafia around the world. The fierce marketing campaign to promote smoking among the young generations through the launch of e-smoking devices and promoting them as means to stop smoking calls for concern because the opposite is true and they are not good for the body," she added.

University Deputy Rector for Planning Asaad Al-Rashid said the opening of the first specialized clinic is the first initiative of this kind at Kuwait University. He appreciated the efforts of all concerned parties to open the clinic on the university campus. This will create awareness about the dangers of smoking. Head of the Health Cities at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Amal Al-Yahya, said the opening will prevent smoking in the university city, adding that Sabah Al-Salem University City was approved as a healthy university.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Board of KSSCP, Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh, said that treatment of addiction is among the most important strategies of



smoking control programs. "Many smokers find it difficult to stop by themselves. They will benefit from the services that are available at the smoking prevention clinics. The goal is to help smokers who wish to stop, create awareness about the dangers of smoking, and dispense medicines that help stop smoking," he explained.

## Arab summit seeks to build bridges, enhances media content

**DUBAI:** The Arab Media Summit kicked off on Monday in Dubai, with Kuwait represented by Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. Under the patronage of UAE Vice President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the summit seeks to contribute to enhancing and developing media content and build bridges of communication and understanding between Arab members of the media, writers, and intellectuals.

The summit will continue until Wednesday and is considered the biggest media gathering in the region, where it will discuss the reality and future of the media and create cooperation opportunities between different Arab institutes. On that matter, the President of the Dubai Press Club (DPC) and the organizing committee of the Summit, Dr. Maitha bint Eissa Buhaimed, told KUNA that the Summit will continue until May 29 and is considered the umbrella for key events and initiatives.

"Focused on knowledge exchange and dialogue in the media industry, the summit will include the 22nd Arab Media Forum, the second Arab Youth



Dr. Ahmed Al-Mansoori



Dr. Maitha Buhaimed

Media Forum, the 23rd Arab Media Award, and the fourth Arab Social Media Influencers Award," she said. "This year's AMF will bring together a large number of thought leaders, media personalities, editors in chief, influencers, scholars, writers, experts, and content creators from the UAE, the region, and across the world to discuss the future of the region's evolving media landscape," she noted.

The agenda on Tuesday will include the participation of Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, in a dialogue session titled "Kuwait to a New Media Decade," in which he will point out the importance of media cooperation to cope with the comprehensive development that Kuwait is witnessing. — KUNA



Part of the sessions held on the sidelines of the 'Arab Youth Media Forum'.



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16 dead after cyclone batters India, Bangladesh

## South Korea, China, Japan vow to ramp up cooperation

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Palestinians gather at the site of the Zionist strike on May 27, 2024.

# Dismembered limbs, charred bodies: Survivors recount Zionist carnage

## Strike hits Rafah camp despite Zionists labelling it a safe zone

**RAFAH:** Men cleared away the charred debris of shelters and children salvaged food in Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Monday after the Zionist strike torched a camp for displaced Palestinians. "People were not just injured or killed, but charred," 24-year-old Mohammed Hamad told AFP in the aftermath of the strike that killed at least 45 people.

The death toll came from the health ministry in Gaza Strip, which also said that 249 people were wounded in the strike. "My cousin's daughter, a child no more than 13, was among the martyrs. She had no features at all because shrapnel tore off her face," Hamad said.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday the strike was a "tragic accident" which his government was investigating. "In Rafah, we evacuated a million uninvolved residents and, despite our best efforts, a tragic accident happened yesterday," Netanyahu told parliament.

The Zionist military had said earlier that its aircraft "struck a Hamas compound in Rafah" on Sunday night, killing two senior officials of the Palestinian militant group in the occupied West Bank. The strike caused a fire that blazed

through the camp in the Rafah governorate's Tal Al-Sultan area, reducing tents and shelters to ashes.

Footage released by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society showed chaotic nighttime scenes of ambulances racing to the attack site and evacuating the wounded, including children. As Palestinians cleared the site on Monday, only blackened metal sheeting and charred planks remained, the tent shelters having been all but obliterated.

"When these rockets fall on a tower block there are dozens of martyrs, so what about when they are tents?" lamented a man called Hamad. "When we heard the sound (of the explosion), the sky suddenly lit up," displaced Palestinian Muhannad, an eyewitness, told AFP. "We saw charred bodies and dismembered limbs as a result of the use of (...) missiles that caused a massive fire," the director of Gaza's civil defense agency, Mohammad al-Mughayyir, said.

### 'Ground shook violently'

Mughayyir, who oversaw the response to the fire, said on Monday "rescue and retrieval operations concluded last night, while efforts to extinguish the fire con-

tinued for 45 minutes". He said battling the inferno was made even more difficult because of fuel and water shortages. "We also saw cases of amputations, injured children, women, and elderly among the dead," he added.

Displaced Palestinians who had sought shelter in the area after being told by the Zionists to evacuate their homes were shocked when the camp was targeted. "They dropped leaflets asking us to go to the humanitarian zone in Tal al-Sultan, so we complied and came here," Abu Muhammad, who was displaced from north Gaza five months ago, told AFP. "But yesterday when I was having dinner at sunset, suddenly it felt like there was an earthquake — the ground shook violently," he said.

Mohammed Abu Qamar, 27, said he was equally baffled by the strikes, after he too moved from north Gaza to the camp that had been labelled a "safe zone" by the Zionists authorities. "Yesterday evening, to our surprise, the camp was bombarded with rockets in this supposedly safe place," he told AFP on Monday. "A fire broke out, and children, women, and old people were burned."

At the Tel Al-Sultan Clinic, body bags of white sheeting lay on the floor of a



RAFAH: A Palestinian woman holds the shrouded body of a child killed in Zionist bombardment, at a health clinic in the area of Tel al-Sultan in Rafah on May 26, 2024. — AFP photos

room before the dead were taken away for burial in pickup trucks. "She was seven months pregnant ... her room was bombed," Ahmad Miqdad told AFP in tears at the clinic.

His only sister, Yasmine, was killed

in the strike and her body could not be recovered because it was blown to pieces in the explosion, he said. "She was preparing to welcome her new baby. What did this innocent child do to deserve this?" — AFP

## Egypt opposition figure Tantawi arrested: Lawyer

**CAIRO:** An Egyptian appeals court on Monday upheld a one-year jail sentence for opposition politician Ahmad al-Tantawi, who was then arrested "inside the courthouse", lawyer Nabeh Elganadi told AFP. Tantawi, who had hoped to run against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in elections last year, was found guilty of election campaign irregularities in February.

"The sentence at the time was suspended on bail until the appeal today," Elganadi said, adding that Tantawi was arrested as soon as the decision was declared. The former lawmaker was also "barred from running in parliamentary elections for five years", according to human rights group the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms.

The Matareya Misdemeanour Court also upheld sentences against 22 members of Tantawi's campaign team, including its director Mohamed Aboul Deyar, of "one year in prison with hard labor", Elganadi said. They had been convicted of "circulating election-related papers without official authorization" in the lead-up to the election, which Sisi won in his third landslide victory.

"This is a political liquidation and a targeting of the person of Ahmed Tantawi," Rasha Qandeel, Tantawi's wife and spokesperson for his political movement, told Reuters. Ali said Tantawi had the right to appeal but that it could take up to two



CAIRO: Egyptian presidential hopeful Ahmed Al-Tantawi looks on during an interview at his office in central Cairo on October 12, 2023. — AFP

months to launch the appeal process.

Tantawi had accused authorities of hampering his effort to collect the endorsements required to run in the presidential election, under various pretexts including computer malfunctions. Tantawi instead asked his supporters to fill out unofficial "popular endorsement" forms — a tactic the authorities labelled as tantamount to election fraud.

He ultimately collected only 14,000 endorsements — well short of the 25,000 needed from at least 15 of Egypt's 27 governorates to enable him to run. Alternatively, he would have had to garner nominations from at least 20 parliamentary deputies.

The former member of parliament withdrew his candidacy before the December vote, citing harassment and obstruction. The National Election Authority announced Sisi's victory on December 18 with 89.6 percent of the vote. — Agencies

## Not safe for Syrian refugees to return home: EU's Borrell

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union pledged more than 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) on Monday to support displaced Syrians, but it dismissed any notion of them being able to return home because of instability under Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Before an EU-led donor conference on the 13-year-old war, Jordan's foreign minister said that the international community was abandoning Syrian refugees as funding to support them in host countries dwindles, suggesting that ways had to be found to ease voluntary returns to Syria.

The EU conference aims to keep the war on the agenda, as well as support for the millions of refugees it has created. But as the economic and social burden on neighboring countries mounts the bloc is divided and unable to find solutions, diplomats say. Refugees returning home is not yet one of them however, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell made clear at the start of the conference.

"While the European Union would wish that returning home could be a realistic option for all refugees, everywhere and always, we concur with the United Nations system that currently the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns to Syria are not in place," Borrell said. "We insist that it is the Assad regime that bears the primary responsibility for putting in place these conditions."

Borrell said the bloc was pledging 560 million euros in 2024 and 2025 to support refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan and a further 1 billion euros for Turkey. Syria has become a forgotten crisis that nobody wants to stir, amid the Zionist war in Gaza and tensions growing between Iran and

western powers over its regional activities.

Although Assad has long since reasserted control over most of Syria in a war that began with a 2011 uprising against him, more than 5 million refugees mostly in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan and millions more displaced internally still have little prospect of returning home. "We're going to be sending a very clear message from Jordan as a host country that we feel that refugees are being abandoned," Ayman Safadi told reporters on arrival in Brussels. "Host countries are being abandoned." Jordan is hosting around 1.3 million Syrians. Safadi said the issue "can only be solved by them going back to their country. So, we need to focus more on creating conditions conducive for them to return voluntarily." Funding to support refugees is dropping with the likes of the World Food Program reducing its aid. Countries say hosting refugees is an increasing burden, notably in economic crisis-hit Lebanon, where the discontent has seen forced deportations. "We expect our partners to uphold international law, including the principle of non-refoulement, and reject and condemn any forced deportations," Borrell said.

The 8th Syria conference brings together European and Arab ministers along with key international organizations, but beyond vague promises and financial pledges there are few signs that Europe can take the lead, diplomats said. The bloc has no ties with the Assad government and Monday's talks come just ahead of the European elections on June 6-9 in which migration is a divisive issue among the EU's 27 member states. With far-right and populist parties already expected to do well, there is little appetite to step up refugee support. An upswing in migrant boat arrivals from Lebanon to Europe, with Cyprus and Italy major destinations, has prompted some EU countries to warn of a big new influx into the bloc. "We'll continue to do everything we can. But unless we're helped, unless the international community shoulders its responsibility, there will be a decrease in services and there will be more suffering for refugees," Safadi said. — Reuters



## International

# South Korea, China, Japan vow to ramp up cooperation

## Countries affirm commitment to denuclearization in rare summit; N Korea hits back

SEOUL: Leaders from South Korea, China and Japan reaffirmed their goal of a denuclearized Korean peninsula Monday, during a rare summit at which they also agreed to deepen trade ties.

The summit brought together South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Seoul for the countries' first trilateral talks in nearly five years, partly due to the pandemic but also to once-sour ties.

While North Korea was not officially on the agenda, hours before the leaders met Pyongyang announced that it would soon put another spy satellite into orbit - a move that violates rafts of UN sanctions barring it from tests using ballistic technology. At a joint press conference, Yoon and Kishida urged North Korea to call off the launch, with the South Korean leader saying it would "undermine regional and global peace and stability".

Yoon also called for a "decisive" international response if Kim went ahead with his fourth such launch - aided by what Seoul claims is Russian technical assistance in exchange for Kim sending Moscow arms for use in Ukraine. But China, North Korea's most important ally and economic benefactor, remained notably silent on the issue, with Premier Li not mentioning it during the briefing.

In a joint statement issued after the talks, the countries reaffirmed their commitment to the "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula", adding that peace "serves our common interest and is our common responsibility".

North Korea hit back immediately, saying in a statement by a foreign ministry spokesperson that "to discuss the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula today constitutes a grave political provocation." Any talk of denuclearization would "violate the constitutional position of our country as a nuclear weapons state," said the statement, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. "Such thing as 'complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula' has already died

out theoretically, practically and physically," it added.

### Differences

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has previously condemned North Korea's nuclear tests and supported sanctions aimed at curbing its weapons development. In recent years, as China's relations with the United States have deteriorated, it has increasingly obstructed Washington-led efforts to impose stricter sanctions on the North.

China has consistently supported calls for the denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula. South Korea does not have nuclear weapons, but is protected under the US nuclear umbrella, and Washington has deployed nuclear-armed submarines to the South in a show of force against the North.

In recent years, Beijing has blamed US-South Korea joint military drills for escalating regional tensions. The press briefing in Seoul and the joint statement "clearly showed the difference of opinions" between the three countries, said Asan Institute research fellow Lee Dong-gyu.

Reaching a quick consensus on how to handle Kim Jong Un's regime was always going to be difficult "because there have been differences in diplomatic and security positions in each country", Lee told AFP. Even so, the fact that Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing are seeking to ramp up trilateral cooperation and boost economic ties is a good sign for future agreements on more difficult topics like Kim's nukes. "If the three countries do well in (economic cooperation), they can cooperate on security issues based on that foundation," he added.

### Trade ties

The three countries announced Monday that they would arrange "discussions for speeding up negotiations for a Trilateral FTA", and boost three-way cooperation, including holding summits on a regular basis. China's Li also said they had agreed on not



SEOUL: South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol (center) speaks as Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (left) and China's Premier Li Qiang listen during a joint news conference following their trilateral summit meeting on May 27, 2024. — AFP

turning "economic and trade issues into political games or security matters, and rejecting protectionism as well as decoupling or the severing of supply chains", Xinhua reported. Li serves as premier under China's top leader, President Xi Jinping.

After their talks, Yoon, Li and Kishida joined a business summit aimed at boosting trade between the countries, which was also attended by top industry leaders. Nuclear-armed North Korea successfully launched its first reconnaissance satellite last November.

Seoul said on Friday that South Korea and US

intelligence authorities were "closely monitoring and tracking" preparations for another launch - which could come as early as Monday, according to the launch window Pyongyang gave to Tokyo.

A group of Russian engineers has entered North Korea to help with the launch preparations, Yonhap reported Sunday, citing a government official. "North Korea might feel compelled to launch this satellite this week," said Choi Gi-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University. "One key factor will be the weather conditions for the launch." — AFP

## State of emergency in New Caledonia to be lifted: Elysee

NOUMEA, France: The state of emergency in New Caledonia that was imposed to quell deadly rioting will be lifted, the French presidency said, adding 480 gendarmes were being sent to the Pacific territory as reinforcements. "The President has decided for the time being not to extend the state of emergency" beyond its legal deadline of 12 days to allow for meetings with the pro-independence FLNKS party, the Elysee said in a statement Sunday.

