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## Crown Prince visits Saudi Arabia

Sheikh Sabah, Prince Mohammed discuss ties, latest developments



**JEDDAH:** HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, accompanied by an official delegation, arrived on Tuesday in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on an official visit. HH the Crown Prince, along with his entourage, was received at the airport by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud, Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti Consul General in Jeddah Mohammad Al-Mutairi.

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah then held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed at Al-Salam Palace. They discussed the deep-rooted fraternal ties between the two nations and mechanisms of boosting bilateral relations, issues of common interest and the latest developments on the regional and international fronts. Attending the talks were HH the Crown Prince's accompanying delegation and senior Saudi officials.

Prince Mohammed later hosted a lunch banquet at Al-Salam Palace in honor of HH Sheikh Sabah and his accompanying delegation on the occasion of

their official visit, before they returned to Kuwait. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah sent a cable of gratitude to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, thanking him for the generous hospitality reflecting the deep ties connecting the two nations. HH the Crown Prince expressed his pride in the exceptional relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, affirming intent on boosting cooperation across various fields to achieve further prosperity. He wished the King good health and long life and the kingdom and its people further progress.

HH the Crown Prince sent another cable of gratitude to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed, thanking him for the generous hospitality reflecting the depth and sturdiness of ties connecting the two nations. HH the Crown Prince expressed joy at visiting Saudi Arabia and the successful talks that took place, and affirmed keenness on developing bilateral ties to achieve the ambitions of the two countries' leadership. He wished his counterpart good health and success and the kingdom and its people further progress. — KUNA

### NEWS IN BRIEF

**Eid holiday from June 16 to 18**

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet decided in its weekly meeting on Tuesday that the Eid Al-Adha holiday in all government ministries, agencies and public institutions will be from Sunday, June 16 until Tuesday, June 18, with work resuming on Wednesday, June 19. Specialized entities and bodies can determine their holiday schedules in coordination with relevant authorities, taking into consideration public interest. — KUNA

**Kuwait welcomes UN Gaza resolution**

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait welcomed on Tuesday a UN Security Council resolution calling for a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza and the withdrawal of Zionist occupation forces from the region. In a statement by the foreign ministry, Kuwait commended the resolution and affirmed that adopting it was a crucial and pivotal step towards ending the systematic Zionist aggression against Gaza and Palestinian civilians, adding the international community must take responsibility to ensure the decision's implementation. — KUNA

**Kuwait, Iraq discuss security issues**

**BAGHDAD:** Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq Tariq Al-Faraj on Tuesday discussed with Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir Al-Shammari ways to boost bilateral cooperation and coordination in security matters and prepare for the latter's visit to Kuwait in July. Faraj said they addressed the importance of exerting more efforts to promote cooperation in securing joint borders and combating narcotics and organized crime. They also discussed exchanging information between the two countries. — KUNA

**Kuwait urges action on missing persons**

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has affirmed the great significance of the UN resolution addressing the issues of missing persons and civilian protection in armed strife. "On the fifth anniversary of the UN Security Council's issuance of Resolution 2474/2019 regarding persons missing in armed strife, unanimously adopted on June 11, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses Kuwait's affirmation of the great importance of this humanitarian resolution," the ministry said. — KUNA

### Crown Prince meets Al-Sabah family members

**KUWAIT:** HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met Monday evening with the Al-Sabah family at Bayan Palace and recalled Kuwaiti rulers and loyal citizens throughout the years. During a speech on the occasion, HH Sheikh Sabah recalled various stands of Kuwaiti rulers in the past and its loyal citizens, which have set the most wonderful examples in confronting the most difficult circumstances and challenges to the homeland.

HH the Crown Prince remembered

the values of fathers and grandfathers instilled in the most severe situations that required solidarity and cohesion from all, until the dear homeland crossed those difficult circumstances and sailed its ship to safety. HH Sheikh Sabah stressed the need to continue with such a leadership journey towards further progress and prosperity for the nation under the wise leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

HH Sheikh Sabah called on Al-Sabah family members to be the best supporters of HH the Amir and embody the best example of good morals and adherence to the law. HH Sheikh Sabah stressed the rule of law will be respected and upheld for everyone without discrimination or exception, wishing them continued success and prosperity for the benefit and good of their country. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addresses members of the Al-Sabah family on June 10, 2024. — KUNA (See Page 3)

### Gulf Bank studying transition to sharia compliant banking

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank announced on Tuesday that its board of directors has approved the engagement of an international consultant to conduct a feasibility study on converting Gulf Bank into a sharia-compliant institution. In an official disclosure on the Boursa Kuwait website, signed by Chairman of the Board of Directors Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, the bank confirmed it has received no objection from the Central Bank of Kuwait to proceed with the study to transition to an Islamic bank. Gulf Bank will disclose the study's findings upon completion.



**Gulf Bank Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi**

tion to an Islamic bank. Gulf Bank will disclose the study's findings upon completion.

### Deadly Zionist raids in Gaza, West Bank amid ceasefire bids

**GAZA:** Deadly fighting rocked Gaza on Tuesday as US top diplomat Antony Blinken promoted a ceasefire plan and Jordan hosted an emergency summit for the war-ravaged Palestinian territory. Secretary of State Blinken, on his eighth Middle East tour since Oct 7, urged the Palestinian group to accept the truce and captive release deal.

The UN Security Council on Monday endorsed a US-drafted ceasefire plan in a resolution that expressed support for the Zionist-backed initiative and urged Hamas to accept it. Hamas said it "welcomes" elements of the resolution, and also reaffirmed its willingness to engage with mediators. However, it has also insisted on a permanent ceasefire, contrasting with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stance, which emphasizes the return of captives and the dismantling of Hamas.

Zionist forces killed 10 Palestinians on Monday and Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Authority said. The 10 were killed by Zionist occupation fire in the towns of Kfar Naima and Kfar Dan, the territory's health ministry said. A general strike was called in Ramallah by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in response to the killings, along with a pre-planned rally for Palestinians jailed by the Zionist entity. During a visit to the Zionist entity, Blinken said Netanyahu had "reaffirmed his commitment" to the proposed six-week cessation of hostilities.

Continued on Page 6

### Kuwait qualify for Asian Cup



**KUWAIT:** Fans rejoice as Kuwait beat Afghanistan 1-0 in the joint qualification match for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2027 AFC Asian Cup to qualify for the Asian Cup and advance to the next round in World Cup qualifiers. (See Page 16)



## Local

Russians mark  
'Russia Day'Vladimir Zheltov  
Russia Ambassador

On June 12, the Russian people celebrate its national holiday - Russia Day. Essentially, this date is associated with the adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty in 1990 by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, which then was the nucleus of the Soviet Union. After the USSR's dissolution our country has become known as the Russian Federation.

In civilizational prospect, Russia is a unique entity also called "the Russian World" with its own identity and statehood. Its rich history dates back centuries, amounting to more than a millennium. Russia's roots derive from Ancient Rus' (named by historians as Kievan Rus') which later took shape as Moscow Tsardom, then evolved into the Russian Empire and in the twentieth century appeared as the Soviet Union. The modern Russian Federation is the successor state of the USSR.

Therefore, the traits of our national character combine civilizational continuity, loyalty to our past and aspiration to the future. We treasure our Fatherland's history and remember all ordeals that fell onto our ancestors' lot. We also take pride in the achievements and the contribution of our country to the global civilization. Russia gave the world many outstanding and renowned writers, composers, artists and scientists. Russian culture in all its diversity is a significant and integral part of the global cultural heritage.

Due to its weight, might and influence Russia has been present on the international arena throughout ages. Our country remains one of the world's greatest powers and one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. More than once Russia has foiled aggressive plans of notorious conquerors such as Napoleon and Hitler. Our decisive contribution to the victory over Nazism in World War II is evident and undeniable. It is the Soviet Union that broke the backbone of once invincible German military machine. Hence, the attempts of the United States and its Western satellites to rewrite world history and attribute this victory exclusively to themselves look absurd and ridiculous.

Our country made a substantial contribution to supporting national liberation movements of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America and to bringing to an end the West European colonialist system based on a shameful concept of racial superiority and segregation. The USSR's assistance to newly established developing nations also played a significant role in attaining their full independence and sovereignty.

Nowadays humanity faces new challenges. We are witnessing the decline of the obsolescent Western-centric global order, while the failing hegemony is attempting to keep this collapsing system afloat at any cost despite the ongoing irreversible global changes. In such realities, Russia stands for the establishment of a fair multi-polar world order based on the principles of true equality, mutual respect and consideration of other parties' interests, non-interference in internal affairs as well as equal security for all. Russia and like-minded states strongly oppose the so-called "rules-based international order" enforced by the US led collective West for the rest of the world.

In fact, most of the countries, in general, and those of the Global South, in particular, grow tired of dictate, pressure and sanctions threats of the collective West with its notorious exceptionalism and imposition of pseudo-values on the rest of the world. Even worse are the West's attempts to contain their geopolitical rivals, first of all Russia. All means and instruments are being used, including proxies such as Kiev's regime, sanctions and blatant pressure on our friends and like-minded partners.

## Mutual respect

Russia has always treated the Arab world with respect. Our cooperation was built on the basis of mutual understanding and mutual benefit. This fully applies to friendly Kuwait, which became the first Arab Gulf state to establish diplomatic relations with our country back in 1963. Last year we celebrated their sixtieth anniversary. We value traditionally pragmatic and balanced approach of the Kuwaiti leadership to its foreign relations. It demonstrates highest wisdom and consistency of the emirate's rulers.

Bilateral contacts at different levels have never stopped. They bore special meaning during the difficult period for the emirate when it was under Saddam's occupation. The Amirs of Kuwait visited Russia twice: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah in 1991 and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah in 2015. We maintain fruitful foreign policy cooperation regardless of the changes in the international situation. The heads of our foreign ministries communicate regularly in different formats. Just last year they met in Moscow twice: in July - on the sidelines of the 6th session of the Russia-GCC Strategic Dialogue and in November - during the visit of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister to Russia.

## Russian-Kuwaiti ties

Pragmatism and mutual benefit define the Russian-Kuwaiti economic ties. Oil policy is a special area of interest, taking into account mutual energy priorities. Our close interaction and coordination within the "OPEC+" format help maintaining stable oil prices. Regardless of the global political environment, the steady growth of the Russian food exports to the world markets, including that in the Middle East, allows for more of our agricultural products to be supplied to Kuwait and other GCC countries.

Another area of mutually beneficial cooperation is the military-technical sphere. One cannot but highlight the strengthening of our ties in the humanitarian realm and in the field of tourism. The launch of direct flights by Jazeera Airlines between Moscow and Kuwait City in the beginning of last year and the introduction of the Russian electronic visas for Kuwaiti citizens contributed to increasing the number of tourists from the emirate to our country almost tenfold.

More and more Kuwaitis are discovering Russia as an attractive tourist destination. All necessary conditions are in place - rich cultural and historical heritage, abundant nature, modern infrastructure and last but not least safety and order on the streets. In the field of cultural relations, the upcoming year of 2025 will witness holding the "Russian Seasons" in Kuwait, which will become a landmark event in our bilateral relations.

Zain family contributed to  
World Blood Donor Day

Employees, executives joined blood drive in partnership with Central Blood Bank

KUWAIT: Zain renewed its collaboration with the Central Blood Bank of Kuwait to host a special blood drive at its headquarters in Shuwaikh. The move coincided with the upcoming World Blood Donor Day, which is globally celebrated on June 14 of every year. Nearly 100 employees and executives from various departments participated in the blood drive to help save lives and bolster Kuwait's strategic blood reserve. Additionally, participants benefited from the many health advantages gained by periodically donating blood.

Zain frequently launches initiatives and programs to support the local healthcare system, partnering with organizations like the Central Blood Bank and the Ministry of Health. The company also aims to raise awareness about the life-saving importance of blood donation. As usual, Zain's blood drive campaign was well-received by employees eager to donate, and the entire process was supervised and managed by the Central Blood Bank's medical team. The company is proud of the great turnout by employees to make this initiative a success, reflecting the values of its brand: Zain: A Wonderful World.

World Blood Donor Day is celebrated around the globe on June 14 of every year. The initiative was organized for the first time in 2004 by four core international organizations: the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); the International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations (IFBDO), and the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT). The annual campaign aims to raise awareness of the need for blood and blood products, as well as the importance of having a strategic and sustainable blood reserve. The initiative also highlights the vital role donors play by thanking them for their voluntary, life-saving contributions.



Zain employees were eager to contribute to the initiative's success.



A group photo of Zain and Central Blood Bank teams.



Al-Masoud Diwaniya honored after winning the 'Health without Smoking Competition.'

Al-Masoud Diwaniya  
wins 'Health without  
Smoking Competition'

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Al-Masoud Diwaniya was announced as the winner of the 'Health without Smoking Competition' that was organized by the Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer (KSPSC). The competition was held in April 2024 in Faiha. It is aimed at having an import-

ant group of Kuwaiti society join the smoking prevention campaign, chairman of the Board of the Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer (KSPSC), Dr Khalid Al-Saleh, said during an event to honor the winner.

Some of these diwanias host various age groups who continually frequent them, and because they are closed places, smoking harms non-smokers who are exposed to passive smoking as well. According to the World Health Organization's reports, there are 600,000 early deaths linked to smoking. Many of these people are exposed to passive smoking, and 64 percent are women.

"Smoking is very dangerous to health, but regrettably, Kuwait occupies the top place on the list of countries with high smoking rates among GCC

countries. KSPSC, in cooperation with the Health Ministry, NGOs and cooperatives (such as the Faiha Cooperative Society) are keen to promote anti-smoking awareness," Dr Al-Saleh said, adding that the announcement of Al-Masoud Diwaniya as the winner came after inspecting participating diwanias in the area.

"We were pleased with what we saw in Al-Masoud Diwaniya. The diwaniya's commitment to ban smoking is a good example for others to follow. KSPSC has a smoke cessation clinic that receives those who wish to quit smoking. The clinic receives smokers from all areas," he explained. Dr Al-Saleh thanked Kuwait University, Life Science College, for opening a smoking cessation clinic in Sabah Al-Salem University City.

Amir's Representative  
meets Jordanian FM

AMMAN: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, met in Jordan on Monday with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi. The minister is leading Kuwait's delegation partaking in an emergency humanitarian response conference for the Gaza Strip due at the Dead Sea on Tuesday. During their meeting, Al-Yahya and Safadi tackled bilateral relations, and the latest developments in the region, mainly the emergency aid to Gaza Strip. The two ministers also discussed regional and international efforts to end the suffering of the Palestinian people. — KUNA



# Crown Prince praises former rulers, loyal citizens



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met Monday evening with the Al-Sabah family at Bayan Palace and recalled, during a speech, Kuwaiti rulers and loyal citizens throughout the years. During a speech on the occasion, His Highness Sheikh Sabah recalled various stands of Kuwaiti rulers in the past and its loyal citizens, which has set the most wonderful examples in confronting the most difficult circumstances and challenges to the homeland.



**JEDDAH:** Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud receives His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation depart Saudi Arabia on Tuesday after an official visit. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti-Saudi ties: 130 years of shared bonds

**JEDDAH:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday - his first official visit since his appointment as the Crown Prince - is reflective of the strong bonds and ties between the two countries. His Highness the Crown Prince has a track record of achievements spanning nearly four decades, during which he was able to strengthen Kuwait's posi-

tion regionally and internationally and advance its developments.

On June 1, an Amiri decree by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was issued, nominating His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Crown Prince, and on June 2, he was appointed as Crown Prince by another Amiri decree. The political life of His Highness the Crown Prince witnessed significant milestones and remarkable achievements that greatly contributed to shaping Kuwaiti diplomatic work and determining ways to address major challenges inside and outside Kuwait.

One of these milestones was his role as Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation from 1995 to 1998, during which he participat-

ed in the ministerial council meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) foreign ministers. In affirmation of the strong relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, spanning over 130 years, the Saudi-Kuwaiti Coordination Council was established in 2018 during the reign of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The Saudi-Kuwaiti Coordination Council's aim is to develop a shared vision to deepen and sustain relations between the two countries in line with the goals of the GCC, enhance the integrated economic system, find innovative solutions for optimal utilization of current resources, and more. On June 5, 2021, the first meeting of the Saudi-Kuwaiti Coordination Council was held under the directives of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber

Al-Sabah and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

On June 3, 2024, the council held its second meeting in Kuwait under the directives of the leaderships of both countries. This meeting aimed to strengthen bilateral relations in all fields. The meeting of the subcommittees of the council resulted in the approval of 50 initiatives to enhance cooperation between the two countries in various fields and push bilateral relations to new and broader horizons.

The Council consists of five subcommittees: the Political, Consular, and National Coordination Committee; the Military and Security Coordination Committee; the Coordination Committee in Culture, Media, Tourism, and Social Development; the Coordination Committee in Energy, Economy, Trade, and Industry; and the Coordination Committee in Investment, Environment, and Infrastructure. — KUNA

## OIC welcomes UNSC resolution calling for ceasefire in Gaza

**JEDDAH:** The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomed on Tuesday the adoption by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) of a resolution calling for a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza. The resolution calls for the withdrawal of Zionist occupation forces, the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, and ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian aid as well.

The OIC considered in its statement that the adoption of this resolution constitutes an important step towards the international community assuming its responsibilities to stop the genocide being committed by the Zionist occupation against the Palestinians in Gaza for eight months. The organizations called for concerted efforts and for everyone to assume their responsibilities in order to ensure immediate implementation.

The UNSC adopted on Monday, by a majority of 14 members and one member's abstention, a resolution presented by the US in support of its proposal regarding Gaza, which calls for a ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners in four stages leading to a ceasefire and access to humanitarian aid within the sector.

The United Nations Security Council on Monday adopted a US-drafted resolution supporting a ceasefire plan in Gaza, which was first announced on May 31. The text passed with 14 votes in favor and Russia abstaining. The resolution "welcomes" the truce and hostage release proposal announced on May 31 by President Joe Biden and urges "parties to fully implement its terms without delay and without condition." The resolution says Zionist entity has accepted the truce plan and "calls upon Hamas to also accept it." The United States, a staunch ally of Zionists, has been widely criticized for having blocked several previous UN draft resolutions calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. "Today we voted for peace," US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said after the UN session.

