

Polestar 2
Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



3 Info minister examines plans to overhaul cultural facilities



6 Palestinian couple bracing for east Jerusalem eviction



8 Aviation industry experts say airfares may remain sky-high



16 Swiatek fights off Muchova for third French Open title



Kuwait announces new visa for sports, cultural activities

Call to ease Schengen visas • 66,584 driving licenses canceled • Checkpoints to be set up



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah holds a luncheon for European ambassadors, heads of diplomatic missions and charge d'affaires serving in Kuwait on June 10, 2023. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah gave orders to issue a new type of visa whose holder can enter Kuwait to practice sports, cultural and social activities. The visa will be issued through an application from sports clubs, as well as cultural and social societies in Kuwait. It is valid for a three-month stay that can be extended for a maximum of one year.

Meanwhile, Kuwait on Saturday urged European states to facilitate the granting of Schengen visas to Kuwaiti citizens. The call was made by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who received at a luncheon, held upon instructions of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, European ambassadors, heads of diplomatic missions and charge d'affaires serving in Kuwait.

The minister, during the luncheon held at the ceremonies diwan at the foreign ministry headquarters, called upon the diplomats to act to ease difficulties facing Kuwaiti nationals seeking Schengen visas, facilitate procedures to apply for the visa, set more

dates and speed up paperwork. Sheikh Salem requested the Schengen visa for Kuwaiti citizens be valid for several years, lauding the missions' efforts in tackling visa applications during the travel season and facilitating procedures for Kuwaitis traveling to resorts in European countries. He expressed utter respect for these states' procedures and sovereignty with respect to issuing the visas.

Separately, Interior Minister Sheikh Talal gave orders to cancel 66,584 driving licenses of expatriates whose residency visas have expired due to death or staying outside Kuwait for more than six months. Holders of the canceled visas will have to apply again for a new license should they return to Kuwait, provided they meet the requirements to obtain a driving license, the interior ministry said in a statement Saturday.

Also, senior police sources said the interior ministry has agreed to set up permanent security checkpoints in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to arrest residency violators and not only rely on surprise raids.

Continued on Page 6

UK reels from shock Johnson's departure as MP



Boris Johnson

LONDON: Former British prime minister Boris Johnson's angry departure from parliament over COVID lockdown-breaking parties sparked fevered speculation Saturday over his and the current government's future, with allies and enemies trading barbs. Johnson announced he was leaving as a member of parliament on Friday, claiming he had been forced out in a stitch-up by his political opponents. The 58-year-old populist politician has been under investigation by a cross-party committee about whether he deliberately lied to parliament over parties when he was in office.

In evidence earlier this year, he insisted he had not. But as the committee prepares to make public its findings, he said they had contacted him "making it clear... they are determined to use the proceedings against me to drive me out of parliament". The Privileges Committee, which has a majority of MPs from his own Conservative party, has powers to impose sanctions for misleading parliament, including suspension.

Ordinarily, suspension of more than 10 working days leads to a by-election in the MP's constituency. By quitting, Johnson avoids the consequences of a humiliating fight to remain

Continued on Page 6

Children lost in Amazon for 40 days found alive

BOGOTA: Four Indigenous children who had been missing for more than a month in the Colombian Amazon rainforest were found alive and flown to the capital Bogota early Saturday. The children, who survived a small plane crash in the jungle, were transported by army medical plane to a military airport at around 00:30 am Saturday (0530 GMT). They were immediately taken off the plane on stretchers with ambulances

waiting to bring them to hospital. "Today we have had a magical day," President Gustavo Petro told the media earlier on Friday, after announcing their rescue. "They are weak. Let's let the doctors make their assessment," he added. The president had posted a photo on Twitter showing several adults, some dressed in military fatigues, tending to the children as they sat on tarps in the jungle. One rescuer held a bottle to the mouth of the smallest child, whom he held in his arms.

"A joy for the whole country! The 4 children who were lost 40 days ago in the Colombian jungle were found alive," he wrote on Twitter. Video shared by the defense ministry late

Continued on Page 6



GUAVIARE, Colombia: Members of the Colombian army pose with four lost indigenous children who were found in the Amazon rainforest on June 9, 2023. — AFP

Trump indicted for putting US security at risk

WASHINGTON: Federal prosecutors unsealed a wide-ranging indictment of Donald Trump on Friday, accusing the former US president of endangering national security by holding on to top secret nuclear and defense documents after leaving the White House. The 76-year-old Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, took "hundreds" of classified government documents in

cardboard boxes to his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, the 49-page charge sheet said.

Trump kept the files — which included records from the Pentagon, CIA and National Security Agency — unsecured at Mar-a-Lago, which regularly hosted large social events involving tens of thousands of guests over time, the indictment said. On at least two occasions, Trump showed classified documents on US military operations and plans to people not cleared to see them at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club, it said. Trump faces 37 separate counts in the indictment including 31 counts of "willful retention of national defense information" relating to specific documents. A conviction on each count carries up to 10 years in prison.

Continued on Page 6



WASHINGTON: A woman celebrating the indictment of former US president Donald Trump holds a banner in front of the White House on June 9, 2023. — AFP

Hobbyist stuns maths world with new shapes

PARIS: David Smith, a retired print technician from the north of England, was pursuing his hobby of looking for interesting shapes when he stumbled onto one unlike any other in November. When Smith shared his shape with the world in March, excited fans printed it onto T-shirts, sewed it into quilts, crafted cookie cutters or used it to replace the hexagons on a football — some even made plans for tattoos.

The 13-sided polygon, which 64-year-old Smith called "the hat", is the first single shape ever found that can completely cover an infinitely large flat sur-



This handout image released on June 9, 2023 shows a tile shape recently 'discovered' by British mathematician David Smith. — AFP

face without ever repeating the same pattern. That makes it the first "einstein" — named after the German for "one stone" (ein stein), not the famed physicist — and solves a problem posed 60 years ago that some mathematicians had thought impossible.

Continued on Page 6

Cheap diabetes drug reduces risk of long COVID

PARIS: People who took a cheap diabetes drug after testing positive for COVID-19 had a 40 percent lower risk of getting long COVID, a US-based study said Friday. The finding was hailed as a potential "landmark" in the fight against the still little-understood condition, which the World Health Organization estimates affects one in 10 people who get COVID.

The study said it was the first randomized, placebo-controlled phase 3 trial — considered the gold standard in research — to show that taking a

Continued on Page 6



Citizens, expats give blood in record-breaking drive

Strategic blood reserves safe for now: Official



KUWAIT: Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah donates blood at the campaign organized by the governorate.



Sheikh Fawaz Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) is seen with officials.



A donor registers her information before donating blood.



Citizens and expats donate blood during the blood drive held in Al-Kout Mall.



A donor receives a care package from one of the volunteers at the blood drive.

KUWAIT: A blood drive organized by the Ahmadi governorate on Friday broke the record for the number of blood bags donated in the governorate's history, officials said.

Citizens and expats donated what amounts to 161 blood bags in the campaign held under the patronage and in the presence of Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Al-Kout Mall in Fahaheel. The campaign, which coincided with World Blood Donation Day, had a major turnout, continuing for seven hours, said Sheikh Fawaz.

Assistant Undersecretary for Allied Medical Services Affairs at the Health Ministry Dr Yaqoub Al-Tammar told reporters he was pleased with the turnout, confirming his support for such activities especially before summer break. He added

that Kuwait's strategic blood reserves are in good shape for now.

The campaign comes about a month after the Ministry of Health made the controversial decision to charge expats for blood transfusions. Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi justified the move as a measure to preserve the state's strategic blood reserves and will contribute significantly to the rationalization of blood transfusion services and derivatives based on medical priority.

According to the new policy, expatriates residing in Kuwait will be charged KD 20 per bag of blood, while those on visit visas will be charged KD 40 per bag. Patients who provide their own blood donors, emergency cases, cancer patients, children and other humanitarian situations are exempt. The decision

drew the ire of many citizens and expats who took to social media to say they will refrain from donating blood in the future.

Multi-sector cooperation

Speaking to media, Sheikh Fawaz thanked all those who contributed to organizing the campaign and all those who donated blood, whether citizens or expats, and to the campaign partners including the health ministry with its Blood Transfer Services Directorate, Medical Emergencies, Burgan Bank, Tamdeen Group and Al-Kout Mall management. He also thanked the media and governorate volunteers.

Director General of Tamdeen Group Muath Al-Roumi said participation of Al-Kout Mall in the campaign for the second consecutive year is

out of the group's belief in the importance of social responsibility. The drive, he added, fulfills the importance of cooperation and integration of goals between the public and private sectors as well as NGOs through organizing activities and programs that achieve the goals of sustainable development within Kuwait society.

Senior Manager of Corporate Communications and Social Responsibility at Burgan Bank Hessa Al-Najada said: "we are proud for sponsoring the blood donation campaign and the success it achieved in cooperation with Ahmadi Governorate and health ministry, adding that this indicated the bank's active role in the society and our commitment to supporting the health system in Kuwait to guarantee sufficient supplies of blood and its derivatives.



KUWAIT: Dr Amal Khader speaks at the launch of the IN-CHARGE program in Kuwait.

Doctor stresses need for health services targeting women

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Obstetrics, Gynecology and Fetal Medicine Consultant Dr Amal Khader said women's health is the responsibility of all workers in the health sector, adding that this reflects on the family and entire society.

Dr Khader, who is also Head of Maternity Department at Farwaniya Hospital, was speaking following her participation in the launch of the IN-CHARGE program in Kuwait.

She said the program is in cooperation with Kuwait Medical Association and Kuwait Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and aims at caring for women's health and caring for her being.

The spread of reproductive health diseases confirms the need for the treatment of gaps in women's health in this region, said Dr Khader, who heads the Kuwait Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

She added that providing health support to a woman in her various life stages is important, especially that 20 to 25 percent of women in the Middle East suffer from polycystic ovary syndrome which is a major cause of female infertility in the world. Bleeding after giving birth, also known as postpartum hemorrhage, is still the main contributor to mothers' death as it leads to the death of 13,000 women in the MENA region each year.

Officials from the private sector lauded the developments in Kuwait's health sector, particularly wom-

en's health, adding that their role as a private sector is to develop partnerships.

The role of the private sector, they said, is to promote partnerships with various sectors, be it government or otherwise, so to provide suitable care, raise awareness and achieve educational development not only in the medical field but also in society in general.

They added that the launch of the IN-CHARGE initiative in cooperation with the health ministry will supply healthcare providers with the necessary tools to improve women's health. The initiative, which is set to last for one year, will provide doctors with programs, awareness and tools that help them improve women's health.

The initiative goes along with Kuwait's goals, particularly in the health sector to make available equal opportunities to care for the health of women and men and to supply medical services for both genders.



Dr Amal Khader

Outrage after medical scholarships in Egypt, Jordan suspended

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: A decision from the education ministry suspending scholarships for medicine, pharmacy and dentistry university programs in Egypt and Jordan has been the talk of town over the past few days. According to the directive, the government will stop funding the study of children of diplomats in medical programs in both countries. The ministry will also stop providing the countries as options for Kuwaiti students applying for government-funded scholarships. The programs specifically mentioned in the new rule are medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and doctoral program in pharmacy.

But according to informed sources, students who wish to study medicine in Egypt and Jordan can still do so at their own expense. Although the ministry has made these programs ineligible for government-funded scholarships, they will continue to be accredited and graduates will still be able to find employment in Kuwait, sources added.

Over the weekend, the directive drew criticism from 12 newly-minted members of parliament. The parliamentarians rejected the suspension of scholarships, with some calling the move "ill-considered" and "rash". The document outlining the decision, on the other hand, implies it was made after careful consideration. The

ministry said it was based on thorough assessments of some higher education institutions in Jordan and Egypt following visits to both countries.

It added that government entities concerned with the quality of education in the country were also part of the decision-making process. The move was discussed in a meeting held on May 31 by a committee responsible for setting the standards for higher education institutions approved by Kuwait. The committee recommended the suspension of scholarships after reviewing reports prepared by officials who made the visits. The National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance approved the new rule on June 4.

Other options available

Education ministry statistics released in 2022 show a 209 percent increase in the number of students accepted in medical and dentistry specialties over the past five years. "The scholarship plan should come in line with labor market needs. The COVID-19 pandemic is proof that we need more seats allocated to medical programs," said one MP on Twitter, suggesting the decision could lead to a labor shortage.

According to unofficial sources, however, 5,000 students are currently studying these specialties on government-funded scholarships in Jordan and Egypt, which is far more than what the Kuwaiti labor market needs. Being among the most popular destinations for medical education, suspending scholarships to universities in these two countries might ruin the plans of some students. But they are not left without options — the education ministry sends hundreds of students on scholarships every year to study these specialties in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, among other countries.



KUWAIT: The interior ministry on Friday announced the arrest of seven suspects of different nationalities in possession of about 5.250 kg of various types of narcotics and 2,600 tablets of psychotropic substances. First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed that security men in all sectors of the ministry continue to arrest dealers, the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media said in a statement. — KUNA

Local

Plans discussed to renovate historical palaces in Kuwait

Sheikh Khazaal Palace, Mubarakiya School to be turned into museums

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Information Minister, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chairperson of the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi discussed with NCCAL officials a blueprint to renovate Abdullah Mubarak Al-Kabeer Palace (Mishref Palace) and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace (formerly Sheikh Khazaal Palace), which is known for being the first national museum in the Arabian Gulf. Kuwait is pushing for the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace to be nominated as a possible World Heritage Site. The topic was discussed during a meeting Saturday to review NCCAL's strategy for 2023-2028. The strategy includes plans to maintain and renovate affiliate sites, museums and theatres, in addition to the old Al-Mubarakiya School, which will be totally overhauled and turned into a museum for the history of education in Kuwait.

"Information Minister, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chairperson of the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi has examined various tasks of the council and its buildings that need renovation," Kuwait News Agency reported Saturday. During the meeting which was also attended by the NCCAL acting secretary general Dr Mohammad Al-Jassar, the officials examined a preliminary report about tasks set in the strategy, in addition to the condition of the council's buildings.

One of the topics discussed was upgrading other facilities such as Sabah Al-Ahmad Cultural Center and expanding it to incorporate a museum, a gal-

lery, a library, centers for conventions and children, a green spot and an outdoor theater. Furthermore, the discussions touched on reopening public libraries and partnership with the private sector to invest some NCCAL buildings for simulating the cultural movement in the country.

The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace is one of the most famous a heritage sites in Kuwait located in Dasman next to Dasman Palace, near the Arabian Gulf coast. This site was built in the early 20th century by Sheikh Khazaal Bin Mirdaw, Ruler of Muhammadarah (1897 - 1925) on a piece of land which he received as a gift from Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Kuwait's Ruler (1896-1915). After Sheikh Khazaal's death, it was bought by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who took it as a family residence, thereafter converted it into the first national museum in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf region, after which it remained as the property of his heirs until it was taken over by the state and rated as a high preservation building.

"When it was built and for many decades thereafter, the Palace was reported to be the most magnificent structure in Kuwait," the UNESCO wrote on its World Heritage Convention website, describing the building. "Patterned on regional antecedents, it was large, elaborate two-storey structure in coral stone and mud brick in a stark contrast to Kuwait's primarily single storey, austere architecture."

"The remains of exotic chateau-like palace built in early 20th century, emulating a variety of European and Middle Eastern architectural styles on the desert coast setting of Kuwait within Kuwait City's third wall survives until today as a testimony to a



Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace (Sheikh Khazaal Palace)

rich heritage representing cultural infusion on a regional and universal scale," it wrote. "It embodies the collaboration of architectural styles resulting in the development of traditional craftsmanship and a transition into a combination of architectural and building traditions including Persian, French, Arabi-

an and Indian, representing an active cultural exchange between settlements on both sides of the Gulf Region."

In 2008, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters took over the Sheikh Kazaal Palace for renovation.

Homeschooling good option for families who put in effort: Teachers

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Homeschooling is an alternative to traditional education methods that involve sending a child to a public or private school. Homeschooling involves educating a child at home by a parent or a tutor instead of enrolling them in a formal school program. This approach allows parents to have more control over their child's education and tailor their curriculum to their child's individual needs. To look more into the pros and cons of homeschooling, Kuwait Times interviewed two local teachers and a parent to hear their opinions about this educational method.

