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Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait – Egypt Net Profit Jumps 189% in Q1 2024

Ali Marafi: The Bank's outstanding results reflect the remarkable success in delivering our growth strategy and highlights our strong market position. See Page 9



Amir nominates Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled as new Crown Prince

Premier asked to convey Amiri order to Council of Ministers



HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



Crown Prince designate HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

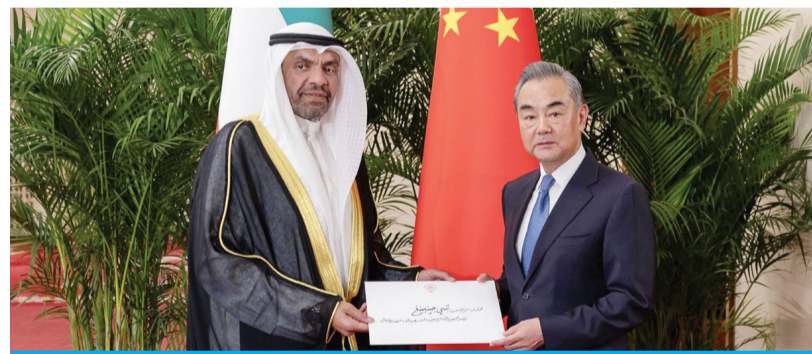
KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued an Amiri order on Saturday nominating former prime minister HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as the country's new Crown Prince. Under the Kuwaiti constitution, the Amir and Crown Prince must be from the descendants of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, who ruled Kuwait between 1896 and 1915.

HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled graduated from Kuwait University in political science and began his career as a senior employee in the foreign ministry. He was appointed as head of the Kuwait National Security Council, which was abolished last week, in 1998. He took his first ministerial job as minister of social affairs and labor in July 2006. He later became minister of information, justice and Islamic affairs.

In 2011, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was appointed foreign minister and continued to lead Kuwait's diplomacy until 2019, when he was appointed prime minister for the first time, succeeding HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His term as head of the government ended in 2022 when he declined an offer to form the new government, although he continued to attend important events as a former prime minister.

Under the Kuwaiti constitution, the new Crown Prince must be endorsed by the National Assembly, but as parliament has been dissolved and parts of the constitution were frozen for four years by HH the Amir, he will not need the endorsement. The Amiri order however asked HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah to convey the order to the Council of Ministers in order to take the necessary constitutional measures.

Amir sends letter on bilateral relations to Chinese President



BEIJING: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya delivers a letter from HH the Amir to the Chinese President regarding bilateral relations and ways to boost strategic partnership during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Zain youth program with Kuwait News, Kuwait Times, INJAZ

KUWAIT: Zain announces the kick-off of its fifth Summer Program for youth this year in partnership with Kuwait News, a leading local media institution, Kuwait Times, the first English daily in Kuwait, and INJAZ Kuwait, the youth empowerment non-profit. This program is designed for university-level students, offering them exciting internship experiences to develop essential business, marketing, sales and media skills during the summer season.

Jana Alnaqeb, Kuwait Times/Kuwait News PR and CSR Director, said: "At Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, we carefully select our media partnerships, and we joined the Zain Summer Program because we share a joint vision to empower the next generation of creative minds." (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: (From left) Kuwait Times/Kuwait News PR and CSR Director Jana Alnaqeb, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh, and INJAZ Kuwait Business Development and Strategic Partnerships Manager Jaber Ashkanani.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Warning against fake news

KUWAIT: Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Press, Publishing and Publications at the Information Ministry Lafi Al-Subaie called on media outlets to avoid publishing false information and to uphold high standards of professionalism and national responsibility. He noted some social media accounts recently disseminated incorrect news and analyses, making them legally accountable. — KUNA

Warning against reckless driving

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced vehicles involved in reckless driving will be crushed or dumped, as they pose a danger to public safety. The ministry emphasized that the law will be strictly enforced against all violators as part of enhanced security measures with severe legal penalties. Ongoing traffic campaigns have already begun implementing these punishments. — KUNA

Kuwaiti ambassador presents credentials to Indian President

NEW DELHI: Kuwait's Ambassador to India Meshal Al-Shemali presented his credentials to President of India Droupadi Murmu as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of India. Kuwait's Embassy in New Delhi, in a press release obtained by KUNA, said Ambassador Al-Shemali presented his credentials during a ceremony held at the presidential palace.

The ambassador relayed greetings of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to President Murmu, as well as wishes for India and its people of further progress and prosperity. Ambassador Al-Shemali expressed his pride in the trust he was granted and his keenness to develop bilateral relations between the two countries.

President Murmu conveyed greetings to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and wished progress and prosperity upon Kuwait and its people. She wished Ambassador Al-Shemali success in his endeavors and in strengthening bilateral relations that bring the two countries together. Furthermore, the Indian President stressed her country's readiness to provide all possible support to facilitate the ambassador's tasks. — KUNA



NEW DELHI: Kuwait's Ambassador to India Meshal Al-Shemali presents his credentials to Indian President Droupadi Murmu. — KUNA

Kuwait sets heat record as outdoor work ban begins

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Kuwait experienced record-breaking temperatures of 51 degrees Celsius in the shade on May 31, setting a new high for the month of May not seen in the past 65 years. This unprecedented heatwave was confirmed by Kuwaiti scientist and meteorologist Adel Al-Saadoun, who attribut-

ed the phenomenon to the escalating impacts of climate change and global warming. "For the last 65 years, this is the first time we've registered such a temperature record in May," Saadoun told Kuwait Times. He also highlighted that April 2024 saw record-breaking temperatures worldwide, marking extremes not observed in over 173 years. "This is due to global warming," Saadoun emphasized.

In response to these climatic challenges, the Public Authority of Manpower has enacted the annual ban on outdoor labor activities from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm daily from June 1 until the end of August to protect workers from extreme heat. Over the next three months, dedicated teams will conduct surprise inspections at various worksites to ensure compliance and address any infractions through legal channels.



KUWAIT: A restaurant deploys giant parasols, air coolers and mist sprayers to protect patrons from the heat in Souq Mubarakiya on June 1, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Local

Kuwaitis, expats raise concerns as Kuwait Zoo remains closed

By Aaron Philip

KUWAIT: The much-loved animal kingdom of Kuwait, the Kuwait Zoo, has been closed for at least four years, leaving the citizens and residents confused. The Kuwait Zoo is an umbrella for a diverse population of wildlife, including rare species like the white tiger and white peacock. When the zoo temporarily closed during the pandemic, people believed it would reopen when restrictions were lifted. Why the zoo remains shuttered today remains a mystery.

Prior to the shutdown, citizens and residents visited the zoo regularly. It also served as a learning experience for students when they visited the zoo on a school trip. "We used to take the lower grade students to the zoo for picnics; it was a great experience for them to see the animals they had only ever seen in textbooks in real life; however, after the pandemic, the zoo has been shut down, and we haven't been able to take the students to the zoo," said a teacher.

On enquiring with the public regarding their viewpoint on the closure of the zoo, it was noted that a majority of families and individuals do miss the zoo; however, a number of people were unaware of the zoo being shut, and some of them were not much concerned about it. Many recalled their child-

hood visits to the zoo with their parents.

"I recall my father taking me to the zoo and showing me the different animals," said a citizen. Shutting the zoo, he added, is not fair to the children—they get to learn a lot from a zoo. "I miss taking my family to the zoo; it was relaxing taking the children and showing them around; it was neatly maintained and had a wide range of animals," said another citizen. He went on to say that he really wished that the zoo would be open soon.

The zoo was an integral part of some expats' weekends. An Indian expat, who has been in Kuwait for about 25 years, recalls taking his kids to the zoo on Fridays for a stroll. "Back in the day, I used to live with my family in Khaitan, which is close to the zoo, and we could actually hear the lion's roar distantly," said an Indian expat.

A few of the individuals the Kuwait Times spoke with raised concerns about the animals in the zoo and whether they were taken care of and dealt with properly while the zoo was closed. Many people expressed their dissatisfaction with the zoo's facilities and services prior to its closing, citing issues such as poor hygiene and a lack of sufficient supervision over visitors feeding and mistreating the animals. They wanted the zoo to be reopened with top-notch amenities for both the animals and the visitors.



KUWAIT: A closed sign hangs on the gates of Kuwait Zoo. — Photo by Shakir Reshamwala

Campaign highlights dangers of smoking

KUWAIT: The chairman of the board of directors of the Kuwait Anti-Smoking and Cancer Association, Dr Khalid Al-Saleh, stressed that raising awareness among the younger generations of the scourge of smoking is a national duty and a social and humanitarian responsibility, pointing out that the problem of smoking is global and needs combined efforts to address it.

Saleh explained in a press statement on Saturday on the occasion of World No Smoking Day, which comes this year under the slogan 'protecting children from the tobacco industry', that there are active campaigns by the tobacco industry in the world aimed at encouraging young people to smoke and using all means to reach this segment.

He stated that these campaigns aim to hinder the efforts of the state in the face of the spread of this deadly scourge, pointing out that smoking is one of the main causes of chronic diseases such as atherosclerosis, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. There are more than 3.8 million people around the world killed by tobacco annually, of which about 3.1 million are non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke.

He revealed the association's intention to hold its international anti-smoking conference under the slogan 'the scourge of smoking and conflict of interests' in October. The program will be held under the auspices of the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, with the participation of a group of scientists, researchers, and specialists across the globe. — KUNA



Officials and participants take a group photo after the event. — KUNA

Kuwait TV, Radio win awards at Gulf event

KUWAIT: The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information and Assistant Undersecretary of Media Planning and Knowledge Development at the Ministry, Adel Al-Mashaan, said that Kuwait TV and Radio won awards at the Gulf Radio and Television Festival in a ceremony in Bahrain. Al-Mashaan told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that awards reflect the

attention paid by the Ministry's leadership to support creative ideas and hardworking people, giving them the opportunity to work, accomplish, and do their best through high-quality productions at the intellectual, artistic, and cultural level.

He pointed out that the youths of Kuwait have a high level of creativity, innovation, and culture, which reflect these great efforts. He wished them continued success and more achievements as he conveyed his congratulations to the Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and the Kuwaiti leadership.

He said that these awards should be an incentive for them to continue working to achieve more and greater successes in the future. The radio and

television sectors of the Ministry of Information received 12 awards at the closing ceremony of the 16th Gulf Radio and Television Festival in the Bahraini capital, Manama. This participation is the most rewarding for Kuwait through its participation in the previous sessions.

Bahrain hosted the Gulf Radio and Television Festival in its 16th session, and the ceremony was organized under the auspices of the first deputy chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports of Bahrain, Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad, and organized by the Bahraini Ministry of Information in cooperation with Gulf radio and television. The first edition of the Gulf Radio and Television Festival was held in Kuwait in 1980. — KUNA



Photos show medics at the Urology Unit at Jaber Al-Ahmad Armed Forces Hospital.

Urology Unit using modern technology for prostate cancer

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The head of Urology Unit at Jaber Al-Ahmad Armed Forces Hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Ghanim said the Urology surgery department has been using a new technique to diagnose prostate cancer with more accuracy - using the fusion of MRI image of the prostate with the ultrasound image in order to take samples and biopsy. This process leads to the reduction of getting urinary tract infections.

He said the modern technique at Jaber Armed Forces hospital is considered the most advanced in the world currently, adding that it is characterized with diagnoses accuracy. It helps the doctor in determining the type of tumor and treatment program.



He said prostate tumor grows gradually, but in some patients, it could be aggressive.

The causes of this type of cancer are not clear, and genetics has a role in its occurrence as the rate increases in first degree relatives, advanced age as well as the geographic distribution. It is more widespread in the US, Africa and Europe than in Asia and the Middle East. Al-Ghanim asked men over 50 to carry out necessary prostate tests periodically.

Late Amir's award 'an incentive to promote public health'

KUWAIT: Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, said on Friday that the award of the late Amir III Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for research in the fields of health care for the elderly and health promotion for the year 2024 represents a positive incentive to advance sustainable development goals, promote public health, and ensure its compatibility with health priorities.

The Kuwaiti ambassador handed over the award to the winners at a meeting at the 77th session of the World Health Assembly, currently held in Geneva. He said that the award comes within the framework of supporting the elderly in our communities and in recognition of their tireless efforts, the fruitful contributions they have made to us, and their sincere work throughout their life's journey. He stressed that the award also reflects the constructive cooperation



between Kuwait and the World Health Organization, which has had its roots for more than six decades.

In his speech, the Kuwaiti Ambassador congratulated the winners of the award, namely the vice president of the Chinese Geriatrics Society, Professor Feng Cao, and the head of the Department of Elderly Care and Community Care Program at the Ministry of Health of Oman, Dr. Ahmed Al-Wahibi, in recognition of their outstanding achievements in improving elderly care and appreciating their hard work, valuable contributions, and excellence in this field. — KUNA



Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations Office and other international organizations, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen presents the award to the winners. — KUNA photos

Local

Zain kicks off 5th Summer Program for youth

In partnership with Kuwait News, Kuwait Times and INJAZ

KUWAIT: Zain has announced the kick-off of its fifth Summer Program for youth, this year in partnership with Kuwait News, a leading local media institution, Kuwait Times, the first English daily in Kuwait, and INJAZ Kuwait, the youth empowerment non-profit. This program is designed for university-level students, offering them exciting internship experiences to develop essential business, marketing, sales, and media skills during the summer season.

Hamad Al Musaiibeh, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager, said: "For the fifth season, our Summer Program continues our mission to invest in young people's capabilities by offering interactive internship experiences. We aim to develop a variety of skills to help graduates prepare for the job market, and the previous four seasons have been highly successful with great participation from so many ambitious students."

Al Musaiibeh added: "The program provides university students with a chance to experience Zain's wonderful work environment at select branches nationwide. Under the supervision of our dedicated team, the students will have the opportunity to learn a wide range of skills, including sales management, customer service, teamwork, and more."

He concluded: "The Zain Summer Program falls under the umbrella of our Future University Network (FUN) initiative, one of our most engaging sustainable programs since its launch in 2008. Over the years, FUN has provided hundreds of students with paid part-time experiences at Zain, helping them launch their careers. We're so proud that many FUN members continued their journey with us and became part of the Zain family as full-time employees after graduating."



Al Musaiibeh, Alnaqeeb, and Ashkanani announce the program's kick-off.

Jana Khaldoun Alnaqeeb, Kuwait Times/Kuwait News PR and CSR Director, said: "Our commitment to social responsibility drives us to participate in unique programs like this one. We aim to communicate directly with students and highlight the media's role in shaping community awareness and culture. This collaboration also allows us to elevate students' sense of creativity and passion for excellence."

Alnaqeeb continued: "At Kuwait Times and Ku-

wait News, we carefully select our media partnerships, and we joined the Zain Summer Program because we share a joint vision to empower the next generation of creative minds. We seek to enhance the program by offering experiences in news story development, content creation, media reporting, photography, videography, and more, providing students with an in-depth look at our leading media experience."

Jaber Ashkanani, INJAZ Kuwait Business Devel-



opment and Strategic Partnerships Manger, said: "Investing in young people's capabilities and energies is a community goal shared by both INJAZ and Zain since our strategic partnership began 19 years ago. Our ongoing collaboration stems from our commitment to prepare youth for their future careers in the private sector." Ashkanani further noted: "INJAZ will host special training sessions for the Zain Summer Program participants to guide their career paths, learn about their ambitions, and provide one-to-one mentoring and guidance. INJAZ experts will also assist in supervising the interviews process."

After the interviews and evaluation of students' preferences, selected participants will join the program at various Zain branches across Kuwait. They will acquire essential business skills such as customer service, marketing products, promoting offers, along with invaluable personal skills like critical thinking, problem solving, time management, teamwork, and more. Another group of students will intern at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News to learn about media operations, including creating news reports, editorial pieces, content creation, and using cameras and audio equipment. The program offers a paid part-time system with dedicated weekly work hours for one month.



Mohammad Shah, head of the team is pictured with some of the participants during their visit to Kubbar Island.



Various birds that were observed by KEPS members in Kubbar Island.



KEPS and Coast Guard document, monitor, protect migratory birds

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS), Dr Wijdan Al-Uqab, said the programmed work plan between KEPS and the Coast Guard, which was agreed upon during a meeting with Director General of the Coast Guard, Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah, has enhanced some field activities in support of environmental work in the country.

She lauded the support of Staff Captain Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah and commended his quick

response by deploying Coast Guard men to the team to monitor and protect birds during their field scientific visit to Kubbar Island. The team documented the natural life and observed the migrating birds. Head of the bird observation team at the society, Mohammad Shah, said the scientific trip included a field tour and a quick workshop to count the number of nesting birds this season.

He said the participating team members do document various species of sea birds nesting on the island

at this time every year. "The team counted the migrating birds on the island and documented the natural components and elements," Shah said. The monitoring process resulted in documenting more than 11,000 birds: 3,000 (bridled tern), 4,000 (white-faced tern), 4,000 (small crested tern), 100 (large crested terns), 10 (house sparrow), and 2 (willow warbler).