### 'UN Women'

Meanwhile, UN Women, a UN entity dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, on Monday called on the international community and stakeholders to take decisive measures to finance Palestinian women-led organizations. This came in the UN Women's fourth Gender Alert, focusing on the work of women-led organizations (WLOs) and detailing the findings of a UN Women assessment of 25 Palestinian women-led organizations operating in Gaza and the West Bank. It shows that, despite this dire situation, these organizations are at the forefront of the humanitarian response.

Together, these 25 organizations maintain a network of 1,575 staff members across Gaza and the West Bank. The assessment showed that 89 percent of the surveyed organizations have experienced damage to their offices, with 35 percent suffering complete destruction. These offices serve as operational hubs and are vital for delivering assistance and coordination. "The work of women-led organizations in Gaza and the West Bank is as much about the survival of women and girls as it is about maintaining hope, dignity, and the possibility of a better future for those they serve. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A blacksmith works at a construction site in Kuwait on June 10, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## NBK hosts delegation from WHO and Kuwait Green Building Council

Bank's headquarters 'a notable example of environmentally sustainable practices'



**KUWAIT:** Marking World Environment Day, a delegation from the World Health Organization (WHO) Kuwait Country Office, and Kuwait Green Building Council (KGBC) paid a visit to National Bank of Kuwait (NBK's) headquarters to tour the building which stands out as a notable example of environmentally sustainable practices that promote health and well-being.

The tour aimed to showcase environmentally sustainable building practices and advocate for the links between the built environment and good health. It featured a group of decision-makers and specialists in urban sustainability, including members of the Municipal Council, representatives of Environment Public Authority (EPA), the Ministry of Health, and WHO Healthy Cities Initiative, in addition to researchers specialized in sustainable building from Kuwait University and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), and representatives of UN agencies in Kuwait.

The tour, which saw the participation of 22 officials and specialists, aimed to highlight environmentally sustainable urban practices that have a positive impact on human health. The participants discussed the best ways to promote green building practices among institutions and individuals for good health and well-being. Dalal Al-Hashash, the General Manager of the Kuwait Green Building Council, stated, "This tour aimed to highlight an outstanding example of green buildings in Kuwait and to spark meaningful discussions among stakeholders. Our focus is on shaping policies and actions that support sustainable development, promote environmentally friendly practices, and prioritize human health in urban planning." "There is often a lot of focus on the impact of the natural environment on health and well-being, sometimes stakeholders and communities forget about the impact of the built environment. This collaboration with the National Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Green Building Council is an important opportunity to highlight the critical links between infrastructure and health.

By convening policymakers and civil society from across sectors in Kuwait, we are ensuring that good practices, data, and technical expertise come together to further improve the policy landscape for infrastructure that bolsters health and wellbeing of the community in Kuwait" said Dr. Assad

Hafeez, WHO Representative to the State of Kuwait. This visit underscores NBK's dedication to adopting the highest sustainability standards, endeavors to reduce our environmental footprint, and setting an exemplary model for eco-friendly construction practices in Kuwait.

As part of its strides to embrace modern architecture of green buildings, NBK designed its headquarters in a way that ensures harmony with the surrounding environment and reduces any negative environmental impact by using low-emission materials, including the paints, coatings and adhesives, in addition to a construction and building operations waste segregation and management system.

In line with its sustainability agenda, NBK strongly supports the global trend of transitioning to a low-carbon economy and mitigating climate change risks. In this context, NBK headquarters is the first LEED Gold-certified building in Kuwait under the LEED v2009 Certificate for Building Design and Construction granted by USGBC. It was also named "Commercial Property Project of the Year", in MEED's Project Awards for the MENA region for 2021. The benefits of green buildings extend beyond cost reduction and efficient construction methods; they also offer a healthy and safe living environment.

The NBK headquarters' design focuses on employee health and well-being by ensuring superior indoor air quality, utilizing the use of safe materials, and minimizing exposure to toxic and hazardous substances. Advanced air filtration systems maintain air purity, especially in dusty conditions, by removing harmful particulates from indoor air. The building promotes physical health through amenities such as a gym and an on-site medical clinic open to all staff. Mental health is also prioritized with open spaces that encourage social interaction, green areas, and access to natural sunlight.



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KUWAIT: KUNA Media Development Center on Tuesday wrapped up a program titled 'Responsible journalism' that was conducted in collaboration with US Embassy's Public Affairs. The program saw the participation of KUNA journalists along with other news journalists. After the training, Public Affairs Counselor at the US Embassy, Dr Farid Mohamed, thanked KUNA for their cooperation and highlighted potential areas for further collaboration, especially in training journalists on verifying news sources and identifying disinformation. — KUNA



Talk of French right-wing alliance sparks outrage

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Biden's son found guilty in gun case

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## Ukraine musters help for rebuilding EU banks to promote investment in Ukraine; Zelensky warns of pro-Russian rhetoric

**BERLIN:** Ukraine and its allies drummed up support to protect Ukrainian cities from Russian missiles at a conference in Berlin on Tuesday and urged international businesses to put their faith, and billions of dollars, into post-war reconstruction. Kyiv hopes the recovery conference will cement its credentials as a future member of the European Union that is worthy of huge injections of reconstruction financing - even as Russian forces continue to make slow advances in Ukraine's east.

Switzerland hosts an international conference this weekend to seek a path to peace in Ukraine, but it has been shunned by China and dismissed as a waste of time by Russia, which was not invited to attend. Speaking alongside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had already wiped out enough energy infrastructure to power the cities of Berlin and Munich combined.

He was hoping to come away from the conference with pledges of billions of euros for defense and agreements on building a new and more modern energy system. "Ukraine is suffering from the most destructive form of the Russian view of energy as a weapon," Zelensky said. Citing World Bank estimates that Ukraine could need \$500 billion over a decade, Scholz said companies had to be offered a business case for investing, and talked up Ukraine's potential in sectors including renewables, IT and pharmaceuticals.

He also said Germany was sending more air defense systems to bolster Ukraine's defenses against a barrage of Russian attacks on cities and critical infrastructure, more than two years after Russia launched a full-scale invasion. "The best kind of reconstruction is the one that doesn't have to happen at all," he said. A Russian campaign of aerial bombardment that began in March has inflicted such heavy damage to generating capacity that blackouts are having to be scheduled across Ukraine. A flurry of diplomacy will have both Zelensky and Scholz attending a summit of the Group of Seven major Western powers in Italy this week.

### AFD boycott

In a Reuters interview at the conference, the mayor of Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, said Western weapons and the permission to use them to strike targets just inside Russia had helped to restore calm. Zelensky also addressed the German parliament during his visit, where his speech was boycotted by two parties including the far-right Alternative for Germany (AFD), whose



BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (right) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky shake hands at the end of a joint press conference on June 11, 2024. — AFP

support surged in European elections last weekend. Zelensky warned that the pro-Kremlin parties' stance posed a threat that stretched beyond Ukraine. "It seems to me that the most important thing is that people did not choose pro-Russian populist rhetoric. But radical pro-Russian rhetoric is dangerous for your countries," Zelensky warned.

The co-leaders of the AFD said they "refused to listen to a speaker wearing camouflage fatigues".

"Ukraine does not need a war president now, it needs a peace president who is ready to negotiate," said Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, adding that AFD MPs had therefore decided to leave their seats empty at the Bundestag on Tuesday.

Speaking alongside Scholz and Zelensky, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced agreements with banks worth 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to help attract private investment for Ukraine.

She also said the EU would deliver 1.9 billion euros to Ukraine from its own assistance program by the end of the month, and that Kyiv would benefit from interest income from frozen Russian assets. "Russian President Vladimir Putin must fail, and Ukraine must prevail," she said. "And we must help Ukraine to rise from the ashes and to be the master of its own future. This means, first and foremost, that we must provide Ukraine with the means to defend itself." — Agencies

## Knesset advances ultra-Orthodox conscription bill

**JERUSALEM:** The Zionist parliament moved ahead with a contentious law on conscripting ultra-Orthodox religious students into the military amid angry scenes on Monday in the Knesset as families of some of those taken by Hamas on Oct 7 demanded more action to get them home.

Coming a day after centrist former general Benny Gantz quit the government in a dispute over the strategic aims of the Gaza war, the vote and confrontations underscored the volatile mix of forces buffeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, now increasingly dependent on his allies from the hard right.

The conscription bill, which must still pass further readings and committee hearings after the late-night vote, would see a gradual entry into the military of some ultra-Orthodox Jews, who have traditionally resisted serving in the armed forces. Although originally put forward by Gantz in 2022 under the previous government, he now opposes the measure, which he says is inadequate for new personnel demands facing the military.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, the last of a group of former generals left following the departure of Gantz and his ally, former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, broke ranks and voted against the bill. By contrast, the religious parties in the coalition, which have strongly opposed a general expansion of conscription, gave their support, with a view to inserting changes in the review stage.

While the proposal is for more ultra-Orthodox in

the military, their numbers would be restricted, and the bill would allow some alternatives to military service. "We have a great opportunity that should not be missed. The ultra-Orthodox public must not be pushed into a corner," Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, leader of one of the pro-settler parties in the coalition, said in a statement.

The issue of lifting some of the restrictions on conscripting ultra-Orthodox men into the military has been a divisive issue for decades in the entity where broad military service has been seen as one of the bedrocks of its security. Resented by many secular citizens, it has been more sensitive than ever since the start of the war in Gaza, in which more than 600 Zionist soldiers have been killed.

"There are those who supported it then and oppose it now because they see it as wrong for (the Zionist entity) now, and there are those who opposed it then and will support it now because they see an opportunity to change it," Assaf Shapira, an analyst, told Reuters.

As parliament prepared to vote on the bill, there were angry exchanges at a meeting of the finance committee, where members of some of the families of captives waylaid Smotrich and demanded the government do more to bring them home.

Inbal Tzach, whose cousin Tal Shoham was one of the 253 people abducted by Hamas gunmen, said ministers such as Smotrich needed to do everything to get the remaining 120 hostages back.

Smotrich, who has ruled out any deal with Hamas and has opposed proposals for a ceasefire deal which would bring the hostages back in an exchange for Palestinian prisoners, dismissed the families' campaign as cynical. "I will not endanger (the Zionist entity) and its people," he said. "I will not stop the war just before the destruction of Hamas, because this an existential danger to (the Zionist entity)." — Reuters

with support including helicopters and drones.

The group departed just after 9:00 am (0700 GMT) from Lilongwe on Monday to attend the funeral of a former cabinet minister some 370 km away in Mzuzu. Malawi's former first lady Shanil Dzimbiri, who was married to former president Bakili Muluzi, was also on board. Chilima had returned from South Korea on Sunday after participating in the Korea-Africa summit.

Chakwera said he had previously flown on the same aircraft for similar trips. The crew had successfully operated it just hours before the accident, he added. "And yet, despite the track record of the aircraft and the experience of the crew, something terrible went wrong with that aircraft on its flight back to Lilongwe, sending it crashing down," he said.

First elected vice president in 2014, the charismatic yet stern-talking Chilima was a widely loved figure in Malawi, particularly among young people. "I am deeply shocked and I am mourning. Saulos was like a son to me," former president Joyce Banda told AFP. "This country has lost a genius, we have lost a champion who an expert in commerce and industry and he is one who believed that the private sector is the engine for growth. Unfortunately for me, I have to be personal as well, because he was like my son."

In the 2019 election, Chakwera had stood as presidential candidate for the Malawi Congress Party, and Chilima for the rival United Transformation Movement. Both lost, but the vote was annulled over polling irregularities and when a new election was held in June 2020, the pair campaigned and won as presidential and vice-presidential running mates. — Agencies

## Malawi VP, 9 others, killed in plane crash

**LILONGWE, Malawi:** Malawi's Vice President Saulos Chilima was killed in a plane crash, the nation's president said on Tuesday, after searchers located the wreckage of the aircraft in a mist-shrouded forest. The military plane carrying Chilima, 51, and nine others disappeared on Monday, after it failed to land in the northern city of Mzuzu due to bad weather and was told to return to the capital, Lilongwe.

Photographs shared with AFP by a member of the military rescue team showed army personnel standing on a foggy slope near debris bearing the registration number of the Dornier 228-202K aircraft operated by the Malawi Army Air Wing. "The search and rescue team have found the aircraft... completely destroyed with no survivors, as all passengers on board were killed on impact," Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera said, addressing the nation. "Words cannot describe how heartbreaking this is," he said, describing the accident as a "terrible tragedy."

Rescuers had been combing a fog-cloaked forest south of Mzuzu on Tuesday, after authorities located the last tower it transmitted to before the plane disappeared. Earlier, army commander General Paul Valentino Phiri said other countries, including Malawi's neighbors, had been aiding the search effort,

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## International

## Biden's son found guilty in gun case

Verdict could be used by Democrats to counter Trump's claims of unfair justice system

WILMINGTON, US: President Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden was convicted by a jury on Tuesday of lying about his drug use to illegally buy a gun, a verdict Democrats may seize upon to counter Donald Trump's claim of a justice system weaponized against him.

A 12-member jury in Wilmington, Delaware, federal court found the defendant guilty on all three counts against him, making Hunter Biden the first child of a sitting US president to be convicted of a crime. Hunter Biden, 54, lightly nodded his head after the verdict was read but otherwise showed little reaction. He then patted his lawyer Abbe Lowell on the back and hugged another member of his legal team. He then left the courthouse without making a statement.

His father, Joe Biden, issued a statement saying he accepted the outcome of the case and would respect the judicial process as his son considers an appeal. The judge set no date for sentencing, but added the timeline is usually in 120 days. That would place it no later than a month before the Nov 5 US presidential election.

Sentencing guidelines for the gun charges are 15 to 21 months, but legal experts say defendants in similar cases often get shorter sentences and are less likely to be incarcerated if they abide by the terms of their pretrial release. Some 61 percent of registered voters responding to a Reuters/Ipsos poll in February said Hunter Biden's legal troubles would have no impact on whether they voted for his father in November. The poll showed voters divided over whether Hunter Biden's legal troubles were related to his father's service as president.

The trial followed the May 30 criminal conviction of Trump, the first former US president to be found guilty of a felony and the Republican challenger to Joe Biden, a Democrat, in a tight race for the White

House. Trump, convicted on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to cover up a sex scandal, accuses Democrats of pursuing that case and three other criminal prosecutions to prevent him from regaining power in his rematch with Joe Biden.

Congressional Democrats have pointed to cases including the Hunter Biden prosecution as evidence that Joe Biden is not using the justice system for political or personal ends, having said last week he would not pardon his son if convicted. In a statement on Tuesday, Joe Biden said: "As I said last week, I am the President, but I am also a Dad. Jill and I love our son, and we are so proud of the man he is today. So many families who have had loved ones battle addiction understand the feeling of pride seeing someone you love come out the other side and be so strong and resilient in recovery."

"As I also said last week, I will accept the outcome of this case and will continue to respect the judicial process as Hunter considers an appeal. Jill and I will always be there for Hunter and the rest of our family with our love and support. Nothing will ever change that," the statement said.

The Hunter Biden case was brought by US Department of Justice Special Counsel David Weiss, a Trump appointee. Weiss has also charged Hunter Biden with three felony and six misdemeanor tax offenses in California, alleging he failed to pay \$1.4 million in taxes between 2016 and 2019 while spending millions on drugs, escorts, exotic cars and other high-ticket items. Hunter Biden has pleaded not guilty to those charges. A trial is scheduled for Sept 5 in Los Angeles.

The Delaware trial included prosecution testimony by Hunter Biden's ex-wife, former girlfriend and



WILMINGTON: Hunter Biden, his wife Melissa Cohen Biden and US first lady Jill Biden leave the federal court after the jury finds him guilty on June 11, 2024. — Reuters

sister-in-law, who gave firsthand accounts of his spiraling addiction in the weeks before and after he bought the gun in October 2018. Prosecutors also showed text messages, photos and bank records that they said showed Biden was deep in the throes of addiction when he bought the gun and knowingly broke the law by answering "no" to being a drug user on a government screening form.

Biden's lawyers sought to show he was not using drugs when he bought the gun and did not intend to deceive because he didn't consider himself a drug user when he filled out the form. The defense called Hunter Biden's daughter, Naomi Biden, who testified that her father seemed to be doing well when she saw him shortly before and after he bought the gun. — Reuters

## At least 49 migrants dead, 140 missing off Yemen coast

GENEVA: At least 49 migrants died and 140 others were missing after their boat capsized off the coast of Yemen, the UN migration agency said on Tuesday. The vessel, which departed from Somalia and was carrying 260 migrants, among them Somalis and Ethiopians, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) statement said. Earlier, a Yemeni official had given a toll of at least 38 dead.

The boat capsized on Monday near Alghareef Point in Yemen's Shabwah governorate. Among the dead were 31 women and six children, IOM said. "This recent tragedy is another reminder of the urgent need to work together to address urgent migration challenges and ensure the safety and security of migrants along migration routes," said Mohammed-ali Abunajela, a spokesperson for IOM.

IOM, which runs a tally of migrants who are killed or go missing on migration routes, has since 2014 recorded 1,860 migrant deaths and disappearances along the route running from East Africa and the Horn of Africa to Gulf countries. Nearly 500 of those were caused by drowning. Many are trying to reach Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries where they can work as laborers or domestic workers. — Agencies

## 4 US instructors stabbed in China; suspect arrested

BEIJING: Four American instructors from a small Iowa university were wounded in a stabbing attack in a public park in northeast China's Jilin province on Monday, prompting an investigation into the attacker's motive, Chinese officials said. The alleged assaults occurred shortly before noon on Monday at a park in Jilin City, police said. A 55-year-old local man, identified only by his surname Cui, was detained the same day. "Cui collided into a foreigner while walking in Beishan Park, and then stabbed the foreigner and three fellow foreigners with a knife, as well as a Chinese tourist who tried to stop him," Jilin City police said on social media, adding the victims' injuries were not life-threatening.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Lin Jian, said on Tuesday that police believed it was a random attack but authorities were still investigating. "All the injured individuals were immediately taken to the hospital and were given appropriate critical care," Lin said.

The ministry said the incident would "not affect normal people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States" and that it would take measures to ensure the safety of foreigners in China. US

officials expressed dismay over the attack, and the State Department said it was in touch with local authorities and monitoring the situation.

"We are deeply concerned by the stabbing of US citizens in Jilin City, China," White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan wrote on X on Tuesday. "Our team has been in touch these Americans and our PRC counterparts to ensure that the victims' needs are met, and appropriate law enforcement steps are being taken," he said, referring to the initials for the People's Republic of China. "We wish them a speedy recovery." Officials have not released the names of the victims.

