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KUWAIT HAS SPOKEN

Amir, PM congratulate winners • 7 new faces elected • Turnout 62.1%

1st Constituency



2nd Constituency



3rd Constituency



4th Constituency



5th Constituency



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis have voted back a majority of members of the dissolved parliament in crucial snap polls, the fourth in Kuwait during the past 40 months. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Friday a cable of congratulations to the winners of the National Assembly elections. HH the Amir expressed sincere sentiments to all MPs for the trust placed in them by citizens in this election, wishing them success in their duties and contributions to the country's progress, development and prosperity. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a similar cable to the winners.

HH the Amir also sent cables of thanks to ministers and heads of state agencies who contributed to success and orderliness of the 2024 Assembly elections. He expressed appreciation of the great efforts made by the ministries and state departments in the preparation and organization of the elections in an orderly way. He also expressed gratitude to the members of the judicial commission who supervised the electoral process, appreciating their efforts to ensure the credibility and transparency of the elections. HH the Amir also thanked the voters for taking part effectively in the elections and exercising their constitutional right to vote, which reflected the civilized democratic aspect of the dear homeland.

Of the 46 members who contested the polls, 39 were re-elected, including veteran former speakers Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Ahmad Al-Saadoun. Three members did not run and one member was barred by the elections committee. Of the 11 other candidates who won seats, seven are new faces and the remaining four are former MPs from previous assemblies. They include top pro-government MPs Obaid Al-Wasmi and Ahmad Al-Fadhl, and outspoken opposition figure Bader Al-Dahoum, in addition to veteran MP Saleh Ashour. New faces include opposition members Anwar Al-Fiker, Mohammad Al-Dossari and Mohammad Al-Dahoum, brother of Bader Al-Dahoum. Jenan Bushehri was the only woman candidate who managed to win a seat. She returns to the parliament for a third consecutive term.

The "reformist majority" or opposition, which consisted of 48 MPs in the previous 50-member Assembly, will shrink slightly, but is expected to comprise around 45 MPs, barring unexpected problems. The information ministry said turnout was 62.1 percent, described by many candidates as a very good percentage considering the elections were held during the last 10 days of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, normally devoted to worship.

MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf, who was re-elected from the third constituency, said the turnout was relatively high because elections were held in Ramadan. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, whose remarks in the Assembly were cited by the government as offensive to HH the Amir and triggered the decision to dissolve the Assembly, came in first place in the third constituency, way ahead of the MP in second place.

Ghanem, the speaker between 2013 to 2022, called for opening a new page and to comply with the address of HH the Amir. "I think that a new page should be opened," Ghanem told his supporters celebrating his convincing victory and retaining first place in his constituency. Ghanem said that it was premature to announce whether he will run for the speaker's post. He said it is the right of any MP to run for the speaker and that he will study the matter in due time.

MP Fahad Al-Azmi, however, said he has decided to contest the post of the speaker. If he wins, it will be the first time a tribal MP takes the top position in the Assembly. He insisted he will not withdraw. Azmi was re-elected in top place in the fifth constituency with a record-breaking tally exceeding 16,000.

Islamist MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqaabi, who was re-elected from the third district, said "the success of a reformist ma-

majority to reach the Assembly is a message that the Kuwaiti people will not abandon their constitutional rights". "The people are hungry for achievements and they will not accept the return to square one," said Saqaabi, the only member of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, to win. Two other ICM candidates lost, including veteran former MP Hamad Al-Matar. Bedouin tribes together won half of the Assembly's seats, two up from the previous house.

The new National Assembly must hold its first session within two weeks, in accordance with the constitution. The first task will be electing a new speaker. The previous Assembly had agreed on a legislative roadmap with the previous government and several MPs said they want to revive that roadmap and approve key bills. The most immediate laws are one calling to increase wages of Kuwaitis and another proposing to reform the elections law. Both could become flashpoints with the new government.

SEE PAGES 2 & 3

Amir congratulates new Members of Parliament

Sheikh Mishal thanks election organizers



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Friday a cable of congratulations to the winners of the National Assembly 2024. In his cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere sentiments to all members of parliament for the trust placed in them by citizens in this election, wishing them success in their duties and contributions to the country's progress, development, and prosperity.

Also, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to the winners of the National Assembly 2024. His Highness the Premier expressed his sincere sentiments to all members of parliament for the trust placed in them by citizens in this election and wished them success in their duties and many contributions to the country's progress, development, and prosperity.

In another development, His Highness the Amir sent cables of thanks to

ministers and heads of state agencies who contributed to the success and orderliness of the 2024 National Assembly elections. The Amiri cables were addressed to His Highness the Commander of the National Guard Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Abdul-Wahhab Al-Awadhi, and Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malek Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir also sent cables of thanks to Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Adel Mohammad Al-Adwani, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Saeed Al-Ghareeb, and Minister

of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr. Noura Muhammad Khaled Al-Meshaan, Board Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr. Hilal Musaed Al-Sayer, and Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Lt.-Gen. Khaled Rakan Al-Mikrad.

In his messages, His Highness the Amir expressed appreciation for the great efforts made by the ministries and state departments in the preparation and organization of the just-ended elections in an orderly way. He also expressed gratitude to the members of the judiciary commission that supervised the electoral process, appreciating their efforts to ensure the credibility and transparency of the elections. His Highness the Amir also thanked the voters for taking part effectively in the elections and exercising their constitutional right to vote, which reflected the civilized democratic aspect of the dear homeland. — KUNA



Premier inspects polling stations

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, made an inspection tour of a number of polling stations for the 2024 National Assembly elections on Thursday. He was accompanied by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, and the Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Faisal Saeed Al-Ghareeb. Hailing the high voter turnout, His Highness the Prime Minister appreciated the citizens' sense of national responsibility and allegiance to their homeland. He also appreciated the cooperation and dedication shown by state agencies in organizing the electoral process and setting the stage for credible and transparent elections.

Minister praises media
Meanwhile, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi praised on Friday the efforts exerted by employees in the Ministry of Information and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) for their coverage of the National Assembly elections (Nation 2024) and the level of professionalism and dedication since the announcement of the election date. The Minister expressed, through his account on the social media platform (X), his thanks and great gratitude to all local, international, and private media outlets for their coverage of the election. Polling stations for the National Assembly elections (Nation 2024) for the 18th legislative term were closed at 12 o'clock A.M. (local time) on Friday. The voting process lasted 12 hours, starting at noon in five electoral districts, and was conducted according to the single electoral vote system to choose 50 members of the National Assembly from among 200 male and female candidates. — KUNA



Young Kuwaitis turn out to vote, support fresh blood

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In the realm of democracy, the infusion of fresh perspectives and leadership plays a major role in shaping the future. This was evident in the collective backing of the Kuwaiti people for young candidates to push a wave of fresh energy and viewpoints in the Kuwaiti parliament. Kuwait stands in a position where revitalizing its social fabric depends on the decision of the Kuwaiti people themselves.

Kuwait Times spoke to Jumannah Taqi, a young citizen from the third constituency, who shared her opinion about the candidate she voted for and the reason behind her choice. "He is a vibrant young man with a youthful vision and embodies the role of youth in shaping the future, which aligns with the new era in its view of the importance of youth in advancing Kuwait's development. This is one of the most important points upon which the candidate was chosen," Taqi said. She highlighted the significant role of contemporary perspectives and the importance of giving voice to the youth to achieve national development.

Kuwait Times also spoke to Ali Al-Bloushi, a citizen from the first district. "I voted for a new face, fresh blood and an opportunity for new minds to engage in this democratic experience.



KUWAIT: In this combination of pictures, Kuwaiti women display their citizenship documents as they arrive to vote in parliamentary elections at a polling station in Kuwait City on April 4, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Renewal, change and altering perspectives and ideas are important aspects in the development of the democratic process," he said. Bloushi also spoke on the importance of introducing fresh perspectives into the democratic zone, by mentioning the candidate's innovative thinking, which will help direct Kuwait towards a progressive approach.

Advisor and head of the committee in Jabriya at Abdullah Al-Whaib School Khaled Abdulaziz Al-Asousi highlighted the smooth voting process during the holy month of Ramadan. "The voting process started today at exactly 12:00 pm, in compliance with the new law. As for the turnout of females, it was even better than we expected," he said.

High voter turnout highlights increasing awareness

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Polling stations witnessed a good turnout on Thursday, as citizens lined up in front of centers before the start of the electoral process. Kuwait Times spoke with citizens in several electoral districts to find out their aspirations and hopes for the new parliament. Citizen Adel Al-Otaibi expressed satisfaction with the voter turnout, highlighting increasing awareness among Kuwaiti citizens. He emphasized the significance of active participation in the elections. "The high turnout is a message to every corrupt person who wants to deprive the people of the usefulness of the National Assembly so that he can freely corrupt himself without accountability," he said.

Bibi Al-Haddad confirmed that citizens have increased awareness and have responded to the speech of HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in which he called on the Kuwaiti people to go out and exercise their constitutional right and not fail to do so. Fahd Al-Fayez praised the efficiency and organization of the voting process this year, noting that it only took him five minutes to cast his vote. He commended the smooth coordination of the election procedures, highlighting the notable turnout evidenced by the fullness of the ballot boxes. Fayez viewed this as a positive sign, indicative of widespread participation in the electoral process, praying for continued security, safety and stability in the country.

Regarding women's participation in the elections, Asmaa Al-Hudayri said turnout among female citizens was good, even though women are reluctant to participate because women in the previous parliament did not have many seats. "We hope the actions of the previous parliament will change and that the National Assembly will be reformist, particularly in light of the challenges arising from disagreements between appointed governments and elected parliaments, which have led to disruptions in decision making across the country," she said.

Voters confirmed that their participation in the elections comes out of concern to elect the best representatives who will be keen to convey their demands to the government, legislate laws that improve the lives of citizens, defend their rights and put the interest of Kuwait and its people above all.

Sarah Al-Khalidi (correctly) anticipated the election of only one woman in the elections, saying she demonstrated in the previous parliament her ability to provide a wonderful performance and perhaps will enjoy the support of a large segment of society. She attributed this potential support to her close alignment with the concerns of citizens, her boldness in addressing them and her ability to articulate them with grace and strength. She expects the new parliament to be balanced.

Despite feelings of frustration, Talal Al-Salman affirmed his commitment to casting his vote, emphasizing the significance of exercising his civic duty. He indicated that participating in the electoral process is the only means through which he can voice his opinions and concerns, highlighting the importance of active engagement in the democratic process, even amidst challenges or discontentment. "I have to participate, even though I do not expect the new parliament to adopt major human rights issues. But we must try to protect democracy," he said.

Benefits of fasting

There are a number of physical benefits of fasting, including the following:

Helps in weight loss

Fasting for several days helps in preventing obesity and weight loss. It helps in protecting against the hazard of a fat and sugar-rich diet.

Enhances the heart

As per the Mayo Clinic, "Researchers aren't sure why, but it seems that regularly fasting — severely restricting food and drink for 24 hours on one to two days a week — can potentially improve your risk factors related to heart health."

Defeats cancer

As per the research on curing cancer, there is evidence that fasting can fight against cancer. Researchers from USC states that evidence shows short-term fast starves cancer cells and facilitates the chemo drug therapies to better target cancer. Specific to the new study, the researchers found a fasted diet, particularly when used with chemotherapy drugs. This raises the levels of bone marrow cells that generate immune system cells that infiltrate tumors.

Enhancing blood sugar level

Fasting improves the level of proteins providing insulin resistance. It lowers blood cholesterol and prevents heart attacks, strokes, and other disorders. If a healthy diet is maintained after fasting, the body will retain the newly reduced cholesterol level. Report shows that fasting may be a safe alternative to insulin. More specifically, the report shows fasting reversed insulin resistance, which resulted in the ending of insulin therapy while maintaining control of blood sugars.

Improved digestive system

Fasting positively impacts the digestive system. The human body naturally detoxifies after a month of flushing out the toxins in the body. Further, it balances the heat generation and acidity levels in the human stomach.



Kuwaitis look for their names on electoral lists to cast their votes in parliamentary elections at a polling station on April 4, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Voters hope for development

Kuwaitis voice their expectations, concerns and hopes

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis voiced their expectations, concerns and hopes for the future direction of the country as they voted on Thursday in the National Assembly elections. Kuwait Times spoke to some voters, who called for effective governance to accelerate development. They also praised the smooth organization of the elections.

Mohammad Hamadah: "This year there must be cooperation between the government and candidates, because this will lead to the development of the country. We must stay away from personal interests. MPs must look at the most basic service, which is providing efficient modern roads. Education must be improved, especially with regards to more infusion of the English language in the public sector. They must also improve our health services. The money spent on treatment abroad can be spent to upgrade local health services. I appreciate the efforts of the interior ministry — from the parking to the election committee, it was very smooth as always. It didn't take more than 5 minutes."

Omar Al-Mutairi: "Firstly, supervision and legislation on the upcoming government plan, as well as to avoid internal personal conflicts. We need candidates that are loyal to the nation. We need to develop a new political system that would reflect positively on the process of committees and voting for the speaker of the parliament. If the government is moving forward well, then candidates should cooperate to facilitate its progress. If we oppose the

government on minuscule things, then the country will not move forward.

The organization of the elections has been excellent, with the leadership of the interior minister. The process was simple and quick." Youssef Al-Jabir: "I hope people vote for the best and not someone who can provide personal interests or just because they share the same (family) name. And just like how His Highness the Amir said, that voting for the most qualified candidate is important, which is also a religious duty. I would like that candidates not insult each other, as it reflects badly on Kuwait's reputation internationally."

Salah Al-Mutawa: "We look for the best and we have ambitions for the best. We will remain loyal to the nation, and we wish the best for everyone." Abdulaziz Al-Obaidan: "We hope for the best. We hope laws are legislated so we can move forward. I hope the next parliament remains without internal fighting. We would like to see a peaceful four years for the legislative branch."

Ahmad Al-Siba: "From the perspective of newer generations, we hope for the best, and our confidence in Allah is strong. The election process was smooth — it took only a matter of minutes to cast my vote. We hope they put the citizen first, and set their priorities for the coming years, especially at the international level, to get the development process moving. We need to prepare ourselves today for the future for the upcoming generations to benefit."

Johar Al-Johar: "I have seen amazing organization from the interior ministry, and their assistance



KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti woman checks the electoral lists before casting her vote in parliamentary elections at a polling station in Kuwait City.

of people to reach their designated voting committee. Thankfully, it has gone smoothly. This is a celebration of democracy and we wish the best for everyone. I think this government has had a positive futuristic approach recently. We have noticed development in the health and education sectors. I wish them the best."

Mohammad Al-Abaad: "We need good representatives who put the interests of the nation first and not their personal interests. We need to fix the housing crisis — it is really important. The election process was very smooth. I went at two in the afternoon and was done in less than 5 minutes. The interior ministry has done an amazing job at organizing it."



Kuwaitis cast their ballots in parliamentary elections at a polling station in Kuwait City on April 4, 2024.

Head of election commission affirms soundness of polls

KUWAIT: President of the advisory commission on organization and supervision of the 2024 National Assembly elections, Justice Saleh Al-Hamadi, said the electoral process went on in a sound, smooth, and orderly way. Nothing happened to affect the integrity and soundness of the elections, as the elections were conducted under full judiciary supervision and field follow-up by the members of the commission, as well as effective monitoring by civil society institutions, he told reporters tonight.

"The high voter turnout reflected a wonderful aspect of the national sense of responsibility by the sons of Kuwait since the start of polling," Justice Al-Hamadi pointed out. He appreciated the efforts of all state agencies that contributed to the success

of the electoral process. The vote counting started soon after polling stations for the National Assembly's 18th legislative term closed at 12:00 Thursday or Friday night. Voters had started casting their ballots at 12:00 on Thursday midday to elect 50 members out of 200 parliamentary hopefuls, males and females, to serve a four-year legislative term.

