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Amir names Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah as new premier

MPs welcome appointment • Govt denies hiking petrol prices by 25%



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday appointed Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah as the new prime minister and asked him to form the new Cabinet. The US-educated Sheikh Ahmad, a veteran member of the Cabinet in the past, replaces HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who reportedly declined an offer to form the next Cabinet after barely three months in his post. HH Sheikh Mohammad resigned after the snap parliamentary polls on April 6, as required by the law.

Sheikh Ahmad, a top banker, was a member of the Kuwaiti Cabinet between 1999 and 2009 during which he became the minister of finance, oil, health, information, planning and

communications. In 2021, he was appointed head of the Diwan of the Crown Prince.

Lawmakers welcomed the appointment, saying Sheikh Ahmad's position on raising wages and improving the standard of living of Kuwaitis, in addition to other reforms, are the parameters for cooperation with his government. They said cooperation with the next government is linked to the selection of qualified ministers and joining hands with the National Assembly to approve legislation to improve the standard of living of Kuwaiti citizens and completing political and legislative reforms.

Lawmakers said the new premier is before a new delicate era which requires the selection of a highly qualified team for the Cabinet, which should be able to resolve problems facing the people, including rais-

ing wages of citizens and commitment to the Kuwaiti constitution. They cautioned the new government should not use the issue of raising the standard of living of citizens as a bargaining chip for other issues, adding lawmakers will cooperate with the new government if it achieves the demands of the people to raise salaries, resolve unemployment and control price hikes.

Meanwhile, government spokesman Amer Al-Ajmi denied on Monday claims by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri that the government has decided to hike the price of petrol by 25 percent from June 1. "The government has not made any decision regarding raising the price of fuel, but it was decided to postpone discussions. The issue is still under consideration by the ministerial committee for economic affairs," Ajmi said in a brief statement.

Oman floods kill 16; Amir sends condolences

MUSCAT: Flooding in Oman has killed at least 16 people, many of them schoolchildren, authorities said following the discovery of the bodies of a child and three adults on Monday. The Gulf sultanate's official news agency initially reported on Sunday nine schoolchildren and three other adults had "lost their lives after their vehicles got swept away in gushing wadi waters". Five others individuals were reported missing in the floods that struck the northeast of the country. The Oman News Agency reported on Monday the bodies of a child and three further individuals and had also been recovered.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of condolences to Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq over the victims of the floods. HH the Amir wished speedy recovery to the wounded, expressed solace for the souls of the victims and hoped the Omani people would overcome this natural disaster.

Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs had expressed on Sunday Kuwait's sympathy and solidarity with Oman. In a statement, the ministry affirmed its support for brothers in Oman to overcome the difficult circumstances resulting from this crisis. The ministry also extended its sincere condolences to the government and people of Oman on this tragic incident.

Violent thunderstorms, heavy rain and strong winds beginning on Sunday have battered the country, causing flash floods in several regions in the north and east of Oman. The sultanate's Council of Ministers said in a statement it was "filled with grief" and "extends its sincere condolences and sympathies to the families and relatives of school students who recently died in the Governorate of Al-Sharqiyah". On Monday, the ministry of education shuttered schools in most regions as a precaution against the flooding which also resulted in the closure of five roads. Dozens left stranded were rescued in operations aided by helicopters from Oman's air force. Storms were expected to affect other Gulf states, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, later in the day. Flooding had already claimed the lives of three children during downpours in Oman in February. — Agencies

Zionists pound Gaza; Hezb hits Zionist troops

GAZA: The Zionist entity bombed war-battered Gaza on Monday as world leaders awaited the Zionist entity's reaction but urged de-escalation after Iran's unprecedented attack that heightened fears of wider conflict. World powers have called for restraint after Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles at the Zionist entity late Saturday, though the Zionist military claimed nearly all were intercepted.

Tehran's first direct assault on

the Zionist entity, in retaliation for a deadly April 1 strike on its Damascus embassy consular annex, followed months of violence across the region involving Iranian proxies and allies who act in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has warned that a "reckless" Zionist move would spark a "much stronger response".

Tehran has insisted the attack on the Zionist entity was an act of "self-defense" after the Damascus strike that killed seven Revolutionary Guards including two generals. Attention has also turned to the Zionist entity's top ally, the United States, which played a key role in shooting down the Iranian drones.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: A woman reacts as she stands amidst rubble before a collapsed building in the eastern side of Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in central Gaza on April 15, 2024. — AFP

Trump slams trial as 'assault' on America

NEW YORK: Donald Trump's New York criminal trial opened Monday in a historic first for a US ex-president and a seismic twist to an already explosive 2024 presidential election where the Republican is seeking to defy multiple scandals and return to power. Lawyers for both sides wrangled with Judge Juan Merchan over what evidence could be admitted as Trump, shoulders hunched, stared sternly straight ahead or looked down at the computer alongside his legal team.

Jury selection will follow, but given the notoriety of the case it could take as much as two weeks for

defense lawyers and prosecutors to agree on the panel of 12 jurors. Wearing his trademark red tie, white shirt and blue suit, Trump struck a defiant tone on arrival at the gritty Manhattan courthouse, telling a throng of journalists that his trial was an "assault on America".

Outside, at a small but noisy pro-Trump protest, the former commander-in-chief's supporters shouted obscenities about President Joe Biden and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, the lead prosecutor. One Trump backer flew a flag proclaiming "Trump or death". The 77-year-old is accused of falsifying business records in a scheme to cover up an alleged extramarital sexual encounter with adult film actress Stormy Daniels to shield his 2016 election campaign from a last-minute upheaval.

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NEW YORK: Former US President Donald Trump attends the first day of his trial at Manhattan Criminal Court on April 15, 2024. — AFP

Lightning, rain kill 41 people across Pakistan

LAHORE: At least 41 people have died in storm-related incidents across Pakistan since Friday, including 28 killed by lightning, officials said on Monday. Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has warned of landslides and flash floods because more rain is expected in the coming days.

Punjab, Pakistan's largest and most populous province, witnessed the highest death toll, with 21 people killed by lightning between Friday and Sunday. "I have asked the

NDMA to coordinate with the provinces... and for the NDMA to provide relief goods to areas where damages occurred," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Monday.

People living in open, rural areas are more at risk of being struck by lightning during thunderstorms. At least eight people were killed in Balochistan province, including seven struck by lightning, where 25 districts were battered by rain and some areas were flooded. Schools in the province were ordered shut on Monday and Tuesday, delaying the return of students after Eid Al-Fitr holidays at the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Four people were killed in road accidents linked to flooded roads in southern Sindh province. Another eight people were killed in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including four children, when houses collapsed in the heavy downpours. —AFP



QUETTA: Children wade through floodwater near a damaged road following heavy rains on April 15, 2024. — AFP



Beyond blood ties: Mother bonds with her adopted son

'You were in your birth mother's belly, but you were born from my heart'



Safa Faikawy and Mohamed depicted with radiant smiles on their faces.



Safa Faikawy beams for the camera as her two children kiss her on each cheek.



Safa Faikawy plays with her son.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: "Mom, was I in your belly?" At four years old, Mohamed, Safa Al-Faikawy's adopted son, asked, intrigued about where he came from. Faikawy, who described her son as "a piece of her that has always been living inside", didn't hesitate before responding: "You were in your birth mother's belly, but you were born from my heart."

Then young — and fertile — at 24 years old, Faikawy, now 37, had always been driven by the urge to make an impact on a child's life. It was Mo-di (as she fondly calls her son) towards whom she felt an immediate, natural connection when she first saw him at the adoption center. Amidst a room filled with babies, her eyes fell on this six-month-old lying on his belly at the far end of the room. Drawing him gently towards her, she felt her heart stir as he met her gaze with an innocent smile and hugged her. "It was as if he is the one who chose me," she remarked,

reflecting on the profound bond they shared in that precious moment.

Since then, she has rarely let go of his embrace, especially in his earliest months, as advised by the therapist. "She told me to always hold him and keep him skin to skin," said Faikawy, as she learned from her that the sound of her heartbeat reminds him of his birth mother, providing him with a sense of security and reassurance.

In their everyday's life, Faikawy is trying her best to mend the inner crack inside him, left by his mother's separation at the age of two weeks. She never wanted him to feel as if he was lacking anything, instead urging him to admire his unique nature as a foster child. Since adopted children in Islam aren't allowed to take the family names of their foster parents, Mohamed sometimes wondered: "Why don't I have a family name? Don't I belong to a family tree?"

Meeting such inquiries with positive talk and reading him children's stories that would teach him

about his identity in a very inspiring way was the best approach she used to deal with him. So, she often told him: "We all came from a tree, but God gave you the honor to be the seed. You're the one who'll start your own family tree."

Additionally, she always reminded him: "I am not the one who did you a favor by adopting you. It's you who added a blessing to my life." She noted that such words would always raise his self-esteem, which society usually kills in orphans, as the media usually depicts them like criminals, covering their faces and changing their voices. But the decision to adopt at this young age led to widespread criticism from society. However, Faikawy consistently challenged these misconceptions and societal norms, questioning: "Why do I have to be too old and desperate to adopt a child? It's a right for everyone."

It amazed her how God has an incredible ability to give every woman the instinct of motherhood, even towards a child to whom she hasn't given birth to. When

giving birth to her biological daughter after adopting Mohamed, she was surprised to find no difference in how she felt toward both. "I never once doubted that he was my son. There were nights when I'd wake up with a sense that something wasn't right. I'd rush to check his temperature, only to find him running a fever."

Despite Mohamed having no vivid memories of his birth mother, Faikawy firmly believes she will always remain a part of his life. Therefore, she consistently reminded him of his biological mum, speaking positively about her, and assured him of her unconditional support if he ever wished to seek his original parents out. She also never feared that he might leave her one day if he ever found them, confident in his loyalty to the family who raised him. "He's like a bamboo stick," she asserted without hesitation. "Wherever you plant it, it will take root — if the ground isn't its own. He is strongly rooted in my family, which is why I am never afraid that he might choose to leave me or pursue a different path in life."

In my view

Where is Kuwait's beauty?



Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The measure of success for strategic plans lies in active participation in the implementation process. Conversely, centralization signifies failure. In Kuwait, we have six governorates, each delineated by clear boundaries marked by signs in the streets (eg, welcome to Ahmadi governorate). However, these signs hold little significance as governors lack sufficient authority over their respective geographical areas. As a result, there is little to no competition between governorates for beauty, cleanliness and law enforcement.

In contrast, in other countries where governors govern their sectors, there is healthy competition among governorates to enhance aesthetics, cleanliness and law enforcement. Unfortunately, our six governorates lack such initiatives. Open areas, particularly sand yards near mosques and spaces left undeveloped by owners, often lack cleanliness due to the absence of ministerial contracts and insufficient resources for governors to intervene.

An illustrative example is a Kuwaiti cooperative society that volunteered to fill potholes in certain areas at the shareholders' expense. However, the public works ministry issued a directive to leave the holes untouched until a tender is awarded, a process that has been pending for years. The late Amir had asked the minister of public works during the coronavirus pandemic to use the opportunity of people being at home to repair Kuwait's streets, but time went by and nothing was done and the situation remained the same; rather it became worse.

Despite numerous discussions and writings on this issue, including analyses of various income sources, little progress has been made. The solution lies in activating participation in Kuwait's vision and selecting capable individuals to manage governorates based on merit rather than nepotism. It's imperative to empower the council of governorates, hold officials accountable through a system of rewards and penalties, and provide necessary resources.

This approach is not insurmountable, as neighboring countries have successfully implemented similar strategies. What Kuwait needs is decisive action, trust in its citizens and a departure from the current cycle of narrow appointments that have marred the country's beauty.



Coast Guard foils attempt to smuggle narcotics and drugs

KUWAIT: As a part of their efforts to combat drug dealers and smugglers, security officials from the General Department of the Coast

Guard were able to thwart attempts to smuggle illicit drugs into the country through the sea. Six suspects were arrested. While the Coast Guard personnel were monitoring the sea borders, they spotted two boats entering Kuwaiti regional waters. The officials stopped them and found about 26,000 pills of psychotropic substances, 20 kg of meth, and 158 kg of weed in their possession. — KUNA

Meteorologist predicts scattered rain, lightning

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Meteorological Department predicts light to medium-intensity rain on Tuesday, which might be accompanied by thunderstorms. Director of the Department Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that Kuwait is affected by an extension of surface air depression, which is accompanied by a humid air mass in the upper layers of the atmosphere. This leads to the proliferation of low and medium clouds, interspersed with some cumulus clouds. Al-Qarawi explained that there may be scattered rain, accompanied by thunderstorms and dusty winds, which could lead to a decrease in horizontal visibility in some areas. The depression will recede in the afternoon and gradually fade into the clouds. The weather will generally be warm during the day and moderate at night. —KUNA



KUWAIT: (Top L) Photo shows the view of a publisher's booth during the 46th edition of the Islamic Book Fair. Visitors check books displayed by various publishing houses. The 46th edition of the Islamic Book Fair was launched on Sunday, with the slogan (Emerging Consciousness) in participation of over 120 local and global publishing houses under the auspices of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. The event will continue till Saturday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local

Kuwait, UAE discuss security ties

Deputy PM, US Defense Secretary hold talks

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah held talks on Monday in his office with a security delegation from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) concerning cooperation in the security field between the two countries. Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf also discussed enhancing joint partnerships in other fields to boost cooperation between the two countries, the Interior Ministry's statement added.

Sheikh Al-Nawaf adorned the joint security cooperation between the two countries' interior ministries and the ongoing joint meetings on security and traffic cooperation. The UAE delegation expressed their appreciation for the hospitality of the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry and their efforts in boosting ties, wishing Kuwait more progress under the country's leadership.

In another development, Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin discussed topics of common interest. This came during a phone call on Monday, the Ministry of Defense said in a statement. The statement also noted that Sheikh Fahad stressed Kuwait's position, calling for the importance of the Security Council assuming its responsibilities towards maintaining international peace and security by ensuring the commitment of the entire international community to what is stipulated in international laws and conventions.



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah held talks with a security delegation from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday. — KUNA

Egypt warns of the risk

Meanwhile, Egypt has raised alarm about the risk of expanding military confrontations in the Middle East and called on Iran and Zionists to maintain maximum restraint and avoid a brinkmanship policy that could further escalate regional tension and instability. Egypt's warning was conveyed by Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry in three separate phone calls with his US, Iranian, and Zionist counterparts.

In a press statement, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said that Shoukry discussed with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken the developments in the region, the escalating tensions in recent weeks amid the Gaza crisis, and its re-

gional implications, which now present a significant threat to the region's security and stability. The ministers exchanged views and assessments regarding strategies to de-escalate tensions and spare the region the risks of expanding the conflict.

Minister Shoukry emphasized Egypt's keenness on close coordination with the US to contain the current crisis between Iran and the Zionist entity, stressing Egypt's unwavering commitment to exerting all efforts to halt the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid to alleviate the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe faced by Palestinians in the strip. He underscored that the widening scope of the con-

flict, as witnessed, will serve no party's interests and will only bring further tension and instability to the region's people.

The two ministers agreed to continue consultations and coordination between their respective countries to contain the ongoing tensions, promote de-escalation efforts, and defuse crises in the Middle East. Earlier, Minister Shoukry called the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and the Zionist Minister of Foreign Affairs, I Katz. He expressed Egypt's deep concern due to the ongoing unprecedented military escalation between Iran and Zionists, which threatens to spiral the situation out of control, jeopardize regional stability,

and endanger the interests of its people.

During the separate calls, Minister Shoukry urged his Iranian and Zionist counterparts to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from policies of brinkmanship and mutual provocations that could further escalate tensions and instability in the Middle East. He conveyed to his Iranian and Zionist counterparts Egypt's readiness to intensify its efforts in collaboration with its partners to defuse the current crisis, which is taking on a dangerous escalatory trend, especially given the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip and the daily suffering of the Palestinian people, as well as the escalating tensions in multiple hotspots in the region. — KUNA

Minister chairs KPC meeting for precautionary measures

KUWAIT: On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Dr. Emad Al-Atiqi, chaired a meeting with the leaders of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and its subsidiaries, in the presence of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil, during which he was briefed on their preparations to confront all possibilities at the security level.



Dr Emad Al-Atiqi

KPC stated in a press statement that the minister listened to a comprehensive explanation of the precautionary measures and procedures followed by the corporation and its subsidiaries to ensure the safety of its facilities and employees. Moreover, they pointed to the continuation of its operations to

ensure the provision of fuel supplies to electric power generation stations in the country and to meet the needs of the Corporation's customers for crude oil and petroleum derivatives. — Agencies

Health Ministry keen on implementing quality control in medical labs

KUWAIT: Director of the Medical Laboratory Services Department at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Remaa Al-Safi, affirmed the implementation of quality control policies in medical laboratories according to international standards in all laboratories affiliated with the ministry. This came in a press statement on the sidelines of a celebration held by the Ministry on the occasion of International Medical Laboratory Day under the slogan (Let us be guardians of the quality of work and patient safety) on Monday. Dr. Remaa pointed out that laboratories are included in external quality control systems that are internationally approved to compare the validity of test

results in international reference laboratories, pointing out that laboratory workers place patient safety as a priority.

Al-Safi appreciated the role played by workers in medical laboratories in the ministry and private medical sector and the outstanding efforts they provide in serving patients, detecting diseases, and improving laboratory services. The General Assembly of the International Federation for Biomedical Laboratory Sciences approved this at its global conference in Norway in 1996, selecting April 15 as an annual international day for medical laboratories to raise global awareness of their vital role in diagnosing diseases. —KUNA

News in Brief

Attempted suicide

KUWAIT: A domestic helper was rushed to Mubarak hospital's ICU after attempting suicide by ingesting a large quantity of an unknown medication. A police source said the woman's sponsor said she was suffering from severe pain, so she was taken to the hospital and was found to have taken the medication. She was charged with a felony and will be questioned upon recovery.

Gulf teen killed

KUWAIT: A 16-year-old was killed in a traffic accident. His father, who was in the same 4WD vehicle, died upon arrival at the Jahra hospital. The vehicle, which carried a license plate from a GCC country, was driven by the father.

Luxury items stolen

KUWAIT: A citizen was accused another of stealing two iPhones, 10 watches, a pair of air pods and two expensive bracelets. Police said the accused denied charges, adding that he visited the accuser once and did not steal anything. Detectives are investigating.

Abnormal condition

KUWAIT: Jahra police arrested a man in his 20s after finding him in an abnormal condition and in possession of hashish joints and paraphernalia at a check point in Na'em area. He was referred to the Drug Control General Department.