Representative Adam Zabner of the Iowa Legislature said his brother was one of the victims from Cornell College in Mount Vernon, about 15 miles east of Cedar Rapids. "My brother, David Zabner, was wounded in the arm during a stabbing attack while visiting a temple in Jilin City, China," he said in an interview with Reuters. "I spoke to David... He is recovering from his injuries and doing well. My family is incredibly grateful that David survived this attack."

## Foreign exchange

A video of people lying on the ground in a park covered in blood was circulating on X on Monday, apparently taken at the scene of the attack, though no trace of the images could be found on Chinese social media. Reuters was able to identify the location of the video based on Chinese characters written on a wall, the wall's structure and the layout of the path, but it was not able to confirm when the video was shot.

## Deadly Zionist raids in Gaza, West Bank...

Continued from Page 1

"Everyone has said yes, except for Hamas," Blinken said. "And if Hamas doesn't say yes, then this is clearly on them." He then headed to neighboring Jordan to attend an emergency summit for Gaza, alongside leaders from the Arab world and beyond, aiming to address Gaza's humanitarian crisis. The Zionist siege has left Gaza's 2.4 million people without adequate food, clean water, medicines and fuel, pushing many to the brink of starvation. Only occasional aid shipments provide temporary relief.

"The horror must stop," UN chief Antonio Guterres told the conference, voicing his support for the truce plan first outlined by US President Joe Biden late last month. "The speed and scale of the carnage and killing in Gaza is beyond anything in my years as secretary-general," he told the gathering on the shores of the Dead Sea. UN humanitarian coordinator Martin Griffiths labelled the Gaza conflict a "stain on our humanity" and called for \$2.5 billion in funding until year-end.

Amid diplomatic efforts to address the crisis, the Zionist entity conducted further strikes on Gaza, resulting in casualties according to hospital sources. The Zionist army said four soldiers were killed in the southern city of Rafah on Monday in what Hamas called a booby-trap explosion. The Zionist entity has faced mounting international criticism over the escalating death toll in the conflict.

Health officials in Hamas-ruled Gaza reported 274 people were killed during a Zionist special forces raid on Saturday to rescue four captives. The UN human rights office expressed deep concern over the civilian casualties in the Nuseirat raid and said it was "deeply distressed" over the ongoing hostage situation in Gaza.

Netanyahu suffered a setback on Sunday when Benny Gantz, a centrist former army chief, quit his war cabinet, citing the lack of a post-war governance plan for Gaza as the main reason. During his visit, Blinken met Gantz and opposition leader Yair Lapid, both of whom have been vocal critics of the right-wing prime minister and his handling of the conflict.

Washington has also pushed for a "day-after" plan for Gaza, promoted a governance role for Hamas' rival, the Palestinian Authority, and urged steps toward a two-state solution. Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners reject the idea of Palestinian statehood, arguing it would endanger the Zionist entity's security and effectively "reward terrorism".

The Zionist offensive on the Gaza Strip has left at least 37,164 people dead, the majority of them



GAZA: Palestinian men walk along a narrow street past buildings destroyed in Zionist strikes in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on June 11, 2024. — AFP

women and children. In Jabaliya, Soad Al-Qanou said her young child Amjad was suffering from malnutrition as aid shipments had failed to adequately address Gaza's desperate needs. "This war has destroyed our lives and turned them upside down," she told AFP. "There is no food, no drink. There is siege and destruction everywhere."

Among aid pledges made at the Jordan meeting, the United States promised \$404 million for food, water, health supplies and other aid. Spain announced \$17 million in new assistance, and Indonesia said it was ready to send medical teams, a field hospital and a hospital ship and to evacuate 1,000 patients.

Blinken, hitting back at critics of US support for the Zionist entity, noted the UN appeal for the Palestinians was only one-third funded. "Some who have expressed great concern over the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza, including countries with the capacity to give a lot, have provided very little or nothing at all," Blinken said, likely referring to US adversaries China and Russia. "It is time for everyone — everyone — to step up." The United States is the largest donor to the Palestinians. It also provides the Zionist entity with \$3.8 billion in annual military aid. — Agencies

## Activists slam France hijab ban in sports

PARIS: French Muslim basketball player Diaba Konate Tuesday said she had hoped to represent her country at the Paris Olympics but did not stand a chance because she wears a headscarf. "Despite my desire and skills, I'm... not actually allowed to play for France because of discriminatory policies," the 24-year-old said during a press conference organized by rights groups to urge France to overturn bans on the Muslim headscarf in sport.

"It's very frustrating to be excluded from representing my home country... simply because of my religious identity," said the athlete who has played on France's national youth team and has a career in college basketball in the United States. "I strongly believe that sports should be inclusive," she said.

France has invoked its strict rules on secularism to ban its athletes from wearing religious symbols during the Paris Olympics from July 26 to August 11. This has barred French women wearing a headscarf from competing at the international event, on top of their being excluded from football and basketball tournaments nationwide.

The Sport & Rights Alliance — whose partners include Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International — on Tuesday called for an end to what it described as discriminatory bans. It said it had called on the International Olympic Committee to show "its commitment to gender equality" in the run-up to the Games and put pressure on the French authorities, but had not received a response.

In a letter to the IOC dated May 24 and shown to the press on Tuesday, it urged the Olympics body "to publicly call on sporting authorities in France to overturn all bans on athletes wearing the hijab in French sport, both at Paris 2024 and at all times and all levels of sport". This "would ensure that the Olympics leave a long-lasting and meaningful legacy for the values of dignity and equality," said the alliance's director Andrea Florence.

## 'Hypocrisy'

France's laws on secularism are intended to keep the state neutral in religious matters, while guaranteeing citizens the right to freely practice their religion. They prohibit pupils and teachers in schools as well as civil servants from wearing "ostentatious" religious symbols. Beyond the Olympics, women athletes are allowed to wear the headscarf in some sports but not in others.



Diaba Konate

Last year, France's highest administrative court upheld a ban on women footballers wearing the hijab despite FIFA allowing head coverings since 2014. And the French Basketball Federation has also banned the headscarf during competitions, whereas the International Basketball Federation FIBA has permitted it since 2017. The Paris region in October cut funding from clubs not respecting the rule.

"The girls are disgusted," said Timothee Gauthierot, a basketball coach in the Paris region and co-founder of the Basket pour Toutes (Basketball for All) activist group. "Already some girls have stopped doing sport. It's having an impact on their physical and mental health," he said. "It's dramatic just weeks ahead of the Olympics, which are supposed to be popular games for everyone... There's a paradox, a hypocrisy," he added.

He explained that, despite basketball rules forbidding all religious symbols like the Jewish kippa or Sikh turban, they seemed particularly targeted at the Muslim hijab. "I don't know players who wear the kippa," he said. "But I do know Sikh players who wear a turban... They're still playing and they haven't been banned from the court." — AFP

## International

# Talk of French right-wing alliance sparks outrage

## French conservatives' chief wants election deal with far right, in major political shift

**PARIS:** The leader of France's conservative Republicans on Tuesday called for an alliance between his party's candidates and the far right National Rally in a snap parliamentary election - a political shift that will have wide repercussions.

"We say the same things so let's stop making up imagined opposition," Eric Ciotti told TF1 television. "This is what the vast majority of our voters want. They tell us 'reach a deal'."

Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration, eurosceptic National Rally (RN) is widely expected to emerge as the strongest force after President Emmanuel Macron unexpectedly called snap elections for June 30 and July 7, although it may fall short of an absolute majority. The RN was therefore looking for allies to secure control of parliament and it immediately applauded Ciotti's comment. But this in turn means The Republicans (LR) is likely to implode.

Ciotti's comments also signified that a decades-old consensus in France's political establishment to join forces to keep the far right from the power was blowing up. The Republicans, and its previous versions — all heirs of Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Chirac's parties — were in power for large chunks of France's modern political history.

But LR is a shadow of its former self, with far fewer lawmakers, and had already lost key members to Macron's centrist party and the far right. Other mainstream parties to the left and right have also been weaker since Macron was first elected president in



This combination of photos shows French far-right RN party leader Marine Le Pen (left) and leader of the LR right-wing opposition party Eric Ciotti. — AFP

2017 on a neither-left-nor-right platform with an upstart party that wanted to reshape France's political landscape.

Philippe Gosselin, an LR lawmaker, told Reuters he would leave LR over Ciotti's comments and that LR lawmakers would create a new group. "It is unthinkable for me (and many LR MPs) that there could be the slightest agreement, the slightest alliance, even local, or personal, with the RN," Gosselin said.

Other LR veterans lined up to reject any deal with the far right. An LR parliamentary source estimated

that only about a sixth of LR lawmakers would accept such a deal. Olivier Marleix, who heads the LR group of the lower house of parliament, said on X: "What Eric Ciotti is saying is valid only for himself, he must leave the leadership of the Republicans."

Ciotti "lied to us" about his plans, said Bruno Retailleau, head of the Republicans in the Senate upper house. "This is disloyalty. It's a failure to be upright," he added. The LR speaker of the Senate, Gerard Larcher, a heavyweight figure, said he would "never swallow" an agreement with the RN and called on Ciotti to resign. But speaking to reporters, Ciotti said he would not resign and emphasized that his mandate depended on party activists.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, a past defector from the LR to Macron's alliance, described the move as a "dishonor to the Gaullist family" and compared it to the Munich accords with Nazi Germany on the eve of World War II.

### Divided

Macron's camp was quick to say Ciotti's comments were shameful and, according to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, a former LR member, reminiscent of the 1938 Munich agreements signed by France and Britain with Nazi Germany. All French political parties have been rushing to find alliances — and trying not to fall apart — since Macron announced the snap election following a poor performance by his Renaissance party in

European Parliament elections on Sunday. France's divided left-wing parties pledged to work together and nominate joint candidates in the elections but are yet to strike a formal deal. The euro dropped as did French stocks and bonds after Macron's announcement. Rating agency Moody's warned of the risk that political instability triggered by the snap election meant for France's already challenging fiscal picture.

The RN calls for protectionist "France first" economic policies and a radical cut in immigration. It would restrict childcare benefits to French citizens and withdraw residency for migrants who are out of work for more than a year. It has also proposed higher public spending, despite already significant levels of French debt, threatening to further raise financing costs at banks.

Speaking to Le Figaro, Macron said he was in for the win and that calling a snap election "was the right decision, in the interest of the country" and that it would clarify things. He ruled out resigning, whatever the result of the election.

Marine Le Pen's party would win 235 to 265 seats in the National Assembly, a huge jump from its current 88 but short of the 289 needed for an absolute majority, according to the survey by Toluna Harris Interactive for Challenges, M6 and RTL published Monday. The same poll sees LR with 40-55 seats, so the two combined might eke out an absolute majority, but with no certainty. — Agencies

## Zuma's party seeks to block S African parliament over fraud

**JOHANNESBURG:** Former South African president Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party has applied to the country's top court to block the newly elected parliament from sitting this week on the grounds that the May 29 vote was marred by fraud, it said on Tuesday. The National Assembly is due to convene on Friday for lawmakers to swear the oath of office and elect their speaker, deputy speaker and the country's president.

The challenge from MK comes as South Africa faces a level of political uncertainty unseen in 30 years of democracy, with no clarity as to who will govern the country when the electoral dust settles. The African National Congress, which has been in power since the end of apartheid in 1994, lost its majority but remains the biggest party, and is now negotiating with a range of other parties with diametrically opposed policy aspirations.

MK came a surprisingly strong third, winning 14.6 percent of the vote which translates into 58 seats in the 400-seat chamber, but despite its success it has alleged vote-rigging took place and threatened to boycott the new parliament. "The 2024 elections were anything but free and fair," said Sihle Ngunane, MK's secretary-general, in the party's application to the Constitutional Court, which it circulated to media on Tuesday via a WhatsApp group. The Independent Electoral Commission and other parties said the election was free and fair, and South Africa does not have a history of significant vote fraud.

"My view is that it's not going to change anything that happens between now and Friday," said Lawson Naidoo, executive secretary of the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution, re-



NKANDLA: Men in uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) t-shirts walk past a poster of the African National Congress (ANC), in Nkandla, South Africa on June 2, 2024. — Reuters

fering to MK's court application. He said there was not enough substance in the party's document to warrant the intervention of the Constitutional Court.

Pierre de Vos, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Cape Town, said the application would not be successful as the law was clearly against MK. "I am assuming the application was brought for political and not legal reasons," he said in a post on X.

### 'Vintage Zuma'

A new entrant in South African politics, MK gained momentum after Zuma announced in December he would be backing the party and soon became its leader. The party advocates rewriting the constitution, seizing land from white farmers and nationalizing all natural resources including mines.

Political analyst Ongama Mtimka, a lecturer at Nelson Mandela University, said it was in MK's interest to create anxiety about the outcome of the election because it wanted leverage in negotiations with the ANC and other parties. "It is only in an en-

vironment of panic that political accommodation would be considered," he said, adding: "It's vintage Zuma, playing the role of perpetual victimhood."

A longtime pillar of the ANC, Zuma fell out with the party after he was forced to quit as president in 2018 over a string of corruption scandals. He was jailed in 2021 for refusing to give evidence at a public inquiry that found there had been widespread public sector corruption during his administration. News of Zuma's jailing triggered deadly riots in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal, where extra police have been deployed in the wake of the election.

Zuma retains a vast and loyal following in the populous province, where the major city of Durban is located. MK won 45.9 percent of the parliamentary vote there, compared with a humiliating 17.6 percent for the ANC. MK's name, which means "Spear of the Nation" in Zulu, was also the name of the ANC's armed wing from the apartheid era, but an attempt by the ANC before the election to prevent its rival from using that name and branding was unsuccessful. — Reuters

## Singapore Airlines offers \$10,000 for injured passengers

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore Airlines (SIA) said Tuesday it had offered \$10,000 in compensation to passengers who suffered minor injuries on a flight hit by extreme turbulence last month and will discuss higher payouts with those more badly hurt. A 73-year-old British man died and several other passengers and crew onboard flight SQ321 from London suffered skull, brain and spine injuries during the terrifying high-altitude ordeal.

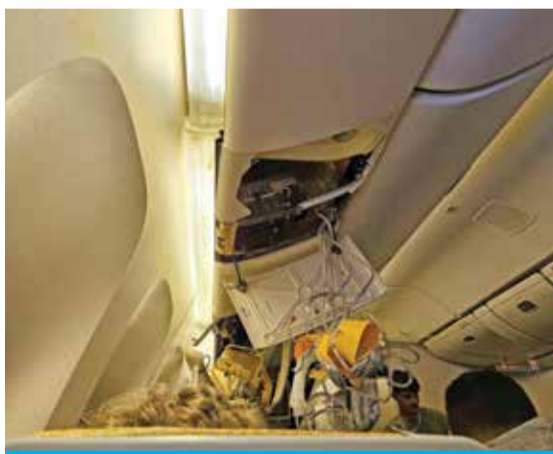
The pilots diverted the Singapore-bound Boeing 777-300ER carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew to Bangkok, where the injured were taken to hospitals. In a statement on Tuesday, SIA said it had sent out emails offering US\$10,000 in compensation to passengers who sustained minor injuries during the incident.

"For those who sustained more serious injuries ... we have invited them to discuss a compensation offer to meet each of their specific circumstances when they feel well and ready to do so," the airline said. "Passengers medically assessed as having sustained serious injuries, requiring long-term medical care, and requesting financial assistance are offered an advance payment of US\$25,000 to address their immediate needs. "This will be part of the final compensation that these passengers will receive."

In addition, the carrier said it would refund the airfares of all passengers on the flight, including those who were not injured. "All passengers will also receive delay compensation in accordance with the relevant European Union or United Kingdom regulations," it said.

As of Tuesday afternoon, 11 passengers from the flight were still receiving treatment in hospitals in Bangkok, a SIA spokesperson told AFP.

An international agreement, the Montreal Convention, makes airlines liable for physical injuries from accidents on international flights, which can include turbulence, regardless of whether they were negligent. If passengers file a lawsuit, the airline cannot contest



BANGKOK: The interior of Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 is pictured after an emergency landing in Bangkok, Thailand on May 21, 2024. — Reuters

damages up to about \$175,000, but if greater damages are sought, Singapore Airlines can try to limit liability by proving it took all necessary measures to avoid the turbulence, lawyers say.

Individuals' travel insurance policies will probably cover injuries from aircraft turbulence, but policies may vary, the Association of British Insurers said after the incident. Travel claims lawyer Peter Carter said his Australia-based firm, Carter Capner Law, which represents some passengers, is paying close attention to what accident reports may say about the type of turbulence and whether pilots could have avoided it.

SIA earlier gave Sg\$1,000 (\$740) to each passenger departing Bangkok for their final destination to cover their immediate expenses. It has also been shouldering the medical expenses of the injured passengers, and had arranged for their family members to fly to Bangkok when requested.

In a preliminary report, Singapore's Transport Ministry said a rapid change in gravitational force and a drop in altitude of 54 m (177 ft) probably caused passengers and crew to become airborne. The plane was probably flying over an area of "developing convective activity", it said, using a term referring to developing bad weather. — Agencies

## Resignation attempts, gloom as Macron camp weighs election gamble

**PARIS:** When French President Emmanuel Macron told his young prime minister of his decision to call a snap election just hours before announcing it on television, Gabriel Attal tried to dissuade his boss, asking him to accept his resignation instead, two sources told Reuters. "I can be the fall guy," Attal implored Macron, after his efforts at dissuasion went nowhere, according to a minister and another government source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Macron declined Attal's offer, and a few hours later, as exit polls showed Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) trouncing his ticket, he dissolved parliament. The resignation bid by Attal, initially reported by Le Monde newspaper and other French media, underlines how Macron's shock decision to bet the house on snap elections was not universally applauded by his camp and threatened to prematurely curtail their political project. Attal's office did not respond to a request for comment.

The 34-year-old Attal, France's youngest ever prime minister when he took office in January, has been mooted as a potential Macron successor in 2027, but now risks losing his job to the RN's 28-year-old party president Jordan Bardella. Attal was unaware of Macron's plans, which he had kept from all but a tiny circle of advisors, the sources said.

Among them was Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, another potential successor and snap vote advocate, and Bruno Roger-Petit, an ex-journalist-turned-strategist who has masterminded Macron's rightward shift over the last few years. Macron's calculation, which he had arrived at with close advisors over several weeks before Sunday's announcement, was that it was better to blindsight his opponents with an immediate election than wait for inevitable conservative no-confidence motions later in the year when he would be weaker.