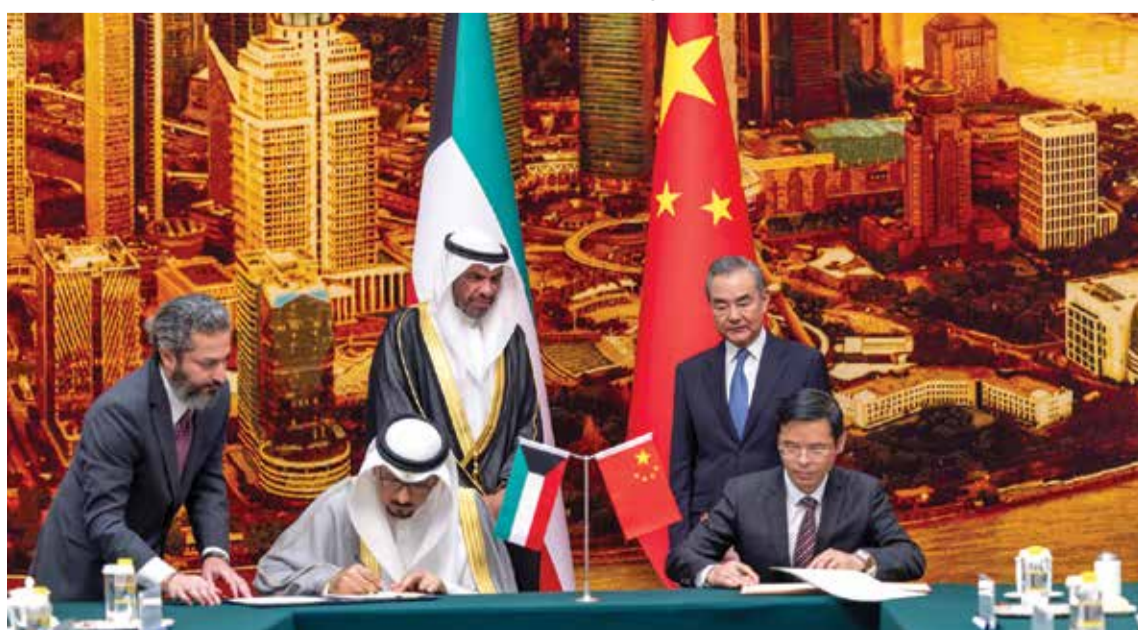
These birds are currently nesting in Kubbar. They come each summer to hatch. They arrived by May and started mating and laying eggs. By August, they will leave with their chicks - heading towards the Indian Ocean. Shah said there will be another visit in June to check the nests. He said that the team was accompanied by the Coast Guard, including Ahmad Al-Shawaf, Sameera Al-Khaleefa, and Athari Buhamd.




Kuwait, China ink agreement

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met on Friday with the China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the China's capital, Beijing. In a statement released by Kuwait's Foreign Ministry, it


was said that the meeting focused on bilateral relations and ways to enhance and develop joint cooperation in all fields. In addition, the latest regional and international developments were also touched upon, according to the statement. The meeting was followed by the signing of an agreement between the two sides regarding the allocation of land for the construction of the buildings of the General Consulate of the State of Kuwait in the city of Guangzhou. — KUNA






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CMA Academy promotes the knowledge economy

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Academy is a specialized educational and training institution, an independent and non-profit body under the authority's supervision. The Academy, established in 2021, comes as part of New Kuwait Vision 2035, as it contributes to promoting the knowledge economy, fashioning a suitable infrastructure for it, and equipping those in the field with adequate skill sets.

The project aims to create a competitive environment, the benefits of which are reaped by Kuwait's economy. Speaking to KUNA, Academy Director General Abdulaziz Al-Bader described the institution as an educational extension of the Authority, helping it achieve long-term strategic goals. The Academy will positively impact socioeconomic reality, reflected Al-Bader, adding that it goes in line with the Authority's operational strategy and comprehensive financial national program.

It is setting forth to be an active contributor to promoting the efficiency of capital market workers via presenting diverse programs, commented Al-Bader. To achieve Kuwait's vision of becoming a regional financial hub brimming with investment opportunities, the academy is seeking cooperation with professional international institutions, he added.

Alongside training and accreditation programs, Al-Bader said the Academy will also be establishing a digital library and creating alliances with local universities for the exchange of expertise and opportunities. CMA was established in 2010 to regulate and supervise securities' activities, ensure transparency, fairness, and efficiency, and observe listed companies' implementation of corporate governance regulations, in addition to protecting investors from unfair practices and violations. — KUNA



Academy Director General Abdulaziz Al-Bader

Burgan Bank concludes its sponsorship of 'Umm Kulthum with Marwa Nagy' concert

Bank offers private banking clients unique and memorable experiences



KUWAIT: In line with its comprehensive social responsibility strategy and its unwavering commitment to offering its private banking clients an all-around exceptional experience, Burgan Bank concluded its sponsorship of the two-day musical theatre performance, "Umm Kulthum with Marwa Nagy", in partnership with the National Creative Industries Group (NCIG). The show, which took place at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre, was met with wide scale success, selling up to 1,700 tickets per day, including exclusive invitations for Burgan Bank's private banking clients. The Bank's latest sponsorship is among numerous efforts that it exerts as part of its dedication to advancing the arts and entertainment scene in Kuwait.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Meshari Shehab, General Manager – Private Banking and Wealth Management at Burgan Bank, said: "In line with our slogan 'Together Managing Wealth with Confidence', and as part of our overarching Burgan strategy, we remain committed to creating new memorable experiences for our private banking clients, that is, of course, in addition to offering them exclusive benefits, products, and services that are tailored to their unique needs and aspirations.

As a strategic sponsor of the musical evening 'Umm Kulthum with Marwa Nagy', we were delighted to invite our esteemed private banking clients to enjoy a musical theatre performance that transported the audience to the nostalgic performances of the iconic Umm Kulthum through a series of mu-



Meshari Shehab

sical performances that entwine acting and some of the mega star's most notable songs. It is worth pointing out that this memorable performance marks 100 years since Umm Kulthum's debut." Meshari added: "As part of our social responsibility program, we continue to expand our strategic partnerships across different fields, and today, we proudly celebrate Burgan's first collaboration with NCIG, which stands as one of the most impactful forces of development in Kuwait's arts and entertainment sector."

It serves to note that, in line with its expansive social responsibility program, Burgan Bank continues to support individuals and institutions that dedicate their work to advancing the domestic arts and entertainment sector, especially the young and aspiring talents who explore new horizons by fusing different arts and adopting new technologies and the latest industry trends worldwide.



Electricity minister checks power and water supplies

KUWAIT: Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr Mah-moud Bushehri has praised the ministry officials for their dedication and efficiency. Speaking while inspecting the East and West Doha power and water desalination stations, the minister affirmed the necessity to increase attention to the national cadres and enable them to shoulder responsibilities in full. During his inspection tour, the minister met with the stations' managers and checked the preparedness for power and water supplies this summer.

Wael Khamees, the director of the East Doha station, briefed the minister about work at the site, noting that its daily electricity output amounts to 910 megawatts in addition to 42 million imperial gallons of water. At the West Doha station, the acting director Mohammad Al-Shemmari also made a presentation about the facility, mentioning that its daily production of power amounts to 2,390 megawatts. He has also indicated that it produces 170 million imperial gallons a day. — KUNA

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times
management and staff
convey their deepest condolences to

Hasan Al-Kelani

on the sad demise of his cousin

Samer Ahmad Haytham Al-Hraky

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him



Trump to appeal historic conviction

South Africa election ends 3 decades of ANC majority

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FIROZPUR: A man waits to vote at a polling station during the seventh and last phase of the general election, at a town in Firozpur district in Punjab, India, on June 1, 2024. — Reuters

Modi's alliance to win big: Polls

Opposition slam exit polls for being 'pre-fixed'; Modi celebrates 'with confidence'

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led alliance is projected to win a big majority in the general election that concluded on Saturday, TV exit polls said, suggesting it would do better than expected by most analysts. Most exit polls projected the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) could win a two-thirds majority in the 543-member lower house of parliament, where 272 is needed for a simple majority. A two-thirds majority will allow the government to usher in far-reaching amendments in the constitution. A summary of five major exit polls projected the NDA could win between 353 and 401 seats, a number that is likely to boost financial markets when they reopen on Monday. The NDA won 353 seats in the 2019 general election, of which BJP accounted for 303. Three of the five polls projected BJP alone could win more than the 303 it won in 2019. The opposition "INDIA" alliance led by Rahul Gandhi's Congress party was projected to win between 125 and 182 seats. Exit polls, which are con-

ducted by polling agencies, have a patchy record in India as they have often got the outcome wrong, with analysts saying it is a challenge to get them right in the large and diverse country. In his first comments after voting ended, Modi claimed victory without referring to the exit polls. "I can say with confidence that the people of India have voted in record numbers to re-elect the NDA government," he said on X, without providing evidence of his claim. "The opportunistic INDI Alliance failed to strike a chord with the voters. They are casteist, communal and corrupt." Pre-election surveys said the BJP would easily keep its majority in the election. But the party ran into a spirited campaign by the "INDIA" alliance, sowing some doubt about how close the race might be, and many political analysts had predicted the BJP's margin of victory would be narrower than or close to the 2019 tally. The opposition dismissed the exit polls, and ahead of their publication had called them "prefixed".

Most opposition parties accuse India's main news channels of being biased in favor of Modi, charges the channels deny. They also say exit polls in India are mostly unscientific. "This is a government exit poll, this is Narendra Modi's exit poll," Supriya Shrinete, the Congress's social media head, told news agency ANI, in which Reuters has a minority stake. "We have a sense of how many seats we are winning, it will not be one seat less than 259," she said. **Uncertainty lifted, analysts say** Nearly one billion people were eligible to vote in the seven-phase election that began on April 19 and was held in scorching summer heat in many areas. The Election Commission will count votes on June 4 and results are expected the same day. A victory for Modi, 73, will make him only the second prime minister after independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru to win three consecutive terms. Modi began his re-election campaign by focusing

on his achievements over the last 10 years but soon switched to mostly targeting the Congress by accusing it of favoring India's minority Muslims, which the opposition party denies. The opposition has largely campaigned on affirmative action programs and saving the constitution from what they call Modi's dictatorial rule, an allegation the BJP denies. Unemployment and inflation are the main concerns for voters in the majority-Hindu country of 1.4 billion people, surveys have said. Market analysts said the exit polls had lifted uncertainty about the likely result and signaled the continuity of Modi's growth-focused economic policies. "Exit poll results which indicate a clear victory for the NDA with around 360 seats completely remove the so-called election jitters which have been weighing on markets in May," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. "This comes as a shot in the arm for the bulls who will trigger a big rally in the market on Monday," he said. — Reuters

Zionists pummel Gaza after Biden details truce plan


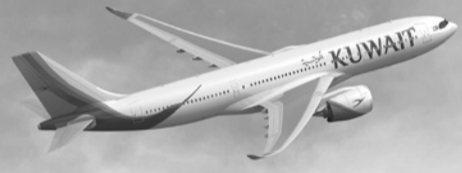

GAZA: Zionist forces hammered Rafah in southern Gaza with tanks and artillery Saturday, hours after US President Joe Biden said the Zionist entity was offering a new roadmap towards a full ceasefire. Shortly after Biden's announcement, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted his country would still pursue the war until it had reached all its aims. He reiterated that position on Saturday, saying that "(The Zionist entity's) conditions for ending the war have not changed: The destruction of Hamas's military and governing capabilities, the freeing of all hostages and ensuring that Gaza no longer poses a threat to (the Zionist entity)". Hamas, meanwhile, said it "views positively" the Zionist plan laid out by Biden.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden delivers remarks on the Middle East in the State Dining room at the White House in Washington, US, May 31, 2024. — Reuters

In his first major address outlining a possible end to the nearly eight-month war, the US president said the Zionist entity's three-stage offer would begin with a phase that involves a six-week ceasefire when Zionist forces would withdraw from "all populated areas" of Gaza, some captives — including the elderly and women — would be freed in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, Palestinian civilians could return to their homes in Gaza and 600 trucks a day would bring humanitarian aid into the devastated enclave. In this phase, Hamas and the Zionist entity would negotiate a permanent ceasefire that Biden said would last "as long as Hamas lives up to its commitments". If negotiations took more than six weeks, the temporary ceasefire would extend while they continued. In the second phase, Biden said there would be an exchange for all remaining living captives, including male soldiers. Zionist forces would withdraw from Gaza and the permanent ceasefire would begin. The third phase would include a major reconstruction plan for Gaza and the return of the "final remains" of hostages to their families. The US leader urged Hamas to accept the Zionist offer. "It's time for this war to end, for the day after to begin," he said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called his counterparts from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on Friday to press the deal. UN chief Antonio Guterres "strongly hopes" the latest development "will lead to an agreement by the parties for lasting peace", his spokesman Stephane

Dujarric said. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the offer "provides a glimpse of hope and a possible path out of the war's deadlock", while EU chief Ursula von der Leyen welcomed a "balanced and realistic" approach to end the bloodshed. Saudi Arabia stressed its "support for all efforts aimed at an immediate ceasefire" and the withdrawal of Zionist troops. Indonesia, meanwhile, said it was ready to send "significant peacekeeping forces" and medical personnel to Gaza if a ceasefire is agreed. But Netanyahu took issue with Biden's presentation of what was on the table, insisting on Friday the transition from one stage to the next was "conditional" and crafted to allow the Zionist entity to maintain its war aims. "The prime minister authorized the negotiating team to present an outline for achieving (the return of hostages), while insisting that the war will not end until all of its goals are achieved," Netanyahu's office said. Zionist opposition leader Yair Lapid said the government "cannot ignore Biden's important speech" and should accept the proposed deal, vowing to back Netanyahu if his far-right coalition partners quit over it. "I remind Netanyahu that he has our safety net for a hostage deal," Lapid said Saturday on social media platform X. In his speech, Biden called on the Zionist leadership to resist pressure from those in the Zionist entity who were pushing for the war to go on "indefinitely", a group he said included some in the Zionist governing coalition. "They want to occupy Gaza. They want to keep fighting for years and hostages are not a priority for them. Well, I've urged leadership in (the Zionist entity) to stand behind this deal, despite whatever pressure comes," he added. The Zionist entity sent tanks and troops into Rafah in early May, ignoring concerns over the safety of displaced Palestinian civilians sheltering in the city on the Egyptian border. On Saturday, residents reported tank fire in the Tal al-Sultan neighborhood in west Rafah, while witnesses in the east and center of Rafah described intense shelling. "From the early hours of the night until this morning, the aerial and artillery bombardment has not stopped for a single moment", a resident from west Rafah told AFP on condition of anonymity. "There are a number of occupation (Zionist) snipers in high-rise buildings overseeing all areas of Tal al-Sultan ... making the situation very dangerous", the resident added. There was also shelling and gunfire from the Zionist army in Gaza City, in the north of the territory, an AFP reporter said. Before the Rafah offensive began, the United Nations said up to 1.4 million people were sheltering in the city. Since then, one million have fled the area, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, has said. The Zionist seizure of the Rafah crossing has further slowed sporadic deliveries of aid for Gaza's 2.4 million people and effectively shuttered the territory's main exit point. Blinken acknowledged on Friday that the humanitarian situation was "dire" despite US efforts to bring in more assistance. Egyptian state-linked Al-Qahera News said Cairo will host a meeting with Zionist and US officials on Sunday to discuss the reopening of the Rafah crossing. The World Food Program said daily life had become "apocalyptic" in parts of southern Gaza. The Zionist offensive has killed at least 36,379 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. In northern Gaza, witnesses said that after carrying out a three-week operation in the town of Jabalia and its neighboring refugee camp, troops had ordered residents of nearby Beit Hanun to evacuate ahead of an imminent assault. — Agencies

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Kuwait Airways announces the opening of applications for the jobs listed below in accordance with the following specific requirements and specifications:

Required Job	Qualifications	Required Experience
Sales Representative	Completion of High School (12Years) Education	4 Years of experience in the same field of reservations and sales, preferably 2 years as a ticket sales representative
Officer Ticketing Sales	Completion of High School (12Years) Education	2 years' experience in similar field

General Terms:

- Priority in appointment shall be for eligible Kuwaitis who meet the requirements.
- The applicant is required to be proficient in English (Reading & Writing & Speaking) and proficient in computer applications.
- A minimum of 70% is required to pass the English language test.
- The applicant must successfully pass a set of tests with specified success rates to qualify for a personal interview.
- The applicant must have performed the mandatory military service or be postponed, excluded, or exempted from it in accordance with Law No. 20/2015 and submit a Completion Certificate of the mandatory military service.
- Applicants shall be subject to the necessary conditions for appointment in accordance with the rules and regulations at Kuwait Airways.
- University degrees that are not recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait will not be considered.
- Applicants will be subject to personal interviews and the necessary tests, and in the event of equal ratings, comparison between them will be made according to the following standards of Civil Service Commission Resolution No. (4) of 2001 and in their order:
 - Holding a grade of (90%) or higher for the qualification.
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 - Age seniority.
 - Married applicants are preferred over single status applicants.
- Submission and receipt of the application do not imply acceptance. Any application that fails to meet the specified conditions will not be considered, and the company reserves the right to decline or not respond to the applicant.

How to apply:

- Applications shall be submitted on the website: careers.kuwaitairways.com. This shall be within 15 days from the date of publishing this announcement.
- Documents to be attached to the website:
 - Updated CV.
 - Educational Qualification and professional certificates approved, and equivalency approved by the official authorities in the State of Kuwait.
 - Copy of Civil ID, Passport, Nationality and Birth Certificate.
 - A certificate from The Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) and Career Progression.
 - Experience certificates
 - To whom it may concern certificate from military service for service completion, or postponed, excluded or exempted (If applicable).
- Applications that do not meet the requirements or incomplete applications shall be excluded, and this exclusion is considered an official apology without the need to notify the applicant.

Kuwait Airways Company
02 June 2024

International

South Africa election ends 3 decades of ANC majority

Strong performance by ex-leader Zuma's party among main factors leading to ANC's failure

Russia labels wives of mobilized soldiers group 'foreign agent'

MOSCOW: Russia on Friday labelled a women's organization campaigning for the return of mobilized men from Ukraine and a former pro-peace presidential candidate "foreign agents". Moscow uses the label, heavy in Soviet-era connotations, on Kremlin critics to silence dissent.

The justice ministry included the "Put Domoy" movement, which has organized women-led protests in Moscow to bring mobilized men back from Ukraine, in its list of "foreign agents". Put Domoy has been made up of wives of Russian men mobilized to fight in Ukraine. The justice ministry said it had worked to create a "negative image" of Russia and the Russian army and called for illegal protests. It also labelled one of the movement's leaders, Maria Andreyeva, as a "foreign agent."

She had become the face of the grassroots movement, which became increasingly uncomfortable for the Kremlin. "I do not agree with this," she told AFP of the label, adding: "I will protest this." Russian authorities had previously appeared unwilling to target the movement in an apparent bid not to anger relatives and wives of soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

The women had earlier this year staged rare protests in central Moscow. Moscow also included Yekaterina Duntsova, who had tried to run against President Vladimir Putin in a March presidential election, as a "foreign agent".

Duntsova, who had filed documents to register in the race as an independent candidate, had campaigned on a platform of ending the Ukraine offensive. She was slapped with the "foreign agent" tag more than two months after the vote, which saw Putin cruise to a fifth term in office unchallenged by any meaningful opposition. Duntsova told independent media SOTA — also labelled a "foreign agent" Friday — that the move was "expected" but that the timing was odd. "It could have been done during the presidential campaign," she said.