Seven people have been killed in New Caledonia since riots over planned voting reforms erupted on May 13. Paris enforced the state of emergency two weeks ago, flying in hundreds of police and military reinforcements to restore order in the archipelago, which lies around 17,000 kilometers (10,600 miles) from mainland France.

The French government hopes that this easing of restrictions will enable dialogue to be re-established on the many blockades still in place that have paralyzed the archipelago. The lifting of the blockades is "the necessary condition for the opening of concrete and serious negotiations", the French presidency added in its statement, which said the state of emergency would be lifted at 5:00 am Tuesday (1800 GMT Monday).

President Emmanuel Macron flew to the Pacific archipelago on Thursday in an urgent bid to defuse the crisis, with the situation gradually easing over the past few days. On Friday, France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said the situation "remains extremely fragile".

Police are struggling to control certain districts of the capital Noumea and the international airport will remain closed to commercial flights until at least June 2. The first French tourists were evacuated Saturday from Noumea aboard military aircraft headed for Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand had already begun repatriating their nationals on Tuesday.

The Elysee also announced "7 additional mobile force units, i.e. 480 mobile gendarmes" would be sent to New Caledonia "within the next few hours" as reinforcements. In total, around 3,500 troops have been deployed to the



NOUMEA: People man a roadblock barricade, with Kanak flags, controlling access to a district in Noumea, France's Pacific territory of New Caledonia, on May 24, 2024. — AFP

archipelago, where two gendarmes died during the riots over planned voting reforms.

### Possible referendum

New Caledonia has been ruled from Paris since the 1800s, but many indigenous Kanaks still resent France's power over their islands and want fuller autonomy or independence. France is planning to give voting rights to thousands of non-indigenous long-term residents, something Kanaks say would dilute the influence of their votes.

Macron pledged during his lightning trip to New Caledonia that the planned voting reforms "will not be forced through". "Violence should never be allowed to take root," Macron said told journalists at the end of his visit, adding that all roadblocks should be "immediately" removed.

Christian Tein, leader of the CCAT, the pro-independence group organizing the protests, did not call off the roadblocks, but said on Friday that he wanted to "loosen the noose a little" so that fuel and medicines could be delivered. "This is our priority," he said.

The FLNKS party reiterated on Saturday its demand for the withdrawal of the voting reforms after meeting with Macron. The president said he would be willing to hold a referendum on the contentious changes, though he hoped that elected New Caledonia officials would be able to reach an agreement. — AFP

## Gunmen kidnap 150 people in central Nigeria

KANO: Hundreds of people have fled their villages in a rural community in northwestern Nigeria after weekend attacks by armed groups left 10 dead and at least 150 missing, a local government chairman and two residents said on Monday.

A year after President Bola Tinubu came to power promising to end widespread insecurity, kidnappings in the northwest by armed gangs demanding ransoms have become almost routine, with authorities seemingly powerless to stop them.

Gunmen on motorbikes first attacked Kuchi community in Niger state's Munya local government area on Friday evening, killing five residents and five hunters who tried to fight back, before kidnapping dozens of people, said local chairman Aminu Ajume. They came on around 100 motorcycles each carrying three men," he said. "No help came throughout the three hours they took operating in the village."

The gunmen returned on Sunday night and seized livestock and food and burned shops, forcing at least 700 villagers to flee to nearby communities, Ajume added. "As I am speaking to you, Munya is (a) no go area. They moved from house to house abducting people ... they abducted 150 villagers, including women," he told Reuters by phone. A UN source gave the same figure for the number kidnapped, while Nigerian state rescue agency SEMA said more than 100 were abducted.

Large-scale kidnappings for ransom are common in Nigeria's northwest and central states, where heavily armed gangs known locally as bandits often target remote villages. Boko Haram and rival jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) also regularly carry out abductions in northeast Nigeria. Some jihadist groups have established a presence outside the region including in Niger state. Najume, who blamed bandits for

Friday's attack, accused Nigerian security forces of failing to prevent regular raids.

"These killers usually come in from neighboring Kaduna state to operate in Niger and go back. They come in hundreds and surprisingly security personnel don't see them while they are on their way. And when villagers alert them they take no action," he said. The Nigerian army says it regularly carries out operations against gunmen in the region and rescues kidnap victims. Maryam Abubakar, a resident, said she hid in the toilet when she heard sporadic gunfire around 1900 GMT on Friday and gunmen burst into her home shortly after.

"It was raining at that time. The bandits entered the house, searched the rooms and kitchen and they took my aunt and her two children," Abubakar said, adding the three were still missing. Musa Auwal was in his shop when gunmen attacked on Friday but he hid in a nearby bush, he said. When he returned the next day, his shop had been looted, so he fled to stay with relatives 60 km away.

Bandits have no ideological leaning and are motivated by financial gain, but there has been concern over their increasing alliance with jihadists waging a 15-year insurgency in the northeast. Many communities in northwest Nigeria have formed self-defense vigilante forces to fight off bandits in remote areas with little state presence.

Najume said the gunmen had killed four vigilantes and four villagers. Rights group Amnesty International condemned the attack, saying on social media: "The invasion of the village by the gunmen is yet another indication of the Nigerian authorities' utter failure to protect lives." "The Nigerian authorities have left the rural communities of Niger state at the mercy of gunmen who kill and abduct people daily," it added. The group called on the authorities to prevent mass kidnappings and bring the culprits to justice. AFP contacted the police and the Nigerian presidency for comment, but they did not immediately respond. Data on kidnapping is notoriously unreliable because of under-reporting, but in March Nigerian risk consultancy SBM Intelligence said it had recorded 4,777 people abducted since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu took office in May last year. — Agencies

## Horror at Kuwaiti Gaza camp...

Continued from Page 1

used by (the Zionist entity) that have already led to so many civilian deaths". French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on X that "these operations must stop. There are no safe areas in Rafah for Palestinian civilians." EU foreign ministers agreed to call a meeting with the Zionist entity to get it to explain its actions in its Rafah offensive despite a UN court order to halt it, said the bloc's top diplomat Josep Borrell, who called the strike "horrifying".

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the government was investigating the "tragic accident" which he told parliament occurred "despite our best efforts" to protect civilians. Zionist government spokesman Avi Hyman earlier said: "It was definitely grave. Any loss of life, civilian live, is grave and is awful. We seek to go after Hamas and limit civilian casualties."

Relatives of captives held in Gaza, who have increased pressure on Netanyahu's government demanding action to secure a captive release deal, heckled the premier from the public gallery as he was speaking and raised posters of their loved ones. The Zionist entity launched the attack on Rafah on Sunday evening, hours after Hamas unleashed a barrage of rockets at the Tel Aviv area, most of which were intercepted. The Zionist army said its aircraft "struck a Hamas compound in Rafah" and killed Yassin Rabia and Khaled Nagar, senior officials for the militant group in the occupied West Bank.

Gaza's civil defense agency said the strike ignited a fire that tore through a displacement center in northwestern Rafah near a facility of the UN agency for Palestinian ref-



Palestinians gather at the site of the Zionist strike on May 27, 2024. — AFP

ugees, UNRWA. "We saw charred bodies and dismembered limbs ... We also saw cases of amputations, wounded children, women and the elderly," said civil defense agency official Mohammad Al-Mughayyir. "The sky suddenly lit up," said displaced Palestinian Muhammad, an eyewitness. One survivor, a woman who declined to be named, said: "We heard a loud sound and there was fire all around us. The children were screaming."

Footage from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society showed chaotic nighttime scenes of paramedics racing to the attack site and evacuating the wounded. Mughayyir said the rescue efforts were hampered by war damage and the impacts of the Zionist entity's siege. "There is a fuel shortage ... there are roads that have been destroyed" as well as "a shortage of water to extinguish fires", he said.

"We were praying...and we were getting our children's

beds ready to sleep. There was nothing unusual, then we heard a very loud noise, and fire erupted around us," said Umm Mohamed Al-Altar, a Palestinian mother in a red headscarf. "All the children started screaming... The sound was terrifying; we felt like the metal was about to collapse on us, and shrapnel fell into the rooms."

Video footage obtained by Reuters showed a fire raging in the darkness and people screaming in panic. A group of young men tried to haul away sheets of corrugated iron and a hose from a single fire truck began to douse the flames. By daylight, the camp in Rafah was a smoking wreckage of tents, twisted metal and charred belongings. Women wept and men held prayers beside bodies in shrouds. Sitting beside bodies of his relatives, Abed Mohammed Al-Attar said the Zionist entity lied when it told residents they would be safe in Rafah's

western areas. His brother, sister-in-law and several other relatives were killed in the blaze. "The army is a liar. There is no security in Gaza. There is no security, not for a child, an elderly man, or a woman. Here he (my brother) is with his wife, they were martyred," he said.

The Zionist attack sparked strong regional protests from mediators Egypt and Qatar as well as from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Egypt deplored the "targeting of defenseless civilians" and labelled it part of "a systematic policy aimed at widening the scope of death and destruction in the Gaza Strip to make it uninhabitable". Jordan accused the Zionist entity of "ongoing war crimes", Saudi Arabia condemned "the continued massacres", and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed "to hold these barbarians and murderers accountable". — Agencies



A man reacts next to the body of his grandchild killed in the Zionist strike. — Reuters



## International



KUAKATA, Bangladesh: A man carries a child as he walks towards a shelter during a rainfall on May 26, 2024, ahead of cyclone Remal's landfall. — AFP photos



KOLKATA, India: A rickshaw puller carrying people wades through a waterlogged street during rainfall in Kolkata on May 27, 2024.

# 16 dead after cyclone batters India, Bangladesh

## Storm surge damages nearly 116,000 homes, threatens fresh water sources, mangroves

**PATUAKHALI, Bangladesh:** Millions of people in low-lying areas of Bangladesh and India on Monday surveyed the tangled wreckage left by a powerful cyclone that killed at least 16 people, destroyed thousands of homes, smashed seawalls and flooded cities.

Winds and torrential rain still hammered residents as they tried to salvage what remained of their belongings, a day after Cyclone Remal made landfall with fierce gales and crashing waves. "At least 10 people were killed in the cyclone" in Bangladesh, the country's state minister for disaster Mohibbur Rahman told reporters. Some drowned, while others were crushed when their houses collapsed. In neighboring India, "at least six people" died, said Sumit Gupta, a senior government official from West Bengal state, including three who were electrocuted and others who were hit by debris.

Villages had been swamped by storm surges, tin roofs ripped off, trees uprooted and powerlines cut, an AFP reporter in the affected area said. "A total of 3.75 million people have been affected ... 35,483 homes were destroyed by the cyclone, and another

115,992 homes were damaged", Rahman said of the damage in Bangladesh alone.

### 'Extreme'

Cyclones have killed hundreds of thousands of people in Bangladesh in recent decades, but the number of superstorms hitting its densely populated coast has increased sharply, from around one a year to as many as three, due to the impact of climate change.

While many are used to the annual storm season, some said this cyclone was stronger and lasted longer than previous ones. "This time the wind is extreme," said local businessman Uttom Kumar Das, 62. "It is also lasting longer than before."

Most of Bangladesh's coastal areas are just a meter or two (three to six feet) above sea level, making them vulnerable to storm surges. The streets in the Bangladesh's second largest city Chittagong were waist-deep in water after recording 240 millimeters (9.5 inches) of rain, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department said.

In the Indian city of Kolkata, residents sloshed

through water up to their ankles. Waves driven by the cyclone breached a major embankment on Bangladesh's Manpura island. "The town protection embankment at Manpura was broken by the strong waves and heavy rains unleashed by the cyclone," said Showkat Ali, government administrator of hard-hit Barisal district. "We are trying to rescue some 100,000 people."

At its peak, Remal's wind speeds hit 111 kilometers (69 miles) per hour, said Muhammad Abul Kalam Mallik, senior weather forecaster at the state-run Bangladesh Meteorological Department. Around a million people in Bangladesh and neighboring India fled inland seeking safety before the cyclone, with 250,000 remaining in concrete storm shelters in Bangladesh on Monday.

### 'Crying for food'

While scientists say climate change is fueling more storms, better forecasting and more effective evacuation planning have dramatically reduced death tolls. In India's West Bengal, the "cyclone has blown off the roofs of hundreds of houses" and "up-

rooted thousands of mangrove trees and electricity poles", senior state government minister Bankim Chandra Hazra told AFP.

"Storm surges and rising sea levels have breached a number of embankments," Hazra added. "Some island villages are flooded." Sumita Mondal, 36, who hunkered down overnight away from India's coast, said she had fled with only what she could carry. "My three-year-old son is crying for food," she told AFP by telephone.

But Mallik, the Bangladeshi weather expert, said the expansive Sundarbans mangrove forest - where the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers meet the sea - helped dissipate the worst of the storm. "Like in the past, the Sundarbans acted as a natural shield to the cyclone," he said. However, Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain, Bangladesh's senior forest official for the Sundarbans, said the storm surge had swamped crucial freshwater areas with salt water. "We are worried," said Hossain. "These ponds were the source of fresh water for the entire wildlife in the mangroves - including the endangered Bengal tigers." — AFP

## Spain pledges 1 billion euros in military aid to Kyiv

**MADRID:** Spain on Monday pledged one billion euros in military aid to Ukraine as Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a security deal in Madrid. The deal "includes a commitment for one billion euros in military aid for 2024," Sanchez told a joint news conference.

"It will allow Ukraine to boost its capabilities including its essential air defense systems to protect its civilians, cities and infrastructure which are still suffering indiscriminate attacks as seen this weekend in Kharkiv," he said, referring to a Russian strike on the northeastern city that killed at least 16 people.

Zelensky's visit comes as Ukraine has been battling a Russian ground offensive in the Kharkiv region which began on May 10 in Moscow's biggest territorial advance in 18 months. With the Russian assault now in its third year, Ukraine has been pleading for more weapons for its outgunned and outnumbered troops, notably seeking help to address its lack of air defense systems. Sanchez said Spain had already pledged to supply Patriot missiles, but what Zelensky needed from Ukraine's allies was "the systems to launch these missiles". "That's what he's working on with different allies to see exactly how many we can send to guarantee this aerial security."

Spain would also send "another batch of Leopard tanks and above all ammunition," Sanchez said, pledg-

ing to keep working with Kyiv "to understand how else - and with what other alternative systems - we can help ensure Ukraine's air security."

### For defensive purposes

Zelensky has already signed bilateral security agreements with several countries including France, Germany and the UK. Sanchez said the security agreement would cover a range of a different issues, ranging from "military, humanitarian and financial support, to collaboration between Spanish and Ukrainian defense industries, as well as help with reconstruction and de-mining among other things".