At a hastily convened cabinet meeting on Sunday night, shortly after announcing the snap vote, stunned ministers listened in silence as Macron said he wanted to give the French people a chance to "take back control" of their parliament, and reinstate order in an increasingly chaotic chamber, sources said. "There was surprise, a bit of perplexity, some combativeness from those who were favorable to the option, such as Gerald," one source present at the Elysee palace meeting said.

Attal, meanwhile, has been tasked by Macron with leading his ticket in the lightning, three-week campaign, the two sources said. Attal has yet to make any public comment since resigning, although he told lawmakers behind closed doors on Tuesday that the "die was not cast" and that he would do everything to "avoid the worst." There was also wide concern across Europe. "The problem is what his decision will mean for the rest of us," one EU diplomat said.

Macron has long been frustrated by the fractious lower house that resulted from the previous parliamentary elections in 2022, when he lost his governing majority, with hard-left lawmakers in particular often using spectacular filibustering tactics. His entourage said the president made his decision after last week's 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, when he met people out and about who said they were tired of endless political infighting in parliament. But the plan came into sharper focus as it became clear Le Pen would inflict a humiliating defeat in Sunday's vote.

One source with knowledge of Macron's battle plan said he is convinced he can win, betting that the short campaign — the minimum allowed by the constitution — will wrongfoot his foes. The source said Macron also expects the left to fail to unite this time round, unlike in 2022 when Greens, Socialists and the radical left France Unbowed agreed on a common platform that did well in the two-round voting system. —Reuters

## ICC chief prosecutor 'extremely concerned' about Darfur atrocities

**THE HAGUE:** The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Tuesday voiced serious concern about violence raging in Sudan's Darfur, urging witnesses to send his office evidence to aid their investigation. War has raged for more than a year between the regular military under army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

The city of El-Fasher in North Darfur has seen fierce fighting since May 10, with at least 192 killed and more than 1,200 wounded, according to medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF). "I am extremely concerned about allegations of widespread international crimes being committed in El-Fasher and its surrounding areas," prosecutor Karim Khan said in a statement.

Evidence already collected "seems to show credible, repeated, expanding, continuous allegations of attacks against the civilian population," said Khan. El-Fasher is the only state capital in the vast western region not under RSF control, and a key humanitarian hub for a region on the brink of famine.

The city's last operating hospital has been closed due to paramilitary attacks. MSF announced on Monday, saying it was "outraged" that RSF fighters opened fire inside the hospital. Khan said there was also evidence apparently showing "the widespread, prevalent use of rape and other forms of sexual violence" and attacks against hospitals.

"It is an outrage that we are allowing history to repeat itself once again in Darfur," said the prosecutor. "We cannot and we must not allow Darfur to become the world's forgotten atrocity, once again," added Khan.

The war across Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people, including up to 15,000 in a single West Darfur town, UN experts say. Nearly nine million people have been forced from their homes. —AFP

## Business

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2024

# Apple partners with OpenAI as it unveils 'Apple Intelligence'

US tech giant seeks to catch up to rivals racing ahead on adopting the white hot technology

CUPERTINO, US: Apple on Monday unveiled "Apple Intelligence," its suite of new AI features for its coveted devices—and a partnership with OpenAI—as it seeks to catch up to rivals racing ahead on adopting the white hot technology.

For months, pressure has been on Apple to persuade doubters on its AI strategy, after Microsoft and Google rolled out products in rapid-fire succession. But this latest move will take the experience of Apple products "to new heights," chief executive Tim Cook said as he opened an annual Worldwide Developers Conference at the tech giant's headquarters in the Silicon Valley city of Cupertino, California.

To help towards that end, Apple has partnered with OpenAI, which ushered in a new era for generative artificial intelligence in 2022 with the arrival of ChatGPT. OpenAI was "very happy to be partnering with Apple to integrate ChatGPT into their devices later this year! Think you will really like it," posted the company's chief Sam Altman on social media.

Apple Intelligence will also be added to a new version of the iOS 18 operating system, similarly unveiled Monday at the week-long conference. Apple executives stressed privacy safeguards have been built into Apple Intelligence to make its Siri digital assistant and other products smarter, without pilfering user data. The big challenge for Apple has been how to infuse ChatGPT-style AI—which voraciously feeds off data—into its products without weakening its heavily promoted user privacy and security, according to analysts.

The system "puts powerful generative models right at the core of your iPhone, iPad and Mac," said Apple senior vice president of software engineering Craig Federighi. "It draws on your personal context to give you intelligence that's most helpful and relevant for you, and it protects your privacy at every step." But Tesla and SpaceX tycoon Elon Musk lashed out at the partnership, saying the threat to data security will make him ban iPhones at his companies.

"Apple has no clue what's actually going on once they hand your data over to OpenAI. They're selling you down the river," Musk said in a post on social media. Musk is building his own rival to OpenAI, xAI, and is using the company that he helped found in 2015.

Apple Intelligence, which runs only on the company's in-house technology, will enable users to create their own emojis based on a description in everyday language, or to generate brief summaries of e-mails in the mailbox. Apple said Siri, its voice assistant, will



CUPERTINO: Apple CEO Tim Cook attends a panel discussion with Craig Federighi and John Giannandrea during the annual developer conference event at the company's headquarters in Cupertino, California on June 10, 2024. — Reuters

also get an AI infused upgrade and now will appear as a pulsating light on the edge of your home screen.

Launched over 12 years ago, Siri has long since been seen as a dated feature, overtaken by the new generation of assistants, such as GPT-4o, OpenAI's latest offering. GPT-4o grabbed the headlines last month when actress Scarlett Johansson accused OpenAI of copying her voice to embody the assistant after she turned down an offer to work with the company. OpenAI has denied this, but suspended the use of the new voice

in its products. In its deal with OpenAI, users can choose to enhance Siri on certain requests with ChatGPT, Federighi said. "It sounds like it's Apple—then if it needs ChatGPT, it offers it to you," Techsponential analyst Avi Greengart said.

"The implementation is what is special here." The partnership with OpenAI was not exclusive, unlike Apple's landmark tie-up with Google for search, which has drawn the scrutiny of antitrust regulators. Apple said it expected to announce support for other AI models in the future. The

company founded by Steve Jobs had remained very quiet on AI since the start of the ChatGPT-sparked frenzy, with Apple for a while avoiding the term altogether. But the pressure became too great, with Wall Street propelling Microsoft past Apple as the world's biggest company when measured by stock price, largely because of the Windows-maker's unabashed embrace of AI. Wall Street investors were not overly impressed by the AI announcements with Apple's share price down nearly two percent at close on Monday. — AFP

## Aramco stake sale brings rare foreign investment to Saudi

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia began preparing more than a year ago to sell a new chunk of state oil giant Aramco, targeting foreign investment that has lagged goals for years and is needed for an ambitious economic transformation. The preparations led by CEO Amin Nasser paid off. Over half of the \$11.2 billion Aramco shares were sold to foreign investors, a far cry from five years ago, when they largely shunned its \$29.4 billion initial public offering, citing concerns about risks around governance, regional geopolitics and the environment. Foreign money is critical for projects under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 to diversify the economy and end the kingdom's reliance on oil.

More than 100 new investors bought into the \$1.8 trillion company, one source familiar with the matter said. It was not immediately clear how many of those were from outside the region, though the source said they included investors from the United States, Britain, Hong Kong and Japan.

## Wall St slips before inflation data, Fed move; Apple rebounds

NEW YORK: Wall Street's main indexes declined on Tuesday as caution dampened investor enthusiasm ahead of a crucial inflation reading and a policy announcement from the Federal Reserve expected this week. Shares of Apple rose one percent to hit a record high after declining in the previous session following its long-awaited AI strategy, presented at a developer conference. However, major banks including JPMorgan Chase & Co, Citigroup and Bank of America dropped over 2 percent, sending the broader banking index down to a seven-week low. The S&P 500 and the Nasdaq posted record closing highs on Monday in a choppy session, boosted by shares of Nvidia after its 10-for-one stock split. Markets are readying for Wednesday's release of the Consumer Price Index report for May and the conclusion of the Fed's two-day policy meeting.

"There's an abnormal amount of anxiety around these numbers and around the Fed meeting, particularly after the jobs report on Friday," said Thomas Hayes, chairman at Great Hill Capital LLC. The central bank is not expected to change rates but will release its updated economic projections and "dot plot", which shows where policymakers expect interest rates to stand over the next few years and in the longer term. The CPI num-

bers and the Fed's projections will be scrutinized closely as recent reports have sent out conflicting signals on the economy's underlying health. "If they (Fed policymakers) take down growth a bit, then they will have cover to keep two dots on the dot plot, which would be very bullish for markets. So this trepidation you're seeing is a fear of 'what if that doesn't happen,'" Hayes said. Markets are pricing in a 54.4 percent chance of the Fed's first rate cut happening in September, according to the CME's FedWatch tool. Rate futures also imply just one cut this year, compared to two before Friday's bumper Nonfarm Payrolls data.

Other rate-sensitive growth stocks slipped, with Microsoft, Meta Platforms and Amazon.com falling between 0.4 percent and 0.7 percent, while Tesla dropped over 3 percent to an over one-month low. At 9.43 am ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 316.10 points, or 0.81 percent, at 38,551.94, the S&P 500 was down 20.73 points, or 0.39 percent, at 5,340.06, and the Nasdaq Composite was down 10.86 points, or 0.06 percent, at 17,181.67.

Ten of the S&P 500's 11 sectors declined, with energy, utilities and financials all losing over 1 percent each. The small-caps Russell 2000 Index also dropped 1 percent. Prison operators CoreCivic and Target Hospitality slumped 23.2 percent and 37.1 percent, respectively, after the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement said it would close a detention center in Texas. Cryptocurrency-linked stocks slipped as bitcoin slid 3.8 percent, with bitcoin miners Riot Platforms and Marathon Digital and crypto exchange Coinbase falling between 5.7 percent and 8.8 percent. —Reuters

fortably for now, analysts have said, despite debt-to-GDP soaring to 26.2 percent at the end of March from just 5.7 percent at the end of 2015.

Saudi Arabia has posted a budget surplus only once since 2014, in 2022 - when Brent crude averaged around \$100 and Aramco posted a record \$161.1 billion in profit. Aramco has helped lift FDI previously. In 2021 and 2022, inflows increased significantly after the company signed lease-and-lease-back agreements for its oil and gas pipeline networks with the likes of BlackRock and EIG.

Even with those deals, FDI remained far from the \$100 billion by 2030 goal, peaking at \$32.8 billion in 2022. FDI last year was \$19.2 billion, under a fifth of the target and less than 3 percent higher than in 2018. "Since foreign investors weren't interested in direct ownership of those projects, the Saudi government has managed to bring in outsiders' cash via the alternate route of Aramco shares," Krane said.

Saudi Arabia remains among countries emerging-market asset managers are most underweight in, and foreign ownership had fallen in Aramco in the six months preceding the share sale, said Steven Holden, founder of Copley Fund Research.

"At some point, one hopes the Saudi government can improve its institutional profile to the extent that foreigners feel comfortable putting their cash to work into the kingdom," Krane said. — Reuters



World Bank Deputy Chief Economist Ayhan Kose

## Global growth well below pre-COVID levels: World Bank

WASHINGTON: The World Bank said on Tuesday the US economy's stronger-than-expected performance has prompted it to lift its 2024 global growth outlook slightly but warned that overall output would remain well below pre-pandemic levels through 2026.

The World Bank said in its latest Global Economic Prospects report that the global economy would avoid a third consecutive drop in real GDP growth since a major post-pandemic jump in 2021, with 2024 growth stabilizing at 2.6 percent, unchanged from 2023. That's up 0.2 percentage point from the World Bank's January forecast, largely on the strength of US demand.

"In a sense, we see the runway for a soft landing," World Bank Deputy Chief Economist Ayhan Kose told Reuters in an interview, noting that sharply higher interest rates have brought down inflation without major job losses and other disruptions in the US or other major economies. "That's the good news. What is not good news is that we may be stuck in the slow lane," Kose added. The World Bank forecast global growth of 2.7 percent in both 2025 and 2026, a level well below the 3.1 percent global average in the decade prior to COVID-19. It also is forecasting that interest rates in the next three years will remain double their 2000-2019 average, keeping a brake on growth and adding debt pressure to emerging market countries that have borrowed in dollars.

Countries representing 80 percent of the world's population and GDP output will see weaker growth through 2026 than they had prior to the pandemic, the report said. "Prospects for the world's poorest economies are even more worrisome. They face punishing levels of debt service, constricting trade possibilities and costly climate events," said World Bank Chief Economist Indermit Gill, adding that those countries will continue to require international assistance to fund their needs. —Reuters



The German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany, June 11, 2024. — Reuters



## Business

# Burgan Bank participates in Oracle's digital transformation conference

## Participation in line with bank's dedicated digital transformation strategy

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently participated in the one-day digital transformation conference hosted by Oracle, titled "Navigating Digital Transformation: Oracle's Blueprint for Data and Application Platforms Excellence and Security". The bank was represented by Barrak Al-Mattar, General Manager – Information Technology, who took part alongside 61 market leaders and decision-makers in the public and private sectors, whose efforts and contributions continue to shape the digital transformation journey of Kuwait. Burgan's participation stems from its expansive technology and digital transformation strategy, coupled with its vision to be the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait. Commenting on his participation in the

event, Al-Mattar said: "We live in a world where digital transformation is no longer the next frontier but a reality and a mandate for the success of any business. At Burgan Bank, we have long since placed innovation and technology at the center of our operations as well as the products and services we deliver to our customers and the market. However, our success would not have been possible without our strategic partners who continue to supply us with cutting-edge solutions and disruptive technologies that respond to the market's evolving challenges and needs."

Al-Mattar added that events such as Oracle's 'Navigating Digital Transformation' are essential for bringing together key decision-makers from across Kuwait's various industries in order to share

insights, discuss potential opportunities for collaboration, and altogether build an integrated ecosystem that ultimately strengthens the domestic economy and benefits all of its businesses.

The event shed light on Oracle's latest database innovations, data management best practices, means to simplify and automate, and ways to protect valuable data, closing with a panel showcase of Burgan Bank's successful adoption and implementation of Oracle's latest technologies and solutions in finance and banking.

Al-Mattar further added: "On our mission of leading with innovation and developing a native digital banking experience, it is vital that we continue to adopt the latest state-of-the-art technologies that guarantee ultimate safety for our

customers' data while maintaining convenience and seamlessness with every transaction, operation, or query."

As a prominent champion of digital transformation in Kuwait's banking sector, Burgan Bank has developed several bespoke digital products and services that optimize and elevate its customers' overall experience. These innovations include everything from the Bank's seamless SMS and digital onboarding to the ease of digitally opening several accounts in less than a minute and flagship innovations such as the 'Tijarati' one-stop-shop for merchants. Other digital transformation milestones include the introduction of virtual cards, an enhanced AI-powered chatbot assistant, and the constant development of the Bank's digital banking platform.



Barrak Al-Mattar

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### China firm Dexin ordered to liquidate by Hong Kong court

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong court ordered the liquidation of Chinese developer Dexin on Tuesday, according to a report, making it the latest firm to be hit with such an order as the sector struggles with a long-running debt crisis. The decision comes as Beijing tries to shore up the industry, which accounts for a huge portion of the world's number two economy and is causing a headache for leaders struggling to boost growth. Dexin joined the growing ranks of Chinese developers under pressure from creditors in the aftermath of a years-long crisis in China's property market. — AFP

### Production starts at Senegal's first offshore oil field

DAKAR: Production has started at Senegal's first offshore oil project, Australian operator Woodside Energy said on Tuesday, adding the West African country to the club of crude-producing nations. "This is a historic day for Senegal and for Woodside," said the company's chief executive, Meg O'Neill, calling the extraction of oil from the Sangomar field "a key milestone". The floating facility is moored about 100 kilometres (60 miles) offshore and has a storage capacity of 1.3 million barrels, Woodside said. The project aims to produce 100,000 barrels of oil per day. The field also contains natural gas. — AFP

### French tech group Atos chooses Onepoint financial rescue offer

PARIS: Struggling French tech group Atos, an Olympics partner and key French defence contractor, said on Tuesday it had chosen a financial rescue offer by a consortium led by Onepoint, its main shareholder. Atos - which runs supercomputers for France's nuclear deterrent, holds contracts with the French army and is the IT partner for the Paris Olympics - is sagging under almost five billion euros (\$5.4 billion) of debt. "Atos' Board of Directors has decided to proceed with the financial restructuring proposal submitted by the Onepoint consortium consisting of Onepoint, Butler Industries and Econocom, and a group of some of the company's financial creditors," a company statement said. — AFP

### China issues rules to push cross-border e-commerce

BEIJING: China on Tuesday issued draft rules to promote construction of overseas warehouses and expand cross-border e-commerce businesses, which have become a vital force in its foreign trade, according to the Chinese commerce ministry. Companies including Shein, PDD Holdings' Temu and Alibaba's AliExpress, which predominantly ship made-in-China products "cross border" to markets around the world have been rapidly growing in recent years. This has opened a new avenue for growth for some firms previously focused on domestic consumption, which remains muted by a macroeconomic slowdown, prolonged property crisis and income insecurity. — Reuters

## India's Sitharaman gets finance again amid new challenges

NEW DELHI: Nirmala Sitharaman, who is credited with India's economic success over the past five years, will remain finance minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, taking on the challenge of ensuring more equitable growth across the world's most populous nation.

Sitharaman, 64, who became the nation's first full-time female finance minister in 2019, is a trained economist under whose tenure the Indian economy has charted a path of high growth and fiscal prudence. But discontent in the countryside over a lack of jobs and high inflation prevented Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from securing a majority, leaving it dependent on alliance partners.

The decision to keep Sitharaman as finance minister signals Modi is vying for policy continuity in his third term, said Madhavi Arora, lead economist at brokerage Emkay Global.

"With Sitharaman returning to the ministry, it will be business as usual for the markets," Arora said. Still, Sitharaman may need to tweak policies, such as by lowering taxes for individuals and increasing handouts for the poor, to ensure that benefits of India's high growth trickle down more

## China's discount wars risk cementing frugal consumer mindset

SHANGHAI: An aggressive market grab by low-cost Chinese retailers has delivered bumper earnings for some firms but has also intensified a bruising price war, exacerbating deflationary fears in the world's second-largest economy. From coffee to cars to clothes, China's discount retailers have cut prices on just about everything as they chase a consumer whose confidence has been battered by a property crisis, high unemployment and a gloomy economic outlook.