Duntsova said she will not give up efforts to create a political party but that "it will become a bit harder with self-expression." As a "foreign agent", she now cannot run for any office. Russia also labelled the media project SOTA, one of the few independent media reporting from Russia, a "foreign agent". — AFP



OBSERVATORY: Voters queue outside a polling station in Observatory, Cape Town, on May 29, 2024, during South Africa's general election. — AFP

JOHANNESBURG: South Africans angry at joblessness, inequality and power shortages have slashed support for the African National Congress (ANC) to 40 percent in this week's election, ending three decades of dominance by the party that freed the country from apartheid.

A dramatically weakened mandate for the legacy party of Nelson Mandela, down from the 57.5 percent it got in the previous 2019 parliamentary election, means the ANC must share power with a rival in order to keep it — an unprecedented prospect.

"We can talk to everybody and anybody," Gwede Mantashe, the ANC chair and current mines and energy minister, told reporters in comments carried by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), dodging a question about who the party was discussing a possible coalition deal with.

Vote tallying from Wednesday's poll was entering its final stages on Saturday, with results from 99.53 percent of polling stations giving the ANC 40.21 percent. The main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), had 21.80 percent, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a new party led by former president Jacob Zuma, managed to grab 14.60 percent, while the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), led by former ANC youth leader Julius Malema, got 9.48 percent.

"We have achieved our mission: ... to bring the

ANC below 50 percent. We want to humble the ANC," Malema told journalists at the results center. "We are going to negotiate with the ANC" for a possible coalition deal, he said, although that would not be quite enough to clinch a majority without including another party on the current count.

The ANC has won every previous national election by a landslide since the historic 1994 vote that ended white minority rule, but over the last decade its support has dwindled as the economy stagnated, unemployment rose and roads and power stations crumbled. MK's strong performance, especially in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal, is one of the main reasons the ANC failed to secure a majority.

Analysts say one option for the ANC could be a "government of national unity" involving a broad spectrum of many parties, rather than a formal coalition between a few — an arrangement similar to the one set up after 1994's historic all-race vote. Malema said the EFF was against that idea and preferred to be part of a coalition.

'We are all talking'

Political parties' share of the vote determine their seats in the National Assembly, which elects the nation's president. Investors in Africa's most industrialized economy will hope the uncertain picture can quickly become clear and that the country avoids an

extended period of wrangling if the main political players struggle to agree how they can cooperate.

Some parties have questioned what they say are vote-counting inconsistencies that may lead to some results being contested. Electoral commission chair Mosotho Moepya told a news conference on Saturday that "every concern raised in these objections will be considered and we will do so carefully".

ANC First Deputy Secretary-General Nomvula Mokonyane meanwhile urged voters and communities to remain peaceful. Despite the ANC's result, President Cyril Ramaphosa could still keep his job, as the former liberation movement was on course to get about twice as many votes as the next party. But he will be weakened and could face calls to quit both from opposition parties and critics in the deeply-divided ANC.

On Friday, however, Mokonyane — one of the ANC's top officials — backed him to stay on as party leader, and analysts say he has no obvious successor. A deal to keep the ANC in the presidency could involve opposition backing in exchange either for cabinet posts or for more control of parliament, perhaps even the speaker. "One of the positions we are going to demand from the ANC is ... the speaker of parliament," Malema said. The election commission has penciled in a final results announcement for Sunday. — Reuters

El Salvador's Bukele sworn in for second term

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador's gang-busting President Nayib Bukele was sworn in for a second term Saturday, more popular — and more powerful — than ever. Raising his hand at the National Palace in the capital San Salvador, the 42-year-old took the oath of office in front of a packed crowd.

Bukele is set to govern for another five years with near-total control of parliament and other state institutions after his New Ideas party dominated in legislative polls on the back of a brutal but popular gang crackdown.

Invited to the ceremony were ideological allies like Argentine President Javier Milei and Donald Trump Jr, son of the former US president. Bukele, who unapologetically describes himself as a "cool dictator," enjoys sky-high approval ratings due to his heavy-handed campaign against criminal gangs, credited with returning a sense of normalcy to a violence-fatigued society.

The campaign has drawn criticism from rights groups but has made Bukele the most popular leader in Latin America, according to a regional poll, and the envy of many peers. He was reelected in February with 85 percent of the vote.

His popularity also translated downballot into a near-clean sweep for Bukele's New Ideas party in the Legislative Assembly, where it took 54 out of 60 seats. Yet experts warn his extended honeymoon with voters may be nearing its end as economic worries overtake safety concerns in the public discourse, amid high government debt and fast-rising prices for

consumer goods in a country where more than a quarter of the population lives in poverty.

Social media whiz Bukele has laughed off criticism of his authoritarian tendencies. But he was only able to seek reelection after a loyalist Supreme Court ruling allowed him to bypass a constitutional ban on successive terms. "What he has demonstrated is that the law is irrelevant and that he can do whatever he wants, how he wants," public policy expert Carlos Carcach told AFP, describing Bukele as an "all-powerful" president.

Gangs as a 'cancer'

With his preferred getup of jeans and a baseball cap, millennial Bukele came to power in 2019 promising to crush the country's gangs, to which he attributes some 120,000 murders over three decades — more than the 75,000 lives lost in El Salvador's civil war from 1980 to 1992.

And he did just that, rounding up more than 80,000 presumed gangsters under a state of emergency in place since March 2022 that allows for arrest without a warrant. He also built the largest prison in Latin America to hold them.

The result, Bukele has boasted, has been turning "the murder capital of the world, the world's most dangerous country, into the safest country in the Western Hemisphere." But it has come at a cost. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported the killing and torture of detainees, and thousands of innocent people — including minors — among those arrested. Bukele insists drastic action is needed to cure the country of the "cancer" of gangs.

'Period of prosperity'

The president will have even more power in his second term, after the legislature approved a reform that will make it easier for him to push through constitutional changes. Many hope he will use it to fulfill his reelection promise of "a period of prosper-

ing-Lockheed Martin joint venture. But less than four minutes prior to liftoff, a ground system computer triggered an automatic abort command that paused the countdown clock, according to mission officials.

It was not immediately clear why the abort command was activated or how long the underlying issue would take to address. But the next available launch window for the mission is Sunday at about noon local time, followed by two more opportunities on Wednesday and Thursday.

The first attempt by Boeing to send an uncrewed Starliner to the space station in 2019 failed due to software and engineering glitches. A second try in 2022 succeeded, paving the way for efforts at getting the first crewed test mission off the ground.

A May 6 countdown was halted just two hours before launch time over a faulty pressure valve on the Atlas upper stage, followed by weeks of further delays caused by other engineering problems, since resolved, on the Starliner itself.

The two-member crew, NASA astronauts Barry "Butch" Wilmore, 61, and Sunita "Sunni" Williams,



SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele (left) salutes next to his wife Gabriela Rodriguez (right) and their daughter Layla during his inauguration ceremony, at the National Palace in downtown San Salvador on June 1, 2024. — AFP

ahead" in a country where the poverty rate has swelled to more than 27 percent and food inflation has outpaced salary increases. Another problem for Bukele: El Salvador's public debt has skyrocketed on his watch to more than \$30 billion, or 84 percent of GDP. Growth is forecast to slow to three percent this year from a higher-than-expected 3.5 percent recorded in 2023, largely due, Bukele says, to the reduction in violent crime.

In a bid to revitalize El Salvador's dollarized, remittance-reliant economy, Bukele in 2021 made bit-

coin legal tender — the first country in the world to do so. He invested an undisclosed amount of taxpayer money in the cryptocurrency, despite warnings about volatility risks from global institutions. Since then, bitcoin has dropped to as low as \$16,000, only to rocket in March to a record of \$73,797.

The ceremony was also due to be attended by dignitaries including Spanish King Felipe VI. Donald Trump Jr said on TikTok upon his arrival Friday that he and his team were in the country to promote those who "support freedom around the world." — AFP

Boeing calls off historic test flight of spacecraft

CAPE CANAVERAL: The launch countdown for Boeing's new Starliner space capsule on its inaugural crewed test flight was halted on Saturday for the second time in weeks due to an unspecified technical issue, postponing the mission for at least another 24 hours. The CST-200 Starliner's first voyage carrying two astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) has been highly anticipated and much-delayed as Boeing scrambles to gain a greater share of the lucrative NASA business now dominated by Elon Musk's SpaceX.

The gumdrop-shaped Starliner capsule had stood poised for blastoff from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida atop an Atlas V rocket furnished by United Launch Alliance, a Boe-

ing-Lockheed Martin joint venture. But less than four minutes prior to liftoff, a ground system computer triggered an automatic abort command that paused the countdown clock, according to mission officials.

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SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule, which since 2020 has been NASA's only vehicle for sending ISS crew to orbit from US soil. The test flight comes at an especially critical moment for Boeing. Its airplane business is dealing with fallout from a midair blowout of a cabin panel door plug on a nearly new 737 MAX 9 in January, as well as previous deadly crashes of two 737 MAX jets. Getting Starliner to this point has been a fraught process for Boeing under a \$4.2 billion fixed-priced contract with NASA that has since swelled to roughly \$4.5 billion, according to a Reuters review of contract changes since it was awarded in 2014.

The space agency wants the redundancy of having two different U.S. rides to the ISS, which is expected to retire around 2030. NASA is encouraging private development of new space stations that could replace the ISS after its retirement, potentially giving Starliner new destinations. Depending on the outcome of the first crewed test flight, Starliner is booked to fly at least six more crewed missions to the space station for NASA. — Reuters

International

Trump to appeal historic conviction

Trump's campaign announces \$52.8 million raised online in 24 hours after the verdict

NEW YORK: Donald Trump said on Friday he would appeal the guilty verdict that made him the first U.S. president convicted of a crime, though he will have to wait until after his sentencing on July 11 before taking that step. In rambling remarks at the Trump Tower lobby in Manhattan where he announced his first presidential run in 2015, Trump repeated his complaints that the trial was a "rigged" attempt to hobble his comeback White House bid and warned that it showed no American was safe from politically motivated prosecution.

"If they can do this to me, they can do this to anyone," Trump, 77, said in an unscripted 33-minute speech. Applauded by supporters, Trump, the Republican candidate in the 2024 election took no questions from reporters. "We're going to be appealing this scam," he said.

Trump will have 30 days from the date of his July 11 sentencing to file a notice of appeal. Democratic President Joe Biden, who will face Trump in the Nov 5 election, said Trump had been given an opportunity to defend himself in the same justice system that applies to all Americans. "It's reckless, it's dangerous, it's irresponsible for anyone to say this was rigged just because they don't like the verdict," Biden, 81, said at the White House.

Thursday's guilty verdict catapults the United States into unexplored territory. The charge Trump was convicted of, falsifying business records, carries a maximum sentence of four years in prison. Others convicted of that crime often receive shorter sentences, fines or probation. But Trump's public criticism of jurors and witnesses during the trial, which prompted Justice Juan Merchan to impose a \$10,000 fine, could push the judge to impose a tougher penalty, said Rebecca Roiphe, a former New York prosecutor.

Any sentence would likely be suspended until the appeals process plays out. A close ally, House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, predicted the US Supreme Court would eventually overturn the verdict. "I think they'll set this straight, but it's going to take a while," he said on Fox News.

Incarceration would not prevent Trump from campaigning, or taking office if he were to win. Trump's July 11 sentencing comes just days before the Republican Party is due to formally nominate him as its presidential candidate at its convention in Milwaukee.

Trump was found guilty of 34 criminal counts of falsifying documents to cover up a hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels to illegally influence the 2016 election, in which he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump still faces three other criminal prosecutions — two for his efforts to overturn his 2020 defeat to Biden — but the New York verdict could be the only one handed down before Americans vote, as the other cases have been tied up in legal wrangling. Trump has pleaded not guilty in all four cases, which he says are politically motivated. A source familiar with his campaign's inner workings said the verdict was expected to prompt him to intensify deliberations on picking a woman as his vice-presidential running mate.

What do voters think?

National opinion polls show Trump locked in a tight race with Biden, and one in four Republican respondents in an April Reuters/Ipsos poll said they would not vote for him if he were convicted of a felony by a jury. Strategists from both parties questioned whether the verdict would have a significant impact on the race.

On pro-Trump corners of the internet, some supporters called for riots, revolution and violent retribution. In the battleground state of Georgia, retiree Wendell Hill, 65, said the verdict would not cause him to abandon Trump. "It is all politicized. I still don't understand what crime he's supposed to have committed," he said as he set up chairs for a concert in downtown Marietta.

Carol Cuba, 77, a longtime Republican voter, said she was disgusted with Trump. "For the first time in my life I'm thinking about voting on the dark side," she said referring to the Democrats. Trump's campaign said it raised \$52.8 million online in the 24 hours after the verdict. Several major Republican donors said



NEW YORK: Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump attends a press conference, the day after he was handed a guilty verdict at Trump Tower in New York City, US on May 31, 2024. — Reuters

they would continue to donate to Trump's campaign despite the conviction.

Explicit testimony

The jury found Trump guilty of falsifying business documents after a trial that featured explicit testimony from Daniels about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in 2006 while he was married to his current wife Melania. Trump denies ever having sex with Daniels. Trump's former fixer Michael Cohen testified that Trump approved a \$130,000 hush money payment to Daniels. Cohen, who handled the payment himself, testified that Trump approved a plan to re-

imburse him through monthly payments disguised as legal work.

Falsifying business documents is normally a misdemeanor in New York, but prosecutors in Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office elevated the case to a felony on grounds that Trump was concealing an illegal campaign contribution.

If elected, Trump could shut down the two federal cases that accuse him of illegally trying to overturn his 2020 election loss and mishandling classified documents after leaving office in 2021. He would not have the power to stop a separate election-subversion case taking place in Georgia. — Reuters

6 wounded in knife attack at German anti-Islam rally

MANNHEIM: Six people were wounded in a knife attack at a far-right rally in Germany on Friday, including a prominent critic of Islam, drawing immediate condemnation from the nation's leaders. The attack, just days before EU-wide elections, comes amid a spike of politically motivated violence in Germany. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser raised the possibility that the assault could have been Islamist motivated. A man with a knife attacked and wounded several people on the market square in the city of Mannheim in southwest Germany at around 11:35 am (0935 GMT), police said in a statement.

Five of those wounded were taking part in a rally organized by Pax Europa, a campaign group against radical Islam, police said. A police officer who intervened was also stabbed several times in the back of the head, it said. Another officer fired at the attacker and wounded him. "The extent and severity of the injuries are not yet known," the police said, adding that the identity of the attacker had not yet been determined.

'Terrible'

Der Spiegel magazine said a suspect had been identified and named him as Sulaiman A. a 25-year-old who was born in Herat, Afghanistan, and lived in Hesse state. The suspect had not previously come to the attention of the authorities as an extremist but investigators believe he probably acted with an Islamist motive, the magazine said.

"The images from Mannheim are terrible," Chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote on X, adding that "Violence is absolutely unacceptable in our democracy. The perpetrator must be severely punished."

Pax Europa said on its website that one of the



MANNHEIM, Germany: Members of the fire brigade clean away the blood at the scene where several people were injured in a knife attack on May 31, 2024. — AFP

victims was Michael Stuerzenberger, a German far-right activist and blogger, who had been due to take part in the rally. Stuerzenberger suffered serious stab wounds to his face and to his leg, the group said.

Stuerzenberger has been a prominent anti-Islam campaigner in Germany for several years. The Bavarian security services have accused him of making "Islamophobic statements", and has classed Pax Europa as Islamophobic.

'Great danger'

Faeser called for a thorough investigation into the attacker's motive. "If the investigations reveal an Islamist motive, this would be a further confirmation of the great danger posed by Islamist acts of violence," she said in a statement.

Germany has been on high alert for possible Isla-

mist attacks since the outbreak of the Zionist-Hamas war, with the country's domestic intelligence chief warning that the risk of such assaults is "real and higher than it has been for a long time". The country had also seen a spate of attacks on politicians at work or on the campaign trail ahead of EU elections on June 9.

Matthias Ecke, a European Parliament lawmaker for Scholz's SPD party, was set upon this month by a group of youths as he put up election posters in the eastern city of Dresden. Days later, former Berlin mayor Franziska Giffey was hit on the head and neck with a bag as she visited a library in the capital. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said last week that he was worried by the growing trend and said Germans "must never get used to violence in the battle of political opinions". — AFP

'In jail for everyone else': A Hong Kong democrat's sacrifice

HONG KONG: Owen Chow has spent most of the past four years in prison and in repeated court hearings, fighting charges carrying a possible life sentence — a far cry from his days as a nursing student and one of thousands supporting Hong Kong's democratic freedoms. The 27-year-old is one of 14 convicted on Thursday of conspiracy to commit subversion. Two were acquitted and 31 have pleaded guilty in the landmark national security case, which has drawn international criticism of the financial hub.

Once one of Asia's most liberal cities, China-ruled Hong Kong is experiencing a years-long crackdown on dissent under China-imposed security laws that have silenced liberal voices, unnerved investors and triggered a wave of emigration. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of China's State Council has said the laws will "secure Hong Kong's prosperity and stability" as well as safeguard the interests of overseas investors, democracy and freedom. Chow and the 13 others were found guilty by three judges of conspiracy to commit subversion for holding an unofficial primary election in 2020 that was deemed by Hong Kong authorities as a plot to paralyze the government and "subvert state power". The verdict caps a marathon legal process following the arrest of Chow and 46 other leading democrats in early 2021 in a citywide police raid.

Chow's activism began when mass protests broke out in 2019 over a planned China extradition bill. In a separate trial he was sentenced in March to more than five years in prison for occupying the city's legislature during those protests. In several prison visits over three



HONG KONG: In this file photo, Owen Chow hands out postcards at a street booth on September 18, 2020. — AFP

years, Chow told Reuters he had done no more than fight for democratic freedoms legally enshrined when his home city was handed over to China from the British in 1997. "Democracy is the future of Hong Kong. This won't change regardless of those in power," he said on a phone handset through a pane of glass in a room in a high-security prison.