Mohammad Al-Ansari, an English teacher at a public high school in Kuwait, told Kuwait Times: "I genuinely believe that proper learning can take place from the comfort of one's home, given that a well-designed curriculum created by qualified teachers or parents is provided for the students." One of the primary advantages of homeschooling is the flexibility it offers. Parents can design a curriculum that meets their child's specific needs and interests, which can boost engagement and motivation. Homeschooling also allows for greater flexibility in scheduling, as a

student does not have to adhere to the schedule of a traditional school day.

"The traditional school curriculum often underestimates students' abilities and presents a simplified version of scientific concepts. High school students, for instance, are often capable of engaging with scientific papers and delving deeper into complex topics. By homeschooling, parents have the flexibility to provide more challenging and intellectually stimulating materials, allowing children to develop a deeper understanding of scientific principles," Ansari added.

Ghadeer Ghafour, also an English teacher at a private school in Kuwait, agreed with Ansari. "There are many advantages of homeschooling. Besides flexibility, homeschooling is considered the best option for many families who want to maintain their family values. A homeschooled child is less likely to be affected by an outsider. Also, teaching your child at home will give you a chance to know your child better and build a closer relationship with them. Most importantly, homeschooling will reduce stress and anxiety. This is mainly because spending time with your family and siblings will encourage a strong relationship. Furthermore, homeschooling will allow siblings to exchange ideas and information, which encourages siblings to socialize more and that will result in good relations," she told Kuwait Times.

Abeer, a teacher who is also a mother of three, concurred with Ghafour and Ansari. "A significant advantage of homeschooling is the ability to provide a safe learning environment for a child, where parents can choose what their child is exposed to



Ghadeer Ghafour



Mohammad Al-Ansari

and limit the amount of negative social influence that they might encounter in a traditional school environment. This can be particularly helpful for children who have experienced bullying, social anxiety or other types of negative experiences in traditional schools," she said.

Like everything else, homeschooling has a number of disadvantages that should be taken into consideration. Ansari expressed his concerns, saying: "One concern that worries me most is lack of social interaction for homeschooled students. It's utterly important for children to develop social skills, and unfortunately, it appears to me that homeschooling seems to have limitations in this aspect." Therefore, Ansari sees that parents must proactively seek out opportunities for their child



to interact with others, such as sports teams, clubs and other community activities in case they decide to homeschool their children.

"If homeschoolers could provide evidence of being involved in any extracurricular activities, in addition to their academic achievements, I would be more supportive of homeschooling. Extracurricular activities can be beneficial because they can aid in building social skills and meeting a lot of people who may be of benefit to you in the future, which is essential for success in both work and life overall," Ansari added.

Abeer highlighted the financial impact of homeschooling. "Parents who homeschool their children have to forego work opportunities to assist with their children's education. This results in a loss of income, which may be difficult for some families to manage financially," she pointed out.

In conclusion, homeschooling can be an excellent educational option for families who are willing to put in the time, effort and resources to make it work. By taking advantage of the privileges that homeschooling offers, parents can provide a unique educational experience for their children that adheres to their individual needs and interests.

Exhibition celebrates Palestinian food products, crafts



A woman stands behind a stall showcasing handwoven textiles at the Palestinian products festival. — KUNA photos



Handwoven textiles are highlighted at the exhibition.



Palestine olives and olive oil globally favored for its health components.



Handmade items are showcased at the exhibition.



Thyme, a famous food in Palestine and the region.



A handmade item is showcased at the exhibition.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) hosted the Palestinian products festival in coordination with the Palestinian Embassy in Kuwait. The festival is marked with an exhibition showcasing products famous in Palestine and the region, namely olives and olive oil, now globally favored for its health components. Other products on display are traditional Palestinian woven textiles and handicraft items. — KUNA

NEWS IN BRIEF

176 vehicles to transport
grade-12 exam papers

KUWAIT: With end-of-year exams beginning Sunday for students in grade 12, the Ministry of Education held a drill Saturday morning to test its process for transferring exam papers to testing sites. The ministry said that it has allocated 176 vehicles for the transportation of exam papers. Ministry of Interior patrols will supervise the transportation of tests daily until the last exam is held on Thursday, June 22. The papers were successfully taken from the printing press used by the ministry, whose location is not known to the public, to their final destination.

Officers foil cigarette
smuggling attempt

KUWAIT: Nuwaiseeb customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle out 833 cigarettes cartons through the Nuwaiseeb border crossing in southern Kuwait. The cigarettes were found after officers became suspicious of a vehicle upon its arrival at the crossing. Upon closer inspection, officers found that the vehicle had a large number of cigarette cartons ready for smuggling. Legal action was taken accordingly.

Blaze extinguished
in Kaifan house

KUWAIT: Firemen put out a blaze in an abandoned house in Kaifan area on Saturday, according to the media department at the Kuwait Fire Force. Teams dispatched from the Al-Shaheed and Industrial Shuwaikh centers found upon inspection that abandoned timber and rubbish had caught fire. The fire was put out with no injuries reported.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This aerial photo shows Al-Shaheed Park, the largest urban park in Kuwait, flanked by Kuwait City skyscrapers on the right and a residential area on the left. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Iraq, GCCIA super grid to benefit
economy, environment: Kuwaiti officials

Project to connect Kuwait's Wafra station to Al-Faw station in Iraq

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Eng. Mutlaq Abu-Rguba said the new electrical interconnection project connecting the GCC super grid with the southern region of Iraq is a big stride in the regional Arab strategy.

The project, which Abu-Rguba described as an important part of the vision of the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) for regional integration, was launched Thursday in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. The inauguration ceremony took place in the presence of senior GCC government officials. GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Kuwait's Abu-Rguba were in attendance.

The GCC chief said the interconnection project is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects for the GCC countries. "The project will serve as a backup for the GCC power emergency response system and offset the carbon emissions in the entire region," Al-Budaiwi said in a statement.

The ambitious undertaking, spearheaded by Qatar Fund for Development and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, involves the construction of a cutting-edge double circuit 400 kV transmission line stretching from the Wafra station in Kuwait to the



KUWAIT: GCC officials pose for a photo ahead of the inauguration of the GCC-Iraq super grid on Thursday. — KUNA

Al-Faw station in southern Iraq. With a total length of 1,050 km, will provide essential backup to the regional power grid, said Abu-Rguba.

Abu-Rguba noted that the project will bring great economic and technical benefits for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries. It will support the GCC power emergency response system and help avert any partial or total blackouts in the future, the minister explained. Since 2009, the GCC super grid

project has cut expenses by \$3 billion in 2022, chairman of the board for the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) Dr. Naif Al-Abdadi said in 2022.

According to the World Bank, electricity trade could save the Arab world \$17-25 billion and reduce required capacity by 33 gigawatts (GW) through better mutual utilization of existing capacity. The GCCIA further estimates that GCC power trading could achieve savings of up to \$24 billion by 2038.

NBK organizes
innovation, digital
trends masterclass

KUWAIT: Reflecting its belief in the importance of increasing the efficiency of its employees, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a masterclass titled "Innovation and Digital Trends" which was delivered by Alberto Levy, the Professor at IE's Entrepreneurship & Innovation Center.

The masterclass that was attended by managers from various groups and divisions across the bank explored the latest digital trends and how they are driving innovation in various industries. It also discussed some special concepts about providing innovation environment and the key factors that help in creating an ideal environment for innovation, generating new and unconventional ideas and solutions, and ways to promote innovation culture within the same work team.

The lecturer provided an overview of the latest digital trends that are shaping the business landscape including digital transformation, artificial intelligence, blockchain, data analytics, which is based on predicting customers' behavior and interests. He also explained how these technologies are disrupting industries and creating new opportunities for innovation.

The class included a workshop in which participants worked in groups to explore how digital trends are being applied to drive innovation, and how to leverage emerging technologies to transform business models, enhance customer experiences and improve operational efficiency.



Emad Al-Ablani

It also examined the challenges and risks associated with implementing digital technologies in the banking industry.

Throughout the class, the participants engaged in interactive discussions and activities to encourage participation and collaboration, which helped them gain a deeper understanding of the latest digital trends and how they can be leveraged to drive innovation.

Alberto Levy is considered an "Innovation Evangelist". He holds a master's degree from New York University in interactive telecommunications and is an international lecturer and professor at IE's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center.

Commenting on this, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are pleased to organize this intensive training program, which includes eight masterclasses which extend until the beginning of next year, and focus on many key topics that are instrumental in the future of the banking industry."

"NBK regards investing in its employees as a key strategic pillar to achieve sustainable growth and maintain its excellence and leading position in the banking sector. Therefore, it strives to keep pace with the latest developments in the training and development area, to deliver on its commitment to empower and qualify its employees through specialized programs," he emphasized.

Alblani mentioned that all the programs and courses delivered to employees are designed within an integrated training plan developed according to methodological and scientific standards to meet the needs of all relevant departments, in cooperation with the best banking experts and globally reputable training agencies.

"NBK is always introducing new training opportunities that promote an open work culture, enabling leaders to create a work environment driving employees' creativity and innovation," he remarked.

NBK focuses on developing its employees as a top priority, harnessing all its capabilities to contribute to their career progression by providing training and development programs. In addition, it makes its utmost endeavors to support employees in building their careers within the bank, believing that its successful and sustainable transformation depends on diverse and high-caliber talent.



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Latest Sudan truce begins amid civilian scepticism

Syrians lose life-saving care as Turkey halts medical visits

Page 6

Page 7



MOGADISHU: Residents walk past a damaged tuk-tuk left outside the site of an attack at the Pearl Beach Hotel in Mogadishu on June 10, 2023. — AFP

Six killed in Somalia hotel siege

Three brave members of security forces were martyred during the rescue operation

MOGADISHU: Six civilians were killed and 10 wounded in a six-hour siege by Islamist Al-Shabaab militants at a beachside hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, police said Saturday. The Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists have been waging an insurgency against the internationally backed federal government for more than 15 years and have often targeted hotels, which tend to host high-ranking Somali and foreign officials.

"Six civilians were martyred in the attack... and 10 others were wounded. Three brave members of the security forces were martyred during the rescue operation," the Somali Police Force said in a statement. The assault, for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility, began just before 8 pm on Friday (1700 GMT) when seven attackers stormed the Pearl Beach hotel, a popular spot at Lido Beach along Mogadishu's coastline. It ended at around 2 am, police said, after a fierce gunfight between security forces and the militants, all of whom were killed during the battle. "The security forces managed to rescue 84 people including women and children and elderly people," the police statement added. Witnesses reported hearing gunfire and explo-

sions at the hotel on Lido beach. "I was near the Pearl Beach restaurant when (a) heavy explosion occurred in front of the building," one witness, Abdirahim Ali, told AFP. "I have managed to flee but there was heavy gunfire afterwards and the security forces rushed to the area."

Yaasin Nur was at the restaurant and told AFP it was "full of people as it was recently renovated." "I'm worried because there are several of my colleagues who went there and two of them are not responding to their phones," he said. Several ambulances were also parked nearby, an AFP journalist saw.

'All-out war'

The attack at Lido beach underscored the endemic security problems in the Horn of Africa country as it struggles to emerge from decades of conflict and natural disasters. Al-Shabaab, which was driven out of Somalia's main towns and cities by an African Union force, still controls large swathes of countryside and continues to carry out attacks against security and civilian targets, including in the capital.

Last year, Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud launched an "all-out war" against Al-Shabaab, rallying Somalis to help flush out members of the jihadist group he described as "bedbugs". His pledge came after 21 people were killed and 117 others were wounded in an Al-Shabaab siege on a Mogadishu hotel in August 2022 that lasted 30 hours. That attack raised serious questions about the security forces, who failed to protect a heavily guarded administrative district. Two months later, twin car bombings in Mogadishu killed 121 people and injured 333 in the country's deadliest attack in five years. The army and militias known as "macawisley" have in recent months retaken swathes of territory in the centre of the country in an operation backed by the African Union mission ATMIS and US air strikes. But Al-Shabaab fighters killed 54 Ugandan peacekeepers last month in an attack on an African Union base in the southern town of Bulo Marer. In August 2020, Al-Shabaab launched a large-scale attack on the Elite, another hotel at Lido beach popular with officials, killing 10 civilians and a police officer. — AFP

France sentences man for burning pregnant teenager

BEAUVAIS: A court in France sentenced a man to 18 years in prison on Friday for stabbing and then burning alive his 15-year-old girlfriend. The 2019 killing of the secondary school pupil, identified in court only as Shaina, revived outrage in France over the number of women who die at the hands of intimate partners. The court was told that the accused, a 17-year-old high school student at the time, had lured Shaina to a shed in the town of Creil north of Paris to kill her and burn her body.

Post-mortem forensic examination revealed "multiple wounds" inflicted by a knife, but also that Shaina was still breathing at the start of the fire. According to public prosecutor Loic Abrial, the crime was "premeditated at every stage."

He had sought a tougher, 20 or 30-year sentence, but the court took the accused's status as a minor into consideration. In response, Shaina's brother, Yaasin, cried angrily. "18 years! That's justice in France," he shouted at the special juvenile court in Oise, and had a tense exchange with the accused before collapsing and being taken to hospital.

Restrictions prevent the media from identifying the accused, who has staunchly maintained his innocence. "Why, why?" he said in reaction to the verdict, following four-hour deliberations. "You're wrong, I'm innocent."

Defence lawyer Elise Arfi said it was "too early" to comment on the possibility of an appeal. The case made waves in France where a woman is murdered by her partner or former partner every three days, according to official figures. — AFP



BEAUVAIS: Shaina's parents arrive for the trial of the alleged murderer of their daughter, accused of murdering and burning alive the 15-year-old girl in 2019, at the Juvenile Assize Court of Beauvais. — AFP



KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shake hands after signing bilateral agreements during a press conference following their talks on June 10, 2023. — AFP

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau visits Kyiv

KYIV: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made an unannounced visit to Kyiv on Saturday as Ukrainian forces were engaged in fierce fighting against Russia on the southern front line. Trudeau, who is due to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky later on Saturday, placed flowers by a wall displaying the faces of soldiers killed in combat while a military orchestra played, AFP journalists saw.

He also visited an open-air exhibition featuring destroyed military vehicles. Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Oleksandr Polishchuk handed Trudeau a container holding shrapnel from a rocket that fell on the Black Sea port city of Odesa. A group of Ukrainian soldiers who received training in Canada spoke with Trudeau. One of them, Colonel Petro Ostapchuk, told reporters the troops received training for elite shooters, engineers and young commanders. "It's a great privilege to meet the prime minister," he said. Canada, which hosts a large Ukrainian diaspora, has been one of Kyiv's key allies since the Russian invasion.

Ottawa has provided Ukraine with significant military aid, trained more than 36,000 soldiers and adopted sanctions against Moscow. Trudeau's visit comes as Russia has reported thwarting Ukrainian attacks in the

east and south that some observers have interpreted as the start of Kyiv's expected large-scale counter-offensive. Ukraine has so far minimized the importance of the attacks.

As fighting raged Friday in southern Ukraine, but Russian leader Vladimir Putin claimed Kyiv's long-expected offensive was already failing, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky praised the heroism of his country's soldiers, but made no direct reference to what some observers believe is the start of Ukraine's bid to claw back territory from Russia. "For our soldiers, for all those who are in particularly tough battles these days, we see your heroism, and we are grateful to you for every minute of your life," Zelensky said in his daily address. Ukrainian officials have said their forces are ready, but there would be no formal announcement when the counter-offensive starts.

Earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin said it had already begun, after Moscow said it had repelled several Ukrainian assaults. "All counter-offensive efforts so far have failed, but the offensive potential of the Kyiv regime still remains," Putin said in a video, as Washington announced a new \$2.1-billion package of military aid for Ukraine.