While the retail downshift has propelled revenues for firms like discount e-commerce platform Pinduoduo against larger rivals such as Alibaba, economists fear their success is entrenching a Japanese-style deflationary mindset in the consumer that will be difficult to shake. As retailers compete on price above all else, they force tough cost cuts onto their suppliers, squeezing profit margins. This in turn leads to lower wage growth or higher dependency on low-paid gig work, hurting household demand.

"If this situation continues, China may end up with what we call a vicious cycle: lower value added consumption, deflation, low profit rates leading to low wages, which further pushes consumers to downgrade their consumption," said He-Ling Shi, an economics professor at Monash University in Melbourne. In the most recent earnings season, revenues for low-cost firms beat market expectations and outpaced their competitors.

Revenues of PDD Holdings, which owns Pinduoduo, surged 131% while China's leading food delivery app Meituan saw 25 percent growth. Discount retailer Miniso and Luckin Coffee reported growth of 26 percent for 42 percent, respectively.

PDD, Meituan, Miniso and Luckin Coffee did not immediately respond to requests for comment. China's consumer price data for May due on Wednesday is expected to show a slight uptick in inflation to 0.4 percent from 0.3 percent April. However, analysts expect the headline figures will mostly be propped up by utility price hikes, masking more critical deflationary pressures.

In an environment where consumer confidence is

in London on Tuesday morning last week to meet investors, then travelled to New York that evening to meet money managers there on Wednesday, showing face at the two financial centers in a little over a day.

"He wanted to make sure investors heard from the very top of the company along with other C suite members, namely the CFO in London and the Chief Strategy Officer in New York," the source said.

Despite reviewing material for weeks ahead of the road show, Nasser spent another four hours going over it during his six-hour flight to the British capital. "He was strategic but could also get into the details," the source said. Saudi Arabia has been seeking to lure international investment to pour tens of billions of dollars into projects to diversify away from its reliance on oil. Yet foreign inflows have repeatedly lagged targets. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 is funding projects from electric vehicles to futuristic cities in the desert, mainly via its Public Investment Fund (PIF).

Foreign investors largely steered clear of the 2019

widely across the Indian population.

"Some of the previous government's capex plans may be diverted to more welfare and subsidy spending," Capital Economics said in a note after the election verdict last week. The world's fifth-largest economy is forecast to grow by 7.2 percent during the financial year ending March 2025, after a rapid 8.2 percent expansion the previous year. However, growth has been lopsided, with urban centres growing much faster than rural parts.

During her first term as finance minister, Sitharaman took a decision to bring down corporate tax rates, hoping it would lead to a pickup in private investment and create jobs. This has not happened and reforms needed to push investment under a coalition government may be difficult, said independent economist Govinda Rao.

"The fact that they have to depend on coalition partners constrains the (Modi) government's ability to take fundamental reforms," Rao said, referring to changes in the country's land and labour laws seen as critical to boosting its manufacturing sector.

"The reforms will have to be incremental." Over the past five years, the federal finance ministry under Sitharaman has brought down the budget gap from more than 9 percent of gross domestic product in 2020-21 to a targeted 5.1 percent for 2024-25. "A finance minister's job is not easy; everyone wants more money and she has been able to walk on the path of fiscal consolidation," Rao added.

India's accounting processes have also become more transparent under her, he said. In May,



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman holds up a folder with the Government of India's logo as she leaves her office to present the federal budget in the parliament in New Delhi, India, Feb 1, 2024. — Reuters

S&P Global Ratings raised India's sovereign rating outlook to 'positive' from 'stable', citing the country's improving finances and robust economic expansion. India's benchmark equity indices have doubled during her five-year term, while Indian government bonds have been included in the prestigious JPMorgan Global Emerging Market Index and Bloomberg index.

Investors are expected to take comfort from Sitharaman continuing as finance minister. "Sitharaman is not prone to making dramatic changes and in that sense there is comfort that broad policy direction will continue," said Arora. — Reuters



BEIJING: A customer shops at a store of Chinese retailer MINISO Group in Beijing. — AFP

near rock bottom, price is king. Car makers in China have been in a price war for almost two years due to tepid domestic demand. Over the past two months, some car dealers and auto financing firms have launched loan programs with no down payment and even zero interest. Starbucks, which saw its China revenues decline 8 percent in the first quarter due to what CEO Laxman Narasimhan described as "fierce competition among value players" has in recent months increased its use of discount coupons to bring prices closer to Luckin Coffee.

CEO of food delivery giant Meituan, Wang Xing, said last week the firm had expanded coupon offerings and onboarded more delivery-only kitchens with lower overheads than dine-in restaurants. The app's newer hotel booking business is pursuing what Wang called a "low star" strategy targeting cost-conscious domestic travelers. Alibaba's domestic e-commerce unit Taobao and Tmall Group and JD.com, which saw single-digit revenue growth, said in post-earnings calls that price competitiveness will be key to future growth.

Both companies have introduced longer sales pe-

riods for China's mid-year shopping festival, known as "618", with lowest-price guarantees for millions of products. In response, Pinduoduo has launched an "automated price-tracking system" to enable merchants to monitor and beat rivals.

An internal memo to staff sent by JD.com founder Richard Liu describing his firm as "bloated" has led to speculation the company will respond to the increased competition by cutting jobs - which is the opposite of what China needs for domestic demand to recover. Longer-term, price wars may take out weaker players in various industries, allowing rivals to then lift prices and give their supply chains some respite, said Albert Hu, professor of economics at the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai. He warned, however, that they would only be able to do so if growth in other industries creates enough jobs and income growth to compensate for any market exits triggered by price wars in consumer goods. "Deflation is a serious issue, Japan has struggled with it for over three decades," said Hu. "A critical factor is wage growth." — Reuters

## From London to NY: Aramco boss' quest to lure investors

DUBAI: Aramco boss Amin Nasser went against his banking advisers' guidance to go straight to New York for a roadshow where the state oil giant's shares were on sale, and instead got on a plane to London first. The soft-spoken chief executive, a Saudi-educated engineer, did not want to leave any stone unturned to drum up support for his multi-billion dollar secondary offering and avoid the tepid response from foreign money the Saudi oil giant got for its debut listing nearly five years ago.

"He said he doesn't want to divide and conquer but to unite and conquer," a financial source told Reuters. The head of Saudi Arabia's crown jewel landed

initial public offering (IPO), citing persistent concerns about risks around governance, the environment and regional geopolitics. This time around, they had questions over Aramco's gas strategy, hydrogen and renewables - and Nasser was there to chat. His strategy appears to have been successful.

Over half of the \$11.2 billion transaction was allocated to foreign investors. The identity of the buyers and how many of them were from outside the region was not immediately clear. A source with knowledge of the matter has told Reuters more than 100 new investors, including from the United States, Britain, Hong Kong and Japan, bought into Aramco.

While Nasser's visits did help, so did the company's generous dividend policy. It is expected to shell out \$124.3 billion this year, after \$97.8 billion in dividends in 2023. The bulk of that will still go to state coffers, though, as the kingdom directly and indirectly holds more than 98 percent of the oil giant. Aramco, a cash cow for the Saudi state, has boosted dividends, introducing a new performance-linked



HOUSTON: Amin H Nasser, President & Chief Executive Officer Saudi Aramco, speaks during the CERAWeek energy conference in Houston, Texas. — Reuters

payout last year to entice investors even as lower production hit earnings. Saudi Arabia is producing about 75 percent of its maximum capacity of crude oil. "Aramco has continued to pay the dividends even during COVID for example," the financial source said. "It's hard to resist." — Reuters

# IKEA unveils a completely new showroom at The Avenues

Inspired by all the customers that visited IKEA during 40 years



CEO for IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco Marino Maganto cutting the ribbon.



**KUWAIT:** IKEA Kuwait, the leader in life at home, unveiled the fully renovated IKEA The Avenues showroom, offering the visitors in Kuwait an unprecedented shopping experience and a level of inspiration like never before. The launch event which was held yesterday in IKEA The Avenues, was chaired by Marino Maganto, CEO for IKEA Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco.

"In a world where home is the heart of our lives, at IKEA Kuwait we believe that the space around you should inspire you every day. Over the last 40 years, we have listened to your stories, learned from your everyday challenges, and witnessed how you have turned our room sets into your own personal and inspiring place called home", welcomed Marino Maganto, IKEA CEO for Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco.

"The renovation of IKEA The Avenues showroom is our appreciation and recognition to you and the time that we have been together - a new spark of inspiration to WOW you like when we met for

the first time. We have reimagined our new showroom to reflect the heart and soul of everything we learned from you and your home." "We have created bigger, more inspirational and immersive spaces that not only display the great IKEA solutions, but also present a canvas for your imagination, where every space you find will engage you into an inspirational journey to your dream home", explained Maganto.

The new IKEA The Avenues showroom incorporates bigger spaces that are now even more relevant to the way we live in Kuwait, taking inspiration to a level you have never seen before. You can imagine any new room you may want, from your dream walk-in wardrobe, to the most amazing kitchen to impress your neighbors. From a diwaniya that you would never think you could find in IKEA, to the most amazing gaming room to play with your kids or your friends. You will also find storage solutions that will help you make the most of your space across all the different areas of the home. It is your choice if

you prefer hiding or displaying your favorite items.

"It is very important to mention children when talking about home. We believe that children are the most important people in the world. In IKEA, we want to create better homes for the families of Kuwait, as the home is a great space for children to explore and learn while playing. Creating inspiring spaces that transform dreams into reality, we help children progress through different developmental stages", explained Maganto.

"Today, while celebrating the relaunch of IKEA The Avenues Showroom, we are also announcing the second round of permanent price reductions of IKEA favorites. Continuing to drive one of our key commitments with the people of Kuwait, to be more affordable every year, we have invested on many more of the most loved iconic IKEA products so that more and more people in Kuwait can afford them", added Maganto. We also want to contribute to the 2035 plan for a more sustainable Kuwait, enabling and inspiring people



to live more sustainably. Focusing on affordable, resource and energy-efficient solutions and ideas to live a healthier and more active life, we're paving the way for more sustainable homes in Kuwait",

explained Maganto. We encourage everyone to visit IKEA the Avenues to be inspired and surprised, while enjoying an exciting journey and a seamless shopping experience.



## UK PM woos voters with tax cuts and home ownership

**SILVERSTONE, UK:** UK leader Rishi Sunak on Tuesday sought to get his lackluster general election campaign back on track by promising voters tax cuts and lower immigration as he launched his Conservative party's manifesto.

The prime minister channeled Tory heroine Margaret Thatcher by pledges of greater home ownership to woo a largely disaffected electorate away from frontrunners Labour before the poll on July 4.

"We Conservatives have a plan to give you financial security," said Sunak, unveiling his party's blueprint for a fifth consecutive term in office at Silverstone, home of the British Formula 1 Grand Prix.

Centre-left Labour are in pole position, however, and Tuesday's launch marked one of Sunak's last chances to close the gap in his bid to overtake the main opposition. Sunak, appointed party leader by fellow Tories in October 2022 after Liz Truss's disastrous tenure, has endured a nightmare election campaign in which he was even forced to deny rumours that he might quit.

Polls have predicted for many months that Labour, led by former human rights lawyer Keir Starmer, will win a huge majority and return to power after almost a decade and a half in opposition.

Sunak's uphill battle was last week made even harder after right-wing firebrand Nigel Farage announced he was running to become an MP, and the prime minister drew near-universal criticism for leaving D-Day commemoration events early. The Tories pledged to cut national insurance paid by employees and employers for state health, unemployment and pensions for a third time this year if re-elected and scrap it for the self-employed.

The party also promised to abolish stamp duty up to the value of £425,000 (\$540,000) for first-time home buyers and end capital gains tax for landlords who sell properties to their tenants.

Sunak said his government would pay for lower taxes by cracking down on welfare payments



SILVERSTONE: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivers a speech to launch the Conservatives' general election manifesto in Silverstone, central England, on June 11, 2024.— AFP

for people of working age. "We are the party of Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Lawson—the party that believes in sound money," Sunak said, referring to the free market former Tory prime minister and her finance minister. "We are the party of the property-owning democracy," said Sunak, 44, who even on Monday night admitted in a television interview that owning a home had got harder under the Tories in the last 14 years.

Critics also point to record low levels of house building and high mortgage rates under the Tories, blamed on Sunak's short-lived predecessor Liz Truss's promise of unfunded tax cuts.

A shortage in supply has increased prices, including for renters already hit by cost-of-living pressures. Sunak elsewhere promised that his government would halve record levels of immigration, including with a "regular rhythm" of flights carrying failed asylum seekers to Rwanda.

He accused Labour of wanting to increase the tax burden on households although the figures are in dispute. Starmer said the money was not there to pay for Sunak's pledges and warned the manifesto was a "recipe for five more years of chaos". — AFP

## Malaysia's palm oil stocks hit 3-month high in May

**KUALA LUMPUR/MUMBAI:** Malaysia's palm oil stocks rose marginally to a three-month high in May, as strong exports were offset by a rebound in production, the industry regulator said on Monday. Malaysia's palm oil stocks rose 0.5 percent from the previous month to 1.75 million metric tons, the highest since February, the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) said.

The data from the world's second-largest palm oil producer after Indonesia could potentially weigh on benchmark futures. Prices were down about 0.6

percent by the midday trading break. Crude palm oil production gained 13.48 percent from April to 1.70 million tons, the biggest in six months. Palm oil exports also rose to a six-month high of 1.38 million tons, up 11.66 percent from April, the MPOB said. A Reuters survey had forecast May inventories at 1.75 million tons, with output at 1.65 million tons and exports at 1.41 million tons.

"The growth in production has far exceeded industry expectations," said a New Delhi-based dealer with a global trade house. "If this trend continues in the coming months, prices could come under pressure, especially if exports don't rise above 1.5 million tons, which looks difficult." The MPOB report is neutral for the market, said Anilkumar Bagani, research head of vegetable oils broker Sunvin Group. Palm oil's discount to rival soybean and sunflower oil makes it attractive to price-sensitive buyers such as India, he said. — Reuters

## IMF reaches deal with Kenya, urges fiscal consolidation

**NAIROBI:** Kenya has reached a staff level agreement with the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday, the organization said, paving the way for the disbursement of about \$976 million. The fund said in a statement that if its Executive Board approves a second review of Kenya's Resilience and Sustainability Facility, it would have immediate access to \$120 million.

The lender also urged the East African nation to adjust its 2024/25 budget to include more revenue raising measures, as a worsening in the primary fiscal balance in the previous financial year and a tax collection shortfall was expected to keep domestic borrowing needs high. Although Kenya has been facing liquidity challenges since 2022, it managed to sell a new \$1.5 billion Eurobond from international markets in February, albeit at a steep price, to partly buy back another Eurobond that is maturing in June. The issuance assuaged investor concerns about a po-

tential default, restored foreign investors confidence in the economy and caused the shilling currency to strengthen against the dollar.

The fund said fiscal adjustments for 2024/25 could remedy the situation. "Authorities have taken decisive steps towards fiscal consolidation by introducing several measures in the context of the draft 2024/25 Budget and the 2024 Finance Bill," it added.

The finance minister is due to present the 2024/25 (July-June) budget to parliament on Thursday. Parliament approved overall spending for the year at 4 trillion shillings (\$31 billion), up from the 3.75 trillion shillings the minister presented last June for the 2023/24 year. That budget was later adjusted to 3.85 trillion shillings. The 2024/25 budget will be accompanied by the Finance Bill 2024, a separate law outlining revenue-raising proposals which some critics say some could cripple sectors including financial services, transport, manufacturing and retail.

Kenya's current IMF deal, which is for a total of \$3.6 billion, was agreed in April 2021. The current review is the seventh under the program. Last week, the central bank governor said Kenya will use part of a \$1.2 billion World Bank budget support loan to make a payment of roughly \$500 million on a Eurobond maturing this month. — Reuters

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2024

## G7 to meet in luxury Italian oasis favoured by Madonna



A luxury southern Italian resort frequented by Madonna and Justin Timberlake will host the G7 leaders this week, a secluded oasis far from the public, media and any potential protesters.

Borgo Egnazia, a complex built from scratch in the style of a traditional village, is located on Italy's Adriatic coast near Bari in Puglia, the region which forms the "heel" of the boot-shaped country.

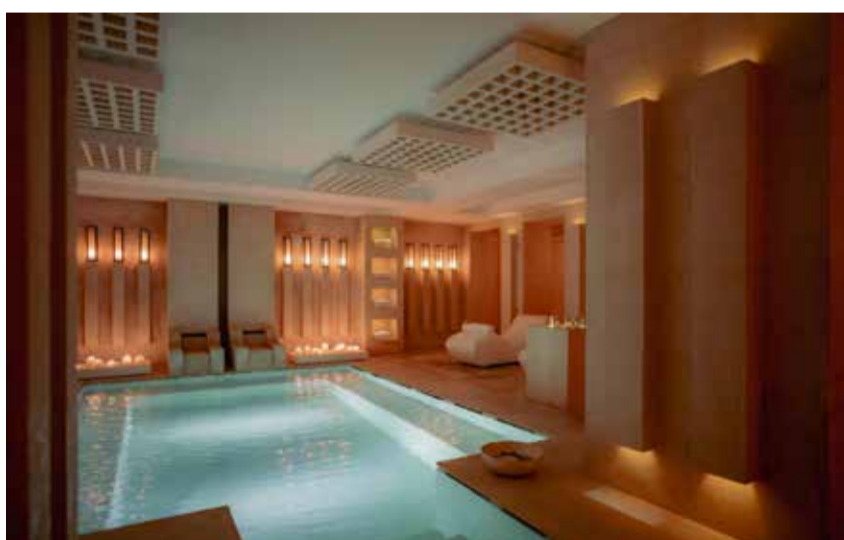
From Thursday to Saturday, it will host discussions between leaders of the Group of Seven rich nations and other invited guests, from US President Joe Biden



This handout picture shows a space of the luxury complex.



This handout picture shows a space of the luxury complex.



This handout picture shows a Spa area in the luxury complex.

to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pope Francis. Equipped with several swimming pools and its own village square, Borgo Egnazia - whose motto is "No-where Else" - allows guests to move freely around the strictly private complex.

Set among olive trees and boasting its own private beach offering an array of water sports, the complex is made up of traditional-style buildings and cobbled streets lined with flowers.

Within its walls are bars, restaurants - including one with a Michelin star - shops and spa facilities, meaning that if they choose, guests never need leave.

Pop megastar Madonna has stayed here three times, including to celebrate her birthday.