Last month, Spain pledged to send an unspecified number of Patriot air defense missile systems to Ukraine; it has previously sent 10 Leopard tanks. Until now, Madrid has only provided limited military aid to Kyiv. According to the Kiel Institute - which tracks weapons pledged and delivered to Ukraine since the Russian invasion - Spain has so far committed 330 million euros in military aid, making it a small contributor on a European level. By comparison, Berlin, Paris and Rome have committed 18.61 billion, 5.65 billion and 1.0 billion euros respectively, while London's contribution stands at 9.22 billion, the figures show. Following talks with Sanchez, Zelensky met King Felipe VI for talks at the palace and then lunch, after which the monarch said "more than 4,300 Ukrainian soldiers" had already received training in Spain.

Spain's military support was purely for defensive purposes, the king said, indicating it was "based on the rejection of the use of armed force in an international context" - effectively a ban on firing such arms into Russian territory. Washington and other allies have also imposed a similar ban. — AFP



TEXAS: Wreckage is strewn across a property the day after a deadly series of tornadoes hit the central United States, in Valley View, Texas, US in a still image from aerial video. — Reuters

## Death toll climbs to 21 after storms, tornadoes buffet US

**WASHINGTON:** The death toll from tornadoes and other extreme weather that buffeted the central United States over the weekend climbed to 21 on Monday, as the severe storms threatened to roil parts of the East Coast.

The system, which struck the Southern Plains region beginning late Saturday, overturned vehicles and ripped up homes, leaving a wake of deadly destruction in its path. Storms were still likely to produce damaging wind and hail as they pushed eastward Monday, part of the US Memorial Day holiday weekend, as well as possibly produce "isolated tornadoes" in the eastern Mid-Atlantic, the National Weather Service said.

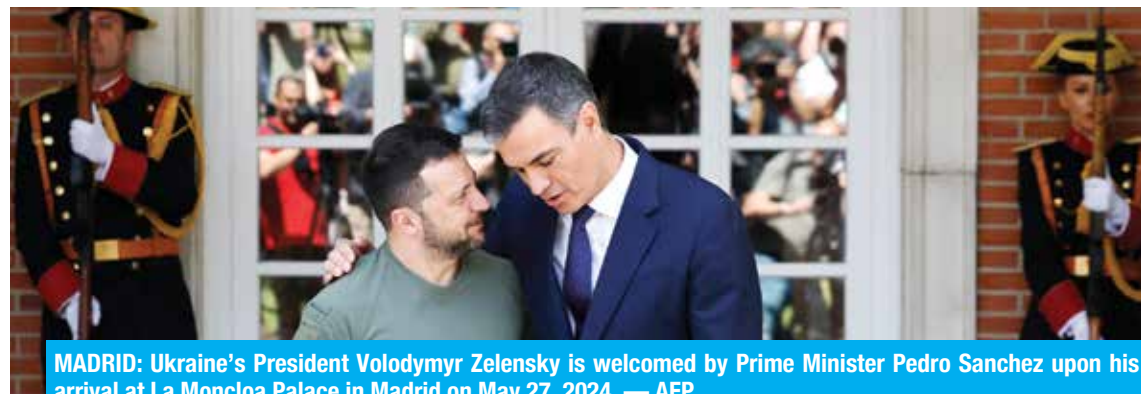
Over the weekend eight people died across northwest Arkansas in the severe weather, Lacey Kanipe, a public information officer with the state's Division of Emergency Management, told AFP. In Kentucky four people died as tornadoes ripped through the state, Governor Andy Beshear said during a news conference Monday, explaining that "at least a few" twisters

touched down in the state, including one that traveled on the ground for some 40 miles (65 kilometers).

The storms also caused "significant damage to the power infrastructure," said Beshear, who declared a state of emergency, adding that it could be days until all power is restored. Seven people died in Texas after a tornado ripped through the Valley View area north of Dallas, Cooke County Sheriff Ray Sappington told reporters. The twister destroyed homes and a gas station, and overturned vehicles on an interstate highway. Sappington called the damage "pretty extensive," in an interview with The Weather Channel. And in Oklahoma, at least two people were dead after a tornado hit Mayes County late Saturday, the county head of emergency management, Johnny Janzen, told the Fox News affiliate in Tulsa.

Storm chasers shared impressive footage of tornadoes ripping up roofs and tearing through trees, causing power lines to spark and sending branches and debris flying. As far north as Indiana, the start of the Indianapolis 500 motor race was delayed for four hours Sunday due to storms in the area, with fans asked to exit the stands and seek shelter.

More than 530,000 customers were without power midday Monday in states stretching from Arkansas up to West Virginia and south to Georgia, according to the website Poweroutage.us. Tornadoes are relatively common in the United States, especially in the center and south of the country. — AFP



MADRID: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky is welcomed by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez upon his arrival at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid on May 27, 2024. — AFP

## N Korea's latest satellite launch explodes in flight

**SEOUL/TOKYO:** North Korea said its attempt to launch a new military reconnaissance satellite ended in failure on Monday when a newly developed rocket engine exploded in flight. The attempt came just hours after Pyongyang issued a warning that it would try to launch a satellite by June 4, in what would have been its second spy satellite in orbit.

Instead, the launch became the nuclear-armed North's latest failure, following two other fiery crashes last year. It successfully placed its first spy satellite in orbit in November.

"The launch of the new satellite carrier rocket failed when it exploded in mid-air during the flight of the first stage," the deputy director general of North Korea's National Aerospace Technology Administration said in a report carried by state media.

An initial analysis suggested that the cause was a newly developed liquid fuel rocket motor, but other possible causes were being investigated, the report said. Officials in South Korea and Japan had earlier reported that the launch seemed to have failed. North Korea fired the projectile on a southern path off its west coast at around 10:44 p.m. (1344 GMT), the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. JCS said it had detected a large amount of debris from the rocket in the sea just two minutes after launch, however.

The object launched by North Korea disappeared over the Yellow Sea, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters, adding the government presumes nothing had entered the space. "These launches are in violation of relevant security council

resolutions and are a serious matter concerning the safety of our people," Hayashi said.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK showed video of what appeared to be an orange dot flying into the night sky and then bursting into flames in an area close to the border between China and North Korea. A Japanese defense ministry official told reporters that the color of the flames in the footage suggests that liquid fuel may be burning, but details are currently being analyzed, NHK reported.

The launch appeared to originate from Donggahang-ri, a northwestern area of the country where North Korea's main space flight center is based, JCS said. The Japanese government issued an emergency warning on Monday for residents in the south to take cover from the possible threat of a North Korean missile, before lifting the warning and saying it was not expected to fly over Japanese territory. Japan said over its J-Alert broadcasting system that North Korea appeared to have fired a missile, sending out the warning

to residents in southern prefecture of Okinawa. The launch would be the nuclear-armed North's attempt to place a second spy satellite into orbit. After several failed attempts that ended when the rockets crashed, North Korea successfully placed its first such satellite in orbit in November.

The North's first bid to launch the new Chollima-1 satellite rocket, on May 31 last year, ended after a failure in the second stage. State media blamed the setback on an unstable and unreliable new engine system and fuel. After the May launch attempt, South Korea retrieved the wreckage of the satellite from the sea and said an analysis showed it had no meaningful use as a reconnaissance platform. Another attempt in August also ended in failure, with stages of the rocket boosters experiencing problems resulting in the payloads crashing into the sea. North Korea's space authorities had described the August failure after the rocket booster experienced a problem with its third stage as "not a big issue" in terms of the rocket system's overall reliability. — Reuters



TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024

# Saudi fund launches 'Neo Space Group' to boost space industry

## Establishment of NSG an important milestone: Official

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) on Monday launched the Neo Space Group to work on the kingdom's nascent satellite and space industry, its first investment in the sector. One of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, the PIF has already invested heavily in sports, gaming and so-called Saudi giga-projects including Neom, a \$500-billion futuristic megacity under construction in the desert.

The Neo Space Group or NSG is the "PIF's first investment focused on the space industry", the sovereign wealth fund said in a statement.

It "aims to develop and enhance commercial space operations in Saudi Arabia, providing innovative satellite and space solutions locally and globally", the PIF said. It will also "invest in localization, technology, start-ups, and knowledge in the space and satellite sector in Saudi Arabia" in the latest bid to boost economic diversification.

Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has sought both to open up and diversify its oil-reliant economy. From world-class footballers to a new national airline and even a speciality shop serving camel milk gelato, the PIF has splashed billions on acquisitions intended to support diversification.

The fund has also made high-profile investments in foreign firms including stakes in Uber, electric car maker Lucid and video game company Activision Blizzard. Domestic investments consti-



NSG aims to develop and enhance commercial space operations in Saudi Arabia, providing innovative satellite and space solutions locally and globally.

tute the vast majority of its portfolio, however. "The establishment of NSG marks an important milestone in the development of the growing satellite and space sector in Saudi Arabia," said Omar

Al-Madhi, PIF's co-head of MENA Direct Investments. Last year, Saudi Arabia sent its first two astronauts into space, including Rayyanah Barnawi, the kingdom's first female astronaut. — AFP

## Burgan Bank's 4 Visa cardholders to win a trip to Paris Olympics

**KUWAIT:** As part of its continued efforts to offer its customers a holistically rewarding banking journey, Burgan Bank unveiled its latest draw campaign, "Visa Olympics", which grants four lucky Visa cardholders an all-expenses-covered trip to Paris to attend the 2024 Summer Olympics. The campaign is valid throughout the entire month of May for all Burgan customers using Visa credit and prepaid cards, with the draw set to take place on June 2, 2024.



Nasser Al-Qaisi

Commenting on the Bank's latest reward campaign, Nasser Al-Qaisi, General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank, said: "As a core part of our retail strategy, we seek to offer a fully integrated and rewarding customer journey: one that goes beyond simply delivering on everyday banking needs. With the approach of the awaited Paris Summer Olympics, we wanted to express our gratitude to our loyal customers by giving our Visa cardholders a chance to win a trip to Paris and attend the Summer Olympics – simply by using their Visa credit and prepaid cards for their everyday purchases."

To enter the draw, Burgan customers must make



at least one domestic or international purchase using their Visa credit card or prepaid card, at a minimum value of KD 10, between May 1 and May 31. The cardholder gets one chance to win for every KD 10 spent, whether online or through point-of-sale (POS) transactions; and the higher the value spent throughout the campaign, the higher the chances of winning three nights in Paris and a ticket to attend the Summer Olympics.

The Paris Olympics draw campaign is one of many advantages of Burgan's Rewards Program, which

offers the Bank's cardholders numerous benefits, beginning with exclusive discounts and cash-back offers to premium services (such as concierge and VIP lounge access). The Programs also offers its customers access to unique experiences and exclusive events. The Paris Olympics also echoes the success of Burgan Bank's partnership with Visa in 2022, whereby one lucky winner was rewarded an all-expenses-paid trip to Qatar in 2022 to attend the FIFA World Cup – all in an effort to continue adding unique value to customers' everyday transactions.

## Elon Musk's xAI valued at \$24bn after fresh funding

**NEW YORK:** Elon Musk's AI startup xAI raised \$6 billion in series B funding, reaching a post-money valuation of \$24 billion as investors bet big on challengers to companies like OpenAI in the intensifying AI race. The funding round was backed by investors including Andreessen Horowitz and Sequoia Capital, the company said in a blog post on Sunday.

The company's pre-money valuation was \$18 billion, Musk said in a post on X. The money will be used to take xAI's first products to market, build advanced infrastructure and accelerate research and development of future technologies, xAI said.

"There will be more to announce in the coming weeks," Musk said in another X post, in response to the announcement of the funding. Companies like Microsoft backed OpenAI and Alphabet's are among those leading the fierce race for generative AI dominance, driving significant investments and innovation in the rapidly evolving landscape.

The latest funding, including from well known venture capitalists and a Saudi prince, takes the firm's total valuation to \$24 billion, based on a pre-infusion figure of \$18 billion cited by Musk.

"xAI is pleased to announce... Our Series B funding round of \$6 billion," the company said in a blog post on Sunday. "The funds from the round will be used to take xAI's first products to market, build advanced infrastructure, and accelerate the research and development of future technologies," it added. Musk teased on his social media platform X that there would be "more to announce in the coming weeks".

The latest round of funding came from Valor Equity Partners, Andreessen Horowitz, Sequoia Capital and Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, among others. Musk launched the company in July last year, shortly after he signed a letter calling for a pause in AI innovations.

He is one of the world's few investors with deep enough pockets to compete in the AI sphere with the likes of OpenAI, Google and Meta. Building an AI model at the same scale as those companies comes at an enormous cost in computing power, infrastructure and expertise.

xAI said Sunday its primary focus was to develop "advanced AI systems that are truthful, competent, and maximally beneficial for all of humanity". It is developing a chatbot named Grok, which can access X, the former Twitter, in real time. Musk earlier this month told investors that he planned to build a supercomputer dubbed "gigafactory of compute" to support the development of xAI. — Agencies

## German business morale stagnates as recovery falters

**FRANKFURT:** German business sentiment stagnated in May after several months of improvement, a survey showed Monday, denting hopes that Europe's biggest economy is on course for a strong recovery.

The Ifo institute's closely-watched confidence barometer, based on a survey of around 9,000 companies, came in at 89.3 points. It was the same reading as in April, and lower than a forecast of 90.3 from analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet.

Prior to May, the survey had risen for three consecutive months, fuelling hopes the economy would stage a strong rebound after shrinking last year as it faced myriad headwinds. Despite the unchanged reading, Ifo president Clemens Fuest struck an upbeat note. "Germany's economy is working its way out of the crisis step by step," he said in a statement. Companies were less satisfied with their current business situation but expectations improved, the survey showed.

It pointed to improvements in the manufacturing, trade and construction sectors but the picture in the service sector worsened. ING economist Carsten Brzeski said the latest reading represented a "cold shower to optimists". It "suggests that the bottoming out of the German economy is not yet being followed by a strong recovery," he said. But Fritzi Koehler-Geib, chief economist at public lender KfW, said there was still a "little more confidence" in German companies than just a few months earlier.

"Although the business climate stagnated in May, it remains at a significantly higher level than at the beginning of the year. All in all, the economic trough should be largely over." The German economy was hit hard after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sent energy costs soaring, with the crisis compounded by a manufacturing slowdown and weakness in key trading partners, particularly China. — AFP



SINGAPORE: A bunkering barge (right) supplies fuel to a container ship (left) with "green methanol," which comes from low carbon sources, at PSA Tuas Port terminal in Singapore on May 27, 2024. — AFP

## Singapore shipper sets record with bio-methanol refueling

**SINGAPORE:** A Singapore shipping firm performed on Monday what it called the world's first simultaneous refueling of a container ship with bio-methanol while it was being loaded with cargo in the port. Simultaneous loading and refueling hastens a vessel's turnaround time, according to Shmuel Yoskovitz, chief executive of Singapore-based X-Press Feeders.