'Patience'

When the massive pro-democracy protests broke out, Chow said he felt compelled towards activism. He gained a reputation as a young firebrand who also railed against the more cautious approach of elder democrats in their demands of Beijing. He is one of nearly 3,000 people who have been prosecuted for offences related to the city's pro-democracy protests since 2019. More than 290 people have been arrested under national security laws. In what UN human rights experts and the US say is a departure from established common law practices, Chow and other democrats were denied a jury trial, and 32 of the 47 have languished for over 1,000 days in detention without bail. The Hong Kong

government has said in a statement that all defendants have the right to a fair trial by an independent judiciary. Many democrats have struggled through the process. Some became ill, while the high cost of hiring barristers for years has depleted life savings. Many have lost their livelihoods. Chow — crew cut and cleanly shaven in a short-sleeved, russet prisoner's uniform, shorts and sandals — said he tried to remain physically and mentally strong through exercise, meditation, study and writing letters while in solitary confinement. "I have gained more patience, perseverance, and love ... and lost much anger and arrogance," he said.

In March this year, Hong Kong's pro-Beijing legislature unanimously passed a further set of national security laws, giving authorities more power to clamp down on offences including espionage, sedition and theft of state secrets. Chow told the court he considered withdrawing from the election after studying the security laws imposed by Beijing in 2020. "But I found that I simply could not make the decision to withdraw from the (primary) election. I felt that I could not leave the masses," he said.

In their judgement on Thursday, the three judges wrote that they had "no doubt" that Chow's objective for taking part in the election was to "undermine, destroy or overthrow the existing political system".

Chow said he had a hard time adapting to prison life at first, and had once cried himself to sleep before the closely watched trial started, due to the pressure he faced. "If we accept that adversity is inevitable and treat adversity as a rare chance to train ourselves, to improve ourselves, we can all take things in our stride."

Chow met Amanda, a reporter who interviewed him, in 2021 and their relationship blossomed despite his time in detention. "He's doing something he thinks is right. I also think he's doing the right thing. I don't want him to face these things alone," Amanda, who declined to give her last name given the sensitivity of the matter, told Reuters. — Reuters

US shifts focus to China risks at Asia defense meeting

SINGAPORE: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin tried to refocus attention on China's threat in the Asia-Pacific on Saturday, seeking to alleviate concerns that conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have distracted from America's security commitments in the region.

Just hours after Austin spoke at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in Singapore, where he will address delegates at the security forum on Sunday. In a statement on the social media platform X, he said that he had come to gather support from the Asia-Pacific region for a peace summit planned for June 15-16 in Switzerland. He said he planned to hold several meetings, including with Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta, Austin, and Singaporean investors.

Austin met his Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun, on the sidelines of the conference on Friday in a bid to cool friction over issues ranging from Taiwan to China's military activity in the South China Sea.

There has been increasing concern that Washington's focus on helping Ukraine counter Russia's invasion and support for the Zionist war in Gaza, while trying to ensure that the conflict does not spread, has taken away attention from the Indo-Pacific. "Despite these historic clashes in Europe and the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific has remained our priority theatre of operations," Austin said in his speech, which appeared aimed at underlining the administration's legacy in the region as President Joe Biden's first term in office nears its end. Biden is running for re-election in November against former President Donald Trump.

"Let me be clear: The United States can be secure only if Asia is secure," Austin said. "That's why the United States has long maintained our presence in this region." Austin underscored the importance of alliances in the region. "And ... peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and not coercion or conflict. And certainly not through so-called punishment," Austin said, taking a shot at China. In response, Chinese Lieutenant General Jing Jianfeng said the US Indo-Pacific strategy was intended "to create division, provoke confrontation and undermine stability".

"It only serves the selfish geopolitical interests of the US and runs counter to the trend of history and the shared aspirations of regional countries for peace, development and win-win cooperation," said Jing, deputy chief of the Joint Staff Department of China's Central Military Commission. Some US officials say Beijing has become more emboldened in recent years, recently launching what it described as "punishment" drills around Taiwan, sending heavily armed warplanes and staging mock attacks after Lai Ching-te was inaugurated as Taiwan's president.

About \$8 billion in US funding is set aside for countering China in the Indo-Pacific as part of the supplemental funding bill passed by lawmakers. Philippine President Ferdinand R Marcos Jr on Friday denounced illegal, coercive, and aggressive actions in the South China Sea, a disputed ocean territory that China has been flooding with coastguard ships in recent months. The Philippines, a sprawling archipelago with strong historical ties to the United States and close geographical proximity to China, is at the center of an intensifying power struggle between Washington and Beijing.

Austin said the harassment faced by the Philippines was dangerous and reiterated that the United States' mutual defense treaty with Manila was iron clad. He said the aim was for tensions between Beijing and Manila not to spiral out of control. "America will continue to play a vital role in the Indo-Pacific, together with our friends across the region that we share and care so much about," Austin said. Jing, the Chinese general, said these alliances contributed to instability in the region. — Reuters

Business

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2024

NBK pioneers sustainable finance with \$500m debut green bonds

First Green issuance out of Kuwait, showcasing bank's dedication to innovative financial solutions

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has successfully priced its first \$500 million green bonds under its Global Medium Term Note program. The Green notes have a 6-year maturity and first call date after 5-years. The inaugural issuance not only marks the first Green issuance by NBK but the first of its kind out of Kuwait, marking a pivotal step towards NBK's commitment to sustainable and transition finance. Issued in both Reg S and Rule 144A formats, these bonds represent a landmark debut in the realm of green bonds from a Kuwaiti financial institution.

- **Strong interest from global investors, reflecting confidence in the bank's credit strength and commitment to sustainability**
- **Demand peaked at US\$1.5 billion, an oversubscription of more than 3 times**
- **Strong international investor participation with 74 percent allocated to non-MENA investors.**
- **Priced at 95 bps over 5-year US treasuries, marks the tightest spread out of Kuwait and amongst the tightest in the region**
- **NBK leads the initiative supporting Kuwait's inclusive vision to reinforce the pillars of sustainable growth**
- **This issuance offers a powerful tool for investing in green projects, fostering a positive environmental impact**

NBK remains the sole FI issuer in 144A format, allowing investors from the US access to the scarce paper out of the country. Notably, they also stand out as one of the largest green issuances from conventional financial institutions in the MENA region, underscoring NBK's pioneering role in advancing sustainable financial practices. The issuance aligns with the Group's strategy to enhance the Bank's foreign currency liquidity, improve regulatory ratios, diversify funding sources, and showcase its commitment to ESG practices and principles.

The total order book for the new issuance peaked at \$1.5 billion (Excluding Joint lead managers interest), resulting in an over subscription of more than 3 times. This reflects global investors' strong interest and confidence in the quality of NBK's credit position and its sustainability initiatives as well as the attractiveness of Kuwait as an investment destination. The bank's bond issuance saw strong reception from a diverse array of global investors and financial institutions. US investors made up 49 percent of the issuance, followed by Middle East investors at 26 percent, UK investors at 18 percent, European investors at 5 percent, and Asian investors contributing 2 percent of the coverage.

In terms of the bond coverage by investor type, asset managers accounted for 69 percent, followed by banks and private banks at 22 percent, while governments, insurance companies and pension funds made up 9 percent of the total investor base. NBK continues to be the tightest non-sovereign issuer out of Kuwait. Strong investor demand provided the bank with a significant advantage in pricing the bonds, which featured a spread of 95 bps over US Treasuries, the equivalent of a 5.522 percent reoffer yield.

The notes were issued at a discount and had a final coupon of 5.500 percent, fixed with semi-annual coupon payments until their first call date, followed by a floating rate of SOFR + 116 bps paid quarterly thereafter. The bonds will be listed on the Irish Stock Exchange (Euronext Dublin). The Bank will allocate an amount equivalent to the net proceeds from the bonds exclusively to finance eligible green assets, in accordance with the Sustainable Financing Framework launched by NBK Group in 2022.

Citigroup, JPMorgan, along with HSBC and Standard Chartered acted as Global Coordinators on the issuance. Additionally, Citigroup, JPMorgan, HSBC, Standard Chartered, Goldman Sachs International, First Abu Dhabi Bank, Emirates NBD, and National Bank of Kuwait acted as joint lead managers. NBK Group's ambitious sustainability strategy is meticulously crafted on a robust four-pillar framework. Rooted in a profound commitment, this strategy spearheads the drive towards a sustainable economy while championing the cause of sustainable finance within the region. At the core of its strategy lies the pillar of "Responsible Banking," shaping the bank's trajectory towards achieving net-zero emissions.



This fundamental principle drives the evolution of products, services, and financing solutions offered to customers, embodying NBK's unwavering dedication to sustainability and environmental stewardship. NBK has achieved significant milestones on its ESG journey. By introducing its comprehensive Sustainable Financing Framework, NBK has elevated its commitment to driving sustainable initiatives. This framework now serves as a cornerstone incorporated throughout NBK's diverse business models, operational strategies, and corporate culture.

Embracing a future of sustainability and fostering a transition toward a low-carbon economy, NBK's progressive approach harmoniously aligns with Kuwait's vision of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060. Looking ahead to 2030, the bank is steadfast in its commitment to cultivating a sustainable asset portfolio exceeding \$10 billion. NBK has also set interim targets for its gross operational emissions (Scope 1 and Scope 2), targeting reduction of 25 percent by 2025.

Furthermore, NBK is committed to integrating

ESG standards into its business activities and decisions and has taken significant steps towards this commitment by joining the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), the world's largest sustainability initiative for responsible business practices. Setting new benchmarks in environmental accountability and as part of its carbon neutrality commitment, NBK has recently joined the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF) initiative.

This landmark move positions the Bank as the trailblazer from Kuwait and among just six banks within the MENA region to enlist alongside global financial giants. By participating in this initiative, the Bank commits to meticulously tracking and identifying the greenhouse gas emissions linked to its lending and investment activities, underscoring its dedication to transparent and responsible financial practices. In a notable achievement, and for the second consecutive year, the bank has recently received a score of "C" from CDP for its Climate Change and Forests 2023 Categories.

Crypto exchange loses \$300 million bitcoin in a 'leak'

TOKYO: Japanese crypto exchange DMM Bitcoin said it had lost bitcoin worth around \$300 million in what it described as "an unauthorized leak" from its digital wallet. "We are still investigating details of the damages," it said in a statement after detecting the "unauthorized leak" at around 13:26 (0426 GMT) Friday. "We have already taken measures to prevent the unauthorized leak, but we have also implemented restrictions on the use of some services to ensure additional safety," the exchange said.

DMM Bitcoin did not give details on the "leak" but global cryptocurrency analysis firm Chainalysis said it was one of the biggest crypto hacks. "Today's hack of Japanese exchange DMM Bitcoin for \$305M worth of bitcoin is the biggest hack since Dec 2022 and the 7th largest crypto hack ever," Chainalysis said in post on social media platform X, adding it had labelled the funds as "stolen". DMM Bitcoin said the amount of the "leak" was about 48.2 billion yen (\$300 million), which equals to 4,502.9 bitcoins. All of its customers' "Bitcoin (BTC) deposits will be fully guaranteed" with support from its group companies, the company said.

Japan's Financial Services Agency has ordered the company to investigate the cause of the incident and protect customers from damages, while police have started probing the case, the business daily Nikkei reported. Despite their growing popularity, cryptocurrencies have a history of scandal and sudden price collapses. Thieves stole 850,000 bitcoins from Japanese exchange Mt. Gox in 2014. It was worth around \$470 million at the time. Another Japanese exchange, Coincheck, was hacked for nearly \$500 million in 2018.—AFP



TANDO ALLAHYAR: A farmer shows rotten mangoes at a field in Tando Allahyar village, in Pakistan's Sindh province. Pakistan's juicy mangoes are normally a source of national pride and much-needed income, but farmers are blaming climate change for a season being ruined by parasites and extreme weather. — AFP

Pakistan farmers pin poor mango crop on climate change

TANDO ALLAHYAR: Pakistan's mangoes are normally a source of national pride and much-needed income, but farmers are blaming climate change for the parasites and extreme weather ruining much of this season's crop. A white and orange scarf wrapped around his head in the scorching heat, farmer Muhammad Yusuf lamented the erratic weather. An abnormally long winter was followed by the wettest April in decades, while the country is now experiencing a heatwave with temperatures hitting up to 52 degrees Celsius.

"Buds didn't flower on time, many buds just died. Those that started growing were infected with (parasite) black hopper," said Yusuf, who has worked half his life growing mangoes. Now over 60 years old, Yusuf said "climate change has wreaked havoc" in his village of Tando Allahyar, around 200 kilometers northwest of economic hub Karachi. Pakistan is the world's fourth-largest mango producer and agriculture accounts for almost a quarter of its GDP.

Further south in Tando Ghulam Ali, Arsalan, who manages a 900-acre mango orchard, noticed the damage as soon as the harvest started this week. "We have production losses of 15 to 20 percent, and the picking has only just started so this figure will surely increase," said the 32-year-old. Exports will be slashed as a result warned Arsalan, who goes by one

name. "The mangoes turn yellow from the outside but remain under-ripe or overripe inside," he explained. Ziaul Haq, a mango grower and exporter from Tando Ghulam Ali, said the "many attacks on fruit" by pests were unprecedented. "This, in our history, has never happened before," he told AFP.

'Feed our families'

The proliferation of parasites has led to an explosion in spending on pesticides. This uptick was confirmed by several farmers in Sindh province, where Tando Allahyar and Tando Ghulam Ali are located, as well as those in the leading agricultural province of Punjab further north. They told AFP that chemicals are now used six to seven times per year, compared to just twice three years ago.

Farmers in Sindh said they have been struggling since 2022 when a series of severe heatwaves were followed by unprecedented flooding, while those in Punjab said the declining crops yields date back several years more. "The losses in Punjab reached 35 to 50 percent and in Sindh, 15 to 20 percent" compared to last year, said Waheed Ahmed, head of the Pakistan Federation of Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association (PFVA). Speaking to local media, he said that last year Pakistan had only managed to export 100,000 of the 125,000 tons of mangoes it planned to sell abroad. Pakistan's 20 varieties of mangoes come second only to oranges as the most-produced fruit in the country. The income loss from a poor harvest could have a significant impact on the country, which is in talks to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Mashooq Ali, a 30-year-old laborer in Tando Ghulam Ali, wants the government to help farmers cope.—AFP

India's economy grows 8.2%, a boost for Modi

MUMBAI: India posted world-beating growth of 8.2 percent in the year to March, in a last-minute boost to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic credentials the day before national elections conclude. The world's most populous country also remains its fastest growing major economy thanks to robust demand and huge government infrastructure spending. That has kept sentiment positive about India's overall economic trajectory despite chronic unemployment and immense welfare outlays to hundreds of millions of poverty-stricken citizens. Strong growth in the manufacturing and mining sectors contributed to India's annual growth numbers, which beat both government and analyst projections.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the result showed India's economy was "resilient and buoyant despite global challenges". India's economy also recorded 7.8 percent growth for the March quarter, higher than the government's projection of 5.9 percent. ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar told AFP that the result "exceeded both our and market expectations". The figures from India's statistics ministry were published a day before the country concludes voting in general elections staged over six weeks.

Re-election pledge

Analysts widely expect Modi's Hindu nationalist government to win a third term once results are counted on Tuesday. The 73-year-old premier has pledged to make India the world's third-biggest economy after the United States and China by the end of the decade. Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has vowed if re-elected to maintain its focus on infrastructure spending and keep in place popular subsidies including free rations for needy families and cash handouts for farmers. Its re-election campaign has been aided by a campaign war chest that dwarfs its rivals thanks to donations from some of India's biggest conglomerates.

The BJP received \$730 million in five years from leading companies and wealthy businesspeople through electoral bonds, a contentious political donation tool since ruled illegal by India's top court, making it by far the biggest single beneficiary. But Modi's government has struggled to create enough jobs for the tens of millions of young Indians entering the workforce each year. The International Labor Organization has estimated that 29 percent of India's young university graduates were unemployed in 2022.

India emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic to be buffeted by a new set of global headwinds, including price spikes in global oil and food markets as a result of the war in Ukraine. Inflation has since receded to 4.83 percent from its peak in 2022 above seven percent. Friday's figures put India's economic growth higher than China, Western nations and all other major emerging economies, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts from April.—AFP

Business

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait – Egypt records EGP 3.185 billion net profit in Q1 2024

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (ABK-Egypt) recorded breakthrough financial results for Q1 2024, achieving a significant increase in Net Profit by 189 percent, which stood at EGP 3.185 billion compared to EGP 1.102 billion over the same period in 2023. Net Interest Income increased by 71 percent to reach EGP 1.439 billion compared to EGP 841 million in March 2023, while Net Fees and Commissions income grew by 165 percent to reach EGP 477 million compared to EGP 180 million over the same period last year.

Furthermore, the Bank's Total Assets grew by 18 percent to reach EGP 115.159 billion compared to EGP 97.606 billion in December 2023. Total Customers Deposits increased by 15 percent to reach EGP 95.865 billion compared to EGP 83.064 billion at the end of 2023 and Total Gross Loans Portfolio increased by 22 percent to reach EGP 60.385 billion compared to EGP 49.494 billion at the end of 2023. In addition, the Non-Performing Loans (NPL) ratio was 1.65 percent at the end of March 2024.

Commenting on the results, Ali Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt, stated, "The Bank's outstanding results over Q1 2024 reflect the remarkable success in delivering our growth strategy. It also confirms the strength of the Bank's financial position, balance sheet, quality of credit services, sustainable finance, and liquidity growth ratios while maintaining steady growth in business volume and profitability, all paving the way to achieving further success in 2024."

Marafi added that ABK-Egypt continues to actively carry out its digital transformation plan in its operations. The Bank remains committed to staying abreast of changes and developments in the banking industry, catering to all customer needs through innovative banking solutions, products, and services.

He elaborated that ABK-Egypt is also expanding its presence across various



Ali Marafi:

The Bank's outstanding results over Q1 2024 reflect the remarkable success in delivering our growth strategy.

Egyptian governorates. The Bank is focused on modernizing its branches with the latest technologies to enhance customer satisfaction and attract them, with the aim of becoming their preferred banking partner in Egypt. Emphasizing customer-centricity, the Bank prioritizes customer needs and consistently strives to deliver exceptional services 24/7.