US singer and actor Justin Timberlake married Jessica Biel on Borgo Egnazia's main square in 2012, in front of approximately 80 guests.

The experience does not come cheap, however, with a double room costing around 2,000 euros (\$2,170) for a weekend night in June.

Although eclipsed for years by Italian regions such as Tuscany, Puglia offers pristine beaches, local delicacies, heritage and centuries-old olive groves, which have made it a top tourist destination in the past decade.

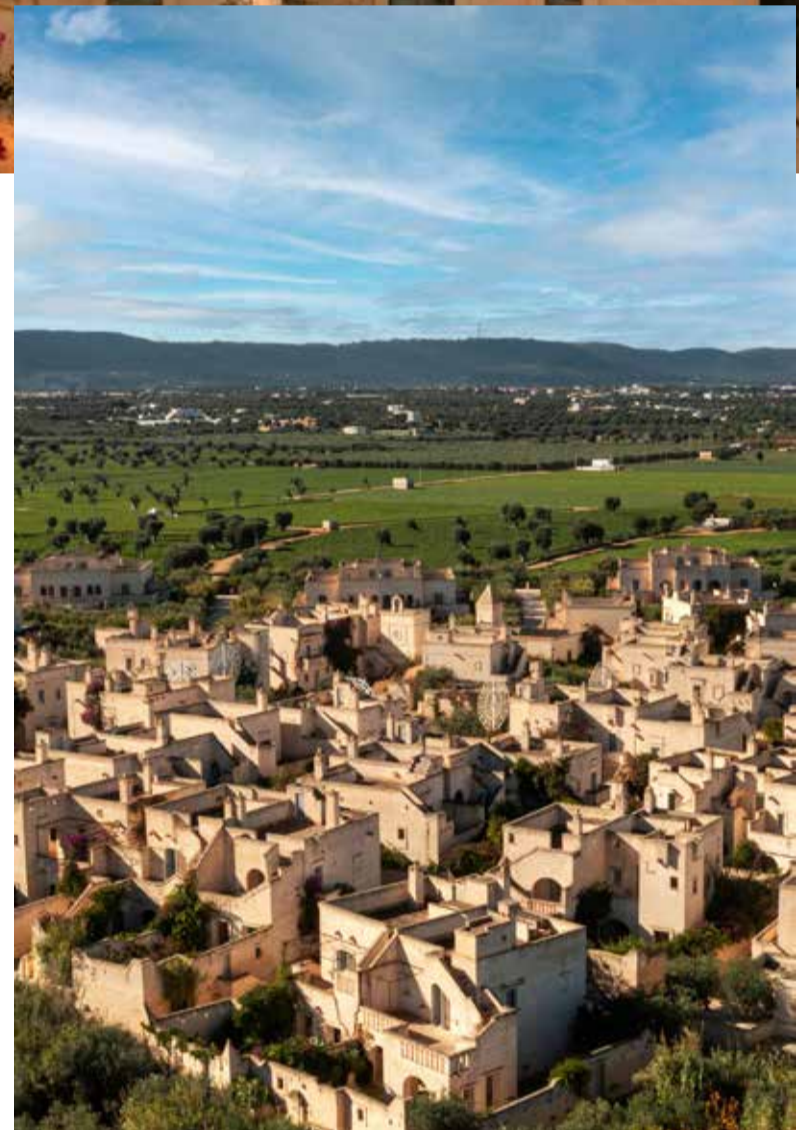
Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the host of the



This handout picture shows a room of the luxury complex.



This handout picture shows buildings of the luxury complex.



An aerial view of the luxury complex that will host the G7 summit in Puglia from June 13 to 15. — AFP photos



This handout picture shows houses of the luxury complex.

G7 summit, is among those who holiday there. A long way from Rome or Milan, Puglia is, however, served by two international airports in Bari and Brindisi as well as high-speed train service - although exploring the southernmost parts still requires a car. Borgo Egnazia has been expressly chosen for being a little out of the way, a pocket of luxury in the countryside more easily locked down than a more urban location.

The high-profile guest list means security at G7 summits is always extremely tight, and even the media this year are being kept well away.

The hundreds of journalists descending on Puglia to cover the event will be kept in a media centre in Bari around 60 kilometres away, and only bussed in for press conferences. Demonstrations are similarly expected to be confined to nearby towns and cities. — AFP

## Lifestyle



This picture shows a tourist from the US (second right) singing karaoke as "mama-san" Kuri Awaji (left), who runs a snack bar, waving a glow stick at her bar "Kuriyakko" in Tokyo. — AFP photos



Photo shows "mama-san" Kuri Awaji making juice at her bar in Tokyo.



This picture shows glasses behind the bar at the snack bar "Kuriyakko" in Tokyo.

## TOURISTS GET TASTE OF OLD JAPAN AT HIDDEN 'SNACK BARS'

Down a Tokyo street lined with bright signs, up narrow stairs and behind a windowless door is a "snack bar" long cherished by regulars but hidden from tourists - until now. Snack bars are cozy, retro establishments found across Japan, often crammed into small buildings and equipped with karaoke systems that echo late into the night.

They are typically run by a woman nicknamed "mama" who chats to customers while serving drinks with nibbles such as nuts, dried squid or simple

Nora, who used to live in Japan, told AFP she booked the tour for her parents, sister, aunt and uncle after seeing it on Instagram. "I've always seen the signs for snack bars, but I wasn't sure of how to enter them, or what to do," said the 30-year-old, who is now based in San Francisco and did not want her surname published.

"My family hasn't really been in Japan very often, so it was a good opportunity to get a real experience of the bar culture" in a "jovial" and "intimate"

male "master". After World War II, to make money, they "took a simple wooden box to the regular street and served drinks and snacks".

Little by little, these early snack bars moved indoors to small premises that the women could manage without having to prepare elaborate dishes. Many were divorced and raising children alone, hence the "mama" nickname, according to Igarashi. "It was difficult for them to work during the day when the children were around, so after they went to bed, women stood at the counter to work in the evening," she said.

### Face-to-face

It's believed there were 200,000 snack bars in Japan in the 1950s and 60s, according to Igarashi, but the number has declined as the "mama" retire or sell up. Now with record numbers of tourists visiting Japan, Snack Yokocho says interest in its tours is growing.

As well as classic spots like Kuriyakko, the company's guides bring visitors to themed snack bars such as a golf bar with a makeshift putting green.

It also sometimes runs tours for Japanese women who want to experience snack bar culture, but have reservations about knocking on a closed door alone. For years, the bars' clientele was almost exclusively men, Igarashi said.

But as more women have joined the workforce, snack bars have become a "place for them to relax, or talk to 'mama' about their problems". People tend to talk on social media, but after a bad day, nothing beats face-to-face communication, she added. "At a snack bar, people can look into each other's eyes, and get to know each other very quickly - even strangers." — AFP



This picture shows "mama-san" Kuri Awaji, singing karaoke as she entertains foreign tourists taking part in a snack bar tour.

cooked dishes. Despite being a fixture of Japanese nightlife since the post-war era, the tucked-away bars' tight space can be intimidating, especially for people who don't speak the language.

So one company is offering guided tours to snack bars like Kuriyakko, in the capital's Shimbashi business district. Inside, dim lights reflect warmly off the red wall tiles, illuminating an art-deco poster as an American family belts out "Hey Jude" and "Take Me Home, Country Roads".

way. A guide from tour company Snack Yokocho teaches the group how to order drinks in Japanese, and how to say "cheers" - "kanpai!"

### Red-light roots

Behind the bar, dressed in a smart pale kimono with her hair in a traditional up-do, is "mama" Kuri Awaji, who has run Kuriyakko for 25 years. It's one of around 100,000 snack bars in Japan, according to Snack Yokocho, and while most are run by women, some have a



A tourist from the US looks at a certificate she received for taking part in a snack bar tour.



This picture shows a tourist from the US singing karaoke.



This picture shows tourists posing for a picture with "mama-san" Kuri Awaji.



This picture shows tourists from the US joking around at the bar "Kuriyakko" in Tokyo.



This picture shows a Japanese man (left) joking around with tourists.



## Picasso Museum opens vast online archive

The Picasso Museum in Paris launched an online portal on Monday, providing access to tens of thousands of little-seen photos, artworks and other memorabilia from the iconic artist's archives. It comes ahead of a study centre dedicated to Pablo Picasso, due to open later this year near the museum in central Paris for researchers and artists-in-residence.

The digital portal opens up access to the museum's vast collection of artworks, essays, conferences, podcasts and interviews. Many have never been accessible to the public, including some 19,000 photos.

In the coming years, some 200,000 texts from Picasso's workshops will also be digitized and uploaded. Picasso was born in 1881 in Spain and lived almost all his life in France, where he died in 1973. The family entrusted his archives to the French state in 1992.

Meanwhile, the Paris museum opens a new exhibition on Tuesday, "Picasso: Consuming Images".

It places dozens of famous works by Picasso alongside the historical masters that inspired him - including Poussin, Rembrandt, Delacroix, Goya and Matisse - and many other images and concepts that he drew from.

"Picasso grew up with a flood of new images and works that he went to see in person in Paris museums," said curator Cecile Godefroy.

But his absorption of images went way beyond the academic, she added, saying that his fascination with postcards, art magazines, photographs, television images, cinema, comic strips and advertising presaged the torrent of images we consume in the age of social media. — AFP

## Rare elephant twins born in dramatic birth in Thailand

An elephant in Thailand has delivered a rare set of twins in a dramatic birth that left a carer injured after he tried to rescue one of the newborns. The 36-year-old Asian elephant named Jamjuree gave birth to an 80-kilogramme (176-pound) male at the Ayutthaya Elephant Palace and Royal Kraal north of Bangkok on Friday night.

But when a second, 60-kilogramme female calf emerged 18 minutes later, the mother went into a frenzy and attacked her new arrival. "We heard somebody shout 'there is another baby being born!'" said veterinarian Lardthongtare Meepan.

An elephant keeper, also known as a mahout, moved in to prevent the mother from attacking her newborn, and took a blow to his ankle in return. "The mother attacked the baby because she had never had twins before - it's very rare," said Michelle Reedy, the director of the Elephant Stay organization, which allows visiting tourists to ride, feed and bathe elephants at the Royal Kraal centre.

"The mahouts who are the carers of the elephants jumped in there trying to get the baby away so that she didn't kill it," Reedy told AFP. Jamjuree has now accepted her calves, who are so small that a special platform has been built to help them reach up to suckle.

They are also being given supplemental pumped milk by syringe, said Lardthongtare. Twin elephants are rare, forming around only one percent of births, according to research organization Save the Elephants, and male-female twin births are even more unusual.

Mothers often do not have enough milk for both calves and the pair might not have survived in the wild, said Reedy.

"Whether the rest of the herd may have intervened - they may have, but the baby may have been trampled in the process," she said. Reedy said many of the 80 elephants at the centre were rescued from street begging, a practice that became increasingly common after a logging ban in 1989 that left mahouts working in the industry with their elephants

seeking alternative income.

The practice, which was outlawed in 2010, involved the animals performing tricks like playing with footballs or carrying baskets of fruit. Some elephants at Royal Kraal carry tourists to the nearby ruins and temples of Ayutthaya, the historic former capital of Siam.

Many conservation groups oppose elephant riding, arguing it is stressful for the animals and often involves abusive training. The centre argues the rides allow the animals to socialize and exercise, and promote conservation of the species, which is endangered in Southeast Asia and China. Only about 8,000-11,000 Asian elephants remain in the wild, according to the WWF. The animals were once widespread, but deforestation, human encroachment and poaching have decimated their numbers.

The twin calves, whose father is a 29-year-old elephant named Siam, will be named seven days after their birth, in accordance with Thai custom. — AFP



Newborn elephant twins, a female (left) and a male (right), stand next to their mother Jamjuree at the Ayutthaya Elephant Palace and Royal Kraal in Ayutthaya. — AFP photos



Newborn elephant twins stand next to their mother Jamjuree.

Lifestyle



South African conductor Ofentse Pitse (left) waves her conducting baton during rehearsals at Marks Park Sports Club in Johannesburg as they prepare for a show that brings together classical music and popular South African genre, Amapiano.—AFP photos



South African conductor Ofentse Pitse poses for a photograph during rehearsals.



# PIONEERING BLACK CONDUCTOR MELTS OPERA WITH S AFRICAN DANCE MUSIC

Ofentse Pitse embodies a fierce sense of fun as she waves her conducting baton passionately in a dimly lit auditorium in Johannesburg, ahead of a one-of-a-kind show. The pioneering 31-year-old who hails from Mabopane, a township some 40 kilometres (25 miles) northwest of Pretoria, is the first black South African woman to own and run her own orchestra.

Now, she is producing a show that brings together classical music and popular South African genre, Amapiano, which developed from a mix of kwaito, South Africa's take on house music, and the more international variety. Pitse grew up with a family that was deeply involved in a Salvation Army church and recalls her pastor urging her to play an instrument.

At 12 years old, Pitse said she "got taught how to play C scale... and the

evolution of that was my love for classical music, my love for choral and opera." By the age of 25, she had started her own youth choir and she later approached classical musicians and built a 40-piece orchestra.

Some of the musicians who were part of her all-black orchestra joined Pitse and other musicians on stage last week for an opera featuring various Amapiano artists such as Kabza De Small, one of the pioneers of the genre. Speaking to AFP at a rehearsal, Pitse said De Small's approach to music is similar to opera and that inspired the idea of creating "an Amapiano opera" where she would reimagine his songs.

An elegant, unfamiliar version of "Nana Thula", a popular song by Kabza De Small and DJ Maphorisa, filled the room as a choir sang softly, backed by violins and a saxophone.

The duo, who go by the name Scor-

pion Kings, each enjoy fame and an international following, having produced some of the most notable Amapiano tracks.

"I want to do African works... imagine the juxtaposition of these classically trained musicians and these musicians who just feel by spirit, and we combine that," an excited Pitse said of the show.

### 'A gift'

As the ensemble performed some of the biggest Amapiano hits, Pitse became lost in the music, dancing slightly to the beat while maintaining her poise, often with a face full of emotion. She told AFP she steered away from being stern in her conducting and prefers to lead "with passion... to add that motherly, sensitive, very genuine" vibe.

But a career in classical music was not always her dream, rather "a gift". Last year, the qualified architect led a

74-piece female orchestra rendition of Alicia Keys' "If I Ain't Got You" alongside the Grammy award-winning artist for Netflix's "Queen Charlotte", a spinoff of the popular "Bridgerton" televised drama.

The performance was the "greatest accomplishment of my career", she said. "For me it was like 'wow, so women can really create at this level?'" Pitse said her driving force was advancing youth opportunities and inspiring women of colour.

### 'Meticulous detailing'

But success and recognition has also brought pressure, she admitted. Being young and black in a white male-dominated industry, she said there was often someone checking to see if she really knew what she was doing. Sometimes observers "would want to put in a sly comment that does

not have anything to do with music... so you have to be overly prepared".

Sporting flared black pants, a white jacket, and her signature braided updo, Pitse joked with the crew in between takes. As a zealous Beyonce fan, her ultimate dream is working with the US singer whose work ethic she simulates.

"Beyonce will spend four months on dance rehearsal, another four months on band rehearsal for a two-hour show. That's meticulous detailing," she marvelled, adding that she approaches her own shows the same way.

Pitse's next move, she hopes, will be her own body of work. "I want people to transcend, and I make music for the academics of classical music" and "those who have never been to a theatre", she said.—AFP



Lasse Stolley, who has been living on German trains since August 2022, poses for a photo at the main railway station in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.—AFP photos

## Room with a view: The German teen living on trains

Lasse Stolley was looking for a change in scenery after a planned apprenticeship fell through. So nearly two years ago the teenager began living on German trains. The epic journey has taken the 17-year-old from a small community in Germany's windswept far north to the country's southern borders and beyond.

Setting off in August 2022, he has travelled a staggering 650,000 kilometres (400,000 miles), the equivalent of going around the Earth over 15 times, while sitting on trains for more than 6,700 hours. "Being able to decide every day where I want to go is simply great -- that's freedom," Stolley told AFP in an interview in a cafe at Frankfurt train station.

"I like that I can just look out of the window while travelling and watch the landscape quickly zipping by... and the fact that I can explore every place in Germany." He travels with just a rucksack and lives mainly on pizza and soup which -- as a holder of a train pass -- he gets for free in rail operator Deutsche Bahn's station lounges.

### Bumpy start

With his broad smile, the lanky teen seems an unlikely figure to have decided to swap the comfort of his family home for the rigours of life on the rails.

He had little interest in trains growing up. He never owned a model railway, and had only travelled twice on Germany's high-speed ICE trains before deciding to start living permanently on the network just after he turned 16.

But after finishing secondary school, a planned apprenticeship in computer programming fell through. Searching around for what to do next, he stumbled across a documentary about someone who had lived on trains. "I thought I

could do that," he said.

"At first it was just an idea, such an unrealistic idea. But then I kept getting into it... and then I thought, 'OK, I am going to really do this.'" After initially trying to dissuade him, his parents decided to support him.

He bought a rail card that granted him unlimited travel on the network and set off from his home in Fockbek in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, heading to Hamburg from where he took a night train to Munich.

The early days were difficult. Stolley could not sleep at night -- his railcard does not allow him to use night trains with beds -- and returned home frequently to see his family. But he soon got used to living on the trains.

He bought an airbed that he used to sleep in the large baggage areas of high-speed trains at night. And after a year, he upgraded his travel card to a first-class one -- costing 5,888 euros (\$6,400) a year -- allowing him access to more spacious carriages and Deutsche Bahn's lounges.



Lasse Stolley, who has been living on German trains since August 2022, poses for a photo at the main railway station in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.—AFP photos

### Rail romance

Now he no longer needs the airbed and can sleep so comfortably upright in a train seat that he struggles in a regular bed. "In a normal bed, I miss the rocking of the train jerking me around a bit at night," he said. Stolley even works while on the move, doing a part-time job programming apps for a start-up. He frequently travels to major cities, such as the capital Berlin or Frankfurt, the country's financial hub. He also often heads to smaller towns and travels through the Alps, and has been to Basel in Switzerland and Salzburg in Austria, just over the German border -- the points furthest south covered by his railcard.

But living on the German train network, which critics say is in a sorry state after years of underinvestment, is not without challenges. "Delays and other issues are certainly daily affairs," said Stolley. Train staff have staged regular strikes as they pushed for better pay and conditions, paralysing the network and meaning that Stolley was forced to sleep in airports. Asked about what they thought of someone choosing to live aboard their trains on a permanent basis, Deutsche Bahn declined to comment.