Expatriate to be deported

KUWAIT: Residency affairs detectives arrested an expatriate who filmed a misleading video clip and published it on social media. The clip included false information and was considered an interference in government procedures. Legal action is being taken prior to his deportation.

Ploice arrest 'hunter'

KUWAIT: A citizen was sent to central prison for using a firearm near a military camp in Subhan area. Police found two shotguns and knives on him. The man said he was there because he wanted to shoot birds to feed his falcon. The citizen, after using his firearm in a protected area of the army in Subhan, prompted a call to police, so patrols looked for the source and located a 4WD vehicle attempting to leave the area, but were not able to get him. The same incident was repeated the second day at the same place, and this time the suspect was arrested.



KUWAIT: The Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf countries honors 18 schools that won the School Excellence Award. — KUNA

Arab Bureau of Education honors 18 schools

KUWAIT: The Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf countries, in its second session on Monday, honored 18 schools that won the School Excellence Award for the public and private sectors in the bureau's member countries, including three Kuwaiti schools. The director general of the office, Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Asmi, said in a speech during the ceremony that this award was introduced in 2021 for schools that provide outstanding educational and administrative performance, which has a positive reflection on quality and leadership.

Al-Asmi added that the award was developed according to criteria formulated in line with educational work and in accordance with inter-

national best practices in an effort to develop a road map for the competing units to achieve leadership and educational excellence. He thanked the leaders of the member states for their support. He congratulated the schools that won the Excellence Award, which is in three categories: gold, silver, and bronze.

For his part, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Mansour Al-Dihani, confirmed in a similar speech that this award seeks to spread a culture of school excellence and its consecration through the promotion of educational and administrative practices and improvement in school performance. Al-Dihani expressed his thanks to the school Excellence Award recipients



for highlighting the bright aspects of schools. Kuwait's Abdulmohsen Al-Rashid Al-Bader Elementary School for boys won gold, while Al-Yasaa

Middle School for girls took the silver award. The bronze award went to Qamariya Mohammed Amin Middle School for girls. — KUNA



Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev received Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on the sidelines of the second ministerial meeting between GCC and central Asian countries, held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. During the meeting, they discussed the bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to develop and enhance relations in various fields. — KUNA photos

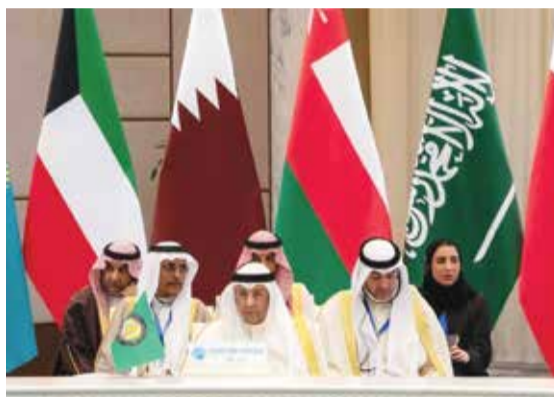
GCC, Central Asia strengthen ties

Southeast Asian countries express concern on Mideast escalating situation

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jassem Al-Budaiwi, said Monday that the second ministerial meeting of the strategic dialogue between the GCC and Central Asian countries aims to strengthen the foundation of cooperation between the two sides. This came during his speech at the meeting, held in the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent, with the participation of the Cooperation Council and the foreign ministers of the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries.

In his speech, Al-Budaiwi noted the multiple reasons for the importance of this meeting, as he stated that there are two main reasons that distinguish this joint ministerial meeting and make it among the most important and accurate meetings. The first reason is that it is the first of its kind, following the historic summit hosted by Saudi Arabia in July 2023, which brought together the leaders of the GCC countries and the leaders of the Central Asian countries to establish the frameworks for future cooperation between both sides.

He added that the second reason is the unprecedented developments and state of uncertainty in many political, economic, security, and even social matters and issues that the international community is facing, which require intensifying communication and coordination in an effort to resolve these issues. Al-Budaiwi explained that the joint cooperation ac-



tion plan for the period 2023–2027 was approved during the meeting, which includes strengthening cooperation in various fields, such as political and security dialogue, economic, trade, and investment cooperation, as well as cooperation in the fields of education, health, culture, media, youth, and sports.

He also highlighted the direction of the GCC partnership with the countries of Central Asia, which includes ensuring joint success, establishing effective partnerships, enhancing exchange and communication between peoples, opening markets and elevating economic activities, working to save energy and its flow, and striving towards strengthening the digital economy.

Escalating situation

In another development, the ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia expressed on Monday their deep concern for continuous escalations between Iran and Zionists after the former's retaliatory strikes against the latter. In a statement Monday, the Philippine Foreign Ministry urged all parties to de-escalate the situation and find a peaceful solution, calling on all countries to comply with international law, while the Singaporean Foreign Affairs Ministry condemned the Iranian strikes, noting that they would further escalate the tension in the region.

The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the UN Security Council to act immediately to de-escalate tensions and continue work-



ing toward lasting peace in the Middle East. The Southeast Asian countries called on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, avoid escalatory actions, and focus on ensuring an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages, stressing the need for an immediate,

safe, and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to affected civilians in Gaza. Last Saturday night, Iran launched a massive attack with marches and missiles on targets inside Zionist entity in response to the bombing of the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus. — KUNA



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GAZA: A man rides a bicycle past the rubble of a collapsed building in the eastern side of the Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip on April 15, 2024. — AFP photos

KRCS delivers flour shipment to Gaza

GAZA: The Wafa Foundation for Development in Palestine announced the arrival of the first relief aid shipment, carrying 500 bags of flour to Gaza's northern regions, with support from the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. Wafa director Moheisen Atawneh told KUNA that, for the first time since the Zionist occupation aggression on Gaza, 500 bags of flour were secured as an initial shipment to the northern regions. Atawneh stated that 30,000

bags of flour have been distributed to all governorates of the Strip.

Additionally, 500 bags of flour will be delivered daily to the northern governorates. He also mentioned that during the holy month of Ramadan, more than 60,000 iftar meals were distributed to displaced Palestinians. In addition to causing casualties among Palestinians in their search for bags of flour, the Zionist occupation obstructs aid delivery to the northern areas of the Gaza Strip by setting up military checkpoints and roadblocks along the main routes. Observers confirm Kuwait's robust support for the Palestinian people through frequent air bridge deliveries of relief, food, and medical supplies. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A handout photo shows humanitarian aid, bound for Gaza being loaded into a military aircraft.



'It was hell': 10 years after South Korea ferry disaster

Marcos rules out giving US access to more bases

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NEW YORK: The United Nations Security Council holds a meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including Iran's recent attack against the Zionist entity at UN headquarters on April 14, 2024. — AFP

Zionist entity, Iran trade accusations at UN meeting

Security Council 'failed in its duty to maintain peace', leaving Iran with no choice: Ambassador

UNITED NATIONS: The Zionist entity and Iran accused one another Sunday at the United Nations of being the main threat to peace in the Middle East, each calling on the Security Council to impose sanctions on their sworn enemy.

"The mask is off. Iran, the number one global sponsor of terror, has exposed its true face as the destabilizer of the region and the world," the Zionist entity's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan told an emergency meeting of the Security Council convened after Tehran's unprecedented attack on the Zionist entity overnight.

"The mask comes off and the gloves must come on," he said, imploring the body to "take action." Erdan asked the Security Council to designate the Revolutionary Guards, the Islamic Republic's ideological army, as a terrorist organization and to "impose all possible sanctions on Iran before it's too late."

In particular, he referred to the "snapback" mechanism

that allows members of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — which the United States exited in 2018 — to reimpose international sanctions against Tehran. "We have a collective responsibility as members of the Security Council to ensure that Iran complies with the council's resolutions and ceases its violations of the charter," said Deputy US Ambassador Robert Wood.

In the coming days the United States will "explore additional measures to hold Iran accountable." Late Saturday, Iran launched a direct attack on its arch foe the Zionist entity for the first time, firing more than 300 missiles and drones.

Nearly all were intercepted by the entity and others, including the United States, Jordan and Britain. Iran said its attack came in response to a deadly April 1 air strike on Tehran's consulate building in Syria's capital Damascus that was widely blamed on the Zionist entity. That attack killed seven Iranian Revolutionary Guards, including two senior generals.

On 'the brink'

Addressing the emergency meeting, Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani insisted the Islamic republic was exercising its "inherent right to self-defense." "The Security Council ... failed in its duty to maintain international peace and security," Iravani said. Therefore, Tehran "had no choice" but to respond, he said, adding that his country does "not seek escalation or war," but will respond to any "threat or aggression." He also lashed out at the Zionist entity.

"It is time for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and address the real threat to international peace and security," Iravani said. The body "must take urgent and punitive measures to compel this regime to stop a genocide against the people of Gaza." The rising tensions come against the backdrop of the Zionist entity's six-month-old war in Gaza, which began after the Palestinian militant group's October 7 attack in the Zionist entity, which resulted in

the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Zionist figures.

The Zionist entity's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 33,729 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution the Zionist entity has been considered a sworn enemy by the Islamic republic, which calls for the entity's destruction. Until now, Tehran had refrained from attacking the Zionist entity head-on, and the two countries have opted instead to confront each other through third parties.

On Sunday United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres urged restraint, telling the emergency meeting that "neither the region nor the world can afford more war." "Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate," he said. Guterres also repeated his condemnation of Iran's strikes on the Zionist entity, and the attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus. "It's time to step back from the brink," Guterres said. — AFP

Biden in 'tough spot' trying to stop wider war

WASHINGTON: Iran's attack on the Zionist entity gives Joe Biden a familiar dilemma, but on steroids — how to balance support for a difficult ally while preventing the nightmare scenario of a wider war?

Tensions with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the entity's war on Gaza were papered over as the US president offered "ironclad" support, including shooting down Iranian drones. But the White House said it would not support a Zionist counterattack and warned the entity to "think carefully" about escalation that could trigger a full-blown regional conflict.

The question then for Biden, who is facing a tough reelection battle against Donald Trump in November, is what if Netanyahu goes ahead anyway, as he has done in Gaza? "It puts him in a very tough spot" Colin Clarke, Director of Research at the Soufan Group, told AFP. "I think he's suspicious of Netanyahu's motives here ... that Netanyahu is attempting to broaden the war throughout the region to deflect from how poorly the war is going for him in Gaza."

Biden has been trying to avoid a regional war that could suck the United States back into the Middle East ever since Hamas' October 7 attack and the entity's offensive on the Gaza Strip. The 81-year-old has, however, struggled to use the leverage provided by the United States being the entity's main military supplier, especially given a long history of tense relations with Netanyahu.

'Slow things down'

Biden has been increasingly critical of the death toll in the Palestinian territory and even went as far as suggesting the US could limit military aid, but so far to little effect. Iran's attack has seen Biden go back to showing overt support — but at the same time scrambling to stop the crisis spiraling.



WASHINGTON: This handout picture courtesy of the White House taken on April 13, 2024 shows US President Joe Biden (center) in a meeting with his national security team after Iran's retaliation on the Zionist entity. — AFP

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Netanyahu was "well aware" that Biden did not want a "wider war". Biden himself warned Netanyahu of the potential dangers in a call on Saturday night at a time of "heightened emotion". "The president had a discussion about trying to slow things down, think through things," a US official said.

The hope was that "in the light of day" the Zionist entity would see it had had a "spectacular success" against Iran's attack, added the official. Washington's calculus looks to be that Iran also got what it wanted, with a show of force in retaliation for the entity's strike in Damascus earlier this month that killed a key Iranian general, but with minimal damage. "However, I fear the status quo will be short-lived," said James Ryan, Executive Director of the Middle East Research and Information Project, warning of a "dangerous spiral". "I expect Biden to attempt to restrain (Zionist) responses, but Netanyahu has already shown a willingness to test any kind of limit Biden wishes to impose," he added. "It's all very cynical now, unfortunately."

Biden's options for restraining the Zionist entity are likely to be limited at this stage to tough language in private and making threats in public. "They've got themselves into a corner in many ways," said Clarke.

"I think they've overplayed their hand a little bit by saying the administration is considering cutting off weapons to the Zionists. It's never going to happen — I think it's an empty threat, especially in an election year." The US presidential election in November comes as Biden faces domestic political pressure on all sides when it comes to the Zionist entity. Trump has led a chorus of Republicans accusing Biden of being weak on the issue — while young and left-wing voters in particular are angered by his failure to stop the bloodshed in Gaza. Netanyahu, facing his own political and legal issues at home, would now be able to use the Iran attacks to "paper over the very real rifts that exist" with Washington on Gaza, said Clarke. "If he can drag this out until November, he's hoping for a Trump victory" when he would have "carte blanche" to act however he wanted in the region, said Clarke. — AFP

Lebanese officials say Mossad killed Hamas financier

BEIRUT: A Lebanese minister and two senior officials said preliminary findings suggest the Zionist entity's Mossad spy agency was behind the killing of a US-sanctioned Lebanese man accused of sending Iranian money to Hamas.

The body of Mohammad Sarur, 57, was found riddled with bullets in a villa in the Lebanese mountain town of Beit Mery last Tuesday. Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi told Al-Jadeed TV late Sunday that, "according to the data we have so far, (the killing) was carried out by intelligence services". Asked whether he was referring to Mossad, Mawlawi confirmed. AFP has requested comment from Zionist government officials but has received no response so far.

The US Treasury said in August 2019 that it had sanctioned Sarur for funneling "tens of millions of dollars" from Iran's Revolutionary Guards "to Hamas for terrorist attacks originating from the Gaza Strip", through Lebanon's Hamas-allied Hezbollah. The Lebanese group has been exchanging near daily cross-border fire with the Zionist military since October 7.

A Lebanese judicial official and a security source told AFP that Mossad likely masterminded Sarur's killing, both speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the press. "The preliminary results of the investigation indicate that the Zionist Mossad was behind the assassination," the security official told AFP.

Initial findings "suggest the Mossad used Lebanese and Syrian agents to lure Sarur to a villa in Beit Mery," the official said, adding that they had wiped fingerprints from the crime scene and used silenced weapons. The judicial official also told AFP that preliminary information pointed to Mossad, but that the probe was ongoing, with investigators collecting evidence "especially from communications data". — AFP

International

Marcos rules out giving US access to more bases

Japan-Philippines defense pact negotiations 'very close' to conclusion: Philippine President

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said Monday the United States would not be given access to more Philippine military bases. Marcos' remarks came days after a trilateral summit between the United States, Japan and the Philippines in Washington where tensions over the disputed South China Sea — which Beijing claims almost entirely — were high on the agenda.

The Philippines is a key focus of US efforts to strengthen regional alliances due to its proximity to the waterway and self-ruled Taiwan, which China claims as its own. Manila expanded a 2014 agreement last year to give US military access to another four military bases in the country, taking the total number to nine.

The Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) allows US troops to rotate through and store defense equipment and supplies. It has infuriated Beijing. "The answer to that is no. The Philippines has no plan to open or to establish more EDCA bases," Marcos said in response to an AFP question about whether there would be more EDCA sites.

Marcos spoke during a forum with the Foreign Correspondents Association of the

Philippines that was attended by senior members of the Philippine military and foreign diplomats. US President Joe Biden reiterated during last week's trilateral meeting that Washington's commitment to defend its treaty ally Manila was "ironclad".

While the two countries have a complex history that has seen relations seesaw in recent years, they remain bound by a 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty. Repeated confrontations between Philippine and Chinese vessels in the South China Sea in recent months, including collisions and Chinese ships using water cannon on Philippine vessels, injuring Filipino troops, has fueled speculation over what actions would trigger the treaty.

Top Biden administration officials have repeatedly said that "an armed attack" against Philippine public vessels, aircraft, armed forces or coastguard anywhere in the South China Sea would invoke the treaty. Marcos said Monday that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had given assurances that the treaty would be invoked if another "foreign power" killed a Filipino soldier.

Last year's expansion of EDCA came as

the countries sought to repair ties that had been strained in recent years. Previous Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte favored China over his country's former colonial master but Marcos' administration has been keen to reverse that.

Beijing's growing assertiveness in pressing its claims to almost the entire South China Sea and over Taiwan has given fresh impetus to Washington and Manila to strengthen their partnership. Given the proximity of the Philippines to Taiwan and its surrounding waters, the country's cooperation would be crucial in the event of a conflict with China.

Asked how a Donald Trump-led Republican administration might affect the United States' "ironclad" commitment to the Philippines, Marcos said the agreements between Manila and Washington were "beyond politics" and were almost "treaty agreements" that would have to be honored whoever was in power. Marcos also said that negotiations with Japan for a defense pact that would allow the countries' troops to set foot on each other's territory were "very close" to a conclusion. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin welcomes Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to the Pentagon in Washington, DC, on April 12, 2024. — AFP

Top Syrian officer faces war crimes charges in Sweden

STOCKHOLM: The highest-ranking Syrian military official to be tried in Europe on Monday appeared before a Stockholm court accused of war crimes during Syria's civil war. Former brigadier general Mohammed Hamo, 65 who lives in Sweden, is accused of "aiding and abetting" war crimes and could get a life jail sentence.

The war between President Bashar Al-Assad's regime and armed opposition groups, including Islamic State, erupted after the government repressed peaceful pro-democracy protests in 2011. It has killed more than half a million people, displaced millions, and ravaged Syria's economy and infrastructure.

Wearing a dark blue shirt, jeans and sneakers, Hamo listened carefully and took notes as prosecutor Karo-

lina Wieslander read out the charges. Wieslander said Hamo had contributed — through "advice and action" — to the Syrian army's warfare, which "systematically included attacks carried out in violation of the principles of distinction, caution and proportionality." "The warfare was thus indiscriminate," Wieslander told the court. The charges concern the period of January 1 to July 20, 2012. The trial is expected to last until late May.

'Disproportionate'

The prosecutor said the Syrian army's "widespread air and ground attacks" caused damage "at a scale that was disproportionate in view of the concrete and immediate general military advantages that could be expected to be achieved."

In his role as brigadier general and head of an armament division, Hamo allegedly helped coordinate and supply of arms to units. Hamo's lawyer, Mari Kilman, told the court her client denied criminal responsibility. "In any case he has not had the intent towards the main charge, that indiscriminate warfare would be carried out by others," Kilman said.

Kilman said the officer could not be held liable for the actions "as he had acted in a military context and had to follow orders." Hamo also denied all individual charges and argued that Syrian law should be applied. Several plaintiffs are to testify at the trial, including Syrians from cities that were attacked and a British photographer who was injured during one strike.