Marafi attributed this success to the Executive Management for leading the implementation of ABK-Egypt's strategic plans and ensuring the agility of its business model in the face of changing local and global economic environments. He said, "These efforts have ensured that we are well equipped and able to build on our growth momentum to achieve exceptional results on all financial indicators."

Marafi added that he is confident that the Bank will continue to achieve remarkable progress and that the team will spare no effort in achieving aspired growth across all business lines and upholding its strong position in the Egyptian market. He continued, "We will remain committed to our vigilant approach in facing prevailing challenges and will continue to upgrade our digital infrastructure to gain market share in a highly competitive sector and a vastly changing technological landscape."

He also stated that ABK-Egypt is ready to invest in financing development projects in the country. The Bank aims to support small and medium en-

terprises, entrepreneurs, and other institutions as part of its strategic plans and its role as a responsible financial and banking institution. Marafi stated that the Bank is working on forming partnerships with local entities to conduct training courses aimed at enhancing the skills and productivity of its employees. The Bank is also focused on attracting top talents to join its divisions, thereby boosting its innovative capabilities.

He elaborated that the Bank is also developing plans to address the current economic challenges in Egypt. Furthermore, ABK-Egypt remains committed to supporting the relevant authorities in the country to meet the needs of citizens and residents, acknowledging the dedicated efforts of all parties involved in elevating economic activity to greater heights in the upcoming period. At the end of his statement, Marafi expressed his gratitude to all regulatory authorities in Egypt, led by the Central Bank of Egypt, for their ongoing support and relentless efforts to enhance the banking sector's performance and achievements over time.

Strongly positioned

Reaffirming the strength of the Bank's financial results, Khaled El Salawy, CEO & Managing Director of ABK-Egypt, said, "We are delighted to start the year with outstanding growth rates on all financial indicators, which reinforces our strong position and sets us on the right



Khaled El Salawy:

Our strong performance in Q1 grants us confidence in the capability of our team to deliver even stronger results in the future.

path. We were able to achieve operational excellence on all business fronts, which led to realizing outstanding financial results as Profit Before Tax shows a notable increase of 185 percent to reach EGP 3.558 billion by the end of March 2024, compared to EGP 1.249 billion over the same period in 2023. Our strong performance in Q1 grants us confidence in the capability of our team to deliver even stronger results in the future."

El Salawy further acknowledged the efforts of all employees for their hard work and perseverance that allowed the Bank to consistently deliver added value to customers whilst adhering to an astute risk management framework to adapt to market changes. He said, "The Executive Management remains committed to implementing our ambitious growth strategy that is pillars upon resilience and innovation and look forward to achieving more accomplishments to make 2024 another successful year for ABK-Egypt."

El Salawy also stated that the upcoming period will witness further focus on leveraging performance across all business lines as well as higher proficiency in serving the needs of all customer segments and speed in adapting to market changes. He clarified, "We intend to focus on achieving our strategic priorities that enable us to achieve rapid growth and an increase in our market share." Furthermore, El Salawy mentioned that the Bank provides a range of offers and

promotional campaigns throughout the year to reward customers for their trust and to entice them to utilize its diverse solutions for their ongoing financial and banking transactions.

Corporate social responsibility

El Salawy highlighted that ABK-Egypt is actively strengthening its social responsibility program by sponsoring various health, educational, sports, cultural, and other events and initiatives in collaboration with diverse entities and institutions across sectors. These initiatives reinforce the Bank's presence and uphold its prominent position among all segments of society.

Ambition and awards

In continuation of ABK-Egypt's journey of success throughout the past eight years, the Bank will continue to set ambitious goals for 2024 and beyond to boost performance, expedite growth, and maximize profitability whilst maintaining governance standards and applying best banking practices. ABK-Egypt's strong performance and noticeable growth rates have been recognized over the years through prestigious awards from various reputable entities. The most recent of which is MIED's MENA Banking Excellence Awards where ABK-Egypt was recognized as 'Best Retail Bank - Egypt' as well as 'Fastest Growing Bank in Egypt' by International Business Magazine.

Chinese shopping app Temu faces stricter EU safety rules

BRUSSELS: Chinese shopping app Temu will have to comply with stringent new safety rules after Brussels on Friday added the company to its list of digital firms big enough to face curbs. Temu is one of the fastest-growing apps in Europe despite only entering the EU market in April 2023, and has already faced fierce scrutiny from consumer groups over its practices. The app joins fellow marketplaces AliExpress, Amazon, Shein and Zalando on a list of 24 "very large online platforms", which have more than 45 million monthly active users in the European Union.

From the end of September, four months after the designation, Temu will have to apply the tougher rules under the Digital Services Act (DSA), one of the EU's mammoth new laws regulating online platforms, the European Commission said in a statement. This includes "the obligation to duly assess and mitigate any systemic risks stemming from their services, including the listing and sale of counterfeit goods", it said. Other platforms targeted by DSA scrutiny include Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

Temu, the international version of China's shopping app Pinduoduo, said earlier this year it has on average around 75 million monthly active users in the 27-country EU. Earlier this month, Europe's BEUC umbrella consumer rights group accused Temu of violating the DSA by manipulating its users to make them spend more. BEUC filed a complaint with the European Commission while 17 member organizations including in France, Germany and Spain did the same with national authorities, demanding a probe into Temu.

Chinese property giant Evergrande fined \$576 million

BEIJING: China's deeply indebted property giant Evergrande has been fined \$576 million for fraudulent business practices, Beijing's top financial regulator said. Evergrande was once China's biggest real estate firm, a powerhouse in a sector that helped propel the country's rapid economic growth during recent decades. But its spiraling debt became emblematic of a prolonged crisis in China's real estate sector. Struggling to repay creditors for years, it defaulted in 2021.

China's Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) said Friday that, between 2019 and 2020, the firm "falsely increased its revenue and profit by prematurely recognizing revenue, resulting in the fraudulent issuance of bonds publicly offered on the exchange market". It said the firm had "failed to disclose regular reports as scheduled, failed to disclose major litigation and arbitration as required and failed to disclose failure to settle debts due as required".

The CSRC said it had also imposed a maximum fine of \$6.5 million on Evergrande founder Xu Jiayin, also known as Hui Ka Yan, banning him from the securities market for life. Turmoil in China's property sector has put increasing pressure on Beijing to provide help as the crisis weighs down growth in the world's second-largest economy.

Housing woes

Beijing took action this month, unveiling a slew of



WASHINGTON: This photo illustration shows the Temu app in the App Store. — AFP

The platform has come under pressure beyond Europe including in South Korea where regulators are investigating it on suspicion of unfair practices including false advertising. In a statement, Temu acknowledged being designated and said that "we are fully committed to adhering to the rules and regulations outlined by the DSA to ensure the safety, transparency, and protection of our users within the European Union".

EU means business

The EU has increasingly put tech titans in its sights with a fortified legal armoury, launching a

wave of probes into some of the world's most popular apps. Under the DSA, the EU has launched investigations into Meta's Facebook and Instagram as well as TikTok, Elon Musk's X and Chinese retailer AliExpress. The DSA stipulates that firms must prepare yearly risk assessments to evaluate what dangers the platforms may pose and how these must be mitigated to protect users. Violations can be met with fines reaching as high as six percent of a platform's global turnover, or even a ban for serious and repeated violations. Last month, the EU added Chinese-founded online retailer Shein to its list of platforms that must comply with the DSA's stricter rules. — AFP



BEIJING: A general view shows the entrance of the Evergrande Group's residential complex called Evergrande Palace in Beijing. — AFP

measures to support the housing market -- including cutting the minimum down payment rate on mortgages for first-time home purchasers from 20 percent to 15 percent. Plans were also announced for local governments to acquire unused property in a bid to ease the financial burden for struggling firms. The new measures, some of the strongest yet taken by Beijing to tackle the crisis, have increased optimism that China's economy might return to full health in the near future. The International Monetary Fund said this week that it has raised its growth forecast for China this year from 4.6 percent to five percent.

It cited Beijing's recent housing market support proposals among the reasons for its decision but warned that current industrial policy risks a "mis-allocation" of resources that could damage trade. Evergrande's fate has been mirrored by several other Chinese real estate firms, including Country Garden and Vanke, that have crumpled under massive debts. A court in the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong issued a winding-up order for Evergrande in January, ruling that the company had failed to come up with a debt repayment plan that suited its creditors. — AFP

News in Brief

Japan government spent \$62 billion to bolster yen

TOKYO: Japan said it spent about 62 billion dollars to bolster the yen over the past five weeks, when it intervened in forex markets for the first time since 2022 after the currency hit a 34-year low. Finance ministry data showed that for intervention operations totaled 9.79 trillion yen (\$62 billion) between April 26 and May 29. Shortly after Friday's data was released, one dollar bought 157.26 yen, compared with 156.83 yen earlier in the day. The Japanese currency has cratered from around 115 per dollar before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This plunge is due in part to the Bank of Japan's maverick policy of maintaining ultra-low interest rates while other central banks have hiked theirs. In early May, the yen weakened to its lowest level since 1990, but then suddenly jumped more than three percent. That stoked speculation among market-watchers that the government had sold dollars and bought yen for the second time in a week to support the Japanese currency. — AFP

US Fed's inflation gauge unchanged

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve's favored measure of inflation remained unchanged in April, according to government data published Friday, as service prices remained elevated. The news will likely lead the US central bank to keep interest rates elevated throughout the summer, as it balances a desire to start easing monetary policy with the need to keep inflation falling towards its long-term two percent target. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose at an annual rate of 2.7 percent in April, the Commerce Department said in a statement, while monthly inflation increased by 0.3 percent. These figures were in line with the median forecast in a survey of economists conducted by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal, and came in at the same level as it did in March. — AFP

Canada economy slower than expected

OTTAWA: Canada's economy saw slower than expected 1.7 percent growth in the first quarter, government data showed, adding to expectations of a central bank cut in interest rates. Higher household spending on services, up 0.7 percent, led the growth in GDP, while slower inventory increases moderated overall growth, the government statistics agency said. The biggest factor in the household spending boost was a 1.1 percent rise on services, primarily telecoms services, rent and air transport. "Businesses continued to add to their non-farm inventories," but "accumulations eased in most industries in the first quarter of 2024," the agency said. The Bank of Canada has forecast modest economic growth in 2024. The central bank has been widely expected to cut interest rates as early as June after having hiked rates aggressively in an effort to tame inflation. — AFP

Gulf Bank and Ottu partner to revolutionize digital payments

Bank delivers exceptional customer services



Mohammad Al-Qattan and Talal Al-Awadhi during the signing of the agreement.



Mohammad Al-Qattan and Talal Al-Awadhi with Gulf Bank and Ottu teams.

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance digital solutions and provide top-tier services to its merchant clientele, Gulf Bank has announced a strategic partnership with Ottu, a leading provider of digital payments management. This partnership aims to deliver outstanding services to both large companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Through this agreement, Ottu will provide Gulf Bank's merchant clients with an Online Payment Management System (OPMS) and an Application Programming Interface (API) that integrates all on-line sales channels and payment gateways into a single, unified dashboard.

Additionally, both existing and new Ottu clients will benefit from Gulf Bank's direct integration of electronic payment gateway services. This collaboration will enable clients on both sides to deliver exceptional services to their customers, and manage financial operations with ease. Commenting on

the partnership, Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said, "We are pleased to sign this partnership agreement, which combines Gulf Bank's extensive expertise in banking services with Ottu's innovative digital payment platform.

This collaboration will allow us to mutually promote each other's services to our respective clients, as both Gulf Bank and Ottu are committed to leading innovation and providing outstanding customer experiences". Al-Qattan highlighted that this strategic partnership marks a significant milestone in driving the ongoing digital transformation in the banking industry.

He noted that the collaboration would enable corporate clients and business owners to manage their digital payments seamlessly, enjoying a seamless banking experience characterized by simplicity, speed, and security. They will have access to user-friendly payment gateways and a wide range of innovative financial solutions.

"We look forward to building a robust partnership that will lead to mutual growth and success for both parties, reflecting our shared commitment to helping companies and merchants to grow and expand their businesses through innovative digital solutions. This will ensure their integration into the rapidly evolving world of digital banking services," he concluded.

Talal Al-Awadhi, CEO of Ottu, also expressed his enthusiasm stating: "We are pleased with the strategic collaboration we have established with Gulf Bank, representing a strong partnership aimed at enhancing digital payments in Kuwait." He added: "We aspire to go beyond simple technological development; we see this partnership as a realization of our vision to support the future of digital banking services and boost economic growth in Kuwait. By empowering companies and business owners to achieve

new heights in digital payments, we aim to provide a seamless and advanced payment experience."

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 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.

S&P downgrades 3 Baltic countries due to Ukraine war

WASHINGTON: Rating agency S&P announced that it had downgraded the ratings of the three Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, citing the effects of the war in Ukraine and geopolitical risks with Russia. Estonia saw its sovereign debt rating raised from "AA-" to "A+", while Latvia's has been raised from "A+" to "A", as has Lithuania's, all with a stable outlook. The downgrades reflect "our view that the impact of the war in Ukraine and the wider regional geopolitical risks" will affect the Baltic region's "economic growth, public finances, and competitiveness over the medium term," S&P said.

The countries were particularly hard hit by the hike in inflation that hit the European Union after the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While inflation peaked at around nine percent for the EU, it exceeded 20 percent in the Baltic States, which are more dependent on energy from Russia. The countries were hit the hardest by the shock to gas and oil prices caused by the invasion and subsequent

sanctions against Russia.

Faced with the threat posed by Russia, with which the trio of countries share a border, but also because of their support for Ukraine, the Baltic states have also increased their military spending. This is bound to weigh on public finances in a context of recession or weak growth, the agency warned.

The stable outlook reflects the rating agency's confidence that the war in Ukraine "will not spread to the territory of any NATO member country," the military alliance to which the three countries belong. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday that Russia was preparing "provocations" at the borders of the Baltic region, which includes not only Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also Finland, a member of the EU and now NATO. He made the comments a week after Estonia said Russian border guards had removed buoys from the Narva River marking the border.

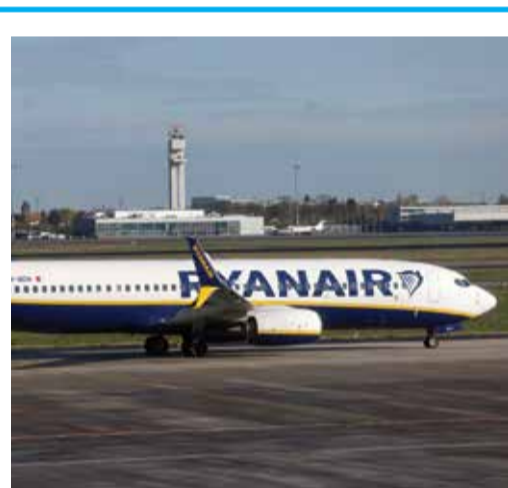
\$2.2 billion IMF payout
In another development, Ukraine



MEDYKA: Cars and trucks queue to cross the Polish-Ukrainian border at the Medyka crossing, Subcarpathian region in the south-east of Poland. — AFP

is set to receive a \$2.2 billion payout from the IMF after successfully meeting the terms of an existing loan program, the Washington-based financial institution said Friday at the end of a five-day staff mission to the country. The much-needed funds, which are still subject to approval by the International Monetary Fund's executive board, follow Ukraine's completion of the fourth review of its existing four-year IMF loan program, worth roughly \$15.4 billion.

The agreement forms part of a \$122 billion international support package designed to help Ukraine's economy amid the ongoing Russian invasion of the country, now well into its third year. "Performance under the program has remained strong despite the challenges of the war, with all quantitative performance criteria met, and one structural benchmark met and another implemented with a short delay," IMF Ukraine mission chief Gavin Gray said in a statement. — AFP



Spain fines Ryanair, Easyjet over hand luggage fees

MADRID: Spain has fined four budget airlines including Ryanair and Easyjet over 150 million euros for charging passengers for hand luggage and other practices deemed abusive, consumer groups said Friday. The carriers were also fined by the consumer rights ministry for forcing passengers to pay to choose seats so they can sit beside their children or other dependents and not accepting cash when selling tickets at airports, consumer rights association Facua said.

Spanish airlines Vueling and Ryanair, part of the International Airlines Group which also owns British Airways and Iberia among others, were the other two budget carriers that were slapped with fines, said Facua, which has campaigned against the fees. "It has been almost six years of battling to get the authorities to act against practices whereby airlines have been illegally inflating their profits and we have finally succeeded," Facua secretary general Ruben Sanchez said in a statement.

The fines total over 150 million euros (\$163 million), with some airlines ordered to pay more than others. Irish no-frills carrier Ryanair, which was the first to start charging extra for hand luggage in November 2018, was slapped with the biggest fine, Facua said without specifying the amount. Vueling received the second largest fine, followed at a greater distance by Easyjet and Vueling, it added.

Contacted by AFP, a consumer rights ministry spokesman confirmed that proceedings were opened against four budget airlines a year ago which have now resulted in fines. He did not name the airlines or give the amount of the fines. The airlines will appeal the fines, which "seem to us absolutely disproportionate", the head of Spanish airlines industry group ALA, Javier Gandara, told a news conference.

If the extra fees are abolished, passengers who travel without hand luggage will have to pay for services they do not need, he added. Facua rejected this argument. "The industry is trying to convey the idea that they are making the price cheaper for those who do not carry luggage, and this is false, they are illegally making the price more expensive, they are illegally enriching themselves with many millions of euros with those who do carry small hand luggage," Sanchez said Ryanair last week said its net profit jumped a third to 1.92 billion euros in its financial year as higher demand and fares offset ballooning fuel costs. — AFP



PARIS: A pedestrian walks with an umbrella past a deserted café's terrace in Paris. — AFP

S&P downgrades French credit rating in blow to Macron

PARIS: Ratings agency Standard & Poor's downgraded France's credit score on Friday citing a deterioration in the country's budgetary position, a blow to Emmanuel Macron's government days before EU parliamentary elections. In a statement, the American credit assessor justified its decision to drop France's long-term sovereign debt rating from "AA" to "AA-" on concerns over lower-than-expected growth. It warned that "political fragmentation" would make it difficult for the government to implement planned reforms to balance public finances and forecast the budget deficit would remain above the targeted three percent of GDP in 2027.