The National Assembly's General Secretariat received ballot boxes on Friday after the completion of the election results. The General Secretariat's Head of the Receiving and Delivering Committee, Omar Al-Ajeel, said in a press statement that the committee received the ballot boxes from members of the judicial authority supervising the election in accordance with the procedures stipulated in articles 27, 28, and 31 of Decree-Law No. 4 of 2024.

He stated that the committee checked all ballot boxes to make sure that the boxes were waxed and sealed by members of the judiciary. He pointed out that the number of boxes received by the General Secretariat is 759, which will be kept in the National Assembly building until the completion of the electoral appeals and later handed over to the Ministry of Interior. — KUNA



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Aid worker killed by Zionist entity felt need to help, parents say

Taiwan rescuers free nine from cave after quake

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RAFAH: Displaced Palestinians collect food donated by a charity before an iftar meal, the breaking of the fast, on the first day of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Rafah. — AFP

Zionist entity announces 'temporary' opening of aid routes into Gaza

Palestinians in Gaza eat an average of just 245 calories per day since January

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity announced on Friday that it would allow "temporary" aid deliveries into famine-threatened northern Gaza, hours after the United States warned of a sharp shift in its policy over Gaza war.

In a tense, 30-minute phone call on Thursday, US President Joe Biden told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that United States policy on the Zionist entity was dependent on the protection of civilians and aid workers in Gaza, the first hint of possible conditions to Washington's military support. Just hours later, in the middle of the night in Jerusalem, the Zionist entity announced it would open more aid routes into the coastal Palestinian territory which the Zionist entity placed under siege at the start of the war nearly six months ago.

"(The Zionist entity) will allow the temporary delivery of humanitarian aid" through the Ashdod Port and the Erez land crossing, as well as increased deliveries from neighboring Jordan at the Kerem Shalom crossing, Netanyahu's office said. The White House quickly welcomed the moves — saying they came "at the president's request" — and said they "must now be fully and rapidly implemented".

The Zionist entity has come under mount-

ing international pressure over the toll inflicted by its six-month war on Gaza, and drawn increasingly tough rebuke from its main backer Washington. Gaza war began on October 7 which resulted in the deaths of at least 33,037 people, according to Gaza's health ministry, while the United Nations has warned of "catastrophic" hunger.

'Unacceptable'

Palestinians in northern Gaza have eaten an average of just 245 calories per day — less than a can of beans — since January, according to the charity Oxfam. Charities have accused the Zionist entity of blocking aid, but the Zionist entity had defended its efforts and blamed shortages on groups' inability to distribute aid once it gets in to Gaza.

The dangerous work of trying to stem a famine was underscored this week by a Zionist strike that killed seven humanitarian workers distributing food in Gaza. "The strikes on humanitarian workers and the overall humanitarian situation are unacceptable," Biden told Netanyahu, according to a White House summary of their call.

Biden also "made clear that US policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by our assessment of (the Zionist entity's) im-

mediate action" to improve the humanitarian situation. A longtime Zionist supporter, Biden is facing growing criticism in an election year over his response to the Gaza war — with allies pressing him to leverage the billions of dollars in military aid sent by Washington.

"If we don't see the changes that we need to see, there'll be changes in our own policy," US top diplomat Antony Blinken told reporters after the leaders' phone call, without elaborating on what would shift. Blinken added that, as a democracy, "(the Zionist entity) is not like Hamas," and democracies "place the highest value" on every human life. "If we lose that reverence for human life, we risk becoming indistinguishable from those we confront," Blinken said.

'Concern' over Rafah plan

Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas, including in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, despite widespread international concern that such an operation would only worsen a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said the deadly strike on the World Central Kitchen staff had "reinforced the expressed concern over a potential Zionist military operation in Rafah, specifically focusing on the need to ensure the evacuation of Palestinian civilians

and the flow of humanitarian aid".

In a call with his Zionist counterpart, Austin also "discussed the threat posed by Iran and its proxy activities", according to the Zionist army. Iran blamed the Zionist entity for an air strike on Monday on the Iranian consulate in Damascus that killed seven Iranian Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals.

Analysts saw the move as part of stepped-up the Zionist actions against Iranian and pro-Iran commanders in Syria and Lebanon, which they said could spiral into wider war. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed in a social media message post in Hebrew that "with God's help we will make the Zionists repent of their crime of aggression against the Iranian consulate in Damascus".

The Zionist military said that after a "situational assessment, it was decided to increase manpower and draft reserve soldiers". Netanyahu faces intense domestic pressure from the families of the hostages still held in Gaza, and a resurgent anti-government protest movement. War cabinet member Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival of Netanyahu, has demanded a snap election in September, a call rejected by the premier's right-wing Likud party.

'No rules'

Relentless the Zionist entity bombardment has reduced much of Gaza to rubble, collapsed the hospital system and spawned a humanitarian crisis, with all of the 2.4 million Palestinians "experiencing acute food insecurity and malnutrition," a World Bank report said on Tuesday. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said on Thursday that 31 Gazan children have died as a result of hunger and dehydration.

Despite the dire need, relief work has become almost impossible in Gaza, major international aid groups, including Oxfam and Save the Children, said after the Zionist entity killed the World Central Kitchen staff. Spanish NGO Open Arms, which along with World Central Kitchen was working to establish a maritime aid corridor, announced it was suspending operations after the strike.

"This pattern of attacks is either intentional or indicative of reckless incompetence," the head of the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) charity, Christopher Lockyear, said, calling it "a war fought with no rules". Of the nearly 200 humanitarian workers killed in the conflict, he said five were MSF staff. The UN Security Council is set to discuss humanitarian workers' safety and Gaza's looming famine on Friday. —AFP

Their schools ruined, Gaza's children face long road to healing

GAZA: Eight out of 10 schools in Gaza are damaged or destroyed, UNICEF says, but it is the psychological damage the war has done to the territory's nearly 1.2 million children that has experts really worried. "To be able to learn, you need to be in a safe space. Most kids in Gaza at the moment have brains that are functioning under trauma," child psychiatrist Audrey McMahon of Doctors Without Borders told AFP. Younger children could develop lifelong cognitive disabilities from malnutrition, while teenagers are likely to feel anger at the injustice they have suffered, she said. "The challenges they will have to face are immense and will take a long time to heal."

David Skinner of Save The Children said rebuilding the "schools is massively complicated... but it's straightforward compared to the education loss". "What's often lost about the coverage of Gaza is that this is a catastrophe for children. "These are children who have been bereaved, who have lost people, who are sick and malnourished," he said.

Cognitive damage

Small children whose brains are still developing are particularly at risk from mental health and cognitive damage, Skinner said. The UN child welfare agency estimates that 620,000 children in Gaza are out of school. Skinner said getting them back into

class and rebuilding their schools were only the first steps. The true challenge will be healing displaced and traumatized young Gazans so that they can learn to learn again.

When the war broke out, schools immediately stopped classes and the majority were turned into shelters for families fleeing air strikes. Nearly half of the Palestinian territory's population is under 18, and its education system was already struggling after five wars in 20 years.

Destruction

So far in this war at least 53 of Gaza's 563 school buildings have been destroyed, according to UNICEF. More than eight out of 10 schools have been damaged and 67 percent took direct hits, according to a report by aid agencies including UNICEF based on satellite imagery and on-the-ground reporting.

"This is an unprecedented situation," said Juliette Touma of the UN Palestinian refugee agency, UN-RWA, which helps educate 300,000 Gazan children. "Colleagues who have been here the longest remember maybe one school being hit" in previous conflicts, she said. Majd Halawa didn't have to wait for the bombs to destroy his school in Gaza City to realize his dreams of becoming a lawyer would have to be put on hold.

Two weeks after the war began, the Zionist army gave him and his family three minutes to leave their apartment block in the north of Gaza. "I left all my books, thinking it wouldn't take long to go back, but it didn't happen," the 16-year-old told AFP. Their home was flattened by an air strike. Makeshift schools have been set up in tents in the southern city of Rafah, where half of the territory's population has



GAZA: Children attend class at a makeshift classroom in a camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

now fled. In one tent, Hiba Halaweh was teaching 30 children to learn to read their first words. "The children are happy to get back into it," said the teacher, who lacks even "textbooks and pens".

The education ministry plans 25,000 such temporary schools. Elsewhere in the world, many children who have lived through wars never return to school. In Iraq, six years after the government de-

clared victory over the Islamic State group, tens of thousands are still out of school. Thousands of destroyed school buildings have yet to be rebuilt, according to the World Bank. But for Majd, whose family managed to get him out to Canada, it is not just about having a school to go to again. "No one can get over all the memories of what happened, not in 100 years." —AFP

International

Aid worker killed by Zionist entity felt need to help, parents say

'He was hesitant to go, he's a new father. He has a beautiful 18-month-old son'

WASHINGTON: The father of US-Canadian citizen Jacob Flickinger, one of seven aid workers killed in a Zionist entity strike earlier this week, said his son was hesitant to go to Gaza but had felt a need to help. Flickinger, 33, was among a group of World Central Kitchen staff who died on Monday when the Zionist entity bombed their vehicle convoy in what it called a "grave mistake," sparking outrage from world leaders. In interviews with US media, parents John Flickinger and Sylvie Labrecque paid tribute to their son, who started working with food relief organization World Central Kitchen in Mexico last year before traveling to Gaza.

"He was hesitant to go, he's a new father. He has a beautiful 18-month-old son," John Flickinger told CBS News. "But he felt the need and he of course needs to support his family." In a separate interview with BBC News, he said his son — a Canadian Armed Forces veteran — felt "reasonably confident that he could accomplish the mission safely" in Gaza, adding that he had a "desire to serve and to help others." "He felt that the World Central Kitchen knew what they were doing there. They were in a de-conflicted zone, controlled by the IDF," Flickinger said.

In the emotional interview, he said his thoughts went to his son's family. "Now my grandson will grow up without having his father," he said. Jacob Flickinger's partner, Sandy Leclerc, told ABC News in an interview Thursday that she wanted to know the "truth of what happened, because this situation is so unclear." "I am devastated by this



GAZA: An undated picture provided by World Central Kitchen (WCK) shows US-Canadian Jacob Flickinger, Relief Team member of the US-based aid group, at an undisclosed location. — AFP photos

news... He was a part of me," Leclerc said, adding that she did not know how to explain to their son that his father had died.

Monday's strike was widely condemned by global powers, with US President Joe Biden saying he was "outraged and heartbroken," before warning Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday that continued American support de-



GAZA: United Nations staff members inspect the carcass of a car used by US-based aid group World Central Kitchen, that was hit by a Zionist strike the previous day in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on April 2, 2024.

ended on Zionist's protection of civilians in Gaza. Biden emphasized the need for a series of "specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers," a White House statement said.

World Central Kitchen, which was founded in

2010 by Spanish-American chef Jose Andres, has paused its operations in Gaza since the attack, which also killed a Palestinian as well as citizens from Australia, Britain and Poland. The aid workers had just unloaded supplies at a warehouse in central Gaza when they were killed. — AFP

UN rights council demands halt to arms sales to Zionist entity

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council on Friday demanded a halt in all arms sales to the Zionist entity, highlighting warnings of genocide in its war in Gaza, which has killed more than 33,000 people. The resolution — which passed with 28 of the council's 47 member states voting in favor, six opposed and 13 abstaining — marked the first time the United Nations top rights body has taken a position on the bloodiest-ever war to beset the besieged Palestinian territory.

Meirav Eilon Shahar, the Zionist's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, slammed the resolution as "a stain for the Human Rights Council and for the UN as a whole". The strongly worded text called on countries to "cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to the Zionist entity... to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights".

It stressed that the International Court of Justice ruled in January "that there is a plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza. Friday's resolution, which was brought forward by Pakistan on behalf of all Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states except Albania, also called for "an immediate ceasefire" and "for immediate emergency humanitarian access and assistance".

'Stop this genocide'

"We need you all to wake up and stop this genocide, a genocide televised around the world," Palestinian ambassador Ibrahim Mohammad Khraishi told the council before the vote. Shahar meanwhile told council members that "a vote yes is a vote for Hamas". Key ally, Washington, heeded Zionist's call to vote no, as did Germany, Argentina, Bulgaria, Malawi and Paraguay. US ambassador Michele Taylor agreed that "far too many civilians have been killed in this conflict and that every civilian death is a tragedy", acknowledging that "the Zionist entity has not done enough to mitigate civilian harm".

More than 13,000 Haitian migrants forced back home: UN

GENEVA: Some 13,000 Haitian migrants were forcibly returned home by neighboring countries in March, despite a worsening humanitarian and security crisis, the UN's migration agency said on Thursday. Since the end of February, powerful Haitian gangs have teamed up to launch a coordinated offensive across the Caribbean nation, attacking police stations, prisons and the airport, and forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. The returned migrants represent a 46 percent increase on the previous month, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Of those, nearly 3,000 received humanitarian assistance on their return home. "For most Haitians, the prospect of regular migration remains an insurmountable hurdle, leaving irregular migration as their only semblance of hope," the IOM said. It can take more than a year for Haitians to obtain a passport, preventing them from accessing "existing avenues for regular migration, such as humanitarian visas and programs". In the "turmoil engulfing Haiti" an increasing number of people are expressing suicidal tendencies, "which once was a taboo topic but is now becoming more commonly disclosed", the IOM said.

The IOM said Haiti has more than 360,000 internally displaced people, including "many multiple times over". The country had a population of 11.6 million people in 2022, according to United Nations figures. But the nation has been ravaged in recent decades by poverty, natural disasters and



GAZA: A Palestinian youth salvages items from a damaged apartment following overnight Zionist bombardment in Gaza. — AFP

But she said Washington could not support the text, which she said contained "many problematic elements", including its failure to specifically condemn Hamas and its October 7 attacks. Friday's vote came after the UN Security Council in New York last week also finally passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire, thanks to an abstention from Washington. Since the war on Gaza, the Zionist's relentless military assault has killed at least 33,091 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Hamas not mentioned

While the rights council resolution did not name Hamas, it did condemn the firing of rockets at Zionist civilian areas and demanded "the immediate release of all remaining hostages". It repeatedly named the Zionist, demanding that the country end its occupation of all Palestinian territories and "immediately lift its blockade on the Gaza Strip and all other forms of collective punishment".

The text, which was revised late on Thursday removing several references to genocide, continued

to express "grave concern at statements by Zionist officials amounting to incitement to genocide". And it urged countries to "prevent the continued forcible transfer of Palestinians within and from Gaza". It warned in particular "against any large-scale military operations in the city of Rafah" in the south of the densely populated Gaza Strip, where well over one million civilians are sheltering, warning of "devastating humanitarian consequences".

The resolution also condemned "the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in Gaza", where the UN has warned that famine is looming. The text insisted on the "imperative of credible, timely and comprehensive accountability for all violations of international law" in Gaza. It called on UN war crimes investigators - tasked with probing the rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories even before October 7 - to look into all "direct and indirect transfer or sale of arms, munitions, parts, components and dual use items to the Zionist entity... and "analyze the legal consequences of these transfers". — AFP



HAITI: A police vehicle monitors the area near the National Palace and Ministry of Finance building in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. — AFP

political instability. A transitional presidential council has yet to be fully established, delaying the arrival of a multinational force to help Haiti's overwhelmed police restore order. It is also affecting the ability of NGOs to provide aid to the stricken population.