With extra time, the ship can sail at

a slower pace, reducing fuel use and leading to lower costs and emissions, he added. Global maritime transport accounts for 2.89 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions, data from the International Maritime Organization shows. On a global scale, it is more polluting than air transport.

"This milestone represents a significant leap forward for X-Press Feeders and the global maritime in-

dustry," said Francis Goh, the firm's chief operating officer. He told reporters that as far as they know this was the first such simultaneous port refueling with green methanol.

Green methanol, or bio-methanol, is composed of waste carbon dioxide (CO2) and "green hydrogen", which is created by using renewable energy to split water molecules. Compared to conventional marine fuels, green methanol has a lower carbon footprint, cutting emissions by up to 65 percent, according to X-Press Feeders. Last year, a ship was refueled with bio-methanol via another ship, but this was done offshore. Singapore's Maritime and Port

Authority, which supported Monday's refueling at the Tuas Port, signaled a readiness to offer methanol bunkering on a commercial scale.

The city-state operates the world's second-biggest port and is a major bunkering hub. Last year, in a bid to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets set by the European Union, Danish shipping giant Maersk launched the first container ship running on bio-methanol. X-Press Feeders' ship is the first vessel made in China that can run on both conventional fuel and green methanol. The company said it will add 14 such dual-fuel vessels to its fleet over this year and next. — AFP



## Business

# NBK announces its strategic partnership with FII Institute

## Collaboration aimed at fostering growth, driving innovation in investment

RIYADH: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the leading financial institution in Kuwait, and FII Institute, a global non-profit foundation dedicated to making an impact on humanity, marked a significant milestone on Monday with the official announcement of their strategic partnership. The signing ceremony, held in Riyadh, brought together Anas Al-Ubaid, GM of NBK KSA, Musaad Al-Sudairy, CEO of NBK Wealth KSA, and Rakan Tarabzoni, COO of FII Institute, to set the stage for a transformative collaboration aimed at fostering growth and driving innovation in investment within the region and beyond.

Combining NBK's legacy of financial excellence and FII Institute's unwavering commitment to shaping the future through its impactful global initiatives, this partnership represents a powerful union of expertise and vision. With a shared dedication to driving positive change through the power of investment, NBK and FII Institute will join together to drive innovation.

This strategic partnership comes on the heels of the announcement of the 8th edition of the Future Investment Initiative (FII) conference set for Oct 29-31 in Ri-

yadh under the theme "Infinite Horizons: Investing Today, Shaping Tomorrow." It promises to convene today's greatest minds to share their global perspectives, unlocking new frontiers for human advancement and impactful innovation. FII stands poised to transcend limitations and explore boundless opportunities for progress.

In statements echoing their enthusiasm for the partnership, the CEO of NBK Wealth KSA and the GM of NBK KSA expressed their confidence in the transformative impact that this collaboration will bring to the financial sector and beyond:

Musaad Al-Sudairy, CEO of NBK Wealth KSA: "We are thrilled to announce our collaboration with the FII Institute, a strategic alliance that will empower our clients globally and catalyze sustainable development. Together, we are not only investing in a brighter future but also unlocking new pathways for innovation, growth, and community prosperity."

"This partnership to address key global issues aligns perfectly with NBK's commitment to creating meaningful impact. Collectively, we will explore actionable solutions of the future, reinforcing our shared

dedication to a sustainable and prosperous future."

Anas Al-Ubaid, GM of NBK KSA: "At NBK, we share the FII Institute's dedication to addressing global challenges through collaboration and innovation. By aligning our efforts, we aim to leverage our combined expertise to generate insights and solutions that will drive sustainable growth and improve lives worldwide. This partnership represents a significant step towards creating a more resilient and equitable future, benefiting not only our clients but also the global community."

Richard Attias, CEO of FII Institute, emphasized the importance of partnering with esteemed international institutions like the National Bank of Kuwait, known for its trusted seven-decade history and progressive approach to finance. He stated, "The deployment of strategic capital plays a crucial role in addressing the most pressing global challenges. Our collaboration with NBK represents a convergence of expertise and resources, advancing our collective mission to drive positive change and develop innovative solutions through our initiatives and programs."



Anas Al-Ubaid, Musaad Al-Sudairy and Rakan Tarabzoni, COO of FII Institute during the signing ceremony.



A man carries merchandise at a market near the border with Argentina, in Nanawa, Paraguay May 16, 2024.— Reuters

## Argentina's inflation, propped-up peso spawn Paraguay town

NANAWA: Paraguayan shoppers used to flock in their droves to the border town of Nanawa to buy cheap imports from Argentina, where the weak peso currency for years kept relative prices low for fuel, medicine and groceries smuggled in across the frontier. Now Nanawa is a ghost town, with prices of the contraband pushed up steeply by Argentina's rare mix of near 300 percent inflation and a propped-up peso that has even rallied against the dollar in widely-used parallel markets under libertarian President Javier Milei.

"Before, things worked very well, we sold everything," said Marta, 57, a pharmacy employee in Nanawa who only wanted to go by her first name. "Now there is nothing left. For two months we've been like this, the town is dead." Shopkeepers in Nanawa, 30 km (18 miles) from capital Asuncion, estimated to Reuters that sales had plunged between 60-80 percent since Milei took office in December when he sharply devalued the official peso currency and ushered in austerity.

Since then the peso has been allowed to depreciate just 2 percent per month on a controlled 'crawling-peg', and monthly inflation - while slowing - has been some 10-20 percent each month. That's meant prices in dollar terms have soared. Something that cost 1,000 pesos on Jan 1 would have been worth \$1.24 at the official exchange rate that day. With 65 percent accumulated inflation though April, that same product would have cost 1,650 pesos, worth \$1.88, on April 30, an over 50 percent rise.

That's made Argentina far more expensive in relative terms, stoking claims by analysts that the peso is overvalued and calls for another devaluation. Meanwhile tourists and exporters have felt the pinch of less competitive local prices. "For Argentina this process is painful," said Economist Gimena Abreu, who analyses relative prices across on the Uruguay-Argentina border at the Catholic University of Uruguay, adding in the short-term exports and tourism would be hit.

Data from her team shows the price gap between Uruguay and Argentina plunged from 180 percent in September before Milei took office to 50 percent in March as Argentine relative prices shot up. "In the short-term Argentine exports will become less competitive," Abreu said. Argentina's top exports include soy products, corn, wheat, beef, energy products and automobiles.

### Beefed up prices

That's pushed up costs for regular Argentines,

hitting consumption. A kilo of beef last September cost on average 2,846 pesos (some \$3.70 at freely accessible parallel exchange rates then), official data show, much cheaper than a minimum of \$7 in regional capitals like Montevideo and Santiago in Chile.

The latest data in April shows the Argentine beef price at 6,505 pesos, nearly \$7, largely erasing the cost advantage. "My relatively comfortable dollar income lifestyle has gone to the other extreme," said Buenos Aires resident Paige Nichols, 37, who moved to Argentina from the United States 17 years ago. "I now need to be very mindful of what I'm spending."

Nichols told Reuters her monthly household expenditure had shot up by roughly 150 percent since the December devaluation, driven primarily by health insurance, utilities and groceries.

Products like olive oil and toothpaste are becoming small luxuries. Reuters found on average a half liter bottle of olive oil cost \$15 in Buenos Aires, with some brands priced as high as \$26. Colgate toothpaste was 4,976 pesos or \$5 for a single 90g tube, twice what retailers charge in Paraguay and Uruguay. Nichols, who works in the travel sector, said once cheap prices for tourists were getting in line with regional neighbors and even the United States. She said dining out in Buenos Aires was almost twice as expensive as a year ago.

Despite that, government data show that incoming tourist numbers were up in the first two months of the year, though there are signs of strain as prices rise, a potential risk to the \$3.2 billion travelers brought into the economy last year. Between January and March 2024, arrivals from neighbor Uruguay - who spent \$1.3 billion in Argentina last year - fell 25 percent versus a year ago, Uruguayan outbound tourism figures show.

Border towns in Paraguay, Chile and elsewhere have seen lower local demand for Argentina imports, but others have cheered the shifting trend, which has also meant fewer locals making day trips to Argentina to look for bargains. "What I will say is I've heard of fewer people crossing over the bridge to Argentina to shop," said Uruguayan cafe owner Lilian who runs Helianthus Bistro in the border town of Fray Bentos, just across the Uruguay River from Argentina.

"Things are getting more expensive there, so there are no longer lines of cars bumper to bumper crossing the bridge." Back in Nanawa, 36-year-old supermarket employee Raquel Alvarenga, said flourishing demand previously for cheaper Argentine imports meant the store had to expand outside its doors to deal with the number of customers. Now that was over. "It has been quite damaging. Sales have dropped by 50 percent and it's hitting trade... Argentine businesses raise their prices through the sky constantly. They change every day," she said. "Before we had to serve people outside because we couldn't fit everyone in the store. Now we have time to drink terere (local tea)." — Reuters

## EU law to hit gas imports with emissions limit

BRUSSELS: European Union countries approved a law on Monday to impose methane emissions limits on Europe's oil and gas imports from 2030, pressuring international suppliers to cut leaks of the potent greenhouse gas. Methane is the main component of the natural gas countries burn in power plants and to heat homes. It is also the second-biggest cause of climate change after carbon dioxide, and fuels global warming when it escapes into the atmosphere from leaky oil and gas pipelines and infrastructure. Ministers from EU countries gave their governments' final approval to the policy at a meeting in Brussels, meaning it can now enter into force. Only Hungary voted against it.

From 2030, the EU will impose "maximum methane intensity values" on fossil fuels placed on the European market. The European Commission will design the exact methane limits by that date.

Importers of oil and gas that flout the limit could face financial penalties. "This import standard could potentially reduce global methane emissions from oil and gas by a third," said Alesia Virone, EU affairs director at the non-profit Clean Air Task Force, noting the EU's status as the world's biggest oil and gas importer. The rules are likely to hit major gas suppliers such as the US, Algeria and Russia. Moscow slashed deliveries to Europe since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine and has since been replaced as Europe's biggest pipeline gas supplier by Norway, whose supply has among the world's lowest methane intensity.

The Biden administration - which alongside the EU has rallied countries to cut methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030 to limit climate change - has welcomed the EU's methane law. The US last year set out its own rules requiring oil firms to limit their methane emissions. A spokesman for the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers said it was concerned the EU may not recognize other jurisdictions' existing methane standards as complying with its own - and failure to do this could jeopardize security of energy supplies. The EU will also require European producers to regularly check their operations for leaks of methane, and bans most cases of flaring and venting, when oil and gas companies intentionally burn off or release unwanted methane into the atmosphere. — Reuters



## EU clears law to boost domestic green technology

BRUSSELS: European Union governments formally cleared on Monday a new law designed to ensure the bloc produces 40 percent of its solar panels, wind turbines, heat pumps and other clean tech equipment and to help European industry compete with US and Chinese rivals. The Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA) will enter force next month or early July once it has been signed by the presidents of the European Parliament and the Council and is published in the EU's official journal.

The act is a centerpiece of the EU's push to ensure it is not only a global leader in cutting greenhouse gas emissions, but also in manufacturing the technology required. Europe is increasingly relying on China, which is forecast to have 80 percent of global man-

### News in brief

#### Cyprus scraps \$1.2bn port concession

NICOSIA: Cyprus has scrapped a 1.2 billion euro (\$1.30 billion) concession agreement for the development of Larnaca port, claiming on Monday the operator awarded the project in 2020 was in breach of contract. Operator Kition Ocean Holdings, which held a long-term lease to develop and operate both a yachting marina and a commercial port in the southern port town, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Larnaca is the staging post of a maritime shuttle of international aid into Gaza. The issue would not affect activity at the port, government officials said. The consortium had failed to renew a letter of guarantee for the project which legal authorities considered a contractual breach. Transport Minister Alexis Vafeades said. — Reuters

#### Vietnam CB stops auctioning gold

HANOI: Vietnam's central bank will stop auctioning gold in the domestic market and launch a new measure to stabilize prices of the precious metal, it said on Monday. The central bank, formally known as the State Bank of Vietnam, has held several gold auctions since April 23 aimed at reducing domestic prices and narrowing the gap with international prices. It will launch the new measure, likely from June 3, it said, without elaborating. The central bank has held six gold auctions since April 23, its first such auction in more than a decade, but has managed to sell less than half of the gold offered, according to its data. It sold only 48,500 tael out of 100,800 tael of gold offered at the auctions. A tael is equivalent to 37.5 grams, or 1.21 troy ounces, and domestic prices for a tael are about \$700 more than current global prices. — Reuters

#### Brazil's market for Chinese EVs grows

BEIJING: Brazil has overtaken Belgium as the largest export market for Chinese new energy vehicles, industry data showed, as Chinese car-makers increase sales to non-European markets amid European Union's anti-subsidy probe into Chinese electric vehicles. Exports of pure electric and plug-in hybrid cars to Brazil soared 13-fold year-on-year to 40,163 units in April, making it the biggest export market for a second straight month, according to data from the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA). The steep increase in exports to Brazil, which was the 10th largest export market in January, comes ahead of a further increase in tariffs on EVs and hybrid vehicle imports from July as the South American country seeks to encourage local auto production. — Reuters

ufacturing capacity in solar power. The EU also has concerns that the \$369 billion of green subsidies in the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act will entice European producers to relocate.

The bloc has set a 2030 target of producing 40 percent of the products it needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These will cover renewable energy, nuclear power, heat pumps, electrolyzers and other decarbonizing technologies, including carbon capture.

The EU is also aiming to reach 15 percent of global production of these technologies by 2040. The NZIA proposes streamlining the granting of permits for projects that boost EU manufacturing, ensuring most are issued within six to nine months. Public authorities buying clean tech products will have to base their choices not only on price but with a 30 percent weighting to an offer's sustainability and resilience - the degree to which the EU relies on supply from a single third country. Hitting the target will be particularly tough in solar, given EU manufacturers supply fewer than 3 percent of EU panel deployments and are fighting for survival. The EU wind energy sector is far stronger, although Chinese companies are gaining a foothold. — Reuters



## Business

# Gulf Bank promotes diversity and inclusion at 'Partners for Their Employment' career fair

## Initiative aims to support individuals with special needs

KUWAIT: In its ongoing commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion, Gulf Bank recently participated in the "Partners for Their Employment" Career Fair, organized by the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs in partnership with the Human Construction Institute. This initiative aims to support individuals with special needs by providing them with equal employment opportunities. During the event, Gulf Bank received a substantial number of job applications from graduates of the fifth batch, totaling around 100 trainees for the training year 2024/2023.