'Complete impunity'

"The attacks in and around Homs and Hama in 2012 resulted in widespread civilian harm and an immense destruction of civilian properties," Aida Samani, senior legal advisor at rights group Civil Rights Defenders, told AFP. "The same conduct has been repeated systematically by the Syrian army in other cities across Syria with complete impunity."

This trial will be the first in Europe "to address these types of indiscriminate attacks by the Syrian army", according to Samani, who added that it "will be the first opportunity for victims of the attacks to have their voices heard in an independent court".

Hamo is the highest-ranking military official to go

on trial in Europe, though other countries have tried to bring charges against more senior members. In March, Swiss prosecutors charged Rifaat Al-Assad, an uncle of President Bashar Al-Assad, with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

However, it remains unlikely Rifaat Al-Assad — who recently returned to Syria after 37 years in exile — will show up for the trial, for which a date has yet to be set. Swiss law allows for trials in absentia under certain conditions.

In November, France issued an international arrest warrant for Bashar al-Assad, accusing him of complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes over chemical attacks in 2013. Three other international warrants were also issued for the arrests of Bashar Al-Assad's brother Maher, the de-facto chief of the army's elite Fourth Division and two generals.

In January 2022, a German court sentenced former colonel Anwar Raslan to life jail for crimes against humanity. This was the first international trial over state-sponsored torture in Syria and was hailed by victims as a victory for justice. — AFP

4 injured in Sydney church stabbing, man arrested

SYDNEY: Four people are being treated for "non-life threatening injuries" after a stabbing at a live-streamed church service in Sydney on Monday, the latest knife attack to rock the city.

Australian police said they had arrested one man, after a member of the congregation at an Assyrian church rushed at the dais and slashed at the bishop, causing pandemonium. Amid the panic and screams, several churchgoers rushed to safety while others tried to subdue the attacker.

The ambulance service told AFP that four men aged between 20 and 70 were being treated for injuries, including lacerations. "The injured individuals suffered non-life threatening injuries and were treated by New South Wales Ambulance paramedics before being conveyed to hospital," police added. "A male was arrested and remains in police custody."

The incident came two days after a man with a knife killed six at a shopping mall in the east of Sydney. AFP verified video of Monday's attack as being taken at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church in Sydney's western suburb of Wakeley.

The neighborhood is a hub for Sydney's small Christian Assyrian community, many of whom fled persecution and war in Iraq and Syria. There were tense scenes outside the church after the attack, with hundreds of members of the local community trying to make their way past a phalanx of riot police

to reach the suspect. An AFP journalist at the scene saw projectiles being hurled before police with riot shields and armor pushed the protesters away from the church. "He has been removed from the church and taken to an undisclosed location," police said. They urged the public to avoid the area amid "a large police response."

The Christ the Good Shepherd Church holds a bible session every Monday evening. Police said they began to receive emergency calls from the scene "about 7:10 pm". Australians are still reeling from Saturday's stabbing, which was carried out by a 40-year-old man with a history of mental illness. In that attack, videos shared on social media showed unshaven itinerant Joel Cauchi pursuing mostly female victims as he rampaged through the vast, crowded Westfield shopping complex in Bondi Junction on Saturday afternoon. — AFP



SYDNEY: A black ribbon is projected onto the Sydney Opera House on April 15, 2024, as a mark of respect for the victims of the Westfield Bondi Junction shopping mall attack. — AFP

Zionists pound Gaza; Hezb hits...

Continued from Page 1

While US President Joe Biden has been increasingly critical of the civilian death toll in Gaza, after the Iran attack he reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad" support for the Zionist entity. But Biden has been pushing for caution from the Zionist entity, telling Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the White House would not offer military support for any retaliation against Iran, according to a senior US official.

The Hamas government media office said Zionist aircraft and tanks launched "dozens" of strikes overnight on central Gaza, reporting several casualties. Witnesses told AFP that strikes hit the Nuseirat refugee camp, with clashes also reported in other areas of central and northern Gaza. The Zionist entity's offensive has killed at least 33,797 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the territory. The toll rose by at least 68 deaths over 24 hours.

The Zionist entity released around 150 detainees on Monday who had been rounded up in Gaza, the territory's crossings authority told AFP, saying they had been mistreated in detention. Zionist soldiers have rounded up hundreds of Palestinians during their more than six-month military offensive in Gaza, holding them without charge before releas-

ing some in groups. The detainees to be released were taken to the Zionist entity and returned via the Kerem Shalom border crossing before some were treated in a hospital in Rafah, in the south of the besieged territory.

"Since the early hours of the morning, 150 prisoners from various parts of the Gaza Strip who were detained by the (Zionist) occupation have been released," the spokesman for the Gaza Crossings Authority, Hisham Adwan, told AFP. "It is very noticeable that there is severe mistreatment of these prisoners, as a number of them were sent to Abu Yousef Al-Najjar Hospital for treatment," he added.

One of those released on Monday told AFP he and a friend were beaten and tortured in Zionist detention. AFP is not publishing his name for his safety. "I remained on my knees for (almost two months), from five in the morning until 10 at night, blindfolded and with tied hands," he said. "The army... released dogs on us to attack us," he added. "They beat and tortured us."

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group, which has had near-daily cross-border clashes with the Zionist entity since the war broke out, claimed an overnight attack on Zionist soldiers who had crossed into Lebanese territory. The Zionist army confirmed that four of its troops were wounded in an explosion while inside Lebanon. The group's fighters "planted explosive devices in the Tal Ismail area" inside Lebanon and detonated them after Zionist soldiers crossed the border, Hezbollah said. — AFP

Biden wants to prevent Mideast conflict spreading

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden said Monday he wants to prevent the conflict in the Middle East, where the Zionist entity is waging war in Gaza and attacking Iran, which responded, from spreading more widely. "Iran launched an unprecedented aerial attack against (the Zionist entity), and we launched an unprecedented military effort to defend it. Together with our partners, we defended that attack," Biden said as he met Iraq's visiting prime minister.

"The United States is committed to (the Zionist entity's) security. We're committed to a ceasefire that will bring the hostages home and prevent the conflict from spreading beyond what it already has," Biden added in the Oval Office. Biden was referring to those captured by Hamas fighters on Oct 7.

The Zionist entity is weighing its response to Iran's massive drone and missile attack on Saturday, which Tehran said was in retaliation for a Zionist strike on an Iranian consulate building in Syria that killed a top general. Biden has promised "ironclad" support for the Zionist entity but also urged it to "think carefully and strategically" before launching a response against Iran that could trigger a wider war.

The US president said he was "also committed to the security of our personnel and partners in the region,



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden shakes hands with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani in the Oval Office of the White House on April 15, 2024. — AFP

including Iraq". Iraq's Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani was visiting the White House for talks on the presence of US troops in Iraq as part of an anti-jihadist coalition. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said Washington did not want any escalation, but would continue to defend key ally the Zionist entity.

"We don't seek escalation, but we'll continue to support the defense of (the Zionist entity) and to protect our personnel in the region," Blinken said at the start of a meeting with Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Tamim. "What this weekend demonstrated is that (the Zionist entity) did not have to and does not have to defend itself alone when it is the victim of an aggression, the victim of an attack," he added, also calling Iran's actions "unprecedented". — AFP



GAZA: People search through the rubble of a collapsed building in the eastern side of Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza on April 15, 2024. — AFP

Trump slams trial as 'assault' on...

Continued from Page 1

The so-called hush money affair is one of four criminal cases hanging over Trump, including historic prosecutions against the Republican's alleged attempts to subvert the 2020 election and prevent the winner, Biden, from taking office. If convicted in the hush money case, Trump would potentially face years in prison, but legal observers consider this unlikely.

Still, the prospect of Trump becoming a convicted felon throws an unprecedented wild card into an already unpredictable Nov 5 election, at which he will seek to defeat Biden and retake the White House. The hard-right populist is running on dark vows of

"vengeance" and seeking to spin his criminal cases as evidence of persecution. Attempting to keep up his trademark bravado, Trump said last week that he will take the stand in the trial — a highly unusual and often risky move for defendants. "Other defendants would be cautious, careful, demure, and always respectful of the court," said Columbia Law School professor John Coffee. "Trump is not that way. He basically lacks self-control as a witness."

For jury selection, a pool of ordinary citizens convened by Merchan must answer a questionnaire including checks on whether they have been members of far-right groups. The actual charges revolve around highly technical finance laws. Trump is accused of illegally covering up remittances to his longtime attorney and fixer Michael Cohen, who was using the funds to pay Stormy Daniels to keep quiet about the alleged sexual encounter in the final weeks of the 2016 election campaign. — AFP

International

'It was hell': 10 years after South Korea ferry disaster

Victim's father laments lack of proper investigation, slams current government's disaster response

ANSAN: The ferry sank live on television as the children on board sent desperate text messages to their parents — 10 years after South Korea's worst-ever maritime disaster, families are still reckoning with the horror. Jung Sung-wook's teenage son was one of 304 people who died when the overloaded Sewol ferry capsized off South Korea's southern coast on April 16, 2014.

Almost all the victims were schoolchildren who obeyed orders to stay in their cabins, while the crew escaped. One of the last text messages Jung's son Jung Dong-soo sent was to his mother, telling her that the ferry had tilted to 45 degrees — prompting his father to race to the scene of the rescue operation in a desperate bid to find his child.

When the senior Jung arrived at the school gymnasium in southern Jindo where survivors were being taken, he got his first glimpse of the chaotic rescue operation. "It was literally hell — I mean, chaos. No one responded properly, the children were left alone, and the parents came down and took the children home. It was so chaotic, in a word, it was hell," he told AFP.

He says he has "a lot of regrets" about how the rescue effort played out, thinking that if things had been done differently, more people could have been saved. After it became clear his son had died, Jung became involved in the search for missing bodies, and after that, in the campaign to salvage the vessel, helping to lobby the government to have the Sewol raised from the seabed and taken to shore. Even in that process, "there were a lot of errors," he said.

Botched rescue

As the 6,825-tonne Sewol began taking on water the passengers were told by the crew to stay put — but the captain and his colleagues were first to leave the vessel. They were later jailed for

their actions. The disaster was blamed on a deadly combination of cargo overloading, an illegal re-design and poor helmsmanship by what the court called an "incompetent" crew.

The rescue was also botched, many experts have said, but former coast guard chief Kim Suk-kyoon who was tried on charges of mishandling the rescue mission — and acquitted in November — recently said there was nothing else they could have done.

"People claim that casualties could have been prevented or their scale reduced had the coast guard issued an evacuation order. They make such claims without understanding the situation," Kim, who now teaches maritime policing at a local college, said in an interview Saturday with the daily Hankook Ilbo.

"The Sewol was already tilting at 50-60 degrees when rescuers arrived," he said. "It was difficult for passengers to escape safely without instructions from the captain or crew." Intense public fury targeted then-president Park Geun-hye after it emerged she was uncontactable for several hours as the disaster unfolded. She was later impeached, in part due to her handling of the sinking.

'Things have got worse'

Despite prison sentences, court-ordered compensation, and a change of government, father Jung says he feels not enough has been done to account for the tragedy and make sure it doesn't happen again. "Now, 10 years later, I feel even more sorry about the fact that even though I tried so hard, there was no proper punishment and no investigation into the truth," he told AFP.

"Looking at the current administration now, we believe things have got worse ... in relation to the disasters. (President) Yoon Suk Yeol's government just keeps trying to hide them and has no plan."



ANSAN: Jung Sung-wook holds a woodblock print of a portrait of his late teenage son Jung Dong-soo, who died when the overloaded Sewol ferry capsized off South Korea's southern coast a decade ago, in the son's room at his home in Ansan. — AFP

South Korea's rapid transformation from a war-torn country to Asia's fourth-largest economy and a global cultural powerhouse is a source of national pride. But a series of preventable disasters — from the Sewol ferry to the 2022 Itaewon Halloween crowd crush, which killed more than 150 mostly young people — has shaken public confidence in authorities.

District-level officials and some police officers

have been prosecuted over the Itaewon disaster, but no high-ranking members of the government have resigned or faced prosecution, despite criticism from victims' families over a lack of accountability. "The victims have the right to be accurately informed by the state of why such a disaster occurred and how things are progressing. This is something that our country is lacking so far," Jung said. — AFP

Czech whooping cough spread ramps up, 3 dead

PRAGUE: The Czech Republic has been hit by a soaring number of whooping cases and the fast growing outbreak has killed three people, health authorities said on Monday. The country of 10.9 million people has registered 7,888 cases of the respiratory illness this year, said the State Institute of Public Health.

Last week, health authorities registered 1,494 new cases, the fastest weekly growth this year. Some 183 are in hospital. The spread is the worst since 1959 when vaccinations started, official health records have shown. Vaccination is mandatory in the Czech Republic, but it is not for life and some people refuse. Teenagers are the worst-hit age group as parents often ignore the recommended revaccination at the age of 10-11 years, chief public health officer Pavla Svrčinová said. "Of the total number, 5,808 people were vaccinated," the state institute said on its website.

Three people with the disease have died this year: a 62-year-old man, an 84-year-old woman and a newborn. All had other health issues too. The spread goes against the previous expectations of health authorities, who last month had believed the number of cases was peaking.

The disease has been on the rise in other European countries as well as in China with global health authorities blaming the COVID pandemic. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said last month that whooping cough was "an endemic disease worldwide" with peaks every three to five years. — AFP

France hosts Sudan talks a year into 'forgotten' war

PARIS: France and its allies on Monday sought to drum up hundreds of millions in aid for Sudan a year since civil war erupted, sparking one of the world's worst and most under-funded humanitarian crises. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and 8.5 million more forced to flee their homes since fighting broke out on April 15 last year between rival generals.

Sudan is experiencing "one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory", with more people displaced inside the country than anywhere else in the world and a fast-growing hunger crisis, the United Nations says.

At the conference in Paris, France is seeking contributions from the international community and attention to a crisis that officials say is being crowded out of the global conversation by conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. "For a year the Sudanese people have been the victims of a terrible war," French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said. Yet they had also suffered from "being forgotten" and "indifference".

"This is the reason for our meetings today: to break the silence surrounding this conflict and mobilize the international community," he said in opening remarks. The conference, co-hosted by Germany and the European Union, was to include a ministerial meeting on political matters as well as a humanitarian meeting to raise funds.

'Staggering' indifference

Aid workers say a year of war has led to a catastrophe, but the world has turned away from the country of 48 million as conflict rages between

Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Only five percent of the 3.8-billion-euro (\$4.1 billion) target in the UN's latest humanitarian appeal had been funded ahead of the conference this year, according to France's foreign ministry. At the opening, a total of 840 million euros (\$895 million) had been pledged after announcements from France, Germany, the European Union and the United States.

A diplomatic source, asking not to be named, said total donations could well top "a billion euros" by the end of the meeting. On the fifth anniversary of a fire that ravaged the French capital's Notre Dame cathedral, Save the Children contrasted the lack of donations for Sudan with the international response to the Paris blaze.

"It is staggering that after a fire in which nobody died, donors from across the world were so moved to pledge funds to restore Notre Dame," said the charity's country director in Sudan, Arif Noor. "Meanwhile, children in Sudan are left to fend for themselves as war rages around them, starvation and disease are on the increase and almost the entire country's child population has been out of school for a year."

Fourteen million children need humanitarian assistance to survive, Save the Children says. According to Will Carter, Sudan country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council, civilians in Sudan are "enduring starvation, mass sexual violence, large-scale ethnic killing, and executions". "Millions more are displaced, and yet the world continues to look the other way," he said earlier.

An estimated 1.8 million people have fled Sudan — many to neighboring Chad, now also suffering a humanitarian crisis — and 6.7 million have been internally displaced.

'We can't get in'

Human Rights Watch says warring parties have blocked access for humanitarian assistance, pillaged foreign financial aid and targeted humanitarian



PORT SUDAN: An elderly man waits to refill his donkey-drawn water tank during a water crisis in Port Sudan in the Red Sea State of war-torn Sudan on April 9, 2024. — AFP

workers in attacks. The head of the UN's food agency warned the world should not wait for famine to be officially declared.

"Our goal now is to be able to get in ... About 90 percent of the population can't be reached right now," WFP director Cindy McCain said. "When we start talking about is there famine, is there not famine, the truth is we don't know because we can't get in."

The ministerial meeting, behind closed doors, brings together representatives from Sudan's neighbors, as well as from Gulf nations and Western powers, including the United States and Britain, along with regional organizations and the United Nations.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock lamented the failure of mediation efforts so far and urged "better coordination". Chad's Foreign Minister Mahamat Saleh Annadif urged "pressure for there to be an immediate ceasefire". "If we continue like this, in a year's time, Sudan risks disintegrating," he said. — AFP

Nepalis demand safeguards a decade after Everest disaster

KATHMANDU: Ten years ago, Nepali mountain guide Dawa Tashi Sherpa was fighting for his life after being hit by an avalanche on Everest which was then the deadliest disaster on the world's highest mountain. The accident, which killed 16 Nepali guides on April 18, 2014, shone a spotlight on the huge dangers they face to let high-paying foreign clients reach their dreams.

Without their critical work to carve out climbing routes, fix ropes, repair ladders and carry heavy gear up the mountain, few foreign visitors could make it to the daunting peak's top. A decade ago, a wall of snow barreled through the Nepali guides as they heaved heavy kit up the treacherous high-altitude Khumbu icefall in the freezing dark.

The force of the avalanche tossed Dawa Tashi about 10 meters (33 feet) down, injuring his rib cage, left shoulder blade and nose. Dawa Tashi, then aged 22, recalled his friends who died. Three of their bodies were never recovered. "I was lucky to survive," he told AFP. "In the hospital, whenever I tried to sleep, they would appear in front of my eyes." The disaster led to protests for improved benefits and conditions for the guides, and an unprecedented shutdown on the peak for a season.

'Tipping point'

It sparked a debate about compensation for the families of injured or killed Nepali guides and mountain workers. Many are forced to rely on the charity of Western climbers — despite being employed by expedition companies and being fundamental to the multimillion-dollar industry's success. "It was very difficult back then," said Nima Doma Sherpa, who lost her husband Tser-



EVEREST BASE CAMP: This photo taken on April 18, 2014 shows a Nepalese rescue helicopter landing at Everest Base Camp during rescue efforts following a deadly avalanche. — AFP photos

ing Onchu, 33, in the avalanche.