"Humanitarian staff, including our own, are facing unparalleled security challenges, balancing the imperative to assist others with the stark realities of personal risk and displacement," said Philippe Brachat, head of IOM in Haiti. The UN's emergency relief coordinator, Martin Griffiths, on Thursday allocated \$12 million in emergency funds for Haiti. — AFP

"Unending gang violence has displaced 50,000 people, pushed five million into acute hunger and weakened an already fragile health system," Griffiths wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "These funds will enable aid partners to reach the hardest-hit." In Geneva on Thursday, the UN's human rights commission adopted a resolution imploring its members "to continue to support the measures taken and efforts made by the government of Haiti to combat armed gang violence and the illicit sale, importation and circulation of firearms and to ensure respect for human rights in Haiti". — AFP

Teen hospitalized after savage attack in France

EVRY: A 15-year-old teenager has been badly beaten in a town south of Paris and rushed to hospital following a cardiac arrest, in the latest incident of school violence in France. Thursday's attack came at a time of heightened tensions around French schools. Earlier this week a teenage girl was left temporarily comatose after being beaten outside her school in the south of the country. In the new incident, which occurred in the town of Viry-Châtillon, located around 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Paris, a teenager was attacked by several people as he left school on Thursday afternoon.

The public prosecutor's office said it had opened a probe into attempted murder and gang assault. The schoolboy suffered cardiorespiratory arrest, a police source said. He was rushed to Necker hospital, a top paediatric hospital in Paris, said Jean-Marie Vilain, the mayor of Viry-Châtillon. The assailants "tried to massacre him", said Vilain, speaking of "the worst kind of thugs". "This extreme violence is becoming commonplace," he added. According to the mayor, psychological help would be provided to the pupils and teachers of the school, which the teenager attended. According to a police source, the teenager was beaten by several people who then fled.

The pupil was found in a street "not far from his school", according to prosecutors. The school is located in a working-class district of Viry-Châtillon, which is home to around 30,000 people. No arrests had been made by Thursday evening. On Tuesday, a teenage girl was attacked outside her school in the southern city of Montpellier. Prosecutors said the girl was "seriously injured". Three alleged attackers have been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder of a minor. One of the accused is a girl from the same school. Dozens of messages threatening attacks have been sent to schools around France in recent days. — AFP

Trump says Zionist entity 'losing PR war' in Gaza

WASHINGTON: Former US president Donald Trump has said that the Zionist entity is "losing the PR war" in Gaza because of the images coming out of the territory and must end the conflict quickly. "Every night, they're releasing tapes of a building falling down. They shouldn't be releasing tapes like that," Trump said in an interview broadcast on The Hugh Hewitt Show on Thursday. "They're doing, that's why they're losing the PR war. They, (the Zionist entity) is absolutely losing the PR war," he said.

"You've got to get it over with, and you have to get back to normalcy," Trump said. "You have to have a victory, and it's taking a long time." "Get it over with. They've got to finish what they finish. They have to get it done," the Republican presidential candidate said.

The Zionist entity has come under increasing international pressure over the toll from its six-month war against Hamas and has drawn increasingly tough rebuke from its main backer Washington. Relentless Zionist bombardment has reduced much of Gaza to rubble, collapsed the hospital system and created a humanitarian crisis for the Palestinian territory's 2.4 million people. Trump's comments came as US President Joe Biden warned the Zionist entity of a sharp shift in his policy over the Gaza war, amid growing frustration with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and mounting domestic pressure in a US election year. — AFP

Taiwan rescuers free nine from cave after quake

Search continues for missing people after the island's biggest earthquake in 25 years

HUALIEN: Rescuers freed nine people trapped in a winding cave in Taiwan's mountainous east on Friday, while locating two others who were feared dead, as they searched for those still missing after the island's biggest earthquake in 25 years. The official death toll from Wednesday's magnitude-7.4 quake still stood at 10, but the government in the hardest-hit area of Hualien county said two more people on a hiking trail were found with "no signs of life".

Crushed by a landslide, the two people were buried deep beneath massive boulders, making it difficult for workers to get to them. "Their bodies have been found, but they have not been excavated yet. We will add them to the death toll after they are excavated and identified," said Interior Minister Lin Yu-chang. Hundreds more were still stranded around the mountains that flank the county on Friday, with roads blocked off by landslides and rockfalls. However, most were known to be safe as rescuers deployed helicopters, drones and smaller teams with dogs to reach them. Rescuers had found nine people alive in a cave popular with tourists called the Tunnel of Nine Turns on Friday.

Lin said that progress was "ahead of schedule". "There are still aftershocks and rocks falling but in a very short period of about five hours today, we have managed to repair 10 kilometers of roads," he said. In the main city of Hualien, authorities allowed residents to enter a building with a crumbling facade in 15-minute intervals so that they could retrieve their belongings.

Some opted to throw mattresses and bags of clothing out the window, while a young mother slowly carried a cot out for her 10-month-old baby. "We are told the building has become dangerous and there probably won't be another chance to move our things afterwards," said the 24-year-old woman surnamed Chen. "During the big quake... I was

only thinking about protecting my baby at the time," she said. "I didn't expect it to be so serious and the structure below has become like that."

Ten minutes away, workers started demolishing a building named Uranus — tilting at a 45-degree angle after half its first floor pancaked — by first using a pink crane to smash its glass windows. The plan was to slowly take it apart — a process that could take two weeks — but an aftershock around 1 pm alarmed the construction team as the building appeared to lean more perilously forward. As rain drizzled across the city, workers accelerated the process, inserting giant metal bars to stabilize the structure.

Next to the Uranus, a digital sign on another building blared, "Don't give up! Hualien add oil!" — using a Chinese expression of support. The national disaster agency said 10 people had been killed and 1,123 injured — though the severity of the wounded was not specified. More than 630 were stranded but accounted for, while authorities had lost contact with 13.

Stranded, but safe

Rescuers set off early Friday to airdrop boxes of food and supplies to a group of students, teachers, residents and some tourists stuck at an elementary school that was inaccessible. Some were also airlifted out from a luxury hotel, the Silks Place Taroko, that had converted its parking lot into a makeshift helicopter landing pad. One of the places cut off was a youth hostel, where a staffer told AFP on Thursday that more than 50 people — including a Briton and four German nationals — were stuck waiting for roads to be cleared.

"We are all safe and have enough supplies. The damaged roads are being repaired," the staffer surnamed Lin said, adding that she was hopeful they could leave by Friday afternoon. But the light rain which started around noon meant more precarious conditions, said Wu Bao-lung, a search and rescue

minutes to retrieve their things, carrying torches to navigate around the debris. Some opted to throw mattresses and bags of clothes off windows, while a young mother slowly carried a cot out for her 10-month-old baby.

"We are told the building has become dangerous and there probably won't be another chance to move our things afterwards," said the 24-year-old woman surnamed Chen, adding that she did not feel the powerful aftershock as she was busy trying to move everything out. When the quake hit on Wednesday morning, Chen said "I was only thinking about protecting my baby at the time". She had left her home in a hurry, fretting about things that feel small now — like "if the eggs were broken or how I would reorganize", she told AFP.

Nearby, an elderly woman cradled her rice cooker, while another man with a headlight on his motorbike helmet carried a standing fan. One couple heaved a washing machine out. Wang Zhi-yu, 50, said she was very thankful that the borough chief allowed them to go inside to get their things. The lottery store owner said she and her family had luckily been at work when the quake hit.

"When we first saw it, we just saw the outside — we had no idea what the inside looked like," she said, tearing up as she spoke. "Later when the authorities stuck a red sign (warning that the building was dangerous) on it, that's when we knew we could not return to our home." She had lived in the area for around six years, but only bought her apartment in Tongshuai building about three years ago.

"I have a lot of emotions regarding this place because the area here is really very good," she said, adding that she was unsure about where her family would stay next. Chen, the young mother, was asking similar questions. "I was planning to go back to work (post-pregnancy) - but after the earthquake, I am not sure if I should go back to work or stay with my baby," she said. — AFP



HUALIEN: This handout picture shows search and rescue personnel working on a mountainside during the search for the body of a hiker in Hualien, a day after a major earthquake hit Taiwan's east. — AFP

team leader, who was near the park's entrance. "I've asked my colleagues to watch out for their safety... The collapse inside is quite serious, and there are constant aftershocks today, but we will still try our best," he told reporters.

In Taiwan's north, life continued as normal, though remnants of the quake damage could still be seen. One sky train rail in New Taipei City appeared to have been dislodged, with engineers and welders working to fix the line, while alleys around Taipei

where debris was still falling were cordoned off. Wednesday's quake was the most serious in Taiwan since a magnitude-7.6 seism hit the island in 1999.

The death toll then was far higher — with 2,400 people killed in the deadliest natural disaster in the island's history. Stricter regulations — including enhanced seismic requirements in its building codes — and widespread public disaster awareness appeared to have stayed off a more serious catastrophe this time around. — AFP

Families in Taiwan quake epicentre pick up the pieces

HUALIEN: Residents wearing hard hats and carrying large backpacks stood outside a building Friday with a crumbling facade in Hualien, the epicentre of Taiwan's biggest earthquake in 25 years, waiting to be allowed in to collect their belongings. "You have 17 minutes — now you can go up!" said an announcer with a loudspeaker, as a small group hurried into Tongshuai building, which was declared "dangerous and uninhabitable".

The lobby's floor was littered with glass and broken tiles, and a calendar behind the reception had its page torn to April 3. It marks a magnitude-7.4 tremor that was felt across the island. In epicentre Hualien, it left buildings tilted, tunnels crushed, and landslides tumbling down the mostly mountainous region. Hundreds are trapped deeper within the mountains, either stranded in luxury hotels or a hostel, as well as in tunnels and an elementary school.

Despite the quake's severity, authorities have so far confirmed at least 10 dead, and are racing against the clock — and weather conditions — to excavate the blocked roads around the coastal county. A tilting building in Hualien's main city has emerged as the most recognizable symbol from the disaster — leaning at a perilous 45-degree angle as construction workers hurried to demolish it. Ten minutes away, Tongshuai building's outer damages look less severe — just gnarled wiring frames and crushed windows on the first floor.

But inside, its marbled walls in the lobby had fallen, while its stairwells were littered with crumbling concrete. Residents were allowed to enter for 15-18



HUALIEN: Residents with safety headgear, backpacks and plastic bags prepare to salvage their belongings from the damaged Tongshuai Building following the April 3 earthquake in Hualien. — AFP

Iran pays homage to guards killed in Syria strike

TEHRAN: Thousands of people chanted against the Zionist entity and the United States at Friday's funeral for seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps members killed in a strike in Syria, which Iran blamed on the Zionist entity. The Guards, including two generals, were killed in the air strike on Monday which levelled the Iranian embassy's consular annex in Damascus. The Zionist entity has not commented on the strike, but analysts saw it as an escalation of its campaign against Iran and its regional proxies that runs the risk of triggering a wider war beyond the war in the Gaza Strip.

Friday's ceremony coincides with the annual Quds (Jerusalem) Day commemorations, when Iran and its allies stage marches in support of the Palestinians. Quds rallies were also planned for other countries on Friday, including Syria and Lebanon. Iran has said that among the dead were two brigadier generals from the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi and Mohammad Reza Zahedi. A Britain-based war monitor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said Zahedi was the Quds Force commander for Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

The 63-year-old had held a succession of commands in a Guards career spanning more than 40 years, and was the most important Iranian soldier killed since a United States missile strike at Baghdad airport in 2020 killed General Qassem Soleimani, who headed the Quds Force. The coffins of the seven were placed on the trailers of two trucks in one of the largest squares in Tehran, an AFP journalist said. Mourners held Iranian and Palestinian flags, as well as those from the Leba-



MANILA: Parents accompany their children from school after their classes in Manila. — AFP

Philippine schools suspend in-person classes due to heat

MANILA: Thousands of schools in the Philippines suspended in-person classes on Friday, the education department said, as parts of the tropical country endured dangerously high temperatures. Official figures showed 5,288 schools across the archipelago nation switched to remote learning, affecting more than 3.6 million students. The months of March, April and May are typically the hottest and driest in the archipelago nation, but conditions have been exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon.

Many schools have no air conditioning, leaving students to swelter in poorly ventilated, crowded classrooms. The Department of Education has issued an advisory giving school heads the power to decide when to switch to remote learning "in cases of extreme heat and other calamities". Some schools have reduced class hours to avoid teaching during the hottest times of the day.

The heat index was expected to reach the "danger" level of 42 or 43 degrees Celsius in several areas of the country on Friday, the state weather forecaster said. In Manila, the heat index was forecast to hit the "extreme caution" level of 40C, when heat cramps and exhaustion are possible. The country's heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity. Friday's actual maximum temperature in Manila was 35.5C. — AFP

nese Hezbollah group. "Death to the (Zionist entity)!" and "Death to America!" they chanted.

The Fars news agency reported that among those present was Ziad Nakhala, leader of the Islamic Jihad group that fights alongside Hamas in Gaza. Revolutionary Guards chief General Hossein Salami also attended the ceremony, as did President Ebrahim Raisi and his predecessor Hassan Rouhani, local media reported. Pictures of the men killed were displayed on the trucks, accompanied by the slogan "Martyrs on the road to Jerusalem".

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said the Zionist entity "will be punished" for the killings. Tehran backs Hamas but has denied any direct involvement in that attack. One placard on Friday echoed Khamenei's pledge to strike back after the Damascus strike: "We will make them regret this crime," it said. State television broadcast footage of similar gatherings on Friday in other Iranian cities including Mashhad, Qom, Sanandaj and Shahrekord. — AFP

India's Congress party promises minority protection and jobs

NEW DELHI: India's main opposition party Congress vowed Friday to protect minorities — generally seen as a reference to the country's Muslims — while accelerating growth and jobs in a manifesto for an election it is widely expected to lose. Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary elections starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world.

Many analysts see Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election under his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) banner as a foregone conclusion. Congress led India's independence struggle and dominated politics for most of the next seven decades but its secularist vision has since struggled against the BJP's appeal to members of India's majority faith. In its manifesto, Congress promised to protect "linguistic and religious minorities".

"The plurality of religions represents the history of India," it said. "History cannot be altered." India has a long and grim history of sectarian clashes between the country's Hindu majority and Muslims, its biggest minority faith with 200 million members. Party leader Rahul Gandhi — the son, grandson and great-grandson of prime ministers — said the upcoming election was "fundamentally different" from any other in India's history. "It is between those who want to end India's constitution and democracy and those who want to save it," he said.

The Congress manifesto, titled a "justice document", offered "concrete guarantees unlike Modi's empty promises", said lawmaker and lead author P Chidambaram. The party has promised to address India's "massive unemployment" on a "war footing", adding that it would earmark half of all government jobs for women. Young people voted for Modi in droves when he was first elected a decade ago after he said he would create 10 million jobs a year.

But a recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report warned that India was hamstrung by a "grim" crisis, with unemployment on the rise. Congress proposed an unconditional annual cash transfer of Rs 100,000 (\$1,200) "to every poor Indian family", without precisely defining who would qualify. The BJP is yet to publish its own manifesto. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Indian National Congress party leader and candidate for Kerala's Wayanad constituency Rahul Gandhi reads the party's manifesto after its release in New Delhi ahead of India's upcoming general elections. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2024

India's central bank keeps interest rates unchanged

Inflation risks linger; uncertainties in food prices pose challenges



KOLKATA: A metro train runs over a newly launched stretch between New Garia and Ruby stations, after commencement of its commercial services in Kolkata. — AFP photos

MUMBAI: India's central bank kept interest rates unchanged for the seventh time in a row on Friday, with the world's fifth-largest economy seeing both lingering inflation risks and strong economic growth. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said its benchmark "repo rate", the level at which the central bank lends to commercial banks, would remain the same at 6.50 percent. Major central banks around the world have signaled a move towards rate cuts this year.