Salma Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, expressed the bank's annual commitment to participating in the "Partners for Their Employment" campaign. She highlighted the comprehensive recruitment, training, and development program offered to individuals with special needs, resulting in job opportunities within the bank. Al-Hajjaj emphasized Gulf Bank's confidence in the capabilities of individuals with special needs, and its commitment to facilitating their inclusion in both society and the banking industry. She highlighted Gulf Bank's significant presence as a participant in the career fair, showcasing its dedication to fostering sustainable development in Kuwait.

Gulf Bank's involvement in the career fair is in line with its 2025 strategy and Kuwait's vision for the future. The bank is dedicated to nurturing young talents and consistently enhancing their skills as part of its comprehensive strategy. The bank is committed to tapping into the talents of young individuals, recognizing their crucial contribution to its human re-



Salma Al-Hajjaj

Gulf Bank is confident in the capabilities of individuals with special needs, and is committed to facilitating their inclusion in both society and the banking industry.

sources sustainability goals. Gulf Bank's dedication has been recognized with the "Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives" award from MEED Magazine, showcasing its efforts to uphold community sustainability principles and cultivate a diverse and inclusive workplace environment.

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 every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the



Gulf Bank's Human Resources team.

choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social

and governance levels 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.

## Shanghai lowers home downpayments, eases buying curbs

BEIJING: China's commercial hub Shanghai has lowered the minimum downpayment ratios for home buyers and relaxed some home purchase restrictions, after the country lowered the national level in a market stabilizing effort earlier this month. Shanghai will lower the minimum downpayment ratio for first home purchases to 20 percent, and cut the ratio for second home purchases to 30 percent for suburban areas and to 35 percent for the rest of the city. The new rule will become effective on Tuesday. Shanghai previously set the downpayment ratio for first home purchases at 30 percent and second homes at 40-50 percent.

Shanghai will also cut its minimum interest rates on first home mortgage to the loan prime rate (LPR) minus 45 basis points, compared to LPR minus 10 basis points earlier. The city will also relax home buying restrictions for non-Shanghai residents by shortening the number of years of social insurance and income tax payments required before buyers become eligible. It will also abolish restrictions on home purchasing by divorced couples. China on May 17 announced steps to stabilize its crisis-hit property sector, by slashing the downpayment ratio for home buyers and cutting interest rates of mortgages. China lowered the minimum down payment ratio for first homebuyers to 15 percent and for second home purchases to 25 percent at a national level.

The four first-tier mega cities Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen and Guangzhou require higher minimum downpayments and higher mortgage interest rates than the national levels. — Reuters

## ECB policy must stay restrictive into 2025: Economist

PARIS: The European Central Bank is ready to cut interest rates next month but policy must continue to be restrictive this year as wage growth will not normalize until 2026, ECB chief economist Philip Lane told the Financial Times. The ECB has all but promised a rate cut for June 6, so the debate has shifted to subsequent moves and markets have dialed back their expectations, betting on just one more cut this year.

"Barring major surprises, at this point in time there is enough in what we see to remove the top level of restriction," Lane told the FT in an interview published on Monday. "The best way to frame the debate this year is that we still need to be restrictive all year long," he added. "But within the zone of restrictiveness we can move down somewhat."

While Lane made no explicit comment about the July policy meeting, a string of policymakers including fellow board member Isabel Schnabel have already said that a second step should not come quite so soon. Wage growth is expected to "visibly" decelerate next year and policymakers can then debate normalizing policy.

At 4 percent, the ECB's deposit rate holds back growth and there is little debate that the first few cuts, at least until 3 percent but possibly further, merely remove restriction rather than provide stimulus.

"We need to see more progress (on inflation) before we move from maintaining the restrictive phase to thinking about normalization," Lane added. Lane said ECB policymakers needed to keep rates in restrictive territory this year to ensure that inflation kept easing and did not get stuck above the bank's target, which "would be very problematic and probably quite painful to eliminate".



A key wage indicator accelerated last week, spooking some but Lane said the figure was well anticipated and a slowdown was already in the works.

"Deceleration does not necessarily mean an immediate return to steady state," Lane said. "This year the adjustment is clearly quite gradual."

The European Central Bank has plenty of room for rate cuts and current market expectations, ECB policymaker Francois Villeroy de Galhau said in a newspaper interview on Monday. After a first rate cut next month that Villeroy described as a "done deal", debate among ECB policymakers remains open about how fast and far to keep easing after that.

Villeroy, who is also the governor of the French central bank, has repeatedly made the case for the ECB adopting an approach of "maximum optionality" after June. In an interview with German newspaper Boersen Zeitung, he pushed back against suggestions that the ECB should only cut once a quarter when its economic forecasts are updated, which would exclude a July move.

"I don't say that we should commit already on July, but let us keep our freedom on the timing and pace," Villeroy added. Looking through the debate about the short term, market analysts surveyed regularly by the ECB expect it to cut its main rate over time to 2 percent, which Villeroy described as "not unreasonable". — Reuters

## China sets up \$47.5bn fund to boost its semiconductor sector

BEIJING: China has set up its third planned state-backed investment fund to boost its semiconductor industry, with a registered capital of 344 billion yuan (\$47.5 billion), according to a filing with a government-run company's registry. The hundreds of billions of yuan invested in the sector puts into perspective President Xi Jinping's drive to achieve self-sufficiency for China in semiconductors.

That commitment has taken on renewed urgency after the US imposed a series of export control measures over the last couple of years, citing fears Beijing could use advanced chips to boost its military capabilities. Chinese chip shares rose, with the CES CN Semiconductor Index rallying more than 3% and set to log the biggest one-day gain in more than a month.

The third phase of the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund was officially established on May 24 and registered under the Beijing Municipal Administration for Market Regulation, according to the National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System, a government-run credit information agency. The third phase will be the largest of the three funds launched by the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, known as the "Big Fund."

China's finance ministry is the biggest shareholder with a 17 percent stake and paid-in capital of 60 billion yuan, ac-



According to Tianyancha, a Chinese companies information database company, China Development Bank Capital is the second-largest shareholder with a 10.5 percent stake.

The ministry of finance didn't immediately reply to Reuters request for comment. Seventeen other entities are listed as investors, including five major Chinese banks: Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China, and Bank of Communications, with each contributing around 6 percent of the total capital. Reuters reported in September that China would launch the third phase of the Big Fund.

The first phase of the fund was es-

established in 2014 with registered capital of 138.7 billion yuan, and the second phase followed in 2019 with 204 billion yuan. The Big Fund has provided financing to China's two biggest chip foundries, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, and Hua Hong Semiconductor, as well as to Yangtze Memory Technologies, a maker of flash memory and a number of smaller companies and funds. One of the major areas the third phase of the fund will focus on is equipment for chip manufacturing, Reuters reported in September. Also, the Big Fund is considering hiring at least two institutions to invest the capital from the third phase. — Reuters

## Russia to build nuclear plant in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT: Russia will build a small nuclear power plant in Uzbekistan, the first such project in post-Soviet Central Asia, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said on Monday at a meeting with visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin. The nuclear deal, if implemented, will showcase Russia's ability to export not only energy, but also high-tech products to new Asian markets, at a time when the West is increasing pressure on it through sanctions. Mirziyoyev also said Tashkent was interested in buying more oil and gas from Russia, a reversal of decades-long practice where Moscow imported hydrocarbons from Central Asia.

The Uzbek president described Putin's visit as "historic". "It heralds the beginning of a new age in the comprehensive strategic partnership and alliance relations between our countries," he said.

Putin also called Tashkent Moscow's "strategic partner and reliable ally". The leaders gave no details of the planned nuclear project, although Mirziyoyev's comments indicate it has been scaled down from the one they agreed in 2017, but never finalized. There are no nuclear power plants in any of the five ex-Soviet Central Asian republics, although

Uzbekistan and its neighbor Kazakhstan, both uranium producers, have long said their growing economies needed them. The Kazakh project, however, can only move ahead after a national referendum which has not yet been scheduled.

Taking advantage of Russia's campaign to redirect its gas exports to Asia amid a rift with the West over Ukraine, Uzbekistan last October started importing Russian natural gas via the same pipeline which had previously pumped it in the reverse direction. Although its own gas production remains substantial at about 50 billion cubic meters a year, Uzbekistan struggles to fully meet domestic demand, and Russian supplies have allowed it to avert an energy crisis.

"(Gas) exports are running well ahead of schedule and we are ready to increase their volume if needed," Putin said. According to Mirziyoyev, Tashkent is also keen to increase imports of Russian oil.

The two leaders also said their governments were working on large projects in mining, metals, and chemicals. Uzbekistan, whose economy depends heavily on remittances from migrant laborers working in Russia, has maintained close ties with Moscow after it invaded Ukraine in 2022.

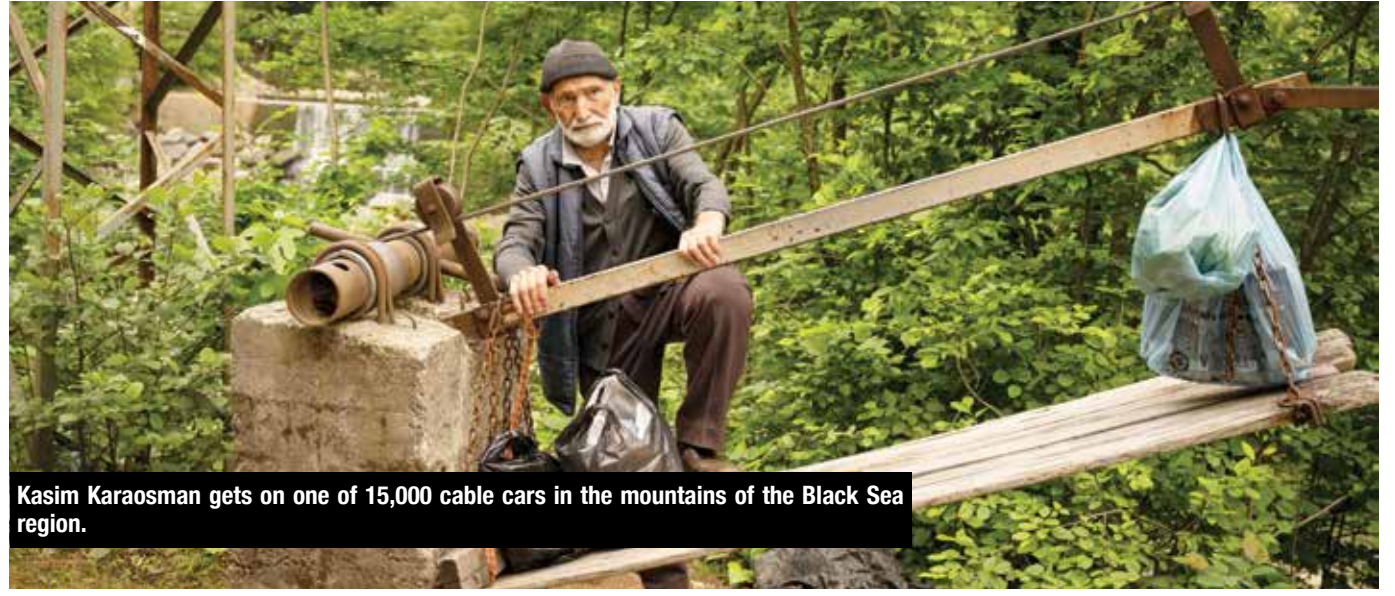
However, Mirziyoyev and other leaders in the region have never spoken in support of what the Kremlin calls its special military operation in Ukraine, and all countries in the region are also working with the West on projects such as cargo shipping routes designed to bypass Russia. — Reuters



TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024



Tea farmers pull bags off the cable car.



Kasim Karaosman gets on one of 15,000 cable cars in the mountains of the Black Sea region.

## Deathtrap cable cars spook Turkey's intrepid tea farmers



Kasim Karaosman rides the cable car.



Bilgi Kopuz pulls the tea collected from the fields off a cable car in the village of Daginiksu.



A farmer sorts tea leaves in the village of Daginiksu.

**Y**ou need to be part daredevil to live in the spectacularly steep hills overlooking the Black Sea where Turkey grows its tea. To get to his home, 90-year-old Kasim Karaosman has to hoist himself into a rickety cable car contraption that shoots him 300 meters across a deep mountain valley on his back.

Only a couple of planks separate him from the gorge and tea gardens far below. "You must not look down," warned Karaosman, who built the rough and ready mechanism himself more than 50 years ago.

Many of his neighbors in tea growing villages above the coastal city of Rize in northeast Turkey make similarly perilous trips to and from their precipitous fields every day in thousands of primitive gondolas. But a string of deaths and hair-raising accidents has sent a shudder of fear through the deep green mountainsides where every inch of farmable land, no matter how steep, has been given over to tea.

"I no longer ride on it myself. I've had too many accidents," Sevilay Sen told AFP as she unloaded bales of freshly cut tea from a swaying gondola near the village of Daginiksu. In April two of her neighbors fell 20 meters (65 feet) after being caught in a gust of wind, cheating death by a whisker. Despite the tough climb, Sen and her husband now prefer to clamber up from their fields to the road.

### 'I'm scared'

"By the grace of Allah they will walk again one day," said Hasan Uzun, the husband of one of the victims, the anger in his voice clear. "I only use them when I have no choice," said Ercan Calik, perched on a ridge, with tea plantations stretching as far as the eye can see. "Without the cable cars, there would be no life here," the 50-year-old farmer said, fingering his prayer beads as he surveyed a slope that yields hundreds of tons of tea every year.

The makeshift machines are essential for locals harvesting fields in steep valleys inaccessible by car or tractor. But journeys on the gondolas — made from planks nailed to a metal frame hanging from a steel cable — are risky, with no barriers or railings to stop people falling.

The accident in April has panicked many locals in Daginiksu, where nearly every household makes their living from tea, selling their crop on to behemoths like the Turkish state-owned company Caykur. "I no longer ride on my cable car since the accident. I'm scared," said Hurmet Yildirim, 64, her hair covered in a black veil. "Our lives are at stake," the farmer added.

### Homemade contraptions

Rize's Chamber of Mechanical Engineers estimates there are around 15,000 such cable cars across the mountainous Black Sea region. It said 18 people have been killed on the cable cars and sev-

eral hundred injured between 2008 and 2021.

Since then, at least two people from Rize and neighboring Trabzon province have died in similar accidents, including

Back in nearby Selamat village, Kasim Karaosman slowly climbed up into his gondola with his shopping bag. With no road to his house high on a ridge, he has no choice but to take his life in his



Mehmet Sen rides the cable car.

a 25-year-old man electrocuted in July last year after boarding a gondola laden with tea. Two local forensic scientists, who published a study in 2021 of eight fatal cable car accidents, found that "since there is no license for primitive cable cars, there are no official tests" to ensure they are well maintained.

hands in his homemade contraption. Yet despite the risk, Karaosman has no plans to leave his cliff-top home. "From here I can see the snowy mountaintops" of the Pontic Alps, he smiled. — AFP



This aerial photograph shows Kasim Karaosman, 90, who goes home every day using the primitive cable car in the village of Selamat.