"What can you do when the main pillar of your house is not there? The children were small, and I was worried how I will educate them and how we will sustain ourselves." The government reaps hefty revenues from the lucrative climbing industry — in the last season in 2023, it earned more than \$5 million from Everest fees alone.

Soon after the 2014 accident, it pledged a meagre \$400 to the families of those killed to cover funeral expenses. The offer was rejected by angry Nepalis, whose families received only \$10,000 then in life insurance. The resulting furious dispute, with Nepalis clamoring for better death and injury benefits from the government, saw

days of tension at the base camp.

Sherpa guides, grief-stricken over the deaths of their colleagues, threatened to boycott climbing, throwing mountaineers' plans into disarray, and cancelling the season. "It was a tipping point for young Sherpas who were frustrated," said Sumit Joshi of expedition operator Himalayan Ascent, who lost three guides from his team in the avalanche that year. Since then, his Everest teams have not climbed on the anniversary date. "Ten years on, there is an improvement in their working conditions and the respect that they command," he said.

Safety standards needed
In 2014, the protesters at Everest



KATHMANDU: Nima Doma Sherpa, wife of avalanche victim and mountaineer Tsering Onchu Sherpa who died in the 2014 avalanche, looks at an old picture of her husband and family during an interview with AFP.

base camp made several demands. They included an improvement in insurance payouts and a relief fund from mountain royalties. "We were advocating for the Nepali climbers, ensuring they can get as much benefit as possible," said Ang Tsering Sherpa who headed the Nepal Mountaineering Association at the time. "But not all demands could be met as there were limitations."

The insurance payout was increased by 50 percent to 1.5 million Nepali rupees (\$11,250) if someone is killed. Helicopters are now allowed to fly in supplies to higher camps, decreasing the number of trips Nepalis make across the treacherous Khumbu icefall.

Nepali companies have displaced foreign operators to bring in the majority of climbers, and pay and conditions have improved for guides at larger firms. But, guide Mingma G

Sherpa said, little else has changed. "They protested, but it was limited to the base camp," he said. "The main thing is that the government policies are still not good ... we really need to set a standard for climbers to make the mountains safer".

'Wives don't agree'

In 2015, a powerful earthquake triggered an avalanche that killed 18 people at Everest's base camp before the climbing season began. Last year's season started with the death of three Nepali climbers carrying expedition supplies, after they were hit by glacial ice fall and swept into a crevasse.

Mingma G Sherpa said many local guides have quit the industry. "The number of Sherpas has gone down significantly. Now companies have to go look for Sherpas. In the past, Sherpas would have to go around looking for work," he said. "We want to go to climb because we know the environment there, but the family members don't want to send. The mothers and wives don't agree."

Survivor Dawa Tashi, who began trekking when he was just 11, still guides climbers and returned to Everest in 2021. He is preparing to guide six Americans up the 6,461-metre-tall central Mera peak. "There were improvements after the disaster, but it is not enough," he said, pointing to the \$11,000 fee each foreigner pays to the government to climb Everest. "The government ... should make a fund to safeguard the manpower," he said. "The clients would also happily pay it, knowing that it will be used to take care of their team." — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2024

OpenAI launched in Asia
with new office in Tokyo

First Asian outpost for the groundbreaking tech company



TOKYO: A group of tourists take pictures with the background of the landmark Tokyo Skytree at Sumida Park, near the famous tourism spot of Asakusa district in Tokyo. ChatGPT creator OpenAI opened a new office in Tokyo on Monday, the first Asian outpost for the groundbreaking tech company as it aims to ramp up its global expansion. —AFP photos

TOKYO: ChatGPT creator OpenAI opened a new office in Tokyo on Monday, the first Asian outpost for the groundbreaking tech company as it aims to ramp up its global expansion. Thanks to the stratospheric success of its generative tools that can create text, images and even video, OpenAI has become a leader in the artificial intelligence revolution and one of the most significant tech companies in the world. The Japan office is the latest part of the Microsoft-backed firm's international push, having already set up bases in London and Dublin.

"We're excited to be in Japan which has a rich history of people and technology coming together to do more," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in a statement. "We believe AI will accelerate work by empowering people to be more creative and productive, while also delivering broad value to current and new industries that have yet to be imagined." OpenAI said its Japan office would bring it closer to enterprise clients - including global auto leader Toyota, tech conglomerate Rakuten and industrial giant Daikin - that are using its products "to automate complex business processes".

"We chose Tokyo as our first Asian office for its global leadership in technology, culture of service, and a community that embraces innovation," the company added. OpenAI also announced a new Japanese-language version of ChatGPT on



TOKYO: OpenAI Chief Operating Officer Brad Lightcap holds a press conference regarding the opening of their Japan office in Tokyo on April 15, 2024.

Monday, and hailed the country as a "key global voice on AI policy", offering potential solutions to issues such as labor shortages. The company said its Japan office would also help "accelerate the efforts of local governments, such as Yokosuka City" in their drive to improve the efficiency of public services.

The Tokyo 'buzz'

The San Francisco-based firm has been reportedly in discussions with hundreds of companies as

25 years of AI

A pioneer of e-commerce, Amazon also dominates the cloud. AWS had 31 percent of the cloud computing market at the end of 2023, according to Stocklytics. But rivals Microsoft and Google are gaining ground with their cloud businesses, with 24 percent and 11 percent market share respectively. Thanks to a \$13 billion investment in ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, Microsoft is "in the driver's seat" of an ongoing cloud revolution, according to Wedbush analyst Dan Ives.

Microsoft and Google compete with their in-house, AI-infused digital assistants to help with creating content - emails, presentations, ads - and applications (especially chatbots). AWS is less known to the public and its digital assistant Alexa is not yet as conversational as ChatGPT. But Amazon has been in the AI business for more than 25 years, said Selipsky. "If you go back to personalization on the retail website in 1998 - we called it personalization, but it was AI." The Seattle firm has long had thousands of people working on the technology and has pivoted some of them to the new frontier of generative AI, Selipsky said.

"We've moved rapidly on new generations of our (AI) chips like Trainium, and building Amazon Bedrock, and getting it adopted quickly and coming out with exciting applications on top of the models, like Amazon Q", an AI assistant, he said. Selipsky, who took command of AWS in 2021, replacing Andy Jassy, who stepped into the chief executive role vacated by founder Jeff Bezos, was confident Amazon would remain a leader in cloud computing.

Clients eye AI programs

As proof, he points to AWS customers and partners, including Nvidia. The high-profile chipmaker

it looks to expand revenue sources. OpenAI's chief operating officer Brad Lightcap told Bloomberg in an interview published this month that the firm has seen huge demand for its corporate version of ChatGPT. "We have a very global base of demand," he said in the interview.

"So we want to show up where our customers are. We feel a lot of pull from places like Japan and Asia broadly." OpenAI, reportedly valued at \$80 billion or more earlier this year, is the latest major tech firm to invest in Japan. Microsoft, one of OpenAI's biggest investors, last week announced a separate \$2.9 billion investment to provide Japan with the powerful graphics processing units crucial for running AI apps, and to train three million Japanese workers in AI skills.

Amazon Web Services is spending \$14 billion to expand its cloud infrastructure in Japan, while Google has launched a regional cybersecurity hub in the country. Experts say geopolitical tensions have made Japan an increasingly attractive partner for tech firms compared to China, in addition to advantages such as supportive policies and a highly educated talent pool. "What happens in Tokyo can create a buzz," Hideaki Yokota, vice president of the MM Research Institute, told AFP. "A base in Tokyo should help (OpenAI) attract much young talent." — AFP



FRANKFURT: A photo shows the letters AI on a laptop screen in Frankfurt am Main. — AFP

recently announced it is building a "supercomputer" on AWS using Nvidia's own high-performing processors, the ultrasophisticated and coveted GPUs. Most notably, Amazon has invested \$4 billion in Anthropic, an OpenAI rival that is also backed by Google.

The start-up will use AWS and its Trainium chips to build AI models and help "improve our technology," said Selipsky. When asked about exciting aspects of generative AI, Selipsky cited examples of ramped up productivity for its clients. AWS user pharmaceutical giant Pfizer estimates that it will launch more powerful drugs faster, achieving as much as a billion dollars in annual savings due to AI, according to Selipsky. Airlines and other industries are already using generative AI to power chatbots that interact with customers. And while chatbots can make mistakes, companies reason that "human beings don't give 100 percent accuracy either," Selipsky said. — AFP

News in Brief

Tesla to reduce workforce

NEW YORK: Tesla plans to lay off "more than 10 percent" of its global workforce, news site Electrek reported Monday, publishing an email from Chief Executive Elon Musk announcing the cuts. The job cuts were needed after "rapid growth" that has led to duplication of roles, Musk said in the email to staff, according to Electrek, an online news site focused on electric vehicles (EV). "There is nothing I hate more, but it must be done," Musk said. "This will enable us to be lean, innovative and hungry for the next growth phase cycle." The move comes about 10 days after Tesla reported a drop in first-quarter auto deliveries in a report that disappointed investors. Musk's company has also undertaken a series of price cuts on EV in response to rising competition among producers and slowing demand growth in some markets. Tesla late last year began deliveries of the Cybertruck, a space age-inspired vehicle that Musk has effused over while warning that it would take time to ramp production to reach profitability. Shares of Tesla fell 0.4 percent in pre-market trading. — AFP

CBK's bonds, Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240,000,000 for six months with rate of return (4.5 percent).

US retail sales up

WASHINGTON: Retail sales in the United States grew more than anticipated last month, government data showed on Monday, defying predictions of weaker consumer demand. US retail sales picked up by 0.7 percent in March to \$709.6 billion, after February's increase was revised to 0.9 percent, said the Commerce Department. From a year ago, the March figure was 4.0 percent higher. Boosting the headline figure was a 2.1 percent rise in gas station sales from February to March, said the latest report. Excluding gas stations, overall sales were up by a slightly lower 0.6 percent. But motor vehicle and parts dealers saw a sales decline of 0.7 percent in March, while electronics and appliance stores' sales slid 1.2 percent. While resilience in consumer spending has helped US economic growth in the last year, analysts expect demand to cool this year amid cost fatigue and high interest rates. Households would also have drawn down on savings from the COVID-19 pandemic period. — AFP

Race for AI is not zero-sum, Amazon cloud boss says

SAN FRANCISCO: As Google races with Microsoft and OpenAI to create world-changing generative artificial intelligence, some critics see Amazon as lagging behind. "I respectfully disagree" with that viewpoint, said Adam Selipsky, Amazon's cloud chief, in an interview with AFP. Tech giants like Microsoft, Google and Meta have made headlines talking about their own foundational models, or those of their close partners, that are key to AI and its ability to produce written works, images, videos or even computer code from simple user prompts. But "there is simply not going to be one model to rule them all," argued Selipsky. AWS, Amazon's industry-leading cloud branch, is already seeing customers "needing multiple models for multiple different use cases," he explained.

He cited the capabilities of various AI models available on the AWS Bedrock platform, such as Meta's Llama and Claude from Anthropic, as well as some from Mistral in France and Amazon's own Titan brand. Generative AI is regarded in Silicon Valley as poised to revolutionize the way people get jobs done. And cloud computing companies, which have massive computing power, troves of data and AI expertise, now host generative AI models. They are in a prime position to capitalize on the new technology - but they have a lot to lose if they don't cough up the latest innovations.

Business

Apple announces spending boost in Vietnam; CEO Tim Cook visits Hanoi

US seeks to ramp up Vietnam's role to reduce dependence on China



HANOI: (Left) Apple CEO Tim Cook (center) walks near Hoan Kiem lake in downtown Hanoi during his visit to Vietnam on April 15, 2024. Tech giant Apple said it would increase spending on suppliers in Vietnam, a key production hub, as CEO Tim Cook arrived in the country for a two-day visit. (Right) A shoe street vendor uses her phone as she waits for customers along a street in Hanoi. — AFP photos

HANOI: Tech giant Apple said Monday it would increase spending on suppliers in Vietnam, a key production hub, as CEO Tim Cook arrived in the country for a two-day visit. The iPhone maker announced the news in a statement on its website but gave no details of how much it would spend or where the money would go. Cook is expected to meet programmers, content

creators and students during his visit, according to VnExpress. The visit comes as US President Joe Biden's administration seeks to ramp up Vietnam's role in the global tech supply chain in order to reduce American dependence on China. Images on the VnExpress news site showed Cook taking a walk by Hoan Kiem lake in downtown Hanoi. "Hello Vietnam. I am so excited to be

here today. I can't wait to see all the developers and creators in the community," the Apple boss said in a video posted on the news site.

The Apple statement said the company has spent nearly 400 trillion dong (\$16 billion) since 2019 through its local supply chain and has more than doubled its annual spending to Vietnam during the same period.

"From cooperating with local suppliers, to supporting clean water projects and educational opportunities, we are committed to continuing to strengthen connections in Vietnam," Cook said in the statement. Last week more than 60 environmental and human rights organizations called on the US-based company to oppose the detention of climate activists in Vietnam. — AFP



NEW YORK: People walk past the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — AFP

Middle East tension, conflicts hit stocks

HONG KONG: Equities retreated Monday after Iran ramped up Middle East tensions by launching a barrage of missiles and drones at Zionist entity over the weekend, fuelling fears of a wider conflict in the volatile region. However, while Zionists called the attack - which Tehran said was in response to a strike on its Syrian embassy - an escalation of hostilities, analysts said there was hope among traders that the crisis could be contained. That sliver of optimism helped drag oil prices lower.

Saturday's bombardment of more than 300 ballistic and cruise missiles and attack drones - which were mostly repelled by air defenses - compounded worries about the outlook for US interest rates following more forecast-beating inflation and jobs data. Iran told the United Nations the strike was a "legitimate" defensive response to the attack in Damascus on April 1, which killed seven Revolutionary Guards including two generals.

It added on social media that "the matter can be deemed concluded" but warned that "should the Zionist regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe". Zionist military spokesman Daniel Hagari said it was "a severe and dangerous escalation". But experts said the limited scope of the attack showed Iran was seeking to make a show of strength with its attack, but without sparking a conflict.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden was reported to have cautioned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "take the win" and forego a counterattack. Still, Saxo's Redmond Wong said: "All eyes remain on whether there will be any response from Zionists and markets will likely be volatile in the day ahead to any geopolitical headlines." Asian markets mostly fell Monday, though they pared their initial big losses. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul, Sydney, Wellington, Singapore, Mumbai, Taipei and Manila were all in the red.

Shanghai rose more than one percent after China on Friday unveiled fresh market regulatory measures that one analyst said could help its long-term performance. London was lower in the morning session, while Frankfurt and Paris rose. US futures rose, having dropped sharply on Friday as investors went nervously into the weekend. "The muted market response likely stems from the highly intricate sentiment in the market at this stage," said IG Markets' Hebe Chen. "Market participants are certainly not giving up hope that the past weekend's events were just a one-off occurrence, while holding their breath for what could happen next."

With worries about an escalation subsiding for now, oil prices dipped, though observers warned they could spike back above \$100 if the crisis worsens. "This war may move down the escalation ladder if the Zionist government follows the advice of the White House and forgoes retaliatory action," said Helima Croft at RBC Capital Markets. The broadly risk-off mood sent the dollar up to a new 34-year high against the yen, putting Japanese officials in the spotlight after they said they were ready to step in to support their currency. — AFP

US to grant Samsung up to \$6.4 billion for chip plants

WASHINGTON: The United States announced on Monday grants of up to \$6.4 billion to South Korean semiconductor giant Samsung to produce cutting-edge chips in Texas. The award is the latest from the US government as it looks to cement its lead in the chip industry - especially for chips needed for the development of AI - both on national security grounds and also in the face of competition with China. President Joe Biden's administration has previously approved billions in grants to US titan Intel and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) as it tries to avoid the prospect of shortages of semiconductors - the lifeblood of the modern global economy.

"The US Department of Commerce and Samsung Electronics (Samsung) have signed a non-binding preliminary memorandum of terms (PMT) to provide up to \$6.4 billion in direct funding under the CHIPS and Science Act," said a statement published by the Department of Commerce. Samsung "is expected to invest more than \$40 billion in the region in the coming years, and the proposed investment would support the creation of over 20,000 jobs," it said.

Chips are crucial in powering everything from smartphones to fighter jets. They are also increas-

ingly in demand by automakers, especially for electric vehicles, adding to the pressure to raise production. The global chip industry is currently dominated by just a few firms, including TSMC and US-based NVIDIA. That means the United States is highly dependent on Asia for chips and is vulnerable to shocks to semiconductor supply chains, especially during geopolitical crises that affect places such as Taiwan. This has fueled a US push to strengthen production.

The Chips and Science Act, passed in 2022, calls for tens of billions of dollars in funding to overhaul the US semiconductor industry, with the idea that making public money available for this purpose will lure private investment. The Samsung agreement will "cement central Texas's role as a state-of-the-art semiconductor ecosystem," Biden said in a statement. "These facilities will support the production of some of the most powerful chips in the world, which are essential to advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and will bolster US national security."

'Made in America'

Under the latest agreement, Samsung will not only build a new facility to produce advanced chips but also expand its existing facility in Texas, according to the Department of Commerce. "We're not just expanding production facilities; we're strengthening the local semiconductor ecosystem and positioning the US as a global semiconductor manufacturing destination," Samsung's Kye Hyun Kyung said in the Commerce Department statement. US officials revealed this month that a preliminary agreement with TSMC would see the company receive up to \$6.6

Debt, climate back on IMF, WB spring meetings' agenda

WASHINGTON: The spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank opened Tuesday, with two clear objectives: help countries combat climate change, and assist the most indebted nations. The meetings - which bring central bankers together with finance and development ministers, academics, and representatives from the private sector and civil society to discuss the state of the global economy - will kick off with the IMF's publication of its updated World Economic Outlook.

Even as they look ahead, the meetings will have an air of nostalgia this year, as 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of both institutions. They were born of the Bretton Woods conference, held in 1944 as allied nations sought to regulate the international financial order after World War II, which was then still raging. At the time the financial challenges were huge, with great swathes of Asia and Europe needing to be rebuilt.

In many ways the problems now are no less daunting, particularly as the World Bank and IMF - which just reappointed its managing director Kristalina Georgieva to a second five-year term - seek a path forward on climate change. "There's the climate crisis, debt, food insecurity, pandemics, fragility, and there is clearly a need to accelerate access to clean air, water and energy," World Bank head Ajay Banga said during a recent live streamed press conference. The Bank "cannot tackle poverty without the broader view," he added, saying it is taking steps to widen its scope in order to help "create a world free from poverty on a livable planet."