Moscow says clashes have intensified since Thursday in the Zaporizhzhia region, home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which relies on the waters of the Dnipro for its cooling ponds. These water supplies have been put at risk by the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, which has left 600 square kilometres under water in the region, with around a dozen killed and thousands forced to flee. — AFP

How Trump indictment could impact White House race

WASHINGTON: The latest twist in Donald Trump's attritional war with US law enforcement, as with so much else in the former president's story, throws the United States into unprecedented territory. Facing multiple federal charges over his hoarding of government secrets, the mercurial Republican presents the country with the possibility of a winning candidate moving into the White House while under indictment — or running the government from a jail cell.

The defiant billionaire has dismissed the notion that he would ever drop out of his party's primary contest, reverting instead to a favored tactic of accusing his "corrupt" political adversaries of election interference.

"It likely won't sway undecided voters but it will galvanize Trump supporters who might be wavering or looking to a candidate with less baggage," Matt Shoemaker, a national security analyst and former intelligence officer, told AFP.


Prosecutors in both the federal documents case and the state-level financial fraud probe targeting Trump in New York will hope to have him face justice before the country goes to the polls in 17 months. But there is no guarantee of either case wrapping up that quickly and Trump also faces federal and state-level probes into his efforts to subvert the 2020 election.

He would likely torpedo any outstanding federal prosecutions were he reelected, by attempting to pardon himself — an unprecedented scenario that would almost certainly spark a constitutional crisis. But he would have little influence over state-level cases and his more immediate worry is the damage his legal woes could do to his campaign to win the Republican nomination in the first place.

The latest indictment allows Trump's primary challengers — Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, former vice president Mike Pence and others — to level the criticism that the runaway frontrunner is unfit for office. But they run the risk of alienating Trump's loyal base, whose support has only grown more fervent since the Manhattan indictment. As a result, many rivals have rallied to Trump's side, perhaps hoping to keep their powder dry until he is finally taken out of the running by further indictments expected in the coming months. — AFP

"Those We love don't go away they walk beside us everyday Unseen unheard but always near so loved so missed so very dear"

Obituary



PRINCY SANTHOSH
It is with utmost pain and sorrow we share the loss of our beloved Princy Teacher-(Princy Thomas) Senior Wing Science Department. The Management, staff and students of United International Indian School express our deepest condolences to the bereaved family and friends.
May her soul rest in peace

UNITED INTERNATIONAL INDIAN SCHOOL

International

Syrians lose life-saving care as Turkey halts medical visits

Only cancer patients allowed to cross into Turkey after months of waiting

HALZOUN: Huddled inside a tent in rebel-held north-western Syria, Umm Khaled says she fears her baby will die unless she gets specialist treatment in neighboring Turkey for a congenital heart defect.

Seriously ill Syrians in the country's last rebel bastion of Idlib used to be able to access life-saving care across the border. But the main crossing there for medical visits slammed shut after a deadly earthquake ravaged southern Turkey on February 6, prompting Ankara to prioritize its domestic needs.

Born just a week before the disaster, baby Islam needs urgent cardiac surgery, unavailable in Syria's war-scarred Idlib region where the healthcare system fell into further disarray after the quake.

"I watch my daughter suffer and I can't do anything about it," said Umm Khaled, showing only her eyes and hands beneath her black niqab. The 27-year-old said her baby was losing weight and her condition worsening. Islam often struggles to breathe, and a doctor has warned that repeated such episodes, which put further strain on her heart, could be deadly without an operation or treatment.

But only cancer patients have been allowed to cross into Turkey after months of waiting - and only since Monday. "When she cries, she turns blue and her heart beats very fast," Umm Khaled said, as her three other young children sat on the ground in their tent in the village of Halzoun. "I hope they'll open the crossing soon," she said, baby Islam squirming in her lap.

Treatment 'unavailable'

Doctors in Idlib refer most heart and cancer patients to Turkey, where they can receive free treatment under an agreement between local authorities and Ankara.

Burns victims, premature babies and people requiring complicated surgery have also been allowed to cross. But after the quake ravaged health facilities on the Turkish side of the border, Ankara halted medical visits through the Bab al-Hawa crossing - the sole access point for patients from Idlib. The border has remained open for United Nations humanitarian aid, goods and even Syrians visiting relatives in the area. Firas al-Ali, diagnosed with a benign tumor near his brain in 2017, has undergone surgery and tests in Turkey, where he usually gets medication and treatment every three months.

He had been waiting for treatment on February 23, but then the earthquake struck. "Due to the delay, I'm getting pain in my eyes and my head," the 35-year-old blacksmith said.

"My treatment is unavailable here and if it is, it is expensive and I can't afford it." Rebel-held Idlib is home to around three million people, many of them displaced from other parts of Syria and dependent on humanitarian aid. Government-held areas of Syria are off limits to civilians from Idlib. The Syrian side of the Bab al-Hawa crossing into Turkey is controlled by the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

Syrians 'risk dying'

The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) runs the only centre in Idlib for cancer patients. Pediatric oncologist Abdel Razzaq Bakur said the clinic lacked diagnostic equipment and medications, and had been overwhelmed by "numerous patients who urgently need to be admitted in Turkey".

The children's ward alone has admitted 30 patients left untreated by the border closure, he said. Around 40 more "haven't been getting chemotherapy and their



IDLIB: In this picture taken on May 2, 2023, people register as they arrive at the Haematology and Oncology department run by the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) at Idlib Central Hospital in the rebel-held northwestern Syrian city. — AFP

condition is very bad - some risk dying". Some families had tried to get medicine from Turkey or Lebanon, but prices were often prohibitive, he added. "Most people can't cover their basic daily needs, so how are they supposed to secure chemotherapy doses?" he asked.

Yusuf Haj Yusuf, 60, was scheduled to have chemotherapy in Turkey the day the quake struck and

said a recent scan showed his lung cancer had worsened. He had asked relatives to help pay for treatment in Idlib but "no longer had the strength" to raise funds. "I was very happy about the reopening of the crossing," he said. "After the earthquake, we cancer patients have suffered a lot. We have all been waiting to return to the Turkish hospitals." — AFP

Palestinian couple brace for east Jerusalem eviction

JERUSALEM: In the walled Old City of Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, Nora and Mustafa Sub Laban are counting down the last days before a court decision that has hovered over them since 1978 is carried out. After decades of legal wrangling, they are set to be evicted from their home in the Muslim Quarter to make way for Jewish settlers.

"These days, I'm like a prisoner waiting to be put to death. I don't sleep like other people," Nora Sub Laban told AFP. The east Jerusalem residents have been embroiled in a 45-year legal battle with authorities and

Zionist settlers. The settlers are part of an organization called Atara Leyoshna and are represented by Eli Attal, according to both the Sub Laban family and Ir Amim, an anti-settlement watchdog. Attal declined to comment about the case when approached by AFP.

The Zionist plaintiffs claim that Jews lived in the building before the division of the holy city into Zionist-occupied and Jordanian sectors following the proclamation of the Jewish state in 1948. They invoke a Zionist law from the 1970s that allows Jews to reclaim property owned by Jews before 1948, even if they are not related.

The Sub Labans say they were designated "protected tenants" by Jordan in the 1950s, before Zionist-occupied east Jerusalem in 1967 and proceeded to annex it in a move regarded as illegal by the United Nations.

The family showed AFP a Jordanian rental contract dating back to 1953, as well as Zionist court rulings recognizing their status as "protected tenants". Yet the courts said that the couple do not currently live per-

manently in the building, so their "protected tenants" status no longer applies and the eviction can go ahead.

Nora said the judgment refers to a period when she was not living in the apartment daily because of a hospitalization. "Legally speaking, within the Zionist system, nothing more can be done," said Rafat Sub Laban, the couple's son and an employee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the West Bank city of Ramallah. According to Ir Amim, some 150 Palestinian families in Jerusalem's Old City and nearby neighborhoods are currently threatened with eviction because of "discriminatory laws and state collusion with settler organizations".

The group says such evictions are part of "a strategy to cement Zionist hegemony of the Old City basin, the most religiously and politically sensitive part of Jerusalem and a core issue of the conflict". Over the years, settlers have opened several yeshivas — Jewish seminaries — on the street where the Sub Laban family lives.

Their nearest Zionist neighbors lives just a few steps from their home — they share a landing. But it is not a peaceful cohabitation. "We do not live in freedom and security," said Nora. Inside the apartment, photos have been taken down and objects of sentimental value removed. The Sub Labans know that when the police come, they will have only a few moments to clear out their things.

"When unfortunately that happens, we will bring our parents to my sister and me" in another neighborhood of east Jerusalem, their son Rafat said. "It's the only option." Messages scribbled on the wall in black marker by their grandchildren are one of the few things left in the almost empty apartment.

"Palestine will be free," "We will return" and "This is our home," they read. "I lived my childhood in this house, I grew up here, I lost my father and my mother here," said Nora Sub Laban. "People think that a house is just walls, but it's also memories, it's my whole life," the 68-year-old added. — AFP

Kuwait announces new visa for...

Continued from Page 1

Sources said the checkpoints will be at the entrances and exits of the area, as the ministry found from its data that most violators reside in Jleeb, in addition to most violations taking place in this area. Sources said such permanent check-

points will also be set up in other expat-populated areas such as Mahboula, Farwaniya, Hawally, Khaitan and Bneid Al-Gar.

Sources said the interior ministry will seek the help of its civil employees and volunteers to find violations and inform interior ministry operations, particularly vendors who sell goods in front of mosques or in alleys in residential areas. The volunteers will have the right to ask residents for their IDs and confirm their residency status, and immediately coordinate with interior ministry operations to arrest any violator. — Agencies

MP, meaning current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whom Johnson partly blames for his downfall, faces two by-elections as his party languishes in the polls. Johnson's ability to generate strong feelings of admiration or hate was reflected in the reaction to his shock announcement. The Daily Mirror likened him to "a criminal who refuses to come to court for his sentencing."

Labour's deputy leader Angela Rayner said the public — battling a cost-of-living crisis — had had enough of the "never-ending Tory soap opera" while her opposite number with the smaller Liberal Democrats, Daisy Cooper, said it was "good riddance". But Johnson's supporters rallied behind him, lauding his achievements in pushing through Brexit and galvanizing support for Ukraine. Conservative-leaning tabloid The Sun hailed his "unique magnetism and historic achievements" which "dwarf those of the pygmies who set out to expel him as an MP and, appallingly, have succeeded". There was, however, widespread agreement that Johnson will remain a looming presence and a problem for Sunak. "He may have resigned as MP but he made very clear in his statement that he does not see this as the end of his political career," the Times wrote. — AFP

Minnesota and the new study's lead author, told AFP that "our data show that metformin reduces the amount of SARS-CoV-2 virus" in patients. The research was published in the Lancet Infectious Diseases journal.

Jeremy Faust, a doctor at Harvard Medical School not involved in the study, said in a linked comment piece that if confirmed, the findings "are profound and potentially landmark" for long COVID. Frances Williams, an epidemiology professor at King's College London, pointed out that 564 people had to take the drug "to prevent 23 hypothetical cases". "This means 24 people would need to take metformin to prevent one case of long COVID," she said, adding that this was a lot of drugs to stop such a poorly understood condition.

The researchers cautioned that they did not test metformin on people who had already been diagnosed with long COVID, so the findings did not mean it could be used to treat the condition. The study also found that the antiparasitic drug ivermectin, which was the subject of misinformation throughout the pandemic, as well as the antidepressant fluvoxamine did not prevent long COVID.

Tens of millions of people have been estimated to have had long COVID, in which numerous and sometimes debilitating symptoms last or recur three months after infection that can then drag on for years. The most common symptoms include fatigue, breathlessness and a lack of mental clarity called brain fog. — AFP

Children lost in Amazon for 40...

Continued from Page 1

Friday showed the children being pulled up into a helicopter as it hovered over the tall trees in almost complete darkness. Originally from the Huitoto indigenous group, the children — aged 13, nine, four and one — had been wandering alone in the jungle since May 1, when the Cessna 206 in which they were traveling crashed.

The pilot had reported engine problems only minutes after taking off from a jungle area known as Aracuara on the 350-km journey to the town of San Jose del Guaviare. The bodies of the pilot, the children's mother and a local indigenous leader were all found at the crash site, where the plane sat almost vertical in the trees. Officials said that the group had been fleeing threats from members of an armed group.

A massive search involving 160 soldiers and 70 indigenous people with intimate knowledge of the jungle was launched after the crash, garnering global attention. The area is home to jaguars, snakes and other predators, as well as armed drug smuggling groups, but ongoing clues — footprints, a diaper,

half-eaten fruit — led authorities to believe they were on the right track.

Worried that the children would continue wandering and become ever more difficult to locate, the air force dumped 10,000 flyers into the forest with instructions in Spanish and the children's own indigenous language, telling them to stay put. The leaflets also included survival tips, and the military dropped food parcels and bottled water. Rescuers had also been broadcasting a message recorded by the children's grandmother, urging them not to move. According to the military, rescuers found the children about five kilometers west of the crash site.

Huitoto children learn hunting, fishing and gathering, and the kids' grandfather, Fidencio Valencia, had told AFP the children are well acquainted with the jungle. News of the rescue came as Petro returned home from Cuba, where he signed a six-month truce with Colombia's last active guerrilla group, the ELN. "Getting closer and attaining peace in the agreement that is moving forward with the ELN... And now I return and the first news is that indeed the indigenous communities that were in the search and the military forces found the children 40 days later," he told reporters in Bogota. "They were alone, they made it on their own. An example of absolute survival that will go down in history," he said. — AFP

making false statements. Trump's personal aide, Walt Nauta, was named as a co-conspirator, charged with six counts for helping Trump hide documents, which were kept at various locations in Mar-a-Lago, according to the indictment, including a ballroom, a bathroom, Trump's bedroom and a storage room.

"The classified documents Trump stored in the boxes included information regarding defense and weapons capabilities of both the United States and foreign countries," the indictment said. Other records dealt with US nuclear programs and potential vulnerabilities of the United States and its allies to military attack along with plans for retaliation, it said. "The unauthorized disclosure of these classified documents could put at risk the national security of the United States, foreign relations, the safety of the United States military, and human sources," according to the indictment. — AFP

ridiculous story — but wonderful". He said that Smith, a retired print technician who lives in Yorkshire's East Riding, emailed him "out of the blue" in November. Smith had found something "which did not play by his normal expectations for how shapes behave", Kaplan said.

If you slotted a bunch of these cardboard shapes together on a table, you could keep building outwards without them ever settling into a regular pattern. Using computer programs, Kaplan and two other mathematicians showed that the shape continued to do this across an infinite plane, making it the first einstein, or "aperiodic monotile".

When they published their first preprint in March, among those inspired was Yoshiaki Araki. The Japanese tiling enthusiast made art using the hat and another aperiodic shape created by the team called "the turtle", sometimes using flipped versions. Smith was inspired back, and started playing around with ways to avoid needing to flip his hat. — AFP

UK reels from shock Johnson's...

Continued from Page 1

an MP in his Uxbridge and South Ruislip constituency in northwest London where he holds a slim majority of just over 7,000. He denounced the committee, chaired by veteran opposition Labour MP Harriet Harman, as a "kangaroo court". "It is very sad to be leaving Parliament — at least for now — but above all I am bewildered and appalled that I can be forced out, anti-democratically... with such egregious bias," he said.

He claimed the committee's report, which has not been published, was "riddled with inaccuracies and reeks of prejudice", adding he had "no formal ability to challenge anything they say". Their "purpose from the beginning has been to find me guilty, regardless of the facts", he said. Responding to the resignation, the Privileges Committee said Johnson "impugned the integrity of the House by his statement".

Johnson loyalist Nadine Dorries also quit as an

Cheap diabetes drug reduces risk...

Continued from Page 1

drug can prevent long COVID. It tested a drug called metformin, which was originally developed from the French lilac flower, and has been the most common medication used to treat type 2 diabetes across the world for decades. This means the drug is known to be safe, as well as being inexpensive and widely available. The study covered 1,126 overweight or obese people in the United States, half receiving metformin and half a placebo in the days after testing positive for COVID. After 10 months, 35 of the participants who took metformin were diagnosed with long COVID, compared to 58 for the placebo group, representing a 40 percent reduction in risk.