Sevilay Sen looks on as the tea she collected from the fields is sent on a cable car.



Villagers harvest tea leaves in a field near the village of Daginiksu, in the north-eastern Turkey province of Rize, on May 10, 2024. — AFP photos





People take part in a giant open-air picnic on the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris on May 26, 2024.



## PARIS' CHAMPS-ELYSEES HOSTS GIANT OPEN-AIR PICNIC

Paris' most famous street the Champs-Élysées has hosted a giant open-air picnic on Sunday as the French capital's iconic boulevard seeks to reinvent itself. Nearly 273,000 people applied to take part in the event which saw a 216-metre-long red-and-white checkered rug cover the picnic ground and feature free packed meals from organizers' eight

partner restaurants. Around 4,000 people have been selected to participate in the "le grand pique-nique", with each guest invited to bring up to six additional people and choose one of two sittings, at noon or 2:00 pm. The "world's largest tablecloth", made from 25 pieces of recycled fiber, was to be assembled on site by 150 people, the organizers said.

The aim of the event was to show that the Champs-Élysées, famous for its expensive boutiques and restaurants, was not only good for shopping, said Marc-Antoine Jamet, president of the organizer, the Champs-Élysées Committee. "It's a way of telling Parisians: 'Come back to the Champs-Élysées'", he said.

In 2023, the association transformed

the avenue into an open-air mass "dictation" spellathon, pitting thousands of France's brainiest bookworms against one another. With 1,779 desks laid out on the boulevard, organizers had sought to break the world record for a dictation spelling competition.

A top tourist attraction, the avenue has been gradually abandoned by lo-

cals in recent years. The historic UGC Normandie cinema, which opened in 1937, is set to close in June due to decline in business. On Monday, the Committee was due to present a 1,800-page study of possible ways to reinvent the Champs-Élysées. — AFP

### Hollande's love affair scooter auctioned off

The scooter at the center of a headline-grabbing love affair between then-French president François Hollande and his actress lover Julie Gayet sold for 20,500 euros at an auction in France on Sunday. A huge scandal erupted in 2014 when French glossy magazine Closer said Hollande, who then lived with his partner Valerie Trierweiler, routinely hopped on a scooter to spend the night with his 41-year-old mistress, publishing pictures of the three-wheeler.

Hollande went on to marry Gayet in 2022, and on Sunday, France's most famous scooter was auctioned off at a chateau in the town of Montbazou in western France, according to an AFP correspondent. The auction, which was organized by the Rouillac auction house and attended by around 40 people, lasted just 10 minutes.

The grey Piaggio MP3 125 was purchased by Denis Breheret, owner of a car museum. Breheret wants to exhibit the scooter at his museum in the town of Jallais so that "everyone can enjoy it". The scooter "is part of French history," he said. "I will be presenting it among the 120 vehicles that I already own, which range from 1922 to the present day."

The Elysee Palace, which was the first owner of the scooter, sold it in 2015. The starting price for the vehicle at the auction on Sunday was 10,000 euros. "It's the Rolls (Royce) of scooters, but its value on the second-hand market is only estimated at between 1,300 euros and 4,000 euros," said auctioneer Aymeric Rouillac.

"In January 2014, François Hollande's scooter entered the category of legendary vehicles," the Rouillac auction house said in a statement. "It tells the story of a man like any other and of a nation torn between its desire for power and the realization of its decline."

Trierweiler took revenge on Hollande for spurning her for Gayet with a sensational 2014 kiss-and-tell memoir called "Thank You for This Moment", which all but sank Hollande's presidency. Before his relationship with the journalist Trierweiler, Hollande was involved for three decades with Segolene Royal, a French Socialist politician who unsuccessfully ran for president in 2007. They have four children. Speaking on television in April, a smiling Hollande, 69, said: "I've always had scooters, and this was the last one." — AFP



(From left) British actress Hannah Waddingham, US actor Chris Pratt, US cartoonist and creator of Garfield Jim Davis and Garfield pose following a handprint ceremony at the premiere of "The Garfield" movie.

### 'Garfield' and 'Furiosa' battle in weak North America box office

"The Garfield Movie" and "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" battled for the top spot in North American theaters over the long US holiday weekend, but it was still a rough Memorial Day at the box office, industry estimates showed late Sunday.

"The Garfield Movie," Sony's animated reboot about the lazy cat who loves lasagna, starring Chris Pratt ("Guardians of the Galaxy") as the orange feline, was expected to take \$31.9 million from Friday to Monday, Exhibitor Relations said.

"Furiosa" - the fifth installment in Australian director George Miller's "Mad Max" post-apocalyptic action series, starring Anya Taylor-Joy in the role first played in Charlize Theron - was right behind at \$31.5 million over the four-day weekend. "Furiosa," from Warner Bros, was ahead in the estimated Friday-Sunday totals, Exhibitor said, but the four-day figure is the key metric. Final figures are due out Tuesday.

Critics have given "Furiosa" 89 percent on Rotten Tomatoes. "The Garfield Movie" has a 37 percent critics rating. "Garfield" is not among the animation elites, but it's reasonably budgeted," said industry analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "It's doing what it's supposed to do."

As for "Furiosa," Gross called it "a weak opening for Mad Max's 5th episode," adding that though it was well received by critics and audiences, the prequel paled at the box office in comparison to "Mad Max: Fury Road," which starred Theron. Much of the press for "Furiosa" focused on the filming experience for Taylor-Joy, which she talked

about at length. Taylor-Joy revealed she only has 30 lines of dialogue in the entire movie, and told The New York Times that she would go months on set without speaking a single line. She called herself "a really strong advocate of female rage" and said she fought with director George Miller to give her character the opportunity to voice her anger, saying "I fought for that scream for three months"

the worst Memorial Day opening in nearly three decades.

In third place at \$21 million was Paramount's animated feature "If," which stars Cailey Fleming as a young girl who, along with neighbor Ryan Reynolds, embarks on an adventure to reconnect forgotten made-up playmates with their children.

Fourth place went to 20th Century action sci-fi "Kingdom of the Planet of the



(From left) Australian actor Chris Hemsworth, Australian director and screenwriter George Miller and British-US actress Anya Taylor-Joy pose during a photocall for the film "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

in reference to a scene in the film. "I've never been more alone than making that movie," Taylor-Joy told the Times.

Memorial Day is the traditional kickoff to summer in the United States, and also usually a big weekend for new movies - meaning studios are sure to be disappointed with the overall box office total. Both Variety and The Hollywood Reporter said whichever film triumphs, it will be

Apes," at \$17.1 million, and in fifth was Universal's action-comedy "The Fall Guy," starring Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt, with \$7.8 million. Rounding out the top 10 were: "The Strangers: Chapter 1" (\$7 million), "Sight" (\$3.5 million), "Challengers" (\$1.7 million), "Back to Black" (\$1.3 million) and "Tarot" (\$935,000). — Agencies

### Madrid's Prado museum unveils newly verified Caravaggio

A painting by Italian master Caravaggio, once mistakenly thought to be by an unknown artist and almost auctioned off, was unveiled Monday at the Prado museum in the Spanish capital. Entitled "Ecce Homo", the dark canvas depicts a bloodied Jesus wearing a crown of thorns just before his crucifixion. It is one of around only 60 known works by the Renaissance artist.

A Madrid auction house had been due to sell the painting in April 2021 with an opening price of 1,500 euros (\$1,627), mistakenly attributing it to an artist belonging to the circle of 17th century Spanish painter Jose de Ribera. But just hours before it was to go under the hammer, the culture ministry blocked the operation on suspicion it was actually by Caravaggio, whose works are worth millions.

The ministry action came after the Prado museum sounded the alarm, saying it had "sufficient documentary and stylistic evidence" to suggest that the work was in fact by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. The museum announced earlier this month that top experts have determined that the painting is "without a doubt, a Caravaggio masterpiece", calling it "one of the greatest discoveries in the history of art". The painting has been restored and will be displayed to the public for the first time since it was confirmed as a Caravaggio at a press conference at the Prado museum on Monday. Spanish media have reported that the new owner is a British national who lives in Spain and who paid 36 million euros (\$39,056,000) for the painting, which may remain on public display after its run at the Prado for several months. The painting "is not going to end up in the home of its buyer" who wants it to join "public collections, for the moment, on loan", Jorge Coll, the lead of London art gallery Colnaghi which handled the sale, told Spain's top-selling newspaper El Pais.

Painted around 1605-1609, the dark and atmospheric canvas is believed to have at one point been part of the private collection of Spain's King Philip IV, before being exhibited in the apartments of his son Charles II. One of the experts who took part in its authentication, art history professor Maria Cristina Terzaghi of Italian university Roma Tre, told AFP in a 2021 interview that when she saw a picture of the painting sent to her by WhatsApp by some art dealer friends, she "immediately realized it could be very important". She flew to Madrid to see the canvas and "had no doubt... it was clear it was a work by Caravaggio". For her, the evidence was ample: from "the head of Christ" to the color of his cloak and "the three-dimensional nature of the three figures, who are offset in a transition that is almost cinematic". — AFP



Lifestyle



Tourists pose for a photo during a boat tour around the islands of Kinmen on May 25, 2024.



Oyster farmer Li Kai-chen uses a metal staff to harvest oysters near Guningtou village in Kinmen.

# Taiwan's OYSTER farmers keeping tradition alive



On an island separated from China by a narrow strip of sea, oyster farmer Li Kai-chen collects mollusks on a shore known for its bloody battle over control of Taiwan. While the 66-year-old has worked to keep tradition alive in Kinmen, the island administered by Taiwan has found itself on the frontline of Chinese war games. "These centuries-old oyster beds not only produce food, they represent a culture and a history," he told AFP.



Li Kai-chen shows oysters harvested on his farm.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te vowed to defend democracy during his inauguration last week. China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, launched military drills on

Thursday to encircle Taiwan and its outlying islands.

China deployed warplanes, naval vessels and coast guard ships in the latest show of force since several drills in 2022 and 2023. Kinmen's oyster farmers said they were accustomed to the shows of Chinese might and would focus instead on collecting as many mollusks as they could. "I'm more afraid of the tide than of China," said a woman also surnamed Li, who declined to provide her full name. "Kinmen is very safe," said the 64-year-old.

Their historic oyster farm stands less than five kilometers (three miles) from Xiamen, a Chinese megacity filled with imposing skyscrapers. Li Kai-chen stood among rows of granite blocks brought from China more than 400 years ago where the oysters grow. He used a metal staff to scrape them off - a farming method unique from shuckers typically taken off reef rocks.

### Fortress island

The blocks are also embedded on the site of the defining clashes decades ago, when the nationalist army of Chiang Kai-shek after his forces fled to Taiwan in 1949. Known as the Battle of Guningtou, they fended off the communist troops under Mao Zedong on those beaches, successfully retaining Kinmen under the nationalists' control.

"During the war, people fled to survive and the oyster beds were abandoned," said Li, who is also head of Guningtou village on Kinmen. At the time, "the soldiers had to take stones

vibrant democracy, but Chinese President Xi Jinping has upped the rhetoric in recent years and vows that Taiwan's "unification" with China is "inevitable".

Kinmen is geographically closer to

to broadcast propaganda messages to the communist troops on the other side, is now a tourist attraction. Down on the shore, Li lamented that their farming method is at risk largely because "young people don't want to work in this industry".

He used a puddle of seawater to clean the shells, which are smaller than those farmed industrially in China. Kinmen oysters are also distinguished by their light, melt-in-the-mouth texture due to exposure to the wind and sun at low tide on the granite blocks.

They are typically prepared in omelets slathered with a viscous sauce - a Kinmen delicacy that Taiwanese tourists often seek out when visiting the island. But with only a few elderly farmers working on the beaches, not all the mollusks are harvested in time.

Nowadays, Li entertains tourists mostly from Taiwan's main island, teaching them how to harvest and shuck the oysters. But Taiwan's plummeting relations with China have meant that Chinese travelers are no longer among Kinmen's visitors - something Li hopes will change in the new administration. "I hope there will be more (Chinese) tourists coming so we will have business," Li said. "Then our lives will be improved." — AFP



An oyster farm is seen near the Guningtou village in Kinmen.

(from oyster beds) near the shore to build shelters," he said.

Until 1979, Kinmen faced regular bombardment from the Chinese military, and it was massively fortified by Chiang's troops. Taiwan has transformed over the decades into a

China than Taiwan's main island, which is located about 200 kilometers away. Today, anti-landing spikes dot the island's beaches, while abandoned bunkers can be seen along its coast.

A loudspeaker the size of a building, historically used by the military



Li Kai-chen collects mollusks from a mud beach that was once the site of a bloody battle for control of Taiwan.



Oyster farmers Li Kai-chen (left) and a woman surnamed Li (right) place oysters into a large basket.



A girl takes a selfie near the Guningtou village in Kinmen.



## Sports

# Josef Newgarden wins thrilling second straight Indianapolis 500

## First back-to-back winner in 22 years

WASHINGTON: Josef Newgarden of Team Penske denied a late challenge from Mexican Pato O'Ward to win a thrilling and incident-packed Indianapolis 500 on Sunday, becoming the first back-to-back winner in 22 years.

New Zealand's Scott Dixon finished third in the race which had been delayed by four hours due to heavy rain and lightning in the area. The crowd were rewarded for their patience during the storm delay with a dramatic finale to the race.

O'Ward, whose best finish in the race was runner-up in 2022, looked to have timed his push perfectly, grabbing the lead in turn one on the final lap. But Newgarden powered back to pass him going into turn three and claim a record-extending 20th victory in the Indy 500 for Penske.

Newgarden finished 0.341 ahead of Arrow McLaren's O'Ward and celebrated by jumping into the crowd. "There is no better way to win a race than that. I've got to give it up to Pato as well," Newgarden told race broadcasters NBC. "He's an incredibly clean driver. He could have easily won this race, too, but it just fell our way and I am so proud of everybody, proud of the whole team," he said. The last driver to win back-to-back in the fabled race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway was Brazilian Helio Castroneves, who triumphed in 2001 and 2002.

### So close

O'Ward was distraught after again getting so close to the prize he has sought for so long. "It's hard to put it in words. I'm proud of the work that we did today. We recovered, we went back, we went forward, we went back," he said.

"Some people were just driving like maniacs. We had so many near race enders and just so close again,

so close," he said. "I put that car through things I never thought he was going to be able to do. Oh man, it's just so painful when you put so much into it and then two laps short, or two corners short," he added.

Alexander Rossi of Arrow McLaren, had jostled with Newgarden for the lead but finished fourth with Spaniard Alex Palou of Chip Ganassi Racing in fifth. Penske's Scott McLaughlin, who started on pole, finished sixth.