Providing financing as countries make the transition to a low-carbon energy future and prepare for the impact of global warming remains a central focus. Trillions of dollars are needed in this area, and both the IMF and WB are clear: they will never be able to cover all the resources required. But it's not just a question of resources, as Rachel Kyte, a professor specializing in climate policy at Oxford University, pointed out Wednesday. "We need to see much more radical collaboration" between the IMF,



WASHINGTON: Global activists demonstrate on the first day of the IMF-World Bank Group spring meetings, near the Washington Monument in Washington, DC on April 15, 2024. — AFP

WB and regional development banks at the country level, she said. Doing so will call for "streamlining procedures and processes."

Debt, another major challenge

And then there's debt, with the money owed by emerging countries once again at the heart of the discussions. Negotiations between creditors and indebted countries have stalled in a number of cases, further delaying the implementation of IMF aid plans and the release of funds. "The basic problem is that the Chinese don't necessarily agree among themselves on how to proceed. And they don't have a clear picture of what they have lent and to whom, given the multiplicity of players involved," a source close to the matter told AFP. This issue will be a particular focus of Wednesday's meeting of the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable, which brings together financial institutions, representatives of the main bilateral and private creditors, and indebted countries. The urgency has been underscored by the ef-

fect that interest rate hikes by the central banks of major economies, such as the US Federal Reserve or the European Central Bank, have had on debt. Central bankers have sought to combat post-pandemic inflation with the hikes, but in doing so have sharply increased debt costs for borrowing countries. And while the first cuts are expected this year, rates are likely to remain higher over the long term than they have been over the last decade, according to all concerned.

That presents an additional challenge for governments that can spend more than a third of their income just to pay the interest on their debt. "The inflation news is not good news for the developing world, and it's especially problematic for a lot of countries that face rollovers on their EuroBonds that are coming due in 2024," said Clemence Landers, a researcher at the Center for Global Development, during a Thursday press call. "In the absence of easing global financing conditions, these EuroBond rollovers are going to be a big problem." — AFP

China economy slowing down amid housing, consumer woes

Home prices continue to fall

SHANGHAI: China's economy is expected to have slowed in the first three months of the year as it continues to be buffeted by a debilitating property sector crisis and flagging consumer activity. Beijing officials last month set a target of around five percent growth for the year - a goal they admitted would "not be easy" and which analysts said was ambitious given the headwinds the country is confronting.

But there are some bright spots - figures last month showed industrial production soared even as consumption remained sluggish, reflecting the uneven recovery China has charted since emerging from growth-strangling zero-COVID policies in early 2023. And analysts said they expected China to post around 4.6 percent growth in the year's first quarter Tuesday, down from 5.2 percent in the final three months of last year.

Analysts polled by Bloomberg expect it to come in at 4.8 percent. Woes in the property market remain a millstone for the economy, analysts said, as home prices continued to fall and top developers including Country Garden and Vanke sent out distress signals over their profits and challenges paying off debt. "Persistent property sector weakness and subdued household consumption, resulting from negative wealth effects from the property correction and somewhat sluggish income growth" will hamper growth, Brian Coulton, Fitch Ratings' Chief Economist told AFP.

Policy makers have announced a series of targeted measures as well as the issuance of billions of dollars in sovereign bonds in order to boost infrastructure spending and spur consumption. But analysts say much more needs to be done in the form of a "bazooka" stimulus. "The stimulus is limited (both

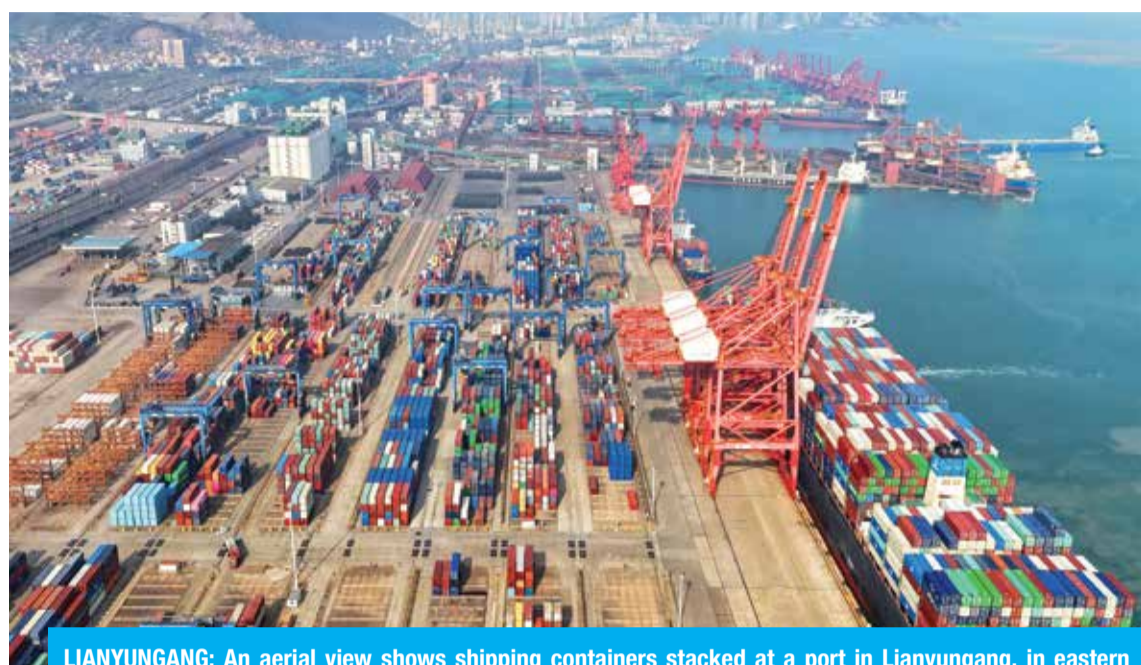
monetary and fiscal) so the effect will be limited," Alicia Garcia Herrero, Chief Economist for Asia Pacific at French investment bank Natixis, told AFP. "We do not expect major interest rate cuts or big fiscal stimuli since the room for China to do both things is limited," she added.

'Very bearish'

Ratings agency Fitch this month downgraded China's sovereign credit outlook to negative, warning of "increasing risks to China's public finance outlook" as the country contends with more "uncertain economic prospects". And observers say state pledges of support for the property sector are yet to sway the market or consumers. "Home buyers remain very bearish," Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance, told AFP.

Sluggish consumption is another bugbear. Last month, retail sales - the main indicator of household consumption - increased 5.5 percent year-on-year, down from the previous month despite covering a holiday period that typically sees a spike in spending. "A lack of domestic consumer demand will remain a drag" on growth despite an improvement on the industrial production front, Heron Lim, an analyst for Moody's Analytics, told AFP. Fears that China could slip back into deflation was also a major drag. Consumer prices fell for several months from August, before rising 0.7 percent in February. But the consumer price index edged up by only 0.1 percent year-on-year last month, renewing deflationary fears.

While deflation suggests goods were cheaper, it poses a threat to the broader economy as consumers tend to postpone purchases, hoping for further price reductions. A lack of demand can then force compa-



LIANYUNGANG: An aerial view shows shipping containers stacked at a port in Lianyungang, in eastern China's Jiangsu province. — AFP

nies to cut production, freeze hiring or lay off workers, while potentially also having to discount existing stocks - dampening profitability even as costs remain the same. "Inflation is a fever of an economy, while deflation is a cancer," Ma said. "A prolonged deflation will hurt consumption and investment demands."

Manufacturing was one bright spot in the first quarter, the analysts said, pointing to the strong official data in March. "Our proprietary indicators sug-

gest more robust manufacturing activity than construction activity," James Seddon of Goldman Sachs told AFP. "Relatively positive industrial production and export news mean that growth will come in steady this quarter," Lim at Moody's told AFP. Still, he warned that more government support would be needed to prop up growth in the medium term, as there were "few policy support measures targeted at supporting domestic consumption directly". — AFP



HYDERABAD: Unemployed people gather by an 'employment van' to fill application forms and access job openings in the private sector in this file photo. — AFP

Educated and unemployed: India's angry young voters

MUMBAI: At a run-down job centre in the suburbs of India's financial capital Mumbai, 27-year-old Mahesh Bhopale dreams of a well-paid government post - just like millions of other young, unemployed graduates. As the world's most populous nation readies for general elections that begin April 19, politicians face a sobering reality. India is the fastest-growing major economy, but there are still not enough white-collar jobs for its educated youth.

"Our only way out of this life is to get a government job and get good benefits," said biology graduate Bhopale. "That will help us get married and start a family." He has eked out a living in part-time jobs ranging from a tailor's assistant to a nighttime security guard while cramming for grueling civil service examinations.

Coming from a farming village to the big city seeking work, Bhopale said he lacked the contacts to push his application in the private sector. "A government job is the best kind of job," he said. "Educated

people from villages like us can't get high-paying private sector jobs." He isn't alone. The International Labor Organization estimates 29 percent of India's young university graduates were unemployed in 2022. That rate is nearly nine times higher than for those without a diploma, who typically find work in low-paid service or construction jobs.

'Demographically expanding'

Over half of India's 1.4 billion people are aged under 30, according to government health figures. "Jobs are not rising as fast as the potential workforce is demographically expanding," said development economist R Ramakumar, from Mumbai's Tata Institute of Social Sciences, noting many of the new jobs being created are in farming. "That is one reason why you see a large number of applicants for a small number of positions in government jobs," Ramakumar said.

It also explains the "urge of people to go out of India through illegal channels", seeking jobs in the United States or Canada, he added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is widely expected to win a third term in the upcoming elections, points to his success in convincing global tech giants like Apple and Dell to set up in India. But critics say this has not translated into the millions of manufacturing jobs that people demand. — AFP

Record heat rots cocoa beans, threatens Ivory Coast's agriculture

ABIDJAN: Surrounded by cocoa trees and intense heat, Christian Andre Yapi is forced to admit that the precious beans are no longer growing as they should, a major problem for the world's leading producer. "The beans are turning black," and rotting, he tells AFP at his plantation near Agboville, 70 kilometers (nearly 45 miles) from the economic capital Abidjan.

"They are not growing properly because of the heat." The leaves on the trees usually provide shade for the pods, but the sun "is drying them up and they are falling" off the trees. It is so hot Yapi can work only in the morning, leaving plenty of spare time to dwell on his losses. "Normally in the off season I get up to a ton," but this year he expects just 300 kilograms (660 pounds).

Last year's heavy rains have given way to high temperatures, particularly from January to March, which have slashed the cocoa crop, which accounts for nearly 45 percent of global production. The thermometer climbed to a record 41 degrees Celsius (106 Fahrenheit) at Dimbrokro in central Ivory Coast in February, said Daouda Konate, head of the national weather agency Sodexam. Normal temperatures for that time of year would be 35C-36C (95-97F), he added. Ivory Coast has not been alone in battling the hot weather over the region.

In Mali, the town of Kayes, in the southwest, suffocated under 48.5C (119F) in early April. Long-lasting and intense periods of heat stress plants, said



HERMANKONO, Ivory Coast: Workers collect dry cocoa beans in front of the store of a cocoa cooperative in the village of Hermankono. — AFP

agronomist Siaka Kone, head of the higher school of agronomy in the Ivorian capital Yamoussoukro. "The quantities of water available will not be sufficient for proper growth and there will be no blossom. Without flowers ... no fruit," he said. Soil temperatures increase in line with air temperatures leading to greater water evaporation, noted Kone. Agriculture represents a quarter of Ivory Coast's GDP and provides half of all employment.

"This year is different because of El Nino", a natural weather phenomenon which pushes up the temperature of a large part of the South Pacific, said Daouda Konate, recently appointed the first African vice-president of the UN's World Meteorology Organization. "Human activity: what we consume and

Iran attack injects fresh anxiety into oil markets

DUBAI: Iran's attack on Zionist entity has injected fresh anxiety into oil markets already roiled by regional tensions, but analysts stress that it is unclear if a durable price spike is imminent. The overnight drone and missile barrage was Iran's first-ever direct assault on Zionist territory. Tehran says it was triggered by the April 1 air strike on its consulate building in the Syrian capital that was widely blamed on Zionists.

The Iranian mission to the United Nations warned on X of "considerably more severe" actions should Zionists "make another mistake", raising the prospect of intensifying violence in the days ahead. Oil prices had already jumped in the build-up to the Iranian attack, with benchmark Brent North Sea Crude closing on Friday at \$90.45 per barrel. Prices are expected to climb further when markets reopen on Monday, perhaps as high as \$95 per barrel, though it is too soon to say whether they will stay elevated, said Kuwaiti oil expert Kamel Al-Harami.

"The picture is not clear about the future. We do not know if and how Zionists will respond and whether Iran will also resort to stopping oil supplies as a response," he said. The Islamic republic was the world's seventh-largest crude producer in 2022, and has the third-largest proven oil reserves behind Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, according to the United States Energy Information Administration. Iran also has a range of ways to wreak havoc with markets, including disrupting maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and pressuring countries such as Iraq to cut supply, Harami said. "There are several scenarios... The fear is that Iran will stop exporting oil or attack oil facilities." Harami said.

Red Sea woes

Fallout from the six-month-old war between Zionists and Hamas in Gaza—along with other geopolitical hotspots like Ukraine—has already driven up oil prices in recent months. Since November Houthi rebels in Yemen have carried out a campaign



TEHRAN: A woman uses a phone while riding behind a man on a motorcycle moving past a billboard depicting named Iranian ballistic missiles in service, with text in Arabic reading 'the honest [person's] promise' and in Persian 'Zionist entity is weaker than a spider's web', in Valiasr Square in central Tehran on April 15, 2024. — AFP

of strikes on vessels in the Red Sea. They say this is in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, where Zionist military operations have killed at least 33,729 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry. In January, US and British forces began retaliatory strikes against the Houthis, exacerbating fears about oil flows from Gulf producers.

Widespread expectations that Iran would target Zionists in response to the April 1 Damascus strike on its consulate already account for some of the oil price rise seen in recent weeks, meaning any further impact will be "limited and short-lived", said Texas-based oil expert Anas Al-Hajji. Ole Hansen, head of commodity strategy at Saxo Bank, also said crude prices "already included a risk premium" before Iran unleashed its missiles and drones, almost all of which were intercepted before reaching Zionist entity, army said. — AFP

Goldman Sachs profits boosted by uptick in mergers

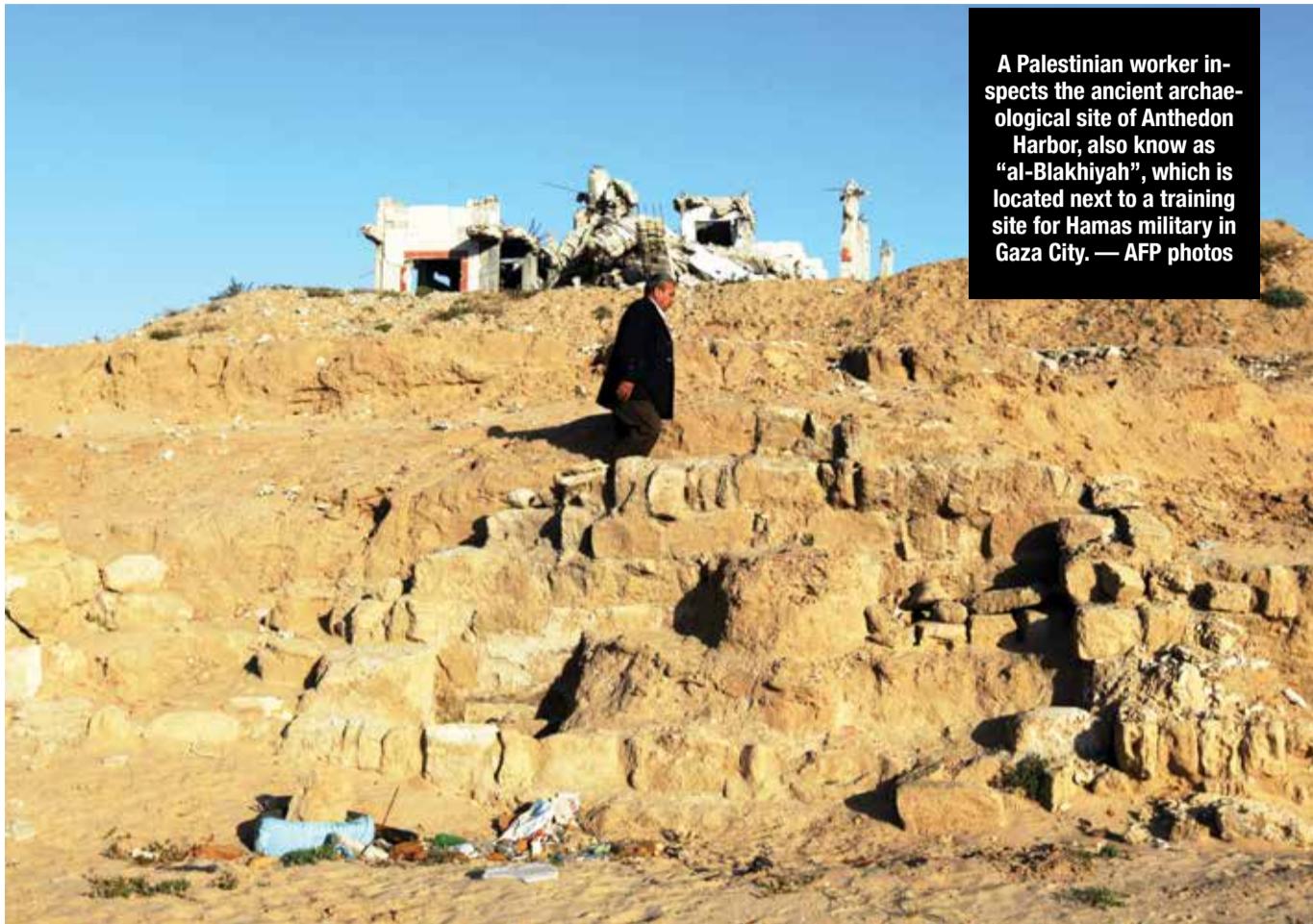
NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs reported higher first-quarter profits Monday on a strong performance across most businesses, benefiting from a boost in merger activity and increased markets revenues. Profits were \$3.9 billion, up 27 percent from the year-ago period and translating into much better earnings per share than expected. Revenues rose 16 percent to \$14.2 billion. The investment bank enjoyed "significantly" higher revenues in debt underwriting, as well as an uptick in equity underwriting from initial public and secondary offerings.