The trial was conducted between Dec 2020 and Jan 2022, meaning it included the Omicron variant, which research has suggested causes long COVID at a lower rate than previous strains. The team behind the COVID-OUT trial had previously shown that metformin reduced coronavirus patients' risk of emergency department visits, hospitalizations and death by more than 40 percent.

Carolyn Bramante, a researcher at the University of

Trump indicted for putting US...

Continued from Page 1

"We have one set of laws in this country, and they apply to everyone," said Special Counsel Jack Smith, who brought the historic indictment against Trump, the first former US president ever to face federal criminal charges. "Laws that protect national defense information are critical to the safety and security of the United States, and they must be enforced," Smith said, adding that he would seek to ensure that Trump receives a "speedy trial".

Other charges facing the twice-impeached Trump include conspiracy to obstruct justice, punishable by up to 20 years in prison, withholding a document or record, which also carries a prison term of up to 20 years, and

Hobbyist stuns maths world...

Continued from Page 1

After stunning the mathematics world, Smith — a hobbyist with no training who told AFP that he wasn't great at maths at school — then did it again. While all agreed "the hat" was the first einstein, its mirror image was required one in seven times to ensure that a pattern never repeated. But in a preprint study published online late last month, Smith and the three mathematicians who helped him confirm the discovery revealed a new shape — "the specter". It requires no mirror image, making it an even purer einstein.

Craig Kaplan, a computer scientist at Canada's Waterloo University, told AFP that it was "an amusing and almost

International

Latest Sudan truce begins amid civilian scepticism

US, Saudi mediators warn they may break off mediation efforts

KHARTOUM: A 24-hour ceasefire took effect Saturday between Sudan's warring generals but, with fears running high it will collapse like its predecessors, US and Saudi mediators warn they may break off mediation efforts.

With the fighting now about to enter a third month, civilians trapped in the battlegrounds in greater Khartoum and the flashpoint western region of Darfur are desperate for relief from the bloodshed but deeply sceptical about the sincerity of the generals.

Multiple truces have been agreed and broken since fighting erupted on April 15, and Washington had slapped sanctions on both rival generals after the last attempt collapsed at the end of May. The nationwide truce announced by US and Saudi mediators on Friday took effect at 6:00 am (0400 GMT).

"Should the parties fail to observe the 24-hour ceasefire, facilitators will be compelled to consider adjourning" talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah which have been suspended since late last month, the mediators said. Civilians voiced disappointment that the promised ceasefire was so limited in scope.

"A one-day truce is much less than we aspire for," said Khartoum North resident Mahmud Bashir. "We look forward to an end to this damned war." Issam Mohamed Omar said he wanted an agreement that required fighters of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) who had occupied his home in Khartoum to leave so that he can return there from his temporary lodgings across the Nile in Omdurman. "For me, a truce that doesn't kick the RSF out of the home they kicked (me) out of three weeks ago, doesn't mean anything to me," he said.

'Incentives not changed'

Sudan specialist Aly Verjee said he saw lit-

tle reason why this truce should be honored any more than its predecessors. "Unfortunately, the incentives have not changed for either party, so it's hard to see that a truce with the same underlying assumptions, especially one of such short duration, will see a substantially different result, said Verjee, a researcher at Sweden's University of Gothenburg. Upwards of 1,800 people have been killed in the fighting, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Nearly two million people have been displaced, including 476,000 who have sought refuge in neighboring countries, the United Nations says. The Saudi and US mediators said they "share the frustration of the Sudanese people about the uneven implementation of previous ceasefires".

The army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, said it has "agreed to the proposal", adding in a statement it "declares its commitment to the ceasefire". The paramilitary RSF, commanded by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, said: "We affirm our full commitment to the ceasefire."

Both statements said the truce could support humanitarian efforts, while cautioning against violations by their opponents. "If observed, the 24-hour ceasefire will provide an important opportunity... for the parties to undertake confidence-building measures which could permit resumption of the Jeddah talks," the US-Saudi statement said.

UN backs envoy

Friday's announcement came a day after Sudanese authorities loyal to Burhan declared UN envoy Volker Perthes "persona non grata", accusing him of taking sides. UN chief Antonio Guterres later expressed support for Perthes, who is currently in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa for a series of talks.



KHARTOUM: A woman buys vegetables at a market in Khartoum, on June 10, 2023. A 24-hour ceasefire took effect on June 10 between Sudan's warring generals but, with fears running high it will collapse like its predecessors, US and Saudi mediators warn they may break off mediation efforts. — AFP

Speaking through his spokesman, Guterres said "the doctrine of persona non grata is not applicable to or in respect of United Nations personnel" and is contrary to Khartoum's obligations under the UN charter.

The fighting has sidelined Perthes's efforts to revive Sudan's transition to civilian rule, which was derailed by a 2021 coup by the two generals before they fell out. It has also complicated the coordina-

tion of international efforts to deliver emergency relief to the 25 million civilians that the United Nations estimates are in need.

Alfonso Verdu Perez, outgoing head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Sudan, warned on Friday that "health care may collapse at any moment". "The needs are immense and much more remains to be done" in both Khartoum and Darfur, he told reporters in Geneva. — AFP

Taiwan's armed forces hold coastal drills

KAOHSIUNG: Patrol boats circled and officers descended by rope from a helicopter during a staged hostage crisis in the southern city of Kaohsiung, as Taiwan's armed forces held drills on Saturday. The island holds frequent military drills in the face of increasing military and political pressures from China, including near-daily Chinese warplane incursions into its air defence zone.

Beijing claims self-ruled, democratic Taiwan as its territory and has vowed to retake it one day — by force if necessary. At Kaohsiung port on Saturday, the coast-guard, military, police and airborne services simulated a hostage situation, accompanied by action-movie music and an ongoing narration of the "attack".

"This is (Taiwan) Coast Guard! Stop the engine immediately!" shouted the announcer. "We are going to board and inspect your ship!" Smaller patrol boats surrounded the ship while a helicopter hovered overhead. The officers managed to "covertly" board the ship, and they opened fire — not live rounds — on the yellow-clad hostage takers.

At the end of the rehearsal, officers saluted President Tsai Ing-wen, who waved from the pier. "Everyone who participated in today's drill are our



KAOHSIUNG: Taiwan special force troops enter a container during a coast guard drill in Kaohsiung on June 10, 2023. — AFP

country's frontline defenders. I want to emphasize again, we have to strengthen ourselves in order to ensure peace in the Taiwan Strait," Tsai said in a short speech.

"The more we are united, the more secure we are; the more secure Taiwan is, the safer the world will be." Since Tsai — who rejects that Taiwan is a part of China — came to power in 2016, the island has seen

by our mission... will be to restore that dignity which was often lacking to those who arrive in Italy," said Ignazio Schintu, Red Cross director for emergencies, during a media tour this week.

Calling home

Famed for its white sand beaches, Lampedusa was for decades best known as a tourist destination and still draws huge crowds each summer. But located just 90 miles (around 145 kilometres) off the coast of Tunisia, it has also become one of the first points of call for the wave of migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

More than 46,000 migrants landed last year on Lampedusa, out of 105,000 total arrivals in Italy, according to the UN refugee agency. In the picturesque old harbor, a small fleet of coastguard and police boats is moored alongside the fishermen and tourist day-trippers.

When the weather is fine and the sea calm, they are called out almost every day to meet the migrant boats approaching the coast. At the reception hotspot, the arrivals are given food, water, clothes and a medical check-up, as well as access to a phone, a charging point and the Internet.

"Wi-Fi and connection... is one of the first requests that they make of us," to enable them to let loved ones back home that they are safe, said Francesca Basile, Red Cross' head of migration. Sadly, her team also helps with "clarifying the fate of dead bodies or missing persons" for families "looking for somebody that is not present anymore", she told

officials said on condition of anonymity. The State Department has not officially announced his travel. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby recently said the United States would announce travel by senior officials "in the near future" without giving details.

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in Bali in November and agreed to try to stop high tensions from soaring out of control, including by sending Blinken to Beijing. Blinken abruptly canceled a trip scheduled in early February after the United States said it detected — and later shot down — a Chinese surveillance balloon flying over the US mainland, drawing fury from US lawmakers and denials by Beijing.

But the two sides have more recently looked

increased incursions by Beijing's boats warplanes.

In April, Beijing conducted three days of military exercises simulating a blockade of the island in response to US Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy meeting Tsai in California. And last August, China held four days of live-fire drills around Taiwan's territorial waters — with some of the exercises taking place just off the coast of Kaohsiung. — AFP



LAMPEDUSA: Migrants wait in line prior to board a boat at the port of the island of Lampedusa. Italy's special commissioner for the migration emergency and director of emergency operations of the Italian Red Cross presented a policy as Red Cross take over managing the migrants hotspot on the island of Lampedusa. — AFP

AFP. More than 1,000 migrants have died this year so far in the central Mediterranean, according to the UN migration agency.

Migrants once came and went as they pleased but these days the centre is surrounded by a high fence and patrolled by soldiers outside. On trestle tables under a gazebo between the prefabricated buildings, a group of young Tunisian men sat chatting. — AFP

again to keep tensions in check including with an extensive, closed-door meeting between Biden's national security advisor Jake Sullivan and top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Vienna last month.

Tensions have risen sharply between the world's two largest economies in recent years, especially over Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that Beijing claims and has not ruled out seizing by force. The two countries are also at odds over China's increasingly assertive posture in the region and over trade and human rights.

Biden, however, has looked to limited areas for cooperation with China, such as climate change, in contrast with the more fully adversarial position adopted at the end of the administration of his predecessor Donald Trump. — AFP

UN peacekeepers to leave Central Africa after abuse claims

BANGUI: The United Nations will repatriate a Tanzanian unit of its peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic after allegations of exploitation and sexual assault, the force said on Friday. Preliminary evidence gathered by the UN's internal oversight body revealed that 11 of the 60-strong contingent "are involved in the exploitation and sexual abuse of four victims", the MINUSCA force said in a statement.

MINUSCA said the 11 soldiers were deployed at a temporary base in the western CAR but did not provide a timeline of the alleged crimes. The victims "received immediate care and support through partners of the mission based on their medical, psycho-social and protection needs", MINUSCA added. A spokesman for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Stephane Dujarric, said the unit "will be repatriated once their presence is no longer required by the investigators".

The UN said it had informed the Tanzanian authorities, which "noted the seriousness of the allegations and pledged to take the necessary measures". CAR authorities had not responded to AFP requests for comment. The United Nations has for years been trying to eradicate exploitation and sexual abuse by its peacekeepers, including in the conflict-torn CAR. In 2021, it ordered 450 Gabonese peacekeepers to leave the country after allegations of abuse.

The UN says it has recorded 254 accusations of sexual abuse or exploitation against MINUSCA members since 2015 and identified 659 victims. "The United Nations remains committed to robustly implementing the secretary general's vision of zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse," Dujarric added. — AFP

Record Everest season among most dangerous

KATHMANDU: Scaling Everest is always dangerous, but expedition organizers have warned that a combination of extreme weather, corner-cutting on safety, and inexperienced and "impatient" foreign climbers has resulted in one of the peak's deadliest mountaineering seasons.

As the last search and rescue teams hang up their boots and the tent city at base camp packs up for the year, expert climbers say several of the 17 people killed or missing and presumed dead this season could have avoided disaster.

"This season was very bad overall," said expedition organizer Mingma Gyalje Sherpa, of Imagine Nepal Trek and Expedition, whose team was responsible for opening the route to the summit. "The main reason is that the weather was extremely cold... but there was also carelessness." Higher death numbers were recorded in past seasons, but those tolls included several killed in single large-scale disasters. In 2014, 16 Nepali guides were killed by an avalanche, with climbing closed for the season thereafter.

The deadliest season was in 2015, when at least 18 people died in an earthquake that also killed nearly 9,000 people across Nepal. This season, 12 people died and five others are missing. Ten of them were foreigners, the highest such toll on record, as well as seven Nepalis: guides, mountain workers and a climber. Around five climbers die each year on the oxygen-starved paths to the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) icy peak. Some say too many of the foreign mountaineers are ill-prepared for what remains a major test of body and soul. — AFP

On Lampedusa, Red Cross takes over migrant hub

LAMPEDUSA: The reception centre on the Italian island of Lampedusa is for many migrants their first taste of Europe after crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and for those arriving, it is a grim, desperate place.

Flooded bathrooms, a lack of food and water and chronic overcrowding that left men, women and children sleeping on filthy mattresses in the open air — the stories told by humanitarian workers are bleak.

Three migrants have died in the centre in recent months, according to the UN's migration agency, amid accusations of a dangerous lack of doctors. On June 1, the government brought in the Italian Red Cross, which has vowed to provide a more dignified welcome to the tens of thousands who arrive each year from North Africa, hoping for a new life in Europe. Tonnes of rubbish have been cleared, and new bathrooms installed, although a sour smell still lingers. There is a new medical team in place and sites of modern cots are ready to almost double the site's emergency capacity.

Efforts are also being made to speed up transfers off the island to ease pressure on a facility built for 389 people but which often houses more than 3,000. "Here we are at the door of Europe. And obvious-

Blinken reschedules postponed Beijing visit for June 18

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to China next week, rescheduling a visit that was canceled in February after a saga over a suspected surveillance balloon, US officials said Friday.

Blinken is expected to arrive in Beijing on June 18, the first trip by a top US diplomat to China since his predecessor Mike Pompeo in October 2018. US

Business

SUNDAY, JUNE 11, 2023

Air fares may stay sky-high

51 percent increase for flights to Asia-Pacific region



GENEVA: Commercial planes of Swiss air lines, Lufthansa and Spanish low-cost airline Vueling are parked on the tarmac of Geneva Airport. — AFP

PARIS: Despite the recent fall in oil prices, high air fares may stay in place for some time to come, say airline industry professionals and experts. The gradual return of demand for travel last year following the lifting of COVID-19-related travel restrictions, had already given the signal for higher fares. But this year, just as the airlines are expecting to see passenger numbers almost back to pre-crisis levels, prices have really taken off. In France in April, the average cost of an air ticket was 32.6 percent higher than four years earlier, according to the French Civil Aviation Authority. That increase was as much as 51 percent for flights to the Asia-Pacific region.

In the United States, the air ticket price index published by the St Louis Federal Reserve showed an 11-percent increase in air ticket prices between April 2019 and April 2023. This is despite the fact

that oil prices have eased since peaking in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates that they will fall to an average of \$98.5 a barrel this year, compared with \$135.6 last year. Representing between 25 percent and 30 percent of airline costs, fuel normally has a significant effect on ticket prices.

However "labor costs and other costs associated with the supply chain... seem to be higher or rising," Marie Owens Thomsen, IATA's chief economist said earlier this week in Istanbul. "Airlines will have to find a way to cover those costs or they will start making losses again," at a time when they are barely back in the black and have to pay off the colossal debts incurred due to COVID-19, she added at the general meeting of her association, which brings to-

gether 300 airlines from around the world.

'Too few seats'

For Vik Krishnan, a specialist in the airline sector at strategy consultancy McKinsey, the main issue is now "less about oil prices and more about the fact that there are too few seats chasing too many people who want to be in them". Despite order books that are sometimes full right up to the end of the decade, aircraft manufacturers are struggling to meet their delivery targets because of shortages of parts or materials from their suppliers.

There is also the thorny issue of labor costs. "Many airlines had to recut their deals with their flight and cabin crews... but also all of the supply, the ground handlers, the maintenance shops, they all had to pay considerably higher wages coming

out of COVID," said Geoffrey Weston, from the consultancy firm Bain & Company. "There aren't many factors that are going to bring ticket prices down," echoed Pascal Fabre, aviation sector specialist at AlixPartners.

And given that the airline industry will have to invest hundreds, if not thousands, of billions of dollars in new aircraft and renewable fuels if it hopes to meet its 2050 decarbonization target, IATA's Owens Thomsen sees no respite for consumers any time soon. "Costs are likely to increase until such a point when all of these solutions have become commercially viable and produced at scale. "When we reach that lucky moment, we can start thinking that these costs can decline again. I cannot pinpoint necessarily when that's going to happen but I'm tempted to say 2040". — AFP

Apple, defying the times, stays quiet on AI

SAN FRANCISCO: Resisting the hype, Apple defied most predictions this week and made no mention of artificial intelligence when it unveiled its latest slate of new products, including its Vision Pro mixed reality headset. Generative AI has become the tech world's biggest buzzword ever since Microsoft-backed OpenAI released ChatGPT late last year, revealing the capabilities of the emerging technology.