The lead changed 87-times over the 500 miles with 16 different race leaders. The opening lap was a chaotic one when British rookie Tom Blomqvist caused a crash on the opening lap that collected 2022 winner Marcus Ericsson of Sweden and Brazilian Pietro Fittipaldi.

Blomqvist lost control after touching the curbing and span across the track colliding with Andretti Global's Ericsson. "I can't believe it," said Ericsson after completing a medical check. "It's unbelievable. It's so frustrating. I don't know what to say. We had to work so hard. We fought all last weekend. We fought all week and this happens," he said.

### Penske redemption

Marco Andretti failed to finish after his car made wall contact as he was approaching O'Ward on turn one of lap 114 after a restart following a yellow flag. "I don't really trust half the guys I'm around, but you've just got to go for it and whatever happens, happens," said Andretti.

The victory for Newgarden was a sweet moment for Penske who have endured criticism and sanctions after a cheating scandal. Team president Tim Cindric, race engineer Luke Mason and two others were suspended for two races including the Indy 500.

The suspension came after IndyCar uncovered a



INDIANAPOLIS: Josef Newgarden, driver of the #2 Shell Powering Progress Team Penske, celebrates in Victory Circle after winning the 108th Running of the Indianapolis 500 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway on May 26, 2024 in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

set-up on three Penske cars at Long Beach last month allowing drivers to utilize a "push-to-pass" button on starts and restarts in violation of series rules. Newgarden was stripped of his win in St. Petersburg, Florida, in the season opener and he didn't miss the chance to respond to the critics.

"They can say whatever they want at this point, I don't care anymore," said the Tennessean. "I'm just so proud of the team, they crushed it. They came in with the fastest cars and we've worked our tails off," he added. "Luke, Tim, they are not here today but they are a huge part of this," he added. — AFP

## WI complete 3-0 T20I series rout of South Africa

KINGSTON: The West Indies completed a 3-0 sweep of their T20I series with South Africa after an eight wicket crushing of the Proteas at Sabina Park on Sunday. Set 164 to win, the Caribbean side raced to the target with 6.1 overs to spare and for the loss of just two wickets.

Openers Brandon King and Johnson Charles put on 92 in 6.4 overs with Charles in particular punishing the tourists as he battered 69 off just 26 balls. Charles hit 14 of those 26 balls for boundaries including five sixes.

Kyle Mayers came in and kept up the momentum and when stand-in skipper King departed for 44 (28 balls), West Indies were 130-2 with 9.1 overs remaining. Mayers ended on 36 not out as the West Indies ensured they head into the T20 World Cup, which they will co-host with the United States, in confident mood.

"Happy with my own performance," King said. "I would've liked to carry my bat through the end though. It was an important 3-0 win, last series before the World Cup, so important preparation and good momentum going into the World Cup. "Our bowling performances were very pleasing, we had consistency throughout," King added. "Gudakesh Motie and other different contributors. Speaks well that a lot of our main players are missing. I can't wait to meet with the other boys before the World Cup."

The West Indies squad for the tournament will feature several players who missed this series such as skipper Rovman Powell and Andre Russell. South Africa had their stand-in captain Rassie van der Dussen to credit for even setting a half-decent target. — AFP

## Starc fit, ready for T20 WCup after heatwave-hit IPL

CHENNAI: Mitchell Starc dismissed fears the intense Indian heat might have drained him during his IPL-winning exploits, with the Australian declaring Monday he was fit and ready for the T20 World Cup. The 34-year-old left-arm pace spearhead lived up to his record \$2.98 million price tag with an opening burst of 2-14 to set up a third title triumph for the Kolkata Knight Riders against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

At the end of the two-month tournament, largely played in relentless heatwave conditions, player-of-the-match Starc helped dismiss Hyderabad for 113 as Kolkata cruised to their target with 9.3 overs to spare in Chennai.

"My body is fine," Starc, who took 17 wickets in 13 matches, told reporters in a post-midnight news conference at the end of extended Kolkata team celebrations. "I've played enough cricket to manage that sort of thing. T20 is not as demanding as Test cricket. It's been warm, it's been humid, so that plays a part, but that's fine," he said.

The T20 World Cup begins in the United States and the West Indies on Saturday, June 1, with Australia's first match against Oman on June 6. "It will be cooler in the West Indies than it has been over here," said Starc, who was also player of the match against the same opponents Hyderabad in the 44 Celsius heat of Ahmedabad last week. — AFP

## Peerless Pogacar wins Giro d'Italia

ROME: Tadej Pogacar won the Giro d'Italia on Sunday, crossing the finish line in Rome in glorious sunshine and with the biggest winning margin in almost six decades. The 25-year-old UAE Emirates rider won six of the 21 stages on the 3,400km tour that began in Turin, finishing 9min 56sec ahead of Colombia's Daniel Martinez of Bora while Geraint Thomas of Ineos was 10min 24sec off the winning pace in third.

The overall triumph was sealed Sunday on the 21st stage around Rome, which was won by Belgian sprinter Tim Merlier, who picked up his third stage win of the 2024 Giro. Billed as a champion in waiting, Pogacar proved peerless taking the lead as early as stage two and rampaging across the peaks, plains and picturesque panoramas to triumph by the largest margin at any of cycling's grand tours since Vittorio Adorni won the Giro by 11min 26sec in 1965.

The swashbuckling Slovenian showman was decked out in the iconic pink leader's jersey, riding a pink bike and even arriving on a pink bus as the route raced south. Hoping to become the first rider to win both the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France since Marco Pantani in 1998, Pogacar resembled more another rider, Eddy Merckx, also known for wanting to win as many stages as possible.

He won the opening time-trial, and the following day's first major summit finish and would go on to romp home on the Queen stage in the Dolomites, doubling his lead in the process. Italians took to Pogacar, cheering him through the dramatic port of Genoa, the chic Tuscan town of Lucca and the southern port of Naples and Pompei in the shadow of the volcanic Mount Vesuvius.

The two-time Tour de France winner had extended his lead slowly up the Adriatic coastline before the third week's relentless series of ascents and descents in the Alps.

## Riley wins at Colonial as Scheffler struggles

LOS ANGELES: Davis Riley shook off some early struggles to card an even par 70 and claim his second US PGA Tour title Sunday at the Charles Schwab Challenge, where honoring late colleague Grayson Murray gave him "a little extra to play for."

Riley, who started the day with a four-shot lead over world number one Scottie Scheffler, had three bogeys and three birdies to finish with a 14-under par total of 266 at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

He finished five strokes in front of Scheffler and Keegan Bradley on a day when Murray was in the thoughts of all the golfers on the course a day after his death at the age of 30. Murray's parents confirmed the two-time PGA Tour winner, who withdrew from the tournament late in Friday's second round, had taken his own life.

"Obviously super-sad day in the golf world," Riley said. "My heart just goes to him and his family and there was definitely a little extra to play for today." Riley said he'd expected a tough day playing alongside Scheffler, whose second Masters title in April was part of a run of four titles in five starts.

After a bogey at the second he rolled in a 27-foot birdie at the fourth, but promptly bogeyed the fifth. But on a day when low scores were hard to come by, a birdie at the ninth saw him take a six-shot lead into the back nine, where he followed a bogey at 15 with a bogey at 17 on the way to adding another title to the one he claimed alongside Nick Hardy last year in the Zurich Classic two-man team event.

"I knew coming into the into today it was going to be tough - a very tough golf course and when you've got the world number one breathing down your neck, you know it's going to be difficult until the last hole.

"So proud of the way I just stayed in it, fought some adversity early, just kind of hung in there and I played



ROME: Team UAE's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar wearing the overall leader's pink jersey poses for photographs with the "Trofeo Senza Fine" (Endless or Infinity Trophy) in front of the Foro Romano (Roman Forum) after the 21st and last stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race, 125km from Rome to Rome. — AFP

### Out to prove Merckx wrong

Should Pogacar pull off the ambitious Giro-Tour double he will join a list of legends in Fausto Coppi, Jacques Anquetil, Merckx, Bernard Hinault, Stephen Roche, Miguel Indurain and Pantani. Pogacar burst onto the scene winning three stages at the Vuelta a Espana in 2019 and coming third.

The following year he pulled off one of cycling's biggest ever surprises when he overhauled a 90-second gap on Primoz Roglic to take the lead at the very end of the Tour de France in 2020. In 2021, Pogacar dominated the Tour to claim back-to-back triumphs, before a rival emerged in the form of Danish Vismar rider Jonas Vingegaard.

The wispy Dane has dominated Pogacar on the very toughest mountain stages, allowing Pogacar to tack up the stage wins as he himself remained firmly focused on the overall. Merckx stated in 2023 that for now the Dane was the best Grand Tour rider, but Vingegaard is scrambling to achieve top fitness for the Tour de France after a nasty crash at the Tour of the Basque Country.

While Pogacar had no visible rival at the Giro, Vingegaard will be just one hazard to watch out for on the French roads, with Belgian maverick Remco Evenepoel, Colombian climber Egan Bernal and old foe Roglic all muddying the waters on a wide-open roster ripe for surprises this July. — AFP



HOYLAKE: (FILES) US golfer Scottie Scheffler plays from the 5th tee on day one of the 151st British Open Golf Championship at Royal Liverpool Golf Course in Hoylake, north west England. — AFP

some really good golf coming down the stretch," Scheffler had three bogeys before a pair of back-nine birdies saw him post a one-under 71 for 271.

### Such a family

Bradley had five birdies in his three-under par 67, and had reached 10-under with a birdie at the 17th before he gave back a shot at the final hole. "My best round of the year probably," said Bradley, whose six tour titles include the 2011 PGA Championship.

He, too, played with a heavy heart, saying he was "heartbroken" to learn of Murray's death. "I was thinking about him all day today," Bradley said. "I had this pin on my hat. We're such a family here and he was into the locker room this morning and know he to walk in there two days earlier ..."

Murray's parents, Eric and Terry Murray, had asked golfers to wear ribbon pins in black and red to honor Murray, who wore the colors of his hometown NHL team, the Carolina Hurricanes, when competing on Sundays. — AFP



Sports

# Doncic, Irving give Mavs 3-0 series lead over Timberwolves

## Winners of the series face Celtics or Pacers in NBA Finals

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving combined for 66 points and Dallas surged home in a 116-107 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Sunday that gave the Mavericks a 3-0 stranglehold on their NBA Western Conference final.

The latest thriller in the series, this time in Dallas, came after the Mavs won games one and two in Minneapolis by a total of four points. In a fourth quarter that saw the teams trade the lead seven times, the star Mavs duo spearheaded a closing 12-3 scoring run.

The Mavericks will have their first chance to clinch the series when they host game four on Tuesday. No team has rallied from 3-0 down to win an NBA playoff series, but Doncic said Dallas cannot get complacent. "We need one more," he said. "They have an amazing team, so nothing's done."

Doncic and Irving each finished with 33 points, Doncic adding seven rebounds and five assists and Irving producing 14 of his points in the fourth quarter. P.J. Washington scored 16 points, draining a three-pointer that put Dallas up for good, 107-104, with 3:38 to play.

Daniel Gafford blocked three shots for Dallas, including a monster rejection on Mike Conley in the final minute.

Anthony Edwards led Minnesota with 26 points, but had just four in the fourth quarter. Karl-Anthony Towns missed all four of his attempts in the fourth.

The winners of the series face either the Boston Celtics or Indiana Pacers in the NBA Finals.

The Celtics, winners of a league-best 64 games in the regular season, have a 3-0 lead ahead of game four of their Eastern Conference final in Indianapolis on Monday.

### Bruising contest

Doncic said the Timberwolves' attempts to smother him and Irving had actually energized the Mavericks' offense. "They're trying to double me the whole game, trying to double Ky, so that just makes us better," he said. "Everybody touches the ball, everybody plays, and man, it's an amazing win."

"We come down to the stretch and we execute." Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said defense wasn't his team's problem. "I thought it was our offense, it broke down more than anything," Finch said. "You've got to try to score alongside of them. The whole series we've struggled to close games."

"These three-minute games that we're playing, we're losing." A bruising contest saw the Mavericks lose Dereck Lively early in the second quarter after the rookie reserve took a knee to the back of the head from a leaping Towns.

The frightening moment brought Mavs coach Jason Kidd out to check on Lively, who had already taken a painful knee to the groin from Towns trying to guard him under the basket.

Down by as many as 12 in the second quarter, the Timberwolves had cut the deficit to eight at half-time and got on level terms in the third.

Edwards soared in for a one-handed jam that cut Dallas' lead to 77-73 midway through the third. He then drilled a pair of step-back bas-



DALLAS: Anthony Edwards #5 of the Minnesota Timberwolves and Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks battle for a loose ball during the fourth quarter in Game Three of the Western Conference Finals at American Airlines Center on May 26, 2024 in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

kets to tie it up before Naz Reid connected to make it 79-77 with less than four minutes left in the third—Minnesota's first lead since the open-

ing minutes. It was tied at 87-87 heading into the fourth, but after several lead changes, Dallas would eventually pull away for good. — AFP

## Atalanta bask in hero's welcome on home return

BERGAMO: Atalanta were given a hero's welcome on Sunday as the Europa League winners strolled past Torino 3-0 in a festive homecoming after their stunning triumph over Bayer Leverkusen in Dublin. Rain and storms have battered northern Italy for most of a soaking wet spring but the sun shone powerfully on the Gewiss Stadium as fans hailed the team that Wednesday swatted aside Leverkusen by the same score in the Europa League final.

Fresh from winning their first ever European trophy—their first major honour of any sort since 1963 -- and having already qualified for the Champions League, Atalanta could have been forgiven for going through the motions in a party atmosphere.

But instead Gian Piero Gasperini's side thumped Torino to move up to fourth and give themselves a chance to equal their best ever finish of third by winning next weekend's game in hand with Fiorentina. Atalanta's loud home support chanted "we're the champions of Europe!" at the end of a typically swashbuckling performance against sorry Torino, after which the team paraded the Europa League trophy on the pitch to further chants of "thank you, lads".

Gasperini's future has been the hot topic in Bergamo, with persistent rumours of talks with Napoli, who finished their dismal campaign as defending champions with a goalless draw with Lecce. The 66-year-old, who has been in charge since 2016, had described Napoli as a beautiful woman tempting him away from his wife, but after Sunday's win he con-



BERGAMO: Atalanta's fans celebrate as they watch on a giant screen the UEFA Europa League final football match between Atalanta BC and Bayer Leverkusen. — AFP

firmed that he would remain faithful.