The S&P's first downgrade of France since 2013 puts the EU's second-largest economy on par with

the Czech Republic and Estonia but above Spain and Italy. The announcement will sting for Macron, who has staked a reputation as an economic reformer capable of restoring France's accounts after low growth and high spending. The risk of a ratings downgrade had been looming for several quarters, with the previous "AA" assessment given a "negative outlook".

The surprise slippage in the public deficit for 2023 to 5.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) instead of the expected 4.9 percent did not play in the government's favor. France's general government debt will increase to about 112 percent of GDP by 2027, up from around 109 percent in 2023, "contrary to our previous expectations", the agency added. Responding to the downgrade decision, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire reaffirmed the government's commitment to slashing the public deficit to below three percent by 2027. "Our strategy remains the same: re-industrialise, achieve full employment and keep to our trajectory to get back under the three percent deficit in 2027," he said in an interview with newspaper Le Parisien, insisting that nothing would change in the daily lives of the French. — AFP

WeWork bankruptcy exit approved: Court

NEW YORK: WeWork, the embattled co-working company, has secured final court approval for its restructuring plan, paving the way for it to exit Chapter 11 bankruptcy next month. The US Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey approved WeWork's reorganization plan on Thursday, a crucial milestone for the once high-flying startup that had been weighed down by excessive lease obligations and unsustainable losses.

"We have emerged from this process with a comprehensive restructuring underway and a redoubled focus on providing flexible workspace environments that meet the needs of today's workforce," said David Tolley, WeWork's executive chairman. Under the restructuring, WeWork has achieved more than a 50 percent reduction in long-term lease obligations, shaving off approximately \$12 billion in future commitments. The company has also eliminated over \$4 billion in debt from its balance sheet, emerging from bankruptcy debt-free. Tolley said that WeWork had secured \$400 million in new capital, positioning the company for sustainable growth.

The reorganization plan marks a dramatic turnaround for the co-working pioneer, which was once valued at a lofty \$47 billion before mounting losses and corporate governance concerns triggered a spectacular downfall in 2019. WeWork's path through bankruptcy has involved painstaking negotiations and terminations of numerous leases around the world. The company currently maintains a footprint of around 600 locations across 37 countries and 120 cities. The new plan also put an end to a bid by ousted WeWork co-founder Adam Neumann to buy the company. In a statement on Tuesday Neumann said his former company's plans would fail. "For several months, we tried to work constructively with WeWork to create a strategy that would allow it to thrive," he said in a statement, which was first reported by The New York Times. — AFP

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2024



Visitors browse the museum's collection. — AFP photos

IN CONFLICT-TORN LIBYA, ARTIST'S FAMILY TURNS HOME INTO MUSEUM

A seemingly ordinary villa in the heart of Tripoli holds a lifetime of works by the late Libyan artist Ali Gana, whose family has turned his house into a unique museum. In the North African country still grappling with divisions and conflict after the fall of longtime dictator Moammar Gaddafi in 2011, "art comes last", said Hadia Gana, the youngest of the artist's four children.

A decade in the making and with the help of volunteers, she had transformed the classic-style Tripolitan villa her father had built, before passing in 2006 at age 70, into "the first and only museum of modern art in Libya", Gana told AFP.

Bayt Ali Gana ("Ali Gana's House" in Arabic) finally opened this year, seeking to offer both retrospection and hope in a country constantly threatened by violence and where arts and culture stand largely neglected. "It is seen as something superfluous," Gana said, adding that galleries in the war-torn country often focus solely on selling pieces rather than making art more accessible.

Once past a lush garden, visitors reach the museum's permanent exhibition of paintings, sculptures and sketches by the masterful Ali Gana. Other rooms include temporary exhibitions and offer space for seminars and themed workshops. Set on a wall, an old shipping container houses an artist res-



Hadia Gana, the daughter of late Libyan artist Ali Gana, gestures in front of an old coffee-making machine at the museum.

idency for "curators and museologists" whose skills are scarce in Libya, said Hadia Gana.

'Losing everything'

Libyan artists had long been subject to censorship and self-censorship under Gaddafi's four-decade rule, and "we couldn't express ourselves on politics", recalled Gana, 50, a ceramic artist. Art "must not have barriers", she said, proudly standing in the family-owned space for artistic freedom.

Bayt Ali Gana appears timeless, though the villa bears some signs of

the unrest that followed the overthrow and death of Gaddafi. A road sign riddled with bullets hangs from the gate that separates the museum from the private residence.

Mortar shells turned upside down sit among flowers in the garden, where visitors are offered cold drinks or Italian espressos in a setting that replicates Cafe Said, once owned by Ali Gana's father in the old medina of Tripoli.

During the unrest that began in 2011, Hadia Gana said she feared "losing everything if a rocket hit the house". Then came the idea of creating a museum in the hopes of conserving her father's precious works and archives.

Sporadic fighting, water or electricity cuts, and forced isolation due to the Covid pandemic have piled challenges on the family's mission, while the Ganas steered clear of state funding or investors to maintain the independence of their nascent institution.

'Curiosity in all its beauty'

Gradually, the house morphed into a cultural center celebrating Ali Gana's calling to "teach and educate through art", said his daughter. It "is not a mausoleum", but a hub of creativity and education, she said.

Gana's archives also document traditional crafts and trades, some of



Hadia Gana shows an old photograph during her interview with AFP.

which have completely disappeared by now. After taking power in a 1969 coup, Gaddafi had imposed a ban on all private enterprise, and "for 40 years, crafts became an outlawed activity", said the late artist's oldest son Mehdi, who now lives in the Netherlands.

He told AFP that in his lifetime, Ali Gana took on a mission to "build archives in order to link Libya's past to a possible future". It is "the nature of the family" to preserve and share

knowledge, said matriarch Janine Rabiau-Gana, 84.

Hadia Gana lamented that while museums should be educational spaces, "here in Libya, we don't have that notion yet". She said she wanted to avoid "making it a museum where everything is transfixed". Instead, "I wanted something lively, almost playful, and above all a place that arouses curiosity in all its beauty." — AFP



Children play at Bayt Ali Gana.



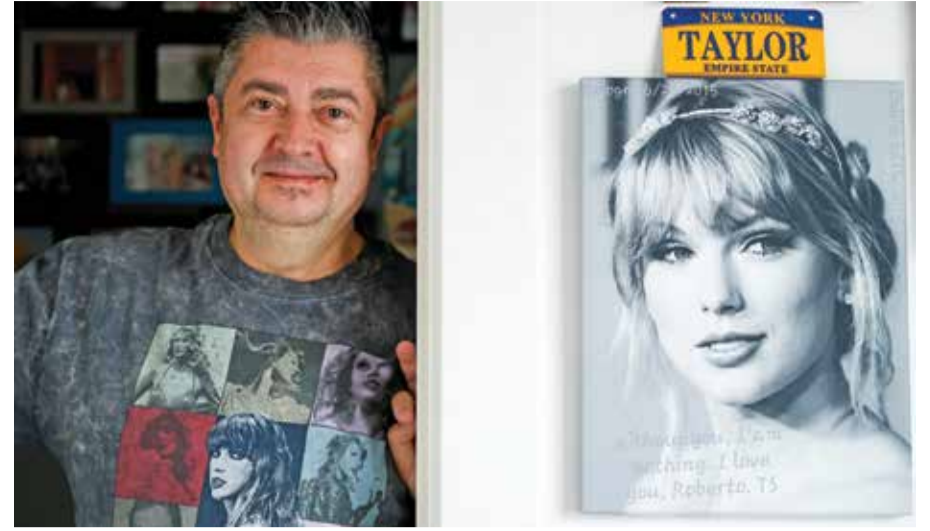
A woman visits the garden of Bayt Ali Gana ("Ali Gana's House" in Arabic), in the Libyan capital Tripoli, on April 24, 2024.



Lifestyle



Roberto Santos shows some of his tattoos with Taylor Swift's album titles, in his home in Madrid, Spain, May 21, 2024. — Reuters photos



Roberto Santos, a Spanish superfan who is part of a select list of fans who receives exclusive gifts from the pop icon, poses next to a photo personally dedicated by Taylor Swift.

Decades-long Spanish fan shows off Taylor Swift 'sanctuary'

Roberto Santos, 55, stands out among other "Swifties" for his decades-long devotion to American pop icon Taylor Swift and a plethora of gifts the Spaniard has received from her team in recognition of that - enough to fill up an apartment room he calls a sanctuary.

As Swift, 34, was preparing to play her Eras Tour gigs in Madrid on Wednesday and Thursday, Santos,

who runs a dental prosthetics lab in Spain's capital, solemnly displayed the items, including Swift's limited-edition platinum disk award, signed photos, recordings, and sneakers bearing both their names.

"Sometimes I wake up at night, turn on the light and look a little, and say to myself: 'What are you doing?'... I just look, it gives me calm, and I go back to sleep," Santos said in an inter-

view. "For me she means everything; I've been following her since before 2011... I had the gut feeling that she was going to be big. If I had the same intuition with the lottery, I'd be rich," Santos said.

He said going to see her perform in Dublin in 2018 made him the only person to have travelled twice from Spain for a Swift show. Her management team then added Santos and

his wife Inmaculada to an exclusive fan list, and sent them gifts and invitations, including an all-paid trip to Los Angeles last year, Santos said. "If I was 18 or 20, I imagine I could go a bit crazy... but now everything feels more mature and calm," said Santos, who has Swift-themed tattoos on his arms and ankle.

He has yet to meet her in person. A planned meeting in Oslo was cancelled

due to the pandemic. Santos is particularly thankful to Swift and her team for thinking about older fans, and for "the values she has transmitted" through her art. Swift's record-breaking Eras Tour has boosted local economies. In Madrid, hotel occupancy rates have climbed to 90 percent on average for the concert dates. — Reuters



Santos poses with some of the albums in his home.



Santos displays some of his Taylor Swift themed tattoos.



Santos shows off his "Taylor Swift shrine".

The winners take it all: ABBA members get royal honors

Sweden's king on Friday handed royal orders to the members of iconic pop group ABBA, marking the first time in 50 years the honors have been awarded in the Nordic country. At a ceremony at the royal palace in Stockholm, King Carl XVI Gustaf presented the Royal Order of Vasa to Benny Andersson, Agnetha Faltskog, Anni-Frid Reuss and Bjorn Ulvaeus, who made a rare public appearance together.

Known for disco hits like "Mamma Mia" (1975), "Dancing Queen" (1976), and "The Winner Takes It All" (1980), the four were honored for "outstanding achievements in Swedish and international music."

Sweden stopped awarding royal orders to its own citizens in 1975, as the practice was deemed anachronistic. The country continued to award royal orders to foreign citizens. However, the country's parliament reinstated the practice in 2022 and Friday's ceremony marked the first time the orders were awarded to Swedes in half a century.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of ABBA's 1974 Eurovision Song Contest win with "Waterloo", which launched the group's international breakthrough.

With their unique style and catchy melodies, the group personified disco around the globe until they stopped per-

forming in 1982. ABBA's popularity was rekindled by the "Mamma Mia" films, which introduced the group's music to new generations.

The quartet has also returned to the stage through ABBA Voyage, a new album released in 2021, and a permanent show of the same name in London in which they are represented by digital avatars (holograms).

In total, 13 Swedes were honored for their achievements at the ceremony, including two Nobel Prize winners: geneticist Svante Paabo and French-Swedish physicist Anne L'Huillier. — AFP



The members of the music group ABBA Bjorn Ulvaeus, Anni-Frid Lyngstad, Agnetha Faltskog and Benny Andersson receive the Royal Vasa Order at a ceremony at Stockholm Royal Palace, in Stockholm, Sweden, on May 31, 2024. — Reuters

Ticketmaster confirms data breach

US concert booking site Ticketmaster confirmed Friday that it was investigating a data breach after a hacking group known as ShinyHunters claimed to have accessed 560 million customers' information. The well-known hacking group posted evidence on May 27 of the hack on the dark web, according to a screenshot shared widely on social media.

The group demanded a ransom payment of \$500,000, describing it as a "one-time sale," according to the post. Ticketmaster, a California-based company, operates one of the largest online ticket sales platforms in the world. In filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, Ticketmaster's parent company, Live Nation Entertainment, said it had "identified unauthorized activity within a third-party cloud database environment." According to Ticketmaster's public filing, the company first identified "unauthorized activity" on May 20, a week before the post on social media.

"We are working to mitigate risk to our users and the company, and

have notified and are cooperating with law enforcement," it said. Ticketmaster added that the incident "has not had, and we do not believe it is reasonably likely to have, a material impact on our overall business operations or on our financial condition or results of operations." The Australian government on Thursday said it was investigating the hacking claims, with the FBI offering its assistance.

ShinyHunters burst into notoriety in 2020-21 when it put up huge troves of customer records from more than 60 companies, according to the US Department of Justice. In January, a court in Seattle jailed Sebastian Raoult, a French computer hacker who was a member of ShinyHunters.

JLo cancels summer tour as Affleck split rumors swirl

Jennifer Lopez said Friday she was cancelling her summer tour to spend more time with her family as rumors circulate over a split with actor-husband Ben Affleck. The announcement from the singer and her promoter also comes after reports that sales for the multi-date event were flagging.

In her newsletter "On the JLo" which she sent to fans on Friday she revealed the tour was off. "I am completely heartsick and devastated about letting you down. Please know that I wouldn't do this if I didn't feel that it was absolutely necessary," Lopez wrote.

"I promise I will make it up to you and we will all be together again. I love you all so much. Until next time..." The email also included a message from tour promoter Live Nation noting that "Jennifer is taking time off to be with her children, family and close friends."

The cancellation comes after a number of adjustments and curtailments were made to the tour, including slicing dates off and rebranding it as a greatest hits tour, rather than one focused on her latest album.

But it also comes with Lopez and Affleck's apparent troubles dominating the tabloid and entertainment press. Reports suggest the pair — who married in 2022, almost two decades after their first relationship fell apart — have been living separately in Los Angeles.

People Magazine said relations between the "Good Will Hunting" star,

51, and the "On The Floor" singer, 54, were strained because of their different approaches to celebrity. "She likes to open her heart to her fans and to the world," the magazine quoted an unnamed source saying. "He is more introspective and private. This has been difficult day-to-day."



US actress Jennifer Lopez (right) and US actor Ben Affleck.

The pair first met on the set of the widely panned movie "Gigli," released 2003. They became a media sensation as they dated but postponed their planned 2003 nuptials, then announced their relationship was over in early 2004.

"Bennifer" — the couple's public nickname from their first highly publicized relationship — set the internet alight in 2021 when photos of them together again began circulating. They wed in a small ceremony in Nevada in July the following year, and then had a star-studded ceremony at Affleck's lavish 87-acre (35-hectare) waterfront compound in the southeastern US state of Georgia in August. The couple reportedly bought a \$60 million home together in Los Angeles last year. — AFP



Lifestyle



Bruhat Soma from Florida wins the Scripps National Spelling Bee over Faizan Zaki, from Texas, in National Harbor, Maryland, US, on May 30, 2024. — Reuters

Florida 12-year-old triumphs at US spelling bee

Mastering words such as "cricket" and "indumentum", 12-year-old Bruhat Soma clinched victory Thursday in the United States' spelling bee. The seventh-grade student from St Petersburg, Florida, beamed as colorful confetti rained down after he won the tiebreaker. "Bruhat Soma from Florida cemented his win by correctly spelling his final word, 'abseil,'" organizer Scripps National Spelling Bee announced on X. Soma, who also competed in the past two annual competitions, will take home a \$50,000 prize and a champion-

ship trophy. "I never expected this," he said at a news conference after his win, quoted by The Washington Post. The boy told reporters that there was only one word he did not recognize — but luckily it wasn't his turn. Soma correctly spelled 29 words in 90 seconds during the competition's second-ever "Spell-off" tiebreaker, US media reported. Such success was enough to see him put 12-year-old Faizan Zaki from Dallas, Texas, in second place. In earlier rounds, Soma correctly spelled 10 words right, including

"coulisse" — defined as a backstage area — and the Dutch town Hoofddorp. In addition to spelling words correctly, Soma helped secure his victory with accurate definitions of a "troglodyte" — a primitive cave dweller — and "sine qua non" — something considered essential. Children have participated in US classroom, school and regional spelling bees in hopes of making it to the national contest since 1925, according to Scripps National Spelling Bee. — AFP

K-pop agency HYBE asks US court to help unmask X account in defamation case

Entertainment group HYBE, home to K-pop group BTS, has asked a U.S. court to compel social media platform X to reveal the identity of a user it accuses of defamation and harassment, according to a court filing reviewed by Reuters. The application for a court order is to assist a criminal complaint filed by HYBE against anonymous X user with the handle "@guiltyarchive" with the Seoul Yongsan Police Station on May 2, it showed.

The case follows calls by BTS fans to better protect the group against malicious rumors amid an ongoing internal dispute with a sub-label. Some of the fans, known as ARMYs, sent flowers and trucks bearing supportive messages to HYBE's headquarters in Seoul this month and called on the firm to take legal action. HYBE said it had no comment to add. X Korea did not respond to request for comment, while X Corp and HYBE's lawyer Eugene Kim were not immediately available for comment.

The operator of the account said to Reuters in a direct message on X that the posts mentioned in the court filing were "not defamatory against certain artists" and that they had been deleted. In South Korea, those who make sensationalist social media content, often

targeting celebrities, are dubbed "cyber wreckers" and have been blamed for encouraging cyberbullying.

In a rare move, K-pop singer Jang Won-young and her agency Starship Entertainment identified an individual behind a YouTube channel with the help of Google while seeking lawsuits over defamation charges against the individual. "It's a process of gathering evidence about a dispute in a foreign court so when you judge freedom of expression, you don't judge it from the standpoint of U.S. law," Kyongsok Chong at LIWU Law Group, who is representing Jang and her agency, told Reuters.

HYBE's lawyer said in the legal document that "false" and "defamatory" statements from the X account, which has over 100,000 followers, had caused irreparable harm to the firm's business and shareholders. The X posts cited in the filing mention K-pop groups managed by HYBE and its subsidiaries including BTS and girl group Le Sserafim. The subpoena request was made at the San Francisco Division of the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, where X's headquarters are located. — Reuters



BTS perform during the 49th Annual American Music Awards in this file photo. — Reuters

British breakdancer Kid Karam aims high at Paris 2024



UK Breakdancer Karam Singh known as B-boy Kid Karam poses for a portrait.