In India, inflation has been on a downward trajectory, but is still stubbornly above the RBI's 4 percent target. The government has also forecast a heatwave in several parts of the country, which would threaten to send food prices spiking. Strong economic growth has also reduced the urgent need for a rate cut. India's economy grew at a robust 8.4 percent in the December quarter with a surging manufacturing sector helping defy more modest analyst forecasts.

"Looking ahead, robust growth prospects pro-

vide policy space to remain focused on inflation and ensure its descent to the target of 4 percent," said RBI governor Shaktikanta Das. But "uncertainties in food prices continue to pose challenges", he added, so that "monetary policy must continue to be actively disinflationary". Interest rates were hiked by 2.5 percentage points between May 2022 and February 2023, but have stayed constant since then.

India's retail inflation came in at 5.09 percent in February, almost unchanged on the previous month, led mainly by an increase in food prices. The country's "core" inflation, which excludes food and fuel costs, remained below 4 percent. For the financial year ended March 31, experts project India to have grown between 7.5 percent to 8 percent, the fastest among all major economies. In February, New Delhi announced a smaller-than-expected fiscal deficit for the current financial year, shunning populist spending in the last budget before national elections that start on April 19. — AFP

China's industrial subsidies 'pose risk,' Yellen warns

GUANGZHOU: US Treasury chief Janet Yellen warned during a visit to China on Friday that Beijing's subsidies for industry could pose a risk to global economic resilience. Yellen arrived in the southern city of Guangzhou on Thursday for several days of talks with Chinese officials on her second visit to the world's second-largest economy in less than a year.

She expressed concerns about China's "overcapacity" undercutting American and other countries' companies. Such overcapacity is seen as a result of huge Chinese subsidies to industries, such as solar, electric vehicles and batteries, that risk creating a surplus of cheap goods that threatens those sectors elsewhere. "Direct and indirect government support is currently leading to production capacity that significantly exceeds China's domestic demand, as well as what the global market can bear," she told a gathering of the US business community in Guangzhou on Friday.

"Overcapacity can lead to large volumes of exports at depressed prices," she said. "And it can lead to overconcentration of supply chains, posing a risk to global economic resilience." Such fears are not part of an "anti-China policy", she said during a question-and-answer session after the speech, but are intended to mitigate risks from "inevitable global economic dislocation that will result" from no change in Chinese policies. Washington instead seeks to manage US-China ties so that they are "resilient" and can "withstand shocks and challenging circumstances".

Yellen also told the gathering, organized by the US Chamber of Commerce in China, that she would seek to raise with Chinese officials the "challenges" faced by US businesses operating in the country. That included Beijing "imposing barriers to access for foreign firms and taking coercive actions against American companies", she said. "I strongly believe that this



GUANGZHOU: China's Vice Minister of Finance Liao Min (2nd right) and US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns (right) receive US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen upon her arrival at the Baiyun International Airport in southern China's city of Guangzhou on April 4, 2024. — AFP

doesn't only hurt these American firms: ending these unfair practices would benefit China by improving the business climate here," Yellen said. Yellen is set to meet with Vice Premier He Lifeng later on Friday.

The United States has said talks with He will see the two dive deep into both countries' economic conditions and address more sensitive areas such as national security and Beijing's alleged support for Russia's defense industrial base. Yellen in the morning told the governor of Guangdong - a vast province emblematic of the reforms and development that drove China's breakneck growth - that the United States was committed to a "healthy economic relationship". But, she stressed, that required "a level playing field for American workers and firms", as well as "open and direct communication on areas where we disagree".

Beijing has dismissed concerns over its vast state support for industry, last month condemning an EU probe into its subsidies for EVs as "protectionism" and part of a Western effort to politicize international trade. Washington's worries about a flood of exports come as US President Joe Biden pushes to boost domestic manufacturing in clean energy, with policymakers warning that China's excess capacity could harm the growth of those industries. — AFP



AMRITSAR: A fruit vendor (left) sells grapes on a horse-drawn cart along a street in Amritsar.

China dominates the clean energy industries

GUANGZHOU: China has extended its manufacturing domination to clean energy industries in recent years, alongside a global push for climate change action, but that is starting to worry the United States, Europe and others. Washington is especially concerned about "overcapacity", where Chinese subsidies to industries such as solar, electric vehicles and batteries threaten to undercut these sectors in other countries. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has vowed to raise the issue in her talks with key Chinese officials this week. Here is a look at China's power in these green tech sectors:

Solar dominance

China is the world's biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases driving climate change, such as carbon dioxide. It is also pouring billions into green energy and is set to dominate the world's solar supply chain, according to Wood Mackenzie. A report by the analytics firm noted that China put more than \$130 billion into the solar industry in 2023.

With these investments, "China will hold more than 80 percent of the world's polysilicon, wafer, cell, and module manufacturing capacity from 2023 to 2026", Wood Mackenzie added, referring to materials key to the production of solar panels. This is worrying for Washington, as the United States tries to build up its production capacity to reduce dependence on China and support its own green transition. On Wednesday, Yellen told reporters that beyond tax subsidies for green industries, Washington would not rule out other means of protecting these sectors, such as trade barriers.

Electric vehicles

China's auto exports rocketed 57.9 percent on-year to a record of 4.9 million units in 2023. This

was driven by a 77.6 percent jump in new energy vehicles (NEVs) -- including all-electric and plug-in hybrids -- to more than 1.2 million units, state media reported, citing data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM). In 2023, state media noted, China made up more than 60 percent of global NEV sales. Last year, the production of such vehicles rose around 36 percent as well to exceed 9.6 million units, state media said.

Battery boost

China's lithium-ion battery sector also grew in 2023, with state media reports saying total output surged 25 percent on-year. Exports of such batteries, meanwhile, were up 33 percent on-year in 2023, reports added. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, China accounted for some 57 percent of global demand for lithium-ion batteries in 2022. But there are warnings that the industry is grappling with excess production capacity. The worry in Washington and Brussels is that Chinese green tech firms with subsidy-fueled production muscle and huge inventories can offer prices so low that US and European firms would not be able to compete in the absence of trade barriers. — AFP



BEIJING: A woman walks past the Hengchi car showroom at a partially operating Evergrande commercial complex in Beijing — AFP

Business

Electric vehicles credited with lower CO2 emissions in US neighborhoods

California bolsters key pillar of state's drive towards net zero

LOS ANGELES: The booming use of electric vehicles in parts of California is reducing CO2 emissions in those areas, a study showed, bolstering a key pillar of the state's drive towards net zero. Scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, say a network of sensors set up around the San Francisco Bay Area - where Teslas and other EVs are a common sight - has logged a small but steady drop in the volume of planet-warming carbon dioxide being pumped out every year.

"We show from atmospheric measurements that adoption of electric vehicles is working, that it's having the intended effect on CO2 emissions," said chemistry professor Ronald Cohen, the study's lead author. Carbon dioxide is one of the main contributors to global warming, the human-caused phenomenon of rising temperatures that is increasingly playing havoc with global weather patterns.

Scientists agree that nations have to rapidly shift away from burning fossil fuels in order to keep global temperature rises to a manageable level and avoid the worst environmental calamities. More than two-thirds of CO2 emissions come from cities, but granular information about those emissions is scant - leaving policymakers guessing at how best to tamp them down. Cohen's network of dozens of sensors, which he started installing in 2012, has started to change that. It logged a 1.8 percent drop in emissions ev-

ery year over a five-year period.

Cross-referencing this data with vehicle registration information in the Bay Area - where almost one in every 20 vehicles is electric or hybrid - led Cohen and his team to conclude electrification was having a measurable effect. "The state of California has an ambition to be net zero in 2045 and that requires a decrease (in emissions) of a little more than three and a half percent per year for the next 20 plus years," Cohen told AFP. "1.8 percent per year is half the rate that we need to decrease. But I think it's an amazing down payment on our way to the right future."

'Good news'

California's ambitious plan for net zero - where CO2 production is vastly reduced and any remaining emissions are offset - puts it ahead of the 2050 target of the United States as a whole. The state, which if it were a country would have the fifth-biggest economy in the world, has some of the strictest environmental standards in the United States, including a plan to ban the sale of new gas-powered cars by 2035.

Cohen, who plans to roll out his sensor network in Los Angeles, in Providence, Rhode Island and in the Scottish city of Glasgow, acknowledges that the Bay Area's enthusiastic adoption of EVs in a state sympathetic to the



LAS VEGAS: The EV charger from LG with ports of both sides and capability to charge Tesla and non-Tesla electric vehicles is displayed at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

cause makes it an atypical case study. "This is what a good news story looks like in the place that's most aggressive," he said. "But it shows it's possible. It shows both how we can make

measurements that allow us to report on how cities are doing with their policies, and it shows us those policies can make changes that are observable at scale," he said. — AFP

Canada trade surplus jumps due to record gold exports

OTTAWA: Canada's trade surplus soared in February, mainly due to "all-time high" exports of gold, Statistics Canada announced. The country's merchandise trade surplus with the world widened from Can\$608 million (USD\$451 million) in January to \$1.4 billion in February. Total exports were up 5.8 percent, the largest percentage increase since August 2023, according to the agency.

Much of this increase was driven by a sharp rise in exports of unwrought gold, with exports of metal and non-metallic mineral products rising 31.1 percent in February to a record \$9.4 billion. Statistics Canada also noted an increase in wheat exports to Asian countries as well as exports of other crops. Imports rose 4.6 percent, the highest level since June.

Imports of electronic and electrical equipment and parts increased 9.7 percent, driven mainly by



VANCOUVER: A container ship sits in Burrard Inlet in front off the coast of North Vancouver. — AFP

an increase in imports of computers and peripherals (up 41.4 percent). At the same time, imports of metal and non-metallic mineral products declined slightly. After falling in January, crude oil imports rebounded. Canada's trade surplus with the United States,

its main trading partner, widened from \$8.8 billion in January to \$9.1 billion in February. At the same time, Canada's trade deficit with other countries widened to \$7.7 billion in February, compared to \$8.2 billion in January. — AFP

US trade deficit expands, imports exceed exports

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit expanded in February by more than analysts expected to reach its highest level since April 2023, as imports once again exceeded exports, according to government data published Thursday. The overall trade gap grew to \$68.9 billion, up \$1.3 billion from a month earlier, the Commerce Department said in a statement. This was above market expectations of a slight decrease in the trade deficit, according to Briefing.com. The February increase reflected a \$7.1 billion rise in imports from a month earlier, which was counteracted by export growth of just \$5.8 billion, meaning the overall trade gap rose.

Among the rise in goods exports, civilian aircraft and crude oil exports saw big increases, while imports were boosted by consumer goods including cell phones and other household goods, and foods, feeds, and beverages. "The real deficit is \$86.5B quarter-to-date versus \$84.4B in the previous quarter, suggesting a small drag from trade on growth in Q1," High Frequency Economics chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients. "The outlook for trade flows going forward is likely one of moderation given expectations of slower global de-



JERSEY CITY: Night view of New York city's lower Manhattan skyline, with the One World Trade Center skyscraper, as seen from Jersey City. — AFP

mand and growth going forward," she added.

The United States' trade deficit with China shrank to \$21.9 billion, but remained the widest of any country, while the trade deficit with Mexico surged to \$15.3 billion. The continued gap in trade between the world's two largest economies likely to be on the mind of Treasury secretary Janet

Yellen, who is on her second visit to China in less than a year in which she will raise concerns about overcapacity in certain sectors. "We're concerned about the spillovers that Chinese subsidies to these industries are having on the United States, and other countries as well," Yellen told reporters on Wednesday. — AFP

US awards \$20bn in grants to support clean energy

WASHINGTON: The US Environmental Protection Agency unveiled the winners of \$20 billion in government grants Thursday to support clean energy and finance solutions, marking one of the Biden administration's largest climate change investments to date. The eight nonprofits selected have committed to projects that will collectively "reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions by up to 40 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent per year," the EPA said in a statement.

Together they will create a "national clean financing network that will finance climate and clean energy projects, especially in low-income and disadvantaged communities." The funding will come from two different initiatives under the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), which was created by President Joe Biden's landmark 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA has channeled billions of dollars towards renewable energy projects, helping to spur a manufacturing boom that has created tens of thousands of jobs across the United States.

"When President Biden and I made the largest investment in our nation's history to address the climate crisis and to build a clean energy economy, we made sure that every community would be able to participate and benefit," vice president Kamala Harris said in a statement. "The grantees announced today will help ensure that families, small businesses, and community leaders have access to the capital they need to make climate and clean energy projects a reality in their neighborhoods," she added.

The GGRF recipients are looking to commit "over \$14 billion toward low-income and disadvantaged communities, including over \$4 billion for rural communities as well as almost \$1.5 billion for Tribal communities—ensuring," according to the EPA statement. — AFP

German electric car sales 'very weak'

FRANKFURT: Sales of new cars in Germany fell in March, official data showed Thursday, dragged down by plummeting demand for electric vehicles following the phase-out of government incentives. A total of 263,844 new cars hit roads in Europe's largest economy last month, the KBA federal transport authority said, down 6.2 percent from a year earlier. The decrease could be partly attributed to fewer working days compared with March 2023.

But analysts said new registrations were also hit by an ongoing slump in the market for battery-powered electric vehicles (BEVs), after the govern-

ment withdrew incentives at the end of last year. BEV sales plunged by nearly 29 percent in March, the KBA said. "This political decision has led to considerable uncertainty in the market," said EY analyst Constantin Gall. "Demand for electric cars is currently very weak - despite the high discounts that many manufacturers have given to compensate for the cancellation of the environmental bonus," he said.

Fully electric vehicles made up just 11.9 percent of all car registrations in March, compared with 15.7 percent a year ago. Despite the slowdown, Transport Minister Volker Wissing on Thursday said the government was still aiming to see at least 15 million fully electric cars on German roads by 2030. "Creating a market through subsidies is not a durable solution," Wissing told public broadcaster ZDF, adding that car manufacturers also had to make "attractive price offers". — AFP



GRUENHEIDE: An aerial view shows Tesla's electric car plant, the company's only European production site, in Gruenheide, east of the German capital Berlin. — AFP

Business

Equities struggle, oil extends gains on Middle East worries

Threat of regional war compounds fears

HONG KONG: Stocks fell Friday and oil extended the previous day's surge on worries that Zionist war with Hamas could widen to a regional conflict with Iran as both sides ratcheted up tensions. The threat of regional war compounded fears that the Federal Reserve would not cut interest rates as much as previously expected, with focus now on the release of key US jobs data later in the day. The sell-off followed a plunge across the board on Wall Street that observers said could also be partially blamed on profit-taking from a months-long rally that has seen several indexes hit multiple records this year.

Optimism was at a premium on trading floors after a deadly strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, which Tehran blamed on Zionist and threatened retaliation. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Tuesday the country "will be punished at the hands of our brave men. We will make them regret this crime and the other ones".

On Wednesday he called the strike a "desperate" effort by Zionists that "will not save them from defeat" in Gaza. "Of course they will be slapped for that action." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in return has pledged to go after those who harm his country. The military strengthened its defenses Thursday, while the army paused leave for combat units, blocked GPS signals in certain places and raised its "alertness".

"For years, Iran has been acting against us both directly and via its proxies; therefore, Zionist entity is acting against Iran and its proxies, defensively and offensively," Netanyahu said. "We will know how to defend ourselves and we will act according to the simple principle of whoever harms us or plans to harm us, we will harm them." The

prospect of a war in the crude-rich Middle East sent prices up more than one percent Thursday, with Brent breaking \$90 a barrel for the first time since October.