ChatGPT opened the world's eyes to the idea that computers can churn out complex, human-level content using simple prompts, giving amateurs the talents of tech geeks, artists or speechwriters. Apple has laid low as Microsoft and Google raced out announcements on how generative AI will revolutionize its products, from online search to word processing and retouching images.

During the recent earnings season, tech CEOs peppered mentions of AI into their every phrase, eager to reassure investors that they wouldn't miss Silicon Valley's next big chapter. Apple has chosen to be much more discreet and, in its closely watched keynote address to the World Developers conference

in California, never once mentioned AI specifically. "Apple ghosts the generative AI revolution," said a headline in Wired Magazine after the event.

'Not necessarily AI?'

Arguments vary on why Apple has chosen a more subtle approach. For one, Apple follows other critics who have long been wary of the catchall "AI" term believing that it is too vague and unhelpfully evokes dystopian nightmares of killer robots and human subjugation to machines. For this reason, some companies — including TikTok or Facebook's Meta — roll out AI innovations, but without necessarily touting them as such. "We do integrate it into our products [but] people don't necessarily think about it as AI," Apple CEO Tim Cook told ABC News this week. Indeed, AI was actually very much part of Apple's annual jamboree on Monday, but it required a level of technical know-how to notice.

In one instance, Apple's head of software said "on-device machine learning" would enhance auto-correct for iPhone messaging when he could have just as well said AI. Apple's autocorrect innovation drew giggles with the promise of iPhones no longer correcting common expletives. "In those moments where you just want to type a 'ducking' word, well, the keyboard will learn it, too," said Craig Federighi.

Autocorrect will also learn from your writing style, helping it guide suggestions, using AI technology similar to what powers ChatGPT. In another example, a new iPhone app called Journal, an inter-

percent in 2021. The central bank "replaces its puppet banker," Ipek Ozkardeskaya, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank, said in a note. She suggested that the new governor would likely return the bank toward a more conventional monetary policy that would require rate hikes. The analyst also expects diminishing foreign exchange market interventions "which will first lead to a further lira depreciation to catch up a year-and-a-half coma - an expensive coma."

The bank is due to make a rate decision on June 22. Erdogan, who was re-elected to a third term in office last month, already signaled a shift on Saturday when he unveiled a new cabinet with Mehmet Simsek, a former Merrill Lynch economist, as finance minister. Simsek - who worked as finance minister and deputy prime minister in the past ruling AKP governments - is known to oppose Erdogan's unconventional policies of lowering interest rates to fight inflation.

Turkey's inflation rate dropped below 40 percent in May for the first time in 16 months. Independent economists believe it is much higher, above 100 percent. Simsek welcomed the appointment as an "outstanding choice" while Turkish media have for days



LOS ANGELES: Justin S Lee, a writer and director in TV and Film, holds a sign in front of Apple's flagship store during the writer-led Apple Day of Action - continuing strike by the Writers Guild of America (WGA), in Los Angeles. — AFP

active diary, would use "on-device machine learning... to inspire your writing," Apple said, again not referring to AI when other companies would have. But AI will also play a major role in the Vision Pro headset when it is released next year, helping, for example, generate a user's digital persona for video-conferencing. For some analysts, the non-mention of AI is an acknowledgement by Apple that it lost ground against rivals. "They haven't put much effort into it," independent tech analyst Rob Enderle told AFP. — AFP

Zuckerberg shakes off Apple Vision Pro

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg has told employees that while Apple's mixed reality gear may be nice, it is not his vision of the future, according to US media reports. Zuckerberg's comments came during the first all-hands gathering at its Silicon Valley campus since the pandemic, and just days after Apple unveiled Vision Pro mixed reality headsets. "I mean, that could be the vision of the future of computing, but like, it's not the one that I want," Zuckerberg reportedly said while assessing what he has seen of Apple Vision Pro. "There's a real philosophical difference in terms of how we're approaching this."

Meta makes Quest virtual reality headsets and has invested heavily in Zuckerberg's belief that internet life will one day play out in virtual worlds referred to as the metaverse. "Our vision for the metaverse and presence is fundamentally social," Zuckerberg said, according to a transcript of remarks posted by tech news website The Verge. "By contrast, every demo that (Apple) showed was a person sitting on a couch by themselves."

Meta was so confident it could create the metaverse — an idea of a 3D immersive internet — that it changed its name from Facebook in 2021 and began funneling billions into the project. But the idea has been hampered by botched launches, dodgy graphics, no clear path to profitability and a general feeling that few people know what it is. Meta's Reality Labs, the division helming its metaverse effort, has lost \$4 billion so far and Zuckerberg has been increasingly talking up artificial intelligence rather than the metaverse.

Zuckerberg was quoted by CNBC as saying at the all-hands gathering that Meta planned to build generative artificial intelligence into "every single one" of its products. Apple this week unveiled a sleek Vision Pro "spatial reality display" packed with technology and priced at \$3,499. Vision Pro is to be available early next year. It allows users to communicate, work, watch movies, listen to music — and even choose whether to be immersed or to keep an eye on the outside world. Meanwhile, a new-generation Quest 3 with improved performance and slimmed design will be available later this year at a starting price of \$500. Zuckerberg described the coming model as Meta's "most powerful headset yet" and promised it would provide the best wireless way to experience mixed and virtual reality. — AFP

Erkan named Turkey's central bank governor

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed former Wall Street executive Hafize Gaye Erkan as central bank governor on Friday, signaling a possible shift from his unconventional policies against soaring inflation. Erkan - a former chief executive of US real estate finance firm Greystone, co-CEO of First Republic Bank and managing director at Goldman Sachs - will be the first woman to head the central bank. She takes over from Sahap Kavcioglu, who lowered rates even though central banks worldwide have done the opposite to fight inflation. Her appointment was published in the official gazette on Friday.

Under Kavcioglu's watch, the bank's policy rate was decreased to 8.5 percent. It had been at 19



ANKARA: This photograph shows the Central Bank of Turkey, in Ankara. — AFP

talked of Erkan as the "brilliant Turk" or "genius." "Her strong academic credentials and extensive experience in international financial markets mean that she is well positioned to guide Turkey through challenging economic times," Simsek tweeted. — AFP

Canada unemployment rises for first time in nine months

17,000 jobs shed; Jobless rate pushed up to 5.2%

OTTAWA: Canada shed 17,000 jobs in May, pushing up for the first time in several months the unemployment rate to 5.2 percent, the national statistical agency said. The net job losses came as a surprise, after robust employment gains in recent months. Since last September about 400,000 new jobs had been created. "After a long string of outsized gains in job growth, hiring apparently hit a rough patch in May," said Desjardins analyst Royce Mendes. According to Statistics Canada, most of the job losses were full-time and self-employed. There were fewer people employed in the month in business, building and other support services (-31,000), as well in professional, scientific and technical services (-13,000), the agency said.

Employment, however, increased in manufacturing (+13,000), "other services" (+11,000) and utilities (+4,200). Mendes commented that the total hours worked, which fell 0.4 percent in May, "looked ugly," and that "the only decent reading for workers came in the wage numbers, which are still running at an above-five percent annual pace." RBC assistant chief economist Nathan Janzen noted that more economic data is scheduled to be released before the next interest rate announcement in July.

The Bank of Canada, after becoming in March the first major central to pause its recent aggressive monetary policy to fight inflation, came off the sidelines this week to hike its key lending rate to 4.75 percent. This followed several back-to-back hikes started in June 2022 when interest rates were at a record low. "We continue to expect data releases to look softer as time goes on," Janzen said in a research note, adding that "it will probably take more downside surprises to upend plans for another rate hike in July."

Stock markets mixed

Meanwhile, European stock markets dropped after gains in Asia Friday as investors awaited next week's crucial interest-rate decision from the US Federal Reserve. The dollar was higher against main rivals, while the Turkish lira sat around record lows against the greenback. Newly re-elected President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed former Wall Street executive Hafize Gaye Erkan as central bank governor, signaling a possible shift in his unconventional policies to fight inflation.

Erkan, the first woman to head the Turkish central bank, is a former chief executive of US real estate finance firm Greystone, co-CEO of First Republic Bank and managing director at Goldman Sachs. Oil prices steadied Friday at the end of a volatile week for the commodity following Saudi Arabia's decision to slash output. Expectations that the Federal Reserve will hold off raising interest rates on Wednesday for the first time since starting its hiking cycle last year to combat high inflation have pushed equities higher for most of the month.

Market expectation was thrown off course, however, after the Bank of Canada's surprise lift and a similar move in Australia this week. The Australian and Canadian central banks "are raising rates in part because they think the Fed will hike once more and if they fail to match this they risk" a weakening of their currencies, said analyst Krishna Guha at Evercore ISI. Despite the rate rises elsewhere, analysts believe news of a forecast-busting jump in US jobless claims to the highest since October 2021 will cause the Fed to pause until next month.

All three main US indices ended higher Thursday, with the S&P 500 entering a bull market after rising more than 20 percent from its October low.



MONTREAL: Two people relax in the shade during a heatwave in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. - AFP

Analysts said a pick-up in industrial stocks indicated a broadening of the rally while others said the United States could even avoid a recession, which many had feared would happen because of the surge in interest rates over the past year. Europe's leading stock markets were trading lower Friday, a day after official data showed the euro-zone had fallen into recession.

China stimulus talk

Elsewhere, eyes are on China where there is growing speculation that authorities will unveil fresh stimulus measures to kickstart the world's number two economy, with the post-zero-COVID rally already fading. Disappointing readings on manufacturing

produced in an eight-hour shift, and the rate could be increased, said Weismueller. After huge pressure, Berlin agreed in January that German-made Leopards — for which Rheinmetall makes parts, and which are developed by manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann — could be sent to Ukraine. The first tanks were delivered in late March.

New production lines

From 60,000 a year before the war, Rheinmetall has ramped up production to 240,000 of the tank shells annually. The firm is Europe's biggest manufacturer of ammunition for tanks and artillery, ahead of Norway's Nammo and France's Nexter. This position will be cemented with the acquisition of Spain's Espal, a leading manufacturer of 120 mm shells. Such is the boom in demand that the company is sitting on a backlog of orders worth 18.5 billion euros — three times its sales in 2022. As well as supplying Ukraine, Germany's decision to beef up its armed forces in the wake of the Ukraine war is helping to drive the surge. Rheinmetall estimates that Europe's biggest economy will need to spend \$40 billion to replenish its stocks of armaments.

At Unterluess, new machines are being installed and whole new production lines set up. Equipment to make 35 mm shells fired by Gepard anti-aircraft tanks should begin production in less than six weeks, Weismueller said, with up to 500,000 to be produced a year. The shells are also produced in Switzerland but authorities in the traditionally neutral country have refused to allow their export to conflict zones. The factory has also ramped up production of 155 mm shells for self-propelled howitzers, which can hit targets 25 kilometers away.

Elsewhere in the plant, old armored vehicles, with patches of rust, have been completely dismantled, as workers prepare to refurbish them to be deployed once again on the battlefield. This includes the Marder infantry fighting vehicle, dozens of which have already been sent to Ukraine. Booming demand means the 2,400 staff at the site are working flat out, as the sound of shots ring out from Leopard 2 cannons being tested on an adjacent firing range, the largest in Europe. — AFP

Germany's arms maker guns for rapid production

UNTERLUSS: In a factory in a tranquil German village, 120 mm tank shells with black-painted tips, packed into wooden crates, sit on pallets waiting to be delivered to Ukraine. Leading arms manufacturer Rheinmetall is racing to meet demand for weapons and ammunition to supply Kyiv, as well as Germany and other NATO countries which are bolstering their defenses after draining stockpiles.

In March, as intense fighting continued around Bakhmut, NATO's chief said "we need to ramp up production" warning Ukraine's usage is outstripping allies' production capacity. "We are pulling out all the stops when it comes to production of ammunition for tanks," said Harald Weismueller, head of the factory in Unterluess, Lower Saxony state. Germany has long been a major arms maker and exporter, but in a country still haunted by guilt over Nazi atrocities in World War II, its manufacturers have kept a relatively low profile.

But as Russia's war in Ukraine spurs demand, business is booming for Rheinmetall, which has seen orders surge and in March joined Frankfurt's blue-chip DAX stock index. The European Union has agreed on a plan to spend two billion euros (\$2.1 billion) on artillery shells for Ukraine to try to get a million rounds of artillery ammunition to the country over twelve months. Kyiv had told the EU it needed 350,000 shells a month to support troops, saying its forces were having to ration firepower as the conflict turned into a grinding war of attrition.

Among the wide array of armaments produced at Rheinmetall's major Unterluess plant are shells for Leopard 2 battle tanks, which can travel at 1,700 meters (5,580 feet) per second and pierce the armor of a Russian tank. Between 400 and 500 shells can be



UNTERLUSS: Cabins for military trucks are produced at the facility of German armaments company and automotive supplier Rheinmetall in Unterluess, northern Germany. - AFP

Mali passenger train service back on track

DAKAR: Mali's sole passenger train service, linking the capital Bamako with the west of the country, resumed commercial operations on Friday after a five-year break, the transport ministry said. "Locomotive CC2207 of SOPAFER-Mali left Kayes this morning at 8:00 am, heading for Bamako," it announced on Facebook. "The departure marks the de-facto resumption of commercial passenger rail traffic be-

tween Bamako and Kayes." After a 400-kilometre (250-mile) trip, the train is expected to arrive at 3:00 am on Saturday.

Service on the line had halted in May 2018 because of poor maintenance, adding to transport problems in a deeply poor country where decent roads are few. The Bamako-Kayes line is part of a track completed in 1924 during the French colonial era linking Bamako with Dakar, the Senegalese capital, 1,286 kilometres away. The economy and finance ministry in a statement said that rehabilitation had cost 6.26 billion CFA francs (around \$10 million), which would be recouped over the first two years of operation. Passengers rushed to buy tickets after news that the service had resumed, according to pictures posted by the transport ministry on Twitter. — AFP



LUGANO: Two men sit under a sign of Credit Suisse displayed on a building in Lugano. — AFP

UBS set to carve up Credit Suisse after takeover

ZURICH: UBS is set to finalize the takeover of Credit Suisse on Monday, but the hardest part is yet to come: turning the arranged marriage of Switzerland's biggest banks into a success. Reassuring the financial markets, customers, employees, the government and the public remains a challenge once the mega-merger is completed. "From Monday onwards, UBS can start being proactive," Andreas Venditti, an analyst at Swiss investment manager Vontobel, told AFP.

Switzerland's largest bank must already have an idea of what bits of Credit Suisse it wants to keep, close or sell, but "so far they were limited in what they could do," he said. On June 5, the two Zurich-based banks announced that the merger should be completed on June 12. A merger this complex could turn out to be a nightmare, particularly given how little time UBS has had.

UBS expects an exceptional accounting gain of nearly \$35 billion due to the difference between the purchase price and the recognized net assets of Credit Suisse. UBS chief executive Sergio Ermotti has warned the coming months will be "bumpy" for the bank. Takeover preparations have already brought "a first wave" of emotions and difficult decisions, but "other waves" are still to come, he told the Swiss Economic Forum conference in Interlaken on Friday. He said jobs would be the trickiest part of the merger, adding that cuts were inevitable given the overlap in some activities.

Shotgun wedding

Like UBS, Credit Suisse was among 30 international banks deemed too big to fail due to their importance in the global banking architecture. But the collapse of three US regional lenders in March left Credit Suisse looking vulnerable, and its share price plunged more than 30 percent during trading on March 15. The Swiss government, the central bank and financial regulators then stepped in and strong-armed UBS into a \$3.25 billion takeover announced on Sunday, March 19, before the markets reopened the following day. The government feared Credit Suisse would have quickly defaulted and triggered a global banking crisis.