Team GB breakdancer Karam Singh is determined to go down in history alongside the best in the world at the Paris Olympics this year. "I could never say that I was ever going to be an Olympian. But we're here," said British number one Singh, 26, who is currently ranked second in Europe. In December 2020, it was officially announced that breakdancing would take part in the Olympics for the first time. Four years on, 16 of the best "B-boys" and "B-girls" will face off in improvised solo battles on the Place de la Concorde square in the heart of the French capital.

"We're kind of here to make history," Singh told AFP, promising to viewers who may not have seen it before that "breaking brings fireworks". "I think everybody that's going to watch it is going to be sort of astounded by what it is." Breakdancing, rooted in hip-hop culture, became popular in the Bronx borough of New York in the 1970s. Singh, from Derby in central England, discovered it through music videos by artists such as Justin Timberlake in the early 2000s.

He remembers telling his sister that he would become a breaker one day, and made his debut on the stage of a funfair in a local park, where a crew of



B-boy Kid Karam performs during a UK breakdancing (breaking) event held beside The River Thames in London on May 29, 2024. — AFP photos

breakers let him try a few head spins. "They loved my passion," he said, and recalls rushing to sign up for classes at the age of eight, with a determination to be the best. In preparation for the last qualifying event and the Olympics, he said he has been training five to six times a week and "enjoying every minute of it."

Artist and athlete
The acrobatic sport is physically

demanding, with highly complex floor moves. "Originality is a huge part of breaking," said Singh, likening it to playing an instrument, with variations in each breaker's style and flow. "When you're training and creating, you're an artist, and when you're preparing for competition, you're an athlete," he added.

During the Olympics, breakers' performances will be judged on technique, personality, and the originality of their movements. Countries such as Japan,

the United States and Olympic host France have strong teams while places such as Canada and Kazakhstan have "incredible" individuals, said Singh.

Karam, who has a huge following on Instagram and is also a sponsored Nike athlete, is also involved in projects alongside training. At a recent London workshop to pass on his knowledge he spent time with young breakers, going over specific moves and offering words of encouragement. "When I was growing up, I had crews, people to look up to," he said. "I always want to be the person that can offer that."

The Olympics, he added, has given a new structure to breakdancing, with new rules and a "sporting" element. "We have things that we've heard of for other sports, but we've never had ourselves, like nutritionists or physiotherapists," he said.

For now, the future of breakdancing at the Olympics remains unsure, as it is not guaranteed to remain for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. But Singh is hoping the Paris crowds will take it to their hearts, helping to secure a permanent Olympic berth. "I think it's going to touch a lot of people in a positive way," he said. — AFP



Sports

Cricket in uncharted territory as T20 World Cup starts in Texas

India, winners of the first edition in 2007, are the favourites

DALLAS: Cricket ventures into uncharted territory on Saturday as the first ever major tournament to be staged in the United States gets under way in Texas with the opening game of the T20 World Cup. A month-long festival of the fastest and most explosive form of the sport—which is being shared between venues in Texas, Florida, New York and the Caribbean—begins with the US taking on Canada at the Grand Prairie Stadium on the outskirts of Dallas on Saturday.

It marks the opening skirmish of the first ever major International Cricket Council (ICC) event to be held in part in the United States. While the bulk of the tournament will be played out in the Caribbean, 16 group stage games in the 20-team tournament will be played on American soil, including the highlight of the group stage—a clash between India and Pakistan. That match is due to be played at a 34,000-capacity temporary venue in Long Island, New York on June 9. The rest of the tournament will be held in the West Indies, including the Super Eight stage, the semi-finals and the final, which will be played at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados.

While cricket is widely played at a recreational level in the United States, with strong presences in all three of the states that have been chosen for games, organisers are realistic about the chances of “converting” mainstream American sports fans.

USA batsman Aaron Jones said the hosts are aiming to impress American fans both on and off the field. “Obviously what you do on the field is very important,” Jones said. “We want to get a lot more support from the American born-and-raised people. I think we could only do that by playing good on the field and obviously interacting with the fans and the growing fans off the field as well.” The ICC

also sees the tournament as a launch pad towards the sport's return to the Olympics for Los Angeles 2028, when the T20 format will be used.

Major League Cricket, a T20 tournament, was launched last year and also stands to benefit from any growth in interest in the big-hitting, spectacular shortest form. But it is not only the American market that the ICC is focused upon—the expansion of the tournament has opened up opportunities for newer cricket nations to compete on the big stage.

In recent years, the sport has been able to expand outside of its traditional strongholds with Ireland and Afghanistan earning places in the 12-strong elite with full Test status. But the ICC sees the T20 format as the perfect vehicle for growing the game and this year's edition will feature three T20 World Cup debutants in the USA, Canada and Uganda.

Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Oman are among the other nations who are relatively new to the big stage and who will be looking to make their mark and grab some attention with an upset win. With the teams drawn in four groups of five teams, with just the top two advancing, none of the smaller nations are expected to progress beyond the group stage and there is a danger the pool stage could mainly be a ‘weeding out’ process.

India favourites

India, winners of the first edition in 2007, are the favourites, with their lineup packed with players from the annual Indian Premier League. Australia, winners of the ODI World Cup last year along with the World Test Championship, opted to leave out their veteran batsman Steve Smith but big-hitting David Warner and pacemen Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins provide plenty of experience.



GRAND PRAIRIE: Officials check the pitch the day before the first match of the T20 World Cup at Grand Prairie Stadium in Grand Prairie, Texas on May 31, 2024. The USA make their debut in the T20 World Cup against Canada. — AFP

Other possible contenders include defending champions England, who will be without the star of their 2022 triumph Ben Stokes, who is managing his fitness after a knee operation. England warmed up for the tournament with a seven-wicket rout of Pakistan in London on Thursday.

Co-hosts West Indies won the tournament in 2012 and 2016 and are hoping that they can benefit from familiarity with the surfaces in the region. South Africa, New Zealand and Pakistan will all fancy their chances of making an impact in a tournament which always produces surprises. — AFP

Kuwait's disabled badminton team grabs gold, silver medals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's national disabled badminton team received an outstanding welcome home as the team members came back with three medals one gold, one silver and one bronze in the Gulf Special Olympics Badminton Championship that was organized by UAE Special Olympics in cooperation with MENA special Olympics.

Al-Sheikha Sheikh Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah headed officials who received the team along with deputy Chairman of Tomooh club Dherar Al-Rabah, National Director of Special Olympics Rihab Boursli, Secretary General of Tomooh Club Sadreeqa Al-Ansari, Executive Director of the Club Huda Al-Khaldi, representatives of Public Authority for Sport and families of the players.

Kuwait was represented in the tournament by Mohammad Burabaa, and Fouzan Al-Qassar in the singles and doubles while Sheikh Al-Hindi in the women's singles. The delegation which included Rawan Al-Foudary and Mustafa Hassouna coaches, and Hazim Al-Tarkait as administrator was headed by President of Kuwait Special Olympics Hanaa Al-Zawawi.

The tournament had 25 participants from the six GCC countries. Sheikh Al-Hindi won the gold



KUWAIT: Team members receive outstanding welcome at the airport.

medal of the women's singles, Mohammad Burabaa won the men's singles bronze medal, while Fouzan Al-Qassar and Mohammad Burabaa won the men's doubles silver medal. Al-Sheikha Sheikh Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah lauded the outstanding achievement of our heroes who are special needs and congratulated the players, as well as the technical and administration departments of the Special Olympics and Tomooh Sports Club.

Al-Sheikha Sheikh Al-Sabah expressed pleasure at the players continuing to make achievements in all re-

gional and international arenas, and this is due to efforts, perseverance and enthusiasm of players and officials. Hanaa Al-Zawawi dedicated the achievement to the political leadership, Kuwait people and players' families.

She said that all were up to the task and succeeded in presenting an honorable image of the disabled sport. Al-Zawawi thanked players, officials Special Olympics, Tomooh Club and Public Authority for Sport. She also thanked UAE Special Olympics for the good organization and hospitality.

Thailand's Wichanee leads Women's Open, Korda misses cut

LANCASTER: Thailand's Wichanee Meechai overcame an attack of nerves to launch an early birdie spree and take a two-shot lead at the US Women's Open on Friday as world number one Nelly Korda missed the cut.

Wichanee, who has never posted a top-10 finish at a major, rattled off six birdies and three bogeys on her way to a three-under-par 67 at Lancaster Country Club in Pennsylvania. That left the 31-year-old from Bangkok on four under for the tournament after 36 holes, two clear of Andrea Lee of the United States, who finished on two under after a second straight 69.

Wichanee was catapulted to the top of the leaderboard after making a blistering start to her second round after teeing off on the back nine. The Thai veteran, who has missed the cut in four of her six most recent major appearances, opened with four straight birdies to move to five under.

Though three bogeys on the 15th, 18th and third holes checked her momentum, Wichanee bagged her fifth birdie of the day on the fourth.

She then grabbed another on her penultimate hole, the par-three eighth, arrowing a tee-shot to eight feet and rolling in the birdie putt. Wichanee revealed afterward she had nearly been overcome with nerves before the start of her second round.

“Before the tee time, I was so nervous,” she said. “Like my hands just shaking, my brain just stop working...I know that the course is hard; just go with the flow probably.” No one had been more surprised by her dazzling early birdie blitz than Wichanee herself.

“To be honest, I don't know who she is the first four holes—but I'm glad that she came,” she said. “The first four holes, I just picked the club that's shorter and hit it hard.”

Korda heading home

Lee, the world number 49, mounted her own charge just after the turn, holing out from 180 yards for a brilliant eagle on the par-four first, before nailing three straight birdies.

Two bogeys down the stretch denied her a share of the lead alongside Wichanee.

“It's really tough out there,” Lee said. “The course requires all of your attention on every single golf shot. “But par is a really, really good score out here, so that's what I'm going to try and do on the weekend, just try and make as many pars as I can.”

Lee is one shot clear of Australia's Minjee Lee and Japan's Yuka Saso, both former champions who are tied for third on one under.

Eight players share fifth on one over heading into the weekend, where American star Korda is the most high-profile absentee. Korda started the day with a mountain to climb after a disastrous 10-over-par opening 80 on Thursday.

Although the 25-year-old steadied the ship in her second round with a level-par 70, it was not enough to get her inside the 36-hole cut line, which came at eight over.

“I knew it was going to be a tough day,” Korda said. “There's not many low scores out here, and I was pretty far back.”

“I tried to give it my all. That's what I do with every round. I had nothing to lose, so that was kind of like the mentality. Just go for it.” Korda's opening round unraveled after a horror 10 on the par-three 12th hole on Thursday.

History almost repeated itself on the same hole on Thursday when her tee shot came up short and threatened to roll into the water before coming to a rest on the edge of the moat at the front of the green. Korda chipped on and then made a long putt to save par for a three. “I wanted to make a birdie to get my revenge on that hole, but par will do,” she said. — AFP



WELLINGTON: Hurricanes' Du'Plessis Kirifi runs with the ball during the Super Rugby match between the Wellington Hurricanes and Otago Highlanders at Sky Stadium in Wellington on June 1, 2024. — AFP

Hurricanes top rugby standings, Crusaders ousted

WELLINGTON: The Wellington Hurricanes qualified top for the Super Rugby play-offs Saturday, but perennial powerhouse the Canterbury Crusaders were eliminated in a dramatic end to the regular season.

The Hurricanes finished one point above the second-placed Blues on the standings after the Auckland side failed to clinch the bonus-point win they needed over Waikato Chiefs to claim the top spot. They were on course to achieve that until Chiefs replacement back Josh Ioane crossed for a try in the final minute, denying the Blues a bonus point in their 31-17 victory.

Blues captain Patrick Tuipulotu felt let down after his side dominated the contest, boosted by two tries from in-form loose forward Hoskins Sotutu. “We can be happy with the win but our goal was to win with a bonus point,” Tuipulotu said.

“Unfortunately we didn't do that, so that's very disappointing for us—it's not enough to just play in

patches.” Earlier, winger Salesi Rayasi crossed for a hat-trick as the Hurricanes brushed past the Otago Highlanders 41-14 in Wellington, playing the fast-paced style that has carried them to 12 wins from 14 games. TJ Perenara was also among the try-scorers, although there was concern when the veteran scrum-half limped off with a knee injury. It set them up with a quarter-final next week at home to the eighth-placed Melbourne Rebels, while the Blues will host Fijian Drua. The third-ranked ACT Brumbies, who ended their campaign with a 24-19 win over Western Force in Perth, will face the Highlanders in Canberra. The fourth-placed Chiefs will meet the Queensland Reds in Hamilton.

The seven-time defending champion Crusaders were ousted when the Drua overwhelmed the Rebels 40-19 in Lautoka. The Drua took command with three tries early in the second half, ending any chance of the Crusaders extending their seven-year run of titles, all achieved under new All Blacks coach Scott Robertson. The Christchurch-based side have failed to fire under Robertson's successor, Rob Penney. Their 43-10 win on Friday over Moana Pasifika was just their fourth of the season and came too late as they failed to advance to post-season play for only the second time since 2001. — AFP

Australia skipper Marsh fit for World Cup opener

SYDNEY: Australia skipper Mitchell Marsh has been declared fit for their opening match at the T20 World Cup, but he will not be bowling, coach Andrew McDonald said.

The all-rounder headed home from the Indian Premier League in April with a hamstring injury and only made his return this week in two practice matches in Trinidad. But he did not field for the full innings in either game, with a timeline on his bowling return still unclear.

“For Mitch, (the warm-up games) were about ticking off where his body was at,” McDonald told cricket.com.au in comments posted late Friday. “He fielded more overs, he was able to move more freely, so he's building a little bit of confidence there. It looks as though he's all set for the first game.”

“The second part is just when the bowling comes back online ...it won't be the first game.” Marsh, officially appointed T20 skipper last month to replace the retired Aaron Finch, will head into Australia's opening World Cup match against Oman on June 6 in Barbados with limited time in the middle.

He made 18 off 14 balls against Namibia and four-from-four against the West Indies in their two warm-up matches. His recovery is the main concern for an otherwise fit 15-man squad, which is looking to add the T20 crown to their one-day and Test world titles.

Pat Cummins, Travis Head, Mitchell Starc, Glenn Maxwell and Cameron Green all missed the warm-up fixtures after playing in the IPL finals and will link up with the squad in Barbados. “We feel as though we have plenty of time to bring that group together,” said McDonald.

“It's a familiar group, they've played a lot together. If they hadn't played a lot together then the prep might have looked different. “It will just be finalising the XIs for the games, and the balances that we want. We've got plenty of options,” he added. — AFP

Sports

France beat England, Spain win in Women's Euro qualifiers

England manager: It is very disappointing, we should have won the game

PARIS: France came from behind to beat England 2-1 in Newcastle in a pivotal Women's Euro 2025 qualifier on Friday, while Jenni Hermoso scored as world champions Spain won 2-0 in Denmark. Reigning European champions England had gone ahead on the half-hour mark at St James' Park when Arsenal's Beth Mead fired home after the ball broke to her in the box.

However, France equalised before the break as Elisa De Almeida hooked in a volley from a corner, and they stunned the home crowd by going in front midway through the second half thanks to a fine finish from inside the box by Paris Saint-Germain striker Marie-Antoinette Katoto.

France then held on to make it three wins out of three as they sit top of Group 3 in League A, from which the top two will progress directly to next year's European Championship in Switzerland. The result potentially complicates the holders' chances of making the finals, with England now level on four points with Sweden, who won 3-0 away to Ireland in Dublin.

France coach Herve Renard praised the performance as giving an "important signal" to their rivals. "It was perhaps not France's best match but we have shown we can be strong when we travel. "It's the reward for teamwork," added Renard, saying it was "the best possible way to prepare for the Olympic Games" at home in Paris this summer.

England manager Sarina Wiegman said: "It is very disappointing. We should have won the game. No matter how good the goals were, you have a chance to stop it. The first one was fantastic and so was the second. It is disappointing and we definitely need to tighten up on second balls."

Johanna Rytting Kaneryd of Chelsea scored twice for Sweden either side of a goal by Fridoliva

na Rolfo, and Ireland are bottom without a point halfway through the campaign. The reverse fixtures take place on Tuesday, when France and England meet again in Saint-Etienne, with Sarina Wiegman's side now aware that they can ill afford to suffer another defeat.

Friday's win is a boost for Herve Renard's France side who are also preparing for their bid for Olympic gold at the upcoming Games on home soil, at which Spain and Germany will be the other European contenders.

Protester delays

Spain made it three wins out of three in Group 2 as Hermoso gave them the lead in Denmark before Mariona Caldentey added a penalty. The World Cup holders, whose side featured several members of Barcelona's Champions League-winning line-up even if Aitana Bonmati was left on the bench, are now three points clear of the Danes at the top of the group. Behind them, Belgium got their first points with a 2-1 win in the Czech Republic. Elsewhere, Germany have maximum points in Group 4 after recovering from the loss of an early goal to beat Poland 4-1, with Giulia Gwinn netting twice.

Austria and Iceland drew 1-1 in the same group, while Group 1 leaders the Netherlands defeated Finland 1-0 and Norway played out a goalless draw with Italy in the same section.

Meanwhile the League B, Group 2 qualifier between Scotland and Zionist entity in Glasgow was delayed for over half an hour after a demonstrator avoided security at Hampden Park and chained himself to a goalpost.

Friday's fixture in Glasgow, like the 'return' match in Hungary on June 4, was taking place behind closed doors, without any spectators. That decision was



NEWCASTLE: France's defender #22 Eve Perisset (L) and France's defender #02 Maëlle Lakkar (rear R) fight for the ball against England's striker #09 Alessia Russo (front R) during the UEFA Women's Euro 2025 League A Group 3 qualifying football match between England and France at St James' Park stadium in Newcastle, northern England. — AFP

taken against the backdrop of the ongoing Zionist-Gaza conflict.