It extended those gains Friday, along with West Texas Intermediate. "The wider Mideast tensions stemming from the Gaza war are probably at the highest in months," said Vandana Hari, of Vanda Insights. "Crude is reflecting that Mideast conflagration fear premium." Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management added that the crisis and the war in Ukraine were making investors increasingly nervous. "The world feels markedly less safe today than when we woke up on Monday. Market sentiment seems to reflect a growing sense of widespread geopolitical unease," he said.

All three main indexes on Wall Street ended more than one percent down, and Asia continued the selling. Tokyo tanked two percent, with a stronger yen adding to the pain for Japanese investors, while Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington and Manila were also deep in the red. Hong Kong was flat and Jakarta edged up. Shanghai and Taipei were closed for a holiday. London, Frankfurt and Paris fell at the open.

Traders are awaiting the release of US non-farm payrolls data later in the day, which could have a bearing on the Fed's decision-making regarding interest rates. Confidence in three cuts this year, beginning in June, is being tested by a string of recent data indicating the US economy remains in rude health, while bank officials have done little to soothe concerns. Minneapolis Fed chief Neel Kashkari said Thursday that there was a chance of no reductions this year, calling inflation figures in



SINGAPORE: A boat cruises on the water in the central financial business district area in Singapore. — AFP

January and February "a little bit concerning" and adding that he wanted to see more positive data.

His Philadelphia counterpart Patrick Harker warned prices were still rising too sharply and that "we're not where we need to be", while Richmond boss Thomas Barkin called it "smart" to take time to

get a clearer idea about the path for inflation. However, Cleveland's Loretta Mester indicated officials were close to being confident enough to start lowering rates and Chicago Fed boss Austan Goolsbee said the recent uptick in inflation did not change the view that it was coming down. — AFP

NBK organizes 'Safe Ramadan' campaign

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) in collaboration with Kuwait Fire Force organizes its Safe Campaign during the summer season. NBK volunteers along with the Kuwait Fire Force team visited Kuwait Towers, to provide visitors with safety kits that included a fire blanket, fire alarm, first aid and fire extinguisher to support ensuring that they adhere to regulations for safety. "The campaign targeted limiting the fire incidents during Ramadan", said Yaqoub Al Baqer, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager. "NBK Volunteers and Fire Force team visited Kuwait towers to distribute the safety kits".



Yaqoub Al Baqer



"NBK aims to help keep the environment clean and people safe this Ramadan. The visits aimed to urge people to enhance their security as well as environmental awareness about precautions to be used to prevent accident fires and maintain cleanliness", he added. NBK and Kuwait Fire

Force Team distributed safety kits and provided visitors with a safety kit ensuring that they adhere to regulations for safety and wellbeing. Al Baqer praised the Fire force efforts and the influential role they play in raising to avoid accidents during camping.



SEOUL: A man walks past the Samsung logo displayed on a glass door at the company's Seocho building in Seoul on April 5, 2024. — AFP

Samsung Electronics expects 10-fold rise

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics said Friday it expects first-quarter operating profits to rise more than 10-fold year on year as chip prices recover. The firm is the flagship subsidiary of South Korean giant Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia's fourth-largest economy. The tech giant said in a regulatory filing that January-March operating profits were expected to rise 931.3 percent to 6.6 trillion won (\$4.89 billion). Operating profits in the same period last year totaled around 640 billion won.

The expectation exceeded the average estimate by 20.5 percent, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, which referenced its financial data firm. Sales, meanwhile, are expected to rise 11.4 percent to 71 trillion won, Samsung said. South Korean chipmakers, led by Samsung, enjoyed record profits in recent years as prices for their products soared, but a global economic slowdown dealt a blow to memory chip sales.

However, the semiconductor market had been predicted to recover this year and grow 11.8 percent, according to industry monitor World Semiconductor Trade Statistics. The news from Samsung comes after South Korea's SK Hynix - the world's second-largest memory chip maker - announced in January that it had returned to profit after four consecutive quarters of losses. Samsung's overall outlook is "fortified by a resurgence in the smartphone market, escalating DRAM (memory chip) prices", Neil Shah, vice president of Counterpoint Research, told AFP. Samsung is expected to release its final earnings report at the end of this month. — AFP

UK deepens probe into Vodafone-Three deal

LONDON: Britain's competition regulator has deepened its probe into Vodafone's planned merger of British mobile phone operations with those of Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison, citing concerns over higher prices. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), which began in January a formal investigation into the tie-up, said in a statement that it will launch an in-depth probe after both firms declined to offer undertakings to ease its concerns. The watchdog had warned last month that the deal could have a "substantial" impact on competition and may lead to higher prices and also reduced quality for consumers. It had given the groups until April 2 to respond.

"The CMA has referred the anticipated joint venture... for an in-depth investigation," it said in a statement on Thursday. "On the information currently available to it, it is or may be the case that this merger may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition within a market or markets in the United Kingdom." Vodafone said

Creditors give Ethiopia more time for IMF deal

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's creditors have extended a deadline for the country to reach a support deal with the International Monetary Fund, a source told AFP on Thursday. The Paris Club of creditors gave Addis Ababa until the end of June to agree on economic reforms with the IMF. Ethiopia had reached agreement with its international creditors at the end of November for a two-year suspension of debt repayments over 2023 and 2024.

The suspension came with a condition that the country of 120 million people strike a deal with the IMF before March 31. IMF experts left Addis on Tuesday after failing to reach agreement with the authorities. "There was a March 31 deadline to progress the talks between the IMF and the authorities, it has been extended until the end of June," a source at the Paris Club told AFP. Ethiopian authorities have been very reluctant to devalue the local currency fearing already high inflation will skyrocket.

They also want to receive the bulk of any loans as soon as agreement is reached while the IMF wants to link tranches of payment to Addis meeting

in response that the move was "an expected next step in the process" and expressed confidence it would complete the transaction, while insisting there would be no price changes.

"Vodafone UK and Three UK remain confident that the transaction will drive stronger competition in the mobile sector and give customers and businesses a step-change in network quality, speed, and coverage," Vodafone said in a statement emailed to AFP. "Both companies have already stated there will be no change to each operator's pricing strategy as a result of the merger." The proposed tie-up, announced in June last year, is aimed at creating Britain's biggest mobile operator with 27 million customers and to accelerate rollout of faster 5G connectivity.

The planned transaction sees British giant Vodafone taking 51 percent of the combined group and CK Hutchison the rest. The pair have a target value of £16.5 billion (\$21 billion) for the new group. The merger, if approved, will vault the combined operations above the country's two largest mobile operators BT EE and Virgin Media O2 in terms of customer numbers. Expansion of 5G across the UK has been hampered by Britain's ban on Chinese giant Huawei, a major supplier of equipment for mobile telephone networks. — AFP



AFAR: A man holds a camel with a rope on the top of Erta Ale volcano, in the Danakil Depression of the Afar region. In the heart of the Horn of Africa, the Danakil Depression is one of the hottest, most inhospitable place on earth, with temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius. — AFP

economic reform commitments. The World Bank puts Ethiopia foreign debt at US\$28.61 billion. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pledged to reform Ethiopia's closed and state-dominated econ-

omy when he took office in 2018. But little has changed with two years of domestic conflict from late 2020, drought and the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP



LONDON: A pedestrian passes a Vodafone store in west London. — AFP

Weekender

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2024



'Dam Al Ghazal', a red powder mixed with henna to enhance its color and pigmentation.



Henna premixed in a tube to help draw the desired shape easily.

THE COLOR OF DEVOTION



By Ghadeer Ghloum

The holy month of Ramadan and Eid tend to take people back to their traditional practices. The art of dyeing hand and fingernails with henna is an example of such traditions, holding cultural and heritage significance for women in Kuwait. Women used henna to dye their hair, hands, fingernails and feet in the past, especially during traditional and religious celebrations. Today, henna still holds its role as a fashionable art form, loved by women for its creative designs.

Shanti, an Indian henna specialist, said women love to decorate their hands with henna. "I draw different designs using different colors of henna, depending on each woman's preference. There are multiple colors of henna including red, black and brown, but

henna. "Different types of henna are of different quality with different names. There is the 'Katim', a black henna, which is one of the best. It sells for KD 5 per kilogram. There is also 'Jabaliya', a red henna. Women use this for beautifying purposes such as dyeing their

the henna powder is usually mixed with water to create a paste, but some people mix the powder with yogurt, roselle or butter for moisturizing.

Hamid, an Iranian herbalist, told Kuwait Times that types of henna vary — some come readymade, already mixed and filled in a conical plastic bag that helps the specialist draw the desired shape, while some come in powder form. "The henna plant is ground until it becomes a powder. This powder is mixed with substances and oils that give it the texture that allows women to use it for decorating their hands or dye their hair, such as 'Dam Al-Ghazal', which is a red powder that gives color and pigmentation to the henna to last longer," he explained. According to Hamid, the majority prefer readymade cones and tubes due to their convenience.

Lama, a Kuwaiti woman, told Kuwait Times: "The holy month of Ramadan and the days of Eid take us back to our roots, both spiritually and physically. Just as we renew our connection with Allah, recite the Holy Quran, pray and fast, we also love to bring back the traditional things that add to the overall atmosphere of this month. It gives us a break from Westernization and sets us free from getting caught up in the virtual world and its trends. We basically enjoy the comfort of our heritage, culture and identity."



A henna artist decorates the hands of a girl.

in Kuwait, the majority prefer to decorate their hands with black," she said.

Abu Fares, a Yemeni herbalist and vendor, showed Kuwait Times a few examples of the best types of Yemeni

hair and body — it sells for around KD 3 per kilogram. There is also 'Sahiliya', a brown henna. This type is only used for the hair and sells for around KD 3 per kilo," explained Abu Fares. He said



Abu Fares, a Yemeni herbalist and vendor.



Black Yemeni henna called Katim, one of the best types, which sells for KD 5 per kilo.



A woman shows her hand with henna designs. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The stars behind the scenes



A blacksmith sprays a star and crescent with gold paint.

By Ghadeer Ghloum

Iconic giant lighted star and crescent shapes can be seen gracing various locations in Kuwait. However, it is important to recognize that behind every product that makes its way to the market and to our homes, there are dedicated workers who play an essential role in the production process, working behind the scenes. They have a role and impact on society, as their products not only contribute to the economy, but also enrich our culture and heritage.

Mahmoud Al-Refai, a skilled blacksmith, shared his work routine with

Kuwait Times during the holy month of Ramadan, crafting products from 7:00 am until 4:00 pm. Refai said he provides products to retailers to be sold in markets, but also offers his products directly from his workshop, which may be slightly cheaper than in the market.

"During this month, our work sometimes extends beyond iftar, as we focus on selling the items we have worked on during the day. This season's best-selling items are based on the theme of Ramadan, which feature the Islamic star and crescent symbol. Our customers, from shop owners to locals, buy our unique designs to beautify their

homes," he explained.

Zainab Dashti, a Kuwaiti citizen, has noted the rising popularity of these adornments in Kuwait this year, specifically the Islamic star and crescent. "Since the beginning of the month, I am seeing this decoration almost everywhere I go. I believe it is this year's trend. Indeed, it looks really nice and appealing with its golden color and LED lights, giving it a warm and inviting glow that resonates very well with the Ramadan vibes," she enthused.



A worker adds LED lights to a star and crescent. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Blacksmiths make popular star and crescent shapes at a workshop.





'Allah and His angels send blessings on the Prophet O ye that believe send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect' - Moroccan calligraphy in the Qandusi style.



'And God knows and you do not know' (والله يعلم و أنتم لا تعلمون) -- simplified Andalusian script.



'The pious will have a pleasant ending' (و العقبه للمتقين) — Square Kufic and Andalusian simplified script.

The divine elegance of Arabic calligraphy



'Take charge of me and make me among those whom You have taken charge of' (تولني فيما توليت) — Diwani jali script.



By Passant Hisham

For centuries and up to this day, the intricate and mesmerizing designs of Arabic calligraphy have left a mark on Islamic art and culture. By treating writing and the written word as sacred, it showcases the exquisite beauty of Arabic script in a visually captivating manner. Among the many Arab calligraphers dazzled by this art form is Shaymaa Hitou, a Syrian artist living in Kuwait.

Within this art form, lies countless secrets and mysteries, which Hitou firmly believes can only be revealed to those who are eager enough to dive into its depths. She views calligraphy not just as a skill to be temporarily acquired, but as a lifelong journey intertwined with the calligrapher's soul and body. "Even if I devoted my entire life to learning it, I know that I won't be able

served as the primary tool for recording God's sacred words in the Holy Quran. Captivated by its spiritual nature, and historical origins, she only found herself further drawn to it, eager to deeply study archaeological inscriptions and historical manuscripts, with a yearning passion for identifying and deciphering ancient writings.

Immersed in her search for the hidden treasures within letters, and after years of avid learning and practicing, she finally crafted her own distinctive calligraphy script and named it "Hijazi inscription script," which according to her is extracted from tombstones in the Hijaz dating back to the second and third centuries. Describing it, she said, "It is distinguished by its beauty, majesty and meticulous details, reflecting the mastery of its engravers during that era."

The script that Hitou created belongs to the family of Kufic calligraphy script, one of the oldest forms of Arabic calligraphy, which she considers her favorite. "Kufic calligraphy is a universe of its own, unveiling stories and narratives, characterized by its ancientness, originality, and its unfamiliar form to the people of our time," she noted.

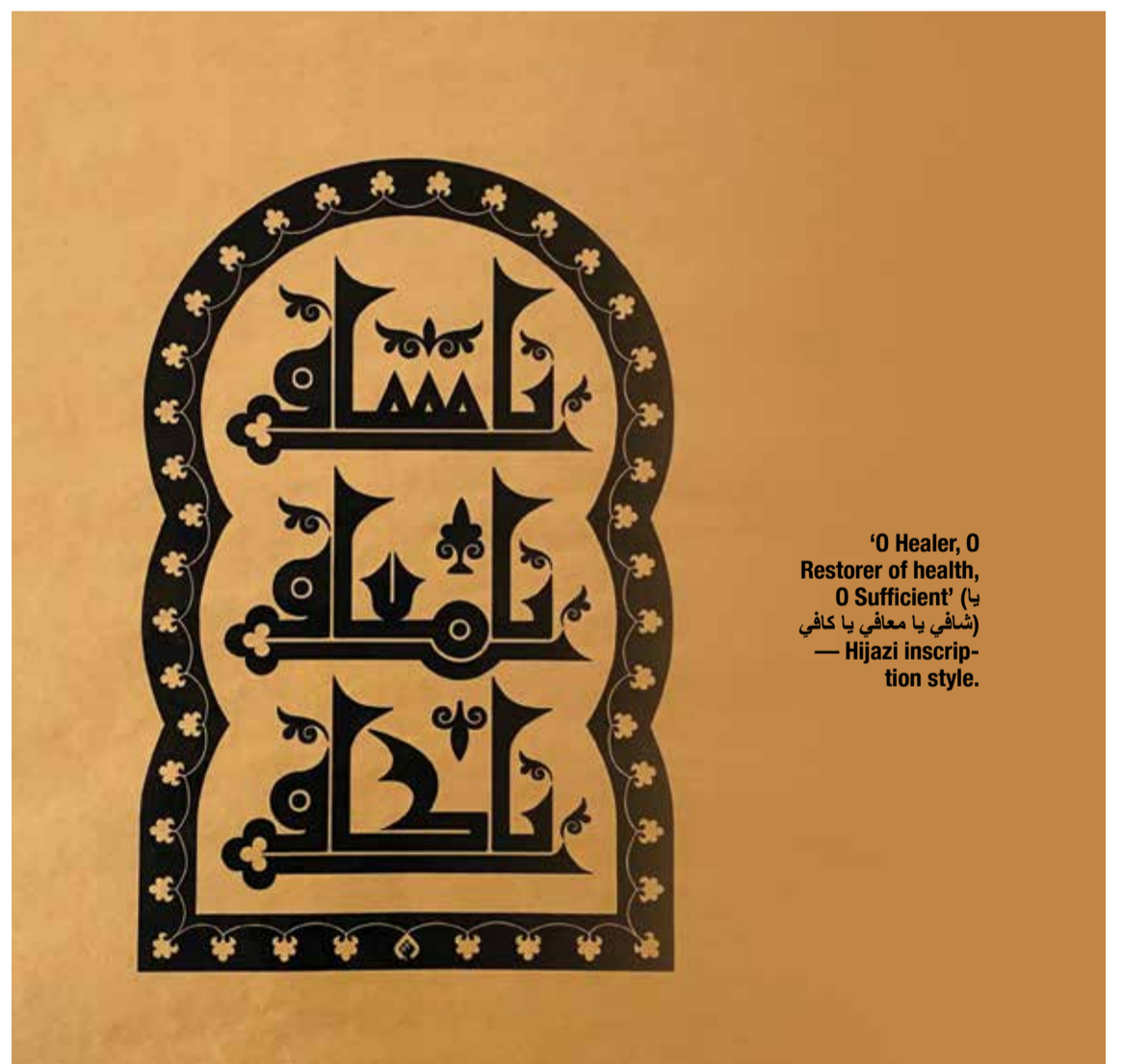
Watching the evolution of Arabic calligraphy has deeply intrigued her, particularly with its development of a diverse range of styles, all while maintaining the original structure from the oldest known inscription on rock to the letters written today. For that, she has been keen to adopt her own style that reflects a harmonious blend between uniqueness and preservation of traditional artistic elements. "I find no satisfaction or fulfillment if I didn't introduce something new. I aim to leave my own touch in every art piece that I create," Hitou expressed.