The deal includes guarantees for UBS in case there are any nasty surprises in the Credit Suisse cupboards. UBS and the Swiss government signed the guarantee contract on Friday, which can reach up to nine billion Swiss francs (\$9.85 billion), if the losses exceed five billion francs. The takeover terms and the size of the resulting megabank are causing serious concern in Switzerland. The parliament in Bern has set up an extremely rare commission of inquiry, with lawmakers set to investigate how the emergency rescue was stitched together in double-quick time. — AFP

activity and trade this week have compounded the view that officials need to step in, with reports suggesting the People's Bank of China will cut interest rates soon.

Expectations were ramped up Thursday after a key government adviser said borrowing costs should come down to help struggling firms' financing ability. The need for action was reinforced Friday by Chinese data showing consumer inflation essentially flat in May and wholesale prices falling more than expected. "On the whole, the muted inflation environment may call into question the sustainability of the economic recovery, but it also provides a favorable backdrop for policymakers to roll out more policy support," said HSBC's Erin Xin. — AFP



LAGOS: Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, co-founder of fintech firm Flutterwave and training platform Andela, poses for a portrait at Victoria-Island, Lagos Nigeria. — AFP

African space tech? Don't rule it out, says Nigeria's startup king

PARIS: Iyinoluwa Aboyeji might not have the personal wealth of Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg, but his level of success as an African entrepreneur bears comparison with any Silicon Valley tech titan. While still in his twenties, the Nigerian co-founded two "unicorns", an industry term for companies that achieve a valuation of more than \$1 billion. By most counts, Africa has produced only seven unicorns compared with more than 700 in the United States.

Aboyeji, who has many of the trappings of a global tech boss — he is often known simply as "E" — he wants to build a city devoted to tech — says African entrepreneurs should have big ambitions. But they cannot simply copy-paste from the playbooks of Zuckerberg or Musk. "We admire these guys, they're inspirations," he told AFP over the phone from an investor conference in the United States. "But when we're looking for a path we don't look to them because they've got a completely different reality from ours. You've got to find your own way."

Now 32, Aboyeji now spends much of his time funding startups, having left his posts in both of his unicorns — fintech firm Flutterwave and training platform Andela, which counted Zuckerberg as an investor. "Now I'm the coach, I take a backseat," he said with a laugh. "I had my time in the spotlight, I played well." His Future Africa firm, one of the continent's biggest startup funds, is preparing to launch a new round of investing. But it comes as tech firms across the world have slashed workers, and venture capitalists have tightened their purse strings.

An African Delaware

The global downturn has seriously hampered African tech startups. They attracted more than \$2 billion in funding during the first quarter last year but this year's figure is less than half that amount, according to specialist publication The Big Deal. The gloomy figures do not dim Aboyeji's confidence. "It feels like the recession really unlocked people's ability to build all of a sudden," he said.

His firm Future Africa has invested more than \$10 million in dozens of projects, many of them fintech startups trying to improve access to loans and banking services. Future Africa helps them launch their ideas and get further funding. But Aboyeji still has an eye for a grand scheme — he is helping a project to build a city devoted to tech talent. "Think Delaware, but for Lagos," he said, referencing the tiny US state with low taxes that hosts many international companies.

The project, called Itana, aims to house thousands of tech workers and give firms tax breaks and other incentives — with a likely budget of \$500 million. Silicon Valley libertarian ideologue Peter Thiel is among the backers. Like similar attempts to create such "charter cities", critics have said Itana will be a tax haven or an opt-out from state control. Aboyeji and his partners have repeatedly denied that, insisting Itana is located within an established free trade zone and will respect Nigerian law. — AFP

Reduction of fossil fuel use 'inevitable': UAE executive

EU fossil fuels emissions lower thanks to gas crisis

BONN: The head of the upcoming COP28 climate summit, who also is the chief executive of the UAE's national oil company, acknowledged that a reduction in the use of fossil fuels is inescapable. "The phase down of fossil fuels is inevitable," Sultan Al-Jaber said on the sidelines of technical climate talks six months ahead of the summit. "The speed at which this happens depends on how quickly we can phase up zero carbon alternatives, while ensuring energy security, accessibility and affordability," added Al Jaber, who runs the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc).

Al-Jaber defended a COP28 roadmap that includes a "global goal to triple renewable energy, double energy efficiency, and double clean hydrogen, all by 2030." His comments came as numerous participants and observers in the UN climate negotiations have called on Al-Jaber to explicitly acknowledge the importance of ending the use of fossil fuels, an objective no COP summit to date has been able to put down in writing.

'Need to kick the habit'

Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa, an African climate and energy think tank, told AFP that Al-Jaber is right to acknowledge the inevitability of the phaseout of fossil fuels. "Like a drug addict, we need to kick the habit if we're going to heal and start getting better," he said. After coming close to getting a COP resolution to phase out fossil fuels in Glasgow in 2021, and again in Sharm-El-Sheikh in 2022, Adow said this was the year to get it done. Al-den Meyer, a senior policy analyst at climate think tank E3G, called the acknowledgement of the need to phase down fossil fuels "a useful first step".

However he added that the vast majority of emis-

sions reductions to be achieved by 2030 "needs to come from cutting use and production of oil, gas, and coal," rather than from carbon capture or hydrogen. Ross Fitzpatrick, Policy and Advocacy Officer at Christian Aid Ireland, said it was great to see the COP28 chief "waking up to the inevitability of phasing out fossil fuels". "The UAE would be a very fitting location to mark the end of the fossil fuel age," he added.

On Wednesday, Al-Jaber signed a statement with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen calling for "a transition towards energy systems free of unabated fossil fuels," meaning fossil fuels without carbon capture systems, hinting at a possible compromise in the coming months between different camps in the negotiations. "We must be laser-focused on phasing out fossil fuel emissions, while phasing up viable, affordable zero carbon alternatives," Al-Jaber said at an event in Germany last month.

The statement was interpreted at the time as a defense of oil and gas, on the condition that it is used with carbon capture technologies that are still not mature and remain uncertain. At the talks in Bonn, the exit from fossil fuel use dominated the talk among activists and experts who pointed to the fact that burning fossil fuels is by far the main driver of global warming. Activists have organized protests at the Bonn talks calling for energy firms to be kicked out of the climate negotiations.

Fuel emissions lower

Meanwhile, carbon dioxide emissions from energy use in the European Union fell by 2.8 percent last year, thanks to reduced use of natural gas following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Eurostat reported on Friday. The European Union's statistical agency



WASHINGTON: Protesters calling for an end to fossil fuel use demonstrate outside the World Bank and IMF headquarters during the Spring Meetings in Washington, DC. — AFP

in a report that CO2 emissions from the 27 EU nations was almost 2.4 billion tons last year. Carbon dioxide emissions from energy use are a major contributor to global warming and account for around 75 percent of all man-made greenhouse gas emissions in the EU.

While natural gas use was down, by around 13 percent, emissions from coal and oil were up slightly "reflecting, among other things, the efforts invested by EU countries to achieve the voluntary gas demand reduction target introduced in August 2022."

as the conflict in Ukraine hit supplies. According to Eurostat, the fall in energy-related emissions also varied greatly from country to country.

The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium saw the biggest falls, with the Netherlands leading the way with a 12.8 percent reduction. At the other end of the scale, Bulgaria registered the biggest increase in CO2 emissions of 12 percent, followed by Portugal and Malta. The European Union has ambitious plans to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. — AFP



SHENYANG: A vendor (left) sells vegetables at a market in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

China's inflation stays low, growth sputters

BEIJING: Chinese inflation came in flat again in May, official figures showed Friday, as the country's economy sputters owing to softening demand and falling exports, leading to calls for a rate cut and a bigger government stimulus. The consumer price index (CPI) rose 0.2 percent on-year, from 0.1 percent in April, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), said. The figure was in line with expectations of analysts polled by Bloomberg. Beijing has kept interest rates low compared to other major economies, but the near-zero inflation highlights challenges faced by policymakers as they try to stimulate the economy.

Top economist and government adviser Liu Yuchun on Thursday called for regulators to cut borrowing costs further to ease the financing burden of small and medium-sized private businesses. Private companies' borrowing costs exceeded that of large state-owned enterprises, Liu said, according to Bloomberg News. Large state-owned enterprises enjoyed loan rates lower than 1.8 percent but many private firms had to pay nearly nine percent, he said on the sidelines of the Lujiazui Forum in Shanghai.

"It'll be better if the rate cut comes as a part of

a package of support policies," he said. China's six largest state-owned commercial banks cut interest rates for savers on Thursday to boost spending, according to announcements on their websites, after being asked by the central bank. The country's producer price index (PPI) — which measures prices paid by wholesalers — dropped a bigger-than-expected 4.6 percent in May, from a 3.6 percent decline in April, and the biggest drop since 2016.

PPI has fallen for eight consecutive months because of sluggish domestic demand and lower commodity costs. Other economic data released recently also signal weakness in the world's second-largest economy, despite the lifting of strict pandemic rules at the end of last year. Exports sank in May for the first time since February, state media reported earlier in the week, breaking a two-month growth streak as a post-COVID rebound faded.

The Chinese economy is weighed down by a debt-laden property sector and a global economic slowdown. "The risk of deflation is still weighing on the economy," Zhiwei Zhang, Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said. "The government has not sent a clear signal on potential policy stimulus," he said, adding that the next round of policy reviews may come after July. Analysts from Capital Economics said: "We still think a tightening labor market will eventually put some upward pressure on inflation later this year." — AFP

Vicente de la O Levy, minister of energy and mines, had in recent weeks declared "there will be a recovery" from fuel shortages, "and a decrease in uncomfortable queues." With a processing capacity of 22,000 barrels per day at the Havana refinery, the capital could be supplied for up to three weeks, said Jorge Pinon, director of the Latin America and Caribbean Energy and Environmental Program at the University of Texas.

Tuesday's arrival of the Bicentenario is the third such shipment this year, said Pinon. State-owned Petroleos Mexicanos did not respond to a request for comment. Mexico, led by leftist President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, is pursuing a policy of both pushing for an end to US sanctions on Cuba while also maintaining a dialogue with Washington and cordial hemispheric relations, said Arturo Lopez-Levy, a visiting professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid.

Relations between Moscow and Havana, meanwhile, have intensified in recent months, with an uptick in bilateral projects and visits between senior officials. But it can be difficult for Cuba to pay for the oil. Sometimes, countries ship the oil on credit, or in exchange for Cuban doctors coming to work in the country shipping the oil. — AFP

CI affirms Gulf Bank's forex rating at A+ and bond rating at BBB+

KUWAIT: Capital Intelligence Ratings ("CI Ratings") has affirmed the Long-term Foreign Currency and the Short-term Foreign Currency of Gulf Bank ratings at "A+" and "A1", respectively. At the same time, CI Ratings has also affirmed the Bank's Stand Alone Rating of "a-", with a "Stable" Outlook. On the other hand, CI Ratings has also affirmed the rating of Gulf Bank's KD 50 million Basel III-compliant Tier 2 Subordinated Bonds at "BBB+". The Outlook for the Bond is "Stable".

Gulf Bank's Stand Alone and Core Financial Strength ("CFS") are both supported by the Bank's well established business franchise, especially in retail banking, good loan asset quality metrics, solid capital position and sound liquidity metrics. The CFS also reflects the Bank's size as the fifth largest bank in Kuwait in terms of total assets as on first quarter of 2023, with one of the largest distribution networks in the country and a sound market share of both loans and deposits, as mentioned by CI Rating announcement.

On Gulf Bank's asset quality, CI Ratings stated in their report that "Gulf Bank is considered a well-managed institution and conservative lender. Loan asset quality metrics are good as indicated by a fairly well diversified loan book by customer segment and economic sector. CI Rating therefore,

Pakistan unveils \$50.5bn budget

KARACHI: Pakistan's cash-strapped government unveiled a 14.5 trillion rupee (around \$50.5 billion) budget Friday, with over half set aside to service 7.3 trillion rupees of debt. Pakistan's economy has been stricken by a balance-of-payments crisis as it attempts to service crippling external debt, while months of political chaos have scared off potential foreign investment.

Inflation has rocketed, the rupee has plummeted and the country can no longer afford imports, causing a severe decline in industrial output. About 950 billion rupees was earmarked for vote-winning development projects ahead of a general election later this year, while other populist measures include civil service pay rises of up to 35 percent, and a 17.5 percent increase for state pensions.

Presenting the budget to the National Assembly on Friday, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar insisted targets had been prudent. "There are general elections in the country soon, but despite that the next fiscal-year budget is prepared as a responsible budget instead of an election budget," he said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif blamed his predecessor Imran Khan - ousted by a vote of no-confidence in April last year - for the morass. "Our preceding government has battered the economy," he said.

Poor being 'humiliated'

Akhtar Khan Nawaz, a laborer at a fruit and vegetable market in the capital Islamabad, said "the poor were being humiliated". "(The budget) will be of no use unless inflation is reduced, the poor will only get relief if inflation is eased," he said. Sharif said he was optimistic for an extension later this month on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan facility crucial to keeping the economy afloat. "The IMF chief has given his verbal commitment... there is no hindrance," he said. The IMF has told Pakistan it needs to secure additional external financing, scrap a swathe of populist subsidies, and allow the rupee to float freely against the dollar before unlocking another tranche of the \$6.5 billion facility.



Dalal Al-Dousari

anticipates that the Bank will maintain its good and better than sector average loan asset quality metrics."

Commenting on Capital Intelligence Ratings Bank and Bond credit rating announcement, Dalal Al-Dousari, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Investor Relations said: "We are very pleased to receive the affirmation of our Bank's Long-term Foreign Currency rating at "A+" and our KD 50 million Tier II subordinated Bond rating at "BBB+" by Capital Intelligence Ratings. This is an international acknowledgement of Gulf Bank's positive market position and highly experienced management that contributed to its excellent loan asset quality metrics, well established business franchise and market position which will continue to enable the Bank to generate sustainable earnings."

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength internationally as it is rated 'A' by three major credit rating agencies. In addition to Capital Intelligence recent affirmation of its Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating at 'A+' with a Stable Outlook, Gulf Bank has a Long-Term Issuer Default Rating of 'A' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Fitch Ratings and a Long-Term Deposits rating of 'A3' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Moody's Investor Services.



RAWALPINDI: A vendor selling mangoes pushes a handcart while looking for customers along a road in Rawalpindi. — AFP

Still, the latest budget sets aside 1.07 trillion rupees for subsidies. "The government definitely has to take such popular decisions as it is the election year," said Nasir Iqbal, an economist at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). The country failed to meet any economic growth targets for the fiscal year 2022-23, according to a key government report released Thursday, with GDP growth a miserly 0.3 percent.

Dar said Friday the latest budget was based on GDP growth of 3.5 percent, although the World Bank projected a less-ambitious two percent growth in a report issued earlier this week. It also had an annual inflation forecast of 21 percent, against a current year-on-year rate of 37.97 percent. The economy has also been ravaged by record monsoon floods last year that left almost a third of the country underwater, laying waste to vast swathes of farmland and leaving tens of millions homeless. But the political crisis remains the biggest risk factor in the months ahead. Former premier Khan's hugely popular campaign to return to office spilled into street violence after his brief arrest last month, prompting a massive crackdown on his party including mass arrests and trials scheduled for military courts. The army holds undue influence over Pakistan politics, having staged at least three successful coups leading to decades of martial law. — AFP

Mexican, Russian oil shipments ease Cuban fuel crisis

HOUSTON: With oil tankers docking from Mexico and Russia in recent days, Cuba could see its severe fuel shortage ease for the near future. Since the end of March, endless lines of cars queuing for gasoline have been a common sight on the Communist Party-ruled island, and service stations have created WhatsApp groups to organize customers. Cuba, under US embargo, is going through its worst economic crisis in three decades. It only produces a third of the fuel it needs each day, while residents navigate blackouts and food shortages.

According to shipping tracker Vessel Finder, Mexican tanker Bicentenario, with an estimated cargo of 265,000 barrels of oil, arrived at the port of Havana on Tuesday. The ship was anchored at the Nico Lopez refinery in the capital, AFP confirmed. At the end of May, Cameroon-flagged supertanker Limo, en route from Russia, arrived at the port of Matanzas with some 800,000 barrels.