"After eight years you can get to the stage when you feel some tiredness and think that maybe next year is the time to make a change," said Gasperini to DAZN. "It's normal that both sides take time to think about these things. But we're going to continue together and we're all happy about it." And after Gasperini held aloft the trophy to huge cheers the crowd belted out a chant of "we're gonna win the league!". "Fans need to dream. It's right that they dream big, but if you ask me if we can win the Scudetto I have to say no," a realistic Gasperini then told reporters.

### 'Thank you'

Before the match, fans in the Curva Nord section invited Duvan Zapata, who is on loan from Atalanta at Torino, for a warm round of applause, a scarf

and a gigantic bottle of local wine. Former Colombia forward Zapata led the line for the thrilling Atalanta team which was desperately unlucky to be knocked out of the COVID 19-hit Champions League quarter-finals by Paris Saint-Germain in 2020.

Bergamo was ground zero for the pandemic in Europe and Atalanta have been a ray of light for a city which was deeply scarred. And as Atalanta walked out through a guard of honour, fans showed their appreciation for the team with a giant banner which read "Thank you for this fantastic season".

Wednesday night's hat-trick hero Ademola Lookman was again on target, sweeping home the hosts' second just before half-time after in-form striker Gianluca Scamacca celebrated his Italy call-up with a beautiful finish midway through the first half. — AFP

## PSG, French football prepare for challenges of post-Mbappe era

LILLE: Paris Saint-Germain finished the season with a domestic double after beating Lyon in Saturday's French Cup final but will now start building for another assault on the Champions League next year, this time without Kylian Mbappe.

The France captain brought the curtain down on his seven-year spell at PSG in the 2-1 win over Lyon, in which he failed to add to his club-record tally of 256 goals as Ousmane Dembele and Fabian Ruiz netted on the night.

It was a deserved victory against a Lyon team who had been the best side in France in the second half of the season, after sitting bottom of the table in December. But PSG's ongoing dominance of the French game simply reflects their crushing financial power compared to every other club.

Going by the most recent detailed accounts published by the DNCG, the watchdog that oversees the finances of France's professional clubs, PSG's income in 2022/23 was roughly equivalent to that of the next five richest sides—Marseille, Lyon, Monaco, Rennes and Lille—put together.

Their focus has long been on winning the Champions League, a trophy they have never managed to get their hands on over the years with Mbappe, Lionel Messi, Neymar, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and other superstars in their ranks.

And coach Luis Enrique knows how big a task lies ahead as they look to build a team that can enjoy the Champions League success they never managed to achieve with Mbappe. "He is obviously a different player and we can't replace him with one single player. Forget it. There is no substitute for Kylian Mbappe," PSG's Spanish coach said after Saturday's final. "We will need to replace him with the team as a whole, and with maybe four, five or six new signings."

### 'Great challenge'

Whether PSG move for one big star—think Victor Osimhen or Rafael Leao—remains to be seen, but they may wish to avoid the kind of approach taken by Barcelona when they lost Neymar in 2017, or Tottenham Hotspur when they sold Gareth Bale to Real Madrid.

Barcelona paid premium prices for several big names in an effort to replace the Brazilian, but most did not work out. Spurs employed something of a scattergun approach with a host of signings making up for the loss of Bale—again the success of that strategy was limited.

"A great challenge for any player who might want to come here is that we want to make history," Luis Enrique added. "This club will sooner or later win that long-desired Champions League title. It is difficult to win. It might take years but they will win it in the future without any doubt." — AFP

## Osaka, Alcaraz in winning starts as Murray bids adieu

PARIS: Naomi Osaka swept to her first victory at the French Open in three years on Sunday, setting up a potential showdown with Iga Swiatek, as Carlos Alcaraz maintained his record of never losing in the first round of a Grand Slam.

However, Andy Murray's French Open career was ruthlessly ended in straight sets by fellow three-time major winner and 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka. The 39-year-old Swiss hailed his beaten rival as a "great champion" as the former world number one bid adieu to the tournament ahead of his expected retirement later in the summer.

Osaka, a four-time major winner who has yet to get past the third round in Paris, needed three sets to defeat Italy's 48th-ranked Lucia Bronzetti on the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5. The 26-year-old fired 31 winners, including six aces, and 45 unforced errors in a match where she gave up a 4-0 lead in the decider before finding herself 5-4 down.

However, she rallied strongly to register her first win at a Grand Slam since the 2022 Australian Open. "It feels really nice to be back and I'm just really grateful to be here in front of everybody," said Osaka.

The Japanese star, a former world number one now at 134 in the rankings, has endured a bittersweet relationship with the French capital. In 2021, she was fined for opting out of mandatory media commitments before withdrawing from the tournament in order to protect her mental health.

A year later, she fell in the first round before leaving the sport in September 2022 for 16 months to give birth to her daughter. Top seed and defending champion Swiatek, chasing a fourth French Open, will face Osaka if the Pole gets past qualifier Leolia Jeanjean on Monday.

World number three and reigning Wimbledon champion Alcaraz eased to a 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 win over America's J.J. Wolf, the 107th-ranked player who entered the main draw as a 'lucky loser' from qualifying.

Alcaraz, 21, who made the semi-finals in 2023 where he was defeated by Novak Djokovic, took his first-round record at the majors to 13-0. Alcaraz showed no sign of suffering from the right arm injury which sidelined him from the Rome Open as he coasted to victory on the back of 27



PARIS: Japan's Naomi Osaka serves to Italy's Lucia Bronzetti during their women's singles match on day one of the French Open tennis tournament on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland Garros Complex in Paris. — AFP

winners and nine breaks of serve.

"I don't need too many matches to be at my best," said Alcaraz. Defending champion Novak Djokovic begins his bid for a fourth French Open title and 25th major on Tuesday. "Low expectations and high hopes," said the Serb on Sunday after arriving in Paris without a title in the season for the first time since 2018. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqaq	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, Mohamed Nijam Uddin Ahmed, holder of Indian Passport No. M5765018 issued at Guwahati. Resident of Vill- Borpukhuri PS & Dist - Hojai Assam (India), PIN - 782435. I have changed my name from Mohammed Nijam Uddin Ahmed to Nijam Uddin Ahmed. (#5610, 28/05/2024)

I Neethu Jose holder of Indian passport no N6512046 issued at Cochin, Indian permanent address No. Thek-kevalalil House, Thidanad PO, Pin 686123, Kottayam, Kerala, India. Present hereby declare that hence forth my name will be read as given name Neethu and surname Kurian. (#5608, 27/05/2024)



## Kolkata thrash Hyderabad to win third IPL title

'Great night for KKR, what a game, what a season,' says Starc



CHENNAI: Kolkata Knight Riders' players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 final cricket match against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — AFP

CHENNAI: Mitchell Starc bowled a sensational opening spell to fire Kolkata Knight Riders to their third Indian Premier League title with an eight-wicket thrashing of Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Sunday final.

Kolkata bowled out Hyderabad for IPL's lowest total of 113 in a final as Australia's left-arm quick Starc returned figures of 2-14 to live up to his top billing in the world's most lucrative T20 tournament. Starc went to Kolkata for a record \$2.98 million in the December auction and ended the IPL with two stellar performances, including a match-winning 3-34 in the first play-off to hammer the same opponent.

Kolkata's batsmen had it easy and despite Sunil Narine's early departure, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who made 39, and Venkatesh Iyer, on 52 not out, helped the team home with 9.3 overs to spare after a partnership of 91. Iyer, a left-handed batsman, reached his 50 in 24 balls and hit the winning runs to trigger celebrations for Kolkata, who remained the most dominant team after they ended top of the table with 20 points in the league phase.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer was unbeaten on six, and at the other end, when Kolkata players came rushing on to the pitch and the stadium fireworks went off. "Great night for KKR. What a game, what a season," player-of-the-match Starc said.

"Probably the two most exciting teams in the final. We have had a fantastic squad of bowlers and batters, our staff have been fantastic to get every-

one peaking." On the pressure of his high price tag, 34-year-old Starc said: "There's been jokes about the money. I am experienced, that's helped with all the expectations." Players and national teams now move into the T20 World Cup starting June 1 in the West Indies and the United States.

### 'Mom is watching'

Afghanistan's Gurbaz, who left the tournament midway through to be with his ailing mother back home and returned for the play-offs, said: "My mom is watching from home. She is feeling good now. I asked mom before the match if she wanted anything. She said just the win," added the wicket-keeper-batsman.

Kolkata's co-owner and Bollywood superstar actor Shah Rukh Khan was in attendance and congratulated his champion players after he suffered from a heat-related illness in the first qualifier in Ahmedabad. It was Kolkata's second title triumph at the venue, after they won their first trophy in 2012, and a near-capacity crowd at the 36,000-seater stadium cheered on. Narine, a left-hand batsman and a right-arm spinner, ended as the player of the series with 488 runs as an opener and 17 wickets.

### Gambhir effect

Apart from the big signing of Starc, they got Gautam Gambhir as mentor after the former India bats-

man led the team to their first two titles, including in 2014. Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins won the toss and elected to bat first and go with his team's strength of scoring big, after they racked up IPL record totals of 277 and 287 in this year's edition.

Hyderabad took Cummins for \$2.5 million in the same auction and made him captain after he led Australia to two titles, including the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup last year. "So many (positives), the style with which the guys played especially with the bat. Lot of skills to get to 250 three times," said Cummins.

"I loved how brave the guys were. It was a lot of fun, great season." But it was Starc who took the limelight as he struck in his first over when he bowled in-form Indian batsman Abhishek Sharma, for two, on a delivery that pitched in the middle and caught the top of off stump.

Travis Head followed his fellow left-hand opener Abhishek to the dug-out, caught behind for his second duck in three matches off fast bowler Vaibhav Arora. Starc struck again and the opposition top-order was in disarray at 47-4 inside seven overs.

Andre Russell took down Aiden Markram for 20 and wickets kept tumbling as fellow South African Heinrich Klaasen fell for 16. Cummins, who was dropped on 10 by Starc, took the team past 100 before falling for 24 off Russell, who ended with figures of 3-19. — AFP

won when Zverev quit with ankle ligament damage, the Spaniard had his chances.

He was a break of serve up in the second and third sets, only to be pinned back on both occasions by his in-form 27-year-old opponent. However, a relentless Zverev broke six times from 18 opportunities and fired 44 winners to Nadal's 34. Chants of "Rafa, Rafa" had loudly echoed under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier which was shut tight against the torrential rain sweeping across the grounds and bringing havoc to the schedule.

They subsided to silence when Nadal was broken to love in his opening service game and he was left to regret his inability to convert two break points in the fourth game. Nadal saved two set points in the ninth game but surrendered the opener after 50 minutes when he buried a loose forehand into the net. It was only the fourth opening set he had lost at Roland Garros. Nadal broke for the first time in the match to lead 3-2 in the second set but couldn't back up the advantage and handed the break back to three-time semi-finalist Zverev as he served for the set.

A tense tie-breaker followed which the German claimed, buoyed by stretching to 5/3 on the back of a gruelling 19-shot rally. Nadal dug deep and with the likes of Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek having watched from the packed stands, he broke and held for 2-0 in the third set. However, Zverev again roared back to level at 2-2 before a besieged Nadal had to save four break points in a 13-minute fifth game to stay in contention. The effort was too much and a composed Zverev was soon 4-3 up and the match was over when Nadal fired a forehand wide and long. — AFP

## Nadal's French Open career comes to likely end

PARIS: Rafael Nadal's record-breaking French Open career came to its likely end on Monday when the 14-time champion slumped to a demoralizing first round defeat against Alexander Zverev before he admitted: "I really hope to see you again - but I don't know." Nadal, who turns 38 on June 3, went down 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to world number four Zverev, suffering only his fourth loss in 116 matches at Roland Garros since his 2005 title-winning debut. It was the first time he had been defeated in Paris in the opening round and will again lead to questions over his long-term future in the sport.

"It is difficult for me to talk. I don't know if it's the last time I'll be here in front of all of you," he said. "Honestly, I am not sure. If it is, then you have been amazing. The feelings I have today are difficult to describe in words. It is the place I love the most." He added: "It's hard to say about the future. I am travelling with my family and I am having fun. The body is feeling better than it did two months ago. "Maybe in two months I say it's enough. That is something I don't feel yet."

Nadal may not return for the 2025 French Open but he still plans to play the Olympics in the city in July. "I hope to be back here for the Olympics, that motivates me. I really hope to be well prepared," he said to loud cheers. Plagued by injuries, which had limited him to



PARIS: Spain's Rafael Nadal gestures to the public as he leaves the court after losing against Germany's Alexander Zverev in their men's singles match in Paris on May 27, 2024. — AFP

just four events since January last year, former world number one Nadal is now 275 in the rankings and was unseeded in Paris. However, he insisted on the eve of the tournament that he was "100% keeping the door open" on his future in a sport which has brought him 22 Grand Slam titles.

### 'Thank you Rafa'

"I don't know what to say. Thank you Rafa from all of the tennis world. It is such a great honor," said Zverev. "I've watched Rafa play all my childhood and I was lucky enough to play him two times on this beautiful court. Today is not my moment, it is Rafa's moment." In a repeat of the 2022 semi-final, which Nadal

## FIFA, UEFA 'abused dominant position' on Super League

MADRID: FIFA and UEFA "abused their dominant position" and "prevented free competition" by opposing the creation of a European Super League, a Spanish court said Monday. The ruling echoed an earlier one by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) which ordered the two governing bodies "to halt anti-competitive behaviour".

The court said FIFA and UEFA had imposed "unjustified and disproportionate restrictions" on free competition within the market, in a case filed by the promoters of the Super League. Real Madrid and Barcelona are strong supporters of the project that most of Europe's other big clubs have abandoned.

The scope of the court's decision is uncertain, however, as it tackles regulations that have been completely rewritten in the interim period. The case was brought before the Madrid Commercial Court by A22 Sports Management, the promoters of the three-tier, 80-club project.

A22 were buoyed after a decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) in December 2023, which also ruled that the ban on the Super League was contrary to European law, finding that UEFA did not have clear criteria for authorizing or not authorizing new competitions.

"It is not possible to impose a prohibition or restriction as a matter of principle, in other words to prohibit any other project in the future," explained judge Sofia Gil Garcia in her ruling on Monday, seen by AFP.

"To admit the contrary would be tantamount to accepting a kind of ban ... on any football competition project" that competes with the current Champions League, continued the judge. Spain were not among 26 European countries who signed a joint declaration against projects such as the Super League in February, stressing the need for "open" competition.

Proposed in 2021 by twelve elite European clubs, including Real Madrid and Barcelona, the first draft of the Super League project quickly collapsed, mainly due to fierce opposition from English clubs' fans and threats from UEFA and FIFA.

However, the project was relaunched this winter after the ECJ ruled that the powers of these two bodies were not "governed by any criteria ensuring that they are transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate". UEFA has since corrected this 'shortcoming' with new, much more detailed regulations adopted in June 2022. — AFP