'And We haven't sent you except as a mercy for mankind' (و ما ارسلناك الا رحمة للعالمين) — Qandusi script.

to unleash all its secrets. It's like an endless ocean, and I only hope to grasp just a bit of its wisdom along my road," she told Kuwait Times.

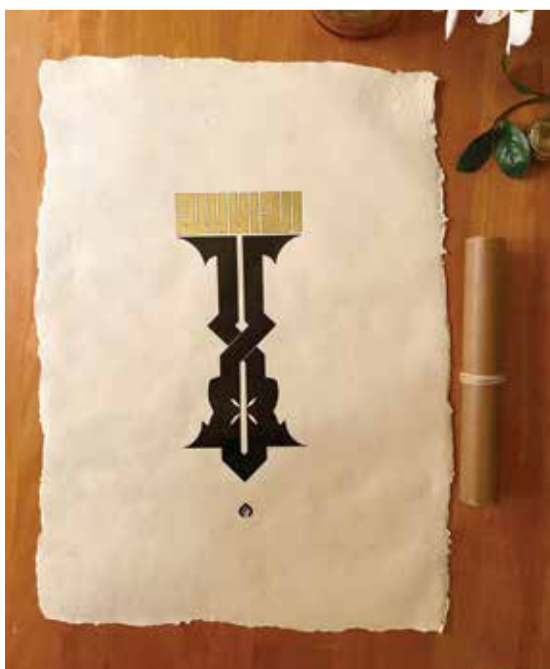
For her, perhaps the allure of Arabic calligraphy lies in its special connection to the divine, dating back to the beginning of Islam, when it



'O Healer, O Restorer of health, O Sufficient' (يا شافي يا معافي يا كافي) — Hijazi inscription style.



'No' (لا), from a manuscript dating back to 573 AH in the Levantine Kufic script.



'There is no God but Allah' (لا اله الا الله) — Almoravid Kufic and square Kufic.



'O Healer, O Restorer of health, O Sufficient' - Square Kufic script.



'Have a blessed month' (مبارك عليكم الشهر) - Kufic Quranic script.

What's cooking in our kitchens



Food has the magical ability to bring people together. Cooking together or sharing recipes close to one's heart can be a great way to get to know people and appreciate different cultures. At Kuwait Times, our conversations often revolve around food, from reminiscing about dishes from home (watermelons from Jenin are the best, according to one of our staff) to debating whether there are any restaurants in Kuwait that make good jollof rice. Here are some of our much-loved recipes – some passed down through generations, others newfound favorites.

CARROT CAKE

By Nebal Snan



I was never a big fan of carrot cake — the idea of having a vegetable in a dessert put me off a little bit. That was until I met my fiancé. As a self-proclaimed foodie, one of the questions I like to ask people when I first meet them is what their favorite cake is. To my intrigue, carrot cake was at the top of his list, but he said he couldn't find a cake shop that makes it to his taste. Little did he know that when it comes to baking, I'm always up for a challenge.

With carrot cake being something my family doesn't usually make, my hunt for a good recipe landed me on YouTube. I rarely follow a recipe without making a lot of alterations, but this one was that good. Thankfully, it was a huge hit with my fiancé and my family — who, like me, were never fans of veggies in a cake — loved it. The secret is in the balanced cream cheese frosting and the genoise-like texture of the cake. Without further ado, here's the recipe. Try it and maybe it will convert you, too. (Now I'm thinking adding vegetables to a cake might not be such a bad idea after all. Zucchini chocolate chip muffins next?)

Carrot Cake
(Adapted from Hanbit Cho)
Quantity: 1 Carrot cake (3 sheets/
layers of 1.5cm thickness + plenty of
cream cheese frosting)

Ingredients
Carrot Cake Sheet (Pan size: 15cm
x 7cm (diameter/height). For an 8-inch
pan (20cm diameter), multiply all the
ingredients by 1.8x)

- 89g light brown sugar
- 122g eggs
- 77g neutral oil (you can use sunflower oil)
- 111g cake flour (you can make your own cake flour using all-purpose flour and cornstarch)
- 55g almond powder (you can ground your own almonds instead of buying readymade almond flour)
- 3g cinnamon powder



- 4.4g baking powder
- 2.1g baking soda
- 1g salt
- 25g chopped pecans
- 25g chopped walnuts

- 50g raisins (feel free to omit the raisins or only use one type of nuts)
- 168g grated carrots

How to make it

1. Add eggs and light brown sugar into a bowl and whisk. Add the oil and mix.
2. Add the dry ingredients (cake flour/almond powder/cinnamon powder/baking powder/baking soda/salt) and mix well.
3. Add the remaining ingredients (pecans, walnuts, raisins, carrots) and mix.
4. Pour into the pan and bake for 45-50 mins at 165°C (Pre-heat to 165°C). Adjust the baking time to suit your oven and taste. Stick in a wooden rod to check if any wet batter comes out — if so, then bake further.
5. Place the carrot cake onto a cooling

6. rack and let it cool completely.
6. Slice it into three sheets of 1.5cm thickness. (You can also slice it into two thicker sheets if you prefer)

Cream cheese frosting

Ingredients

- 320g cream cheese (room temp)
- 120g powdered (or icing) sugar
- 160g unsalted butter (room temp)
- 3.5g lemon zest
- 30g heavy cream

How to make it

1. Make sure the cream cheese and butter is at room temp (20°C)
2. Smooth out the cream cheese by lightly beating it.
3. Sift in the sugar powder and mix.
4. Smooth out the butter and add it in.
5. Add in the lemon zest, followed by heavy cream.

If you find that the frosting is a bit too runny, then put it in the fridge to harden it up a bit.

Assembly

1. Start by a sheet of cake on a plate or a rotating cake stand. Spoon one third of the frosting (or half if you have 2 cake sheets) onto the sheet and spread the frosting with a spatula.
2. Repeat for the second and third sheets of cake. You can get creative with the decoration. Hanbit Cho has a step-by-step tutorial in his video recipe that I followed.

Storage: Store the finished carrot cake in the fridge for up to five days. It's best to store in an air-tight container so it doesn't dry out.

MAQLUBA

By Islam Al-Sharaa



Maqluba is a traditional dish with roots in Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon that go back to ancient times. The dish gained its unique name, "upside down", during a historical event in Jerusalem when the Muslim conqueror Salah Al-Deen Al-Ayoubi and his soldiers were served this flavorful meal after their victory. Salah Al-Deen loved the dish and described it as the "upside down" dish due to the way it's served.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 teaspoon crushed coriander
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- Salt to taste and pepper to taste

- 1/2 tablespoon turmeric
- 1 cinnamon stick

For the vegetables

- 2 eggplants, sliced lengthwise
- 2 potatoes, sliced
- 2 cups (330g) basmati rice, washed
- Chicken stock

onion and cook until translucent. Add the chicken and cook for 2-3 minutes on each side. Note: traditionally Maqluba is made with bone-in chicken with skin. I prefer boneless and skinless chicken. If you prefer the traditional way, use bone-in chicken thighs and legs.

3. Add bay leaves, water, turmeric, cinnamon stick, cardamom pods and cook for 15 minutes. Note: If you are using bone-in chicken, cook for 20-25 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, prepare the vegetables: Deep fry the potatoes, then deep fry the eggplants. Drain on paper towels.
5. Assemble the maqluba: Brush a bit of oil at the bottom of a large and wide pot, layer eggplant slices and potatoes (make sure to layer them at the bottom and the side of the pot). Note: You also can use other vegetables to make maqluba, such as carrots, cauliflower and more. Then place the chicken, then spread evenly the rice.
6. Pour in the stock. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover and cook for 20-25 minutes.
7. Once cooked, turn the heat off and allow to cool slightly. Then, place a very large serving dish or a plate on top of the pot, then carefully invert the pot onto the dish in one smooth motion. Tap the bottom of the pot to make sure that everything is separated.
8. Chop some parsley and fry the nuts and sprinkle them over the maqluba.



- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 500g chicken thighs/legs (with skin or without/with bone or without)
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 cups (1L) water (or more, check how much water is needed for the rice)
- 5 cardamom pods

- For serving: chopped parsley and toasted almonds

How to make it

1. Make the chicken for the maqluba: In a bowl mix oil and spices. Add chicken and mix until coated.
2. In a pot heat the oil, add chopped

CHICKEN CAFREAL

By Sebastian Dsouza



Here's an authentic yum Goan chicken recipe, Chicken Cafreal, that's made with freshly blended ingredients that bring out a burst of aromatic Goan flavors. Every Goan would relate to this dish. Having had this for years makes us crave and often prepare it at home. My wife is an excellent chef and adds her magical touch, which makes any dish flavorful. Chicken Cafreal is one of the epic dishes that my wife makes and I've learnt from her how to prepare this authentic dish.

Ingredients

- 1 kg chicken legs or chicken pieces
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp cloves
- 1 inch cinnamon stick
- 1 inch ginger
- 6 garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp lemon juice or 1 tbsp white or apple cider vinegar
- 1 bunch of fresh cilantro (coriander leaves)
- 6 fresh green chilies
- 8 leaves of fresh mint
- 1/4 tsp turmeric powder
- Salt to taste

How to make it

1. Add all the ingredients, except for the chicken, in a blender and blend it to a fine paste.
2. Marinate the washed chicken pieces with salt and the blended paste.
3. Let it sit for around 30 minutes to absorb the juicy flavors.
4. In a pan add some oil and fry the marinated chicken pieces. Little water can be added for a thick gravy consistency only after the chicken pieces are fried (well done and browned).

For garnishing

Separately in a pan, fry two potatoes - sliced oval-shaped or like French fries and fry two onions - sliced like rings.



Finally, in a dish, place the fried chicken pieces. Add the thick gravy, fried potato slices and fried onion rings and garnish with mint or cilantro sprigs.

Voila! It's ready to eat and once you taste this dish you'll definitely crave for more. It is traditionally served with Goan brown bread (poe). However, it can be had with any bread or rice too.

Sports

Never rule out 'phenomenal' Vettel, says Mercedes boss

Russell: Hamilton exit will give Mercedes fresh start

SUZUKA: Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said Friday that "you can never discount" Sebastian Vettel, after the four-time world champion hinted he could return to Formula One to replace Lewis Hamilton. Vettel, who retired in 2022, said earlier this week that he had held talks with Wolff, who needs to replace seven-time world champion Hamilton at Mercedes next year.

Hamilton said in February that he was leaving to join Ferrari at the end of the season after 11 years with the Silver Arrows. Speaking ahead of Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix, Wolff said Vettel's track record was "phenomenal" but stressed that his team have not chosen Hamilton's successor yet.

"It's not something that we plan to do in the next few weeks," he said. "The driver market is very dynamic. Some of the really good guys are about to sign for some of the other teams. We want to continue to have discussions and keep the options open, but at this stage it's much too early to commit to a driver," he added.

Vettel won his four world championships with Red Bull from 2010-13. He bowed out of Formula One at the end of the 2022 season after six years at Ferrari and two with Aston Martin. Hamilton gave his former rival his seal of approval on Thursday, saying he would "love for Seb to come back" and calling him "an amazing option" for Mercedes.

Wolff also had words of praise for the 36-year-old German. "Sebastian is someone that you can never discount," he said. "His track record is phenomenal. Sometimes taking a break is also good to re-evaluate what is important for you and find your motivation."

Mercedes have been linked with several drivers to replace Hamilton, who will take Carlos Sainz's seat at Ferrari. Triple world champion Max Verstappen is reportedly top of Wolff's wish list. Highly rated young Italian F2 driver Kimi Antonelli and Mick Schumacher, son of seven-time champion Michael Schumacher, have also been mentioned.

Wolff said his team have a shortlist in mind but refused to say how many names were on it. He also said he was looking forward to assessing the 17-year-old Antonelli. "He's been our young boy for a long time and we're keen to see what he is able to do in a Formula One car," he said.

George Russell believes Mercedes can start with "a fresh sheet of paper" without Lewis Hamilton and says their relationship has improved since his Ferrari-bound team-mate announced he is leaving after this season.

Seven-time world champion Hamilton made the shock announcement in February that he is quitting Mercedes after 11 years to replace Carlos Sainz at Ferrari. Mercedes have yet to name Hamilton's successor but Russell will remain with the Silver Arrows next season. The 26-year-old British driver told AFP that he thinks the move will be good for Hamilton and will also allow Mercedes to move on.

"I think a change for him is positive, a change for us is positive," he said ahead of this weekend's Japanese Grand Prix. "It's a fresh sheet of paper. Sometimes when you have so much success from the past, you're leaning on all of the experience of those winning days."

"But the days today are different." Russell said he was "surprised, same as everyone else" when he



SUZUKA: Kick Sauber's Chinese driver Zhou Guanyu drives during the second practice session ahead of the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix race at the Suzuka circuit in Suzuka, Mie prefecture on April 5, 2024. — AFP

heard about Hamilton's move, but he thinks the early announcement has brought "clarity" to the situation. He said Hamilton's impending exit has done nothing to weaken their working relationship.

"If anything, I could argue that things are better,

to be honest," said Russell. "Of course, we're in a different situation but I think Lewis has been very rational and constructive and objective when we're talking with the team, with the feedback. That's only a positive," he said. — AFP

Bhatia fires bogey-free 63 to seize lead

WASHINGTON: Akshay Bhatia birdied five of the last seven holes to fire a nine-under par 63 and grab a three-stroke lead after Thursday's opening round of the PGA Texas Open. The 22-year-old American fired a bogey-free round at TPC San Antonio to match his lowest career PGA round and notch his lowest total in the first 18 holes at any tour event.