Still, while life on Germany's creaking railways can sometimes be a headache, it can also have unexpected up-sides -- Stolley found romance during his travels, meeting his girlfriend at the Cologne rail station lounge. Stolley said he doesn't know how long he will continue living as a postmodern digital hobo -- maybe for another year, or five.

"At the moment, I am having a lot of fun and experiencing so many things every day," he said.—AFP

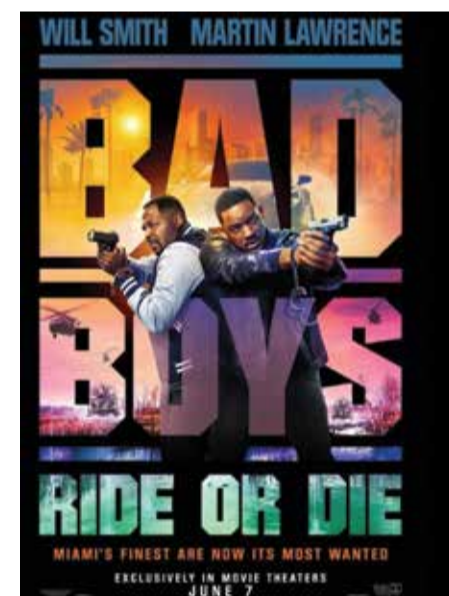
## 'Bad Boys' tops North American box office in boost for Will Smith

Will Smith marked his first major film hit since his infamous Oscars slap as "Bad Boys: Ride or Die" debuted atop the North American box office, in a sign audiences are ready to welcome back the actor.

Sony's fourth installment of the action comedy series took home an estimated \$56 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported, making it a major step in Smith's career rehabilitation after he slapped Chris Rock at the Academy Awards in 2022. "Bad Boys is in elite company and the series has room to run. These are excellent numbers," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. The success is a welcome departure from Smith's 2022 action release "Emancipation," where his role as a runaway slave in the American Civil War failed to resonate with audiences and flopped at the box office.

Bad Boys snatched first place from Sony's family-friendly "The Garfield Movie," starring Chris Pratt as the lazy, lasagna-loving feline, which dropped to second place with \$10 million in ticket sales for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

In third and taking in \$8 million was Paramount's "If," which follows Cailey Fleming as a young girl who, along with



neighbor Ryan Reynolds, embarks on an adventure to reconnect forgotten made-up playmates with their children. Warner Bros horror film "The Watchers" opened in fourth place at \$7 million, while 20th Century's action sci-fi "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes" ranked fifth at \$5.4 million.

### Rounding out the top 10 were:

"Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" (\$4.2 million)  
"The Fall Guy" (\$2.7 million)  
"The Strangers: Chapter 1" (\$1.8 million)  
"Haikyu!! The Dumpster Battle" (\$820,000)  
"In A Violent Nature" (\$640,000).—AFP

## Tourists in Japan trapped in out-of-service bus resort to calling police

Two tourists trapped on an out-of-service bus in Japan resorted to calling the police for help. After the instruction of police, the driver finally pulled over, and the 20-minute ordeal came to an end.

"We will investigate the facts of what happened, and reprimand or re-educate the driver if they were found to be at fault", the spokesman said.

Overtourism is emerging as a headache for many parts of Japan, including tradition-steeped Kyoto, where locals have complained of tourists harassing the city's famed geisha.

A different Japanese town erected a large mesh barrier last month to block views of famous Mount Fuji, in an attempt to deter photo-taking by an ever-growing number of sometimes unruly tourists.—AFP

With the bus showing no sign of stopping, the tourists resorted to calling police for help. At the instruction of police, the driver finally pulled over, and the 20-minute ordeal came to an end.

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## Sports

# South Africa edge Bangladesh by four runs at T20 World Cup

## Fresh debate to spark over the suitability of the pitch being used in New York

**NEW YORK:** South Africa defeated Bangladesh by just four runs in another low-scoring game at the T20 World Cup on Monday, a result likely to spark fresh debate over the suitability of the pitch being used in New York.

South Africa were restricted to 113-6 in their 20 overs with Heinrich Klaasen top-scoring on 46 while fast bowler Tanzim Hasan Sakib returned a career-best 3-18. However, Bangladesh could only manage 109-7 in reply as South Africa wrapped up a third win in three Group D games.

"It was not a nice one to watch, it was good that the boys got it over the line," said Klaasen. "The wicket is not too great for strokeplay." Chasing just 114 to win on the controversial drop-in strip at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, Bangladesh initially struggled in the face of the Proteas' pace battery.

They were 50-4 at the 10-over mark having lost Tanzid Hasan (nine) to Kagiso Rabada while Anrich Nortje accounted for skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (14) and Shakib Al Hasan (three). Spinner Keshav Maharaj sent back Liton Das for just nine. However, Towhid Hridoy, who top-scored with 40 when Bangladesh defeated Sri Lanka in their opener, and 38-year-old Mahmudullah steadied the ship for the Tigers.

The pair put on 44 for the fifth wicket before Hridoy was lbw to Rabada for 37, an innings which took up 34 balls and featured two fours and two sixes. Bangladesh took seven off the penultimate over but still needed 11 off the last to be bowled by Maharaj.

That became seven off four balls. With the pres-

sure building both Jaker Ali and Mahmudullah were caught by Aiden Markram going for big heaves over long on. Needing six off the final ball, Taskin Ahmed could only produce a scrambled single.

### 'Should have won'

"I think this is a match we should have won. In the last couple of overs they bowled well, but this can happen in cricket," said Shanto. Earlier, Bangladesh restricted South Africa to 113-6 with Tanzim backed up by Taskin's 2-19 after Proteas skipper Markram won the toss and opted to bat.

South Africa were struggling at 23-4 at one stage before Klaasen and David Miller, celebrating his 35th birthday, came to their team's rescue with a partnership of 79 for the fifth wicket. Klaasen's 46 came off 44 balls with two fours and three sixes before he was clean-bowled by Taskin, slogging across the line in the 18th over with the score on 102.

Miller, who made a match-winning undefeated 59 in the nervy win over the Netherlands, went four runs later, bowled by Rishad Hossain. His innings of 29 came from 38 deliveries with a boundary and one six.

The Proteas had been 12-4 against the Dutch on the same pitch on Saturday. On Monday, they were quickly four down for just 23 runs in the fifth over thanks to Tanzim and Taskin. Tanzim, playing in only his eighth T20 international, started the collapse, having out-of-form opener Reeza Hendricks lbw for nought off his first ball.

Star batsman Quinton de Kock was the next to go, clean-bowled by the 21-year-old for 18 with the total on 19. Taskin uprooted the stumps of



**NEW YORK:** South Africa's Keshav Maharaj jumps to catch the ball during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group D cricket match between South Africa and Bangladesh at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in East Meadow, New York. — AFP

Markram (four) before Tanzim grabbed the third of his opening spell when he forced Tristan Stubbs to spoon a catch to Shakib Al Hasan in the covers without scoring.

Miller could have been dismissed on 13 but

wicket-keeper Liton Das dropped an edge off Mahmudullah's first ball. With South Africa virtually certain of a place in the second round Super Eight phase, Bangladesh, with two points, are still well-placed to join them. — AFP

## Rodrigues double as Panthers sink Oilers, take lead

**MIAMI:** Evan Rodrigues scored twice as the Florida Panthers came from behind to beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-1 and take a commanding 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven NHL Stanley Cup Final on Monday, Edmonton, aiming to become the first Canadian team to lift ice hockey's most prestigious title since 1993, made a dream start after Mattias Ekholm fired them into the lead in the first period.

But Florida's relentless offensive pressure eventually brought its own reward as the Oilers' resistance was broken in the second and third periods. The game got off to an explosive start with Edmonton's Warren Foegele ejected in the first period for a brutal knee-on-knee hit on the Panthers' Eetu Luostarinen that left the Finn sprawled on the ice.

Luostarinen was helped off the rink, limping heavily on his left leg before returning to the game later in the period. Florida failed to capitalize on the five-minute power play awarded to them after Foegele's foul, and instead surrendered a chunk of the advantage when defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson was whistled for tripping.

That left it four-on-four for two minutes and it was Edmonton who took advantage with what was their first shot on goal of the game. Ekholm raced forward after an assist from Connor McDavid and beat Florida goalie Sergei Bobrovsky with a wrist shot.

The Panthers, dominant in a 3-0 victory in game one on Saturday, responded superbly to the setback and drew level midway through the second period after a bizarre passage of play that saw Niko Mikkola come within a whisker of scoring an own goal moments before his leveler.

The Finnish defenseman nearly backpassed into his own net and had Bobrovsky to thank for deflecting the puck away. Florida then launched a lightning counter-attack which culminated with Anton Lundell deftly teeing up a snap shot for Mikkola who blasted his effort into the net past Edmonton goalie Stuart Skinner with 10:26 remaining in the period.

With Florida carving out chance after chance it seemed only a matter of time before the Oilers defense was breached again. Florida's second goal duly arrived early in the third period, with Rodrigues bagging his fifth goal of the postseason with a snap shot with 16:49 remaining.

Edmonton frustration boiled over when Leon Draisaitl was sent to the sin-bin for roughing Aleksander Barkov midway through the final period. Florida rammed home their advantage from the ensuing power play, with Lundell once again providing the assist as Rodrigues deflected in his second goal of the night to make it 3-1.

Aaron Ekblad then put the result beyond doubt in the final minutes after shooting into an empty net to put Florida 4-1 up. The Oilers are trying to become the first Canadian team to capture the trophy since the Montreal Canadiens in 1993. Six Canadian clubs have lost in the final since then.

The Panthers are in the championship series for a second straight year after falling in five games last season to Vegas. — AFP

## Sizzling Scheffler seeks more golf history at US Open

**PINEHURST:** Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler, already off to a historic golf season start, took his first true look Monday at Pinehurst, where he's an overwhelming favorite to win the US Open. Scheffler has already broken his US PGA Tour season prize money record and won more titles before the US Open than any player in 44 years and oddsmakers like his chances even though he hadn't seen the 7,543-yard Pinehurst layout live before Monday.

"Just because I'm the favorite doesn't really have any affect on my score," Scheffler said. "I think we all start at even par, if I remember correctly." The 27-year-old American, who became a new dad in May, will be tested by a course with sloping greens, unique sandy native areas and snarly wiregrass lurking off fairways and greens. Patience and accuracy will be at a premium.

Scheffler won his fifth tour title of the season Sunday at the Memorial, edging seventh-ranked compatriot Collin Morikawa by a stroke. Scheffler added to a trophy haul that includes triumphs at Bay Hill, the Players, the Heritage and the Masters, where he captured his second green jacket in three seasons.

He has already broken his own PGA Tour money earnings record for a single season with \$24,024,553 after setting the full-season mark of \$21,014,342 last year. This week, he will try to match Tiger Woods as the only player to win a US Open while ranked world number one, the 15-time major winner having done so in 2000, 2002 and 2008.

"It's a good place to be. I like how my game is feeling right now," said Scheffler. "I feel like I've been

## Argentine Olympics athletes fret over dwindling funds

**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentine judoka Paula Pareto, a 2016 Olympic gold medalist, made waves when she announced she was giving up her state coaching stipend to share it among struggling athletes. Her comments last month came after Argentina's austerity-minded government cut the number of judokas it supports from 18 to four.

With just weeks to go until the Paris Olympics, Argentina's high-level athletes are increasingly worried about their futures due to cost-cutting measures under libertarian President Javier Milei. "When you are an athlete, results are demanded of you, but each time they give you a little less," Pareto told the TyC Sports channel.

This year, the body in charge of supporting high-performance athletes, ENARD, had its budget frozen at 2023 levels, despite annual inflation of almost 300 percent. "In a country like Argentina today, where people don't eat, we are aware that there are other priorities," ENARD director Diogenes de Urquiza told AFP.

He said the country was focusing financial support on athletes who had qualified or were likely to qualify for Paris. The Undersecretary of Sports, Julio Garro wrote on X that Pareto's remarks "overshadowed and minimized the effort" the government has made.

### 'Never been easy'

Light years away from the well-paid glory of Argentina's star footballers, some 1,200 Argentine high-level athletes and coaches receive stipends of an average \$350 per month. This is slightly more than the minimum wage of about \$255.

"But we live on that," said Argentine swimmer Macarena Ceballos, who dreams of a "real state policy" for athletes. The 28-year-old, voted best South American swimmer in 2023, has struggled to train for the Olympics in the chilly Argentine winter after a pump to heat the pool at her training center broke.

"It's the same every winter," she said. "Things have

playing some good golf. It has been great to see some results too. Out here the margins are so small between winning and losing. It's a putt or a shot here or there. "I'm going to stick to my game plan and prepare the way I usually would and get ready to go out and compete again on Thursday."

Scheffler has been first or second in seven of his past eight starts and in the top-10 in 12 of 13 events this year. He's in rare company with such an amazing start. Not since Tom Watson in 1980 had a player won five times before the US Open.

And not since Arnold Palmer won six before the 1962 US Open has a player won so many in that span with a major among them. "There's so much excitement with so much guys playing well, Scottie dominating," said 2012 US Open winner Webb Simpson. "He's doing everything exceptionally well."

"He capitalizes on wedge shots and par-5s. He just doesn't make mistakes. He's so hard to beat. "To play this well for this amount of time, a couple years where he's for sure the guy to beat every week, it's fun to watch. I don't see any reason he's going to slow down anytime soon."

Scheffler hopes to become only the seventh player to win the Masters and US Open in the same year after Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Woods, Palmer, Craig Wood and Jordan Spieth. Americans have won each of the past five major titles. US players have not taken six consecutive majors since a run from the 1981 British Open through 1982 PGA Championship.

"I'm always trying to work on all aspects of my game," Scheffler said. "I feel like I put in an awful lot of work into this game and just because I got to number one in the world doesn't mean I'm going to stop working."

### 'In a heartbeat'

Second-ranked Xander Schauffele, who won his first major at last month's PGA Championship, will try to become the first back-to-back major winner



Scottie Scheffler

since Spieth took the Masters and US Open in 2015. Two-time major winner Morikawa, ranked seventh, likes his form with a chance for his first US Open title.

"If I could play like this heading into every major, I would take it in a heartbeat," Morikawa said. Woods, who has struggled to walk 72 holes after a 2021 car crash, was with 15-year-old son Charlie during a morning practice round. — AFP

## England expect stiff challenge from Japan with Jones in charge

**TWICKENHAM:** Steve Borthwick has warned his England side not to underestimate a Japan team coached by mentor Eddie Jones ahead of their Test in Tokyo later this month. England have won all of their previous internationals against Japan, including a 34-12 victory at last year's World Cup in France.

Former England coach Jones was then in charge of his native Australia but he resigned soon afterwards, after just two wins from nine Tests in his second spell at the helm, including an early World Cup exit.

Jones, 64, guided England to their first Grand Slam in 13 years in 2016 and took them to the 2019 World Cup final in Japan, where they were beaten by South Africa. But he was sacked after seven years in the England hot seat in December 2022 following a lean spell and replaced by Borthwick.

The former England captain knows Jones well after working with the outspoken coach at Saracens and England, as well as during the Australian's first stint in Japan. "What we expect next week is a really well-coached Japan side," Borthwick said at Twickenham on Monday, after announcing a 36-man touring squad for Tests against Japan and New Zealand.

"I've worked with Eddie. That's what we're preparing for." "What I'm saying to the players is focus on what we're doing as a team and what we can control," he added. "Then I'm looking for these Test match animals to go out when we play on a Saturday in these big arenas like in Tokyo."

Borthwick will need a new starting fly-half on tour as he will be without the veteran Owen Farrell, ineligible after deciding to continue his club career in France, and the injured George Ford. His choice will come down to one of two Smiths - Northampton rising star Fin Smith and the more experienced Marcus Smith of Harlequins. — AFP



**BUENOS AIRES:** Diogenes de Urquiza, director of the ENARD (National High Performance Sports Entity), poses during an interview with AFP in Buenos Aires, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. — AFP

never been easy. Yet there have always been medals. Olympic finalists." Argentina secured one silver medal and two bronze in the 2021 Olympics in Tokyo.

Since Milei came to power in December last year, his "chainsaw" approach to budget cuts has left the film and culture industry reeling, and soup kitchens with empty pantries. In his drive to end decades of economic decline, Milei also cut his cabinet in half and did away with tens of thousands of government jobs.

### 'After Paris'

The libertarian Milei believes the private sector and civil society should step in where the government cannot. "There are very few sports that are in a position to be governed by the mere condition of the market and profit," said Jon Uriarte, a volleyball player who won a bronze medal in Seoul in 1988.

"The network of clubs that supports Argentine sports is unique on the planet." According to an official survey from 2021, there are about 12,000 clubs and sports entities in Argentina, which play a crucial social role in underprivileged areas. "How many Argentines can pay their child's club fee?" Walter Perez, a cyclist who won gold in Beijing 2008 and president of the Argentine Olympic Athletes Commission, acknowledges government efforts to keep up support for those who have qualified for Paris. — AFP

Sports

# Benin stun Nigeria, Salah rescues Egypt, Ayew treble lifts Ghana

## Victory lifts Benin 67 places below Nigeria in world rankings

JOHANNESBURG: Benin came from behind to stun Nigeria 2-1 and Liverpool star Mohamed Salah scored to salvage a 1-1 draw for Egypt against Guinea-Bissau in World Cup qualifying on Monday.

Ghana were another side to stage a fightback, defeating the Central African Republic 4-3 after trailing at half-time with Crystal Palace forward Jordan Ayew claiming a hat-trick. Success was particularly sweet for Benin coach Gernot Rohr, the 70-year-old German sacked by Nigeria in 2021 after five years in charge.

The victory lifted Benin, 67 places below Nigeria in the world rankings, to the top of Group C with seven points, two more than Lesotho. Nigeria, six-time qualifiers for the World Cup and runners-up to hosts the Ivory Coast in the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations, were expected to dominate the six-team section with South Africa.

But after three draws and a loss they lie fifth with just three points. Only Zimbabwe are beneath the Super Eagles. The defeat by Benin puts pressure on Nigeria coach Finidi George, who took over the reins when Portuguese boss Jose Pereira quit in February after the Cup of Nations.

Former Nigeria star George has won only one of four competitive and friendly matches, and losing to neighbours Benin is sure to trigger criticism. Benin, disadvantaged by having to play in Ivorian commercial capital Abidjan because they do not have a FIFA-approved stadium, fell behind after 27 minutes.