Lifestyle

AI statue designed by Michelangelo on show in Sweden

A historical dream team of five master sculptors, including Michelangelo, Rodin and Takamura, have trained artificial intelligence (AI) to design a sculpture dubbed "the Impossible Statue", now on show in a Swedish museum. "This is a true statue created by five different masters that would never have been able to collaborate in real life," said Pauliina Lunde, a spokeswoman for Swedish machine engineering group Sandvik that used three AI software programs to create the artwork.

Shaking up traditional conceptions about creativity and art, the stainless steel statue depicts an androgynous person with the lower half of the body covered by a swath of material, holding a bronze globe in one hand. On show at Stockholm's National Museum of Science and Technology, the statue measures 150 cm and weighs 500 kg. The idea was to create a mix of styles from five famed sculptors who each made their mark on their era: Michelangelo (Italy 1475-1564), Auguste Rodin (France 1840-1917), Kathe Kollwitz (Germany 1867-1945), Kotaro Takamura (Japan 1883-1956) and Augusta Savage (US 1892-1962).

"Something about it makes me feel like this is not made by human being," Julia Olderius, in charge of concept development at the museum, told AFP. Visitors will note the muscular body inspired by Michelangelo, and the hand holding the globe inspired by Takamura. Sandvik's engineers trained the AI by feeding it a slew of images of sculptures created by the five artists. The software then proposed several images in 2D which it believed reflected key aspects from each of the artists. "In the end we had 2D images of the sculpture in which we could see the different masters reflected. Then we put these 2D images into 3D modeling," Olderius said. But is it art, or technological prowess? "I don't think you can define what art is. It's up to every human being to see, 'this is art, this is not art'. And it's up to the audience to decide," Olderius said. Amid debate about the role of AI in the art world, Olderius said she was optimistic. "I don't think you have to be afraid of what AI is doing with creativity or concepts or art and design," she said. "I just think you have to adapt to a new future where technology is a part of how we create concepts and art." — AFP



The world's first AI sculpture "The Impossible Statue" is displayed at the Tekniska museum in Stockholm on June 8, 2023. — AFP

US lawyer sorry over ChatGPT 'bogus' cases

What happened when a US lawyer used ChatGPT to prepare a court filing? The artificial intelligence program invented fake cases and rulings, leaving the attorney rather red-faced. New York-based lawyer Steven Schwartz apologized to a judge last week for submitting a brief full of falsehoods generated by the OpenAI chatbot. "I simply had no idea that ChatGPT was capable of fabricating entire case citations or judicial opinions, especially in a manner that appeared authentic," Schwartz wrote in a court filing.

The blunder occurred in a civil case being heard by Manhattan federal court involving a man who is suing the Colombian airline Avianca. Roberto Mata claims he was injured when a metal serving plate hit his leg during a flight in August 2019 from El Salvador to New York. After the airline's lawyers asked the court to dismiss the case, Schwartz filed a response that claimed to cite more than half a dozen decisions to support why the litigation should proceed.



They included Petersen v Iran Air, Varghese v China Southern Airlines and Shaboon v Egyptair. The Varghese case even included dated internal citations and quotes. There was one major problem, however: neither Avianca's attorneys nor the presiding judge, P Kevin Castel could find the cases.

Schwartz was forced to admit that ChatGPT had made up everything. "The court is presented with an unprecedented circumstance," judge Castel wrote last month. "Six of the submitted cases appear to be bogus judicial decisions with bogus quotes and bogus internal citations," he added. The judge ordered Schwartz and his law partner to appear before him to face possible sanctions.

In a filing on Tuesday, ahead of the hearing, Schwartz said that he wanted to "deeply apologize" to the court for his "deeply regrettable mistake". He said his college-educated children had introduced him to ChatGPT and it was the first time he had ever used it in his professional work. "At the time that I performed the legal research in this case, I believed that ChatGPT was a reliable search engine. I now know that was incorrect," he wrote. — AFP

AI chatbots offer comfort to the bereaved

Staying in touch with a loved one after their death is the promise of several start-ups using the powers artificial intelligence, though not without raising ethical questions. Ryu Sun-yun sits in front of a microphone and a giant screen, where her husband, who died a few months earlier, appears. "Sweetheart, it's me," the man on the screen tells her in a video demo. In tears, she answers him and a semblance of conversation begins.

When Lee Byeong-hwal learned he had terminal cancer, the 76-year-old South Korean asked startup DeepBrain AI to create a digital replica using several hours of video. "We don't create new content" such as sentences that the deceased would have never uttered or at least written and validated during their lifetime, said Joseph Murphy, head of development at DeepBrain AI, about the "Rememory" program.

"I'll call it a niche part of our business. It's not a growth area for us," he cautioned. The idea is the same for company StoryFile, which uses 92-year-old "Star Trek" actor William Shatner to market its site. "Our approach is to capture the wonder of an individual, then use the AI tools," said Stephen Smith, boss of StoryFile, which claims several thousand users of its Life service.

Entrepreneur Pratik Desai caused a stir a few months ago when he suggested people save audio or video of "your parents, elders and loved ones," estimating that by "the end of this year" it would be possible to create an autonomous avatar of a deceased person, and that he was working on a project to this end.

The message posted on Twitter set off a storm, to the point where, a few days later, he denied being "a ghoul." "This is a very personal topic and I sincerely apologize for hurting people," he said. "It's a very fine ethical area that we're taking with great care," Smith said.

After the death of her best friend in a car accident in 2015, Russian engineer Eugenia Kyuda, who emigrated to California, created a "chatbot" named Roman like her dead friend, which was fed with thousands of text messages he had sent to loved ones. Two years later Kyuda launched Replika, which offers personalized conversational robots, among the most sophisticated on the market. But despite the Roman precedent, Replika "is not a platform made to recreate a lost loved one", said a spokeswoman. — AFP



Takashi Murakami loves and fears AI



Takashi Murakami

Neo-pop art superstar Takashi Murakami has always embraced new technology and was an early adopter of crypto and NFTs, but even he admits fearing that AI might make him obsolete. Murakami, 61, has become a brand unto himself thanks to his loveable technicolour paintings that mix traditional Japanese art motifs with modern anime and manga.

His paintings have sold for millions of dollars, led to fashion collaborations with Louis Vuitton and Kanye West, and been shown at some of the world's great institutions, prized as insightful commentary on the fine line between art and commerce. It has not always made him popular in Japan's art establishment, but Murakami likes being a disruptor.

He sees another wave of change coming thanks to AI-powered software. "The generational change will be dramatic," he told AFP at the opening of a new exhibition at the Gagosian gallery on the outskirts of Paris. It reminds him of the arrival of the Apple II computer in the 1980s that swept away an older generation of design professionals, but empowered those who embraced it.

"AI will certainly do damage to technical trades but I don't think it will be able to block our ideas," he said. "The wackiest ideas, those that even AI cannot generate, will become even more valuable." That does mean power perhaps shifting from artists to tech engineers, who will be able to explore things that are hard to imagine at the moment. "Artists who create familiar things will be left behind," he said. "I myself work with a certain kind of fear of one day being replaced."

'Not very appreciated'
Ironically, Murakami says he was touched to finally receive some praise from a more traditional part of Japanese society with his recent work in homage to kabuki theatre. He spoke to AFP in front of an enormous 23-metres-long by 5-metres-high fresco that tells a kabuki narrative in his dazzling, cartoonish style.

"I'm not very appreciated in Japan," he said, wearing bermuda shorts and a jacket adorned with his famous smiling flowers. "My reputation is fairly bad because I'm seen as presenting a false image of Japanese culture to the rest of the world. "This is the first time I was welcomed in this way in Japan. I was very pleased."

'A new continent'
Nonetheless, his commitment to technological change is clear. Visitors to Saturday's gallery opening — requiring some dedication since it was hidden away among the private jet hangars near Charles de Gaulle airport — were set to receive an NFT of a flower-adorned virtual coin.

The show includes a wall of NFT-style pixelated portraits that draw a line from Karl Marx and Adam Smith to current tech honchos Vitalik Buterin and

Elon Musk. Like all his work, they are deceptively simple, seemingly printed, yet in fact painstakingly painted by hand and then lacquered to remove any sign of human involvement and create his renowned "Superflat" aesthetic.



Murakami poses during a photo session.

He sees this work as building a bridge between traditional and digital art, but admits they can be a hard sell. "Collectors who have been fans of mine for a long time clearly have some trouble with these pixelated drawings," he said. "But I created my works following Japanese or Eastern styles, not Western, and I consider pixel art to be a sort of representation of Japanese culture from the video games of the 1970s." The world of crypto is "like a new continent" still being discovered. "It will take several more years for people to get used to it," he said. — AFP



Japanese contemporary artist Takashi Murakami poses during a photo session at the Gagosian art Gallery in Le Bourget, north of Paris on June 8, 2023. — AFP photos

'AI doctor' better at predicting patient outcomes

Artificial intelligence has proven itself useful in reading medical imaging and even shown it can pass doctors' licensing exams. Now, a new AI tool has demonstrated the ability to read physicians' notes and accurately anticipate patients' risk of death, readmission to hospital, and other outcomes important to their care.

Designed by a team at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, the software is currently in use at the university's affiliated hospitals throughout New York, with the hope that it will become a standard part of health care. A study on its predictive value was published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

Lead author Eric Oermann, a NYU neurosurgeon and computer scientist, told AFP that while non-AI predictive models have been around in medicine for a long time, they were hardly used in practice because the data they needed requires cumbersome reorganization and formatting.

But "one thing that's common in medicine everywhere, is physicians write notes about what they've seen in clinic,

what they've discussed with patients," he said. "So our basic insight was, can we start with medical notes as our source of data, and then build predictive models on top of it?"

The large language model, called NYUTron, was trained on millions of clinical notes from the health records of 387,000 people who received care within NYU Langone hospitals between January 2011 and May 2020. These included any records written by doctors, such as patient progress notes, radiology reports and discharge instructions, resulting in a 4.1-billion-word corpus.

One of the key challenges for the software was interpreting the natural language that physicians write in, which varies greatly among individuals, including in the abbreviations they choose. By looking back at records of what happened, researchers were able to calculate how often the software's predictions turned out to be accurate. They also tested the tool in live environments, training

it on the records from, for example, a hospital in Manhattan then seeing how it fared in a Brooklyn hospital, with different patient demographics.

Not a substitute for humans
Overall, NYUTron identified an unnerving 95 percent of people who died in hospital before they were discharged, and 80 percent of patients who would be readmitted within 30 days. It outperformed most doctors on its predictions, as well as the non-AI computer models used today. But, to the team's surprise, "the most senior physician who's actually a very famous physician, he had superhuman performance, better than the model," said Oermann. "The sweet spot for technology and medicine isn't that it's going to always deliver necessarily superhuman results, but it's going to really bring up that baseline."

NYUTron also correctly estimated 79 percent of patients' actual length of stay, 87 percent of cases where patients were denied coverage by insurance, and 89 percent of cases where a patient's primary disease was accompanied by additional conditions. AI will never be a substitute for the physician-patient relationship, said Oermann. Rather, they will help "provide more information for physicians seamlessly at the point-of-care so they can make more informed decisions." — AFP



Lifestyle



A crown is exhibited.



Two portraits painted by Francisco de Goya in 1799 depicting King Carlos IV of Spain and his wife Queen Maria Luisa of Parma are exhibited at the Galeria de las Colecciones Reales (Royal Collections Gallery), the new museum in Madrid, on June 7, 2023. - AFP photos



Picture shows a Spanish royal carriage exhibited at the Galeria de las Colecciones Reales.

New Madrid museum showcases Spain's royal treasures

A new museum packed with hundreds of treasures collected by Spain's monarchs over the past five centuries is set to open in Madrid this month. Located just across from the Royal Palace, the Royal Collections Gallery, which opens on June 29, will showcase paintings, tapestries, furniture and elaborately decorated carriages. Most of the 650 works that will go on display have not previously been accessible to the public or were sitting in quiet corners of historic sites across Spain.

"There are works that come from palaces or monasteries and here we promote another way of looking at them," the museum's director Leticia Ruiz Gomez said. Among the highlights is a painting by one of Spain's most emblematic historical masters, Diego Velazquez, depicting a horse rearing up without a rider. "White Horse" was last shown to the public in 2015 during a temporary exhibition in Paris. The rest of the time "it sat in a corner of a room in the Royal Palace," said Ruiz Gomez.

Nearby is a massive 16th-century tapestry once owned by Spain's Queen Isabella which the culture ministry bought in February for one million euros (\$1.1 million). Another standout item is the very first edition of Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote", one of history's greatest literary works. The collection also includes paintings by Italian masters Caravaggio and Jacopo Tintoretto, as well as Spain's Francisco de Goya whose works reflect the country's historical upheavals.

In addition, visitors will be able to see a multicolor wood sculpture by Spain's first female court sculptor, Luisa Roldan, which depicts Saint Michael slaying the Devil. The goal is to "show the diversity, richness and quality of what Spanish monarchs have collected over five centuries," said Ana de la Cueva, head of Spain's state heritage agency, Patrimonio Nacional.

'Spectacular'
The idea to set up a museum to display Spain's royal collections first emerged nearly a century ago but it was interrupted by the 1936-39 civil war. The new museum joins a prestigious lineup of other world-famous galleries in Madrid such as the Prado Museum and the Reina Sofia, home to Pablo Picasso's historic Guernica painting.



Picture shows a detail of the tapestry entitled "La Gallina Ciega" (Blind Man's Bluff) made in 1789 by Francisco de Goya, exhibited at the Galeria de las Colecciones Reales.

To maintain the public's interest, the Royal Collections Gallery plans to replace a third of its works with new items roughly every 18 months. "The idea is to show all the national heritage we have, so we can bring restored works to be exhibited. Then they can go back to their original places," said De la Cueva.

The modern building which houses the collection has won several architectural awards and is likely to add to the museum's appeal. Built down the side of a steep hillside, the scale of the seven-storey museum is not immediately evident from street level, with the main entrance located on the top floor.

As visitors descend to the lower galleries, there are impressive views onto the parklands of western Madrid.

At the entrance to one of its main rooms are four gigantic columns with gilded vines, the huge windows flooding the room with natural light. De la Cueva said the combination of seeing historical art in a modernist setting "is spectacular". "I think the opportunity of having the most modern building with the most ancient collections is a privilege," she added. - AFP



An equestrian statue depicting a royal horse is displayed.

Acrobats show off Art Nouveau heritage of Brussels

Belgium's capital Brussels is a treasure trove of Art Nouveau gems and now the city is trying to attract new audiences to its rich heritage, with the help of acrobats and trapeze artists. The Belgian capital's decorative delights are thanks in large part to famed architect Victor Horta (1861-1947). To mark the 130th anniversary of Horta's first landmark masterpiece, Tassel House, the authorities have designated 2023 the year of Art Nouveau. The aim is to stake Brussels' claim as the capital of a style that for many captures the essence of the Belle Epoque's languid beauty before the horrors of World War I.

Born at the end of the 19th century, the Art Nouveau movement was based around the aesthetics of curves, combined with intense craftsmanship centered in particular on sgraffito wall decorations and stained glass. Among the initiatives aimed at shining a spotlight on the Art Nouveau riches is the eye-catching decision to invite acrobats into these museum-like spaces.

"It's an architecture inspired by life, the body and plants," Michael Hottier, co-director of the Brussels-based acrobatic company behind the project, told AFP. "You very quickly get the natu-



ral connection with grace, the organic side." A trapeze artist dangled down the middle of a sweeping staircase and acrobats perched in front of an intricate window at another house designed by Horta.