"Just played really solid," Bhatia said. "This is my third time here. Not many golf courses on the tour have been my third time, so I think (I was) understanding the golf course a lot more. It was just a good day." Justin Lower and Brendon Todd shared second on 66 with fellow Americans Max Homa, Denny McCarthy, Austin Eckroat and Tyson Alexander sharing fourth on 68.

World number two Rory McIlroy, in his final tuneup for next week's Masters, opened on 69. Bhatia, with five top-17 finishes and four missed cuts in nine starts this season, captured his first PGA title last July at the Barracuda Championship, beating Patrick Rodgers in a playoff. He comes off a season-best finish of 11th at Houston last week.

"The last couple weeks is when I started working with Ryan, my psychologist, and that's where it has really paid off, just changing the way I look into the days and my goals for the day," Bhatia, ranked 87th in the world, sank a six-foot birdie putt at the par-5 second, added back-to-back birdies at the fourth and fifth then closed the front nine with a 16-foot birdie putt.

He birdied the 12th from just outside six feet, added a tap-in birdie at the par-5 14th and sank a 15-foot birdie putt at 15 to seize the lead alone at 7-under. Bhatia wedged his approach inches from the hole for a tap-in birdie at 17 and blasted out of a bunker to set up another tap-in birdie at the par-5 18th. "I knew I had two tough tee shots coming in, 15 and 18. If I could just get out of there with a par, maybe birdie 18, just play it how we planned to, it would all work out," Bhatia said. "I thankfully birdied 15 and then 18 got a very good break and happened to kind of hit in the right spots at the right time."

Lower, chasing his first PGA triumph at age 35, closed his bogey-free round with a 28-foot birdie putt. Todd, who began on the back nine, birdied four of his final five holes, sinking a birdie putt from just inside 46 feet at the ninth to grab a share of second.

McIlroy happy at start

McIlroy, who can complete a career grand slam with a Masters victory, saw some optimistic signs in his game after a bogey-free round. "I thought I played pretty well, hit some nice shots, played pretty consistently," McIlroy said. "It's the first round I've had without a bogey in quite a while."

"My game over the last couple months has been quite volatile, so to go out there and play a solid round of golf in pretty tricky conditions, pretty happy with it." Meanwhile three-time major winner Jordan Spieth aced the 199-yard, par-3 16th hole. It was the American's fourth ace on tour and first since 2021 at Bay Hill. — AFP

Punjab edge Gujarat to spoil Gill's party

AHMEDABAD: Shubman Gill smashed an unbeaten 89 for the highest individual score of this year's Indian Premier League for Gujarat Titans but Punjab Kings still snuck through to a three-wicket victory on Thursday. Shashank Singh's 61 and a late cameo by debutant Ashutosh Sharma saw Punjab reach the target of 200 with one ball to spare, the highest successful chase this season.

"Still trying to sink in," said Singh. "Visualized all these things, but when it turned into reality, proud of the effort." For most of the evening, Gujarat looked on course for a comfortable victory with Punjab plummeting to 70-4 in the ninth over.

Captain Shikhar Dhawan was out in the second over when he chopped one onto the stumps. England batsman Johnny Bairstow fell soon after for 22, deceived by Afghan spinner Noor Ahmad who was the pick of the Gujarat bowlers with 2-32.

Young wicketkeeper Prabhsimran Singh scored an entertaining 35 off 24 balls but holed out trying to pick up the pace. Singh came to the crease with Punjab still needing 130 runs but made 61 off 29 balls, with six fours and four sixes.

Impact substitute Sharma, playing his first-ever IPL match, chipped in with a quick 31 off 17 balls to pull off an unlikely win for the Kings. Gujarat skipper Gill batted through the home team's innings to score 89 off 48 balls,

Zhang, Kim, Yin, Ciganda share lead at LPGA

LOS ANGELES: South Korea's Kim Sei-young, Spain's Carlota Ciganda and Americans Angel Yin and Rose Zhang shared the lead after Thursday's second day of stroke play at the LPGA Match Play tournament. A revamped format for this year's event at Shadow Creek in Las Vegas features three rounds of stroke play with the top eight advancing to weekend match play. Ciganda fired a bogey-free five-under par 67 to seize a share of the lead with Yin, who shot 68; Zhang, who fired a 73, and day one leader Kim, who fired a 74.

"I've been hitting lots of greens and that's key in Shadow Creek," Ciganda said. "If you can hit fairways and greens and avoid those bogeys, those mistakes, I think it's big. And my putting was working. I made some good putts, five birdies, no bogeys so very happy."

Ireland's Leona Maguire and Japan's Minami Katsu each fired 69 to share fifth on 141 while Japan's Yuka Saso and England's Jodi Ewart Shadoff were on 143. Together, they were the eight players set to compete in the match play quarter-fi-

late Wednesday by 25-year-old compatriot Eileen Ando, who secured a Paris weightlifting berth for the Philippines after finishing seventh with a total of 228kg.

Only one athlete per country can qualify in any weight division and Diaz, who won gold at Tokyo in the now-scrapped 55kg division, finished 11th on 222kg after failing with her final two clean-and-jerk attempts to match Ando's total.

Diaz has lifted at every Olympics since Beijing in 2008 but will be 37 when the Los Angeles Games take place in 2028. "I will still lift,



AHMEDABAD: Punjab Kings' Shashank Singh (2R) and Harpreet Brar (L) celebrate their win as Gujarat Titans' Darshan Nalkande (R) and captain Shubman Gill react at the end of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

the highest individual score this season.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson scored 26 in his first appearance this IPL season for Gujarat after opener Wriddhiman Saha fell cheaply for 11. Gill and left-hander Sai Sudarshan stitched together a rapid partnership of 53 in the middle overs to give Gujarat a launch-

ing pad to accelerate in the final overs.

All-rounder Rahul Tewatia provided the final fillip with a quickfire 23 off eight balls — together he and Gill raked in 56 runs in the last four overs to take Gujarat to 199-4. Gill blamed the defeat on "dropped catches". "Never easy on a wicket like this," he added. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Sei Young Kim of South Korea tees off on the third hole on day two of the T-Mobile Match Play presented by MGM Rewards at Shadow Creek Golf Course on April 04, 2024 in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

gneys to bring her down into a pack.

"I knew today was going to be a grind and it proved to be," Zhang said. "I've played in difficult conditions before, but this definitely was up there in terms of difficulty." Zhang, 20, won her pro debut last June at the LPGA Americas Open, the first player to win her pro debut at an LPGA event since Beverly Hanson in 1951.

Kim made her only birdies of the day on the closing two holes to lift herself into a share of the lead. "It was a very tough day," Kim said. "I'm very happy it was just 2-over." Kim, ranked 39th, has won 12 LPGA titles but none since the November 2020 Pelican Championship, which came a month after her lone major win at the Women's PGA Championship. — AFP

Philippines gold winner to keep lifting as Paris dream ends

MANILA: Hidilyn Diaz, the first and only Olympic gold medalist from the Philippines, vowed Thursday to continue in weightlifting just hours after failing to qualify for a fifth consecutive Games. Diaz, 33, was beaten in the IWF World Cup 59kg class in Thailand

but I'm not sure for the next Olympics," Diaz told AFP via Facebook messenger. "Right now, I have to enjoy the moment."

"I will pursue what I have started, training and serving our athletes in the future," she said, revealing she would open her own sports academy soon. Diaz has struggled since stepping up to the heavier 59kg class where she faces naturally bigger athletes — Ando competed in the 64kg class in Tokyo.

The event, the final Olympic weightlifting qualifier, was won by China's Luo Shifang with a new world record of 248kg, a massive 24kg

more than Diaz hoisted to win Olympic gold three years ago. "To my followers and supporters — many thanks!" wrote Diaz. "Our initiative of giving inspiration to our youth and Filipinos in sports will go up to the next level," she added.

Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham Tolentino told AFP it was "unfortunate that Diaz missed the record of having five consecutive appearances in Olympics". Both Diaz and Ando were "not in their natural weight class", he said, adding Diaz's training for the Phuket qualifiers had been hampered by an injury, without giving details. — AFP

Sports

Mac Allister's 'wonder goal' fires Liverpool back to the top

Liverpool head to Manchester United in the league on Sunday for a crucial clash

LIVERPOOL: Alexis Mac Allister fired Liverpool back to the top of the Premier League as the Argentine's "wonder goal" inspired a tense 3-1 win against lowly Sheffield United on Thursday. Jurgen Klopp's side were growing anxious after Darwin Nunez's early opener was cancelled out by Conor Bradley's own goal in the second half.

But Mac Allister eased the nerves around Anfield with a brilliant finish from the edge of the area and Cody Gakpo sealed the points in the closing moments. On a potentially pivotal evening in the title race, Liverpool moved two points clear of second placed Arsenal with eight games left for each of the three teams involved in a gripping battle for supremacy.

Arsenal's 2-0 win against Luton had knocked Liverpool out of pole position on Wednesday, with third-placed Manchester City's 4-1 rout of Aston Villa keeping them in the hunt. But Liverpool, unbeaten in their last 28 home league matches, are now a step closer to being crowned English champions for a record-equalling 20th time and first since 2020.

"We needed Macca's wonder goal to turn it around. The impact he can have is massive," Klopp said of Mac Allister, who is the first Liverpool midfielder to score or assist in six consecutive games since Steven Gerrard in 2013. Klopp's treble chasers have already won the League Cup and face Atalanta in the Europa League quarter-finals as they eye a memorable farewell for the German in his last season.

However, they will have to improve on this erratic display to hold off Arsenal and champions City, who are three points adrift of Liverpool. "Our general game until I think we made the changes was not great. That's what we have to admit," Klopp said. "It's tricky, they had such a low block, but you have to do better.

"That's how it is. You have to change games from the bench when needed and so I'm really happy with that." Liverpool head to Manchester United in the league on Sunday for a crucial clash with their bitter rivals.

The Reds had to come from behind to beat Brighton last weekend, but Klopp insisted he was feeling "calm" as the title race approaches a dramatic climax.

Even so, his heart must have been beating a little faster than usual when United almost snatched a shock lead. Jack Robinson's long throw reached the unmarked James McAtee in the area and on-loan Manchester City youngster's volley forced a reflex save from Caoimhin Kelleher. From the resulting corner, Ben Brereton Diaz almost tapped in at the far post as the Liverpool defence stood statuesque.

Klopp relief

United keeper Ivo Grbic handed Liverpool the lead in farcical fashion after 17 minutes. Needlessly taking far too long to clear on the edge of his area, Grbic was charged down by Nunez, the ball hitting the Uruguay striker on the backside as it rolled into the empty net.

Joe Gomez, Mac Allister, Dominik Szoboszlai and Luis Diaz all went close from long-range as Liverpool threatened to deliver the knockout blow. Bottom of the table United have won just three times during a dismal league campaign that looks certain to end with relegation.

Yet they rocked Anfield to its foundations in the 58th minute. Gustavo Hamer's superb pass picked out McAtee on the right flank and he cleverly cut back inside before whipping a cross into the area. Hamer had carried on his burst forward and his close-range header beat Kelleher via a decisive



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Scottish defender #26 Andrew Robertson (R) shoots the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Sheffield United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

deflection off Bradley's foot. Klopp responded by surprisingly hauling off Salah as Harvey Elliott came on for the Egypt forward, whose glum face and limp handshake with his manager betrayed his disappointment at the move. But Klopp's angst was finally soothed in the 76th minute when Rob-

ertson's cross was only cleared to the edge of the area, where Mac Allister lashed a blistering strike into the top corner.

Gakpo put the seal on Liverpool's hard-fought victory in the 90th minute as he stooped to head in Robertson's cross. — AFP

Stuttgart take on Dortmund with Bayern in sight

BERLIN: Stuttgart travel to Borussia Dortmund on Saturday just three points behind second-placed Bayern Munich with seven games remaining, chasing their best Bundesliga finish in 17 years. If not for Xabi Alonso's unbeaten Bayer Leverkusen, who are 13 points clear and cantering towards a maiden top-flight crown, Stuttgart would have undoubtedly been the story of the season.

Needing to win a two-legged playoff against second-division Hamburg to stay in the Bundesliga last campaign, Stuttgart are on the cusp of Champions League qualification for the first time since 2009-10. In going down 2-0 at home to Dortmund last weekend, Bayern played like a side who knew their hopes of catching Leverkusen were purely mathematical.

Dejected Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel sent his "congratulations to Leverkusen" after the game. Bayern play at promoted Heidenheim on Saturday. With Bayern now expected to focus on their Champions League quarter-final tie with Harry Kane's old foes Arsenal, Stuttgart could do the unthinkable and finish above the likely outgoing German champions, securing their highest placing since winning the title in 2006-07.

Although the Bavarians travel to Stuttgart in May, Sebastian Hoernes' side could take a major step towards overtaking Bayern by beating Dortmund on Saturday, cementing their top-four hopes in the process. Stuttgart have soundly beaten Dortmund twice this season — at home in the league and in the German Cup — and are one of only four teams to take points off Leverkusen in 40 matches in any competition. Dortmund are on a five-match winning streak and have lost just one of 13 games this year.

Hoernes on Thursday recognized the task at hand, saying: "We know we are playing probably the most difficult game there is at the moment against a team in very good form." "There's something special about playing in Dortmund."

Dortmund boss Edin Terzic said his side needed to be wary of more than just Stuttgart's strike duo of Serhou Guirassy and Deniz Undav, who have a combined 38 league goals this season. "Stuttgart is doing a great job this season. The strikers are heavily in focus, but the lads behind them are doing really well."

"Stuttgart are flexible and full of self-confidence — that's a dangerous mix." Dortmund sit just three points clear of fifth-placed RB Leipzig but Terzic said his team had "drawn plenty of confidence from the game against Bayern", their first league win in Munich since 2014. — AFP



STUTTART: (FILES) Stuttgart's German forward #26 Deniz Undav (L) tries to score against Heidenheim's German goalkeeper #01 Kevin Mueller (R) as other Heidenheim's players defend during the German first division Bundesliga football match VfB Stuttgart v 1. FC Heidenheim in Stuttgart. — AFP



PATHUM THANI: This photo taken on March 9, 2024 shows Rabbit Girls filming dance routines for social media before BG Pathum United FC's Thai League 1 football match against Sukhothai at BG Stadium in Pathum Thani. In a rowdy Bangkok stadium, BG Pathum United's "Rabbit Girls" dance to a drumbeat and cheer their team on — the Thai football league's last band of women promoters. — AFP

Thai football's last women promoters

PATHUM THANI: At a rowdy Bangkok stadium, BG Pathum United's "Rabbit Girls" dance to a drumbeat and cheer their team on — the Thai football league's last band of women promoters. Nightclubs, brands, shopping malls and car shows in Thailand often hire young women — known as "pretties" — for promotion purposes. Gender stereotypes remain deep-rooted in Thailand, and critics say that is especially the case among many Thai football fans. Only unmarried women are eligible to become Rabbit Girls and there is an age limit of 30.

But BGPU say the role of the Rabbit Girls — named for the team's animal logo — is evolving, and the women are not just cheerleaders but club ambassadors. Phatlita Lertphaholpath, 29, known by her nickname "BB", is now in her sixth year as a Rabbit Girl. She arrives three hours before the match to change into her uniform of blue t-shirt, white shorts and white trainers. "We are brand ambassadors, so it's important to have a good appearance," she told AFP after perfecting her make-up, explaining that she spends around 50,000 baht (\$1,400) a year on beauty products.

BB, who has over 9,000 followers on Instagram, promotes the team and sponsors in person and on social media, as well as pumping up fans in the stadium. She said the Rabbit Girls help to keep things polite in the male-dominated football crowd.