A long pass was transferred by Samuel Chukwueze to Raphael Onyedika, who bagged his first goal for Nigeria with a fierce shot. Unperturbed, Benin hit back with goals from Jodel Dossou and captain Steve Mounie before half-time to take a lead they retained till the end.

Dossou burst forward to beat goalkeeper Stan-

ley Nwabali and Mounie celebrated his 50th cap by slamming the ball into the net after a corner was not cleared. Benin top the table with seven points, Lesotho have five, Rwanda and South Africa four each, Nigeria three and Zimbabwe two.

### Much-changed Algeria win

Lesotho, forced to stage home matches in South Africa as they lack an international-standard stadium, host Rwanda and South Africa play Zimbabwe in Bloemfontein on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Salah added to his four goals against Djibouti in matchday one by equalising on 70 minutes in Bissau after Mama Balde had put Guinea-Bissau ahead just before half-time.

Salah took the ball across several defenders inside the area before unleashing a shot past goalkeeper Manuel Balde in the top-of-table Group A clash. Mama Balde had fired past Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed el Shenawy to raise hopes of a home victory in the first World Cup qualifier between the countries.

Guinea-Bissau recently hired former Fulham assistant manager Luis Boa Morte as coach after the failure of Baciro Cande to win a match in four Cup of Nations tournaments cost him his job. Egypt retained a four-point advantage over Guinea-Bissau with Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone, who drew 2-2 in Bamako, a further point behind.

Ghana led and trailed before building a two-goal lead over the Central African Republic in Kumasi, where Ayew and Louis Mafouta, who plays in the French second tier, scored hat-tricks. Mafouta completed his treble in the final minute of regular time to create a tense finish before Ghana took over the Group I leadership from Madagascar, who play Mali on Tuesday.



ABIDJAN : Benin's #12 David Kiki fights for the ball with Nigerian #9 Terem Moffi during the FIFA 2026 World Cup qualifiers group C football match between Benin and Nigeria at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny stadium in Abidjan. — AFP

Algeria coach Vladimir Petkovic made five changes after a surprise home loss to Guinea last week and they paid off with a 2-1 Group G victory against Uganda in Kampala. A careless pass by Mohamed Madani allowed Travis Mutyaba to race through and beat goalkeeper Anthony Mandrea and put Uganda ahead on 10 minutes.

Houssein Auar levelled in the first minute of the second half and former West Ham United forward Said Benrahma struck the 58th-minute match-winner. Algeria top the table with nine points, three more than Mozambique, who upset Guinea 1-0 with Geny Catamo converting an added-time penalty. — AFP



Carlo Ancelotti

## Ancelotti denies Real Madrid will skip Club WCup

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti denied on Monday that the Champions League winners would refuse to play in next season's expanded Club World Cup, claiming comments he made to an Italian newspaper had been misinterpreted.

"In my interview with Il Giornale, my words about the FIFA Club World Cup have not been interpreted in the way I intended," Ancelotti posted on X. "Nothing could be further from my interest than to reject the possibility of playing in a tournament that I consider to be a great opportunity to continue fighting for great titles with Real Madrid."

Ancelotti had been quoted in Monday's edition of Il Giornale saying that "players and clubs will not participate" in the new tournament. "A single Real Madrid match is worth 20 million euros and FIFA wants to give us this amount for the entire Cup," he is quoted as saying. "So no. Like us, other clubs will refuse the invitation."

Real Madrid, who last season won the La Liga title under Ancelotti as well as a 15th European Cup and Champions League title, were also quick to distance themselves from the remarks. "Real Madrid C.F. would like to announce that at no time has there been any question regarding our participation in the new Club World Cup to be organised by FIFA in the coming 2024/2025 season," the club said in a statement on its website.

"Our club will therefore take part, as planned, in this official competition and we are proud and excited to be involved in it and we will once again inspire our millions of fans all over the world with another trophy." The expanded 32-team Club World Cup is proposed to take place next summer, adding to an already congested calendar for players. England's Professional Footballers' Association has warned FIFA that players could go on strike. — AFP

## Fans get 8 months jail for racism targeting Vinicius

MADRID: Three Valencia fans were handed eight-month jail terms Monday for racist abuse towards Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior, a court said, in what Spain's La Liga said was the first such conviction in Spain. The defendants, who were not identified, were convicted of an offence against moral integrity with the aggravating factor of racially motivated discrimination, the Valencia court said. They were also slapped with a two-year match ban. With no previous criminal record, none will serve jail time as judges habitually suspend prison sentences of less than two years for first-time offenders.

La Liga hailed the ruling as "the first sentence handed down for racist insults in a Spanish football stadium". "This sentence is very good news for the fight against racism in Spain," said La Liga president Javier Tebas. "It sends a clear message to anyone who goes to a football stadium to hurl insults that La Liga will find and prosecute them and that they will face criminal consequences." The incident took place on May 21, 2023 when Real Madrid played away to Valencia at the Mestalla stadium during a match which saw home fans hurling abuse and chanting monkey noises at the Brazilian forward.

Play was halted as Vinicius stood in front of fans and pointed at those responsible, prompting stadium officials to demand an end to racist insults before the match could resume. All three "shouted and chanted at the player with... evident contempt for the colour of his skin... making racist gestures of contempt and causing him to feel frustration, shame and humiliation", court documents showed.

It said they were "simulating the gestures made by primates and repeatedly making... the sound made by monkeys" in front of a full stadium and a "massive" TV,

## Lewandowski to miss Poland's Euro 2024 opener

WARSAW: Poland captain Robert Lewandowski will miss his country's Euro 2024 opener this weekend with a thigh injury, the Polish football federation's doctor said on Tuesday. Lewandowski, 35, will be absent to face the Netherlands on June 16 after suffering the injury in Monday's 2-1 win in a friendly against Turkey. Poland then play Austria on June 21 and the tournament's joint favourites France four days later.

"We are doing everything so that Robert can play in the second match against Austria," doctor Jacek Jaroszewski said in a statement. Barcelona forward Lewandowski was substituted after just 33 minutes on his 150th international appearance as Poland ended their Euro 2024 preparations with a victory.

Following the game, Poland coach Michal Probiez had been upbeat about Lewandowski's injury, saying he was "optimistic" and "there shouldn't be a problem".

The absence of the former Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich player adds to the injury worries for Probiez. Hellas Verona attacker Karol Swiderski sustained an ankle injury while celebrating the opening goal against Turkey. Swiderski's club team-mate, defender Pawel Dawidowicz, strained his quadriceps during the game. "After treatment, both players should



Vinicius Junior

return to full training within 3-4 days," Jaroszewski.

Probiez will be without another striker for the tournament after Arkadiusz Milik suffered a knee injury in the warmup victory against Ukraine on Friday. The Italian club said Milik had undergone minor surgery, without stating the length of his absence. Probiez's fit options in attack in his squad are Istanbul Basaksehir's Krzysztof Piatek and Antalyaspor's Adam Buksa. The pair have 17 goals in 44 appearances for their country. Poland are unbeaten in eight games and have the reached the past three European Championship finals, making it to the quarter-finals in 2016. — AFP



WARSAW: Poland's goalkeeper #01 Wojciech Szczesny (L) and Poland's forward #09 Robert Lewandowski (2nd L) are pictured prior to the international friendly football match between Poland and Ukraine in Warsaw, Poland. — AFP

radio and media audience. In a statement, Real Madrid said the trio had admitted their wrongdoing and sent a letter apologising to Vinicius, the club and to everyone else "who felt belittled or offended by their behaviour", urging fans to avoid all expressions of "racism and intolerance".

### Years of abuse

The incident, the latest in a string of racist attacks on the player, sparked an international outcry with Brazil lodging a diplomatic protest and turning off the lights on Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer statue in solidarity. Real Madrid filed a criminal complaint and within days, police arrested three youths for "insults and gestures with racist overtones" at the Valencia match on suspicion of "an alleged hate crime"—an offence which includes racist behaviour.

Now 23, Vinicius has been taunted by opposition fans since joining Real Madrid in 2018, suffering racist abuse at several Spanish stadiums. In January 2023, a dark-skinned effigy wearing a Vinicius shirt was found hanging from a bridge near the club's training ground alongside a banner saying: "Madrid hates Real".

In December, four Atletico Madrid fans were charged over the incident, with prosecutors pushing for jail terms of four years. No date has yet been set for a trial. The Valencia incident sparked a fierce debate about whether Spain is doing enough to stamp out racism in football. — AFP

## Japan leave Syria on brink in World Cup qualifying

HIROSHIMA: Japan thrashed Syria 5-0 in Asian World Cup qualifying on Tuesday to complete the second round with a 100 percent record and leave their opponents in grave danger of elimination. Strikes from Ayase Ueda, Ritsu Doan and a Syria own goal in the first half put Japan in the driving seat in Hiroshima before Yuki Soma scored a penalty and Takumi Minamino notched a fifth late on.

The result meant Syria can only advance to the next round of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup if Myanmar beat North Korea later in the evening. North Korea would go through at Syria's expense if they secured at least a draw against bottom-of-the-group Myanmar.

Japan have no such problems after finishing the round on maximum points and with 24 goals scored and none conceded. Hajime Moriyasu's side clinched their place in the final phase without kicking a ball in March when FIFA said their away game against North Korea would not be rescheduled.

North Korea were supposed to stage the game in the capital Pyongyang but, five days beforehand, officials abruptly said the isolated country could not play host, without giving a reason. —AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

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

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, **BALU RAM**, holder of Indian Passport No. M9886812 having permanent address Vp Mahida Nayagaon Kherwara Udaipur Rajasthan India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: given name Babu Lal and surname Patel  
(12/06/2024)

Emergency call 112

## Kuwait qualify for Asian Cup, advance in World Cup qualifiers

Qatar beat India, Indonesia march on in Asian World Cup qualifiers



KUWAIT: Kuwait and Afghanistan players battle for the ball in the first half during Asian World Cup qualification match played in Kuwait.

**KUWAIT:** Eid Al-Rashidi scored in the second half to lead Kuwait to a 1-0 victory against Afghanistan in the joint qualification match for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2027 AFC Asian Cup. With this result, Kuwait officially qualifies for the Asian Cup and advances to the next round in the World Cup qualifiers after finishing in second place in Group A, ahead of India who lost their match against group leaders Qatar 2-1.

Elsewhere, Indonesia look set to be the only Southeast Asian nation still in with a chance of reaching the 2026 FIFA World Cup - after advancing to the third round of the Asian qualifiers with a 2-0 win over Philippines on Tuesday. Heading into the tie lying second in Group F and a point ahead of Vietnam, the Indonesians' fate was in their own hands and they duly got the result they needed through goals

from Thom Haye and Rizky Ridho. Even if Vietnam do pull off an unlikely upset over Iraq later on Tuesday evening, they are guaranteed to miss out on the third round of the Asian qualifiers after doing so well to get that far last time out. Indonesia could have been joined by one of their regional rivals but it was not to be as Thailand narrowly missed out despite a 3-1 triumph over Singapore.

Needing a three-goal win to progress, the Thais took the lead through Suphanat Mueanta's deft close-range finish but their hopes then took a real hit when Ikhsan Fandi equalized for the visitors with a thunderous effort three minutes before the hour mark.

Remarkably, Thailand mustered a stirring late rally as goals from substitutes Poramet Arjvirai and Jaroensak Wonggorn put them in with a chance,

but they were just unable to find the crucial fourth goal as they spurned a glut of gilt-edged opportunities in the dying moments of the contest. Despite netting twice in the final 11 minutes for a dramatic 3-1 win over Singapore, Thailand have been eliminated from the World Cup qualifiers after losing out to second spot in Group C to China on an inferior head-to-head record.

The result saw them finish with an identical record with China but it was the latter who would ultimately claim second spot in Group C on the next tiebreaker of their head-to-head record, with Thailand having lost their opener to the Chinese before playing out a draw last Thursday.

Meanwhile, Malaysia gave themselves a glimmer of a chance as they overcame an early setback to beat minnows Chinese Taipei 3-1. Hav-

ing fallen behind to Yu Yao-Hsing's 20th-minute opener, Malaysia hit back eight minutes after the restart through a Safawi Rasid strike before Paulo Jose fired them ahead 16 minutes later.

But needing a big win to give themselves the best possible chance due to a turnaround in goal difference required, Adib Ra'op popped up in the 6th minute of injury-time to give them just an extra bit of hope. Still, the Malaysians will perhaps not be overly holding their breaths as they need Oman to beat Krgyz Republic by seven goals later in the evening in order for them to leapfrog into second spot in Group D and advance.

Prior to Tuesday's action, Singapore, Philippines and Myanmar had already been eliminated and the trio would finish with a solitary point to their names each. — Agencies

## Fantini trumps over Wlodarczyk, Mayer on track

**ROME:** Sara Fantini notched another gold for Italy to ruin Anita Wlodarczyk's bid for a fifth European hammer throw title in Rome on Monday, while world record holder Kevin Mayer was half way to locking up a Paris Olympic berth on the opening day of the decathlon.

Wlodarczyk is a giant in field events: the 38-year-old Pole is a three-time Olympic champion, a four-time world gold medalist and since first striking European gold in Helsinki in 2012, had won three more continental crowns. Her one blip was missing the 2022 Euros in Munich after being injured when she apprehended a thief trying to steal her car. Wlodarczyk only won silver at the Stadio Olimpico after a humdinger of a competition.

Backed by raucous home support, Fantini eventually came away victorious, her best of 74.18m ensuring an upgrade from her silver in Munich as she won Italy's eighth gold in Rome. Wlodarczyk's 72.92m just edged France's Rose Loga (72.68) on the podium.

"Sometimes, before the attempt, my coach shouts at me: 'Come on granny!'" joked Wlodarczyk. "And a granny can maybe win an Olympic medal, too. We still have two months to prepare for Paris and I still have some reserve in my technique so it is nice to see that this was still not my maximum." Fantini said she "still can't believe I duelled and beat Anita Wlodarczyk".

"She roused me with her fourth attempt: she is a reference for me, and receiving her compliments was really emotional."

France's Mayer may be a two-time world champion and have two Olympic silver medals, but it looks like his wait to win a European outdoor championship might continue after the first day of the decathlon. The Frenchman sat eighth after the opening five disciplines on 4,230 points, Norway's Sander Skotheim led the field on 4,566.

A tough second day on Tuesday, comprising the 110m hurdles, discus, pole vault, javelin and 1500m, awaits the decathletes, with Mayer seeking to do the necessary to ensure qualification for next month's Paris Olympics.

### Double Swiss gold

Switzerland enjoyed double gold on a balmy night. Angelica Moser won her first senior outdoor medal in the women's pole vault. The unheralded Timothe Mumenthaler took the men's 200m.

In the pole vault, world bronze medallist and reigning European champion Wilma Murto of Finland bailed out at 4.43m. Just seven vaulters cleared 4.58m. That was reduced to three as the bar was raised by 10cm: Moser, Britain's world indoor champion and European leader Molly Caudery and Ekaterini Stefanidi of Greece, seeking a historic third continental title.

The Swiss gambled by skipping the next mark at 4.73m, but was left punching the air when she cleared 4.78 at the first attempt. That proved too high for Stefanidi and Caudery, the Greek taking silver on countback. The cowbells were soon ringing again after Mumenthaler, in the outside lane, timed 20.28sec to win the 200m ahead of home favorite Filippo Tortu, in 20.41. Another Swiss, William Reais, took bronze. Belgium's Alexander Doom, who claimed the world indoor 400m title in Glasgow in March, set a championship record of 44.15sec to win the one-lap race.

Doom fought back to hold off Britain's Charles Dobson in the final metres, the Briton taking silver in



ROME: Gold medallist Italy's Sara Fantini celebrates during the medal ceremony for the women's hammer throw during the European Athletics Championships at the Olympic stadium in Rome on June 11, 2024. — AFP

a personal best of 44.38sec, with Liemarvin Bonevacia of the Netherlands claiming bronze (44.88).

Poland's multi-medal winning relay specialist Natalia Kaczmarek transmuted her individual silver from Munich two years ago to gold in a thrilling shoot-out with Ireland's Rhasidat Adeleke.

Adeleke and Sharlene Mawdsley had been the female components of their country's gold-medal winning 4x400m mixed relay team on Friday—Ireland's first Euro gold since Sonia O'Sullivan's 5,000-10,000m double in Budapest in 1998.

As Mawdsley faded, Adeleke and Kaczmarek found themselves in a straight tussle for gold, the Pole eventually running out the winner in a world leading 48.98sec. Adeleke timed 49.07 for silver, with Dutch athlete Lieke Klaver taking bronze (50.08). Alexis Miellat led a French 1-2 in the men's 3000m steeplechase, winning in a personal best of 8:14.01, 0.35sec ahead of teammate Djilali Bedrani. Germany's Karl Bebenorf will return home with bronze. — AFP

## Australia's McKeown swims second-fastest 100m backstroke

**BRISBANE:** World record-holder Kaylee McKeown ramped up preparations for the defence of her Olympic 100m backstroke crown with the second-fastest swim of all time on Tuesday. The 22-year-old blitzed home at the Australian Olympic trials in 57.41secs, just shy of her world-record 57.33 and ahead of Mollie O'Callaghan who became only the fourth swimmer ever to dip below 58.

O'Callaghan's 57.88 in Brisbane was enough to also easily qualify, but she may not swim the fastest times in history and will return to the pool on Thursday for the 200m backstroke, where she is also the defending Olympic champion.

"Look I'm not going to lie, I was a bit disappointed with that," said McKeown of her time. She holds world records in all three backstroke disciplines.

"But, you know, there's always room for improvement. Glad to have another swimmer in the 57-club." McKeown has swum nine of the 10 fastest times in history and will return to the pool on Thursday for the 200m backstroke, where she is also the defending Olympic champion.

She is also scheduled to contest the 100m and 200m freestyle, having already booked her ticket to France by clocking the fastest 200m medley since the 2016 Rio Olympics on Monday.

Despite joining McKeown, Smith and Masse in the sub-58 club, O'Callaghan said she had yet to finalize her Olympic plans. "To touch in 57.8 is really amazing, I was not expecting that," said the 20-year-old, who is the 100m freestyle world record holder. — AFP



BRISBANE: Australia's Kaylee McKeown starts the women's 100m backstroke final during the Australian Swimming Trials at the Brisbane Aquatic Centre on June 11, 2024. — AFP