The New York giant also pointed to an increase in completed mergers. Goldman Sachs also won higher revenues from its markets businesses, as well as higher fees from asset and wealth management, which reflected an increase in assets under management. These buoyant figures were partly by a modest rise in operating expenses and \$318 million in provisions for credit losses, due in part to credit card charge-offs.

The broadly positive results come despite a series of high-level executive departures in recent months that have included officials in asset management and global banking and markets. In the middle of 2023, Goldman Chief Executive David Solomon's management style came into question over efforts to grow consumer banking that have been mostly abandoned. The CEO, who was also scrutinized for his side gig as a disc jockey, undertook a series of meetings with Goldman partners to repair relations. — AFP

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2024



A Palestinian worker inspects the ancient archaeological site of Anthedon Harbor, also known as "al-Blakhiyah", which is located next to a training site for Hamas military in Gaza City. — AFP photos



This combination of pictures shows one taken on January 5, 2024 of Gaza City's historic Hammam Al-Samra, which used to be the only active traditional Turkish bath remaining in Gaza, located in the Zeitun quarter of the old city before it was destroyed in Zionist bombardment and (left) dating back to December 4, 2005 with Palestinian youths relaxing in the same steam bath.

GAZA'S HISTORIC TREASURES SAVED BY 'IRONY OF HISTORY'

Gaza's ancient Greek site of Anthedon has been bombed, its "Napoleon's Palace" destroyed and the only private museum burned down: the war has taken a terrible toll on the rich heritage of the Palestinian territory. But in a strange twist of fate, some of its greatest historical treasures are safe in a warehouse in Switzerland. And ironically, it is all thanks to the blockade that made life in the Gaza Strip such a struggle for the past 16 years. Based on satellite images, the UN cultural organization reckons some 41 historic sites have been damaged since the Zionist entity began pounding the besieged territory after the October 7 Hamas attack.

On the ground, Palestinian archaeologist Fadel Al-Otol keeps tabs on the destruction in real time. When he has electricity and Internet access, photos pour into a WhatsApp group he set up with 40 or so young peers he mobilized to watch over the territory's vast array of ancient sites and monuments. As a teenager in the 1990s, Otol was hired by European archaeological missions before going on to study in Switzerland and at the Louvre Museum in Paris. "All the archaeological remains in the north have been hit," he told AFP by phone from Gaza. The human toll since the October 7 Hamas attack has been chilling.

A total of 1,170 people were killed in the unprecedented raid on the Zionist entity, according to an AFP tally of Zionist official figures. Almost 34,000 have died in Gaza in unrelenting Zionist retaliation, according to the territory's health ministry. The damage to Gaza's history has also been immense.

Napoleon's HQ flattened

"Blakhiya (the ancient Greek city of Anthedon) was directly bombed. There's a huge hole," said Otol. He said part of the site, near a Hamas barracks where "we hadn't started excavating", was hit. The 13th-century Al-Basha palace in Gaza City's old town "has been completely destroyed. There was bombing and (then) it was bulldozed. "It held hundreds of ancient objects and magnificent sarcophagi," Otol added as he shared recent photos of the ruins.

Napoleon is said to have based himself in the ochre stone edifice at the disastrous end of his Egyptian campaign in 1799. The room where the

French emperor supposedly slept was full of Byzantine artefacts. "Our best finds were displayed in the Basha," Jean-Baptiste Humbert of the French Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem (EBAF) told AFP.

But we know little of their fate, he said. "Did someone remove the objects before blowing the building up?" Nerves were frayed even further when the director of Zionist Antiquities, Eli

impressive number of ancient treasures, Gaza remains relatively untouched by the trowel despite a rich past stretching back thousands of years.

Ancient crossroads

The only sheltered natural harbor between the Sinai and Lebanon, Gaza has been for centuries a crossroads of civilizations. A pivot point between Africa and Asia and a hub of the incense



This combination of pictures shows Gaza City's Omari Mosque on January 5, 2024, the oldest mosque in Gaza, damaged in Zionist bombardment (left) and a file picture of a Palestinian man reading the Quran in the courtyard of the same mosque on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on March 23, 2023.



Escusido, posted a video on Instagram of Zionist soldiers surrounded by vases and ancient pottery in the EBAF warehouse in Gaza City. Much of what has been unearthed in digs in Gaza was stored either at the Al-Basha museum or the warehouse. Palestinians quickly accused the army of pillaging. But EBAF archaeologist Rene Elter said he has seen no evidence of "state looting". "My colleagues were able to return to the site. The soldiers opened boxes. We don't know if they took anything," he told AFP.

However, he added: "Every day when Fadel (al-Otol) calls me, I'm afraid he'll tell me that one of our colleagues has died or that such and such a site has been destroyed". Archaeology is a highly political issue in (the Zionist entity) and the Palestinian territories, with discoveries often used to justify the claims of the two warring peoples. While the Zionist entity has an army of archaeologists who have unearthed an

trade, it was coveted by the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Ottomans. A key figure in excavating this glorious past over the last few decades has been Jawdat Khoudary, a Gazan construction magnate and collector.

Gaza, with its "seafront real estate", had a property boom in the 1990s after the Oslo peace accords and the creation of the Palestinian Authority. When building workers dug up the soil, they came across lots and lots of ancient objects. Khoudary amassed a treasure trove of artefacts that he opened up to foreign archaeologists. Marc-Andre Haldimann, then curator of MAH, Geneva's art and history museum, couldn't believe his eyes when he was invited to have a look around the garden of Khoudary's mansion in 2004. "We found ourselves in front of 4,000 objects, including an avenue of Byzantine columns," he told AFP.

Quickly an idea took shape to organize a major exhibition to highlight

Gaza's past at the MAH, and then to build a museum in the territory itself so that the Palestinians could take ownership of their own heritage. At the end of 2006, around 260 objects from the Khoudary collection left Gaza for Geneva, with some later going on to be part of another hit show at the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris.

But geopolitics changed along the way. In June 2007, Hamas drove the Palestinian Authority from Gaza. And the Zionist entity imposed its blockade. As a result, the Gazan artefacts could no longer return home and remained stuck in Geneva, while the archaeological museum project fizzled out. But Khoudary did not give up hope. He built a museum-hotel called Al-Mathaf, museum in Arabic, on the Mediterranean coast north of Gaza City. But then came the Zionist ground offensive after the Hamas attack on October 7, which began in Gaza's north.

'Anything but a black hole'

"Al-Mathaf remained under Zionist control for months," Khoudary, who fled Gaza for Egypt, told AFP. "As soon as they left, I asked some people to go there to see what state the place was in. I was shocked. Several items were missing and the hall had been set on fire. His mansion was also destroyed during fierce fighting in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City.

"(The Zionists) flattened the garden with bulldozers... I don't know whether objects were buried (by the bulldozers) or whether the marble columns were broken or looted. I can't find words," he added. The Zionist military did not comment on specific sites. But it accused Hamas of systematically using civilian structures like cultural heritage sites, government buildings, schools, shelters and hospitals for military purposes. " (The Zionist entity) maintains its commitments to international law, including by affording the necessary special protections," the army added in a statement.

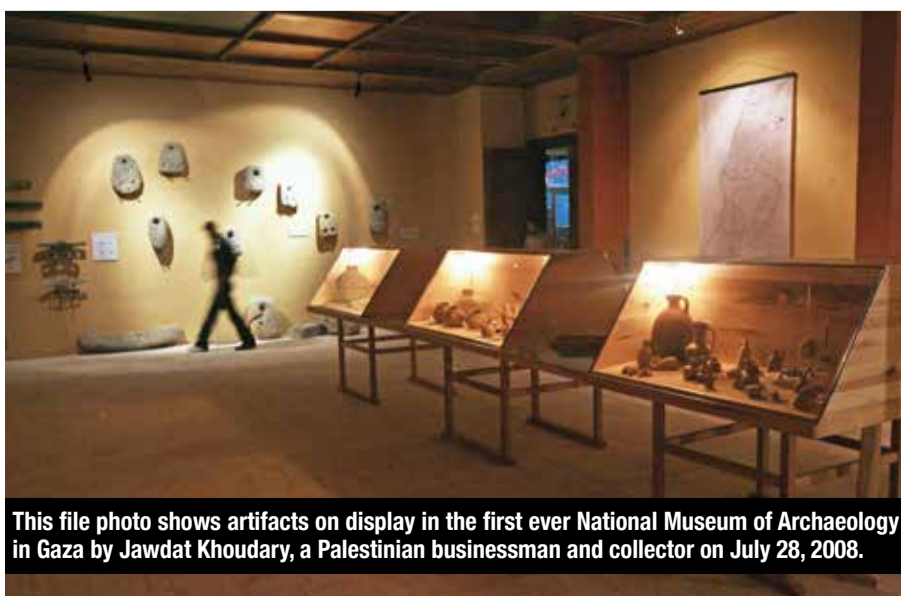
While part of Khoudary's collection has been lost, the treasures held in Switzerland remain intact, saved by the blockade and the red tape that delayed their return. "There were 106 crates ready to go" for years, said Beatrice Blandin, the MAH museum's current curator. Safely far from the war raging in Gaza, "the objects are in good con-



This combination of pictures shows a file picture of the 17th century Qasr al-Basha in Gaza City on April 21, 2021, where Napoleon Bonaparte slept for several nights during his campaign in Egypt and Palestine (bottom), and the same building severely damaged in Zionist bombardment.

dition", she added. "We restored some of the bronze pieces that were slightly corroded and repacked everything.

"We just had to be sure that the convoy would not be blocked," she told AFP. "We were waiting for that green light." But with any return impossible for the moment, Blandin said "discussions are under way" for a new Gaza exhibition in Switzerland. Khoudary is excited by the idea. "The most important collection of objects on the history of Gaza is in Geneva. If there is a new show, it will allow the whole world to learn about our history," he told AFP from Cairo. "It's an irony of history," said Haldimann, who is trying to get his friend Fadel al-Otol safely out of Gaza. "A new Gaza exhibition would show once again that Gaza... is anything but a black hole." — AFP



This file photo shows artifacts on display in the first ever National Museum of Archaeology in Gaza by Jawdat Khoudary, a Palestinian businessman and collector on July 28, 2008.



Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas views antique bottles during his visit to the exhibition "Gaza, at the crossroad of civilizations" at the Art and History Museum in Geneva.



This file photo shows artifacts on display in the first ever National Museum of Archaeology in Gaza opened recently by Jawdat Khoudary, a Palestinian businessman and collector on July 28, 2008.

Lifestyle

New Amy Winehouse movie set to open in UK

A biopic of troubled British singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse tracking her meteoric rise and very public downfall opens in UK cinemas amid a swirl of controversy. Even before its release, "Back to Black" has attracted backlash with criticism ranging from the casting to concerns it could exploit Winehouse's story. "Given the vulture-like efficiency with which her life was picked over, it's near-impossible to think of a sincere reason to make a movie about Winehouse — at least not one that isn't motivated by greed," wrote music editor Roisin O'Connor in The Independent. Winehouse, who died from alcohol poisoning aged just 27 in 2011, was a distinctive figure with her beehive hairdo, heavy black eye makeup, multiple tattoos and smoky voice.

She shot to international fame with her Grammy Award-winning 2006 album "Back to Black" which included the track "Rehab", charting her battle with addiction. Director Sam Taylor-Johnson's biopic is the second big-screen telling of Winehouse's story, coming nearly a decade after Asif Kapadia's 2015 documentary "Amy". That film won an Oscar but was publicly condemned by her family, in particular Winehouse's father who claimed it tried to portray him as "money-grabbing" and "attention-seeking".

Quest for 'truth'

After the film became the second-highest grossing documentary at



British singer Amy Winehouse performs at the Glastonbury Festival at Worthy Farm, in Glastonbury on June 28, 2008. — AFP photos

the British box office, Mitch Winehouse said it dwelled too much on the negative and not enough on his daughter's fun-loving side. He hinted the family could collaborate with another filmmaker in future to correct the record. Mitch Winehouse and his former wife Janis attended this week's premiere in London but Taylor-Johnson said the family had not contributed to her film. "It was important to meet with them out of respect," she told Empire. "But they didn't have any involvement in terms of... like they couldn't change things. They couldn't dictate how I was to shoot," she said.

The filmmaker, whose 2009 feature "Nowhere Boy" dramatized John

Lennon's early years, said she had been after "the truth" of Winehouse's life. "What I wanted as much as possible was the truth of Amy, and Amy's relationship was that she loved her dad, whether we think he did right or wrong," she said. Eddie Marsan, who plays Mitch Winehouse, said he tried to avoid a "comfortable narrative" that there was "someone to blame" in some way for Winehouse's death, such as her father or her ex-husband Blake Fielder-Civil.

'Burden of guilt'

To research the role, he said, he approached a friend who worked with both Amy and her father in the music

industry who told him Mitch had been a "loving father but he was in an impossible situation".

"He had a daughter who was an addict, she was the most famous woman in the world, she was hounded by the paparazzi, she had unlimited resources and money. Every drug dealer in London wanted to give her drugs," the friend told him. "Back to Black" also depicts Winehouse's turbulent relationship with Fielder-Civil who has been blamed for introducing her to heroin and who inspired the album. He said in 2018 he would "always carry a burden of guilt" over his role in her decline.

Marisa Abela who portrays the tragic singer said it would have been a mistake to "judge a character and a character's decisions". "If other people who watch the film decide she shouldn't have loved a certain person, or shouldn't have trusted someone, that's fine. The only villains in our story are addiction and the relentless paparazzi. I'm not telling people how to feel about it," she said.

'Wayward genius'

Reviews have been mixed but some have pointed out that it is still likely to be a box office success due to Winehouse's enduring star power. Describing a recent crop of music biopics as "far worse" than earlier efforts, Zach Schonfeld noted in the Guardian that "these movies remain profitable". The Times's Ed Potton said the film felt "a bit lightweight".



British singer Amy Winehouse performs during the "Rock in Rio" music festival in Arganda del Rey near Madrid, on July 4, 2008.

He praised Abela's willingness to perform her own vocals but said the result was only as good as "you could reasonably hope". Peter Hoskin in the Daily Mail said the film failed to capture the "wayward genius of the original artist". "If they try to make you watch this movie, say: no, no, no," he wrote. "Much better to put on Back to Black, the album, or the song, and remember what really made Amy a star," he added. — AFP



(From left) Jenelle Riley, Tom Hiddleston, Owen Wilson, Sophia Di Martino, Justin Benson, Aaron Moorhead and Eric Martin speak onstage during the LOKI S2 Official Emmy FYC Event at Samuel Goldwyn Theater. — AFP photos



Displays and signage are seen during the LOKI S2 Official Emmy FYC Event.

Disney hosts 'Loki' Season 2 Emmy FYC event in Los Angeles



Owen Wilson speaks onstage during the LOKI S2 Official Emmy FYC Event.

This weekend, Disney held a special Emmy FYC (For Your Consideration) event in Los Angeles at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater for the second season of the Disney+ Original Marvel Studios' "Loki".

The event featured a screening of the finale episode and a panel discussion with the attendees, which included stars Tom Hiddleston, Sophia Di Martino and Owen Wilson, along with directors/executive producers Aaron Moorhead and Justin Benson, and head writer/executive producer Eric Martin.

"Loki" Season 2, which launched on Disney+ last fall, picks up in the af-

termath of the shocking season finale when Loki finds himself in a battle for the soul of the Time Variance Authority. Along with Mobius, Hunter B-15 and a team of new and returning characters, Loki navigates an ever-expanding and increasingly dangerous multiverse in search of Sylvie, Judge Renslayer, Miss Minutes and the truth of what it means to possess free will and glorious purpose. At the event, some of the costumes from the show were also on display for those in attendance to see.

Ballet star and survivor Steven McRae says dance must change

After an almost super-human recovery from an injury, star dancer Steven McRae says the ballet world must take much better care of its artists. As charted in the upcoming documentary "A Resilient Man", McRae thought his high-flying career as a principal dancer in London's Royal Ballet was over when he heard the horrific sound of his Achilles tendon snapping midway through a performance of "Manon" in October 2019. It took months for McRae to walk again, but he was lucky: the Royal Ballet is one of the only companies in the world with a dedicated medical team.

"In the world of dance, injuries have always been seen as a sign of weakness," he told AFP. "You're injured, you're useless. Out. Next!" It took a Herculean two-year effort, supported by his physios, for McRae to return to the stage and get back in peak form. But the experience has radically changed his view of the ballet world.

'Go go go'

McRae had unlikely origins in Australia. He is the son of a mechanic and drag-racer, with his family having limited funds for a classical dance education. But talent and determination ultimately led him to first prize at the world's biggest dance competition, in Lausanne, and a scholarship to the Royal Ballet School. "None of it was handed to me on a silver platter, and anyone who has to fight for something then protects it," he said. "In that fear of losing it all, you say yes to everything. You don't complain about anything. Just go go go."

McRae became one of the company's biggest stars, but he did it by pushing his body to extremes with little care for his physical and mental well-being, relying on a steady intake of painkillers to survive performances and being so burned-out that he felt emotionally numb when he came off stage. Something had to give, and, aged 35, it was his Achilles. "Now I know I was dangerously underweight and not as powerful as I thought," he said. "And the culture of ballet means I was surrounded by these alien bodies... it didn't matter how small or ill I looked, there were always many more people that looked worse than me."

'Stop torturing children'

McRae is 10 kilos heavier than before his injury thanks to the muscle he has acquired in the gym. He sees that added strength as common sense



Australian ballet dancer Steven McRae poses in Paris.

and wants ballet to give up its obsession with slender figures. "The reality is our profession is a visual art form so there's a certain look that complements what we're trying to create," he said.

He said ballet academies often judge children more on appearance than skill. "That's wrong... we need to be looking at them as young artists, as individuals. Not 'How long are their legs? How thin are they?'"

Even companies with physios and gyms are still not making time in weekly schedules for dancers to use them, he added. "Now we have a medical team, we are receiving a lot of new information from sports scientists about our physical and mental well-being and how it's correlated," he said. "Now it's time to respond. It doesn't have to be huge — just small, incremental changes. We can still achieve excellence without sacrificing our entire world."