The students from Brussels' Higher School of Circus Arts were being captured for a visual project "Arabesque" that will go on display to draw attention

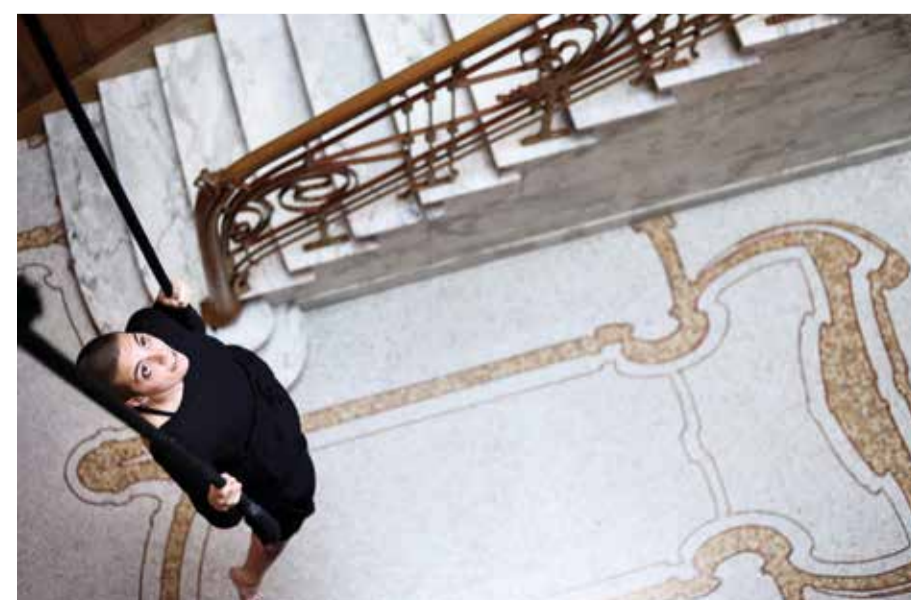
to the masterpieces. Staging shows for lots of people in the protected buildings is not feasible, so the photo and video displays should help bring it to a broader audience. But it wasn't always the case that these architectural jewels were treated with such reverence. As Brussels went through the upheavals of the 20th century, they were often left abandoned, damaged by war or deni-



grated by city planners.

Horta's piece de resistance - the grand People's House - was torn down in the 1960s to be replaced by a high-rise office block. Those that did survive have now been restored to their former glory and are being showcased to the public. That is the case for the magnificent Solvay House, which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Monu-

ment in 2000 and opened as a museum in 2021. Hottier hopes the acrobatic exhibition will tour beyond Brussels and spread knowledge of the city's Art Nouveau wealth outside of Belgium. "These are buildings where you feel good, where the light is beautiful," he said. - AFP



Artists of the ESAC (ecole superieur des arts du cirque) perform during a photo session for an exhibition called "Arabesque" at Art Nouveau house designed by Victor Horta in Brussels on May 14, 2023. - AFP photos



People take photos of two large inflatable yellow ducks in Victoria Harbor on June 9, 2023.

Giant rubber duck no match for Hong Kong's baking heat

Two giant yellow ducks meant to signify good fortune in Hong Kong ran into bad luck of their own after one was deflated Saturday to protect it from the heat. The art installation by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman, featuring twin 18-m inflatable ducks, was unveiled to the public on Friday.



A woman poses in front of the two ducks.

The exhibition came a decade after one of Hofman's air-filled avians first visited the Chinese city, with the artist saying the new work would bring "double luck". But organizers had to let the air

out of one bird due to high summer temperatures, which on Saturday reached highs of 33 degrees Celsius. The "rubber duck skin had become strained because the hot weather has caused air pressure to rise", the organizers said in a statement.

The affected creature was drained of air to "avoid risk" and was pending repair, organizers said, leaving just one sitting duck in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour. Hofman's Rubber Duck series has made appearances in major cities since its 2007 debut. The faddish artwork previously made headlines in Hong Kong for drawing huge audiences and for accidental deflations, including when it shrank to a flat disk next to a ferry pier in 2013.

Following stormy weather early Friday before they were released onto the water, Hofman joked that the two ducks "took a bath this morning". "In a world where we suffered from a pandemic, wars and political situations, I think it is the moment to bring back the double luck," he said. Setting sail in front of Hong Kong's landmark Convention



People visit the installation "Double Ducks" by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman after one of the ducks deflated at Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong on June 10, 2023. - AFP photos

and Exhibition Centre, the mighty ducks moved through the harbor before stopping to nest near the city government's headquarters. Office workers strolled by during lunch breaks to snap selfies, while others carried yellow duck balloons to celebrate the sunny duo's new perch.

"I think it's very good to have the duck back after 10 years because it is simple happiness, especially after the pandemic," one admirer named Vivian told AFP.

"It's a form of flashback," said 32-year-old bank employee Zenj. "I think it brings luck." During its 2013 visit to Hong Kong, the solo lemon-hued bird ruffled feathers in Beijing after Internet users edited the famous "Tank Man" photo from the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown by replacing the tanks with ducks.

Internet searches for "yellow duck" were banned in mainland China in the run-up to June 4 that year, the anni-

versary of the crackdown, as Beijing forbids discussion of the day Chinese troops crushed demonstrations. Even after Hofman's duck exhibitions slowed in the mid-2010s, the creature has found new life as an inadvertent protest symbol in Brazil, Russia and most recently Thailand. — AFP

Skies clear as New York's Gov Ball music fest kicks off

New York's Governors Ball kicked off Friday under clearer skies after days of wildfire-induced noxious smog blanketed the city and threatened to derail the annual music festival. As of Wednesday afternoon air quality in New York was clocking in as the worst in the world, according to an international monitor, as levels of pollution hung at hazardous levels well into the night.

Even as the apocalyptic skies gave residents the illusion of living in a sepia filter, festival organizers took a wait-and-see approach in consultation with local officials. "We are a go," they announced by Thursday evening, as the smoke began to dissipate due to the shifting direction of the winds over the Canadian province of Quebec, where the fires are raging.

It was welcome news for thousands of revelers planning to attend the festival in New York's Queens borough, among them Simrya Anand who traveled from Boston to see artists including headliners Lizzo, Odesza and Kendrick Lamar. "I was really worried about



American rapper Eladio Carrion performs.

the weather," the 20-year-old told AFP. "I was thinking about, like, wearing a mask here but thankfully it looks like things have cleared up. But I wasn't considering not coming," she added with a smile.

Hamza Hussein, 25, just wrapped a graduate degree at New York University and was looking forward to attending his first Gov Ball ever, in particular the set of famed rapper Pusha T. He and his friend were concerned about the potentially "poisonous" air — but "we predicted it was going to go on because it's really hard to rebook all these artists".

Breathing easy

By Friday evening as Diplo took the stage, the air quality level had dropped to a refreshing 38 on the 500-point scale — earlier in the week it had jumped past a dangerous 400 — and festivalgoers along with artists were able to breathe easy once more.

It was a relief for New Yorkers Andy and Bonnie Goolcharan, both in their early 50s, who said they had been ready to skip. "We weren't going to come," Andy Goolcharan told AFP. "We thought it would be canceled... but it worked out."

And unlike many of their fellow attendees in their 20s, the couple said if both the smog and the festival had persisted, they would have stayed home. More than 111 million people in the United States had been under air quality alerts as of Thursday due to the fires. The wildfire smoke from Canada was also detected several thousand miles away in Norway.

The mayors of New York, Montreal, Toronto, Washington and Philadelphia issued a joint statement Friday say-



American DJ Diplo performs.

ing "this alarming episode serves as a stark reminder of the harmful impacts that the climate crisis is having on cities around the world. The three-day Governors Ball music festival is set to continue through Sunday, and along

with the headliners will feature Lil Nas X, Haim, Lil Uzi Vert, Rina Sawayama, Omar Apollo and Ice Spice. — AFP



People attend the 2023 Governors Ball Music Festival in Corona Park, New York City, on June 9, 2023. — AFP photos



Swiatek wins 3rd French Open title

First woman to defend Roland Garros title since 2007

PARIS: Iga Swiatek battled past Karolina Muchova 6-2, 5-7, 6-4 to win her third French Open title on Saturday and become the first woman to successfully defend the Roland Garros title since 2007. The 22-year-old Swiatek is just the third woman in the Open era to win each of her first four Grand Slam finals, the Pole adding to her 2020 and 2022 titles in Paris and last year's US Open triumph. Monica Seles and Naomi Osaka are the only other players to accomplish the feat.

Swiatek, the world number one from Poland, is also the youngest woman to claim back-to-back French Open titles since Monica Seles in the early 1990s. Justine Henin was the last woman to win successive Roland Garros crowns when she captured her third in a row and fourth in total 16 years ago. Swiatek's latest coronation caps another dominant two weeks on the clay in Paris, where her record stands at 28 wins and two losses in five visits.

Muchova, at 43 in the world, was the fourth lowest ranked woman to reach the French Open final, her first championship match at a major. Swiatek, then just 19, was ranked 54 when she lifted her first trophy - three years after Jelena Ostapenko's shock triumph. Muchova's compatriot Renata Tomanova was runner-up in 1976.

However, the unseeded Czech had won all five matches in her career against players in the top three - four of them at Grand Slams - having stunned Aryna Sabalenka in the semi-finals. On guard against an underdog with a habit of taking those down at the top, Swiatek quickly applied pressure on the 26-year-old Muchova. A miscued forehand from Muchova gave the Pole two break points in the second game which she took with minimal fuss.

The top seed consolidated with a quick hold before Muchova got on the board in game four, drawing loud roars from the Court Philippe Chatrier

crowd. Muchova carved out a break opportunity to get back on serve but Swiatek snuffed it out in a protracted fifth game - pumping her fist in relief as she surged 4-1 up. Swiatek saw another break point come and go the following game, but her disappointment was brief as she easily won the next two games to wrap up the opening set.

Muchova had outfoxed her rivals with her cunning variety throughout the tournament, but Swiatek had clearly done her homework since the Czech won their only other meeting in Prague in 2019. A loose service game allowed Swiatek to pull 3-0 in front in the second set, but Muchova refused to roll over, displaying the grit and resolve she used to rally from match point down against Sabalenka in the previous round. A crunching forehand down the line retrieved the break before Muchova leveled at three games each. Swiatek slowed Muchova's momentum as the pair traded holds before the reigning champion showed her first real sign of nerves, double-faulting to leave her rival serving at 5-4 to force a decider.

Muchova couldn't take advantage as Swiatek broke right back, but another shaky game from the Pole presented her with another shot. Two set points passed Muchova by but she set up a third with a brilliant backhand volley on the stretch, with Swiatek then pumping her return long to send the match to a third set. Muchova sensed the tide was turning in her favor as Swiatek's title defence began to creak, the Pole broken to love as her opponent rattled off eight straight points to move 2-0 ahead.

But with her formidable record at Roland Garros, Swiatek came storming back and snatched three

games on the bounce. Muchova broke for 4-3 only for Swiatek to hit back immediately and then secure a nervy hold, resisting another break point, to move within a game of victory. Swiatek swiftly raced 30-0 ahead and earned two championship points when Muchova dragged a forehand wide, the Czech succumbing in the most brutal of ways with a double fault to end a thrilling contest. — AFP



PARIS: Poland's Iga Swiatek raises the trophy Suzanne Lenglen following her victory over Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova during their women's singles final match on June 10, 2023. — AFP

Nuggets on the brink of first NBA championship

MIAMI: Aaron Gordon scored a career playoff high 27 points in an all-out attack on the Miami Heat on Friday that helped push the Denver Nuggets to the brink of their first NBA championship. Gordon led all scorers in the Nuggets' 108-95 victory over the Heat in Miami that put Denver up 3-1 in the best-of-seven NBA Finals. The player once known for his dunking prowess - including runner-up finishes in the 2016 and 2020 All-Star weekend slam-dunk contests - showed just how versatile he has become as he connected on 11 of 15 shots from the field - including three of four from three-point range.

"Making threes, getting to the foul line, guarding at a high level - Aaron did it all for us tonight, he really did," Nuggets coach Mike Malone said. Gordon erupted for 15 points in the second quarter as the Nuggets - who trailed by one after Jimmy Butler's three-pointer to close the first period - took a 55-51 halftime lead. "This team does a good job finding the people that are kind of in a rhythm and kind of going," Gordon said. "When it comes down to it, it's just wanting to be great for my teammates. I know when my teammates need me and just doing it for my brothers."

He made his first three attempts from three-point range - including one from the corner that put Denver up 86-73 with five seconds left in the third quarter. "I'm just taking the ones that they're giving me, taking the open shots," said Gordon, who was staring down the Heat bench before the ball had cleared the net. "It's just gamesmanship," he said. "That's part of the game. When you make a three in the corner with the opposition's bench, you can have a little fun with them."

Teammate Kentavious Caldwell-Pope wasn't sur-



MIAMI: Jamal Murray #27 of the Denver Nuggets shoots against Bam Adebayo #13 of the Miami Heat during the fourth quarter in Game Four of the 2023 NBA Finals at Kaseya Center on June 09, 2023. — AFP

prised to see a few long-range shots fall for Gordon - he's given him some advice. "I always tell AG, man, continue to play his game. When you're shooting threes, no up, no in, so make sure you get that ball up so it can go in. He did that tonight." Gordon's big second quarter helped the Nuggets gain control even as Nikola Jokic shook off a twisted ankle.

When foul trouble sidelined Jokic for more than five minutes in the fourth, Bruce Brown took it to Miami. Brown scored 21 points in 30 minutes off the bench, pouring in 11 in the final period as the Nuggets repelled every Heat run. Miami had cut the deficit to eight when Brown converted a three-point play to push Denver's lead back to double

digits. His pull-up three-pointer with 1:21 remaining was the final dagger, giving Denver a 108-91 lead. "We knew they were going to trap Jamal (Murray) and try to get the ball out of his hands, so the other four players were going to have to make plays, and then luckily it was just my time in the fourth quarter," Brown said. — AFP

Messi gets rockstar welcome in China

BEIJING: Football superstar Lionel Messi arrived in Beijing by private jet on Saturday and was greeted by hundreds of jubilant fans, with his World-Cup-winning Argentina set to face Australia in a friendly match next week. "Messi! Messi!" chanted several hundred fans who were waiting for him at the airport, many wearing the blue-and-white striped jersey of the Albiceleste's No 10, according to social media images. Several hundred others waited outside his hotel, not far from the banks of the Liangma River, popular with Beijingers for strolls. This is Messi's seventh trip to China, the last being in 2017, according to local media. World champions Argentina will play a friendly against Australia on June 15 at Beijing's newly-renovated 68,000-capacity Workers' Stadium. By mid-day, the arrival of global sporting superstar Messi was the most talked-about topic on the Weibo social network. "I absolutely want to see Messi!" wrote one user, echoing others' comments. "I am still feeling the emotions of the match of when Argentina secured the World Cup," said another, referring to the Albiceleste's victory after an epic final against France in December.

The friendly will mark the return of international football to China, after three years of strict COVID-19 restrictions that emptied stadiums and led to a cas-



BEIJING: Fans of the Argentine national football team gesture towards a bus transporting members of the team during their arrival at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beijing on June 10, 2023. — AFP

cade of cancellations of sporting competitions. The clash will be a rematch of the Round of 16 at the World Cup, where Argentina won 2-1 against the Socceroos. Messi, who has chosen to leave Paris Saint-Germain

over the summer to pursue his career with Inter Miami, will also play another friendly match, when Argentina take on Indonesia in Jakarta on June 19, as part of this tour. — AFP

49ers Enterprises and Leeds ink deal

LONDON: Leeds chairman Andrea Radrizzani has agreed a deal to sell his controlling stake in the club to co-owners 49ers Enterprises, the recently relegated Premier League club said on Friday. As a result the American investment group, owner of NFL franchise the San Francisco 49ers and a minority shareholder in Leeds since 2018, will take full ownership. "Leeds United can confirm an agreement has been reached between Aser Ventures and 49ers Enterprises for the purchase of the club," said a statement.

"Both parties continue to work through the details, and further updates will be provided soon. "All of our focus remains on a quick return to the Premier League." 49ers Enterprises increased its stake in Leeds to 44 percent in 2021 with the option of buying Radrizzani's remaining 56 percent before January 2024. That agreement, which had valued Leeds at around £400 million (\$500 million), was contingent on the club remaining in the Premier League. Leeds' relegation last month forced both parties back into negotiations with the deal now reportedly worth a valuation of just £170 million. Italian businessman Radrizzani bought Leeds in 2017 and helped lead the club back to the Premier League for the first time in 16 years as the appointment of Marcelo Bielsa as manager proved a masterstroke. — AFP