"When there is a beautiful girl or calm girls there, the atmosphere will be soft," BB told AFP. On the club's social media channels, as well as choreographed dance routines, the Rabbits hand out prizes to fans and push green messages about recycling and sharing transport to games. BGPU, currently fourth in Thai League 1, began using promotional women in 2009, starting a trend followed by other big Thai clubs. But financial problems have led others to ditch their cheer squads and cut "unnecessary expenses", according to Nuengrutai Srathongvian, football expert and former coach for Thailand. But for BGPU, the promoters are here to stay.

Old habits die hard

While the women's game is booming in many parts of the world, attitudes in Thailand have been slow to change, though last month the kingdom's football association got its first woman president with the election of insurance tycoon Nualphan Lamsam.

Naiyana Supung, a women's rights advocate, said there is still the view that "men excel in sports, while women need to entertain well". Sukrittaya Jukping, professor of gender studies at Thammasat University, said the focus on a woman's appearance — particularly body shape and skin tone — was common among companies in Thailand.



"It's like capitalism and patriarchy shake hands," she told AFP. BGPU insist the roles of Rabbit Girls have become "more modernized", particularly since the pandemic, when the club realized the importance of social media in brand promotion. "When we look for the new generation of Rabbit Girls... we look for talented ones who have speaking skills," said Nittayaporn Tharasuk, the club's director of sponsorship and marketing, denying that the club used the young women as "objects".

Stepping stone

The Rabbits are paid at least 20,000 to 30,000 baht (\$550 to \$800) a month, and many hold down other jobs at the same time. BB rejected the idea that she was being exploited, saying the job helps her to save while supporting her family of five, paying for a house and car loan. She is confident it will lead to other work. "There are skills I have picked up in this job... like speaking and time-management skills," she said, adding that experience is more important than looks. "I plan to do this for another couple of years, then I want to set up my own company." — AFP

Today's Matches

English Premier League

Crystal Palace v Man City	14:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
Aston Villa v Brentford	17:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
Everton v Burnley	17:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 1	
Fulham v Newcastle United	17:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
Luton Town v Bournemouth	17:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 3	
Wolves v West Ham	17:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 2	
Brighton v Arsenal	19:30
beIN Sports HD 2	

Italian League Serie A

AC Milan v US Lecce	16:00
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
AS Roma v Lazio	19:00
beIN Sports 2 FR	
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Empoli v Torino	21:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	

Athletic aiming for seventh time lucky in Mallorca Copa final

BARCELONA: Athletic Bilbao are the second most successful team in Copa del Rey history but they have tasted defeat in each of their last six final appearances. Ernesto Valverde's side are aiming to end that torrid streak on Saturday when they face Real Mallorca at La Cartuja in Seville.

With brothers Inaki and Nico Williams propelling Athletic's dangerous attack, they are firm favourites, although the underdog dynamic is one Mallorca coach Javier Aguirre and his team thrive in. Los Leones' last Copa triumph came as part of a domestic double in 1984, before any of their current squad were born.

The 23-time winners are making their 40th final appearance against Aguirre's hard-working Mallorca, who lifted the cup for the first and only time in 2003 and will be playing only their fourth final. Most painfully for Athletic, currently fifth in La Liga, in 2021 they lost two Copa finals in the same month.

The 2020 final, against Basque rivals Real Sociedad, was delayed until April 3, 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. They suffered an agonizing 1-0 defeat against their fiercest rivals, before Barcelona thrashed them 4-0 a fortnight later in the 2021 final, their most recent.

Adding insult to injury, fans were not allowed in the stadium for those matches and Inaki Williams says getting to play in front of their supporters could be crucial. "With the good season that we've had we've got the fans excited again and we know that we have a big responsibility, but we will try to bring them a victory," said the Ghana international.

"Thousands will go to Seville to support us and we will leave our skins out there and hope the coin falls our way."

'Without fear'

Despite the club's defeats in the 1985, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2020 and 2021 finals, Inaki Williams said Athletic could not be afraid of losing again. "We are calm, with the confidence that we can do well, because very few teams have been able to beat us this season," continued the striker, who scored against record 31-time champions Barcelona and Atletico on the run to the final.

"We know Athletic are going through a moment of very good form, with a lot of players at a very good level. That's what we will try to capture in the final — to be ourselves, play with bravery, as we are doing, and without fear of defeat."

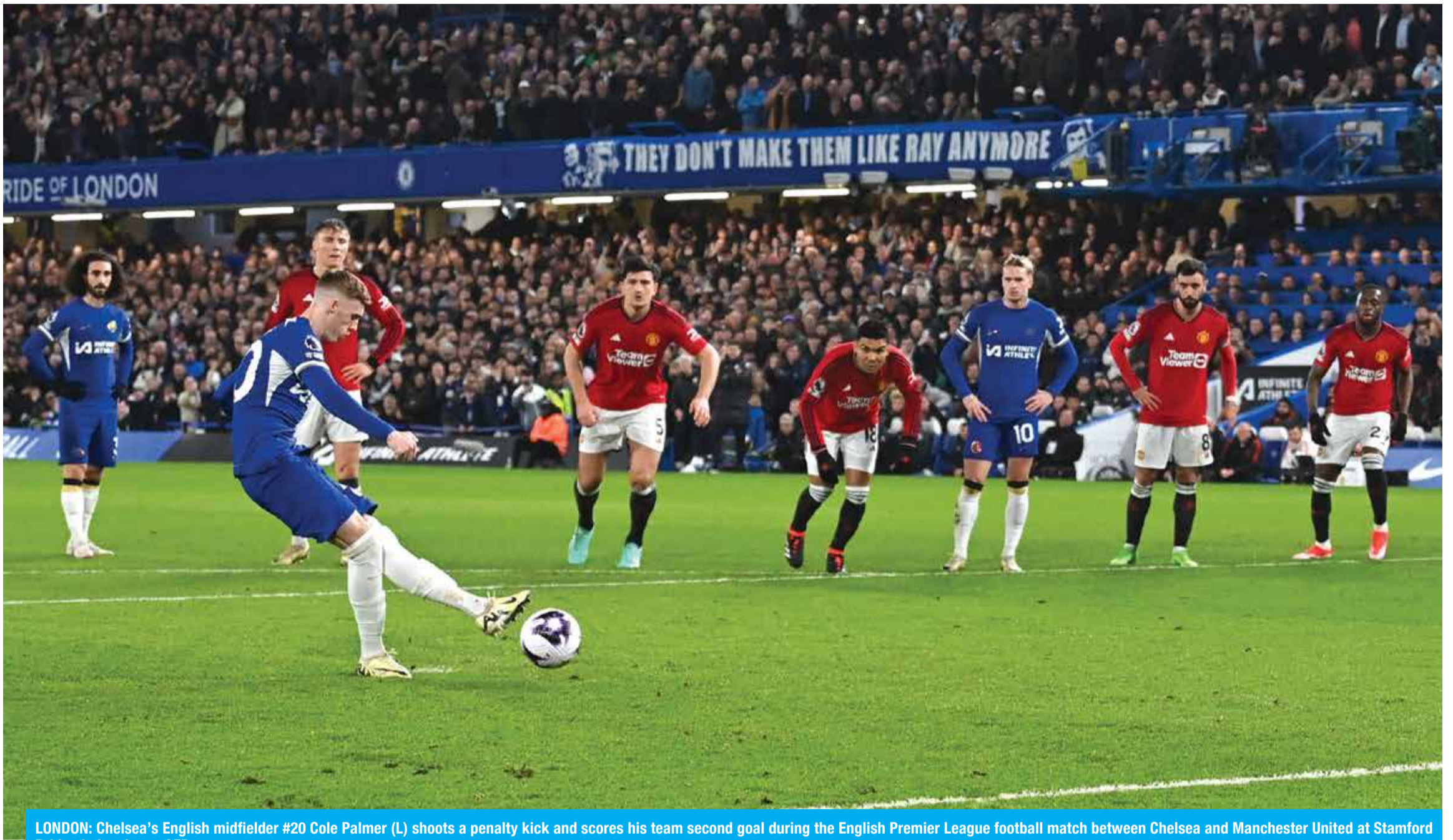
Inaki's brother Nico missed the team's La Liga loss at Real Madrid last weekend with a hamstringing issue, but is expected to return for the final. Alex Berenguer has filled in brilliantly for him at times this season, another example of Athletic's strength in depth compared to Mallorca, whom the Basques thrashed 4-0 in February in La Liga.

"Athletic are the favourites, everyone knows it," Mallorca striker Vedat Muriqi told Cadena SER radio this week. If the islanders are to find a way past one of Spain's strongest defences, the physical strike partnership of target man Muriqi and Cyle Larin could be crucial on the counter.

"They have more experience in this game, but they haven't won in 40 years and they are favourites, — they have too much pressure, more than us," continued Muriqi. "We can use it to our advantage and if we start the game well, we will have our chances." Wily Mallorca coach Aguirre, 65, finished as Copa runners-up with Osasuna in 2005 in his only final appearance. The Mexican took Mallorca past high-flying Girona and then Real Sociedad on penalties to reach the final. — AFP

Hat-trick hero Palmer fires Chelsea to last-gasp win over Manchester United

Bitter defeat leaves Ten Hag under mounting pressure at United



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder #20 Cole Palmer (L) shoots a penalty kick and scores his team second goal during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Manchester United at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

LONDON: Cole Palmer scored twice deep into stoppage time to complete a hat-trick as Chelsea stunned Manchester United 4-3 on Thursday, all but ending their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League. Erik ten Hag's men appeared set for a vital win after storming back from 2-0 down to lead 3-2 in a breathless game containing a combined 47 shots.

But boyhood United fan Palmer turned the game on its head, levelling from the penalty spot in the 100th minute and then netting the winner moments later in a frantic end to the game at Stamford Bridge. United were still ahead at 99 minutes 17 seconds, the latest a side has ever led in a Premier League match they have gone on to lose.

The bitter defeat leaves sixth-placed United 11 points off fourth-placed Aston Villa with just eight games to play and facing a season outside Europe's elite club competition. But it lifts Mauricio Pochettino's side to 10th spot in the table, keeping

them in the hunt for a European place after an inconsistent season.

Pochettino said his team had started well but the way they conceded "affected the team in an emotional way". The Argentine, in his first season at Stamford Bridge, praised 21-year-old Palmer, who has been the club's standout player since he joined in September. "The impact is amazing," he told the BBC. "He is doing a fantastic job. It is difficult to talk more about him. Today he showed the mentality and the quality. "I said 'Cole, two minutes more and to believe'."

Lightning start

Chelsea came into the match without a win against Manchester United in 12 Premier League meetings but were ahead in just the fourth minute through captain Conor Gallagher. Palmer doubled the home side's lead with his first penalty in the 19th minute after Anthony felled Marc Cucurella in a torrid opening for the visitors.

But United were handed a lifeline in the 34th minute when Moises Caicedo inexplicably gave the ball away to Alejandro Garnacho, who burst forward and coolly slotted home. Five minutes later they were all square when Diogo Dalot's cross found Bruno Fernandes, who headed home at the back post.

Play swung wildly from end to end in a thrilling second period but Garnacho headed home a pinpoint cross from the outside of Antony's left boot to put United ahead in the 67th minute. The visitors appeared set for all three points but the officials signalled there would be eight minutes of added time.

Chelsea were given a lifeline when Dalot lunged at Noni Madueke and referee Jarrod Gillett's on-field decision to award a spot kick was confirmed after a lengthy VAR check. But the drama did not stop there. United were caught out by a quick corner from Enzo Fernandez, who played it short to Palmer.

The Chelsea man fired home past the despairing Andre Onana with the help of a deflection off Unit-

ed's Scott McTominay to seal the win, sending the Stamford Bridge crowd wild. "When the eight minutes got added on it gave us a lift—madness," Palmer told TNT Sports. The former Manchester City player has now scored 19 goals for Chelsea since he switched clubs on September 1. "We need to try to win as many games as possible," he said. "To win like that, there is nothing better."

The bitter defeat leaves Ten Hag under mounting pressure at United in just his second season in charge, with new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe yet to decide whether to stick or twist. Their only remaining hope of silverware is in the FA Cup—they face Coventry in the semi-finals later this month for the right to face City or Chelsea in the final at Wembley.

"Definitely a setback and now we have to deal with this and get up," said Ten Hag. "We are resilient and you have seen that today. "The quality of our football is really high, but football is about results and you have to bring it over time." — AFP



Kuwait ice hockey team

Kuwait's ice hockey team leaves for UAE

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ice Hockey team left for UAE on Thursday to prepare for the World Cup tournament (2024), the fourth level, to be held in Kuwait from April 16th - 19th with Malaysia, Mongolia and Indonesia participating.

Chairman of Kuwait Winter Sports Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi told KUNA that the national team has 20 members and will play two friendly matches with two UAE teams. Al-Ajmi added that the

10 day training camp will be a continuation of the national team preparations that started immediately after the end of the league on March 10th, and this is an opportunity to implement the tactical plans the technical department will follow during the championship matches.

As for the organization, Al-Ajmi who chairs the organizing committee said the club's hall is being prepared including the dressing rooms, medical clinic and ice has been thickened and marked according to international rules. He said new fans stand was added to allow a larger number of fans to attend, as some technical issues were adjusted so to agree with the International Federation's requirements, as it oversees the tournament both technically and organizationally. — KUNA

Saudi Arabia to host WTA Finals tennis

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals for the next three editions, the Women's Tennis Association said on Thursday, following widespread speculation and criticism from some of the game's greats.

In just the latest high-profile Saudi sporting acquisition, the capital Riyadh will first hold the season finale featuring eight singles players and doubles teams from November 2-9. "Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, will host the next three editions of the WTA Finals from 2024-2026," the WTA posted on X, formerly Twitter, on its official account.

The widely anticipated deal comes just weeks after Saudi's Public Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth vehicle, announced a "strategic partnership" with the Association of Tennis Professionals, which runs men's tennis.

It also follows criticism from legends Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova, who slammed the prospect of holding the WTA Finals in Saudi in a Washington Post opinion piece. "We did not help build women's tennis for it to be exploited by Saudi Arabia," the players wrote in January, in a nod to the "sportswashing" allegations often levelled at Saudi owing to its human rights record.

"The WTA's values sit in stark contrast to those of the proposed host," they added. The Saudi ambassador to Washington, Princess Reema bint Bandar al-Saud, accused Evert and Navratilova of repeating

"outdated stereotypes", while Tunisian player Ons Jabeur urged critics to be "more informed".

The season-ending tournament joins a list of major sports events hosted by the world's biggest oil exporter as it tries to diversify its economy. Formula One, heavyweight boxing, horse racing and some of football's biggest stars now appear regularly in the desert nation, which will be rubber-stamped as hosts of the 2034 World Cup later this year.

Saudi's PIF is also responsible for the LIV Tour, which has shaken up the world of golf, and took a majority stake in English football club Newcastle United in 2021. "The WTA Finals has the power to inspire far beyond the sport, especially for our young girls and women," Saudi Sports Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Faisal said in comments sent to AFP. "This should come as no surprise, because the transformation we've often spoken about is driven by our desire to encourage the growth of both men's and women's sport with equal access and equal opportunities."

At the start of its transformation, from 2018 Saudi Arabia, which hosts Islam's two holiest sites, allowed women to drive, reopened cinemas and started issuing visas to non-Muslim tourists. However, despite rapid social change, critics argue that legal discrimination remains in place in areas like divorce and child custody, and that women are frequently ensnared in an ongoing crackdown on dissent.

Saudi has quickly established links with tennis. In February, the PIF announced its multi-year tie-up with the ATP, in which it becomes the naming partner of the men's rankings. PIF will also partner with ATP Tour events in Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid, Beijing and the ATP Finals, in addition to the Next Gen ATP Finals, hosted in Jeddah until 2027. — AFP