Stephane Carrel, the director of "A Resilient Man", which will be released in Britain and elsewhere later this year, said he hopes the film will encourage change. "It would be good to stop torturing children and ensure that dancing remains, above all, a pleasure," said Carrel. Nonetheless, he said watching the extreme efforts of dancers helped motivate his own work. "Trying to get a documentary made is extremely difficult... so to see Steve's fight, it helped me a lot. I told myself: I'm not giving up." — AFP



Australian ballet dancer Steven McRae (right) and French movie maker Stephane Carrel (left) pose in Paris. — AFP photos

Lifestyle



Rapper Saint Levant performs at the Gobi stage at the 2024 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club. — AFP photos

'From Gaza With Love': Palestinian Saint Levant rouses Coachella

Saint Levant, the Palestinian-French-Algerian-Serbian rapper who's found viral fame online, made his Coachella debut over the weekend, bringing eminently danceable beats and Palestinian solidarity to the stage. The 23-year-old played a set scheduled for a time conflicting with the highly anticipated No Doubt reunion but still packed the desert festival's Gobi Tent, where he played both his hits and newer work to a sea of fans, many sporting keffiyehs and waving Palestinian flags. "There's so many people we wanted to see at the same time—but this was a hundred percent where we were coming," Mustafa Arch, a 32-year-old Syrian-Lebanese festival-goer, told AFP after the set. "Free Palestine—we're so happy to be here, this is probably the best day of the weekend for us. We'll continue to represent the whole weekend," Arch said.

Zionist's assault on Gaza has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced many more. "Coachella, my name is Saint Levant and I was born in Jerusalem and raised in Gaza," the artist

told the crowd to cheers. "As I hope all of you are aware, the people of Gaza have been undergoing a brutal, brutal genocide for the past six months. And the people of Palestine have been undergoing a brutal occupation for the past 75 years." "It's not just me on the stage—it's the whole Arab world on the stage."

'No going back'

The artist born Marwan Abdelhamid spent many of his childhood years living in the Gaza Strip. In 2007 he and his family fled to Jordan, where he lived for approximately a decade before moving to California, where he is now based in Los Angeles. Saint Levant's trilingual rap track "Very Few Friends" went viral after he released it in November 2022, and 2023's "From Gaza With Love" has also found a growing fanbase. During Saturday's set he performed the new works "Deira" and "5am in Paris," he released the latter just a few days ago. "It's about exile," he told his Coachella audience. "A feeling that us Palestinians know a bit too well."

The artist said he would also soon release a broader project called "Deira," named after a hotel built by his father which was bombed in recent months. Speaking to AFP after the set, 43-year-old Yara Brenton called it "incredible" to see a fellow Palestinian onstage. Saint Levant's performance follows last year's show from Elyanna, a Palestinian-Chilean who became the first Palestinian to perform at Coachella. "I remember coming to Coachella ages ago, there was nothing like this. I never saw myself represented in anything popular," said Brenton. "It means a lot, and it means a lot to see so many younger people enthusiastic about it too."

She voiced praise that Saint Levant was outspoken about the Palestinian cause onstage, saying that "a few years ago, this wouldn't have been okay." "There are a lot more people who know about Palestine" today, Brenton said. "And there's no going back, I think, from this awareness." —AFP

Taylor and Travis spotted dancing at Coachella

Taylor Swift made a much-speculated on appearance at Saturday's Coachella festival... as a fan, canoodling and dancing with beau Travis Kelce as Bleachers performed a rollicking set. Bleachers is fronted by Jack Antonoff, Swift's friend and longtime producer. Kelce's blocking skills came in handy as the 6'5" (1.96 meters) NFL tight end did well to obscure his wildly famous girlfriend from view, as the couple enjoyed the show from stage right.

Still, an AFP journalist saw the much-discussed lovebirds twirling and singing along during the performance of Antonoff, who's co-written

and produced a number of Swift's albums. Fan videos quickly started circulating online. Swift's appearance comes less than a week before her forthcoming album, "The Tortured Poets Department," drops April 19. The 34-year-old billionaire is currently on break from her blockbuster Eras tour, and was spotted on a date night in Los Angeles Friday. Antonoff founded and has fronted Bleachers since 2014, meanwhile becoming one of the most sought-after producers in pop who has worked with superstars including Swift, Lana Del Rey and Lorde. —AFP



US musician Jack Antonoff performs at the Mojave stage during the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California, on April 13, 2024. — AFP



Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce

Doja Cat leads powerful cast of women commanding Coachella day three

Doja Cat closed Sunday's Coachella writhing in a mud wrestling pit, an orgy of a finish that cemented her status as one of music's great entertainers. The Californian's weird, sexy exclamation point of a performance was the crown jewel of a day that capped a weekend of powerful sets from stage-commanding women at the premier desert festival. Rising star Renee Rapp, whose musical turn follows a starring role in the film remake of "Mean Girls" as well as the Broadway version, brought Ke\$ha onstage to the delight of fans packed in at Coachella's Outdoor Theatre.

Rapp dubbed Ke\$ha "the hottest person in the world" before they launched into a rendition of the latter's 2009 global smash "Tick Tock." Victoria Monet—who recently won the Grammy for Best New Artist, after years of songwriting for the likes of Ariana Grande—led the Mojave Tent in an impressive set flanked by gyrating dancers. She also used the moment to say "stop the genocide," one day after Tyler, The Creator performed wearing pins of the Palestinian and Congolese flags.

Jhene Aiko soaked thousands of fans in a warm bath of a performance on a stage that doubled as a grotto of crys-



US singer Doja Cat performs during the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, California. — AFP photos

tals, serenading the crowd with her buttery vocals. And Bebe Rexha delivered a high-energy club pop set including the singles "Me, Myself & I" and "I'm the Drama." "I always thought I wasn't cool enough for Coachella," she exclaimed. "I'm cool now." Ludmilla brought Brazilian funk to the desert, becoming the

first Afro-Latina to play the main stage. And Lauryn Hill staged a mini-Fugees reunion onstage during her son's YG Marley set. Wyclef Jean joined her to perform "Killing Me Softly" and "Fu-Gee-La" as they all paid tribute to Marley's grandfather Bob, singing parts of "One Love" and "Exodus."

'Just a girl'

Women have long been chronically underrepresented at music festivals, but they were the standouts throughout Coachella weekend one. Lana Del Rey cemented her status as a singular figure in pop, donning sparkling knee-high boots and a mini dress as she floated through a sensual sequence of her catalog, flanked by a sisterhood of dancers who writhed, pole-danced and performed acrobatics along to the "born to die" singer's languid vocals. It was an atmospheric finish to a day whose afternoon built a lot of heat, not least thanks to Shakira and Bizarrap's collaboration that saw the former announce a global tour.

And Puerto Rico's Young Miko helmed the main stage with a rager of a set, showcasing her playful Spanglish bars and Latin trap that also alludes to 1990s west coast rap. On day two Ice Spice packed the mammoth Sahara tent with fans intoxicated on her Bronx-born blend of pop-savvy hooks and laser-edged drill rap, as the likes of Taylor Swift danced along among the VIPs.

Gwen Stefani was among the weekend's huge draws: the 54-year-old was on fine 1990s form as she belted nearly two hours of No Doubt classics, as the ska punk band reunited for the first time



Lauryn Hill performs at Coachella Stage.

in 15 years. With electric blue-lined eyes and a bright red lip, Stefani dropped to the stage to do push-ups—boy-style—in the intro for "Just A Girl," before climbing a stage rig and holding a call-and-response, first requiring the boys to recite the titular line back to her. "But you know all I care about—where are my Coachella girls at?" she screamed to cheers, before asking the girls to repeat the line. Led by Stefani, the girls of Coachella let out a scream for the ages. —AFP



Wyclef Jean performs at Coachella Stage.



Bebe Rexha performs at the Coachella Stage.



Young Miko performs at the Coachella Stage.



Renee Rapp and Ke\$ha perform onstage.



Gwen Stefani performs during the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.



(From left) YG Marley and Lauryn Hill perform at Coachella Stage.



Colombian singer Shakira performs with Argentine record producer and songwriter Bizarrap on the Sahara Stage.

Sports

Rohit ton in vain as Chennai beat Mumbai Indians in IPL

Kolkata Knight Riders crush Lucknow Super Giants to eight-wicket victory

MUMBAI: India's Rohit Sharma hit an unbeaten 105 but his Mumbai Indians fell 20 runs short as they tried to chase down a big target set by holders Chennai Super Kings in a battle of IPL heavyweights on Sunday.

Set 207 for victory, five-time winners Mumbai finished on 186-6 even though Rohit raised his ton in 61 balls at his home in Wankhede Stadium. Skipper Rituraj Gaikwad and the in-form Shivam Dube powered Chennai, who won their fifth title last year, to 206-4.

Gaikwad hit 69 and Dube smashed an unbeaten 66 before warhorse M.S. Dhoni smashed three successive sixes in the 20th over to take Chennai past 200. Dhoni came in to bat with four balls left and scored 20. He smashed Mumbai skipper Hardik Pandya for three sixes and finished with a two to end a 26-run over.

"Our young wicketkeeper scoring three sixes down the order helped a lot and I think that was the difference," Gaikwad said of the 42-year-old Dhoni. Sri Lanka quick Matheesha Pathirana then took four wickets to push Mumbai to their fourth loss of the season and Gaikwad said he bowled "exceptionally well and nailed those yorkers".

The two teams are on contrasting runs after changes of guard this season. Pandya replaced Rohit as Mumbai captain while Dhoni surprisingly handed over the Chennai leadership to Gaik-

wad. Gaikwad had his fourth win as captain after he set the pace for his team with his 40-knock laced with five fours and five sixes.

He put on 90 runs with Dube before falling to Pandya, but Dube and then Dhoni's cameo ensured Chennai finished strongly. Mumbai started well with Rohit and Ishan Kishan putting on 70 runs for the first wicket before Pathirana hit back.

Salt and Starc

Pathirana, known "Baby Malinga" for his slinging action similar to former Sri Lankan quick Lasith Malinga, sent back Kishan and then Suryakumar Yadav, for his second duck this season, in the space of three balls. He later dismissed Tilak Varma for 31 as Rohit attempted to keep up the charge in his 63-ball knock and his second IPL ton. Pathirana was named man of the match and Pandya said the Sri Lankan "was the difference".

Tushar Deshpande got Pandya out and the home crowd cheered in another sign of growing unpopularity of Mumbai's choice of captain. In the first match of the day, Phil Salt's rapid 89 and three wickets for Mitchell Starc helped Kolkata Knight Riders race to a crushing eight-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants.

Starc's 3-28 kept Lucknow down to 161-7 at Kolkata's Eden Gardens, with the other Knight Riders' bowlers putting in disciplined perfor-



MUMBAI: Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma (C) watches the ball after playing a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. - AFP

mances after their side elected to field first. The Australian left-arm quick became the most expensive buy in IPL history after Kolkata shelled out \$2.98 million for his services.

Opener Salt then steered the two-time IPL win-

ners to their target in 15.4 overs for their fourth victory in five matches this season. The English wicketkeeper-batsman put on 120 runs with skipper Shreyas Iyer, who made 38, smashing 14 fours and three sixes in his 47-ball knock. - AFP

Burgan Bank concludes sponsorship of KEF Tour for 2023/24 season

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank concluded its strategic sponsorship of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation (KEF) Tour for the 2023/2024 season, continuing its dedicated efforts to help elevate the local sports scene. A highlight in the country's sporting calendar, the Bank's sponsorship comes for the third consecutive year, emphasizing its commitment to promoting the sports culture in Kuwait, as part of its comprehensive social responsibility program.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Mrs Kholoud Redha Al Feeli, Deputy General Manager - Marketing and Communication at Burgan Bank, said: "We are delighted to have been a part of this exciting tournament for yet another year. Equestrian sports are a significant part of Kuwait's cultural heritage, and this sponsorship aligns perfectly with our goals of promoting sporting excellence and community engagement in Kuwait."



Kholoud Redha Al Feeli

Offering a memorable experience for both participants and spectators, the tour showcased the talent of 400 national equestrians. The tournament also featured a range of competitions, including show jumping, endurance riding, and dressage. Al Feeli further noted: "Burgan's sponsorship is a testament to our dedication to our sporting community in Kuwait. We aim to enhance the quality and scale of tournaments, as well as, help in nurturing the talent of Kuwait's athletes, providing them with a platform to excel."

It is worth mentioning that Burgan Bank's support for the KEF tour commenced in 2021. This continuous sponsorship and collaboration come as a significant part of the Bank's extensive social responsibility initiatives, which is dedicated to fostering and strengthening the sports culture in Kuwait.

Kuwait, Malaysia to clash in Ice Hockey World Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Hockey Team will start its quest for the Ice Hockey World Championship Division IV with a match against Malaysia on Tuesday. This match will be preceded by another between Mongolia and Indonesia. The opening ceremony will be under the patronage and presence of Minister for National Assembly Affairs, Minister for Youth Affairs, Minister for Communications Affairs Dawood Maarafi.

The Championship will be for four days under the supervision of International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF). Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Winter Games club Khalid Al-Mutairi said the organizing committee exerted hard efforts and completed all logistics related to hosting the championship and received the approval of IIHF, adding that the club worked on preparing Kuwait Team in a way that is suitable for this important cham-



Khalid Al-Mutairi

pionship through training camps and friendly matches at the highest of levels as the matches will not be easy.

Al-Mutairi asked Kuwait fans to be present and support the team as the organizing committee was keen to allocate a section for families.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Ice Hockey team coach said his players are ready for the championship and come out the winners to move to division III, bearing in mind that they are playing at home in front of their fans.

He said the players are experienced and able to deal with the pressure of major events. Indonesia's coach said his team is relatively new to the game, and this championship will be an important step for gaining experience and will help promote the game in Indonesia. He said that Mongolia's team is strong and experienced, yet we will do our best to come out with the best results and make it the best start in this world event.



OKLAHOMA CITY: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder goes to the rim during the first half against the Dallas Mavericks at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City. - AFP

Thunder grab top seed in West, Lakers one win from playoffs

LOS ANGELES: The unexpected Oklahoma City Thunder clinched the Western Conference top seed ahead of the defending champion Denver Nuggets as the NBA regular season wrapped up on Sunday. The youthful Thunder rolled past the playoff-bound Dallas Mavericks—who rested Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving among others -- 135-86 to emerge from the trio of teams who went into the final day of action tied atop the West. It marked the first time that three teams entered their final games with identical records, all with a shot at the number one seed in a conference. Thanks to the Thunder's edge in their head-to-head record, the Nuggets' 126-111 victory over the Grizzlies in Memphis wasn't enough and the Minnesota Timberwolves, who also had a chance, fell 125-106 to the Phoenix Suns.

The Suns snatched the sixth and final automatic playoff berth and will face the No. 3 Timberwolves again in the first round. In New Orleans, superstar LeBron James scored 28 points with 11 rebounds and 17 assists in his 112th career triple-double to propel the Los Angeles Lakers to a 124-108 victory over the Pelicans and eighth place in the West.

The defeat dropped the Pelicans out of sixth place and they'll host the Lakers in the play-in tournament on Tuesday, with the winner advancing to the playoffs as the seventh seed. James added five steals and Anthony Davis had 30 points and 11 rebounds against his former team. Davis gave Lakers fans a scare when he hobbled out in pain late in the fourth quarter.

Davis said his back "locked up" after he took a shove, but vowed there was "no doubt" he'd play on Tuesday. James said the quick turnaround to another game against the Pelicans was reminiscent of a playoff series.

"That's exactly what it feels like," he said. "So you don't get too high on one win because you've got to come back and play again." The Golden State Warriors, with Stephen Curry and Draymond Green resting, beat the Utah Jazz 123-116 to lock up the last play-in berth.

They'll play Tuesday against the Sacramento Kings, who cruised past Detroit 123-95, with the winner of that play-in game earning a shot at the loser of the Lakers-Pelicans contest for the final Western Conference playoff berth.

Brunson propels Knicks to No 2

There was a bit less to settle in the East but the New York Knicks, fueled by 40 points from Jalen Brunson, edged the Chicago Bulls 120-119 in overtime to grab the second seed. Brunson's pull-up shot with 1:01 remaining in regulation tied it at 109-109.

Brunson fed Donte DiVincenzo for a go-ahead

three-pointer with 3:13 left in overtime and the Knicks held on for their 50th win of the season. The Knicks leapfrogged into second place over the Milwaukee Bucks, who fell 113-88 to the Orlando Magic as Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo missed a third straight game with a leg injury.

The Magic, led by 26 points and 11 rebounds from Paolo Banchero, avoided the play-in tournament, clinching the fifth seed ahead of the Indiana Pacers. The Pacers grabbed the sixth and final automatic playoff spot with an emphatic 157-115 victory over the Atlanta Hawks and booked a first-round clash with the Bucks.

The Boston Celtics, already assured of the top seed in the East, closed the regular season with a 64th victory, 132-122 over the Washington Wizards. The Cleveland Cavaliers, who also had a shot at second place, fell to the Charlotte Hornets 120-110 and finished fourth. They will meet the Magic in the first round.

The Miami Heat, beaten by the Nuggets in last year's Finals, finished eighth after a 118-103 victory over the Toronto Raptors. On Wednesday, the Heat will take on the Philadelphia 76ers, who rested star big man Joel Embiid in a 107-86 victory over the Brooklyn Nets—in the play-in.

The winner will advance to the playoffs and the loser will take on the winner of the play-in clash between Chicago and 10th-seeded Atlanta. Sixers coach Nick Nurse said reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid would be available. "We decided out of caution to hold him out," Nurse said. "He'll be ready to go." - AFP

'I want to be number one' says rising star Aberg

AUGUSTA: Swede Ludvig Aberg's bid to become the only major debutant to triumph at the Masters fell short on Sunday but his major tournament performance confirmed his status as the rising star in golf. The 24-year-old finished second, four strokes behind winner Scottie Scheffler, after carding a final round 69 but he certainly won many admirers among the patrons at Augusta National and beyond.

And his performance has filled Aberg with self-belief. "Everyone in my position, they are going to want to be major champions. They are going to want to be world number one, and it's the same for me, that's nothing different," he said.

"It has been that way ever since I picked up a golf club, and that hasn't changed. So I think this week solidifies a lot of those things are there, and we just need to keep doing those things and put ourselves in positions to win tournaments," he said. Aberg only turned professional in June 2023 after a stellar college and amateur career but has already made a big impact in the pro ranks. He was a key component in Europe's Ryder Cup victory over the United States last year when he and Victor Hovland defeated Scheffler and Brooks Koepka with a record 9 and 7 win.

That performance came after his first pro win in the European Masters in Switzerland in September and two months later he had his maiden win on the PGA Tour at the RSM Classic. Having risen to ninth in the world rankings, Aberg was seen as a contender at Augusta despite his lack of major experience.