But on Friday, as pro-Palestinian protests took place outside Scotland's national stadium, it emerged just before the scheduled 1805 GMT kick-off that somebody had managed to access the arena and

attach themselves to one of Hampden's goalposts with a heavy-looking chain around their neck. The protester, wearing a 'Red Card' T-shirt, was eventually removed before the teams emerged for a second warm-up, with the game eventually kicking-off at 1836 GMT. Scotland won the match 4-1. — AFP

Weld rolls back the years in Epsom Oaks

EPSOM: Ezeliya delivered Irish trainer Dermot Weld his second Epsom Oaks 43 years since Blue Wind triumphed and six years before Friday's winning jockey Chris Hayes was born. Ezeliya provided owner the Aga Khan with a first win in the race as he suffered the crushing disappointment in 1989 when Aliysa won but was subsequently disqualified.

Weld's only Epsom Derby winner, Harzand in 2016 was also owned by the Aga Khan. Hayes looked in total control halfway down the finishing straight on the challenging camber track, in stark contrast to Irish favourite Ylang Ylang, the Aidan O'Brien-trained filly was struggling throughout the 1 1/2 mile (2,400 metres) race. Weld, 75 and whose globetrotting exploits are legendary having won two Melbourne Cups and a Belmont Stakes, welcomed back the winner with his sons Mark and Chris. "A very special day, the competition these days is very



EPSOM: Britain's King Charles III (L) shakes hands with British businessman Michael Tabor (R) as he presents him the Coronation Cup Trophy after his horse Luxembourg, ridden by British jockey Ryan Moore, won the race on the first day of the Epsom Derby Festival horse racing event, in Surrey. — AFP

keen," said Weld.

"She is a beautiful filly to train, I was never worried about the distance. "This is my 25th classic winner in Ireland England. "Classic races are the pinnacle, it is what you do it for, what trainers are remembered for.

"I am very fortunate as for one that stands out, no they are all special,

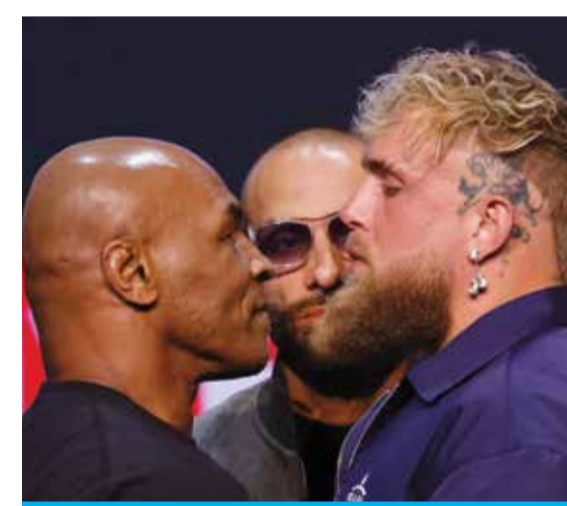
any classic race you win is very special." For Hayes the winner is a 'queen' though he cast himself as a rather more lowly personality plucked from a British comedy 'Only Fools and Horses'. "I am like Del Boy Trotter, ducking and diving and looking to get my way through life," he said. Ylang Ylang's disappointing run leaves O'Brien

without a classic winner this season, though, he has the favourite City of Troy in Saturday's 'blue riband' of flat racing, the Epsom Derby.

Ylang Ylang's rider Ryan Moore reported: "We didn't go mad and I didn't think she handled the track particularly well. "She was following the winner in second and she just didn't take me into the straight the way I was expecting her to.

"She had a hard race in the Guineas and maybe it's come a bit too soon. She'll be better than today." The 54-year-old O'Brien -- who will be seeking a 10th triumph in the Derby—thought he had turned a corner this season earlier on Friday.

O'Brien landed the Group One Coronation Cup for the ninth time as Moore guided home Luxembourg in a terrific front-running display. For O'Brien it was his first Group One success of the campaign—his relief palpable as he grinned and gave a thumbs up sign—which has been an unusually slow start for him. Luxembourg has proved the most durable of campaigners, the Coronation meaning he has won Group One contests at two, three, four and now five-years-old. "It was an incredible ride by Ryan, he controlled everything," said O'Brien. — AFP



NEW YORK: (FILES) Former US boxer Mike Tyson (L) and YouTuber Jake Paul face off during a press conference at the Apollo Theatre in New York, on May 13, 2024. — AFP

Tyson fight postponed

LOS ANGELES: Mike Tyson's upcoming return to the ring against YouTuber Jake Paul has been postponed after the former heavyweight champion's recent health scare, organisers said Friday. Tyson, 57, needed medical treatment on board a flight from Miami to Los Angeles on Sunday after complaining of nausea and dizziness in an incident that came just under two months away from his July 20 fight with Paul in Texas. Fight organisers said in a statement on Friday that Tyson had been advised to do only minimal training in the coming weeks following a follow-up with doctors on Thursday, revealing the boxer had been struggling with an "ulcer flare up."

"The recommendation is for Mike Tyson to do minimal to light training over the next few weeks and then return to full training with no limitations," the statement said. "Both Mike and Jake are in agreement that it is only fair to ensure that both athletes have equal training time to prepare for this important match and are able to compete at the highest level.

"The health and well-being of athletes is our top priority, and we fully support Mike in taking the necessary time to allow him to perform at the level he expects of himself." The statement said a new date for the fight, which is to be carried live by streaming giant Netflix, would be announced by June 7. Tyson, who on Tuesday insisted he felt "100%" despite Sunday's health drama insisted he would be in prime condition when his showdown with Paul eventually goes ahead. "I want to thank my fans around the world for their support and understanding during this time," Tyson said in a statement.

"Unfortunately, due to my ulcer flare up, I have been advised by my doctor to lighten my training for a few weeks to rest and recover. "My body is in better overall shape than it has been since the 1990s and I will be back to my full training schedule soon. "Jake Paul, this may have bought you some time, but in the end you will still be knocked out and out of boxing for good." Paul meanwhile said he backed the fight's postponement. "I fully support postponing the event so Mike Tyson has no excuses come fight night," Paul said.

Tyson, who turns 58 in June, had been due to face the 27-year-old Paul in a professional bout comprising eight two-minute rounds that has been sanctioned by boxing authorities in Texas. However several members of the boxing community, including former heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder, had voiced reservations about the fight, expressing concern Tyson could be hurt. Tyson shrugged off the misgivings at a press conference earlier this month, describing his decision to return to the ring as a "no-brainer." "I'm beautiful, that's all I can say," Tyson said. "The people who said that wish that they were up here. No one else can do this." Tyson, who terrorized the heavyweight division in the 1980s and 1990s as the self-styled "baddest man on the planet", last fought as a professional in 2005. — AFP

Biles dominates US Gymnastics Championships

LOS ANGELES: Simone Biles continued her march toward the Paris Olympics Friday, launching her US gymnastics championships campaign with a dominant day-one that included signature vault and floor skills. The four-time Olympic gold medalist launched her night in Fort Worth, Texas, with a scintillating performance of her Yurchenko double pike vault.

She soared through her trademark vault, now also known as the Biles II, and despite a big step back with one foot on landing she earned 15.800 for the vault so difficult no other woman has attempted it in competition. Biles capped her night with an impressive floor routine that included a triple-twisting double somersault on her first tumbling pass on the way to a score of 15.20.

On all four apparatus she improved on her scores from the Core Hydration Classic two weeks ago and built a leading all-around score of 60.450 going into Sunday's final night of competition. Skye Blakely was in second place on 57.050. Blakely was the only other gymnast to hit 15 points, scoring 15.0 on her vault. Kayla DiCello was in third on 56.850 points. Biles is chasing a ninth US all-around title, but this year the championships take on added significance as the last meeting at which to secure a berth at the US Olympic trials June 27-30 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Shilese Jones, a two-time world championships all-around medallist, withdrew from the championships on Friday after an old shoulder injury flared up, but said she would petition USA Gymnastics to compete at trials and have a shot to make the five-woman team for Paris. In the meantime, all eyes are on Biles. "Well, she broke 60, so that was a goal of hers," said coach Cecile Landi, who said she was pleased not just with Biles's routines but with her attitude.

"It's not even the skills, it's the attitude and her behavior," said Landi, who coaches alongside husband Laurent Landi. "I truly feel like she's happy to be here. "I think she's really enjoying it and appreciating every meet she gets to do." Reigning Olympic all-around champion Suni Lee was in fourth place on 55.750. — AFP



KRONG AREYKSAT: This photo taken on May 25, 2024 shows ancient Khmer martial art Yutkromkhorm practitioner Kim Bonneat (2nd L) and students training at a club in Krong Areyksat. — AFP

Young Cambodians fight to preserve ancient martial art

KRONG AREYKSAT: In a small Cambodian town near the banks of the Mekong River, law student Oeun Bunthav tenses his slender torso and steels himself for an elbow strike to his head. Bunthav is among 20 young Cambodians at an open-air club in Krong Areyksat training in the ancient Khmer combat martial art of Yutkromkhorm.

The practice was largely forgotten after many of its masters were killed in a purge of intellectuals under the communist Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979, but Bunthav and his fellow students are determined to learn its techniques and keep their heritage alive.

For the students, who wear headbands and arm ties, the training includes learning to launch knockout blows with fists, high-powered precision kicks and rapid elbow and knee strikes. Stick, sword and spear

fighting are also on the curriculum. "I will try my best to train with it so that I can know about it clearly and try to preserve this martial art for the next generations," Bunthav told AFP.

Yutkromkhorm—which translates to "the art of war" in the Khmer language—was born out of the numerous wars fought by the ancient Khmer empire. It has three components—the art of war, magic spells and military strategy.

"In the ancient time, they did not have modern weapons like nowadays," said Nak Rinda, the 25-year-old master who leads the classes in Krong Areyksat. "In the ancient time people used this martial art such as punches, elbows, kicks, knees, swords, spears and arrows to protect our nation from invading enemies," he added, explaining that the art's techniques were refined and perfected by warriors over time.

In the early 2000s, some of the old Yutkromkhorm masters emerged from the shadows and began to showcase the little-known martial art. It was introduced to the Cambodian military and some universities, but remained largely unknown to the public, who are more familiar with Kun Khmer kickboxing and another ancient martial art, Bokator. — AFP

Al-Hilal beat Al-Nassr to win Saudi Cup and land double

Ronaldo in tears • Gomis has no regrets about not playing alongside Neymar



JEDDAH: Hilal's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the King's Cup final match between Al-Nassr and Al-Hilal at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium in Jeddah on May 31, 2024. — AFP

Mavericks crush Timberwolves to book NBA title

LOS ANGELES: The Dallas Mavericks, fueled by 36 points each from Luka Donic and Kyrie Irving, routed the Minnesota Timberwolves 124-103 on Thursday to clinch the Western Conference crown and book an NBA title showdown with the Boston Celtics.

Denied a sweep at home on Tuesday, the Mavs left no room for doubt in Minneapolis as they wrapped up the best-of-seven conference finals 4-1 to return to the NBA Finals for the first time since they won the title in 2011. The Celtics will host game one of the championship series on June 6.

Slovenian star Donic and Irving had their way with the league's top-rated defense, Donic taking the game by the throat in the opening minutes. "My mindset was: set the tone," said Donic, who scored 20 points in a fast-paced first quarter, one more than the Timberwolves managed as a team.

He scored four of his six three-pointers in the first period, including a bomb from the center court logo, and the Mavs closed the quarter on a 17-1 scoring run to put the Timberwolves on their heels for good. Irving got going with 15 points in the second quarter as he and Donic combined for 44 first-half points -- four more than the Timberwolves put on the board before halftime, when the Mavs led 69-40.

Anthony Edwards and Karl-Anthony Towns scored 28 points each for Minnesota, Towns adding 12 rebounds for the third-seed Timberwolves, who had swept the Phoenix Suns in the first round and stunned the defending champion Denver Nuggets in seven games in the second. The Timberwolves had been 3-0 in elimination games this post-season, with wins in games six and seven against the Nuggets as well as their victory on Tuesday. But the early damage by Donic and Dallas' disruptive defense put this one out of reach early and the Mavs grabbed the first double-digit victory of a hard-fought series.

"Luka came out tonight and put his stamp on the game," Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said. "Hit a couple of bomb threes, kind of got them loosened up offensively." Derek Lively returned for the Mavs after missing game four with a neck sprain suffered when Towns inadvertently kneed him in the back of the head in game three. The energetic reserve went down hard again when he took a blow to the back of the head from Naz Reid, who was charged with a flagrant foul shortly before halftime. He stayed in the game and finished with nine points.

Dallas are in the finals for the third time, chasing a second title to go with the one they captured back in 2011. The Celtics, who swept the Indiana Pacers in four games in the Eastern Conference finals, share the record for most NBA titles with the Los Angeles Lakers at 17. They're back in the title series for the second time in three years. — AFP

JEDDAH: Saudi Pro League champions Al-Hilal battled past Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr 5-4 in a penalty shootout on Friday to win the Saudi Cup and claim the domestic double, leaving the Portuguese forward in tears at the end of the drama.

Al-Hilal's Aleksandar Mitrovic scored in the shootout, as did Ronaldo, but goalkeeper Yassine Bounou was the hero as he saved Al-Nassr's final two penalties to secure the trophy after three players were sent off before the game went to extra time.

The two teams, who dominated the Saudi league campaign before Jorge Jesus's side won the title for the 19th time, were locked at 1-1 after 90 minutes when a last-gasp equaliser from Ayman Yahya forced the extra period but there were no goals.

Mitrovic had put Al-Hilal ahead after seven minutes when he headed home Malcom's cross in the presence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at King Abdullah Sports City. Ronaldo fired a spectacular bicycle kick against the post after the break but he was in any case offside.

Sabalenka battles back, Djokovic eyes Federer record

PARIS: World number two Aryna Sabalenka stormed back to defeat close friend Paula Badosa and reach the French Open last 16 on Saturday as Novak Djokovic took aim at equalling Roger Federer's record for Grand Slam match wins.

Two-time Australian Open champion Sabalenka downed Badosa 7-5, 6-1 by reeling off 10 of the last 11 games. Badosa had served for the first set at 5-3 but was eventually over-powered by Sabalenka who is into the second week in Paris for the second year in a row.

Sabalenka, a semi-finalist in 2023, has made at least the last four at her past six Grand Slams and is expected to be Iga Swiatek's chief rival in the Pole's bid for a fourth French Open title. "I just tried to play my best, play for every point. I knew I could come back," said Sabalenka after her win under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier as rain again brought disruption to the outside arenas. Next up for the Belarusian is a clash against either Madison Keys or Emma Navarro for a spot in the quarter-finals. With Sabalenka joining Swiatek, Coco Gauff and Elena Rybakina in the next round it is the first time in 11 years that all top four seeds have made the second week.

Defending champion Djokovic, chasing a fourth title at Roland Garros and 25th career major, will go level with Federer on 369 Grand Slam match wins if he sees off Italian 30th seed Lorenzo Musetti. Djokovic has defeated Musetti four times in five meetings. However the Italian gave the Serb a major scare at the French Open in 2021 when he won the first two sets of their fourth round clash before retiring injured in the decider. "There is always that kind of conviction and belief inside of me I can win a Slam. That's the reason why I'm still competing at this level," said the 37-year-old Djokovic.

Djokovic arrived in Paris under a cloud having not

ing for his first title in Saudi Arabia. Former Al-Hilal striker Bafetimbi Gomis said he has no regrets that he never got a chance to play alongside the club's current talisman Neymar as he won numerous titles during his 3-1/2-year stint with the Saudi Pro League champions.

The Frenchman won seven titles with Al-Hilal including the Saudi Pro League three times and AFC Champions League twice before leaving the club in early 2022. He now plays for Japanese side Kawasaki Frontale. Neymar completed his transfer from Paris St Germain to the Saudi giants last August. When asked whether he would have won more trophies if he had shared the pitch with Neymar, the 38-year-old Gomis told Reuters: "There is no need to look at things this way. I won everything with Al-Hilal with the best players. I scored many goals and we won everything. There is no more to achieve," added the former Swansea City player. — Reuters

Al-Nassr were then reduced to 10 men when goalkeeper David Ospina used his hand to prevent Malcom getting past him outside the box in the 56th minute. Coach Luis Castro replaced forward Sadio Mane with substitute keeper Walid Abdullah and, despite being a man down, Al-Nassr still pushed for an equaliser, with Ronaldo's long-range free kick saved by Bounou. With the clock running down Al-Hilal's Ali Al-Bulayhi received two yellow cards within 10 seconds for violent conduct in the 87th minute and after he was dismissed Ayman Yahya equalised for Al-Nassr.

Al-Hilal were then reduced to nine men when defender Kalidou Koulibaly received his second booking but they managed to hold on in extra time to force a shootout and emerged triumphant. At the end Ronaldo broke down in tears and is still search-



PARIS: Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka plays a forehand return to Spain's Paula Badosa during their women's singles match on Court Philippe-Chatrier on day seven of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros Complex in Paris on June 1, 2024. — AFP

won a title or even reached a final in the season for the first time since 2018. Adding injury to insult, he was accidentally hit on the head by a metal water bottle in Rome before suffering stomach problems in Geneva.

However, he hasn't dropped a set in two matches and cracked an impressive 43 winners past Spain's 63rd-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena on Thursday, dropping just seven games. German fourth seed Alexander Zverev, who has made the semi-finals in each of the last three years, started this French Open by likely ending the Roland Garros career of 14-time champion Rafael Nadal.

On Saturday, he tackles Dutch 26th seed Tallon Griekspoor and has shown no indication of being distracted by the start in Berlin of a trial against him over allegations of assaulting an ex-girlfriend. Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Nadal and then Djokovic in the last two seasons, needed five sets to see off Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the second round.

The seventh-seeded Norwegian faces Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry who made the third round when his French opponent Arthur Rinderknech retired with a foot injury caused by kicking out in frustration at an advertising hoarding. Canada's 21st seed Felix Auger-Aliassime booked a last 16 clash against Carlos Alcaraz after sweeping past 15th-ranked Ben Shelton of the United States 6-4, 6-2, 6-1.

Auger-Aliassime reached the fourth round in Paris in 2022 when he lost in five sets to Rafael Nadal. The 23-year-old holds a 3-2 career lead over world number three Alcaraz although the two have never met on clay.

World number four and former Wimbledon champion Rybakina, a quarter-finalist in Paris in 2021, eased past Elise Mertens 6-4, 6-2. Russian-born Varvara Gracheva of France, ranked 88 in the world, reached the last 16 of a Slam for the first time by seeing off Irina-Camelia Begu 7-5, 6-3. — AFP