His second round of 69, when so many struggled in Friday's high winds, put him in contention for the weekend but while he had to settle for runner-up spot—and a handy \$2,160,000 -- he also said he was able to soak up the experience.

"Playing here at Augusta National is a dream come true. Just to be in this situation and feel the nerves and feel the pressure walking down the last couple holes is what you dream of," he said. "This is what I have been wanting to do for such a long time, and it's quite surreal to actually have the opportunity to experience it. But I'm so proud of myself and all of the people on my team and my family and everyone involved."

At a time when golf is riven by the often bitter divide between the PGA Tour and LIV Golf, the emergence of a new star excites many but he isn't entirely comfortable with being described as the "new face of golf."

"I wouldn't consider myself the face of golf. Absolutely not. Obviously I'm OK with all these things that comes with it. My main focus is to play good golf and all the media things that comes with it is not really up to me," he said. - AFP

Sports

Lyon come back to win against Brest in 16th minute of injury time

Defeat leaves Brest in second place but 10 points off leaders PSG

LYON: An Ainsley Maitland-Niles penalty 16 minutes into second-half added time gave Lyon a stunning 4-3 win against Brest on Sunday, pushing the home team up to within two points of the European spots. It was a topsy-turvy affair in which the lead switched hands three times before Lyon eventually emerged victors well beyond the original allotted period of added time to stun second-placed Brest at the Groupama Stadium.

Corentin Tolisso opened the scoring before Steve Mounie and Romain Del Castillo struck in the space of seven minutes to give Brest a 3-1 lead but Alexandre Lacazette, Nicolas Tagliafico and Maitland-Niles hit back in the final 20 minutes to grab all three points for Lyon.

Pierre Sage's side sit seventh and, after an appalling start to the Ligue 1 season, now have a realistic chance of qualifying for European football next term. "It shows us that anything is possible with this team looking towards the end of the season," said Lyon boss Sage.

The defeat leaves Brest still in second place but 10 points off leaders Paris Saint-Germain and one point ahead of third-placed Monaco, both of whom have a game in hand. "We're being taken for fools. It's a difficult evening but we've been through others this season already," bemoaned Brest coach Eric Roy, who was angry his team were not awarded an early penalty for a handball appeal against Lyon's Jake O'Brien.

"We've been dealt a few blows by unfavourable decisions but that's football today." Brest failed to clear a set-piece and Tolisso took advantage, controlling the bouncing ball before turning and lashing a left-footed finish past goalkeeper Marco Bizot

in the 18th minute. Mounie struck back for Brest, cancelling out Lyon's lead on the hour mark with a firm header back across goal following Del Castillo's whipped free-kick from deep.

Del Castillo then netted twice in three minutes to send Brest into a 3-1 lead. The first came in the 64th minute courtesy of a curling free-kick from inside the 'D' that Anthony Lopes got a hand to but could not prevent from going in.

Kamory Doumbia then set up Del Castillo's second with an intelligent pull-back that the attacker swept into the goal from just inside the box. The two-goal lead lasted only two minutes as Lacazette volleyed home on 70 minutes after more poor Brest defending from a set-piece.

Defender Tagliafico completed the come-back 11 minutes from time with a driven finish into the far corner. Both sides finished with 10 men apiece after Tagliafico and Pierre Lees-Melou saw red for an altercation in the 86th minute.

Lyon claimed for a penalty deep into injury time after the Brest keeper cleaned out Lacazette, injuring the Lyon captain. After a lengthy VAR review, the referee pointed to the spot and Maitland-Niles made no mistake from 12 yards to claim all three points for Lyon in the 16th minute of injury time.

Daylight for Nantes

An injury-time winner gave Nantes a precious victory away to Le Havre as Antoine Kombouare's side went three points clear of the 15th-placed hosts and five clear of Lorient in the relegation play-off spot. Abdoul Kader Bamba fired home three minutes into injury-time at the end of the second half to give a Nantes a crucial 1-0 victory.

Ramadan with 70 players participating along with their parents and guardians.

The closing ceremony was held in the presence of Tomooh Club Deputy Chairman Dherar Al-Rabah, National Director of Special Olympics Rihab Bouresli, Tomooh Treasurer Hanaa Al-Zawawi and board member Qaseema Al-Mousawi and club director Huda Al-Khalidi.

The program aimed at encouraging the sport of walking due to its positive effect on health, physical and mental fitness, as weights of participants were taken at the start of the program, and all participants walked for 3 kilometers every day, then at the conclusion of the program weights were taken again and



LYON: Lyon's French forward #10 Alexandre Lacazette (C) is fouled by Brest's Dutch goalkeeper #40 Marco Bizot (L) during the French L1 football match between Olympique Lyonnais and Stade Brestois 29 at the Groupama Stadium in Decines-Charpieu, near Lyon.-- AFP

"Le Havre could have won... we were able to push our limits and snatch three points out of nowhere," said Nantes coach Kombouare. The result leaves Le Havre two points ahead of Lorient with the 16th-placed side having played one less match.

Clermont picked up a point at home to Montpel-

lier following a 1-1 draw but remained rooted to the bottom of the Ligue 1 table and six points from safety. Muhammed Cham put the home team ahead going into the break with a penalty five minutes into first-half added time, before Tanguy Coulibaly levelled matters for Montpellier in the 56th minute.--AFP

Your Health Is In Your Step-4 concludes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tomooh Sports Club for the mentally disabled concluded its sports program "Your Health Is In Your Step-4" that was organized by the Kuwait Special Olympics during the month of



Barca hope young blood can overcome old ghosts in Europe

BARCELONA: Barcelona host Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday hoping their young stars can help them vanquish the ghosts of the past and return the five-time winners to the Champions League elite. The Catalans' dramatic 3-2 quarter-final first leg victory in Paris is arguably their finest result away from home in the competition in the last decade, sparking big dreams in Catalonia. "I understand the euphoria—it's better to live with euphoria than with pessimism," said Barca coach Xavi Hernandez on Saturday. Xavi's side which snatched victory at the Parc des Princes featured the two youngest players ever to play in the final eight of the Champions League, in 16-year-old Lamine Yamal, and Pau Cubarsi, 17.

That fresh blood has brought new life to a team not only struggling this season but which has been weighed down mentally by failure stacked on failure since they last triumphed in Europe in 2015. The Catalans lifted the

trophy in Berlin with current PSG coach Luis Enrique at the helm, propelled by the magical strike force of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez.

The years since have been a collection of dramatic collapses on the biggest stages on the continent and, worse still, ignominious defeats in earlier rounds. Yamal and Cubarsi are untainted by the psychological damage of those defeats and Xavi has praised their mentality.

"(Yamal) is very calm and very mature, so measured in the sense that he bears everything so well that's happening to him, despite his young age," said Xavi in March. After Cubarsi shone to help Barcelona progress from the last 16 against Napoli, Xavi offered similar praise. "He has a very well furnished brain," said the coach.

'Put the ghosts aside'

Cubarsi's cool was just what Barcelona lacked when they threw away a 4-1 first leg lead to crash out in 2018 at Roma in the quarter-finals, pounded 3-0 at the Olympic Stadium in the Italian capital. The following season they collapsed at an ecstatic Anfield, unable to protect a 3-0 advantage earned at the Camp Nou.

The remarkable 4-0 second leg defeat sent shock waves reverberating around the club and led to coach Ernesto Valverde's eventual sacking a few months later.

The final nail in the coffin for the majority of the players remaining from Barcelona's golden era was an 8-2 hammering by Bayern Munich in the 2020 quarters.

Many of Barcelona's veteran stars seemed scarred by their European collapses and before long Messi, Suarez, Jordi Alba, Gerard Pique and company were gone. Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is one of two survivors from the triumphant 2015 team, along with Sergi Roberto who famously scored the decisive sixth goal in Barca's 6-1 'remontada'—comeback—against PSG in 2017. "We have to put the ghosts aside," said the goalkeeper in October after Barca won a hard-fought group game at Porto. "It's not necessary to put pressure on ourselves... we have a different team (now)." The Bayern defeat left no doubts about the idea Barcelona had fallen from the game's upper crust.

Between then and now Barcelona have twice crashed out in the group stage, dropping into the Europa League and hitting their lowest ebb in the 21st century. President Joan Laporta pledged to restore Barcelona to the highest pedestal of European football and now has the club on the verge of the final four, after four years without making the quarter-finals. Critics chastised him for failing to make good on his pledge to keep Messi at the club, but that role on the right of the attack is now where Yamal is flourishing.--AFP

Saudi reviews football fan rules after whip attack

RIYADH: The Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) has vowed to review the fan code of conduct after a "disgraceful" attack in which a spectator appeared to whip a player. The incident occurred on Thursday during a match between Saudi teams Al Ittihad and Al Hilal at the Saudi Super Cup in Abu Dhabi.

Footage circulating online shows Al Ittihad striker Abderrazak Hamdallah, a Moroccan national, getting into a tense exchange with --- and flinging water on—a thobe-wearing fan in the stands who then strikes Hamdallah with what looks like a whip.

Spectators and players then intervene to separate the two men. Hamdallah scored in the 21st minute but his team went on to lose 4-1. SAFF and the Football Players Association of Saudi Arabia said in a statement at the weekend that they were "shocked with the disgraceful scenes" and that their priority was to ensure the safety of everyone at matches.--AFP

Today's Matches

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

FC Barcelona v Paris Saint-Germain 22:00
beIN Sports HD 1

Borussia Dortmund v Atletico de Madrid 22:00
beIN Sports HD 2



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish forward #07 Ferran Torres attends a training session on the eve of their UEFA Champions League quarter-final second leg football match against Paris SG at the training center in Barcelona on April 15, 2024. -- AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401
Sabah Hospital	24812000

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **KADAPA BABAIAH** (old name), resident of D.No.26, Nallaguttapalli, Ramapuram, Annamayya District, Andhra Pradesh. Henceforth be known as **KADAPA ABDULLA** (new name).
(#5194 - 15-4-2024)

Leverkusen win first Bundesliga crown, snap Bayern's 11-year run

Victory keeps dream of remarkable treble alive



LEVERKUSEN: Bayer Leverkusen's fans celebrate with a mock-up of the Bundesliga trophy after the German first division Bundesliga football match against Werder Bremen on April 14, 2024. — AFP

LEVERKUSEN, Germany: Bayer Leverkusen lifted the Bundesliga title for the first time in their 120-year history on Sunday, a 5-0 victory over Werder Bremen breaking Bayern Munich's 11-year stranglehold on the German top flight. Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen knew victory would secure the title with five games to spare, and there were no signs of nerves in a dominant performance.

A hat-trick from Florian Wirtz and goals from Victor Boniface and Granit Xhaka extended their unbeaten run to a stunning 43 games in all competitions. Leverkusen's maiden title, coming after five second-place finishes in their history, keeps their dream of a remarkable treble alive while shedding their unwanted 'Neverkusen' nickname for good.

With 10 minutes to go, the long-suffering fans began making their way to the sidelines and a few jumped the gun, storming the pitch with the match still ongoing. Leverkusen's players ushered the fans back and some obliged, albeit briefly, with the stands swiftly emptying on the 90-minute mark as tearful supporters made their

way onto the turf to celebrate with the players.

Leverkusen are now on 79 points — the best tally after 29 games in German league history — and are 16 clear of second-placed Bayern and third-placed Stuttgart. "It's impossible to describe. Personally I can't quite grasp what we did. I needed to go back to the changing room to clear my head," Wirtz told DAZN. "We've already started the party with the supporters."

Wirtz, who moved from neighboring Cologne at the age of 16 and grew up just 20 minutes away in Pulheim, told DAZN he "could not imagine what we would achieve at the start of the season". "It was when we started winning some matches, with a dominant style of play, that's when I realized we could do a little better than just making the Champions League."

Sea of red and black

The Leverkusen bus arrived at the stadium 90 minutes before kick-off, wading through a sea of fans clad in black

and red on the way to the 30,000-capacity BayArena. Normally known as Bismarck Street, fans had stuck temporary signs saying 'Xabi Alonso Street' along the main road in honour of the club's coach. Alonso looked ahead to Thursday's Europa League trip to London to face West Ham, making seven changes to his starting XI and benching stars Wirtz, Jeremie Frimpong and Alex Grimaldo, the latter for the first time in the league this season.

Piero Hincapie, Grimaldo's replacement, had an early effort at goal saved but it would be the fit-again Boniface, making his first start since mid-December, who put the home side in front. With 22 minutes gone, Jonas Hofmann was felled in the box by Bremen's Julian Malatini, with the referee pointing to the spot after VAR urged him to view the contact again on the monitor. Boniface stepped up and nervelessly slotted the penalty past a helpless Michael Zetterer to send the home fans into raptures.

Hofmann was almost the provider again shortly be-

fore half-time, his pass finding Amine Adli who fired against the crossbar. Bremen started the second half strongly but their hopes of spoiling the party were snuffed out on the 60-minute mark, Boniface finding Xhaka who unleashed a long-range rocket before slapping his badge in front of the ecstatic home fans.

Wirtz, who came on at half-time for Adli, replicated Xhaka's effort eight minutes later from almost the same spot on the pitch. Wirtz added another with seven minutes remaining before sealing his hat-trick in the 90th minute as Leverkusen rid themselves of their nearly men tag in style.

Earlier on Sunday, a 36th-minute goal from Ritsu Doan took Freiburg to a 1-0 win at Darmstadt, pushing the last-placed hosts closer to immediate relegation. Winless since October and with only two victories all year, the loss leaves Darmstadt dead last, eight points from second-last and 13 points from safety with five games remaining. — AFP

Arsenal's Premier League title bid rocked by Aston Villa loss

LONDON: Arsenal's Premier League title hopes suffered a massive blow as Aston Villa struck twice in the closing stages to boost their top four bid with a dramatic 2-0 win at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday. Mikel Arteta's side would have gone back to the top of the table with a victory, but instead they surrendered the initiative to Manchester City after conceding two goals in the last six minutes.

Leon Bailey put the visitors ahead and Ollie Watkins doubled their lead as Villa boss Unai Emery enjoyed a second sweet win this season over the club that sacked him in 2019. Arsenal's first defeat in 12 league games leaves them in second place, two points behind City, while third placed Liverpool are behind Arsenal on goal difference. With just six games left, champions City are closing in on an unprecedented fourth successive Premier League crown. City's rout of Luton on Saturday had knocked Arsenal out of first place. But the Gunners should have been on a high after Liverpool suffered a shock 1-0 defeat against Crystal Palace just half an hour before kick-off in north London.

Instead, Arsenal produced a spluttering display that could prove fatal to their challenge for a first English title in 20 years. It has been a dispiriting week for the Gunners, who were held to a 2-2 draw by Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday, setting up a tricky trip to Germany for the second leg on Wednesday.

After blowing an eight-point lead in the title race last season, Arsenal are in danger of squandering the advantage yet again. Villa had moved up to fourth place without kicking a ball after Tottenham's thrashing at



LONDON: Aston Villa's Italian midfielder #22 Nicolo Zaniolo (2R) is held by Arsenal's Brazilian defender #06 Gabriel Magalhaes (2L) during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Aston Villa at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

Newcastle on Saturday dropped them below Emery's men on goal difference.

And Villa's second win in six league games moved them three points clear of Tottenham, who have a game in hand in the race to qualify for the Champions League via a top four finish. Arsenal had started brightly and Kai Havertz's low drive was palmed away by Emiliano Martinez before Gabriel Jesus headed into the side-netting from Bukayo Saka's cross. Accelerating onto Martin Odegaard's pin-point pass, Saka took aim from inside the area, but couldn't test Martinez from an acute angle.

Watkins should have put obdurate Villa ahead when he was allowed to break into the Arsenal area unimpeded for a low strike that cannoned back off the post and ricocheted along the goalline to safety.

Just seconds later, Arsenal were repelled by Martinez's superb reflex save after Leandro Trossard met Jesus's cross with a close-range shot that appeared destined for the net until the Argentine keeper stuck out a foot to block it. — AFP

Inter set up Milan derby title shot, Ndicka collapses

MILAN: Inter Milan will have a chance to win the Serie A title in the Milan derby despite slipping to a 2-2 home draw with lowly Cagliari on Sunday, while Roma said defender Evan Ndicka is recovering after he collapsed during their game at Udinese.

Nicolas Viola snatched a potentially huge draw in 14th-placed Cagliari's bid for Serie A survival as Inter failed to extend their 14-point lead at the top of the league after their closest challengers AC Milan drew a spectacular match at Sassuolo 3-3.

Viola struck with seven minutes remaining at the San Siro, shortly after Hakan Calhanoglu had fired Inter back into the lead from the penalty spot following Eldor Shomurodov's 64th-minute strike which levelled Marcus Thuram's early opener.

Italian Viola could have even given Cagliari, who are four points above the relegation zone, a stunning win in stoppage time had he not headed a golden opportunity straight at Yann Sommer. "It's annoying not to win after going ahead twice because we wanted the victory in front of our fans," said Inzaghi to DAZN.

"We're very close to a big goal but we know that we still need points to make it mathematically certain." A win would have left Inter needing only a draw in the Milan derby on Monday week to beat their local rivals to a 20th league crown.

Instead Sunday's draw means Inter have to win a sixth straight match against their city rivals if they are to claim the Scudetto with five matches remaining. Regardless, save for an unprecedented collapse, it is simply a matter of time until Simone Inzaghi's team will win



REGGIO EMILIA: AC Milan's English midfielder #08 Ruben Loftus-Cheek (L) shoots the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Unione Sportiva Sassuolo and AC Milan at the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia. — AFP

the league, and it could yet come in the derby.

That would be a bitter blow for Milan, who have not been in the title race as Inter have charged off into the distance since the turn of the year. Noah Okafor salvaged a hard-fought point for Milan in the 84th minute on a hot spring day in Reggio Emilia.

Coach Stefano Pioli made a raft of changes in the wake of a first-leg defeat to Roma in the Europa League quarter-finals and his team were two goals behind after less than 10 minutes following early strikes from Andrea Pinamonti and Armand Lauriente.

Frenchman Lauriente struck again seven minutes after the break to ultimately ensure the point that lifted second-from-bottom Sassuolo to within two points of safety. Milan visit Rome on Thursday trying to overturn a single-goal deficit, ahead of the derby and a trip to third-placed Juventus the following weekend. "I believe 100 percent in my team, we have men of quality, we are a really good team," said goalscorer Okafor. "Now have to focus... for sure we are going to Rome to win." — AFP